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This fact which is not one: differential poetics in transatlantic american modernism

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THIS FACT WHICH IS NOT ONE:
DIFFERENTIAL POETICS IN TRANSATLANTIC AMERICAN MODERNISM

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BSD	Goldin, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*
CL	Goldin, *Couples and Loneliness*
GP	Stein, *Geography and Plays*
LHR	Hughes, *Langston Hughes Reader*
MV	Spicer, *My Vocabulary Did This to Me*
SW	Stein, *Selected Writings*

INTRODUCTION.
This Fact Which is Not One

"I was talking like this to the Princeton professor and he said well if these are the facts there is no hope and I said well what is hope hope is just contact with the facts."
                                                                —Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography* (1937)

I. A Brief History of the (Literary) Fact

What happens to a fact when it is "made literary"? Contested narratives of modernism itself, and the demands made by what came after it, inform the construction of texts from documentary evidence, the complicated poetics of multiple modernities. The literary fact is a concept and method that discloses an intersection between critical formalism and social realism, offering an expanded interpretive zone within which we can read twentieth-century avant-garde poetic and artistic practices on both sides of the Atlantic. This project seeks to elucidate the social, formal, and historical interventions of the poetics made possible by the literary fact. Poetics inquires into the making of the work of art, and by approaching the literary fact as the work under examination, I hope to expand the definition of fact beyond the easily and widely accepted realist or documentary paradigm, wherein facts quite simply and transparently represent history and in turn present social circumstances.

This project works at the intersection of multiple modes ranging from fact-oriented, to transatlantic, to queer or gender inflected. The point of departure for this project is Gertrude Stein's *Geography and Plays* (1922), which I use to establish this intersection as the focus of my study. With Stein's work as the foundation, I construct a theoretical framework based initially in canonically modernist poetics, then inscribed by difference as it is informed by the multiply interpretable fact, by several and overlapping geographical spaces, and by both reparative and destructive erotics. I then go on to examine a range of texts that extend beyond modernism proper to show how cultural practitioners outside the modernist horizon

(as it is traditionally understood) incorporated this modernity which is not one into their own work, adapting it to sites, periods, and approaches ranging from the Harlem Renaissance and the Civil Rights movement to the early Cold War to punk-inflected activism of New York's 1980s "downtown" scene. Rather than attempting the kind of revisionist project that attempts to recover the work of Langston Hughes, Jack Spicer, and Nan Goldin for the modernist canon, I am instead working to account for a field of objects of *modernist study/ies* that finds its beginning in the specific poetics—the differentials of modernity *in use* rather than moderism *as such*. In provisionally defining such a field, using Hughes's *Montage of a Dream Deferred,* Spicer's *Heads of the Town up to the Aether*, and arriving at Goldin's documentary photography and presentation strategies, I am arguing less for a revised modernist object than I am for a possible new approach, a critical poetics, for twentieth-century American forms that can account for an evolving field by examining not how later authors and artists *are* modernists, but rather how they *used* the queer, transatlantic, poetics of fact made possible by multiple modernisms in difference.

The work of this dissertation is thus less to discover new poetries, new truths, or new documents than it is to challenge and unbind the ties of the representation of fact or documentary evidence to realist textual modes. In "On Literary Evolution," Jurij Tynjanov wrote of the literary fact that "its existence depends on its function," and my study is equally informed by the importance of the historical function and social construction of the literary fact (69). The facts themselves are not objective and it is the relations in which they appear, *as facts*, that are the central objects of this study. In my use of the term, *fact* is the materiality of history as it moves from the social world, carrying with it the index of its own production, through to literary form. Facts seek representation in form that textualizes the production of history while also accounting for the social circumstances of both that production and its

representation. This is a poetics that re-establishes facts like gender, race, and geography as central motivations for formal experimentation with material. As the American twentieth century progressed from Stein's high modernism, this fact-oriented mode extended into and evolved within the work of authors like Hughes, Spicer, and Goldin, who took up such a poetics as a way of introducing difference into their textual and artistic practice at distinct—gendered, racial, classed, and geographic—points of fact.

Thinking about facts requires thinking about material, first and foremost. I initially approached this project through the work of Walter Benjamin, who identified the material fact as the basic unit of historical production. In 1927, Benjamin wrote to Martin Buber detailing the completion of his "Moscow" essay and noted that the material fact was necessarily formulated "on the basis of economic facts," a Marxist orthodoxy crucial for understanding the "full range of possibilities" revealed in the "schematic form" of Moscow's present: "The outlines of this are at present brutally and distinctly visible among the people and their environment" (*Moscow Diary*, 6). Similarly, in the well-known essay "From Faktura to Factography," Benjamin H.D. Buchloh notes that, at its inception, the concept of the *faktura* was meant to be understood, in and around 1917, as the texture created by the way that material evidence is arranged and constructed in order to acquire meaning. And this arrangement should be determined by "incorporating the technical means of construction into the work itself and linking them with existing standards of the development of the means of production in society at large" (Buchloh, "Faktura," 89). Yet because *faktura* "implied a reference to the *placement* of the constructivist object and its interaction with the spectator" (90), the ultimate result was the obfuscation of the material by the technical means of construction—the fact effaced by its own production—and the reduction of "the process of representation to purely *indexical* signs: matter seemingly generates its own

representation without mediation" (ibid.). The production of the work thus became the work's subject matter, and the fact of the work came to appear self-evident, shoring up what Buchloh calls "the old positivist's dream" (ibid.). Benjamin, on the other hand, understood the material fact in its existence between social, aesthetic, and political orders, as a production with the unique ability to access the potentialities of history otherwise hidden in the everyday. For Benjamin, production opened the material fact to its full historicity, acting as the radically negative mediation that disclosed the investment of the object with the collective desire of the society at large without ever positivizing that desire as a self-evident fact of the work.

This conception of factuality guided Benjamin to compose "One Way Street" (1928), a text in which he initiated a mode of inquiry into his own history as a German, a lover, and a Marxist/Surrealist working at the intersection of production and the structures of desire. His initial investigation into the way social objects are invested with the desiring subjectivities of their collective users would later develop into a method for investigating the social history of modern Europe. It is precisely *how*, *why*, and *under what circumstances* material facts, fragments of sociality and history, come to be textualized—what Jacques Rancière, whom I will discuss below, might call "ways of doing and making"—that was of utmost concern to Benjamin. In "One Way Street," Benjamin grants a certain authority to subject matter, first by allowing readers to approach it conventionally, as the contents of a given document, and then by breaking the phrase into its constitutive components—*subject* and *matter*. The subject is attached to the matter, and invests himself in its facticity by attaching it to language in use, in this case, literally signs lining a street. Objects, like the sign for "Arc Lamp," textualize subject matter—"The only way of knowing a person is to love that person without hope"—in a way that is situated but still without reference to the kind of master

narrative, in this case, biography, that would efface such a textualization (Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 467). Thus, Benjamin breaks down the production of objects by the desiring subject; what looks like a diary—as he practiced in *Moscow Diary*—is given the status of an object "in which 'all factuality is already theory' and which would thereby refrain from any deductive abstraction" (Benjamin, *Moscow Diary*, 6). Under the sign of "Imperial Panorama," Benjamin creates a material fact from the disappearance of mediation that has resulted in the modern Germany's forgetting (forgetting that objects, histories, and facts are made): "And in the denaturing of things—a denaturing with which, emulating human decay, they punish humanity—the country itself conspires … Here one lives as if the weight of the column of air that everyone supports had suddenly, against all laws, become in these regions perceptible" (*Selected Writings*, 454). Here and throughout "One Way Street," Benjamin problematizes the historical consequences of realism *as* unmediated documentary representation, foregrounding instead the practice of textualization, the making literary of facts, as an event with a material history all its own.

The literary fact can be understood as an event inscribed in a text or inscribing it. By *event*, I mean an opening in history, a moment when material evidence is textualized with specific social stakes. A wide range of current critics think about facts as historical events, although to the ends of wildly different theoretical and critical programs. In *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Rancière considers the fact to be the basis for the "distribution of the sensible," ultimately responsible for "the level of the sensible delimitation of what is common to the community, the forms of its visibility and of its organization" (18). Rancière begins by defining aesthetics, in part through Kant, and inflected by Foucault, as the "system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sensory experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously

determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience" (13). So although his initial definition of the distribution of the sensible positions so-called self-evident facts at the center of that system of "sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it" (12), there is really, for Rancière, no such self-evident fact. In modernity, facts are already mediated by aesthetics to the extent that social subjects are able to recognize them as facts, part of the "aesthetic regime of the arts," which Rancière names first of all as "a new regime for relating to the past" (25). Modern subjects get the facts that they deserve, in other words, perceived through senses that have already been determined by the aesthetic regime's remaking of the very concept of self-evidence.

Returning to Aristotle's *Poetics*, Rancière attempts to trace the movement of fact, through poetry, to its present position at the center of the distribution of the sensible. "Poetry owes no explanation for the 'truth,' Aristotle initially put forth, because it is made up of "arrangements between actions … which confers a causal logic on the arrangement of events" and is thus superior to history, which is "condemned to presenting events according to their empirical disorder" (*Politics of Aesthetics*, 36). What Rancière terms "poetic history" is thus more suited to the transmission of fact since it "links the realism that shows us the poetic traces inscribed directly in reality with the artificialism that assembles complex machines of understanding," that is, the way that facts can appear to have become self-evident (38). This link, for Rancière, poetic history, functions in "a certain idea of history as common destiny, with an idea of those who 'make history,' and that this interpenetration of the logic of facts and the logic of stories is specific to an age when anyone and everyone is considered to be participating in the task of 'making' history" (39). The truth content of facts is a function of the relationship between how they are used, and by whom, to create

narratives of history, which in turn fold back on the facts that informed the social circumstances of their production; again, modern subjects get the facts we deserve. The arrangements between actions, and the facts they make, circulate among and between us to "produce effects in reality":

> They define models of speech or action but also regimes of sensible intensity. They draft maps of the visible, trajectories between the visible and the sayable, relationships between modes of being, modes of saying, and modes of doing and making. They define variations of sensible intensities, perceptions, and the abilities of bodies. They thereby take hold of unspecified groups of people, they widen gaps, open up space for deviations, modify the speeds, the trajectories, and the ways in which groups of people adhere to a condition, react to situations, recognize their images. (39)

Such arrangements between actions, the very making that Aristotle named poetics, produce facts—no less, facts that are socially useful, politically available, "effects in reality" (ibid.). These, then, are literary facts in that they exist in the differential spaces between modes of discursive production and participation that such arrangements both necessitate and open. "In short," Rancière concludes, literary facts, which he calls "quasi-bodies" to suggest a certain way of being in a differential space, "contribute to the formation of political subjects that challenge the given distribution of the sensible" (40). Such facts or quasi-bodies are not self-evident except in that they circulate among real bodies, histories, and socio-political systems. They belong not to "imaginary identification" but to " 'literary' disincorporation," by which Rancière means the kind of "political subjectivization" that produces " 'disorder in the established system of classification'" (ibid.) and reveals the "arrangements between actions" by way of which facts are produced to be "heterotopias rather than utopias" (41). Facts thus disrupt knowledge, since they no longer form the basis of disciplinary consequences for bodies circulating differentially within discourses. Here, I want to argue for aligning Rancière's notion of disincorporation with Dianne Chisholm's understanding of a kind of queer theory that is "*pure* critique," in other words, a "purely *negative* critique" that

aims to disturb forms and that "'blocks' all narrative and totally disables the plot of heterosexist expectation" (*Queer Constellations*, 57). This kind of critique appears situated at the differential intersection of aesthetic and social experience. At these differential sites, experimental work becomes heterotopic space where aesthetic experience inform(e)s theoretical structures. Aesthetic and social concerns come out in form, but only if they remain locked in differential relation.

The Foucauldian heterotopia, a sort of differentially distributed system of the sensible, the regularity in dispersion factuality takes in order to become literary, appears in this project in a variety of ways, and I will attend to it further in the present introduction as well. For now, though, I want to turn to Lawrence Rainey's quite different approach to the problem of fact, wherein he presents the concept as part of a program critical of New Criticism's uncritical, positivist error of reading facts in Pound's *Malatesta Cantos*. In *Ezra Pound and the Monument of Culture,* Rainey poses the basic question: "What is a fact, and how is it constituted?" (79). Rainey seeks, further, to problematize the premise of studies of modernism that seek to "preclude any alterity suggesting a social world that poses resistances to the shaping power of the imagination, whether that power be assigned to the work (New Criticism), to the critic (post-structuralism), or to the 'text' (deconstruction)" (147). "The accumulation of facts," he posits, "is distressing because so many of them are related to history" and are believed to possess a truth value that should not be mediated by social language, language in use (80). But all facts, Rainey argues—much as Rancière does—are already mediated by language and only seem to be self-evident after Rancière's aesthetic regime has made them so: "Here is the white mythology of transmission: the process is no longer noticed and is taken for the proper 'fact'" (142). The production of facts through transmission, a differential poetic act, is thus effaced by the facts produced, by the result of

their being transmitted. Facts become self-evident, even if the very evidence consists of the history, outlined by Rancière through Aristotle's poetics, of their transmission. Although Rainey's conclusion—that "works are never given, pure, or stable objects" (154)—may by now seem commonplace, it is worth setting up as a supplement to Rancière's argument: "Facts of the past are typically constructed not through any set of transparent signs, but through transmissive histories that are extremely intricate and complex. Reconstructing those histories is seldom a straightforward return to origins, but rather a negotiation of discrepant communicative functions in precise and historically specific contexts" (143). In other words, facts are produced by arrangements of actions within the heterotopic space of the always differential distribution of the sensible in which quasi-bodies circulate. The facts presented in the *Malatesta Cantos*, then, should not be tethered to stable representations of the past, "knowable outside the documentary and material forms," but rather always considered as constitutive parts of "the institutional apparatuses and historical processes that transmit them, encoding their appropriations by subjects," which have implications for the very concept of factuality's continued and future engagements with these systems (154).

To think facts in this way is to rethink the poetic history of the modern period and thus to also rethink the term *literary*, which becomes then not a genre proper but a way of practicing facts at the juncture between emerging forms and documentary evidence. This practice of facts, named *literary*, also produces *the literary* as a social and cultural category, which, like the fact, is never a stable object. "To speak of practices rather than objects of knowledge," Fred Moten writes in *In the Break*, quoting Randy Martin, "allows production to be named historically so as to situate it with respect to existing political mobilizations" (263). "The epistemological shift that Marx allows," Moten continues, "wherein practices are thought as if for the first time, as if in eclipse of objects, can itself be thought as an irruption

of or into the sciences of value," truth value especially (ibid.). *The literary* in modernity, when read through a poetics of literary fact that takes into account the transmissive and poetic histories of documentary evidence, as Michael Renov writes in *The Subject of Documentary*, "thus undertake[s] a double and mutually defining inscription—of history and of the self— that refuses the categorical and the totalizing" (110). This action results in a change in the concept of fact, one that carries with it not only the index of its origins but also the necessity of continued and continuing re-inscription as it circulates in the space between text and world, the space where production happens. In Rainey's view: "A fact, then, consists only partly in the synthetic narrative or assertion that is its most typical form, for informing this is also a multiplicity of heterogeneous histories that have occurred in public and institutional spheres characterized by inequalities in power and whose transmission has been irregular and uneven, occurring as a discontinuous series of events that extends far beyond their origins into unforeseen futures" (*Ezra Pound,* 144). The heterogeneous histories and uneven transmissions that produce facts as inscribed events, continuous with history but discontinuous with regard to their own self-evidence, ask for another way to talk about material and materiality, a way that can account for Rainey's claim that "fact, in this view, is preeminently social in character, and its sociality is grounded in possible futures" (145). The attributes that real bodies inscribe on quasi-bodies are the resistant facts within the literary whose material forms occupy the space between different sensible orders. As Moten writes: "And if we understand race, class, gender, and sexuality as the materiality of social identity, as the surplus effect (and cause) of production, then we can also understand the ongoing, resistive force of such materiality as it plays itself out in/as the work of art. This is to say that these four articulating structures must be granted not only historicity, politics, and practice, but aesthesis as well" (*In the Break*, 263). By "granted aesthesis," I think Moten means that

we should account for their place in poetic history and for their role in the transmission of facts as they become literary, which is indeed exactly what I mean by the literary fact.

Devin Fore notes a similar impulse in the early twentieth-century shift, in artists in Soviet Russia, from the idea of *faktura* to the practice of factography. In his introduction to *OCTOBER* 118, Fore notes that factography "challenged" the positivism that the *faktura*-centered "production art" eventually became "by reincorporating into its conception of the object the symbolic and ideological systems that had been neglected by its predecessor" (5). That is to say, the factographers reincorporated potentially resistant facts, articulating structures, into aesthetic material. Thus, Fore continues, "the factographers engaged not just with physical and dimensional bodies, but also with bodies of collective social knowledge and networks of communication" (6), in other words, the differential space where quasi-bodies circulate; moreover, the factographers "conceived of signification not as a mere system of mimetic reflection, but as an act of productive labor" (ibid.). Much as Benjamin, especially in "One Way Street," attempted to challenge realism and its fantasy of the unmediated by practicing textualization and establishing its everyday production of facts as material historical events, as material as street signs and as everyday as walking down a street and reading them, so too the factographers "understood acts of signification not as veridical reflections or reduplications of an ontologically more primary reality, but as actual and objective components of everyday, lived experience" (Fore, introduction, 6). In turn, just as this understanding required for the factographers new modes of signification, joining facticity to aesthetics necessitated for Benjamin a new form, which he believed he had found "inasmuch as I have succeeded in seizing and rendering this very new and disorienting language that echoes loudly through the resounding mask of an environment that has been totally transformed" (Benjamin, *Moscow Diary,* 6).

Benjamin's commitment to representing the "material components of remembering" (Buck-Morss, "Flaneur," 134), born as a practice in "One Way Street," became a poetics in the *Passagenwerk* a practice of the arrangement of actions of the facts and objects of material history; in that work, according to Benjamin, "I deal with the arcades just as if they had in fact happened to me" (ibid.). In the words of Viktor Shklovsky: "If facts destroy theory, then all the better for theory" (Fore, introduction, 3). The dialectical image, the site where Benjamin's subject matter crystallized into fact and in turn into the form that these facts took, emerged through the course of his work, eventually "destroying" theory in the traditional sense in the *Passagenwerk*. It became his primary tool for cultural remembering, and yet another way of thinking Benjamin's commitment to the program of literary fact. As a form of literary fact, the dialectical image becomes not an image-object, arrested in motion (which is also to say that the "dialectic at a standstill" never really stands still), but a zone or site within which the material becomings of history figure. Just as, according to Tynjanov, "the very existence of a fact *as literary* depends on its differential quality, that is, on its relationship with both literary and extraliterary orders" ("Literary Evolution," 69), so too the dialectical image depends upon this differential space of practice that Benjamin found in the Paris arcades. Using the dialectical image, Benjamin was able to make facts of the present that combined Marxist materialist history with a radical self-reflexivity that precluded self-evidence and that would permanently alter the fact itself by creating an articulating structure perpetually available—like Louis Aragon's "unverifiable [but] demolished" Passage de l'Opera—for possible future investment. If this possible future investment, for Benjamin, was the transformation in modernity of ruins into facts and the attendant production of a kind of knowledge that might resist appropriation by realism and the institutional

apparatuses and historical processes it perpetuated, fascism, for example—all the better for theory.

This is not to say that Benjamin advocated abandoning form, or a particular work's formal specificity, in favor of the free play of facts dispersed across the textual surface. My use of the word *figure* to describe the activity of Benjamin's zone of historical material becoming fact is carefully chosen to refer to Fredric Jameson's concept, detailed in *The Political Unconscious*, of figuration. For Jameson, figural forms cluster around the unrepresentable, history itself. History, then, is a negative, differential space not fully accessible to realist representational practices. Since I will discuss this concept in greater detail in the chapters that follow, I will treat it only briefly here as it relates to Benjamin's work with the dialectical image. For both Jameson and Benjamin, figuration is the process through which form is created; for Jameson, figuration is a totalizing method, while for Benjamin, it is always open and in process. In applying this concept to Benjamin, and later to Gertrude Stein, I want to stress its opening into the textual zone where facts become literary. Rather than being represented, for both Jameson and Benjamin, this zone must be chronicled, and for Benjamin that means documenting the differential moments of the process through which forms come to be.

Since my project spans the years between World War I and the present, I also want to pause briefly to think about the space of the zone as it relates to Jameson's concept of cognitive mapping, which helps to further explain figuration in the context of Benjamin's practice. For the sake of brevity, I will turn here to the especially lucid reading of Jameson's "Cognitive Mapping" that Fred Moten presents in *In the Break*. Moten begins: "Jameson says that we are in need, but incapable, of those forms of representation—political and aesthetic—that would allow for both a description of postmodern global space and a

prescriptive vision of that space transformed, resocialized" (218). Returning to Benjamin, the *Passagenwerk* was a similar attempt to create the conditions for a new way of knowing that would open new forms—not types, *forms*—of representation for modern space and revolutionary potential. In modernity, the arcades were only mappable when considered as differential passages structured by and articulating/textualizing the facts gathered there. As Aragon wrote in *Paris Peasant*: "Let us pause in this strange zone, in the farthest reaches of the two kinds of daylight which pit the reality of the outside world against the subjectivism of the passage" (47). "But," Moten continues, "it's important to point out that Jameson's recovery of these uses of the aesthetic are bound up with a necessary attempt to rehabilitate the notion of representation, a notion that he equates with figuration as such and not with, as I noted earlier, restrictive notions of more or less impossible forms of verisimilitude," in other words, realism (*In the Break*, 219). Benjamin's engagement with the fact as literary was a critical aesthetic project that sought to produce new forms by transforming the historical and social contexts of cultural material. In this way, as Rainey argues, "fact is better understood less as a crude correspondence between present assertion and past event than as the formation of a consensus through the construction of a space that is counterfactual with respect to the original circumstances" (*Ezra Pound*, 146). With Benjamin as a starting point, my project aims to problematize the ontological priority of the fact as a self-evident representation in favor of approaching its construction and transmission, its poetic history. In "The Literary Fact," Tynjanov comments: "The uniqueness of the literary work lies in the way the constructive factor is applied to the material, in the way it 'gives form to' (i.e., in effect, deforms) the material" (37). When the facts that comprise "the literary" are traced counterfactually, a logic Rainey calls "less a return to origins than a departure from them"

(*Ezra Pound*, 144), as heterotopic textual forms, an alternative poetics of the fragments of material documentary evidence in modernity appears.

II. Differential Poetics and Other Heterotopias

I want to avoid defining the literary fact in terms that reduce it to nothing more than another formal strategy for manipulating the material text, yet another way to "Make It New" by de-forming the text's construction. Documenting the literary fact is a way to show how seemingly obscure or overly dense experimental texts are not purely formalist gestures but are, instead, crucially connected to the social and historical periods that produced them. Form thus becomes a mode of social rethinking for conditions like gender, race, queerness, and nationality as they relate to historical context and individual authorship; in other words: form follows fact. Yet form also determines the individual circumstances in which facts are produced, in the work of art, as literary. Instead of reading avant-garde works as self-consciously formalist constructions, that is, in the more Anglo-American sense, as *nothing but form*, or as content made subservient to experimental (re)presentation, I want to show how the literary facts of the Russian formalist conception can open even the most radically anti-realist texts to socially based readings. I follow Rainey's assertion that "a more self-critical interaction with the problematics of fact … may go far toward enabling us to achieve a less reductive and less unilateral definition of literary criticism, one that addresses more forthrightly the delicate issue of how subjects relate and have related to objects of the past, historical and cultural, and how they might relate to them in a possible future" (*Ezra Pound*, 154). Rainey makes the point that this interaction is a critical investigation of the fact "in the conditions that ground its formation" (ibid.), that is, in the specific circumstances under which facts find form, and in which the forms of the facts themselves then enter into what Rancière calls "literarity." A "unique logic of the sensible," literarity is "at one and the same

time literature's condition of possibility and the paradoxical limit at which literature as such is no longer discernable from any other form of discourse" (*Politics of Aesthetics*, 87). The relationship between cultural practitioners and their contexts, and the work this relationship produces, also offers another way to think about aesthetic autonomy; closely investigating the way that facts come to form differentially, as a critical production between the literary and the extraliterary, to use Tynjanov's phrasing, helps us to better see the ways that literature is part of culture and not merely its reflection.

Gertrude Stein's textual work during World War I can thus be seen as more than abstraction or pre-symbolic play celebrating—but also covering—her sexuality and her love for Alice B. Toklas. *Geography and Plays* incorporates into its form the facts of war, its ruptures and transformations, and joins them with sociality as Stein has experienced it to create a way of knowing the war that is both a model of relating to history as it happens and a language to bring forward into future social and textual investments. Likewise, Langston Hughes's *Montage of a Dream Deferred* produces not simply an illustration of black modernity with a bebop soundtrack, but a record of the emergence of modern blackness freed from American capitalist narratives of progress. Hughes's long poem succeeds in creating a language from the differential social and historical spaces of the Harlem Renaissance that tells modernity in its own terms. Jack Spicer's practice of dictation thereby becomes more than alien transmissions reaching a poet fatally estranged from the pre-Stonewall, Cold War social world; *Heads of the Town up to the Aether* documents spaces outside of language, places in the heterotopic geography between text and the city that Spicer called "love," that asked poets not to withdraw from but to create a world that they would not be consumed by. We can read Spicer's devotion to the idea of (queer) love as a practice of outside, rather than his disenchantment by it, in the facts this text makes literary. Finally, Nan Goldin's photographs

cease to be simple snapshots of a now mythologized bohemia; beyond their transformation into documents of the loss of that bohemia to the early days of AIDS, beyond even reading them as acts of mourning, we can see how these images disclose the facts of a collective production of both a history and a future for an always-still-becoming community. In these ways, and so many more, experimental forms transform both evidence and material language (including visual language) into facts that accumulate as new knowledges and ways of being in the world.

For Tynjanov, the fact was only literary to the extent that it was differential, that is, to the extent that it worked, in its material form, as a bridge between literature, history, society, and experience. So the form in which a fact was textualized, in addition to its *subject matter*, needed to be differential in order for the fact to function, which in turn defined the status of the fact as literary. With Lyn Hejinian, I believe that poetics is a "language of inquiry" through which we can interrogate structures—like, in this case, the literary fact—by working to disclose the differential relationships that produce them. Poetics is, as Aristotle initially put forth, in this way a methodology for documenting the construction of forms from the material fragments of fact—for finding and inquiring into the ways that facts find form. What ideally will emerge from this kind of investigation is a new way of reading the relationships between artists and their texts that resists, through its active oppositional or counterfactual—which looks not to the origin of facts but to the ways that, as socially and historically invested objects, they are textualized *as facts*—engagement with factual material, subsumption by official narratives of history (whether or not these narratives are always realist and whether or not realism always presents official narratives is a larger question that I will not, at present, attempt to answer). Michel Foucault's emphasis on the importance of the Nietzschean concepts of effective and monumental history for genealogical analysis

presents a good starting point for thinking about critical cultural production as a differential structure wherein the social aspect of the work cannot be abstracted into official representational narratives (realist or otherwise) without thereby divesting it of its transformative potential.

According to Foucault's "Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History," genealogy is "patiently documentary … and it depends on a vast accumulation of source material," which means that it "opposes itself to the search for origins" (76–77). Thus the literary fact is a structure that should be interrogated to find not its originary truth value but instead its possibilities for transformative historical reinvestment. Rainey's emphasis on investigating facts on a site that is counterfactual with respect to origins thus strikes me as similar to Foucault's advocacy of the practice of "countermemory" as a way to "remember having been" (Castiglia, "Sex Panics," 160). Both oppositional practices emphasize the potential resistance of the fact as a way to leverage a history of relations against the disappearance of the everyday, and of communicative circumstances of transmission, behind official representations of history. I want to suggest that the productive tensions between the textualization of material fragments and the lived historical practices of countermemory can be read through the differential quality of the literary fact as what Christopher Nealon calls "ways of situating poetry in a 'matter' or medium so as to present the poem as an *event*— especially an event between reader and writer, but also between lover and beloved, teacher and initiate, friend and friend" (*Matter of Capital*, 125). By *event*, Nealon means here the creation of a shared social and historical site, a moment where the negativity of mediation becomes "matter" from which to create something like countermemory. His use of the term helpfully supplements, with a distinctly queer logic, my understanding of the event as a historical moment of opening material evidence to textualization.

That my project is engaged with such poetics as countermemory, an arrangement of actions after all, which has come to be recognized as a specifically queer structure of feeling in part because it is frequently deployed by queer thinkers as a mode of activism, means that I have necessarily turned to queer representational strategies—and queer theory as such—as a way into the difference that names the foundational work of the differential. Stein made from the event of textualization, the opening of her history, "an account of those who have been here" (Dydo, *Language that Rises*, 163), whose matter is the exchange of language or images in the differential form of countermemory. However, I did not choose the authors that each chapter examines because of their various identifications as queer, since that would suggest a single and totalizing way to identify or represent *as queer*. The sexual identities of Stein, Hughes, Spicer, and Goldin are less important to me than the way each approaches difference and incorporates it into the structure of the facts he or she makes literary. Queer thinking about difference has provided me with a way to approach differential poetics since there is no single point of refusal from which we can positivize *queer* as the locus of revolutionary energy in modernism. Instead, the multiple, dispersed, and embodied resistances that queer theory makes available are helpful models for the kind of heterotopias in which literary facts are constructed. Theorists like Chisholm and Samuel Delany both understand heterotopias as real countersites that are fundamentally queer because of the way that they practice difference without subsuming it; it is their differential quality that helps these spaces remain resistant. *Queering* figuration, the way that social and political horizons achieve form, to produce from these horizons heterotopic forms capable of producing and reproducing themselves, does not allow for the stabilization of a redemptive horizon on which the literary fact can be recuperated from its differential oscillation into a totalizing modernist tradition.

I want to briefly outline what I see as the major stakes in debates over figuration, queer logic, repetition, and social forms. Unlike some conceptions of, for example, Stein's work that would reduce the differential element of figuration to pure repetition, a consideration of the literary fact in its fullest social and historical sense, through cultural poetics and narratives of transmission, introduces contingency and negativity into formalization. In Leo Bersani's view, recounted in *The Freudian Body*, a poetics is an inherently anti-queer logic because it attempts to formalize and structuralize the "mobile repetitions of an eroticized text" (52). Steinian repetition, or Spicer's more stuttering variety, thus becomes not a differential site of multiple refusal structured by the articulation and construction of resistant facts, but the bearer of a formalism that recapitulates the Oedipal process. In this case it would be tempting to read Stein's experimental work as a site where what is arguably most queer about her—the way that her language becomes differential by giving body to difference, and giving that difference to the facts she represents—"is neutralized through a discourse inspired by structural linguistics" (Bersani, 64). And despite Spicer's training in structuralist linguistics, one might be thus tempted to read his awkward, variant, stuttering repetitions as the immobilization of resistant queerness by poetic form—"my vocabulary did this to me." A critical poetics, however, such as Stein and Spicer undertook in their work with the production of differential literary facts, is meant to disrupt such reductions by reprogramming language to support an order of facts produced by and productive of difference. So rather than neutralizing difference, as Bersani asserts, authors like Stein and Spicer activate the repetitions of their respective texts by eroticizing difference to mobilize and disperse what is most queer within their forms throughout the structure and field of the work.

Throwing the site of production onto the differential axis is a project that shares certain sympathies with what Judith Halberstam, thinking through Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, calls "perverse presentism." This is a methodology well-suited to alternative propositions of knowledge that denarrativize facts and factuality and the seemingly self-evident ways we have come to recognize them. Materialist queer interventions like those attempted by Stein and Spicer use language to disrupt and "denaturalize the present" (Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 48). The "order of things" (ibid.), as Sedgwick terms it, works through language, and by creating literary facts an author can use language to effect the actual reordering of factuality and its real social implications, as Spicer hoped to do. Such reorderings result in what Sedgwick called "nonce taxonomies," wherein facts find form and come to signify "perverse presently" according to the forms they have effected.[1] The present, denaturalized by facts rendered literary in language, prevents us from re-establishing such differential facts as "a coherent set of terms" that is not a critical poetics at all (Halberstam, 54). In other words, when we understand the present as a set of facts determined by language, or, in Goldin's case, as a presentation of images, we cannot ignore the potential ways difference can always destabilize discourses. If we do, we risk simply limiting experimental work to the kind of presentist analyses that, according to Halberstam, "actually seek to find what they think they already know" (ibid.).

Finally, the title of this dissertation is taken from Luce Irigaray's foundational critique of the phallic economy of representation, *This Sex Which is Not One*. In it, Irigaray uses

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[1] Even the word "nonce" has a second life as a British slang term meaning "pervert"; to allow "nonce" to truly belong to a nonce order of facts, it is necessary to admit that definition, to accept the risk of associating queer "flamboyant" knowledges with their corresponding hateful stereotypes. Unless "nonce" means in its full sense, there can be no "perverse presentism," and then there can be no nonce taxonomies without the present having first been perverted.

feminine sexuality as a model for alternative representational strategies that neither reduce all representation to the "absolute power of form" (the phallus) nor rely upon representational systems or structures that neutralize constitutive difference in order to produce textual/historical coherence (*This Sex*, 110). "Prior to any representation," Irigaray writes, "we are two" (216), but because of the threat that difference poses to the order of things, "woman serves (only) as a *projective map* for the purpose of guaranteeing the totality of the system—the excess factor of its 'greater than all' … serves as fixed and congealed *intervals* between their definitions in 'language,' and as the possibility of *establishing individual relationships* among these concepts" (108). Irigaray avoids essentializing the feminine or *woman* by making the structural function of these categories within the prevailing signifying economy clear. "Their history, their stories," she writes, "constitute the locus of our displacement … their fatherland, family, home, discourse, imprison us in enclosed spaces where we cannot keep on moving" (212). The figure of woman functions as the *matter* of constitutive difference that prevailing economies of representation—narratives of monumental history—have traditionally found so threatening because of its potentially transformative effects on factuality and thus on systems of order. The necessity, then, is to reopen facts to make them "render up" difference. Irigaray proposes doing this is a way that is correspondent to Foucault's genealogy, Rainey's counterfactual histories of transmission, and Rancière's literary disincorporation:

> One way is to interrogate *the conditions under which systematicity itself is possible:* what the coherence of the discursive utterance conceals of the conditions under which it is produced, whatever it may say about these conditions in discourse. For example the 'matter' from which the speaking subject draws nourishment in order to produce itself, to reproduce itself; the *scenography* that makes representation feasible, representation as defined in philosophy, that is, the architectonics of its theater, its framing in space-time, its geometric organization, its props, its actors, their respective positions, their dialogues, indeed their tragic relations … All these are interventions on the scene; they ensure its coherence so long as they remain

uninterpreted. Thus they have to be reenacted, in each figure of discourse, in order to shake discourse away from its mooring in the value of 'presence.' (74–75)

"Interventions on the scene" are never obscured when we read literary space as heterotopic, introducing constitutive difference into the signifying economy so that this space can emerge. Using poetics as an interrogative method is meant to create productive heterotopias that undermine the coherence of discursive utterance in the text of this dissertation itself. The move to heterotopias as differential spaces is a way of reenacting figuration as a poetic history that challenges the authority of the prevailing signifying economy by using material literary facts. Hence, this queer and feminist inflected methodology seeks to transform our reading of modernity by ushering it into heterotopias in which the poetics of literary fact produce multiple modernisms in difference.

III. The Making of Transatlantic American Modernisms

Crucial to my consideration of a transatlantic American archive in modernity is the tension between an Adornian modernist tradition that privileges the negative and the aesthetic and a more Foucauldian modernism centered on discourse and radically mobile desire. History is both negative and unrepresentable but also radically transformative, in Jameson's formulation, and Benjamin's question of the production of a new aesthetic object emerges in the twentieth century as inseparable from its participation in the discursive structuring of history. By positing the non-realist textualization of fact as a modernist mode grounded in Benjamin's *Passagenwerk* poetics, I hope to foreground both a non-redemptive reading of Benjamin, one that accounts for the investment of historical objects with desire, and also a non-recuperable reading of the modern avant-garde aesthetic. Transatlantic modernity is, after all, a way of practicing history, not simply a formal strategy. It is an arrangement of actions, an archive that continues to be made and remade as we interrogate the transmission as a fact as well as the poetic histories it tells in the literary facts it transmits.

Thus, multiple modernisms are required in order to account for the subject matter of the literary fact and the difference constitutive of this fact. Stein's expatriate modernism, her production of Americans from Europe, and then her textualization of a broken Europe from this newly-discursivized American sensibility provide multiple sites for interrogating modernist textual objects. Hughes's repeated Atlantic crossings, as well as the influence of both Popular Front and Black Internationalist sensibilities on his poetic production led him to create a work, in *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, that creates a new narrative of American facts within modernity. Spicer's letters to Lorca and his correspondence with the figure of Rimbaud ultimately return us to the immediate geography of San Francisco, of Polk Gulch and the Broadway tunnel, with new vocabularies to remake this terrain. Goldin borrowed from Benjamin fragments of intimate interiors and oppositional streets and used a language of light and shadows to remake cultural meaning as a collective practice, where the modern community is both the "subject matter" and the resistant object of previously invisible knowledges and histories. And although Tynjanov advocates for the endlessly differential "fusion of a constructive principle with the material," he also notes that "for every literary movement there comes the inevitable moment of historical generalization, when it is reduced to the simple and uncomplicated" ("Literary Fact," 46). I want to suggest that looking at modernity not only as a transatlantic formation but also *in the form of its transatlanticism* helps us to avoid reducing modernist literature, and with it the literary fact, to a simple and uncomplicated genre or historical generalization.

For Astradur Eysteinsson, modernism is the aesthetic embodiment of the crisis of representation. Matei Calinescu understands modernism as "the other modernity," and both concepts obtain in Benjamin's work, especially in "One Way Street." I want to suggest that the "crisis of representation" and the "other modernity," terms with which we have become

perhaps too comfortable, can combine, through Benjamin, to act on modernism in a way that does more than simply rename or redefine it. Just as recent theories of queer city practices examine the "everyday life of social space," joining social and desiring production in a Jamesonian overlay of modes, "One Way Street" uses this overlap in modes of production as a way for "the other" to emerge into history. "One Way Street" eventually becomes the *Passagenwerk*, a record of the "others" of modernity that emerges next to, beneath, and even superimposed upon the official city of monumental history. The *Passagenwerk* records the creation of what Kristin Ross, in *The Emergence of Social Space*, calls "a positive social void" (39) allowing for modernism to be an occupation of the moment of the materialist realization of history. Benjamin embodies the others of modernity, ghostlike in the Arcades, as the negative form the crisis of representation takes, through which the "other modernity" becomes textualized in the fabric of history. Occupying this moment of textualization, Tynjanov might argue, is the way that "revolutions usually burst through what is strictly speaking 'literature' and seize hold of the domain of everyday life" ("Literary Fact," 46).

Benjamin's interrogation of the material fragments of both the proletarian streets and the bourgeois interior served as a way to effect the emergence of a repressed tradition— modernity as a representational economy whose "other" is the production of "subject matter." There are, of course, other transatlantic modernisms and other, perhaps more strictly *modernist*, American modernisms that I could have used as exemplary texts. I do not mean to assert my choices, when viewed alongside this brief explication of why I understand transatlantic forms to be a crucial part of a full reading of American literary modernity, as the only texts where a poetics of literary fact can be found. I might also have read Hart Crane, Ezra Pound, H.D., Mina Loy, and the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. Certainly,

poets like Edna St. Vincent-Millay, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Marsden Hartley, Muriel Rukeyser and Charles Reznikoff, as well as visual artists like Lee Miller, Jean-Michel Basquiat, or Robert Mapplethorpe would have provided ample opportunities for finding and examining literary facts. The possibilities present in the transatlantic American archive of the twentieth century suggest that the Atlantic performs as a differential space in modernity that is not reducible to anything except for ongoing irruptions of difference in the structure we have come to call modernism. The constellation of timing, subject matter, alignments with my particular theoretical interests, and distinct historical moments of crisis led me to choose the examples that I did, which are further explained in the chapter outline below. Representations *in* crisis, such as those facing difference as a future at radically negative moments, can intervene in conventional accounts of modernist economies of signification, and looking at modernity as transatlantic is one way of putting its forms in crisis. Rancière argues that "it is possible to challenge a good many imaginary stories about artistic 'modernity' and vain debates over the autonomy of art or its submission to politics" (*Politics of Aesthetics*, 19). The differential has been concealed in modernity by these imaginary stories, but there are ways to disclose it: "The arts only ever lend to projects of domination or emancipation what they are able to lend to them, that is to say, quite simply, what they have in common with them: bodily positions and movements, functions of speech, the parceling out of the visible and the invisible" (ibid.). Transatlanticism, when viewed as modernity's constitutive difference, allows for zones of differential production like the literary fact to become critical modernisms, countersites that don't reify difference but account for it as the how and why of a cultural poetics of modernity.

Looking at modernity's transatlantic form, or looking at modernist forms "transatlantically" enbles us to think about modernity not strictly as a time period, but, with

Rancière, as a regime of art—"a specific type of connection between ways of producing works of art or developing practices, forms of visibility that disclose them, and ways of conceptualizing the former and the latter" (*Politics of Aesthetics*, 20). This way of relating to the past, that is, of conceiving of a literary or artistic tradition "is based on a distribution of spaces, times, and forms of activity that determines the very manner in which something in common lends itself to participation and in what way various individuals have a part in this distribution" (12). Thinking about the Atlantic as the basis for this distribution renames that specific type of connection a correspondence. "Things do not connect," Spicer wrote in *After Lorca*, "they correspond" and disperse across difference (*MV,* 133):

> That is what makes it possible for a poet to translate real objects, to bring them across language as easily as he can bring them across time. That tree you saw in Spain is a tree I could never have seen in California, that lemon has a different smell and taste, BUT the answer is this—every place and every time has a real object to *correspond* with your real object—that lemon may become this lemon, or it may even become this piece of seaweed, or this particular color of gray in the ocean. One does not need to imagine that lemon; one needs to discover it. (*MV,* 133–34)

This kind of "bringing across" language and time creates the outline of a space, a region that can't be represented as tradition but must be disclosed by its appearance in each work. This assertion of what Michael Davidson, in "Incarnations of Jack Spicer," calls "place as a dimension of experience" (115) is a crucial component of reading modernity in a transatlantic frame. At the same time, what both Rancière and Spicer seem to recognize is a non-place, an outside or heterotopia that doesn't positivize poetic tradition *as* a place; instead, it signals the new relationship to form that emerged from the region that the Atlantic Ocean opened in modernity. Tynjanov would call this opening "*not regular evolution, but a leap; not development, but a dislocation*" ("Literary Fact," 31).

Thus I am arguing that we use transatlantic modernity as a way to rethink "place" as a Benjaminian "perceptible region" of transmission, a zone for the production of literary facts. In *Words of Light*, Eduardo Cadava notes:

> As Benjamin puts it in the *Passagenwerk*, 'there is a kind of transmission that is a catastrophe.' This catastrophic transmission would be the one that works to articulate a single thing—whether it be the single meaning of a body, idea, community, people, nation, or leader. It would be the one that, mobilized in order to ensure the continuity and transfer of this single meaning, aligns itself with what Jean-Luc Nancy has called the phantasms of immediacy and revelation. (xxiv)

There can, therefore, also be a kind of archive that is a catastrophe, in other words, that articulates a single tradition and that appropriates each revision into itself to ensure the continuity of its meaning. While I am not proposing that transatlantic modernity be considered as the space for a paradigmatic "redemptive modernism," it is true that the Atlantic Ocean of modern textual production is a region not reducible to any of its poles; the literary facts that this region discloses present a heterotopic horizon that opens new readings not as guarantees but as warnings. Indeed, these facts in turn both disclose and create a modernity which is not one. The Atlantic, when thought as an intervention in modernist transmissions, "discloses the breaks, within history, from which history emerges … to delineate the contours of a history whose chance depends on overcoming the idea of history as a mere reproduction of a past" (Cadava, *Words of Light*, 60–61), and in turn recapitulates the role of the literary fact in Tynjanov's conception of literary evolution.

One of the ways that literary landscapes become historical—become regions—is that they are marked by material language when resistant facts become visible. Since it was not only, as Renov notes, the "waning of objectivity as a compelling social narrative" (*Subject of Documentary*, xvii) but also the emergence of a new subject, and thus new subject matter that marked documentary production in the twentieth century, it makes sense to investigate regions of production for the historical marks these subjects made. These new ways of

treating the subject matter of documentary evidence gained visibility differently on either side of the Atlantic but should be considered correspondent both in that difference and in the circumstances of their production. Fore notes how "documentary enterprises have always been drawn to the sites of rapid modernization and social reorganization" (introduction, 6), and offers as examples "the photographic archive of the Farm Security Administration, which captured premodern, small-town America at the moment of its extinction during the era of New Deal reforms" and also Soviet factography's fascination with "Magnitogorsk's feat of urban and social engineering" (7). In 1933, Langston Hughes translated Aragon's revolutionary poem titled, tellingly perhaps, "Magnitogorsk (Fragments)," which documented and celebrated the achievements represented by that new city. Hughes's translation of Aragon's poem opens to both Hughes's familiarity with the FSA archives and their documentation of his American history and Aragon's belief in the kinds transformative spaces that Benjamin also found in the arcades, as well as Aragon's renunciation of surrealism for a "better" revolution (which I would argue that "Magnitogorsk (Fragments)" in fact undermines); these histories touch each other in the differential space of translation to produce a literary fact, not an immediate revelation, but a structure that we can read back through to find new lines of transmission, new poetic histories, within the modernity that we think we know. What ultimately emerges are new modernisms, "dislocated" by the complications of what came after.

IV. Chapter Outline

Like Charles Olson's "archaeology of morning" or Jameson's "archaeology of the future," this mode of inquiry into differential structures, because of such vast accumulations and the shifting contexts and relations underlying them, is a necessarily provisional one, as is poetics more generally speaking. The poetics of literary fact that I propose finds its basis in

the inquiry and archive I have outlined above and reflects several important twentieth century social moments—World War I, the Harlem Renaissance, the Cold War, and the AIDS crisis—to illustrate how historical and social facts seek poetic form. These texts speak to each other as a series of challenges put to modernism by the very difference that its complications of language, realism, and fact disclosed. As such, the chapters approach "fact" through its manifestations in the socially inflected material language of family, war, community, personal history, and radical activism. The chapters are collected chronologically, beginning with World War I and ending in the Reagan era, yet resonances should weave in, around, and among the works presented in a way not determined by the twentieth-century timeline. The shift, with my final chapter, from poetry to visual art reflects my interest in finding a motivated connection across genres that create new languages using different forms of images; literature, strictly speaking, can't possibly be the only place where we ask questions about the literary fact. Documentary images demand, in a way that literature doesn't, a certain kind of interrogation of facts, as Rancière writes: "As a specific type of entity, images are the object of a twofold question: the question of their origin (and consequently their truth content) and the question of their end or purpose, the uses they are put to and the effects they result in" (*Politics of Aesthetics*, 20). This shift into the realm of images also calls into question the nature of literariness itself, and perhaps supports a definition closer to Rancière's "literarity" as a transdiscursive category. I begin in the work of Gertrude Stein to investigate how a literary fact is made, and then examine in turn how such facts are used, and, as such, continuously remade, to create alternative histories, habitable geographies, resistant communities, and possible futures. I do not mean to suggest that each chapter successively discovers or treats these listed outcomes, nor to imply that these are the only conclusions present in any given chapter. Rather, it is the making and remaking of

literary facts across founding moments of difference, as an active resistant textual practice, that interests me and that the chapter sequence presents.

My opening chapter, "The Differential Is Spreading: Reading Gertrude Stein's *Geography and Plays* as Literary Fact," examines Stein's 1922 collection of experimental texts, *Geography and Plays*, to establish how Stein creates literary facts by using gender and sexuality to introduce difference into language. The literary fact is the resulting expression of these relationships. In turn, Stein documents World War I and its destruction of her immediate social and geographical surroundings using this differential language, producing a work that is not reducible to either realist representation or material textuality. Employing Stein criticism by Ulla Dydo and Marianne DeKoven, as well as diverse meditations on the Great War from the work of Paul Fussell and Erich Maria Remarque, alongside French feminist thinkers like Monique Wittig and Luce Irigaray, I show how *Geography and Plays* as a text goes far beyond lesbian desire and presymbolic play and likewise beyond a simplistic reduction to high modernist "difficulty." The collected texts open Stein's entire body of work, as well as avant-garde modernism more generally, to further questions of abstraction and meaning and the problems of nonrealist representation in traumatic historical moments. War structurally echoes the form of the literary fact and enforces the mechanisms of evolution over and above the linear stasis of tradition, if we think in Tynjanov's terms. *Geography and Plays* is as much a document about Stein's history as it is an example of her aesthetic production; it is a literary fact that documents the intrusion of history into, and its effect upon, Stein's production. In so doing, I hope to recover an important textual moment in Stein's work that orients Stein studies toward the significance of geography and plays as nonrealist documentary modes. This additional focus works in concert with biographical, formalist, and

poststructuralist approaches to expand the field of Stein studies to include her own ongoing commitment to the complication of facts by grammar.

Chapter 2, "'Just Contact with the Facts': Langston Hughes's *Montage of a Dream Deferred*," examines how Hughes discovered differential space in narratives of self and community and then, after decades of experimenting with the implications of this discovery, composed a poem that challenged both realist modes of documentary representation and established narratives of modern blackness. *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951), is a long poem made up of lyrical fragments, "facts" of black modernity, re-collected on the contested site of Harlem to recapitulate the presence of the ever-deferred dream in black modernity's form. Hughes transforms Harlem into a literary fact, one where the imitation of fact, its representation, becomes the history of the fact itself. "As a poet," Anita Patterson notes in "Jazz, Realism, and the Modernist Lyric," "Hughes constantly tries to illustrate how formal qualities may assist an act of engaged social criticism" (655). Using Georges Bataille's concept of the *informe* as what is in excess of form and joining it to contemporary readings of the history and political uses of bebop forms from critics like Fred Moten and Eric Lott, along with a sustained look at Hughes's own formal and political commitments to the international black avant-garde through the work of scholars like Brent Hayes Edwards— who also contributes important insights on Bataille—this chapter shows how "intolerable facts" can interrupt standard progress narratives. Such interruptions disclose the differences that constitute modern blackness as an independently motivated form connected to, but not dependent on, its founding moment of trauma in American capitalism. This move away from the implicit symbolic commitments of realism, already established more generally in African American cultural criticism by thinkers like Moten and Edwards, enables Hughes

criticism to approach what is "more than realist" throughout his work and the ways he chooses to represent modern black experience.

In chapter 3, "Not Love But a Name: Geographies of Love and Fact in Jack Spicer's *Heads of the Town up to the Aether*," I argue that Spicer designed a poetics of literary fact around the idea of love that would undermine "the fix" of mid-century master narratives and their illusory connection to origins. Spicer presents an especially compelling example because of the way he translated the social outside of queerness and radical politics, implicit in all the works I examine, into an explicit textual form. In *Heads of the Town up to the Aether* (1960), Spicer sought to free love from language by casting it as the negativity that breaks language open to reveal its "outside," where the initial opacity of his poems can finally come to light. On one hand, the three sections of that book—"Homage to Creeley," "A Fake Novel About the Life of Arthur Rimbaud," and "A Textbook to Poetry,"—are difficult and often confrontational. In the first section, Spicer's use of footnotes seems intended to confound coherent meaning. But, as Rainey's comment suggests, such confounding also serves to make facts vulnerable: "We use footnotes, for example, not (as often thought) in order to amass 'facts' that 'prove' our point, but in order to specify in abbreviated form the transmissive [letter/across] dynamics that inform an exchange of testimonies—a kind of moral record of the communicative conditions we have created" (Rainey, *Ezra Pound*, 145–46). So on the other hand, the texts themselves are exceedingly vulnerable, much as Spicer thought that poets and poetry were, because of the misrecognitions that love and transmission open outside of language. But for an outsider, these misrecognitions are also potential futures. In "the city we create in our bar talk," Spicer's Orphic descent is thus not only into "our fuss and fury about each other," the part of the city that occurs in language, but also into the structures of misrecognition that are the absence of poetry. With help from

foundational Spicer scholarship from Michael Davidson, Kevin Killian, and Peter Gizzi, as well as Jean-Luc Nancy's theorizing of love *as* outside, we can develop a way of reading Spicer that takes into account, as Nancy puts it, that "love's name is not love" (Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 100) but is instead an utterance or event as vulnerable in the world as in the tangled and entangling geography of Spicer's poems. It is worth re-examining the critical reception of New American Poetry to see how and where poets like Spicer used the margins, the outsides that they lived, to develop a poetics that at one and the same time did not capitalize on their marginalization; this is a critical strategy that points away from Ginsberg's "Angelical Ravings," back toward Spicer's "guts" and John Weiners's "bloody hero." In arguing for such a reading of Spicer, I aim to reframe what it meant for poets like him to be outsiders and to encourage a reading of their practice that is not conceived in terms of alienation but in terms of vulnerability as agency.

Chapter 4 explores how Nan Goldin's vulnerable presentations contest and resist realist conceptions of authorship as well as dominant narratives of community, self, and history as she takes and circulates images among her group of friends in New York in the 1980s. "Documenting Disappearance: Exhibition, Community, and Nan Goldin's Challenge to the Authority of Fact" links Goldin's aesthetic practice to the cultural politics and material history of an outsider community in a specific place and time. The facts produced, and their relation to their practitioners, become the terms by which the aesthetic is constituted through the documentary impulse. When the images are viewed as facts through this new structure of memory that their initial appearance occasioned, and photographable objects become affective acts of collective consciousness, incomplete and beyond conventional strategies of representation. In this chapter, I consider the relationships between individual images and the contexts and ways in which they were taken and exhibited to show how

agency arises in the collective space—structured by light, darkness, intimacy, and loss—where Goldin's images work to establish a familiar past, a meaningful present, and a possible future for her community. I chose to turn to photography here because Goldin's use of images as an early transmedia storyteller connects to my ongoing interest in current and contemporary documentary media practices, especially in film, video, and trans/hyper-media. Using feminist and queer theoretical frameworks from Judith Butler, Elizabeth Grosz, and art historian Douglas Crimp, I then investigate "accounts of those who have been here," Goldin's contemporaries Luc Sante, David Wojnarowicz, and others, to better situate her cultural practice both theoretically and socially. Julia Kristeva's work on melancholy in *Black Sun* framed this chapter in its early stages, but more lately I have turned to Jonathan Flatley's ideas in *Affective Mapping* as a means to better understand the ways that light and shadows can effect collective transformations that challenge official regimes of fact. Flatley, thinking mood through Heidegger, writes: "It is through the changing of mood that we are most able to exert agency on our own singular and collective affective lives; and it is by way of mood that we can find or create the opportunity for collective political projects" (*Affective Mapping*, 20). Goldin's images thus make an affective documentary of bodies that have certain, but always possibly transforming, meanings within their social contexts as they simultaneously produce and register the affective marks of collective presence and disappearance. The payoff for both Goldin criticism and documentary studies appears in the way that the grammar of affect and the logic of presentation challenge the authority of documentary representation, a critical move supported by Rancière's concept of the "double poetics" of the image, which the chapter itself addresses at length.

My readings of both Michel de Certeau and Eduardo Cadava in relation to Goldin's work lead, in this final chapter, back to Benjamin. Writes Cadava: "Death, corpse, decay,

ruin, history, mourning, memory, photography – these are the words Benjamin has left for us to learn to read. These are the words that prevent his other words from being organized into a system, that prevent his writings and readings from being crystallized and frozen into a merely negative method" (*Words of Light*, 130). Likewise, my chapters are organized to be read less as a system dictating a specific modern/postmodern trajectory, but instead in ways that overlap, rhyme, and accumulate to evoke a collective heterotopic voice for the text. I hope the chapters themselves correspond across difference to produce and figure new readings founded in the differential poetics of the literary fact and its potential transformations of the ideas of literariness and the multiple modernisms that avant-garde texts have to offer us. Finally, the literary fact reveals the construction and presentation of multiple modernities as more than overcoming the crisis of representation or undermining realist documentary modes; they enact the relationships between cultural practitioners and cultural narratives in a way that intervenes in both discursive structures and their material effects, and posit transmission as an alternative to tradition.

CHAPTER 1.

The Differential Is Spreading:
Reading Gertrude Stein's *Geography and Plays* **as Literary Fact**

Part One: Beyond Abstraction

I. Material Language and the "Fact" of *Geography and Plays*

In 1922, Gertrude Stein published a collection of abstract work composed largely of portraits and plays written over the preceding decade. As an object of knowledge, *Geography and Plays* is often framed by attempts to consider the collection's content as an initial key to understanding its difficult modernist form. In most Stein criticism, the referential content is abstracted from the collection as a whole, then overcome, and critical analyses move to examining each text's formal features. In his work on *faktura* and Russian Constructivism, Benjamin Buchloh identifies a "utopian radicalism in the formal sphere" ("Faktura," 94) that could easily describe the overcoming move in Stein criticism that so strongly rejected referential content in order to establish—and then often discredit—Stein's work as "pure formalism." The text is frequently cited as literary cubism, an assemblage of words that have individual meanings—meant to be deciphered—but that ultimately points back to a meaning in the assemblage that has little to do with the words that comprise it. Material language thus seems to find form in *Geography and Plays* as "the old positivist's dream" in which "matter generates its own representation without mediation" (90), the radical utopian formalism for which Stein has been both lauded and condemned. In her work, however, material language is precisely the mediation between matter and its representation that cannot be dissolved or reabsorbed into either category. Facts find their own form, but only in language, and Stein makes a fact of language itself so that its mediation can never disappear into positivist fantasy. I want to argue against the logic of overcoming (either residual referential content or unquestionable form or both) in order to examine *Geography*

and Plays as a textual object that privileges neither content nor form. Instead, *Geography and Plays* foregrounds the differential textual site where content and form intersect to produce "facts."

I am examining *Geography and Plays*, rather than Stein's more obviously documentary *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, bearing in mind Foucault's proposition that "knowledge is not made for understanding, it is made for cutting" ("Nietzsche," 88). By that, Foucault means that any facts produced by a text (of any kind) should not answer our questions but should be mobilized to question the very reading that disclosed them. In *Geography and Plays*, form varies from piece to piece, and so to read this collection of texts one must produce some abstract continuity in order to account for Stein's seemingly endless textual play. Faced with such a demand for abstraction, oftentimes Stein criticism retreats to her biography to solve the very formal problems that the text produces. The referential content of *Geography and Plays* includes Stein's marriage to Alice Toklas, her friendship and fellowship with artists like Picasso, her travels throughout Europe, and the great upheaval brought about by World War I, all of which are conveniently established by the *Autobiography*. Thus, despite having left behind *Geography and Plays*' necessary but troublesome referential content—because it suggests that one cannot approach Stein's texts without help from Stein herself—many critics have read *Geography and Plays* in the final instance thematically: it is a feminist text, a lesbian text, a cubist text, a language text, a formally difficult modernist text. The text is either abstractly formal or referentially thematic. After any one of these readings has been established as the preexisting fact of the text, its radical formal difference can be resolved in the critical unification of authorship. The pieces frequently extracted from this *Geography and Plays*—"Susie Asado," "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene," and, to a lesser extent, "Ada" and "Pink Melon Joy"—have typically been grouped together under the rubric of Stein's lesbian

sexuality, leading to readings that limit Stein's experimentalism to a regressive, semiotic, expression of her repressed—avowed but heavily encoded—sexual desires.

Other critics, like Michael North in *Reading 1922*, prefer not to deal with *Geography and Plays* at all. North acknowledges the collection's appearance in 1922, but then treats only its periphery, discussing Sherwood Anderson's introduction to the work and Stein's response, "Idem the Same: A Valentine for Sherwood Anderson," first published in the *Little Review* in 1923. North extends his discussion of "A Valentine" to reflect on the time of its composition, but ends up at the work's most famous lines: "Very fine is my valentine and mine,/very fine very mine and mine is my valentine." These lines leave us far outside of *Geography and Plays* but are presumably thematically connected to the 1922 collection by, again, Stein's love for Toklas. Furthermore, while the individual pieces of *Geography and Plays* may be known, anthologized, and recognized, the text is not considered—as a whole— historically important as a published work of 1922. When we consider Stein's collection alongside *The Waste Land* or *Ulysses*—both of which are equally formally challenging and referentially dense—we can see how the non-responses to Stein's text might be a result of criticism's relatively narrow register of facts about it. North's own non-response is telling; approaching density by way of reduction is a strategy that is in the end fairly transparent.[2] In such readings, the desire to critically account for the variation and abstraction of *Geography and Plays* leads away from the collection's commitment to material language, back to the conclusion that the work means precisely what critics have already decided it should mean.

With its release as a book in 1922, however, *Geography and Plays* became a material fact as well as a textual object. The book was made fact—happened—in 1922, constructed

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[2] I think it would be similar to writing that Eliot's long poem is "about fascism," "about authoritarianism," or "about mythic redemption," or that Joyce's novel is the 800 page story of a hand job.

as a collection, an accumulation of distinct textual facts locked together in a relationship not only of thematic unity but also of foregrounded material difference. I want to argue, in what follows, that the differential relationship that characterizes *Geography and Plays* as a material text also structures this text as a literary fact defined by its existence between aesthetic and social, or textual and referential, orders. That is to say, *Geography and Plays* as a text goes far beyond lesbian desire and presymbolic play and likewise beyond the paradigm of modernist difficulty. The text accesses Stein's entire body of work in a way that opens larger questions of meaning and problems of representation that make up literary facts. *Geography and Plays* is as much a document about Stein's history as it is an example of her aesthetic production; it documents the intrusion of history into, and its effect upon, Stein's textual production. The event that *Geography and Plays* works parallel to in its form is World War I, a fact *in* the history of her aesthetic production. The collection reproduces her positions in relation to the facts from which narratives of the war are composed, as well as to the failure of narrative that is the war's primary trauma. World War I breaks the collection into two distinct pieces—before and after—even as it simultaneously condenses the texts that comprise it around a singular, radically negative, event, the rupture of the war. The Great War enabled Stein to formally conceive of difference by undermining the organizing patriarchal authority of history, of society, and finally, of the text. Hence, *Geography and Plays* delivers a sense of World War I as an event in a way that the retrospective coherence of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* cannot. "In short," Stein recalls in the latter work, "in this spring and early summer of nineteen fourteen the old life was over" (*SW*, 134). The Great War did more for Stein than simply confirming what she already knew about modernity and its forms; it helped her to put the differential in *difference* by introducing history into form itself, where, as North

puts it, "something uncanny and strange had been exposed within the everyday" (*Reading 1922*, 204).

Pair Stein's vision of the possibilities of the textual field with her tireless recording of her own life in notebooks, journals, and later, published texts, and what appears is poetics at the intersection of historical documentation and aesthetic form. The activity of composition renders up, as document, material that crosses over into the aesthetic order. My reading revisits *Geography and Plays* to read the collection as a site constructed of literary facts, a differential space out of which Stein coaxes a formally and socially meaningful avant-garde poetics. By "differential," I mean to refer to Tynjanov's use of the term as a quality expressing the inscription of difference, that is, describing the way that difference is an activity of negotiation between orders of factuality. The literary fact is more than just a constructivist concept that reaffirms avant-garde literariness; it conveys the negotitation that I call differential without reifying the difference that results. I understand the literary fact as a basic unit of literature's social form, wherein poetics is not merely the construction of the made thing but is also the inscription of that textual form within the history of its social production. By using the literary fact, Stein commits to modernism in its fully social sense, documenting where the fact enters into (or comes out) into modernity in and as language. *Geography and Plays* marks the convergence of material textuality, queer sociality, aestheticism, and the disrupted grammar of modernism on the differential scene of transnational modernity.

By the time she began composing the works that would appear in *Geography and Plays,* Stein had already set the stage for a refigured sociality by working through some of the social implications of non-normative grammar and narrative order in *The Making of Americans*. That text, composed for the most part between 1906 and 1911, embarks on a genealogical

expedition to locate Americans via a certain set of facts: the "few words that have 'really existing being'" (DeKoven, *Different Language*, 56). These words become facts, "really existing being," because they have "many meanings many ways of being used to make different meanings to everyone" (ibid.). The ideal literature, for Stein, was "a book which asks questions of everyone" (Dydo, *Stein Reader*, 3). To attempt to write a genealogy of all Americans, as she did with *Americans*, was for Stein an attempt to construct a semantically unstable, but at the same time stabilizing, field against which the modern American—in this case Stein herself—would be constantly posited and in turn questioned. Crucially linked in this questioning were the issues of society and identity that appear thematically in the text, but which Stein also locates in the uneasy relationship of her words to the linguistic multitudes comprising the language-based societal field. Stein situated the making of *The Making of Americans* in the "spatial-temporal paradigm" that for her was "typical of both America and the twentieth century," what Stein called a "space of time filled with moving" (ibid.). This movement registered as one's relationship to social structures when both the self and the structures were transfiguring into modern forms. This is not merely the intersection of the modern individual with staid, traditional society, nor is it the typically modern crisis of human consciousness in industrial society, the divide that referential language sets out to describe and repair. Nor is it realism. Stein's crisis of representation is not so simple; its implied result locates the individual figure in strange, differential proximity to the founding trauma of modernity and of the subject itself, where the individual may be both reconstructed and reconstituted grammatically. Grammar, in *The Making of Americans*, is at once non-referential and the expression of "one," forging this strange and disturbing link.

Figuring a new order of modernist facticity appears in Stein's work as a process that refuses fixed functions in both social space and the text. For Stein, this was important

because it offered a way to be, and to further imagine being, in the social landscape of the twentieth century. "Far from partaking of [a] narrative movement toward a viable political future," *The Making of Americans* enacts a figural process like the one Lee Edelman, in *No Future*, names as "queer": "Far from perpetuating the fantasy of meaning's eventual realization," this paradigmatically modernist text "comes to figure the bar to every realization of futurity, the resistance, internal to the social" (Edelman, *No Future*, 4), which for Stein meant internal to social history and patriarchal forms. Edelman's formulation is helpful in that he makes explicit what is implicit throughout Stein's work, from the earliest experimental texts to the later, more traditionally structured, memoirs. Sociality, the way that "one" relates to others and to the world, is constituted through regular textual forms, and that "one" is subjected to them constitutes subjectivization. Non-normative narratives of self, such as Stein constructs in *The Making of Americans*, model a subject grammatically freed from regulation by narrative into the world of textual objects.

For Stein, patriarchy designated an ordered "system of relations and values" devoted to fixed and rigid definitions (Dydo, *Language That Rises*, 139). This was a "way of putting things together" that "did not distinguish gender and sexuality," but rather delivered them as a complete, named, unalterable subjectivity (ibid.). By figuring social facts not already thus "pre-packaged" by patriarchy, Stein was attempting to rearrange intimate and social landscapes and contexts, things like familial structures, to produce new ways of making sense. In *The Making of Americans*, this rearrangement manifested in the text's structure of desire, its "insistence on repetition, its stubborn denial of teleology, its resistance to determinations of meaning … [and] to reproductive futurism" (Edelman, *No Future*, 27). Borrowing this description from Edelman's analysis helps us see how Stein's non-normative narratives resist resolution and recognition, offering instead an endlessly oscillating self,

"one" continuous with both textual and historical worlds. This "one" is a subject who doesn't fit into and who cannot use fixed patriarchal typology. Through the nonstandard syntax and stretched grammar of *The Making of Americans*, Stein renders continuous the literary and non-literary and refuses us the relief of narrating ourselves away from our founding trauma as "not-one," offering instead only a narration that tumbles unstoppably into its desiring structure. We could say that, for Stein, *The Making of Americans* was a project for tracing the way that identity, sociality, and grammar come to form as facts in the material text. From its surface emerges the document of a material text coming to social form.

In Ulla Dydo's detailed readings of Stein's *carnets*, we find extensive meditations on the legal, financial, and moral implications of variously structured family configurations. Questions of "property and propriety," for Stein, emerged from the intersection between public and private lives, and in turn helped to generate her own dynamic definition of sociality (*Language That Rises*, 451). Textually, *The Making of Americans* locates Stein as a "no longer … private person meditating in the landscape but a resident in a house and a part of the social landscape" (ibid.). The dual definitions of "house" as both a physical and familial structure open the possibility that Stein's linguistic constructions acted dually as well: materially, on the page, and also socially, to build for Stein a history of her position in her brother Leo's "house" and an opposition to that history at one and the same time. Stein absorbed the social and historical facts of her situation and transformed them into material language for use in composition. In so doing, Stein renders these facts "literary." The rigid, dogmatic lineage of patriarchal houses and history is not a facticity that Stein can use. Her situation in relation to this structure leads not to knowledge but to questions, problems, and openings—that is, to difference. I would argue, however, against the feminist readings of Stein in which her inability to engage with the patriarchal ground results in a reversion to

non-sensical, "presymbolic playfulness" (DeKoven, *Different Language*, 84). Rather, Stein figured facts useful for constructing, and reflective of her vision of, the differential social landscape in which she could make sense.

"There is not more than one of most of us," Ulla Dydo writes, "—or is there?—but there is more than one Gertrude Stein. There is Gertrude Stein to read in printed books. There is *Gertrude Stein* (1906), oil on canvas, by Pablo Picasso. There is Miss Gertrude Stein, an American lady living in Paris. There are three sitting here, in the studio at 27 rue de Fleurus" (*Language That Rises*, 167). If, as Dydo seems to propose, we can read Gertrude Stein herself as a literary fact—material, semiotic, and situated between language, representation and context—it makes sense to ask how this fact functions in her compositions. Facticity is not a pure object discovered prior to or at the end of textual production; it comes to us through abstraction, which effects the kind of continuity that frees the subject from being normalized by narrative processes. It is helpful here to think, with Barrett Watten, of Stein's abstraction as "a consequence of social relations" (*Constructivist Moment*, 126): "It is a mediation of form within modernity, not a site of transcendental reflection from a critical distance opposed to it" (ibid.). If abstraction is a consequence of social relations, *The Making of Americans* can't be read as a record of pure, semiotic subjectivation; likewise, the textual abstraction of *Tender Buttons* is not purely "objectist" in the sense that Charles Olson proposed it, emptied of the "lyrical interference" of the subject and his soul (*Collected Prose*, 247). In "Projective Verse," Olson calls for the poet to become object and to hear "through himself … the secrets that objects share"; "by an inverse law," Olson continues, "his shapes will make their own way" (ibid.). Facts find form, Olson seems to suggest, when the mediating subject has been removed. But for Stein, the self, the subject, was never "found" in *Americans* so much as it was disclosed in language

through Stein's processing of familial structures, and so it cannot be simply abandoned or disavowed in *Tender Buttons*, since language is also the way that objects disclose their "secrets." "The poet is himself an object," writes Olson (ibid.), a claim that Stein might well dispute, as we can see in *The Making of Americans* as yet another way to naturalize patriarchal definitions of subject, object, fact, and self by attempting to remove from the equation the language through which one *becomes* any of these things. Language is, for Stein, the secret life of the object and the subject, and it is what does not permit us to categorically reduce the world of facts. Linking these two major early works helps us to clarify the way in which abstraction emerges as a formal consequence of dismembering the familial given of social relations. The former text set the conditions for denarrativizing the normative self, while the latter text showed how self could be reconstituted as a literary fact. Stein used the process of composing *Tender Buttons*, with its focus on objects, rooms, and food, to move away from questions of subjectivity towards writing that becomes object-like, "form within modernity," the better to highlight the continuity between a text and its facts, the process by which language becomes material.

Dydo reads the materiality of *Tender Buttons* in Stein's "tenderly receptive" attitude toward the "world whose words she composes" (*Language That Rises*, 88). In that text's opening passage "A carafe, that is a blind glass," this tender receptivity may be how "the difference is spreading": "A kind in glass and a cousin, a spectacle and nothing strange a single hurt color and an arrangement in a system to pointing. All this and not ordinary, not unordered in not resembling" (*SW,* 461). Instead of imposing a formalist code upon linguistic material, Stein listens—for alliteration, for "arrangement in a system"—for the "difference" that spreads via language into the object world, and then back again. Here, the literary fact appears in the content of the objects that make up the individual pieces and

informs the space where these objects are composed—or recomposed—between material text and social history. In kind, we see Stein's identity reflexively coming to form "out of the materials of language" (Watten, *Constructivist Moment*, 118); we can therefore avoid reading in Stein's formal constructions "a displaced disavowal of identity" (ibid.). Loss of the subject is part of the textual process, for Stein, of narrative deregulation, but it is not the end result of this process. Stein's poetics of literary fact uses the differential site made possible by denarrativization to experiment with the social lives of objects, an act of simultaneous finding and placing that refuses the indifference of materials by redefining the orders of materiality and fact. Denaturalizing the object world, as Stein did in *Tender Buttons*, is a crucial part of this process, a Foucauldian "history of the present" that undertakes an examination and "analysis of those objects given as necessary components of our reality" (Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 53). This process appears in "Objects" as: "The sight of a reason, the same sight slighter, the sight of a simpler negative answer, the same sore sounder the intention to wishing, the same splendor, the same furniture" (*SW*, 463). "Reason" becomes the more material "furniture," while its "sight" simultaneously dissolves into the subject-lacking "intention to wishing"—this internal difference conditions what Stein now means by fact.

Marianne DeKoven characterizes *Tender Buttons* as a work of "lively words" that "functions anti-patriarchally": "As presymbolic *jouissance* and as irreducibly multiple, fragmented, open-ended articulation of lexical meaning" (*Different Language*, 76). I appreciate DeKoven's distinction here that "lively words" *function* anti-patriarchally, as it does not imply Stein's gender is somehow inherently expressed in her language. "Lively words" function similarly to the literary fact as a site of what DeKoven calls "double contact," which gives the words "tension and energy" (78). She goes on to read "A substance in a cushion" as "characteristic of 'lively words'" (ibid.). There is tension between a cushion, which bears

imprint, is receptive even, and substance, "a seal and matches and a swan and ivy and a suit" (*SW,* 462). But then "is there not much more joy in a table and more chairs and very likely roundness and a place to put them?" (ibid.). Whether there is or is not "much more joy" in substance is troubled by the fact that there is very likely much more joy in the cushiony "roundness." For DeKoven, this double contact prevents a purely "objectist" reading of *Tender Buttons*, as the point of contact is a subject "concentrating simultaneously on an 'outside' and an 'inside'… to have the effect of cutting the language loose from coherence but not from meaning" (*Different Language*, 79). Here, "outside" names material history and "inside" the genealogy of Stein's subjectivity, so that Stein offers in these object lessons a kind of materialist genealogy of "one." This site of double contact is not the subject but the social subject; language constructs both the self and its context, and where the self is made of the same material as that which situates it, the subject becomes permeable and imprecise, constructed from the very matter through which it would also guarantee itself. When composing "Rooms," Stein was certainly receptive to the possibilities of this site:

> If comparing a piece that is a size that is recognised as not a size but a piece, comparing a piece with what is not recognised but what is used as it is held by holding, comparing these two comes to be repeated. Suppose they are put together, suppose that there is an interruption, supposing that beginning again they are not changed as to position, suppose all this and suppose that any five two of whom are not separating suppose that the five are not consumed. Is there an exchange is there a resemblance to the sky which is admitted to be there and the stars which can be seen. Is there. That was a question. There was no certainty. Fitting a failing meant that any two were indifferent and yet they were all connecting that, they were all connecting that consideration. This did not determine rejoining a letter. This did not make letters smaller. It did. (*SW*, 501)

Stein seems to want to illustrate the provisionality of the site in her pauses and her stutters. Any two were indifferent and connecting, but connecting what? Stein can only offer the answer as a "consideration." Posed in this passage as a question about the connection between genealogy and materiality, "consideration" does not propose a solution to double

contact but instead works to produce a new kind of object "that is a blind carafe." In the "blind carafe," we can discern the outline of a literary fact as conducting object, one that, in this case, works between *The Making of Americans* and *Tender Buttons.* This fact is a matter of constant figuration and refiguration around these tender sites that in turn yield the contours of form. The earlier text comes out of the social context of history and geography and moves into form, asserting itself thus as too much language, which then becomes the fact of the "one" it produces. *Tender Buttons* takes up this language and makes it into an object— form becomes the fact produced by the work of the text. Thus the subject—"one," but also the word/thing that designates "one"—arrives at *Geography and Plays* as a literary fact. Its function is neither purely biographical nor formally autonomous; rather, the literary fact is a site of contact, a zone, where Stein's particular facticity comes into view.

II. Composition as Denarrativization

In *Geography and Plays,* as the title might suggest, formal and social concerns exist always in differential; that is, one never precedes or follows the other. The composition of such a text must happen in the provisional space between abstraction and narrative, in the mode of "nonnarrative" that accounts for the differential structure of the site of production in the act of production. The text itself is a differential formation in which the play of texts around the rent geography of a world at war figures the literary fact. A number of critics have theorized "differentials," including Marjorie Perloff in her work of that title, and Jerome McGann in *The Romantic Ideology.* Perloff argues for a differential reading strategy in which readers remain open and receptive to the polyvalences and "play" of a work displaced from both strict formalist and cultural studies positions. In "Gertrude Stein's Differential Syntax," Perloff extends her concept beyond the role of the reader and into the composition of the work. In Perloff's analysis, differentials move into Stein's syntax as participles, the

"living" "cultivating" "learning" and "telling" of "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene," for example (*21ˢᵗ-Century Modernism*, 60). Considered in light of Stein's tentative advance toward participles in *Tender Buttons*, where "intention to wishing" still retains the agency of intention and wishing has not yet been released into its purely participial form, Perloff's reading supports my claim that Stein used her earlier work to prepare her language for its deployment in material differential space. Still, for Perloff, the "characteristic constructions" of Stein's differential syntax "depend on the placement of ordinary words in what are usually simple declarative sentences that combine in a tightly interlocking paragraph" (62); that is, "differential syntax" here functions as DeKoven's "lively words"—within the text. This functioning could be considered "poetic" in the sense that it is a matter of "the suspension of reference in the defamiliarization of form" (Watten, "What I See," 100). The differential aspect of the text remains in the syntax of the autonomous poem, without any attempt to redistribute the difference it effects onto the scene of either composition or reception. McGann, on the other hand, argues for a historicized differential "which separate[s] every present from all the past—by virtue of those differentials which draw the present and the past together across the field of concrete and particular differences" (*Romantic Ideology*, 14). I want to combine these readings to argue that there is a historically specific geography of differentials that corresponds to its play. In this way, Stein extends the zone of double contact, rematerialized by language into history and geography. This extension moves the textual horizon beyond the assertion of difference to difference's consequence in order to show how differential processes act as a material genealogy of references that destabilizes referentiality—in other words, how "the difference is spreading."

If the literary fact contours a site of experience as a kind of double contact, and produces, for Stein, literature that is all "to me me" (Dydo, *Language That Rises*, 7), for

according to Monique Wittig, "each time I say 'I,' I reorganize the world from my point of view" (*Straight Mind*, 81), then this must be an oddly tender site of receptiveness and yielding, where experience is both material for composition and, at the same time, that impossibility around which figural forms gather. Stein represents not things but her relations to things, not the social but her relation to the social; these relations can only be drafted into composition as facts of a certain kind: the literary. Stein employs the objects in, and references from, her current landscape. Out of this double contact we may begin to conceive of Steinian repetition as a differential production of the relationship between Stein and the world that surrounds her. The "tea" in "Susie Asado" is not simply "sweet"; it is "Sweet sweet sweet sweet sweet," a line of description that leaves the plane of referentiality and tells us, instead, about the position of the tea in Stein's differential geography (*GP,* 13). The word's semiotic center is shattered and dispersed, again, not for its own sake but as a disclosure of the form's origin in difference, in consequence. This is abstraction within a narrative that is initially referential, where "sweet" becomes abstract as a consequence of social relations: the fact of "sweet" is always locked into a differential relation that begins with its existence as what is sweet, what makes Stein ecstatic, disrupts the sense of "sweet tea" with its overwhelming sweetness, agitated and finally sexual. The other side of this differential is the side of material language in the text: there, "tea" is what resolves the phrase, what first causes "sweet" to be applied as well as what brings the phrase to close at an object and a finishing sound. "Tea" is the back of the word "sweet," turned around to close the sentence but always pointing back towards its textual origins. "This is a please this is a please there are the saids to jelly" repeats the opening phrase once before Stein tells us that *there* are the "saids to jelly," *there*, in that repetition, where language transforms from something simply said to a trembling, yielding—and frankly sexual—*thing*. Somewhere

between recording facts and experimenting with language the text itself becomes a conducting object. In this contact zone, Stein calls forth facts as pairs of words—"sets"—until this becomes a method for composition. Much like Walter Benjamin's dream of the Surrealists' use of objects, Stein was able to find "revolutionary energies in outmoded things—how the poverty of interiors, enslaved and enslaving objects, can be transformed" by language (Benjamin, "Surrealism," 181).

"Susie Asado" is the first portrait to appear in *Geography and Plays*. Composed in Spain in 1913—and one of seven portraits in the collection written that same year—"Susie Asado" marks a moment, for Stein, where she seems to have condensed all the elements of her portraiture into this single succinct work. The piece incorporates the sexual connotations of "A Sweet Tail" (65) and "In the Grass" (75) with the meditations on nationality in "Americans" (39), "England" (82), and "France" (27), all written in 1913. Earlier portraits like "Ada" (14) and "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene" (17) appear in the context of "Susie Asado" as precursors to the later work, displaying neither the urgency nor the sense of historical context that infused Stein's work as she traveled to Spain on the brink of the war. The portraits, especially 1913's "Susie Asado," offer an approach to *Geography and Plays* that allows us to read Stein's pre-war compositions as expressions of her desire to be freed from narrative and national regulation, and to read in these compositions that textual apparatus she had prepared to dismantle a sociality constituted by forms. The majority of works in *Geography and Plays* that were composed before World War I were portraits; given that most of the works composed after the war were plays, it makes sense to say that Stein considered these portraits to be a kind of geography, maps of textually disrupted selves. "Every *modern* culture and person," Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes, "must be seen as partaking of … a 'habitation/nation' system" (*Tendencies,* 147). This system, which Sedgwick defines as "the set

of discursive and institutional arrangements that mediate between the physical fact that each person inhabits, at a given time, a particular geographic space, and the far more abstract, sometimes even apparently unrelated organization of … for instance, citizenship" (148), is what Stein set out to investigate and formalize in *The Making of Americans*; later, in the portraits, she could re-narrate how the modern person partook of identity. The decentering of narrative identity that we find in "Ada" becomes, by the time we get to "Susie Asado," a violent—and abrupt, at the opening of the collection—refiguring of referential content into a nearly unrecognizable subject. Sedgwick goes on to compare the "habitation/nation system," the way in which every person "has" a nationality, to the way in which every person "has" a gender, emphasizing that the process of mediation through which a person "has" is not the same for every person who "has" (ibid.). Stein, I want to argue, had seen this parallel as well in her play with discursive and institutional arrangements in *The Making of Americans*. Yet until the war, the mediator remained effectively hidden within entrenched narratives of nation, family, and identity. The possibilities of a differential site seem to have arisen, at least initially for Stein, out of her travels to Spain during 1912. Subsequently, the war offered "in the massive fact of itself a huge structure for the derealization of cultural constructs and, simultaneously, for their eventual reconstruction" (Scarry, *Body in Pain*, 137). Reading the portraits as the "first half" of *Geography and Plays* makes apparent Stein's precedent desire to textually enact what the war would allow her the opportunity to do: intervene in the "habitation/nation system" to disclose mediation as precisely the way that "having" a nationality, gender, or self—what we might call a fact—is always differential.

Between the first and second identical occurrences of "Susie Asado"'s opening line lies Susie Asado herself. Between the first and third occurrences lies the text of the portrait itself; Susie Asado is a text. Certainly she is also a "told tray sure," a told treasure as opposed

to a *tresor cache*, a common French idiom meaning "hidden treasure." In this portrait, what is told is no longer hidden. The pairs, the "sets" in "Susie Asado," "defamiliarize the writing, shifting the focus from private and sexual life to the words" (Dydo, *Language that Rises*, 191), themselves facts that now contain that private life, that sexuality, that transnationality, in the material form of the sets. How do we read "this mean slips slips hers"? In the way that affords it the most mobility and possibility. All of "this" writing "means" "hers," but Stein seems to pause here, narrating herself as she "slips slips" and lets slip this secret, this told treasure. The pair of "slips" explodes into the text as a differential site, no longer either language or reference but both—Stein acting textually, actuating text. A single "slips" would be a word—a loaded word, perhaps—but in a pair, the slips become literary fact. "Slips slips" becomes a self-enclosed unit of composition at a standstill, beginning and ending with the letter "s" and the limitless continuation of either the plural (if we read "slips" as a noun) or the ongoing act (if we read it as a verb). The "hers" following is invited into this suggestive opening; the "s" of "slips slips" may have run over into "hers," or "this" could "mean" about more than one "her." There is also a worthwhile Irigarayan reading in this pair, wherein the limitless, immeasurable "s" confounds the patriarchal naming of "lips" and enables them to truly speak together in a figure, always "hers," which is not one: the perfect expression of the feminist potential residing in the differential of the literary fact. Without the "s," "this means slip slip her," and while not necessarily barring the sexualized sense of the words, this version of it *would* enable a reader to exclude it if she so chose. Composition at the site of the literary fact—Stein's poetics—is a process of transforming personal vocabulary into the units of form that are never entirely free of their history of having been spoken. "When the ancient light grey" word of conventional—patriarchal—usage "is clean," in Stein's process of dissolution and dissolving, "it is yellow, it is a silver seller." The old

words, although cleaned, are subjected to a near-alchemical process by which the former "light grey" is never completely lost but is transformed to a brighter silver; no less, the ambiguous, descriptive phrase "light grey" is transformed a mere adjectival descriptor into a shining silver object—a "silver seller." The "silver seller" (a person, a thing that sells, an alternative spelling of cellar) then comes to life as a language object full of non-identical facts—it "has" meaning, but only the kind of meaning that undermines any system of making unified meaning. At the level of the individual words that construct the portrait, then, "Susie Asado" is a fact in the sense that William James describes:

> A conscious field *plus* its object as felt *plus* an attitude towards the object *plus* the sense of self to whom the attitude belongs … such a concrete bit of personal experience may be a small bit, [but] it is a solid bit as long as it lasts; not hollow, not a mere abstract element of experience, such as the 'object' is when taken all alone. It is a *full* fact … the motor-currents of the world run through the like of it. (Richardson*, Natural History,* 99)

In "Susie Asado," Stein doubly phenomenalizes James's determination of fact *as* language by rendering up in language the accumulated parts of the "full fact" as James lists them.

Without simply being excess, the order of facts that Stein produces out of the differential space between the words in her pairings are the "fragmented referential nuclei [that] give body to her life" (Dydo, *Language That Rises*, 19). The differential nature of the literary fact defies what Luce Irigaray calls "the absolute power of form," and becomes, in fact, "*what is in excess with respect to form*" (*This Sex*, 110). There is never simply a single historical, personal, or social fact in Stein's portraits, but many, kept from dispersion and incoherence that could be regrouped around a pure form by double contact. Destroying what Irigaray calls the "standardizing laws" of phallogocentric representation leads Stein to "releasing" a "second language" (ibid.), in Theodor Adorno's formulation, "a deteriorated associative language of things" (*Notes to Literature*, 35). This is an economy of representation outside of the phallic order, and I want to argue, from this point, that Stein's literary fact

arose from a specifically gendered kind of figuration and led to structurally gendered poetics. DeKoven, however, offers the argument that "throughout her radically experimental period…[Stein] essentially *thought of herself* as a man" (*Different Language*, 36; emphasis added), suggesting that Stein herself identified her most experimental forms in a way precisely opposite to how I have presented them above. If Stein, in fact, conceived of her experimentalism as a masculine form "and the concomitant suppression of her female identity," DeKoven argues that we could view the "shift of the rebellious impulse from thematic content to linguistic structure" as its textual parallel (37). Here, Stein's found masculinity enabled her to turn her attention to form, where finally, "the subversive implications of the writing are at once more powerful and more abstruse" (ibid.). But it is this very turn toward a form more readily subverted that undermines this simplified account of Stein's gender identification. Instead of declaring that her female self-hatred was such that she was psychologically compelled to identify herself as a man in order to be a happy, sexually active person and functioning writer, we might work *with* Stein's gender (mis)identification to conceive of Stein as queer: precisely the kind of identity that exists outside of prevailing economies of representation, that throws the axis of gender into differential space, as neither a man nor a woman. While I will address what *queer* means for Stein more fully later in this chapter, for now I want to propose that we think of Stein, by her own description husband to Toklas, as Judith Halberstam defines "the female husband": "She was both a kind of folk hero who lived a daring life of subterfuge and dissimulation, and a rebellious figure who usurped male power" (*Female Masculinity*, 67).

Michel Foucault suggests that "sexual epistemology accounts for the discursive fact as a way to knowledge production" (*History of Sexuality*, 33), and Stein's gender outlawry works to produce literary facts throughout *Geography and Plays* as a kind of non-patriarchal

counter-knowledge. Stein's denarrativization of identity echoes Wittig's feminist wielding of language as a force to change women's material conditions. For Wittig, this meant attempting to universalize the point of view of *elles* in *Les Guérillières* "not to feminize the world but to make the categories of sex obsolete in language" (*Straight Mind*, 85). *Elles*, the actual, material word, is an "assault," a "total war" on the text (ibid.). Inhabited by *elles* within and upon the text, *Les Guérillières* becomes a social form, *elles* the clearest example to date of the gendered literary fact. *Elles*, according to Wittig, "imposed an epic form, where it is not only the complete subject of the world but its conqueror" (ibid.). Wittig intended for *elles* to leave in its wake a demolished epic form and a transformed textual economy, like Stein's, a "forbidding text, rising from everywhere" asking of readers that they "read, read, and reread" (Dydo, *Language That Rises,* 66), adding to meaning but never adding up. This accumulation produces instead selves whose social "habitation/nation system" is a language composed of differential discursive facts and figured around the threat of mobilized sexualities.

The extent to which Stein troubles futurity in *The Making of Americans*, and identity in *Tender Buttons,* makes it frankly impossible to conceive of her later work in *Geography and Plays* as either stringent Oedipal formalizing or its validating opposites: "unintelligible textuality" and "failure to proceed" (Bersani, *Freudian Body*, 114). Here her experimental work must be read in experiment—perhaps in what Bersani later terms "agitated, erratic formalism" which, rather than "distracting us from an *historical* violence," alerts us to the figuration it necessitates (ibid.). Stein's development of the literary fact as a form could be seen as a project of what Sedgwick calls "nonce taxonomy": "The making and unmaking and *re*making and redissolution of hundred of old and new categorical imaginings" (*Epistemology*, 23). Nonce taxonomies reimagine the "natural" order of things through the subtleties of knowing difference. New taxonomies made up of mobile and multiple categories trouble

singularity and the "hegemonic processes of naming and defining" (Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 8). As early as *The Making of Americans*, Stein attempted to construct her words as "categories" and to express meaning in the "incantantory shaping of repetitions that eventually allow[ed] her to devise a descriptive language" (Dydo, *Stein Reader*, 19). Like Wittig's *elles*, this new descriptive language arose out of Stein's resistance to the processes that sought to name and define subjectivity according to gender and sexuality. Dydo points out that Stein considered this early attempt a failure, but it nonetheless announces to us Stein's interest in constructing taxonomies out of language-in-use. By setting up an elaborate production of categories in *The Making of Americans* as "the refinement of necessary skills for making, testing, and using unrationalized and provisional hypotheses about what *kinds of people* there are to be found in one's world" (Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 23), Stein was documenting her social relationship to facts. Recording repetitions in behavior enabled Stein to study the "discerned elements" of "a sense of self that is an essential motif of self-classification in personalities acting themselves out" (Dydo, *Stein Reader*, 20).

To produce and invoke categories provisional and vulnerable enough to account for difference entails a queer, perverse, nonce relationship to facts. The act of figuring new textual realities around "one" happens at a site necessarily informed by, and having implications for, several and differential orders of textuality and reality. Both *The Making of Americans* and *Tender Buttons* were part of Stein's attempt to create for herself "theoretical room to deal" with what Sedgwick characterizes as "a large family of things *we know* and need to know about ourselves and each other" (*Epistemology,* 24). This troubling of the distinct spaces that denote "literature" and "theory" in Stein's texts appears as moments of resistance in her work that, according to Sedgwick, mark "the surface tension of this reservoir of unrationalized nonce-taxonomic energies; but, while distinctly representational,

these energies are in no sense peculiarly literary" (ibid.). In these new categorizations, the subject exists in differential space among and alongside material objects and historical things; here, nonce taxonomic work could be considered as what Catherine Stimpson identifies in Stein as "the desire to transform apprentice materials into richer, more satisfying verbal worlds" ("Mind," 498–99).

DeKoven finds this desire in the nonce taxonomies that inform Stein's portraits. Stein's portraits begin as referential, but they function in texts as differential. In "Ada" (*GP*, 14–16), for example, there is the fact of Colhard/Toklas family history, yet the text doesn't tell the story of Alice B. Toklas until it becomes *this* text, created by Stein. Because the 1908 portrait appears in *Geography and Plays*, further suggesting that the text be read as the central scene for Stein's poetics of literary fact, I think it is important to follow DeKoven into the text and to continue beyond her brief reading. Alice Toklas, the subject of "Ada," is here produced as a fact only when Stein "weaves together several key observations about Toklas's life and personality, about her relationship with Stein, and about Stein's feelings towards her" (DeKoven, *Different Language*, 60). The portrait begins referentially with Barnes Colhard, who had a sister (who does not get named until the second page, suggesting that she could also be Stein and Barnes, her brother Leo) who told stories with her mother. Barnes, however, "did not say he would not do it," indicating that, though *as Barnes* he may be disinclined, he intends to participate in the storytelling to some extent (*GP,* 14). Barnes gets married, and it seems then that he may be participating in the storytelling *as Stein*. Stein begins inhabiting the differential position that Judith Halberstam calls the "female husband," acting as Barnes Colhard to get into the origins of Alice Toklas. Stein is only able to do this by putting herself in the text as a fact of Toklas's life. Without the "happy telling of [stories] and not having that thing she was always trembling" (15), although in fact she is only

trembling, living, loving, *now*, after being textualized by Stein. Toklas "needs" Stein, and Stein creates herself for Toklas by creating Toklas as Ada. As Ada/Toklas writes "tender letters" (16) to her father, Stein was writing *Tender Buttons* simultaneously, equating the two writings, textual levels, and activities of addressing heritage, genealogy, and patriarchy.

What arises from this equation is a pair—a set—legible in the differential space of decentered textual identity, now made material through language for their everyday inhabitation. Toklas only exists as fact in the differential space of Stein's daily experience with her and of her, and the fact of Toklas retroactively produces Stein—this "one" who didn't fit into categories—as fact as well:

> Some one who was living was almost always listening. Someone who was loving was almost always listening. That one who was loving was almost always listening. That one who was loving was telling about being one then listening. That one being loving was then telling stories having a beginning and a middle and an ending. That one was then one always completely listening. (*GP*, 16)

Stein here makes sense of herself in relation to the textual Toklas, who only makes sense in relation to the writing Stein: "She came to be happier than anybody else who was living then. It is easy to believe this thing. She was telling someone, who was loving every story that was charming" (ibid.). Form arises from this social relationship, which is queer not just because it involves two women in love, although it is absolutely that too: "Certainly this one was loving this Ada then. And certainly Ada all her living then was happier in living than anyone else who ever could, who was, who is, who ever will be living" (ibid.). Stein uses grammar here to demonstrate the subtleties of verb tense, to document how their love takes place in grammar's history, in material textual history, where it also can finally become fact. The piece ends by naming Ada again and completing her as a literary fact: "Ada was then one and all her living" (ibid.). All the activity in the text figures into fact: "One completely telling stories that were charming," and one "completely listening to stories having a beginning and a

middle and an ending," placed, by language, in differential relation to themselves and each other: "Trembling was all living, living was all loving, some one was then the other one" (ibid.).

The willful disjunctions of time, space, lineage, and language from which Stein composes *The Making of Americans* and *Tender Buttons* drag her poetics beyond the tree of reproductive futurism, beyond the flattening norm of redemptive modernism, to a new site for interpretation: *Geography and Plays*. Here, the repetition and abstraction of the prior texts take part in the queer textual process that Foucault names "the reorganization of the singularity of discourse into immense verbosity" (*History of Sexuality*, 33). "Loving repeating" was not, for Stein, an affirmation of Oedipal cultural logic; it was a way for her to "seize the differentia" (Dydo, *Language That Rises*, 95) that she would refigure as the literary fact. If we embark from the interpretive moment staged in *Geography and Plays*, we can see Stein figuring the radically negative into provisional facts to avoid subjecting it to a discourse of normalization. She reorganizes material language around the historical and formal discontinuities that rend sociality, creating literary facts that recast the world in her terms: *geography* and *plays*, *gay* and *portraits*. Stein's attempt to stabilize these terms into a discursive formation inscribed with difference does not provide the end point for interpretation, but rather offers a hermeneutic through which we can more clearly see the social orientation—family, nation, and the structures they share—of Stein's poetics. This discursive formation, nonnarrative, insists on the differential quality of facts as a way to disrupt the normative orders of knowledge in which the facts themselves are embedded.

III. The Fact of "Gay" in Stein's Queer Modernism

Stein's experimental work used language in order to make facts *queer*; this is not a poetics that presupposes queerness based on sexuality but rather sets up, in grammar, a

series of plays between language and sexuality that produce *queer* as a category of fact, a way to have an identity. Stein's queer modernism emerges from this difference as a site for investigation. In Stein's economy of geography and plays, the word *gay* becomes an occasion for the transformation of language into the literary fact. According to Dydo, the repetition of phrases and names—the beginning again and again—that Stein began practicing in her early writings continued in her work as a preoccupation with identity that came to its fullest expression in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (*Language That Rises*, 556). This work, in Dydo's formulation, develops identity in "complex forms" using ideas of "calling, calling up, calling by name, calling forth" (ibid.). But Stein worked in complex and fully expressed ways with fact of social identity, one's "name," in *Geography and Plays*, where she called forth the identity term "gay" as a differential term that disclosed the literary fact. In the present epoch, *gay* is a social convention, a piece of language attached to the fact of a certain relation— whether *gay* bestows this relation with a specific factuality or the fact is prior and gives meaning to *gay* is the subject of ongoing debate. What is important here is that in Stein's time, *gay* was had not yet achieved the status of convention, and she captured it as a language object, foregrounding the word's repetition in difference and creating a moment in its evolution where literary and extra-literary orders made contact.[3] As *Tender Buttons* tries to

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[3] I don't want to engage in the debate—which seems, often enough, to cite Stein's work as an example—over the exact historical provenance of the term, nor do I mean to suggest that by rendering it a literary fact, Stein directly "invented" *gay* in its present usage. Marjorie Perloff acknowledges that in "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene" Stein quite possibly used this "key" word "for the very first time… in its contemporary sense of homosexual, but here only as an undertone" (*21st-Century Modernism*, 58); this seems to imply the possibility that "gay" was retroactively "activated" in the piece, where it had previously been a latent site for the construction of a new kind of textual relation—for Perloff, as the stage for Stein's differential syntax. Alan Sinfield, in *Gay and After*, takes a quite different approach, arguing for the emergence of "gay" as a specifically post-Stonewall identity formation. One becomes "gay" by coming into its form as an identity until one is sufficiently "constituted as gay" to take part in the post-Stonewall group identity politics (191). "Gay," he remarks, is an

transform facts into language objects in order to produce a new scene or site, Stein in *Geography and Plays* doubles back and brings forth from the resulting site these facts as literary, using the new taxonomies and categorizations that the earlier text makes possible. This is how we "create for ourselves," as Sedgwick put it, "theoretical room to deal" with the "things *we know* and need to know about ourselves and each other" (*Epistemology*, 24). We could say that *gay* retexturizes the text of historical memory and of identity by placing both on the differential site of the literary fact.

"Gay," Alan Sinfield asserts, is a "response to a situation" (*Gay and After,* 16), one that instances a "perverse dynamic" (31) from within dominant structures. Looking back to *The Making of Americans*, we can see Stein responding to the situation of patriarchal familial relations and invoking the "gay" family of "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene" (*GP,* 17–22) as a structural challenge against the subjectivities occasioned by and inhering within that preexisting structure. This is not, however, the same thing as suggesting that Stein "encoded" a great deal of " 'unallowable' lesbian feeling and experience in her radical experimental work" (DeKoven, *Different Language*, xxii), and that we might retroactively use *gay* as the map by which to find it.[4] For Wittig, the "bar in the *j/e* of *The Lesbian Body* is a sign

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"affiliation": "If you don't feel 'gay,' then you aren't" (192). Sinfield, I think, would mainly oppose my analysis based on historical timing, because while he does believe that gay is a specifically late twentieth-century social identity, he also asserts that queer identities (*gay* is one) "derive from resistance—including, in most cases, our own resistance to our selves. In other words, they could hardly have a stronger basis in social interaction and in our subjectivities" (200).

[4] DeKoven is quoting Catharine Stimpson. I am disinclined to disagree with Stimpson on this point, although I do not support this particular use of it. DeKoven seems to be arguing that this "encoding" appears in Stein's work as the "limitless, dense semantic plenitude," this "writing as erotic celebration, as liberation of meaning from the strictures of hierarchical, sensible, monologistic order" (*A Different Language*, 16). She thus fetishizes Stein's "moments of incoherence" (18) to the end of precisely limiting them; when these moments become the focus of critical attention, she argues, they reverse the focus on the priority of meaning. In its sympathy with Derridean deconstruction, Stein's experimental writing supposedly de-

of excess," where "'I' has become so powerful in *The Lesbian Body* that it can attack the order of heterosexuality in texts" (*Straight Mind*, 87). But this "queering," Wittig concludes, should *not* become thematic, or the text will lose its ability to "change the textual reality within which it is inscribed. In fact by reason of its theme it is dismissed from that textual reality, it no longer has access to it … it can no longer operate as a text in relationship to other past or contemporary texts" (63). The suggestion that Stein decontextuated her work in order to conceal her lesbianism is thus so reductive and limiting as to be completely at odds with what the work itself does. Stein's experimental work, as Dydo notes, "is compositional and constructive, not concealing," and "the need to conceal sexual references fails to explain her language" (*Language That Rises*, 18). Stein herself likened the creative act to the sexual act, associating it both with lesbian sexuality and patriarchal gender, a differential position that we can see in action in Stein's performance of the outlaw "female husband." As a female husband, Stein intervenes on the site of naming. Unlike the name "lesbian," Halberstam writes, the label "female husband" never "quite adds up to, or feeds directly into, what we now understand as lesbian sexual orientation" (*Female Masculinity*, 50). The name *lesbian*, like the name *gay*, is the end result of the process Foucault calls the "incorporation of perversions" by which we recognize the "embodiments, practices, and roles that historical processes have winnowed down to the precise specifications of an identity" (ibid.). Materialist feminism's wielding of language, the use of language itself to construct textual

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legitimates the priority of themes. Although she argues that reading Stein in her specific historical and political context allows us to see her experimental writing "as a location of her literary rebellion, against the patriarchal structures which excluded her, in language itself rather than in thematic content" (149), DeKoven undermines her own argument by making that language subservient to preconceptions of identity rather than constructive of it. By casting Stein's experimental writing as an elaborate encoding of lesbian desire, DeKoven transforms its experimentalism *into* theme, and in so doing performs the exact opposite of the task deconstruction proposes: "What was merely a piece of writing becomes a statement about life" (17).

reality (as opposed to using language to simply convey or conceal or thematize an *assumed* truth) enables Stein to create such a position through composition, even—and especially—where one might not have been structurally possible otherwise. Language at the level of the manifesto here calls forth "new and self-conscious affirmations of different gender taxonomies" (Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 9). Through literature, argues Wittig, "words come back to us whole," and in them, "form and content cannot be dissociated, because they partake of the same form, the form of a word, a material form" (*Straight Mind*, 73). Read through a materialist focus, words are by necessity literary facts, and we must either conceive of them or create them that way if they are to have any—especially important for feminist and queer materialists—transformative agency.[5] "Gay," in the piece "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene," manifests the word's status as an object and its subsequent openness to incorporation by or investment with the status of a literary fact. In other words, *gay* here announces the word's material siteness. Emerging from the text of "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene," we find an economy of language based in the material siteness of *gay*. Like the real life figure of the female husband, Miss Furr and Miss Skeene's relationship, "crisscrossed with conventional patriarchal… terminology, *breaks usage open*" (Dydo, *Language That Rises*, 30). By creating this intersection and then locating it, announcing it, as *gay* in social and formal terms at once, Stein produces the word as a literary fact.

Iteration is a crucial part of language's material siteness, providing the social occurrences of incorporative scenography. Iterations, in "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene," create a double portrait that is a complete narrative as a love story (Dydo, *Stein Reader*, 254).

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[5] Here again is Stimpson's invocation of Stein's "desire to transform apprentice materials into richer, more satisfying verbal worlds." Stimpson makes sure to note that the concealing and evasive aspects of Stein's experimentalism are secondary to this desire, simply listing them as "other reasons" that are "psychological" ("Mind," 499).

Iterations, after Elspeth Probyn, are "interstitial moments in the work of articulation" (*Outside Belongings*, 5), the varied and several processes through which one comes to "have" facts like gender, nationality, and self. Language iterations accumulate in "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene" until they make manifest materially that "they were both gay then there and both working there then" (*GP,* 17). Probyn views "the body as image, place of passage," and sees, in one's movement through the landscape, "queer images as iterations seeking other iterations" (*Outside Belongings*, 53). Seeking other iterations, Helen Furr "came to use many ways of being gay, she came to use every way in being gay" (*GP,* 22). Continuity, the historical kind, "builds" here "by accretion" (Dydo, *Language That Rises*, 273):

> They were in a way both gay there where there were many cultivating something. They were both regular in being gay there. Helen Furr was gay there, she was gayer and gayer there and really she was just gay there, she was gayer and gayer there, that is to say she found ways of being gay there that she was using in being gay there. She was gay there, not gayer and gayer, just gay there, that is to say she was not gayer by using the things she found there that were gay things, she was gay there, always she was gay there. (*GP*, 17–18)

Dydo notes of Stein's work that it is common that "a given phrase enters into her piece with its own history of occurrence" (*Language That Rises*, 39). *Gay* offers a good example of how Stein constructs this history. After being "gayer and gayer," Miss Furr is finally "not gayer," but she is always "gay," more or less so based on the circumstances surrounding the word's occurrence (*GP*, 18). We might consider Miss Furr's "using many ways in being gay" until "she came to use every way in being gay" (22) to be a kind of cultivation synonymous with Stein's cultivation of *gay* as a literary fact in this text. Dydo reads "cultivating something" as a "self-conscious, theatrical phrase" that describes "learning lesbian behavior and speech, cultivated code for the unnameable something" (*Stein Reader*, 254). This reading, however, misses cultivation completely by associating it with obfuscation, thereby transforming the text into an act of deception. Yet Stein plainly associates cultivation with the act of finding—

"she found ways of being gay there"—so that the textual process is one of discovery and the text is itself a "finding." Stein invested *gay* with the status of a literary fact as she used this piece to figure how documenting one's life—her life—could come to form, through iteration, as composition. This is cultivation.

The appearance of the word *regular* also signals the cultivation of literary facts in the piece:

> They were regular in being gay, they learned little things that are things in being gay, they learned many little things that are things in being gay, they were gay every day, they were regular, they were gay, they were gay the same length of time every day, they were gay, they were quite regularly gay. (*GP,* 20)

It is important that Miss Furr and Miss Skeene were "regularly gay" rather than *gayer*, and that *regularly* signaled more strongly the intensity of *gay* than the usual intensifier. *Regular* suggests both an average and repetition, and we can see how the passage establishes gay as regular by establishing it regularly, even at the level of the concrete visual text. If "grammar is the art of reckoning that it is by themselves that they are one and two" (Stein, *How to Write*, 48), once Helen Furr establishes a grammar of literary fact, cultivation can rest. Reckoning is over: "It was quite completely enough cultivated and it was quite completely a pleasant one and she did not use it very often" (*GP,* 21). Now that "gay" has been made regular, she no longer needs to use "pleasant" to cover gay with its conventional definition.

In *The Making of Americans*, Stein used grammar to reckon the existence of *Brothers Singulars*; in Watten's reading of this text, the *Brothers Singulars* stood in for the singular, odd one who figured queer.[6] And Dydo mentions in a footnote that she is "told that the French term *frere singulier* refers to homosexuals" but looks no further into this implication (*Language*

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[6] In this reading, Watten notes that Stein identifies with the *Brothers Singulars* as "numerous types of characters who, by reason of their queerness, are left to ponder the origins of their 'singularity'"; at this point, he concludes, Stein "is content that queerness suggests a different mode of subjectivation than Oedipal reproduction" ("Epic of Subjectivation," 103).

That Rises, 292). *Brothers Singulars* is in the next instance a literary fact, its existence rendered

up, reckoned grammatically, in the differential space between orders of fact:

> Brothers Singulars, we are misplaced in a generation that knows not Joseph. We flee
> before the disapproval of our cousins, the courageous condescension of our friends
> who gallantly sometimes agree to walk the streets with us, from all of them who
> never any way can understand why such ways and not the others are so dear to us,
> we fly to the kindly comfort of an older world accustomed to take all manner of
> strange forms into its bosoms and we leave our noble order to be known under such
> forms as Alfred Hersland, a poor thing, and hardly even know then our own. (*SW,*
> 21)

Brothers Singulars' function in the text is easily confused with the social beings the term

references, creating a queerly narrativized sociality. As language in action, *Brothers Singulars*

confers social form on *The Making of Americans* by announcing that the text is, indeed, *made*

from literary facts; and what, then, is the fact of an American? Similarly, to be "regularly gay"

not only dispenses with pleasantry, it actually threatens normative orders of fact by the

continuity it effects—as do the *Brothers Singulars*—between textuality and sexuality. Even

though they are singular in name, the plural form that Stein uses shows that the *Brothers

Singulars* have become regular by having been established regularly—by having been

cultivated. As such, their threat figures as queer in accord with Bersani's "radical possibility"

that "*homo-ness itself necessitates a massive redefining of relationality*" (*Homos*, 76). This "radical

possibility" is a constructive principle based in negativity, limit-work that does not constitute

a limit, and it aligns perfectly with Stein's ongoing project of redefining categories and

troubling relationality. The *Brothers Singulars* elbow their way into *Tender Buttons*, transforming

"Rooms" into a site for their establishment, "solid," as a literary fact—and also as

"sisters"—in the order of material, object language:

> […] and a single set of sisters and an outline and no blisters and the section seeing
> yellow and the centre having spelling and no solitude and no quaintness and yet solid
> quite so solid and the single surface centered and the question in the placard and the
> singularity, is there a singularity, and the singularity, why is there a question and the
> singularity why is the surface outrageous, why is it beautiful why is it not when there

is no doubt, why is anything vacant, why is not disturbing a centre no virtue, why is it when it is and why is it when it is and there is no doubt, there is no doubt that the singularity shows. (*SW*, 505–6)

The "singularity" may show, but it no longer signals alienation or irrelevance. They are on the surface beautiful and outrageous disturbing centers—there is no doubt. As literary fact, the *Brothers Singulars* carry into social form something "more fundamental than a resistance to normalizing methodologies": "A potentially revolutionary inaptitude—perhaps inherent in gay desire—for sociality as it is known" (Bersani, *Homos*, 76). And for identity: in terms of the destruction and rebuilding of the naming conventions by which social identity is structured, the name "Brothers Singulars" signals a differential relationship to the language facts that make up domestic sociality.

When composition ends, Miss Furr does not go back to being "one"; without Miss Skeene, Miss Furr is still "gay exactly the same way" (*GP,* 21). The difference is that "Helen Furr was not needing using her voice to be a gay one. She was gay then and sometimes she used her voice and she was not using it very often" (ibid.). But instead of reading this as a kind of "pure pathos that is not even lonesome" (Dydo, *Stein Reader*, 255), a conventional stereotype of the lesbian spinster if ever there was one, we can read in the following lines Stein's reassurance that, where repetition is not digression, the work of figuring *gay* has been settled: "It was quite completely enough cultivated and it was quite completely a pleasant one and she did not use it very often" (*GP,* 21). These are, after all, repetitions in language that do not end in formalizing catachresis but that instead fail to reproduce *productively* and begin again, with a difference. In the text, that difference is "very well": "She was living very well, she was gay then, she went on living then, she was regular in being gay, she always was living very well and was gay very well and was telling about little ways one could be learning to use in being gay, and later was telling them quite often, telling them again and again" (22). I do

not see pathos here, but rather the expectant pause of differential forms. Ending on "again and again," Stein gives *gay* the kind of agency that extends the scene of the text into the social world: the zone of literary facts. Whether we read *gay* as the French *pleasant* or in its more modern form as *homosexual*, it is impossible to say that at this point in the composition, Miss Furr is not gay anymore; even if, without Miss Skeene, she is not happy, Miss Furr is still gay. When *gay* finally figures as a literary fact—part material text, component of a composition, part social fact, a personal detail—the term becomes irreducible to a single one of its parts. Thus iterated, cultivated, and composed, *gay* becomes the fact of "this one," the differential document of such a self. From the start of her work with texts, Stein had been trying to invent the social possibility of her life in language, to effect a kind of living that could be called "gay": "She came to using many ways in being gay, she came to use every way in being gay" (22).

The project of opening the site to social possibility by rendering it on the differential continues to be a crucial queer social strategy. Much as *gay* comes to figuration in Stein's text, so also has the group Queer Nation used material language to open a differential zone. In the group's slogan, "We're here, we're queer, get used to it," Lauren Berlant reads a significant shift at the scene of identification. For Berlant, "we're here, we're queer" "stages the shift from silent absence into present speech, from nothingness to collectivity, from a politics of embodiment to one of space, whose power erupts from the ambiguity of 'here'" (*Queen of America*, 151). Its ambiguity as a differential figure, a literary fact, fills *gay* with the power to bring Stein out of "silent absence" and into "present speech." "We're here, we're queer" is language at the level of action, manifesto in the most Wittigian sense, opening a new order of factuality—the queer—in the disrupted space of identification, Berlant's "*Where ?*" *Gay*, in this way, and even if we understand it as meaning *pleasant*, is Stein's "we're

here, we're queer"—even when not present, "we" are in language, queering it through the differential relations "we" effect. Structurally, *gay* can be categorized as a materialist queer term in Stein's work. Stein had to create the scene where *gay* could obtain as a literary fact, much as Queer Nation had to create the "here" where they could be "queer" before the "queer" in that "here" could come to signify *in a queer way*, as fact. For Stein, this amounts to a refusal of the orders of fact in which she, as "this one," has no purchase, as well as a refusal of the concomitant "narratives of progression"—the Oedipal narrative, for example—that threaten her access to social language. This cluster of illuminations refuses a timeline; there is only the explosive collision of movement, language, and sexuality: "She learned a few more little ways of being gay there" (*GP,* 21). In Spain in 1912 "restrictions fell away and opened the geography, moving and still" (Dydo, *Language That Rises*, 45), to reveal the kinds of compositional, relational, and societal possibilities that *Geography and Plays* would later set out to demonstrate. This voyage, when she opposed it to "being gay in one place," created for Stein the context or field from which the differential site was able to emerge.

Part Two: An Absorbing Landscape: Stein's Great War

I. "C'est nous qui avons fait ça"

Stein, writing as Alice B. Toklas, related many years later the now familiar anecdote about Picasso's response to a parade of war machines down the boulevard Raspail in the first year of World War I: "All of a sudden down the street came some big cannon, the first any of us had seen painted, that is camouflaged. Pablo stopped, he was spellbound. C'est nous qui avons fait ça, he said, it is we that have created that, he said. And he was right, he had" (*SW,* 85). Looking at Stein's later, more frankly documentary work—namely, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*—we can see the moment, sometime around 1914, where the history Stein had renounced in *The Making of Americans* begins again to merge with modernist

composition. DeKoven asserts that Stein's experimental period "was divided by World War I into two discontinuous phases" (*Different Language*, 46). This divide manifested in the text of *Geography and Plays*, and, following DeKoven's implication, we can look at the collection as non-identical with itself from the start. "Geography" and "Plays" might then name the two phases of Stein's experience of the war—in terms of discontinuity and its effect on the connection she forged between form and history. Stein names Picasso's response "right" not because he could be said to be literally responsible for the machines of modern warfare but because of his realization that the negativity modern artists had made visible in forms was now about to be returned to society by the machines of war. War, Elaine Scarry asserts in *The Body in Pain*, "attempts to bestow the force of the material world on the immaterial" (127), that is, on "national consciousness, political belief, and self-definition" (114). Thus, if war "forces" artists to conceive of history as living and responsive, war also "accelerates change everywhere" (Dydo, *Language That Rises*, 91), causing the street, the studio, the battlefield, and the home to refigure dynamically around the negative pause of discontinuous, indeterminate history. War—like representation—has an economy as well, a beginning, middle, and end that, regardless of their relative stability, could be violently reconfigured at any time the machines were in motion: "War is a thing that decides how it is to be when it is done" (*SW*, 513). World War I also decided how and when *Geography and Plays* was to be done, providing the text's future anterior.

The Great War, Paul Fussell writes, "reversed the Idea of Progress" that had "dominated the public consciousness for a century" preceding it (*Great War*, 8). Yet the war's reversal was far more than just intellectual, or even formal, much as Stein's work with material language attempts to show. The war brought the force of material violence to bear

on "the Idea of Progress"—total war. Fussell quotes British military expert John Keegan's final accounting of the war, which offers no conclusions:

> The First World War is a mystery. Its origins are mysterious. So is its course. Why did a prosperous continent, at the height of its success as a source and agent of global wealth and power and at one of the peaks of its intellectual and cultural achievements, choose to risk all it had won for itself and all it had offered to the world in the lottery of a vicious and local internecine conflict? Why, when the hope of bringing the conflict to a quick and decisive conclusion was everywhere dashed to the ground within months of its outbreak, did the combatants decide nevertheless to persist in their military effort, to mobilize for total war and eventually to commit the totality of their young manhood to mutual and essentially pointless slaughter? (*Great War*, 339)

World War I not only reversed ideas of progress, it replaced them with the material marks of irrationality that took the form of both the trenches scarring the landscape of Western Europe and the language insufficient to explain them. Scarry aligns this reversal into irrationality with the structural alteration of facticity that war effects:

> The rules of war are equally arbitrary and again depend on convention, agreement, and participation; but the legitimacy of the outcome outlives the end of the contest because so many of its participants are frozen in a permanent act of participation: that is, the winning issue or ideology achieves for a time the force and status of a material "fact" by the sheer material weight of the multitudes of damaged and opened human bodies. (*Body in Pain*, 62)

While the winning ideology only attains facticity "for a time," the structure of the fact is indeed permanently disrupted each time it is altered precisely because of the "permanent act of participation." Scarry goes on to say that the essential structure of war consists of a relation between two orders of fact: "[T]he collective casualties that occur *within* war, and the verbal issues (freedom, national sovereignty, the right to a disputed ground, the extra-territorial authority of a particular ideology) that stand *outside* war, that are there *before* the act of war begins and *after* it ends" (ibid.). The second order of facts will exist after the war ends, but it is necessarily transformed by the denarrativizing process of the first since, as Scarry's main premise attests, "the main purpose and outcome of war is injuring" (*Body in Pain*, 63).

Thus, the "central question" of war is itself is the material fact of an absence, the unstable position of facts subjected to the irrationality of pure violence, a "question about the relation between the interior content of war and what stands outside it" (ibid.). Writing nearly two decades after the devastating attack on the Somme on the first day of July 1916, scholar and soldier Edmund Blunden illustrated the material manifestation of this terrifying new space: "By the end of the day both sides had seen, in a sad scrawl of broken earth and murdered men, the answer to the question. No road. No thoroughfare. Neither race had won, nor could win, the War. The War had won, and would go on winning" (Fussell, *Great War*, 13).

World War I provides the absent center around which *Geography and Plays* figures as text. Stein seems first to have intended to compose a collection of portraits that applied the language of objects she discovered in *Tender Buttons* to the subjectivities freed by *The Making of Americans*. In fact, the vast majority of the portraits in the collection were composed prior to the war, beginning with "Ada" and "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene," both completed in 1912, and ending with "Mrs. Whitehead," the only piece completed (according to the chronology of the Yale catalogue) in 1914. Stein wrote seven portraits in 1913, along with three plays—the most of *Geography and Plays* composed in any one year. She also seemed to be intently focused on portraiture as a category that year, completing "Publishers, the Portrait Gallery and the Manuscripts at the British Museum" (*GP*, 134–40). In a passage from that text, we can begin to discern the organizing principle that Stein would apply to a collection of portraits:

> There is no rejoinder. The end is in the great division between the counting and the bloom of a passing glass covering. If it were left and in a way it was left, if it were left then the meaning would be that there was hope and hope which is active does direct that there is some one to stay there and say it and doing so why should it determine a passage, it should. When it should and there is more there then certainly all of them are the same that is to say there is a difference. Any difference is greater. (140)

The war, however, would soon arrive and demonstrate that difference as an organizing force is also, as Scarry writes, "an act of severing and disowning that has a wide, perhaps collective, authorship" (*Body in Pain*, 136). This meant for Stein, in terms of her portraits, that difference would have to intrude upon the unity of the collection in order that the very principle of identity be denarrativized. With the inclusion of the plays—most of which she completed in 1916—and the history pieces written during and after World War I, *Geography and Plays* became a truly differential text, one in which the logic of collection did not attempt to overcome the discontinuity of the circumstances of its composition. Reading this collection in the terms of its own encounter with history, we can see how the war's sudden material transformation of narratives modeled for Stein the kind of critique of representation she wished to undertake.

The Great War intervened in the collection that would become *Geography and Plays* by smashing the self-identical narrative of construction, and the kinds of facts and portraits it could produce, with the collective authorship of destruction. "Tourty or Tourtebattre: A Story of the Great War" (*GP,* 401–4), documents this process in the later pages of *Geography and Plays*, telling the story, in the form of a play about how facts "come out" of war. The piece considers "what we can say about relations when they are disrupted by war" (Dydo, *Stein Reader*, 322) and apparently what we can say is multivocal and directly social:

> Why I don't know.
> Why don't you know.
> I don't call that making literature at all.
> What has he asked for.
> I call literature telling a story as it happens.
> Facts of life make literature.
> I can always feel rightly about that. (*GP,* 403)

Stein refuses what Fussell calls "problems of factual testimony" that appeared against the background of mechanized warfare in World War I—"the collision between events and the

language available … the public language used for over a century to celebrate the idea of progress" (*Great War*, 169). "Logically," Fussell continues, "there's no reason why a language devised by man should be inadequate to describe any of man's works. The difficulty was in admitting that the war had been made by men and was being continued *ad infinitum* by them" (170). As Stein wrote: "Can we say it./We cannot./Now" (*GP,* 403). This is perhaps one reason why so many accounts of the war invoke immobility as a primary theme; men fighting in the trenches were trapped underground, locked into the system of trench warfare that progress had delivered. Erich Maria Remarque writes: "The front is a cage in which we must await fearfully whatever may happen. We lie under a network of arching shells and live in a suspense of uncertainty. Over us Chance hovers. If a shot comes, we can duck, that is all; we neither know nor can determine where it will fall" (*All Quiet*, 69). At the same time, men like Remarque were imprisoned in a system of language that was utterly inadequate in the very fact of itself:

> We wake up in the middle of the night. The earth booms. Heavy fire is falling on us. We crouch into corners. We distinguish shells of every caliber…. The bombardment does not diminish. It is falling in the rear too. As far as one can see it spouts fountains of mud and iron. A wide belt is being raked…. The attack does not come, but the bombardment continues. Slowly we become mute. Hardly a man speaks. We cannot make ourselves understood. (Remarque, *All Quiet*, 72-3)

Without minimalizing the significant shift in scale between Remarque's terrified silence and Stein's transfer of an approximation of the experience of irrationality into language, I want to suggest that, for Stein, this crisis of representation works also on a textual level, since because it determines how and when it is to be done, war produces a landscape where one cannot make oneself understood. In writing, what were once portraits of selves become, in our being displaced from them by their unnarratable negativity, landscapes. Yet as this crisis remained on the level of the text for Stein, it actually made "landscape" a new form, however embattled, because she could change her position relative to it.

In this way, the war machines that so enthralled Picasso helped Stein to transform textual geography into a landscape of possibility. Stein was in a unique position with regard to World War I and her involvement in it: she *wasn't* trapped in the trenches and, although at times she felt trapped by circumstance, Stein lived a war defined largely by mobility, choice, and discovery. "The old life"—as Stein put it in *The Autobiography*—"was over" (*Selected*, 134). In this sense we can read "the old life" as one defined by limits— gendered, familial, historical, and national—and when she couldn't speak, activities like volunteering to drive for the war effort enabled Stein to move to a place where she could. A brief account of Stein's activities during the war, from the *Autobiography*, situates her work in context. Stein and Toklas saw the beginning of the war in England in the summer of 1914. When war erupted in Europe, they were the houseguests of Doctor and Mrs. Alfred North Whitehead. It is a significant fact, then, that the portrait "Mrs. Whitehead" (*GP,* 154) should usher the period of the war into the textual space of *Geography and Plays*; the Great War begins with Mrs. Whitehead. Stein and Toklas remained in England for several months and finally returned to a "beautiful and unviolated" Paris in time for winter (*SW,* 146). In the spring of 1915, the pair joined their friend William Cook in Spain, eventually settling in Palma de Mallorca, where they remained until the following spring. "It was during this stay," Stein's rendering of Toklas tells us, "that most of the plays afterwards published in Geography and Plays were written. She always says that a certain kind of landscape induces plays" (*SW*, 155). So while most of the plays in the collection were written during the war, Stein composed them in response to a space completely apart from the battles that comprised the war. She had an idea of war as it took place elsewhere, a self-contained, total event—like a play. In "Two Stein Talks," Lyn Hejinian remarks: "It is thus that Stein can envisage battles and charging up or down hills as landscape events—flattened out onto the names of the hills"

(*Language of Inquiry*, 114). The commencement of the battle of Verdun, in the spring of 1916, marked a turning point in Stein's relationship to the Great War. In Toklas's voice, she writes: "I had been so confident and now I had an awful feeling that the war had gotten out of my hands" (*SW*, 157). Soon, Mallorca lost its allure—perhaps because of its remove from the battle scenes of the war—and Stein and Toklas returned, again, to Paris. This time, however, the two "did not settle down" into a familiar housekeeping routine at the rue de Fleurus; instead, Stein writes, "we decided to get into the war" (159). She ordered a Ford from America, learned to drive, and, with Toklas, entered the war—on her terms, in fact—in the service of the American Fund for French Wounded.

The plan was to be on the move. Soldiers, both French and American, were the priority: "We drove by day and we drove by night and in very lonely parts of France and we always stopped and gave a lift to any soldier, and never had we any but the most pleasant experiences with these soldiers" (*SW,* 164). This movement, in contrast to the frustration of being "trapped" in England or comfortable yet helpless in Mallorca, sustained Stein as Europe shattered around her. Paris, on one hand, and the actual battlefields of the trench system, on the other, remained on the horizon. Stein and Toklas traveled in the provisional space between these two horizons. Like "dances and battles," these travels "construct landscapes, since persons go in and out of them and fill them with movement back and forth" (Hejinian, *Language of Inquiry*, 110). "The landscape," Stein's Toklas tell us, "the strange life stimulated her" (*SW,* 175). The war had nearly ended by the time Stein saw its actual machinery, not the guns and tanks that Picasso claimed, but the trenches, the geographical cuts that were the war's center. Stein later recalled a French nurse, who said, surveying this scene in Alsace, "c'est un paysage passionant, an absorbing landscape" (177). As she experienced it from her Ford, a modern machine that produced the mobility she

sought, The Great War brought Stein from portraits to plays to an absorbing landscape, because "that was what it was as we saw it" (ibid.). Stein believed that the highly organized mechanisms of modern warfare could never effect mere ruin; somewhat perversely, the abandoned trenches appeared to her as structures of desire, productive, absorbing, erotic. When finally Stein and Toklas returned to Paris, they found a "restless and disturbed world" in the shadow of the recently ended war (179). Stein, restless herself, began to work furiously and "it was at this time that she wrote her Accents in Alsace and other political plays, the last plays of Geography and Plays" (178).

World War I reconfigured and connected various orders of reality, made most evident to Stein in the violent disruption of the landscape she encountered in Alsace: "Soon we came to the battlefields 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. And it belonged to no country" (*SW*, 176). There are again two things to note about Stein's reading of the landscape of war that are crucial to her poetics. First, it belongs to no country, a non-patriarchal space that is the result of a disruption. In this case, the modernist, transnational landscape bears the marks of lines of descent destroyed by the always moving machine of war. Second, the war-scarred scene is a landscape different from ruins. It is a comprehensive site, where radical negativity leads not to an absence of meaning but rather to meaning's production and dispersion. With this in mind, it becomes difficult to read the experimental work in *Geography and Plays* as nonsense, even of the politically engaged presymbolic kind. Ruins differ from landscape as nonsense differs from composition; landscape, for Stein, was "an empty form, or rather a form free of prediction" (Hejinian, *Language of Inquiry*, 106), and she claimed for it a kind of ultimate realism of self-description

by language objects. In this case, literary facts are like Adorno's empirical ruins, which "divested of their own context accommodate themselves to the immanent principles of construction" (*Aesthetic Theory*, 258): "In art the object is the work produced by art, containing elements of empirical reality as well as displacing, dissolving, reconstituting them according to the work's own law" (259). "Displacing, dissolving, and reconstituting" are actions that take place in between; these words also describe the differential actions of a world at war, where borders are indeterminate and the only continuity that can be expected is that of violence. In turn, Stein's relation to the war was non-identical, not an imitation of the war's violence but kind of play parallel to and inflected by such differential acts.

Stein's refusal to see ruins as an end amounted to a violent refusal of avant-garde irrelevance. According to Astradur Eysteinsson, Adorno "points out how dissonance itself, the hallmark of modernism, runs the risk of solidifying into indifferent material, creating a form of immediacy without cultural memory" (*Concept of Modernism*, 39). Stein's dissonance creates forms that are productive of and invested with cultural memory (and forgetting) in their structures. Once she got into the war, Stein saw that destruction could produce cultural memory—and forgetting—as a kind of immediacy, the endless, mechanical repetition of experiencing and re-experiencing trauma. The war was difficult for Stein to make a fact of, since from the start her relationship to its events and effects was parallel but non-identical; thus, she could never overcome the materiality of the war to positivize it as a fact identical to her writing of it. But by recording her differential relationship to the war in *Geography and Plays*, she could approximate its meaning by showing its effects. Instead of providing critical distance from the war, Stein uses the literary fact to make form historical through language. This assimilation, on Stein's part, of heteronomous nature and traumatic history to thought or language, marks her use of the mimetic faculty; Stein's figuration takes up negativity and

assimilates it into its own process, an extreme version of Adornian mimesis wherein the encounter with history is mediated not by form but by the language through which that history is en-formed. While "art negates the negativity in the primacy of the object, negates what is heteronomous and unreconciled in it" (Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 259), Stein uses literary facts to refuse that negation and cause form to threaten itself. By figuring literary facts, Stein threatens to eliminate the distance that form figures around the absent "what hurts" in favor of differential and repetitive contact between fact and history—not the unmediated "old positivist's" dream but an inescapable new consequence of progress, in the sense that war determines how it is to be when it is done, and will keep on winning. When figuration, Stein's method for creating literary facts, is put into the service of language-mediated continuity instead of formalized critical distance, it brings mimesis near to psychosis—an expression of the self, perhaps, subject to modern warfare. An escape into formalism would be the dream here, but that can only happen when facts are formalized without mediation; differential facts, for Stein, are how history enters form through language, and this is not an escape from history, from trauma, but an immersion in it. Figuration, for Stein, is neither invention nor, in this case, reversion. In her refusal to honor the absent center—instead, reabsorbing it in her forms—Stein also refuses the distinction between figure and fact that had once privileged representation as a preserve of identity by textually modeling a subject invaded by its objects. Stein even figures that refusal itself in the form of *Geography and Plays*, which posits the radical negativity of the ruined narrative as an organizing force.

During the war, Stein found the key to her nonnarrative deployment of facts: "every one became consciously became aware of the existence of the authenticity of the modern composition" because war made every one "contemporary in self-consciousness made every

one contemporary with the modern composition" (*SW,* 521). It might be better to think of Stein's figuration as a differential machine similar to Deleuze and Guattari's "desiring machines," of which there are always a multitude and which only work when they are broken. Differential machines, like Foucault's knowledge made for cutting, problematize rather than stabilize categories and systems of knowing—discourses—typically ordered around facts. In response to the collective trauma and the indeterminate body of Europe at war in and around 1914, Stein proposed what she thought to be an "American" solution. An "American" like Stein could render negativity as *the* coming "American" form by systematizing differential action as a machine. Watten writes that "a negation and reconstruction of the subject at the point of production is common to the constructivist moment in both Stein and Ford: an encounter with the mode of production realized in the formation of the modern subject" (*Constructivist Moment*, 120). Parallel to the indeterminate site of catastrophe and redemption that modern warfare created, Stein used language to reabsorb historical trauma into the process of figuration, producing literary facts that remained in a differential relationship to the war, never retreating into either positivism or psychosis.

If poetic form is a specific kind of knowledge of social facts, *Geography and Plays* presents a unique and important location from which to observe the emergence of literary facts. Stein's "absorbing language" represents a queer mode for producing such facts, yet it is not only because of Stein's gender or sexual orientation that we can call this a queer project, or a feminist concern. The radical negativity made explicit by World War I destroys normative social forms in Stein's experimental work and replaces them with language that *plays*, effectively replacing geography with "absorbing landscapes." In *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler describes a strategy of feminist (and queer) intervention that sounds much like

a Steinian poetics: "[I]t is necessary to learn a double movement: to invoke the category and, hence, provisionally to institute an identity and at the same time to open the category as a site of permanent political contest" (222). Where patriarchy is simply (or, never simply) one way of making sense, making facts, of the social universe, Stein draws from its dominance new ways, new sites for the production of fact. These facts are defined not by their fixed, unchanging function, but rather by the circumstances of their production and the refusal to disguise the site of their making, even if it is radically negative social space. Remarque, for example, could not positivize facts, even as (perhaps because) his own injury, his own encounter with negativity, produces them: "The forward trenches have been abandoned. Are they still trenches? They are blown to pieces, annihilated—there are only broken bits of trenches, holes linked by tracks, nests of craters, that is all" (Remarque, *All Quiet*, 78).

In this sense Stein was undertaking a specifically materialist feminist project meant to undo the language operation of reduction through which, according to Wittig, the category of sex is able to function by "taking the part for the whole" (*Straight Mind*, 44). The single most positive effect of World War I was its destabilizing of patriarchal order and privilege, something that Stein would come to identify in works composed during and after the war as plays. This undermining of the masculine organization of nations allowed Stein access to the scene, geography, and to what is in excess of it—plays. Alongside materialist feminism's commitment to language and form as agents of transformation, Stein engaged in the critically queer (and Foucauldian) project of using the logic of destruction to break singularities into "immense verbosity." Stein used the war to disperse nationalism—what Sedgwick calls "the name of an entire underlying dimension of modern social functioning" (*Tendencies*, 146)—across the landscape of her texts so that what had been established by patriarchal language structures as "facts" could be reorganized "in a near-infinite number of

different and even contradictory ways" (ibid.). Between her willed disjunctions of time and space in composition, her experiments figuring new orders of fact, and her use of transnational language, Stein recast the site of literary production and bestowed historical life upon material words. Writing of Proust, Sedgwick concludes that this recasting is an ongoing project, and describes it in a way that evokes Stein's queer texts as well, bringing *Geography and Plays* almost disturbingly current: "I don't think any of these accounts will be simple ones to render—even to render visible. But we need to do so lest we continue to deal numbly around and along the eroticized borders of this apparently universal, factitiously timeless modern mapping of the national body" (*Tendencies*, 153). In her war writing, Stein challenged patriarchal orders of fact by creating a new kind of knowledge, a way of knowing based in the literary fact that would eventually come to be queer.

II. Negativity and Plays

Destruction can be a site of both queer and materialist feminist interventions in discourse, working to overthrow an economy where "one" does not signify. Occupying this geography is a theoretical intervention, as in the case of Wittig's *elles*, that should not be read as a purely redemptive act. Nor should Stein's opposition be too thoroughly positivized as a terrain that celebrates the destruction wrought by World War I. Rather, the text and the trench are locked, via the negative of history, in "absorbing landscapes," in a differential relation of empty form where "the vanishing point might be on every word" (Hejinian, *Language of Inquiry*, 106). Modernity, according to Foucault, was a matter of adopting a certain attitude with respect to the contingent: "to take oneself as an object of a complex and difficult elaboration" ("Enlightenment," 41).[7] Out of the war's historical rupture, Stein

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[7] Foucault wrote this of Baudelaire specifically, but to the extent that Baudelairian modernity is certainly in Stein's genealogy, I think the comment can be read more generally as well.

developed a relation to the contingent, a poetics necessary to survive a modernity that meant taking oneself as the object of a complex and difficult elaboration—the formation of the modern queer subject. In Stein's vision of high modernism, "the subject of a masterpiece might be steeped in contingency, but the work itself must be free of it" (DeKoven, *Different Language*, 24). Double contact, however, even and especially as DeKoven finds it in "A Substance in a Cushion," has its precondition in the contingency of material language, thus equating material language with the subject of the masterpiece, "steeped in contingency." The paradigm for this method of reading is in the piece itself, in the phrase "'and a difference a very little difference is prepared,' which evokes a panoply of tiny but carefully plotted differences" (ibid.). These tiny differences, spreading, are by definition contingencies, both within the text and connected to the social world. Great literature, Stein's patriarchal imaginary, could be characterized by "its complete solidity, its complete imagination, its complete existence" (ibid.), but to argue that this characterization must be applied wholesale to her body of work subjects both the author and her texts to a logic Stein rejects. *Geography and Plays* enacts this rejection most explicitly in its impulse to assert the material negative of real war against the aestheticized fantasy of totalizing political theater. Masterpieces, according to Stein in "What Are Master-pieces," "exist because they came to be as something that is an end in itself and in that respect it is opposed to the business of living which is relation and necessity" (DeKoven, *Different Language*, 24). *Geography and Plays* constitutes a textual challenge to the easy identification of the work and the idea of the "master-piece,"[8] clustering texts around the absent masterpiece like forms around the

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[8] In "Desperate Seriousness and Avant-Garde (Mis) Recognition in Some of Stein's Sentences," David Kaufmann writes: "Stein is quite clearly making a pitch for the complete autonomy (not the engagement) of art…. Not only have recent technologies of reproduction usurped the older privilege of high art to serve as the model of the mimetic, they have also

negative of history, in this case, World War I. So, can we simply say that *geography* and *plays* are not masterpieces? If we understand *geography* as the differential site of social form, can we understand *plays* as that unassimilable excess brought forth by the literary fact?

The emergence of a new genre for Stein—plays—marks her assertion of difference as a destruction of tradition that is not identical with combat but instead names the zone between portraits and landscape under the sign of war. Plays make a parallel activity, the production of a differential relationship in language—between verb and noun—and the effects of that relationship on its historical context. This parallel, differential activity opens an other space correspondent to what is conventionally known as the "theater" of war. In works like "Tourty or Tourtebattre," multivocal "reflections" accumulate but never add up to a rational, coherent narrative of the war, despite the fact that the piece is subtitled "A Story of the Great War." Instead, this incoherence reflects the incommensurable space of difference and irrationality in which wartime socialty must take place—the theater of war contours the space of the play. Despite the intention of one of the speakers to positivize war—"We said in English these are the facts which we are bringing to your memory"—the reflections, negativity in excess of narrative, continue to overcome the narrative itself and in a sense determine how and when it is to be done:

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banalized the mimetic so that it 'does not really thrill any one.' The campy hyperbole of the term 'thrill' does not mask the text's intent here, which is to (re)instate the legitimacy of high art in its autonomy" (225–26). In fact I think that the "campy hyperbole" does exactly mask the text's intent, which, in all its discussions of non-simultaneity, necessity, and contingency, is to problematize the idea of the masterpiece in the most literal sense, at the level of textual disruption. If the masterpiece is autonomous, and Stein's works are in any sense committed, then we might in fact read the entire piece as "campy hyperbole" composed with the express intent of problematizing masterpieces as Stein came to terms with the depth of her social concerns. Stein used this piece for disturbing the ground of the rhetoric of merit in order introduce differential logic into an argument that otherwise would come full circle to support socialist realism. As Adorno worked the dialectic in similar arguments in *Aesthetic Theory*, so Stein worked the differential even at the level of meta-criticism.

> What were the reflections.
> Have we undertaken too much.
> What is the name of his wife.
> They were lost. We did not look forward. We did not think much. How long would
> he stay. Our reflections came later. (*GP*, 403)

Stein's version of the theater of war presents plays as the unassimilable element that destroys the aesthetic totality of political theater. The destruction of narrative here is frightening, and eerily similar to Remarque's reflections from inside the trenches, which by necessity came later and were absorbed then into the total history of the war. Stein's plays, on the other hand, remain unassimilable in part because of the way the irruption and disruption of negativity is eroticized in plays like "Accents in Alsace," where the opening narrative is interrupted by a literally *different* language—French—and then the request "Let me kiss thee willingly" (*GP*, 409). In this text, which I will discuss further, below, we see geography transformed by war into a play; it is an absorbing landscape, but at the same time, what is in excess to the political theater seems to rush out of the landscape itself. "That's a picture," Stein writes in "Pink Melon Joy," in which she introduces the possibility that the erotics within the space that plays afford is reparative:

> When I remember how surpised I was at certain places which were nearly in the way
> I cannot doubt that more accumulation is needed. I cannot doubt it. (*GP*, 352)

In "If You Had Three Husbands," Stein confirms this possibility within a multivocal exchange, that is, the text performs as play the way that an erotically mobile text can disrupt historical totalization to "effect tenderness":

> I am not telling the story I am repeating what I have been reading.
> What effects tenderness.
> Not to remember the name.
> Say it.
> The time comes when it is natural to realize that solid advantages connect themselves
> with pages of extreme expression. (*GP*, 381)

When Deleuze writes that "difference and repetition have taken the place of the identical and the negative, of identity and contradiction" (*Difference and Repetition*, xix), I do not think he necessarily means that we should dispense with negativity entirely, but rather that repetition—after modernity and through, perhaps, writers like Stein—has become a primary and viable way that we are brought into an encounter with negativity. For Stein, this meant that negativity "could be multiplied," as Hejinian suggests: "There could be many objects and then therefore many relationships, simultaneously—coincidents, which are the most reversible of relationships" (*Language of Inquiry*, 106). A certain attitude with respect to the contingent seems necessary in order that repetition can "express a power, which resists all specification" (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 13–14), a differential attitude wherein the useable narrative of self begins at "I make, remake, and unmake my concepts… from an always decentered center" (xxi). By bringing material negativity to bear—in the form of contingency—on social language, repetition "puts law into question, it denounces its nominal or general character in favor of a more profound and more artistic reality" (ibid.). In Stein's work, double contact's "intensification of meaning" has a double—uncanny—effect: simultaneous "obliteration and expansion" of the site where meaning is made (DeKoven, *Different Language*, 111).

Stein's use of the "continuous present" foregrounded her commitment to both repetition and denarrativized continuity as forms meant to push the subject closer to contingency. DeKoven defines the continuous present as a "notion of time, derived from William James and akin to Henri Bergson, as a continuous process or succession of steadily shifting present moments rather than a linear progress or march from past through present to future" (*Different Language*, 27). Where many critics read Stein's development of the continuous present as progress toward pure formalism, I see it as the exact opposite. For

one thing, this conception of the continuous present completely ignores Stein's concept of the "continuous present." Stein herself was careful to note that the continuous present was only "one thing," but it was one moving thing multiplied, rendered simultaneous and coincident by her foregrounding of its internal difference. In "Accents in Alsace" (*GP,* 409– 15), Stein begins with a narrative of war that is soon interrupted by "accents," different ways of saying the same thing—the internal difference in an identical word. The family name Schemil becomes Schemmels and then Schemmil, multiplying in one thing—one word—the contested region of Alsace in order to call forth all of the history of its local-national identity in one moment, and in the space of one word.[9] Finally, we "come back to" the family name, thoroughly German, and interestingly so since when Stein herself had seen Alsace, it had been after the German retreat: "Schimmel Schimmel Gott in Himmel/ Gott in Himmel There comes Shimmel./Schimmel is an Alsatian name" (410). The misspelling of the third "Shimmel" in the sequence suggests not a mistake but an unnoticeable difference in pronunciation, an "accent" that we see only in the language object that remains, simultaneous with the apparent conclusion that "Schimmel is an Alsatian name." According to Deleuze: "We must distinguish between these discrete elements, these repeated objects, and a secret subject, the real subject of repetition, which repeats itself through them. Repetition must be understood in the *pronominal*; we must find the self of repetition, the singularity within that which repeats. For there is no repetition without a repeater… repetition is difference without a concept" (*Difference and Repetition*, 23). Later in the piece,

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[9] Scarry helpfully reminds us: "France may perceive Alsace-Lorraine as a deep and abiding part of her national integrity temporarily separated from her at Versaille in 1871, while Germany may see France's yearning toward Alsace-Lorraine as territorial lust for land that has long and rightfully been part of Germany, and as a dangerous extension of French presence toward the German heartland" (*Body in Pain*, 129). Stein, I am sure in jest, suggests that the Alsatians circumvent this problem of identity by claiming to be Swiss: "Can you mix with another/ Can you be a Christian and a Swiss" (*GP*, 412).

Stein invokes another name, performs an act of multiplication in language, and then, "reading French singing," suggests that the trauma at the center of World War I is in its own way a repetition:

> Joseph. Three three six, six, fifty, six fifty, fifty, seven.
> Reading french.
> Reading french.
> Reading french singing.
> Anyone can look at pictures.
> They explain pictures.
> The little children have old birds.
> They wish they were women.
> Anyone can hate a Prussian.
> Alphonse what is your name.
> Henri what is your name.
> Madeleine what is your name.
> Louise what is your name.
> Rene what is your name.
> Berthe what is your name.
> Charles what is your name.
> Marguerite what is your name.
> Jeanne what is your name.   (*GP,* 413)

This is not especially encouraging, since, as Stein creates this "anyone" out of French children (or perhaps, recalling her experience at the battlefields, they are soldiers and nurses), she demonstrates how many "anyone"'s there can be at one time, and who, as coincidents, can provoke the founding moment of world war. "Accents in Alsace" is subtitled "A Reasonable Tragedy." Repetition, as demonstrated here, is the expression of the negativity of difference as unstable, unstoppable continuity—it is the action of the differential, figuring war's threat to identity. The "introduction of an objective dimension into the subject" (Cohen, *Profane Illumination*, 67)—a founding Surrealist tenet—carries with it the possibility that "the boundary between subject and object will crumble in the direction of contingency rather than recuperation" (ibid.). The "national," good French names are patriarchal marks until Stein performs them as repetition, and then they are thrown into the space of national difference. In Alsace, a place between nations—neither French nor German *in language*—the

threat of negativity to national identity, the boundary between subject and object had crumbled during trench warfare into a "zone" of contingent and repeated non-identity.

As it appears in *Geography and Plays*, Stein's literary fact is emblematic of her work's investment in an alternative, non-phallic and anti-Oedipal, economy of signification. Irigaray calls this kind of work "reopening" and "interrogating … the *scenography* that makes representation feasible" (*This Sex*, 74–75). It is necessary for an anti-phallogocentric project to reopen discursive figures—particularly those that traditionally produce knowledge—"in order to pry out of them what they have borrowed that is feminine, from the feminine, to make them 'render up'" (ibid.) the facts of their own making. These "interventions on the scene" (75) must not simply be announced and then slip, acquiescing, into discursive coherence. Rather, in Irigaray's formulation, the interventions must take place in a text engaged in the ongoing work of perpetual refiguration; in other words, a text committed to such reopenings would reenact its interventions "in each figure of discourse, in order to shake discourse away from its mooring in the value of presence" (ibid.) and into differential space. Stein presented this odd scenography in the piece "Geography," written in 1923 and published in the 1955 Yale volume *Painted Lace and Other Pieces*, which suggests that through the composition of the works in *Geography and Plays* she was able to come to a definition of the term that could finally be reported and potentially reopened for further use. Dydo describes the piece as an embodiment of "the act of creation in steadily shifting forms" (*Language That Rises*, 73). One line of "Geography" simply states "An interval" (Dydo, *Stein Reader*, 467). An interval (or, "An interval") brings us through such an interval concerning the sea to a place where "Such phrases" leads us to "More geography, more than, more geography" (468), that is, to plays.

It seems important to look at this piece as the scenography of the word itself, the documentation of the process by which it came to be a literary fact: Stein's use of geography to negotiate the fractured selves and landscapes that surrounded her, multiplying as plays during World War I. The "shifts of seeing and saying, closeness and distance, moving and hearing, writing and loving" (Dydo, *Language That Rises*, 73) characterize an act of reopening, also an act of response to the violent reconfiguration of one's context. This is the threat posed by the act of reopening, which can also figure continuously, and Stein indicates the impossibility of its resolution in the pairs of unstable subject-less adverbs that follow the assertion of "Immeasurably": "Immeasurably and frequently. Frequently and invariably. Invariably and contentedly. Contentedly and indefatigably. Indefatigably and circumstances. Circumstance and circumstantially. Initiative and reference" (Dydo, *Stein Reader*, 469). Here we depart from description—the simultaneously adjectival and adverbial "immeasurably"— into a geography provisionally stabilized by "circumstances," which is immediately destabilized by its own action, until finally we arrive at "reference." It is not an issue, for Stein, of creating a stable system of incoherence as protest against the symbolic order, wherein referentiality appears, reconstituted, as the final normative textual form. And for Irigaray, the issue "is not one of elaborating a new theory of which woman would be the *subject* or the *object*, but of jamming the theoretical machinery itself," by "repeating" a "*disruptive excess*" (*This Sex*, 78).

The disruptive excess of differential play is at the crux of Irigaray's logic of the specular economy. Irigaray is careful with her terms in order that she not limit feminine writing work to a simple opposite of phallogocentric signification: "This 'style,' or 'writing,' of women tends to put the torch to fetish words, proper terms, well-constructed forms" (*This Sex*, 79). Critical attempts to assign to Stein's more experimental work the distinction of

the (ultimately fetishized) embodiment of *differ(e/a)nce* might do well to consider Irigaray's

delicacy here. The terms that Irigaray is willing to assign to the category of "disruptive

excess" are all differential, the unassimilable excess of production on the scene, of

geographical interventions: simultaneity, nearness, "rubbings between two infinitely near

neighbors that create a dynamics" (ibid.)—in other words, pairings and orders without

fetishized forms or hierarchy—compositional concepts that work only differentially. Irigaray

proposes a method, a poetics, that puts geography and plays into the dynamic proximity that

calls forth the literary fact in Stein's work:

> If this is to be practiced for every meaning posited—for every word, utterance,
> sentence, but also, of course, for every phoneme, every letter—we need to proceed
> in such a way that linear reading is no longer possible: that is, the retroactive impact
> of the end of each word, utterance, or sentence upon its beginning must be taken
> into consideration in order to undo the power of its teleological effect, including its
> deferred action. That would hold good also for the opposition between structures of
> horizontality and verticality that are at work in language. (*This Sex*, 80)

Discourse must structurally be transformed in practicing geography, not for the sake of

creating nonsense but for the sake of leaving a material record of intervention that reflects

constantly on the circumstances of its own production. In Stein's World War I work, "the

resulting landscapes constitute plays" (Hejinian, *Language of Inquiry*, 110).

When she decided to "get into the war" by driving for the American relief effort,

Stein became part of the plays that she'd composed in Mallorca earlier, before the events at

Verdun had made her participation necessary, and "it was during these long trips that she

began writing a great deal again" (Hejinian, *Language of Inquiry*, 175). In a later essay, "Plays,"

Stein writes:

> The landscape has its formation and as after all a play has to have formation and be
> in relation one thing to the other thing and as the story is not the thing as one is
> always telling something then the landscape not moving but being always in relation,
> the trees to the hills the hills to the fields the trees to each other any piece of it to any
> sky and then any detail to any other detail, the story is only of importance if you like

to tell or like to hear a story but the relation is there anyway. (Hejinian, *Language of Inquiry*, 110)

In "Accents in Alsace," the Great War is in differential relation to the form of the text, creating a textual landscape that constitutes a play, but the form of the play is not prior to the telling of the war. For example, in a section titled "An Interlude," the reader is told: "Three days in February gave reality to life" (*GP,* 414). Several lines later, another section is titled "February XIV"; the numerals translate to a date, 14, St. Valentine's Day and a real date in the history of the war. Yet as a section title, the numerals signify a formal feature of the play while also constituting a play between the earlier piece of information and the next: "On this day the troops who had been at Mulhouse came again" (ibid.). The play is happening in history, but history is also acting on the form of the play. The structural and geographical project casts language not as a medium for telling history, but instead as what brings us disturbingly close to the trauma that constitutes it. Stein modeled this undoing of reference on the undoing of geography—what is referenced—by modern warfare.

Language, as Wittig conceives of it, "casts sheaves of reality upon the social body" (*Straight Mind*, 78). Pronouns, in the sense that they represent persons, "are the means of entrance into language" (ibid.) the social self manifest in material form. As the material instance of the fully social—for it has already been stamped, inscribed by language, by prior usage and histories—Wittig's pronouns act as literary facts *par excellence*. In the next step, pronouns produce gender as a literary fact: "As soon as there is an 'I,' gender manifests itself" (79). And to the extent that pronouns are material, they are subject to textual processes, opening always new sites of disturbance, a "suspension of grammatical form" (ibid.). For Wittig, this is the moment for the "direct interpellation" (ibid.) of the speaker, when she is called upon to reveal her gender and take her place once again in the phallogocentric order of language. This suspension of form is of course also an opportunity,

a moment available to be recast in a grammar, such as Stein invents, that can effect alternate orders of factual/textual reality. Stein attempts to reassert grammar so that gender manifests belatedly in form: "this one," for example, replaces the more gender identifiable "I." Stein thus redefines gender in the here and now as indeterminate, subject to the contingency of the scene of both production and reading.

Gender, in Stein, is a differential site around which her literary facts cluster, oftentimes as pronouns. In Wittig's work, the most effective intervention into suspended form is the French pronoun *on*.[10] For many French feminist writers, *on* afforded an always problematized yet still insistently material disruptive possibility, and I would argue that the pronoun's effectiveness lies in its differential quality; if the personal pronoun takes on the status of literary fact, *on* is the one most available for investment. As Deleuze puts it, in a world like the one destroyed and re-inhabited by Wittig's *elles*: "We believe in a world in which individuations are impersonal, and singularities are pre-individual: the splendor of the pronoun 'one'" (*Difference and Repetition*, xxi). *On* is in fact much like this *one* that Stein tries to create out of "this one" in *The Making of Americans*, possessed of indefinite gender and number but remaining singular. Simply put, *on* is this one which is not one. *One* is therefore, for Stein, a continuous present of queered national identity endlessly oscillating between American English and French, individuality and collectivity, national narrative arrested by undone gender: the transnational self at a standstill. I come back to Stein's "Brothers Singulars" for an example, wherein—as Watten puts it—"queerness removes one from the cycle of social reproduction and establishes one's 'singularity'" ("Epic of Subjectivation,"

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[10] Wittig gives a complete account of her pronoun use in the essay "The Mark of Gender," in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (76-89).

102). Casting *Brothers Singulars* in feminist terms is not only in keeping with Stein's gender outlawry, it also helps us to reopen the pronouns throughout her experimental texts:

> Yes real singularity we have not made enough of yet so that any other one can really know it. I say vital singularity is as yet an unknown product with us, we who in our habits, dress-suit cases, clothes and hats and ways of thinking, walking, making money, talking, having simple lines in decorating, in ways of reforming, all with a metallic clicking like the type-writing which is our only way of thinking, our way of educating, our way of learning, all always the same way of doing, all the way down as far as there is in any way down inside to us. We are all the same all through us, we never have it to be free inside us. (Stein, *Making of Americans*, 47)

In this singular "we," Stein has *ons* everywhere.

In the Marxist terms that inform Wittig's argument, a class must represent itself as *on*. As she famously stated, "'Woman' is there to confuse us, to hide the reality of 'women.' In order to be aware of being a class and to become a class, we have to first kill the myth of 'woman'" (*Straight Mind*, 16). But this can't be simply a Marxist struggle, since Marxist class struggle implies, for Wittig, a reduction of identity. Watten, reading the "Brothers Singulars" in *The Making of Americans*, seems to agree, noting that queerness establishes singularity in the text "at the cost of irrelevance" ("Epic of Subjectivation," 102). This would seem to be Stein's view as well: "No brothers singulars, it is sad here for us, there is no place in an adolescent world for anything eccentric like us, machine making does not turn out queer things like us, they can never make a world to let us be free each one inside us" (ibid.). But while Stein may say that becoming a class is impossible for the Brothers Singulars, she is in fact creating textually precisely that class. Where Wittig sees the inadequacies of a Marxist class struggle, Stein seems to focus on a moment when "we are… confronted with the historical necessity of constituting ourselves as the individual subjects of our history" (Wittig, *Straight Mind*, 16), and she sees in that moment a differential operation of social structuring rather than the progressive narrative of class formation. Stein's solution was to try to produce a textual machine that turns out queer things "like us," looking to material language

to effect a social reality. She did so with a repetition that "belongs to humor and irony; it is by nature transgression or exception, always revealing a singularity opposed to the particulars subsumed under laws" (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 5).

Stein's pre-World War I texts prefigured her desire to introduce negativity into form as a way of releasing the social from narrative determination. The irony appears in the way that the war exposed the social negativity within progress that had been there all along. Fussell quotes Henry James, who, just after Britain joined the war, wrote:

> The plunge of civilization into this abyss of blood and darkness … is a thing that so gives away the whole long age during which we have supposed the world to be, with whatever abatement, gradually bettering, that to have to take it all now for what the treacherous years were all the while really making for and *meaning* is too tragic for any words. (*Great War*, 8)

With this in mind, Stein's poetic knowledge comes to resemble what Adorno calls "the reconciling aspect of form," wherein "the violence done to the material imitates the violence that issued from the material and that endures in its resistance to form" (*Aesthetic Theory,* 50). What may have been "too tragic" for James opened, for Stein, a way for aesthetic and social concerns to come out in form, but only if they remain locked in the same sort of differential relation between history and the language event that is their making. This glimpse of the link between poetics and social subjectivation in Stein can be best seen retroactively or, perhaps better still, as anterior to the text. "What will have been" is a differential present that allows access to social facts outside realist modes, wherein "the subjective domination of the act of forming is not imposed on irrelevant materials but is read out of them"(ibid.). Stein's inquiry into social content happened in language, so that this inquiry became "immanent" in the texts she produced. This "integrated, simultaneous whole mode" is constructed from the "constantly moving parts" (DeKoven, *Different Language*, 123) of Stein's grammar, which seem to determine "how it is to be when it is done."

III. Mapping, Thinking, and "Pink Melon Joy"

"Pink Melon Joy" (*GP,* 347–76) enacts the production of the document of Stein's immersion as a social subject in a historical landscape now defined by the anti-patriarchal logic she found in World War I. A record of Stein and Toklas's stay in London during the war in 1914 and their subsequent return to France, this long poem is full of participles that refuse stability, an evasion characteristic of grammar in Stein's texts. These participles foreground a structure determined by the ongoing act of its own making in relation to a history or landscape being unmade. "I like to be excellently seized," writes Stein (358). And then: "I made a mistake./I like to be excellently seizing…/I like to be excellently searching" (ibid.). There is also "Feeling mounting" (353), and "Willing./Willing, willing./Willing willing…" (354). Under the heading "Pink Melon Joy./II," there is an interruption, an eruption of barely controlled participles into the text: "I meant to mention pugilism. Pugilism leaning. Leaning and thinking. Thinking./I meant to mention pugilism. Pugilism and leaning./Leaning and thinking. I think" (357). While present participles are not necessarily the predominant form in the text, they nonetheless form its structural underpinnings, its "little keys trembling" (357). Participles "render yourselves further"(372). They are part of Stein's hope to "please be restless" for "I cannot count./I looked for the address" but "there was plenty of time in softening" (376). If Stein located the possibility for subjectivation in *Geography and Plays* at the site of the national trauma of the Great War, "Pink Melon Joy" shows how she "rendered" that subject "further" by creating an eroticized grammar of sensation in her textual production.

In her 2003 text *My Paris*, Gail Scott strolls through Paris, in a kind of ecstatically failed *flaneurie*, "thinking of Stein's predilection for predicates" (29). It might be helpful to consider that in mathematical language, a "predicate" is a relation; in formal grammatical

terms, it denotes an intersection. A predicate is often defined as "an expression that can be true of something," and philosophy considers it an aspectual classification. Perhaps the most intriguing definition of "predicate" is Bertrand Russell's: a verb meaning "to assign a type." Stein questions all of these received meanings in turn: "Why should eating be agreeing./Why should darkness turn colors./Why should peddling be honorable./Why should another be mother" (*GP,* 368). From "Pink Melon Joy," the grammar released by Stein's participles and predicates moves across *Geography and Plays* to suggest a parallel enacted in language to both her mobility throughout the war—which begins, literally, during this poem—and the negativity she saw released by war into the landscape. On one hand, predicates become participles and types or classifications transform into open verbs that are "restless," mobile, and uncountable, negative. On the other hand, a selection of predicates perform the kind of anti-patriarchal language strategies that *Geography and Plays* deploys: "It is chance. An accident. A resemblance. An offspring. An intuition. A result. A repetition. Repeat" (*GP,* 372). As Scott finds them, "Which predicates—in multiplying—soaking up surroundings" (*My Paris*, 29), do multiply in "Pink Melon Joy" until they appear as "uncanny sensations," soaking up "contemporary aspects" of the "I" into the "site where the obscured past persists in disfigured form" (Cohen, *Profane Illumination*, 98):

> Deep set trustworthy eyes dark like his hair
> Lips close fitting and without flew.
> Blue should have dark eyes.
> Light brown flesh color amber shades black nose, ears, legs, good sized feet rather.
> Color dark blue, blue and tan, tan and liver, sandy, sandy and tan.
> Height about fifteen to sixteen inches.
> He wondered if she had ever thought of him as she sat in the chair or walked on the floor. (*GP,* 358)

If we think of *Geography and Plays* as the site—produced in concert with the trauma of the war—where that "obscured past persists" in the restless and uncountable mobility of

desiring movement, it is the predicates from "Pink Melon Joy" that multiply and spread the material difference that disfigures forms. Historically, Scarry comments, the structure of war and its ability to be ongoing has depended upon the multiplication of predicates: "The construction, 'War is *x*,' has, over the centuries, invited an array of predicate nominatives" (*Body in Pain*, 63). Likewise Stein is not content to let predicates rest, preferring that they continue to multiply: "Why are we shattered" (*GP,* 350) Further, she continues, "I'll mention it. I have resisted. I have resisted that excellently well. I have resisted that I have resisted that excellently. Not a disappointment" (351). The predicate nominatives that Scarry recognizes appear as history's attempt to make the theater of war a rational space by naming it; Stein's deployment of predicates, in this example, shows that rationalization confounded by the logic of plays, an other space that belongs to anti-patriarchal names.

It is useful here to consider Stein for a moment in relation to her contemporary, the "lived Dada" artist Baroness Elsa, not because of their common social and artistic contexts, but because each threatened constant and unstoppable movement to denarrativize ways of being. Stein and Baroness Elsa have been frequently published together, and although their projects were substantively different, both took on the problem of social subjectivation and created from it a poetics that referenced historical trauma. But while Stein's work, all language, used the instability of that reference to create form, Baroness Elsa performed a more stabilized trauma by attaching it to her body. As Irene Gammel describes, the Baroness was famous for her costumed promenades through the streets of New York, which she "illumined strangely" with "beauty aghast" (*Baroness Elsa*, 233). She referenced her history as a woman and as a German in every move, in every discarded object she wore:

> The Baroness's personal history had marked her body with trauma that remained largely unassimilated in her journey through Europe. Memory was deeply registered on her body to be acted out during a time of collective trauma. In the midst of youthful America, by 1917 the Baroness came to represent Old Europe, associated

with old age, decadence, and destruction. For America and its young modernist poets and authors … her body was the unsettling body of Europe at war. (207)

There was almost no negativity at all in this performance, but rather a trauma so over-positivized that Stein looks almost pastoral in comparison. In Baroness Elsa's written work, trauma is continuous with and projected onto a body under siege: "Since her participles grammatically refuse to define the agent of activity, the real protagonist is the action itself, through which emerges the modern city/body of activity in ecstatic moments of doing" (233).[11]

But for Stein, the multiplication of relations, intersections, categories and possibilities borne by predicates is not an attack but the crucial production of the text. By way of its predicates, "Pink Melon Joy" "absorbs events and objects into its verbal process" much as the theater of war naturalizes its absorption of social forms (Dydo, *Stein Reader,* 280). Stein constructs an eroticized alternative to war, enabled by its attack on patriarchy, with effects of displacement that signal more than just parallel play. The spaces of plays, their absorbing landscapes, are the absent centers that the totalizing theater of war tries to hide behind its aesthetic fantasy. "Pink Melon Joy" is thus more than parallel play—it *is* a play that absorbs the continuously present other space of the war into its verbal process to create an eroticized "war which is not one." In this different yet simultaneous space, Stein's erotics are reparative in that they enable her to create a new kind of modern subject—a queer kind. The subject "not resting," oscillates between "I am satisfied" and "we are neglected immensely" (*GP,*

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[11] See Gammel's reading of Baroness Elsa's poem "Cast-Iron Lover" and its brutal positivization of World War I (*Baroness Elsa*, 214–18).

355). "I meant to be closeted./I should have been thin./I was aching./I saw all the rose (349), while "We were right. We meant pale. We were wonderfully shattered" (350).[12]

In "Pink Melon Joy," Stein uses participles—quite apart from "beginning again and again"—to effect a continuous present in the text, wherein the action is never beginning or ending but goes on and on presently until the text "decides how it is to be when it is done." Early in part 1, predicates overwhelm the subject and turn verbs into the participle form: "This is it mentioning" (*GP,* 353). And then pleading with/in predicates: "Please be cautious and recalcitrant and determined to be steady. Please be neglectful. Please be ordered out./Please be ordered out" (364). But since Stein echoed this threat in language, a geography in which she had already established herself as freely mobile, she was not subject to the war machines but, as Picasso said, their creator. At the site of its production, "Pink Melon Joy" absorbs the cut of the war into its own history and into the history—as DeKoven notes—of Stein's own poetics. We know from Dydo's notes that "the first part of 'Pink Melon Joy' of the summer of 1914 was written in England, but before the end of the second part [Stein] was back in Paris, where she finished the piece" (Dydo, *Stein Reader,* 280). "There may come a pause," Stein writes in "Pink Melon Joy": war, in which we can discern the founding scene of textual figuration (*GP,* 373). When Stein writes, seemingly out of nowhere in "Pink Melon Joy," "Maps./I am thinking" (376), she posits both a pause— indicating, perhaps, her difficulty with maps—and a similarity between the two ideas. World War I destroyed the old order of maps and replaced it with giant cuts across the landscape. "Thus," Fussell writes, "the drift of modern history domesticates the fantastic and

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[12] The word "closeted" should not be read here in the sense that it has come to mean, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, "secretly homosexual," although it is reasonable to think that Stein may have been considering it as a synonym for repression more generally.

normalizes the unspeakable" (*Great War*, 74). Stein's pause, which is always about to come, is erotic when it becomes a space for both difficulty and a certain familiarity between the domestic and the unspeakable, the normal and the fantastic—what the "drift of modern history" seems so desperate to elide. At the same time, destruction created possibilities for knowledge, for thinking, for the emergence of non-normative sociality. The war was terrifying in its ability to violently reconfigure reality, but Stein did not overlook its capacity to denarrativize patriarchal privilege.

If we read, for example, Stein's "I" as just such a disturbed form, as "I wish I was may be I am" (364), we can see how she brings the French *on* into *Geography and Plays* as the self saturated with predicates—with relations, types, possibilities, and other selves. This *on* is the denarrativized wartime self that moves between individual and collective identities, between nationalities, gender, and locations, and we can see from the "I wish" sequences her desire to usher that self into modern, postwar textual sociality. The "I wish" sequences illustrate how this saturated self is mobilized across the text in moments of "immense verbosity," the intensified doing of unspecified desire: "I wish anger./I wish religion./I wish bursts…./I wish again./I wish more than that" (368-70). Once desire is "dissociated from inflexible forms" (Dydo, *Language That Rises*, 141), it is no longer necessary to read Stein's lesbian desire as coded or hidden. She begins by writing "I cannot mention what I have," but later mentioning takes over the action of the text (*GP,* 363). Even in the lines following, Stein mentions what "I have": "Guess it./I have a real sight./This is so critical./Alice" (363). Later, Stein reminds us, "I mentioned gayety./I mentioned gayety" and, throughout *Geography and Plays*, she has (369). It is an ecstatic sexuality on the level of language, in which words and images "violently implode against each other, tearing down the patriarchal sign system itself" (Gammel, *Baroness Elsa*, 8). Stein calmly bids the reader "come in," but we

come directly into "splashes splashes of jelly splashes of jelly" (*GP,* 355). Much as the war absorbed all reality and surrounded Stein with constant violence and destruction, we are meant to see how, if we take part in her textual economy, there are places where the bombs will be rendered as soft and sexual as "splashes of jelly." Transforming war in this way destroys the distinction between landscape and language, maps and thinking, domesticating the unspeakable to establish plays. Toward the end of part 1, Stein presents this as the reparative erotic bridge by way of which we can overcome the patriarchal logic of the war and of language by being "wonderfully shattered."

Just after the start of part 2, ostensibly under the heading "It pleases me very much," the thread of "mentioning" continues, interspersed with moments of "thinking," "leaning," and "pugilism": "The reason I mention what is happening is not by way of concealing that I have babies. I don't mean to leave so I shall speak in silence. What is a baby" (*GP,* 357). A pause or interruption follows: "Now I know what I say./I had loads of stationary" (357). Much has been made of the way that Stein equated her texts with "babies," thereby associating textual and sexual production. Instead of producing babies, the lesbian relationship produces texts, which are then *called* "babies" in order to normalize lesbian sexuality by associating it with reproductive futurity. Here, however, Stein undoes this concealing logic by opening the scene of textual production so that, in between the question "what is a baby," and its answer, there is a moment that "belongs" to no text, that gives no information except for documenting that "what is happening is not by way of concealing that I have babies": "Now I know what I say." "What is a baby," then? Stein answers, after the pause that reveals the site of production, "Not pink melon joy. Pink melon joy. Pink melon joy" (357). Here, the fact is not a representation, it is a differential production beyond the displacement of war, a queer erotics where text and body meet via "Pink Melon Joy."

The fact erupts from the page: "Shall I be splendid" (358). At this point, "babies" are no longer hidden or coded, but are instead literary facts, exploding with sexuality, texuality, and all the *siteness* they contain: "Baby mine baby mine I am learning letters I am learning that to be sent baby mine baby mine I arranged it fairly early" (358). True to her word, Stein "arranged" this possibility "fairly early," in *The Making of Americans* and *Tender Buttons*. And now she is producing babies, texts, during the war that will drop on normative identity like the bombs that explode the landscape. Babies, not yet possessed of socialized national or gender identity, disperse difference throughout *Geography and Plays* to pieces like "Accents in Alsace," a collective geographical portrait of a region and a tradition subjected to the denarrativizing destruction of trench warfare:

> I hold my baby as I say.
> Completely.
> And what is an accent of my wife.
> And accent and the present life.
> Oh sweet oh my oh sweet oh my
> I love you love you and I try
> I try not to be nasty and hasty and good
> I am my little baby's daily food.
>   Alsatia.
> In the exercise of greatness there is charm.
> Believe me I mean to do you harm. (*GP,* 410)

What begins as "love talk" between Stein and her wife is a total system—"Completely"— and an accent is how it is conveyed. Yet "Alsatia," changed by this accent so it is not "completely" "Alsace," is placed in the text so that it interrupts the narrative that the initial intimate conversation attempts to construct. This differential "Alsatia" could also be "Alice," and suddenly it is the intimacy between the two wives, domestic and unspeakable, that denarrativizes the site on which one might otherwise have been able to find a coherent gender or nationality; the region and tradition of identity becomes a space of gender "play." It is a textual space defined as parallel to war by the last two lines: "In the exercise of

greatness there is charm./ Believe me I mean to do you harm." Here, the movement of history into form, and the parallel movement of form through history is the plainly— disturbingly plainly—stated fact of violence differentially linked by Alice/Alsace/Alsatia to the fact of two wives loving.

And while it is likewise disturbingly affirmative, on Stein's part, to equate war with birth and to suggest that she is dropping babies like bombs, or to equate the destructive threat of her love for Alice to normative narratives of identity to the violent interruption of Europe by the trench system, it is here that we can very clearly discern the power and threat of the literary fact and the scene of its modern figuration. Words no longer "hint at" facts, secreting identity away behind a screen of material language, but are instead facts themselves, telling and absorptive; "I mean to be heavy," Stein tells us (*GP*, 355), invoking the fullness of textual possibility found in the literary fact of "A substance in a cushion." The texts, no longer author-centered, identical, come to us shattered by their indefinite participles and multiplicity of predicates, leading readers back to their raw material. Stein was well aware of the price of disobedience both as a woman and as a writer, and she had long studied identity and names in order to "open questions of what happens to women, and … also to Stein's own marriage to Toklas, their free, creative union not bound to property and patriarchy nor sanctioned by a joint legal name" (Dydo, *Language That Rises*, 451). So statements like "I didn't complain Susie" (*GP,* 370) "speak the fragmentary truth of life 'outside the sentence,'" allowing us to penetrate "our own cultural fictions of smoothness" to the "gaps, faults, craters beneath" (DeKoven, *Different Language*, 92) that contour the differential site. Yet this is not, as DeKoven calls it, an "escape" from rationality or coherent communication that forms the foundation of experimental writing (95). In the fragmented, decontextualized "I didn't complain Susie," we are transported back to the opening text of *Geography and Plays.*

The texts in between take on the status of literary facts, suspended in the differential space of figuration that is the book, from where we can see how the war offered the possibility of negativity not as pre-symbolic lack but as gendered counterstrategy. The facts—names—do not change, yet the accent changes them, foregrounding the power of difference over identity at the level of not just the individual text but the collection as well. Stein's plays perform the poetics of the absent center, the trauma of war, but in order for them to do so we must consider them always in difference with geography. I want to argue that "Pink Melon Joy" is the piece in the collection that finally gets us there, to the textual geography of an eroticized alternative to war and its normalization by the rationality of naming or description. So while Stein establishes geography as more than naming or description, more than documentary, it is not until the language transformed therein is used in plays that the collection becomes a literary fact, a system of making meaning that works only in differential.

Part Three: Conclusion: What Resists Being Formed

In his introduction to *Geography and Plays*, Sherwood Anderson concludes: "For me the work of Gertrude Stein consists in a rebuilding, an entire new recasting of life, in the city of words" (8). *Geography and Plays* provides us with an opportunity to trace the development of Stein's poetics of literary fact through her response to a historical threat—World War I— and the subsequent reparative erotics, deployed in and as plays "bridging" the negative absent center, of the text itself to the modern queer subject. In her urban, feminist, transnational, and queer spaces, broken open by World War I, Stein produced literary facts and, along with them, a poetics based in relations that recast language as action and text as a differential machine. Throughout her early work, Stein was trying to create a differential machine, a uniquely modern textual apparatus of counterstrategical figuration. The

differential machine not only opens sites for the emergence of literary fact but also documents their emergence. The differential machine figures a particularly "American" response to the indeterminate body of Europe at war, as well as the indeterminate *body* itself in catastrophic modernity. Stein's self, exploding with multiplicity, was under threat of being engulfed by the very indeterminacy that provided agency as it was reified in the machine age and put to the service of destruction in World War I. One needed a machine of one's own to figure at all, to work the differential instead of sink (or escape) into it, where "any question leads away from me" (*GP,* 405), to create literary facts as proof of existence. In Stein, we see how this machine, not just necessary, has the means to "delight me" in its production: "I delight a lamb in birth" (406). After the tender textual erotics of *Tender Buttons* and the anti-Oedipal denarrativizing insistence of *The Making of Americans*, *Geography and Plays* seems to define experience as "the transformation of what is hostile to art into art's own agent" and the subject as "what resists being formed," in Adorno's words (*Aesthetic Theory*, 49). Likewise the queer, anti-patriarchal, unrepresentable and indistinct borders of a world at war are incorporated into a text that resists being formed by language—its own agent—into a referential representation: "These are the wets," Stein tells us, again in "Susie Asado," in what could be read as a play on both words and the French *mots* (*GP,* 13). These are the *words*, at one and the same time *wets*, and "these say the sets"—sex?—until we begin to realize that these are a certain kind of word—a wet kind—denoting a way to say sex, and in fact are, in the agitated bumping and rubbing of their irresolvable differential, sex itself. All this possibility resides in "sets." The "immense forces of 'atmosphere'" (Benjamin, "Surrealism," 182) trapped, concealed, in patriarchal systems of order and representation come out in Stein's work at the point of double contact between fact and literature, form and history, that was her experience of World War I.

Stein's "scrutiny of herself in relation to her ongoing perceptions and formulations" (Dydo, *Stein Reader*, 21) manifests as disruption on the surface of the text and produces what we now talk about as "experimentalism," stark against the impenetrable field of structured discourse, "beginning again and again." The textual production of countersites facilitates the dispersion of authorship across the textual surface, and this dispersion in turn produces the heterotopias that Foucault calls "other spaces." From these spaces of time—in other words, *Geography and Plays*—"filled always filled with moving" (Dydo, *Stein Reader,* 3), Stein writes: "I cannot help it. I cannot expect places" (*GP,* 375). Figured into a machinic assemblage in the modern style—and why shouldn't Stein make a war machine now if according to Picasso this was a thing that had already been done by modernism—Stein's multiplying predicates become heterotopic spaces in which alternative social identities at play move form through history. Heterotopic textual space comprises an important differential site that appears throughout modernist poetics and thereby deserves a thoroughgoing analysis in its own right. For the moment I would like to suggest that we can discern Stein's orientation toward heterotopia in the refusal of "I cannot," which defines *Geography and Plays* as a heterotopic space. So instead of ignoring any "regrettably necessary" referential content (DeKoven, *Different Language*, 12), I propose an understanding of Stein wherein what Dydo calls "the relation of the disembodied texts to the bodied referential vocabulary" (*Language That Rises*, 7) is always in differential. In this way we can read within her order of facticity rather than reducing our readings to so many attempts at resolving her texts. Stein's refusal of referential representation also refuses normative identity in a way that's queer and that leads her to use language to effect a direct relationship to traumatic history as a spatial form. This continuity registers as a threat, always queer, to patriarchal ordering principles at the level of the work's form.

A "prominent concern" in American "counter-poetics," according to Jerome Rothenberg, appears at the point when "the poet confronts *still different* kinds of knowing, sees himself with others in time, [and] the 'rush of experience' opens into history" (*Revolution of the Word*, xvii; emphasis added). Rothenberg's carefully chosen "still different" gestures toward both the "other spaces" of heterotopic landscapes and the logic of differential machines, which each in their own but connected ways refuse realist knowledge. According to Tynjanov, if "the very existence of the fact *as literary* depends on its differential quality, that is, on its interrelationship with both literary and extraliterary orders," then "what in one epoch would be a literary fact would in another be a common matter of social communication, and vice versa, depending on the whole literary system in which the given fact appears" ("Literary Evolution," 69). The existence of a literary fact thus "depends on its function" (ibid.). At the level of the single text, as yet uncollected, "Pink Melon Joy" functions as an exemplary differential and absorbing landscape, the geography between portraits and plays, and a text whose logic we can extend throughout a sustained analysis of Stein's work both in and beyond *Geography and Plays*. As a poetic response to the discontinuity of war in the terms of modern warfare—a machine that necessarily elicits response—the continuous present in "Pink Melon Joy" discloses a zone within *Geography and Plays* that both refuses formalist autonomy and redeploys that refusal in the material text whose language is mobile and defiantly between categories, genders, nations. The title of Stein's heterotopic collection should finally be read as differential; "Geography" and "Plays" are not equivalents—they are, instead, elements whose never-settled relation of difference produces landscapes, portraits, and the always-moving narratives of modern selves against a background of facts that are never *one*.

CHAPTER 2.

"Just Contact with the Facts": Langston Hughes's *Montage of a Dream Deferred*

I. Harlem History: Refusing Realist Heroics

Toward the end of 1922, Langston Hughes had abandoned Columbia University, and Harlem, to sign on as a "messboy" on the S.S. Malone. The ship, bound for Africa, sat in port for months until, sometime in the late winter or early spring of 1923, Hughes received word that the S.S. Malone would weigh anchor the next day. He rushed back to Harlem to retrieve his library and, upon returning to the ship, divested himself of its entire contents. "I leaned over the rail of the S.S. Malone," Hughes writes in *The Big Sea*, "and threw the books as far as I could out into the sea—all the books that I had had at Columbia, and all the books I had lately brought to read … I was twenty-one" (*LHR,* 317). On one hand, this pitching of books into dark water seems like the overwrought gesture of a young man. Yet, as Amiri Baraka suggests, if the start of the Harlem Renaissance announced "the entrance into the twentieth century of Afro-American people" and "the motion of black people in America" out of the South and into modernity (*Baraka Reader*, 317), Hughes's act also registers a break with the facts that had until that moment constituted his history; he declares one end, to be a *real* writer, by enacting another end, throwing his books into the sea. "You see," Hughes writes, "books had been happening to me. Now the books were cast off back there somewhere in the churn of spray and night behind the propeller" (*LHR*, 317). Hughes, the moment that he was free of America, already in the dark waters between Harlem and Africa, cast his intellectual history into the oceanic abyss. The gesture registers not as progress or even as a positivized rejection, but as an "end." Brent Hayes Edwards recognizes a seeming "conundrum" in the "coalition among people of color… that represents the 'end of race'" ("Futures of Diaspora," 705), such as Harlem might have

appeared to Hughes: That it is "tempting to hear 'end' in both senses of the word," as the simultaneous overcoming and goal of the race consciousness that makes it "possible to imagine a future" (ibid.). Hughes represented Harlem's "'end' in a gesture" that indicated the conundrum of "modern blackness" at that precise location, which is "neither redemption nor return, but it is a political stance that finds in diaspora the ground of" a "critique without guarantees" (ibid.).

Hughes was preparing to undertake the journey to Africa in reverse, perhaps to loosen the overdetermined ties to history that the books represented—in both senses of the word—to him. Having experienced Harlem as a kind of "end," Hughes prepared to reposition it as the start for imagining a history. Like Gertrude Stein, Hughes was seeking a poetics that would challenge realist representation, the history it made available, and the future it made possible. As the "end" that signaled the start of black modernity, Harlem and its culture became the "expression of a particular kind of American experience" (Baraka, *Blues People*, 155); if, as Baraka notes in *Blues People*, "what is most important, that this experience was available intellectually, that it could be learned" is true (ibid.), then it is also true that it could be unlearned. So Hughes made a journey that would introduce the ultimate differential space of history into his poetics: the Atlantic passage. Casting his books into the sea captured this unlearning as a gesture, and served to reactivate, for Hughes, the interval of diaspora that seems to close at an "end." As early as 1922, Hughes seemed to have seen the potential for Harlem to become a symbolic location for the resolution of modern blackness and the illusion that black modernity represented the emergence of African Americans from their troubled history. Resisting that illusion was thus a function of location as well; to reinstantiate diaspora as a historical concept, Hughes needed to locate black modernity geographically.

Harlem began as a community of transplanted Southerners taking their places in the modern industrial economy, and as it grew into a complete city that housed, fed, clothed, and cared for these workers—as well as those who had arrived only to find Harlem's mythic promise unfulfilled—the need for a material historical narrative expressive of this "not-end" emerged. With Edwards, we should understand that diaspora "involves an encounter among 'similars'… in a place that is 'home' to *neither*," a "shared elsewhere" ("Futures of Diaspora," 704). In this instance, Hughes practiced a "poetics of diaspora" located at the site of such an encounter and using language to approach "the task of instancing such a yearning of the particular, taking the measure of its distances" (703), preserving the distances in collective history rather than eliding them behind a metonymic "community"—covered in a thick dark gloss of redeemed modern blackness. Harlem held no mythical allure for the poet, as he would later note in *The Big Sea*: "The ordinary Negroes hadn't heard of any Negro Renaissance. And if they had, it hadn't raised their wages any" (*LHR*, 371). At the time Hughes signed on to the S.S. Malone, it was mostly practical economic necessity—he needed a job—that compelled him to sail for Africa, further revealing Harlem as an illusory "end." But Hughes's trajectory, as a modern worker, also imitated displacement and exile, beginning with Harlem and moving backwards through history in a parallel and not-at-all symbolic gesture: Harlem hadn't raised his wages, so this "ordinary Negro" headed back to Africa. David Levering Lewis, in *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, is careful to note that concomitantly, Hughes "avoided romanticizing Africa excessively" (83). But still the voyage provided Hughes with a crucial opportunity to shape his own life's narrative and, in turn, to find a standpoint from which to conceive of Harlem's.

In this chapter, I want to examine how Hughes discovered differential space in narratives of self and community and then, after decades of experimenting with the

implications of this discovery, composed a document that challenged both realist modes of documentary representation and established narratives of modern blackness. Differential space, the internal difference within forms, functioned for Hughes similarly to what William J. Maxwell calls "a constructive sort of African-American double consciousness: an untorturous twoness allowing one to see birth cultures as both subject and object, thus ensuring that black difference could not be interpreted as black deficiency" (*New Negro*, 164). *Montage of a Dream Deferred,* published in 1951, is a long poem made up of lyrical fragments of black modernity, re-collected on the contested site of Harlem as facts that cut through the work itself to recapitulate the presence of the ever-deferred dream—now finally "heard of," but with a difference—in black modernity's form. The narrative of self and community in which Hughes located this difference were the unstable forms of both black and modern self-determination, "productive of" the facts "of a race-radical modernism that was not black alone" (202). Deploying such facts in *Montage*, Hughes transforms Harlem into a literary fact, one where the imitation of fact, its representation, becomes the history of the fact itself.

Devin Fore notes that for Soviet factographers of the same era, "the task was not to reflect human experience but to actively construct and organize it," in much the same way that Hughes's sought to produce facts of the black American narrative of progress that begins and "ends" in exile (introduction, 5). Although the question of fact didn't become central to Hughes's poetics until after the 1930s, Hughes's 1920s poetic practice can be compared to that of the factographers, who based their definitions of the "fact" on Tynjanov's 1924 essay "On the Literary Fact," and who understood factography not "as a static genre but as a mode of praxis" between modernist and realist aesthetics (4). In that essay, the author argued from a standpoint of cultural evolution that facts "resulted from a procedure of cultural valorization" (ibid.); factography, in turn, recognized documentary as

an "interventionist practice" that worked in the differential space of the production—not merely the "objective" realist representation—of facts (ibid.). The factographers, in turn, "engaged not just with physical and dimensional bodies, but also with bodies of collective social knowledge and networks of communication" (6). Perhaps most crucially, through Tynjanov the Soviet factographers defined the fact in the sense that I am using it here; Fore notes: "For them, the fact was the outcome of a process of production. The very etymology of the word fact, which comes from the Latin word *facere*—'to make' or 'to do' (this derivation is also reflected in the French word *le fait*, the past participle of the verb *faire*)— bears witness to the fact's constructed nature. The fact is quite literally made" (4–5). Factography thus challenged—as Hughes's Harlem poetics also did—the positivism of "production art" and documentary by "reincorporating into its conception" of the fact or object "the symbolic and ideological systems that had been neglected by its predecessor," Constructivism (5).

Because Hughes's journey also traced, in reverse, the economic geography of black American modernity—*from* Harlem, *to* Africa—it is possible to read in his gesture a rejection of modern industrial capitalism as having been accomplished. Influenced first by the rising Black Internationalism of the 1920s, and later by his involvement with the radical left during the 1930s, Hughes came to understand the need for a dialectical conceptual model of race that would not serve the interests of fascism. And Harlem would not provide this model. That capitalism and identity should be so thoroughly tied, at the "end" of modern blackness, to each other marks an elision of the "contradictory terrain" on which "capitalism advances" (Edwards, "Futures of Diaspora," 705, n.1). In the early twentieth century, Harlem's position as the manifest dream of black modernity allowed for it also to be a primary site of such as elision. Harold Cruse argues that, as a result, "the Harlem Renaissance and its radical allies

missed the implications of cultural revolution in the 1920's" because its "racial aesthetic" was insufficiently dialectical (*The Crisis*, 69). This period, which Hughes would later recognize as "when the negro was in vogue," expressed the central class contradiction of the Harlem Renaissance, which was predicated on the assumption of modernity's "having been accomplished" in the identity of the "New Negro." I want to examine Hughes's desire to reintroduce contradiction, to make a politics of aesthetics, into the terrain of modern black identity so as to reactivate the interval between black modernity—how blackness was experienced during the advent of modern capitalism, and how modernity was experienced by black Americans—and modern blackness—the narrative of progress that subsumed this experience—in order to contest the "end" that Harlem had come to represent and, in consequence, enact. Ryan Jerving notes that Hughes's "not uncritical reading" in his early poetry of modern black cultural production—in Jerving's example, jazz, to which I will later return—"demands that we rethink the standard story about Hughes's 'turn to the left' in the 1930's" ("Early Jazz Literature," 671, n.9). Hughes did not miss the point that Cruse suggests at all; rather, he incorporated it into the long-term trajectory of his work. By the time he made his speech to the Second International Writers Congress in 1937, Hughes had not only grasped but had also mobilized, as concepts, the dialectical implications of the Harlem Renaissance: "We represent the end of race. And the Fascists know that when there is no more race, there will be no more capitalism, and no more war, and no more money for the munition makers, because the workers of the world will have triumphed" ("Too Much," 272). Hughes's aesthetic affiliation with the Popular Front during the 1930s is an important piece of the trajectory that leads from the S.S. Malone to *Montage of a Dream Deferred.* His complication of Popular Front aesthetic practices acts as a "critique without guarantees" that cuts Harlem, and modern black class alliances, on the slant to disclose multiple affiliations

between possible modern black subjectivities no longer limited to an assimilatory "end" in Harlem's illusory accomplished modernity. In other words, Hughes wanted to find a way to use nonpositivist material, and a nonteleological idea of history, to claim his own version of fact.

The founding moment for Hughes's intervention in Harlem's narrative of emergence started when he cast his books over the rail of the S.S. Malone. Thus began a journey during which Hughes would become what Jessica Schiff Berman, after Homi Bhabha, calls "the itinerant and iterative 'I,'" a self formed by the "ways people leave home and return"[13] (*Modernist Fiction*, 17). Berman is careful to note that this is not simply a "migrant" identity, a "remaking… between cultures or…the dissolution of the essential self into 'an endlessly fragmented subject in process'" (ibid.). Rather, Hughes's narrative of self, as informed by this voyage, is one that "comes into being in the moment between these two locations"— Harlem and Africa—a moment that occupies "interstices" and the differential spaces where figuration collapses and subject and history collide. For Hughes, this narrative from an end which is not one and back again is a gestural poetics of diaspora that expresses, in Edwards' words, "not only a relation to deprivation and dispossession, but also a particular link to possibility and potential" ("Futures of Diaspora," 690). "This discourse of diaspora," Edwards notes, "is inflected by its moment—above all in its complex negotiation with the discourse of international communism" (705). Given this, Hughes must have wondered, what of cities like Harlem, figured in the image of a unified modern black American narrative no longer "owned" by its traumatic past but rather assimilated into the capitalist narrative of modernization? Here, Hughes would later identify a site or potential form equal to the task of a critical history of the accomplishment of Harlem and therefore of modern

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[13] Here Berman is using James Clifford's terminology (*Modernist Fiction*, 17, n. 60).

blackness. I want to argue that jazz, particularly in its bebop manifestation, blued positivity to enact the critical poetics of fact that would provide Hughes with this form.

Hughes mostly saw Africa from the deck of the S.S. Malone, moored offshore in the oceanic space of the journey. What little contact he did have with the continent itself was marked not by identity but by historically deferred difference. "The Africans looked at me and would not believe I was a Negro," he wrote: "You see, unfortunately, I am not black. There are lots of different kinds of blood in our family … I am brown" (*LHR*, 322). Hughes's journey to Africa confirmed the direct contact with the material history of slavery that manifested in the identity of black Americans. History disrupted even the site of Hughes's identification as "black," his body thus rendered disturbingly continuous with its own absent cause. Likewise, Hughes's specific relationship to Harlem was not, from the start, based on an "ideal of detachment" from his pre-modern past (Berman, *Modernist Fiction,* 16), nor on a sentimental attachment to his African heritage, but rather on the "reality of (re) attachment, multiple attachment, or attachment at a distance" that his journey to Africa modeled (ibid.).

Hughes's narrative of Harlem, *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, would not be completed or published until 1951, but I want to suggest that its founding moment was the intersection of history, geography, and racial "otherness" that arose from his sea-journey on the S.S. Malone. Cruse argues that after World War II, Harlem suffered a crisis of continuity brought about by the black community's desire "to push forward" as a part of the overwhelming and threateningly promising American industrial "ethos," "impatient with history" (*The Crisis*, 14–15). However, Cruse asserts, Harlem's intellectual leadership "had to"—and here it is unclear whether Cruse means to imply that the intellectuals succeeded or failed in this adjustment—"go back into the 1930's, the 1920's and even before World War I, in order to

understand the Harlem saga—where it had come from, where it had been, and where it might be going" (14). Here, in Cruse's use of the word "saga," we can begin to discern where Hughes might have seen the necessity for a social and cultural poetics in which the facts that composed Harlem could intervene in narrative form. While it seems that Cruse is espousing the aesthetic as nostalgia, Hughes approached his own history, and Harlem's, by taking this crisis as an opportunity to "re-groove" narratives of nostalgia and progress (even including his own autobiography, *The Big Sea*, written in the 1930s and published in 1940) to a polyvocal Harlem saga without "end." Edwards uses the term *décalage* to characterize such a crisis of continuity as Harlem experienced, noting that the term, although functionally untranslatable, can be read as a "gap" or, more crucially, an "interval" (*Practice of Diaspora*, 13). Hughes did not merely recognize that "such an unevenness or differentiation marks a constitutive *décalage* in the very weave of the culture, one that cannot either be dismissed or pulled out"; he took up the "constitutive *décalage*" of Harlem as *the* form of black modernity, the "end" of modern blackness (ibid.).

Harlem's crisis of continuity was a formal manifestation of diasporic identity. Edwards continues:

> Any articulation of diaspora in such a model would be inherently *décalé*, or disjointed, by a host of factors. Like a table with legs of different lengths, or a tilted bookcase, diaspora can be discursively propped up (*calé*) into an artificially "even" or "balanced" state of "racial" belonging. But such props, of rhetoric, strategy, or organization, are always articulations of unity or globalism, ones that can be "mobilized" for a variety of purposes but can never be definitive: they are always prosthetic. In this sense, *décalage* is proper to the structure of a diasporic "racial" formation, and its return in the form of *disarticulation*—the points of misunderstanding, bad faith, unhappy translation—must be considered a necessary haunting. (*Practice of Diaspora*, 14)

Edwards emphasizes the anti-abstractionist uses of diaspora, the "necessary haunting" by "nation, class, gender, sexuality, and language" of the concept such that it becomes method and "points to difference not only internally … but also externally" (12). Cruse points to the

"faulty orientation" of the black intelligensia, their acceptance of "the *illusion* of the integrated world of the creative intellectuals as the social *reality"* (*The Crisis*, 111), as the primary failure of the Harlem Renaissance aesthetic and of black cultural leadership in general. But Hughes, working within *décalage* to (dis)articulate modern blackness and to bring the facts of black modernity to form as diasporic, rejected such false consciousness. In practice, Edwards reminds us, "the ambiguities of diaspora do not resolve" (*Practice of Diaspora*, 118), and we could perhaps say that Hughes learned this, in practice, as he tried to make facts of blackness and black internationalism in his earlier poetry, especially the more explicitly Popular Front verses of the 1930s. Hughes struggled—and this is apparent in some of his more awkward political verses—to positivize black modern experience while also avoiding realism's deployment of facts as a guarantee of resolution. For Tynjanov, crises of continuity—"*Not regular evolution, but a leap; not development, but a dislocation*"—are precisely where literary facts emerge ("Literary Fact," 31). A fact, then, is the site where differences recollect (but do not resolve) in language, sound, or image as a representation of the construction and organization of experience beyond just its immediate sensory features, "reincorporating into its conception of the object the symbolic and ideological systems" that realism seeks to elide (Fore, introduction, 5). Coming eventually to reject the false consciousness of the "end," Hughes practiced a poetics that absorbed, reflected, and refracted difference as a modern black aesthetic while still preserving and presenting blackness as fact.

His political engagement in the 1930s with the Popular Front, as well as his travels in Europe, brought Hughes into contact with aesthetic forms well suited to his desire for textual resistance. Hughes's journeys, first to Soviet Russia in 1932, and later to Spain in 1937, provided him with opportunities to absorb difference in both his material

circumstances—as a modern "Black International"—and his poetic practice. Hughes turned, as he traveled, increasingly to translation, to make money, no doubt, and to make friends, but also as a way to enter into forms in order to discover poetry at its most radical. In his translations of García Lorca, for example, Hughes found "a poetics that continually strives to figure absolute otherness, using abrupt shifts in register, tone, and image to force the reader into a confrontation with alterity" (Edwards, "Futures of Diaspora," 699). Hughes, as translator, was in the unique position to be subject to the disclosure of the multiple affiliations of author and reader, producer and consumer, figuring alterity as he confronted it. He translated selections from the work of then recently deceased Vladimir Mayakovsky; describing the poet in *I Wonder as I Wander*, Hughes seems to prefigure his own later approach to a revolutionary poetics, which would appear in *Montage*: "Mayakovsky was the mad surrealist poet of the revolution, writing strange but intriguing slogans for May Day Parades, fantastic poetic ads for Soviet shoeshops, and rhymes in favor of hygiene, such as: 'Let a little more culture,/Workers, take place!/Don't spit on the floor—/Spit in a vase'" (198). This short translated passage shows the simultaneously pragmatic and absurd orientation that the poets shared, suggesting the importance of the good-natured but always conscious everyday social revolutionary that Hughes would transport from Mayakovsky's Russia, home to Harlem. Hughes also met Louis Aragon, who had by that time quit surrealism for the French Communist Party, in Moscow in 1933 and translated from French Aragon's poem "Magnitogorsk." It is significant, in the context of Hughes's physical and poetic journey, that the poem addresses a discrete revolutionary "site." Magnitogorsk was intended to be an emblem of progress, a modern cityscape that was itself production art representing Soviet achievement. To identify place or location with the revolutionary impulse is one way that we can see Hughes thinking through the "end" of the Soviet Union's

revolutionary becoming, and it presented to Hughes a new language with which to narrate progress that was as yet uninflected by American capitalism. Harlem might be Magnitogorsk, translated to retain the internal difference of international black modernity; Hughes considered these corresponding "ends" in *I Wonder as I Wander*: "The Soviet Union was at that time only fifteen years old. I kept thinking of what someone once said about the freed Negroes in America, 'Don't try to measure the progress of the Negro by how far he has gone but rather the distance from which he has had to come'" (211). His journey on the S.S. Malone revealed modern blackness to Hughes as a "frame of cultural identity determined not through 'return' but through difference" (Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*, 12), and his subsequent experiences of displacement as a traveler and translator during the 1930s demanded a poetics critical of black modernity's accomplishment—its *calé* or discursive propping up by capitalist progress—returned Hughes, in 1951, to *Montage of a Dream Deferred*.

According to Lewis, Harlem provided "a copiously detailed printed record" (*When Harlem*, 211) of itself, but these documents alone don't convey what Claude McKay called "the hot syncopated fascination of Harlem" (xxviii) that characterized the community as Hughes experienced it from the 1920s on. It wasn't until bebop appeared in the late 1940s that Hughes was able to identify an aesthetic form that could express Harlem's "end." Eric Lott, in his 1988 essay "Double V, Double-Time: Bebop's Politics of Style," names bebop as "one of the great modernisms" (602). In the same essay, which has by now become foundational for the study of bebop history, Lott notes that "militancy and music were undergirded by the same social facts" (599), so bop was simultaneously a goal—the sonic self-determination of individual players negotiating collective performance—and a means of denarrativizing established forms like swing that offered no guarantees for either the individual or the collective. The solo performance doesn't necessarily contribute to the

coherence of the collective, as Miles Davis writes: "But if you get a group of guys who don't understand what's happening, or they can't handle all that freedom you're laying on them, and they play what *they* want, then it's no good" (*Miles*, 89). According to his preface to *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, Harlem's "hot syncopated" form was for Hughes an avant-garde form, both on the streets and on the page:

> In terms of current Afro-American popular music and the sources from which it has progressed—jazz, ragtime, swing, blues, boogie-woogie, and be-bop—this poem on contemporary Harlem, like be-bop, is marked by conflicting changes, sudden nuances, sharp and impudent interjections, broken rhythms, and passages sometimes in the manner of the jam session, sometimes the popular song, punctuated by the riffs, runs, breaks, and disc-tortions of the music of a community in transition. (*LHR*, 89)

Bebop didn't provide a coherent narrative between production and consumption, between its origin—both in the now, being played, and in history, becoming modern—and its result. The only constant was the making, the foregrounded poetics of instability that Hughes took up as a denarrativized social form, a saga of production. Tynjanov writes: "Every work is like an off-centre disc, where the constructive factor is not dissolved in the material, does not 'correspond' to it, but is connected to it eccentrically, stands out against it" ("Literary Fact," 37). "Bebop didn't have the humanity of Duke Ellington," according to Davis: "It didn't even have that recognizable thing" (*Miles*, 119). Bebop was a critique, and it didn't have "that recognizable thing," a guarantee.

Jerving rejects "a notion of 'jazz' as a single, transhistorical aesthetic or 'tradition'" in favor of recognizing in the music and its associated literary forms "complex, compromised kinds of cultural transitions" ("Early Jazz Literature," 665). Jazz in general, and then later, bebop more specifically, was therefore a "music far beyond the reaches of the CP aesthetic" (Lott, "Double V," 603); it took place in and as common experience, but the constitutive features of this experience, like solos and flatted fifths, make the concept of the music itself

collective and dialectical. In this way, bebop worked within form to negate the common experience of "race" as an end. For Hughes, as for Fred Moten, "the avant-garde is not only a temporal-historical concept but a spatial-geographical concept as well," wherein a "community in transition" is told in its "riffs, runs, breaks, and disc-tortions" and "constraint, mobility, and displacement are, therefore, conditions of possibility of the avant-garde" (*In the Break*, 40). The disappearance of an important material piece of jazz history also contributed to bebop's challenge to traditional progress narratives, as John Lowney notes: "Its sound was perplexing, if not threatening, to many listeners because its historical development had been obscured by the events of the war, including the recording ban from 1942 to 1944" (*Literary Left*, 112). By the time Hughes published his bebop epic, jazz was a form so disrupted in its relationship to official modern American history that it made possible a space for modern black avant-garde documentary practice. "Bebop," Lott concludes, "was about making disciplined imagination alive and answerable to the social change of its time" ("Double V," 597).

Harlem was, as Cruse argues, not a community of owners, and this lack of ownership of spaces for living, industry, and cultural production caused the "cultural disintegration" (an odd word choice considering that, for Cruse, the illusion of integration was much to blame for the crisis of leadership in black modernity) of Harlem and the failure of the Harlem Renaissance to come to terms with black modernity (*The Crisis*, 83–84). Cruse simultaneously argues, however, that the black intellectuals who comprised Harlem's cultural leadership *also* failed because they looked to the international Communist movement for models of social organization—proletarian power and collective ownership. The crisis, for Cruse, is his own confrontation with and inability to negotiate the conundrum of Harlem as what I have been calling an "end," both a goal and an overcoming, and also with the aesthetic as a politics. For

Hughes, it provided an opportunity; Harlem's crisis of ownership opened a space in which he could compose a transitional relation to modernity expressed as the ongoing possibility of avant-garde form. Long before composing *Montage*, Hughes recognized the way that jazz might resist the modern American standardization impulse and the capitalist narratives of progress that upheld this impulse, as well as the direct controlling influence of the Communist aesthetic, all at once (Lowney, *The Literary Left*, 104). "The Weary Blues," for example, can be read as a counternarrative to DuBois's ideas of progress, borne on his presentation of the "Sorrow Songs" before each chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk*. In *I Wonder as I Wander*, Hughes wrote of his time in Russia in 1933: "Once I gave as my reason for not joining the Party the fact that jazz was officially taboo in Russia … [where it was considered decadent bourgeois music] … 'It's my music,' I said, 'and I wouldn't give up jazz for a world revolution'" (122). Jazz—especially, during the rapid moment of industrialization and demobilization following World War II, bebop—recasts the absolutism of Cruse's "disintegration" as a series of "social and historical questions of 'how': how to satisfy the demands of both art and commerce; how to improvise within the organizations, disciplinary conventions, and arrangements of the culture industries; how to take advantage of the opportunities as well as the limitations offered by the very ephemerality of the forms those industries made available" (Jerving, "Early Jazz Literature," 667). Above all, Baraka insists, is the *fact* of bebop: "People made bebop" (*Baraka Reader*, 183). Bebop was a social poetics, in which, as Moten writes (after Cecil Taylor), "words don't go there; words go *past* there," past documents, narratives, texts, "Bent. Turned. Blurrrred" (*In the Break*, 52).

In writing *Montage*, Langston Hughes saw that modern Harlem's present would be filled, sometimes to non-standard capacity, with material, documents, dreams, and evidence from its past. As such, Hughes's task did not differ much from that of other prominent

modernists. The long poem, even in its "modern epic" form, was not new when Hughes composed *Montage*, nor was the confrontation between documentary material and lyric subjectivity any longer a startling announcement of the modern crisis of representation. Hughes was writing, in part, in the tradition of *The Waste Land* (1922), *Paterson* (1946-63), *Cane* (1923), and even *Ulysses* (1922). I don't want to suggest that what differentiates Hughes from Eliot, Crane, Williams, or Joyce is simply that he was black, nor do I wish to associate his work with Toomer's based solely on that fact. I want to argue that where the writers I have mentioned above used the modern epic as an attempt to re-establish authorship in the face of the crisis of representation brought about by the advent of modernity, Hughes allowed *Montage of a Dream Deferred* to remain fluid and unstable, and that is a crucial point of difference. *Montage* does not lead back—however tortured and circuitous the route—to a unified vision of the author, the relief of the still-standing lyric "I," or the objective distance of the documentarian. There never was a unified, single authorial voice in black modernity— an "I" of modern blackness—and in *Montage*, Hughes looks back at the time that was to have produced this author but failed to do so. In this, *Montage* contrasts perhaps most starkly with Melvin B. Tolson's epic, heroic *Libretto for the Republic of Liberia* (1953) or *Harlem Gallery* (1965) (subtitled, tellingly, *The Curator*). This is not to say simply that *Montage* should be categorized as a "postmodern" poem; rather, it is the modernist long poem in and as deferral, wherein the collective voice of the Harlem Renaissance—the blues impulse to "blurrrrr," to turn to the past and the future in one moment intact—has finally, in bebop, found a form in which to speak. Fore characterizes factography as "the literature of becoming" (introduction, 9), and we can in turn read *Montage* as a factographic work that ends not at a modernist author but with a factographic site of authorship, both geographic— Harlem—and documentary—modern blackness, and thus the deferral continues. Hughes,

like the Soviet factographers, was seeking to "reorganize outmoded, artisanal conditions of authorship in accordance with collective methods of modern production" (8), a collective form of production that looked more like jazz than industry.[14] As Hughes noted in 1933, jazz and Soviet revolutionary practices like factography were incompatible in the context of the kind of revolution he was looking for, but bebop finally got him this reorganization as a kind of deferred becoming. In the sense that Hughes uses language to transform authorship into a site of denarrativization, maybe "end" is also a good word here; his long poem is composed more in the tradition of Stein's *Tender Buttons* (1914), Crane's *The Bridge* (1930), or even H.D.'s *Trilogy* (1944–46). These "epodes"—especially *The Bridge*, which, like *Montage*, begins with an apostrophe invoking a specific location—are characterized by a lack of completion that suggests a gendered authorship in difference; the subject matter is not so much mastered or brought under the control of the author as it is asked to speak, violently, tenderly, and confused. Thus, difference, in Hughes's "epode," retains its negativity and is endlessly deferred in its compensatory realist purpose.

Montage of a Dream Deferred is both an epode and a bebop epic. The text is made up of six sections or sequences: "Boogie Segue to Bop," "Dig and Be Dug," "Early Bright," "Vice Versa to Bach," "Dream Deferred," and "Lenox Avenue Mural." Each "sequence" contains an irregular number of individual poems or verses, so that *Montage of a Dream Deferred* is comprised of a total of 86 sub-poems. There seems to be no regular pattern or schema that

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[14] In his travels and interactions with aspects of the Popular Front during the 1930s, Hughes may have come into more direct contact with the factographic method than my rather vague association suggests. Note, for example, the striking similarity between Hughes's approach to Harlem and Fore's elaboration of the Soviet factographers' "reorganization": "Their efforts to redress the gap between abstract knowledge and lived quotidian existence situate the factographers within the current of 'phenomenological Marxism,' which thrived in the 1920s and which undertook the construction of … a comprehensive 'context of living' … a framework for human experience that is cognitively coherent yet experientially concrete and sensuous" (introduction, 8).

determines the text's organization. Perhaps because the text itself is difficult to quantify or to statistically account for, it has rarely been studied as a whole, although most readers are familiar with certain individual verses that have been extracted and anthologized, like "Theme for English B," from the "Vice Versa to Bach" sequence. "Harlem," of "a raisin in the sun" fame, begins the sequence "Lenox Avenue Mural" (*LHR,* 123). And many readers will know "Night Funeral in Harlem," from the "Dream Deferred" section, first as a poem, for its evocative concrete imagery, and then as fact, for its elegiac social commentary. But what is *Montage of a Dream Deferred* as a literary fact? If we look into the differential spaces that Hughes creates in the collisions between form, sense perception, content, and historical context—we read the geography of Hughes's long poem as a "saga," composed in a mode between the epic and the lyric series. This "saga" signals a poetics, a method of production in which facts do not end in authorship but instead produce form as history. To understand modern blackness as the improvisational and irregular relation of diaspora, we must also read the poem as *décalé*, that is, as not reducible to the content of its individual pieces but whose individual pieces are yet crucial to formalizing diasporic history. *Montage* begins with "Dream Boogie," which opens the frame with a variation of invoking the muse of history, the "basic blues trope" (Jerving, "Early Jazz Literature,"671, n. 10) of "Good morning, blues: blues, how do you do?":

> Good morning daddy!
> Ain't you heard
> The boogie-woogie rumble
> Of a dream deferred?
>
> Listen closely:
> You'll hear their feet
> Beating out and beating out a—
>
>> You think
>> It's a happy beat?

Listen to it closely:
Ain't you heard
something underneath
like a—

     What did I say?

Sure,
I'm happy!
Take it away!
Hey, pop!
Re-bop!
Mop

Y-e-a-h! (*LHR,* 89)

Hughes's muse, "daddy," is both a colloquial street term of the jazz era and a reference, clothed in bebop terminology, to the troubled paternity of black America's past. Yet Hughes does not simply recapitulate the established blues trope; his "good morning" has a difference—there is no comma in the poem's opening line. A "good morning daddy" can then emerge as a figure in Harlem, the identity, perhaps, of a displaced parent, lover, or disturbed tradition personified. All these possibilities exist simultaneously in this opening poem, interrupting the poem's rhythm both formally and at the level of fact. Instead of asking this "good morning daddy" "how do you do," Harlem authorship re-bops the whole foundational exchange with the difference that will continue throughout the sequence. "Beating out and beating out a—" does not allow for the poem's line or for its image to resolve; again, "like a —/What did I say?" disrupts both form and imagery, causing the verse to resist representing Harlem as a complete, recognizable, unified community. The poem undergoes a metric shift from repetition to bebop improvisation, rendering it senseless in terms of realist documentary but recognizable as a representation of the ongoing, deferred figuration characteristic of the *décalé* site.

Hughes closes the frame with "Island," a seemingly more complete image of Harlem whose final lines match the opening of "Dream Boogie," but again, with an incorporated difference. The final line of *Montage of a Dream Deferred* retains the comma of "good morning, blues," and Hughes's more explicitly Popular Front oriented 1930s work "Good Morning, Revolution." In this final line, the difference constitutive of tradition and revolution are joined in the act of "re-bop":

> Between two rivers,
> North of the park,
> like darker rivers
> The streets are dark.
>
> Black and white,
> Gold and brown—
> Chocolate-custard
> Pie of a town.
>
> Dream within a dream
> Our dream deferred.
>
> Good morning, daddy!
>
> Ain't you heard? (*LHR*, 126)

Here, the Harlem "daddy," when the comma is retained in the phrase, stands in for "Revolution": "Aint you heard?" Re-bop's differential interventions within the blues tradition are these dreams within a dream—dreams for the future contained within dreams of the past—that put "our dream," the collective dream, into deferral. What begins as a definitive geographical description of Harlem's location is disrupted, when we reach "north of the park," by "darker" and "dark." When the figure "like darker rivers" appears, so does the image of Harlem's "dark" streets. "Dark" is a fact that only exists in differential, in the "dream within a dream" of becoming "darker" that takes place in the space between—as "between two rivers," where we know from his earlier work that "the negro," Hughes, speaks—the first and last good mornings. Harlem becomes a literary fact when our reading

of this "dark" comes to depend upon the differential space between the opening and closing poems, where "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," composed in 1922, finds deferred signification. Within this space, sequences and verses work in differential to produce a site where Harlem means in disruption, where the literary fact resists determination or regulation by its (con)text. In *Blues People*, Baraka discusses the significance of "the solo" in "post-communal black society"; the solo, that bringing forth of the lyric self from "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," is "expression as it had to exist to remain vital outside its communal origins" (157). According to Baraka, this lyric "solo" "spoke singly of a collective music" to form a crucial "link with an earlier, more intense sense of the self in its most vital relationship to the world" (158). "The mystery/and the darkness/and the song/and me" (*LHR,* 115), from the poem "Mystery," (114–15) become unstoppably continuous and threaten to override the borders that define text, self, community, race, form, history.

But there are the "complete" images of Harlem, snapshot portraits, film stills that would be realist documents were it not for the recurrence and recapitulation of their components elsewhere in the long poem. "Passing," for example, tells of a Sunday afternoon in Harlem (*LHR,* 115–16); "Juke Box Love Song" is a love lyric for a "sweet brown Harlem girl" (93). Yet lines, phrases, images slip into the spaces between sequence and verse so that "Passing" comes to mean in its more insidious racial sense, "the ones who've crossed the line" (116) and "Juke Box Love Song," with its irregular rhythm, unpredictable line breaks, and solo riffs, produces a beat not at all suitable for dancing. There are other, briefer figures that switch on and off like streetlights or a flickering film reel: "Drunkard," "Street Song," "125th Street," and "Dive," a mini-sequence that leaves us in the dark space where Lenox Avenue meets Central Park (106). The kinds of facts that obtain in *Montage* are made from experiences that formally refuse to be *calé*, that is, to be propped up by false consciousness

into an illusory autonomy or authority. "One can never talk about Harlem in purely social terms," writes Baraka in *Home*, "though there are ghetto facts that make any honest man shudder. It is the tone, the quality of the suffering each man knows as his own that finally must be important, but this is the most difficult thing to get to" (116). For Hughes these "ghetto facts"—displacement, desire for a better life, disappointment, hope—were literary in that they carried tone. So he worked to use facts to produce a new kind of authorship and thus a form of ownership of voice and narrative, the dreamed of "autonomy" of Harlem.

In *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, Hughes textualizes a denarrativized community, a strategy that finds precedent in the way Hughes might have experienced Harlem during its Renaissance years: "An endless stream of Americans, whose singularity in America is that they are black" (Baraka, *Home*, 113). Baraka notes that the very terms used to announce this "endless stream" also served to reduce its heterogeneity to but a standardized representation of that singularity: "Everyone spoke optimistically of the Negro Renaissance, and the New Negro, as if, somehow, the old Negro wasn't good enough" (112). David Jarraway, in "Montage of an Otherness Deferred," finds in Hughes what he calls a "fierce resistance" to the "standardization … of personal experience" (821). By formalizing the voice that speaks of rivers on the very site of that "endless stream" in a denarrativized bebop idiom, Hughes takes up poetics as a refusal of standardization, of commodification, that becomes, like Baraka's "Changing Same," "the expression of where we are" (Baraka, *Baraka Reader*, 208). James Baldwin would later criticize what he seemed to read as Hughes' commitment to a formalism ultimately removed from its generative context, saying that Hughes had not "forced" his forms "into the realm of art where their meaning would become clear and overwhelming" (Patterson, "The Modernist Lyric," 651). Baldwin continues: "'Hay Pop!/Re-Bop!/Mop!' conveys much more on Lenox Avenue than it does in this book, which is not

the way it ought to be" (ibid.). Baldwin's main criticism of works like *Montage* is that they are

insufficiently realist to offer a "clearly recognizable, accurate record of experience that calls

attention to their embeddedness in history" (652). Yet to "dig and be dug in return," the

"digging of everything," as Baraka calls it, tells the history of "a more complete existence"

than realist representation (*Baraka Reader*, 193).[15]

Where Harlem was concerned, however, the black American lyric was founded on a

site that was never recognizable to realist modes. Alain Locke famously stated—in his essay

announcing the special March 1925 number of *Survey Graphic: Mecca of the New Negro*—that

Harlem "isn't typical—but it is significant, it is prophetic," a site where "the masses" stir,

move, and produce with an agency not yet quite recognizable to the outside observer (Locke,

"Harlem," 630). Some, like David Levering Lewis, would argue that the movements of the

community never did in fact become recognizable and that its arrest in the nascent state for

which Locke was so hopeful actually signified Harlem's artistic failure.[16] Locke, however, in

the same essay, notes Harlem's incompatibility with realist modes of documentation:

> The professional observers, and the enveloping communities as well, are conscious
> of the physics of this stir and movement, of the cruder and more obvious facts of a
> ferment and a migration. But they are as yet largely unaware of the psychology of it,
> of the galvanising shocks and reactions, which mark the social awakening and
> internal reorganization which are making a race out of its own disunited elements.
> (629)

Certainly this is a recognizably modernist goal, yet it differs from Eliot's desire to unite

cultural fragments against authorial ruin as well as from Walter Benjamin's Baudelarian

"shocks" of modernity, against which the subject sought to protect himself. Locke's

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[15] Baraka continues: "Again even the purely social, as analyzing reference, will give the sense
of difference, what directions, what needs are present in the performers, and then, why the
music naturally flows out of this" (193).

[16] Lewis blames Freudianism for transforming "the African American's lack of cultural
assimilation from a liability into a state of grace," whereupon he argues that readers should
go back to considering this lack a liability (*When Harlem*, 99).

disunited elements prioritize the process of making as a representation of production rather than the recovery of a unified, predetermined whole. Locke suggests that "the social awakening and internal reorganization which are *making a race out of its own disunited elements*" be read as Harlem's cultural production, not as a necessary step to be overcome so that Harlem could produce culture. Culture is, after all, according to Baraka, "simply how one lives and is connected to history by habit" (*Home,* 273). I want to suggest that Locke recognized in Harlem's structure, in its provisional arrangements of community in relation to modernity, its implicit resistance to representation, to being standardized by narrative, and that he knew at the time of writing that Harlem's forms already constituted a textual politics. With Locke, Hughes envisioned a Harlem based on Marx's model of community "as the means by which the worker becomes world-historical," wherein its representational "failures" were acts of resistance, not regressive but ongoing and productive of new social figures (Berman, *Modernist Fiction*, 8).[17] *Montage of a Dream Deferred* is the poem of this becoming, itself its own record of making.

Hughes's *Montage* presented a Harlem forced to the "end" of modernity by the fact of modern blackness. "Negro writing was always 'after the fact,'" Baraka argues, "based on known social concepts within the structure of bourgeois idealistic projections of 'their America,'" and, as such, the black writer was always already a "social object" (*Home,* 131). But while Baraka goes on to suggest that, as a result, the black writer "never moved into a position where he could propose his own symbols" (ibid.), I want to argue that Hughes's struggle to write the fact itself, his opposition to writing "after the fact" of modern social

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[17] Berman writes: "As he puts it in *The Civil War in France*, the 'commune, which breaks the modern State power, has been mistaken for a reproduction of the mediaeval Communes,' but is instead a 'new historical creation,' one which is itself both the new realm of social relations and its first act" (*Modernist Fiction*, 8).

objectification, was precisely the process through which he created that position, which was still different from recuperative modernist authorship (or political authority, for that matter) in that its establishment was endlessly deferred by its poetics. In so doing, he was able to address the fact of modern blackness, to both "get at that experience" of black modernity "in exactly the terms America has proposed for it, in its most ruthless identity" (133), and then also to use that identity to transform the proposed terms.   Hughes called this ruthlessness, this constant interruption of standardizing narratives "those elements within the race which are still too potent for easy assimilation" (Lewis, *When Harlem*, 193); James Weldon Johnson also conceived of Harlem as a textual site, an "ambiguous event" appearing simultaneously as both "past achievements" and "monument[s] to future glory" or, as he put it, "Harlem is still in the process of making" (246). This process, what Moten refers to as a "generative reconstruction," asserts Harlem as a differential site where "the surface or topography upon which a spatio-temporal mapping depends is displaced by a generative motion" (*In the Break*, 59). On this site, facts "refuse the abandonment of the full resources of language," refuse "to follow the determining, structuring, reductive force of law" (59–60) that closes the circuit between production and consumption to create a standardized, capital-assimilated black modern subject. Harlem's facts threaten because they are figuring modern blackness all around us. Lewis presents a gallery of portraits, Harlem scenes, faces, and voices, throughout *When Harlem Was in Vogue*. These voices cannot be assimilated into a single representative or representing subject; they accumulate, but do not add up. So we cannot reduce Wallace Thurman's oversaturated material detail:

> In a short while she had even learned how to squelch the bloated, lewd faced Jews and eager middle aged Negroes who might approach, as well as how to enveigle the likeable little yellow or brown half men, embryo avenue sweetbacks, with their well-modeled heads, sticky plastered hair, flaming cravats, silken or broadcloth shirts, dirty underwear, low cut vests and shiny shoes with metal cornered heels clicking

with a brave, brazen rhythm upon bare concrete floor as their owners angled and searched for prey. (196)

Or Richard Bruce Nugent's "blued" lyric:

> The street was so long and narrow… so long and narrow… and blue… in the distance it reached the stars… Alex walked like music… the click of his heels kept time with a tune in his mind… Alex walked and the click of his heels sounded… and had an echo… sound being tossed back and forth… back and forth… someone was approaching… Alex liked the sound of the approaching man's footsteps… he walked music also… he knew the beauty of the narrow blue…. (197)

Or Claude McKay's sensory seduction:

> Harlem! How terribly Ray could hate it sometimes. Its brutality, gang rowdyism, promiscuous thickness. Its hot desires. But, oh, the rich blood-red color of it! The warm scent of its composite voice, the fruitiness of its laughter, the trailing rhythm of its "blues" and the improvised surprises of its jazz. (228)

Or even Thurman again, writing of Nugent's delicate despair:

> Beneath this inscription, he had drawn a distorted, inky black skyscraper, modeled after Niggerati Manor, and on which were focused an array of blindingly white beams of light. The foundation of this building was composed of crumbling stone. At first glance it could be ascertained that the skyscraper would soon crumple and fall, leaving the dominating white lights in full possession of the sky. (284)

Finally, in Hughes's own recollections:

> Almost every Saturday night when I was in Harlem I went to a house-rent party. I wrote lots of poems about house-rent parties, and ate thereat many a fried fish and pig's foot – with liquid refreshments on the side. I met ladies' maids and truck drivers, laundry workers and shoe shine boys, seamstresses and porters. I can still hear their laughter in my ears, hear the soft slow music, and feel the floor shaking as the dancers danced. (*LHR*, 374)

This Harlem anthology in miniature does not lead back to a singular "recognizable thing," but instead reflects the documentary evidence of the collective authorship that "owned" the facts of Harlem.

Where Lewis sees rent parties, for example, as signaling and prefiguring Harlem's descent or regression from expressivity and recognition into a failed "slum" (*When Harlem*, 108), Hughes read them as material fragments awaiting their signification. The "failure" is in

the fragments' refusal to assimilate in order to signify; they don't surrender to a totalizing logic. But to positivize, by assigning historical significance and also value to, the social facts of Harlem simply by formalizing them would also be unjust. People couldn't pay their rent, promised jobs never materialized, and there was real despair in Harlem that this dreamed of utopia of black cultural awakening proved incompatible with modern reality. Cruse's argument ends here, but this is an end which is not one. Hughes took up this end to find a way to tell about both the utopian horizon and the frustrated history of movement toward it without reducing this history to yet another utopian horizon—an epic of Harlem heroics. What Arthur P. Davis identifies, in his 1951 review, as the overall theme of "frustration" in *Montage of a Dream Deferred* arises then as a formal, rhythmic frustration, the figured resistance of Harlem to aesthetic regulation (224). For Davis, Harlem's frustration was pathos borne in the "deep and persistent rolling of a boogie bass" that marched "relentlessly throughout the poem" (226). Locke, on the other hand, had recognized Harlem's "frustration" as the production of modern blackness by its "moving, half-awakened newcomers" ("Harlem," 630). As Locke—and to the extent that he meant "newcomers" like Hughes—lived Harlem, it was incompatible with realist representation at the level of its present historical context: "And that is why statistics are out of joint with fact in Harlem, and will be for a generation or so" (ibid.). Fore notes "a general pattern of historical consonance between industrialization campaigns and the documentary projects that intended to record and archive these transformations" (introduction, 6). Such documentary projects, according to Fore, "have always been drawn to the sites of rapid modernization and social reorganization," fitting facts into a realist frame to produce, in accordance with modern methods of production, a coherent and useable social and cultural reality (ibid.). A more realist text like Richard Wright's *12 Million Black Voices* (1941), then, recorded this

reorganization as a means of positivizing the facts of modernization in terms of race; Wright's book is itself a stunning achievement—spare, striking, and oftentimes poetic, his narrative guides readers through a selection of photographs from the Farm Security Administration's archive in an attempt to provide a collective black voice to tell the story of American industrialization. The book succeeds, but it succeeds at a very different kind of factographic project than the one Hughes—and to a lesser extent, Locke—undertook. Wright is complicit with the goals of realist representation, while Hughes seeks to document the very incompatibility of this mode with facts as they were appearing in modern black American consciousness. Thus, Hughes works within a crisis of authorship still seeking to discover the resistant possibilities of collective action, what Benjamin H.D. Buchloh calls "one of the most profound conflicts inherent in modernism itself: that of the historical dialectic between individual autonomy and the representation of a collectivity through visual constructs" ("Faktura," 114), (and I would add, in Hughes's case, visual-poetic and sonic constructs) whereas Wright attempts to resolve the dialectic by individually authoring—with illustrative images that hint at autonomy—a static "collective" voice. As Fore argues, "the photographic archive of the Farm Security Administration, which captured premodern, small-town America at the moment of its extinction" (introduction, 6)[18] was a kind of documentary completely distinct from the factography that "understood acts of signification not as veridical reflections or reduplications of a ontologically more primary reality, but as actual and objective components of everyday, lived experience" (7), which is how the representation of facts clearly appeared, in Harlem, to Locke and Hughes.

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[18] Buchloh notes: "The contempt meted out from a Western perspective at the fate of modernist photomontage and factographic practice in the Soviet Union during the 1930s or at its transformation into totalitarian propaganda in fascist Italy and Germany seems historically inappropriate. For the technique was adapted to the specifically American needs of ideological deployment at the very same moment" (117).

Immersed in the crisis of continuity characteristic of black modernity, Harlem's facts would always be reproduced in its refusal to represent factually, in its frustrated, failed refusal to figure in a normative relationship to history. Moten asks the question that Locke seems implicitly to posit, and that Hughes attempts to answer: "What shape must a culture take when it is so (un) grounded?" (*In the Break*, 4). Locke's description of Harlem's "site of subjection,"[19] as Moten—after Saidiya Hartman—might call it, is central to the (un)grounding of Harlem from which Hughes would later be able to produce the literary facts he used to tell the community's history. By defining Harlem's "frustration" not as failure but as resistance within a spatially bounded site, Locke undermined the totalizing view of its aesthetic community proposed by the very *Survey Graphic* number in which the essay appeared as introduction. Hughes was, at the time, already figuring Harlem in language, on the page, producing this deferral of authorship as desire. It is not coincidence but the convergence of two founding moments of Harlem Renaissance textual resistance that locates Hughes in the *décalé* poetics of modern black diaspora.

Conceiving of Harlem as a site of subjection allows for a possibility of a disruption in authorship that problematizes the standardization of identity by the production of a totalizing historical narrative. For Hughes, the threat of collapsing the distance, artificially propped up by modern capitalist mythology that in pre-civil rights movement America passed for modern racial history, was a way of inducing a radical breakdown in black American subjection, the utopian epicenter of which was Harlem, that revealed the

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[19] In "Resistance of the Object: Aunt Hester's Scream," Moten uses Frederick Douglass's narrative of the beating of his Aunt Hester to posit that "the history of blackness is testament to the fact that objects can and do resist" and goes on to argue for reading this "scene of subjection" as a scene of resistant objection by way of the irreducible sonic and visual performance of "blackness" (*In the Break*, 1–24). For the sake of clarity, I will simply reference—rather than explain—Moten's argument in the present account.

dialectical "end" of modern blackness. Edwards quotes Henry Louis Gates, Jr., who notes that "just as *utopia* signifies 'no-place,' so does 'New Negro' signify 'a black person who lives at no place,' and no time" (*Practice of Diaspora*, 143). Yet as much as the New Negro may have been a utopian identity, Harlem was also simultaneously a real place where black people lived, a particular and materially real detail in the diasporic fabric of black internationalism. Thus the resistance to modern blackness as a utopian form that Hughes displays "produces a rhetorical tension between what Gates calls 'the weary black dream of a perfect state of being, with no history in particular detail' on the one hand and 'the search for a group of black and especial historical entities' on the other" (ibid.). Gates leaves out the material present and the copious facts that, during the Harlem Renaissance especially, this present provided. He is then led to conclude that a black artist's choices were limited to being determined by one of these two "dreams"—either to "resolve this tension in favor of nostalgia, in favor of the easy universalism that … resides in perpetual unfulfillment, a 'sadness without an object'"—Hughes could have stopped at "The Weary Blues" (ibid.). But what about the collective sound of "our dream deferred?" Hughes chose instead to activate the tension Gates invokes, to compose a history from within perpetual unfulfillment that resists the standardization of resolving in nostalgia or in a universalized "blue" blackness. *Montage of a Dream Deferred* appears as a "short and accelerated history" (Moten, *In the Break*, 128) of the poem as the poem's history, the "emergence," to use Moten's terms, "of an art and thinking in which emotion and structure, preparation and spontaneity, individuality and collectivity can no longer be understood in opposition to one another" (ibid.).

Harlem had once been imagined as the fulfillment of, or the cure for, the legacy of slavery by way of which blacks became African-American. Hughes, however, re-imagined a Harlem whose history was still in the process of constructing the implications that past had

for a modern future. This history was thus incompatible with established narratives of modernity in which constitutive difference at the site of production is resolved by being assimilated to progress.[20] Similarly, Jerving notes, "to whatever extent jazz" could have called a "modernist diasporic identity into being," the form itself would have to be re-grooved to a "modern American machine-age identity reluctant to take into account black difference and dissonance or the need for a useable and potentially unsettling past" ("Early Jazz Literature," 661). Harlem could never represent as a figure of progress, as simply the positive modern black metropolis—"the pivot of the black world's quest for identity" (Cruse, *The Crisis*, 11)—if, as in *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, meaning was constantly figuring and refiguring around Harlem. Jerving argues that Hughes's use of blues tropes indicates a "contextual portability" by way of which the blues represents a voice that "could lead an independent life outside of those commodity relations in which it was normally enmeshed" (Early Jazz Literature," 664). He goes on to note that Hughes's use of jazz was informed by this function of the blues lyric, so that in the "jazz poems" "there was a move to regroove and rearticulate jazz to non-commodified ends" (ibid.). Hughes posited, through form, "the contingency of borders" that would "open the community to a wider network of differences" (Berman, *Modernist Fiction*, 15). "Radical community" thus "begins to figure as an antidote to the consolidation of social identity" (ibid.) that started, for black Americans, with the de-individuation of the Middle Passage and reappeared as the totalizing narrative of the modern black "slum"—both consolidations in which subjectivity was assimilated to progress. In order to make Harlem one such "radical community" in *Montage*, Hughes regrooved the Harlem Renaissance by deferring or re-bopping emergent 1920s jazz to a

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[20] On the implications of the Marxian idea of "uneven development" for narratives of literary modernism, see also Ruth Jennison's dissertation *The Zukofsky Era: An Objectivists' Modernism* (UC Berkeley, 2004).

post-World War II bebop beat, a repetition that preserved difference in the narrative of black modernity.

As "a protest, an objection," the literary fact becomes, through Hughes's use of it in *Montage*, a resistant object (Moten, *In the Break*, 14). Moten's key term suggests an anti-realist documentary pre-figured in the documented object itself, much like Locke's vision of Harlem. The resistance of the object, Hughes's differential Harlem form, "is more than another violent scene of subjection too terrible to pass on, it is the ongoing performance, the prefigurative scene of a (re)appropriation—the deconstruction and reconstruction, the improvisational recording and revaluation—of value, of the theory of value, of the theories of value" (ibid.). The concept of value obtains in terms of facts and their imitation by figures, this "ongoing performance," this constant figuring and refiguring in deferral that re-grooves realist modes and produces literary facts. If we consider that at some point all of this improvisation, this imitation of fact, becomes fact, the "value" of documents as objects bearing reality suddenly becomes differential. Documents no longer furnish a dreamed-of resolution in irrefutable fact but are instead subject to the figural process of the imitation of fact. Hughes's ongoing performance in *Montage*, structured in language by the bebop idiom, foregrounds sound as fact, made literary as the unstable narrative that is not melody but tone. "The impulse," Baraka writes, "is one thing … what it produces is another" (*Baraka Reader*, 187). A social fact becomes literary (or sonic) when "you react to push it, re-create it, resist it. It is the opposite pressure producing (in this case) the sound, the music" (ibid.).

In his essay "The Ethnics of Surrealism," Edwards considers the "document," after Bataille, as a threat to critical distance instead of its guarantor. For Hughes, facts become literary in documents because they threaten authorship. He calls the document a "Figurine," activating it in *Montage* as a resistant object that works on the surface of the poem, constantly

refiguring its own meaning and the form that surrounds it. A figurine is a resistant object because it doesn't fully figure, instead drawing attention to the artificial value or guarantee of the realist figure or image. A figurine indicates *décalage*, as Edwards writes: "The reestablishment of a prior unevenness or diversity; it alludes to the taking away of something that was added in the first place, something artificial … It is a different kind of interface that might not be susceptible to expression in the oppositional terminology of the 'vanguard' and the 'backward' … It is a changing core of difference … an unidentifiable point that is incessantly touched and fingered and pressed" (*Practice of Diaspora*, 14). The verse titled "Figurine" happens in "Boogie Segue to Bop" and consists of a single construction, neither one word nor two, centered beneath the title: "De-dop!" (*LHR,* 93). "De-dop!" figures sound, or musical idiom, into the language of the poem. Yet "de-dop!" is, by definition, not a word but a movement, a partial, non-realist figure—a "figurine"—that shows us figuration in process between the specific historical moments identified as "Boogie" and "Bop." This figure in process, the nonidentity or difference *in sound*, appears in "Parade" on the streets of Harlem:

> PARADE!
> A chance to let
>   PARADE!
> the whole world see
>   PARADE!
> old black me! (*LHR,* 90)

We see "old black me" in the process of figuring into a collective narrative interrupted by the parade. As such, "old black me" figures in steps, and readers have the opportunity to see the individual's relation to his community as an always incomplete set of movements rather than a stable narrative. "Figurette" (*LHR,* 98), in "Dig and Be Dug," adds "De-daddle-dy!" to "De-dop!" and in so doing further complicates the idea of the figure. It almost seems as if the "Daddy" of the opening poem is attempting to figure in language but is, again, like "old

black me," arrested somewhere in process and transformed into a notation of movement. "Figurette" is a variation on "Figurine" but is also, like the objects—figurines—that each evokes, a self-contained moment of completion in miniature. Baraka sees this "return to collective improvisations," in jazz, as "the miniature 'thing' securing its 'greatness'" (*Baraka Reader*, 197). Hughes's readers must take part in this improvisation, performing the dialectic movement between process and resolution that characterizes the "end."

Near the end of *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, a verse titled "Chord" works as a figurine, and further connects the "De-dop!" of sonic notation and musical idiom to the act of figuration and the figure in process:

> Shadow faces
> In the shadow night
> Before the early dawn
> Bops bright. (*LHR*, 120)

There is no verb in the verse except for the "bops," which is not an "official" verb but is, instead, the slang shorthand for a musical movement. Music, according to Baraka, is an empirical "*attitude*, or *stance*" (*Blues People*, 152) toward referentiality; "since reference (hence value) is as scattered and dissimilar as men themselves" (153), so too must music be an ongoing sonic record of resistance. This is the deferred "end" of the "Chord"; the "shadow faces" are caught in process before the bop, their stance a suspension just prior to an endlessly deferred act of their own invention. "Neon Signs," in "Dig and Be Dug," presents the figurine both formally and literally:

<div align="center">

WONDER BAR
* * *
WISHING WELL
* * *
MONTEREY
* * *
MINTON'S
(altar of Thelonious)
* * *

</div>

MANDALAY
* * *
Spots where the booted and unbooted play
LENOX
* * *
CASBAH
* * *
POOR JOHN'S
* * *

> Mirror-go-round
> where a broken glass
> in the early bright
> smears re-bop
> sound   (*LHR*, 97)

Harlem is represented in language and graphic in the "Neon Signs" of the title, but these figures become figurines when they are recapitulated in the partial reflections, refractions, of the broken glass. The figures, facts, and words in the signs are transformed by the broken glass of the "mirror-go-round" into "smears" of "re-bop sound." Hughes makes a figurine by connecting the neon signs to the broken glass by way of the action of the "mirror-go-round," which also invokes the child's fantasy of a merry-go-round or carousel. The merry-go-round, populated with figurines of horses and other animals, circles continuously without ever arriving at any destination; its "end" is perpetually deferred and, as such the ride becomes both the goal and its means. The musical loop accompanying the carousel marks the figurines' sonic recurrence, and the only thing that signals its stop is a break in the music—although since it will inevitably begin again in order for the ride to continue, this break is exactly that: an end that is not one. So in Hughes's verse, what could be realist documents, the neon signs, are transformed into the ongoing continuous process of deferred "re-bop sound," wherein they do not figure but instead "smear." The facts of Harlem are not discrete objects to be quantified or unified, but by presenting them as such and then explicitly transforming them into differential figurines, Hughes shows these facts as resistant, triumphant, not passively ruined. Hughes's "Figurine" is a resistant object, what Edwards

calls "a document of veerition," a figure in glass whose "stillness scrapes the surreal of the imagination with the real of history" ("Ethnics of Surrealism," 135). It is "Figurine" that leads the poem into deferral, refusing to produce a cure, instead threatening narrative by "grounding its invocation of community in that very refusal" (ibid.).

"These sliding and slurring effects in Afro-American music," Baraka reminds us, "the basic 'aberrant' quality of the blues scale, are, of course, called 'blueing' the notes" (*Blues People*, 25). In *Montage of a Dream Deferred,* Hughes conceives of such variations as sexual, political, and formal "blueing" in ways of being that recast deferral as an active refusal of narrative. "MINTON'S" was the site, in Miles Davis's recollection, of the birth of bebop (*Miles*, 54). Minton's Playhouse was an autonomous, black-owned cultural institution where the aberrant scale transformed, through use, into the fact of jazz. Music wasn't "as hot or as innovative" anywhere as it was "uptown at Minton's," according to Davis (ibid.). Minton's was "the music laboratory for bebop" (ibid.), and the facts that emerged from this material site of production were to Davis more real than any representation of Harlem could be. To "blue" facts of sexuality, political affiliation, and formal commitment is a way for Hughes to work in pure critique, introducing the negativity into textuality so that authority no longer obtains, and the rule of law is overpowered by the differential figure. In "Café: 3 A.M." from the "Early Bright" sequence, Hughes demonstrates how variation—in this case, the queer differential figure—can work on geography:

> Detectives from the vice squad
> with weary sadistic eyes
> spotting fairies.
>
> > Degenerates,
> > some folks say.
>
> > But God, Nature,
> > or somebody
> > made them that way.

> Police lady or Lesbian
> over there?
>
> Where? (*LHR*, 105)[21]

The questions that end the poem attest to the power of variation over standardization. Is that regulation (the "Police lady") or infinite variation (the "Lesbian") "over there"? As soon as these two figures are conflated by being confused, the geography of the site shifts into differential. Thanks to its queer residents and their resistance to authority—appearing in the streets and in the same initial capitalization as "God" and "Nature"—Harlem is recast as a site that produces difference: "Somebody *made them* that way." Simply by being "there," these queer figure(in)es transform the site into "where?"[22] The variation that is named "queer" is not self-contained or identical, but rather performs as a difference that—to reference Gertrude Stein—is spreading.

This is a Harlem whose narrative form figures "where maladjustment converges with the unassimilable, where communism converges with sexual nonconformity, where outward presence—as visual-gestural-aural-locomotive pathology—is given as the extension of just that kind of criminal insanity we call the ongoing resistance to slavery" (Moten, *In the Break*, 166). "Flatted Fifths," in turn, shows "little cullud boys" subject to the variation that they produce musically as the narration of their production progresses into the denarrativization of lived and performed variations:

> Little cullud boys with beards

---

[21] Hughes has, at this point, already acknowledged the differential social space in which the "people of the night" exist in the verse "Live and Let Live" from the same sequence (*LHR,* 105). The title of the verse itself is a variation of "Dig and Be Dug" and so brings that sequence to bear on the "critical possibility of freedom" (Moten, *In the Break*, 256) that "Café: 3 A.M." suggests.

[22] See my discussion of Lauren Berlant on the power of the "ambiguity of 'here'" in chapter 1.

re-bop be-bop mop and stop.

Little cullud boys with fears,
frantic, kick their CC years
into flatted fifths and flatter beers
that at a sudden change become
sparkling Oriental wines
rich and strange
silken bathrobes with gold twines
and Heilbroner, Crawford,
Nat-undreamed-of Lewis combines
in silver thread and diamond notes
on trademarks inside
Howard coats.

Little cullud boys in berets
      oop pop-a-da
horse a fantasy of days
      ool ya koo
and dig all plays. (*LHR*, 103–4)

The flatted fifth is the founding "aberrant" tone of bebop, the original "blue note," the non-standard sonic production that characterizes the form. A group of players negotiating this unstable pitch must essentially play across *décalage*, producing, as sound, a network of collective unresolved tensions as they attempt to construct improvisational relationships in the flatted fifth's terms. The imagery of the poem is worked on similarly by the actions of the musicians in the poem, a conflation of textual levels that produces a differential textual space also best described as "where?" The regular couplets describing the "little cullud boys" "kick their CC years/ into flatted fifths and flatter beers" until the "sudden change" or variation in the jam becomes a sudden textual change to imagery of history, evocations not only of sound but of sight, taste, touch—"visual-gestural-aural-locomotive pathology."

In the verse "Jam Session," a few pages later, Hughes subjects these lines themselves to variation, and "kick their CC years" becomes "nudge their draftee years" (*LHR*, 108). In a curious attempt at resolution, in many versions of "Flatted Fifths," "draftee" replaces "CC"—whether this was Hughes's decision or an editor's is not clear—and this substitution

serves both to clarify the initial reference and also to elide its later variation. If we retain

"CC" in tension with its variant, we might understand it to mean, in military terminology,

"command and control"; the letters, then, take on the additional connotation of the regular

musical scale cast in "middle C."[23] The "little cullud boys" kick authority and standardization

into the formal logic of bebop, where their resistance takes a different form of authorship

that can imagine a future of ownership: "In silver thread and diamond notes/on trade-marks

inside/Howard coats" (104). Yet in the end this resistance to authority and the attendant

sound the resistance makes is still subject to the deferral of resolution within the text; the

utopian imagery dissolves into the atonality of the bebop "line" and the players' autonomy is

undermined by their very participation in an undeniable aspect of bebop culture, drugs:

"Little cullud boys in berets/ oop pop-a-da/ horse a fantasy of days/ ool ya koo/ and dig all

plays" (104).

In "Ballad of the Landlord," traditional ballad form gives way to variation as the

tenant *in* the poem resists the landlord's authority (*LHR*, 101–2). When resistance is applied

to the fact of ownership in Harlem, the ballad transforms into a document of the process

that leads to the reported headlines. More and more frustrated with his landlord's

indifference to the deteriorating conditions of the apartment, the tenant refuses to pay his

rent: "ten bucks you say I owe you?/Ten bucks you say is due?/Well, that's ten bucks

---

[23] I am foregrounding this interpretation of "CC years" based on the changes made to later versions of the manuscript, which suggest that Hughes intended the military connotations of this now somewhat opaque reference. Hughes might also have been referring to "Colored College," which would, during that time, have been the term for a historically black university such as Howard University. At the end of the same stanza, "Howard coats" serves to anchor the latter interpretation. I would argue for retaining both possibilities in accordance with the logic of the flatted fifth's resistance to resolution; the "CC" then becomes the individual "cullud boy's" solo, and the unresolved variation expresses its relation to the collective performance named by the potential common denominator of "Howard."

more'n I'll pay you/Till you fix this house up new" (*LHR,* 102). As the dispute escalates, the ballad form disintegrates: "Police! Police!/Come and get this man!/ He's trying to ruin the government/ And overturn the land!" The tenant ends up in jail and in the headlines, his resistance quashed and his mission failed, but the effects of this resistance appear in the destruction of the text:

> MAN THREATENS LANDLORD
> *   *   *
> TENANT HELD NO BAIL
> *   *   *
> JUDGE GIVES NEGRO 90 DAYS IN COUNTY JAIL

By destabilizing the traditional lyric ballad, Hughes's tenant also denarrativizes the lyric "I" so that his resistant act in the poem brings about textual revolution by way of its introduction of the variant into form. The poem addresses ownership in Harlem directly and as such corresponds both thematically and formally to Hughes's more overtly political poetry of the 1930s, which, with its montage of expositions, slogans, and news headlines, was an intervention in critical social discourse in the more strictly defined sense. Hughes recapitulates this form in *Montage of a Dream Deferred* with very little difference in the repetition itself except for the smeared, refracted, "blued" difference that the poem introduces into the context of the sequence. Yet here, too, the utopian end of his resistance is deferred when the tenant is jailed. Trying to "overturn the land" is an action that succeeds in the textual production of difference but fails "in the street." If modernist authorship masks its valorization of capitalism in a dispersion of documents, then workers endlessly defer self-determination in attempts to collect the scattered fragments that shore up the capital process because they are told that this equals collective action. The political aspirations and affiliations of the 1930s appear as another dream deferred. In *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, Hughes uses a montage within a montage to articulate possibilities of

resistance across time, producing not resolution but the ongoing resistance of deferred social and political action. Real collective action, Hughes's use of both bebop and montage suggests, does not look like anything we recognize; it is a pure critique without guarantees. This critique foments resistance to the kind of authorship or ownership that legitimizes capital production and disperses it, deferred, into moments or sites of action, made fact by the process of textual production of montage/*Montage*.

II. Montage in the Street: Hughes's Popular Front Poetics

Experimental though the text may be, *Montage of a Dream Deferred* is founded in the familiar tradition of materialist historiography. Hughes meant to break the Harlem scene into objects, facts that would "revea[l] with shock the devastation and suspension of the city's revolutionary past" as available for ongoing and future resistance (Chisholm, *Queer Constellations*, 30). Dianne Chisholm calls this strategy "smashing dominant narrative and dominated space into montage" (ibid.), and in so doing Hughes both produces and wields facts that the montage immediately renders differential, reflecting in form what Moten recognizes as "the impossibility of a return to an African, the impossibility of the arrival at an American, home" (*In the Break*, 94). As such, Hughes's long poem can also be situated within the context of montage as a means of expressing a specifically black cultural modernity. *Negro*, the 1934 collection curated by Nancy Cunard, offers an extreme example of the intervention of modernity into the established "progressive" narratives of Harlem that surrounded the Renaissance of the 1920s and 30s. The immensity of the book itself, which gathers documents from more than 150 contributors, including Hughes, introduced the concept of black internationalism into the narrative of the American "negro" in undeniably material form. Edwards calls *Negro* "the last anthology" (*Practice of Diaspora*, 306), an attempt to account for modern blackness that refuses to succeed: "If *Negro* attempts to frame its 850

pages of contents, it is a framing that is defied over and over again, a framing that fails" (315). On one hand, the text is itself diasporic; on the other, *Negro* became less an "anthology" and more of a challenge to the anthologizing labor that produces the modern anthology, a labor easily mistaken for collective action but really serving to shore up predetermined authorship or ownership.[24] Edwards continues:

> And any attempt to read the sprawling, messy text of the anthology necessitates coming to terms with the ways that it exhibits "an internal limit to formalization." It is "the last anthology" neither in the sense that it is canonical or definitive, nor in the sense that it somehow closes a historical period. *Negro* is "last" in the sense that it demonstrates—it attempts to *practice*—the impossibility of anthologizing blackness. (316)

In this sense, then, the collection is itself a document, evidence, more real than any realist conclusion. Yet the text as a whole is still, from the point of view of authorship, discursive, in that the collection produced Cunard as the author or facilitator of black internationalism, a fact that she herself supported by publishing letters, addressed to her and opposing the publication of *Negro*, in the anthology itself. It is thus somewhat ironic that Cunard represents the black international diaspora—a community, in Louis Kaplan's words, "forged out of and through interruption" (*American Exposures*, 110)—by appropriating breaks, interruptions, and distances and transforming them into her own avant-garde montage practice. Cunard herself does not articulate across *décalage*, but in fact acts as the *calé* or discursive propping up of her own version of black international collective forms.

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[24] Cunard was a noted champion of the Harlem Renaissance and of black internationalist movements more generally. In the 1930s, she actively organized and fought against fascism in Spain and Ethiopia. Yet there is still, in her stewardship of this collection, an imperialist element, especially considering her position as heiress to the Cunard Line shipping fortune, which was made by carrying cargo across the Atlantic. It was, ironically, Cunard's cultural ownership over the writer/artist/laborers represented in *Negro* that made it possible for the book to exist.

The labor of the reader of *Negro*, on the other hand—which is largely the orientation from which Edwards approaches the collection—is still undertaken with no predetermined end to the "collecting" of the facts within the book. From the perspective of the reader, then, *Negro* does not formalize the international "negro." Although it is unlikely that black Americans were the primary audience for *Negro*, the collection succeeds at provisionally disclosing diaspora to its readers in and as "a mark of critical discrepancy between different regimes of representation"(Kaplan, *American Exposures*, 128), a break around which some kind of action—resistant to closure—must then be collected. In connection with the project of forging "a documentary link to issues of race and representation" (ibid.) that refuses positivization or pure formalizing, it is also useful to consider the collage work of Romare Bearden in the same tradition of modern black montage that Hughes practiced. Bearden, a slightly younger contemporary of Hughes, documented black modernity in the recollected fragments of visual composition. His collages were a kind of textural history of a number of modern black communities, including Harlem, in which he used photographs, fabrics, paints, papers, and the rhythm of repetition in difference to re-create facts as the documents of collective activity.

Bearden's body of work is enormous, so I have chosen to look only briefly at two pieces: *Slave Ship* (fig.1) and *The Block* (fig.2). *Slave Ship* is a relatively small screen print that, because it is unified in its use of material, might be better characterized as a montage since the disparate elements intersecting on its two-dimensional plane are images and not media. These images carry material weight, however, because they appear as the collision of (at least) two historical narratives: American slavery and Soviet photomontage, as well as Dada and European avant-garde collage practices. The dominant images are a partial continent—Africa—and the singular figure of the individual slave—a black woman—superimposed over

and above a group of less distinct individuals in various shades of brown and black. Yet because these figures, slaves on a ship, appear to be armed and resistant, rising up to overtake the ship, the singular figure does not dominate but represents them. Bearden posits an alternate narrative of resistance while also critiquing Soviet photomontage and its depictions of collectivity by associating the glorified "worker" with the slave and thus forcing a comparison between Communism's iconic collective and the deindividuation of the Middle Passage. *The Block*, on the other hand, uses a variety of media and textural details on a 4–by–18 foot canvas to document life on a single block in Harlem. Bearden repeats the shape of the rectangle in bricks, windows, and smaller details like storefront signs, to create a rhythm that is given polyvalent tone by the materials he uses to render the rectangles in difference. The inconsistent sizes of the elements in the collage impart a shifting and unstable sense of scale, as if perhaps *The Block* has been composed in the visual pitch of the flatted fifth. "There is always rhythm, but it is a rhythm of segments," Zora Neale Hurston wrote in "Characteristics of Negro Expression" (Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*, 317). Bearden's piece is a document that is simultaneously a translation of lived space to the representational plane—the insistent sonic character of Harlem to the insistent visual character of the collage—and the site where the imitation of the fact of a Harlem block becomes the fact that is *The Block* itself. As such, Bearden, like Hughes, transforms the way that the subjectivities of individuals in Harlem are constituted; rather than representing the modern black community, he records its representation of itself, which becomes a document of how modern blackness is articulated across "breaks," not as a standardized, unified identity.

Hughes's use of the montage as method brings forth the suppressed fact of his own politics. His widely known but little spoken affiliation with the Popular Front becomes fact

through form, appearing belatedly in a document of the moment when the historical implications of the montage collided with the lyrics of Harlem. Because the Popular Front was primarily a class alliance against fascism rather than a positive class position—except as it manifests in *action* against fascism—we must go through Hughes's literary articulation of this alliance to make a fact of his political orientation. There are a number of ways to approach this, all of them retroactive. Hughes's anti-fascist writing were collected in 1973 as the text *Good Morning Revolution*; once it was safe to do so, Hughes's Popular Front affiliation was positivized, made fact by the publication of this text. On one hand, the availability of these writings changed the narrative of the Hughes canon. Collected, however, the writings also became more easily reducible, more conveniently marginalized and separated from his body of work as a whole. I would, instead, argue that readers could look for the manifestations of Popular Front facts in action, perhaps guided by such correspondences as "Good morning, revolution" and "Good morning daddy," and then read into the forms anchored by such connections. When Hughes began writing *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, montage had been used for over a decade as the method by which social facts were "problematized in larger structural relations" in order to foreground the causes— "particularly the impact of mechanization"—of human crisis in the face of modern industrial capitalism (Stein, "Good Fences," 155). In the United States during the 1930s, the "full scale mobilization of the domestic population" to urban centers of industry brought about social changes that made it necessary for cultural producers to discover the "potential of montage" as an international form, the use of which suggested an alliance across national and political boundaries that could only appear in practice: "To express a sense of crisis and simultaneously to drive home the importance of cooperation" (179). By the time Hughes took up the practice in *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, however, montage had been further

problematized by the Stalinist narrative of "socialism in one country," which co-opted the form as a way to "mythologize post-revolutionary Soviet reality in general and the figure of Stalin in particular" (Tupitsyn, "Politics of Montage," 120). In "From the Politics of Montage to the Montage of Politics," Margarita Tupitsyn writes of how photomontage evolved in the Soviet context so that by the mid-1930s, "even more effectively than Socialist realist painting, [it] served to displace the strains of Soviet reality behind a 'simulative' vision of a benign Stalinist utopia" (125). Of this transformation of the collective impulse into institutionalized authorship, Tupitsyn writes:

> Certain answers can be drawn from the side effects of industrialization and collectivization. The process of collectivization led to the peasants' migration on a significant scale to urban areas and industrial sites. This phenomenon engendered a housing problem of enormous proportions, turning the cities into a conglomeration of overcrowded apartments where different families were forced to cleave together in a single communal body. Stalin's course was to exploit the situation in the advancement of his project to de-individualize the consciousness and daily life of the Soviet people…. As a consequence of this mass communalization the proletariat had been lost in the communal swamp, desolved in "urban peasantry" or to use Leopold Sacher-Masoch's term, in "the low of the commune." (ibid.)

That is, montage itself had transformed into yet another established master narrative, and perhaps it was with this warning in mind that Hughes set his work to the denarrativizing rhythm of bebop, wherein the form was not a predetermined method of delivery for social facts but rather the expression of the action through which those facts "spoke." Hughes sought to join the representation of facts to the production of facts in a "system of signification," or a new language of aesthetic facts "commensurate with" (Fore, introduction, 7) the movement of black Americans into modernity rather than the ideology this movement might be levied to support. So, like the Popular Front, montage was not simply the positive formal position of the proletariat agent of history; imitating the dialectic, it was a form of resistance that had to remain in use between multiple subject positions—including race and nationality, thus making the form also uniquely suited to the black internationalism

embodied in a work like Cunard's *Negro*—so that it did not stabilize into a representational strategy for containing the collective, "blues" impulse it set out to free.

I want to argue that Hughes's unstable, action-based, iterative association with the Popular Front is a fact of his work and that we view his work not "after the fact" of his alleged involvement with the CPUSA but rather as an alliance that becomes fact in his use of montage as a historical and social aesthetic practice. That is to say, Hughes knew what montage "meant" formally because the history of the form was documented as fact in the form itself. Yet, as James Smethurst notes, Hughes's "revolutionary poetry" is often seen as "beyond form" ("Hughes in the 1930s") and his politics appear to exist therein as no more than simple slogans. Such a reading of Hughes misses the point of the Popular Front as a mobile, active political form opposed to the fascism of entrenched ideology. Michael Denning defines the Popular Front as "a radical social-democratic movement forged"—articulated across disparate social positions including race and nationality—"around anti-fascism, anti-lynching, and the industrial unionism of the CIO" (*Cultural Front*, xviii). The Popular Front forms that Hughes practiced are not simply reducible to the content of his revolutionary poems or to his possible affiliation with the CPUSA, which Denning in turn sees as a "fetishization of Party membership, and an overemphasis on the narrative of affiliation and disaffiliation" (ibid.).[25] Hughes absorbed the international opposition to fascism into his forms without reestablishing it as yet another master narrative; he was able, then, to present social texts that were material documents of their circumstances as well as

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[25] In "Langston Hughes' Radical Poetry and the End of Race," Anthony Dawahare writes: "The Communist analysis in the 1930s recast the issue of 'race' in terms of a 'nationality' constituted by common experience rather than a common racial ancestry" (29). This "common experience" was of course class-based, and although I want to be careful not to equate Hughes's Popular Front aesthetics with a position of Communist Party affiliation, it is important to note that in the face of the emergence of fascist powers in the 1930s both Hughes and "Communist analysis" cast race in the same dialectical terms.

vessels for conveying essential information. This is apparent in the way that Hughes, in his autobiography, reported his experiences in Spain in 1937:

> Some of the men in the International Brigades had told me they came to Spain to help keep war and fascism from spreading. "*War and fascism*"—a great many people at home in America seemed to think those words were just a left-wing slogan. War and fascism! He was not just a slogan, that dead man sprawled on the floor of his house; not just a slogan the chee-eep, chee-eep, chee-eep of what I thought were birds singing; certainly not a slogan the streets I had to traverse through that smashed village with a leg here, a hand there, to get back to the road exposed to snipers' fire to reach our car to return to Madrid.
>   "Death does not smell good at all," I thought, a little sick at the stomach as I walked away from that Spanish town where nobody lived any more on account of war and fascism. (*LHR,* 442)

The crucial point here is his insistence that the material facts and effects of fascism should supercede left-wing slogans. Each component of the scene is made material fact through language: the "chee-eep, chee-eep, chee-eep" of the bullet-birds, the increasingly fragmented and repetitive lines, the primarily sensory—rather than intellectual—register of fascist violence's results. Hughes's social text originated in an explicitly anti-fascist, Popular Front aesthetic that is not reducible to a positive political position, that is, it is not simply ideological. Just as "war and fascism" is not merely a slogan, a linguistic representation of a stable and monolithic entity, but rather is something that can be misheard like an unstable pitch and does not "smell good at all," so too is our knowledge of the facts and effects of "war and fascism" disrupted by narrative's inability to reconcile words and objects.

Hughes's earlier poem "Broadcast on Ethiopia" (1936), a "tragi-song for the news reels," incorporates the formal features of montage as well as explicitly Popular Front sentiment. Woven into the "wild shifts of voice, typography, diction, rhythm, rhyme, line length, stanzaic form and its interpolation of song, prose items, expressions of mass culture, and sound effects often occurring simultaneously," is Hughes's anti-fascist solidarity with Ethiopia (Smethurst, "Hughes in the 1930s"). Hughes's startling formal innovations in this

poem coincide with its occasion—the Italian invasion of Ethiopia that charged the anti-fascist movement with the urgency of action. In this sense, "Broadcast" both describes a situation and enacts the moment of political immediacy in which an alliance like the Popular Front found form. Explicitly linking montage form, Popular Front politics, and the inability to represent Africa without fascistically conquering it except through such radical means signals Hughes's developing conception of the document as a resistant form and, conversely, of the resistance of the elided fact.[26] I want to argue for the necessity of reading the relationship between Hughes's politics and his poems—objects made of material language—as a fact or document of his darkened, elided Popular Front poetics.

The fact of Hughes's Popular Front politics is not a straightforward pronouncement—a narrative of affiliation—but, rather, appears as a montage, pointing "not just to the flatness of facts or to objects devoid of artistic value, but more precisely to the

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[26] In "Who Was Langston Hughes?" Eric Sundquist comments that Hughes's 1930s poetry "was often trivialized by politics" (55). Tynjanov might comment here that "for every literary movement there comes the inevitable moment of historical generalization, when it is reduced to the simple and uncomplicated" ("Literary Fact," 46). Sundquist attributes this trivialization to Hughes's "loss of artistic direction in poetry during the 1930s" (56) when in fact I would argue that during the 1930s—not because of, but concurrent with, his turn to the left—Hughes's poetry found direction as he developed out of his interactions with left intellectuals a more radical vocabulary in his work. As such, according to Tynjanov, "these revolutions usually burst through what is strictly speaking 'literature' and seize hold of the domain of everyday life" (46). Sundquist characterizes Hughes's 30s poetry as "embarrassing," (55) and asserts as proof of this the fact that "Hughes excluded most of his radical verse from his *Selected Poems* in 1951" (ibid.), during the McCarthy Era, while also acknowledging the 30s poetry as "a superior instance of socialist realism in America" (ibid.). Yet this argument ignores the most obvious reason why Hughes might exclude his more radically socialist—and admittedly, as I have noted, sometimes awkward in its search for a radical language before the advent of bebop—poetry from a 1951 collection. Sundquist demonstrates here the trend in Hughes scholarship to marginalize or dismiss his radical work on the basis of quality so as to be able to avoid dealing with its political implications; the 1958 *Langston Hughes Reader*, for example, contains almost no political writings at all, none of his 1930s verse, and no mention of his travels to Russia, although the volume in which they appear is partially represented. But Sundquist, writing in 1996, has the benefit of historical distance and still chooses to ignore that in the years following World War II it would have been politically expedient for Hughes to de-emphasize his left radical affiliations.

relationships between facts and objects" (Edwards, "Ethnics of Surrealism," 100).[27] That is

to say that Hughes's involvement with the Popular Front has artistic value when we refuse to

see it as transparent and choose instead to read it as a region of production resistant to

singular meaning. Critics of Hughes's "revolutionary" work have tended to assume,

according to Smethurst, that the form of the poem "is, or should be, transparent, allowing

the clear viewing of the message" ("Hughes in the 1930s"). For Hughes, political authorship

was relational and based on the perceptibility of facts at the intersection of sensory and

political registers. Thus, Hughes looked for these intersections in black internationalism to

provide the context within which his particular version of poetic action could articulate a

specifically black resistance to "war and fascism." Black internationalism, Edwards reminds

us, was "not a predetermined 'solidarity' but a hard-won project only practiced across

difference, only spoken in ephemeral spaces" (*Practice of Diaspora*, 186). These spaces, in turn,

allowed for a specifically black articulation of Popular Front anti-fascist aesthetic practice

that was portable and expressive of multiple subject positions, multiple narratives in relation

to modernity. Hughes addressed the relationship of modern black Americans to fascism in a

speech in July, 1937: "We are the people," Hughes proclaimed, "who have long known in

actual practice the meaning of the word Fascism—for the American attitude towards us has

always been one of economic and social discrimination" (Edwards, "Futures of Diaspora"

704). Though he made this statement before he went to Spain, Hughes's experiences there

would give him the opportunity to formally demonstrate what it meant to know war and

fascism materially. Because of the sounds, their register, the smell—this is how we know war

and fascism and fear. This knowledge is a literary fact and it can only be known by way of its

difference with respect to its own representation, much as the modern black American

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[27] Edwards is referring here to Didi-Huberman's concept of the document.

knows himself largely in his difference from being modern and American. Such facts are not realist simply because they are immediately sensory, however, nor is Hughes's statement a naïve attempt to resolve the ambiguities of blackness or its relation to fascism. The immediate sensory register—"actual practice"—is also a social function that produces literary facts as knowledge, opening the meanings of words like war and fascism to the differences constitutive of material factual production, that is, *how* and *where* we make facts of our experiences, and *why*.

In a way, Hughes used the Popular Front's aesthetic strategies as a way to formalize the logic that Monique Wittig calls "for-we-know-it-to-have-been-slavery," "the dynamic which introduces the diachronism of history into the fixed discourse of eternal essences" (*Straight Mind*, 31–32), or of progress, or narrative, or modernity. Such regions of difference appear in Hughes's work as "darkness," the resistant black relationship to modernity recapitulating in individual texts the unquantifiable dark space of material history. "One might go so far as to claim," Edwards notes, "that in Hughes's work, formal discontinuity and disjuncture are the paradigmatic indexical effect" ("Futures of Diaspora" 702). In *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, then, what Hughes called Harlem's "sheer dark size" (Jarraway, "Montage of Otherness," 824) interrupts and fragments the text while also rejoining those fragments in montage, making darkness the index of that knowledge, "for-we-know-it-to-have-been-slavery." If we understand Harlem as "blackness's most specifically American signifier, just as Africa is its most universal" (826), we can see in Hughes's darkness/blackness, in the cuts between images, not a lack of meaning but an excess that, when considered in terms of Hughes's political affinity with the montage form, figures resistance. This darkness, the unassimilated excess of difference, comes to form as the "blues impulse" in *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, something like what Edwards calls the "insistent …

audible characteristic that links disparate documents" to make a text that is "neither 'a final thing' (a framing of the past) nor a 'prophecy' (a prediction of the future), but a space of 'new creation' in the performance of reading that takes place in the subjunctive, in a condition of probability" (*Practice of Diaspora*, 318).

Consequently, the fact of Hughes's involvement with the Popular Front was also resistant even to his biographer, Arnold Rampersad, who undercut this involvement by noting that "the fact that there was now more shadow than substance to his socialism escaped almost everyone, including his enemies" (Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 58). Rampersad takes part in the elision of the fact by naming it a failure. Some of the most significant evidence of Hughes's substantive involvement with the Popular Front's cultural production is in his theater work, including musicals and opera libretti. Rampersad, however, rather disingenuously disputes this involvement, calling it "something of a puzzle, since [Hughes] was no passionate lover of the form," attempting perhaps to preserve Hughes's reputation at considerable detriment to the work itself (318). In retrospect, Rampersad's denial of the substance of Hughes's political affiliation was likely an act of protection or academic caution, albeit one that came at Hughes's own expense. Now, though, we can see how such elision provides a moment of opportunity: "In such space-time (separation)," which for Hughes is the political fact of his Popular Front poetics, "in such a cut, lies certain chances" (Moten, *In the Break*, 223). Moten explains that "if we linger in that cut… that spatio-temporal organization" of elision, "we might commit an action" (ibid.). This cut, this disjuncture in the narrative of Hughes's history, is indexed in the effects and formal features of his later work.

In some way, Hughes based his revolutionary poetics on the logic of political form not as a position but as the kind of displaced authorship presented by Bataille in "Popular Front

in the Street" (1936); in this way Hughes's political commitments were immanent in his texts. The "revolutionary symbolism" brought forth by the montage's disruption of modern black identity narratives matched with Bataille's idea of the formal manifestation of the Popular Front as a "brutal convulsion of the masses" (*Visions*, 162). Hughes could elide the fact of his authorship so that it was one resistant fact among many, enabling him to "stay in the audience," the only way that "revolutionary activity can be expressed *in the street* with force" (ibid.). Revolutionary activity in the street, for Bataille, was "no longer a procession," an orderly arrangement of facts into realist forms (ibid.). Rather, the Popular Front created the immediate terrain of struggle by "knowing full well that no development of forces and no great social transformation can take place without a crisis" (166), in this case a crisis of political forms given over to "this ALL-POWERFUL multitude" (168). For Bataille, as for Hughes, form must be revolutionary, and realism must be transformed in order to re-imagine the national-popular as a site of resistance.

While it is possible to read in Hughes's poetics a hint of "idealism regarding the possibility of Soviet world building through an emerging new filmic medium" (Kadlec, "Early Soviet Cinema," 312), there is also significant textual evidence of Hughes's more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of the montage as social form. Intertitles, which Viktor Shklovsky recognized as a crucial component of the politically engaged montage, work throughout *Montage of a Dream Deferred* to connect the disparate clips comprising the sequence, introducing also the element of contingency in order to create multiple continuous narrative threads. Montage, Moten argues, "begins to put some pressure on the idea of singularity" by being a "nonexclusive totality…. A whole art that would offer, represent, and enact what Trinh T. Minh-ha calls 'the multiple oneness of life'" (*In the Break*, 121). According to Shklovsky, the intertitle should function as precisely that pressure,

transforming facts or situations into attractions by becoming "a sort of invocation, the audience immediately recalling all the previous situations accompanied by the same title" ("The Film Factory," 169). The titles that "change the shot" in this way are those which "produce a new and different consciousness" (ibid.). Hughes uses intertitles to pressure facts most explicitly in "Night Funeral in Harlem" (*LHR*, 117). The opening lines of the poem repeat the title, both announcing the subject of the poem and establishing its central structural feature:

> Night funeral
> in Harlem:
>
> Where did they get
> Them two fine cars?
>
> Insurance man, he did not pay—
> His insurance lapsed the other day—
> Yet they got a satin box
> For his head to lay.
>
> Night funeral
> in Harlem:
>
> Who was it sent
> That wreath of flowers?
>
> Them flowers came
> from that poor boy's friends—
> They'll want flowers, too,
> When they meet their ends…. (Ibid.)

The title first seems to simply announce the obvious, that we are witnessing a night funeral in Harlem. But as the poem progresses, we see how the titles change the shots, the phrasings between the titles that describe the realities beneath the night funeral. The repetition of the fact "Night funeral/in Harlem" interrupts the narrative, as though interrupting the funeral procession itself, to reassert the negativity within that fact, the gaps where history appears, that in turn make up the discontinuous narrative of a community. The intertitles here do not

allow readers to understand the night funeral as a coherent event, do not allow it to be textualized in any normative manner. The descriptions—shots—between the titles resist being described by the titles while at the same time the titles prevent any narrative of the event that would attempt to elide its own social disruptions. Though this is the most clear and self-contained example of the use of intertitles in *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, Hughes invokes its twinned social and formal pressure frequently in the text. Perhaps most crucially, the title phrase "Montage of a Dream Deferred," appears throughout the sequence as intertitle, reorienting readers to its emphasis at each occurrence, producing a different consciousness by interrupting the narrative with evidence of the contingency of the theme on its variations. Intertitles here work much as Shklovsky intended, problematizing the spectatorial authority of the audience over the represented scene.

The task, then, according to Osip Brik, was to find a new "plotless method"—not a procession—for representation wherever "there is a more general question of communicating and fixing the real facts of living reality" ("Fixation," 185). For Bataille, answering this question presupposed "a renewal of political forms, a renewal possible in the present circumstances, when it seems that all revolutionary forces are called upon to fuse in an incandescent crucible" known as the Popular Front (*Visions*, 168). For Hughes, the Harlem morning saw a community whose limitless possibilities necessitated the "plotless method" of montage. Beginning with the a variation on the refrain "Good morning, daddy!", and ending in yet another form of deferral, "Daddy, ain't you heard?", the poem "Good Morning" offers a montage of Harlem that chronicles both its development and disappointments. The ever-present figure of "Daddy" speaks, but does not narrate Harlem or answer for its troubles:

> I was born here, he said,
> watched Harlem grow

until colored folks spread
from river to river
across the middle of Manhattan
out of Penn Station
dark tenth of a nation,
planes from Puerto Rico,
and holds of boats, chico,
up from Cuba Haiti Jamaica,
in busses marked New York
from Georgia Florida Louisiana
to Harlem Brooklyn the Bronx
but most of all to Harlem
dusky sash across Manhattan
I've seen them come dark
    wandering
    wide-eyed
    dreaming
out of Penn Station—
but the trains are late.
The gates open—
but there're bars
at each gate. (*LHR,* 124)

In fact, the poem ends with a double question, and we are unsure who asks the first part: "What happens/ to a dream deferred?" Representing the community in montage is clearly not an exercise in "world building," since this vision of Harlem in the street anticipates the deferred dream of "its entire will straining with enthusiasm toward popular power" (Bataille, *Visions*, 168) by undermining Harlem's own discursive foundation with the intervention of internationalist logic. Hughes's montage form does not literalize either the Stalinist oppression of the individual consciousness or Leninist "world building" enterprise. Instead, it incorporates the black international model of *décalage*—the "reestablishment of a prior unevenness"—into his sequences in order to both use montage and destabilize its ideological underpinnings at the same time. The poem, then, is an articulation of multiple positions wherein Hughes uses both the montage and the logic of black internationalism to enact his own manifestation of the Popular Front. "To write poetry under these conditions," writes

Cary Nelson of the Popular Front's cultural movement, organized Hughes's poetics such that the sense of both community and resistance "was pressing and immediate" ("Poetry Chorus," 32). This reflexivity between Harlem's history and its present deferred form was only possible to see and to represent through the *décalé* montage. In *Montage of a Dream Deferred,* Harlem as a political community of modern black subjects appears not as represented by montage but rather as the "lingering emergences from [its] fissures" (Moten, *In the Break*, 162)—the internal complications of "but the trains are late," which are, as Moten writes: "The space of performance, the site of the creation of new models of reality, the rearrangement of the relations and the particularities of representation/resistance/identity is that proletarian, motley reconstitution of the public sphere, the site or precondition of politics, of a politics that improvises resistance" (ibid.).

To be able to "improvise resistance" in this way, Hughes needed the montage, and his commitment to the revolutionary potential of theatrical forms meant that montage took on additional political significance. After Sergei Eisenstein, the "montage of attractions" had a specific provenance and agenda ("Montage of Attractions," 87), one that became increasingly available for Hughes's use as he denarrativized Harlem into a collection of resistant facts. These resistant facts worked as "attractions," defined by Eisenstein as "any aggressive moment in theater" (ibid.). In "The Film Factory," Shklovsky opens by calling to Soviet filmmakers to "stay in the audience," for only those who pause "on the doorstep of the film factory" can create a "conscious, exacting audience" by being simultaneously part of such an audience and, in a sense, its author (166). Such an elision between author and audience turns the fact of authorship into a process through which "we observe a gradual displacement of everyday situations by purely formal elements" (177). For Hughes, this

process echoes the formation of community as a network of identifications produced by "the ways we leave home and return."

So for Hughes, the collision of modern black history in process with its own formal logic is a moment in which diaspora—the ways that we are dispersed, or leave home and return—"forces us to articulate discourses of cultural and political linkage only through and across difference in full view of the risks of that endeavor" (Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*, 13). Here, it is helpful to consider Hughes's compositional strategies in terms of Stuart Hall's definition of articulation as that which "functions as a concept-metaphor that allows us to consider relations of 'difference within unity,' non-naturalizable patterns of linkage between disparate societal elements" (11). Hughes presents a "continuous montage" (Jarraway, "Montage of Otherness," 826) instead of a procession as Harlem's textualization because modern blackness in Harlem "does not inhere in any ultimate referent" (ibid.) that is accessible by realist modes. Whatever "unity" inheres in the montage is subject to the function of articulation as a representational mode, "not that of an identity, where one structure perfectly recapitulates or reproduces or even 'expresses' another" (Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*, 11). In Hughes's montage of Harlem, the structure of black modernity is denarrativized—and simultaneously produced—"in the rhythmic process of multiplication and substitution" that creates a diasporic site (Jarraway, "Montage of Otherness," 827). It is a social formation between forms, a state that Hughes refers to in the short verse "Advice":

> Folks, I'm telling you,
> birthing is hard
> and dying is mean –
> so get yourself
> a little loving
> in between. (*LHR*, 100)

Here we can see Hughes, when we place the apparent platitude of "Advice" in the context of the larger work and of Hughes's textual politics as I understand them, aligning his use of

the montage with Bataille's social-formal anti-concept of the "*informe*." Montage is a process that works through rhythm, multiplication, and substitution—much like sexuality does in the poem—to reintroduce difference into static categories (birth, death) and the narrative systems that connect them. Much as the transformation of the Popular Front into a politically powerful identity takes place in and as a function of the street, where the masses do not adopt a political form but rather resist textualization to become a truly class-less common action or will, *informe* is "not only an adjective" but is instead "a term serving to declassify, requiring in general that every thing should have a form" (Edwards, "Ethnics of Surrealism," 109). Hughes introduces the logic of *informe* into the everyday facts that make up Harlem through the operation of the form that is montage. By placing negatives— "birthing is hard" and "dying is mean"—on both sides of unstructured content—"a little loving"—Hughes posits that unstructured action as the *informe* that undoes the established narrative of "folks" that readers might be tempted to apply to *Montage of a Dream Deferred* in order to stabilize the assemblage. Hughes uses language to refuse the obliteration of facts and their replacement by stabilizing objects, instead transforming facts into an impulse to action that appears in the *décalé* of his assembled documents. This "explicitly *social* declassification" (ibid.) suggests that the formal nonce taxonomies undertaken by Stein in works like *The Making of Americans* were in fact part of a wider model of modernist social denarrativization of facts.

According to Rosalind Krauss, the way that Bataille avoided allowing the *informe* to be "taken as a category, a concept, a meaning, or a theme is by saying: we don't define this word, we give it a job to do" (Sedofsky, "Down and Dirty"), which was for him a confrontation, a battle for the soul of the fact: "It was that stability that Bataille wanted to attack" (ibid.). On one side was identity and realist representation. On the other side was the

informe, an experiment of resemblance subjected to the "radical alteration and redefinition" of denarrativization (Edwards, "Ethnics of Surrealism" 100). The definition of the literary fact, according to Tynjanov, depends upon its differential quality, in this case, the ongoing "radical alteration and redefinition" introduced into factuality by the montage. In Bataille's journal *Documents*, "photographs and illustrations interact and clash with the articles and with each other" (ibid.) on the site of the material text, the textual equivalent of the "street." Krauss argues, however, that we should avoid reducing Bataille to a dialectician because this allows his use of montage to reduce the *informe* to a dialectical operation, a problem that she sees in Didi-Huberman's project (Sedofsky, "Down and Dirty"). According to the logic of the *informe*, the confrontation between disparate images does not always (or ever) resolve; if we look at montage in its fullest historical and social sense, that is, in light of both black internationalist *décalage* and also specifically Soviet (i.e., Stalinist) forms, we can see clearly that its use alongside or in concert with the *informe* is not an attempt at resolution at all. There is a gesture toward resolution here, but it manifests as an impulse to action that resists positivization or completion. Kaplan sees this gesture in Bearden's collage work as a radical negativity that goes past Hegel to mark "the nonlocatable locus of deferral and of *différance* upon which the system of meaning depends and around which the concept of community circulates" (*American Exposures*, 130). In the same way, Hughes sets up a system of *informe* in *Montage of a Dream Deferred* where verses interact and clash with each other in a way that cannot be resolved, that can only be taken up, re-absorbed by, and recapitulated in the collective fact of the community itself.

"Juke Box Love Song" is a fairly traditional lyric in which the speaker addresses his "sweet brown Harlem girl," telling her how he will dance with her to the music that he makes out of the daily rhythms of Harlem. The speaker, evoking Christopher Marlowe's

shepherd, perhaps, proposes to take all the elements of the Harlem everyday, the national popular of the streets, and turn them into a song to whose beat he can wrap his arms around her "like the Harlem night":

> I could take the Harlem night
> and wrap it around you
> Take the neon lights and make a crown,
> Take the Lenox Avenue busses,
> Taxis, subways,
> And for your love song tone their rumble down.
> Take Harlem's heartbeat,
> Make a drumbeat,
> Put it on a record, let it whirl,
> And while we listen to it play,
> Dance with you till day—
> Dance with you, my sweet brown Harlem girl. (*LHR*, 93–94)

But even within this poem, the speaker fails to find a danceable beat, and maybe the sweetness of it all is that the poem fails and the speaker must wrap his Harlem girl in irregular but ultimately more powerful Harlem of the streets. Here, Harlem resists, but still shines. "Juke Box Love Song" is recapitulated in "College Formal: Renaissance Casino":

> Golden girl
> in a golden brown
> in a melody night
> in Harlem town
> lad tall and brown
> tall and wise
> college boy smart
> eyes in eyes
> the music wraps
> them both around
> in mellow magic
> of dancing sound
> till they're the heart
> of the whole big town
> gold and brown (*LHR*, 109)

The components of "Juke Box" are here denarrativized and impressionistic, yet the poem succeeds in producing the soundtrack for a dance between the young man and the young woman. There's no lyric "I" in the poem, just the possible voice of a denarrativized Harlem.

"Brown" repeats and "town" repeats, and these are the academic, traditional rhymes that attempt to stabilize the poem, yet they dissolve as the action begins "in Harlem town," a place that becomes—like "a little loving"—the unstructured content within an ineffective frame. The completion that Hughes withholds from the word "golden," shortening it in the last line to "gold" (a word that is both adjective and noun) again defies any attempt to resolve the everyday actions of Harlem in language. "College Formal" complicates the relation between the formal and the everyday by suggesting that the only form that can hold the everyday, can make it useful, readable, danceable, is *informe*. The poem does not end in definition; "college" and "formal" are two kinds of named knowledge that, when placed in contact with each other, actually work to deontologize stable references, revealing these references' *calé* as the poem stumbles around a little bit looking for a beat. Likewise, "Juke Box Love Song" and "College Formal: Renaissance Casino" come into contact within *Montage*. The two poems are connected in the montage as corresponding verses or "shots," but their true significance is in their formal difference. So while correspondence seems to imply for the *informe* a dialectical movement, the one that Didi-Huberman literalized, the process through which this is worked out—Hughes's montage—implies no such resolution (Edwards, "Ethnics of Surrealism," 102).

Instead, difference establishes itself as the *informe*'s method, deprioritizing dialectical synthesis as an end goal. There is a fact there, but it is not a fact that is recognizable through realist modes. Instead, it is a fact claimed in sound—Baraka's "blues impulse": "The direct expression of a place" (Baraka, *Baraka Reader*, 186). Yet the impulse, Baraka notes, "is one thing," and "what it produces is another": "The elements that turn our singing into direct reflections of our selves are heavy and palpable as the weather … You react to push it, re-create it, resist it … It is the opposite pressure producing (in this case) the sound" (187). The

blues impulse is a specifically black articulation that—as Edwards thinks it—"speaks across *décalage*, an avowedly uneven and 'scattered' transnational context of 'unco-ordinated struggle'" (*Practice of Diaspora*, 303) to make audible and insistent a "claimed identity," like the black American identity described by Ellison as a "*willed* (who wills to be a Negro? *I* do!) affirmation of self as against all outside pressures" (ibid.). Thus Hughes's Popular Front orientation, made manifest in his texts as the form of the montage, allowed him access to questions of "memory, descent, and projection" (Moten, *In the Break*, 173) specific to the black community as represented in Harlem. Alongside its anti-fascist and labor organization commitments, the Popular Front in the United States also confronted and battled institutionalized lynching. Perhaps the most keenly felt manifestation of fascism, for the African-American masses, was the unending slave past that lynching embodied and brought forth into the present, modern moment. Lynching brought the unrepresentable of history— in the case of black Americans, plainly and brutally "race"—into direct contact with the contemporary community-in-formation as a fact. Claimed identity was informed/*informed* within the community by double consciousness, resistant and ambivalent. For Hughes, montage enabled a critical social poetics outside the traditionally positivist, and hence easily assimilated to narratives of "progress" that cast aside the specificity of blackness, strivings for identity that had long dominated both the African-American community and realist representation.

Thus the anti-fascist Popular Front of the 1930s could reappear in the *Montage of a Dream Deferred* of post-World War II Harlem because this reappearance did not depend upon waiting for the formation of a positive class or race position but instead upon creating the conditions for such an alliance of resistance to be "always about to be" in action, gesturing and making itself in language. "When you're talking about the nitty-gritty of form and not-

form," Krauss asserts, "you're working close to the bone of how art gets made, how it signifies, and how certain discursive structures make similar effects to signal something else" (Sedofsky, "Down and Dirty"); for Krauss, that "how" is an effect of the *informe* beat, that is, "where the idea of motion is coupled with the deontolization of the … object" (ibid.). The "something else," here, is the more-than of the literary fact, the resistant object that refuses ontology to signify excessively across discursive structures. Moten's formulation continues to be applicable to the division that I have posited between the realist fact and the differential literary fact: "For now it's enough to try to think the whole—as it has been formulated and identified, in a certain kind of poststructuralist thought, as a necessarily fictive, problematically restrictive, completeness—in its relation to and difference from the *w*hole whose incompleteness is also a *more than completeness*" (*In the Break*, 173). The doubled side of the elided fact of Hughes's political commitments is "a pluri-dimensionality, heretofore repressed, of the instant, of the clearing" (122) of the material-historical site of composition, early twentieth-century Harlem. This pluri-dimensionality enables us to read poems like "Café: 3 A.M." as historically specific sites of resistance, in this case, the Popular Front Jazz spot Café Society. This nightclub was not only a countercultural institution in Harlem, it is also commonly recognized as the birthplace of underground Popular Front jazz. Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit" is just one example of a musical text born out of the collaborations that began at Café Society. Hughes's short verse takes a "shot" of Harlem—this brief moment of nightlife—and turns it into a fact submitted to differential logic, revealing at once its resistant sexuality, politics, and historical memory. Montage formalizes the process of creating resistant objects by submitting facts, including the fact of authorship, to the differential logic of the cut, and thereby "facilitates a seemingly limitless variety of syntactic possibilities," as Kadlec writes ("Early Soviet Cinema," 319). In Moten's formulation,

montage "renders inoperative any simple opposition of totality to singularity" (*In the Break*, 89) according to the logic of "the synthesis of process and artifact that occurs in and as montage" (121).

Hughes shows the generative space made possible by montage in the poem "Jam Session," out of which we can read the formal logic of *Montage of a Dream Deferred* presented in a single, yet limitless, moment of syntactic possibilities. In this poem, the "little cullud boys" from "Flatted Fifths" perform montage in miniature, articulating a figurine of the sonic montage and enabling us to *see* the possibilities in its notation:

> Letting midnight
> out on bail
> >   pop-a-da
> having been
> detained in jail
> >   oop-pop-a-da
> for sprinkling salt
> on a dreamer's tail
> >   pop-a-da
> While Be-Bop boys
> >   implore Mecca
> >   to achieve
> >   six discs
> >   with Decca

Little Cullud boys
>   with fears,
>   frantic,

nudge their draftee years.
>   Pop-a-da! (*LHR*, 107)

Hughes also creates within the sequence a space shared by the two echoing poems. The space opened by the performance, the jam itself, is the simultaneous "while" shared by the "Be-Bop boys" and the "little cullud boys." Yet between "Flatted Fifths" and "Jam Session," meaning is not enforced so much as it is made *informe*. The "Be-Bop boys" play the flatted fifth in their jam session and it is this bringing over of the unstable pitch that allows readers access to the facts of the text. The motion or gesture, in sound, moves within form as a way

of foregrounding language's sonic aspect to deontologize facts expressed in language. This is a form of instability, as Krauss argues, "involved in … a tracking of desire" that looks to Bataille's base materialism for the "divisibility of any definition" (Sedofsky, "Down and Dirty"). Hughes uses this performance as an opportunity to reveal a problematized realism.

Shklovsky anticipated "the historical transposition of materials" (Kadlec, "Early Soviet Cinema," 303) from the documentary film to the long poem as a means for telling the news of the class struggle (312). This was perhaps because the film montage was determined largely by the material facts from which the method arose, including a shortage of film stock that would later reappear literally as social form. If Shklovsky saw how a "future language" could be constructed "from the very sorts of archival fragments that filmmakers were forced to use during times of crisis and shortage" (319), Hughes saw a future language for telling modern blackness within and out of the deferred facts of its own crisis. Montage, the formal method of jam sessions, "was vital enough to break the frame of realism, to restore the truth of disproportion, to 'make the stones roar,' as Eisenstein himself put it" (ibid.).

III. Dream Deferred: The Resistance of Future Forms

Michel Foucault approaches the archive as a "privileged region," a zone at the border "of the present we inhabit" that undermines the assumed totality, or inevitability, of collective circumstance with its own material presence (Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*, 10). Foucault explains the differential function of the archive as a kind of "end" in the way I have taken up the term: "[Reading the archive] deprives us of our continuities; it dissipates that temporal identity in which we are pleased to look at ourselves when we wish to exorcise the discontinuities of history" (ibid.). Thus, Edwards writes, "the archive must not serve to buttress the pretensions or mystifications of the present self or the current community" (ibid.). Hughes approaches Harlem's history and form in much the same way, reading the

history of Harlem not as evidence for the present self or the current community but as the archive or index of its potentially radical always-coming-to-be. Sometime during the years between the "Weary Blues" (1926) and *Montage of a Dream Deferred* Hughes shifted his orientation from the past to the future. His commitment to anti-fascist poetics and the development of montage as social form eventually led Hughes to the formal resistances of jazz as his expression of revolutionary denarrativization. In this refusal of totalizing narratives of self, this abandonment instead to the (dis)continuities of the social self in history, and then the concomitant formalization (or *informe*-ing) of this refusal, the presence of the archive denarrativizes official history and exposes its ideology as an artificial imposition upon the material base of fact. At the same time, the material of fact and the commitment to realistic representation comprises for Hughes a positivity that exceeds form. This realism—the naming, the cataloging, the identifiable people and places, the direct treatment of images and oftentimes the outright refusal of symbolic/fascist language— accumulates as critically other "ghetto facts" that both reform as montage to tell a history and simultaneously de-ontologize progressive narratives of modern black America. The archive is a border zone—for Hughes, much like the unassimilable fragments of the jazz idiom—that begins "outside our own social language practices" to establish that "we are in difference, that … difference, far from being the forgotten and recovered origin, is this dispersion that we are and make" (Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*, 10). Such difference becomes a "shared elsewhere" in which Edwards, in "Langston Hughes and the Futures of Diaspora," encourages readers to find the future orientation in Hughes's anti-fascist 1930s writings (704). To face difference as a future suggests the archive's potential for disclosure, its capacity to reveal discursive openings rather then shore up entrenched structures behind a fiction of completeness.

This is the archive as it looks forward rather than backward; no longer simply a method for collecting scattered fragments of history—to be mistaken for collective action—Hughes's archive is instead the expression of dispersion that creates the site for "future languages." It is in this spirit that Hughes's writing approached "folk" forms, first in the 1920s and 30s and then later, in *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, in which the poet treated his own earlier writings as "folk" forms themselves. Many explicitly anti-fascist and Popular Front oriented artists, especially those involved with the Left folk song movement, located "poetic value in 'popular' forms of the 'folk' supposedly outside of mass culture" (Smethurst, "Hughes in the 1930s"). Earlier in his career, Hughes had employed folk forms in poems like "The Weary Blues" and "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," which referenced and problematized, respectively, the blues and African-American spirituals—"the sorrow songs." "I tried," Hughes wrote,

> to write poems like the songs they sang on Seventh Street—gay songs, because you had to be gay or die; sad songs, because you couldn't help being sad sometimes. But gay or sad, you kept on living and you kept on going. . . . Like the waves of the sea coming one after another, always one after another, like the earth moving around the sun, night, day—night, day-night, day—forever, so is the undertow of Black music with its rhythm that never betrays you, its strength like the beat of the human heart, its humor, and its rooted power. (Patterson, "The Modernist Lyric," 661, n. 20)

Yet while other poets on the Left were reclaiming folk forms, Hughes was already busy redefining those forms not as nostalgic revisions but as future insurrections. His use of the blues could never be the same reclaiming of folk forms as that of other Left documentarists; the fact of slavery was attached to his folk forms like shackles, so to engage these forms would be to betray the vision of a truly social text for a regressive, symbolic yet ultimately ineffective, resistance. Hughes saw the problems of nostalgic attachment to folk forms more clearly than many other Left poets because the material facts comprising those forms—lynching, for example—still threatened his existence. To embrace the primitivism of folk

forms would entail a paralysis of critique, a silencing of the "unassimilable elements" (Edwards, "Ethnics of Surrealism," 115) and resistant objects of black historical experience. Cedric Robinson argues that the "experience of slavery"—including, I would add, its material legacy in such forms as lynching—"is merely the condition for black radicalism—its immediate reason for and object of being—but not the foundation for its nature or character. Black radicalism, consequently, cannot be understood within the particular context of its genesis. It is not a variant of western radicalism whose proponents happen to be black" (Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*, 304). Edwards translates this claim into a question: "Is it possible to divorce the emergence of black radicalism from the history of Western radicalism, especially when so many of its key activists and intellectuals … were formed through contact with international communism?" (305).

I want to argue that Hughes's work between blues and jazz idioms provides an opportunity for considering how to address this question. Jazz, when played both against and in the tradition of the more "folk" blues, was formally involved in ongoing resistance, asserting the unstoppable continuity of facts from history to the present while also working as a kind of knowledge that deforms and transforms those facts "to shift the focus from the decentered subject to the resistant object and to disentangle the practice of epistemology from the violence of appropriation" (Moten, *In the Break*, 256). Cruse asserts:

> The Negro intellectuals and radical theorists of the 1920s and 1930s did not, themselves, fight for intellectual clarity. They were unable to create a new black revolutionary synthesis of what was applicable from Garveyism (especially economic nationalism), and what they had learned from Marxism that was valid. Yet with such a theoretical synthesis, Negroes would not really have needed the Communist Party. They could have laid down the foundation for a new school of revolutionary ideas, which, if developed, could have maintained a programmatic continuity between the issues and events of the 1920s and the Negro movements of the 1950s and 1960s. And the young Negro intellectuals of today would probably not be facing a theoretical and intellectual vacuum. (*The Crisis*, 151)

But jazz, as it comes to form in Hughes's work moving from the 1920s to 1950s, gives the

lie to Cruse's dismissal of synthesis and programmatic continuity in black radical theory and activist/artistic praxis. Jazz was the specifically African-American manifestation of the social and revolutionary potential of montage as the creation of an "other epistemology of blackness, 'heterogeneous,' 'unpredictable,' 'violent and strange' " (Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*, 305). Cruse is thus absolutely wrong in suggesting that "the Negro intellectuals did not take up this issue, develop it, and fight it out as *their* issue, *their* stake, *their* main platform, and *their* specific demand for cultural revolution" (*The Crisis*, 154); moreover, he seems to have created such a vacuum himself by foreclosing on the possibility that the young intellectuals' own experience of their race and its history could be a "real politics" (ibid.). We can find in Hughes's jazz and blues forms—just one example—the ways by which the "Negro intellectuals" unambiguously did demand *their* cultural revolution. This is an epistemology that refuses Cruse's institutionalization of radical thought and in fact deontologizes the foundation of revolutionary ideas by basing itself in the unassimilable acts of resistant exchange that constitute collective communication. In "Jazz as Communication," Hughes puts it more simply, and more definitively: "To me jazz is a montage of a dream deferred. A great big dream—yet to come—and always *yet*—to become ultimately and finally true" (*LHR,* 494).

But while Hughes embraced jazz as a revolutionary communicative form, he did not disavow the blues as a generative force in his work. Jazz, when isolated from the blues impulse, wasn't necessarily a "heroic cultural production," as Jerving notes ("Early Jazz Literature," 650). A critic like Cruse could conceivably turn to jazz as an example of the lack of cultural ownership that doomed the black intellectual. We can't elide the fact that jazz was, in and of itself, not a revolutionary or resistant form. Jerving notes that "race and other potentially divisive issues of cultural access and ownership were exactly this: the not-said

specter haunting the unifying national and epochal discourses surrounding jazz in its cultural emergence" (657). Thus it is important that Hughes turned to the blued jazz of bebop to find his revolution, and that he used language to further blur—or slide, or blue—the distinction between these forms. Hughes calls up the question of how to name the space between "African" and "American" in black modernity—indeed indexing the openings in any unifying discourses—"so that it becomes about something that is actual in the world and … you dig that it is life meant" (Baraka, *Baraka Reader*, 206). Hughes continued to use the word "blues," in *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, where he in fact meant "jazz." In so doing, he made it impossible to separate the forms into either the blues of the nostalgic "folk" past or the "white" jazz of the ahistoric mainstream present. "Jazz seeps into words," Hughes wrote, "With the Blues running all up and down the keyboard through the ragtime and the jazz" (*LHR,* 493). The poem "Same in Blues" comes near the end of the montage sequence and troubles the traditional blues with intertitles that work variation on the title phrase. The "dream deferred" in this poem does things, fragmenting the blues lyric by reorienting each verse to the source of its founding trauma of this particular lyric "I":

> … Daddy, daddy, daddy,
> All I want is you.
> You can have me, baby—
> but my lovin' days is through.
>
> > A certain
> > amount of impotence
> > in a dream deferred.
>
> Three parties
> On my party line—
> But that third party
> Lord, ain't mine!
>
> > There's liable
> > to be confusion
> > in a dream deferred… (*LHR*, 124–5)

Very simply put, we see by way of conclusion what the dream deferred has done to traditional narratives of blackness and to the attendant ability to communicate through these narratives. Yet the blues remains, both in the poem's title and in its speaker. The poem is, perhaps, the retranslation of *Montage* back into a now impossible—*informe*—folk form, impossible because, as an early intertitle in the same poem announces, there is "A certain/ amount of nothing/ in a dream deferred." This complication indicates how Hughes's seeming reluctance to allow jazz to break fully from blues is connected to his desire to avoid institutionalizing silences. By casting jazz as the "changing same," Hughes invokes the protest music of the "invisible institution," wherein the songs that couldn't be heard were songs "about freedom" (Baraka, *Baraka Reader*, 207). "Social consciousness in jazz," Baraka notes, was a kind of consciousness that animated musicians non-verbally; "folk" music, as it is generally known, originated in and as protest and resistance not officially heard (207–8). Taking up bebop at the blued moment of the flatted fifth, Hughes meant to speak in an idiom more real than the "social realism" offered to him by Left folk protest lyrics which were, to Baraka, yet another instance of the undermined autonomy of black music. Hughes's formalization of the transition from blues to jazz is an attempt by the poet to resist the "planned obsolescence of jazz traditions" that, according to Jerving, "tactically" covered its history ("Early Jazz Literature," 659), which was then elided in favor of the form's modernist, progressive force so that jazz *became* avant-garde to compensate for its exploitative origins. Likewise, Hughes here returns to his own simultaneously anti-progressive and anti-nostalgic beginnings: the "certain amount of nothing" of books tossed into the sea.

Hughes seems to have viewed jazz as "neither an atavistic return to Africa nor the swan song of a dying black folk culture" (Edwards, "Ethnics of Surrealism," 116). Instead,

jazz becomes, as Bataille understood it, the "particular *informe* whose task is to undo the old binary of modern and primitive," (ibid.) and whose function corresponds to the breaks and holes in the montage form. Hughes didn't want to simply positivize the trauma within "folk" forms by formalizing it, nor did he wish to fetishize the social moments surrounding the emergence of bebop by textualizing them. Jerving encourages us to consider "how modern [jazz] writers inhabited and revised from within their role" ("Early Jazz Literature," 668) in the compromised and complicated lineage of blackness, nostalgia, modernity, and cultural production; he goes on to suggest that such thinking challenges us to reconsider cultural forms like folk, blues, and jazz in "unheroic terms," not as "literature's authenticating Other" but as "social forms and historical practices of work likewise engaged with … changing, broadly alienating modernity" (669). The *informe* recapitulated the threat of black silences, of lynching, while also asserting an undoing that was at once social and formal, the formlessness of Bataille's Popular Front in the street. Hughes had to subject himself to the particular threat of the *informe* as well, to the silences that he considered "part of the debilitating legacy of slavery" (Patterson, "The Modernist Lyric," 667). As Moten notes, "within a certain continuum of intensity, of aesthetic, political, even libidinal, saturation that black folks call everyday life—[it is hard] to look at what seems only to emerge as the occlusion of blackness, the deferral and destruction of another ensemble" (*In the Break*, 123). Because he was so troubled by "the 'silences' that structure thought and expression in the blues," Hughes sought to produce a distinction between blues silences and jazz silences, a distinction which he founded in the breaks of the montage sequence (Patterson, "The Modernist Lyric," 667). "It would have been impossible," Patterson writes, for Hughes to "write completely in accordance with the verbal constraints of the folk tradition: to do so would have resulted in an endlessly mechanical recapitulation of the racial terror of slavery"

(668). Hughes needed to put pressure on the site where the imitation of fact itself becomes fact: textualization. By saturating his forms with inhabitable silences, Hughes emphasized the act of resistance, the *informe* in textual forms as "chimerical and frightening as the abstract and formless" (Edwards, "Ethnics of Surrealism," 110) internal resistance of the object that is the collective impulse to self-determination. In this way, Hughes's work leading up to and including *Montage* takes part in the discourse that Edwards identifies as "the complexly articulated imagination of black internationalism" (*Practice of Diaspora*, 237), a discourse that, in its silences—its *décale*— "pulls the bottom out" from under the entrenched official narrative (what Edwards names "the color line") and "*dreams* it toward a radical articulation of diaspora" (ibid.).

In "Dream Boogie," Hughes reanimates the break that speaks "the violent historical conditions out of which the impulse to formal innovation emerged" (Patterson, "The Modernist Lyric," 682). The questions in the opening poem of *Montage of a Dream Deferred* mark a crucial transition that I want to connect to Hughes's move away from blues to jazz as a radical form. Patterson identifies this transition as a move away from "the lyric's effort to mime violence (that is, from its performance of a nonrepresentational, violent motion of beating measured feet) to an all-out confrontation with meanings on the verge of verbal explicitness" (ibid.). The pressure that Hughes applies to the fact by enunciating these silences as questions suggests a corresponding permeability in the facts that make up the sequence, the permeability of a denarrativized ensemble, so that by presenting these facts in a montage the silences become jazz breaks, moments resistant to narrative. "This is what objection is," writes Moten, "What performance is—an internal complication of the object that is, at the same time, [its] withdrawal into the external world" (*In the Break*, 253). "Dream Boogie: Variation" takes the initial poem in the sequence and performs its internal

complication. The poem confronts meaning on the site of objection with violence *in* language:

> Tinkling treble,
> Rolling bass,
> High noon teeth
> In a midnight face,
> Great long fingers
> On great big hands,
> Screaming pedals
> Where his twelve-shoe lands,
> Looks like his eyes
> Are teasing pain,
> a Few minutes late
> For the Freedom Train. (*LHR*, 123)

The brutal confrontation between figuration and its absent cause appears through language as a kind of continuity between the trauma of the past and the broken narrative of present performance. The "high noon teeth," "screaming pedals," and "teasing pain" destroy the dream boogie with the sounds of black America's past. This is the emerged formal innovation that the original poem ushered forth by teasing, questioning, troubling, performance. "Dream Boogie: Variation" is a nightmare in sound. Its origin recurs in each phrase, trapped in deferral, the catastrophe of having been "a Few minutes late/For the Freedom Train" made manifest in the contemporary blackness's forms. Of this catastrophic transition—the endlessly missed train—Baraka writes:

> Blues as an autonomous music had been in a sense inviolable. There was no clear way into it, i.e., its production, not its appreciation, except as concomitant with what seems to me to be the peculiar social, cultural, economic, and emotional experience of a black man in America…. That could not be got to, except as the casual expression of a whole culture. And for this reason, blues remained, and remains in its most moving manifestations, obscure to the mainstream of American culture…. Jazz made it possible for the first time for something of the legitimate feeling of Afro-American music to be imitated successfully…. Or rather, jazz enabled separate and *valid* emotional expressions to be made that were based on older traditions of Afro-American music that were clearly not a part of it. (*Blues People,* 147–8)

So if the blues is the unassimilable fact of modern American blackness, the transition to jazz

that Hughes's poetry enacts marks the moment where the imitation of fact becomes the fact itself and brings the unassimilable or inviolable—that which you can't get past—into form as part of its internal and future oriented resistance.

"Nightmare Boogie," in contrast, trapped by Hughes in the blues fact, really couldn't go past representation in the way that "Variation" could. "Nightmare Boogie" is, in a sense, the inviolability of the blues:

> I had a dream
> and I could see
> a million faces
> black as me!
> A nightmare dream:
> Quicker than light
> All them faces
> Turned dead white!
> Boogie-woogie,
> Rolling Bass,
> Whirling treble
> of cat-gut lace. (*LHR*, 116)

Its nightmare *is* realism, a lyric "I" enmeshed in and suffocated by textual regulation, progressing in a manner that he can only watch, as though bound, but cannot control. "Nightmare Boogie" doesn't take part in performance or in resistance; its simple opposition to "Dream Boogie" cancels internal complication, all the while reminding us that such binary oppositions—the tools of realist revolutionary representation—only succeed in turning "black" to "dead white." This might express the seemingly irreconcilable contradiction of modern blackness, which, when read through the history of black American music, appears as the opposition of the inviolable and autonomous blues to the economically enforced appropriation of mainstream jazz by white audiences and producers. Black is to "dead white" as it is to modernity, and only bebop, the deferred expression of the blues impulse— not reified as "folk" music but as a living and lived act—can express the contradiction *as* contradiction. If in any sense the fact can be read as "another vehicle for tradition" (Baraka,

Baraka Reader, 159), the deferred literary fact of bebop in Hughes's work cuts the "tradition" of black modernity on the slant.

As Bataille conceived it in *Documents*, a Popular Front (or more broadly, anti-fascist) poetics should mimic the formless force of the masses in the street to become "an assault on ways of 'settling' the facts of the world into familiar, serviceable, disciplined 'consequences'" (Edwards, "Ethnics of Surrealism," 93). For Bataille, this was a realism *more than* realism; for Hughes, the inadequacy of realist modes of expression for communicating the internal complications of black American modernity drove him to push social forms into experimental categories. *Informe*-ing textuality with jazz breaks, the differential silences that posit resistance, helped Hughes to be able to finally produce a socially and historically resistant version of Harlem as a literary fact. Hughes collapsed the distance of figuration into "an irreducible kernel of resistance to any kind of transposition, of substitution, a real which does not yield to metaphor," the social fact (ibid.). This act simultaneously asserted facts as the basis of social form while also performing the ever-present threat of their breakdown from narrative into montage, in which we are confronted with the literary presentation, the formalization of the fact as constitutive of the fact itself. Composition thus could be, for Hughes, a moment or site unstoppably continuous with the history of its own production, always about to become insurrectional, to rise up against authorship and narrative. Denarrativization produces counternarratives, but they are counternarratives that have been through the process of denarrativization and whose facts have been so *informed*. In modernity, realism carries with it its own impossibility in the form of the *informe*. In other words, the activation of diaspora's interval, what—thanks to the discourse of black internationalism—is in modernity that is more than modernity, in realism that is more than realism, and in the narrative that is more than a gesture toward unification, requires deferral

(Edwards, "Futures of Diaspora," 703).

For Hughes, deferral accomplishes the moment when blues becomes jazz, a moment of denarrativization that is not necessarily redemptive, for to internally complicate the fact, to create a resistant object, is to pose a threat to one's own narrative of self, the very narrative that textualizes the possibility of the subject's relation to the community. It is a moment that cannot be got past and thus the "dream deferred" is a fact whose differential, "literary" quality makes it inherently resistant to normalizing or commodifying narrative structures. I want to look briefly at "Theme for English B," one of the more well known and widely read poems in the sequence. In this poem, a voice responds to a college composition assignment: "Go home and write/a page tonight./And let that page come out of you—/Then, it will be true" (*LHR*, 108). The poem has a specific "I" and is in that sense, among others, traditional realist lyric. The subject begins by telling his own chronological history and the history of his daily trip through Harlem:

> […] I am the only colored student in my class.
> The steps from the hill lead down into Harlem,
> through a park, then I cross St. Nicholas,
> Eighth Avenue, Seventh, and then I come to the Y,
> the Harlem Branch Y, where I take the elevator
> up to my room, sit down, and write this page […]

The poem itself is a relatively conventional, and certainly realist, protest poem. Yet though the lyric's subject narrates his history and his present as a coherent whole—this poem—within that narrative he suggests that his own factuality is already denarrativized by its immersion in Harlem:

> […] It's not easy to know what is true for you or me
> At twenty-two, my age. But I guess I'm what
> I feel and see and hear. Harlem, I hear you:
> Hear you, hear me – we two – you, me talk on this page.
> (I hear New York, too.) Me – who? […]

The speaker recognizes that he is a complicated object, that what is in him more than him—

history, sociality, sexuality—enables the possibility of resistance while also threatening his narrative of self. It emerges, as the poem moves toward its end, that desire—material, political, sexual, and the somewhat less tethered desire for identity—is the future orientation that both enables and threatens:

> […] Well, I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love.
> I like to work, read, learn, and understand life.
> I like a pipe for a Christmas present,
> or records – Bessie, bop, or Bach. […]

At this point, the form of the poem, the mode of address, begins to break down. The lyric "I" is still visible but appears in shorter, more insistent lines, an almost assaulting over-assertion of self that enacts the young man's struggle for social identity visually and materially on the page:

> I guess being colored doesn't make me not like
> the same things other folks like who are other races.
> So will my page be colored that I write?
> Being me, it will not be white.
> But it will be
> a part of you, instructor.
> You are white—
> yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.
> That's American.
> Sometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me.
> Nor do I often want to be a part of you.
> But we are, that's true!
> As I learn from you,
> I guess you learn from me—
> although you're older—and white—
> and somewhat more free.
>
> This is my page for English B. (*LHR*, 109)

This struggle for the "I" does battle, in the poem, with the history of what it means to be black in modern America. The speaker makes a very real kind of progress as he walks out of the classroom and through Harlem back to his room. But when he sits down to textualize himself, the narrative begins to fall apart. What seems to be a coherent self in the context of

the Harlem streets cannot be effectively authorized. Here we see again Hughes's anti-progressive impulse, his gesture of throwing books into the ocean in an effort to unlearn the narrative through which the modern black self has been officially constructed. That any "I" at all manages to complete the writing of the poem suggests Hughes's desire for this to be an active unlearning—the young man must unlearn his own authorship, must denarrativize himself as an act of resistance against normative textualization. At the same time, the poem asserts a double voice that is materially excessive, an authorial body formed by the accumulated conflicts of identity to which each attempt at narrative brings the young man. Like Foucault's archive, this body undermines the assumed continuity of the present self or the current community.

"Theme for English B" recurs, disrupted, as "Deferred," a poem that plays out and extends the hint of internal complication in "Theme" into a realist narrative that is also more than realist. The poem follows the life of a speaker who has seemingly failed to live up to Harlem's dream. His fulfillment of any kind of success is perpetually deferred, as though he is the man from "Variation" who will always be, because he has always been, "a Few minutes late/For the Freedom Train." "Deferred," warns of the ongoing danger of resistance, especially where desire can be so easily narrativized into compliance. The poem does not reach for revolution but sinks instead into resignation—the lyric "I" does not want a different way to tell himself, he just wants a television set. While the breakdown of "Theme for English B" can be read as an act of resistance unlearning and thus can be read *in* difference, "Deferred" disintegrates precisely where capitalist modernity dictates that identity should be found. This is the anti-redemptive deferral, the ever-present risk of internal complication, a poem of breaking against difference that becomes the montage of a denarrativized self:

> All I want is
> one more bottle of gin.
>
> All I want is to see
> my furniture paid for.
>
> All I want is a wife who will
> work with me and not against me. Say,
> baby, could you see your way clear?
>
> Heaven, heaven, is my home!
> This world I'll leave behind.
> When I set my feet in glory
> I'll have a throne for mine!
>
> I want to pass the civil service.
>
> I want a television set.
>
> You know, as old as I am,
> I ain't never
> owned a decent radio yet?
>
> I'd like to take up Bach.
>
>> Montage
>> of a dream
>> deferred.
>
> Buddy, have you heard? (*LHR*, 111–12)

The poem breaks into a mild rant, a list of unfulfilled desires that passes through blues back into the everyday. Finally, with the mention of Bach, the poem is fatally disrupted by the intertitle that recapitulates the entire sequence in a figur(in)e. The intertitle brings about a confrontation between the singular poem and its context that mimics the violence of the denarrativized fact's continuity with social and historical trauma. This is a perfomative moment of jazz silence filled with material history, when the resistant object's internal complication reveals its destructive power and plunges the individual subject into the radical negativity of the break.

Between these two poems, we see that "the emergence, submergence, and

reemergence of the individual subject in and from out of the depths, is about the supposed transition from vernacular to modern" (Moten, *In the Break*, 72), from subjection to textual regulation to denarrativized objection, what Moten calls "revolutionary unconcealment as a particularly special moment or potent and problematic possibility" (ibid.). This is a transition, perhaps, from the "referred" subject—represented, coherent, and complete—to the "deferred"—elided, denarrativized or, as Henry Louis Gates puts it, "critically Other"— subject (Jarraway, "Montage of Otherness," 829). The referred subject, hinted at in "Deferred," "pathologizes" excess in order to structure a whole self, to render coherent what history has put asunder, and ends up re-enacting an illusory reach for "freedom" (833). The deferred subject—here, Hughes himself—enacts a critical position by incorporating difference, naming silences instead: "Buddy, have you heard?" The unstoppable continuity of the subject with its founding historical trauma produces a deferred subjectivity that endlessly cuts into the sequence of regulation in the same way that the improvisatory breaks of the jazz ensemble structure the subjectivity that we can read on the surface of Hughes's *Montage*. Perhaps jazz comes into being by enacting this relationship to history as montage to sequence, where "the tragic-erotic end that the blues seems always to foreshadow is supplemented not only by the transformative effect of improvisation but the ghostly emanation of those last records, the sound that extends beyond the end of which it tells" (Moten, *In the Break*, 72). Where such "non-locatability" (69) becomes the necessary anti-fascist political upheaval of Bataille's *Popular Front in the Street*, jazz emerges in Hughes's work as its analogous poetics and "a quite specific legacy of performance as the resistance of the object becomes clear" (234).

With the legacy of the resistant object in mind, we can read in *Montage of a Dream Deferred* the "rhythmic breakage of the everyday" (49) into the differential logic of literary

facts and read Hughes's experiments with what is more than realism as demonstrations of ways of re-knowing history and community. Harlem emerges as "a shifting and reshifting of spatial conventions and temporal order determined by a radical break," a site where "the community *cuts* the body in an interanimation of affliction and renewal, the fragmentation of singular bodies and the coercive reaggregation of community" (ibid.). Considering the extent to which Hughes's own subjectivity "suffered the fatal elisions of spectatorial regulation and normative reference" (Jarraway, "Montage of Otherness," 833), it is fitting that he employed elision, breaks, and silences to structure his telling of the experience of an imagined and deferred community. In deferral, the representation of fact becomes fact itself, rendered literary by the imminence of resistance to textual normativity in its status as an object. On this differential site, this "third space" that Hughes calls the "Dream within a dream/Our dream deferred," figuration collapses into the collision between subject and history that characterizes the *informe*, resistant object. The "third space," between two rivers, is a heterotopia "where the Negro speaks"—Harlem. Like Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic, Harlem becomes for Hughes a continent in negative that can be read only as it is narrativized, as the always differential set of facts that constitute the kind of knowledge of modern blackness that can also be unlearned as we travel its archive. Black modernity's "end" is not simply a reclaimed or repurposed dream of equality or freedom, shackled to modern capitalist narratives of progress. Hughes proposes instead Harlem as the third space parallel to the still-oceanic experience of Black Internationalism, where facts are produced out of the dialectic of form/*informe*. To get re-oriented to such a third space, one must reconstruct subjectivation, textualization, and the denarrativized modern city into new, more immediate and difficult social forms.

Figure 1: *Slave Ship*, Romare Bearden (1971)

Figure 2: *The Block*, Romare Bearden (1971)

CHAPTER 3.

Not Love But a Name:
Geographies of Love and Fact in Jack Spicer's *Heads of the Town up to the Aether*

Part One: *My vocabulary did this to me. Your love will let you go on.*

I. Recognition

In 1960, San Francisco poet Jack Spicer published *Heads of the Town up to the Aether*, a three-part poem—or, book, as Spicer called it—in which he attempted to subject source texts to the kind of radical redefinition of textuality that would tangle geographic divisions in order to create a world where language was an act, where acts were poetic events, and where the constant disruption of these events was immanent in the geography of the peopled city. Spicer's texts are typically considered dense and difficult, a view that likely has as much to do with Spicer's persona and the accompanying historical lore as with the texts themselves. *Heads* may be a "difficult" work to read, because at points it seems taunting, obtuse, flip, frightening, grotesque, and impermeable; as a work grounded in and recording the failure of communication as Spicer experienced it in his social and historical context, however, the poem is exactly all of those descriptors. Spicer's failure in communication materializes through its difficulty as "correspondence," the outside of named language that is a zone of risk based in desire, absence, and love. Love was, for Spicer, a textual risk—that which always may or may not give value to facts—and also a social risk. On one hand, Spicer's poetry reacts to a specific Cold War modernity, but, at the same time, it enacts the futility of that response by refusing the respite of formalism and instead willing love to open that distance, as language, into public poetry. "That kind of want—" said Spicer of this opening, "is the real thing, the thing that you didn't *want* to say in terms of your own ego, in terms of your image, in terms of your life, in terms of everything" (Gizzi, *House That Jack Built*, 6).

In the final paragraph of his 1975 essay "The Practice of Outside," Robin Blaser leads his readers, as he puts it, to the scene of Jack Spicer's last days in the alcoholic ward of the San Francisco General Hospital in August of 1965. Spicer was forty years old at the time of his death, although he sometimes called 1946, the year he met Blaser and Robert Duncan at Berkeley, the year of his birth. Even by his own account, then, Spicer died young; his life in poetry—the only life he counted—began with the "intense fraternity" he founded with Blaser and Duncan and half-jokingly named the "Berkeley Renaissance" (Gizzi and Killian, introduction, xiv). This familial and poetic connection would come under tremendous strain in later years as the three poets grew to become central figures of the much larger and more widely known "San Francisco Renaissance," arguably recognized as having begun with Allen Ginsberg's first reading of "Howl" in 1955, and which also included writers like George Stanley, Joanne Kyger, Joe Dunn, Harold Dull, Ebbe Borregaard, and Stan Persky.[28]

From this history, Blaser tells the story of Spicer's last words, which, although they sounded the final moments of his life, would become the founding scene for the future of Spicer's poetry. Blaser has no doubt bestowed upon this utterance the status and power of a defining event, what Blaser calls "a continuing recognition here that I share with others" ("Outside," 162):

> That afternoon, there were something like a dozen friends around his bed, when it became clear that he wished to say something to me. By some magic I can't explain, everyone left it to be between us. It was odd because I didn't ask them to leave and Jack couldn't be understood. Their affection simply accounted for something inexplicable. Jack struggled to tie his speech to words. I leaned over and asked him to repeat a word at a time. I would, I said, discover the pattern. Suddenly, he wrenched his body up from the pillow and said,

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[28] Persky, in a prescient barb, noted of Blaser's essay: "(I guess I dread the wholly serious Spicer that'll be invented by what in my mind appears to be an endless procession of grim Pd.D [*sic*] students—unless of course, the Revolution puts an end to some of that nonsense—though at least they'll be forced by Robin's essay on Jack to have read the poetry)" (Vincent, "Before," 3).

My vocabulary did this to me. Your love will let you go on. ("Outside," 162–63)

In the nearly thirty-five years since Blaser recounted these moments, the "continuing recognition" has taken many forms. Blaser introduces the idea as a moment specific at one and the same time to his friend and to language, a combination of sudden sight and understanding, a way to situate Spicer in the always temporary poetic landscape—public and private, textual and social—that he'd sought to create: "Where we are." Lately, *My Vocabulary Did This to Me* has become the title for Kevin Killian and Peter Gizzi's new edition of Spicer's collected poetry. The phrase itself continues, despite its gestural and syntactic pastness, as a bridge or connection between Spicer and his future community of readers. And although Spicer claimed to reject what he termed "the big lie of the personal" (introduction, xiii), in many ways the phrase enables for the future Spicer "the necessary laying of oneself alongside another content, which brings form and keeps it alive" (Blaser, "Outside," 154).

If "my vocabulary did this to me" is the first phrase, an ending that is also usefully a beginning, the second phrase poses a central problem of naming for poetics after Spicer. Even as he wrote "The Practice of Outside," Blaser seemed to recognize and anticipate the defining and limiting powers this work would have on future Spicer criticism and named (almost thirty-five years before they became apparent) what the dual and often contradictory strands of that criticism might look like: "At first this essay was short and simple—about Jack. But that became a reduction which every twist and turn of the work denied—a biography without the world the poet earned or a split between the man and the work which drank him up and left him behind" (Vincent, "Before," 3). Due in large part to Blaser's essay and to the limited availability—and difficulty—of Spicer's body of work, criticism of the poet has been mired in lore, and the phrase "my vocabulary did this to me" has come to

name that lore. What we have left behind is exactly what Blaser recognized: "the world the poet earned." Recent collections like *After Spicer*, edited by John Emil Vincent, have attempted to address the need for a new Spicer criticism. Vincent, in his introduction, recognizes the appeal of turning away from the poetry to read only Spicer's contrariness, but asks instead that readers approach this less as a psychological fact and more as an indication of the poet's "agonized relation to poetic utterance" (1). This reading is still "deeply imbued with the biographical," however, until Vincent takes the important next step of citing Spicer's formal contrariness, his devotion to "uncomfortable music" (2): "He is a poet earnestly, exhaustingly, and thrillingly interested in knots of meaning—the impossible, the invisible, the difficult" (ibid.). This is, of course, a significant departure from a criticism that begins with an impossible, invisible, and difficult poet to eventually make its way back to the work. Later, Vincent notes that the poems—the work that critics and readers are led back to—were often "read as explanatory" and "transparent" (4), bringing us ever back, I would argue, to what vocabulary did to Spicer. Turning for support to an essay by Burton Hatlen, Vincent comments: "For a poet whose greatest and strongest commentary was about how 'language turns against those who use it,' it is strange that Spicer is so often and so fervently taken as if his directives weren't also, as Hatlen insists they must be read, *in language*" (9).

Yet to cite the above as Spicer's "greatest commentary" seems even still to suggest a criticism of Spicer's work that reads through the ultimately biographical transparency of "my vocabulary did this to me"—not the "world the poet earned" but "the man and the work which drank him up and left him behind." If, as Vincent asserts, "poetic practice across a poet's career becomes a palimpsest of ownings and disownings that can only be read after the fact" (12), we, as critics, need always to be vigilant about the "fact" we are reading after. Vincent seems to be acutely aware of exactly this problem at the close of his introductory

essay, commenting that "Spicer's vocabulary did not put him into a hepatic coma" but that "his last words, 'My vocabulary did this to me,' while sometimes facilely hypostasized backward into all his work, provided a handle on difficult and unwieldy poetry" (ibid.). Vincent proposes a Spicer criticism freed from the lore of the deathbed and the bars: "His last words must shed the simple deictics of a death narrative … to ensure his serial continuance. 'My vocabulary did this to me'—and led you, reader, after his death, to his poems" (ibid.). Yet here, Vincent denies Spicer's existence *in language* when he ignores the poet's final directive in favor of a more facile transparency, the simple deictics of a death narrative, to lie across Spicer's poetic practice. Jack Spicer's last words were "Your love will let you go on."

The second phrase, Blaser writes, "is not, as has been said, a recantation, but rather, I think, an admonition and a notice of danger" ("Outside," 163). "Your love will let you go on" places Spicer textually "within a [poetic] community that transcends geography and even time" (Gizzi, *House That Jack Built*, 50). In what follows, I want to argue that *love* names for Spicer the perverse, transgressive literariness that acts on textual evidence, connecting fact to value to make a necessary world. "The thinking of love," as Jean-Luc Nancy writes in *The Inoperative Community*, "invites us to thinking as such … in the movement across discourse, proof, and concept, nothing but this love is at stake for thought" (84). Spicer introduces love as an act of correspondence; letters, correspondence's material form, connect sender to receiver at the same time as they bear the possibilities of misrecognition in their content, form, and means. Love produces form, but transcends language by being that which en-forms language. A Spicer criticism based in the logic of "my vocabulary did this to me" might well dismiss the poet's actual last words since, when they are joined to the first phrase, they are no more than a melancholic attachment to that lack which vocabulary names: "But

the words of love, as is well known, sparsely, miserably repeat their one declaration, which is always the same, always already suspected of lacking love because it declares it" (82). Love, for this version of Spicer, is yet another failure of vocabulary, a word that has turned against the poet; love is also then, a failed correspondence in the Symbolist sense, since it was presumably vocabulary that prevented Spicer from connecting ideal to real and from being *in love.*

This chapter argues that love is both an act and an object in language that "does not designate the object possessed, but the subject in the object" (95). In this sense, misrecognition is a kind of serial mourning where love designates one lost object—one correspondence—after another, "perhaps nothing but the indefinite abundance of all possible loves, and an abandonment to their dissemination, indeed to the disorder of these explosions" (83).[29] Thus love acts for Spicer much like the serial poem, in which the poet *goes on* through dark rooms, turning lights on and then off again. Michael Snediker, in his essay "Jack Spicer's *Billy the Kid*," included in *After Spicer*, reads the serial poem as "the pleasures and aggressions (and consolations) of love, stretched across time" (182): "Not a single one-night stand, nor a proliferation of one-night stands, but the proliferation of nights (and days) held together by the resonances between them: which is also to say, held together by the angers and frustrations unique to those particular resonances" (Snediker, "*Billy the Kid*," 183). The danger is that "openness then is the problem," according to Blaser, "it is near a madness as we learn to live in it" ("Outside," 147). Yet this is only *near* madness, and if he can *learn to live in it,* such openness is a problem of principled refusal, not self-destruction on the part of

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[29] "It is not that love is excluded from this fundamental ontology," Nancy explains, "on the contrary, everything summons it thither … one must rather say that love is missing from the very place where it is prescribed … there is nothing dialectical about this loss or this 'lack': it is not a contradiction, it is not made to be sublated or reabsorbed. Love remains absent from the heart of being" (88–89).

the poet. This refusal, this problem of openness, is one way to talk about Spicer's "outside," what Nancy calls "this 'beyond the self' in which, in a very general manner, love has taken place … the place of the other, or of an alterity without which neither love nor completion would be possible" (*Inoperative Community*, 87).

Much as Spicer's first phrase has acted as a primary site of correspondence between the literary and the facts of his life, so too has Spicer's transformation of the city into form become a commonplace in his reception. This transformation, as Peter Gizzi sees it, is a practice in which "the self, other, companion, and community all collapse or enfold into the space of the poem … creating a location and a history of its own, a lyric history" (*House That Jack Built*, 187). I want to seek out the love and the risk in this practice, where place is correspondence—"an oscillation between two unknown realms" (Davidson, "Incarnations," 115), the textual and the social, or what Nancy terms "the place of the same in the other" (*Inoperative Community*, 87). Love and risk survive only in near madness of necessity, the use of a language "surrounded by fragments of a whole discourse" (Davidson, "Incarnations," 116), correspondences that pass us but, in Nancy's words, "for which we lack any evident access" (*Inoperative Community*, 84):

> But the city that we create in our bartalk or in our fuss and fury about each other is in an utterly mixed and mirrored way an image of the city. A return from exile. (*MV*, 306)

This passage, one of Spicer's most well known, often stands alongside his last words as a kind of primary utterance from which we can extract a continuing poetics. But there is here, as well, a hierarchy of phrasing. Michael Renov notes, after Foucault, that knowledge—such as poetry can create, both by formalizing and positivizing sensory "evidence"—"is an 'invention' behind which lies something completely different from itself: the play of instincts, impulses, desires, fear, and the will to appropriate. Knowledge is produced on the

stage where these elements struggle against each other" (*Subject of Documentary*, 99), which is Foucault's regularity in dispersion, Spicer's serial resonances. In Spicer's correspondence, the traditional Symbolists' "as above, so below" is replaced by "structures of misrecognition" (98) between textual and social orders that both found and confound the poet's lyric gesture. I want to suggest that we resist stopping at "the city we create in our bartalk"—recognized by Christopher Nealon in *The Matter of Capital* as a place "where both playful collaboration and cruel tests of loyalty helped create a sense of the poetic scene as a kind of counterenclosure against the encroachments of mass culture and the terrors of the Cold War" (32–33)—and search into "our fuss and fury about each other"—love—to create a "mixed and mirrored," differentially situated poetic event where love acts as its own opening to fact.

"Gesturally," Gizzi writes, the building of a city and "the last words [*sic*] in [Spicer's] lifetime ('My vocabulary did this to me') constitute either his deepest correspondence or a true magician's great and final trick: to disappear while remaining everywhere manifest, appearing and disappearing in the margins of things, as in the startling poem he dedicates to himself in *Admonitions*" (*House That Jack Built*, 98):

> Tell everyone to have guts
> Do it yourself
> Have guts until the guts
> Come through the margins
> Clear and pure
> Like love is… (Ibid.)

Laying alongside these first phrases, rather than strictly demarcated "as above, so below," are their doubles; "clear and pure" like guts, "our fuss and fury about each other" and "your love will let you go on" give way to the misrecognitions of correspondence, to the love whose necessity produces "margins" and "everywhere." Blaser calls Spicer's San Francisco "a loved habit of friends, bars, streets, the Broadway Tunnel, and Aquatic Park" in which his

poetry could become "a profound interrogation, an operation of language, because it is a meeting" ("Outside," 127). If it is true that "where we are is in a sentence," this "operation of language" does not, for Spicer, amount to the "regression" of a poet destroyed by his inability to live outside of language, outside of his vocabulary, to an "impersonal formalism" (Davidson, *San Francisco Renaissance,* 215) that acted as prophylaxis against the near madness of creating a world. Much as Michael Davidson notes that Spicer and his San Francisco contemporaries "sought a 'ground' outside language obtainable only through language," Spicer also sought to free love from language by using language—and "in the breach" found himself "enmeshed in a series of contradictions" (217). Davidson, quoting Theodor Adorno, recognizes that "the lyric demand for the untouched word is in itself social" (*Guys Like Us*, 74); this is how a lyric history is at once both social and impossible—and this is what Spicer seems to have sought: "It implies a protest against a social condition which every individual experiences as hostile, distant, cold and oppressive. And this social condition expresses itself in poetry in a negative way" (ibid.). Spicer sought to free love from language by casting it as the negativity that breaks language open. A love freed from language would not be a "name," it would be an available act with implications that would echo through the streets of the city and re-contour its geography at every meeting:

> We are all alone and we do not need poetry to tell us how alone we are. Time's winged chariot is as near as the next landmark or busstation. We need a lamp (a lump, spoken or unspoken) that is even about love. (*MV,* 311)

"The word love," writes Blaser, "which may be taken softly and personally or as the difficult understanding that it is in Jack's work, proposes an entangling that is the mode of the real" ("Outside," 156). Nealon asks "whether the activity of capital, capturing things to make them commodities, is modeled on how we traverse the word-thing gap, or whether it seizes on our daily acquiescence to the gap being untransversable, and puts that tendency to

acquiesce to its own use" (*Matter of Capital*, 131). For Spicer, love names precisely the lack of acquiescence that acts as a refusal of the fix of capital and its reliance on the pathologizing of lack, of our attachment to objects. Here neither guts nor love is "clear and pure," but is instead a complicated, tangled idea of the action that battles against the poet to stand "outside" of content, that overtakes the threshold just before public poetry to transform the very landscape of the gesture of making.

For Spicer, what Davidson calls "the spatial metaphor" of the city was "a fiction which we cling to in order to give form to a sense of helplessness" ("Incarnations," 129); for Spicer's later readers, the spatial metaphor is recapitulated in the image of "the city we create in our bartalk" as a way to give form to the helplessness with which we are faced when immersed in the "want" of Spicer's poetics. But in Spicer's city, the spatial metaphor collapses into the entangling of "daily discourse and common care" (ibid.), the "fuss and fury about each other" that Spicer names love. To be immersed in a textual community contoured and rent by love is to re-imagine our spatial metaphor for Spicer's poetics, our first phrase, as a different geography—"a city towards which each proposition of community strives … and fails" (ibid.). I want to suggest that our temptation to rescue these propositions from failure by lifting them up into the geography of completion—of the complete city, or the completed statement—amounts to an Orphism at the level of criticism: "It was the first metaphor they invented when they were too tired to invent a universe" (*MV*, 312). Instead, the risk of continuing recognition and the possibility that "the speaking subject is someone other than the supposed user of words" (Finkelstein, "Jack Spicer's Ghosts," 92) might lead to a criticism based in how love—radically negative—manifests as an ongoing disruption of Spicer's textual geography.

To find "love" in Spicer's poetry is not difficult. In "The Lorca Working," Clayton Eshelman argues that *Billy the Kid* (1958) is Spicer's "farewell to love": "Spicer has not only given up on love, but he has lost touch with his origin too … which is the price he pays for the poem" (48–49). Eshelman seems to suggest that after *Billy the Kid*, Spicer sacrificed his structures of misrecognition for the certainty of a more pure formalism. Reading Section IX of that book, Eshelman notes: "For a second there seems to be a choice—but no, the choice is not this or that, but 'real.' Only abstract—or only here. Which leads him to the diamond again, which in context is the scattered heart. To ask it is to insist on having a choice to ask or not ask, yet it is the diamond which *is* asked" ("The Lorca Working," 49). If the choice is between "only abstract—or only here," yet the diamond is still asked, the diamond is outside of the choice—it is form. This may be Spicer's farewell to love as *content*, but love remains at the center of the transaction of its being lost, in the center of the "real" choice, as Blaser suggests, about what of life can be traded for poetry. This risk, which is a function of love, remains active on the text. I think, given Spicer's indictment of purity—if guts are pure and clear, form is always already contaminated—his work after 1958 signals the movement of love into form until it comes through the margins, the movement from the poetic sequence as a positive statement of "where we are" to the sequence as a path into the negative and unrepresentable of im-"purity," of love.[30] *Heads of the Town up to the Aether* produces a startling achievement in the development of what Spicer conceived of early in his career as the "serial poem": "a book-length progression of short poems that function together as a

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[30] I think, with Nancy, that "It is simply a matter of letting oneself be carried by a tiny movement, barely perceptible, which would not reconstitute the dialectical logic" (*Inoperative Community,* 94) of Platonic love, or, probably more to the point, Duncan's grand Troubadour idealism. "The excess or the lack of this completion, which is represented as the truth of love," Nancy notes, have been the basis for the entire modern conception of romantic love "determined according to this dialectic" (93).

single movement" (Gizzi and Killian, introduction, xvii). This is not to suggest, however, that the serial poem progresses toward any semblance of resolution, as Gizzi and Killian go on to note:

> In his lectures, Spicer quoted Blaser's description of the serial poem as akin to being in a dark house, where you throw a light on in a room, then turn it off, and enter the next room, where you turn on a light, and so on … As his poetry moves from dark room to dark room, each flash of illumination leaves an afterimage on the imagination, and the lines of the poem become artifacts of an ongoing engagement with larger forces. (xviii)

 "Another love presence or another love movement," writes Nancy, "that is what the repetition should let emerge" (*Inoperative Community*, 94). Perhaps not coincidentally, Spicer left an "inconclusive end" when he died at age 40 in 1965, a little known corpus of twelve small "books"—other rooms—published by small presses and limited in edition and distribution (Davidson, "Incarnations," 104). Nealon calls this publication strategy "staging the poem as a porous but enclosed language laboratory, which always points, serially, to the category 'poetry'" (*Matter of Capital*, 118). Spicer's books have since been collected, but the serial risk of the poetry, of the emergence of another love movement from that seriality, remains.

From *After Lorca* (1957) to *Map Poems*, *Language*, and *The Book of Magazine Verse* (1963–65), Spicer's work took place in the context of a "life constricted, in the main, to a few small blocks in San Francisco's North Beach" (Killian and Ellingham, *Poet Be Like God*, xiv), the stage of invention for his poetic knowledge. *Heads of the Town up to the Aether* took shape against the background of at least two overlapping worlds: the paranoia and ideological containment of America during the Cold War, and the hard-drinking, competitive, mostly male and gay circle that surrounded Spicer in North Beach's bars. Where the two worlds met, "the Spicer circle lived out certain rites of exclusion, acceptance, and

initiation in relation to a potentially hostile outside world" (Davidson, *Guys Like Us,* 41).[31]

Heads is a text whose geography is peopled with "individuals who are 'angry at their differences' and who 'use separate words'" (Davidson, "Incarnations," 129), and whose fuss and fury about each other thus necessitated a poetry as "radical redefinition" of lived space (ibid.), a textual geography that arose not as a response to incompletion or to the threat of helplessness, but which *was* a kind of helplessness. Thus, in this text, poetry is constructed as the absence of poetry, producing as structural correspondence the literary fact. The three sections that comprise *Heads of the Town up to the Aether* are "Homage to Creeley," a "Fake Novel About the Life of Arthur Rimbaud," and "A Textbook to Poetry"; in Spicer's words, "throughout the whole book runs the business of a pathway down into Hell and the methods of communication" (Gizzi, *House That Jack Built*, 19). Invoking Orpheus in his poetics, Spicer thus suggests that "the poet destroys his own work if he confronts it directly … trusting it is there without really knowing, much as Orpheus led Eurydice" (Foster, *Jack Spicer*, 7). This book produces, through oftentimes frightening and startling discovery of the necessary incompleteness of language worlds—because, as Edward Halsey Foster writes, "should he turn, it will vanish forever" (ibid.)—love as the difficult understanding "which arose out of the struggles and contentions present in the city itself" (Davidson, "Incarnations," 129):

> It does not have to fit together. Like the pieces of a totally unfinished jigsaw puzzle my grandmother left in the bedroom when she died in the living room. The pieces of the poetry or of this love. (*MV*, 306)

The non-correspondent facts that structure *Heads of the Town up to the Aether*, set alongside Spicer's belief that the "truth value" of any poem had to be "subjected to the

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[31] For a more complete account of Spicer's circle and its formation in the context of the Cold War, see Davidson, *Guys Like Us* (40–47).

world" (Davidson, "Incarnations," 105), suggest that for Spicer there was a real risk involved in poetry's entanglement with the world that corresponded to the risk he called love. One of Spicer's many histories, one that we may recognize, is that of a gay man before Stonewall and such other important historical moments as the election of Harvey Milk, "at the mercy of a series of homophobic codes and taboos" (Killian, *House That Jack Built*, xv): "Over and over, the men and women of Spicer's generation have told us, 'You cannot possibly understand what it was like,' the coldness and cruelty of life lived at the edge of the sexual frontier" (ibid.). When truth value is subjected to the world, the world itself changes, and so does the truth, and in the correspondence that opens between them: "You cannot possibly understand what it was like." Truth-value therefore exists in what Maria Damon calls "the double-bind of the self-identified gay community at the time" (*Dark End of the Street*, 172): "The choice of love-object that identifies the community and gives it coherence is not only illegal but condemned by all institutional authorities … having to hold in one's feelings and deny them expression cripples one's ability to love, since love is communication" (ibid.).

"And what could love and its expression have meant anyway in the gay subculture from the 1940s through the early 1960s?" Damon continues (176). Spicer both lived in and created in poetry a world in which language and acts have not yet, and may never, become history. When we try to map this world, public and private, personal and social, "both become two terms for the same place: where we are," and "where we are is in a sentence" (Davidson, "Incarnations," 113). Where we are is *in* difference. That difference constitutes love, which I have called, after Blaser, both "difficult understanding" and "continuing recognition." Yet, as Damon points out, "it is not exclusively due to historical circumstances that Spicer's poetics revolve around 'the distance between love and the expression of it'" (*Dark End of the Street*, 177).

At the end of his final lecture, "Poetry and Politics," on July 14ᵗ, 1965, Spicer was asked if he agreed with Allen Ginsberg that "Love is a political stance." "Well," Spicer replied, "I guess Allen can make it that way, but I've never been able to" (Killian, *House That Jack Built*, 348). This statement, coming so soon before he would utter his final words into Blaser's ear, sits alongside Spicer's final poem to suggest that the poet was considering love as both an important and complicated—if also impossible—poetic near the end of his life:

> At least we both know how shitty the world is. You
>> wearing a beard as a mask to disguise it. I
>> wearing my tired smile. I don't see how you
>> do it. One hundred thousand university
>> students marching with you. Toward
> A necessity which is not love but is a name.
> King of May. A title not chosen for dancing.
>> The police
> Civil but obstinate. If they'd attacked
> The kind of love (not sex but love), you gave
>> the one hundred thousand students I'd have been
>> very glad. And loved the policemen. Why
> Fight the combine of your heart and my heart or
>> anybody's heart. People are starving. (*MV,* 426)

Instead of reading Spicer's poem to Ginsberg as purely contestatory, or even as angry at Ginsberg's co-opting of love into a named commodity—fame—separate from poetry and thus not risking any exchange of vulnerability between poetry and society, we must also see the "necessity" that love, in any form, should exist in order for us to go on. I would suggest that Spicer's statement shows a certain envy—"I don't know how you do it"—of Ginsberg's ability to make love political, to name it, to insure it against vulnerability so that it may carry his poetry and his (queer) community forward. Spicer admits that he has "never been able to" "fight the combine of your heart and my heart or anybody's heart," but even as a seeming admission of failure, this consideration of love can show us how that "combine" acted on Spicer's texts. "It's a bad night," Spicer used to say when he was bored or angry or lonely, evenings in the bars in North Beach:

> Recollections converge on a text and slip away, accurate or not. What one sees is a collage of bored evenings at The Place or Mr. Otis's bar, a petulant Spicer, conversation about a Hitchcock movie, a rumor about Dora Dull enticing Jim Alexander to bed or vice versa. Rain plays against the bar's plate glass window and Jack Spicer slouches down Grant Avenue toward Mike's Pool Hall to play pinball, wet and angry, muttering his oft-mumbled, "It's a bad night." (Killian, *House That Jack Built*, 176)

It is a "bad night," when one's entire landscape, one's entire text, is vulnerable to love, to the combine.[32] At the points where this occurs, we can develop a way of reading Spicer that takes love into account and is as vulnerable to it as the tangled and entangling geography of Spicer's texts asks.

II. Descent

Spicer compared the three-part structure of *Heads of the Town up to the Aether* to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, a similarity that, as Davidson notes, "occurs through the theme of descent" ("Incarnations," 105). The poet descends into the language that structures the city not in order to reconstruct that city but so that he may engage in poetry as an event, an act by which it will go on. The point of entry into *Heads of the Town up to the Aether*, after its dedication, is "Several Years' Love," "a recollection of Spicer's feelings for the two men he then most recently loved," Russell FitzGerald and Jim Alexander (Killian and Ellingham, *Poet Be Like God*, 176). Entering the book in this way is erotic, as readers "push in" through the thematic of love to land soundly in its textual disruption:

> Two loves I had. One rang a bell
> Connected on both sides with hell
>
> The other'd written me a letter
> In which he said I've written better

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[32] Damon reminds readers: "Recall that at the time Spicer was writing, gay bars were illegal, as was any touching between men in places suspected as gay bars. Thus the alienation is not simply metaphysical; 'metasexuality' was actually mandated by hostile law, and while they may have represented contact and solidarity for some, Spicer experienced the bars he lived in as hells of frustrated communication" (*Dark End of the Street*, 201).

> They pushed their cocks in many places
> And I'm not certain of their faces
> Or which I kissed or which I didn't
> Or which of both of them I hadn't. (*MV,* 250)

At first, the poem seems straightforward in its narrative of Spicer's two loves, whom he distinguishes from one another in separate rhyming couplets. The poem seems to start off as a typical short poem might, with two couplets about two lovers. The traditional structure of both poem and romantic relationship then trips over itself as the couplets dissolve into four lines that seem to almost enact the "Several Years'" of the title. The two loves were properties of several years of Spicer's life, and in the final stanza he renders them, a mass of faces among many, undifferentiated, pushing their cocks into places that presumably aren't limited to Spicer's body. Between the title and the stanza where its possibilities are most fully realized; there is a differential space made from the two specific loves, but rather than the more typically patriarchal structure of lover/beloved, we must go through a queer structure of nonidentity—misrecognition, if we follow "many places" away from the bodies of lover and beloved, as Spicer seems to want us to—in order for the poem to fulfill the title. Spicer's own descent is not only into "our fuss and fury about each other," the part of the city that occurs in language, but also into the structures of misrecognition that are the absence of poetry. The text strives to "record" this language "before it has been assimilated into a coherent, central voice" (Davidson, "Incarnations," 105). The poet descends *from* the influence of the poetic ego as a structuring device, so that *Heads* is the work in which Spicer's central poetic strategy of dictation first appears, establishing the absence that necessitates form. Dictation allowed Spicer to descend into the "real" work of poetry, where the lyric that has posited language as the "continuity" of the "I" with a world gives way the act of constructing such continuity in the field of risk and autonomy.

Throughout *Heads*, the individual word (or phrase) is stripped of its ability to be a name—it has, as Davidson writes, "no referent outside its surrounding semantic environment" (*San Francisco Renaissance*, 164). Readers, then, must also undertake a descent. After having been plunged into the text by way of its opening poem, we find ourselves in "Wrong Turn":

> What I knew
> Wasn't true
> Or oh no
> Your face
> Was made of fleece
> Stepping up to poetry
> Demands
> Hands. (*MV*, 253)

There will be no images here, Spicer announces. The simple rhymes of the first two lines will stop abruptly when the poet and the reader, equally helpless, encounter fleece instead of a face. At this point, "stepping up to poetry" will be the literal act of climbing or even of "stepping up" in the sense of volunteering, and in either case poetry—not the poet—has its demands. The poem exacts these demands on the reader and the poet, requiring no less than the hands that hold tight for safety, that build cities, that write letters. It seems that a "wrong turn" cannot be simply turned out of but becomes a permanent state, a perverse textuality in which continuing poetry is the only viable act.

"Homage to Creeley" comprises the first part of *Heads of the Town up to the Aether*. Blaser calls this section "a hell of meanings" where "everything slips or slides into nonsense and is haunted by meaning and laughter" ("Outside," 159). The section, broken down into three sub-sections, includes 32 short poems, some of which are so short that they are non-existent except as dedications. A line at the bottom of each page divides the "poem" from what is beneath the line; what we find there is prose challenging us to accept it as explanation, as information about the poem that precedes it. This prose often contests the

authority of the poet, referring to the failure of the poems themselves and attempting to destabilize authorship. The text below the line often tells about "The Poet," and therefore enforces a severed connection between the respective regions of text—above and below, authored and conspicuously de-authored, subjective lyricism and objective analysis. The literal subtext or "below-text" to "Several Years' Love" undermines the certainties we may have established about the loves themselves and, by extension, about the poet:

> The two loves are the pain The Poet had. I do not think a doorbell could be extended from one of them to the other. The letter, naturally (as will become more apparent in the conquest of Algeria or outer space) was written to somebody else.
>
> The cocks want to be sure of themselves. (*MV*, 250)

The loves themselves, the couplets, are transformed into a region of difference and as much impossible space as "the conquest of Algeria or outer space." The poet enters the space of the poem as a pronoun in play—any undifferentiated one of "them." And if the letter was written to somebody else, the question, on more than one front, becomes: "From whom?" Even the cocks, so forceful in their disturbance of the poem, only "want" to be sure of themselves as anyone "wants," thereby also undermining the cock's authority of the letter. The effect, for readers, is the opening of a gulf between utterance and understanding that takes the form of a solid line and indicates the gap at the border that constitutes correspondence. Where there is a geographic marker that should tell us something—that above corresponds with below—there is instead a marker of something unreconcilable, something that we risk falling inside if we do not climb willingly into its depths.

"Homage to Creeley" unfolds under the proper name of the poet Robert Creeley and thus under the sign of disturbance. Perhaps Spicer is poking at Creeley's well-known "cocksure" masculinity; as a love poet and a competing male, Creeley is cast here as the "cock" who wants to be sure of himself. The word "want" suggests perpetual unfulfillment,

as though the cocksure straight males are anything but, however much they long to be, whereas the gay men like Spicer remain unburdened by this particular form of sexual doubt. Although it is important that Spicer acknowledged Creeley as the poet who "made it possible to write short poems" (Gizzi, *House That Jack Built*, 238), we can also see in Spicer's championing of the serial poem a challenge to the brief, complete, "sure" works that Creeley presents. Here the short poem becomes another way of asserting cocksure masculinity and the serial poem arises as a counter-assertion of differential poetic knowledge. Later, Creeley wrote of Spicer's sequence to Lew Ellingham:

> I'd taken Jack's "Homage to Creeley" as his play on the syntactical/almost "pronominal"/authorial patterns of my writing to that time (i.e., in poetry particularly). What I could or wanted to "authorize" in that way. So I read his work as a run-through on those presumptions, from a clear base in language preoccupations. I didn't think he was following me into whatever "romantic" condition(s). Ah well. But I did take it as an interest in what I was doing, and as a non-bullshit (in that respect) "homage." In short, I was honored and impressed. (Killian and Ellingham, *Poet Be Like God*, 238).

Creeley's take on Spicer's sequence informs a solid beginning for reading the text as a true homage in the traditional sense. "For Creeley," Foster notes, "the poem was profoundly the words in which it was expressed" (*Jack Spicer*, 36). So Spicer began with Creeley's authorship, at the short poem, at what Creeley calls "those presumptions," and then subjected them to the difference introduced by what Spicer was, by that time, calling "dictation." Difference erupts from the radical inside of the poem and transforms authorship into an other space—Spicer uses Creeley as a source text upon which he can enact that transformation in visible steps. If we read "Homage" as a collection of short poems, which, on the surface, it is, the proper name makes perfect sense because they are all technically short poems. The addition of the line, or fracture, and the commentary beneath troubles such a straightforward reading. The proper name "Creeley" disperses disturbance across the surface of the text so that the short poems can never be assimilated into a single coherent reading that we can interpret

according to Creeley's influence. They must instead be read as authorship in difference; "where we are" in the poem must always come back to Creeley, but the man himself is largely beside the point except that he is the turbulence—impossible and necessary—that must be negotiated to get to the fact. Even then, some of the poems almost parody short poems in their exaggerated brevity, suggesting the possibility that Creeley did not make it possible to write short poems at all. For all that, though, Creeley *did* write short poems, so what Spicer is actually problematizing is his own statement about Creeley and the tradition of short poems. The text becomes a space structured by de-authored and misheard fragments of discourse—our fuss and fury about each other as textual geography in difference.

To confuse matters further, the whole of the section is "studded with allusions and quotes" including "nursery rhymes, spells and incantations, folk and pop music, medieval riddles … drinking songs, stage directions [and] radio jingles" (Killian and Ellingham, *Poet Be Like God*, 189). These elements provided the additional insurance, for both writer and reader, that the poems would not be experienced subjectively since, even when immersed in the textual fracture engineered by Spicer, one must still always negotiate the names that insist on their own appearance. Inside Spicer's structures of misrecognition, we are not in charge and sometimes language itself may misrecognize us as prepared to receive it. These moments of language as agent function as dictation—to the reader from the culture that so thoroughly surrounds him he may hardly realize it is a linguistic construction. As Spicer put it:

> The proper names in the thing are simply a kind of disturbance which I often use. I guess it's "I" rather than the poems because it's sort of the insistence of the absolutely immediate which has nothing to do with anything, and you put that in and then you get all of the immediate out of the poem and you can go back to the poem. I've always found it's a very good thing to put in these immediate things which are in your mind and then just ignore them. It's like the "tap tap tap" the branches make in *Finnegan's Wake*. (Gizzi, *House That Jack Built*, 58).

In a separate statement, Spicer equated the function of these proper names with the disturbing function of obscenity in his poetry, which, he is careful to note, is not meant to be jarring but to be lulling. Obscenity is gratuitous, like names are:

> In these poems the obscene (in word and concept) is not used, as is common, for the sake of intensity, but rather as a kind of rhythm as the tip-tap of the branches throughout the dream of *Finnegan's Wake* … it is precisely because the obscenity is unnecessary that I use it, as I could have used any disturbance, as I could have used anything (remember the beat in jazz) which is regular and beside the point. (92)

Yet how can one be lulled by disturbance? Common names have the quality of obscenity because their "tap tap tap" chips away at the boundaries that demarcate "where we are" and "deflates the narrative curve toward finality" (224) in order to redirect narrative into an other space, thereby making it an "other" event. The subtext of "Wrong Turn" seems to lead us into the actual material by which the turn is confounded:

> Jacob's coat was made of virgin wool. Virgin wool is defined as wool made from the coat of any sheep that can run faster than the sheepherder.

> There are steps on the stairs too, which are awfully steep. (*MV*, 253)

The puerile joke functions as disturbance, putting the seriousness of the poem under stress but, as in jazz, the regular stress of rhythm—in this case, the regularity with which culture dictates the structures for our "fuss and fury at each other." We return, predictably, over and over, to the wrong turn—in this case, the fracture line—that brought us across from the poem to the joke. In my own reading, it feels like I need to keep asking myself what I did wrong in order to end up in Jacob's coat and cheap adolescent bestiality laughs.[33] In so doing, I establish a rhythm in my reading that carries difference into narrative, deflating the "curve toward finality." The last line forces readers and poet back into the poem, does not

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[33] I imagine, actually, that I am in Creeley's "I Know a Man" and the car goes off the road at a big curve. Instead of crashing into a stand of trees, killing us all, the car collides with a cushioning mass of wool fleece and words, and my injuries consist of an excessive vulnerability to language.

allow us to escape into the meaninglessness of the joke but instead makes us take up that meaninglessness as part of the work. We enter the narrative of the wrong turn alongside the poet, through its material of both words and wool. Placing oneself in a state of active vulnerability, inhabiting the threshold between textual spaces and real spaces, these are ways of extending disturbance beyond the point into duration and into landscape, into a zone. Blaser calls this zone "the invisible flowing of what men are," a city whose geography is "a narrative of events in which lives appear and disappear" ("Outside," 145). Nancy calls it "another love presence or another love movement that we in fact touch or that touches us, but that is not the 'love' we were expecting" (*Inoperative Community*, 93).

When it emerged into this contradictory, threshold city, *Heads* was widely and resoundingly praised by the poetry community. Duncan, with whom by this time Spicer had an especially contentious relationship, called the book "beautiful" and "radiant": "What the text brings is the ground for discovery. You have brought the matter so close to my heart… that I am confused, feeling it all *mine,* and carried beyond my envy" (Killian and Ellingham, *Poet Be Like God*, 197). Even Duncan's companion Jess, who by all accounts hated Spicer, conveyed that the book brought him to his knees to crawl towards his enemy in tribute, if not repentance. This reception of *Heads* points to the book's founding in difficult, non-referential intimacy, its performance of the language that seems to be uncannily *yours* because it is so emphatically not the poet's, even while he is its user. *You*, as Duncan seems to express, is the book's point of reference, and suddenly you find yourself located in the geography of difference that Spicer, vulnerable, lays open by way of a love that exists in and as the differential terrain of language in use—not courtly address and response, but the non-identical, risky correspondence of queerness. Spicer's more practical model for this kind of exchange seems to have been his relationships to the younger poets—sometimes to boys

whom he wished to make poets—whom he taught and influenced. His preferred pedagogical method was personal contact, which, for Spicer, was frequently inseparable from loving in its more commonly understood form: "When I saw you in the morning/My arms were full of paper" (*MV*, 137). With arms full of paper, Spicer can't embrace, yet the paper also facilitates his teaching and is therefore an embrace in itself; at the same time, we have an image of waking up beside someone, of seeing him for the first time in the morning and realizing he is an illusion, nothing but paper, language, poetry. Where I see you, really is nothing but pages and pages of words that can never be you. The best a man could do, perhaps, is give poetry as a kind of love. Yet "you" could also be the poem; typically Spicer wrote when he returned home from the bars in the early hours of the morning. If his arms were full of paper, he was ready—maybe more than ready—to receive these transmissions. Thus Spicer created for himself—in the life that he actually lived in and around the North Beach bars—love that was a difficult understanding, an entangling of modes of the real, that he needed and in turn used as textual apparatus. One such young student, Harris Schiff, remembers: "I was only able to, you know, kiss him sometimes, be close to him, be his student, this young poet that he taught some of his wisdom to. But he really needed that person, too. Really needed love. Didn't have it, and everything kind of closed in on him" (Killian and Ellingham, *Poet Be Like God*, 275).

What bound these understandings together, in any case, what so crucially entangled Spicer's poetry with his daily life, could be termed "ardor," the word that is love in the act. If we compare Spicer's concept of "ardor" to Pound's concept of "virtu"—later taken up by Duncan—the latter appears as a kind of overcoming of the former, a kind of resolution by way naming that makes language the ruler of acts and gives value to facts by bestowing upon them names. In Pound's case, language makes facts true and subsumes the act or gesture

into the primacy of the word, whereas for Spicer language discloses the absence in which facts appear. "The farther language moves from correspondence," as Foster phrases Spicer's conviction, "the more it will become entangled in the mysteries of syntax and shades of meaning possible only in abstractions" (*Jack Spicer*, 21). Spicer's purpose in creating and reinforcing his poetic circle "was to forge, and reforge, a world bonded by ardent belief," a city true to poetry (Killian and Ellingham, *Poet Be Like God*, 308). This was, for Spicer "a realm of being and existence and meaning beyond what is visible in the ordinary world" (308–9), according to Stan Persky, who continues:

> He proposed that there was a secret meaning to the world, and poetry revealed it. All this stuff that you did, like listen to ballgames or get your ass wet because the grass leaked through the *Chronicle*, all that was a part of life. But the secret meaning of life was there were ways of being true to poetry, and you had to live so that you were true to poetry. He provided a model for your life, and seemed to do it with great rigor, although to anybody who didn't know him he would seem to be an ungainly person who hung out in bars and the park, younger people around him. But the main thing was, this poetry stuff was for real. You practice it honestly or falsely, and Spicer advocated that you practice it honestly. (Ibid.)

Thinking and writing about Spicer in critical or theoretical constants is thus difficult because of his commitment to living the truth of poetry. Facts do not gain value when they are named by language; they gain differential, non-absolute value as they are being used in language. That use is the underworld into which the poet descends and value, truth, is revealed in and as the means of descent—its ardor—rather than awarded, as in virtu, when language overcomes facts to assimilate them to poetry—Duncan's "work of the living." "And the further language moves into abstraction," Spicer advocated, "the further it moves from poetry" (Foster, *Jack Spicer*, 21). At the center of practicing poetry "honestly" is the endless disruption into which we descend, the common fissure through and across which we all must correspond. Gizzi notes how "this center is available to everyone, providing a structure to which we are *all* marginal" (*House That Jack Built*, xxiv). Pound lacked courage, in

Spicer's opinion: he "never went into the dark" (Killian and Ellingham, *Poet Be Like God*, 317). In spite of Spicer's "rigor" in creating and following a life that was true to poetry, the most notable feature of this honesty is the vulnerability that comes with opening—or maybe this is the risk that the rigor attempts to manage. The truest events, as a questioner suggested during one of Spicer's late-life Vancouver lectures, are those "where you dare to the extent of facing failure very nearly"—"Yes." Spicer responded. "And sometimes failing" (Gizzi, *House That Jack Built*, 117).

The most immediate and real and common—both materially and conceptually—location for the kind of opening he sought was, for Spicer, in letters. The word "correspondence" refuses to anchor entirely outside of its beginning in Spicer's letters. As a critical term, it is impossible to locate; Spicer's "correspondence" disrupts critical fixity by becoming a term which is "not one" but is instead that which delivers the fissure to multiple points of contact in our reading of his work. In 1956, Spicer wrote an article for the Boston Public Library's newsletter in which he recognized Emily Dickinson's letters as "her only surviving prose—and even these are so often embedded with poetry that it is impossible to distinguish poetry from letter with absolute confidence" (Gizzi, *House That Jack Built*, 206). That the same could be said of Spicer's poetry and letters, especially after he completed this article, is a well-known aspect of his work. The letters serve to concretize—however briefly, for once they have left Spicer's hands they too become features of the opening—the common love around which Spicer wished to center a poetics as textual absence. In this sense the letters are events that disrupt the assumed connection between the sender and the receiver by enacting the gulf between them and replacing it with the troubled continuity of correspondence, or, as Spicer wrote to Jim Alexander: "These letters are our mirrors and we imprisoned singly in the depths of them" (210). A notable feature of Spicer's letters is that

those not declaring love are frequently signed "Love, Jack," as if to announce to the reader that the letter itself, no matter the sentiment contained, was an act of love, an offering of the single, imprisoned self to the common space of poetry and of the world. This signature calls poetry a world and initializes love as its constituent formal feature. Love, as indicated in Spicer's correspondence with his friends, lovers, and young "students," does not close the distance between human beings but makes it all the more visible as a formal feature of poetry. To practice correspondence was, for Spicer, to make the theoretical underpinnings of his poetry real—it is the "transformation of a very personal emotional experience into a language" (Killian and Ellingham, *Poet Be Like God*, 104) that does not name it as a theoretical principle but that "allows it to come to life and perform on its own" (ibid.). Other letters, like the following, written to Spicer's beloved FitzGerald in 1958, outline the distance between the two men, between lover and beloved:

> Dear Russ,
> Is it love (yet or not yet) love that you want or something for the scrapbook? I mean scrapbook in the ultimate sense?
> When I first read the letter I imagined a whole new sentence – 'I don't mean a new paediea.'
> Eating cotton fills your mouth with cotton.
> I think we were like planets that passed closer to each other than any astronomer could imagine once in an intergalactic year and now occasionally touch (relatively) in outer orbits. I am afraid of you.
> Fill your mouth with cotton and I will fill mine with words.
> Why don't you paint and shut your mouth and I'll kiss it.
> Jack (134)

The letter is not signed "Love, Jack," because it is so clearly an act of love, one that does not fill the fissure with a palliative ideal of its closure but rather sets it to the language that makes it most active in its destruction. The mixed and incommensurate metaphors in the letter force misrecognition into the structure of communication. "Eating cotton" does nothing but fill one's mouth with cotton; likewise, a mouth or space filled with words is only superficially filled, not resolved—it only allows one to know that the mouth exists. And despite Spicer's

desire for it to do so, which his purposely bad writing sneakily undermines, the letter does not resolve the gulf between the two men. It takes up its own impossibility to become the figure that defines its ground.

As the events that make Spicer's poetic propositions real, his letters become a form indicating what Davidson calls the "poetic realism" that began in the letters of *After Lorca* ("Incarnations," 107). According to Eshelman, *After Lorca* marked the point where "Spicer's failure to connect with another (which seems his choice as often as not)… is beautifully assimilated" into the poetic of "things do not connect; they correspond" ("The Lorca Working," 40). Spicer's letters to the dead poet, scattered throughout his "translations"— each of which is dedicated to a contemporary (including "Jack Spicer") and so addressed, as a letter itself—are, as Spicer puts it, "as temporary as our poetry is to be permanent" (*MV*, 110). This statement suggests that, instead of being taken strictly as "poetics statements" or apologia for the poems that accompany them, the letters to Lorca should be read as acts of correspondence that facilitate a poetry centered on absence: "it is precisely because these letters are unnecessary that they must be written" (ibid.). Spicer's purposeful mistranslations of Lorca's poems are not the center of the book; they are not the objects that the letters frame. The actual translation of language into a gesture or event characterized by failure is the central matter of the book; that is, Spicer practices correspondence as an act of mistranslation, of incompletion, one that mirrors his relationships to others for whom Lorca stands in as proxy. The poems themselves become moments of failure that tear the textual geography of the book so that centers appear everywhere, and likewise margins, each with the name of a friend or figure as impossible to connect to as the dead Lorca. It is thus that Spicer peoples his city, with networks of correspondence-as-failure-to-connect defining its geography and its population. Lorca himself, no longer a fact, does not resolve anything, and

fills no space—he simply shows us where the space is. The reader's complicity, as a user of language, in the failures that open geography contributes the extension of Spicer's realism beyond the immediate text and into the city. After *After Lorca*, Spicer's poetry disclosed more forcefully and explicitly the kind of facts that he found in the social text, and in the world, created by the common space of disruption.

Spicer's idea of correspondence "rejects the image as a privileged center of poetic language" so that, instead, poetry "circles around the failure of language in the face of human crisis" (Davidson, "Incarnations," 108); the inability to connect with an other is the human crisis that is, in turn, the failure of language. The misheard words of this failed conversation become Spicer's puns—from Lorca, Spicer had learned the power of contingency to affect textual geography. The poet spins the punned words back at his reader in an attempt to endlessly defer a fixed or final understanding until the pun takes on the social aspect of the "signifying function" in the realm of correspondence, acting not as the "unifying experience" (114) of the image but as the dispersion of meaning across the terrain of difference. This is where the Logos, the supreme voice of connection in tradition, is misheard and brought low into the transformed "low-ghost," the word without a name, the incomplete meaning brought on by the pun. The "low-ghost" figures a zone of crossing, a "region of immediacy" through which the world enters the poem as a word (Spanos, "Poetry of Absence," 2). Logos is the name, that which we fail to have in common and also the place marker of this failure. Through the punning function of misheard communication— dictation under the sign of correspondence—it becomes the "low-ghost," the opening of this failure as an event productive of common space.[34] This common space—"The Territory

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[34] There has been some debate about the extent to which Spicer wanted his "low-ghost" to function in the community of language users a the beloved figure "brought back" by the

Is Not the Map"—was created by Spicer in an attempt to de-privilege the image or the name:

> What is a half-truth the lobster declared
> You have sugared my groin and have sugared my hair
> What correspondence except my despair?
> What is my crime but my youth?
>
> Truth is a map of it, oily eyes said
> Half-truth is half of a map instead
> Which you will squint at until you are dead
> Putting to sea with the truth. (*MV*, 254)

The explanatory notes tell us: "This is a poem to prevent idealism—i.e. the study of images. It did not succeed" (ibid.). The voice below the line, correspondent to the low-ghost, reflects the half-truth, the half-map that the lobster despairs. It is possible to say what the poem is, but only in the context of what it does not do. "Putting to sea with the truth" is a pun that signals the failure of sight—Orpheus is not permitted to look—as a means to connection and serves as a reminder that the line's continuing existence lies in that failure, much as correspondence is an actual event of the despair of the failure to connect. All of this happens in a territory apart from the map, where it is impossible to "see" because "It is Forbidden to

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efforts of a specifically gay *Georgekreis*, hence placing his community in correspondence with this "circle of magic intensification." Robert Duncan argues that Spicer sought to keep sexuality apart from this magic, and that his rejection of his own body signaled the way that he conceived of sexuality "as an operated magic that brought one into this trap" and therefore would have rejected homosexuality as a feature of the *Kreis*. Kevin Killian suggests that the trap Spicer meant to evade was the "trap of love," an observation that is in fact consistent with my analysis since it is the very vulnerability of love that makes it a force in Spicer's work. To be trapped bodily in love by declaring a specifically gay poetic would be, for Spicer, setting too-specific margins and centers for both poetry and community and redefining public and private space rather than confounding the two. It may be more in line with Spicer's thinking to follow Duncan's wry observation that "Everybody in the *Kreis* in some sense *wasn't* in it." Killian notes that Spicer was, on the other hand, strongly influenced by modernist women writers like Gertrude Stein, Mina Loy, H.D.—and, I would add, going as far back as Emily Dickinson—whose poetry "variously masked or marked sexual difference with a radical approach to logos." See Gizzi, *House That Jack Built* (146–7), and Killian and Ellingham, *Poet Be Like God* (10; 208).

Look." It is a matter of trusting that the poem is there without really knowing, an Orphic descent undertaken by both poet and readers into a zone where even if there are images, we can't look at them. The radical difference in which we are immersed is the outside of language in which we are also complicit; except in the intimate communication that constitutes the "within" of the poem itself, Spicer's language is largely non-referential. This fact announces to us: "Take poetry as truth only at the risk of your life; you may have to use your hands to hold on, it's that perilous" (Davidson, *San Francisco Renaissance*, 164). We may have only our hands since, after Orpheus, we no longer have our sight. Thus the descent is doubly perilous, as perilous, perhaps, as the work of a poet whose dedications and apostrophes are the only points of textual contact between social language and literary words and, although rare, they are absolutely necessary to the life of both poet and poem.

III. Outside

Throughout *Heads of the Town up to the Aether*, Spicer employs the poetics of dictation as "a way of reaching out to that absolutely specific person who is absent to the poem" (Davidson, "Incarnations," 130). The event of reaching out to the absent receiver is how Spicer used love to open common social spaces within the poem, creating a city and a world invested by the love whose disruptions of difference provide its form. Our constitutive functioning in these common spaces takes place outside of language, where love provides the form for common misrecognitions, absences, and failed attempts at communication. The first page of "Homage to Creeley" consists not of a proper short poem but of an isolated dedication: "*For Cegeste*" (*MV,* 249). Yet the explanatory notes of the subtext reflect, out of proportion with what is in the field of text designated for the poem, a work of significant length. The subtext provides the absence of a poem; it also announces the difference

between the poet and the "speaker" and establishes this difference as both confrontation and haunting:

> To begin with, I could have slept with all of the people in the poems. It is not as difficult as the poet makes it. That is the reason I was born tonight.
>
> He wanted an English professor—someone he could feel superior to, as a ghost. He wanted to eliminate all traces of the poetry. To kiss someone goodbye but you people out there know none of the answers either—even the simple questions the poet was asked.
>
> I am the ghost of answering questions. Beware me. Keep me at a distance as I keep you at a distance.
>
> Cegeste died at the age of nineteen. Just between the time when one could use one's age as a power and one uses one's age as a crutch. (cf. A Fake Novel About the Life of Arthur Rimbaud). At 35 one throws away crutches. (cf. Inferno Canto I) (Ibid.) [35]

Spicer's confusion of subjectivities is as vast as the poem is non-existent but it is, in some way, the lack of a poem that allows for the work of the "below-text" to be done. There is no first voice, only its phantom reflection—which is not one but many, capturing the difference of a voice that speaks in common space. Difference, for Spicer, took the social form of love; love was the difference that entangled private and public realms into common space. As a gay man in the 1950s, Spicer's private love had no public expression in the social world— "Keep me at a distance as I keep you at a distance"—and had to code itself, which gave this love an especially intimate relationship to language; consider how "keep" works to simultaneously secure distance and hold close. To give homage similarly secures distance by establishing a hierarchy of honor, while also bringing a follower into closer proximity with his mentor by establishing a line of tradition. I want to suggest that "Homage to Creeley" draws Robert Creeley, Spicer's "cocksure," straight contemporary, into this intimate

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[35] In Jean Cocteau's 1949 film *Orpheus*, Cégeste is the young poet whose death puts the narrative in motion. One could argue that, this being the case, Cégeste is the central absent beloved of Cocteau's Orphic narrative.

structure of difference so that Spicer could, in a fashion, "tell him what it was like." To read Spicer is to enter the intimacy of the fissure, of difference, and to become part of the community that "inhabits" the "posthumous future" (Gizzi, *House That Jack Built*, 183) of the poems, our present, towards which this love has gone on.

If *After Lorca* created a world out of a network of correspondences between Spicer and those who made up his poetic community, *Heads* seeks to use that network to "establish a special dialogue between himself and the other" (Davidson, "Incarnations," 130). In other words, Spicer tried to create a world, a geography, where difference may not be resolved but where it might be viably inhabited, that is, where it is possible for love to be a dialogue between himself and an other. Blaser writes: "The landscape is not then a picture postcard, but the narration of a action in which the poet and reader are imaged. The visibility of it is measured against the vast other that language also holds" ("Outside," 147). *Heads* is addressed to "Jim" as "the personal recipient of the poem," written—as though Spicer calls to him through the streets of the city and those streets are shaped by his calls, which is how immense and public the vast space of love must be—"to someone who will read his life in it" (Davidson, "Incarnations," 130). "'Jim'… resembles the young poet James Alexander" but is also a "complex of mixed signs of desire, intention, loss, and possibility" (Killian and Ellingham, *Poet Be Like God*, 204) whose visibility and realness depends on the act of love, on the mirror that catches his difference from Spicer. Jim Alexander came to San Francisco in 1958 from Fort Wayne, Indiana, a recent high school graduate who felt a mystical connection to Rimbaud. He immediately captured Spicer's attention, and the poet came to believe that Jim was linked to Rimbaud, and to him, by some "larger forces" or "preordained bond" (156–57). Jim Alexander didn't necessarily share Spicer's strong feelings, although he later recognized their power—after all, out of the gulf between Spicer and Jim came *Heads*.

In particular, Spicer claimed "all of *The Heads of the Town* came out of" Jim's *The Jack Rabbit Poem* (159), about which Spicer said: "Jim wrote *my thoughts* and sent them to me" (157). Jim also provided for Spicer the horizon on the other side of love's fissure, that which kept the world open for him. Jim Alexander explained,

> There was for me a certain mystery about my relationship to Jack Spicer which had to do with the Rimbaud theme that permeated Jack's poetry. This relationship between Jack and I does seem to reinforce the plausibility of reincarnation. But it also might be interpreted as a devious plan to mislead people from the truth—a construing of similarities to hatch some plot or other, the purpose of which is to mislead some people from the truth. So I am very circumspect about what interpretation is to be placed on the signs and indications that Jack and I were indeed acquaintances less than a century before in the respective personages of Paul Verlaine and Arthur Rimbaud. And I'm even more concerned about the significance of such a consideration. It would seem on the surface to be little more than self aggrandizement, yet I think the times are such that a knowledge of former incarnations can be helpful and sustaining. On the other hand, they—mysterious indications—may contribute to the phenomena of self-delusion. (158)

Jim seems willing to suggest, if rather obliquely, that Spicer was deluded about the nature of their relationship. The veracity of the claim of reincarnation does not much matter where Spicer is concerned. If such a relationship produced poetry, it existed in poetry and was, hence, real. This love, according to Blaser, can ever be delusion since "a beloved … may begin in sexuality, but it will end in the world—a vocabulary for it, a task, and a chemical necessity" ("Outside," 148). Furthermore, Blaser continues—and this is crucial to my search for the literary in the correspondence between love and dictation:

> The dictation resides not in the shambles of a life, or in a pathology, or even in an unhappiness, but in the heart … as *a task* and *a reparation*. How difficult and costly that the double should have been forwarded in just this way—the discovery of a finitude, where a man or a poet thought he found only himself, the displacement of language to a dead picture that turned out to be only his discourse—and there, just there, in the double of his disappearance and appearance, the form opened again. (149)

Heads of the Town up to the Aether forms around the figure of Jim Alexander, the particular

openness at the center of Spicer that he wishes to extend into a city, into the geography of

community.

"Epilog for Jim" exists apart from the text of *Heads*, enacting Jim's departure or exile

from Spicer's poetic consciousness—specifically from the book in which he is, from the first

poem on, so emphatically addressed:

> The buzzards wheeling in the sky are Thanksgiving
> Making their own patterns
> There in the sky where they have left us.
> It is hot down here where they have left us
> On the hill or in the city. The hell
> Of personal relations.
> It is like a knot in the air. Their wings free
> Is there (our) shadows. (Killian and Ellingham, *Poet Be Like God*, 177)[36]

At the same time, "Epilog for Jim" recognizes Jim Alexander's continuing existence in an

"other" space, apart from *Heads* but still joined to Spicer by difference—now "The Hell/ Of

personal relations"—still a structural feature. Although the poem existed in a space apart

from *Heads*, it nevertheless serves as a kind of précis for that book, which is, after all, an

epilog for Jim. "Epilog for Jim" has the quality of a misheard conversation: Spicer's plays on

words concern "are" and "our," "their" and "there," "hill" and "hell." The first two confuse

the impersonal with the possessive, and the third indicates what that confusion can do to a

city; "here," "where" and "there" bounce off each other and circle the poem as the vultures

do, in a form that is endlessly negotiated and never solved. Even after the end of his

(however "real") affair with Jim, "Spicer continued to use the figure of Jim Alexander inside

his poetry. His greatest work waited for the destruction of their intimacy to appear, radically

transformed" (ibid.). Loving Jim created for Spicer a space out of which poetry could

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[36] "Epilog for Jim" was originally published in *J* 2 (San Francisco, 1959). It is not included in *My Vocabulary Did This to Me* or *The Collected Books*.

emerge, a way of publicly articulating the private gulf between two individuals and transforming it into a textual structure. The most immediate work that came out of that space was *Heads of the Town up to the Aether.* The "destruction" of Spicer's intimacy with Jim did not close that space but made it ever more apparent and we can see in *Heads* how Spicer's failure to connect with Jim is the radical inside that became the poet's literary "outside." When "Jim" appears in each section of that text, his name signals Spicer's "desire to incorporate the actual world into the poem as a word" (Davidson, "Incarnations," 114), but the impossibility of this desire's fulfillment highlights the distance between love and a name. This impossibility is also a historical reality, a "participation in the 'half-hid' encomium to other gay writers that infuses much gay writing" (Damon, *Dark End of the Street*, 197) before and during Spicer's time. In the poem "It Is Forbidden to Look," Spicer can't quite define hell, he can only make it by producing an overwhelming, startling realization of one's powerlessness to effect connection:

> I couldn't get my feeling loose
> Like a goose I traveled. Well
> Sheer hell
> Is where your apartness is your apartness
> I mean hell
> Is where they don't even pick flowers. (*MV*, 276)

As for Orpheus, "It Is Forbidden to Look," to act from love, to establish a common image to reference; we have only this common space that we are in where "your apartness is your apartness." A feature of this apartness is expressed in the distance between Creeley and Jim, between the name and love. The only way to connect the two is through their failure to connect—the textual space of the poems—so that the poems themselves materialize this failure as correspondence. Below the line, the voice we can't quite distinguish explains:

> The edges of a mirror have their own song to sing. The thickness seems alien to The Poet and he equates his own hell with what is between them.

He refers to Persephone as vaguely as she could be seen there. (Ibid.)

She is seen, like the poet, only in the mirror that reflects her absence: "Where they don't even pick flowers." And there is Spicer, in the center where there is nothing: "Imagine this as lyric poetry" (*MV,* 307).

In *Heads of the Town up to the Aether*, Spicer articulates this common space, where we are, as the space generative of everything that is important for poetry. It is a space haunted and activated by an other. "This I promise," he wrote to Jim Alexander

> —that if you come back to California I will show you where they send letters—all of them, the poems and the ocean. The invisible
>   Love
>   Jack
> (Killian and Ellingham, *Poet Be Like God*, 160)

The lack of punctuation that ends the letter suggests the lack of resolution that characterizes the relation of love. It also makes love invisible, somewhere on a line of correspondence with "Jack," the poems, and the ocean. What was invisible in Jim's poems and letters to Spicer haunts the space between them but, through correspondence, becomes real as a feature of Spicer's textual geography. "Jack has supplied the omission," wrote Russell FitzGerald; "Between the syllables, Jack has managed: Love" (164). Blaser writes:

> Jack's poetry takes on the experience, so exact to our present condition, that where we are is equally an experience of not being there at all—of disappearing and destroyed men—of fallen hierarchies and broken honesties, like towers, that once were governments. The men themselves, when one could see them in their acts, were horizons. Their acts remain in language where we join them. When the language breaks up into disbelief, their images disappear and we are, as now, invisible to one another. Left alone inside our needs and desires. We may all be the same there, but it is a leveling and a disappearance into an invisibility called necessity. The curious thing about language is that it holds and makes visible. It performs one's manhood. ("Outside," 130)

Out of this "disappearance into an invisibility called necessity," Spicer created a world, a textual geography where it was possible to live in language and where, disclosed against the ground of its negativity, all acts and facts become literary. To create a world was to

communicate in difference, to correspond or to attempt to negotiate a gulf. Yet the attempt was for Spicer also a real risk, as his analyst would later recall: "And he wonders 'Can he feel this gulf within himself?'" (Killian and Ellingham, *Poet Be Like God*, 297).

Part Two: *For you I would build a whole new universe.*

I. Disclosure

Disclosure is in Spicer's work a spatial function, a movement to the edge of textuality, to language's confrontation with public space; thus, thinking and writing about *Heads of the Town up to the Aether* necessitates a descent into Spicer's work, an immersion in his structural complications. According to Peter Riley, the "primary force of the writing" in *Heads* is "anti-structural, projecting disruption, multiplicity, and distraction, and bringing into play all the socializing modes of prose, parody, joke, error" within the poet's logic of correspondence ("Holy Grail," 164). What results are three discrete disclosures of knowledge: "Homage to Creeley," which Riley identifies simply as "the Orphic narrative"; "A Fake Novel About the Life of Arthur Rimbaud," or, "the life of Rimbaud"; and "the narrative hidden behind 'A Textbook to Poetry'" (ibid.). Spicer's disclosures come together at the location where the displaced "personal content of the poet" meets a "range of frequencies" (Gizzi, *House That Jack Built*, 179), causing a collision of narrative and textual surfaces that makes these disclosures "collage-like in structure, but without the pristine surface of a seamless fit" (ibid.). What we read is the wreckage that is *not* the Orphic narrative or the life of Rimbaud but that is, instead, Spicer's attempt to create the conditions in which we will seek such disclosures as may save us. We are to understand these as disclosures because each section reveals a way of knowing "not *put there* by Spicer" as a kind of false consciousness, "but emerging only because it must emerge, because it is inherent in language" (ibid.). However, what emerges, "inherent in language," can be false consciousness

as well, appearing to readers and critics as a single representation of "the Orphic narrative" or "the life of Rimbaud." Just because a knowledge is disclosure does not mean that we do not remain in thrall to the ideology of the textual surface.

I want to move into a consideration of the second part of that book, "A Fake Novel About the Life of Arthur Rimbaud" in order to focus on the way that Spicer structured a world around Rimbaud where the earlier poet could exist in and as the outside that difference creates. The sequence, like *Heads* itself, has three "books" which are designated by numbers. Within each book are chapters numbered from I–X, although Spicer occasionally misses or mis-numbers, as if to remind us that these designations are arbitrary. Each chapter also has a title, some of which repeat and most of which ostensibly have nothing to do with the content of the chapter. Defying conventional biographic and novelistic structure, Spicer also defies the dominant narrative mode of a life, along with the textual demarcations that usually structure memory and history. "A Fake Novel," according to Blaser, "becomes a book about visibility or time and its messages issue from a strange post-office, the dead letter and the dead letter officer" ("Outside," 159). Writing backwards to Rimbaud "involves a reversal of language into experience" to recreate the beginnings of public space in a new doubling by way of which "a man and a world are recovered to operate in language" (117). In other words, "A Fake Novel" provides Spicer with the opportunity to found textual space in a disruption that appears originary but isn't, and is thus counterfactual to Rimbaud's history and transmission. We must therefore ask of the text differently and participate in a present disclosure not continuous with our present. Re-creating Rimbaud becomes the creation of a textual landscape from "fake" origins, a language founded not in connections or references but in correspondence issued from an impossible past. In "A Fake Novel," Spicer most clearly takes up the question "who is speaking in a poem? —and changes it into

a question of where he is speaking—from what place—in what order—in what composition—a shadowy participant in a folding with something outside himself" (123).

"In the wreckage of our discourse," writes Blaser, "… are the presences and absences with which our thought tries to deal … the love-hate thematics of our writing as it meets the public space" ("Outside," 134) where it becomes—or will become, independent of the will of the poet—knowledge. "It is an absent America whose presence is at stake," Blaser continues:

> The doubling is where the public space begins. Where our words become uneasy as to meaning and designation, it is just there that life in language begins again … It is necessary, I know, to stop over the known, which like one's body, closes form, but then I move again to the edge of it. It is this entangling—out of poetics—that is the source of public love. (ibid.)

This is an "entangling" generative of other spaces from which emerges "public love." Even at the end of his life, Spicer struggled with the construction of this space, which seemed only able to exist in incompletion and impossibility. "I think every poet has to create actively his own community," Spicer said in the 1965 Berkeley lecture. "I think poets ought to center on, not just poetry, but, well, 'community' is a good word. If you could make your own community, which you can't—there's no question about that—but if you could, that would be ideal" (Gizzi, *House That Jack Built*, 167). To be able to create a community appears here as Blaser's stopping "over the known," closing form instead of disclosing a way of knowing. It is the absent space whose presence (perhaps as a ghostly, other America) is the central contradiction in *Heads of the Town up to the Aether*.

It was Rimbaud who proclaimed: "This eternal art will be *functional*, since poets are citizens. Poetry will no longer give rhythm to action; *it will be in advance*" (Ross, *Emergence of Social Space*, 27). For Spicer, such a proclamation would mark a point of correspondence at the entrance to a zone or space common to both poets, since, as Blaser notes, Spicer

thought of language as something "in front of" him (Killian and Ellingham, *Poet Be Like God*, 374). Thus the question of where he is speaking, as enumerated above, is one that has constantly to be gone on to. This created for Spicer an "incredible task," one whose simultaneity was "the learning that rendered his life": "once again to shape a world and it was adrift from what had been happening" (ibid.). Marginal culture indicated the existence of a space other to "what had been happening," the geographic manifestation of the zone where language is in advance and one lives already in the potential of what it can create. More crucially for Spicer, a specifically local culture became necessary as a zone in which to realize a truly social text. As Davidson puts it: "The social role of poetry lies not in the author's political views but in the degree to which he can create a linguistic alternative to the instrumentalized language elsewhere in society" (*Guys Like Us*, 45). The *elsewhere* here is especially significant, since I want to argue that for Spicer, it was the figure of Rimbaud that enabled Spicer's poetics to be spatially and geographically situated outside of named, instrumentalized language.

In "A Fake Novel," Spicer realized this distance as the "dead letter," establishing it in the text as a poetics of fact. We are able to see how first Creeley and now Rimbaud are offered as facts rifted by the logic of the dead letter, asserted in language but never allowed to come into their full meaning. In "What the Dead Letters Said," Spicer writes:

> "Dear X,
>   I love you more than anyone could ever do.
>   signed
>   Y"
>
> … "… Yes, Virginia, there is a postoffice."
> … "… I'm going to go home and eat rose-petals."
>
> … "… It has all been anticipated, there isn't any more for you to do."
>
> "Dearest Y,"   (*MV*, 282)

"Y" composes a letter, but between the full letter that begins the chapter and its aborted reply, there is noise. The noise is somewhat culturally specific—"Yes, Virginia"—but not conspicuously so. The de-authorized fragments that come after the letter and before its reply have not yet been assimilated into a poetic voice and "Dearest Y," although it seems to complete the circuit begun by the opening letter, leaves off as well. "Dearest Y" is a dead letter. It is no more than another fragment of speech, waiting to come into its full meaning and, unable to do so, it opens not into the edifying content of a received letter but into the world. It is, as Nancy writes, "an offering, which is to say that love is always proposed, addressed, suspended in its arrival, and not presented, imposed, already having reached its end" (*Inoperative Community*, 97). The dead letter, the object that has here been substituted for love, creates an outside, "for the return in fact takes place only across the break itself, keeping it open … it does not remain outside; it *is* this outside itself, the other," in Nancy's conception (ibid.). Love, recast as the dead letter, is the outside by way of which *j'est un autre*: "It is not the singular being that puts itself outside itself: it is the other, and in the other it is not the subject's identity that operates this movement or this touch (ibid.). The dead letter intervenes in narrative as the future anterior, announcing a poetics based in meaning that will have arrived. This is the precarious state in which Spicer casts the fact, incorporating both destruction and the refusal of destruction in the simultaneous appearance and disappearance of context in the poem. What ultimately results is the necessary world, an other space where language acts on geography. "Such a city," Blaser says, "is outside our time or at the edge of it" ("Outside," 127). Dictation's insistence on the necessity of this outside "notices first a disappearance or emptying out of an manhood from his language"—the process to which Spicer subjects Rimbaud—"and then watchfully approaches 'a field' including the other"—

here, Jim— "and a 'topography' that is a folding and unfolding of a real that contains us"—
the social text (ibid.).

Spicer was known for being protective, often possessive, of the friends and students
in his circle. Jim Herndon told Killian, "because they would be in danger if they got an
influence from the outside world, it would eat them up," Spicer felt that his friends were in
"danger if they left his circumscribed limits," his geography, his field of influence (*Poet Be
Like God*, 372–73). The fear that outside influence could consume a poet is geographically
specific and signals more than simple jealousy or emotional neediness on Spicer's part. It
seems that Spicer felt that the members of his circle were in actual, immanent danger, not of
abandoning him but of being lost in or destroyed by a world that they did not actively
participate in constructing. A world that didn't ask poets to create it would overwhelm them.
If we trace this idea, Spicer's everyday fear, through *Heads*, we can see how it manifests first
in what Norman Finkelstein calls the "awesome confrontation with negativity" ("Jack
Spicer's Ghosts," 91) in "Homage to Creeley," where "'the voice of language itself,' freed
from the constraints of the interior and exterior modes of utterance, becomes the purest and
most terrifying expressions of the social contradictions that engender it" (88). Having
opened this negativity and freed such social contradictions into language, Spicer now had to
create a territory in which it was possible for the poet to work them without being swallowed
by them. This was for Spicer the impossible creation of community—a landscape governed
not by connection but by correspondence, by gulfs or *dis*closures rather than the safety of
the known or of maps. [37]

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[37] Nealon argues that "Spicer deploys this serial model of poems and poetry, instance and
category, as a way of organizing both his poetics and the poetry scene against
homogenization and commodification, which he sees as linked to the pseudolife of the
emergent spectacle, and to the mass violence of mid-century" (*Matter of Capital*, 118).

Spicer's poetry did not "find its source in the natural landscape" (Davidson, *San Francisco Renaissance*, 151), nor did he believe that it was possible for any poetry to emerge from the kind of landscape where "acts of sympathetic identification connect the poet to numinous qualities latent in all living things" (ibid.). Still, when asked in Vancouver if his writing was related to a certain setting, Spicer answered: "It's usually late in the evening in San Francisco and I'm in a specific place, yes" (Gizzi, *House That Jack Built*, 106). So although the natural landscape was not an element of his poetry, the human landscape, an actively *lived* space, was crucial to his composition. Spicer had a keen sense of human beings as practitioners of space and conceived of a place as something constructed by humans' constitutive functioning in it. The only thing that can truly be common about any space governed by correspondence is our use of it, our feeling of the gulf within ourselves. Spicer continued: "The whole rhythm of Vancouver is different from the rhythm of San Francisco and I do think that there is something to that. I hate the word 'measure'—I've always despised it—but there is some kind of natural measure to a city that does change things" (111). One can therefore use language, to either carry forth or disturb that measure, to affect the landscape of the city in very material ways; the use of language to practice space doubles back into poetry at the moment those practices intersect and become public—what Spicer calls "finding a new country" (112): "It's a kind of thing that does happen differently in different cities, and the difference in the city undoubtedly has made a difference in the metric. I don't know how much of it is simply the alienation or finding a new country. I suspect it's finding a new country from the way the poems go, but I'll wait till I get back to San Francisco to see" (ibid.). For Spicer, the city was also a difficult place, and its ongoing transformation into a poetic landscape would inevitably "exact a certain toll from those who believed in it" and used it (Davidson, *San Francisco Renaissance*, 167). The West Coast was the

closest approximation of a landscape of difference that Spicer could imagine: "West Coast is something nobody with sense would understand" (*MV,* 421). Perhaps in order to avoid the more "sentimental belief in localism" (Davidson, *San Francisco Renaissance*, 167) that for Spicer characterized Olson's devotion to Gloucester, Spicer frequently emphasized the seediness of his context and refined its specificity to the San Francisco bar scene, and the cruising in Aquatic Park, that composed his real days. This is a realism of correspondence, of missed connections and misheard "sense" that actually pulls the landscape away from the mappable, natural, world and toward its own made-ness:

> We shall build our city backwards from each baseline extending like
> a square ray from each distance—you from the first-base line,
> you from behind the second baseman, you from behind the
> short stop, you from the third-baseline.
> We shall clear the trees back, the lumber of our pasts and futures
> back, because we are on a diamond, because it is our diamond
> Pushed forward from.
> And our city shall stand as the lumber rots and Runcible mountain
> crumbles, and the ocean, eating all of the islands, comes to meet
> us. (*MV*, 417)

One way that Spicer dealt with this particular anxiety of influence appears as his well-known use of baseball to structure poetic composition. "In Spicer's poetics," writes Gizzi, "'the house that Jack built,' baseball produces a complex architecture in which 'a poem can go on forever'" (*House That Jack Built*, 199). By the time of *Book of Magazine Verse*, in which the above poem was published, the "diamond" is more explicitly a baseball diamond, perhaps in the moment when, as form, it is most definitively outside—not involved in the illusory choice between abstract and personal poetry. The diamond, in baseball and as poetics, suspends "the rules" of geography, form, and even love: "The point was to create a kind of disjunction or disassociation, not to manipulate the rules of the game one willingly or unwillingly played but to create a moment in which they simply did not apply" (Foster, *Jack Spicer*, 18), the correspondence in which poetry was possible.

The San Francisco geography that informed Spicer's life was a complex mix of private space and public, human interactions and neighborhoods, locations and the relations constitutive of them. It is, for example, impossible to separate North Beach or Aquatic Park from Spicer's intimate use of them. The Broadway Tunnel is another location that appears again and again in Spicer's life, both in his own recollections and the memories of others. It is especially interesting to consider as an "other space" in between places, where construction cuts conspicuously through the landscape and pulls space away from the natural world and into the sphere of common usage. The Broadway Tunnel did not so much connect neighborhoods as signal their apartness by interrupting what stood between them. Spicer passed through it, with others, in order to reach the intimate Sunday afternoon poetry circles at Joe Dunn's apartment. Harold Dull remembers:

> I would so like to get it down just as it was then, everyone, just as they were, Jack, crosslegged on the floor, Duncan in the plush chair, George Stanley, Joanne Kyger, Ebbe Borregard, I, just to see it as it was, today, in the clear light of the day. And that room we met in, Joe Dunn's, is still somewhere inside me. I can trace my way back – out of the Broadway Tunnel, left, and down … And I stop, the top of that next hill I thought I'd be able to see everything from would probably be dark y the time I got to it anyway, and I turn back—out of the Broadway Tunnel, left, and down…. (Killian and Ellingham, *Poet Be Like God*, 110)

The Broadway Tunnel, for Spicer, was a space with the ability to affect a person's constitutive functioning within it. "This is about a mile of tunnel," Spicer explained: "It's a two-way thing, each way one way, and a kind of catwalk above it and echoing car sounds… drunks throwing firecrackers or beer bottles and all of that, and you walk fast through that" (Gizzi, *House That Jack Built*, 113). Spicer's description of the tunnel highlights its unnatural features and the feelings of otherness that these features confer on the walker; once one is so deeply within the natural landscape as to be totally apart from it, in this "thing" with "a kind of catwalk" and the echo of engines giving the space its shape, one's use of the space changes in order that he may incorporate himself into it in a meaningful way. "I mean, shit,"

Spicer said. "If you're walking down a sandy beach, you obviously aren't going to walk the same way you walk through the Broadway Tunnel. There's a different resistance and everything else" (132). Spicer's frequent use and mention of the Broadway Tunnel provides useful insight into the way he practiced space in his everyday life and the way that he—on a most literal level—incorporated that practice into his poetry as the surface disruption of geography in difference.

In 1960, during the time that he was writing *Heads*, Spicer moved into an apartment in the "hardcore hustling" gay district of "Polk Gulch"; Killian describes the apartment as being "nearly under a Bank of America vault" (Killian and Ellingham, *Poet Be Like God*, 188). It seems significant that Spicer lived in such an "other" space, almost literally beneath but yet completely beyond "official" commodity culture during the period when Rimbaud was an active presence in his daily life. Polk Gulch would have presented, above Spicer's head, a commodity culture on completely different terms, one in which bodies incorporated space through their participation in it, where commerce created the common space of bodies intersecting with bodies—"the intersections where lovers are" (*MV,* 251). Polk Gulch appears in "Homage to Creeley" as that intersection. The explanatory notes to "Car Song" tell us that "'intersections' is a pun" (ibid.), evoking collisions, street corners, and bodies cast as what at that time was America's most precious commodity—automobiles. The Handle Bar, a gay Polk Gulch institution, appears in the notes as well, bringing the real Polk Gulch into the geography of Spicer's textual world: "'I like it better in L.A. because there're more men and they're prettier,' someone said in The Handlebar tonight" (ibid.). "Cruising," writes Michael Warner in *The Trouble with Normal*, "directly eroticizes participation in the public world of privacy," naming a different mode of spatial incorporation "not yet as mediated" as official commodity culture (179). I am not sure if it is fair to ascribe to Spicer's thought the

distinctions between queer and hetero belonging that Warner names, but it certainly seems that, if he did not conceptualize these distinctions, Spicer lived among them. His tenure in Polk Gulch and his afternoons in Aquatic Park suggest that Spicer was aware of how "public sexual culture" created its own space in ways that the larger American culture in the 1950s could not. By "articulating" their sexuality, queer bodies "re-mapped" space through their participation in the simultaneity of public and private spaces—in that zone, these bodies were able to construct a space defined by its being in common to them. This queer spatial practice, like Spicer's dream of textual geography, is founded on the logic of correspondence that replaces reified and alienating connection with nonidentity-in-common. It organizes its cities without positivizing their intersections, structuring them around the same kinds of disruptions in continuity that characterize Spicer's poetics—as Warner puts it, "a refusal of the silence of hetero privilege to articulate the activity that goes into making a world" (*Trouble with Normal*, 193). This spatial articulation does not seek the resolution and reassurance of "as above, so below" but instead conveys nonidentity into a kind of counterfactual cartography. Warner's account of participatory queer citizenship mirrors what I have argued is the textual function of love in Spicer's work, highlighting how "the organization of cities is inseparable from queer uses, which need to be freed"—from instrumentalized language—"to find articulation as a public horizon … all the users of a city have a stake in its queer space … inspiring queers to be more articulate about the world they have made" (179) in opposition to or in confrontation with the "privatization of sex" or poetry "in the fantasy that mass-mediated belonging substitutes for" public culture (ibid.). I want to argue that while Spicer could not have explicitly conceived of his project in the post-Stonewall, post-Milk queer terms which Warner has helped to make familiar, his commitment to the poet's impossible attempt to construct community sought, in its practice,

a similar end: to form both textual and personal relationships according to the modes that this culture discovered and made available.

This is not to say that Spicer was completely without a sexual body, some kind of pure, poetic anchorite or, as the more popular myth has it, ugly, chaste, and bitter, ashamed of his body and formalizing his desire in order to force it away from him. The "other space" that Spicer's poetics created was not meant to be a space of avoidance but a zone of encounter where relations could be "established, invented, multiplied, and modulated" (Foucault, "Friendship," 204). In "Friendship as a Way of Life," Michel Foucault reminds us of the textual aspect inherent in desire and the way that queer desire pushes spaces of institutionalized or instrumentalized relations back from their apparent natural-ness and into constructed-ness: "To want boys was to want relations with boys … as a matter of existence: how is it possible for men to be together?" (ibid.). To remain inside this question is, for Foucault as for Spicer, to assert the logic of textual incompleteness upon the landscape, rendering that landscape irredeemably social: "What is it, to be 'naked' among men, outside of institutional relations, family, profession and obligatory camaraderie? It's a desire, an uneasiness, a desire-in-uneasiness that exists among a lot of people" (ibid.). Spicer called this "desire-in-uneasiness" love, the force that opens a space where men "have to invent, from A to Z, a relationship that is still formless" (205). The transgressive movements of queer desire's invention wear away at institutionalized relations as this desire intrudes upon and disrupts the relations through which humans belong in a landscape. Queer ways of being, according to Foucault, assert themselves much more threateningly upon the social landscape than the sexual act itself, making manifest

> Everything that can be uncomfortable in affection, tenderness, friendship, fidelity, camaraderie and companionship, things which our rather sanitized society can't allow a place for without fearing the formation of new alliances and the tying together of unseen lies of force … that individuals are beginning to love one another—there's

the problem. The institution is caught in a contradiction; affective intensities traverse it which at one and the same time keep it going and shake it up … Institutional codes can't validate these relations with multiple intensities, variable colors, imperceptible movements and changing forms. These relations short-circuit it and introduce love where there's supposed to be only law, rule, or habit. (Ibid.)

Foucault makes the point that seems to pierce the heart of what destroyed Spicer, that the introduction of love into institutions and instrumentalized language not only allows poetry to go on, but forces us to as well. In 1962, Spicer wrote in "Three Marxist Essays":

Homosexuality is essentially being alone. Which is a fight against the capitalist bosses who do not want us to be alone. Alone we are dangerous

Our dissatisfaction could ruin America. Our love could ruin the universe if we let it.

If we let our love flower into the true revolution we will be swamped with offers for beds. (*MV*, 328)

Spicer lived in the era of McCarthyist tropes and intense fear about the "outside" that queer ways of being enacted. To live apart from the paternalistic structures by which society protected its citizens, in an economy of bodies where commodities traded themselves was, thus to be "more vulnerable to enemy propaganda, and thus 'less' American" (Gizzi, *House That Jack Built*, 191). Taking up these tropes, Spicer literalized this apartness or outside by recasting it in terms of language and affirming "McCarthyism's ultimate paranoid fantasy," that "the enemy has already invaded from elsewhere" and turning it back on itself as a world of poetic action (ibid.).[38] The act of incorporating the outside, what Foucault considers an opportunity for queer subjects to "trace" lines across the social fabric and "re-open" relational virtualities, was for Spicer also a painful experience of living the open logic of

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[38] Davidson elaborates on the importance social language and a self-defined city in Spicer's specific historical context: "For a homosexual poet, living in Cold War America during the 1950s and 1960s, such community was especially vital. Spicer's cultivation of insularity… may have been a necessary strategy in gaining speech at all. The McCarthy trials, HUAC hearings, and civil rights clashes were providing plenty of models of the 'outside' (Communists, blacks, eggheads, ethnics, and queers) against which average white citizens should defend themselves. Spicer, rather than rejecting such exclusionary rhetoric, inverted it to his own uses" (*San Francisco Renaissance*, 159).

correspondence. "We must think that what exists is far from filling all possible spaces," said Foucault ("Friendship," 209); "We must learn that our lips are not our own. A revolution is a savage education," Spicer wrote to Jim Alexander (Davidson, *San Francisco Renaissance*, 161). In his ongoing quest to live honestly with respect to poetry, Spicer incorporated these possible spaces, these gulfs, within himself. In so doing he also made a "truly unavoidable challenge of the question: what can we make work, what new game can we invent?" (ibid.).

II. Salvage

Heads arose out of a documentary, not simply descriptive, impulse bereft of authorship in the fearful landscape of Cold War America to give form to the love that is not a name, a geography beginning in a division of where one is and opening into the world. "Desperate to salvage something from the noises of consumerism, strident capitalism, and vulgarity" (Killian and Ellingham, *Poet Be Like God*, 300), Spicer envisioned a city freed from maps and reorganized according to language, "in a grid covering both time and place" that took the form of poetry (304). San Francisco in the 1950s provided Spicer with a real site where the simultaneity of a devastated present and a "future Arcadia" could be enfolded in language and transformed into practicable textual geography (Davidson, *San Francisco Renaissance*, 32). "What gets salvaged in the process," then, as Spicer excavates the life of Rimbaud, are the same materials from which the poet then builds his community: "Histories that have been cast off, failed kingdoms, lost vistas, magical worlds no longer believed in, and works of literature no longer read" (Gizzi, *House That Jack Built*, 225). As Nealon notes: "The scene around Spicer left a striking record of the struggle of one milieu to achieve a kind of countertotality to the one emerging after the Second World War" (*Matter of Capital*, 115). In Spicer's particular case, that record is of a formal "stepping up to poetry" that opens gaps and then refuses acquiescence. According to the logic of Spicer's correspondence,

"contiguity and contingency" (Gizzi, *House That Jack Built*, 186) govern the composition of the line and the series so that the poems themselves establish, invent, multiply, and modulate a social landscape in which Spicer and his community may actually live. "It hurts because you are not able to take the sounds that these things make," Spicer said shortly before his death: "A poet almost has to invent his own land and then has to defend it" (243).

"A Fake Novel About the Life of Arthur Rimbaud" takes the sounds that Rimbaud makes, frees them from biography, and reorganizes them according to language. "Freakish Noises" begins with the word "Yes": "Yes. Yesterday's loves." The word could be affirmative or it could be a false start, a fragment of "yesterday" making its first noise (*MV,* 289). "Yesterday's loves" could be an image in the poem that follows, and then perhaps the poem—echoing "Several Years' Love" from "Homage to Creeley"—will be about Russell, or Jim, and will finally tell us something that we have been waiting since the start of the book to discover. "Yes," the next stanza begins, but it is not answering any question:

> Yes. Yesterday is a lover. If he turns around he will see them—beckoning him to some far off gymnasium or poem, turning him off his path, where he had gone so many miles the place to look back. (Ibid.)

"He" could be the poet, it could be Rimbaud, it could be both or neither, it could be the lover named "yesterday"; "they" could be yesterdays, lovers, words. Just as we might begin to consider the possibilities of these multiple images, "yesterday" transforms into "yestestday," taking from us even the small certainty of the word:

> Yestestday was eternity. Is backwards. Is the way that man faces the real that is always going past him. And him it. Yestestday survives in his eyes—like one water's particle in his river. Yields salt and tears—they hadn't seen us coming. (Ibid.)

Re-creating Rimbaud as a figuration or poetic landscape rather than as a persona is an act of assemblage that brings us face to face with the facts of his life as they recede out of natural narrative and into language. "Back there where the air was pure," yesterday was a point of

reference of which one could be sure (ibid.). In language, this is not so. In the geography created in language, "one does not discover yestestday remembering" (ibid.)—we can't look back to "Several Years' Love" or anywhere else to discover what Spicer is doing to these words, or why, because the only thing that we'll find there is the repeated stutter: "Yes." In contrast to Duncan's Poundian rage for order, attained by virtu in the form of a name, here we can only proceed, with no map and expectations that we know will be wrong, to the possibilities that these noises might disclose. If the "Freakish Noises" made by Rimbaud have yet to come into their name or meaning, the text must ardently create the space for them, the world in which these objects, reassembled, will figure. There is always the risk that they might not.

The textual spaces that Spicer creates are what Foucault calls "heterotopias": "a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias", 1967). Spicer's heterotopias, like Foucault's, are not meant as a lament for or a corrective to crises of representation. Rather, a heterotopia is "capable of juxtaposing in a single real place," such as the text, "several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (ibid.). In "Jack Spicer's Ghost Forms," Maria Damon connects the way Spicer situates himself within his "historical circumstance," and, I would add, in relation to Rimbaud, to "the notion of vestige, whose derivation from *vestigium*—footprint— implies a negative space which asserts an absent presence, something or someone who has come and gone, leaving a trace of writing" (138). Spicer's assemblage of Rimbaud designates the co-existence of different orders of space and the materiality of different ways of being through a series of present contingent linguistic disclosures correspondent to the absent ephemera of Rimbaud's life. Damon continues: "'It'—the ghost, vestigial form, the evidence

that has been dragged off the scene leaving its tracks and lines in the surface dirt of cultural history—is the poet, the poet's body, the poem, the generation of the poem (what we call 'process')… it is the body of already available poetry on which any poet's work feeds—that is, it is The Tradition or Traditions—which both exist and do not" ("Ghost Forms," 139). Spicer uses his hands to drag the proper name of Rimbaud back from tradition into language until we are entangled, within these disclosures, with language in its heterotopic state. "A Fake Novel" does more than record language dictated from the outside; it reestablishes, contested and inverted, the originary site of relations that produce narratives, capturing language "before it has been assimilated into a coherent, central voice" or commodity (Davidson, "Incarnations," 106). The reader who goes to the text to discover facts about Rimbaud "fails to discover an experience of language" (123); Spicer privileges "the page" as a heterotopic site for divesting language "of its previous associations and rhetorics" (ibid.).

Spicer's heterotopias are the sites for reconnecting language with experience that undermine fact and narrative by disclosing the social deep within textuality. Here, as Blaser writes, "the visibility of men in speech opens on an invisibility he has not spoken or thought … extends into a space that is not recognized" ("Outside," 118). This is a space that, like lived geographies, cannot be mapped; language and experience are "so immediately reversible" that they *become* "a kind of map" of the emergent knowledge of common space (ibid.). "Suddenly," Blaser continues, "in the contemporary experience, the formal, public language does not hold and our language in the midst of a re-composition has to account for what is stopped, lost, loose, and silent" (119). The dead letter, as it appears here, "distances us from that literal condition of Rimbaud's life" at each accounting, "breaks down the idea of biography until it becomes event" (Davidson, "Incarnations," 124). The fact of

authorship is subjected to the dismantling of public language by the endlessly deferred event of its own actualization.

In "An Ontological Proof of the Existence of Rimbaud," Spicer tells us: "If they call him into being by their logic he does not exist" (*MV,* 293). Instead, Spicer offers a model for building Rimbaud in language. Read alongside the title of the poem, or chapter, this passage shows that it is possible to "prove" something in language that doesn't necessarily "exist":

> Imagine, those of us who are poets, a good poet. Name to yourselves his possible attributes. He would have to be mmmmm, and nnnnn, and ooooo, and ppppp, but he would have to exist. It is a necessary attribute of the good to exist. (*MV,* 292)

This is the ontology of the dead letter that enables us to read Rimbaud as an assemblage not based in biographical or biological fact but in language or literary fact. Spicer envisions authorship thus as a heterotopia where the future anterior of the dead letter always threatens and the impossible completion of meaning reflects back on the users of language, the senders of letters. "If Rimbaud had died there in the cabbage patch before we imagined"—in language—"he existed, there would be no history," no space between Rimbaud and his re-assemblage as a text where facts could be subject to language (*MV,* 293). Such a space appears where "Rimbaud cannot exist as a function of the past but as a continual welling-up of potential who 'fails us whenever we have the nerve to need him,'" and there is no more "him" but only the "welling-up" into the absence of "him" (Davidson, "Incarnations," 126). This is a poetics of fact where fact is a counterfactual symbol; Spicer's dead letter enacts the "problem of desire" spatially, specifying it as love and establishing beneath author and text "an ontology of absence, which finds thematic application in … the attempt to create a poetic 'life' for Rimbaud" (130). Without this ontology of absence as a structural feature, as the basis for the literary facts of Rimbaud, we are left in the realm of biologically mapped—

biographical—authorship that bears no relation to language: "Hysterical voices calling over the path to our womb" (*MV,* 293).

To invoke Rimbaud is, for Spicer, to activate the question of context. Spicer disturbs the ground of the literary by divesting cultural references of their referentiality and forcing us to look at the relation of his counterfactual construction of Rimbaud to the facts it is created out of. This relation arises from language as a disclosure. Spicer takes the confrontation with negativity that he provoked in "Homage to Creeley" and presents the negative movement away from context as a fact of the poem itself, preserving its violation of lyric distinctions as a feature of the text. "Fragmentation is necessary," according to Nealon, "not because the fragment has a self-evident or ironic pathos, but because language lives off the transmutation of nonlanguage, of nonsense, into language" (*Matter of Capital*, 109). Thus structuralizing the destruction of fact, Spicer creates a poetics rendered geographical, where the text does not fall into pure formalism since what disturbs the narrative of "knowing" Rimbaud is a relation correspondent to the social, where language lives. If "what we know about Rimbaud is not the series of events which comprised his life" (Davidson, "Incarnations," 120), but is instead a cracked, broken, irredeemably social surface where his poems confront the negativity of context, Spicer could create an entire universe from facts subjected to the intervention of language. Spicer's relation of not-fact and fact is what Blaser calls a "principle of translation" where "one must reenact life again, that is the same as it was, but with a difference" and where "the body will not and cannot stop, even in its desires" ("Outside," 148). Riley calls Rimbaud a "singular obsessive figure" in this work, asserting that Spicer only found his "ability to operate a book beyond obsession" in *Language* and *The Holy Grail* ("Holy Grail," 165). Yet Spicer's Rimbaud is not singular at all; it (he) is a "field of reference" in difference, where "at the outset there is an assurance which sets the questor (apparently) straight

towards his objective" (180), but where, even in its desires for a singular Rimbaud, the body will not and cannot stop reaching an entire destroyed city of Rimbauds. "Inside every Rimbaud was a ready-made dead-letter officer," Spicer writes in "The Dead Letter Officer": "Who really mailed the letter? Who stole the signs?" (*MV,* 295–96). Spicer's invocation of "who" calls forth a field of possible pronouns, which in this poem are reassembled again into "him"; yet the "him" is not necessarily Rimbaud—it may be the dead letter officer inside any one of many Rimbauds:

> […]He is in every corpse, in every human life.
> He writes poems, pitches baseballs, fails us whenever we have a nerve to need him. Button-molder too, he grows in us like the river of years. (*MV,* 296)

De-authorizing pronouns by subjecting them to assemblage enables Spicer to account for multiple poetic voices in his authorship of Rimbaud, including those that might have yet to contribute. It is language, in the collective voice of its users, which speaks in the absence of the author, Rimbaud; Rimbaud is the name of that gap, that productive absence, not of an actual author. Such an event creates an assembled city at every occurrence:

> That is why we/I are writing this novel. If he had read it when he was sixteen, he could have changed human history. (*MV,* 290)

In Rimbaud, Spicer found a collaborator who would posthumously contribute to his own reconstruction. In the sense that a dead letter officer is one who "authorizes" dead letters by officially registering them as correspondence, Rimbaud's own life work seems to register Spicer's intervention across time in much the same way as, as Spicer argued, Jim Alexander's "Jack Rabbit Poem" prefigured the whole of *Heads of the Town up to the Aether*. If he believed that there was some mystical connection between Jim and Rimbaud, Spicer realized that connection by making the two men correspondent, placing each in the same position with regard to his "letters." Thus Spicer takes the concept of connection and reopens it according to the logic of correspondence, wherein once Rimbaud makes his

transgressive entry into the geography of Spicer and Jim, the space between the two men becomes an other space where the dead letters will have arrived. In "The Muses Count," Spicer reminds us of the vastness of that space and all the possibilities it can contain:

> There is left a universe of letters and numbers and what I have told you. For Jim. (*MV,* 291)

"What I have told you" is just as much in play, as open, as the entire field of the "universe and letters and numbers" that Spicer's challenge to authorship has freed into the heterotopic space of language that his assemblage acknowledges. "What we have said, or sung, or tearfully remembered," the poets tells us in "The Hunting of the Snark," "can disappear into the waiting fire" (*MV,* 296). This fire doesn't appear threatening, a catastrophe lying in wait to devour a carefully authored poetic construction. Rather, it is a feature of the event, the refusal of completion that opens "where we are." And we are "brave, as we disappear into the clearing" (ibid.) of Rimbaud freed from biography, language freed from names.

In *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune*, Kristin Ross observes that in his own work, Rimbaud operated "simultaneously *above* and *below* the French language" in forms that "demonstrate language threatening to move beyond language … forms in which acts are linked to enunciation by a social or collective obligation" (133). As a dead letter officer, what Rimbaud authorizes in Spicer's geography is the possibility for creating a universe where his work goes on and continues, as work, in the present. Rimbaud is able to facilitate Spicer's heterotopic textual space since he had already constructed, earlier, "the real and imaginary displacements authorized by a cultural space that enables passages, meeting places," correspondences that now will have been (124). From the past, Rimbaud authorizes his own "antiautobiographal epic" (101) in the present—his future—where, through Spicer's joining it in language, the destroyed fact of what will have been a singular Rimbaud appears. Spicer neither completes nor corrects this process but instead allows the it

to designate its spatial dimension by textualizing its relations in material language: "When you heard and remembered other people's putting to the question" (*MV,* 290). "This kind of relation is certainly not the static, familial one of identification," Ross writes (*Emergence of Social Space,* 67), where Rimbaud and Jim are the same "singular obsessive figure" against whose surface Spicer attempts to force himself, disguised—like Red Riding Hood's wolf—in language. It is, instead, a passage through identifications that is not unlike what one would undertake as one travels through the city, always having begun, but knowing that each meeting might yield a different correspondence. Passages through this space produce literary facts subject to authorship in difference. Ross explains: "There is no I-Rimbaud who suddenly hallucinates an identity with various marginal characters; instead there is something like a Rimbaud-subject who passes through a series of affective states and who identifies the proper names of history—and later geography—to these states" (66). In "Who Are You," hearing "other people's putting to the question" produces answers that are themselves passages, affective states, multiplied pronouns—the poetics of assembling Rimbaud under the sign of the dead letter:

> What has four legs, three feet, and seldom talks to anyone?
> A corpse.
>
> What is seen in the distance when the murmurings of some defeated ideas, or lives, or even dreams are suddenly manifest?
> A ghost.
>
> What lives forever, has three knots in its rainbow, stores up passion like a squirrel stores up food for the winter, is disengaged from everything worthless, does not even sense the dreamings of poets or notice the river.
> They.
>
> Notice the last lack of questionmark, notice the toss of the last question
> A defeat. (*MV,* 292)

Rimbaud's antiautobiograhical transgression took the form of a crowd, a city of Rimbaud-subjects who worked at "the dismantling and remapping of social and physical

space," the "confounding and horizontalizing of hierarchies" (Eagleton, foreword, x). This was a social poetics related to the textualized modality of the Paris Commune, which, according to Terry Eagleton in his foreword to Ross's text,

> Forms the substance of much of Rimbaud's work, not as content or explicit reference, but as tumult, transgression, mobility, hyperbole, leveling, hypersensoriness, iconoclasm. Political history inscribes itself in the very force fields of his texts, between the lines and within the rhythms, in the whole kind of astonishing practice they are, rather than as some empirical background against which they can be measured. (x)

Rimbaud took the Commune, divested its references of their referentiality, and transformed it into a poetics of practicing social space. I want to avoid reducing Spicer's involvement with Rimbaud to the former's "obsession" with Jim as some kind of mystical reincarnation of the latter. Love, for Spicer, was a social act that contoured geography and was, as such, inescapably historic as it absorbed the ongoing act of transforming references into relations that led, through Rimbaud, from past, to present, to future. "Sentiment is not to the point," Spicer writes in "The Dead Letter Office": "A dead letter is there because it has no longer real addresses" (*MV,* 293). Spicer's heterotopias are the "astonishing practice" rather than the "empirical background": the time-space of the dead letter that has no "real addresses." Ross identifies this space as "a positive social void, the refusal of the dominant organization of social space" (*Emergence of Social Space*, 39) where "'Cherche!', the only sound in the poem"—the sound of a finger pointing—transforms the space of the poem from a "static reality" or identification to an "active, generative" other space constructed through "interaction, as something that our bodies reactivate, and through this reactivation, in turn modifies and transforms us" (35). Therefore, as Spicer has it, "a dead letter is exactly as if someone had received it" (*MV*, 293) in this structure; it is the structure that is "other."

"Let us receive all the influx of vigor and real tenderness," Rimbaud wrote in *Une Saison en enfer*, "and, at dawn, armed with an ardent patience, we will enter into splendid

cities" (Ross, *Emergence of Social Space*, 40–41). The affective simultaneities that Rimbaud presents here—an influx of tenderness, ardent patience—seem to describe also the attitude with which Spicer treats the at once visible and invisible Rimbaud who appears in his text. Spicer brings Rimbaud into the "splendid cities" of what his poetry will have been during the time in which he builds the cities themselves around the absence of Rimbaud, as Rimbaud. According to Spicer's poetics of dead letters, affect is a constructive fact, a structural feature that is "not sentiment but affect that takes a projectile form" (54). As a compositional principle of textual geography, then, affect is an always incomplete fact, a figuration launched into negativity like a letter and thrusting language into the realm of what will have been received. If it is not received, it will arrive at the dead letter office, authorized by an other as an other kind of dispatch, a correspondence that never closes into direct connection. Ross notes that absence stands out among the "striking features" of Rimbaud's work: "it does not possess the structures that allow for nostalgia" (103). Like Spicer's work, Rimbaud's poems incorporate the future as a dimension of poetic space, so that it would seem as if his work authorizes, from the past, Spicer's future assemblage of him as a continuation of that work. Spicer and Rimbaud, to the extent that it is possible for "I" to be Spicer and "Rimbaud" to be Rimbaud, discuss the space, the assemblage, and their complicity in the act that edges authorship away in "Where and What":

> "Why did you throw it?" I asked.
> "I threw it on the ground," Rimbaud said.
> "What is the reason for this novel? Why does it go on so long? Why doesn't it give me even a lover?"
> "On the page," Rimbaud said.
> "Who is fighting? What is this war that seems to go on through history?"
> "On the battlefields," and it was a little ghost that said this that had edged Rimbaud away for a minute.
> "Why is the river?"
> "I is the river." (*MV*, 295)

As in so much of Rimbaud's work, the "immediate effect of the verb is a crowd effect, the multiplication of voices" (Ross, *Emergence of Social Space*, 105)—"I is the river"—that produces the space of the text, the page, as both "Where and What." This is a space that is inhospitable to "obsessive singularity," a heterotopia that beckons not to Rimbaud himself as an exact figure, but as a kind of knowledge "that allows social relations to prevail" (90) because they are never concluded or instrumentalized. In the string of questions, "Rimbaud" and the "I" become confused voices of the crowd until it seems that Spicer may be asking Rimbaud why Jim has not appeared in the space they have opened. Why can they not authorize Jim? It is the diamond which *is* asked: negativized as language, Rimbaud becomes the repetition in difference of the social relation of correspondence, a dead letter officer appearing and disappearing where monuments once stood.

With Ross, we can see how Rimbaud established this heterotopic textual space in opposition to the then-recent advent of academic geography and its construction of a "natural" landscape where "all alterity is absent" (*Emergence of Social Space*, 87). Rimbaud's texts had no stable quality *except* alterity, presented in the simultaneity of "two distinct spaces: the first governed by dimensional, metric division where material (people and things) is organized according to ready-made forms, and space is governed by optical perception and by gravity" (82); there is also the "alternative space of flight as the space of affect and of possible (latent) event: the exchanged glance … a space of intensities, noises, laughter, music, and connivance—tactile and sonorous qualities" (ibid.). Simultaneously above and below these realms, Spicer establishes a third space that captures this alterity and recapitulates it in material language as the event of Rimbaud. The natural—in this case, biological—fact of Rimbaud is pulled into the assemblage as the very gulf that both enables and necessitates projectile affects, negative because Rimbaud is a figure of language,

authorizing correspondence in his refusal to become vocabulary. To emphasize the

negativity common to the gulf and to the language that assembles Rimbaud, Spicer offers

"Plato's Marmalade":

> I can't take the inferior while the superior is there. I, the author of the novel, the dupe—the danger any reader takes reading these words.
>
> After the breath stops, the words listen. To each other? To the song of each idea (whatever that means) that they are bound to? To something's heart?
>
> A metaphor is something unexplained—like a place in a map that says after this is desert. A shorthand to admit the unknown.
>
> A is a blank piece of driftwood being busted. E is a carpenter whose pockets are filled with saws, and shadows, and needles. I is a pun. O is an Egyptian tapestry remembering the glories of an unknown alien. U is the reverse of W. They are not vowels.
>
> When he said it first, he created the world. (*MV,* 294)

Spicer's "I" is the danger that the reader takes, not necessarily the author of the novel or the

dupe—or is the novel the dupe?—but it *is* a pun. All of the letters are metaphors when they

take "is" as their verb; this is how the basic units of language transform from being what we

thought they were—vowels—into "a place on a map that says after this is desert." "After the

breath stops," the words go on, listening, into that place created by Rimbaud's having said

"it." Ross, like Spicer, searches Rimbaud for an otherness beyond biology, biography,

landscape, or fact:

> Yet the scope and manner of the mind's attention, or of the body's capacity for sensation, are social facts—and it is precisely the blindness and dullness peculiar to social relations in market society that enable us to deny the social and allow it to be subsumed in the biological. To that blindness, that dullness that is the "human"… Rimbaud responds with the more-than-human ("All the forms of love, of suffering, of madness"), the transformed utopian body of infinite sensation and libidinal possibility as figure for the perfected community, for associative or collective life. (*Emergence of Social Space*, 120–21)

Spicer receives Rimbaud as a heterotopian figure for the disclosed community, where

otherness is not transformed into a kind of perfection but is instead taken up as the

incomplete language whose transgression and fissures yield the textual city. The "I" that passes through metaphor to become a pun is an "I" whose biology is subject to the infinite associations of the correspondence.

 Spicer's re-created Rimbaud situates the poet in a geography of correspondence where language reflects "a division of where one is" (Davidson, "Incarnations," 115). It is a place where language does not contain reality or history by fixing figures and spaces within predetermined boundaries; instead, in this geography, language is that which has always yet to come into its full meaning and so constantly disrupts the textual surface of "Rimbaud." The result is not a history continuous with established maps but a series of disclosures that create a world by "changing the way we can 'say' anything" (124). In a sense, what we can say—and how we can say it—after Rimbaud is always faulted, both broken and wrong, the obtaining condition of the dead letter or of Spicer's "outside" as described by Blaser: "A world and a cosmology without an image. It is unknown and entering the time of language again" ("Outside," 121). Such a "division of where one is" is the oscillation of visibility and invisibility that cannot be mapped and must, like the city, "be lived in—and at the risk of never emerging" (Gizzi, *House That Jack Built*, 182). The final chapters of "A Fake Novel" are "Certain Seals Are Broken" and "A Piece of Marble." These "certain seals" might be the guarantees of language, which include "love" and "Jim":

> The second seal is love. It has not been known to include the neighboring countries…
> The fourth seal is Jim. A private image. A poet demanding privacy in his poem is like a river and a bank unable to move against each other." (*MV,* 297–98)

The passive voice of the title opens onto a poem with no speaking subject, only a series of broken seals that lead back to:

> Rimbaud. A cry in the night. An offer. What the words choose to say. An offer of something. A peace. (*MV,* 298)

"A peace" becomes "A Piece of Marble" in the poem that immediately follows, an object defined by its faults. Now, "Rimbaud is 106 years old. Meanwhile, everything is going on. A style creates its own context as a river has eels in it" or a piece of marble has channels, faults that run through it (ibid.):

> A piece of marble got lost when they were digging the quarry. His face when he was 86 years old or 104. The mystery of why there is a beauty left in any of us. Human beauty. In marble or in age.
>
> These mysteries are real mysteries. It is I that proclaim these mysteries. Playing leapfrog with the unknown. With the dead. It is I that proclaim this history.
>
> Look at the statues disappearing into the distance. They have space to disappear. Rub your eyes to see them. It is a strategy where we miss what we hit.
>
> I mean that the reader of this novel is a ghost. Involved. Involved in the lives of Rimbaud. (Ibid.)

"I" reappears after its disappearance in the preceding poem as seemingly coherent, a proclaiming voice. But the pointing finger that sounds in the poem tells us to look at the new space in which, after having passed through "A Fake Novel," "I" exists. This is a space where statues—authors—disappear and where they go, the reader must go too because that is how "I" now means. Faulted, statues are both more than and *no more than* a piece of marble, materializations of these broken seals. Spicer meant for the danger and the risk of "being involved in the lives of Rimbaud" to be real, so that to write poetry was to love Jim or to post the letter that would never reach its addressee except as faulted and authorized from elsewhere or to enter into the gulf, the correspondence, the disclosure from which one might never emerge.

Part Three: *A world like that would be worth fighting for, a world that had no maps.*

I. Tradition

Spicer "staked everything on the radical sufficiency of poetic language to create a world," (Davidson, *San Francisco Renaissance,* 171). But what results is more than just the

poetics of a failed utopia; rather, Spicer's great risk includes failure in the structures of misrecognition that give the correspondence its agency as "fact." Failure is what enables the facts to converge in a poem that has fallen back from language "into a universe of relativity and change" (Foster, *Jack Spicer*, 36). Having brought forth and put to question first Creeley and then Rimbaud in the first two sections of *Heads of the Town up to the Aether*, Spicer recasts tradition in "A Textbook to Poetry." Tradition is now the passing down of language through structures of misrecognition to make literary facts. "Textbook" is in this sense the "book of the text," where "text" stands in for "Jim," "Creeley," or "Rimbaud" and Spicer "translates his own poetic practice" into the unmapped field of total language (Gizzi, *House That Jack Built*, 177). Pulling tradition into the gulf of the correspondence, Spicer's "Textbook" severs the referential connection between language and content and hence between author and context. Confronted with its own negative poetics, poetry as a form is unmoored by language from its origins in the image, vision, or intention.

"Now the things that are for Jim are coming to an end," Spicer writes in the last section of *Heads of the Town up to the Aether*, "I see nothing beyond it" (*MV*, 313). A friend later mused that Spicer "had expended everything in *Heads of the Town*. A lot of sorrow in it, and part of the fright in it, is waiting for it to come" (Killian and Ellingham, *Poet Be Like God*, 206). But although Spicer claims to see "nothing beyond it," these are not the concluding words of the book. The "things that are for Jim" mark the place on the map where the unmapped begins, not a "no-place" but an other place of pure language:

> […] Like a false nose where a real nose is lacking. Faceless people.
>
> The real sound of the dead. A blowing of trumpets proclaiming that they had been there and been alive. The silver voices of them.
>
> To be alive. Like the noises alive people wear. Like the word Jim, especially—more than the words. (*MV*, 313)

Between "Several Years' Love" and this final invocation of "Jim," Spicer has created a world made up of "more than the words," where the "nothing beyond" is five more lines and later, an "Epilog for Jim." This is a world without an image, a world without maps, a geography of "increased textuality," the "total materialization of language" that is more than words (Killian and Ellingham, *Poet Be Like God*, 326). Spicer's is a difficult world to see, since it appears and disappears as a language faulted by the channels of correspondence that run through it. Without an overtly political agenda or orientation to define it, Spicer's world constantly slips from view into negativity, but to be within this and to undertake the risk of moving through such geography is to live in a way that is true to poetry. To Spicer, living truthfully with respect to poetry was a kind of politics of continuing and impossible recognition, the creation of a community defined by common space and the act of love by which humans correspond through and across that space. Thus the failure of language is a fact that gains value as Spicer's "response to the belief in the power of language which other San Francisco poets took for granted" (Foster, *Jack Spicer*, 35). To be willing to follow language into negativity is to enter the correspondence and with it, a more overtly political geography, for, as Blaser writes, "disbelief and invisibility are as real to experience as belief and visibility. They are technical issues of our method of moving along. The increasing invisibility of where a man is brings forward every question of what is prior to him" ("Outside," 130). Submitting authorship to the negativity of correspondences and reassembling a world founded in that negativity re-opens tradition as well. If where we are is a division—a de-vision, not an image, an utterly textualized geography—how did we come to be situated there?

"A Textbook to Poetry" thus recasts tradition as Spicer has learned it, not from the actual Creeley or the actual Rimbaud, but from the poet's engagement with each

approximation in the foregoing text. Using the facts of his poetic genealogy, which include Orpheus's descent, Creeley's short poem, and Rimbaud's dead letters, Spicer transforms the concept of tradition by rebuilding it from misheard and misrecognized facts. He imagines negativity as poetic tradition and "Textbook" as the document of this tradition's pedagogy. According to Spicer, "Textbook" was "as near to dictation without interference from me as I have ever written" (Foster, *Jack Spicer*, 35). This document presents the kinds of facts that textbooks become when they are structured by misrecognition and postulates the tradition that might emerge from knowledge that is a series of correspondences. The first six poems in this section problematize tradition by setting it against the background of Spicer's world, embedding tradition in textual geography as a series of eruptions:

> […] To be lost in a crowd. Of images, of metaphors (whatever they were), of words; this is a better surrender. Of the poet who is lost in the crowd of them. Finally. (*MV,* 299)

> […] It is as if nothing in the world existed except metaphors—linkings between things. Or as if all our words without the things above them were meaningless. […](Ibid.)

> […] They go through life till the next morning. As we all do. But constantly. As if the shimmering before them were not hell but the reach of something.

> Teach. (*MV,* 300)

> Taught. As a wire which reaches. A silver wire which reaches from the end of the beautiful as if elsewhere. A metaphor. Metaphors are not for humans. […] (Ibid.)

> The motion of the afterlife. And you will think immediately of a photograph. The ghost of it defined as a blob of ectoplasm—an anti-image.

> […] An anti-image as if merely by being dead it could make the motions of what it was to be apparent. […] (*MV,* 301)

> […] They won't come through. Nothing comes through. The death

> Of every poem in every line

> The argument con-
>   tinues. (Ibid.)

The sentences that Spicer "teaches" or passes down *are* the division of where one is. Spicer situates this logic firmly inside the text, as a feature of its geography, thereby submitting the fact of tradition as the transmission of form to the same immanent disruptions of fact and authorship that structure the language-centered text. In this sense, Spicer performed textual tradition in his lectures as well, which were frequently less-than-coherent and structured by unanswered questions, digressions, garbled transmissions, and the poet's outright refusal to "fix" facts to a positive form of knowledge. Rather than giving his lectures value by proclaiming for himself "fame" or "virtu," Spicer ushered students and audiences into the "fuss and fury" of ardent descent into language itself. The attendant destruction of "the pieces of poetry or of this love" (*MV*, 306) in order to resituate tradition in a world without maps creates a "positive social void":

> Not as a gesture of contempt for the scattered nature of reality. Not because the pieces would not fit in time. But because this would be the only way to cause an alliance between the dead and the living. (Ibid.)

This alliance is an event because it happens in language, and is therefore also social; there is no tradition above language or silently flowing beneath it. Tradition emerges in the language that we use, in the event, in the disclosures that erupt and become form: "To mess around. To totally destroy the pieces. To build around them" (ibid.).

I would like to stop here and turn back for a moment to look at what is perhaps Spicer's most explicitly articulated political commitment in order to see how his opposition to instrumentalized language could inform his conception of tradition as a poetics of difference. In his later years, according to Blaser, Spicer often spoke of "the fix," his term for the systems—political, social, economic—that "stop us" by institutionalizing human relations and "fixing" them with reference to a dominant origin or outcome. Language, and

of course tradition, as systems, could also be subject to such fixing—"a fix of the language that is not true to its own structure and that tends to stop the real in something one can only refer to" (Blaser, "Outside," 124). Opposing "the fix" was thus a matter of form, and so the only social intervention possible was formal intervention; poetry could perform this intervention across an entire discursive surface as poetics, as what could finally reach the negativity of language and bring that negativity to bear across all the forms in the landscape. "The public, the political, the social are all forms of thought and experience," Blaser writes, "and according to Jack's argument, these forms must begin again because we are inside the death of these forms, the 'fix' of them" (130). Spicer opposed "political poetry" as such because the political fails in that "finally it inhabits the possible world exclusively" and becomes the structural death of poetry by keeping language separate from its own negativity (Riley, "Holy Grail," 182). At the same time, Spicer felt that what he called "the big lie of the personal" was also a fix, as perhaps his criticism of Ginsberg's use of love for self-elevation best showed. Love, and the personal, when leveraged into fame, becomes political in poetry as well—especially when it is put into the service of securing language from negativity rather than immersing us in our own "fuss and fury." Instead, Spicer called upon poetry "to speak the total language" (183) that interrupts form by opening it at each event, and so, were it to be comprehensibly political, poetry would be complicit in its own "fix," its estrangement from language. Nealon recognizes this as part of "a poetic program aimed at protecting poetry—from mass culture, from capital—and preserving its specificity, both as a historical relation to language and as a social practice" (*Matter of Capital*, 108). That is why poetry must always also be poetics, an event that interrupts narrative with its own counternarrative of emergence. Ultimately, poetics undermines the fix of master narratives and their illusory connection to origins, and here it does so as a matter of literary fact. A poetry simultaneous

with poetics must constantly refuse its genealogy by formalizing tradition as the ongoing construction of positive social voids within the tyranny of systems. Spicer wanted to enact the moments of creation of new worlds in poetry as a series of eruptions of language in textual geography. This is, as Gizzi notes, "a difficult if not desperate course through language, as it seeks to unseat the transmission of cultural codes through time," so that "the capacity of language to convey a coherent story is thwarted as an artificial system of sign-making which we must undo in order to expose the ultimate randomness of history, perception, or even the intimate ground of love" (*House That Jack Built*, 216–17).

Literary or poetic tradition, as Spicer saw it, was yet another "fix," a form in whose death political poetry ever more completely traps us. Spicer envisioned tradition as a poetic practice in which the disclosures necessary for creating a world bore language—always in front of us—into the forms that carry into the future what tradition will have been. Spicer wrote to Lorca:

> The fools that read these letters will think by this we mean what tradition seems to have meant lately—an historical patchwork (whether made up of Elizabethan quotations, guide books of the poet's hometown, or obscure bits of magic published by Pantheon) which is used to cover up the nakedness of the bare word. Tradition means much more than that. It means generations of different poets in different countries patiently telling the same story, writing the same poem, gaining and losing something with each transformation – but, of course, never really losing anything. This has nothing to do with calmness, classicism, temperament, or anything else. Invention is merely the enemy of poetry.
>
> See how weak prose is. I invent a word like invention. These paragraphs could be translated, transformed by a chain of fifty poets in fifty languages, and they still would be temporary, untrue, unable to yield the substance of a single image. Prose invents—poetry discloses. (*MV,* 110–11)

Spicer's description of tradition is a narrative of "the fix," of the death of forms. Tradition, Spicer suggests, should not come before poetry. It is, as he writes in "A Fake Novel," "the way that man faces the real that is always going past him" (*MV,* 289). When Spicer states "tradition means much more than that," he is not offering a corrective, or a vision of what

tradition should be. He is recognizing the enormous scope of the fix and how dead forms have managed to redefine "invention." Catherine Imbroglio calls this the "principal Orphic paradox" in Spicer's work: "that it is through language that we represent the way the world eludes us in language" ("Impossible Audiences," 121). I would add that Spicer's conception of tradition itself evolved between the time of *After Lorca* and *Heads of the Town up to the Aether* to re-incorporate "really losing anything" into the poetic disclosure, so that tradition can be found (in both senses) in the "temporary, untrue, [and] unable to yield the substance of a single image." At the end of *Heads*, in "Textbook," tradition *is* the making. Instead of the "chain of poets," tradition as shackles, Spicer now sees

> Built of solid glass. The temple out there in the weeds and California wildflowers. Out of position. A place where we worship words.
>
> See through into like it is not possible with flesh only by beginning not to be a human being. Only by beginning not to be a soul.
>
> A sole worshipper. And the flesh is important as it rubs into itself your soleness. Or California. A division of where one is.
>
> Where one is is in a temple that sometimes makes us forget that we are in it. Where we are is in a sentence.
>
> Where we are this is idiocy. Where we are a block of solid glass blocks us from all we have dreamed of. But this place is not where we are we are to meet them. (*MV,* 305)

"We are to meet them" in language, which is not "where we are" unless we are in the fix; Spicer leaves us with only a named "place" where we are not, but this does not mean we are no place at all. We—tradition, poetic community—are in the event of "to meet them," a space of correspondence, constructed by language, where the poem "corresponds to reality" by way of "subversion, inversion, re-creation," enacting a tradition "in which maps of the impossible are finally possible" (Davidson, "Incarnations," 115).

Some critics have concluded that tradition was important to Spicer because, "in a crucial sense, this tradition constitutes the 'outside' that speaks to him" (Finkelstein, "Jack Spicer's Ghosts," 87). This view assumes, however, that Spicer merely sought to take part in the pre-existing structures of tradition, or perhaps to deform them without "ever really losing anything." It is a neat way to resolve Spicer's devotion to ghosts like Lorca, his commitment to dictation as a poetic principle, and his apparent rejection of a politics. Yet this is in a very real way "fixing" Spicer, and, as a text, *Heads of the Town up to the Aether* argues vehemently against it. The gulf of love, the posting of the dead letter, and the event of knowledge work together to usher forth the dis-closed literary fact at the center of Spicer's poetics that destabilizes the ground of tradition in which analyses like the above seek to definitively place him. Critics like Damon find readings of Spicer that cast "outside" as a kind of "violent self-abnegation in the service of language" to be "problematic and ahistorical" ("Ghost Forms," 147–48). Recently, Imbroglio has followed Damon's earlier work on Spicer to assert camp as a viable and equally destabilizing strategy for "counteracting some of the poetry's disabling mechanisms" ("Impossible Audiences," 99) without submitting Spicer to yet another critical "fix." Imbroglio identifies "impossible audiences," a kind of Orphic-inflected "outside"—Spicer's texts go to it, and then come back from it—that refuse definition except as absence and thus, like Rimbaud, may only produce "freakish noises" in response (107). Camp, in this sense, acts within the tyranny of systems as an agent of negativity and "incessant rearticulation" (102). "We might say," Imbroglio concludes, "that Spicer's camp gestures, like his Martians and his radio waves (both of which can be read as important elements of Spicer's camp), function as an invasion, hollowing out, *and* rehabilitation of nearby animating discourses; reciprocally, camp gestures are invaded, re-inhabited, and rehabilitated by those same discourses" (114).

I want to turn now to Jurij Tynjanov's "On Literary Evolution" in order to examine the implications for form and systems that arise from Spicer's ontology of absence: "The main concept for literary evolution is the *mutation* of systems, and thus the problem of 'traditions' is transferred onto another plane" (67). Tradition, Tynjanov argues, needs to be situated within the evolution of systems, not as the governing principle of that evolution. For him, it is a question of priority, as it seems also to be for Spicer; if language is always in front of us, we must agree "that evolution is the change in interrelationships between the elements of a system—between functions and formal elements" that leaves us working from a negative space where these relations have not yet been fixed or determined (76). The problem of literary evolution is in fact "obscured" by what Tynjanov calls "traditionalism" (77), which Spicer knows as the death of forms and our fixed-ness within that death, the "beautiful" "perpetual motion machine" (Gizzi, *House That Jack Built*, 5), or "the fact that each literary movement in a given period seeks its supporting point in the preceding systems" (Tynjanov, "Literary Evolution," 77). The existence of the literary fact, the basic unit of poetics, "depends on its function" (69), the correspondence that activates relations: love, disclosure, or the dead letter. Spicer thus confounds traditionalism by constructing context heterotopically, since, according to Tynjanov: "What in one epoch would be a literary fact would in another be a common matter of social communication, and vice versa, depending on the whole literary system in which the given fact appears" (ibid.). Spicer piles epoch upon epoch in an attempt to free language from a given literary system, that which names it, into its own geography. Rimbaud, for example, freed into language, becomes a function—the dead letter officer, or, later, "we are to meet them"—and, in turn, "a function seeks its own form" (71).

Furthermore, this function, like Spicer's correspondence, is language in its most fully social aspect, the difference at the center of literary facts. "Social conventions are correlated with literature first of all in its verbal aspect," Tynjanov writes: "This interrelationship is realized through language. That is, literature in relation to social convention has a verbal function" (73). So we come back to the "fuss and fury about each other" as a way to put language ahead, prior to form:

> The city redefined becomes a church. A movement of poetry. Not merely a system of belief but their beliefs and their hearts living together.
>
> They are angry at their differences—the dead and the living, the ghosts and the angels, the green parrot and the dog I have just invented. All things that use separate words. They want to inhabit the city.
>
> But the city in that sense is as far from me (and the things that speak through me) as Dante was from Florence. Farther. For it is a city that I do not remember.
>
> But the city that we create in our bartalk or in our fuss and fury at each other is in an utterly mixed and mirrored way an image of the city. A return from exile. (*MV,* 306)

The image returns from exile enlivened by language, freed from instrumentalization. Spicer used the principle of dictation eliminate "intention" from language so that the social is immanent in the text, not fixed or superimposed as a system upon it.[39] That way, language could truly be said to seek its own form. Tynjanov calls this the "orientation" of the literary work, "its verbal function, its interrelationship with social conventions" ("Literary Evolution," 74) once intention has been eliminated, cancelled by the dead letter officer and released into the common space of what will have arrived. So, then:

> To create the beautiful again. It is as if somehow the lovers of postage stamps had created an image of themselves. A red wheelbarrow or a blue image of the unknown. And each stamp we put on the letters they send us must be cancelled, heartlessly. As if its delivery, the beautiful image of it, were a metaphor. (*MV,* 310)

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[39] Thus, Tynjanov writes: "Investigation must go from constructive function to literary function; from literary function to verbal function" (77).

A work's orientation may suggest a "sequence of substitutions" (Tynjanov, "Literary Evolution," 77) in place of authorship. Transferred to the level of tradition, orientation is the verbal function writ large, language in use by poets seeking its own history. On both levels, "the poet is virtually effaced" by language as tradition is effaced by the eruption of literary facts across its surface (Gizzi, *House That Jack Built*, 177). Thus, in the end, despite the poet's having constructed his city, having built an entire universe, in Spicer's schema the poet finds himself alone, that is, in the negativity outside the fixed system:

> We are all alone and we do not need poetry to tell us how alone we are. Time's winged chariot is as near as the next landmark or busstation. We need a lamp (a lump, spoken or unspoken) that is even about love. (*MV*, 311)

Here, tradition—"time's winged chariot" hurrying toward us from Andrew Marvell—enters into the space of the correspondence, as near to us in this geography as "the next landmark or busstation," submerged in the negative poetics of a language prior to history. But "spoken or unspoken," lamp or lump, it is easy to sink into the negativity of this language and lose our definitions, in this case, "about love." Our willing effacement is how alone we are.

Crucially, Tynjanov takes up an example from linguistics to clarify what he means by function, the element in poetics that produces the literary fact. Spicer's background as a professional linguist influenced his work in a number of ways, and in Tynjanov's statement we can see the principle at the center of Spicer's concern with language: "When the referential meaning of a word is effaced, that word becomes the expression of a relationship, a connection, and thus it becomes an auxiliary word. In other words, its function changes" ("Literary Evolution," 69). Spicer replaces Tynjanov's "connection" with "correspondence," but otherwise there is here a clear explanation of the process by which words ("names") become functions in Spicer's poetry until language is the form that language finds or takes. Love is the definitive example in Spicer's poetics, since this was the word whose effaced

referentiality transformed Tynanov's connection into Spicer's correspondence while also effacing both author and beloved as it took on its structural or geographic function. Just past the halfway point of "Textbook," Spicer denarrativizes connection thoroughly and permanently by dissolving the referential meaning of love while at the same time enacting the division of where one is that is love's textual function:

> —A human love object is untrue.
> Screw you.
>
> —A divine love object is unfair
> Define the air
> It walks in
>
> The old human argument goes on with the rhymes to show that it still goes on. A stiffening in time as puns are a stiffening in meaning.
>
> The old human argument that goes ahead with our clothes off or our clothes on. Even when we are talking of ghosts.
>
> —A human love object is untrue.
> Screw you.
>
> —A divine love object is unfair
> Define the air
> It walks in.

Imagine this as lyric poetry. (*MV,* 307)

Negative correspondence has so completely taken over Spicer's form that at this point he needs to remind us to "imagine this as lyric poetry," like, "imagine that this is the I that is no longer possible, and look what language has done to it, look what love can do when it is freed from its name into the sentence where we are." Spicer and Tynjanov have in common the study of structuralist linguistics; but though there is, in Spicer's poetics, a structuralist

account of language working differentially, Spicer's literary fact is not reducible to language.[40] It is, instead, on the way to a language that works as a new and as yet unrecognizable model for correspondence. The couplets above are the dialogue of the "argument," nominally rhymed and evocative of the opening couplets of "Several Years' Love" to "show that it still goes on." "It" is both love and the argument; in *this* lyric poetry, the two are never assimilated into a coherent voice but serve instead to increase the textuality that intrudes on the development of whatever understanding there will have been. The rhymes that hang onto tradition—even to the tradition begun at the start of *Heads* and continuing through to here—stiffen the poem's space until they become the markers of where we lose the traditional lyric to language. The rhymes connect back to everything that no longer exists— language that is context but not reference, correspondence without transparency, an "above" or "below" that we can recognize.

What, then, is the function that makes "A Textbook to Poetry" itself a literary fact? "Textbook" enacts the transmission of knowledge as disclosure at the level of disclosure as a challenge to tradition, thereby undermining the "traditional" function of the textbook. But what is the specific intervention that this disrupted, negativized textbook wants to make in its own social context and circumstances? Or, as Tynjanov might put it, what is "Textbook" in relationship to social conventions as a literary work? "How is a contestatory text transmitted?" asks Ross (*Emergence of Social Space*, 152). Spicer's textbook envisions impossible readers, those who will have read his transmissions in the space of the dead letter; his task was to figure a way to teach or document language that is always in the event of making, to test his vision of tradition against the world in order to determine its truth value. Spicer

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[40] Foster notes: "As a linguist, Spicer had to confront the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis—the contention that language may be its own coherence rather than a system referring to a 'real' world" (*Jack Spicer*, 21–22).

wanted to teach "not so much the inheritance of a 'thing' or an artistic monument as the embracing of a situation, a posture in the world: the conditions for community, the invention or dream of new social relations" (ibid.). Spicer is fighting for a world that has no maps, teaching toward the discovery of literary facts in heterotypic textual landscapes: "What is transmitted is not a solitary, reified literary monument but rather the often prescient strategies that constructed and mobilized it, and, what is more, prevented its own monumentalization" (ibid.). From the beginning, Spicer literalizes construction as a way to prevent monuments, noting, in "Homage to Creeley," "stepping up to poetry demands hands." If we follow "hands" through *Heads of the Town up to the Aether*, we can see how "hands" are emblematic of the social reality that remains within poetry, as language, blocking the commodity production of poetic knowledge. "(What a century for hands!)," Rimbaud wrote: "I'll never learn to use my hands" (Ross, *Emergence of Social Space*, 20). Hands are both what we build with and what we hold with—and, as for Rimbaud, failure to connect as a kind of agency—"a pathology," Spicer writes in "Textbook," that "leads to new paths and pathfinding. All the way down past the future" (*MV*, 309):

> Hold to the future. With firm hands. The future of each afterlife, of each ghost, of each word that is about to be mentioned." (Ibid.)

Hands build poetry as language builds its own history, but our "pathology"—our clinging to the future of the dead letter, our fall into the negativity of language—fortunately prevents the institutionalization of poetry or the collapse of tradition into commodity culture. Thus, as Rimbaud noted in 1871, "the inventions of the unknown demand new forms" (Ross, *Emergence of Social Space*, 21), and this demand demonstrates pathology's agency.

"Textbook" hands down knowledge by disclosing the "pathology" of difference, of negativity in relation to social conventions. That language should have a pathological relationship to social conventions reflects Spicer's historical context, where the creation of

"countercommunities of difference during an era in which difference carried little of the cultural cachet that is has today" was a matter of survival (Davidson, *Guys Like Us*, 59). Spicer did not idealize difference in his poetics, but instead took up its pathological associations and returned them to language as the constructive principles by which his created world would resist monumentalization and his language instrumentalization. If it is true that "a work is correlated with a particular literary system depending on its deviation, its 'difference' as compared with the literary system with which it is confronted" (Tynjanov, "Literary Evolution," 77), then as a fact, "Textbook" took up its own correlation to the tradition of textbooks *as* its teaching. "A Textbook to Poetry" is a literary fact of tradition in difference, where the effaced element—in this case, literary history—becomes the function through which the text finds its form. Not transmitting tradition *is* the form of the text. In this way, writes Tynjanov, "the prime significance of major social factors is not at all discarded" (ibid.), and Spicer's shift of tradition to the level of total language is not indicative of an asocial formalism or dense, insular trickery that refuses political commitment with a hipper-than-thou eyeroll. Rather, the problem of tradition helps to more fully elucidate the interrelationship between history and language that is social textuality: "This is in contrast to the establishment of the direct 'influence' of major social factors, which replaces the study of *evolution* of literature with the study of the *modification* of literary works—that is to say, their deformation" (ibid.). Rather than simply deform or transform the existing textual landscape, Spicer enacts the tradition of creating a new geography, an entire universe waiting to be mapped:

> *27.*
>
> What I am, I want, asks everything of everyone, is by degrees a ghost. Steps down to the first metaphor they invented in the underworld (pure and clear like a river) the in-sight. As a place to step further.

It was the first metaphor they invented when they were too tired to invent a universe. The steps. The way down. The source of a river.

The dead are not like the past. Do not like the passed. Hold to their fingers by their thumbs. A gesture at once forgiving and forgotten.

The eye in the weeds (I am, I was, I will be, I am not). The eyes the ghosts have seeing. Our eyes. A trial of strength between what they believe and we.   (*MV,* 312)

28.

We do not hate the human beings that listen to it, read it, make comments on it. They are like you. It is as if they or you observed one continual moment of surf breaking against the rocks. A textbook of poetry is created to explain. We do not hate the human beings that listen to it, the moment of surf breaking.

It is fake. The real poetry is beyond us, beyond them, breaking like glue. And the rocks were not there and the real birds, they seemed like seagulls, were nesting on the real rocks. Close to the edge. The ocean (the habit of seeing) Christ, the Logos unbelieved in, where the real edge of it is.

A private language. Carried about us, them. Ununderstanding. (*MV,* 313)

"The real edge of it" is the serious and ongoing entanglement of the real with negativity, borne by language, which entanglement Spicer calls love. Love is thus both the space of this complication, the event of it, and the unmapped future of his as-yet-unreceived and always "ununderstood" poems.

Spicer considered this edge a specific geography in correspondence with the real city that surrounded him. According to Blaser: "San Francisco is an odd place. With all the beauty and the comfort of its landscape, it is the end of the land. It seems to be at the edge of something, a gated place, an end which opens again. And so one finds it in Jack's poems where the imagery of the sea carries an openness, strangeness and endlessness. The edge becomes a literal quality of his work" ("Outside," 128). To come to this edge is to approach the total materialization of a world in language, governed by the formal logic of the correspondence, the dead letter, and the disclosure, the negative forms that love's function

finds. This new universe is a "vulnerable terrain" (Finkelstein, "Jack Spicer's Ghosts," 98) where past, present, and future are simultaneous and what results is, as Blaser puts it, "almost a total *divestment* of the memory of words" ("Outside," 126): "(I am, I was, I will be, I am not)" (*MV*, 312). The danger, of course, is that our lives take place in language, join with and depart from others' lives there, in its common space, and we want to cling to the memory of words as a way to orient ourselves. And while Spicer's tradition is also founded in such a divestment, there is always in Spicer's work a movement "toward the imagination of that city, which remains where he left it, only a possibility, [which] is also an *investment* of words" (Blaser, "Outside," 126). To "lay claim to the future" in this way, one must "go beyond the immediate" territory to the edge (Finklestein, "Jack Spicer's Ghosts," 99), and then past it, following the language that is always in front of us, calling into question the systems and structures that had appeared to be *before* us all along. The city that we create in our bartalk is always what will have been founded in the incomplete transmissions of our fuss and fury about each other. As a poetics, the entanglement with negativity—what Blaser calls "the disappearance of manhood" ("Outside," 160)—appears in the dead letters of unfinished forms that we imagine as lyric poetry: "The basic question—who is speaking?— turns of the gossip, the baseball forecasts and the meannesses"—our fuss and fury about each other—"turns into a world" (ibid.).

II. Imagine This as Love Poetry

"Love must only be applied at the wrong time and in the wrong place," Spicer wrote in an early poem (*MV*, 76). His divestment of the memory of the word love allowed its name to be effaced so that love could function in the geography of the poem as the disruption that "keeps us going on and failing and starting again and failing again" (Riley, "Holy Grail," 188). Love is the correspondence as event; love seeks its form as the "very

notion of not-stopping" (ibid.), that which powers Spicer's use of the correspondence, the dead letter, and the poetics of disclosure. The distances opened by love—the gulfs, the channels, the abysses—allow language to become a world by giving a geography to its negativity that is not predetermined but arises, as an event, out of the relation. It is this distance, "impossible to be measured or walked over," "which explains poetry" (*MV,* 384). Love is, as correspondence, "a commotion of the real" (Blaser, "Outside," 156); as dead letter, love "includes an anticipation of 'something that is still absent'" (ibid.). Finally, as disclosure, love is an "information of the real, and an enlargement that has political consequences" (ibid.). As a literary fact, *Heads of the Town up to the Aether* is a book that claims a future for difference by creating a world where love supplants maps, and in which we orient ourselves not in reference to context but in relation to an immediate and ongoing community. This is a community that begins in personal love—Spicer's love for Jim—and then becomes a heterotopia extending back to Rimbaud and forward through the knowledge of the textbook. This is a poetics of misrecognition that gives agency to Lacan's "radical heteronomy… gaping within man" so that it appears as a space that language prevents reaching the heart of (Renov, *Subject of Documentary*, 105). "At the cost of these contradictions and evasions," writes Nancy, "love consistently finds the place that it cannot not have, but it only finds it at this cost. What we would have to understand is why this place is essential for it, and why it is essential to pay this price" (*Inoperative Community*, 86). In the end, Spicer couldn't live in such a space, but he believed that he had created it and that it would continue as the ultimate transformation of tradition without authorship, where the poet is not.

CHAPTER 4.

Documenting Disappearance:
Exhibition and Community in the Photography of Nan Goldin[41]

> Love cuts across finitude, always from the other to the other, which never returns to the same—and all loves, so humbly alike, are superbly singular. Love offers finitude in its truth; it is finitude's dazzling presentation. (This could be said in English: glamour, this fascination, this seducing splendor reserved today for the language of makeup and of the staging of faces. Glamour: love's preparation and promises.)
>
> Or perhaps love itself is eclipsed in this outburst, at once because it does not stop coming and going, never being simply present, and because it is always put into play farther off than everything that would have to qualify it (sublime love, tender love, foolish love, implacable love, pure love, abandoned love). Nietzsche's Zarathustra says: "Great loves do not want love—they want more."
>
>   – Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*

I. Exhibition: The Mirror and the Magic Lantern

A human form, pale and blurred, lies half-submerged in a tub of water. Eyes closed, hands semi-clasped, the arms disappearing into the murky water around the edge of the frame, this human subject barely registers the light and shadows reading on her skin. Centered in the frame, the subject's moment in the bathtub is bathed entirely in a dirty green light bleeding into the water in which her body lies. The only other color that registers is the near-death yellow of the subject's lips, nipples, and knuckles, the contours of her ears; we can know, somehow, from this that the water in the tub is lukewarm. But other than that, there is nothing to know about Nan Goldin's image of *Ryan in the tub, Provincetown, 1976* (fig. 3). We can barely tell if Ryan is female or male, nor can we decipher what comprises her surroundings other than the chipped enamel bathtub. We cannot know who Ryan is, what she does, and yet it is of fundamental importance that Goldin captures her as a semi-corpse, disappearing into the dim reaches of the water as her exhaustion dissolves into and infuses

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[41] A version of this chapter has been published as "*A Radiant Eye Yearns from Me*": Locating Documentary in the Photography of Nan Goldin." *Feminist Studies* 35, no. 2 (2009): 347–380.

the air of the frame. It is tempting to say that Ryan is sick because she appears pale, thin, discolored, and half-conscious. She may be. Her partial death in Goldin's 1976 photograph does not suggest, or deny, that Ryan is alive today; her very unlife suffuses every corner of the image, save, perhaps, for the bright spot of one tooth. "It's very important," writes Goldin, "for me to trace people's histories before I lose them" (*CL,* 57). Goldin's prescient photograph does not document the life of Ryan, yet somehow it spans and gives body to the history of Ryan. Extending into the future, the photograph, which tells us nothing about the individual it captures, is instead an image of the sadness, exhaustion, and gradual disappearance of an entire world.

As Goldin's work—especially when considered in the context of modernist strategies of representation—shows, however, disappearance is not so simple. The visibility of disappearance, of the disappeared, that Goldin's photographs capture is a way of knowing and an opening to history. Working in the tradition of Walter Benjamin, Eduardo Cadava writes that "history happens when something becomes present in passing away" (*Words of Light,* 128). Cadava poses what he understands to be the fundamental questions raised by Benjamin's lifelong engagement with history and its relation to the technology of photography: "How can an event that appears only in its disappearance leave something behind that opens a history? How can the photographed guard a trace of itself and inaugurate a history?" (ibid.). If, as Benjamin believed, "living life means leaving traces," we can see in the accumulation of each shutter click and reproduced negative an account, perhaps akin to Stein's differential repetitions in *The Making of Americans*, of those who have been in any given social-historical moment. As such, Goldin's chosen medium is not incidental to her project's meaning; her photographs convey not only the disappearance of her subjects but also the mode of disappearance that renders these subjects both social and

historical. Cadava warns against the risks of positivizing disappearance as representation, which would substitute a "correspondence theory of historical truth" (84)—wherein the representation would speak the truth of and for the disappeared subject—for a kind of knowledge that intervenes in historical narratives by disclosing the disappearances constitutive of them: "This image of the past—and of the irretrievable present it intends—may be 'fleeting' and 'flashing,' but is also susceptible to being held fast, even if what is seized is only the image in its disappearance" (ibid.). In Goldin's case, the image in its disappearance is especially susceptible to being held fast, and her work does not try to remedy this danger but instead incorporates the complication of the transitory and the eternal in public space into her strategy for making and representing history. Her work thus addresses both of Cadava's questions by creating a network of inaugural traces that cannot be reduced to a single subject or a single representation. At the intersection of individual and community, production and exhibition, documentary and snapshot, Goldin uses the material conditions and situations that form her social and historical context to make from the image a differential fact with specific political stakes.

Much as Stein used grammar to reprogram language so that it no longer supported the classification of facts into minoritizing and universalizing taxonomies, to use Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's formulation, so too Goldin reprograms vocabularies of representation and exhibition to disclose the instability of the facts images are deployed to secure. Goldin's exhibition strategies, which I will discuss throughout this chapter, can be understood not only as vehicles for presenting images, but also as openings and entrances into the history that the images document. In this sense we can, using Cadava as a guide, compare Goldin's photography—images together with their exhibition—to Benjamin's theses, each of which "condenses a network of relations into a frame whose borders remain permeable" and which

intervene formally "in the linearity of history and politics" (*Words of Light,* xx). While it would be rash to suggest that Goldin's photographs cannot (or should not) be viewed, read, or valued individually, considering the individual images as interlocked with the exhibitions to which they belong is a strategy for materially preventing the reduction of either element to a simple identification with author or subject matter. Goldin's project thus "take[s] up [the] question of difference at its source, at the level of the subject" (Renov, *Subject of Documentary*, 118), where "the subject" could be the artist, the audience, the material displayed, or the lives imaged. Goldin's images are constantly negotiating with other images as well as with the fact of being looked at by an audience; the exhibition exists by virtue of the singular images, yet for this reason it is also always incomplete. If Goldin has volunteered to be "our" mirror— as in what is perhaps the most well-known of her exhibitions, *I'll Be Your Mirror* (1996)— that's not a guarantee that the mirror will be whole. It may, like Stein's titular and deceptively identical *Making of Americans*, actually reflect us in fragments, refracted pieces that send us endlessly to another bit in search of our selves.

Nan Goldin began her career in the late 1960s, photographing a group of friends at the alternative high school she was then attending. In the 1970s, Goldin focused her camera on the queer and, specifically, transgendered friends who had by then become her family. A collection of images of her friends in drag shows provided the context that made these friends an entire world—a club, a book, and a space called "The Other Side." Settling in the East Village in the late 1970s, Goldin continued to photograph the everyday realities of her bohemian family, documenting with intimate intensity its history—both amazing and tragic—as it happened. These images became slideshows, filling Lower East Side punk clubs with the bright, if momentary, lights of the downtown "scene." The images come to us through the complicated history of Goldin's own abuse, addiction, and sadness, never

allowing us, as the Ryan photograph demonstrates, the relief of an easy separation between artist and subject, between personal and political, between audience and text. In "Nan Goldin: Bohemian Ballads," Chris Townsend notes how "this apparent reification of bohemian creativity and community, predicated on the authenticity of the work's contents and sentiments, has become the object of a particular critical program," and argues that he seeks to avoid the "eulogistic or demythifying" positions that such critiques tend toward by accepting "the authenticity of Goldin's images, to the extent that one cannot deny the fact of presence in the photographs" (103–4). The "fact of presence" itself, however, makes assumptions about both facts and presence as presentation, as well as completely ignoring the fact of absence that is so central to Goldin's work. This ultimately leads Townsend to read Goldin's images and exhibition strategy through a realist critical program that ultimately retreats into a similarly easy separation between content and form, and indeed, between "fact" and "presence."

Goldin's presence in New York was initially announced by the slideshows that she put together during the late 1970s and early 1980s, and which eventually came to be called *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*. "In its flexibility and historical contingency," Townsend notes, "the performance history of *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* might be understood as reflecting subcultural shifts, so that a performance history is also a history of performance" (104). Goldin's slideshows, depicting the lives of a very specific group of artists, became almost indistinguishable from the lives themselves, inaugurating a collective consciousness in the group they had formed. Goldin imaged this collective consciousness over the years that followed, photographing beauty, violence, addiction, hope, and—perhaps most movingly— the community's devastation by AIDS during the 1980s and 1990s. Townsend goes on to recount the history of *The Ballad* and its transformation from slideshow to book form: "In

1985 *The Ballad* appeared in book form, albeit, and of necessity, with significant differences from its performative mode. The publication contains 125 images in a sequence chosen by Goldin. In performance at this time, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* used about 700 slides and ran for forty-five minutes" (108). In so doing, however, Townsend makes of *The Ballad* a synecdoche for Goldin's body of work as a whole, treating the early work of the slideshows not as a differential and endlessly recapitulating exhibition strategy but as a way to more firmly categorize the content of Goldin's images as realist once and for all: "The public and transitory became established as private and extended" (109). Yet the "Satya School" (fig. 4) and "Dazzle Bag" (fig. 5) images, as Goldin calls the accumulated snapshots that make up her earliest work, appear in the opening pages of the print catalogue for *I'll Be Your Mirror* as a way to open the exhibition strategies present throughout Goldin's career to more differential readings. These collages are dense networks of relations and connections not only represented in but also created by the individual images' correspondences with one another. As proto-slideshows, the photographs of photographs on a wall produce an exhibition space whose constitutive images the audience and the photographer live among. These representations of the collective space in which the photographs happened—that is to say, were both made and exhibited—announce a way to know Goldin's work through our own ongoing series of entries into and exits out of the frame. These collages work within what Jacques Rancière, in *The Future of the Image*, calls the "inter-convertibility between two potentialities of the image: the image as raw, material presence and the images as discourse encoding a history" (11). Thus, Rancière argues, images need no longer be subordinate to history and that instead, "what succeeds histories, and the images that were subordinate to them, are forms" like the spaces that both the early collages and slideshows created (40).

Rancière calls the syntax that makes such spaces the "sentence-image" and then goes on to identify it with the cinematic montage (48).

Goldin's slideshows would follow from her initial exhibition strategy—tacking photographs to a wall—as a way to enact this syntax by subjecting audiences to the literal movement of the individual photograph, entrances and exits by way of light and darkness, what Rancière names the "double poetics of the image," which makes images "simultaneously or separately, two things: the legible testimony of a history written on faces or objects and pure blocs of visibility, impervious to any narrativization, any intersection of meaning" (11). I am arguing that Townsend's "either/or" critical program amounts to a reduction of this double poetics that Goldin's slideshows established as the mode for her ongoing work, to an essentially realist separation between history and image, public and private, performance and fact. Rancière advocates instead for "the seamless fabric of co-presence" that the syntax of the sentence-image affords—"the fabric that at once authorizes and erases all the seams; constructing the world of 'images' as a world of general co-belonging and inter-expression" (63). Goldin's way of exhibiting photographs retroactively transforms their taking—her finger clicking the shutter—into a collective action. In Goldin's "memory work," the "web of interconnections" (Renov, *Subject of Documentary*, 179) is thus not simply made visible; it is also made active. Rancière identifies a poetics of montage, the work of the image's double poetics in action that creates "the endlessly combinable and exchangeable elements of a discourse" (*Future of the Image*, 67), within which images are able to function in differential: "On the one hand, then, the image is valuable as a liberating power, pure form and pure *pathos* dismantling the classical order of organization of fictional action, of *stories*. On the other, it is valuable as the factor in a connection that constructs the figure of a common *history*. On the one hand, it is an incommensurable singularity; while on

the other it is an operation of communalization" (34). The irreducible relationship between image and context that Goldin's early slideshows enacted and made possible did not simply disappear when the slideshows ended; it established her work more generally as a differential space for the creation of facts, meaning, and history.

In this chapter, I want to look at the relationships between individual images and the contexts and ways in which they were taken and exhibited in order to read Goldin's photographs as facts that challenge the authority of representation in official narratives of history. These structural relations are crucial to how and why the slideshows, and later, the museum shows, print catalogues, and grids, meant. This was especially important since the community that Goldin's work collected was, during the time she was developing her most innovative and risky poetics, in the process of being disappeared by such historical narratives. I want to show how agency arises in the collective space—structured by light, darkness, intimacy, and loss—where Goldin's slideshows work to establish a familiar past, a meaningful present, and a possible future for her community. The pictures projected in those dark and crowded clubs, writes Luc Sante, "surprised the ephemeral in its course and projected it onto the world without betraying or falsely inflating it … the pictures were both of their moment and looking back at that moment from a great distance, across a perspective plane strewn with highlights and disasters yet unknown, with the accrued if unaccountable wisdom of that distance" ("Parties," 102). Yet it is also important that I not cast the author in too heroic a light, for, as Sante continues, "Who could resist the lushness of the *mise-en-scene*?" (101).

"I'm not some sort of documentarian of other people's worlds," Goldin also says (*CL,* 85). Pat Ryan's history is one that I know; I know her, but that is irrelevant to my reading of Goldin's work. If it were necessary for me to know all that I know about Pat Ryan

in order to understand the photograph, in order for the image to register as a significant representation of Pat Ryan, Goldin's photographic project would indeed be nothing more than documentary. Townsend's critique of the history of the slideshow acts as a way to factualize a specifically defined realism within the images that negates the differential quality of the presentation, thereby performing this exact reduction. Oddly, Townsend accomplishes this by aligning Goldin's *Ballad* with the poetic form of the same name, all the while ignoring the histories of transmission that ballads carry and accumulate in favor of measuring the ballad's empirical objectivity. He begins by noting: "In 1977, unable to afford time or money to make prints, Goldin showed her work as slides" ("Bohemian Ballads," 106). Describing the ballad as a form that has historically been associated with transitional moments in history, where, for example, nostalgic modes of representation emerge as cultural defenses against impending change, Townsend goes on to comment: "However, we might see the poverty of materiality that characterized punk as reflecting a liminal culture positioning that parallels the liminality so often ascribed to folkloric culture" (112). We might also, I would argue, see the "poverty of materiality" as a characteristic of, such as was the case for early Soviet montage practices, revolution. There are, in this poverty, more differential sites for the production of fact and history. But the ballad's value for Townsend is in its unmediated, naive representations of facts; Goldin's choice to publish *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* as a book thus, for Townsend, devalues the "authenticity" of the work that by now it is clear he associates with the "innocence" of unmediated facts.

And so, Townsend concludes: "In the early 1980s *The Ballad* had no materiality. Its images existed as momentary projections for its audience" (113). In this case, the performance itself cannot be a fact—it must simply be a vessel, like the ballad, for representation. Thus, while I would argue that these momentary projections actually made

the facts of Goldin's images material in a new and more socially useful way, Townsend

argues that *The Ballad*'s transformation into a book bestowed materiality upon it—and in so

doing permits himself a huge leap from "the poverty of materiality" to "no materiality"—

and this made the work no more than a souvenir, which conveniently rhymes with his earlier

allusions toward punk as a kind of "nostalgia." Employing Susan Stewart's definition from

Crimes of Writing, Townsend writes:

> The materialization of signification ensured that it signified with different effects,
> told a different story. In this context *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* comes to
> resemble nothing so much as a souvenir, an objectival trace of authenticity. As
> Stewart remarks: "The souvenir distinguishes experiences. We do not need or desire
> souvenirs of events that are repeatable. Rather we need and desire souvenirs of
> events that are reportable, events whose materiality has escaped us, events that
> thereby exist only through the invention of narrative. Through narrative the souvenir
> substitutes a context of perpetual consumption for its context of origin. It represents
> not the lived experience of its maker but the 'second-hand' experience of its
> possessor/owner." (113)

Against this characterization of *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* as, in the end, no more than a

reified version of Goldin's experience as an artist, I want to place Rancière's critique of

Barthes's similar treatment of the materiality of the image. We could say of Townsend that

"he dispels all the mediations between the reality of mechanical imprinting and the reality of

the affect that make this affect open to being experienced, named, expressed," thereby also

"erasing the genealogy that renders our 'images' material and conceivable" (*Future of the Image,*

15) as productive of a common experience, name, or expression—their affects. Making

visible, material facts of this genealogy, as Goldin's slideshows attempt to do, is politically

important because it shows, according to Rancière, "the choice of the present as against

historicization; the decision to represent an accounting of the means, the materiality of the

process" (129). The process, furthermore, is the relationship between artist and audience,

and "this relationship is not empirical," that is, its materiality cannot escape us; rather, "it is

constitutive," constantly being made and remade (116). Thus, Rancière concludes, the

double poetics of the image that affords us the choice of the present against historicization "expresses the absence of a stable representation between exhibition and signification. But this maladjustment tends towards more representation, not less: more possibilities for constructing equivalences, for rendering what is absent present, and for making a particular adjustment of the relationship between sense and non-sense coincide with a particular adjustment of the relationship between presentation and revocation" (137) such as the slideshows enact. In Goldin's work, the "poverty of materiality" that led her to work with slides amounted both this double poetics and also to an increased awareness among her audiences of the affective materiality of facts and the possibilities of that materiality for representing history.

Goldin documents her world, her own history, and the history of the community that has formed in various permutations around her work, not with "empirical positivism," but with the kind of constitutive relationality that engenders what Dianne Chisholm, in her study of the constellations that make up queer memory, would call "emotional, if not abject, acuity" (*Queer Constellations*, 46). This emotional acuity is made up of and structured by Goldin's own intersections with the histories of other people, her love for them and her inevitable loss of them. Goldin sometimes sees that loss long before it happens, and as such it registers as part of her own lived history. The image of Pat Ryan in the bathtub is an image that foresees Goldin's own mourning of a moment that will inevitably be lost irretrievably, and is, as soon as the shutter clicks. Goldin holds the camera: it is her loss, not Ryan's, that she is mourning. Yet as soon as the image is shown, this loss becomes a knowledge constitutive of the community that experiences it. In *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler presents one way to understand the kind of knowledge such loss catalyzes: "When we lose some of these ties by which we are constituted, we do not know who we are or what to do. On one

level, I think that I have lost 'you' only to discover that that 'I' have gone missing as well. At another level, perhaps what I have lost 'in' you, that for which I have no ready vocabulary, is a relationality that is composed neither exclusively of myself nor you, but is to be conceived as *the tie* by which those terms are differentiated and related" (22). The difference between Goldin's image of Ryan's gradual disappearance and of the possible images of what happens to her as she disappears is a difference of happening, between what happens and to whom it happens. The question this work poses and works through, then, is: When we lose someone, to whom does that loss happen? Or, as Jonathan Flatley writes in *Affective Mapping*: "We might say that the melancholic concern with loss creates the mediating structure that enables a slogan—'The personal is political'—to become a historical-aesthetic methodology. This methodology's questions are: Whence these losses to which I have become attached? What social structures, discourses, institutions, processes have been at work in taking something valuable away from me? With whom do I share these losses or losses like them?" (3). In Goldin's images it is apparent how both the history and the "corporeality of the subject leave their traces or marks on the texts produced," affective marks, which are in turn also how "the processes of textual production … leave their trace or residue on the body" (Grosz, *Space*, 21) of Goldin, the author of a text that is only textualized in its passage through and into collective consciousness. The loss needs to happen in order for it to happen to someone, events need to happen in order for them to produce affect, and so in photographing the images of things happening to her, Goldin produces an affective document based not on the illusion of objective reality but on the fullness of collectively realized facts. Love and loss, the affective counterparts of beauty and vulnerability, Goldin's presentation of history, these elements together form a new way of knowing Nan Goldin's world.

The slideshows were an important aspect of Goldin's representational practices in that they interpellated her audience as forcefully as they represented her work. In short, the slideshows created a community as they represented it. Sante writes: "When Nan began to hold slide shows, everybody was astonished … the slides were raw slices of collective experience, uncannily preserved, but they went far beyond that … the transitions from one shot to the next appeared liquid; the pictures seemed anything but still. The slide show was a vast movie of intersecting fragments that showed us our lives, startling us with meaning where we'd only seen circumstance" ("Parties," 101). The slideshows materialized "the ways we become the subjects that we are by the structuring of our affective attachments," as Flatley puts it (*Affective Mapping*, 4); furthermore, he might recognize in Sante's description precisely the structure of an "affective map," which "gives one a new sense of one's relationship to broad historical forces" as well as "it shows one how one's situation is collectively experienced by a community" (ibid.).

Perhaps because she offered herself so freely to her audience, Goldin became, as an artist, many things to many people. Autobiographical polemicist, historian, pun, queer, bohemian, obsessive diarist, exhibitionist, voyeur—depending upon who chooses to use her as inspiration, nemesis, or teaching tool, Nan Goldin could march off into history as any of these things. In some versions, she's the family photographer of generation that redefined family. In others, she's a narcissist dragged back again and again to her personal tragedies and drug addiction. A political crusader, Goldin made sexual and cultural outsiders visible and beautiful, or maybe she exploited her friends' trust by producing unnecessarily explicit images of their lives and deaths. A feminist asserting the importance of her own history, Goldin has been chided by other feminists for the ease with which she showed her victimhood, for the vulnerability that she sometimes seemed to institute as an aesthetic.

Butler, however, names "the body as the site of a common human vulnerability, even as I have insisted that this vulnerability is always articulated differently, that it cannot be properly thought of outside a differentiated field of power and, specifically, the differential operation of norms of recognition" (*Precarious Life*, 44), which amounts to an argument for vulnerability as precisely that site where a politics of the personal can gain purchase by "reimagining the possibility of community on the basis of vulnerability and loss" (20).[42] Yet maybe because of her choice of transformative site, Goldin is invoked, again and again, as though her career is over, as though she is already dead, as the icon offering opportunities for a new generation to be iconoclasts. Just as Butler, in *Gender Trouble,* seeks to "reconceive" gender identity "as a personal/cultural history of received meanings" (176)—a series of acts of gender—that is in itself a kind of kinship, Goldin's work forms a new way of knowing that I have identified with both affect and the literary fact—rather, affective documentary as an active way of producing facts—and this new way of knowing serves as her work's cultural intervention. As a "set of testimonies about a shared history and world" (Rancière, *Future of the Image*, 25), Goldin's projects act in the differential space that Rancière identifies with "the dual nature of the *aesthetic* image: the image as cipher of history and the image as interruption" (ibid.). In the context of thinking about queer memory, feminist strategies of representation, and the ways of telling history that have emerged from these considerations, the both nostalgic and bitter reception of Goldin's work re-occasions a critical look at how her acts of memory mean.

"If photography is indeed a 'revolutionary' fact," Cadava notes, "it is because it has transformed the entirety of the world into a photographable object" (*Words of Light*, 53). Perhaps the most important and most overlooked aspect of the "photographable object" is

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[42] Butler goes on to note: "Similarly, the cultural barriers that feminism must negotiate have to take place with reference to the operation of power and the persistence of vulnerability" (46–47). See *Precarious Life* for Butler's full discussion of vulnerability as a political concept.

its lack of coherent identity. The revolutionary nature of photography could thus be seen as its refusal of authoritative narratives and its ability to produce facts as multiply interpretable objects. A photographable object does not fix objective reality; its fact-ness is contingent upon photographers' representations of it. Instead, history is what is made by the activity of making history. In the case of Goldin's project, images of memory are made by the activity of making memory, an activity that she renders collective and reactivates in the image itself. Goldin's slideshows are more specifically exhibitions where, in attempting to locate themselves in the context of the images shown, the bodies of audience members create a network of affective relations that becomes a dense and living structure of memory. The images are then viewed, in something like a sequence or history, through this new structure of memory that their initial appearance occasioned, and photographable objects become facts of collective affect.

In this way, Goldin's slideshows can also be compared to Proust's "magic lantern," which effects a kind of transformative relationship, composed of transitions in light and darkness, between the body and the space in which it dwells: "Marcel's eyes open and, under the 'momentary flash of consciousness,' work to fix the 'shifting kaleidescope of darkness' before him" (Cadava, *Words of Light*, 75). The "magic lantern" here is not yet an object but rather is an effect of the relationship of Marcel's body to its surroundings as he tries to orient himself; he projects images into the darkness to help him find purchase and construct a coherent self when faced with radical negativity. The "magic lantern" is first Marcel's own remembering body; only later does it become an object separate from him, after his actions have narratively "designed" it. We could perhaps imagine that Goldin designed her slideshows to produce the effect/affect that she had already seen projected by bodies attempting to find themselves in the fractured identity narrative of the montage. Cadava

notes the correspondence between bodies and photographic technologies (which I am arguing include the exhibition apparatus of the slideshow as well as of reproduction):

> The materiality of this remembering body is therefore not that of a simple physical exteriority, even if we can say that it is the body or flesh of thought. The body that thinks and remembers with its "ribs, knees, [and] shoulders" is, like photography, an archive of memory. As such, it describes an interiority devoted to the production of images. An "inside" in which images are formed and projected (at the level of sensation, perception, memory, or consciousness), the body is a kind of darkroom, what Proust elsewhere calls an "inner darkroom" (2:523/2:227). Like the magic lantern that will soon project its images upon the walls of Marcel's bedroom, the body projects images of the past into the darkness of a mind unable to identify where it is. (76)

I do not believe that Proust intended the magic lantern to represent the body as a closed, discrete identity, but rather as one part of a process that then becomes interpersonal through its projection of internal images as affects. The remembering body not only makes memory in the same way that camera technology makes images, it also textualizes memory as its inseparable slide projector. Thus the body is the intersection of photographic representation as Goldin conceives it—where meaning is not reducible to the single image or its display— and if this body remembers, images, and projects loss—mourns—we need to consider Goldin's project in terms of melancholia, the remembering body's affective mode for loss. Butler writes of the "transformative effect of loss" which "cannot be charted or planned" (*Precarious Life*, 21), and which leads to a kind of productive disorientation in which we wield affective structures as the ties that constitute us: "I cannot muster the 'we' except by finding the way in which I am tied to 'you,' by trying to translate but finding that my own language must break up and yield if I am to know you. You are what I gain through this disorientation and loss. This is how the human comes into being, again and again, as that which we have yet to know" (49). Even before AIDS "began taking out the very ones who seemed most alive to the moment," Sante notes, "Nan's slides made us aware, however subliminally, of the fragility of our eggshell bodies" ("Parties," 102). If bodies, like photographic

technologies, "are machines for the production of images," they produce first "an image of ourselves" which "registers our lived experience and points to our absence in the face of that experience" (Cadava, *Words of Light*, 100). Goldin's slideshows acted as a giant camera that produced collectively imaged documents of a history of disappearing subjects.

This space of incorporation, structured by Goldin's manipulation of affect, is necessarily a historical space, since the loss that informs it is part of the collective history of Goldin and her subjects. "Can the beautiful be sad?" asks Julia Kristeva in *Black Sun* (97). "Is beauty inseparable from the ephemeral and hence from mourning? Or else is the beautiful object the one that tirelessly returns following destructions and wars in order to bear witness that there is survival after death, that immortality is possible?" (98). This progression of questions is crucial to keep in mind when we are attempting to locate the kind of documentary that manifested in Goldin's slideshows as a project with social and political implications. The images enact a moment rather than depict a scene, reasserting it over and over throughout history in a bid to resist its disappearance. In his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Benjamin remarks that history is after all "an image which suddenly occurs to the subject of history in a moment of danger. The historian's authority rests on a sharpened awareness of the crisis that the subject of history has entered at any given moment" (Cadava, *Words of Light*, 85). In Goldin's memory work, the first crisis is personal loss; her attempts to expand the subject to include collective consciousness transform "authority" into a communal function, summoned in the face of immediate danger. This is another definition of activism. Goldin narrates her work as being first and foremost an attempt to deal with loss, or, as she says, "I used to think I couldn't lose anyone if I photographed them enough" (*CL*, 76). My account of affect as a structure informing Goldin's work begins with Kristeva's psychoanalytic interpretation and moves on to newer and more politically-oriented

discussions of affect and community, collective consciousness, and the "personal is political" methodologies of contemporary projects such as the one that Flatley presents. In the context of thinking through "Melancholy as Method" and the history of melancholia as a structuring affect of modernity, Flatley posits that melancholia as agential "melancholizing is something one *does*: longing for lost loves, brooding over absent objects and changed environments, reflecting on unmet desires, and lingering on events from the past. It is a practice that might, in fact, produce its own kind of knowledge" (*Affective Mapping*, 2). In the same way that I want to be careful not to valorize Goldin as a heroic author of subjectivity and alternative history, though, I also want to be cautious in my use of Goldin's narration of her own work as a comprehensive key to its meaning. Loss structures even the narration of the work— Goldin "used to think" her images could act as stop-gaps against loss, but the same phrase makes clear that this is no longer the case. It seems, in fact, that Goldin's images mourn even their original, if impossible, function. This may have led to the active tension of ongoing revisions in both her subject matter and exhibition strategies as she displaced the single image for larger documents like *The Ballad* and the later grids; Goldin seemed to be looking for the differential poetics "melancholizing" might afford, and, as Flatley puts it, thus sought to find "an aesthetic practice that could change one relation of loss into another" (ibid.).

I have used the word "manipulate" intentionally to describe Goldin's project of transforming a group of bodies into a camera because in a number of senses, the word is appropriate here. First, manipulation is the activity of the body as it rearranges objects in space—it's a literal, not theoretical, movement with immediate material results. Stein manipulated language on the material plane in the same way that Goldin manipulates bodies and light, which after all is the photographer's primary activity. My use of this word also makes Goldin sound "manipulative" in the more pejorative understanding of the term and,

in my continuing attempt to avoid valorizing her authorship and in turn positivizing her work as yet another master narrative, this also makes sense. I don't think that Goldin, who was determined not to be subject to anyone else's version of her history, who was intent on never losing anyone again, has ever pretended to not be manipulative. It was necessary for her; "manipulate" is another way to say "touch," which is, after all, another word for "affect." In a talk on Rineke Dijkstra's "Family of Man," renee c. hoogland forwarded the claim that the subjects represented in Dijkstra's project were "dispossessed" of their social identities and given, instead, "representational identities" that correspond not with selves as "naturally" (in the sense of humanism or empirical thought) understood but with other representations.[43] It at first seemed to me that this claim was at odds with my conception of Goldin's project, wherein the image works to bestow a social identity on the represented subject. Yet it seems to me now that, by way of her exhibition strategies—the slideshows and later, the grids—Goldin also manipulates these social identities into representational identities that are precisely a function of presentation. Her shattering of herself as mirror is one way that she accomplishes this; plunging audiences into the negative identifications that happen in the darkness of the slideshow, turning their bodies into Proustian magic lanterns, is another. Thus in Goldin's project, these identities are not at odds but rather work together to re-establish the structure of the community whose center is crisis. By forcing audiences to account for both kinds of identities and the relation between them, Goldin opens the differential between textual and extra-textual and ushers us into the intersection. And then here we are at the center of the (literary) fact: It is a fact that can't be dissolved or diffused

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[43] "Exhibition/s." *The Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900*: February 19, 2010, Louisville, KY. It is important to note that hoogland makes a sharp distinction between presentation and representation, arguing that images present, in this case, rather than represent, although it is possible for them to do both while maintain this crucial distinction.

into either social or formal categories and therefore has a political stake for a group of people disappearing under one of the most profound crises of the twentieth century—AIDS. The disappearing body or identity refigured as a differential fact, the image, was an important way to materialize such sudden, widespread, and apparently endless loss. Recalling again Lauren Berlant's question in response to "We're here, we're queer"—that is, *where?*—I want to suggest that this intersection of social and representational identities is *where*, and as such is still not an answer. It's a challenge to exist *in disappearance*. In a way, the intersection that Goldin creates and imposes is a "multiple concealment of the self [that] brings us closer to the continual distortions and displacements" (Cadava, *Words of Light*, 111) that structure the modern subject in history—the very subject Goldin seeks to produce. The non-identity of the exhibition, whether it is in the form of a slideshow, a grid, or a museum show, challenges audiences to become subject matter (or, maybe, "subjects that matter") in the differential space between the positivity of politics and the negativity of identifying with disappearance. Affects work similarly in differential in that "they produce a kind of subject-object confusion … that is, it is often difficult to tell whether the affect originates in the object or the affect produces the object" (Flatley, *Affective Mapping*, 17). Audiences then enter into specific structures of feeling in order to make meaning of this experience: "When certain objects," Flatley notes, "produce a certain set of affects in certain contexts for certain groups of people—that is a structure of feeling" (26). The differential, non-identical space of exhibition performs the task of structuring a *where* of necessary constitutive ties into which the subject of history can emerge as a collectively experienced fact.

Cadava notes, after Ian Balfour, that "the specter of the subject's own disappearance" arises in the disappearance of objects; the appearance and disappearance of slides (objects after all) shows us how we ourselves disappear as subjects (*Words of Light,*

113). Goldin's photographs mourn the loss of specific moments and the people that fill them; at the same time, they refuse that loss by capturing an image of those moments at the instant of their constant disappearance. Goldin's images, then, are melancholic in the sense that Kristeva uses the term. Of the melancholic, the subject to whom loss happens, Kristeva writes: "In the tension of their affects, muscles, mucous membranes, and skin, they experience both their belonging to and distance from an archaic other that still eludes representation and naming, but of whose corporeal emissions, along with their autonomism, they still bear the imprint. Unbelieving in language, [they] are affectionate, wounded to be sure, but prisoners of affect. The affect is their thing" (*Black Sun*, 14). This "belonging to and distance from," the same relation we see between social and representational selves, confers a characteristic intimacy on Goldin's images that is the result of a performance of affect which problematizes the relationship between figure and ground. The "relations among an entire network" cross at this site of representation: "[S]ubjectivity, the relation between self and other, disfiguration, translation, petrification, historical context, and death—all of which raise fundamental questions about who we are in relation to what we call 'photography'" (Cadava, *Words of Light*, 122). On one hand, Goldin's images attempt to negate loss; at the same time, their very beauty is informed by mourning. "But I am disfigured," Benjamin writes, "by my similarity to everything around me here" (121). "The negation of that fundamental loss," writes Kristeva, "opens up the realm of signs for us, but the mourning is often incomplete … it drives out negation and revives the memory of signs by drawing them out of their signifying neutrality … it loads them with affects" (*Black Sun*, 42). I would argue that for Goldin, this affect overcomes the signs it informs and in so doing her work bears out Kristeva's idea of the "denial of the negation" of language. Kristeva calls the denial of negation "the exercise of an impossible mourning, the setting up of a fundamental sadness

and an artificial, unbelievable language, cut out of the painful background that is not accessible to any signifier and that intonation alone, intermittently, succeeds in inflecting"—melancholia (44). And a language that inverts such a fundamental property of the photographic project must be constructed differently, "artificially," I suppose, and certainly "unbelievably." Indeed, as Kristeva continues to describe it, the denial of negation "on the one hand … denies archaic representations of traumatic perceptions; on the other it symbolically acknowledges their impact and tries to draw the conclusions" (ibid.). Here we are faced with memory as that which "registers, if it registers anything, its own incapacity, our own immolation" (Cadava, *Words of Light*, 106). Melancholic intimacy, which speaks the incorporation of the lost beloved, refuses to be named or pathologized against a background of normalcy. Rather than vainly attempting to negate loss by producing a representation of the lost object, Goldin's images deny this negation by enacting loss through exhibition. This is, of course, an act of considerable risk, for, as Benjamin worried, "it implies not only that there can be no self that is not exhibited, imaged, or photographed but also that the self that is exhibited in this way is not a self. It cannot be understood as a self" (110). Goldin's photographs and slideshows are not monuments to loss, and are as such impermanent; instead they are acts of memory that acknowledge the impact of loss individually, on and as the body, by being ephemeral.

"Indeed," Flatley notes, "affects need objects to come into being. They are in this sense intentional" (*Affective Mapping*, 16). Furthermore, by way of definition: "affects are irreducible, in the sense that they operate according to their own systemic logic; they involve a transformation of one's way of being in the world, in a way that determines what matters to one; affects require objects, and, in the moment of attaching to an object or happening in the object, also take one's being outside of one's subjectivity" (19). In *Gender Trouble,* Judith

Butler famously reads Freud's ideas of mourning and melancholia to show how the performative nature of the language of affect may be connected to crises of representation. One way to think through this is to imagine that we perform the "vicissitudes" of affects as they "try to make their way out" of our bodies, or, if considered as a collective activity, out of our bodies-in-common, the subject matter of the aesthetic work. According to Freud, Flatley explains, "affects resist representation" but also must *go somewhere* (59–60). If we consider affect as emerging into textuality by way of the "muscles, mucous membranes, and skin," there is a way that we can read it as "a *corporeal style*, an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where '*performative*' suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 177). If, then, "melancholizing" is a specific way of performing the vicissitudes of affect, it is also a way of being in the world with the power to change what it is possible for "representation" to mean, and indeed *how* it is possible for representation to mean.

Goldin uses affect to transform and question the grammar of representation and hence its effects on remembered history. "If what has occurred," Rancière writes, "and of which nothing remains, can be represented, it is through an action, a newly created fiction which begins in the here and now. It is through a confrontation between the words uttered here and now about what was and the reality that is materially present and absent in this place" (*Future of the Image*, 127). This is the problematic of queer memory, how its position—at once happening, (not) having happened, and denied—necessitates an act in order to signify. According to Cadava, "the truth of history is performed when we take the risk of making history rather than assuming it to belong only to the past" (*Words of Light*, 72–73); facts, then, are themselves acts of memory, performative: "It happens, in other words, when we understand historicity as a kind of performance rather than as a story or a form of

knowledge" (ibid.). These acts of memory, alongside Butler's problematization of the notion of gender identity, help to inform my conception of Goldin's work with facts as a mode between formalism and personal politics. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls this "the leverage of 'queer,'" a term that in turn "seems to hinge much more radically and explicitly on a person's undertaking particular, performative acts of experimental self-perception and filiation" (*Tendencies*, 9). Butler writes: "'The internal' is a surface signification, and gender norms are finally phantasmatic, impossible to embody. If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the spatial metaphor of a 'ground' will be displaced and revealed as a stylized configuration, indeed, a gendered corporealization of time" (*Gender Trouble*, 179). Goldin's production of historical space comes by way of the figural relationship of incorporation. Melancholy instructs the incorporation of affect into the body and of the body into history; conversely, as Butler notes, "incorporation, which denotes a *magical* resolution of loss, characterizes melancholy" (87). This "*magical* resolution" stands beside Kristeva's "artificial, unbelievable" language as an indication of the intimacy conferred on Goldin's work through her affective grammar. In terms of this kind of grammar, Butler continues, asserting that "incorporation is antimetaphorical precisely because it maintains the loss as radically unnameable; in other words, incorporation is not only a failure to name or avow the loss, but erodes the conditions of metaphorical signification itself" (ibid.). In Goldin's work, Butler's "failure" functions as a refusal, the very refusal that begins to trouble the same figural relationship of signification that Butler asserts the failure "erodes": "If the identifications sustained through melancholy are 'incorporated,' then the question remains: Where is this incorporated space? If it is not literally within the body, perhaps it is *on* the body as its surface signification such that the body must itself be understood *as* an incorporated space" (86). Later, in *Precarious*

Life, Butler rethinks this "failure" as precisely the kind of politically habitable vulnerability that I am arguing exists in Goldin's work: "The primary others who are past for me not only live on in the fiber of the boundary that contains me (one meaning of 'incorporation'), but they also haunt the way I am, as it were, periodically undone and open to becoming unbounded" (28). Goldin's images create a space of incorporation, and a safe space *for* incorporation—the double incorporation of history into bodies and bodies into history.

Goldin's slideshow exhibitions were designed with the aim of both creating such a space and documenting the collective consciousness that was able to emerge there. Each gathering seemed to engender another, and the early slideshows changed from week to week as Goldin incorporated images from the more recent parties and shows. It was possible for audiences to see themselves entering and exiting frames, to watch their friends appearing and disappearing, and to watch their own present become a historical document as it was projected around them. Goldin's slideshows relied on structures of incorporation and displacement to enact the formation of community—bodies into history—as well as to create a mirror—history onto/into bodies—in which this community could see its activity, its "work." The risk in this work is also part of its tie to activism; as Butler explains: "Each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies—as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of a publicity at once assertive and exposed. Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure" (*Precarious Life*, 20). "The communities Nan photographs," Marvin Heiferman confirms, "are often as vulnerable as they are feared, people who must stay in the closet and shun public exposure in order to survive," in other words, people who must disappear from or into history ("Pictures," 282). The community was still in the process of being formed

through negation, and Goldin's incorporative work was charged with the task of representing this process—the crisis at the center of the community—while also accounting for positive identity claims in form. We can see the difficulty of Goldin's project in Derrida's claim that "the experience of mourning … institutes the community but also forbids it from collecting itself" (Kaplan, *American Exposures*, xxvii). Consider the way that Pat Ryan's image means both in disappearance and in the documented relationship between her figure, the photographer, and the slideshow audience, which together create a structure. It is a structure that brings us the subject inscribed as history across a field of bodies, a network of subjectivities. Goldin's incorporative space challenges the literal "truth" of monumental history just as Butler's gender performativity troubles sex as the body's "literal truth." For Michel de Certeau, melancholy produces "an original spatial structure," wherein "to practice space is … in a place, *to be other and to move toward the other*" (*Practice of Everyday Life*, 109–110). Incorporation allows both Goldin and her subjects to create a spatial structure by practicing space, through melancholia, as an act of memory. Practicing space in relation to images also makes this an aesthetic act in which, as Flatley describes it: "One finds oneself in a world that does not exist, or that exists only in this space at this moment. This otherness is not liberatory in itself, but inasmuch as the relationships between space and time, for example, that we are not used to in our everyday lives are altered in some way or another, we may see that the logic of the world we live in is not compulsory. Things might work differently" (*Affective Mapping*, 81). In the act that Goldin's exhibitions catalyze, where once we read history as immanent in space, we may now read space as immanent in history—a more "activist" orientation.

In *Space, Time, and Perversion,* Elizabeth Grosz contends that "The subject's relation to space and time is not passive: space is not simply an empty receptacle, independent of its

contents; rather, the ways in which space is perceived and represented depend upon the kinds of objects 'within' it, and more particularly, the kinds of relations the subject has to those objects" (92). Though undeniably material, the effects of light and darkness and projected images as spatial structures in Goldin's slideshows, "are not," in Grosz's words, "reflective or scientific properties of space but are effects of the necessity that we live and move in space as bodies in relation to other bodies" (ibid.). The slideshows both depicted and interpellated subjects in an active relation to their spatio-temporal location precisely because they shared that location with Goldin and with their fellow subjects. Her images register the impact of affectively continuous subjectivities on representational space collectively as much as they do individually, inscribing on that space the individual's entrance into the collective or ensemble effect/affect. In this way, "space makes possible," in Goldin's images, "different kinds of relations but in turn is transformed according to the subject's affective and instrumental relations with it" (ibid.). Goldin's slideshows made a representational space in which these affective relations condensed into a community that recalls Jean-Luc Nancy: "A community is the presentation to its members of their mortal truth" (Kaplan, *American Exposures*, xix). In his book *American Exposures*, Louis Kaplan argues that Nancy's model of community allows us to see in Goldin's work the "exposure" and re-imaging of "American community along the lines of a queering of the nation and the body politic" (92). I want to complicate Kaplan's assertion by including not just the subjects represented in Goldin's photographs but also their presentation to themselves as an activist mode of important "queering" work. In this way, we are able to move past easy readings of her "permissive view of human relations" and her "transgressive images" to see how collective history, cast in the terms of melancholia and its negation of coherent narratives of self, can be rendered politically useful by figuring a counter-history of incorporated space.

II. Queer Communities: "Some Other Body Was Bursting Out"

So what kind of remembering is at stake here? The work of incorporation that comprises Goldin's project locates the body—both her body and the bodies of her subjects—in a position of difference, and hence potential interaction with, social and historical signs and representations. This conception of the body shows the relationship of the represented body to represented history. Here Goldin's images correspond most powerfully with historically queer projects, opening the interstices of difference to the more subtle languages of signification, the multiplied surfaces of bodies responding—with unique and collective agency—to historical signs. Goldin's images of embodiment render explicit Foucault's sense of history as formed by bodies that have certain, but always possibly transforming, meanings within their social contexts and that in turn document what *happens to* individual and collective subjectivities. In other words, Goldin's work exemplifies the contiguity, oftentimes contingency, between the ways that subjectivity and social space are represented. The images, then, are not "conceptual impositions" on historical space; rather, their invocation of collective history enacts "our ways of living as bodies in space," bodies that make discernible marks in space. If we understand de Certeau's "place" as similar to Goldin's constitutive, relational space of exhibition/incorporation, we can see how, as opposed to "official" history, "stories about places are makeshift things … They are composed of the world's debris" (*Practice of Everyday Life*, 107). Of these stories, he writes: "The paths that correspond in this intertwining, unrecognizable poems in which each body is an element signed by many others, elude legibility … The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces: in relation to representations, it remains daily and indefinitely other" (93). History and documentary often seek to present

"an opaque past and an uncertain future onto a surface that can be dealt with" (ibid.). The "debris" that makes up these stories, which, by way how they practice space affectively, look very much like the same stories Goldin is telling, is that which cannot be dealt with by history: the love and the loss of those disappeared into history's forces. What is not "capable of being dealt with," for de Certeau, "so constitutes the 'waste products'" of the society imagined by official history: "abnormality, deviance, illness, death" (94). Reading contextualized bodies as productive of memory obviates the designation of "waste products" and refigures melancholia in the sense of "forgotten futures" (Flatley, "Moscow"). This is a melancholia whose object is not the past but is instead the potential of a meaningful present, whose simultaneous disavowal and incorporation of the object generates a continuity between present and future that necessitates active agency.

This is perhaps why, according to Goldin, the work "originally came from the snapshot aesthetic": "Snapshots are taken out of love and to remember people, places, and shared times … They're about creating a history by recording a history" (*CL,* 19). Throughout this chapter, I locate in Goldin's project within specific "queer" structures of feeling, but what kind of queer is another matter. Goldin's images often depict gay or lesbian people or transgendered folk, so they are, in that way, "queer," but that is not the *only* way they are queer. More crucially, a major component of Goldin's work involves the incorporation of sexual difference into form in order to challenge the authority of identity as a principle of documentary or community truth—this makes her work constitutively queer. The scenes that Goldin photographs, and the ways she exhibits the resulting images, work together to create the history of a not-quite-defined community by recording the movements in its kinship network, which is another way to talk about "queer." Yet just as none of these strands of narrative exhaust the meaning of "queer," so too they fail to offer a

comprehensive picture of Goldin's project. An additional way of entering into the queer implications of Goldin's work hinges on the basic conception of the snapshot taken out of love and aligns with the way that Sedgwick approaches queer-oriented cultural work:

> I think many adults (and I among them) are trying, in our work, to keep faith with vividly remembered promises made to ourselves in childhood: promises to make invisible possibilities and desires visible; to make the tacit things explicit; to smuggle queer representation in where it must be smuggled and, with the relative freedom of adulthood, to challenge queer-eradicating impulses frontally where they are to be so challenged … I think that for many of us in childhood the ability to attach intently to a few cultural objects, objects of high or popular culture or both, objects whose meaning seemed mysterious, excessive, or oblique in relation to codes most readily available to us, became a prime resource for survival. We needed for there to be sites where the meanings didn't line up tidily with each other, and we learned to invest those sites with fascination and love. (*Tendencies,* 3)

Sedwick argues for a kind of "archive of loss," the conscious and purposeful recollection of our early encounters with difference, with the social and cultural unmooring it produced and that would eventually come to feel liberatory. This archive originates in affect—attaching "intently to a few cultural objects"—and is maintained through "fascination and love." The kind of knowledge of history that Goldin's documentary produces is similarly inseparable from her subject matter; it arises from her exquisite care for the particular subjectivities she documents, and her forms, both individual images and their presentations, are likewise invested with queer cultural specificity.

Goldin's images could only have come out of a period of crisis, when the need to show how historical space alters and is altered by what happens to those within it is most urgent. Goldin's images—even those that came before it and those that came after—are Reagan-era images. The conservatism, hate, and fear that overtook the United States, and to an extent in the 1980s and early 90s, the world, resulted in the attempted disappearance of the "abnormal," the "deviant," the "ill." This disappearance took many forms—silence, surrender, death—and Goldin captured them all. She documented the stories of her

friends—artists, drag queens, club kids, lovers, drug addicts—as they intersected with her own story and the story of the world and became a specific history. In his writings about the early days of AIDS activism, Gregg Bordowitz notes that where documentary "overlaps with political organizing" (*AIDS Crisis*, 29), there arise new public structures based in both recognition and commitment. "There are countercultural strategies," he continues, "that belong specifically to queers": "A queer structure of feeling shapes cultural work produced by queers. In the words of Raymond Williams, who coined the term, a structure of feeling is 'the hypothesis of a mode of social formation, explicit and recognizable in specific kinds of art, which is distinguishable from other social and semantic formulations by its articulation of presence'" (49). It is hard to make social formation "explicit and recognizable" in content only without it becoming thematized and soon, uninhabitable. That is why, as I continue to stress, it is crucial to consider Goldin's exhibitions as representational strategies that add accumulated viewings in the context of community to the meaning of each image, so that structures of feeling appear in the photographs as collective articulations of presence. Goldin and her friends, once fashionable outsiders, were viewed by society during that time as debris, to be hidden or forgotten. It is this very real story of bohemia that Townsend reabsorbs into a nostalgic narrative that fetishizes it and consequently the circumstances of its disappearance. It would also, however, be naive to conceive of all of these subjects as victimized by conservatism; many of them effected their own disappearance. It is important to recognize that despite their strong assertions of presence, Goldin's images are not protest images that aim to tell the world what was "done to" the "waste products" of late capitalist America.

Yet the disappearance of Goldin's friends from official history was nevertheless epidemic. Since "this history makes its mark on what, individually, we are and do" Sedgwick

writes (*Tendencies*, 3), the concept of "queer survival" emerges as the accumulation of one "set of effects": "Being a survivor on this scene is a matter of surviving *into* threat, stigma … and (in the AIDS emergency) the omnipresence of somatic fear and wrenching loss" (ibid.). And so as a "queer survivor," Goldin sought to create a kind of historical knowledge that would envision a history for those whose histories "eluded legibility," or were "daily and inevitably other" (de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 93) to traditional historical representation. "Survivors' guilt, survivors' glee, even survivors' responsibility," Sedgwick continues: "Powerfully as these are experienced, they are also more than complicated by how permeable the identity 'survivor' must be to the undiminishing currents of risk, illness, mourning, and defiance" (*Tendencies*, 3). Goldin, speaking from the point of view of one such "queer survivor," responded fiercely to the effects of 1980s society on her milieu, writing: "I don't ever want to be susceptible to anyone else's version of my history … I don't ever want to lose the real memory of anyone again" (*BSD,* 9). The crisis that brought the most profound loss in the 1980s was AIDS; Goldin lost many friends, these friends lost many friends, and the policies of the Reagan administration offered only fear and denial. With the advent of AIDS, there came many kinds of disappearing. Friends got sick, lovers died, and these losses disappeared unrecognized into history, leaving damaged lives behind them. Fear, sadness, and self-loathing seemed to consume Goldin's community, and with them the light and vibrancy of many lives faded from view.

Kaplan notes that "Goldin's photo development of a community with these fabulous people involves a strategy of unworking and unraveling … [that] is always threatening to come apart at the seams from either, as she puts it, 'euphoric crisis' or 'extreme excess'" (*American Exposures,* 90). But I want to avoid this kind of analogy between the development of a "community that is not one" and these "fabulous people" with AIDS; to align "queer"

so simply with AIDS is obviously wrong. Certainly, the AIDS emergency decimated this particular community, which had been structured in the first place on models of queer kinship that often included the very sexual connections through which the virus could easily be transmitted, and certainly *also* included such activities among friends as IV drug use, another mode of HIV transmission. That this was a structurally queer community whose kinship connections included but were not by any means limited to possible circumstances for HIV transmission is not the same as equating "queer" or "gay" death with AIDS. In other words, I do not mean to suggest that Goldin's community is a queer site just because of the AIDS emergency. The opposite—"they got AIDS because they were queer"—is also clearly absurd. But since it is also true that AIDS disproportionately affected gay men during that time, it would be unjust to finesse that fact with theory; as Bordowitz writes about the material effects of the crisis on the arts community: "The AIDS epidemic precipitated a crisis affecting the actual conditions of existence of many artists—many of them gay" (*AIDS Crisis*, 50). The AIDS emergency necessitated exposing and activating certain aspects of queerness and of community—oftentimes, the riskiest emotions and connections—in order to respond to the urgent need to record "what things really looked like and felt like" (*BSD*, 145). And, in my opinion, to safeguard a future where the difficulties of living in difference, and the material struggles of living with AIDS, could not be reduced to the descriptor "fabulous." "AIDS changed everything," wrote Goldin. "Our history got cut off at an early age. There is a sense of loss of self also, because of the loss of community … but there's also a feeling that the tribe still goes on" (ibid.). For Douglas Crimp, "much of what had been most vital in my life—most adventurous, experimental, and exhilarating; most intimate, sustaining, and gratifying; most self-defining and self-extending—began slowly but surely to disappear" (*Melancholia and Moralism,* 14).

While more conservative commentators have suggested that "HIV transmission is the inevitable result of gay men's traumatic attachment to a pathological past" (Castiglia, "Sex Panics," 7), hence naming melancholia as a kind of "normalizing exercise in the restructuring of gay male memory," the faults of this approach appear against the background of Crimp's memories as a kind of Freudian tautology that Christopher Castiglia, after Foucault, calls "counternostalgia" (ibid.). For one thing, it is mourning, not melancholia, that performs the normalizing and reparative work of restructuring. That is to say that if we read melancholia as the isolated and isolating inability to lose the lost object, the past becomes pathological because of gay men's attachment to it; in turn, AIDS becomes a kind of melancholia characterized by pathological attachment. Goldin's structures of incorporation, the relations between bodies and history that she documents, are founded on the logic of potential and virtual that Foucault recognizes as "to remember having been" (11). Her strategy of refiguration could be read as what Foucault terms "countermemory… a competing narrative of the past composed of memories that exceed official public history" (ibid.). A melancholia that incorporates desire and knowledge in the figure of the potential "emerges as a specifically queer countermemory, a way to 'remember having been'" (ibid.). These acts of memory characterize the particular structures of feeling enacted in Goldin's work. Here, queer memory (and memorializing) makes a politically useful bid on melancholia because it resists the binaries that disappear marginal subjects. In this case, the queer countermemory enacted in Goldin's work does not suggest that—necessitated by the AIDS crisis—intimacy is dangerous and must be mitigated by art; Goldin's work refuses such mitigating. But neither does Goldin's work fetishize the demise of her community, relying upon "risky sex" and dangerous intimacy to supply its images or its energy. If artists like Goldin and David Wojnarowicz were engaging disappearance in their work, they never

assumed that this disappearance was a precondition for the work's meaning. In other words, in this work, the fact of absence was made manifest formally instead of thematized from preexisting content. The structures of feeling that Foucault identifies as countermemory appear in Goldin's work as a poetics—to slightly oversimplify, the images' how and why.

It has often been noted that Goldin's close friendship with photographer Peter Hujar was an important influence on her work; in particular, Goldin looked to the directness of Hujar's images to instill a certain quietude on the surface of her own. Of course this simplicity indexed that complicated emotional web just below the surface, one that would be articulated time and again by Hujar and Goldin's close friend Wojnarowicz. I'd like to point to this particular friendship, which was one among thousands that made up Goldin's community, as an example of how we can reformulate attachments in a meaningful, queer present. The constellation made up of Goldin, Hujar, and Wojnarowicz—and others like it—have produced a significant counterhistory; Goldin writes: "This is my family, my history" (*BSD,* 6). Of her photographs, Goldin wrote: "This is the history of a re-created family" (ibid.). It is a history that is apparent in Wojnarowicz's later narration of the grief he felt at Hujar's death, a grief that incorporated rage, confusion, and even humor:

> I'm kicking around the cemetery mud among huge lifeless tractors and the ravines they've made strewn with boulders and wet earth, talking to him; first walking around trying to find him was so difficult I started laughing nervously, 'Maybe I can't find you, Peter'…. All these erratic movements till finally I stopped myself, forced myself to contain my movements. Walking backward and forward at the same time, I realized how rattled I was. I was talking to him again. (*Close to the Knives*, 100–101)

Wojnarowicz's grieving for Hujar is difficult to represent, in its "erratic movements," its melancholic "walking backward and forward at the same time," a kind of manic refusal to mourn. This is, in short, the grieving of a refigured family, one based in intimacy as "a shared history as much as a shared space; internalized as behavior patterns through its integration into memorial narratives of pleasure, intimacy becomes the basis for a collective

futurity" (Castiglia, "Sex Panics," 11). "In my family of friends," writes Goldin in the introduction to *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, "there is a desire for the intimacy of the blood family, but also a desire for something more open-ended" (6). Goldin's understanding of memory points to the two crucial aspects of re-imagined kinship. Queer kinship especially must at once incorporate a familial intimacy as the "basis for a collective futurity," while also detaching from, or disavowing, the deployment of the family and its structures in the service of oppression—namely homophobia and heteronormativity. In the sense of this simultaneous incorporation and disavowal, queer kinship might be seen as an inherently melancholic structure; but like Wojnarowicz's grief, it is an aggressive and intractable melancholia that can also register as a kind of refusal. Considering the premise of Judith Butler's "Gender is Burning," we can understand how Goldin may have may have been able to see such kinship structures manifest—and available for her use as forms—in the "houses" represented in the drag shows of "The Other Side." Kinship and drag, as Butler argues, have an ongoing relationship that Goldin's body of work literalizes. Further, Butler argues that a queer *resignification* of the family is the most vital element of re-imagined kinship, and that "the resignification of the family through these terms is not a vain or useless imitation, but the social and discursive building of community" (*Bodies That Matter,* 137).

Goldin's work participates extensively in this kind of resignification. Her "Cookie Portfolio," in *I'll Be Your Mirror*, presents an instance of this kind of act of memory. Even in Goldin's early photographs, we find images so formed by loss that they have an incredible prescience from the point of view of history. I look at the early photographs of Cookie Mueller and wonder what loss Goldin saw in those spaces that could foresee Cookie succumbing to AIDS before she had contracted the disease. Of Cookie, Goldin writes: "I kept running into her … with her family—her girlfriend Sharon, her son Max, and her dog

Beauty … part of how we grew close was through me photographing her—the photos were intimate and then we were" (*I'll Be Your Mirror,* 256). Goldin's "Cookie Portfolio" chronicles her friendship with Cookie from its beginnings in Provincetown until Cookie's death from AIDS in 1989. The photograph *Sharon with Cookie on the bed, Provincetown, September 1989,* shows Cookie in the final months of her life (fig. 6). The figures of Sharon and Cookie, former lovers, emerge from an oversaturated field of context. The colors in the photograph are almost lurid, but the shadows, themselves crucially oversaturated as well, point to a resignified family relationship based in a brutally dark future. The figures of both women are joined by three bright spots: Sharon's hair, Cookie's hair, and the photograph of Cookie's wedding on the wall between them. The impermanence of such a family of friends, joined by intimate narratives of memory, is always also threatened by the loss of that memory to narratives of official history. There is a sense, in this image, of the precarious architecture of a kinship of shared memory. Butler continues: "Significantly, it is in the elaboration of kinship forged through a resignification of the very terms which effect our exclusion and abjection that such a resignification creates the discursive and social space for community … toward a more enabling future" (*Bodies That Matter,* 137). Countermemory works as a kinship structure in Goldin's work, so that, as Sante testifies, "I see my own life in it, then and now. This is not always pleasant—sometimes it can be extraordinarily painful, dredging up old but unburied feelings and unresolved knots and continuing fears—but Nan's work won't let anyone stop at pain. The journey is longer than that" ("Parties," 103). Goldin's work resignifying the family is a kind of visual construction of countermemory that creates a meaningful present.

By 1985, writes Darryl Pinckney, "the lights were already starting to go out in many homes because of AIDS" ("Nan's Manhattan," 209), and Goldin's slideshows became

doubly meaningful; in a very real sense, "lights going out" was the precondition for the event of the slideshow, but the irreducible relation this effected between loss and agency continued to inform Goldin's work. This meant that in Goldin's slideshows, "the light captured in each image [became] an illuminated piece of the past" even—or especially—when "most everything we see in them is also lost in this past" (Heiferman, "Pictures," 282); a certain kind of melancholic darkness, perhaps as oversaturated with memory as the darkness in the photograph of Cookie and Sharon, forced Goldin to take pictures of loss and "turn them into pictures to live by" (ibid.). Kaplan suggests that Goldin's privileging of "lived experience," and I would argue that this should not only refer to the vividness of the images but also to their presentation, the way that the slideshows and exhibitions were "lived" by audiences, is "incompatible with the 'loss' and absence that she later recognizes as inhabiting the scene of what it means to take a picture" (*American Exposures,* 106). But loss was always a part of Goldin's work, not something that she only discovered later, after AIDS showed it to her. Kaplan's desire to pathologize Goldin's intimate attachments, limits us to a quite literal reading of the images as themselves pathological attachments. Rather than be mitigated by art, Goldin's attachments are refigured by, as, and through art. It is "by way of these affects," Flatley argues, that "the world, and indeed history itself, makes its way into aesthetic experience. Affect is the shuttle on which history makes its way into the aesthetic, and it is also what brings one back from the work into the world" (*Affective Mapping,* 81–82). The aesthetic work of Goldin's program, and indeed of any aesthetic program, is not incidental to that program's political efficacy, nor is content, as Kaplan seems to suggest, the only way that art can provoke identifications or affiliations. Indeed, sometimes it is through dis-identifications at the scene of the aesthetic experience—an exhibition, for example, or a slideshow—that art encourages political affiliation. Flatley employs Adorno's concept of

"the shudder" to further explain: "The work is something like a meeting place for an affective collectivity … 'Aesthetic comportment,' as Adorno puts it, is one place where one learns how to participate in a collectivity, to make contact with an other, based on a shared affective experience" (83). From its "drag queens to its AIDS victims, from its shattered lovers to its party animals" (Kaplan, *American Exposures*, 106), the lived experiences of Goldin's community are incorporated by her into images and then into collectively produced spaces and refigured as an intervention, the only possible documentary form.

III. Facts: Names that Have Ceased to be Proper

In 1989, Nan Goldin curated an exhibition titled "Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing…" in New York City. Kaplan argues that in this show Goldin committed a grave error in her representations of people with AIDS and in turn forced audiences to identify against the subjects of the images—hence, the title of the exhibition bears with it its own undermining. In Kaplan's view, Goldin employs what Cadava calls "the disciplinary function of the technical media … to distract or disperse the masses—to take them away from themselves in order to prevent them from experiencing pain directly" (*Words of Light,* 53). Yet this function can also create a zone for the emergence of resistance in the form of difference, as Cadava notes: "There can be no politicization of the human face that does not belong to an ideological combat zone. It is within this combat zone that Bloch, in a discussion of montage, states that in 'the all-exploding, all-shattered Today … human beings lack something, namely the main thing: their face and the world which contains it'" (59). Goldin's images install the loss of objects, "human faces," documenting the affect of loss instead of the objects themselves, and in so doing enact a representational strategy that displaces the viewer outward to the context of the exhibition—"the world which contains

it." If Goldin does use this "disciplinary function," however, she uses it not to disperse her audience away from identification but to condense them into the fact of difference.

Ultimately, Kaplan believes that Goldin's work is insufficiently political because she allows queerness to unmoor her gender and sexual identity from their very rigidly defined "postmodernist" politics[44] and thus "leaves no room for a discourse that refuses to identify with AIDS" (*American Exposures*, 104–5); this in turn "constitutes a morbid and essentialized discourse that bears witness to the AIDS victim with whom we are asked to identify over and against death, over and against (our) vanishing" (ibid.). What Kaplan seeks here—while accusing Goldin of doing so herself—is a kind of realism, Crimp writes, that "transmutes documentary specificity into aesthetic generality" (*Museum's Ruins,* 25), an identity politics uncomplicated by the aesthetic. Here again, Flatley's reading of Adorno is helpful, for in it we can see how "identification" with a work of art is not as straightforward as Kaplan would have it, or even as Benjamin feared it could be: "The moment of shudder is a reaction to the simultaneous rupture and connection between the affective experience one has within the world created by the work on the one hand and the affective attachments one has within the world of everyday life on the other. In this way the shudder opens up the space of self-estrangement that is necessary to get a distance on one's affects" (*Affective Mapping,* 84). Because Kaplan's work ignores Goldin's exhibition strategies and her history using them, he

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[44] For example, Kaplan writes: "It is one thing to say that she did not want to unmask gender; it is another to categorize the mask as a third gender in and of itself. If pretending and pretense rule (whatever that means), then how can 'the other side' (Goldin's 'something entirely different') hold or be held to any kind of identity politics? How and why would one want to classify and to count the 'wide range of gender identities among [one's] friends' if identity is somehow steeped in a masquerade that shields its own identification?" (*American Exposures*, 101). To answer the first question: Butler's idea of performativity helps us understand how and why we might want to foreground difference as a kind of identity politics. Second: Kaplan seems really to have answered his own question here, although I would add that the knowledges made possible by such "nonce taxonomies" make a compelling argument for documenting difference in this way.

fails to recognize that *he* is the one "pretending to appeal to a common humanity" (*American Exposures*, 104–5) that he calls identity politics, while excluding difference as a viable mode by which audiences, through affective experience, might collectively identify. "Like Goldin's work," writes Elizabeth Sussman, "Witnesses" "had a simple directness and was a product of a community … what was palpable was rage and grief"—the documented affects, not their general aesthetic equivalents ("In/Of Her Time," 37–38). Out of the intersection of social and formal representation that the exhibitions effect, Goldin creates an affective structure of identification and differentiation into which audiences are drawn but then cannot back out again—once we are in the difference that structures community, it is impossible to simply refuse.

Goldin's "grids" are a good place to find this intervention represented graphically in her work. These grids, like *Positive Grid II* (fig. 7) and the larger Gilles and Gotscho image grids (figs. 8 and 9), make explicit that "the meaning of Goldin's pictures, seen repeatedly over time, in different combinations, is fluid and never completely fixed" (Heiferman, "Pictures," 282); the grids work to imagine kinship visually and structurally, wherein "the work can be understood not as single frames but as shifting constellations of images" (ibid.). The *Satya School* and *Dazzle Bag* sets suggest through visual analogy that the grids represent the photographs Goldin lives with, images that line the walls of her life. In these collages, as in the grids, Goldin narrates her own attempts to "free herself from the static, individual shot" (Sartorius, "Deep Pictures," 323), an act of memory that crucially resignifies the static body as well as the arrested representations of an essentialized discourse. Kaplan argues that "it is very difficult to read an overly melodramatic, morbidly inevitable image such as 'Gotscho Kissing Gilles'" because it is, as he calls it, "a kiss of death" that refuses equivocation—since, ironically, its representation is too "straight" (*American Exposures,*

105).[45] Yet it is only when the reader (here, Kaplan) abstracts the image from its context to facilitate a realist interpretation, for which the work emphatically does not ask, that it becomes inevitable. The vast majority of Goldin's photographs of Gilles and Gotscho appear in grids; although in the catalogue for *I'll Be Your Mirror*, this particular image is alone on a page, this isolation in exhibition is not inevitable. The grids are a moving, fluid network that refuse decontextualization in their structures, rendering an essentialized subject or "AIDS victim" or even individual photograph impossible. I do not think that we can look at "Gotscho Kissing Gilles" apart from the en-gridded set of images that tell us the history of the couple and that lead us to this individual representation. According to Kaplan, Goldin fetishizes death in her AIDS images as a "defensive gesture" because the "vulnerability of her subjects" is something that "rational society will not tolerate" (ibid.). Yet within the grids, this vulnerability is precisely the point; fetishization here becomes the defensive gesture of the reader or audience who cannot tolerate the provisional activity of constructing a meaningful present, or who cannot put these images into the critical relation with one another that the works' presentation requests. Goldin's grids continue the project set forth by her slideshows, in the words of Roland Barthes, "that the *something* I am should be openly expressed as provisional, revocable, insignificant, inessential, in a word: impertinent" (ibid.).

Goldin's images of repositioned human bodies, friends, within a contextually structured present work to destroy the power of the overdetermined HIV/AIDS virus as signifier. This resignification as an expression of kinship is crucial to de-essentializing agency,

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[45] Kaplan proceeds strategically by taking Goldin's images out of the specific presentational context in which she placed them to encourage the growth of structures of feeling and affects/effects of meaning—here, the provisionality of community—and then criticizes the same images for failing to express this meaning, which his reading has prevented them from expressing, which he then in turn is able to "find" in them, thereby redeeming the photographs and bestowing upon them a history.

as it frees "the language that has obsessively accumulated around the body" (Treichler, "Epidemic of Signification," 66). Even when photographing her friends as they became ill, Goldin's images see their bodies incorporated into space, and incorporated by history, in a way that simultaneously asserts their presence and Goldin's eventual loss of them. "Her 'grids' bear witness to this," writes Joachim Sartorius, "by multiplying the act of seeing and documenting" ("Deep Pictures," 323–4). The photographs of Gotscho and Gilles show the two men physically present in the eyes of the camera; the colors are vibrant, the images clear. They look at Goldin, they look at each other, they embrace, they live. The images of Gilles, very sick, alone in his hospital bed, are the closest we come to pure loss in this series, and even then (in the image Kaplan found so morbidly melodramatic), Gotscho kisses him, there is a picture of a smiling child on the wall, the pure color of his arm asserts its presence against the sheet. And this is exactly the spatial relationship that people living with AIDS or HIV—particularly in the early days of the crisis—lacked in relation to history. So afraid were Americans of AIDS that those with the disease were, and frequently are still, only represented as passive participants in space; effectively, they are always already dead. But Goldin shows her love for them, which makes her friends exist positively in the pictures, as well as her mourning of their loss, the presence of their disappearance. Goldin's work creates a space where disappearance is made visible. This visibility of the disappeared is a new way of knowing, and therefore a new opening to history. In this spatial relation, she creates a history.

Goldin's creation of countermemory from a meaningful present began with her—somewhat prescient—slideshows, and her representations of the conditions of construction and its social effects transformed this early mode into her later grids. At the same time, Goldin's landscapes are among her most moving and affecting images. Because they are free

for a moment of her relation to other bodies, they are perhaps the best place to find examples of how Goldin's work creates spaces out of her constitutive functioning in them. Moving from the grids, which so often were cumulative and assertive of presence in the face of uncountable AIDS deaths, to the landscapes suggests a change in the material circumstances surrounding Goldin's production and exhibition of images. Bordowitz characterizes the "feelings of loss and absence many of us experience as the cumulative effect of many deaths from AIDS" (*AIDS Crisis*, 65) as a similar transformation in context and circumstance, an incorporation of figures into ground: "We watch what is all around us turn into memory" (ibid.). This change in the community registers on authorship, Bordowitz notes, as "a challenge to all of us who had accepted the death of the author as a condition of cultural criticism" (67). Cultural producers like Goldin, who had tried to resist authority by creating spaces for a community to articulate its own historical presence, saw the actual deaths of so many artists doubly, as the real loss of individual authors and as the cumulative and collective loss of presence.[46] So it would be wrong to say that these landscapes are spaces free of collective history and so relevant only to Goldin's subjectivity. The landscapes are, in fact, "all that is around us" turned to memory, the world exhibiting itself as the presence of absence that *is* this history.

The landscapes seem to be what de Certeau calls "the bewitching world by which one was 'possessed'" (*Practice of Everyday Life*, 92). Many of the landscapes are filled with loss; we may get the impression that they are spaces constructed by subjects who have

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[46] Bordowitz comments: "Roland Barthes' argument concerning the 'death of the author' meant to displace the hegemony of an author's intention underlying a text's meaning. The actual death of many great artists during the AIDS crisis reinvigorated the attention paid to the author-artist's role in art. I never rejected Barthes' contention that texts have many authors, including its readers, but AIDS compelled me to recognize the contributions of singular figures" (67, n. 15).

disappeared from them. Goldin's experience of these spaces, as she photographs them, is still a relation of incorporation. What the landscapes are empty of is constitutive of Goldin's experience of them and in turn she images the landscape as constitutive of this experience. In Goldin's words: "The landscapes aren't simply pretty postcards. They're often imbued with a kind of melancholia. There's usually some kind of intense emotional state that inspires the picture. A crisis of loss or a feeling of joy and freedom. A lot of the recent landscapes are infused with a sense of emptiness and loneliness" (*CL,* 96). "Powerful emotional experiences," Flatley confirms, "—quite different from more cognitively mediated ones— connect us with, even transport us *into* the materiality of the world around us. In fact, Benjamin contended that because affects come into being through attachment, and because they actually occur in the materiality of the world, affective experience can provide us with a link—unmediated by concepts—to that material world" (*Affective Mapping*, 18). Affect is a related way of structuring space for de Certeau, who writes: "there is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence … Haunted places are the only ones people can live in" (*Practice of Everyday Life*, 108). He continues, his description of space as constructed by affect echoing the connection between landscape and incorporated historical space in Goldin's work: "Places are fragmentary and inward-turning histories, pasts that others are not allowed to read, accumulated times that can be unfolded but like stories held in reserve, remaining in an enigmatic state, symbolizations encysted in the pain or pleasure of the body. 'I feel good here': the well-being under-expressed in the language it appears in like a fleeting glimmer is a spatial practice" (ibid.).

In *Clinic at the hospital, Belmont, Mass*, we can read both mourning, I think, and hope (fig. 10). The image is blurred, a stately building in a partially darkened sky, almost entirely imbued with blue. As with so many of Goldin's images, the relationship of figure and

ground is unclear, and we are not sure if the building is fading into the sky or emerging from it. The image could be dusk, the lights in the windows of the building standing as safety, or it could be dawn, and the lights belong to those who can't sleep or who need all-night care. In the night, which is usually feared, the lights are comfort; in the dawn, which brings comfort, the lights are fear. Like the lights and spaces of Goldin's slideshows, "these are not," in Grosz's words, "reflective or scientific properties of space but are effects of the necessity that we live and move in space as bodies in relation to other bodies" (*Space*, 93). Herein we find Goldin's continual troubling of the figural relationship of representation. We know several things about this photograph; first, that Goldin is standing outside in the semi-darkness, capturing an image, and that there is snow on the ground, so she must be cold. Because we are unsure about so many other parts of the image, we cannot stand apart from it, cannot "conceptually impose" our interpretation on this space. In the space of incorporation, Goldin creates images that see history from "'down below,' below the threshold at which visibility begins" (de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 93). This is not a landscape that we can say is "of" or "about" something because our own questioning of what comprises the image doesn't allow us a passive relation to it. De Certeau writes: "These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each other's arms" (ibid.). In a way, then, we stand alongside Goldin in the either rising or fading light, taking part in the history that the photograph enacts. For Goldin, this is one way that there are always other subjects in an image, even when there are not other bodies physically present; the image shows us, as Flatley puts it, "the shared historicity of that affective life" (*Affective Mapping*, 84). A similar image, *Path in the woods at the Hospital, Belmont, Mass*, offers us at once comfort, gentleness, and unease (fig. 11). There is a light over the path, but we do not know if the path leads to or away from a destination. We

know, from Goldin's own words, that both images were taken when she was at McLean Hospital recovering from drug addiction. Writes Goldin: "When I went into the hospital and I discovered natural light, my work really changed. To become sober after fifteen years on drugs was such an extreme experience that I had absolutely no way to fit into myself; I had no idea who I was. I was completely lost. I made self-portraits compulsively. That was the first time I consciously understood how much I was using the camera to re-assemble myself" (*CL,* 48). While it is not essential for us to know this in order to experience the images, Goldin offers this information alongside the images, so we cannot deny that it is "knowable" and relevant to her project. Goldin's troubling of the figural relationship of representation as a troubling of history suggests that Grosz's reading of the logic of the trace can be useful for understanding how Goldin's own interventions, which invoke her own history, extend to her project in its entirety and inform her work as a way of knowing.

Grosz, following Derrida, writes: "Neither quite outside the text nor at home within it, the signature is a trace resonating and disseminating the textual exterior with its interior" (*Space*, 13). Goldin's concrete history is similarly inseparable from the spaces in which it is lived. The spatio-temporal figuration that Goldin produces leads to an alternative conception of knowing that informs the social and political project her work undertakes. We could conceive of Goldin's project as "offer" of "experience beyond the categories of identity" in the words of Butler (*Gender Trouble,* 162), or as "an erotic struggle to create new categories from the ruins of the old, new ways of being a body within the cultural field, and whole new languages of description" (ibid.). When considering the space that Goldin built through the destabilizing of the figural relationship by incorporation and exhibition, we might ask the same question that Butler asked about "troubling" gender: "What is left when the body rendered coherent through the category of sex is *dis*aggregated, rendered chaotic? Can this

body be re-membered, put back together again?" (161). What is left when the subject made coherent by its assumed relationship to a historical "ground" is rendered chaotic? What kind of remembering is at stake here? The work of incorporation that comprises Goldin's project locates the body—both her body and the bodies of her subjects—in a position of difference, and hence potential interaction with, social and historical signs and representations. This conception of the body shows the relationship of the representational body to represented history. Here Goldin's images correspond most powerfully with projects of "revolutionary" history, opening the interstices of difference to the more subtle languages of signification, the multiplied surfaces of bodies responding—with unique and collective agency—to historical signs. "Evoking images of the past that flash up only to disappear" (Cadava, *Words of Light*, 3), Goldin's work operates with a Benjaminian understanding that calls into question "those forms of pragmatism, positivism, and historicism that Benjamin understands as so many versions of a realism that establishes its truth by evoking the authority of so-called facts" (ibid.). Her images of incorporation render explicit how history is formed by bodies that have certain, but always possibly transforming, meanings within their social contexts—documenting what *happens to* individual and collective subjectivities and turning it into presence. In other words, Goldin's work discloses the contiguity, oftentimes contingency, between the ways that subjectivity represents and the ways that social space is represented and presents it as a kind of fact. In this way, as Benjamin writes: "Facts become something that hit us just now; to establish them is the task of memory … nothing other than what we should determine here, on the level of the historical, and collectively" (71).

The early years of the AIDS crisis, according to Wojnarowicz, "became a time in which one had to choose one's tribe; choose one's *reality*" (*Close to the Knives*, 173). To choose one's own reality is also to choose one's own realism. The potential for agency founded in

this emerging structure of feeling is clear in Goldin's work, in line with what Butler means when she describes the creation of queer kinship: "This is not an appropriation of dominant culture in order to remain subordinated by its terms, but an appropriation that seeks to make over the terms of domination, a making over which is itself a kind of agency, a power in and as discourse, in and as performance, which repeats in order to remake—and sometimes succeeds" (*Bodies That Matter,* 137). This appropriation is opposed to the conception of a knowledge engendering and in turn reproduced by the monument, as Grosz writes:

> Although knowledges are produced at specific times and places, their genesis is largely considered irrelevant … to the information they produce. These processes of production leave no trace in their product. Theories and knowledges are produced in their transparency as *eternally true* or valid, independent of their origins. Knowledge is outside of history, capable of being assessed and reevaluated independently of the space and time of its production. Knowledges do not carry the index of their origins. (*Space*, 28)

Goldin's images are a kind of knowledge of subjects of history that bear in themselves the "index of their origins," and, as such, they produce a document of history that carries the trace of the subject into the present. In her exhibitions—whether on apartment walls, in slideshows, or en-gridded in the pages of a catalogue—the images index the origin of a community and disclose the sites of production of that community's facts, the site where subjects collectively register presence by articulating themselves across difference.

This is finally most apparent in her later photographs, in which the subjects who have *not* disappeared create images that assert their presence in the historical ground rather than a disappearance into it. This shift of presence, an alternative conception of figure and ground, brings her subjects out of the darkness of the slideshows and into light, out of the visible structures of feeling created by the grids and into presence as facts, carrying in both cases with the index of their community's history. It is in part this "refinement in sorrow or mourning" (Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 22), which Goldin came to through her ever-evolving

exhibitions, to include the positive assertion of a lived subjectivity that allows us to see in her images "the imprint of a humankind that is surely not triumphant but subtle, ready to fight, and creative" (ibid.). These subjects are not authorized facts but active ones. *David and Ric on the sidewalk, NYC, 1996* (fig. 12) is an image of presence within historical absence, of subtle light and life emerging from the background of the city streets. In a close-up of two friends in the light of a fading summer sun, Goldin captures the men in conversation. One looks at the other while the other looks intently at something nearby; it is clear that the two men are in dialogue with the world while at the same time in dialogue with each other. Backlit by the fading sun, the figures stand out against the light while it also dims their faces. They are neither engulfed by the shadows, nor are they free from them. They are neither the victims of history, the ceaselessly fading light in the streets where they live, nor are they immune to its effects. David and Ric are both, always, at the same time. Can the sad be beautiful? This image answers "yes." Nan Goldin pictures herself in the same way in the final image of *I'll Be Your Mirror. Self-portrait by the lake, Skowhegan, Maine, 1996*, shows Goldin definitively outside of the city streets, for indeed one cannot get much more outside the city than Skowhegan, Maine (fig. 13). But even when she is literally outside of the city, Goldin remains a part of her community, subject to the same forces of light and history that illuminate her face while at the same time slowing the shutter to blur her image. Goldin is alone in this photograph, and the photograph imagines her myriad loss while also binding her to David and Ric by way of their identical positions with regard to historical and compositional space as produced by Goldin's camera. Both images are relatively straightforward representations, but they have also accumulated the history, both in themselves and in our looking at them, by which they have been narrated into presence, factualized.

Is the sad beautiful? Skowhegan, Maine, is a site of my own history, my community of friends in a series of moments that produces an incorporated space. At discrete and sad points in my own history, I bought fiddleheads from the back of a truck parked beside the mint-green river, washed my friend Claire's hair in the very same lake that Goldin gazes upon. There are losses that structure the space of my own writing. My history coincides with Goldin's throughout this analysis, and I never know what of it I should disappear so that my analysis may seem official. I grew up during the era of which Goldin's photographs are a part. There is no way that I can conceive of an analysis as somehow separate from these facts of my history, so the two must exist in a differential relation where I struggle to orient myself in a narrative structured only by flashes of light. To ask when this project becomes illegitimate would be to ask when my history becomes irrelevant, and then the only question left is, to what? But there is Goldin, looking out over the brilliantly lit lake in Skowhegan, Maine, telling me through this image, through its finally constant presence in the book in front of me, that it is right to bring my experience to bear on this analysis. This nearness, an uncomfortable intimacy, is an affect inseparable from the troubled acts of memory, incorporation, and identity that structure Goldin's project. "Linking acts and footsteps" in our tumble into incorporation, writes de Certeau,

> Opening meanings and directions, these words operate in the name of an emptying-out and wearing-away of their primary role. They become liberated spaces that can be occupied. A rich indetermination gives them … the function of articulating a second, poetic geography on top of the literal, forbidden or permitted meaning. They insinuate other routes into the functionalist and historical order of movement. Walking follows them: "I fill this great empty space with a beautiful name." People are put in motion by the remaining relics of meaning, and sometimes by their waste products, the inverted remainders of great ambitions. Things that amount to nothing, or almost nothing, sym-bolize and orient walkers' steps: names that have ceased precisely to be "proper." (*Practice of Everyday Life*, 105)

But all this walking, this movement, also makes something. Here, in the images, and in how we see them—in their presentation—is a new language for telling history, a document of its

being lived. We are put in motion by the affective attachments these images materialize to create facts, our own realisms made meaningful by both difference and the nearness through which we try to give it a name.
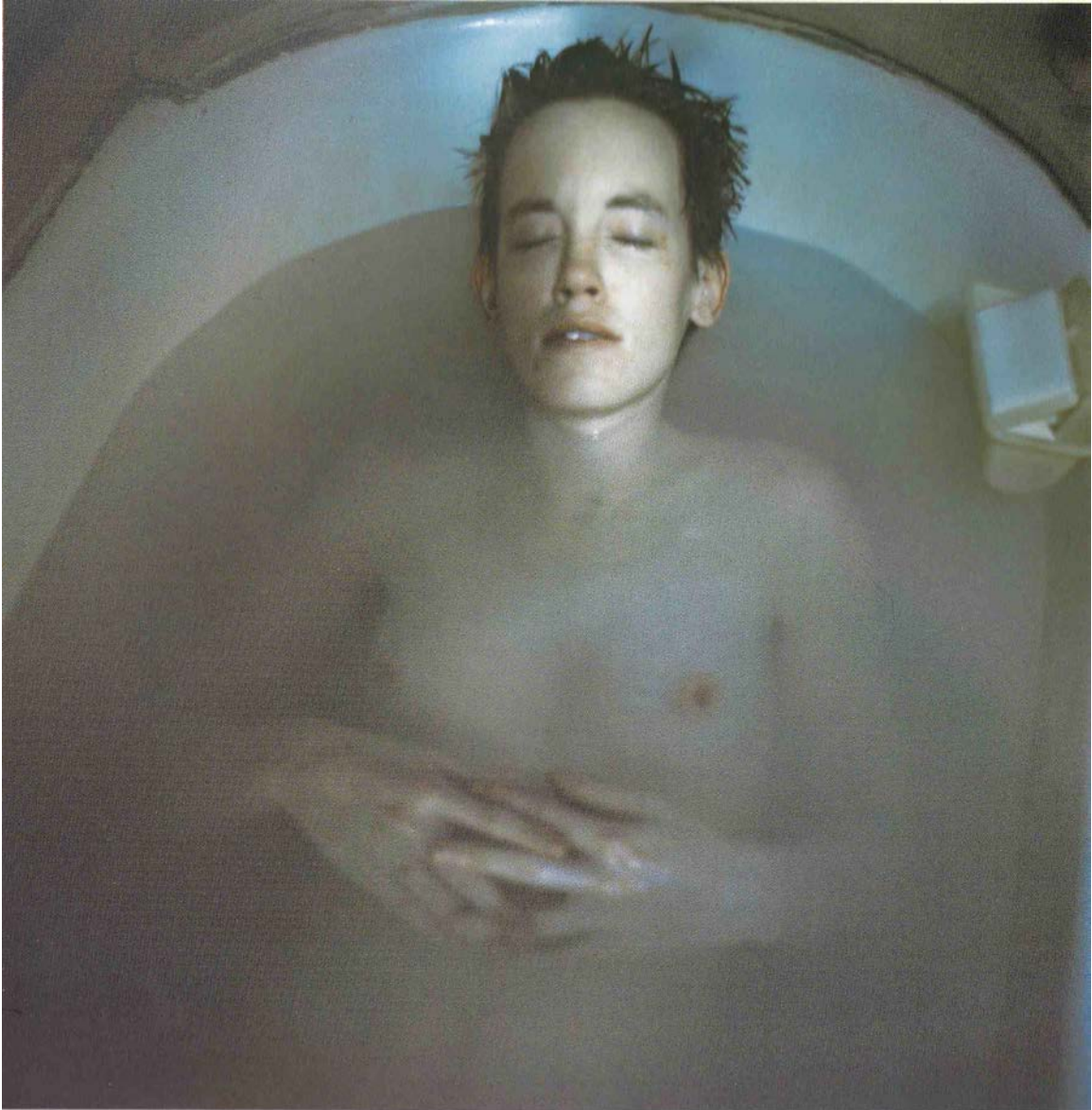
Figure 3: *Ryan in the tub, Provincetown, 1976*. Goldin, *I'll Be Your Mirror* (77)

Figure 4: Satya school years, 1969–1972. Goldin, *I'll Be Your Mirror* (18)

Figure 5: Dazzle Bag, 1972–1973. Goldin, *I'll Be Your Mirror* (20–21)
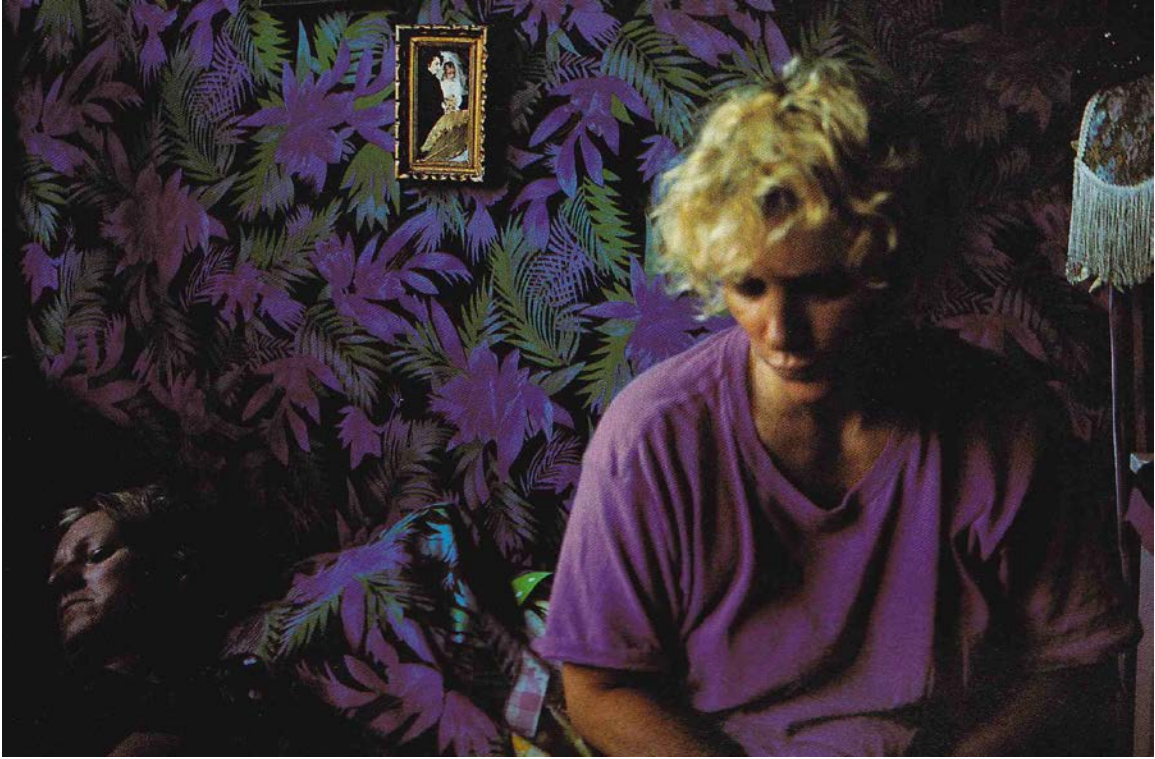
Figure 6: *Sharon with Cookie on the bed, Provincetown, September 1989.* Goldin, *I'll Be Your Mirror*
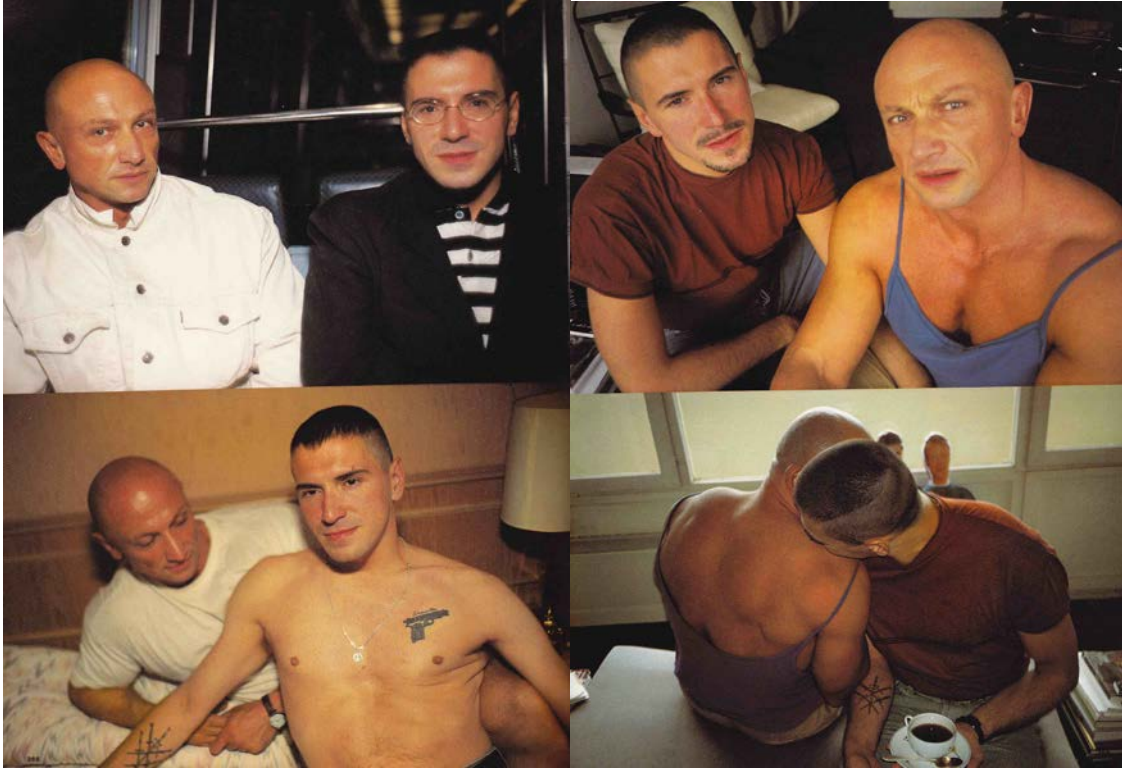
(267)

Figure 7: *Positive Grid II, 1992–2002/2003.* Goldin, *The Devil's Playground* (406–7)

Figure 8: *Gilles and Gotscho Grid I*

Top Left: *Gilles and Gotscho on the metro, Paris, 1991.* Goldin, *I'll Be Your Mirror* (368)

Bottom Left: *Gilles and Gotscho in my hotel room, Paris, 1992.* Goldin, *I'll Be Your Mirror* (368)

Top Right: *Gilles and Gotscho at home, Paris, 1992.* Goldin, *I'll Be Your Mirror* (369)

Bottom Right: *Gilles and Gotscho embracing, Paris, 1992.* Goldin, *I'll Be Your Mirror* (369)

Figure 9: *Gilles and Gotscho Grid II*

Top Left: *Gotscho at the kitchen table, Paris, 1993.* Goldin, *I'll Be Your Mirror* (370)

Bottom Left: *The hallway of Gilles' hospital, Paris, 1993.* Goldin, *I'll Be Your Mirror* (370)

Top Right: *Gilles in his hospital bed, Paris, 1993.* Goldin, *I'll Be Your Mirror* (371)

Bottom Right: *Gotscho in the movie theater, Paris, 1993.* Goldin, *I'll Be Your Mirror* (371)

Figure 10: *Clinic at the hospital, Belmont, MA, 1988*. Goldin, *I'll Be Your Mirror* (240)

Figure 11: *Path in the woods at the hospital, Belmont, MA, 1988*. Goldin, *I'll Be Your Mirror* (250)

Figure 12: *David and Ric on the sidewalk, NYC, 1996*. Goldin, *I'll Be Your Mirror* (458)
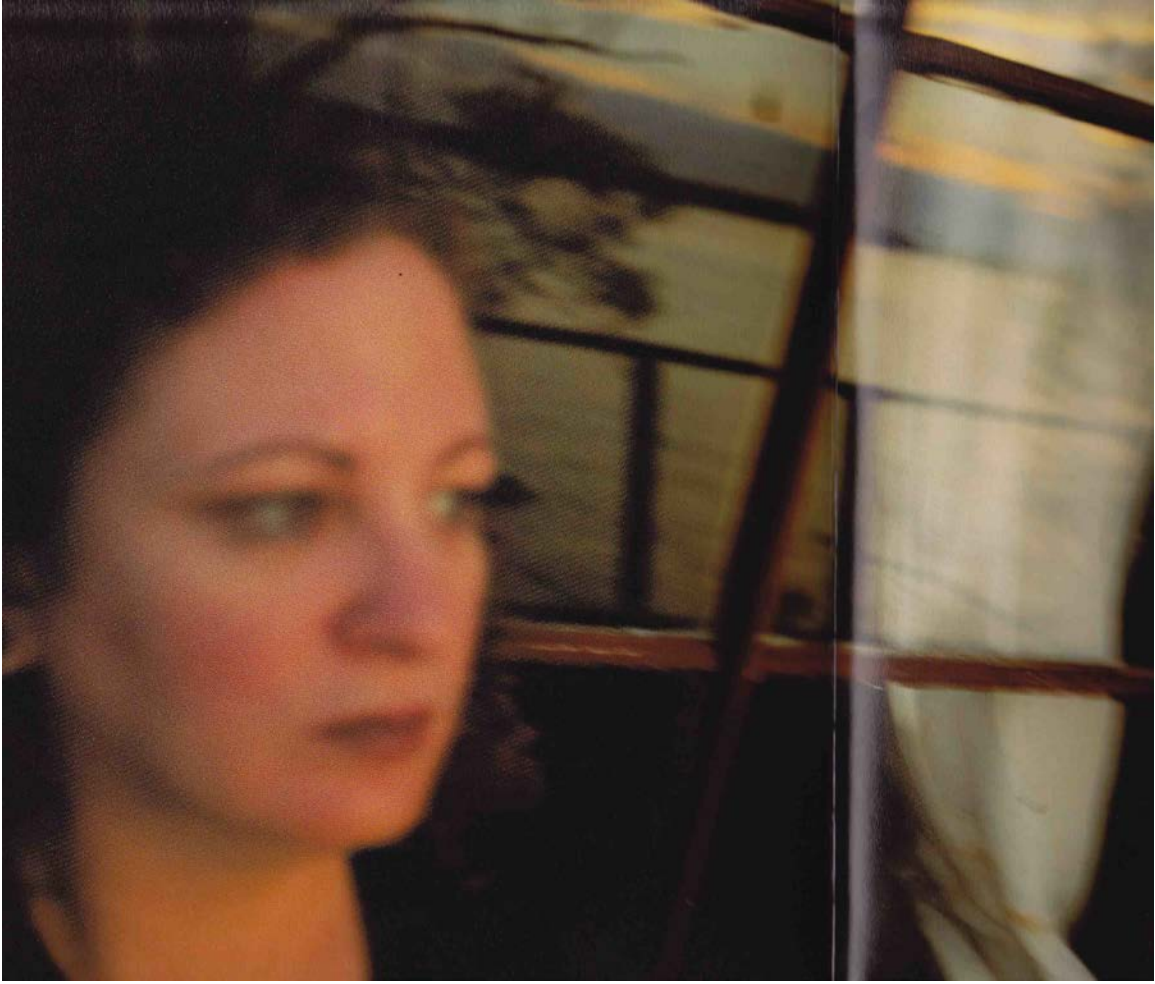
Figure 13: *Self-portrait by the lake, Skowhegan, Maine, 1996*. Goldin, *I'll Be Your Mirror* (460)

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ABSTRACT

THIS FACT WHICH IS NOT ONE:
DIFFERENTIAL POETICS IN TRANSATLANTIC AMERICAN MODERNISM

by

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This dissertation proposes that the literary fact, first discussed by Jurij Tynajnov in his 1924 essay "The Literary Fact," and later in "On Literary Evolution" (1929), names an intersection of literary formalism and social representation central to experimental modernist texts in the twentieth century. The poetics of literary fact that I propose finds its basis in Russian Formalist and Frankfurt School theory and reflects several important twentieth century social moments to illustrate how historical and social facts seek poetic form. In my use of the term, "fact" is the materiality of history as it moves from the social world, carrying with it the index of its own production, through to literary form. Radical form thus becomes a mode of social rethinking for conditions like gender, race, queerness, and nationality as they relate to historical context and individual authorship. In turn, the literary fact helps us to see how experimental texts are not purely self-conscious formalist gestures but are, instead, crucially connected to the social and historical periods that produced them. I propose that form follows fact, and thus that a study of the literary fact can open even the most radically anti-realist texts to socially based readings.

Gertrude Stein's *Geography and Plays* incorporates into its form the facts of World War One, its ruptures and transformations, and joins them with sociality as Stein has

experienced it to create a way of knowing the war that is both a model of relating to history and a language to bring forward into future social and textual investments. Likewise, Langston Hughes's *Montage of a Dream Deferred* produces not simply an illustration of black modernity with a bebop soundtrack, but a record of the emergence of modern blackness freed from American capitalist narratives of progress to tell modernity in its own terms. Jack Spicer's practice of dictation becomes more than alien transmissions reaching a poet fatally estranged from the pre-Stonewall, Cold War social world; *Heads of the Town up to the Aether* documents spaces outside of language that Spicer called "love" in the facts this text makes literary. Spicer's devotion to the idea of (queer) love implored poets to create a world that they would not be consumed by. Finally, Nan Goldin's photographs cease to be simple snapshots of a now mythologized bohemia; beyond their transformation into documents of the loss of that bohemia to the early days of AIDS, we can see how these images disclose the facts of the collective production of both a community's history and its possible future. Thus, experimental forms transform both documentary evidence and material language into facts that accumulate, creating new knowledges.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

I received a B.A. in Creative Writing from the University of Maine in 2002, followed by an M.A. in Poetry and Poetics in 2004. The same year, I arrived at Wayne State University to continue my studies, eventually completing my Ph.D. in 2012. My interest in experimental documentary media and the possibilities of trans-media languages for conveying social and historical facts has led to my ongoing involvement in the world of independent documentary film as producer of the Camden International Film Festival in 2010 and 2011 and as an associate producer for the Maine and New York-based Ffilmcompany. I look forward to revising my dissertation to become a book manuscript that expands upon my study of the literary fact to also address the potential implications of trans-sensory facts that consider experimental and emerging visual, aural, gestural, and linguistic modes for creating new "documentary" languages, new poetics, new maps, and new voices. In the longer-term future, I am interested in studying and producing work about the relationship between institutionalized language and compromised mental and emotional states. I also plan to make a series of short films that reconsider specific poets and poems through trans-media representations.