MINORITIZED KNOWLEDGES:
AGENCY, LITERATURE, TEMPORALITIES

by
Maya Nitis

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Abstract

"I am not erudite enough to be interdisciplinary, but I can break rules."
Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, xiii

"Minoritized Knowledges: Agency, Literature, Temporalities," queries an agency exercised by literature in excess of authorial intention as well as the text itself, which is transforming in its unoriginality, as a convergence of exploited, minoritized knowledges.

The six chapters engage multiple fields as discourses rather than territories. "Nonidentity and Vectors of History," brings Critical Theory's notion of nonidentity into dialogue with key literary work by authors including Claudia Rankine and Elfriede Jelinek. The historical principle of nonidentity illuminates a convergence in their writing, which facilitates understanding history as vectors of trauma rather than modes of domination. Chapter 2. "Literary Agency and Minoritized Grammar" addresses the political work of contemporary poets, including Fred Moten, contesting the sequestering of alternative minoritized grammars in poetic terms. Limiting alternative grammar to poetic experimentation perpetuates melancholy and epistemic hegemony. Chapter 3. "Economies of Sacrifice," situates the work historically, where sacrifice emerges as central to western hegemonic logic. Recent feminist and queer mobilizations of the figure of Antigone highlight how sacrifice undergirds western tradition/s of exploitation and increasingly generates economies of violence that mobilize current knowledge markets. Chapter 4. "Unfinished Knowledge," sets the stage by underscoring the convergence of partial, situated and unfinished knowledges in the works of Black, feminist and queer theorists for which literature is key. Such incomplete epistemologies continue to be underestimated and ambivalently received. Chapter 5. "The Folly of Narrative," engages with current critical re-readings of literary realism, to draw out alternative epistemological figures and temporalities that contest the logic of sacrifice. Chapter 6. "Literary Agency and Minoritized Knowledges" revisits the history of

western ideas decentering eurocentrism's deployment of certainty qua mastery and completion under the guise of knowledge. Pivoting from the convergence of decolonial queer feminist critique, I elaborate alternative epistemological figures, including counter-grammar, nonidentity and folly. By undermining dominant dichotomous epistemologies and inviting diasporic study, these figures challenge epistemic injustice.

The contrast between epistemologies of exploitation versus decolonization is not dichotomous but performative. Hence, it is situated, situational, contextual, temporal, historical and (dis)located.

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balance in conditions that make it impossible, and for his continued dedication to intellectual integrity and to being a great dad.

As the pandemic wore on, I met a person who has dissipated the melancholy that accrues to bodies and minds as we trudge on to the rhythm of the status quo. There is not enough gratitude in my world to express how lucky I feel to share time and space with L, whose everyday expression rifts my existence in more ways than I ever thought possible: intellectually, emotionally, physically and psychologically. L changes lives like others change clothes, with no account of the radical depth of her work and the unprecedented capaciousness and effulgence of her mind, which infuses each letter of my thought.

In shared radical freedom, M. 2/7/2023

For:

My *Doktormutter*: K.P., for unwavering unmothering, steady queer feedback over the years of this wavered work.

My students: whose enthusiasm, daring and fascination sustains and supports my intellectual commitments.

My papa *and* my kiddo: the combination of whose far-reaching thought, errors and (lack of) knowledge have motivated this inquiry and more.

L., who has never (despite any appearances) and will never (despite any desires) be mine or anyone else's, and whose light is the brightest illumination I have ever known or imagined.

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Remnants of Truth: Counter-Thought

An Introduction

"Precedent is not experience and experience is not precedent. If we let precedent determine our future, we have no experiences." Larisa Unger

Introductions come last, when the work itself glimmers on the horizon of in/completion.

Minoritized Knowledges: Agencies, Literatures and Temporalities, emerges from the rift in the academy, echoed in broader social contexts, about the role of literature and its study. For women, people of color, queers, and many other othered others, literature has always played a key if underestimated role in social transformation. Yet in public, as well as academic spheres, literature's place continues to be questioned and undervalued.

I bring minoritized epistemologies to bear on what I call: literary agencies. This nomination gathers traces that exceed literature and that, I suggest, indirectly yet consequentially contribute to social transformation. It occurs, in large part, by generating knowledges that undermine and deviate from dominant epistemologies.

Embodied, situated, temporal, contextualized, concrete, partial, dynamic and unfinished differences do not resolve into camps, parties, sides, nations, identities, genders, classes nor war groups. Neither do they conflate into the homogenized whole, fall into the totalizable, nor fit into the given pigeon-hole/s. Minoritized knowledges do critical work with little credit and no profit: specifically, through literary agencies (and, potentially, by way of other routes), subversive, transformative epistemologies become legible where differences are broken out of the false dichotomies into which dominant identarian logics sequester them. The multiplicity of differences articulated by literary agencies highlight that truth, far from being universal or relative, illuminates and is illuminated by minoritized knowledges, unfolding, vulnerable, fragmented, emergent.

·   **The Unbearable Heaviness of Representation: equality, sameness, substitution**

The German word *Gleichheit*, meaning both sameness and equality, highlights a problem of representation. Milan Kundera's novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, represents this problem in an uncanny image: the surreal dream in which a woman (played by Juliette Binoche in the film version) enters the swimming pool, whose reflection multiplies her into many. The man she loves sits in the high lifeguard's chair above her, and shoots the multiplying women, one by one. They fall into the pool, filling the clear water with blood. The swimming suit underscores the feminized shapes, indicating *Gleichheit*: dead or alive, substitutable by (feminized) doppelgangers.

As a representation of representation, the scene poignantly illustrates the conflation of sameness and equality through substitution. This node belies nuclear "love" as based in ownership, cheating and jealousy, that motor the heteronormative narrative, interdependent with violence. Misrepresenting identity as individual property rather than a social situation, generates profit through the principle of substitution. In this process, unique individuality is sacrificed, exchanged for identity as an emptied category that substitutes for individuality. In the context of the mutual dependency of violence and "love" in the nuclear family, the sons are readied for war by the dead dads (who must prove their masculinity to the death); while the daughters are ready for sacrifice (as individuals) to the ideal and thus sacrificed othered mother.

This ancient narrative trades in sacrifice, which operates through the principle of identity (and difference) as dis-embodied qualities. Modern western philosophy and literature attempt to wrest individuality from this dis-embodiment – primarily through the absolute qua formalism – in effect, dichotomizing and dis-embodying differences further. Capitalism rides the rift between singular freedom and individualized sacrifice, misappropriating the discourses of identity versus

difference for profit by the principle of substitution, which is brought to a pitch by commodification that motors contemporary economies. In pandemic times, embodied differences are sacrificed under the guise of individualized identities economized.

· **Metaleptic Figuration, or Literatures that Matter**

If the concern with misappropriation and commodification did not haunt, rightly, every contemporary endeavor, I would have liked to call this work: *Literatures that Matter*. As I hope is evident from the discussion of *Gleichheit*, no plurality is ever the same, nor should things have the same value, unlike people… This work addresses a selection of literatures, primarily from the 19th century to the present, which illuminate dynamic temporalities and performative historicities that condition transformation. In dialogue with recent critical thought, such illuminations constitute minoritized knowledges. Irreducible to the identities of the authors, minoritized knowledges bring together decolonial epistemologies and modes of figuration that have been racialized, feminized, deemed queer, insane, othered, silenced and exploited. Taking these charges seriously, I draw together their subversive, anti-hegemonic agencies.

The literatures I address are samplings that focus on the historical present. I begin with recent questioning of the aftermath of slavery in the American context and the Shoah in the Austrian context. More than a comparative work, this constitutes a dialogical juxtaposition that highlights literary agencies in social-historical terms. I then move onto contemporary poetic counter-grammars, which undermine the hopelessness of hegemonic logics of commodification. The middle of the work situates it historically by attending to Antigone, from Hölderlin's abstruse notes to feminist queer echoes. I then leap into German realist folly and the recent resurgence of scholarship on realism in relation to queer performativity and convergent temporalities. In the penultimate chapter, key minoritized thinkers of epistemologies pose a

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careful counter program to the disembodied worklessness of literatures. Lastly, I underscore minoritized epistemological figures of folly, nonidentity and counter-grammar through race-critical, class-conscious, queer, feminist, Black studies-informed, Kafkaesque, counter-messianic, performative literary agencies in concert.

In the philosophical and sociological work of the thinkers I discuss, literature holds a special, undervalued place. Through literary figuration – nonbinary praxis, non-synthetic dialectics and queer performativity unfold as instances rather than representational examples. Instances speak to the temporal and spatial singularities that converge and diverge in literary as well as social topographies. Pivoting from necessary fictions, literatures reveal where metaphors congeal into concepts, as Judith Butler notes. I address the chiastic movement by which metalepsis shatters the ossified givens of so-called reality, with its violent heteronormativity. In the ruins of these norms, figuration presents truth as fragile, transformative, performativity. In other words, the literary and the social are not the same terrain, but neither are they opposites. Literary agencies underscore the metaleptic processes by which multiple realities and histories feed into literatures, and vice versa.

· **From Critical to critical theory: Nonbinary praxis, non-synthetic dialectics and queer performativity**

Critical Theory, a.k.a., the Frankfurt School, brings together Marxist and Freudian analysis for a potent critique of ideology as the false claims that reify the status quo. Yet its contemporary applicability is limited by a virtually exclusive theoretical focus. Firsthand experience of National Socialism made leading Critical Theorists, including Theodor Adorno, shy away from and, at times, condemn revolt, specifically during the movements of the 1960's.

Today, the term critical theory (with a little "c") is often used as an umbrella term for feminist, queer, decolonial and Black critical thought, which sometimes incorporates an analysis of ideology, convergent with Critical Theory (with a big "C"). Unlike Frankfurt School Thought, critical theory has focused more on revolutionary praxis convergent with theory.

I stage a dialogue between contested elements of Critical Theory and central critical thinkers, including Patricia Hill Collins, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Donna Haraway, Michel Foucault, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Achille Mbembe, Judith Butler, Fred Moten and Karen Barad vis-à-vis literary agencies. This dialogue brings together non-binary praxis, non-synthetic dialectics and queer performativity in partial, divergent, convergent, comparative and consequential terms that have been noted separately but remain undertheorized dialogically.

· **Secular Illuminations: Counter-messianic Counter-Realism**

Judith Butler's influence on contemporary critical theories, including feminist, queer and race critical thought, can hardly be overestimated. Walter Benjamin, who has been described as a Jewish mystic, although his writings suggest that he would have rejected such nomination, stands out among Butler's references. His thought is heavily influenced by Judaism in theological rather than religious terms, paralleled by an interest in the law and its study in place of its practice. Study suggests a particular relation to what is normally called its "object." However, Benjamin and Butler do not approach discourses or subject matters as objects. Traversing the distance between Critical and critical theories, they endeavor not to ossify their subjects, taking a dynamic approach necessary to avoid objectifying subject matters. This dialogically performative methodology converges with Karen Barad's agential transdisciplinarity and Fred Moten's elusive approach to black study. Moten, a poet and scholar of fugitivity, elaborates a dialogical methodology for Black Studies, weaving multiple interlocutors into the fabric of his writings.

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If contemporary American empire is defined by a secular semblance, conditioned by monotheistic tenets, the failed secular attempt to break faith with religion illuminates remnants of what might be counted as counter-truth. For Benjamin, insight illuminates the past like lightening, which flashes up for a moment to reveal what is around it, and then disappears. Thus, it is fragmentary, partial, temporal and located.

This illuminated and illuminating context, in which truth appears as a ruin, is characterized by convergent temporalities and topographies that are deemed impossible. It is in the interest of the status quo to deem all that deviates from violent heteronormative hegemony as impossible, insane and unreal. However, such impossibility turns out to be paradoxical rather than aporetic. In other words, understood as a situated situation, apparent impossibilities that exceed the norm present transformative possibilities in terms of alternative logics and epistemologies illuminated by literary agencies.

Butler describes Benjamin's thought as "counter-messianic," which activates fragments of truth as partial and irreducible elements of a livable life. A livable life does not rely on the past as precedent, but rather transforms what is unlivable, moment by moment. Thereby, the time of the Messiah ceases to be a time to come, instead characterizing the revolutionary moment of the now. Counter narratives of progress, such performative temporalization opens out onto nuanced attention to multiple temporalities.

· **Responsible Knowledge/s**

The minoritized theorists I address converge on the undervalued insight that knowledges must be approached as partial to be responsible. Partiality contrasts with universality – the incessant, if increasingly veiled, hegemonic demand echoed across epistemological fields. To think of knowledges as partial is not to give up on truth and admit relativism and subjectivism as the only

positions. Rather, from a counter-messianic perspective that rejects the reality of the violent status quo, the abstract formalism of deferral as well as the Stalinist waiting for the totalizing event, partial minoritized knowledges enter into dialogue. Such dialogue illuminates remnants of truth as unfinished moments in the now, situated objectively: hence, at once, embodied and partial.

The ruins of truth do not signal the end of the conversation. On the contrary, starting with situated objectivity, which enables speakers and scholars to take responsibility for their agency without falling into melancholy white guilt, comparativist, transdisciplinary methodologies unfold connection and transformation across classes and languages.

· **Overview:**

The trajectory of this dissertation begins with "Nonidentity and Vectors of History," which addresses major works by two Austrian and two American authors: Ingeborg Bachman, Elfriede Jelinek, Toni Morrison and Claudia Rankine. Although vastly different, all four focus on the aftermath of traumatic histories. The principle of historical nonidentity in their works illuminates how individual identities, specifically in terms of gender and race, are ruined, revealing their constitution in traumatic and historical social terms. The figure of metalepsis – as the traversal between the figurative and the social – highlights the ruins of identity.

The second chapter, "Literary Agency and Minoritized Grammar," turns to poetry through a transdisciplinary lens. In dialogue with Anthony Reed's critical work on mourning in Black experimental poetry, I address the contemporary poetics of Farid Matuk, Mark Nowak and Fred Moten. I argue that undermining grammatical traditions does more than experiment in line with modern avant-garde writing. Through the lens of critical epistemologies, minoritized grammars undermine dominant modes of understanding and relation. Specifically, situated in a

transdisciplinary context that underscores the interrelation of literary genres with one another, as well as with other theoretical discourses and practical social contexts, literary agency intervenes in the historical present as a mode of counter-melancholy. Thereby minoritized grammars enact decolonial education.

Chapter 3. "Economies of Sacrifice: In Pandemic Times," situates the work of minoritized knowledges in the historical present in literary-philosophical-economic terms. "The caesura of the speculative," an essay by one of the original troika of deconstructionists: Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, examines the contested relationship between poetry and philosophy through Hölderlin's pithy yet little understood "Notes on Antigone." Lacoue-Labarthe's work has received insufficient attention. Through feminist queer readings of tragic, deconstructive and economic histories in the work, by philosophers including Tina Chanter and Judith Butler, I show how sacrifice moves from ancient and literary stages to modern philosophy and motors contemporary economies beneath the surface. Sacrifice here denotes concrete violent erasure systematically displaced and channeled along lines of minoritization. These readings of Antigone also open transformative possibilities through non-oppositional logics of singularity.

The fourth chapter, "Unfinished Knowledge," brings together three of the most influential theorists of minoritized epistemologies: Patricia Hill Collins, Donna Haraway and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, whose most cited epistemological contributions converge. Yet such convergence remains underexamined. Collins' "Black feminist epistemology," Haraway's "situated knowledges" and Sedgwick's "epistemology of the closet," all articulated at around the same time, converge on the claim that knowledge must be partial in order to be responsible. Thus, all three thinkers substitute the dominant universal model of knowledge, with partial, unfinished and situated epistemologies. Through the lens of unfinished knowledges, articulated

by minoritized epistemologies, I address two contemporary readings of Blanchot's désoeuvrement, which turn on a different understanding of identity therein. I engage Lynn Huffer and Lars Iyer's competing readings of Blanchot. whose notion of worklessness, as désoeuvrement is translated, poses a direct counterpoint to the thesis about the labor of literary agencies. Through minoritized epistemologies, the distance between désoeuvrement and the transformative work of literary agencies, turns out not be an opposition, but, instead, illuminates how unfinished knowledges operate beyond authorial intentions and the text itself. Nor can literary agencies be limited to the responsibilities of embodied readers, as some deconstructive critics have asserted. Rather, the discussion of what Huffer calls "nostalgic figuration" and Iyer argues is "beyond heterosexuality" underscores how social-historical fragments form unfinished knowledges, in translation.

Chapter 5. "*Narretei des Narrativs*," or "The Folly of Narrative," turns to those queer logics that have been dismissed as foolish within and beyond narrative. Addressing the recent resurgence in realism scholarship, specifically through queer feminist race-critical readings, I re-examine key works by well-known German realists, including Theodor Fontane, Theodor Storm and Adalbert Stifter. Literary realism plays a major role in theories of queer performativity, such as that of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Recent literary scholarship highlights an agential understanding of the relationship between literature and reality. In contrast to enduring theories of representation, this scholarship suggests that literature engages with rather than simply represents reality. I propose that the notion of folly, which appears repeatedly in key passages, structures realist narratology as well as its poetology. Moreover, folly marks the place where love is sacrificed for profit in the narratives, while, simultaneously, opening out onto paradoxical spaces and convergent temporalities.

Literature plays an irreducible yet undervalued role in the western history of ideas, apparently dominated by dichotomized hierarchies. In Stanley Cavell's *The Claim of Reason* and Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things*, two key thinkers of this history, literature erupts in subversive and illuminating ways, overlooked by most of their commentators yet noted by decolonial critic, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. I show how this critical literary trajectory displaces the binary standards of un/certainty that convey today's hyper-commodification, and enables the dialogue to shift to feminist decolonial queer logics. In lieu of concluding, chapter 6: "Literary Agencies and Minoritized Knowledges," pivots from this eruption to the surprising connections between the decolonial theories of Achille Mbembe, agential performativity of Karen Barad's queer feminist quantum physics, Walter Benjamin's literary Kafkaesque and Fred Moten's Black study. These vastly different approaches converge in transdisciplinary, revolutionary terms on the critical need for minoritized ways of knowing as being and doing. I address three figures of literary agencies that embody minoritized knowledges: folly, counter-grammar and nonidentity.

The scope of this dissertation, which examines the performativity of literary agencies across genres, places and time periods, is not to assert that such operation is the same. Rather, similarities and differences emerge that illuminate how these multifarious literary agencies produce a constellation of convergent figures that subvert dominant dichotomous epistemologies, instead offering minoritized figures of knowledge.

CHAPTER 1

Nonidentity and Vectors of History[1]

> Attention to the historical contours of the interaction between genre and a thick historical context makes literature […] an especially compelling field from which to think the interactions of time, place and power beyond official archives, whose function is to normalize the violence of time.

> -Anthony Reed, "The Erotics of Mourning"

The Principle of Historical Nonidentity in Literature

Ingeborg Bachmann and Elfriede Jelinek, two major Austrian authors, are not well-known in English. Although Jelinek was awarded the Nobel prize for literature in 2004, her magnum opus, *Die Kinder der Toten*, has yet to be translated into English (although a translation has been in progress for some time).[2] Bachmann, Jelinek's predecessor and inspiration, has also received insufficient analysis in English. I query the matter of (non)identity in Jelinek and Bachmann's magna opera: *The Children of the Dead* and *Malina*, respectively, rather than examining their scant reception as due to the entrenched sexism of canon formation. The first part of this essay examines literary agency working through the traumas of gender and the inheritance of the Shoah; while the second part addresses traumas of race and the active aftermath of slavery through the work of Toni Morrison and Claudia Rankine.

I articulate race and gender through one another, rather than reading them as analogous or intersectional, per se. Both operate as temporal-historical vectors in literature that complicate and co-constitute.[3] Does knowledge emerge from this equation? I return to this issue in the process of addressing how, akin to Bachmann and Jelinek, primary works of Morrison and Rankine can be

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[1] A talk based on this essay was given at JHU as part of an invited WGS series on 11/3/2021.

[2] Gitta Honegger's faculty website, which lists Honegger as Jelinek's authorized translator, announces a forthcoming translation of *The Children of the Dead* by Yale University Press. https://herbergerinstitute.asu.edu/profile/gitta-honegger.

[3] Drawing on Hortense Spillers, quoted below, Reed says: "race, gender and sexuality mutually co-constitute and complicate." "Erotics of Mourning" 24. Further citations in text.

read productively and poignantly in terms of the historical principle of nonidentity.[4] I argue that the afterlife of the traumatic past ruins identity in the present, thereby contributing to critical literary analysis by reinterpreting the long-contested relation of (postmodern) literature to history. And to take the analysis a step further in the direction of this project's horizon, I suggest that this principle is part and parcel of literature's folly, exposing the brutal madness of the status quo.

Rather than divorcing language from history and its attendant politics, as postmodernist literature has been accused of doing,[5] I show that these works elaborate a complex and consequential connection therewith precisely by displacing identity. Rankine and Morrison are two of the most renowned recent American writers. The assertion is not controversial: the status of both is assured among American writers, as is the status of Bachmann and Jelinek among German-speaking ones. Both Morrison and Rankine have been translated into German. I address their central works to examine how literary agency manifests as a vector of history co-constituted through race and gender.

In a recent New York Times piece titled: "The Condition of Black Life is One of Mourning," Rankine describes the intolerable social conditions of Black life threatened by the established order:

> Though the white liberal imagination likes to feel temporarily bad about black suffering, there really is no mode of empathy that can replicate the daily strain of knowing that as a black person you can be killed for simply being black: no hands in your pockets, no playing music, no sudden movements, no driving your car, no walking at night, no walking in the day, no turning onto this street, no entering this building, no standing your ground, no standing here, no standing there, no talking back, no playing with toy guns, no living while black.[6]

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[4] According to Buck-Morss, a philosophical "principle of nonidentity…became the foundation of his [Adorno's] philosophy, that is, of 'negative dialectics," the development of which Buck-Morss ties closely to Benjamin's earlier influence (63).

[5] A prominent example of this position is Frederick Jameson. See his *Antinomies of Realism* and *Postmodernism*.

[6] Rankine, New York Times Magazine, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/22/magazine/the-condition-of-black-life-

This consequent description illuminates the structural dimension of racism that criticism of the discourse of privilege, such as Robert Boyers' "Privilege Predicament" misses. In other words, although a rich and thin Black person may appear more privileged (in some ways) than a poor and overweight white counterpart, the latter still live every day on the other side of *the specific condition of mourning* in which Black lives are situated by the status quo itself.

A questioning of norms and structuring instability, complexity and fragmented temporality characterize the daring and experimental styles of Rankine, Morrison, Bachmann and Jelinek. If nonidentity is a structuring principle operative in these works, it functions differently in each one.[7] *Malina* explicitly plays out the (non)identity of the title character as its organizing enigma that might be said to progressively engulf the "I" around whom events unfold. In contrast to this organizing vanishing, the three main characters in *Die Kinder der Toten* (to which I refer to as *Die Kinder*) begin already stripped of life and hence also to a greater than lesser extent of identity. Even their names barely cling to them, more like clothes swinging on a clothesline rather than defining letters printed in identity documents. (I return to this image on delving into the meat of *Die Kinder*.) Throughout the novel, the protagonists enter into disorganizing relations with multitudes of unidentified dead, which further puts their own identities into question. I discuss these works through a principle of historical nonidentity that organizes and disorganizes the structure of the text, before turning to nonidentity and race in Part 2.

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is-one-of-mourning.html.

[7] While the conception of "nonidentity" emerges from my encounter with these texts, the centrality of "nonidentity" for Adorno's theoretical method as laid out by Buck-Morss in *The Origin of Negative Dialectics* elucidates its stakes and will be addressed in the following section. This may in part be due to the implicitly shared critique of Heidegger's "focus on identity as the central theme…of all Western philosophy since Parmenides" (Buck-Morss 232). See also Bachmann's dissertation "The Critical Reception of Martin Heidegger's Existential Philosophy," forthcoming in German from Piper press in 2021.

Vectors of History: *Malina*

"Only if thought remained fluid and avoided dogma could it be the ally of history as it ought to unfold."[8]

Bachmann's novel, *Malina*, walks the line between genres: sometimes the narrative careens into what reads like snatches of free verse, yet it is introduced with time, place, setting and characters, as if it were a play. From the opening pages and throughout, the text can thus be said to hold its own identity and that of the protagonists at bay. To give a brief ark of the story: an unnamed yet gendered "I" narrates her fraught relationships with herself, language, Malina: her live-in companion, Ivan: her distant lover, and her nightmares of persecution at the hands of different men, especially a "father" and a Nazi. The spellbinding effect of the novel consists in large part in throwing into question the status of reality by a defiance of expectations that crisscrosses the text at all turns. Thus, for instance, Malina and "I's" relationship of extreme intimacy and shared resources remains undefined in conventional terms (except for the narrator's assertion that they are not married). While the surprise in this lack of definition is somewhat dated, it marks the novel's place in time.

The gendered relations in *Malina* call up stereotypes yet simultaneously defer expectations. Although seemingly in great earnest, the narrator's role as overzealous and jettisoned lover to Ivan, and unruly yet dependent recipient of care in relation to Malina are systematically exaggerated to points of breakage and then subverted. *The fabric of the text consists of such a dynamic*, as for instance the following description:

> Even when Ivan was certainly created for me, I, alone, can never claim him. Because he has come to make the consonants constant and comprehensible...to enable words to come through my lips again, to reconstruct the first shattered connections and to solve problems, and so I will not stray from him one iota, I will align and superimpose our identical, bright-sounding first initials, with which

[8] Buck-Morss on Adorno's idea of history in *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, 58.

we sign out little notes....[9]

The identity of shared letters displaces the identity of the "I," who remains nameless. (This is furthered by the shared letter "I" in Ivan and the German first person pronoun "*Ich*.") As many sentences in the novel, this one is not only extraordinarily long but endless because elliptical, and paratactical. The combined effect of these devices together with the content is surfeit. Such surfeit underscores the contrasting lack of proportion between the narrator's self-deprecatory, attendant positioning and the figure to whom she refers: her lover, Ivan. The contrast and potential breakage implied by such positioning has enabled primary readings of the novel as a feminist work.[10] Further feminist criticism offers performative analyses of *Malina*, underscoring how readers are invited into the text through its mysteries as participants rather than as mere spectators via identification.[11] I radicalize such an approach to reflect on the intertwinement of language and history in the text.

Malina, the character, is himself shrouded in mystery. From the first introduction in the initial list of characters that precedes the narrative, he is described as: "Author of an 'Apocrypha' no longer available in bookstores; As a disguise he has assumed the status of a Class A civil Servant."[12] In a recent article in *Women in German Yearbook*, Alexandra Kurmann takes Malina's authorship of an apocrypha, which etymologically means "hidden," as evidence for her

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[9] "*Wenn Ivan auch gewiss für mich erschaffen worden ist, so kann ich doch nie allein auf ihm Anspruch erheben. Denn er ist gekommen, um die Konsonanten wieder fest und fasslich zu machen...um mir die Wörter wieder über die Lippen kommen zu lassen, um die ersten zerstörten Zusammenhänge wiederherzustellen und die Probleme zu erlösen, und so werde ich kein Jota von ihm abweichen, ich werde unsre identischen, hellklingenden Anfangsbuchstaben, mit denen wir unsre kleinen Zettel unterzeichnen, aufeinanderstimmen, übereinanderschreiben...*" (*Malina* 31).

[10] For a summary of feminist readings of the novel, see Lennox, "Politics of Readings" (156-158) and "The Feminist Reception of Ingeborg Bachmann."

[11] See, for instance Grobbel's "*Malina* as Performative Women's Writing" in *Enacting Past and Present* (93), citing Nancy R. Harrison and Hans Höller.

[12] "*Verfasser eines 'Apokryph', das im Buchhandel nicht mehr erhältlich ist...Aus Gründen der Tarnung Staatsbeamter der Klasse A*" (*Malina* 9).

thesis that "malina" refers to a secret hiding place.[13] For my reading of nonidentity as a

structuring principle, it is important to note that the mysteries surrounding Malina, the title

character – as well as his relationship to the narrator and main character – generate questions

whose answers are not definitively given and cannot be verified. This unknowability gives form

to the structure of the narrative.[14] Kurmann *explains* the centrality of Malina's mystery in relation

to history in the novel as a murder mystery that can and should be solved:

> While her [the narrator's] articulation of a trauma that surpasses the personal to
> speak for the murder victims of modern history drives the narrative (Anderson
> 235), it is the eponymous character that appropriates her story and appears to take
> her life at the novel's close. It is therefore impressed upon readers that if we could
> only find out who Malina really is, not only the murder but also the mystery of the
> text itself may be solved (76).

Although Kurmann repeatedly highlights the significance of mystery for the poetics of the text,

she considers it solvable in terms of culprit and victim. However, Bachmann's depiction

underscores the narrator's agency in her disappearance, as we will see. I focus on the mystery

itself as key to the work, its structure and the social-historical traces it highlights.

Both *Malina* and *Die Kinder* endeavor to express the so-called "unspeakable" through

linking remnants of the Shoah and gender relations. German and Austrian scholarship has lately

come into full force in exploring remnants of Nazism (now that those who went through WWII

are gone). Kurmann ties *Malina,* the novel's title—also the name of one of the three main

characters—to the Shoah. Arguing that "Malina" meant a secret hiding place for Jews in WWII,

Kurmann goes on to explicate that the novel: "reveals the safe house as a *metaphorical*

representation of the experience of womanhood in postwar Europe" (my italics; 76). In addition

to linking the afterlife of the Shoah to gender relations, Kurmann insists on: "a furtive poetics of

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[13] Kurmann, "*What* is Malina?" 77; further citations in text.
[14] Cf. Michaela Grobbel reads the characters in terms of "partial identity" in *Enacting Past and Present* (92).

secrecy" as central to Bachmann's project of articulating "the unspeakable" (Ibid.). Displacing the question of Malina's identity qua the title character, Kurmann asks "*What* is Malina?" Such analysis echoes the riddle of identity that creates the driving tension of the narrative structure, engulfing its protagonists: Malina and the unnamed "I," the novel's unreliable narrator. This pair is locked in a non-romantic deadly "doubling:" in an interview, Bachmann describes Malina as the "I's" "doppelgänger."[15] As Kurmann notes, such a description does not exhaust the question of either of the pair's identities. On the contrary, one might add that it complicates both figures beyond common sense conceptions of neat individualities.

Malina's role in the narrator's disappearance is another central aspect of the story shrouded in doubt. *Malina* closes with the famous definitive words: "It was murder."[16] This clear statement is pointedly passive in not naming the perpetrator of the declared murder. The events preceding the statement are thoroughly ambiguous and defy common sense as well as laws of physics. In culmination, the narrator disappears into a wall (336, 338). Although no ostensible physical violence accompanies the disappearance, and despite her steadfast assertion that "I should have written on a piece of paper: It was not Malina,"[17] her narration of events enables commentators like Kurmann to posit Malina's responsibility. The narrative sequence unfolds as follows:

> I look unwaveringly at Malina. I stand up and think, if he doesn't immediately say something, if he doesn't hold me back, it is murder, and I depart, since I cannot say it anymore. It is no longer entirely horrible, only our parting is horrible, as every clashing.[18]

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[15] Bachmann, *Sätze* 87; also cited in Kurmann 78.
[16] "*Es war Mord*" (338).
[17] "*Ich hätte noch auf einen Zettel schreiben müssen: Es war nicht Malina*" (336).
[18]18 *Ich sehe Malina unverwandt an, aber er sieht nicht auf. Ich stehe auf und denke, wenn er nicht sofort etwas sagt, wenn er mich nicht aufhält, ist es Mord, und ich entferne mich, weil ich es nicht mehr sagen kann. Es ist nicht mehr ganz furchtbar, nur unser Auseinandergeraten ist furchtbarer als jedes Aneinandergeraten.* (336)

A number of feminist readers have interpreted this ending as underscoring the historical impossibility of a woman's voice, since the narrator attributes her disappearance to an inability to say something.[19] At the same time, the announcement of a murder directly follows and is linked to an accusation against Malina for not preventing it, rather than carrying out the act. This decisive passage thus does not allow one to judge who is at fault nor the exact cause of the announced murder.[20]

Although material traces disappear, historical traces imbue the relationships, manifested primarily in gendered terms; gender thereby becomes a historical vector, which expresses remnants of National Socialist history.[21] With the psychological and emotional stifling of the "I" not only vis-à-vis her two would-be counterparts but through the entire social-historical situation that bears on the present, she appears to literally disappear into a wall. Therewith the text enacts a shifting of meaning: "Malina is still drinking his coffee…I have walked over to the wall, I go into the wall, I hold my breath."[22] The steps of the disappearing act present a losing struggle in the expiration of the "I's" agency. This shift signals a metalepsis that moves the question of identity—posed in gendered and historical-political terms—from a given valorization to a performative one. If metaphor establishes a rhetorical connection between distant images, metalepsis connects levels that are normally understood to be uncrossable (i.e., the literal and the

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[19] Lennox, "The Politics of Reading," 156-157. See also Lennox "The Feminist Reception of Ingeborg Bachmann," esp. 86-91, and Weigel "*Der Schielende Blick,*" esp. 121-124.

[20] This undecidability was used as a campaign by the pubisher to popularize *Malina*: *"Die auf dem Klappentext des Buches gestellte Frage nach 'Mord oder Selbstmord' soll auf einem Coupon beantwortet und die Lösung mit einen Satz begründet werden—zur Teilnahme berechtigt sind allerdings nur Frauen.... Als erster, zweiterund dritter Preis winkt ein Skiwochenende mit Verlagsleiter Siegfried Unseld in St. Moritz*" (P., n.p.)" cited in Lennox, "The Feminist Reception" (80).

[21] A metaleptic reading of *Malina* contrasts the two options offered by Boyers to read the connection Bachmann makes between "fascism" and the relations between "men and women," as either literal or metaphorical. My primary disagreement with characterizing Bachmann's use as "metaphor" is that such an interpretation fails to account for its performative force, as I will show.

[22] "*Malina trinkt noch immer seinen Kaffee…. Ich bin an die Wand gegangen, ich gehe in die Wand, ich halte den Atem an*" (*Malina* 336).

figurative levels).[23] The vanishing of the "I" marks the convergence of the past violence of history with the present personal and structural violence of gender.

The psychological and emotional toll of her relationships, structured by historical-political effects refracted through gender, stifles the "I" without trace—except for the writing constituted by the document. At the close of the narrator's disappearance, Malina erases all of "her" traces. On the final page of the novel, the word "woman" (*Frau*), finally catches up with the "I" in her absence as Malina denies the narrator's existence as a woman: "Yes, Ungarn Street 6. No, there's not. There is no woman here. I just said, there were never anyone by that name here."[24] This gendering, which the narrator endeavors to avoid for over three hundred pages through the use of the first-person pronoun, is finally achieved through a total loss of the named and thereby identifiable self.

Metalepsis is closer to Bachmann's performative method than metaphor, providing a sense of how language *erupts in* and history *breaks through* the text. Michaela Grobbel compares Bachmann to Virginia Woolf's literary methodology of "making scenes" as "not the creation of illusion but rather a way to 'crack' reality, to 'recover [her] sense of the present by getting the past to shadow this broken surface'."[25] This comparison of cracking reality underscores the layered and convergent approach highlighted by critical metaleptic analysis. Deviating from this and other performative readings of Bachmann, my focus on nonidentity rather than theatricality illuminates the present significance of history for literary analysis and vice versa.

The historical unspeakabiltiy of the trauma of World War II and its surrounding guilt and

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[23] A metalepsis is generally defined as taking a figure of speech and using it out of context, or, in narratology, transgressing the bounds of one story within another. See John Pier's "Metalepsis" in *the living handbook of narratology* (LHN), Interdisciplinary Center for Narratology, University of Hamburg.

[24] "*Ja, Ungarngasse 6. Nein, gibt es nicht. Hier ist keine Frau. Ich sage doch, hier war nie jemand dieses Namens*" (*Malina* 338).

[25] Woolf 93; cited in Grobbel 94.

aftermath illuminate the necessity and centrality of nonidentity in Bachmann's only completed

novel.[26] Kurmann connects these ambiguities to the wider historical equivocations surrounding

post-Holocaust discourse, citing George Steiner's discussion of "'the unspeakable' in German-

language postwar literature (Steiner 123)" ("*What* is Malina" 77). A critical approach to history

as alive and consequential for the present enables reading "the unspeakable" as a temporal-

historical and ideological condition rather than a permanent, existential or ontological given.[27]

The unclarities, ambiguities and mysteries cutting across multiple levels of the text—

from the characters' (non)identity to their relationships, the nature of the primary events in the

story as well as the genre and grammar of the text—defy presumed givens crisscrossing social

and temporal dimensions. Critics like Robert Boyers and Mary Gordon argue that Bachmann's

literary procedure undermines the given by destroying pairings. I will shift focus from the

mutuality in this description to the implications of dissolving dichotomies with their attendant

hierarchies and ahistoricism that persist in myriad discourses despite being repeatedly

deconstructed. Drawing on a review by Gordon, Boyers underscores the importance of pairs in

Bachmann's writing, and how they are worked through to annihilation: "Nothing in her work is

consolidated, nothing stands still...'Bachmann's vision,' as Gordon has written, 'is structured by a

series of mutually annihilating pairs: thought and action, life and truth, female and male'"

(Boyers 95). His exegesis highlights Bachmann's critical aim:

> The "pairs" in Bachmann are "mutually annihilating" because she thrives
> on opposition and antagonism, sees things not simply as they are but as
> they might be. No principle or person exists in Bachmann without its
> complementary or oppositional other. And because Bachmann sees and
> thinks in this way, she is never susceptible to the simple clarity that allows

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[26] For Bachmann's antithetical relationship to the "Schuldangst" (fear of guilt) characterizing postwar discourse in Germany and Austria as "a societal tendency to evade wartime culpability," see Weigel's *Ingeborg Bachmann* and Kurmann's *Intertextual Weaving* (Kurmann 81).

[27] Such a reading is akin to a Benjaminian/Adornesque understanding of history. For a concise discussion see Buck-Morss' "Dialectics without Identity," 53-62 in *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*.

things merely to be. Turmoil is an essential ingredient of her medium, and although she is powerfully drawn to defeat, she never quite allows herself to assume the posture of the principled victim.

Rather than deconstructing the dubious moniker "principled victim," I want to query Boyers' framing of "mutually annihilating pairs" as a result of "thriving on opposition and antagonism."[28] If the writing succeeds by annihilating dichotomies, to what extent does the redeployment of the phrase "mutually annihilating pairs" underestimate the hierarchy of gender, and with it also of history? The disappearance of the suffering "I" in *Malina* is not a passive act, nor is it mutual (moreover the feminized narrator has two counterparts, thus upsetting the exactitude of coupling). Rather *he*, that is Malina (as well as Ivan), is left thriving—in suspicion for the murder without trace announced by the narrator twice: once as a warning, and again in the closing line of the novel. Following the "I's" disappearance, Malina continues unperturbed, successfully erasing all traces of her. The novel's singular title: *Malina*, suggests that Malina and his legacy not only survive but live on.

If pairing is questionable, the destabilization of the given undermines the basis on which to construct an identity.[29] The nameless narrative "I" signs letters as "a stranger" ("*eine Unbekannte*") before disappearing into a wall (*Malina*, 143). Through her relationships to Malina and Ivan, the two other protagonists, as well as in evocations of her father as persecutor, pronouns emerge into the forefront. Do gendered pronouns tacitly replace identity here as marked ciphers? And if so, does gender operate at the heart of the novel through a dissipation of identity leaving ruins in its wake? For instance, at the denouement of the story, as the "I"

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[28] The problematics of "principled victim" are echoed Boyers' "The Privilege Predicament," which presumes that discussions of privilege rely on a stable notion of identity, in sharp contrast to my reading.

[29] Kurmann, for instance, emphasizes Malina's ephemeral nature, calling him a "ghostly figure," and underscoring how his very existence is put in question (78).

disappears, she says: "I have lived in Ivan and I die in Malina."[30] Turning the characters into

settings for the pronominal narrator marks a shift from tropology to topology in this striking,

ambiguous charge in terms of content as well as form. In "Dialectics without Identity: the Idea of

Natural History," Susan Buck-Morss locates ambiguity as central to the critical procedure: "The

fluctuating meaning of Adorno's concepts, their purposeful ambivalence, is a major source of the

difficulty…But it was precisely his intent to frustrate the categorizing, defining mentality which

by twentieth century had itself become 'second nature'" (58-9). Buck-Morss lays out that this

critical tradition was concerned with textual philosophical analysis of ruins, where the detail,

according to Benjamin, is read as "a mystery containing the general in a way that had to be

deciphered" (243-4). This attention to detail as mystery that exposes social conditioning is

intertwined with nonidentity in the notion of the "concrete particular," shared by Benjamin and

Adorno. At stake in such "micro analysis" is how "the very words and their arrangements,

apparently insignificant details, became meaningful, releasing a significance not even intended

by the author" (Buck-Morss 76).

The reliance of astute second sources on critical theorists brings the present historical

significance in *Malina* to the fore, obscured by frequent misreadings of the historical traces as

arbitrary or existential. Sara Lennox's chapter reflecting decades of Bachmann scholarship, "The

Politics of Reading: A Half Century of Bachmann Reception," begins with Walter Benjamin's

well-known theses "On the Concept of History," in order to argue for a situational, situated and

historical reading that is nevertheless not reducible to one point in time.[31] Lennox underscores

the significance of history to the novel's early reception as follows: "If the world that

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[30] *Ich habe in Ivan gelebt und ich sterbe in Malina*" (336).

[31] Although Lennox posits the multiplicity of times in contrast to Benjamin, I read it alongside his historical material considerations. See Lennox, "The Politics of Reading," 151; and Benjamin, "Über den Begriff der Geschichte," 251-261.

Bachmann's lyrical 'I' inhabited was conceived to be an imperiled one, it served the interests of West Germans then to understand such concerns as motivated by a generic existential insecurity...rather than specific political preoccupations" ("Politics of Reading," 155). Lennox points out that although the most extensive and well-known scholarship on Bachmann by Sigrid Weigel focuses primarily on the historical echoes of the Shoah, it does not take gender into account: "In her 600 page study of Bachmann published in 1999, Sigrid Weigel documents Bachmann's intense focus on the aftermath of National Socialism in Germany and Austria...The concern structuring her book...is Bachmann's role as intellectual and participant in the debates and discussions of her day, but she almost entirely fails to thematize the role that gender might have played in those interactions" ("Politics of Reading, 158). This is especially surprising, given Kurmann's assertion noted earlier that Weigel's 1984 essay on Bachmann "inaugurated the feminist turn in Bachmann studies."

Through the lens of feminist queer theory, I read the narrator's disappearance as a critical metalepsis. As it is important to connect queerness to loving any gender, a queer lens offers singular perspectives to undermining gender dichotomies. Queer performativity, elaborated by theorists such as Eve K. Sedgwick and Judith Butler, provides a historical framework to grasp the dynamic relationships between language, history, theatricality, politics, knowledge and literature.[32] Does language intervene in and perhaps *as* gender on this account, e.g., through exaggerated emphasis in the narrator's plea on words and letters being able to pass her lips only by proximity to her lover? And can such language be described as a vector of gender, itself a vector of history? I return to these questions following the discussion of Jelinek's *Die Kinder der Toten*.

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[32] In "Queer Performativity," Sedgwick says: "The emergence of the first person, of the singular, of the active, and of the indicative are all questions rather than presumptions, for queer performativity" (3).

"The negatives of their names:" *Die Kinder der Toten*

Each morning the day lies like a fresh shirt on our bed; this incomparably fine, incomparably tightly woven tissue of pure prediction fits us perfectly. The happiness of the next twenty-four hours depends on our ability, on waking, to pick it up.[33]

Literary and social history play an irreducible role in *Malina* and *Die Kinder*, both of which evoke a relation to fascism. The children in the latter belong to the (desired) offspring of the dead of the Shoah. Although there is brief reference to the Nazi past in *Malina*, its primary relation to it plays out in terms of gender. Bachmann elsewhere famously writes: "Fascism is first in the relatinship between a man and a woman."[34] The meaning of this line has been contested in feminist and mainstream Bachmann scholarship. Boyers insists that to read it literally does a disservice to Bachmann's nuanced work. It is in this context that he brings up Jelinek, whose writing, he claims, can be characterized by such a "simple and terrifying view of men and women" in contrast to Bachmann's.[35] Such a view, if attributable to Jelinek, is primarily ironic and in direct dialogue with Bachmann.[36] For instance, in the middle of *Die Kinder*, the narrator says: "The man is the death strip of the woman, but the woman is the death penalty of the man."[37] Placing death squarely between men and women as each other's punishment and topology, Jelinek's characteristic play on words is simultaneously explosive and socially-historically rooted (thus anything but simple).

If in Bachmann's time the aftermath of the Shoah still bordered on the unspeakable in

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[33] Benjamin, Reflections. „*Der Tag liegt jeden Morgen wie ein frisches Hemd auf unserm Bett; dies unvergleichliche feine, unvergleichlich dichte Gewebe reinlicher Weissagung sitzt uns wie angegossen. Das Glück der nächsten vierundzwanzig Stunden hängt daran, dass wir es im Erwachen aufzugreifen wissen*." "Madame Ariane zweiter Hof links" 142.

[34] All translations are mine unless otherwise notes. "*Der Faschismus ist das erste in der Beziehung zwischen einem Mann und einer Frau,*" "*Wahre Sätze*" 144.

[35] Boyers, "Many Types of Ambiguity," 93.

[36] Jelinek's most well-known work in English, *The Piano Teacher*, might be read as a more simple and brutal expression of Bachmann's statement, although the relationships of men and women are arguably less important than the mother-daughter dyad in that novel.

[37] "*Der Mann ist die Todesstreife der Frau, aber die Frau ist die Todesstrafe des Mannes*" (277).

German-language literature, by the time Jelinek wrote her tour de force, it had almost become hyper-speakable. Yet Jelinek's representation can also be saliently read as drawing on what I call the principle of nonidentity. Just as identity does not remain static, so historical *non*identity does not remain the same temporally. I investigate whether such a principle has a particular connection to historical trauma, defying generalizability in specific ways.

Jelinek's challenge to her readers consists not only of questioning identity, chronology, causality and development, but also techniques, such as metaphor. Along with undermining the function of identity, the images are less metaphorical and more metaleptic. In the following passage images crowd together with abstract force, characteristic of *Die Kinder*, resisting normative understanding tied to a binary logic of identity versus difference:

> People were picked up out of the uncomfortable intercourse with themselves and people at the adjacent tables; unfortunately, we could not keep an eye on more people as these. It is entirely possible that there will be more who quietly go on holiday in other places. The uncanny are useful to us. In my eyes, they have learned nothing and lost nothing. Whom can be helped? Who strikes into the uncomfortable abyss, where his yellow beam never arrives, and where he, himself, is nothing but the stone on which something shines for a moment and then shortly thereafter no longer, because the sun has gone down.[38]

It is tempting to read the sunset as a metaphorical downfall (to which the German "going under of the Sun" easily lends itself), yet metalepsis allows one to discern shards of history lodged within the image. The question "Whom can be helped?" interrupts the quotation above; by attending to the refracted history in the novel, it can be understood in historical terms as ruining chronology, identity and causality. In this vein, it might be the inside out version of the questions

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[38] *"Es werden Menschen abgeholt aus dem unzufriedenen Verkehr mit sich und Leuten am Nebentisch, mehr Menschen als sie können wir leider nicht im Auge behalten. Kann durchaus sein, dass es noch mehr werden, die sich still verdrücken, an andere Urlaubsorte. Die Einheimischen sind uns dienstbar. Sie haben in meinen Augen nichts gelernt und nichts verloren. Wem kann geholfen werden? Wer schlägt sich in den unzureichenden Abgrund ab, wo sein gelber Strahl aber nie anlangt, und wo er selbst nichts ist als der Stein, auf den einen Augenblick etwas strahlt und kurz darauf nicht mehr, weil die Sonne untergegangen ist"* (289).

regarding the Holocaust for which it is already too late. On this account, Jelinek's word plays and grammar aberrations are more historical than random, allowing the paradoxical temporality of the always already too late to emerge not as a formal category applicable across times, but as a condition of the present. The consequences of mobilizing this temporality as a concrete condition rather than a formal category of analysis include going beyond the deconstruction of dichotomies to attend to the existing convergence of multiple temporalities.

Jelinek's *Die Kinder* removes the reader's attention from identity, individual or collective, and underscores the significance of history for the now. Jelinek overturns both literary and common-sense expectations without abandoning history.[39] For instance, the following meditation on "us" parallel to the emergence of one of the novel's main characters, Edgar, disorients the subject: "Now Edgar Gstranz descends into the world. We, on the contrary, want to ascend; we are quickly coming to the edge of the full bucket, with which our lights will be extinguished, before our way through the night has been illuminated. And it is exactly our essence that we are finally missing."[40] The historical context in which Jelinek writes conditions *Die Kinder* without thereby providing a sufficient key to understanding it; yet at the same time it would be a mistake to overlook its key role within and structuring the text. *Historical context erupts in the novel displacing and ruining identity*. History does not replace identity but conditions or conducts it, and thereby turns it inside out.[41]

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[39] In her essay "*Literarische Inszenierungen von Subjekt und Geschichte in den Zeiten der Postmoderne*," Sabine Kyora says: "*Eine im Jelinekschen Sinn angemessene Erinnerung wäre wahrscheinlich eine, die nicht versucht, durch die Erinnerung Identität des Einzelnen und des Kollektivs zu sichern und die Geschichte trotzdem nicht negiert*" (273).

[40] "*So, jetzt steigt Edgar Gstranz hinab in die Welt. Wir dagegen wollen lieber aufsteigen, wir kommen jetzt rasch zum Rand des vollen Eimers, mit dem unser Leuchten gelöscht wurde, bevor es uns noch den Weg durch die Nacht weisen konnte. Und genau unser Wesen ist es denn auch, was uns letztlich fehlt*" (195).

[41] Similarly, Buck-Morss says of Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: "…the most recent history (mass culture and anti-Semitism) was exposed as radical barbarism, while the archaic, the epic poem of the Odyssey, was read as an expression of the most modern, with Odysseus the 'prototype of the bourgeois individual.'" (59).

The eruption of the undead throughout the novel can also be understood as metaleptic outbreaks. Jutta Gsoels-Lorensen describes historical links in the fabric of the text as follows: "Because the past of the Holocaust has been expunged so thoroughly from Austrian consciousness and the narrative undergirding its postwar history, they [the dead] seem lost as if in prehistorical times, erased to the degree that not even *'die Negative ihrer Namen*' (163) exist anymore" (363). By citing Jelinek's phrase "the negatives of their names," Gsoels-Lorensen points to the characters' unknowability and nonidentity – counterposed to the Shoah's unspeakability. Read metaleptically—i.e., not connected via identity, but as operative on irreconcilable locations and temporalities—the nonidentity of names and characters allows history to shine through. Words are not governed by singular meanings but rather become vectors of history, with its crimes and genders. The image of identity as clothing also functions metaleptically. The already undead characters continue dying and shedding their corporealities, abandoning realistic representation. As a correspondence between name, body and personality, identity is thereby broken down.

The novel raises the specter of the past together with another ghostly apparition that almost never appears in the text. Jelinek writes: "Suddenly, fully aimless, the past is here again, impossible to love it. Why now? We just sent it shopping, in a supermarket, where there are replacement human parts."[42] The impossibility of loving the past connects the past and love through im-possibility;[43] while sending the past to the supermarket for replacement human parts again suggests that the level of meaning—as remembrance of the past—and the level of being— as commercial present, have converged.[44]

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[42] "*Auf einmal, völlig zwecklos, ist die Vergangenheit wieder da, unmöglich, sie zu lieben. Wieso jetzt? Wir haben sie doch gerade erst zum Einkaufen geschickt, in einen Supermarkt, dort gibts Ersatz-Menschenteile*" (15-16).
[43] See my discussion of Lars Iyer's "Impossibility of Loving," in "Unfinished Knowledge."
[44] For an insightful genealogy of modern love, see Pahl 6-7.

The other ghostly apparition in the above quotation is love. In noun form the narrator mentions love once, immediately voicing dissatisfaction with and the fallaciousness of the nomination. Towards the conclusion, love appears as a nominal mistake in response to the question: "Jesus is himself the door, through which the believers can enter mystery, and what do they find there? One of the most frequent tumors from which we, too, suffer, love; I take this this word back and give you all another for it, only I don't know what I did with it."[45] Is there more here than the ironic sacralizing of the Christian tradition? The answer is also imbued with the aura of dead parts. Although the alignment of love with a tumor rehearses common comparisons with sickness, the direct address of the reader in which the narrator wants to exchange the word "love" with another misplaced one evokes a more performative and surprising connection to a German-Jewish conception of mystery and history rather than a secularization ending in itself.

Such a connection is mediated by Jelinek's ironic subversion of Germanic pseudo-Christianity instead of direct reference to well-known German-Jewish thought, such as Benjamin's "On the Concept of History." Although the figuration of Jesus as a door through which the believers can enter mystery where they find love (or another lost word) might be more fruitfully contrasted than compared to Benjamin's conception of "now time," where every second is the small gate through which the Messiah might enter, an ironic echo traverses Jelinek's formulation. Gsoels-Lorensen's understanding of temporality in the novel as interruptive lends support to such an echo: "Jelinek's mountain space [is] covered with a scatter of strangely displaced objects and even shattered bodily remnants that reveal themselves as often inexplicably emerging bits and pieces of another time...Generally speaking, *Die Kinder der Toten* is a text of

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[45] "*Jesus ist selbst das Tor, durch das die Gläubigen ins Mysterium hineingehen können, und was finden sie dort? Einen der häufigsten Tumore, an dem auch wir erkranken, die Liebe, ich nehme dieses Wort wieder zurück und gebe Ihnen dafür ein anderes, nur weiß ich nicht, wo ich es jetzt hingetan habe*" (543).

dislocation and especially temporal displacement" (363). Deepening her analysis into Jelinek's

challenging temporal literality, Gsoels-Lorensen urges that: "It is important to allow the daring

and strangeness of her endeavor to rise to the surface, rather than explaining it away as her

signature style of playing with language...The novel clearly presents a challenge to the repression

of Austria's Nazi past, but it is also a bold effort to write the disappearance of its Jewish

population in and through a contemporary… postmodern space" (364). If the text writes the

historical dead "in and through" a contemporary space in critical feminist queer terms, it can be

understood as metaleptic, where remembrance constitutes a rewriting of a landscape, and the past

speaks the unspeakable.[46] This would be a good explanation for why Jelinek won the Nobel prize

for literature.[47]

Disorientation accompanies *Die Kinder*. The doubt and contrast that imbue Bachmann's

work turn into ironic surfeit with the historical cynicism brought about by the short passage of

time between the 1970's and the 1990's in Austria.[48] Nevertheless the opposition between

unspeakability of trauma in Bachmann and the hyper-speakability thereof in Jelinek is illusory.

Malina's secret of the past, qua history, is resurrected in Jelinek's un-dead; as such, *Die Kinder*

might be understood as *Malina's* (if not Bachmann's) monstrous offspring.

Performativity, History and the Principle of Nonidentity in Literature

The principle of historical nonidentity enables readers to see how remnants of history ruin

identity, providing a subterranean structure to the work. Such remnants illuminate a possible

transference between literature and history, where figuration is more metaleptic than

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[46] "Speaking the Unspeakable" is also a title of an essay and the subtitle of a collection of critical works about Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, echoing the discussion of Bachmann and prefiguring the second part of this essay.
[47] This achievement is lost on Barbara Becker-Cantrino's "*Aesthetik, Geschlecht und literarische Wertung, oder: warum hat Elfriede Jelinek den Nobelpreis erhalten?*"
[48] For a thorough account of historical influences in *Die Kinder*, see Gsoels-Lorensen, esp. 361-366. (There is no mention of Bachmann in this rich and influential essay.)

metaphorical. Language, on this account, opens out onto historical vectors, such as genders and traumas. For both of the latter, the plural tense risks occluding the reification generally ascribed to them. My reading is aimed at the roots of binary gender and the trauma of the Shoah and its aftermath, brought to life in literature. More specifically, Jelinek's novel is situated not so much in the context of the Shoah itself but addresses the timely failure of most German speakers to take responsibility or account for that trauma.

(Queer) performativity underscores the process whereby discourse matters; converging with critical race theory, it marks the relevance of literature and literary criticism to displacing Eurocentrism as well as examining and working through historical traumas.[49] In *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*, Robert Young weaves such critique into the very definition of postmodernism, saying: "Postmodernism can best be defined as European culture's awareness that it is no longer the unquestioned and dominant center of the world" (19).[50] This definition echoes the critical literary aim of questioning the historical given. One of the most well-known theorists to consider the meeting of performativity and discourses that matter cautions: "Just as metaphors lose their metaphoricity as they congeal through time into concepts, so subversive performances always run the risk of becoming deadening clichés through their repetition and, most importantly, through their repetition within commodity culture where 'subversion' carries market value."[51] I have considered the process by which metaphors "lose their metaphoricity as they congeal through time into concepts" as a metaleptic crossing of figuration and sociality. Literature offers a unique purview where this historical process of congealment can be witnessed up-close. I query whether the process of congealment or

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[49] On queer performativity, see, for instance, Sedgwick's "Queer Performativity," and Karen Barad's "Nature's queer performativity.''
[50] Quoted in Lennox, "Politics of Reading," 152.
[51] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminist and the Subversion of Identity* xxi.

reification can be tropologically, or, figuratively, reversed. I have argued that Bachmann and Jelinek's works bear witness to and address this performative process operative largely across the level of meaning, at the levels of words, structure and figuration. I now turn to nonidentity and race in the work of Claudia Rankine and Toni Morrison.

Part 2: Nonidentity and Race

After all, the subversive intellectual *came under false* pretenses, with *bad* documents, *out of* love. Her labor is as necessary as it is unwelcome. The university needs what she bears but cannot bear what she brings. And on top of all that, she *dis*appears. She dis*appears* into the *under*ground, the down*low* lowdown *maroon* community of the university, into the undercommons of enlightenment, where the work gets done, where the work gets subverted, where the revolution is still black, still strong.[1]

There is a lack of comparative material on two of the most important contemporary American and two Austrian authors. In light of the fact that Morrison and Rankine excavate racism at its deepest surfeit,[52] it may be surprising to read them in terms of nonidentity. This approach highlights the destabilization with which nonidentity is intertwined, akin to the disintegration underscored as necessary to dismantling the status quo by Buck-Morss's study of negative dialectics (63-95). I show how performativity in literature subverts the givenness of identity, rehearsing vulnerability to transformation and in this process gives rise to what is both counted and not counted as knowledge**.** In other words, if race is a historical vector that *congeals* into a present replete with discrimination and resistance, which constitute its existence resistant to change, does literature that address race as such a performative have the capacity to effect the transformation of race as both a concept and an experience?[53] And if so, would such literary effects constitute an agency that contributes to the formation of knowledge? In "Feeling Brown,

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[52] The term "surfeit" foreshadows my discussion of Reed's reading of Rankine's *Citizen* in which he addresses race in terms of excess and, what I read in support of my argument of nonidentity, as questioning liberal individual boundaries.

[53] To say that race is performative is somewhat different than saying it is constructed and entirely different from saying that it is a ruse altogether. See Muñoz 678-9.

Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race and the Depressive Position," José Esteban Muñoz says: "A critical project attuned to knowing the performativity of race is indeed better suited to decipher what work race does in the world" (679). The following discussion aims at such decipherment in Rankine and Morrison's work.

Citizen: *The* American Lyric?

"In the fissures of that present, where the body does not already know its place, history begins."[54]

Claudia Rankine's 2014 *Citizen: An American Lyric* won the National Book Critics Circle Award, bringing its already well-known author further renown. I read Rankine's work and reception as showing that *Citizen* is more than "*An* American Lyric," as its subtitle portends. In dialogue with Anthony Reed's essay "The Erotics of Mourning in Recent Experimental Black Poetry," I distill an elaboration of modes of knowing through nonidentity as a principle in this work. I note how literary agency contributes to a minoritized literary practice where the transformative relation between literature and knowledge comes to the fore.

Reed sees the documentation of "microaggressions" as a necessary task. He defines microaggressions as "anti-cathartic non-events" whose accumulation forms "a kind of somatic archive, a repertoire of repeated gestures and affective dispositions accompanied by a dulling of memory that makes it difficult to mark the beginning and end of events because they never quite seem to happen—one continually questions one's own experience—but also never quite seem to stop happening" (28). Microaggressions thus unsettle events as separable also upsetting temporality itself, according to Reed (Ibid. 34). Alongside the documentation of historical events, *Citizen* also creates an alternate archive, in Reed's words, irreducible to the constative utterance of the poem's content. Many passages speak to the possibility of a vital, sustaining and

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[54] Anthony Reed, "The Erotics of Mourning" 33.

transformative mode of knowing.

The primary second person voice of the poem is indicative of a performative form of address. Both Rankine's usage of the second person throughout *Citizen* and Bachmann's decision to leave her first person narrator nameless thus necessitating referring to her by a pronoun, indicate a certain intimate distance thereby established between writer and reader/s.[55] These different choices converge in questioning the implicit identity indicated by personal pronouns, particularly along gendered lines in Bachmann and racialized positions in Rankine's work.[56] During several key passages at moments of transition between the five sections of *Citizen*, pronominal identity is explicitly queried. For instance, early in section V., untitled: "Sometimes 'I' is supposed to hold what is not there until it is. Then *what is* comes apart the closer you are to it" (*Citizen* 71). The significance of temporality, alongside identity, for both constituting and undoing the given is apparent in these lines. What is the role of the first-person pronoun? Pronouns function as substitutes, dissipating identity and contributing to the coming apart of what is, signaled by sequestering "the 'I'" in quotation marks. This meditation on the pronominal given, where the theoretical seams of the work come to the surface, goes on for several epigrammatic pages: "The pronoun barely holding the person together. [Paragraph break.] Someone claimed we should use our skin as wallpaper knowing we couldn't win." (Ibid.) This someone *could* be *Malina's* narrator (the "I" already in the wall at the culmination of the narrative, itself an echo of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's women trapped behind the wallpaper).

In the next line, insanity rears its head after the paragraph break: "You said 'I' has so much power; it's insane." (Ibid.) The "it" in the last phrase appears to describe the amount of

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[55] The absence of a formal second person pronoun in English (unlike German, French or Russian), underscores the intimacy of "you" that evokes the lyric tradition, on the one hand, and the splitting of that intimacy vis-à-vis differential racial positioning, on the other hand.

[56] For more on how Rankine undermines the assumed lyric reader, see Reed, esp. p. 27

power attributed by the "you" to the "I." Yet "it" could equally describe the "I" itself, sequestered by quotation marks. And yet, the power of pronouns is limited: "And you would look past me, all gloved up, in a big coat, with fancy fur around the collar, and record a self saying, you should be scared, the first person can't pull you together." (Ibid.) This resonates with *Malina's* "I," in light of the reading of "fascism in the relation of men and women" in terms of structural metalepsis that propels the nameless narrator to disappear.[57] Both works harness literary agency to attend to sedimented history, undermining literary and social conventions by relying on words and figuration. Speaking of temporality and history in Rankine's work, Reed says: "In the fissures of that present, where the body does not already know its place, history begins" (33). Connecting the body to history through temporality, Reed evokes a non-linear approach in Rankine's work.

In this radical relation "the body" questions common sense contours of identity. I quote a longer passage for the sense of Rankine's tone as well as the content of the poem:[58]

> Everyone understood you to be suffering / and still everyone thought you were the sun— / never mind our unlikeness, you too have heard the noise in your voice.
> Anyway, sit down. Sit here alongside. Exactly why we survive and can look back with furrowed / brow is beyond me. It is not something to know.
> Your ill-spirited, cooked, hell on Main Street, nobody's here, / broken-down, first person could be one of many definitions / of being to pass on.
> The past is a life sentence, a blunt instrument aimed at / tomorrow.
> Drag that first person out of the social death of history, / then we're kin.
> Kin calling out the past like a foreigner with a newly minted 'fuck you' (72).

A close reading highlights the intertextuality of the passage. "To pass on" can mean to discard *or* to preserve, depending on where one places the accent, as Mae Henderson points out in the context of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (83). "Social death" describes effects of slavery and has also

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[57] One might also think of Franz Kafka's "*Das Urteil*," which ends with the narrator being propelled over a bridge…
[58] For the significance of tone in Rankine's work, see Reed 31.

been used as a comparative term in relation to the Shoah and other forms of oppression.[59] The last line resonates with Judith Butler's surprising description of nonviolence as a "carefully crafted 'fuck you.'"[60] Rankine alludes to Butler earlier in the book during another consideration of language that reads almost as an aside. Yet "the philosopher's" voice signals a change in the speaker's understanding of how language exposes the body as self:

> Not long ago you are in a room where someone asks the philosopher Judith Butler what makes language hurtful. You can feel everyone lean in. Our very being exposes us to the address of another, she answers. We suffer from the condition of being addressable. Our emotional openness, she adds, is carried by our addressability. Language navigates this.

Rather than a written quotation, the insight arrives as something overheard by "everyone" in a place where some form of a community of listeners is gathered. The words are couched as an answer to a question posed by an unidentified "someone." It thus seems markedly unimportant who exactly the questioner, the listeners, and perhaps also the speaker/s are (despite the nomination of 'the philosopher').

A shift is also notable between the question, from which Rankine's speaker takes distance by leaving the questioner as "someone" unidentified, and the answer attributed to Butler. Rather than replying directly to "what makes language hurtful" and thereby affirming the question, the response exceeds it. Perhaps such a reply encompasses more than the injurious power of language, or, perhaps it shifts the terms of the question. If "language navigates" "our emotional openness," which "is carried by our addressability," is it directly injurious, or, does it constitute a middle ground/term where such injurability (and other language effects) are negotiated with more openness than direct causality implies?

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[59] For an extensive treatment, see *Slavery and Social Death* by Orlando Patterson; for further comparative uses see, for instance, Claudia Card's "Genocide and Social Death."
[60] Butler, *Frames of War* 182.

Although the conversation is overheard and thus attributed to spoken language while discussing language as such, it is passed on in writing. I would locate literary agency precisely between being open to others and the effects of such vulnerability. My postulation thereof is motivated by the active yet disavowed relationship between knowledge and literature. The passage following the previous description of an overheard conversation with "the philosopher Judith Butler" illustrates the transformative stakes here as well as their disavowal:

> For so long you thought the ambition of racist language was to denigrate and erase you as a person. After considering Butler's remarks, you begin to understand yourself as rendered hypervisible in the face of such language acts. Language that feels hurtful is intended to exploit all the ways you are present. Your alertness, your openness, and your desire to engage actually demand your presence, your looking up, your talking back, and, as insane as it is, saying please (49).

This insight enables processing ongoing experiences of racism in a literary work and coming to a different understanding of their intent and effect. Furthermore, and perhaps crucially, a space opens up in the writing between the intentions of hurtful racist language and one's openness to it. In other words, the (hurtful) intentions of language users and vulnerability to such intentions are separated by a gap that is widened through the writing.[61]

Thus, the last sentence which describes all the ways in which people are open to one another and addressable in languages, veers away from the original question of how language is hurtful and, again encountering the specter of insanity, arrives at what may be most distant from the injurious power of words: "saying please." I wrap up this discussion of *Citizen* with a parting glance at some of its later pages, where pronouns again appear center stage. The final section VII., untitled as the rest, opens with an epigrammatic consideration of being. I take the pronominal play here, again, to be a way of addressing injuries associated with identity:

> Some years there exists a wanting to escape—/ you, floating above your certain ache—/still the ache coexists. Call that the immanent you—

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[61] This is a Butlerian insight; see, especially *Excitable Speech*.

> You are you even before you / grow into understanding you / are not anyone,
> worthless, /not worth you. Even as your own weight insists / you are here,
> fighting off / the weight of nonexistence.

This writing—poetry and I would add literature more generally—enables the speaker to dissipate

the weight of the "you," however temporarily, in order to work through the injuries that accrue to

selves. Experiential and literary levels are thus (metaleptically) crossed, undermining

representation with its privileged metaphorical tropes. Temporality is again central to this

process, enabling (literary) agency to take place. A few lines down the pronouns proliferate as if

on their own:

> I they he she we you turn / only to discover / the encounter /
> to be alien to this place. / Wait. [Two line paragraph break.]
> The patience is in the living. Time opens out to you. /
> The opening, between you and you, occupied, / zoned for an encounter,
> given the histories of you and you— / And always, who is this you?

No comma separates the pronouns indicating their running together rather than being listed as

separate subjects. The simple juxtaposition of "he she" resists an analysis of gender as

differentiated by power. Is the place to which the encounter is alien the space of literature?

Surely it could be, and some, perhaps, think that it is. Countless people who write professionally,

academics and others, complain that writing is a lonely and alienating process. And it can

certainly be. But I don't think that's what Rankine has in mind.[62]

Perhaps "this place," where the encounter is alien, is the quotidian experience of

discrimination and injustice. We wait with the voice of the poem as instructed and "time opens

out;" if the "patience is in the living," the sharing of that patience is nonetheless *t/here*, in the

poem, in writing, in literature: the sharing of that knowing, the knowing of that patience, the

awaiting. Questioning its central second person, the poem interrogates its conditions of being and

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[62] Some assign literature writers an exceptionality, yet such a demarcation is dubious, as I discuss in Chapter 2.

conflates the "you" to whom it is addressed and the "I" implied in the poem's "you." I thus want

to cleave the first insanity of racism in Rankine's analysis, from the second insanity of "saying

please" in the face of injurability. If the cleavage is plausible, perhaps the latter kind is more akin

to a non-pathological folly, characteristic of literary agency. Such folly is irreducible to any

systematization and queries the subject's contours:[63]

> The query into the portentous subject goes on, evoking its historical contours:
> And still a world begins its furious erasure— / Who do you think you are, saying I
> to me? / You nothing. / You nobody. / You. / [Two paragraph break.] A body in the
> world drowns in it— / Hey you— / All our fevered history won't instill insight, /
> won't turn a body conscious, / won't make that look / in the eyes say yes, though
> there is nothing / to solve / even as each moment is an answer (142).

These meditations could be addressed to anyone. At the same time each is punctuated by analysis

of racist incidents, imbuing the descriptions with precision. I read Rankine's *Citizen* not only as a

document of American racism and "an American Lyric," as the book's subtitle announces, but as

encompassing the fabric of American life more comprehensively, hence as *the* American Lyric.

The afterlife of history permeates the structure of American citizenship, for citizens and

non-citizens. Rankine's *Citizen* processes the disavowed history and present of racism as

structuring the symbolic of U.S. citizenship. If the insights arising through this process can be

collectively called a form of knowledge, this knowledge is not of the certifiable sort; yet it

exceeds isolated insights and constitutes an uncertain body of wisdom irreducible to the standard

definition of wisdom as based strictly on experience or common sense. Historical nonidentity as

a principle of literary agency thus points to alternate modes of minoritized knowledges.

"Our fevered history:" Folly as Insight?

"All of our fevered history won't instill insight, / won't turn a body conscious." Rankine's line

offers a segue into Toni Morrison's renowned *Beloved* where "our fevered history" turns a body

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[63] I analyze such "folly" in detail in Chapter 4.

conscious by way of the (magical realist) power of literary agency. I nevertheless read it in tandem with Rankine's thought; such metaleptic reading does not collapse literary and experiential levels together, but indicates the possibilities of crossing them, preserving their distinction. The history embodied in and by *Beloved*, one might say with Ian Baucom, "is the trauma of racial terror, the trauma of the transatlantic slave trade, the trauma of a repeated history of coerced migration, violent unsettlement, cultural upheaval. And it is the trauma of modernity" (40). Baucom is speaking of Paul Gilroy's "*Black Atlantic*, a text which, in its concluding chapter explicitly identifies its own 'conception of time' and 'historical memory' with that dramatized in Morrison's novel [*Beloved*]." (Ibid.) Whereas historical memory is typically assumed to be organized by linear time, in Morrison's work the opposite occurs. Thus, historical memory organizes time.

Citizen and *Beloved* document history framing the contemporary U.S. discourse of race between hope and un/mourning. Although Rankine, Morrison, Jelinek and Bachmann's writing differs in style and theme, a deep affinity courses through them. That affinity is based on the ways in which history erupts and displaces individual *and* collective identity, making it less relevant for the works' structure and enabling gender and race to be read as co-constituting historical vectors. Such a reading attends to the kind of knowledge produced in and by literature and, I would add, as a specific result of literary agency.

It is not easy to analyze *Beloved* without summary. I will set the stage of events with a few brief comments without identifying its structuring paradox.[64] The three central characters in the book are Sethe, her daughter, Denver, and Beloved, an unknown woman suspected of being

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[64] Like *Malina*, the plot of *Beloved* is woven around a central unknown: a ghost whose status is structurally ambiguous in relation to history. However, I would characterize this unknown as more paradoxical than mysterious or secretive due to the centrality of temporality at issue.

the ghost of another daughter of Sethe's who is dead. When Sethe tells the story of her daughter's

murder to her lover, Paul D., his response propels the breakage of their intimacy. I cite the

dialogue in its context to attend to the tone of the work:

> You got two feet, Sethe, not four," he said, and right then a forest sprang up
> between them; trackless and quiet. Later he would wonder what made him say it.
> The calves of his youth? or the conviction that he was being observed through the
> ceiling? How fast he had moved from his shame to hers. From his cold-house
> secret straight to her too-thick love. Meanwhile the forest was locking the
> distance between them, giving it shape and heft. He did not put his hat on right
> away. First he fingered it, deciding how his going would be, how to make it an
> exit not an escape. And it was very important not to leave without looking.
> ….Sweet, she thought. He must think I can't bear to hear him say it. That after all
> I have told him and after telling me how many feet I have, "goodbye" would
> break me to pieces. Ain't that sweet. "So long," she murmured from the far side of
> the trees (165).

Paul D. does not know what makes him utter the words "four feet," which contain the shadow of

the typical insult for women, although he is a sympathetic character, a "good man," and his

response may be chucked up to shock. A forest is made up of trees, from which paper is made.

What is the source of this living divide? Is it the insulting power based on the present history of

racialized misogyny that arises between them?

The specter of confusion between human/animal (four feet or two) evokes the other

central event of the story, causally linked to the killing of Sethe's daughter. And this other

trauma, preceding Sethe's daughter's killing by several years, has to do with knowledge. One

might want to cordon this kind of knowledge off by quotation marks, since it is racism-as-

knowledge, yet I don't think such an approach is historically warranted.[65] The perpetrator in

Beloved —of racist knowledge production as catalyst for something perhaps worse than

murder—is "schoolteacher." This fact is noted and discussed by most studies of *Beloved*, which

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[65] See, for instance, *Race and Anthropology*, edited by Robert Bernasconi.

locate him as "the speaking subject of slavery's discourse."[66] Keeping in mind the book's dedication, which I address in concluding this short excursus, I read schoolteacher's culpability as not only rationalizing slavery but also raising questions about responsible knowledge production in its aftermath.

I resist fully summarizing the story of Beloved (the main character of the novel as well as its title) since, as the narrator repeats in its closing pages, it is "not a story to pass on" (275). Of course, the constative content of this repeated echo is undermined by the writing, yet summary would fail to do this monumental work justice by betraying its paradoxical principle of nonidentity. Summarizing a narrative that emphasizes its own conditions of *im*possibility and undermines narrative conventions runs a particular risk of betraying the text if not doing it violence. In a striking article titled "Revolutionary Suicide in Toni Morrison's Fiction," English literature scholar Katy Ryan reads this line as key both to the story and structure of *Beloved's* narrative. Ryan identifies the refrain that punctuates the final passages of the book with a suicidal movement of the text itself.[67]

If the movement of the text mirrors the story it tells, this constitutes a structuring metalepsis bringing the narratological and structural levels close enough to shift between them and undermining identity in the process. Paradoxically yet nonetheless historically, Ryan reads the frequent and undertheorized instances of self-destruction in Morrison's work in relation to hope. The connection is succinctly articulated by Black Panther Party co-founder Huey Newton, quoted by Ryan: "The concept of revolutionary suicide is not defeatist or fatalistic. On the contrary, it conveys an awareness of reality in combination with the possibility of hope—reality because the revolutionary must always be prepared to face death, and hope because it symbolizes

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[66] Pérez-Torres, Rafael. "Knitting and Knotting the Narrative Thread—*Beloved* as Postmodern Novel."
[67] Katy Ryan, "Revolutionary Suicide in Toni Morrison's Fiction," further citations in text.

a resolute determination to bring about change. Above all, it demands that the revolutionary see

his death and his life as one piece (6)" (Ryan 391).[68] Citing the fact that Morrison edited a

collection of Newton's writings: *To Die for the People*, Ryan goes on to analyze a vision of

collective identity shared by Newton and Morrison. Again quoting Newton, revolutionary suicide

in "an old African saying 'I am we,'" Ryan connects this collectivity to a chain gang in *Beloved*

(Newton 371, quoted in Ryan 392). Ryan concludes that for both thinkers the body is individual

as well as collective (ibid.). I want to suggest that, like this body, literary agency—i.e., the aspect

of writing that arises out of a performative relation to history—can be understood as

simultaneously individual and collective.[69] Moreover, by exceeding identity it gives rise to a

body of knowing irreducible to memory or history, while drawing on both. Literary agency thus

marks a special place, which is not strictly factual nor commemorative, yet establishes and

practices a necessary relation at the crossroads of memory and history. This relation creates the

space for mourning.

Although *Beloved* is beloved by its millions of readers and has earned the highest literary

accolades, the first reception of the work in the late 1980's was not without controversy. I wrap

up my fragmentary discussion of Morrison's tour de force by addressing its dedication through

the principle of historical nonidentity, which generated ample and at first often critical

commentary among some readers and scholars. On the first page of the book there appear only

these words: "sixty million and more." Morrison gave somewhat different answers as to what

this number represents.[70] Whether this staggering figure refers to those people who died during

the Middle Passage itself or also includes those who died as a result of American slavery,

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[68] For another fictionalized working through this relation of self-destruction to revolution against racism, see Alice Walker's short novel: *Meridian*.
[69] For the slippery slope that governs the proximity of either/or, neither/nor, see Derrida's *Khôra*.
[70] See Mandel, "'I made the ink:' Identity, Complicity, Sixty Million, and More."

pointing to the absence of any adequate documentation of either of these, Naomi Mandel keenly observes: "Morrison's figure and the slippage of its referents eloquently emphasize how, in light of such significant absence of historical documentation, the numbers themselves are clearly not the point" (583). This lacuna of documentation and the resulting difficulty of numerical estimation give rise to a story too vast and intractable "to pass on," which nevertheless not only exists but is one of the most widely read pieces of literature in the U.S. that speaks of and to the greatest loss of U.S. *and* world history.

What kind of knowledge results from this nonidentical telling, passing, reading and writing, dedicated to a number that evokes *the* trauma of racialized history, i.e. the slave trade, *and* echoes the 12 million people murdered by the Nazis (an estimated six million of whom were identified as *racially* Jewish in the Aryan discourse)? Morrison's *Beloved* and Rankine's *Citizen* address the ongoing aftermath of racism, documenting its effects on a collective un/conscious/ness, formative of a collective history, however disavowed. The works are different in genre, timeframe and subject matter, and separated in time by Barack Obama's presidency and the Black Lives Matter movement. The lack of comparative material on Morrison and Rankine's work may be due to their unlikeness. Nevertheless, I juxtaposed the literary agency that unfolds in both through a principle of nonidentity, pointing to what is irreducible to documented facts. *Beloved* fractures "national identity," yet a cultural-historical shared terrain inhabited in vastly different ways nevertheless holds space for literature read by citizens and non-citizens. I have analyzed some aspects of agency that might be attributable to this topology, neither sacred nor literal, but tropologically metaleptic.

Connecting social, historical and figural levels without collapsing them together, metalepsis ruins identity. Thereby the works exercise a performative literary agency, producing

knowledge that differs from conventional epistemology by contesting the reification that accompanies traditional identity categories. The status and intention of the author at least partly give way to a literary agency that might be said to speak in excess of individual authorship.[71] As a guiding principle, nonidentity contests reification.[72] Yet these works do more than deconstruction.

The ruins of identity retain traces which conduct history as a remembered past without reifying it as a given horizon. If race and gender displace individual identity in this process, history displaces collective identity, dissolving their static appearance. History appears in this literature in a refracted form that conditions or conducts (without determining) characters, events and narrative structure.[73]

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[71] "Through the lens of Critical Theory[n], the displacement of identity—a bourgeois concept—enables truth to shine through ideology, which constitutes the incisive contribution of art and philosophy to knowledge" (Buck-Morss 24-62).

[72] My focus on nonidentity thus converges with Buck-Morss' analysis of Adorno and Benjamin's methodology; I continue to point to parallels throughout to elucidate the critical stakes of the project.

[73] If these shared aspects place the works under consideration under the sign of postmodernism, it is a postmodernism thoroughly imbued with a live history: most relevant to the now. Although Adorno rejected the idea of art as the revolutionary agent, he nevertheless treated literature as making an irreducible critical contribution to social transformation precisely by undermining the reification of the given.

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CHAPTER 2

Poetic Agency and Minoritized Grammar: Poetics that Matter

It would be a mistake to think that received grammar is the best vehicle for expressing radical views, given the constraints that grammar imposes upon thought, indeed, upon the thinkable itself.[74]

This chapter examines the connection between minoritization and poetics that break the rules of grammar. I take this broad route to address how poetic agency constitutes an undervalued form of decolonial education, bringing transdisciplinary thought to bear on the question of minoritization and poetic agencies. This enables me to query how the refusal of grammatical conventions creates better possibilities for (expressing) anti-hegemonic ways of being, thinking and action. The breaking up of ossified meanings with which dominant cultures overrepresent through dichotomies by minoritized poetic agencies is often conflated with the modernist tradition of experimentation.[75] Whereas the latter's grammatical subversion of meaning tended to dovetail in pure negativity, the former open up modes of being otherwise. Thus, the situated specificity of social positions, such as race and class in minoritized grammars, exceeds abstract experimentation.

In *Freedom Time: The Poetics and Politics of Black Experimental Writing*, Anthony Reed discusses how critics have generally ascribed experimental rebelliousness to white writers (2-3). After showing the inaccuracy of such an attribution, Reed goes on to argue that: "although critics continue to consider black experimental writing in terms of either race or putatively 'raceless' experimental techniques, the two are mutually constitutive" (3). Poet and scholar, Fred Moten, offers a connected insight in a 2015 short essay: "Blackness and Poetry." Reed and Moten suggest that there is an integral connection between blackness and experimental poetics.[76] I

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[74] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, "Preface 1999," xviii.

[75] On overrepresentation, see Sylvia Wynter's "On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory…"

[76] This connection is taken up in poetic and literary work. For a recent analysis of blackness and poetry, see Shockley's "On Seeing and Reading the 'Nothing:' Poetry and Blackness Visualized."

situate the provocative nexus of blackness and poetry in the context of critical theory encompassing racial, class, queer and feminist analysis.

The first section approaches poetic agency through grammar, while the second situates "ungrammaticality" dynamically in the intertwined literary-historical context at the borders of prose and poetry.[77] These encounters facilitate a response to reading and coding contemporary poetics in terms of impossibility and melancholy with a different proposition. In contrast to timely hopelessness, contemporary minoritized poetics offer what might be described as counter-melancholic agencies. I first turn to a slim book by Farid Matuk: *My Daughter La Chola*, which among other striking features, does away with punctuation. I then move to a different mode of grammar and rule bending in Mark Nowak's recent *Coal Mountain Elementary*, which exhibits a radical practice of sheer citationality leaving the author almost entirely silent. Lastly, I address Fred Moten's *The Feel Trio* and his short commentary on "Blackness and Poetry" in the online journal *Evening Will Come*. The varied subversion of grammar in these works is not simply an aesthetic or rhetorical tactic; rather, situated through a social-political-philosophical lens, their serious play constitutes a form of counter-being that presents an irreducible challenge to dominant notions and concomitant practices of domination.

Minoritization indicates three interconnected aspects: the social position of authors, agential qua performative poetics of solidarity, and a quality of the writing generally considered in terms of "experimentation."[78] Discussions of "poetic agency" tend to involve an emphasis on the social-political context in which poetry is written and/or received rather than an exclusive

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[77] "Poetry is 'ungrammatical' in the somewhat confusing sense that it derives significance not from varying content but by deforming it, by ringing changes on the structure that houses it," says Nealon in the context of discussing the poems of Jack Spicer (Nealon 123).

[78] Grammatical play has increasingly become more at home in avant-garde poetics over the course of the last century heralded by Gertrude Stein and followed by other modernists from whom I distinguish the work of the poets discussed here.

focus on authorial intent or the text itself.[79] My focus thereon is appended by wider (yet less wide-spread) attention in poetic analysis to literary and theoretical agencies at the crossroads of multifarious post-subjective discussions among performativity, decoloniality, deconstruction, and critical theory.[80]

Despite a prevalent topical rejection of capitalism as subject matter in English language poetic discourse, it constitutes an irreducible textuality of poetic works. Christopher Nealon's *The Matter of Capital: Poetry and Crisis in the American Century* offers a salient history of poetic response to capitalism. Addressing the lived contradiction of being "a hapless subject of the hegemon," Nealon argues that the poet John Ashbery "develops a poetics of minority" (32). Through a far-reaching analysis of the under-theorized influence of American politics, French poststructuralism and German Critical Theory on poetry and literary criticism in English, Nealon shows that this "hapless subject" is not entirely abandoned yet the role of poetics in relation to social change is circumscribed. (Ibid. 10-32) He also argues that the most prominent literary criticism in English "has tended to merely name, then draw back from, the conditions that arguably make it urgent to restore to the study of poetry a sense of high intellectual stakes" (4). The work I address, written between 2009 and 2015, does just that by situating literary experimentation through a transformation of minoritization from an external social condition to poetic agency. In other words, by attending to positionality and dynamically putting it to work in situating transformative insight, the hegemonies of dominant grammar are displaced.

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[79] These include concerns with ecology and/or with social moniritization, e.g. Nolan's *Unnatural Ecopoetics*, Steward's "Saint's Progeny: Assotto Saint, Gay Black Poets, and Poetic Agency in the Field of the Queer Symbolic," and Xiaojing's "Scenes from the Global South in China: Zheng Xiaoqiong's Poetic Agency for Labor and Environmental Justice."

[80] For instance, Butler's work on performativity provides an account of linguistic agency that is consequential yet neither exhaustive nor definitive of action. On decoloniality and deconstruction, see Spivak's "More on Power/Knowledge;" on Blackness and epistemological decolonization, see Wynter's "On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory…"

Poetry, the queer sheep of the literary constellation,[81] has been alternately elevated, denigrated, idealized, disparaged, praised, excluded and hated, oft in the name of some paradoxical in/efficacy. Debates about the usefulness of poetry resurge time and again in the academy as well as in the public, and poets are called on to defend their craft.[82] Although poetry takes center stage in this analysis, alongside theoretical considerations, also at stake is the categorical division between poetry and other literary genres. To query a division need not lead to erasing distinctions; rather, the inquiry points to both the differential *and* shared quality of certain poetic and prose works. Contrary to repeated complaints, poetry in particular and literature in general, exercise agencies—that is, poetics resonate beyond the text. By situating poetic, theoretical and social discourses relationally, I show how minoritized poetic agencies practice a mode of nonhierarchical and decolonial education that undermines domination through counter-grammar and counter-melancholy as embodiments of nonbinary thought.[83]

1. Bugaboos (of): Grammar

"I am afraid we are not rid of God because we still have faith in grammar."[84]

In the mainstream, as well as in the academy, writers remain mired in grammaticality, with little respite.[85] Poetry has long been acknowledged special privileges in "experimenting" with form, meaning and grammar. Yet such purported freedom has not come without a price, evidenced not least by ever-repeated accounts of poetry's lack of efficacy and readership (and recently, Ben

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[81] For a contemporary literary-poetic discussion of queerness and Blackness—the intersection and/or entanglement of which suture this essay—see *White Girls* by Hilton Als.

[82] Perhaps the most cited and poignant modern defense is Audre Lorde's "Poetry is not a Luxury."

[83] The addition of the prefix "counter" to thought, being and melancholy do not indicate opposition but rather suggest resistance to binary thought, following Nealon, Moten and Butler.

[84] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*.

[85] My first peer-reviewed essay appeared in a journal with a reputation for groundbreaking literary work. (Compared to other experiences, where a highly respected journal can request a change of findings, for instance, this one was a pleasure to work with.) The editor assured me that they liked my "innovative writing" so much, the proposed changes were up to me. Then, the copy editor suggested a change for roughly every sentence of a forty-page article to "standardize the writing." The mere process of clicking "accept" or "reject" kept me mired for days.

Lerner's *The Hatred of Poetry*).[86] The apparently exalted relation of poetry and language has

involved repeated attempts to exploit poetic "specialty" by philosophy,[87] for instance, through

"sacralizing" it (and thereby arguably sacrificing poetry that is not circumscribed to the genre).[88]

Critics, theorists and poets themselves do a disservice to both poetry and prose by denying

poetry's agency to intervene in other discourses, on the one hand, and refusing poetic freedom to

other forms of writing, on the other hand. They do so by sequestering poetry on a pedestal and

attributing freedom to it disallowed to other types of writing.

Over a century ago, "God" represented the highest authority in much of the world. The

contemporary reign of grammar in most discourses can be read as indicating that we are not rid

of hierarchical authority.[89] Conversely, poetic rebellion need not be leftist nor translate into

progressive politics, as modernist avant-gardists have shown.[90] Nevertheless, situated politically

and historically, a peculiar and poignant relation connects the following modes of grammatical

unruliness and minoritization. To take a closer look at such kinship, this section addresses

contemporary poetics in which bending grammar rules through unorthodox practices of citation,

syntax, punctuation and capitalization breaks apart sense without destroying meaning. What

shines through these shards of sense are aspects of minoritized relations that teach us how to

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[86] "What is it all for, this poetry?/ This bundle of accomplishment/ Put together with so much pain? Do you remember the corpse in the basement? What are we doing at the turn of our years,/ Writers and readers…" Kenneth Rexroth, "August 22, 1939" cited in Nealon 23.

[87] For an arresting account of the relation of poetry and philosophy, see Nealon's introduction: "The Matter of Capital, or Catastrophe and Textuality," 1-35. Nealon says: "the leveraging of modernist poetry into an antidialectical argument with Hegel…becomes *the* gesture into which the idea of 'poetry' is incorporated in the French theory that traveled to American shores in the 1970s and 1980s" (Ibid. 14).

[88] Heidegger, a philosopher widely known for poetic analysis, for instance, puts poetry on a pedestal where it becomes the subject of a regulative ideal: "[T]he speculative will have *also* emerged from, and (re)organized itself around, this gesture of expulsion. Heidegger, as we know, was particularly attentive to this point. But this is also, perhaps, why he was unable to avoid 'sacralizing' Hölderlin." Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "The Caesura of the Speculative." *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*. On sacrificing poetry to philosophy, see also Nealon 18. I re-turn to this discussion in Chapter 3.

[89] See, for instance, Hannah Arendt's "What is Authority?"

[90] Ronda addresses the issue of regressive politics in certain innovative poets in *Remainders*.

think and act differently—not simply for its own sake—but to come closer to each other, coexist

and perhaps flourish. Although such proximity is not a sufficient condition of transformative

politics, it may nonetheless be a necessary component thereof.

My daughter La Chola: **without punctuation**

> I learned the year after kindergarten that sentences
> are linguistic artifacts with regulations that fill them-
> selves out, and that for the purposes of our circus-cannon
> ambitions the most important part of the war they enact
> is the full-stopping dots that divide the booty amongst
> camp-following berserkers of the sub-syllabic frontier. Word.[91]

In Farid Matuk's second book of poems, *My Daughter La Chola,* punctuation remains entirely

absent. The initial poem is titled "Pantertanter." Although there are no indications of notes

throughout the poems, the im/patient or persistent reader who arrives at the tail-end is rewarded

with a series of notes without numbers, marked by the titles of some of the poems. But before

getting to the note, the non-Swedish speaking reader confronts only the sound of the enigma:

"Pantertanter." This elusiveness goads the reader into thinking.

Along with other so-called experimental movements proliferating in early 20th century,

the omission of punctuation has been dated by Gerald Janecek to Apollinaire's *Alcools*.[92] This

and other early examples of poems without punctuation tended to use line breaks in place of

punctuation thereby making it superfluous (Ibid). Whereas canonical literary readings attribute a

purity to the negativity of unmeaning achieved by poetic experimentation, I read the absence of

punctuation in "Pantertanter" as marking a torrent of counter-meaning, which indicates thinking

through historical-political shards of sense.[93] This complexity of coherence through run on

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[91] Kevin Davies, "Comp." 33, cited in Nealon 158-9.

[92] Gerald Janecek, "The Poetics of Punctuation in Gennadij Ajdi's Free Verse."

[93] Nealon discusses Derrida and Adorno's readings of the purity of the negative in poetry as primary examples of French poststructuralist and German-language stylistic literary analysis (12-16). He shows how major English language critics of the past century, including Charles Altieri and Marjori Perloff miss the political underpinnings of

textuality without sentences does not abandon meaning but disperses it, enabling other modes of sense to come to the fore. The first poem of *My Daughter La Chola* begins:

> Abdul from Kenya is real
> we'll make a fire tomorrow how many names could they have

On the heels of the "real" assertion of the opening line, the second one veers off in an apparently unrelated direction, running onward. "Pantertanter" is not divided into stanzas. The parataxis of the second line establishes a rhythm, returning throughout the poem. This movement adds to the disorientation staged here, which rather than abandoning meaning entirely, indicates haste turned urgency that falls short of cohering together. The lines following the first two above might constitute separable thoughts until another possible enjambment toward the middle of the poem (lines 16-19):

> when you visited the nerve of the poem trying to be your blindface [16]
> I would have been Blanche the slutty one we'll make a fire tomorrow [17]
> you see if you just write what you know you won't use anybody [18]
> is power qua power the Kenyans in Plano will go to the Mosque [19]

The first of these lines skates just afield of sense yet is not entirely without meaning. Perhaps we are visiting "the nerve of the poem" like the "you" in it. In the next line (17), a mundane piece of sentence runs anew into an apparently unrelated one, repeating the paratactical run-on in line 2: promising to "make a fire." This functions as an ambiguously assuring refrain: it may be something one says to a lover or a child as the weather changes; [94] yet, at the same time, the promise evokes an undertone of James Baldwin's revolutionary tonality in *The Fire Next Time*. Line 18 inserts an assertion about the relation of knowledge and usage into shards of sense. The following one (19) begins with a verb that has no apparent subject since the "anybody" with which the previous line ends is already involved as an object of "use" and thus does not easily

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poetic negativity (Nealon 3-4).
[94] For the ethical-political significance of ambiguity, see Butler's *The Force of Nonviolence*.

lend itself to being the subject of "is" at the beginning of line 19. In this way, disorientation governs the possibility of the enjambment. Again, the line flows head on, twice changing gears without establishing grammatical connection among its fragments. Yet the names of places announce specificity – from the "I" that could have been Blanche, the character of Golden Girls, to the "Kenyans in Plano" going to the mosque – implicitly situating counter-meaning in social-political topography.

The deviation from sense by way of syntax and the omission of punctuation leading to run-on torrents gains momentum as the poem progresses. A few lines down, one encounters further instances of such breakage (26-30):

> in Plano everyone is too just themselves you make plans you call that day [26]
> say hey we're coming your way they say no image flash [27]
> so bad they'd take the hurt tough truths to give your readers too bad art must be terrible [28]
> or beautiful but never cute Dorothy said she got used to this country we need to [29]
> be Kenyan together but everyone is always alone just themselves in their house [30]

The initial line (26) moves from an assertion made ungrammatical and ambiguous by the mis-placed "just," into short descriptions of what "you" do, without pause or clear rhythm. As if time itself does not afford the speaker pause. This hurried lack of stops also structures lines 27-29, introducing a trace of exhaustion,[95] and a hint of something ominous, also present in the closing lines of the poem (33-36):

> the kids beat their eyes to deal you want to protect their dignity always [33]
> increased or preserved by a good poem one uses [34]
> but everyone is always alone just themselves in their house Abdul [35]
> you find the image you need everything here is stolen [36]

So ends the initial poem in Matuk's book. The names: Blanche, Dorothy, Abdul, mark a displacement, highlighted by the first person singular's quasi-identity with Blanche (17),

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[95] Exhaustion is an important theme for Moten. See, for instance, *The Undercommons*, p. 93-95. In his recent work, Moten offers exhaustion as an alternative to Berlant's conception of "social death." Moten, JHU talk 2/4/21.

morphing seamlessly into the plural "we" (29) needing to be Kenyan but remaining alone (30). The paratactical textuality we have been tracking forms a bracket, underscoring self-referentiality regarding the poem's doing expressed directly by a separate line (34). In conjunction with the line above it, this suggests that "the good poem one uses" increases or preserves the kids' dignity, who "beat their eyes to deal." Yet the "but" that initiates the next line (35) questions this agency of the poem, reasserting solitude. Abdul resurfaces as if out of nowhere, from the first line of the poem, tacked ungrammatically at the end of the line (35). The lack of clarity as to his position in the syntax poses him as a kind of question mark just before the final line, which once more exposes the diaphanous quality of the text in its counter-meaning without sacrificing sense, since even if it is difficult to establish an exact relation in the last two lines, the meaning of the final phrase is crystal clear:

"Everything here is stolen" does not ring out as an accusation in such "hot-potato textuality," since we are not sure where we are.[96] Yet the ambiguity does not alleviate the gravity of the statement. Rather, it suggests a shift from guilt to responsibility: facing ahead.[97] At this tail-end, the promised end-note, which the reader may not be aware of, warrants consideration. The note to "Pantertanter" tells us that it was the Swedish name for the TV series *The Golden Girls* and means "Panther Ladies," without any indication about the show's role in the poem. Lines 17 and 29 evoke Blanche and Dorothy, two of the four main characters of the show. The last reference in line 31 reads: "it was Blanche's house had they not arrived there had they not needed one another." All 3 instances exhibit ungrammatical progression in the form of parataxis without punctuation.

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[96] Apropos stolen words, "hot-potato textuality" is borrowed from Chris Nealon.
[97] I will return to the significance of guilt.

Instead of providing comic relief as the title and the genre of the show might suggest, the lines lean toward a tentative un-tethering or half-tethering of reference, inserting evocations adjacent to but not continuous with the scene and counter-meaning at work in the poem. The other sources cited in the note also remain unmarked without quotation marks, although it tells us that "'Pantertanter' borrows lines" from James Dickey, Alan Dugan and D.H. Lawrence. This complex citationality underscores situated specificity through names and places, while rejecting the stasis of grammar and logic. Such situated displacement generates space for embodied connections.

Matuk's book opens with a quotation from Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism*: "People born into unwelcoming worlds and unreliable environments have a different response to the new precarities than do people who presumed they would be protected." It is accompanied by another from *Lynching in the West* by Ken Gonzalez-Day: "After statehood, and contrary to the popular image of the American West as a lawless frontier, it was those areas with the most law enforcement that had the greatest number of summary executions, vigilance committees, and lynch mobs." The informational, unequivocal and grammatical quality of both quotations marks a stark contrast to what follows, while evoking an irreducible social-political context that remains under the surface of the poems. Although I would have liked to tarry with more poems from *My Daughter La Chola*, named one of the best books of 2013 by *The Volta*, an online publication to which I return below, I proceed to instances of displacement of grammar via citation.

***Coal Mountain Elementary*: sheer citationality as transformation**

Mark Nowak's recent *Coal Mountain Elementary* is a book of poems that consists entirely of citations. It also exhibits complex citationality, where situated ungrammaticality conducts social

crisis. One might say that the poem form is displaced by the book's structure, which presents fragments from three sources. The work is an arrangement of the fragments, each with a different font as is explained in the "Works Cited." Each page is devoted to one source juxtaposed with another across it, which alternate in various order. In addition to the three sources, photographs by Ian Teh, who "has been documenting working conditions in China for over a decade," as the final unnumbered page tells us, are interspersed throughout. Loosely, this sheer citationality can be read as altering the grammar of poetry. Zooming in, counter-grammatical asymmetry structures the quotations.

From the first bold face entry, a sense of grammatical estrangement permeates the writing: "And that morning I just – I did actually notice though and I made the comment of an old wive's tale, you know, what does this mean, this lightning and thunder in January because where I'm from there's always a – you know, the frogs in certain part of the year and things like that" (3). A concrete tone is immediately established through grammatical errors and deviations, posing questions about the speaker and the writer's situation. If this prompts the readers to search for notes, which, like in *My Daughter La Chola,* are not indicated in the poems themselves, they learn that the quotations are transcripts, which accounts for some deviation from written conventions. As the boldface quotations proceed, a vaguely ominous sense increases, and another reason for not following grammar rules becomes evident: "And then it cut off, it – when it stopped, it stopped" (19). The choppy, fragmentary syntactical shifts are indicative of the peril to which the accounts testify.

The Works Cited page informs us that the speakers are miners: "Boldface quotes are verbatim excerpts from over 6,300 pages of testimony transcripts" from West Virginia Office of

Miner's Health and Safety Website, recorded between January 17 – June 19, 2006.[98] Nowak's

polyvocal collage itself functions as testimony echoing transnational mining disasters, citing

these transcripts juxtaposed with other accounts of mining disasters in China: Italicized

quotations from a number of Chinese news sources, primarily newspapers, from February 2005 –

September 2006; photographs and lastly: the American Coal Foundation's online "Lesson Plans,"

created "to develop, produce and disseminate, via the web, coal-related educational materials and

programs designed for teachers and students" (Ibid.). Not a word is added to these documents,

only their arrangement with its varying graphics that calls attention to the materiality of language

on the page constitutes the poetic work of the book.[99]

In stark contrast to the miners' boldface quotations, the "Lesson Plans" from the

American Coal Foundation conform perfectly to rules of grammar. Organizing *Coal Mountain*

Elementary visually (the lesson plan quotations sport red headings and are double spaced) and

thematically into its three chapters/lessons, the "Lesson Plans" give voice to a cool detachment

that rings of misinformation juxtaposed across the page and throughout the book with

transnational testimonies of mining disasters. For instance, the "First Lesson," which constitutes

the first chapter of the book, is: "Coal Flowers: A Historic Craft;" the "overview" to which

states: "Students observe the process of crystallization in the making of coal flowers, a historic

craft among coal mining families" (1). The cutesy topics of the lessons, offering a benign

appearance to mining, are exposed by juxtaposition as deliberate campaigns of misinforming

children and others about the egregiously pernicious conditions of mining and the lack of care

taken to prevent regularly occurring disasters. The apposition of the strict grammatical adherence

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[98] Nowak, *Coal Mountain Elementary* 179. Further citations in text.
[99] In this way the book harkens back to the "genre-mixing forms of documentary poetics" developed by writers like Muriel Rukeyser in solidarity with coal miners and working classes generally (Nealon 19).

in the lessons and the grammatical deviations of the testimonies and reports expose the

negligence which accompanies professionalization in contrast to miners' testimonies of

disaster.[100]

In contrast to the duplicitous "lessons" of the coal mining industry, the sheer complex

citationality of *Coal Mountain Elementary* is "unabashedly educative:" the book provides simple

information in a complex, stark citational arrangement.[101] In place of hierarchical models of

education that presume the necessity to bore educationally underserved people thereby

establishing them as empty-headed and in need of knowledge qua possession,[102] Nowak educates

by providing resources and relying on the capacities of learners to make conclusions and draw

connections among the polyphonous points of view in his work, thereby radicalizing the notion

of education.

An earlier poem, "Capitalization," discussed by Gavin Goodwin as an example of

Nowak's practice of citationality in connection with musical sampling, particularly in rap and

hip-hop, can be read in terms of a similar contrast between the dominating concern for

grammaticality and a working-class ethics (Ibid. 9). Its title already points to grammar. Like *Coal*

Mountain, "Capitalization," juxtaposes quotations from three sources without quotation marks,

distinguished visually. While two of the three sources are political, the third is Margaret

Shertzer's *The Elements of Grammar* on the use of capitalization (Ibid). Goodwin comments that

the inclusion of this source, in contrast to the others, is "less obvious" (Ibid. 10). In concluding

his analysis on the subject, he says: "Despite its modernist strategies, Nowak's poetic play, like

those of Brecht, is unashamedly educative" (Ibid. 11). And yet, the force of Goodwin's article

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[100] On professionalization as negligence in academia and beyond, see Moten's *The Undercommons*, 28-31.
[101] Gavin Goodwin, "Work, Experiment, and Solidarity," 11.
[102] See Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*.

shows that Nowak's unconventional and transformative literary practices take more from

minoritized music than modernism. Like musical sampling, the strikingly "less obvious"

subversion of grammar underscores that Nowak's educational aims essentially avoid self-

defeating paternalist pitfalls of dominant modes of education, instead participating in its

decolonization.[103] This is accomplished by situating the practice of sheer citationality socially

and politically, and thereby unleashing the poetic agency of minoritized counter-grammar in

contrast to the alleged purity of experimental modernism.

      Goodwin describes Nowak's poetics, and *Coal Mountain* in particular, as

"'transformatory' in that it opens the door to international worker solidarity in the face of

globalized exploitation" in order to undermine pitting workers against each other. Although it

may be difficult to ascertain to what extent poetic agency succeeds in this task, it is part and

parcel of Nowak's work that exceeds textual boundaries: "Thus for the past decade Nowak has

run transnational creative writing workshops with a variety of labor-based social movement

groups" (Goodwin 17). Poetic agency can be read in this context as neither limited to the text

itself nor strictly outside it but rather connects the writing to other kinds of doing interrelated

with it, governed by a mutual relation of learning and inspiration.

The Feel Trio: without capitalization

> I burn communities in shadow, underground, up on the
> plateau, then slide with the horny horns, vision's festival
> is folded in overtones and outskirts. j tizol, harry carnival
> and feel lined out around an open forte an underprivilege
> of the real presence, curled up around an outlaw corner.

This poem adorns the back cover of Fred Moten's 2014 book of poems, or perhaps better—riffs:

The Feel Trio. The back contains nothing but this writing, which continues for another 6 lines

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[103] On "Decolonizing the University," see Mbembe.

and echoes the contents of the book. It is printed on a black strip in the middle of the unusually

wide book, which makes it difficult to ascertain whether there are line breaks. As one can already

note from this fragment, there is no capitalization except for the "I," which happens to open the

excerpt and hence obscures the subsequent absence of capitalization. However, with the very

next sentence, which begins with "j tizol," the name of a trombonist and composer, a double

grammatical infraction is committed by not capitalizing a name at the beginning of a sentence.

Although punctuation proliferates throughout *The Feel Trio*, no punctuation indicates that the "j"

stands for Juan, reflecting the dispersal of names throughout the work. This non-capitalization of

names further contrasts the singular capitalization of the "I."[104] Like the punctuation omission in

Matuk's *My Daughter La Chola*, the absence of capitalization in *The Feel Trio* does not

obliterate sense but is part of a larger counter-meaning practiced and embodied by the poems,

undermining division and thus generating unexpected non-dominating connections.

The lack of titles suggests a shift away from individual poems as units. In the first poem

of the initial section marked "block chapel," one encounters the specificity of names, as in

Matuk's work, broken out of their usual indicative function:

> so I sail the dark river in the mind by rocket ship
> (my high water everywhere is outer space, alabama)
> and stay alive in the concept with an outbound feeling
> of refuge, I'ma run, I'mo run, I'm gon' run to the city
> of refuse, in russell's anarchy, for angola, by soas.[105]

First, "alabama" appears tacked on at the end of the line in parenthesis, interpolated without

apparent relation to what came before or after. Then grammar runs away with the variations of

the contraction "I'm," peripatetically performing the action named, conflating colloquialism with

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[104] One reading of this exception, in line with Adorno's aphorism: "In many people it is already an impertinence to say 'I,'" would be as underscoring the problematics of individualism in contemporary culture (*Minima Moralia* 50).
[105] Moten, 3. Further citations in text.

cadence, tumbling head on into the specificity of names, notions, relations and places. Yet this

apparent cacophony is anything but arbitrary. As in Matuk's "Pantertanter," lightness and gravity,

chance and politics, are situated by grammatical deviations. This opening poem closes with the

lines:

> I get preoccupied with the tonal situation. I got
> to kiss somebody to end up in the original. it's like
> that outside drama is our knowledge of the world
> and nobody claims it but us. we get it twisted
> in the diagram. we know the score. we got a plan.

Twice the "I" opens a sentence, giving rise to the illusion of grammatical regularity, which the

second sentence already gives the slip to, syntactically. The sole capitalization of the "I," its

privilege, does not simply emphasize singularity, but also highlights the arbitrary power of

capitalization. The belonging of knowledge shared by the pronominal "we" in the poem gets

"twisted in the diagram." And yet, the parataxis indicates that such knowledge is not necessarily

lost, since there is a score and a plan.

The poems in the second part of the *Trio*, "come on, get it!" look different than those of

the first or the third, which may be related to the three musicians: pianist, bassist and drummer,

of the musical group The Feel Trio. The first poem of this section begins:

> Performers feel each other differently, as material things that never happen,
> in persistent substance and their risen cities, even if there's no escape. their
> training in certain clinical tendencies, or in the general structure of being a
> problem,

The ample punctuation in these poems and the switch away from enjambment structuring the

first section does not slow it down much, as one might expect, compared to Matuk's omission of

punctuation. On the contrary, the absence of capitalization after periods emphasizes a feeling of

tumbling over the punctuation while reading. The ethereal quality established from the second

line is strengthened by the ungrammatical use of the past participle in place of adjective in the

third: "risen cities," that contributes to the vertiginous disorientation already at work through the diaphanous graphic structure. Yet, at the same time, the concreteness established by the first line addressing relation: "Performers feel each other differently," never recedes, occupying a similarly specific place to Abdul in the first line of "Pantertanter." Thus, a queer relationality of difference unfolds through rhythm.[106] I slightly switch tracks to pursue the situatedness of minoritized ungrammaticality further in a prose rendition of Moten's poetic agency.

2.   Bugaboos (of): Agency

The present masquerades as the fulfillment, or only thinkable outcome, of the past...[107]
A pithy prose text by Fred Moten published in the July 2015 issue of the online journal "Evening Will Come" on a multimedia site of contemporary poetics, sheds insight into the workings and stakes of counter-grammatical poetic agencies by way of situating "Blackness and Poetry."[108] As evoked by the title, "Blackness and Poetry" discusses the particular, paradigmatic connection between blackness as a historical-epistemological node and poetics. In so doing, that is, in situating blackness as such a node in relation to poetics, the text challenges dominant US-European social-political and linguistic-artistic modes of disembodied, dichotomous, hierarchical, hopeless relations.[109] The scope of the essay testifies to the deep interconnection of poetic and political thought set in its wider "animaterial" life (Moten, Ibid.).

"Blackness and Poetry" crosses the boundaries of literary, philosophical, Black studies and social-political-historical disciplines, while in its complex poetic language, the division of poetry and prose can be said to give way. In spite of according a special place to poetry in accessing truth, the language of the text belies any rigidity dividing poetry and prose, to which

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[106] Queer, here, denotes a situated critique of individualized identity-based relationality.
[107] Anthony Reed, *Freedom Time* 2-3.
[108] Issue 55, online at: www.thevolta.org/ewc-55-fmoten-p1.html. Further citations in text.
[109] For the scope of this challenge, see Wynter.

the closing line testifies: "This has been a pair of little pieces called blackness and poetry. This is

blackness and poetry." (Ibid.) Among the multivocality of readings to which the repeated

parataxis "blackness and poetry" lends itself, I want to underscore how the last sentence points to

the here and now, thus evoking the impossibility of an ahistorical or apolitical here and now in

the context of blackness and poetry.

> Sociality echoes throughout the text as constitutive of blackness:
> ...black thought, which is to say black social life, remains a fruitful site for
> inhabiting and soliciting the human differential within the general ecology. Black
> thought is the socio-poetic project that examines and enacts these possibilities
> insofar as they exist over the edge of the separatist, monocultural and
> monotheistic imperium that will have been defined in and by ontological and
> epistemological settlement. (Ibid.)

The approach to blackness and/as socio-poetics, echoed at the end of the text, is endowed

with historical-political agency. If modernity is defined here as a catastrophic "confluence of the

slave trade, settler colonialism and the democratization of sovereignty through which the world

is imaged, graphed and grasped," postmodernism names "not only...a political-economy of

dispersal but also...the poetics of experiment that corresponds with and resists it" (Ibid.) The

paratactical connection among correspondence and resistance presents a mode of counter-

thinking that does not fit into a binary division of resisters and collaborators, while the relevance

of a historical-political-philosophical-poetic context prevents the claim from slipping into a

generalized existential or deconstructive impossibility.[110]

The notion of minoritized poetics replete with counter-melancholic agency is inspired by

a 2008 book of poems by M. NourbeSe Philip, which Moten describes as follows: "The story

whose telling *Zong!* seizes, the seizure whose toll *Zong!* sings, is well known: In 1781 the

captain of the slave ship Zong (a vessel of Dutch manufacture which earlier had been called

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[110] Cf. Moten and Harney, "The University and the Undercommons," *The Undercommons*.

Zorg, or *care*) ordered that some 150 Africans be thrown overboard so that the ship's owners could collect insurance taken out on their 'lost cargo.'" (Ibid.) The excess of Zong's retelling not only reinscribes relationality but also remains illimitable to hopeless melancholy:

> The one who dives, who falls, into the wreckage of the shipped cannot come back for or as or by herself; but there is a frayed, refrained remainder that is more than both the reality and the dream of subjectivity. *What remains is more than incalculable loss*. The logic of this supplement, whose appearance as fade and induced forgetting is *terribly beautiful*, dictates that the next word be "nevertheless."

Following the surprising, perhaps unprecedented, though not thereby original but originary poetic logic unfolded in this address, is not disappointment (of the dictate): "*Nevertheless*, this deprivation is sung forevermore" (my italics). The "deprivation" at work here is not existential. It may be ontological, if ontology is understood as social, and/or epistemological, but it is also ineluctably historical.[111] The unbearable burden of history is transposed without being lifted. It remains unsynthesized yet marked by time, in relation:

> En masse, Philip realizes this inescapable and overwhelming truth: that insofar as the story of the Zong cannot be told, or sung, alone it isn't a story, it isn't anybody's story, at all. *Zong!* is the story of no-body and it cannot be sung alone...*What remains is that she who is no more, who cannot come, has come to tell you that there's nothing more than that incalculable loss and supplement*. She has come to tell you what she cannot tell, to tell you that she cannot come.

Rather than reading her coming who cannot come as an impossibility, a contradiction or an aporia, all indicative of an impasse, the agency of her coming who cannot, can be taken up as a paradox whose logic deviates from dichotomous models based on mutual exclusion. This passage is exercised by way of "irreducible sociality of black...consent:" "Sent with a song for you to sound, a scar to swoon, a swarm to send you, too...Whatever anextraordinary rendition

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[111] The understanding of ontology as social and historical conditions critical race studies at least since Frantz Fanon's discussion of "historical-racial schema" in *Black Skin, White Masks*, discussed by Judith Butler's recent *The Force on Nonviolence* (112-114). See also Karim Murji and John Solomos' recent edited volume *Racialization: Studies in Theory and Practice*.

proceeds must be in haptic concert, the irreducible sociality of black descent/dissent and black ascent/assent in profoundly exhausted, animated and animative, consent" (Ibid). The sound of alliteration: "sent…song…sound…scar…swoon…send" conducts poetically, sensually, from past to present, from disagreement to agreement, from low to high. However, we can rest assured that this is not an endpoint.

The second and last part of the essay takes up the interaction of rule and openness via familiar themes of newness, genius and the given in the social fabric of poetics. Although Moten specifically evokes the term "supplement" in conjunction with postmodernism, the approach elaborated here deviates from deconstructive reading (as well as from other contemporary critical methodologies) and aligns more closely with black studies.[112] The second part of "Blackness and Poetry" addresses Adorno, Kant and Olson. While to some extent ambiguous in the treatment of all three, the force of the text undermines the basic assumptions about "genius," but also, and more pertinently, the line drawn so easily between "a work" of art and practice: "What if we refuse the distinction between fine art and handiwork...What if practicing, what if the practice of art, is improvisation's continual breaking and making of the rule of art, in jurisgenerative refusal, in unofficial recusal, in the continual putting into play, of the very idea of the work of art?"[113] The musical shift toward practice and improvisation, away from coherent units, echoes the unnamed poems without capitalization in *The Feel Trio* discussed above. The tension between the recusal and jurisgenerative refusal is at the same time conjunctive, convergent. In other words, the rules are not erased or jettisoned by recusing prejudice, rather they are transmogrified into practice and improvisation, whose rules are made to be broken. (If all rules are so made, the

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[112] On the epistemological significance and historical embattlement of Black Studies, see Wynter.

[113] Cf. "Only a cunning intertwinement of pleasure and work leaves real experience still open, under the pressure of society." Adorno, *Minima Moralia* 130.

rules here nevertheless differ in so far as their rhythmic breaking does not generate guilt since they are explicitly posed for the purpose.)[114]

The anti-hegemonic poetic qua symbolic thrust elaborated by Moten exceeds the pure modernist negativity of rule-breaking for its own sake by being embodied qua dynamically socially-historically situated.[115] Moten underscores the broader stakes of the challenge: "This set of ethical questions turns out to be ecological as well—what sustains us in, what sustains itself as, poetry; what poetry calls upon us to sustain in and of itself." How does poetry call on *us*? Does such calling constitute agential doing? "[T]his differential resistance to enclosure, this sounded animateriality, this breaking vessel and broken flesh is poetry, one of whose other names, but not just one name among others, is blackness." The intertwined relationality of blackness and poetry can be apprehended as sundering the tautological identity of the "is" and marking irreducible sociality and agency replete in the account, where poetic agency is neither immaterial not strictly textual, as its "animateriality" suggests. It also involves the biographically embodied:

> To think poetry in the name of (its) blackness is, crucially, to consider the work's generative incompletion along with that of the one who is supposed to have made it. The work presupposes a productive self, an onto-mono-theological presumption with which many contemporary poets have tried to dispense, the trouble being that we have to account for the provenance and the fate of the ones who dispense it.

The necessary incompletion of situating the work becomes an open occasion by accounting for its embodiment.[116] At this juncture, Moten turns to Adorno and Kant. Yet, I want, instead, to

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[114] Nealon describes the guilt that "attaches to having dreamed of a better world" as touching "on a powerful structure of feeling in American political life, one that has always posed problems for the left, which congeals in the idea that it is a betrayal to think against the system—a betrayal against one's friends, one's community, one's art" (7).

[115] I discuss writing for its own sake through Blanchot's désoeuvrement in the next chapter.

[116] See Moten and Harney's *All Incomplete*.

glimpse once more the strange agency in the text (though perhaps not of it), where the play of

openness and rules again takes center stage:

> Poetry blurs, but where's that coming from? How is endless play confirmed after, and against the grain of the very idea of, the work? We're supposed to derive from the work, in its completeness, some sense of its rule. But what about the openness of the work, its internal sociality as well as the social relations of its own production, which not only escape but also succeed the works seizure, not to mention that rubbing of the work that rubs the very idea of the work out and into the everyday crowding of our everyday hold...

The gap between poetry and the everyday is not an absolute one; on the contrary, poetry crowds

into the everyday, rubs into its idea/s and existence. This overlapping adjacency constitutes a

different mode of preserving distinctions than those conceptualized in US-European traditions of

(post-/modernist) thought, including dialectical synthesis.[117] Perhaps more relevant to poetic

agency, "that rubbing of the work" appears to be the subject, or rather, the agencies at work. This

treatment constitutes a sharp contrast to the dismissal of the political intrusion in the everyday in

major literary criticism.[118]

    The slight shift from such traditions can be tracked on the heels of the following claims,

whose familiarity might again be illusive: "But what if representation is the instantiation of a

radical impropriety? What if truth is given in and by way of this dehiscence?" (Ibid.) Although

impropriety, like the earlier logic of supplement, taps into well-covered ground, especially in

deconstructive terms, the presentation of "truth" by dehiscence raises questions about

referentiality, largely discarded by secular western postmodernism.[119] A further challenge to

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[117] The reference to dialectical synthesis as an example of problematic European methodological traditions echoes Moten's "(Un)fortunate" citation of Kant and Adorno. (Ibid.) Nealon shows that the fraught relationship of poststructuralism, postmodernism, deconstruction, negative dialectics and dialectical synthesis tends to bequeath to English-language poetic analysis the premature implication "that poetic writing is either prima facie political, or that the only significant relation between a poem and capitalism is rigorous eschewal" (18). For a queer reappropriation of dialectics, see Butler's *Subjects of Desire* and Pahl's *Tropes of Transport*. I take up negative dialectics in Ch.5.

[118] See Nealon 4, 10.

[119] See Wynter's discussion of Lewis Gates, esp. 114.

these and more entrenched US-European intellectual hegemonies of post-enlightenment can be witnessed in the displacement of understanding characteristic of experimental poetry to which Moten points, as I address below.

If "*this* dehiscence," in which truth may be lodged refers to "radical impropriety" in the previous question, then is guilt once again displaced from its central location? The thought elaborated in "Blackness and Poetry" might then be characterized by counter-melancholic poetics pointing away from guilt, concretely historically situated, and thereby enabling and/or giving rise to another truth by dehiscence. These salient features turn out to be less deconstructive than it might appear (at least if, against the grain of much contemporary scholarship, the distinction between Walter Benjamin's "counter-messianic" critique[120] and Jacques Derrida's always already violent language is considered).[121]

On the borders of prose and poetry, Moten's essay expresses the labor of agencies present specifically in minoritized poetics, which undermine hegemonic modes of thinking and doing by presenting embodied alternatives to dichotomous, (mutually) exclusive, hierarchical logic. Situated dialogically in black studies, "Blackness and Poetry" also draws on European theorists to undermine logics of domination. Thus, it exposes the threat poetic minoritized agencies pose to the status quo's hopeless unwavering march toward omnicidal destruction.

Finally: By way of dehiscence?

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[120] For an incisive reading of the nonviolence of language in Walter Benjamin's "Critique of Violence" contra classical deconstructive reading, see Butler's "Critique, Coercion and Sacred Life in Benjamin's 'Critique of Violence.'" I note Benjamin and related US-Europeans to mark both the proximity and distance of Moten's thought. Besides the rich tradition of Black thinkers with which Moten is in constant dialogue, Benjamin also marks a singular reference.

[121] While Derrida insists on the violence of language throughout his work, the clearest account is found in his essay "Violence and Metaphysics" in *Writing and Difference*.

[Y]ou never receive me apart from the grammar that establishes my availability to you. If I treat that grammar as pellucid, then I fail to call attention precisely to that sphere of language that makes this "I" possible.[122]

The distinction between minoritized poetic agencies and mainstream poetic experiments marks a distinction between melancholy (white) guilt as a dead-end versus generative modes of autopoiesis opened up through "nevertheless." In *Freedom Time*, Anthony Reed defines "poetics" as "shareable techniques that mark the site where literature touches the social and historical" (6). I situate the radical counter-grammaticality of contemporary minoritized poetry in relation to this "touching" of poetics that matter. This study gleaned the interconnection, or entanglement, of poetry with prose and everyday social-political modes of being in relation. This interconnection illuminates the divergence between representation with its examples, and poetic agencies' gathering of instances and their "opening at definite places at maturity to release or expose the contents, such as seeds from a fruit or pollen from an anther."[123] If the process of dehiscence involves what I have called counter-melancholic poetics, it is because hope (particularly and somewhat paradoxically, perhaps, since it's use in the 2008 presidential election campaign of the most militarized world power) has gotten a dubious reputation, at best.[124] Although much evidence for this loss of appeal can be evoked, I turn briefly to a recent literary work by Margaret Ronda, who, in contrast to Moten and Philip, reads contemporary poetics in terms of hopelessness and melancholy.

Offering an incisive account of different poets, attuned to agential and social questions, Ronda critiques "the innovative paradigm," "attentive to the generative energy of poetry as a cultural form."[125] Ronda argues that such views of "poetry as a means of unveiling new forms of

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[122] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, "Preface 1999," xxiv.
[123] This quotation is the American Heritage Dictionary definition of "dehiscence."
[124] See Moten and Harney's *The Undercommons*, pp. 73-81.
[125] Margaret Ronda, *Remainders: American Poetry at Nature's End* 15-16. Further citations in text.

thought that might generate larger social change," "find analogical affinities with the logic of commodity production and liberal narratives of historical progress" (Ibid. 24). Not to participate in this paradigm, her own representational analysis attends to contemporary poetics focusing on hopelessness and melancholy, although she is also interested in mourning. Ronda describes the works she chooses to analyze as follows: "Resisting a perspective of innocence or ethical outrage that would suggest an observational, distanced vantage, these works emphasize ecological interrelationality and complicity..., and explore collective feelings of vulnerability, hopelessness, and dread" (33).[126] Equally refusing a distanced mode of observation, I have pursued the interstices of hope persisting paradoxically at the very vestiges where it *appears*—without however actually being—impossible.[127]

Can the thesis on the complicity of poetics and commodities itself evade the charge of vacuous capitalist logic? Can we afford to cede innovation and hope as poetic modalities wholesale, without differentiation? Or does the rejection of new paradigms in the provinces of thought and writing—sculpted by counter-grammar—risk excluding modes of being that do not fit preexisting politically-infused molds? Can and should "ethical outrage" be distinguished from "an observational, distanced vantage?" Finally, is not the framework of guilt, innocence *and* complicity an integral part of the neo-liberal presumption of individuals in collective compliance, upon which capitalism continues to ride nature out of history?

Minoritized poetics trace how counter-grammatical rupture excavates crevices of explosive hope, or counter-melancholic forces, that do not jettison melancholy in false dichotomies, nor sublate it through generalized complicity, nor cede hope altogether. Through

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[126] The significance of Ronda's "exploration" is underscored by Nealon's account of poetic criticism as characteristically undervaluing the suffering in the gesture of turning away (10).

[127] The paradox of hope might be akin to Franz Kafka's famous answer in a conversation with Max Brod: "There is hope, an infinite amount of hope—but not for us." Max Brod, *Franz Kafka: A Biography* 303.

play with capitalization, punctuation, citation and rhythm, the poets considered here exercise

agencies that expand modes of thinking and being, like the definition of the oft-derogatory term

"La Chola," taken on by Matuk, the grief that animates the sheer citationality of Nowak's work,

and the music and counter-melancholic poetics of Moten, all of which rupture yet suture the

political-historical sociality of the everyday. Thereby situated poetic agencies practice embodied

truths beyond any dichotomous logic in terms of expression as dehiscence: a dynamic openness

coming alive. It may be correct to feel hopeless and melancholy in today's world, generally

presided over by misogynist, homophobic, transphobic and racist tycoons, and yet... As Moten

and Philip suggest, a logic counter domination insists "that the next word be nevertheless."[128]

Perhaps we cannot afford to be hopeless and hence: "'imagination in its lawless freedom needs to

have its wings severely clipped by the understanding': but what if the understanding is, itself, a

function of the imagination and must, itself, be checked?"[129]

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[128] Moten, "Blackness and Poetry."
[129] Ibid.

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CHAPTER 3

<div align="center">

Economies of Sacrifice:
in Pandemic Times

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Is philosophy's model of rationality nothing but a repetition of ritual and sacrificial rite?[130]

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1. The Spectacularly Speculative –

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"The Caesura of the Speculative," Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's hermetic essay, opens and looks down into an abysmal wound of what could be called western civilization if such terms were not overburdened by irrevocable prejudice. And while they surely are, rather than giving up the(se) words and their referents...what follows traces the tortuous path between deconstruction and dialectics, unfolding critique. This path bears down on the complicit rationality of philosophy and capitalism.[131] I stage a dialogue with a reading of Lacoue-Labarthe's seldom-addressed pithy work by feminist philosopher Tina Chanter around "the caesura" by way of "the inexpressible." This dialogue paves the way for juxtaposing Lacoue-Labarthe's deconstruction of Hölderlin's "Notes on Antigone" with more recent critical readings. I argue that the timeless dialogue surrounding Antigone sheds light on the ongoing conversation regarding the epistemological significance of dialectics: enabling a reversal between transformation and sacrifice. Such critique converges with Fred Moten's political-philosophical thought rooted in Black Studies, offering a way for deconstruction to update itself in pandemic times. The field of intervention thus spans Critical to critical theory in the broad sense.

Lacoue-Labarthe was a leading deconstructionist (the least considered vis-à-vis Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy), and Chanter a later deconstructionist-feminist. In "Tragic Dislocations," a rare engagement with Lacoue-Labarthe's formidable essay in English, Chanter argues that the lack

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[130] Chanter, "Tragic Dislocations," 156. Further citations in text.

[131] Although western philosophy is no monolith, Lacoue-Labarthe traces the thread of rationality from ancient Greece to modern thought, which I follow through into the logic of contemporary capitalism. "The Caesura of the Speculative," 208-235. Further citations in text.

of argument is key to his efforts to undermine the problematic logic that connects ancient tragedy and modern philosophy: "It is just such a philosophical conversion, such an economy of death, that is averted when Lacoue-Labarthe declines to theorize…" (157). This assertion is part of a general distrust of stated authorial intentions that are continuously demanded for the sake of "clarity" that turns out to be complicit with commodifying knowledge.[132] What Chanter calls "an economy of death," I address in terms of "economies of sacrifice" as the red thread marking the displacement of sacrifice from the ancient stage in Greece to the threshold of modern literature and philosophy and into contemporary economies.[133] Never, perhaps, has this subterranean capitalization of sacrifice been more apparent than in these pandemic times.

The strands of this complex socio-textual fabric underscore the surprisingly timeless resonance imbuing the notion of sacrificial economies in both historical and contemporary terms. Although Lacoue-Labarthe does not use this formulation, economy of sacrifice constitutes a central topos of his essay, echoed by Chanter. Such economies are linked to what Fred Moten calls "omnicidal politics" in a recent lecture.[134] The temporality of pandemic times underscores the proliferation of a logic of sacrifice into systematized economies, which are accepted and normalized, in part through the misappropriation of the rhetoric of critique, on the one hand, and purported impossibility, on the other.

Alongside these considerations, the question of style insinuates itself, raising methodological issues reflected in the present commentary. Chanter describes Lacoue-Labarthe's stylistic cum methodological approach as follows: "It acts out the very movement of dispersion it

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[132] For an discussion of accessibility versus commodification of knowledge, see my "Introduction" *to Languages of Resistance 1*.

[133] This postulation diverges from trends in literary studies identified by Christopher Nealon in *Matters of Capital* to displace political problems onto philosophy. Rather, I show that, characteristically, *sacrifice is capitalized* in contemporary economies.

[134] Moten, "Black Topographical Existence," lecture, JHU, 2/19/2021.

would have otherwise had to articulate. Like a Catherine wheel, not properly centered, sparks fly off from it in all directions, inciting other texts, and other modes of production, an empty center obliquely instigating these productions and dissimulating itself therein" (Ibid. 154). Without entering these layers "The Caesura" risks illegibility...(and for good reason: namely, the role of rationality in sacrificial economies).[135]

This section stages the scene for Lacoue-Labarthe's struggle with dialectics in light of Chanter's assertion of his lack of argument and the consequences thereof. In line therewith, I then follow a canonical exemplary instance of the poetics of sacrifice to its veiled social-political traces. These marks lead to "The Caesura's" inspiration in Hölderlin's tragic thought before the final assessment of deconstructive impossibility therein. Lastly, section 2 opens another path into a reading of Antigone that points the way to situated knowledges and concrete instances that transform sacrificial economics.

Aligning speculative thought with dialectical in the matrix of tragedy evokes an attempt to master (the thought of) death (Lacoue-Labarthe 208). This attempt at mastery generates an economy that Chanter calls "incessant," and "the inevitable dogmatism of dialectical mastery, where all suffering and negativity is made bearable, where even death becomes tolerable as it is negated into its opposite, subjected to the play of mimicry, made into a spectacle, *represented* as something that can be borne and mastered—overcome" (my italics; Ibid. 156-7). Here the analysis of what Lacoue-Labarthe repeatedly calls "speculative dialectics"–stemming from Idealism– reverberates and occupies the place of philosophy. Trying to master the negative and put it to work for the auto-production of "the Subject," "the theory of death presupposes...a *theater*" (Lacoue-Labarthe 208, original emphasis). This speculative-theatrical "space" is characterized by

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135 Contrary to championing irrationality, this approach offers a careful reading of the mis/uses thereof.

representation that refracts death and is, "for Bataille the space of sacrifice" (Ibid). I trace the logic

of sacrifice in its peregrination from tragedy through modern thought prefiguring a certain

contemporary logic of sacrifice. This logic, percolating through the history of western thought,

motors contemporary economics as calculation and hence the doomed domestication of death,

whereby mourning and melancholy become indistinguishable (by way of representation) turning

sacrifice into the subterranean motor of rational dialectics and generalizing it into the capitalist

social fabric.[136]

Lacoue-Labarthe's "Counter-Proof"

> And if, in fact, the nature of the philosophical operation in general (and of the speculative one in particular) is fundamentally *economic*, the very principle of this economy is offered to philosophy by the specular relation and mimetic semblance, by the very structure of theatricality.[137]

To delve into the abyss of this caesura it is necessary to glimpse (perhaps without grasping) the

central orientation of Lacoue-Labarthe's essay, tracing the inner workings of "philosophy" through

the mode of tragedy.[138] In the opening pages a series of terms is unfolded, tenuously yet

consequentially connected, elaborating the web of the text. The author claims with marked

minimalism to want to "emphasize" that "in the earliest stages of absolute Idealism, we find the

speculative process itself (dialectical logic) founded quite explicitly on the model of tragedy"

(209). (Thus, Hegel accompanies the analysis, joined by the usual suspects.) This remark, this

seemingly humble task of emphasizing "what is a little less known," follows an opening review of

"a celebrated analysis" of tragedy as "the origin or the matrix of...speculative thought: that is to

say, dialectical thought" (208). We must wait another page to grasp the difference between the

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[136] For the socio-economic underpinnings of this theoretical analysis, see Klein's *Shock Doctrine*.
[137] Lacoue-Labarthe 219.
[138] Such an endeavor evokes Benjamin's philosophical analysis in the *Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, whom Lacoue-Labarthe addresses briefly yet consequentially.

"celebrated analysis" and Lacoue-Labarthe's emphasis. Here we already glimpse the trajectory of the essay which will tighten between ancient tragedy and modern thought, passing through idealist philosophy and reverberating into the now (paradoxically more difficult to locate).[139]

The style of "The Caesura" is replete with shifts and starts, feints and inflections, nuances and denials. Their prevalence and significance warrant a full-fledged examination; I address these poetological moves as they are encountered in the fabric of the text. The first of these make their appearance from the opening pages, where Lacoue-Labarthe insists several times that he intends to say nothing new but only emphasize elements of already known and celebrated analyses. Such remarks sharply contrast with the scope and breadth of his work. Moreover, the distance between the humbleness of the gesture and the scope of the essay implicates the near-impossibility of claims to the "new," which can be read in political terms as opposing the demand to produce novelty.[140] These are the stakes moving from style toward method.[141] This method of implication structures the work, obfuscating its aims buried among a vast "procedure" with absolutist overtones (that is, claims to the absolute, to which I return). Following the opening of the above inquiry into the collusion of dialectics and sacrifice, the next sentence mediates as a paragraph of its own: "But let me add right away that this is not the essential part of what I have to say" (209).

And after the paragraph break: "Indeed, I am much more interested in carrying out the 'counter-proof' of this hypothesis" (Ibid). This is the awaited "emphasis:" in fact, not an emphasis at all but a *reversal*; yet the "counter-proof" is not forthcoming. In its place, Hölderlin enters the scene, introduced and surrounded by double negations, displacing speculative Idealism despite, or rather, *because* he collaborated "in the most intimate manner possible in the building of the

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[139] Dornbach's 2020 reading of the caesura in Benjamin and Adorno in binary terms illustrates the continuation of the problem of dualism in academic work.

[140] To highlight Lacoue-Labarthe's awareness of this issue, is not to say that nothing new can or should be produced.

[141] Hence, I speak of poetology rather than rhetorics.

speculative dialectic—on the model of tragedy" (Ibid). This insistence on Hölderlin's dialectical immanence to speculative thought situates and obscures a displacement.

By way of motivating the deferral, if not the absence, of the promised counter-proof, Lacoue-Labarthe avows the paradox he has offered, which he is "bound to explain...a bit;" citing the "entire 'procedure'" (instead of the militaristic "strategy") involved in order to indicate the "general direction" of the text (209). The place of the desired counter-proof to the thought of sacrifice is occupied by a procedure evoking Hölderlin's intimately connected "theory of tragedy" (Ibid). Will this intimacy prove internal to the speculative dialectic on which Hölderlin collaborated with his schoolmates (Hegel and Schelling) or will it, after all, offer a glimpse of a counter-thought? And if this is the author's hypothesis, what are the stakes of its dissimulation? It will take time to unfold Lacoue-Labarthe's investment in denying the possibility of counter-thought, or anti-philosophy.

The Hölderlin to whom the author now turns is the tragedian and theorist who offers "a new kind of writing" (210). (So, perhaps, if the reading of a hesitation in relation to newness above is to have merit, the prerogative on newness must be attributed to the dead, retrospectively.) Always proceeding affirmatively, Lacoue-Labarthe praises and agrees with analyses that focus on Hölderlin's lyric at the expense of theory and dramaturgy.[142] The affirmation is conspicuously introduced: "Yet in saying this, I would like to forestall at once a possible misunderstanding" (Ibid). The affirmation is nonetheless preceded by an allusion to the stakes of an underestimation, which surface and immediately vanish: "no one has wished to see just what was at stake" (Ibid). If Lacoue-Labarthe does have this wish, he nevertheless chooses not to share the stakes presently; hence these remain to be teased out.

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[142] Although readings of Hölderlin's work on tragedy and theory abound, Lacoue-Labarthe addresses canonical analysis discussed below.

The insistence on the correctness and probity of the "traditional" focus on lyric inaugurated by "two well-known texts by Benjamin," allows Lacoue-Labarthe to ask how readings as incisive yet conflicting as those by Heidegger, Adorno and Szondi can attach the same privilege to the lyric in order to locate Hölderlin's thought in poetry at the expense of tragedy" (211). This is problematic in so far as it obscures the double bind "The Caesura" has all along sought to "emphasize" and address (without undressing): *the dialectic constraint, or the difficulty of extracting difference without opposition*, where the latter seems to bind difference to a mirror and hence to an empty reversal. This question of sameness and difference is at the center of Chanter's commentary, evident in the opening lines: "Where to begin? In which time, or what place? With modernity or antiquity? *And would there be a difference?*" (my italics; 151). Chanter problematizes the very possibility of difference, supporting Lacoue-Labarthe's concern that difference is sacrificed and portending my hypothesis of the capitalization of such sacrifice.[143]

With these high stakes of rethinking binary logic, then, the underestimation of the tragedian explains how divergent canonical commentaries fail to see "*both* the way in which Hölderlin rigorously dismantles the speculative-tragic matrix he himself helped to elaborate...*and* the way in which, in the long and difficult work of the disaggregation and undermining of speculative thought, nothing, finally, could offer him the resources for an 'other' thought, or give him the possibility of instituting any difference whatsoever in relation to it" (original emphasis; Ibid). Thus, Hölderlin fails to break the dialectical hold on otherness, and what is sacrificed in this economy catalyzed

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[143] Perhaps nowhere in her essay is this more evident than in the rather surprising "connection: Hölderlin, Creon, Hitler" (Ibid. 165).

by speculative thought—and it is an economy in so far, at least, as it exceeds thinking[144]—is non-oppositional otherness.[145]

But the stakes are higher, impinging on the present. To simply ask whether Hölderlin breaks with dialectical thought remains trapped, according to Lacoue-Labarthe, in the (sacrificial) logic of opposition. Only a tracing of the limit, thus a certain kind of circularity, might offer the resources to circumnavigate if not circumvent the dichotomy in which difference is sacrificed. Again, the language here is replete with inflection: "To pose such a question...would *inevitably* reintroduce the *very* constraint... (that is, the constraint of opposition *in general*). Moreover, as is well known, that is why there is a closure of the speculative that is *by right insuperable*. And it is this *inexhaustible power* of re-appropriation..." (my italics; 212). This insistence, this generalization of a problem that (earlier) appeared historically situated, suddenly intervenes in the present operation and threatens to stall it, necessitating a strict circumscription of questioning to the limits, or to the question of limits.[146] Whose inquiry is here threatened and by whom or what? Speculative dialectics threatens deconstructive inquiry when re-appropriation of difference becomes automatic and thereby constitutes an economy of sacrifice. The last question of the paragraph (from which a typographical star separates the next) seems to confirm this danger: "And what does this imply about the possibility and the structure, about the logic, of truth and of property in general?" (Ibid). Before analyzing the effect of the generalization of speculative dialectics through property, an exemplary *representation* is in order.

A Certain Logic

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[144] The lack of thought underscored by this economic operation highlights the externalization of sacrifice from a poetic to a political economy and the automated capitalization thereof.

[145] For a clear-sighted, consequential rescue of non-oppositional difference in Hölderlin, see Pahl's "A Reading of Love in Hölderlin's 'Andenken'," to which I turn shortly.

[146] For a formidable attempt to transgress these limits, see Foucault's "A Preface to Transgression."

The depth does not surrender itself face to face; it only reveals itself by concealing itself in the work.
A fundamental, inexorable answer.[147]

To proceed, steadily and patiently following and unfolding the twists and turns of "The Caesura," it is beneficial to detour through another text, preceding Lacoue-Labarthe's by roughly twenty years. This other essay exhibits the logic at issue and has become a staple of literary-philosophical thought. Because of this marked and possibly overdetermined place in the canon, I will omit the author's name, trusting the unfamiliar reader to grant me a brief sojourn from looking down (into the bibliography) or up (on search engines).[148] Thus I call on another pithy text (marked Y) by author (provisionally marked X) because it exemplifies the dialectic logic Lacoue-Labarthe describes as: "the general logic of differentiation, of the ordered contradiction, of the exchange or the passage into the opposite as the production of the Same, of the *Aufhebung* and of (ap)propriation, etc." (original italics; 211). The elements of contradiction, opposition, exchange into sameness, *Aufhebung* (synthesis) and appropriation belong unmistakably to speculative dialectics, which "The Caesura" wants to push to the limits (in the despair of going beyond them: a task even Hölderlin could not accomplish, so Lacoue-Labarthe). The scope of the inquiry situates this dialectical logic in a broader economy that involves not only reasoning as is proper to what might be called logic, but also its location, time, and other innumerable concrete factors of context.

I now turn to the text (Y) that illustrates speculative dialectics in a literary-philosophical economy of sacrifice with social-political implications.[149] The hesitation and incompletion carried by examples must be noted and will be addressed shortly. Y, an essay of barely six profound pages,

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[147] Blanchot, "Gaze of Orpheus," 437.
[148] The point of this omission is not only to give the overburdened reader a hiatus from the position of the (all-)knowing subject, but to facilitate a fresh approach to a text with a determined place in the cannon.
[149] The slippage from the plural economies to the exemplary singular and back underscores the issue of differentiation therein.

takes up the sacrifice of writing, or rather, perhaps, the sacrifice in writing or writing as sacrifice. Contemporaneous with Bataille's work on sacrifice cited in "The Caesura," Y, drawing (like Hölderlin) on ancient Greece, offers a way of re-appropriating Hölderlin's failure to establish another logic, thereby perfectly illustrating the speculative dialectic problematized in "The Caesura." Herewith failure, like death and the negative, is reinscribed by dialectical logic in the economy of sacrifice. The workings of the dialectic split death; the attempt to master it, unleashes the economy of sacrifice set in motion by the dialectic: "that other death which is endless death, proof of the absence of ending."[150]

Has a passage among opposites taken place when death comes to represent the absence of ending?[151] Further, is this, mired in circuitous circularity, not what "an ordered contradiction, of the exchange or the passage into the opposite"[152] looks like: "true patience does not exclude impatience; it is the heart of impatience, it is impatience endlessly suffered and endured" (X, "Y," 439)? If one can see past the dazzling insight of this collusion of im/patience—and it is, in this case, about seeing—I want to ask: *whose* endless suffering and endurance is required for this deadly im/patience: "impatience is therefore also a correct impulse: it is the source of what will become his own passion, his highest patience, his infinite sojourn in death" (Ibid). The question regarding the pronominal subject is vindicated (if not justified) by the fact that Lacoue-Labarthe places it squarely within (if in parenthesis of) "the entire *representation*" (my italics; 218).

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[150] For now, only a substitute letter and page numbers: X, "Y," (438). Further citations in text. (Although such a suspension risks giving more value to the name rather than less, my hope is to lighten the judgment—good or bad—associated therewith.)

[151] Cf. Pahl's opening up of the scene of death in Hölderlin precisely in the service of an irreducibly different logic: "These negations can be blissful if they manage to realize a form of death that is moving without ending the encounter in definite destruction. As the most important safeguard against destruction, both parties need to recognize each other as the subject, that is, both the agent and the patient of their negativity" (Ibid. 198).

[152] Lacoue-Labarthe 211.

It could be objected that my blindfold is the obscurantist gesture which prevents the reader from knowing whom the possessive pronoun in the quotation above names. Nevertheless, I will ask for another moment of patience and only offer a rejoining question about an/other pronoun, indicating solely that the "he" in the story around which the essay (Y) spins itself *lives* (and dies only by implication); whereas the "she" who is sacrificed only dies and disappears. No surprises. But this essay is not about gender; it is about sacrifice, and a certain apparently failed attempt to break out of its economy to offer another logic, irreducible to that of opposition, so "The Caesura."

Before re-turning to another logic, which is not reducible to the sacrifice of desire or the desire of sacrifice (X, "Y," 437-8), another glance at the operation of dialectics vis-à-vis failure should suffice – to move on. Locating sacrifice in the general textual movement, Y inscribes inspiration in failure, appropriated in mastering the collusion of death and failure, this time, without hesitation: "This is exactly the way it is. All we can sense of inspiration is its failure, all we can recognize of it is its misguided violence" (Ibid., 439). Who is this "we" that "we" are all surely more than familiar with, however shrouded in obscurity such a "we" might remain? That is what Y is about (shrouding, veiling, absence; which is why I allow myself to play with its author's renowned identity). Is the failure of inspiration akin to the failure attributed by Lacoue-Labarthe to Hölderlin's search for another logic? Ascribing to dialectics the attempt to master the negative and death, X, Lacoue-Labarthe and Chanter all associate death with failure, especially the failure of inspiration and the failure to get beyond dialectics.

The failure of inspiration is certain or absolute in so far as it exceeds the work and demands its sacrifice (X 440). The exchange of un/certainty, rooted in impossibility, the absolute loss of the work in order to regain the uncertainty necessitated by it, is the final moment of this dialectic which I have addressed to illustrate its thematic and poetological resemblance to the much more hesitant

"Caesura." Does this resemblance enable one, someone (*another* kind of "us," perhaps) to ask to what extent dialectical logic prefigures a certain deconstruction as Lacoue-Labarthe alludes to? Y illustrates how the inexpressible that remains within dialectical logic is not strictly abstract but has concrete social underpinnings and effects and can be performatively transformed, as Katrin Pahl's reading of Hölderlin shows (Ibid.).

The problem of examples is related to that of representation and to time. At least, so it seems when Lacoue-Labarthe claims, in a short paragraph separated within his text by a star above and below it, that he is forced to recur to an example due to lack of space: "Obviously, in the space available to me, I could not give even an approximate idea of the path that should be taken in order to approach the singularity, fleeting and essentially undiscoverable, of such a case. I am thus obliged, whether I like it or not, to proceed by example" (213). Does this sacrifice of desire to proceed otherwise itself participate, inscribing itself, in the economy it might have wished to avoid? And if not, what is the meaning of the emphasis this lament receives by being set apart from the rest of the text?

The part just preceding this one is another lament and points to an impossibility around which "The Caesura" turns, attributed to Hölderlin; it returns us to the logic, or the absence of a different logic, to which the latter purportedly falls prey: "But the 'case' is such, in fact, that despite his obstinate insistence on *self-calculation*, he was not able to give rise to any logic that might have been properly his own and that could have brought about a scission" (original emphasis; Lacoue-Labarthe 213). The passage abruptly ends here. Yet, what if the "case" for which there is no time, never time nor space, while failing to "give rise to any logic...properly his own" nonetheless does offer something other – than the logic which the reader/author see(k)s? Let's try to get a handle on this difficult passage. It remains to be inferred that the "scission" required at this

point refers to the rather enigmatic process for which there is no name but which is situated as: "(...the history of the completion of philosophy.) This place is so singular, in fact, that it most probably marks the limit of *critical* power as such" (original emphasis; 212). And this, of course, entails the pinnacle of western philosophy:

> [T]he completion of philosophy is the passage over the gap or the closing of the wound (re-)opened, in extremis, by Kant in the thinking of the Same; if, in short, it is this covering over of the Kantian crisis (the 'leap over Kant,' as Heidegger puts it) and of the loss of everything this crisis swept with it beyond any power of legislating, deciding, and criticizing—then Hölderlin (this is his singular position, his 'case,' if you like) will have represented, in this completion...theimpossibility of covering over this crisis, this wound still open in the tissue of philosophy, a wound that does not heal and that reopens constantly (213).

Thus, it appears that Hölderlin's failure to provide a scission in dialectical logic through a competing logic "will have represented...the impossibility of covering over this crisis, this wound still open in the tissue of philosophy." Kant's wound; or at least, the one "(re-)opened" by Kant "in extremis:" the wound or "the gap" between noumena and phenomena, things-in-themselves and representations, images, words.[153] The crisis over which Heidegger apparently wanted to leap (but failed/fell?) and which is still open – today?

Hölderlin's Tragedy

> "The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk."
>
> G. W. F. Hegel

To get closer to the limits of Hölderlin's speculative logic of tragedy (in Lacoue-Labarthe's parlance), I turn to his short "Notes on Antigone," published along with his own "monstrous" translation of Sophocles' play.[154] I consider this notoriously unpassable text in relation to

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[153] For a thorough discussion of the significance of this "wound" see Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute* 31.

[154] Hölderlin's "Anmerkungen zur Antigonae" were originally published in 1804 alongside another set of notes and a translation of Sophocles' *Oedipus* in *Sophocles: Die Trauerspiele* (in notes). The English translation is *Hölderlin's Sophocles: Oedipus and Antigone* by David Constantine; further citations in text. While the English is divided into

Lacoue-Labarthe's commentary on its failure, and the economy of sacrifice that spills over from ancient tragedy to the completion of philosophy, which passes over the wound that separates words and things, onto contemporary social-political stages.[155] I note Pahl's chiastic reading of dialectics that diverges from deconstruction and may, indeed, offer a different logic (if not the one Lacoue-Labarthe appears to hold out for).

The first part of Hölderlin's notes, which take up barely a page, delves into the rhythm of Antigone in relation to that of Oedipus with the help of diagrams. The opening sentence declares: "The rule, the calculable law of Antigone stands to that of Oedipus as does / to \, so that the balance inclines more from the beginning towards the end than from the end towards the beginning" (113).[156] Although Hölderlin makes clear that he is speaking of rhythm, this is not a strictly formal analysis but rather one that will seemingly seamlessly bleed into a stringent philosophy, involving an implicit philosophy of history.[157]

The following sentence exhibits this interconnection between the rhythm of tragedy and [158]philosophy, proffering a logic of their relationality. Discussing the formal principles that govern the composition of tragedy, Hölderlin goes on: "The rule is one of the various sequences in which imagination and feeling and reasoning develop according to poetic logic" (Ibid.). Although he immediately qualifies any possible imbrication of poetry and philosophy by specifying their different domains, with logic belonging to the latter (while according a more

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three parts, the German original has only two marked sections. (In "The Task of the Translator," Benjamin calls Hölderlin's translations "monstrous.")

[155] See also Suglia's *Hölderlin and Blanchot on Self-Sacrifice*.

[156] "Die Regel, das kalkulable Gesetz der Antigonä verhält sich zu dem des Ödipus, wie / zu \, so daß sich das Gleichgewicht mehr vom Anfang gegen das Ende, als vom Ende gegen den Anfang zuneigt." (288) *Anmerkungen zur Antigonä*, 288-297.

[157] For a detailed analysis of the relation between Hölderlin's work on tragedy and philosophy, see for instance Billings, *Genealogy of the Tragic.*

[158] "Sie [die Regel] ist eine der verschiedenen Sukzessionen, in denen sich Wortstellung und Empfindung und Räsonement, nach poetischer Logik, entwickelt" (288).

holistic approach to poetry), the evocation of "poetic logic" undermines this division. He

designates "rhythm" as belonging to the poetic capacity to treat human beings as a whole,

without parceling imagination, feeling and reasoning, and this "rhythm (in a higher sense)" is

also called "the calculable law," thus once again according to it and to poetry an overarching

theoretical task.[159]

The next paragraph-long sentence returns to the diagram and the rhythm of the opening

sentence above and introduces the caesura as "counter-rhythmic interruption:"

> But if the rhythm of the scenes is such that in the rapidity of the inspiration the
> earlier ones are more carried away by those following, then the caesura (A) or
> counter-rhythmic interruption must lie towards the front so that the first half is, as
> we might say, protected against the second   and, because the second half is
> originally faster and seems to weigh more, the balance, because of the counter-
> working of the caesura, must incline more from the back (B) towards the
> beginning (C). Thus C A\ B.
>
> <div align="right">Ibid., 113[160]</div>

Only by considering the scope of that dramatic rhythm to which Hölderlin's caesura first appears

strictly tied, does the significance of the caesura for the speculative come to light. The first

section of the notes ends with a reversal of the paragraph-long sentence above in the case of the

rhythm being the opposite of that discussed there. This reversal suggests that Pahl's chiastic

analysis may shed light on Hölderlin's "Notes on Antigone."[161]

The second (and in the German original—the last) section weaves through translation

choices together with a philosophy of tragedy tied to history with political implications. It opens

with general observations about humans and the divine, moving into an analysis of tragedy: "The

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[159] "…Rhythmus, im höhern Sinne, oder das kalkulable Gesetz…" (288). Converging with such poetic logic and unlike Lacoue-Labarthe, Pahl reads Hölderlin as proffering "a different logic [that] gives rise to a pleasurable infinity" (Ibid., 201).

[160] "Ist aber dieser Rhythmus der Wortstellung so beschaffen, daß in der Rapidität der Begeisterung, die ersten mehr durch die folgenden hingerissen sind, so muß die Cäsur (a) dann oder *die gegenrhythmische Unterbrechung von vorne* liegen, so daß die erste Hälfte gleichsam gegen die zweite geschützt ist, und das Gleichgewicht, eben weil die zweite Hälfte ursprünglich rapider ist und schwerer zu wiegen scheint, der entgegenwirkenden Cäsur wegen, mehr von hinten her (b) sich gegen den Anfang (c) neiget. c a\ b" (288).

[161] Pahl 203-5.

boldest moment in the course of a day or a work of art comes when the spirit of the times and of

nature, the divine that is seizing hold of a human being, and the object in which he is interested

are at their most wildly opposed..." (114-5). The opposition evokes Lacoue-Labarthe's reading of

speculative dialectics; yet the sentence continues: "...wildly opposed because the sensuous object

of his interest only reaches half way but the *spirit* wakes to its greatest power *beyond that half*"

(original italics; 115).[162] Does a dialectical synthesis (*Aufhebung*) appear in the unfolding of this

opposition, or is this non-resolution, this asymmetrical excess instead more akin to Pahl's

reading of Hölderlin through a chiastic lens of non-reciprocal mutuality (Ibid.)?

If what follows the opposition is not a synthesis but a reversal, temporal or otherwise, its

structure leans towards a chiasmus. Turning to tragedy, we encounter "the unthinkable," which

recurs in the text. Here Hölderlin says that Sophocles is "better able to objectify" "the mind of

man going on its way under the unthinkable" (Ibid.).[163] This kernel of the unthinkable,

irreconcilable with any given logic, helps to track Hölderlin's tragic thought. A little later, he

refers to Antigone's "holy madness" (Ibid.).[164] This unthinkable holy madness can be read

through Pahl's exegesis of Hölderlin's poem in the development of another logic:

> Shame relentlessly takes offense in the results of its own efforts because no union is
> radical enough to be absolutely pure. The work of shame is limitless. Its infinity can be
> frustrating when merely numerical, that is, when we presume separate countable entities.
> If we presuppose a clear-cut distinction between identity and difference, every newly
> achieved unity opposes the difference which it resolved and therefore adds to the series of
> terms to be reconciled. But a different logic gives rise to a pleasurable infinity (201).

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[162] "Der kühnste Moment eines Taglaufs oder Kunstwerks ist, wo der Geist der Zeit und Natur, das himmlische, was den Menschen ergreift, und der Gegenstand, für welchen er sich interessiert, am wildesten gegeneinander stehen, weil der sinnliche Gegenstand nur eine Hälfte weit reicht, der Geist aber am mächtigsten erwacht, da, wo die zweite Hälfte angehet" (289).

[163] "Eigentliche Sprache des Sophokles, da Äschylus und Euripides mehr das Leiden und den Zorn, weniger aber des Menschen Verstand, als unter Undenkbarem wandelnd, zu objektivieren wissen" (290).

[164] "...heiliger Wahnsinn..." (291)

By tying emotion and specifically, shame, to infinity, Pahl shifts the conversation

performatively, also drawing on Hegel.

Language is the key that allows Hölderlin to move seamlessly from the genre of tragedy

to philosophy and an implicit philosophy of history, as in the following sentence: "The manner in

which at the midpoint time turns can, I think, not be altered nor how a character categorically

follows the categorical times, nor how the Greek shifts to the Hesperian, but the sacred name

under which supreme things are made palpable or occur, that may be altered" (114).[165]

Hölderlin's "Hesperian," refers to his own modernity, and the historical shift folded into literary

analysis in this sentence exhibits their close intertwinement.[166] Again without any allusion to

synthesis, thus complicating the speculative framework, the following opposition hinges on a

suspension:

> First in what characterizes the *antitheos* where one, after God's own mind, acts, as
> it seems, against God and recognises His supreme spirit through lawlessness.
> Then the pious fear in the face of Fate and with it the honouring of God as
> something set in law. This is the spirit of the antithesis placed impartially against
> one another in the chorus (115-6, original italics).[167]

Hölderlin is speaking of *Antigone*. Referring to Creon and Antigone, he continues: "The two in

their opposition, not as national and anti-national (or, in that instance, cultured)...but weighing

equally one against the other and different only in relation to the times, so that one loses pre-

eminently because it is the beginning, and the other wins because it is following on behind"

(116).[168] This alternating structure lacks synthesis, instead presenting the rhythmic caesura

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[165] "Wohl die Art, wie in der Mitte sich die Zeit wendet, ist nicht wohl veränderlich, so auch nicht wohl, wie ein Charakter der kategorischen Zeit kategorisch folget, und wie es vom Griechischen zum Hesperischen gehet, hingegen der heilige Namen, unter welchem das Höchste gefühlt wird oder geschiehet" (290).

[166] In *The Tragic Absolute*, David Krell, for instance, links Hölderlin's "Hesperian" to Nietzsche's "modern" 430.

[167] "Einmal das, was den Antitheos charakterisiert, wo einer, in Gottes Sinne, wie gegen Gott sich verhält, und den Geist des Höchsten gesetzlos erkennt. Dann die fromme Furcht vor dem Schicksal, hiemit das Ehren Gottes als eines gesetzten. Dies ist der Geist der beiden unparteiisch gegeneinandergestellten Gegensätze im Chore" (292-3).

[168] "Beide, insofern sie entgegengesetzt sind, nicht wie Nationelles und Antinationelles... sondern gleich gegen

described in the opening of the "Notes on Antigone." The following (and final sentence of section two in the English translation) offers a reversal: "In that way the strange chorus being discussed here fits the whole in the most apt fashion and its cold impartiality is a kind of warmth because it is so peculiarly fitting" (Ibid.).[169] Although the two pairs (Antigone and Creon in the preceding sentence and the coldness/warmth of the chorus here) are not similar, they form a structural chiasmus.

Hölderlin offers the following definition of tragedy: "Tragedy...resides in this: that the immediate God, wholly one with man..., that an infinite enthusiasm infinitely, which is to say in antithesis, in consciousness that cancels out consciousness, and sacramentally departing from itself, apprehends itself, and the God, in the gestalt of death, is present" (116; translation modified).[170] This turn towards death ushers in the "factive" relation of death and language that Hölderlin postulates and which, in turn, meets a reversal between the Greeks and Hölderlin's "us:" "The language of tragedy for the Greeks is lethally factive, because the body it seizes hold of does literally kill" (Ibid.).[171] These observations exceed the stage of tragedy, and spill over, in both motivation and effect, into philosophical-historical realms. I quote the following sentence in its entirety to submit to the reader's discretion the uncanny progression from tragedy in the previous sentence, to speculative thinking on theology, culminating in a thesis on history:

> For us, standing as we do under a Zeus more our own, who not only pauses between this world and the wild world of the dead but also forces the natural course of things (which is always hostile to man) on its way into the other world

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einander abgewogen und nur der Zeit nach verschieden, so daß das eine vorzüglich darum verlieret, weil es anfängt; das andere gewinnet, weil es nachfolgt" (293).

[169] "Insofern passet der sonderbare Chor, von dem hier eben die Rede ist, aufs geschickteste zum Ganzen, und seine kalte Unparteilichkeit ist Wärme, eben weil sie so eigentümlich schicklich ist" (293).

[170] The English translation fails to capitalize "God" in the second instance, yet Hölderlin does not differentiate the two:
"Die tragische Darstellung beruhet… darauf, daß der unmittelbare Gott ganz Eines mit dem Menschen…, daß die unendliche Begeisterung unendlich, das heißt in Gegensätzen, im Bewußtsein, welches das Bewußtsein aufhebt, heilig sich scheidend, sich faßt, und der Gott, in der Gestalt des Todes, gegenwärtig ist" (293).

[171] "*Das griechisch-tragische Wort ist tödlich-faktisch*, weil der Leib, den es ergreifet, wirklich tötet" (294).

more decidedly back to earth, and because this greatly alters our essential and our national conceptions and because our poetry must be proper to our homeland, its subject matter chosen in accordance with our view of the world and its conceptions those of our homeland – for us then Greek conceptions alter because the chief striving of the Greeks is to compose themselves, that being where their weakness lay, whereas our chief striving in the way our times see things is to hit upon something, to have a fate, because we have no fate... (Ibid., 116-7)[172]

Is it the slippage from the Hesperian to "our national conceptions" (that movement that colors the statement: "our poetry must be proper to our homeland") that evinces the weakness of the argument and the groping for a failing counter-logic Lacoue-Labarthe posits?

A parting glance at the final pages of Hölderlin's text and the "total reversal" therein helps elucidate this question. The intertwinement of literary and historical analysis remains characteristic of these final moments in the notes: "The plot in Antigone has the form of an unrest in which, so far as it is a matter for the nation, the essential thing is that every character, caught up in an infinite reversal and shaken through and through by it, apprehends herself or himself in the infinite form in which he or she is so shaken." (Ibid.)[173] The nationalism at work here, as a belief in national distinctness, becomes more prominent in the concluding considerations: "For reversal in the mother country is the reversal of all ways of perceiving things and of all forms. Total reversal in these however, like any total reversal with no restraint, is forbidden to Man as a thinking being." (Ibid.)[174] The slippage between the social emphasis on

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[172] "Für uns, da wir unter dem eigentlicheren Zeus stehen, der nicht nur zwischen dieser Erde und der wilden Welt der Toten innehält, sondern den ewig menschenfeindlichen Naturgang, auf seinem Wege in die andre Welt, entschiedener zur Erde zwinget, und da dies die wesentlichen und vaterländischen Vorstellungen groß ändert und unsere Dichtkunst vaterländisch sein muß, so daß ihre Stoffe nach unserer Weltansicht gewählt sind, und ihre Vorstellungen vaterländisch, verändern sich die griechischen Vorstellungen insofern, als ihre Haupttendenz ist, sich fassen zu können, weil darin ihre

Schwäche lag, da hingegen die Haupttendenz in den Vorstellungsarten unserer Zeit ist, etwas treffen zu können, Geschick zu haben, da das Schicksallose, das *dysmoron*, unsere Schwäche ist" (294 - 295).

[173] "Die Art des Hergangs in der Antigone ist die bei einem Aufruhr, wo es, sofern es vaterländische Sache ist, darauf ankommt, daß jedes, als von unendlicher Umkehr ergriffen und erschüttert, in unendlicher Form sich fühlt, in der es erschüttert ist" (295-6).

[174] "Denn vaterländische Umkehr ist die Umkehr aller Vorstellungsarten und Formen. Eine gänzliche Umkehr in diesen ist aber, so wie überhaupt gänzliche Umkehr ohne allen Halt, dem Menschen, als erkennendem Wesen

context and an ontological limit of human thought gives way in the next sentence to an explanatory mode:

> And in a reversal in the mother country, where the whole shape of things alters and Nature and Necessity, which are always there, incline to another shape, going over either into wilderness or into some new shape, in such a change everything merely necessary is on the side of change, for which reason, in the possibility of such change, even a neutral person, not only one taken up against the form of the mother country, will be forced by a violence of the spirit of the times to be patriotic, to be present to an infinite degree in the religious, political and moral forms of his or her country (Ibid. 118).[175]

A person "taken up against the form of the mother country" refers to the way in which Antigone is propelled, or "taken up" in Hölderlin's words, against the form of her country ruled by Creon and his prohibition against mourning—her brother. "Even a neutral person," on the other hand, seems to be a self-reflexive observation in a confessional, perhaps even an apologetic tone, which, however, insists on the thoroughness, that is, the "infinite degree," to which nationalist mores ensnare the speaker.

In the end Hölderlin's "Notes on Antigone" appear to dovetail into a certain complacency reminiscent of his schoolmate's renowned remark (and infinitely reversible in the generation to follow) referring to the owl of Minerva that opened this discussion of "Hölderlin's Tragedy," which has been repeatedly read as philosophy's coming—in the form of the Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom's, owl—too late on the heels of the acts of the day.[176] Hölderlin says: "We may perhaps idealise, for example choose the best moment, but the ways a country has of

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unerlaubt" (296).

[175] "Und in vaterländischer Umkehr, wo die ganze Gestalt der Dinge sich ändert, und die Natur und Notwendigkeit, die immer bleibt, zu einer andern Gestalt sich neiget, sie gehe in Wildnis über oder in neue Gestalt, in einer solchen Veränderung ist alles bloß Notwendige parteiisch für die Veränderung; deswegen kann, in Möglichkeit solcher Veränderung, auch der Neutrale, nicht nur, der gegen die vaterländische Form ergriffen ist, von einer Geistesgewalt der Zeit, gezwungen werden, patriotisch, gegenwärtig zu sein, in unendlicher Form, der religiösen, politischen und moralischen seines Vaterlandes" (296).

[176] See, for instance, Singer's entry in the *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 638.

perceiving things, in their hierarchy at least, must not be altered by the poet..." (Ibid.).[177] Not

altered yet also not simply observed but carried on: "[T]he national forms of our poets, where

such forms exist, are preferable because they exist not just in order to learn to understand the

spirit of the times but once that spirit is grasped and learned to hold it steady and to feel it."

(Ibid.)[178] German and philosophy scholar, Jennifer Gosetti-Ferencei, argues that the meaning of

"national" for Hölderlin must be understood in historical, and by today's standards, anti-

nationalist terms. Reading his remarks on Antigone against Heidegger's interpretation thereof,

she says: "While Hölderlin's understanding of 'national' and the 'German' is tethered to his

democratic and revolutionary views, and…is, further, intertwined with his hopes for the success

of the French Revolution, Heidegger lifts the 'national' out of Hölderlin's own context…" (182).

This contextualization affords the task of the poets a liberatory rather than colonial ring,

distinguishing national from nationalist; moreover, it undermines the standard interpretation of

the Hegelian owl of knowledge as prescribing an ex-post-facto temporality to thought.[179]

Hölderlin's notes, appearing to follow a rhythmic and a chiastic pattern, offer significant room

for play. If, instead of the ghostly atemporality of deferral, Hölderlin's notes are understood in

terms of his own times, which he underscores in a chiastic relation to the Greeks, the rhythm of

philosophy-history unfolded therein might indeed offer kernels of a counter-logic.

The Final Impossibility

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[177] "Man kann wohl idealisieren, z. B. den besten Moment wählen, aber die vaterländischen Vorstellungsarten
dürfen, wenigstens der Unterordnung nach, vom Dichter… nicht verändert werden" (297).
[178] "Die vaterländischen Formen unserer Dichter, wo solche sind, sind aber dennoch vorzuziehen, weil solche nicht
bloß da sind, um den Geist der Zeit verstehen zu lernen, sondern ihn festzuhalten und zu fühlen, wenn er einmal
begriffen und gelernt ist" (297).
[179] For a different interpretation that relies on the historical sources alluding to the fact that Hegel read "The Owl
of Minerva," a political news source, see Susan Buck-Morss' *Hegel, Haiti and Universal History* (381).

I take leave of "The Caesura," having barely scratched its abysmal surface, with a question about time: Are "we, moderns," as Lacoue-Labarthe insisted forty years ago, still modern (222)?[180] One might recall that Chanter's "Tragic Dislocations" begins by asking "Where to begin? In which time or place? With modernity or antiquity? And would there be a difference?" (151)[181] A small section tucked into the middle of "The Caesura" returns to the elusive "counter-proof," the interest in which inaugurated this complex work, whose trace had apparently vanished only to reappear ten pages later. Turning to Antigone, this section, perhaps the most enigmatic and pregnant of "The Caesura," proceeds by shifts and starts, twisting and denying what is said from the first to the last word: "I offer these indications, though they are elliptical considering the degree of patience required here, not only for the purpose of marking by way of a kind of relief the place of Antigone. Nor..." (Ibid). Every step is made and unmade, rejected yet not erased.[182] And after this one, a barely perceptible break (without so much as a typographical star to mark it) yet a break nonetheless. Immediately preceding it, a statement that punctuates or punctures this part of the text evokes our location in modernity proximate to Greece: "in the modern epoch...one must repeat what is most Greek in the Greeks. Begin with the Greeks again. That is to say, no longer be Greek at all." (Ibid). Another passage from one side to its apparent opposite, this time without resolution? A futural time for modernity replete with a task for "one?" But what of that (obfuscated, displaced yet not erased) "relief" offered by "the place of Antigone"? What "kind of relief" is this and from what?

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[180] I have emphasized the "we" throughout this essay, noting that its usage has been brought into question by feminist, queer and race critical scholarship with unprecedented force since "The Caesura" was written.

[181] "Tragic Dislocations" was originally published in 1998. Chanter continues and expands her engagement with Antigone in 2009 and 2013.

[182] Chanter says: "Lacoue-Labarthe's text, 'The Caesura of the Speculative,' spirals around the vortex of *Antigone*, without ever alighting on the play directly. It is a text set in motion by *Antigone*, decentered, off kilter, circling precariously on the edge of the tragedy, informed by its abyssal structure, yet never settling on its meaning or providing an interpretation" (153).

It is once again a question of time and order, in the sense of what comes next. Amidst all the twists and turns, Antigone sticks out like a sore, does not remain buried and finally comes to occupy the "paradoxically greater" place of modernity (221).[183] This occurs through the ancient figure of the chiasmus, "a historical scheme" through which "a certain form of Greek tragedy...was in a position to define the ground of our own nature" (Ibid). And yet, contrary to appearances, even if, as Lacoue-Labarthe claimed earlier, tragedy is the "matrix" of dialectics, something in the "problematic of imitation in history...*is* not, but *remains* irreducible to the dialectical logic to which it appears to be subordinated" (original emphasis; ibid). Yet this line of pursuit—the kernel of what is no longer the "counter-proof," perhaps—is immediately cut off: "I cannot develop this point any further at this time;" (Ibid.) No explanation, only time, "I cannot...at this time; but I cannot help thinking," one inexplicable or only unexplained impossibility after the other propels the narrative into...deconstruction. Hölderlin's deconstruction and the impossibility of anything else: "...but I cannot help thinking that this is perhaps the sign that for Hölderlin there was basically no modern tragedy except in the form of a *deconstruction*, a practical one, of ancient tragedy. Just as there was, undoubtedly, no possible theory of tragedy and of the tragic except in the deconstruction of classical poetics and its speculative reinterpretation. The one inseparable from the other" (original emphasis; ibid). Which one is inseparable from which other? Is it only classical and modern tragedies that are inseparable, or also times, as Chanter suggests, or tragedy and deconstruction?

Not only does Hölderlin's theory of tragedy prefigure deconstruction, moreover, carrying it out, but it also turns out to be inseparable from a *speculative* reinterpretation of classical poetics. This proximity, this exchange or displacement, positions deconstruction closer to speculative

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[183] On the undead of Antigone, see Rickels, "Anti-Gone."

dialectics in the matrix of tragedy. "We" might recall that Hölderlin has no resources, as Lacoue-Labarthe does not tire of insisting, to offer any logic apart from it.[184]

The non-resolution of this paradox of difference circulates in the economy of the same. The question of circularity recurs and is explicitly taken up at the tail-end of that obscure "counter-proof:" "(though the word seems definitely less and less suitable)" (219); in which case, could it be a kind of hesitant and tentative counter-logic? Perhaps not in the sense of a logic counter to dialectical logic, but a provisional non-systematizability or conditionality? Whether it is too early or late to pose such questions, circularity and the breakage thereof is noteworthy (re-enter Hegel: 223).[185] It is Hegel's reading or rather silence regarding Hölderlin's analysis, and one year following the publication of the latter's *Notes*, Hegel's writing of "the pages of the *Phenomenology of Mind* devoted to Antigone, pages that program...the modern interpretation of tragedy" that make "The Caesura" tarry with Antigone (223-4). For the second time, deconstruction makes an explicit appearance testifying to the impossibility of closing the circle: "where the systematic does not quite succeed in fully overlapping the historical," suggesting a systematicity that almost succeeds, although not quite, not fully (224). Whose attempt is this? Does "the historical" still have room then: "where the circularity (as Szondi notes) alters itself in a spiraling movement while the closure can scarcely contain the pressure under which it has perhaps already succumbed without anyone's becoming aware of it" (224)?[186] Lacoue-Labarthe continues, concluding the "counter-proof:" "-even still (I mean to say: there is one more reason for thinking that) the speculative will have...(re)organized itself around, this gesture of expulsion" (Ibid). Enter Heidegger's attentiveness—to the circle: "But this is perhaps, why, he [Heidegger] was unable to avoid

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[184] Cf. Pahl, Ibid.
[185] On Hegelian non-resolution in terms of love and agency, see Pahl 198.
[186] The quotations which are here punctured by commentary and presented piecemeal are provided for the reader's own perusal in the Appendix at the end of this text.

'sacralizing' Hölderlin" (Ibid). *"Sacralize:" to make sacred; "sacrifice:" from "sacer, sacred + facere, to make."*[187] End of section.[188]

Yet first, a parting glance is due at the final stakes of "The Caesura," which remain to be fully glimpsed let alone grasped. The enduring question of counter-proof, counter-logic or counter-thought resounds again: "Has Hölderlin been able to extricate himself, by some miracle, from the most powerful of theoretical constraints?" (226) Dialectical logic, the most powerful and long-enduring theoretical constraint, requires a miracle to extricate oneself from; in answer: "Certainly not" (Ibid). Paragraph break before and after the answer; and then: "Need I repeat again?" (Ibid.) Apparently again and again: "The theory put forward in Hölderlin...is, through and through" as if pierced or nailed "speculative. At least" enter Derrida "(and here you may refer again to *Glas*, p.188) it can always be interpreted in this way, read in this way, and written in this way" (226-7). Does the fact that it can, mean that it does *not* have to be so? "...in this way. For it is probably in just this fashion—above all, when it wished to extricate itself from this constraint—that the theory was first read and written. But this is not to say that it *reread* itself and *rewrote* itself in this manner—especially when it did not want to extricate itself from this constraint, in which it also saw its resource, its protection" (227). *Who* is doing the reading and *who* is rereading—what is this acting it-self?

Besides stringent criticism from divergent sides, deconstruction has also found resonance alongside reconfiguration in contemporary critical scholars, where embodied minoritized knowledges figure as deconstruction in motion.[189] Pahl and Moten's work turns the

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[187] American Heritage Dictionary. In French, the original language of the "Caesura," sacralize is "*sacraliser;*" sacrifice remains the same. Cf. Chanter on Heidegger and Hölderlin (153).
[188] For more on Heideggerian sacrifice, see Ch.2: "Literary Agency and Minoritized Grammar."
[189] I thank Chris Nealon for the image of "deconstruction in motion," with its uncanny rhythmic divergence from Benjamin's "dialectics at a standstill" ("Paris," 10).

dialectical/deconstructive constraint into a resource and protection by recoding limits as unstable, situated boundaries rather than impossibilities.

The speculative procedure that appears endangered throughout the analysis of being reinscribed and reincorporated into the dialectic it so desperately tried—and failed—to escape, going through and drawing on the dialectic, destabilizes it from within thereby displacing the need of escape. More than escaping, the machinery of the dialectic is suspended. I cite the passage at length:

> [I]n the very difficulty Hölderlin had in theorizing...in the aggravation of that sort of paralysis affecting his discourse (trapping it in ever more rigid logical and syntactic bonds), Hölderlin, by a movement of 'regression,' if you will (I shall return to this: it is without any pejorative implications), comes to touch upon something that dislocates from within the speculative....distends and suspends it. Something that constantly prevents it from completing   itself and never ceases, by doubling it, to divert it from itself, to dig into it in such a way as to create a spiral, and to bring about its collapse (227).

After all the repetitions and denials, twists and (re)turns, then, this cessation of theorizing from within that is not the end of discourse, not madness, but a withdrawal, which involves: "detaching the discursive or the theoretical from what remains, or from its own remainder" (Ibid). Although some pages remain in "The Caesura," this will have been its closing point, to which it returns in the final analysis.

It would appear that the economy itself is here brought to a halt:

> Such a disarticulation of the work and of the process of succession through alternations that constitute it as such—by which we pass (and here again, by what effect of 'regression'?) from a *melodic* conception of the work to a *rhythmic* one— does not do away with the logic of   exchange and alternation. It simply brings it to a halt, reestablishes its equilibrium; it prevents   it, as Hölderlin says, from carrying along its *representations exclusively in one sense or   another*" (my italics; 234-5).

The dialectical speculation-machine that "The Caesura" actively labors to suspend operates through binary representation. A slippage here marks not only the work of tragedy as a rhythmic

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art, and philosophy as its logic, but also implicates a more generalized economic "exchange and alternation." Surely, the terrain covered cannot be restricted to literature or poetry, given Hölderlin's claims pertaining to the philosophy of history and Lacoue-Labarthe's regarding "the completion of philosophy" (212).[190]

2. Another Antigone

> The evaluation cannot be decided by the way the poet has fulfilled his task; rather, the seriousness and greatness of the task itself determine the evaluation.[191]

Another more recent reading of Antigone can be said to take root in the same speculative soil yet veers off the (deconstructive, dialectical) track, which always risks being (re)incorporated by a logic circulating (in) economies of sacrifice. It replies to the question posed by Chanter: "whether any alternate reading of Antigone's potentially disruptive force could ever be maintained without succumbing in its turn to the inevitable dogmatism of dialectical mastery, where all suffering and negativity is made bearable, where even death becomes tolerable as it is negated into its opposite, subjected to the play of mimicry, made into a spectacle, represented as something that can be borne and mastered—overcome" (156). Chanter's subsequent work on Antigone, rerouted through feminist and race critical sources, can also be read as responding to this question by situating the inquiry historically.[192]

If, as I have endeavored to show and despite or through all the denials, "The Caesura" attempts to elaborate—on the basis of Hölderlin's work on Antigone—a kind of counter-thought to the economy of sacrifice, Judith Butler's *Antigone's Claim*, can be read in convergent terms.

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[190] For Chanter, the significance of the "Caesura" is as much in what it does *not* do: "It is just such a philosophical conversion, such an economy of death, that is averted when Lacoue-Labarthe declines to theorize about what makes Antigone the most Greek and at the same time the most modern of tragedies…" (157).

[191] Benjamin, "Two Poems by Friedrich Hölderlin," 18.

[192] Chanter, "The Performative Politics and Rebirth of Antigone in Ancient Greece and Modern South Africa" 95. Chanter cites Butler's *Antigone's Claim* as one of the sources for her later work on Antigone.

The counter-thought of *Antigone's Claim* is less about suspension than about transforming the legacy left by Oedipus: "Antigone is the offspring of Oedipus and so raises the question for us: what will come of the inheritance of Oedipus when the rules that Oedipus blindly defies and institutes no longer carry the stability accorded to them by Lévi-Strauss and psychoanalysis?" (Butler, 22).[193] Such is Antigone's transformative role according to this reading that intervenes in the present, marked by converging temporalities.[194]

Is there a difference between suspension and transformation here? "The Caesura" and *Antigone's Claim* deal with some of the same figures (Antigone, Oedipus, Hölderlin, Hegel) for similar reasons (looking for a counter-thought), spring from shared contexts and concerns (at the borders of literature and philosophy), addressing overlapping issues (the problem of representation and speculative dialectics) but deviate from one another (suspension, on the one hand, and transformation, on the other), as well as from other approaches to the speculative-deconstructive-tragic representation problem of philosophy through the figure of Antigone. Chanter's readings of Lacoue-Labarthe's essay and the shift to an explicitly "performative" approach in her later work follow the movement from suspension to transformation. Ending with "a caesura," Chanter's early essay leaves "us" with dust and abjection, which "we" are doomed to master and fail at mastering, repeatedly ("Tragic Dislocations," 170). Whereas her later work "effects a critique of the conditions that perpetuate such systematic blindness—calling for a future that does not allow suffering to continue as the unabated and unacknowledged condition of prevailing regimes of representation" ("Performative Politics," 95). If "regimes of representation" have to do with

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[193] Preciado echoes this point in a 2019 address to the psychoanalytic congress in *Can the Monster Speak?* (66).
[194] Attesting to the resurging interest in Antigone, Chanter says: "[O]ne wonders whether a tragedy…named for Antigone…has lost any of its power or relevance," "Tragic Dislocations," 168. See also *Feminist Readings of Antigone*, ed. Söderbäck.

temporalities and examples, which Lacoue-Labarthe wants to substitute with "cases," *this* representation is complicit in economies of sacrifice.

In its final moment (after the last typographical star), "The Caesura" takes one ultimate turn in which a movement is legible that might be convergent with that of Antigone's transformative trajectory beyond the text. This movement redoubles a pointed absence it its own path, which nonetheless arises twice in the text: Walter Benjamin's thought with which "The Caesura" can fruitfully be brought into a complex dialogue. In this final paragraph (set off by a star), Lacoue-Labarthe offers a more concrete example or case, (I would insist after all) of Hölderlin's counter-thought. Reminding the reader of the German for tragic drama: *Trauerspiel*, literally: mourning play, he says:

> Something different, then, if you will allow me such an association (in fact, not really so free) from the 'work of mourning,' the sublimating learning of suffering and the work of the negative —the two conditions, as Heidegger has shown, of the onto-logic...Why would we not conclude, then, that in (dis)organizing tragedy in this way, Hölderlin *caesuraed the speculative* (which is not to go beyond it, or to maintain it, or to sublate it) and, in so doing, rediscovered something of the *Trauerspiel*?

So, finally, something other is re-discovered, something hidden in tragedy all along that subverts it, which is not the same as the onto-logic. Does the play of mourning, *Trauer-spiel*, thus differ from the logic of sacrifice by exposing it and thereby achieve its suspension?[195] Is it the play which subtends work that allows the caesuring of that sacrificial economy in which the onto-logic operates?[196]

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[195] In "Tragedy and Trauerspiel for the (Post-) Westphalian Age," Newman argues that Benjamin "offers a theory of tragedy as Trauerspiel that tries to reunite (or at least create some conduit between) the realms of the sacred and the profane" (203-4).
[196] Benjamin's notion of mimesis as playful imitation differs from the problematic of representation in a similar manner that his *Trauerspiel* is irreducible to the economy of sacrifice ("On the Mimetic Faculty").

In the sphere where literature and philosophy traverse the political, Butler claims that the figure of Antigone draws attention to those who mourn without right, that is, to those who are denied the right to mourn, those living beings who are sacrificed in the global political economy dependent on war.[197] Mourning resists representation, belying examples, and underscores where historical mimesis diverges from representation.[198] If representation encompasses the troublesome link between art, philosophy and politics, critical readings of Antigone converge not in attempting to overcome or do away with representation (as if that were possible) but to mark the danger of sacrificing specific cases, substituted with examples, which cannot be mourned but are endlessly capitalized perpetuating the logic of sameness and substitution, thereby rationalizing the general economy of sacrifice that undergirds contemporary hegemonies. This is one reason why masks become politicized in a pandemic, and why the 2020 insurrection came so close to turning the United States from an empire into a tyranny: through the representation of death as normalized, economic sacrifice.

Will this have been my penultimate word: watch out for representation and its deceptions, its uncanny ability to exchange opposites; attend with care to examples, and by situating claims socially and historically, we may be able to help pull the emergency brakes on today's train to annihilation? Although carefully situating claims may help to produce responsible scholarship and suspend the economic displacement and dislocation of mourning with its irreducibly singular cases, onto melancholy with its endless examples, it is not sufficient. If tragedy qua Trauerspiel mourns disembodied abstraction, and anti-philosophy, or counter-thought, describes the completion and continuation of philosophy beyond proper domains of striving for universality (qua) homogenization, then the divergent works of contemporary minoritized thought offer a

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[197] See also Antonello's "Antigone's Claim: A Conversation."
[198] Benjamin Ibid.

concrete and dynamic update to the deconstructive traditions' predilection for formal linguistic play, in the form of embodied deconstruction-in-motion.

Appendix

In reference to note 6, Lacoue-Labarthe's full paragraph on pages 223-224 dealing with Antigone and the first reference to Derrida's *Glas*, reads:

If, in truth, I have delayed a bit over Antigone, this is not simply because I have been thinking of Schelling's consternation at Hölderlin's translation of Sophocles (which, as he wrote to Hegel, "showed his state of mental derangement"). It is because I was thinking of Hegel himself, and of his icy silence: the very one who was nevertheless to write in the year immediately following the publication of Hölderlin's Notes the pages of the Phenomenology of Mind devoted to Antigone, pages that program from Nietzsche to Freud (and even to Heidegger), the modern interpretation of tragedy, but which are difficult not to read also as the detailed and prolix rectification of Hölderlin's analysis. Even if, as Derrida has shown in *Glas*, there is played out in these pages, at its limit, the very possibility of the speculative and of the onto-logic—even if it is true that tragedy (as testimony and as genre) will have always represented within this onto-logic the place where the system fails to close upon itself, and where the systematic does not quite succeed in fully overlapping the historical, where the circularity (as Szondi notes) alters itself in a spiraling movement while the closure can scarcely contain the pressure under which it has perhaps already succumbed without anyone's becoming aware of it—even still (I mean to say: there is one more reason for thinking that) the speculative will have *also* emerged from, and (re)organized itself around, this gesture of expulsion. Heidegger, as we know, was particularly attentive to this point. But this is also, perhaps, why he was unable to avoid "sacralizing" Hölderlin.

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CHAPTER 4

Unfinished Knowledge:
Literary Agency, Situated Objectivity and Queer Désoeuvrement

Alternative knowledge claims in and of themselves are rarely threatening to conventional knowledge. Such claims are routinely ignored, discredited, or simply absorbed and marginalized in existing paradigms. Much more threatening is the challenge that alternative epistemologies offer to the basic process used by the powerful to legitimate knowledge claims that in turn justify their right to rule. If the epistemology used to validate knowledge claims comes into question, then all prior knowledge claims validated under the dominant model become suspect. Alternative epistemologies challenge all certified knowledge and open up the question of whether what has been taken to be true can stand the test of alternative ways of validating the truth.[199]

Literary Agencies and Knowledges: Introduction

What does literature do? Or, in today's terms—still early in the 21st century—does literature matter? Minoritized literary traditions are critical to social life; yet hopelessness is routinely voiced about the uselessness of writing.[200] Literatures and literary studies are increasingly devalued in academia. A managerial undertone is audible in the demand that writing *do something*. The admonition to action and work can be read as a capitalist—though perhaps equally a puritanical *and* a communist—demand. My project begins with the claim that literature does something more than it is often credited with by its detractors, champions and critics alike: a certain agency exceeds literature.[201] These agencies contributes to a questionable kind of knowledge that does not belong among the proved provinces of certainty.

Literary agencies—a literary excess of individual as well as collective texts and

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[199] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*: *Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 271. Hereafter cited as *BFT*.

[200] Hopelessness exceeds literary contexts in recent queer and critical theory, with high political stakes. For instance, in "Cripistemologies: Introduction," Merri Lisa Johnson and Robert McRuer assert that "dreams of changing the world in our moment perhaps border on madness*." Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 8, no. 2 (2014): 127-147. See also Jasbir Puar, "Coda: The Cost of Getting Better," GLQ 18, no.1 (2012): 149-158. For core texts on queer *negativity* as a value, see Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Jack Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); and Lauren Gail Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

[201] Deviating from systematic studies such as "What is agency?" by sociologists Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische, *American Journal of Sociology* 103, no. 4 (1998): 962–1023, my usage is closer to feminist theorist Karen Barad, who says: "Crucially, agency is a matter of intra-acting; it is an enactment, not something that someone or something has" (*Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 178).

subjects—have a peculiar relation to minoritized epistemologies. Patricia Hill Collins' formative

sociological chapter on "Black Feminist Epistemology" puts forth criteria for distilling a notion

of knowledge relevant to literature (and, perhaps, to the humanities more widely). Although

Collins' work has been extensively cited and reprinted, particularly in feminist scholarship,[202]

frequent citation does not always translate into breadth and depth of engagement.[203] Despite

ample analyses of Collins' ideas regarding Black feminist thought generally, as well as material

that "applies" Collins' epistemology to fields such as education,[204] the connections between

Black feminist epistemology and literary theory remain undertheorized in academic

scholarship.[205]

Furthermore, there is a dearth of analysis of Collins' central claims in relation to other

feminist texts on epistemology. This is surprising given that crucial points she makes are

convergent with those made by Donna Haraway and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in their salient

epistemological writing of the same period. Although Sedgwick and Haraway's work is largely

interdisciplinary, Sedgwick is primarily a literary scholar, whose *Epistemology of the Closet* is

structured by literary readings; while Haraway's work in techno-science studies, including

"Situated Knowledges," relies heavily on literature and literary theories and concludes by turning

to poetic analysis.[206]

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[202] *BFT* has been cited over 26,000 times as of 2019 according to Google.

[203] Dotson's 2015 article: "Inheriting Patricia Hill Collins' Black Feminist epistemology," is an exception I address below. Dotson does not mention a single other engagement with Collins, underscoring the dearth of such material despite innumerable citations. The role of systematic racism both in producing academics and knowledge claims is at work in this gap.

[204] See, for instance, Joni Acuff's "Black Feminist Theory in 21st Century Art Education," *Studies in Art Education* 59, no. 3 (July 2018): 201–214.

[205] Thus, the traditions of Black literary studies that include Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, Barbara Christian and Hortense Spillers' work continue to be siloed.

[206] In the final pages Haraway models the agency of the world, which she proposes to read as a trickster/coyote rather than the objectified mother/matter, after Katie King's understanding of literary production. Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminist and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Autumn, 1988): 575-599; Hereafter cited as "SK," 595.

Collins, Sedgwick and Haraway's writing shares the implication that literary agencies are epistemologically generative, echoed in decisive ways in current critical epistemologies.[207] If the yielding of knowledge by literature is less contested than what kind of knowledge is thereby generated and who produces it—authors, critics, theorists, history, signs, language itself or all of the above—is such knowledge not only different in kind from dominant epistemologies but also specifically salient regarding the purported logic of identity, including gender, race, and sexuality? If this is the case, as I suggest, what do minoritized epistemologies—including the open secret of Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*,[208] Collins' "subjugated knowledges" where experience and responsibility are key knowledge generators, and Haraway's "situated knowledges," which situates the speaker without stabilizing identities as subjects—show about literary agencies and sociality?

I am concerned with how undervalued channels in Critical and critical theory debates have created undertheorized and understated trends where responsible knowledge is created as a mobile and transformative dance between writers, readers, historicity as a minoritized discourse (in distinction from dominant history) and the language of literature. This dance is what I call literary agencies.

My selection is organized around a set of figures that together contribute to a constellation, if not a paradigm, that spans the beleaguered terrain of knowledge and history. While there may be paradigmatic aspects to this undertaking, the image of a constellation speaks to its unfinished and contingent cum historical character. As we know from Walter Benjamin's Note A in "On the Concept of History," at the heart of German Jewish thought, the notion of a

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[207] For the most poignant recent example, see Paul B. Preciado's *Can the Monster Speak? Report to An Academy of Psychoanalysis.* Translated by Frank Wynne. MIT Press, 2021.
[208] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and LA: University of California Press, 1990). Hereafter cited as *EoC*.

constellation connects history and the present in a dance ripe for transformation. He says:

> Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history. But no fact that is a cause is for that very reason historical. It became historical posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years. A historian who takes this as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus, he establishes a conception of the present as the 'time of the now' which is shot through with chips of Messianic time.[209]

How can a literary theorist accomplish a task akin to Benjamin's historian?

The figures of this constellation arose from pieces of literature that speak to a relation to history, on the one hand, and knowledge, on the other.[210] Can all literature be combed for such proximate distance to knowledges and histories? Prior to any possibility of addressing this behemoth, I bring Black feminist epistemology into dialogue with other minoritized knowledges. This dialogical process highlights how responsible scholarship is produced metaleptically: that is, by socially situating literary agencies. Turning to Blanchot's worklessness through Lars Iyer

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[209] "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (*Geschichtsphilosophische Thesen*), also known as "On Concept of History" (*Uber den Begriff der Geschichte*). The English translation is in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (Fontana/ Collins, 1973), pp. 255-266. For the original and accompanying notes, see *Gesammelte Schriften*, eds. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhauser (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972-1982), Bd. I, 2, pp. 691-704 and Bd. I, 3, pp. 1223-1266.

[210] *A Dictionary of Critical Theory* succinctly presents the notion of a constellation: "Walter Benjamin famously proposed in the 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue' to *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (1928), translated as *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1977), that ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars. That is to say, ideas are no more present in the world than constellations actually exist in the heavens, but like constellations they enable us to perceive relations between objects. It also means ideas are not the same as concepts, nor can they be construed as the laws of concepts. Ideas do not give rise to knowledge about phenomena and phenomena cannot be used to measure their validity. This is not to say the constellation is purely subjective or all in our heads. The stars in the night sky are where they are regardless of how we look at them and there is something in how they are positioned above us that suggests the image we construct of them. But having said that, the names we use for constellations are embedded in history, tradition and myth. So the constellation is simultaneously subjective and objective in nature. It is not, however, a system, and this is its true significance for Benjamin, who rejects the notion that philosophy can be thought of as systemic, as though it were mathematical or scientific instead of discursive. Benjamin developed this notion further in his account of the arcades in 19th-century Paris. Theodor Adorno adopts and adapts constellation in his account of negative dialectics, transforming it into a model. The notion of constellation allows for a depiction of the relation between ideas that gives individual ideas their autonomy but does not thereby plunge them into a state of isolated anomie." Oxford Reference. Date of access 12 Nov. 2018, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095633862>

and Lynn Huffer's readings, I examine the conflicting accounts of gender, sexism, and (hetero)sexuality that emerge in their works to address how partial knowledges are overtly and implicitly produced by literature and its theorists. Minoritized epistemologies thus inform my approach to literary agencies. If the knowledge yielded by literary agencies is irreducible to what the authors wish to impart, can readers discern aspects of a historical unconscious therein? Perhaps rather than a historical unconscious, shards of wisdom gleamed from minoritized historicities lodged in literature might become legible.[211]

Literary Epistemologies: Overview

My project thus concerns the epistemological insights yielded by literature and literary agency more widely. I propose to read the knowledge evoked therewith not only as different in kind from that purportedly yielded by the sciences (as I will take up through a discussion of Haraway's situated knowledges) but also, following criticisms of authorial intent and the authority of authorship, the knowledge practitioners I follow are not reducible to individual authors and their intentions. Literary agency thus heeds poststructuralist critique of correspondence between intentionality and effects, turning instead to historical contingencies with effects that cannot be reduced to structural/institutional doings. Yet the separation of literary agency from authorship does not sever the text altogether from its emergence.[212]

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[211] Collins makes a tentative distinction between wisdom and knowledge that becomes productively ambivalent. She says: "But the legacy of struggle among U.S. Black women suggests that a collectively shared, Black women's oppositional knowledge has long existed. *This collective wisdom in turn has spurred U.S. Black women to generate a more specialized knowledge, namely, Black feminist thought as critical social theory*" (my italics; *BFT*, 12). Near the end of the book, Collins goes on to make a distinction between knowledge and wisdom more clear, arguing that wisdom relies on personal experience and participates in knowledge production (Collins 256-7).

[212] Cf. Roland Barthes' "Death of the Author," in *Image / Music / Text,* trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977). 142-7. For two of the most relevant texts to this discussion of "the death of the author," see Derrida's "The Deaths of Roland Barthes," in *The Work of Mourning*, ed. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003): 31-68. and Peggy Kamuf and Nancy K. Miller's "Parisian Letters: Between Feminism and Deconstruction, " in *Conflicts in Feminism*, ed. Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller (New York: Routledge, 1990), 121-33.

I offer a comparative reading of Collins' Black feminist epistemology and Haraway's situated knowledges, focusing on responsible reading and situating objectivity. Through this comparative lens, I then turn to what theoretically appears to be irreconcilable with this approach in "Disembodied Désoeuvrement." Huffer and Iyer offer conflicting readings of the ambiguous disembodiment of Blanchot's conception of literary space vis-à-vis identity. Their interpretations not only traverse the interconnections of literature and critical social theory, but they also speak to Blanchot's notion of a distinct literary craft as worklessness, which offers a counter position to my thesis about the situated epistemological work of literary agencies. Worklessness or désoeuvrement does not constitute an opposition to literary agency. Rather, it provides a dialogical point for my account of how literary agencies evoke partial knowledge irreducible to (yet not for that reason severed from) authors and their intentions. Situating identity through literary agencies leads the discussion "Beyond the Heterosexual Matrix." Metaleptically, this points to where Butlerian transdisciplinary analysis meets minoritized epistemologies.

Sedgwick and Haraway's epistemologies self-consciously and productively straddle the fraught relation of feminism and deconstruction, in the process articulating the latent dialogical route I highlight as producing responsible scholarship. Do these works thereby suggest a path beyond the indeterminacy that continues to preoccupy major figures, in German and French literary theory? [213] In place of deconstruction or dialectical materialism as existing discourses, *fragmented historicities and temporalities inflect the inquiry to produce partial knowledges*.

Sedgwick characterized her own analysis as deconstructionist, and Haraway has a close affinity to this discourse. Yet Haraway shifts the terms of the debate surrounding the author's cum the subject's death:

> The boys in the human sciences have called this doubt about self-presence the

[213] See Hent de Vries, Werner Hamacher and Samuel Weber.

> "death of the subject" defined as a single ordering point of will and consciousness. That judgment seems bizarre to me. I prefer to call this doubt the opening of nonisomorphic subjects, agents, and territories of stories unimaginable from the vantage point of the cyclopean, self-satisfied eye of the master subject. The Western eye has fundamentally been a wondering eye, a traveling lens. These peregrinations have often been violent and insistent on having mirrors for a conquering self-but not always. Western feminists also inherit some skill in learning to participate in revisualizing worlds turned upside down in earth-transforming challenges to the views of the masters. All is not to be done from scratch ("SK" 585).

Criticism of Eurocentric epistemology, which is nonetheless not abandoned wholesale, converges with Collins' thought, addressed below.

The convergence of deconstructive and critical accounts does not erase tensions. Like Sedgwick's epistemology, Huffer's discussion of Blanchot's literary space as structured by sexual difference (undermining his postulation of its neutrality) underscores how deconstructive analysis is not methodologically opposed to feminist inquiry without collapsing them together; hence, the tension remains productive. Characterizing her own analysis as "a deconstructive one in a fairly specific sense," Sedgwick says:

> my discussion of each of these structuring binarisms as it functions in a specific cultural text will…move through a deconstructive description of the instability of the binarism itself…toward an examination of the resulting definitional incoherence: its functional potential and realization, its power and effects, the affordances for its mobilization within a particular discursive context, and finally the distinctive entanglement with it of the newly crucial issues of homo/heterosexual definition (*EoC*, 92).

Sedgwick combines deconstructive and critical analysis by situating the incoherence through contextualization and historicization to outline "epistemology of the closet." Hence, the incoherence is situated as a dynamic historical node.

The current work intervenes in continuing reverberations of debates between engaged, critical, authorial and deconstructive approaches that proceed under the surface of literary analyses. Through the joint operation of minoritized epistemologies, critical literary theory and

Freudian/Marxist *refraction*s of German Jewish thought, knowledge becomes irreducible to its

production yet not thereby divorced from it. Structuring limits thus organize situated accounts of

texts and authorship, as much as readers do, ceasing to be either disembodied or transparent and

directly intentional.[214] Minoritized epistemologies thereby facilitate responsible scholarship as

partial, embodied, situated and unfinished knowledges emerging though literary agencies.

Responsible Reading

 The lie, the perfect lie, about people we know, about the relations we have had with them, about
our motive for some action, formulated in totally different terms, the lie as to what we are, whom
we love, what we feel with regard to people who love us…-that lie is one of the few things in the
world that can open windows for us to what is new and unknown, that can awaken in us sleeping
senses for the contemplation of universes that otherwise we should never have known.

<div align="right">

Marcel Proust, *The Captive*[215]

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Collins' describes Black feminist epistemology in a succinct and convincing argument that shows

how conventional epistemological standards fail to account for the lives of Black women. The

following discussion of such failure is familiar; I outline it in diacritical tension with literary

considerations to stage a dialogue of minoritized epistemologies and literary studies. Evoking

feminist philosopher Sandra Harding, Collins defines epistemology as "an overarching theory of

knowledge" (*BFT* 252).[216] Collins notes the political nature of such study: "Far from being the

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[214] Barthes concludes his pithy manifesto by turning to the reader: "[Y]et there is someone who understands each word in its duplicity…: this someone is precisely the reader (or here the spectator). In this way is revealed the whole being of writing: a text consists of multiple writings, issuing from several cultures and entering into dialogue with each other, into parody, into contestation; but there is one place where this multiplicity is collected, united, and this place is not the author…but the reader: the reader is the very space in which are inscribed, without any being lost, all the citations writing consists of; the unity of a text is not in its origin, it is in its destination; but this destination can no longer be personal: the reader is a man without history, without biography, without psychology; he is someone who holds gathered into a single field all the paths of which the text is constituted." These lines are followed by a direct refutation of "humanism" in literature, concluding "The Death of the Author." (Barthes likely had the lionized discussion on humanism in mind between Sartre and Heidegger.)

[215] Cited in Sedgwick's *EoC*, 67.

[216] This broad definition by Harding implicitly opens the notion of epistemology towards critical understanding. In contrast, most philosophers not inflected by critical epistemology still see see it as entwined with certainty; for instance, David Chalmers defined epistemology as "studying 'how we can be certain' about what exists," "The Virtual and the Real," *Disputatio* IX, no. 46 (2017): 309-352.

apolitical study of truth, epistemology points to the ways in which power relations shape who is

believed and why." (Ibid.) Furthermore, she underscores the political at work in knowledge

claims as determining "which questions merit investigation, which interpretive frameworks will

be used to analyze findings, and to what use any ensuing knowledge will be put." (Ibid.) Collins

thus directly addresses the role of epistemology in perpetuating the matrix of domination as well

as pointing to its irreducible operation in social transformation. This analysis is shared by

Haraway and Sedgwick, among other feminist thinkers.

Underscoring the irreducibility of context and location in the interrelation of U.S.

domination and Eurocentric epistemology, Collins says:

> In the United States, the social institutions that legitimate knowledge as well as
> the Western or Eurocentric epistemologies that they uphold constitute two
> interrelated parts of the dominant validation processes. In general, scholars,
> publishers, and other experts represent specific interests and credentialing
> processes, and their knowledge claims must satisfy the political and
> epistemological criteria of the contexts in which they reside (Kuhn 1962; Mulkay
> 1979).
>
> Ibid. 253

If this claim is generally applicable, how do the interests of literary scholars influence their

claims, converging or diverging with their intentions? And if this analysis requires some

identification of interests and locations of writers, does it thereby uncover or produce a (dead or

living) body and its marks?[217] Such questions have been repeatedly posed yet insufficiently

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[217] Two extremes of differential treatment influenced by identity interests in the media, ricocheting in academic halls and texts, are: the enduring refusal to account for the way in which Heidegger's thoroughgoing Nazi sympathies infiltrated his philosophy, and, as a counter point, attempts to fault Avital Ronell's writing through the accusation of sexual harassment. Following Collins, my point here is simply that by belonging to the dominant group of "elite white men" Heidegger evades reckoning despite clear evidence in his *Black Notebooks* in which he indicates how his Nazi sympathies were in cahoots with his thought; whereas accusations against queer feminist theorist Avital Ronell (by an elite albeit gay white man) that were proven to be at least partly false, have all but damned her in the press *and* within the university. For instances of vilification of Ronell, see Zoe Greenberg "What Happens to #MeToo When a Feminist Is the Accused," *New York Times,* August 13, 2018 and Patrick Banners, *"Der Fall 'Avital Ronell' Die Doktormutter," Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 27, 2018. (This title is untranslatable in so far as it plays on the double meaning of the German "Fall" as both "case" and "fall:" hence "The Fall/Case of Avital Ronell: the Doctor-Mother." "Doctor-mother" is the standard term for a woman PhD supervisor; as "doctor-

addressed, remaining mostly on the margins of literary scholarship.

Collins notes the elevated place of literature for Black feminist thought: "Traditionally, the suppression of Black women's ideas within White-male-controlled social institutions led African-American women to use music, literature, daily conversations, and everyday behavior as important locations for constructing a Black feminist consciousness" (251). The shift to non-scientific realms informs Collins' proposal for criteria of an alternative epistemology. Although I point out the relevance of this study to literature, no dichotomy can anchor any final distinction between the sciences and the humanities, as Haraway shows. Collins addresses the significance of everyday behavior and experience for transforming epistemology; Kristie Dotson warns that a direct tie to experience can create a problematic reliance on "ascriber dynamics" in Collins' epistemology.[218]

In "Inheriting Patricia Hill Collins' Black Feminist epistemology," Dotson reads Collins as separating knowledge from subjecthood: "Ultimately, *Black Feminist Thought* reinforces the notion that knowledge has no proper subject and highlights the need for a project aimed at imagining a black feminist epistemology outside of ascriber dynamics" (2323). Dotson lauds Collins' work, calling it a "classic text," while raising questions regarding what she describes as "ascriber dynamics," which refers to Collins' attribution of arbiter power on questions of knowledge to people with experience regarding matters that concern specific groups (Dotson 2326). Dotson reads Collins as calling for further studies that develop Black feminist epistemology less reliant on dynamics which limit knowledge to questions of "who knows?"

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father" is for a man. Its usage here underscores the rarity of a woman professor in Germany and simultaneously questions the legitimacy of this position.) One of the only platforms that gave voice to supporters of Ronell, despite their being far more numerous, including hundreds of students, scholars and colleagues is Theoryilluminati.com.

[218] Dotson, "Inheriting Patricia Hill Collins's Black Feminist epistemology," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38, No. 13 (2015): 2322-2328.

(Dotson 2326). Could this problem be addressed by taking into account the limits of knowledge, and Collins' insistence on its partiality? In "Cripistemologies," Johnson and McRuer propose that the issue of circumscribing what counts as knowledge to certain groups can be alleviated following Audre Lorde's *Cancer Journals*.[219] Lorde shows that not all people who have particular experiences thereby acquire wisdom; yet, this proviso does not discount experience as a possible and partial generator of knowledge.

Collins distills four dimensions as key to a Black feminist epistemology, which are "lived experience as a criterion of meaning, the use of dialogue, the ethic of personal accountability, and the ethic of caring" (Collins 266). All four aspects are in tension with conventional expectations of detached, certain, impersonal and objective standards for knowledge production. Even within critical studies where Collins' ideas have had the most play, their repercussions remain to be fleshed out. If Collins relies on experience as providing a direct transmission of knowledge, the relation of Black feminist epistemology to literature, as well as the reading of these criteria as not simply paratactical but supplementary to one another, temper the problematic aspect of "ascriber dynamics" by implicitly evoking dialogical limits.

Collins contrasts the purported universality of conventional knowledge claims with the partiality of what she calls subjugated knowledges. Whereas the aim of universal claims to truth is to make assertions that everyone is supposed to accept as valid regardless of their value/s, the goal of subjugated claims to truth is to facilitate dialogue: "Each group speaks from its own standpoint and shares its own partial, situated knowledge. But because each group perceives its

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[219] Johnson and queer crip theorist, Robert McRuer, propose a contemporary spin on Sedgwick's epistemology: "we will route cripistemology through a reconsideration of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's now-classic *Epistemology of the Closet* in order to bind cripistemology to crisis and pivot these two special issues of the *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies* away from certain dominant ways of knowing disability in our moment" ("Cripistemologies," 128). I will return to the epistemological significance of crisis.

own truth as partial, its *knowledge is unfinished*...Partiality, and not universality, is the condition of being heard" (my italics; Collins 270). This aspect of being unfinished is particularly relevant for literary knowledge production since literature does not pretend to truth qua fact yet nevertheless, evokes a relation to knowledge.

Rather than inquiring how the four criteria Collins identifies as key to Black feminist epistemology might be applied to literature, I inquire to what extent they appear as situated historical shards *within* works. This approach tethers my readings to the works themselves rather than a version (dead or not) of authorship qua authority. Does reading literature for such shards of partial knowledge offer moments when authors become *historical characters*, thus crossing the boundary between literature, history and the present without erasing distinction? If so, this reading might be characterized as a version of poststructuralism in so far as it differs from structuralism by focusing on a *tenuous relationship* between literature and history—which does not determine meaning yet conditions its emergence. The shift from problems of hypostatization and impossible certainty with authorial intent and authority to the historicity of writers as characters generating partial knowledge as a limited truth in dialogue with readers and in relation to the unknown evokes performative and metaleptic praxis of responsible reading and writing.

The insistence on the significance of certain "lies" for contemplating "universes that otherwise we should never have known" is key for a characterization of literature distinct from the direct connections between politics and literature represented by scholars of engaged/Marxist literary studies.[220] If postmodern discourse generalized a loss of truth by way of decentering the subject (with its corollary of disappearing women, examined by Huffer)—characteristic of

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[220] For one of the central texts in "Littérature engage," translated from French as engaged literature or literature of commitment, see Sartre's *"What is Literature?" And Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988). For contemporary contributions in English studies, see, for instance, *Literary Politics*: *The Politics of Literature and the Literature of Politics,* ed. D. Philips and K. Shaw (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

literature for Blanchot, and of the Author replaced by the grammatical subject for Barthes—a minoritized critical dialogue translates the epistemological condition of the loss of truth into partiality, queer désoeuvrement and situated objectivity. This constitutes a convergence on the question of limits to knowing and the subject, a convergence that traverses the boundaries of literature and its otherness/es in the form of metaleptic literary agency.

The figure of metalepsis highlights historically conditioned reading, activating shards of historicity in literature against reduction or hypostatization. This occurs by way of metaleptic shifting away from identity *and* difference, where the latter substitutes identity as a generalizable primary generator and thereby runs the risk of leveling distinction contrary to stated intentions.[221]

Metalepsis underscores that although text, materiality and historicity inform one another, even condition one another, by retaining the necessity of shifting between these levels, distinctions are preserved while simultaneously open to transformation.[222] Therewith, the temporal, topological and tropological moves among these levels, come into view. The interaction of historical and literary dynamics in their complexities enables readers to navigate their convergences and divergences at multiple points. Metalepsis guides literary agencies away from identity logic, excavating thresholds where the languages of literatures meet historical materiality as concept, and the name of literature becomes undone. I envision such undoing as an opening, a dehiscence, rather than obliteration.[223]

Situated Objectivity (Beyond Methodology)

Objectivity is not about disengagement but about mutual *and* usually unequal structuring, about

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[221] Cf. Elizabeth Grosz's account of difference, where it substitutes identity in "Derrida and Feminism: A Remembrance," *differences* 16, no.3 (2005): 88-94.

[222] This usage of metalepsis is an extrapolation of its narratological definition proposed by Gérard Genette in *Métalepse. De la figure à la fiction* (Paris: Seuil 2004) and expounded by John Pier in his definition of "Metalepsis" in *the living handbook of narratology* (LHN), Interdisciplinary Center for Narratology, University of Hamburg.

[223] On dehiscence contra identity, see Nathan Gies' "Signifying Otherwise," in *Butler and Ethics,* ed. Moya Lloyd (Edinburgh University Press, 2015).

taking risks in a world where "we" are permanently mortal, that is not in "final" control.[224] Unfinished, partial and situated are not tangential aspects of critical epistemology but key to how it differs from conventional knowledge production. As Collins shows, these qualities characterize responsible epistemology, which she uses in a sense similar to Haraway's understanding of situatedness as dynamic and anti-hegemonic. At some remove from Collins' sociological background, Haraway's seminal work on situated knowledges offers perhaps the most cited approach to feminist epistemology.[225] She begins by criticizing "the rarefied realm of epistemology, where traditionally what can count as knowledge is policed by philosophers codifying cognitive law" ("SK" 575). Despite their different backgrounds, like Collins, Haraway considers partiality central for feminist epistemology: "I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims" (Ibid. 589). Both thinkers underscore partiality as a necessary component of epistemology, conceptualized as dialogical.[226]

Undervalued sociological (under)currents course through literary studies and vice versa.[227] Summarizing recent traces of critical epistemologies in a survey article titled "Feminist Methodologies and Epistemology," sociologists Andrea Doucet and Natasha S. Mauthner outline the research on inquiries into feminist knowledge production, in conclusion eliding distinctions between feminist methodology and epistemology. Raising the specter of literature en passant, they quote Dorothy Smith saying that "'sociology . . . has been based on and built up within the

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[224] Haraway, "SK," original italics; pp. 695-6.

[225] Haraway's article has been extensively cited and engaged with in various fields, especially science criticism and social sciences. Work relating literary theory and epistemology through a situated perspective, however, seems lacking.

[226] The different meanings of partiality as something only partial and being partial in the sense of predilection offer a felicitous convergence that contrasts to the purported neutrality of universality. The relevance of this note also echoes in my subsequent discussion of Huffer's feminist critique of Blanchot's neutrality below.

[227] I do not situate the discussion in cultural studies, despite some overlap; according to Bérubé: "[C]ultural studies now means everything and nothing; it has effectively been conflated with 'cultural criticism' in general."

male social universe' (p. 7)" (Doucet and Mauthner 39). They cite Smith's lament "that the lives of women were largely left to novelists or poets" (*The Everyday World as Problematic*; cited in ibid. 39). Doucet and Mauthner do not pursue these leftovers but proceed to criticize male-centered knowledge production. I tarry with this leaving of the lives of women and *others* to literature.[228]

Brilliant scholarship addresses this subject from multiple perspectives: how are the marks left by and of women and designated others in literature legible through minoritized epistemologies? Can such partiality be read productively as rewriting the conditions of what counts as knowledge?[229] Doucet and Mauthner follow Smith's quotation with a conclusion, saying: "This rendered invisible, within the knowledge academies, women's lives and female-dominated domains... Subsequently, and not surprisingly, where women's lives *were* studied and theorized, this occurred within male stream lenses" (Ibid. 39). Is literature categorically sequestered from "knowledge academies" on this account except as a passive object of study, or does it yield a knowledge that often goes unrecognized as such, perhaps passing under less interrogated and more nebulous terminology of wisdom, for instance? Despite the risk of eliding epistemological specificity by conflating it with feminist methodologies, Doucet and Mauthner highlight the consequences of undervaluing literary agencies in concrete entanglement with minoritized voices.

In their summary of "feminist methodologies and epistemologies" (the latter term turning plural in the content of the article without comment despite being singular in its title), Doucet and Mauthner link Haraway's formative work to subsequent uncertainty. Questioning the necessity, desirability or possibility of distinct feminist epistemologies and methodologies, they

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[228] "Others" is italicized for capaciousness. My usage of gendered terms is specifically trans-inclusive.
[229] If these are not new questions, their consequences have not been sufficiently grasped.

offer, instead, two primary "themes" of "feminist research." The first theme is power and the second is what they call "reflexivity," directly linked to the partiality in Haraway's work: "A second theme within feminist debates on reflexivity concerns the partial, provisional, and perspectival nature of knowledge claims. The production of theory is viewed as a social activity, which is culturally, socially, and historically embedded, thus resulting in 'situated knowledges' (Haraway 1988)" (Doucet and Mauthner 41). In the following sentence, "debates on reflexivity" turn into "the reflexive turn" by way of citation, therewith becoming consequentially connected to uncertainty:

> The 'reflexive turn,' combined with the "extensive 'turn to culture' in feminism" (Barrett 1992:204), has, however, created a sense of uncertainty and crisis as increasingly complex questions are raised concerning the status, validity, basis, and authority of the author and their knowledge claims (Bordo 1997; Grosz 1995; Richardson 1988, 1997)" (Ibid.).

Linking uncertainty to crisis implicates a problem, while suggesting that the complexity of feminist inquiry has increased progressively.

Haraway's questions are highly complex. Doucet and Mauthner do not address the fact that making political claims in the face of uncertainty and crisis is Haraway's primary concern in offering situated knowledges. They continue: "This has particular implications for feminist emancipatory goals in that feminists have been left to grapple with how to make 'real' political claims from their work (e.g., Benhabib 1995; Lazreg 1994; Seller 1988; Smith 1999)" (Ibid.). An evocation of "real" political claims, albeit in quotation marks, suggests a contrast, if not an opposition, between these claims and the "extensive turn to culture" in the previous sentence. Such an account risks flattening out the debates behind the terms by citing them out of context to the agonistic political-theoretical discourses in which they are embedded.

The "turn to culture"—often aligned with the so-called turn to language and sometimes

also maligned in "new feminist materialist" discourses—tends to refer to poststructuralist approaches.[230] If such "turns" imply turning away from "real politics" (and science by extension), as the sentence above that follows the postulation of such a turn clearly posits, this criticism overlooks Haraway's primary explicit concern with (real) politics. In response, she proposes the notion of feminist *objectivity*. Rather than recreating an opposition, however, Haraway argues that deconstructing such—always politically constructed—pairs as real/false, man/woman, science/culture is part and parcel of urgent political work (Ibid. 599). For her, as for Sedgwick, understanding the historicity of dichotomies and how they are put to work politically with real consequences constitutes a necessary feminist task, without which no political transformation is possible.

Navigating the complexity of historical discourses in a characteristically bodacious tone, Haraway describes the issue posed by postmodernist questioning as follows: "I, and others, started out wanting a strong tool for deconstructing the truth claims of hostile science by showing the radical historical specificity, and so contestability, of *every* layer of the onion of scientific and technological constructions, and we end up with a kind of epistemological electroshock therapy, which far from ushering us into the high stakes tables of the game of contesting public truths, lays us out on the table with self-induced personality disorder" ("SK" 578). Haraway, too, alludes to the difficulty of finding traction amidst competing claims to truth; yet on her account, the issue is not that some of them may be more or less real but rather that claims must be made responsibly, a characteristic concern of critical epistemologies.

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[230] In the guise of "the turn to language," the moniker has sometimes referred to Judith Butler's work. For incisive and critical accounts of New Feminist Materialist [NFM] debates see Iris Van der Tuin's 'New feminist materialisms,' *Women's Studies International Forum* 34 (2011): 271-277. And Sarah Ahmed's "Open Forum Imaginary Prohibitions: Some Preliminary Remarks on the Founding Gestures of the 'New Materialism,'" *European Journal of Women's Studies* 15, no. 1 (2008): 23–39.

Without pretending to *solve* the problem raised by the irreducibly questionable nature of author/ity and position vis-à-vis researcher/object of knowledge, Haraway nonetheless holds out for a feminist version of what she calls "objectivity." Addressing the historicity in which these discourses are embroiled, she discusses postmodernism in relation to modernism as a shift in which an apparently given object of knowledge that can be known with certainty becomes an always already deferred signifier that can never be stabilized. The object of knowledge is historically constructed as fully knowable only through the gaze of domination that involves more than looking: dissecting.[231]

One could understand the problematized lack of certainty with which to make political claims, contextualized by Haraway as the postmodern exigency of dynamic multiplicity, as follows: any approach to knowledge production may be articulated more or less responsibly, the former suggesting that issues of positionality and opacity be taken seriously. Rather than posing a stumbling block for scholarship, critical responsibility involves displacing certainty in particular discourses through temporal-historical contextualization, thereby acknowledging the conditioning of the knower *and* would-be object of knowledge. [232] On this account neither are constructed as passive, since they contain a history and present that is never finalizable.

While Haraway's work on situated knowledges is expressly addressed to scientific discourse, such an understanding is especially salient in literary studies. Notwithstanding repeated (liberal and erudite) concerns, letting go of certainty and finality does not mean

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[231] Haraway, "Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936," Social Text, no. 11 (Winter, 1984-1985): 20-64.

[232] In Benjamin's "Thesis on the Concept of History," temporality and momentariness are charged with the highest significance. One of the most cited and relevant of these instances is the following: "The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image, which flashes up as an instant when it is recognized and is never seen gain." *Illuminations*, 255. This understanding of temporality in the form of Jetztzeit corresponds to a dialectic image, or dialectics at a standstill yet differs from Hegelian "arrest of dialectics" evoked later by Iyer.

relinquishing responsibility to make political or scholarly claims. On the contrary, this very possibility and reality, i.e. the practice of making both political and epistemological claims responsibly—which are mutually co-dependent—arises precisely through aversion to the dominant gaze for the sake of more tentative yet nevertheless tenacious modes of knowing and doing. Critically*, making claims responsibly as envisioned by Collins and Haraway's insistence on partiality involves doing so with commitment that cannot be limited to what is already known, converging with Sedgwick's epistemology*. Situated objectivity turns us toward this delicate possibility.

The historical conception of the subjects of knowledge is key to a situated understanding of objectivity. If subjects are not passive but, rather, at least partly defined by historicity, which is not definitively exhaustible, objectivity will not be a certain "view from nowhere," characteristic of the gaze of domination asserting static and taxonomic certainty (via taxidermy) ("SK" 584). In fact, it will be quite (though certainly not directly) the opposite. Haraway shows that just as objectivity is neither identical with nor akin to certainty, it is also not the opposite of relativism, the boogeyman construction of the absence of certainty:

> Relativism is a way of being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally. The "equality" of positioning is a denial of responsibility for critical inquiry. Relativism is the perfect mirror twin of totalization in the ideologies of objectivity; both deny the stakes in location, embodiment, and partial perspective; both make it impossible to see well. Relativism and totalization are both "god tricks" promising vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully, common myths in rhetorics surrounding Science. *But it is precisely in the politics and epistemology of partial perspectives that the possibility of sustained rational objective inquiry rests*. (my italics; Ibid.)

Attributing the claims of both totalization under the guise of objectivity and relativism to "myths in rhetorics surrounding Science" with a big "S," Haraway underscores that (good) scientists are,

in fact, perfectly aware of this apparently paradoxical nature of objectivity.[233]

If objectivity is not the "god trick" that claims certainty about objects of knowledge, then what is it on this feminist account? To grasp the relevance of the "cultural turn" earlier in this discussion, one must glimpse the historical evolution of the role of culture for epistemological inquiry. In place of a simple substitution of the would-be-pacified-object of knowledge, e.g. a work of art, with a written work whose marks are to be deciphered, culture as such enters the discursive formation. Haraway notes: "Marilyn Strathern made the crucial observation that it is not the written ethnography that is parallel to the work of art as object-of-knowledge, but the *culture*" (Ibid. 597). This means that culture itself becomes a quasi-subject-object of knowledge, "quasi" because it cannot be stabilized or pacified with any certainty.

Throughout this inquiry I have drawn attention to the significance of historical discourses in which the terms used are situated, since the notion of feminist objectivity depends on knowledge as contextualized, partial and comparative. Haraway's reading of Strathern's observation unfolds the historical rhythm of the (sea) change that occurs as culture as a whole comes to supplement the subject:[234]

> The Romantic and modernist natural-technical objects of knowledge, in science and other cultural practice, stand on one side of this divide. The postmodernist formation stands on the other side, with its "anti-aesthetic" of permanently split, problematized, always receding and deferred "objects" of knowledge and practice, including signs, organisms, systems, selves, and cultures. (Ibid.)

Culture here becomes both the context of other subjects-objects and one of them, thus moving between levels of meaning. One can see why the concern about the cultural turn is repeated,

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[233] In New Feminist Materialist and feminist science discussions, Barad's "agential realism," traverses critical and deconstructive analysis: *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

[234] John L. Austin refers to the work of the performative as a "sea change" in *How To Do Things With Words* (1962 Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975); 22.

since it seems that culture takes on an irreducible if not inordinate role in postmodern inquiry. Yet this is not an individual whim nor a postmodern happenstance but a historical occurrence that itself contains the seeds of situated objectivity and decentering dominant knowledge through minoritized epistemologies.

As culture takes on the weight of meaning or vice versa, i.e., as culture bears down on the possibility of making claims—responsibly, epistemological and political objectivity turn out to be more paradoxical than aporetic. In other words, when the personal is understood to be political and thereby historical, situatedness can be read metaleptically as the mutual conditioning of cultures, histories and agencies. Literary agencies facilitate the cultural translation required by minoritized epistemologies to decenter dominant knowledge and produce responsible scholarship as partial, dialogical and unfinished.

Haraway asserts that "'objectivity' in a postmodern framework cannot be about unproblematic objects; it must be about specific prosthesis and always partial translations. At root, objectivity is about crafting *comparative* knowledge: How may a community name things to be stable and to be like each other?" (Ibid. 597) Hence, objectivity is closely aligned with partiality: "objectivity, that is partial connection" (586). Turning to comparative perspectives and always partial translations in place of both relativism and its twin universalism qua disembodied certainty, allows us to *experience and feel* how vulnerable and responsive ways of producing both knowledge and politics go hand in hand.[235] I now turn to these issues in literary criticism.

Dis-embodied—désoeuvrement, or: Whose Mother?

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[235] I emphasize experiencing and feeling how to produce knowledge differently to underscore the importance of refusing the divide between feeling and thinking, which is a critical part of undermining the reign of mastery and certainty as ideals in epistemologies despite their repeated deconstruction. Neither feeling nor thinking work as absolutes on this account; following Katrin Pahl's succinct formulation: "Feelings can be argued with. Emotions may be shaped, educated, cultivated. They don't have to be treated as forces of nature" "The Logic of Emotionality," *PMLA* 130.5 (2015): 1457-1466; 1457.

The look thus creates its own origin, the fascinating depth of memory. Like an image ricocheting in a hall of mirrors, literature remembers and longs for itself.[236]

Thus it seems that the point to which the work leads us is not only the one where the work is achieved in the apotheosis of its disappearance – where it announces the beginning, declaring being in the freedom that excludes it – but also the point to which the work can never lead us, because this point is always already the one starting from which there never is any work.[237]

Attentive to literary agencies, sociological and science-critical studies addressed above underscore the unfinished faces of knowledges. Does désoeuvrement, the worklessness of the work of art, of writing, its in/famous idleness, throw a wrench into the work of literary agencies? (Must it always be a question rather than an answer? Someone sitting across from me says that Blanchot is the good Heidegger. I don't raise my eyebrows.[238]) I reroute and situate Blanchot's worklessness, or defer it, and address incisive contemporary thinkers' readings, such as "Blanchot's Mother" by Lynne Huffer. Huffer is well known for her work in queer theory, yet this early essay on Blanchot seems to have gone relatively unremarked.[239] Her feminist account, with queer roots, bridges critical epistemological considerations and the work/lessness of literature (through that gaping rabbit hole marked "figuration.") Huffer addresses literary figuration through an "extra turn of the tropological screw," which I consider metaleptically, evoking a queer embodiment of unworking.[240]

In the remaining pages of this query, I work back from minoritized epistemologies toward literary agencies and their (queer) embodiments to investigate anti-hegemonic convergences,

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[236]   Lynne Huffer, "Blanchot's Mother," p.186.

[237] Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (University of Nebraska Press, 2015); 45.

[238] The intrusion of the present is not willy-nilly, here, in the middle of the text. Rather it signals an embodied here and now haunting this mis-reading of désoeuvrement. Mis- as both a constant risk and a willful contra-reading.

[239] One exception is Lars Iyer, to whose examination of the queer inspiration for Blanchot's désoeuvrement I turn after discussing Huffer's feminist critique of Blanchot's conception of literature.

[240] Huffer 183. Huffer's essay explicitly intervenes in French literary theory; my address thereof injects a dose of French theory into a comparative understanding of literary agencies through minoritized knowledges. (Between capitalist and communist influences comes the French twist.) The French Twist I intend is precisely akin to Gazon Maudit's 1995 homonymous film, in which the trope of figuration as turning is aligned with sexuality.

divergences and implications therein. I might have turned to other literary theorists in place of

Huffer's Blanchot.[241] Yet Blanchot's questioning of the literary *work* as such is closest *and*

furthest—as if through a rabbit hole—from the critical inquiry into literary agencies as embodied

minoritized projects.[242]

Although the idleness or worklessness of literature, as désoeuvrement has been translated,

appears in tension to situated scholarship, a critical reading of Blanchot underscores how

readings that claim total freedom are constituted in social-historical terms.[243] Furthermore, the

queer-ly embodied discussion of worklessness, adds perspective on how unfinished the work of

literature and literary agencies must remain. This partiality corresponds to the meaning of

désoeuvrement as the impossibility of completion of any oeuvre or work.

Huffer describes Blanchot's project in his book, *The Space of Literature*, as one that

reveals the irreducible difference between literature as poetic communication and everyday

language (176). This difference is grounded, according to Huffer, in Blanchot's retelling of the

Orpheus myth, where poetic communication is enabled by the infinite loss of Eurydice,

Orpheus's beloved: "Thus his song comes into being at her expense: the more he is heard, the

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[241] For instance, for the specificity of literary discourse, see the work of structuralists such as Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," in *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960), 350-58; Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic and Theory of Literature*, trans. George Grabowicz (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973); and René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977). For more specifically feminist takes on literary theory and killing "the female" author, see Peggy Kamuf, "Replacing Feminist Criticism," Diacritics 12 (1982): 42-47; Nancy K. Miller, "The Text's Heroine: A Feminist Critic and Her Fictions," Diacritics 12 (1982): 48-53; cited in Huffer, 177-9.

[242] Blanchot also marks a turning point between the German Romantic conception of the literary to recent deconstructive readings, as Huffer points out. See also Timothy Clark's "Modern Transformations of German Romanticism," *Paragraph*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (November 1992), pp. 232-247.

[243] See Kare Houle "Making Strange: Deconstruction and Feminist Standpoint Theory," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 30, no. 1 (2009): 172-193. A 2017 issue of the journal philoSOPHIA included several articles elaborating feminism together with deconstruction by Tina Chanter, Ewa Płonowska Ziarek and Marie Draz. Among the extensive literature on Blachot, *After Blanchot: Literature, Criticism, Philosophy* is a volume edited by Hill et all that brings together the various directions in such scholarship.

more absolutely she is lost. In fact, in order for the image to appear, the real object that it names must disappear... Such is the price of representation, the abyssal loss at the heart of writing" (Huffer 177). Although incalculable, the loss nevertheless appears proportional, gendered and embodied.[244]

According to Huffer, Eurydice is doubled in *The Space of Literature* by the figure of "the mother," who constitutes the other of Orpheus the communicator, but also, paradoxically, the groundless ground of poetic communication as loss:

> Correspondingly, Blanchot's two stories of nostalgic longing not only explain the specificity of literary communication as a structure of loss; they also, significantly, reveal a collapse of the figure of feminine absence into Eurydice *and the mother*. This collapse, symbolized by the moment of Orpheus's gaze, forms the center of Blanchot's theory of poetic communication (my italics; Huffer, 181).

This double structure that enacts a doubling of loss to infinity gives rise to the work of art—at the expense of its *feminized* object of inspiration.

Huffer notes that the maternal figure appears only once in the body of the book and once in the index. (Ibid.) She argues that feminine loss is doubled in the form of Eurydice and what she always calls simply "the mother" (without quotation marks) based on a structural and symbolic affinity of the myths of Oedipus and Orpheus. Huffer claims that Blanchot's "nostalgic" theory of literature emerges through this connection of the two stories. I offer a longer quotation to trace the unfolding of Huffer's point:

> Both the Orpheus and Oedipus myths describe a movement of separation and return that forms the skeletal structure of nostalgia. Moreover, in both myths the point of loss is a feminine object of masculine desire: in the Orpheus story, this object is Eurydice; in the story of the Oedipal son, it is the mother. This parallel points to the gendered articulation of the nostalgic structure underlying Blanchot's model of literary communication. Correspondingly, Blanchot's two stories of nostalgic longing not only explain the specificity of literary communication as a structure of loss; they also, significantly, reveal a collapse of the figure of

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[244] Clark ties this proportionality to Blanchot's dialectical steps and beyond, "Modern Transformations," 237.

feminine absence into Eurydice and the mother. (Ibid.)

Blanchot doesn't evoke the myth of Oedipus "who appears only implicitly through his structural parallels to the Orpheus story," as Huffer points out (180). Huffer's thus inserts the Oedipus myth into Blanchot's literary theory. Literature as the opening of absolute loss thereby appears gendered.[245]

Huffer identifies the structure of literary space through feminized loss as nostalgic. Citing the one passage in which Blanchot evokes the figure of the mother to further articulate the parallel between Eurydice and the maternal, she quotes Blanchot at some length. I reproduce this quotation to note both Blanchot's reference and Huffer's argument:

> If our childhood fascinates us, this happens because childhood is the moment of fascination, is itself fascinated. And this golden age seems bathed in a light which is splendid because unrevealed. …Perhaps the force of the maternal figure receives its intensity from the very force of fascination, and one might say then, that if the mother exerts this fascinating attraction it is because, appearing when the child lives altogether in fascination's gaze, she concentrates in herself all the powers of enchantment. It is because the child is fascinated that the mother is fascinating, and that is also why all the impressions of early childhood have a kind of fixity which comes from fascination.
>
> Blanchot 33; cited in Huffer 188

It is not simply that the identity of the mother does not matter for the child's fascination but that such an identity does not exist. Although this can be read as a dissolution of identity, Huffer's nomination of nostalgia underscores the risk of hypostatization in this image. Fascination, alongside loss, is constitutive of Blanchot's literary space (187). Huffer's argument about the parallel of the two myths is thus based on the parallel role of the maternal figure and that of Eurydice as structuring loss, the groundless ground of literature (190).[246] Based on the myths

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[245] It appears to be gendered based on his retelling of Orpheus itself, which I address in Ch.3 "Economies of Sacrifice."

[246] Khõra might be considered isomorphic in Derrida's thinking to this deployment of "the maternal" in Blanchot. Derrida opens "On the Name," with the following lines: "Khõra reaches us, and as the name. And when a name

themselves, Huffer further theorizes that the space of literature is not only founded on a loss

gendered as feminine but is also coded heterosexual:

> In *The Space of Literature*, the heterosexual couplings of Eurydice-Orpheus and mother-son thus function-in the terms of a binary logic of complementary halves- as the internally divisible but inseparable markers of a nonhuman relational movement. The feminine half of these couplings-Eurydice or the mother-names the void or lack-the loss-at the center of the relation through which these apparently symmetrical opposites are produced. The workings of the relational structure described above govern the mutually reinforcing structures of trope and nostalgia. (191)

If Blanchot's narrative implies the myth of Oedipus via a structural parallel of feminized loss,

does this also establish Oedipal heterosexuality as characterizing literary space? Although Huffer

does not offer further evidence for this postulation, the gendered binary in which loss is coded as

feminine is mired in a heterosexual frame.[247] What does this mean for Huffer's understanding of

figuration and trope?

Huffer connects nostalgia, key to her reading of Blanchot's literary space, to figuration.

She understands nostalgia as follows: "It is precisely this infinite structure of loss that links

Blanchot's concept of poetic communication to the problem of nostalgia with which I am

concerned here. More specifically, the continual movement between infinite loss and the infinite

promise of restitution defines both the subjective experience of nostalgia and the rhetorical

structure of trope" (Huffer 181-2). By thus linking trope and nostalgia, Huffer seems not only to

point out the shared structural relation of figuration and nostalgia in Blanchot, but also to

reproduce such a connection: "At this point in the process Blanchot has simply described the

movement of figuration that defines any linguistic act: when we utter a word to describe a thing,

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comes, it immediately says more than the name: the other of the name and quite simply the other, whose irruption the name announces" (89).

[247] See Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of* Identity (1990; New York and London: Routledge, 1999); 75, to which I return below.

we no longer see the thing...To speak means necessarily to turn the thing into a trope or figure"

(182-3). Is the structure of all language nostalgic on this account?[248]

Huffer suggests that for Blanchot, literary communication is distinct from other uses of

language in so far as the former is not simply figurative like all language but adds another "turn

of the tropological screw" (183). This extra "turn" injects memory into poetic language while

doubly displacing—through the second turn of figuration—any relation to truth (183-4).

Separation from truth gives way to the decentering of the authorial subject. Huffer suggests that

the discourse of the displacement of the thinking/writing subject has been played out since

Foucault's 1966 essay on Blanchot and Barthes' "death of the author."[249] The feminist response to

it is also well documented: "As feminist critics have noted, theories that decenter the (masculine)

subject paradoxically privilege the feminine by turning her into a seductive figure of absence. To

put it simply, they celebrate woman by effectively making her disappear" (178). Huffer argues

that while Blanchot effects a similar disappearance, his work shows how the place of literature

itself is constructed as gendered. (Ibid.)[250]

Huffer motivates her return to Blanchot not only as a somewhat neglected yet singularly

influential theorist but also, precisely, by way of his distinction between literary space and

everyday language that disappears in later readers, according to Huffer. This distinction serves

Huffer's reading in teasing out the gendered nostalgic structure of literature. As is evident in the

quotations above, Huffer understands nostalgia as (desire for) infinite loss and restitution, which

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[248] See Huffer's *Maternal pasts, feminist futures: nostalgia, ethics, and the question of difference*, where "Blanchot's Mother" is reprinted.

[249] "[T]he modern writer….traces a field without origin—or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself, the very thing which ceaselessly questions any origin." Bather, "Death of the Author," 143.

[250] Although she cites Derrida's reading of Blanchot more often than any other, Derrida marks the erasure of such a distinction. Joining Barthes and Foucault, this troika of French theory shows the constitutive influence of Blanchot on French discourse (Huffer 178)

are inherently gendered vis-à-vis the mother, who is always present and always lost, at least in the Oedipal sense. This nostalgic longing for the mother is foregrounded in Blanchot's evocation of fascination. Huffer ties the gendered structure of nostalgia to that of trope and, from there, to Blanchot's conception of literature. Despite Huffer's concern with what she postulates as a pre-Derridean distinction of literature from other uses of language, her reading corresponds to Sedgwick's definition of deconstruction in its aim of uncovering dichotomies that are not thereby erased.

Huffer argues that Blanchot's understanding of literary space with its figuration is gendered and hence embodied despite his postulation to the contrary of pure voice and neutrality. Thus, where he asserts radical freedom and worklessness as defining for the specificity of literature, and his canonical readers claim a decentered subject, femininity is constructed and/as suppressed, in a heteronormative relation to a masculine albeit disembodied voice. Hence where Blanchot and his readers claim the fiction of truth as meaninglessness, (social-political) meaning enters. Although meaning returns to writing for Blanchot (as for Barthes)—through reading— Huffer asserts that it was there all along. What if, in addition to this meaning that enters through the back door of literature, so to speak, the fiction of truth also marks its *vulnerable re-turn*? Although Huffer does not offer an alternative account of literature here, such an account might consist of embodied figuration, retaining separation from authorship qua authority.

Huffer reads Blanchot's literary space as positing a second turn of figuration. Her analysis of gendered nostalgic embodiment therein can be read as chiastic, suggesting that "the fiction of truth" is reversible. If critical epistemologies inject a situated historicity into these turns, the shifting of levels between literature and social-political identification renegotiates the terms into

a transformative "truth of fiction" as a dialectical image.[251] To clarify the transformative

potential of such movements in the form of literary agencies, I turn to another reading of

Blanchot on overlapping borders of social and literary phenomena.

…Beyond the heterosexual matrix?

In contrast to Huffer, Lars Iyer reads Blanchot's conception of relation as specifically beyond

"classical heterosexuality" in his essay: "The Impossibility of Loving: Blanchot, Community,

Sexual Difference."[252] Although Iyer does not explain exactly what he means by "classical," his

reading is clear on this point (234). Iyer contrasts Hegel's view of love, ethics and marriage with

Blanchot's understanding of loving. One might surmise that the reason Iyer chooses Hegel for his

interlocutor alongside Blanchot is, in addition to the contrast, what he calls "the arrest of the

dialectics of recognition" in Blanchot's conception of relationality (236). In other words,

Blanchot's relationality may be better understood as a (Benjaminian) dialectical image rather

than a (Hegelian) struggle to the death.

Although Iyer explicitly addresses Blanchot's *Unavowable Community* his argument

relies on Blanchot's work more generally: "Having pointed to a certain privilege accorded to the

model of fraternity in Blanchot's writing, I then read Duras's *récit The Malady of Death* with

Blanchot, showing how his reading implicitly outstrips his own formulations, lexicon and

emphases, pointing to what is active and pressing in his work" (Iyer 227-8). Iyer moves from

"Blanchot's writing" to a particular reading of Duras and back to Blanchot's "work," thus

asserting the wider applicability of his argument. If Iyer's claims vis-à-vis Blanchot about gender

and heterosexuality are not based on "formulations, lexicon" or "emphases," on what *do* they

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[251] On dialectical images, see, for instance, Benjamin's "Paralipomena," *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 4: On the Concept of History, Writings 1938-1940*. Howard Eisland and Michael Jennings, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).
[252] Iyer, *Journal for Cultural Research* 7 (2003): 227-242.

rely? Iyer's account of the implicit overcoming of what he calls gender "determination" proceeds through juxtaposition, following Blanchot's style of reading texts by activating what may remain unsaid therein and interpretation of Blanchot's thinking in dialogue with the latter's interlocutors, such as Hegel and Levinas.[253]

Given the scope of the argument about Blanchot's writing, Iyer's contrast with Huffer's thesis of "nostalgic heterosexuality," to which he refers in passing without quotation marks, poses a more direct disagreement than it might appear. In addition to going beyond "classical heterosexuality," Iyer argues that the spirit of Blanchot's thought, though not the letter, also "leaves behind any specific gender determination" (238). This movement beyond heterosexuality and gender determination includes "sexual difference:" "Community cuts across a swarm of differences – the old and the young, the obscure and the well known, rich and poor – such that the criss cross of relations of which he would write does not annul sexual difference, but releases it into a more general and less determined differentiation." (Ibid.) Do "the obscure and the well known" stand out in such a list of differences? Also noteworthy may be the absence of the homo/heterosexual dichotomy that Iyer notes in the introduction to his essay and that emerges again in the final paragraph of his account. Iyer continues to insist on the difference between a simple "annulment" of (sexual and other) differences versus the apparently utopian opening he envisions in Blanchot: "What happens in the instant of community is not simply the general collapse of the differences between people, but the opening for each of a space that allows them to greet the Other as Other." (Ibid.) I call it utopian not only because the dissolution appears total, but also because this loosening of determination is positioned as coming out of nowhere, leaving one "surprised" as Iyer notes in conclusion.

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[253] See, for instance, 230 in Iyer, for the way he motivates his argument. Although I do not have time to address his reading of Blanchot as following Levinas' dissymmetrical ethics contra Hegel's, I find it succinct and convincing.

Iyer's argument is articulated via a disagreement with criticism of the role of gender in Blanchot's reliance on the notion of fraternity for his conception of community, such as that offered by Huffer: "The relation to the Other is not neutralized by fraternity but vice versa: the differentiation to which Blanchot attends already leaves behind any determination of the relation to the Other despite the shortcomings of his vocabulary. The opening is not specifically fraternal with its inevitably familial, androcentric associations, and in this sense precedes what Derrida calls the schematic of filiation." (Ibid.) Moving seamlessly between what he calls heterosexuality, gender determination and sexual difference, Iyer thus implies that the three are part of a cluster that dissolves altogether in Blanchot's thought (though not in his vocabulary as is repeatedly underscored):

> Blanchot does not only leave behind any specific determination of the gender but refuses to delimit the form of the eruption of the Other, opening the 'cum' of community beyond any specific determination. Without heritage, without specific determination, arriving from without and calling us outside, it demands the renegotiation of the vocabulary of politics, political science, of a political philosophy in order to affirm what has yet to arrive in our being with others. (Ibid. 238)

This non-differentiation is supported by the way in which the cluster is itself part of a greater understanding of non-determined differences. In so far as all differences appear equally and suddenly loosened, unlike Huffer and Sedgwick's deconstructive methods, Iyer's recurrence to Derrida combines a more existential take with deferral, waiting for the event of dissolution.[254]

In the last paragraph, Iyer returns to "heterosexuality beyond heterosexuality," by which he means heterosexuality broken out of its social-historical, and one might add following Huffer, nostalgic, relation to homosexuality (239). He does not mention history or how such a transformation would come about except to urge the reader in the final line to hope against hope,

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[254] In this waiting for an event, Iyer's reading leans more toward Zizekian than deconstructive deferral.

"to watch out for its happening, to await it, to hope for it, to prepare to be *surprised*."[255] (My italics; Ibid.) The essay concludes with this "charge" passed on, according to Iyer, to "us" by Blanchot's *Unavowable Community.* Since I have not addressed Blanchot directly here, my commentary cannot aim to be the arbiter in Huffer and Iyer's readings.

I have juxtaposed them intertextually to underscore how literary analysis as well as literature itself tacitly and/or explicitly produce knowledge not only about texts, but also regarding social organization and transformation. Both essays shift in their conclusions from textual to social analysis: Iyer, as is evident above; Huffer, as she queries in her final lines what would happen—not within but *to literature, theory and feminism*—if Eurydice and the mother would speak to each other (Huffer 195). I read this as a metalepsis since even the possibility of such a conversation is not locatable in either time or space (not so much because Eurydice has disappeared due to Orpheus' gaze but) because she is a mythical figure, and it is not clear *whose mother* is spoken of (despite the article's title, it is tempting to consider other candidates besides Blanchot: Orpheus's, Eurydice's or Huffer's own); must "the mother" shift from a universal to an embodied figure in order to speak?[256]

Foregoing arguments about which reading of Blanchot is more accurate, I want to show that while writing generates knowledge that acts within and beyond literature, literary agencies are *indirectly transformative*. Besides attending to social-historical contexts, situated objectivity

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[255] This mirrors Iyer's discussion of Blanchot's role in the 1968 uprisings in the previous section concluding with the urge to wait. Like Huffer, Iyer frequently cites Derrida. Rather than citing the father of deconstruction himself out of context, one can glimpse the significance of waiting as a core idea for deconstruction in the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy's entry on Derrida: "Our predominant mode of being is what he will eventually term the messianic (see Section 6), in that experience is about the wait, or more aptly, experience is only when it is deferred." In contrast to this association of the messianic with waiting, Benjamin connects the messianic to the time of the now, for instance, in the "Theses on the Concept of History."

[256] Huffer's address corresponds to the narratological definition of metalepsis as "a deliberate transgression between the world of the telling and the world of the told" *and* my extrapolation of metalepsis beyond the text and toward historicity and sociality. https://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/node/51.html

suggests that literary agencies need not be directly transformative to matter. This is far afield of

saying that all readings are equal or equally productive; it is rather to insist on a different set of

questions that are themselves situated, measured not strictly by distance to "the outside" or "the

inside" of text but to a historically-dynamic set of criteria underscored by minoritized

epistemologies.

Iyer's argument about heterosexuality, gender and sexual difference could be further

unraveled (perhaps enabling us to decide whether it can and/or should be characterized as

"queer" or not).[257] Yet I want to move to another elaboration of this irreducible node for critical

literary theory at this juncture.[258] Concluding the examination of knowledge generated by literary

scholarship vis-à-vis sexism, gender, and heteronormativity, I turn briefly to Butler's pivotal

Gender Trouble. In it, nostalgia comes up only once; whereas melancholia constitutes the

structure of what Butler calls the heterosexual matrix.[259]

Butler shows how hetero-and homo-normativity are part and parcel of the same structure

of melancholic foreclosure: "In other words, heterosexual melancholy is culturally instituted and

maintained as the price of stable gender identities related through oppositional desires" (89). This

is the compulsory heterosexual matrix that produces not only stable gender identities, but sex

itself as both pleasure of some organs versus others and as the supposedly biological "fact"

behind binary gender (Ibid). If this account reveals how deep-seated the heterosexual matrix is,

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[257] In a preface to *EoC*, written ex post facto, Sedgwick defines queer as: "exactly this resistance to treating homo/heterosexual categorization—still so very volatile an act—as a done deal, a transparently empirical fact about any person…The dividing up of all sexual acts—indeed all persons—under the 'opposite' categories of 'homo' and 'hetero' is not a natural given but a historical process still incomplete today and ultimately impossible but characterized by potent contradictions and explosive effects" (xvi).

[258] Sedgwick opens *EoC* with the assertion that: "an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition" (1). Johnson and McRuer's "Cripistemologies: Introduction," substitutes the terms "homo/heterosexual" with "abled-bodied/disabled" (131).

[259] For a detailed account, see "Freud and the Melancholia of Gender," *Gender Trouble*, 73-84.

what is at stake in understanding gender as nostalgic versus melancholic?

Both nostalgia and melancholia plunge into loss: unmeasurable, incalculable loss that touches the depth of subject formation and constitutes the structure of gender. Butler addresses the pathologizing of melancholia in early Freud, and his own later ambivalence about the possibility that melancholia is normal (*Gender Trouble* 78-79). The normality of melancholia speaks to its structuring role in gender formation. Despite corresponding commonality, its extremity helps to explain the violent policing by which gender, sexism and heteronormativity are maintained.

Again, my interest is not in siding with one account over another, but rather to underscore how shards of knowledge are extrapolated from readings at once *unfinished and illuminating*. Partiality of knowledge therefore enables scholars to make situated responsible claims without reducing critique, leveling the turn/s of figuration, nor hypostasizing identity. Together these shards do not constitute a seamless whole but instead should provide an image of a constellation, in Benjaminian terms, that illuminates the performative metalepsis of literary agencies. This dialogical approach honors the worklessness of literature as *radical yet conditioned* freedom while at the same time giving an account of its multiple embodiments and historicity. Such a concatenation resonates with the sense of désoeuvrement evoked by Blanchot as the necessary incompletion of any oeuvre or work.

If worklessness cannot be neutral but always has a political and embodied lining, (in the most basic example, if "the author" isn't working, who is so that s/*he* can be free?) does that imply that worklessness is useless? Or does désoeuvrement carry seeds of freedom that can be situated as partial knowledge to unleash the imagination from banal binaries, as Iyer claims?

Through the "Extra Turn of the Screw"

The production of literature and literary criticism share the possibility of being done more or less responsibly, which does not depend on certainty, nor does it correlate with the possibility of providing a finished work single handed. Critical minoritized epistemologies enable readers and writers to bring measure and attentiveness to responsibility in making claims by relinquishing aims of universality qua mastery, instead allowing the partiality of situated knowledges to act as a vulnerable invitation to dialogical wisdom. Combining this epistemological perspective with critical literary theory, Huffer, Iyer and Butler's considerations can be read as accounts of gender, sexism and heteronormativity that are neither limited to the fiction of truth nor the literature they analyze. Rather, their narratives contain shards of histories and knowledges that are unfinished and partial yet nevertheless transformative. Tempering claims through mutually constitutive social-political-historical-temporal limits, literary scholarship contributes to a mode of knowing about the world; because unfinished, this knowledge is responsive to transformation.

It is tempting to allege that literature has a special relationship to what passes under the guise of "sexual" provinces; (and surely a long tradition of salient literary and psychoanalytic studies has addressed this connection).[260] Yet I want to offer the broader postulation about knowledge itself produced and transformed by literary agencies not only about anything related to so-called "sex" in its widest sense but also to "race."[261] Current displacement of conventional scientific discourses as governing concepts of race and sex testifies not only to their proximity or belonging to cultures and histories but also to the shifting conception of science itself, as Haraway argues and other science-critical voices have elaborated.[262]

Is the "extra turn of the screw" in literary endeavors akin to a dose of the unknown in the

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[260] Perhaps the most recent poignant example of which is Preciado's *Can the Monster Speak?*
[261] See Ch.1 "Nonidentity and Vectors of History," here.
[262] Most prominently, perhaps, Barad's extensive *Meeting the Universe Halfway*.

structure of knowing, through which literary agency illuminates the metaleptical threshold where stories touch history, opening to transformation? Rather than measuring the distance between fact and fiction or allowing for their collusion, this threshold offers a way of reading and writing an unfinished, partial, situated, dynamic and historical truth, vulnerable and responsive to change.

Understanding knowledges as plural and unfinished calls on and simultaneously enables readers to piece them together dialogically between writers qua historical characters, temporal commentary and situated responsibility. This process deemphasizes mastery that continues to reign in the academe if less overtly (evidenced not least by ubiquitous traces of impostor syndrome haunting institutional halls as well as in publishing practices). In these concrete terms, otherness qua partiality is not reducible to philosophical accounts of dialectics, phenomenology, and ontology. In literary critical theory this places significance on metalepsis as indirect and partial relation between fiction and truth, literature, theory, knowledges and practice, where the terms are no longer governed by dualist tension displaced and transfigured in a way that was often deemed impossible in the 20th century by the minoritized voices that opened up this very path.

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CHAPTER 5

<h1 align="center">*Narretei des Narrativs*:
Realism's Queer Architecture of Folly</h1>

"What proves vibrant in the present is the partial ruin of what formerly was."[263]

Queer Temporality and Realist *Narretei*

"[N]ot only is the time of fantasy queer here, so also is the time of world history and politics proper."

<div align="right">Freeman, Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories</div>

Where could the time of fantasy and the time of world history and politics converge, but in literature? Literary realism has witnessed a resurgence of critical attention. German realism, in particular, has garnered new readings in feminist, queer and race critical scholarship of the last two decades, with important implications not only for literary studies but also for social-political and theoretical reconceptualizations of basic ideas including temporality. Realism played an important historical role in literary theoretical-political studies.[264] However, the second half of the 20th century saw a decline in interest in literary realism.[265]

Representation remains a contested yardstick when it comes to "realism," and to what extent it can or should represent reality. Bringing critical realist insight together through a performative lens illuminates how the uncanny proximity of stories and histories highlights the changing function of text from representing to "twisting" reality.[266] Elements and figures of uncanny temporality populate the work of three canonical German realists: Theodor Storm, Adalbert Stifter and Theodor Fontane. Folly, repeatedly invoked by realism not only in Stifter's *Die Narrenburg* (Fool's Castle) but also less explicitly by Storm's *Aquis Submersus* and *Der*

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[263] Butler, *Parting Ways* 11.

[264] Key thinkers including Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, Roman Jakobson, Erich Auerbach and, more recently, Frederick Jameson, have debated Realism.

[265] For instance, in her "foreword" to *Adventures in Realism*, Rachel Bowlby laments the dearth of new realism scholarship, while focusing on its representational power (14-15).

[266] Freeman 10. Rather than using "folly" and "queer temporality" as copyrighted terms, this work is intended to decolonize the connections among fields.

Schimmelreiter (White Horse Rider), conjures and twists uncanny configurations to reveal converging temporal traces with other historical timeframes. Whereas Joel Lande's acclaimed recent study of folly focuses on the fool in 18th century German drama, I develop folly as an agential queer temporal logic that does not rely on a singular figure, like the fool, but rather permeates and structures the works under discussion.[267] I argue that folly is not only or strictly a comic narrative device but a marker of structural displacement vis-à-vis historical, affective and political traces.

This movement is accompanied by temporal transformation. Queer and literary studies scholar, Elizabeth Freeman, contrasts queer temporality, which "elongates and twists chronology" with war, which "simply forecloses it." Similarly, folly does more than disrupt the chimerical transparency of Realist texts with innocuous narration; it reveals an uncanny vestige of distorted temporality. Realism thus portrays reality as a performative space-time rather than a one-dimensional given. Does the perseverance of the uncanny under the banner of realism in part account for the genre's enduring fascination, to which emerging scholarship continues to testify?[268]

The connection of realism to the uncanny has occasioned salient critical scholarship. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's formative article on "Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*" addresses James's queer kinship to his works. Noting his description of his novels and stories as "an uncanny brood" (James 337; in Sedgwick 9), Sedgwick underscores how the "fiction itself" becomes a figure in James's writing (Sedgwick 7). A queer appeal to uncanniness relies on a critical qua social sublation of the term's psychoanalytical usage.[269] Recent scholarship on

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[267] Lande, *The Persistence of Folly.*

[268] Noted texts, such as Lilian Furst's *All is True: The Claims and Strategies of Realist Fiction*, also use uncanny images in characterizing the power of the genre: "To unmask realism as…a literary artifact—does not detract from, much less explain, its capacity to haunt readers through its strange powers of making absent objects not only present but credible" (viii).

[269] On the psychoanalytic meaning of the uncanny, see Freud's "Das Uheimliche."

realism brings a queer theoretical lens to temporal and historical questions below the surface of the text. James' uncanny brood of fiction itself underscores literary agency, indicative of a rift in the time of narrative.[270]

This line of questioning brings key temporal-linguistic proximities into a critical Realist framework: *Narratei* (folly) and *Narrativ* (narrative); Geschichte (history) and Geschichte (story).[271] My reading of this proximity in Realism offers a temporal-theoretical intervention into literary and queer discourses: I argue that a queer reading illuminates a structure of folly that converges with queer temporality in surprisingly productive ways. Recent studies examine the relationship between realism and reality in terms of engagement rather than representation, figured in the work of Elisabeth Strowick, Ulrike Vedder and Joseph Metz as conjuration and distortion. I situate their analyses through a reading of folly and converging temporalities. Addressing the temporal stakes of "unleashing" a speaking act which transforms time in the absence of a "memorial difference between a remembered and remembering Subject," German literary scholar, Elisabeth Strowick says: "Nicht um Erinnerung, nicht um Historie wird es in den folgenden Lektüren...gehen, sondern um die wurmstichige Wirklichkeit und Heterochronie [Note 8] des Storm'schen Realismus" (57).[272] Note 8 cites Foucault's "Of Other Spaces: Utopia and Heterotopias," where heterochrony function in conjunction with heterotopias – spaces that touch all other spaces, such as cemeteries, boarding schools and gardens, and constitute "a sort of absolute break with their traditional time."[273] Turning to the enduring question of representation

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[270] Compare Foucault: "'Discourse is not life: its time is not your time," *Archeology of Knowledge*, 232.

[271] Although *Narretei* is usually translated as tomfoolery or buffoonery, while *Narrheit* is more readily translated as folly and madness, the usage of *Narretei* in the realist texts I examine implies the structural dimension of folly as a deceptive Gothic structure or ruin, as I discuss.

[272] "The following lectures do not address memory, nor history...rather the worm-eaten reality and heterochrony [8] of Storm's realism" (translation mind, M.N.).

[273] Foucault 26. One might think of the pivotal role of cemeteries in *Effi Briest*.

inflected by feminist queer and race critical insights, I ask whether the heterochrony—as the paradoxical multiplicity of timeframes—(legible at the interstices) of realism, has implications for the political elaboration of converging temporalities.[274]

Social-historical connections inform and suture realist works; I trace their intertextual and historic relationality through displacement and transformation while questioning the relations of reflection, representation and referentiality. Much realist commentary has concerned its historical underpinnings or social constructions.[275] Recent scholarship addresses critical social themes and structures in the texts. This essay highlights the nuanced mutual conditioning that characterizes the heterotopic place of situated literature and its temporal cum political implications.[276] If folly marks socio-historical distortion and forms a doubling architecture in these texts, uncanniness transfigures what is past and thereby underscores paradoxical temporal convergence opening out onto queer temporality.

Fantastical elements characterize the works of Stifter, Fontane and Storm, which abound in strange apparitions, spooky events, murky penumbras, opaque settings, shadowy topoi, ghostly characters, shady beings, uncanny environments, and paradoxical frameworks. Teetering towards folly, on the border of foolishness, heterochroneous heterotopy—the complex architecture of converging spaces and temporalities—is closer to queer temporality than most realists might imagine.[277] Within the architectural folly of Realism, such temporality indicates twisted rather than linear time, ushering in dynamic spatio-temporal politics.

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[274] Strowick addresses heterochrony in Realism in "'*Eine andere Zeit;*'" for the politics of converging temporalities I draw on Butler's *Parting Ways*.

[275] On how German realism reflects history see, for instance, Kaiser's *Studien zum deutschen Roman nach 1848*; whereas Becker's comprehensive *Bürgerlicher Realismus* understands Realism as constructing reality.

[276] I follow Haraway's dynamic conception of situatedness elaborated in *Like a Leaf* 71. I return to heterotopias in relation to Realism in concluding.

[277] The task of elaborating queer elements within realism diverges from the trend to "queer realism" by pitting it as a forerunner to be overcome by queerer modernist literature. Cf. Miracky and Alexandrowicz.

The interaction of realistic elements with otherness uncomfortably makes up the so-called Realist terrain, which has caused a resurgence of Realism scholarship. The uneasy relationships of the supposedly real with that which exceeds it often define the content in these texts, as well as structure their frameworks by intervening in the act of narration.[278] I address how such narrative confusion approximates folly in content and structure. Stifter, Storm and Fontane's writing teems with references to the uncanny, or to that which cannot be easily integrated in the notion of reality cleansed of the unknown. Folly marks the moments when uncanniness erupts in the narrative, forcing the social-historical remnants of reality preserved by the uncanny to interrupt the text.[279]

Introducing the recent *Wirklichkeit und Wahrnehmung* (*Reality and Perception*), Strowick and Vedder speak of a shift in realism scholarship from representation to "*Beschwörung*" (conjuration), which could be read as substituting the proposition "literature represents reality" with "narrative constitutes perception."[280] The constitution here is neither direct nor unidirectional, as the term "conjuration" indicates. Does reality – and, with it, history – have a place in this "twisted" relation, however displaced?

Architecture of Folly

In Stifter's 1841 *Die Narrenburg* (*Fool's Castle*) fools and foolishness take center stage, as the title indicates, elaborating an architecture of folly inhabited by literature.[281] The overt thematization of folly relies on a generalized structure that underscores the interrelation of folly, knowledge, and temporality. The opening lines familiarize the reader with a "*lächerliches Fideikommiß*"

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[278] See Strowick, *Gespenster des Realismus*.

[279] Thus, I gather several different terms under the constellation of folly, including *Narretei, Lächerlichkeit* (ridiculousness), and *Papperlapap* (nonsense).

[280] Ed. Strowick and Vedder, "Introduction," 2-5. Further citations to this volume in text. In examining the "conjuration" of reality in realism, the editors cite Adorno's "Balzac-Lektüre."

[281] Among secondary literature on Stifter, work devoted specifically to *Fool's Castle* tends to address historical (Grätz) and colonial (Metz) themes, or the literary (Strowick and Arburg). I bring the colonial and literary into dialogue.

(ridiculous estate) stipulating that any inheritor of the castle of Hanns von Scharnast must pledge to read all the predecessors' writings stored there and write the story of their own life without omissions or risk being obliterated from heritage.[282] The ridiculous, or literally: laughable estate with inheritance stipulations (a.k.a. Fedeicomis or fee tail) that demand a written account of one's life, structures folly into the very framework of the story.

Far from preventing foolishness in the inheritors as intended, the stipulations facilitate its proliferation, spilling over into outright folly. "Fool's Castle" gets its name from the people, as the stipulations ironically lead to the opposite of what they were intended to do and appear to turn the inheritors into fools: "Der Stifter würde sich im Grabe umgekehrt haben, wenn er durch die dicken Felsenwände in seine Gruft hineingehört hätte, was die Leute sagten; nicht anders nämlich, als die 'Narrenburg' nannten sie den von ihm gerade in dieser Hinsicht so wohl verklausulierten Rothenstein" (323). "*Stifter*" (in English, "the founder") – who creates the estate intended "*gerade in dieser Hinsicht*" to stem the foolishness of his progeny (the echo of Stifter, the author) – not only replicates the name and the creative gesture but also redoubles the process of writing and its fruits by way of shifts and displacements in the proliferating economy of folly. In uncanny terms, the reference to his turning in the grave if he were to hear the name "fool's castle" through the walls is also noteworthy.

Furthermore, I suggest that another subterranean dimension of foolishness courses through the text, undergirding and subverting its overt architecture in which foolishness is tied to failure. Stifter layers the framework of the novella.[283] After informing the readers of the conditions of the estate, the unnamed narrator from an unspecified time proceeds to tell a story set in 1836 of a

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[282] (319:) Stifter, "Die Narrenburg," *Werke und Briefe*, Band 1,4. 319-436. Subsequent page numbers in the text. All translations mine unless otherwise noted, M.N.
[283] On Stifter's framing techniques on other works, see Densky.

young man "*lächerlich anzusehen*" (ridiculous-looking). (323). The "ridiculous" or "laughable" appearance of the main character, Heinrich (whose name does not appear until late into his tale), aligns him with fools from first glance; nevertheless, the main narrative revolves around his discovery and the process of proving that he is the rightful heir to fool's castle. This process intersects with falling in love; and the narrative tension culminates and dissolves in "*Trauung*" (marriage). Within this story is lodged another one of a predecessor in fool's castle. The first unnamed narrator, deploying the pronoun "*wir*," insists on the "*heiter*" (cheerful or silly) nature of Heinrich's story; while his predecessor's tale, narrated by Heinrich, is "*trüben*" (marred, dull or obfuscated) (434). Several telling contrasts characterize the two narratives. Furthermore, the stories intersect and are brought into dialogue across time through writing and cross-temporal echoes.

After taking possession of his castle—thereby resolving the main tension of the central story—Heinrich immediately goes to his task of writing his own and reading those kept under lock and key in the castle's bowels (409). Thereby Heinrich enters another tale: both a story and history of fool's castle (rather than proceeding with his marriage, hence deviating from conventional narrative). The passage within the first narrative into the second is twisted and described at length: the third chapter opens with an inordinately long sentence referring to all the renovations engulfing the castle, which Heinrich leaves behind to enter the only quiet space containing the writings (408-9). This entry process takes up almost an entire page since multiple locks must be opened and closed to reach the space of writing dominated by "Spiegellichterspiel," (play of reflected light) transfigured through "Lichtbäche...die Alles klar machten, aber die spielende Lichtwunder des Fußbodens auslöschten" (409).[284] The play of light and language indicate how language is bound

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[284] "Pools of light...that illuminate everything, but put out the playing wonder of lights on the floor."

to spatial-temporal structure in the guarding of access to hi/story.

Strowick's "*'Eine andere Zeit'. Storms Rahmentechnik des Zeitsprungs*" ("Another Time: Storm's Framing Technique of the Time Leap") explores the problematic of time in narration and perception, both irreducible to and incommensurable with historical time. Untimeliness thus complements displacement in shifting any possibility of direct representation (62, 65).[285] Strowick shows that another time, irreducible to memory, is at work in text: "Keine memoriale Differenz zwischen erinnertem und sich erinnerndem Subjekt tut sich auf, sondern eine andere Zeit. Der auf den Rahmen fallende Lichstrahl löst einen Sprechakt...aus, mit dem sich Zeit verwandelt" (original italics; 60).[286] This beam of light recalls the mirroring play of lights ushering in a speech act, which stages the possibility and quality of perception qua light in the space of writing.

The account Heinrich proceeds to read at the marble table before "einer Art Altar" (a type of alter) tells the story of his predecessor, Jodok, whose tale Heinrich's narrative can be read as rewriting since the two echo each other. Yet they markedly differ from one another. I focus on the social resonances of Jodok's poignant narration where cultural narratives intersect, spilling beyond the boundaries of one story into the next.[287] The reader enters Jodok's tale, itself circumscribed in quotation marks, as he laments the uselessness of writing: "'Und darum kann ich euch keinen Dank haben...wie ihr heißet; denn der Dämon der Thaten steht jederzeit in einer neuen Gestalt vor uns, und wir erkennen ihn nicht, daß er einer sei, der auch schon euch erschienen war – und eure Schriften sind mir unnütz'" (410).[288] Underscoring the folly of writing, the opening evokes the

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[285] Compare Krauss, who speaks of "*unheimlich de-formierten Repräsentation*" (uncanny de-forming representation) in Storm's *Der Schimmelreiter* (Ibid. 159).

[286] "No memorial difference between the remembered and remembering Subject opens up, rather another time. The beam of light falling on the frame expunges a speech act, with which time is altered."

[287] For an insightful reading of this doubling in relation to the discourse of race to which I will return, see Metz's "Austrian Inner Colonialism and the Visibility of Difference" 1475-1492.

[288] "And hence I can have no thanks for you, however you are called; as the demon of acts stands at all times in new forms before us, and we do not recognize him, that he is the same one who had already shown himself to you before – and your writings are useless to me."

irrevocability and singularity of acts in time, always appearing in new form. He continues: "Jedes Leben ist...ein entzückend Wunderwerk, das nie war, und nie mehr sein wird – aber wenn es vorüber ist, legen es die Söhne zu dem Trödel; denn jeder wirkt sich das Wunder seines Lebens aufs neue." (Ibid.)[289] The singular wonder generated by/as the unrepeatability of life must be added to the junk (*Trödel*) pile by the sons to reproduce wonder anew for themselves. The characterization of writing as useless junk evokes the debris inscribed in the epigraph of *Fool's Castle:*

> Sieh nur, welch düstere Geschichten diese *Trümmer* reden.
>
> Altes Buch (my emphasis; 320).[290]

The doubling of *Geschichten* – stories/histories – is not accidental at this threshold and echoed at the heart of *Fool's Castle*. Do the written *Trödel* (junk) and talking *Trümmer* (debris; ashes) tell more than stories? A long lament follows the assertions of the scrapheap of writing. The manuscripts warn the reader once more to lock up the words after reading and dispel any memories thereof in order to protect "deinen armen Kindern...deinem schönen unschuldigen Weibe*"*[291] from any whiff or umbrage (Hauch) apparently immanent yet emanating from them (412). In the logic of this narration, then, although words are useless to prevent folly, they are highly infectious.[292]

Another unforgettable description of the problem of history as accumulation evokes the piling up of debris (echoing the line that opens and punctuates *Fool's Castle*). Benjamin's noted image of the angel of history being driven into the future by a mountain of debris stacked on debris, brings into relief a relation to history that undermines simple representation:

> Wo eine Kette von Begebenheiten vor uns erscheint, da sieht er eine einzige Katastrophe,

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[289] "Each life is …an enchanting wonder that never was and never will be again – but when it's past, the sons lay it on the junk pile; thus each effects the wonder of his own life anew."

[290] "See only what gloomy stories these ashes tell." "An old book."

[291] "your poor children…your beautiful, innocent females."

[292] See Strowick's reading of realism in terms of a "Poetik der Ansteckung" (poetics of infection), *Sprechende Körper* 195-310.

die unablässig Trümmer auf Trümmer häuft und sie ihm vor die Füße schleudert... Dieser Sturm treibt ihn unaufhaltsam in die Zukunft, der er den Rücken kehrt, während der Trümmerhaufen vor ihm zum Himmel wächst. Das, was wir den Fortschritt nennen, ist dieser Sturm.[293]

This link between Benjamin's critique of progress qua temporal homogeneity to Arendt's opposition to the nation-state is prefigured in German Realism. According to a commentary on the political significance of Benjamin's angel of history, "The homogeneity [Benjamin] opposed was the one that threatened to monopolize temporality in the form of continuous history. The homogeneity Arendt opposed was one that belonged to the nation-state, the unity and sameness of the nation, which she thought could not stand as the basis for any state."[294] As commentators, including Becker point out, literary realism corresponds to the rise of the nation-state.[295] Struggles with racialization, class, kinship and gender that pervade the texts are thus contextualized by the raging battles about the establishment of the state.

Complex temporalities undermine presumed homogeneity. Jodok's tale underscores multiple temporalities as well as the ambivalent, colonialist and paternalistic constructions of what Geoffrey Baker calls "the non-West."[296] Jodok laments his own folly in ethical terms seemingly purified of social context, as he tells of how, having become discouraged with the world, he traveled to India. There he met and fell in love with the daughter of a Pariah, a member of the untouchable caste (412). Jodok tells Chelion that "our" holy men are so "tender and good" that they do not demand the sacrifice of women at their husbands' funeral (413). Chelion, by speaking

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[293] Benjamin, Thesis IX, "Über den Begriff der Geschichte" (my emphasis). „Where a chain of events appears before us, he sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we call progress is *this* storm" ("On the Concept of History," 392).
[294] Butler 100.
[295] Becker 17.
[296] In *Realism's Empire*, Baker argues that such constructions tend to be "subtle" in realist fiction and have thus been "largely ignored" in realist scholarship (10).

with whom Jodok has already transgressed social rules, responds by asking whether the husband would take the wife with him if she goes willingly. When Jodok replies that the husband may be eager yet reluctant to meet his wife in death, Chelion points out his "confusion" (*Irrthume*) before suggesting that she will be sad when he leaves her land and wants to follow him (414). The westernized and romanticized oversimplification of cultural differences obfuscates the pernicious complexity of gendered and racialized social relations with disproportionate costs.

The narrative exhibits what Baker analyzes in terms of how "certain nineteenth-century novels rely on an imported colonial figure to generate or organize their fiction" (9). Jodok's ethical considerations attempt to reduce religious, cultural, ethnic and gendered markers to individual prejudice. "*Entzückt*" (enchanted) by Chelion's words, he asks her to be his wife, which he describes as doing her a great disservice (Ibid). Jodok insists throughout his tale that in her innocence and simplicity Chelion is unable to acclimate to European climate and customs. Hence, when his beautiful, wonderful young brother, Sixtus, falls in love with her, she succumbs to kissing him. The kiss appears motivated by a strange mix of pity, motherly and sisterly love turned confusion of identities between Sixtus and Jodok (422). Jodok not only forgives her but dedicates his life to Chelion's happiness. Yet she appears unable to get over the fear of the murderous intention glimpsed in his eyes when he first discovers her betrayal and eventually dies (424-5). The invitation to Europe becomes thus the overture to death by difference.

The conceptualization of difference as private/individual obscures the ethnicized, racialized and gendered conditions of kinship relations, which structure the tragedy of the story in contrast to the "*heiter*" (jovial) quality of Heinrich's framing narrative.[297] Heinrich, too,

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[297] For Downing's canonical second reading of difference in terms of sameness in Stifter's work that does not address *Die Narrenburg* but makes claims regarding Stifter and realism broadly, see "Adalbert Stifter and the Scope of Realism," 239. The strict selection of second sources in my article is meant precisely to deviate as far as possible from such readings.

inadvertently marries against social mores, since he falls in love with an innkeeper's daughter. At the time he falls in love with Anna, however, he is not yet aware of being the heir to the castle, hence his transgression of class rules is unintentional. This unintentionality enables a happy celebration with the entire village. Whereas Jodok not only knowingly transgresses social-class rules by taking his bride from an untouchable caste in India, but also crosses racialized cultural boundaries.

Long before the reader meets Jodok or learns his name, when Heinrich first chances upon the ruined castle, the innkeeper raises the specter of racialized ethnicity in warring cultures ("*die Heiden gegen Christentum*") as primary evidence of folly (332-3). Making a distinction between being bad and "foolish," the innkeeper then rehearses Jodok's story which the reader will encounter (80 pages later). A confusion around names and identities is instigated by the text that fails to provide Heinrich or Jodok's names long into each story, thus obscuring the initial mention of Jodok's tale. Here, the innkeeper, ignorant of Chelion's Indian origins, calls her a "*Zigeunerin*,"[298] further contributing to the confusion of identities and ethnicities the text sets in motion (333).[299]

Reversing or twisting temporal expectations and thereby proliferating the circulation of disorientation, the innkeeper narrates the history of fool's castle in reverse. He tells Heinrich about the heirs of the castle starting from the most recent: Christoph (whose name, in line with the rest, does not appear until the middle of his tale, disseminating displacements) (332). Throughout his narration, Jodok fails to mention that Chelion bore him a son, Christoph, whose absence is remarkable in Jodok's narrative.

Christoph's name serves as a reminder of his father's failure (to marry a Christian); he can

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[298] The translation of this racialized epithet is "gypsy" (the recognized if not comprehensive term for people who continue to be offensively designated by these words is: Sinti and Roma people.)

[299] See also Metz reading of the significance of this displacement, which he calls "less a representative of real colonial politics than a highly charged signifier of ethnic alterity in the Austrian Empire and imaginary" (1483).

also be read as embodying the climactic hidden folly of the narrative, *walled up* by the logic of war. On the final page of what appeared to be Jodok's detailed (15 page) account of his and Chelion's story, their son appears in his immediate disappearance, following Chelion's death (426). Christoph's name is mentioned once within this inner narrative. The only other time his name appears is in the innkeeper's account, worth citing at length:

> 'Nun Gott sei dank,' antwortete der Wirth, *'närrisch genug*, junger Oheim; habt ihr denn das nicht schon an dem Schlosse erkennen mögen, da es weder Thor noch Eingang hat, und in *keinem Style gebaut ist*, wie ihr selber sagt. Oder ist es etwa vernünftig... oder wie sein Vater der Vorletzte that? Mit unsrem letzten Hernn war es so: Da haben die Franzosen, *um die Unbill gut zu machen*, die sie vordem an unsern Länder verübt, Kriegsvölkerin das Mohrenland geschickt, um Alles in Bausch und Bogen christlich zu machen, und da ließ Graf Christoph eines schönen Tages das Schloß zumauern, und ritt dann den Berg hinab gerade in das Mohrenland, um die Heiden gegen Christentum zu unterstützen, und da haben sie ihn denn auch *glücklich* niedergeschossen; *man weiß nicht, die Christen oder die Heiden. Sein Vater, Graf Jodok, war noch ärger.*[300]

Aligned with the castle's lack of identifiable style, Christoph is the always already missing product of the risky crossing of cultures staged within the story inside the story. That inner tale whose narrator, Jodok, is structurally positioned in the novella as the example of the castle's fools par excellence, ends with a lament for the son, luckily (*glücklich*) murdered by either "the Christians or the heathens" after the endless plaint where the father's (inner) narrative breaks off: "'oft weiß ich nicht, ob eins in diese Geschichte gehöre, oder in jene – ich muß wohl noch älter werden – ach, ich sehne mich nach meinem Sohne...'" (426).[301] This enigmatic final question about the belonging of an unknown story is followed by one short finale in *Die Narrenburg:* Anna, "die schönste,

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[300] Ibid. 332; my emphasis. "'Well, thank God, replied the innkeeper, 'foolish enough, young master; were you not able to recognize it at the castle, as it has neither door nor entrance, and is built in no style, as you said yourself. Or is it reasonable... as his father before the last did? With our last master it was so: Then, then French, to lighten their hardships, which they had imposed on our land, sent warring tribes of moors, to make everything on earth and under the sky Christian, and then, one fine day, Graff Christoph had the castle walled up, and rode up into the mountain precisely into the moors' land, to support the heathens against the Christians, and there they luckily killed him; one knows not, the Christians or the heathens. His father, Graff Jodok, was only worse."

[301] "Often I don't know if it belongs in this story, or in any story – I must get older still – oh, how I miss my son!"

demüthigste Braut," and Heinrich's *Trauung* (marriage) (431).[302] Is there a transversal connection between Christoph's uncannily happy or lucky (*glücklich*) murder, and the beautiful bride's inexplicable weeping at her wedding to her beloved in the framing narrative?

Although at first glance, the architecture of folly in *Die Narrenburg* is inhabited by literature – since it is the writing that was supposed to account for folly and thereby stem it but instead plays the ambiguous role of disseminating foolishness – there is another level and another proliferation to which the reading lends itself. This other structural level of composition makes legible the opaque connection between Anna's mourning/wedding (*Trauer/Trauung*) and Chelion's demise as well as Christoph's "happy" murder. The architecture of folly thus structures both the narrative of the story and the poetics of the text, which converge and thereby underscore literary temporal agency as convergent rather than linear. Whereas narrative folly is evident in the "ridiculously" complex construction containing and demanding writing that fails to alter the intergenerational course of foolishness for the castle's inheritors, structural folly consists in the confusion of individual identities, reversal of social and textual orders, and shifting meanings. The figurative and the literal architectures interconnect through the confounded ruins of social-historical identities.

If the underground folly below the surface is that of the historical madness of the vectors of sexism, xenophobia, budding racism and classism, it connects literal and social death through the architecture of folly, which cuts across temporalities and historical figuration. Thereby Anna's mourning speaks to Chelion and Christoph's (un/happy) untimely ends. The apparent architecture in *Fool's Castle* is thus conditioned by another subterranean one that points beyond the text toward

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[302] "The loveliest, humblest bride." Metz points out that Christoph "etymologically the 'Christ bearer,' becomes the Antichrist bearer, fighting against the colonial forces of Christian conversion in Africa, attempting to undo Jodok's original work on Chelion" (Note 20, 1489).

a struggle with changing social relations reconfigured as uncanny remnants of the dead.[303]

Storm's Edge

In Storm's two novellas *Aquis Submersus* (1877) and *Der Schimmelreiter* (1888) ghostly apparitions take on a defining role, albeit a subtler one in the former. Folly organizes their appearance, obfuscating another force at work in the narrative. This reading of folly draws on its relation to errancy and fallibility, between the tragic and the comic.[304] According to Strowick and Vedder, the dynamic named by *Aquis Submersus*–submerging but also emerging–characterizes Storm's framing technique.[305]

The narrative follows the trace of four enigmatic letters accompanying a painting of a dead boy with a white lily, which lodge in the narrator's imagination.[306] The initial encounter with the striking image takes place while the narrator himself is still a boy and sees the painting in a church, next to another image of a priest said to be the father of the child in the painting. The narrator understands the letters as indicating the fault of the gloomy *Patris* (father), which the present priest must vehemently deflect (383). Years later, by sheer chance, the narrator finds another painting of the same figures. Upon inquiry, he receives the useless diary of the unknown painter, which constitutes the narrative within the narrative. Such framing evokes another time-frame that elongates and twists chronology—by making the dead boy's image last beyond his death and evoking the narrator's interest—making space for what is normally excluded: reality's (dead) other.

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[303] Underscoring the incorporation/appropriation of otherness in realist novels, Baker says that they "also rely on energies or epistemologies irreducible to the historiographical and empirical allegiances of realism as most critics—and most realist novels themselves—have understood and constructed it" (13).

[304] The first meaning of errancy—as disbelief in the infallibility of the Pope and other Christian doctrine—supports this reading of the staging of art versus religion in terms of errancy and fallibility. For the comic aspect of folly, see Lande's *Persistence of Folly*.

[305] Strowick and Vedder, "Einleitung," 11.

[306] 381-2. *Aquis Submersus*, 378-455. Further citations in text.

The contours of both the framing as well as the framed narrative expose the competition of religion and art staged by the text. This competition is mediated through a spectral figure hidden within a likeness, not only of the dead boy, but also of an ancestor who reportedly curses Johannes and Katharina, whose tragic story is told in the diary found by the narrator. The curse erupts as they are falling in love while he paints her, commanded to paint by Katharina's tyrannical brother. The ghostly figure which curses them for disobeying social/class rules – that dictate that Johannes, a painter taken in by a nobleman, may not be together with Katharina, the nobleman's daughter – possesses murky powers of the unknown.

The authority of the curse seems confirmed by the pair's continued misfortune: Johannes is shot in an attempt to help Katharina escape her brother after her father's death and cannot find her on his return from recovery oversees. Years later, asked to paint a priest, he discovers Katharina as the priest's wife and "their" son, biologically and in namesake, his own. While the painter embraces the mother, "their" son drowns. In a final gesture of good (or bad) will, the cuckolded priest asks the artist to paint "their" dead son. The priests (the one in the framing and the other in the inner narrative), on the one hand, and the painter and narrator, on the other hand, orchestrate competing modes of relating to death and authority. While the priests attempt to divinize and enforce authority, further shrouding it in ritual, the artists relate to authority and death without immediate interpretation, deferring understanding. In so doing, although all fail, the latter leave a trace (in the form of the painting and the text) that itself does not necessarily endure yet does not entirely disappear.

Deferring understanding of unknown authority is foolhardy. In his early work, *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson defined the historical significance of "realistic representation…as the systematic undermining…of those preexisting inherited traditions or sacred narrative paradigms,"

which he connected to the production, for the first time, of commodity structure as a referent (152). However, in *Realisms' Empire*, Baker identifies a paradox in how both Jameson and Said describe realism: "To envision realism alongside or even in collusion with its opposite, as Said and Jameson appear to do, is to problematize most scholarship on realism" (14-15). Baker thus identifies a more complex and nuanced relationship between realism and its response to social-historical conditions in terms of paradoxical ambiguity.

Johannes' artistic approach preserves the undercurrent of nonsense – one of the meanings of *Narretei* – both in art itself and within authority by facing injustice spawned by the dominant interpretation and appropriation of authority without attempting to dispel its unknown elements. Johannes, the child who loves the priest despite the latter's apparent severity and is in turn loved by him, evokes another relation to the ghostly authority that curses and condemns. Biologically descendent from his namesake, the artist, the little Johannes unwittingly substitutes love for competition and hierarchy, although this relation is not developed within the text.

In *Der Schimmelreiter*, translated as *The Rider on the White Horse* (more literally, White Horse Rider),[307] the theme of folly comes to the surface and arguably takes on a central role, subtly connecting its multifariously strange elements. This novella also exhibits Storm's famous *Rahmenkunst* (art of framing), aptly described in German in terms of the interplay of *Binnenerzählung* and *Rahmenerzählung*.[308] Yet this structure does not exhaust Storm's art of framing, which involves temporality.[309] In *Der Schimmelreiter*, a rider caught in a storm of uncanny force finds shelter and is told a story of another ghostly rider. The second rider interrupts the tale from time to time, perforating the boundary not only of the framing and the inner narrative,

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[307] English translation refers to The Harvard Classics Shelf of Fiction, Vol. XV, Part 3, online edition at Bartleby.com.
[308] *Rahmenerzählung* names the framing narrative, while *Binnenerzählung*, the inner story within the framing narrative.
[309] See Strowick, "'Eine andere Zeit'" 57.

but also that between reality and its uncanny other. The word "*Narr*" (fool), or its variation, appears seven times in the tale; together, these instances expose a subversively foolish economy at work in the text.

In the framing narrative (on the second page), the narrator rides along the border of a dike through a storm. As the waves threaten to engulf him and his horse, it occurs to him not to be a fool and turn around. Yet, he immediately realizes that to do so would be even more foolish, since it would take longer and hence would potentially be more dangerous. His self-address introduces an initial doubling of folly:

> Und wirklich, einen Augenblick, als eine schwarze Wolkenschicht es pechfinster um mich machte und gleichzeitig die heulenden Böen mich samt meiner Stute vom Deich herabzudrängen suchten, *fuhr es mir wohl durch den Kopf. 'Sei kein Narr!* Kehr um und setz dich zu deinen Freunden ins warme Nest.' Dann aber fiel's mir ein, der Weg zurück war wohl noch länger als der nach meinem Reiseziel; und so trabte ich weiter...(emphasis mine; 2)[310]

The foolhardiness of proceeding and the even more dangerous foolishness of returning meet on the border of an apparent impossibility. The subject of the sentence is neither the "I" riding through gloom, nor the black layer of clouds, nor the wailing gusts which threaten to force rider and horse off the dike's ridge into the waves. Rather, "it" (*es*) is an unnamed passive voice which "drove right through my head," commanding: "Be no fool! Turn around..." Yet the voice that admonishes the foolhardy rider risking his life for no apparent reason, at least none we are given, is even more foolish since as "it then occurred to me, the way back is even longer." So "I *trotted* on." As in English, the German "*trabte*," is a word used for horses. The "trotting on" of the "I" subtly contributes to the confusion of elements that envelopes narrator/s, characters, setting, things,

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[310] "And really, for a moment, when a black layer of clouds spread pitch-darkness round me and at the same time the howling squalls were trying to force me and my horse down from the dike, the thought shot through my head: 'Don't be a fool! Turn back and stay with your friends in their warm nest.' But then it occurred to me that the way back would be longer than the way to my destination; and so I trotted on..." (online).

animals and spooks, whose exchange constitutes the foolish economy of the novella.

The next mention of *Narren* soon thereafter, marks the appearance of ghostly apparitions themselves as foolish and structures the plot through an uncanny economy of folly. This marking of the apparitions as foolish also happens twice and frames the story within the story. The main character of the inner narrative, Hauke Haien, is the white horse rider (who redoubles the first narrator of the framing narrative). In the first of these instances, Hauke—still a young boy here—sees strange shapes, soon after finding dead bodies in the water:

> Hauke sah mit starren Augen darauf hin; denn in dem Nebel schritten dunkle Gestalten auf und ab, sie schienen ihm so groß wie Menschen. Würdevoll, aber...; plötzlich begannen sie wie Narren unheimlich auf und ab zu springen, die großen über die kleinen und die kleinen gegen die großen; dann breiteten sie sich aus und verloren alle Form. 'Was wollen die? Sind es die Geister der Ertrunkenen?' (6)[311]

The "uncanny" jumping of the figures is almost silly, evoking sketchy connections to people whom they are like in size but also dignity. At the same time, they approximate the surrounding elements: the fog, vapors and clouds into which they dissolve. Yet Hauke—a boy whose astuteness turns aloofness, threatening to become a folly among fools of a different order—attributes an agency or at least a wishfulness to the apparitions, asking himself what they want. Hauke wonders if the strange forms might be ghosts of the drowned, evoking the incommensurability of life and death. Do the uncanny figures—resembling both humans and elements—embody this unknowable incommensurability?[312]

Hauke is drawn toward the water, the dike and reading, which neither his father nor his

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[311] "Hauke stared at it with fixed eyes, for in the mist dark figures were walking up and down that seemed to him as big as human beings. Far off he saw them promenade back and forth by the steaming fissures, dignified, but with strange, frightening gestures, with long necks and noses. All at once, they began to jump up and down like fools, uncannily, the big ones over the little ones, the little ones over the big ones—then they spread out and lost all shape. 'What do they want? Are they ghosts of the drowned?'" (Ibid., online.)

[312] In "*Linienführung. Ästhetisches Kalkül in Storms 'Schimmelreiter,'*" Andrea Krauss reads this scene as questioning both the status of representation and its Subject: see esp. 157.

schoolmates can understand let alone appreciate. He is not only taciturn but shadowed by the appearance of folly, which the narrator's rejection cannot finally stave off. That moment, when the second narrator of the story within the story feels the need to explicitly deny the ever-present possibility of Hauke's foolishness, constitutes the third level of folly that structurally conditions the text. Immediately following the scene with the uncanny figurations, the narrator evokes the future scene which will redouble it, also doubling the witnesses to the scene. Yet, before doing so, the narrator places his own reliability in question by citing the fact that Hauke never told anyone of the ghostly dance he had witnessed. The reader is thus left with the impossibility of knowing the scene just narrated, which could be said to constitute a kind of folly or tomfoolery to which the text itself becomes prey.

The epistemological impossibility, first mentioned in passing, now suggests a double break in the fabric of narration. First, the citation of Hauke never having mentioned the incident just retold to anyone, is followed by evoking another similar scene on the same day and time of year many years later. On that later date, Hauke takes his "*blödes Mädchen*" (dumb girl) to the dike, who witnesses an uncannily similar figuration. However, this time Hauke explains it in rational terms as the shadowy shapes of birds and fish (6). At this point the narrator (of the inner story) interrupts himself to at once deflect the possibility of Hauke's foolishness without conceding his rationalist explanation: "'Weiß Gott, Herr!' unterbrach sich der Schulmeister, 'es gibt auf Erden allerlei Dinge, die ein ehrlich Christenherz verwirren können; aber der Hauke war weder ein Narr noch ein Dummkopf" (Ibid.).[313] The schoolmaster narrating Hauke's tale thus performs a double task of denial, pointing toward the tertiary economy of textual folly.

First, thematically: Hauke's (rationalist) foolishness contradicts the uncanny relationality

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[313] "God knows, the schoolmaster interrupted himself, there are all sorts of things on earth that could confuse a Christian heart, but Hauke was neither a fool nor a blockhead" (Ibid., online.)

of elements; nevertheless, this contradiction is less dichotomous and more paradoxical. Second, structurally: uncanny relationality among elements is echoed by uncanny relationality of characters in different narrative frames. The unknown mediates the uncanniness of such relationality, which thus converges on the point of unknowability. Finally, poetologically: the text sets into play multiple frames paradoxically *operative at the same time*. On the heels of the schoolmaster's self-interruption to deny Hauke's foolishness, a penumbral trace of the rider just outside the scene of narration interrupts the framing story (6). The paradoxical construction of logical indecision through mis-en-abyme, underscores an opening onto multiple temporalities (rather than contradiction or aporia).

The second category of folly – bridging Hauke's own foolish and errant striving for mastery established in his almost sovereign dike-building project, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the poetological tomfoolery of unreliability threatening all orders – itself might be unfolded into at least three constitutive elements. Among these is the likeness of other people to fools, which Hauke points out (16); the folly of the figures that could be said to give the text its uncanny structure punctuated by a redoubling of the former when Hauke speculates that the shady seller of his deathly white mare must have also been a fool (29); as well as another, perhaps more subversive dimness alluded to earlier. This last is the most explicit and yet also subtle embodiment of the shadowed thought process to which the text alludes without daring to follow.

Toward the end of the story the scene of the foolishly jumping shapes, which appeared to Hauke in his youth, recurs in the presence of another child. Hauke's "dumb" daughter, as the narrator describes her earlier, witnesses a scene that explicitly recalls the first uncanny dance:

> [A]us den Spalten stiegen wie damals die rauchenden Nebel, und daran entlang waren wiederum die unheimlichen närrischen Gestalten und hüpften gegeneinander und dienerten und dehnten sich plötzlich schreckhaft in die Breite (41).[314]

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[314] "…steaming mists rose out of the cracks as at that time, and there again the uncanny foolish figures were

Again, the marker of foolishness surfaces, although this time it shifts from the movement to the figures themselves; while the sudden "*dienerten und dehnten*" (bowing and stretching) are still constitutive of the strangeness of the scene. Might the doubling of the witnesses offer a key to another, different folly that contains in it a grain of wisdom the text does not explicitly follow yet nonetheless leaves in the form of a trace?

As in *Aquis Submersus*, does the child – Hauke's daughter who is attributed the characteristic of "dim-wittedness" by the unreliable narrator – offer seeds of a different logic? Does calling her "dumb" and claiming that God had "saddled" Hauke with her again imply that the narrator's perspective is limited by eschewing the alternative she offers?[315] Contrary to his wife's fears, Hauke repeats how much he loves and appreciates his daughter with full sight of her mental difference. The girl does not relate to others in normative ways yet shows unmistakable love not only for her parents but also for animals and the old woman the family takes in. Yet her love is not generalized: she does not love all creatures but fears the apparitions, thereby introducing a critical if minimal distinction. Her supposed "stupidity" could thus be read as expressing not only a secret wisdom allied with love by the text but also another obfuscated agency that does not resolve into a normalized subject of mastery.[316] She pleads with Hauke not to go out during the storm which leads to their demise. When, deaf to his daughter's wisdom hidden in love, he does leave, and her mother rushes out after him, the girl is forgotten until a servant brings her back to mother (46). The sometimes explicit yet nevertheless rather slippery topos of folly thereby

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hopping toward one another, bowed and suddenly stretched out into horrible breadths" (Ibid., online).

[315]While the German: "sein blödes Mädchen, womit später der Herrgott ihn belastete," can also be translated as: "his stupid girl, with which later God had burdened him," my translation of "*belasten*" with "saddling" attends to the ways in which the rider becomes indistinguishable from his horse and is himself literally saddled with the girl, which also echoes their consequential ride together with her in his lap when they see the uncanny figures again.

[316]Rather than attempting to correct the text's faulty representation of neurodiversity, such a reading attends to the role of the problematic rendering thereof in the text. Compare Krauss 157.

structures or sutures the narrative throughout which uncanny referents remain undead—not least in the form of the ghostly rider that haunts the story within, its narrative frame as well as their perforation and undoing. Following the analysis of another foolish economy of social exchange in Fontane's *Effi Briest*, I zoom in on a queer temporal-political lens through the uncanny poetics of realist folly.

Effi Briest's Claptrap Economy

Fontane's 1894 novel *Effi Briest* can be read as revolving around a specter mired in textual folly of distortion, albeit more buried within the text.[317] Both *Effi* and *Die Narrenburg* have generated ample commentary; yet the generalized racism emerging in Germanic discourses during the 19th century that crucially appears in the motor of both remains undertheorized.[318] In this brief survey of the structuring role of *Effi's* spook, a spectral economy of displacements is unleashed turning the narrative into a penumbral play of social-historical echoes that do more than intersect: they articulate the processes of gendering, heteronormativity and racialization *through one another*.

Adding to the great novels and plays of the period presenting marriage through the heroine's eyes – *Madame Bovary* (1856), *Anna Karenina* (1877) and *A Doll's House* (1879) – *Effi* tells the story of the good daughter who marries the mother's failed beau and does her best to make do with the leftovers. Not only does Effi not protest her fate, she apparently accepts it not merely from a sense of duty but good will (spurred, perhaps, by expectations of maintaining social status) that almost takes its place. And although the "*beinah*" (almost) comes to characterize her life, Effi generally seems to remain good humored into her melancholy demise (133). Yet the narrative

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[317]While Fontane's 1988 *Irrungen, Wirrungen* may have been a more obvious choice in relation to folly, *Effi Briest* illustrates the interrelationality of uncanny displacement of multiple social markers.

[318] For instance, Prager's influential 2013 essay draws on Said's definition of "the Orient" as a Western construct, while overtly excluding the political dimension of his analysis of Orientalism, Prager 138. Utz takes up aspects of racism in *Effi Briest*; for a typography of "Spuk" see Begemann's 2018 "Ein Spukhaus ist nie was Gewöhnliches …;" See also Yuan's "'Ein Chinese, find ich, hat immer was…"

revolves around a ghost, which institutes a series of displacements unfolding another, perhaps more compelling, story.[319]

In over 300 printed pages, the text engulfs readers through details and myriad nuances, characteristic of realist poetology.[320] The opening paragraph, so significant for Fontane, lays out a complex topography of garden, fences and structures, to which the main character, Effi Briest, will forever return. Thus, a certain *Heimsuchung* – the doubling of haunting and literally seeking home – provide the setting circumscribing the narrative. The journey from home with her new husband, Baron Geert von Innstetten, marks the interplay of usual and strange (*apartes*), homely and foreign, sameness and otherness that motor the narrative.

The new couple's conversation reveals central elements of displacement structuring the text. As Geert proudly tells Effi of the cosmopolitanism of Kessin, she raises the specter of race as a marker of difference (22). The long ensuing dialogue accompanying Effi's entrance into her adult life, introduces and circulates around "*a* Chinese" ghost that will haunt her story with its transformations. (The indefinite article "a" is indicative of the trajectory of this unfolding.) At a key point, the "exotic" richness of ethnic diversity abruptly turns scary, and Effi says:

> 'ein Chinese, finde ich, hat immer was Gruseliges.' 'Ja, das hat er', lachte Geert. 'Aber der Rest ist, Gott sei Dank, von *ganz anderer Art*, lauter manierliche Leute, vielleicht ein bißchen zu sehr Kaufmann, *ein bißchen zu sehr auf ihren Vorteil bedacht und mit Wechseln von zweifelhaftem Wert immer bei der Hand*. Ja, man muß sich vorsehen mit ihnen. Aber sonst ganz gemütlich (my emphasis; 22).[321]

While Effi, from the first, attributes spookiness to racialized difference, Geert points to "an entirely

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[319] Cf. Krause's dismissal of "the Chinese" as an empty analogy: "Effi confronts the purview of nothingness as she tries to grapple with the chimera of the Chinese ghost, which, in essence, is not real, "a non-thing" (Subiotto 141), and hence nothing," "Domesticity, Eccentricity…" 430; Krause makes a similar move in "Eclectic Affinities:"

[320] In "'*Dumpfe Dauer*'" Strowick argues that alongside spooks, nuance and the spell of the real constitute time capsules in the poetology of perception.

[321] "I think there's always something spooky about a Chinese. 'Yes, so there is,' laughed Geert, 'but the rest are quire different, thank God, nothing but pleasant people, perhaps a bit too sales-oriented, thinking rather too much about their own profits, and always ready with some rather dubious bills of exchange. Yes, one has to be careful with them. But apart from that, nice" (49; translation modified, M.N.).

other type" of danger that has to do with profit (*Vorteil*). This early conversation invokes two competing (under)currents circulating through the narrative along which the story unfolds: profit and racialization.

The grammar indicating the increasing importance of the ghost, moving from "a Chinese" to "the Chinese" and finally to "ours" (40), rehearses racist overtones through nominalization—using an adjective as a defining noun—and leads to misappropriation. The dialogue ends with a telling reference in response to Effi's complaint that Geert omitted the promised story of "the Chinese;" he says: "Nein, ich hab ihn nur eben genannt. Aber ein Chinese ist schon an und für sich eine Geschichte..." (23).[322] This story "in and for itself" accompanies Effi's trajectory from good daughter to unfaithful wife, absent/bad mother and eventual return as the good (albeit dead) daughter. But first, Effi encounters a picture of "the Chinese" in the empty rooms upstairs, immediately next to and redoubling the empty dance hall above her bedroom from which Effi hears spooky dance noises. The image of "the Chinese," inexplicably attached to the chair by the maids, intervenes in Effi's relations, occupying what should be her new home (29, 36). In its ambiguity, when Effi's life has fallen apart years after the discovery of her youthful infidelity, she will recall the spook as a mark of happiness (125). The picture attenuates the image, initiating Geert's diminutive repetition: "*der kleine Chinese*," while multiplying its uncanniness (36, 38).

The story with ghostly consequences is a tale of disappearance, finally revealed when Effi realizes the uncanny power of the unknown. Geert tells Effi that their house used to belong to a retired captain, who lived with his niece or granddaughter, Nina, and "auch noch ein Chinese" (40). The latter's position is ambiguous between friend and servant of the old captain. On the young woman's (arranged) wedding night to another captain, she disappears after dancing with the

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[322] "No, all I did was to mention him. But a Chinese is already a story in himself" (51; translation modified, M.N.).

servant. Fourteen days later "the Chinese" dies, and the old captain buys a place to bury him nearby (since the locals are so against burying him in a Christian cemetery, they intend to fire the pastor who suggests it, although the pastor "luckily" dies soon thereafter) (41). The tale thus redoubles disappearances: first of the young woman whose ambiguous identity through unclear kinship (granddaughter/niece) (fore)shadows Effi's own slower demise; and second, the death of the othered other who cannot be buried (in the same place, in proximity) and hence disturbs the economy of sameness.

The relationship between Nina and "the Chinese," as well as the connection between their disappearances remains unknown. Does the opacity of this connection suggest yet another doubling? Could the ghost who brushes past Effi's bed and so upsets her be read as taking more than her happiness with him? Does the close encounter with the ghost mark the beginning of Effi's own spooky becoming – dead? Such displacements are implied from the opening of the narrative, positioning Effi as "*das Andere*" (the other) (5). In another revealing moment, Geert warns her not to position herself "apart," urging a relation to the spook instead (41). I revisit the structural role of these ambiguous displacements and disappearances below.

Having understood that her new home/place is occupied by an apparition, Effi urges Geert to move. His response points to the stakes of the penumbral story that outlines a spectral economy in which displacements (embodied by Effi's – becoming – ghost) effect transmogrification (of *Glück* into *Vorteil*).[323] Geert says:

> Ich kann hier in der Stadt die Leute nicht sagen lassen, Landrat Innstetten verkauft sein Haus, weil seine Frau den aufgeklebten kleinen Chinesen als Spuk an ihrem Bett gesehen hat. *Dann bin ich verloren, Effi. Von solcher Lächerlichkeit kann man sich nie wieder erholen.* (my italics; 38)[324]

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[323] Compare Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* on realism's function in "producing" the capitalist "referent" (152).

[324] "I can't have the people here in the town saying: Governor Innstetten is selling his house because his wife saw the ghost of the little glued Chinaman beside her bed. Then I'd be lost, Effi. I should never recover from the

Fearing the threat of (his own) disappearance through the "ridiculousness" from which "one can never recover" the official exposes the fragility of order. Endangered by folly, such order demands sacrifice (Effi is thereby stuck with – becoming – ghost).

No analogy ties Effi to the racialized other, but each haunts the story of the other's sacrifice, undermining temporal linearity and redoubling another haunting sacrifice.[325] If his tale from another time was a love story transgressing cultural boundaries, is it the refusal of renunciation that conditions this haunting? *Effi* begins with a "*Liebesgeschichte mit Entsagung*" (love story with renunciation) belonging to Geert and Effi's predecessor, her mother (4). If this renunciation (*Entsagung*) initiates the sacrificial economy where love and happiness are traded for profit, Effi's tale narrates love's ghostly othering through folly. In an early telling conversation, Effi expresses the connection as follows:

> Ich bin...nun, ich bin für gleich und gleich und natürlich auch für Zärtlichkeit und Liebe. Und wenn es Zärtlichkeit und Liebe nicht sein können, weil Liebe, wie Papa sagt, doch nur ein Papperlapapp ist (was ich aber nicht glaube), nun, dann bin ich für Reichtum und ein vornehmes Haus, ein ganz vornehmes, wo Prinz... (15).[326]

Similarly to the architecture of folly in *Die Narrenburg*, then, the sacrificial economy of *Effi Briest* (as in *Effi*gi*e br*ennen) appears powered by a spectralization of gendered and racialized otherness. Love haunts these realist stories, elusive and foolish, yet perhaps, after all, subversive?

In-conclusion: Queer Temporality in the Realist Architecture of Folly, or: Heterochroneous Heterotopias across Histories

"If one temporality emerges within another, then the temporal horizon is no longer singular; what

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ridiculousness" (77-8; translation modified, M.N.).

[325] Rather than understanding sacrifice in foundational terms, as does René Girard, I connect sacrifice to economic profit, as I elaborate briefly below and at length in a manuscript in progress: "Economies of Sacrifice in Pandemic Times."

[326] "I'm in favor of...well, I'm in favor of same and equal [*gleich und gleich*], and, of course, love and tenderness. And if there can't be love and tenderness, because love, as papa says, is just claptrap – which I don't believe – well, then I'm in favor of wealth and a lovely big house, a real stately home, where prince..." (36; translation modified, M.N.).

is 'contemporary' are forms of convergence that are not always readily legible."[327] Through layered stylistics and uncanny tropes, these apparently realistic and accessible stories invite generations of readers into the architecture of converging social-political and temporal-spatial complexity, with critical contemporary implications. Stifter's *Die Narrenburg* (1841) and Fontane's *Effi Briest* (1898) roughly frame the literary period of German realism, also questioning its parameters. *Fool's Castle* predates "bourgeois realism" dated in connection to the failed 1848 revolution.[328] Yet it elaborates tropes of supernatural conditions characteristic of the uncanny reality depicted by the genre. If representation does not account for the complex interaction of literature and reality, does this mean that literature has no relation to reality, or does it, more radically, undermine the terms of the relation?

The poetology of conjuration that arises in recent realism studies enables a reading of these tales as constellations where the transfigurations of social complexity are transposed and become legible through another time. Does such an approach tackle the dangerous piling up of the cultural debris in the now?[329] Exploring a "strange, temporal insurgency," apropos Benjamin's work, Judith Butler says: "What is more, the messianic depends on a notion of scattering linked with social heterogeneity and converging temporalities, both of which contest those forms of political nationalism that depend on founding and continuing forms of expulsion and subjugation."[330] Through a queer performative lens, the uncanny topography of realism offers another foolish logic that haunts the texts with displacements, making space and time for excluded others in the process.

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[327]Butler, *Parting Ways* 124.
[328] See Becker, "Einleitung," 9-51.
[329]Compare Strowick: "*das 'Jetzt-als-andere-Zeit', das einen Wirbel, ja, Paroxysmus heterochroner Wahrnehmung freisetzt*" (70).
[330]Butler 110, 99.

Queer temporality examines the twisted temporality highlighted by the relationships of literature and reality / stories and histories; queer performativity brings this examination together with spatial-historical heterogeneity in the production of meaning. Sedgwick's work on Henry James introduced the uncanny as a central lens illuminating the significance of realism. Sedgwick defined queer performativity as "the name of a strategy for the production of meaning and being, in relation to the affect shame and to the later and related fact of stigma," claiming James, the liminal realist, as a "prototype" of "queer performativity."[331] She showed how James substituted the non-referentiality of deconstructionists like Paul de Man with a tentative and twisted relationality between words and referents (Ibid. 11). Although the works of Fontane, Storm and Stifter rely on carefully constructed framing devices characteristic of Realist literature, a queer performative reading of their work activates the social-historical ruins and temporal perforations in the texts, rather than queering it from the outside. This approach attends to the underlying force of literary agency that exceeds the construction of narrative and what it ostensibly or intentionally conveys. If heterochrony connects the time of real spaces to the time of narrative, textual folly conjures a fragmented sociality buried beneath hegemonic accounts.

The rejection of "*Historie*" in German "*Poetologie*" of realism above is aligned with rethinking the narrative of progress.[332] According to Foucault, this narrative dominates the 19th century conception of history (as, perhaps, also our own): "The great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history: with its themes of development and suspension, of crisis, and cycle, themes of the ever-accumulating past."[333] If the temporal disjunction of history and narrative implies a heterochroneous literary agency, does this agency course through the texts

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[331] Sedgwick, "Queer Performativity," 11.

[332] "Homosexuality" appeared as a term in German-speaking lands right in the middle of the realist literary period in 1869 and was criminalized throughout the empire the year of German unification. See Beachy 836.

[333] Ibid. 22.

encountered earlier in the form of spectralized love under erasure, threatening to undo their narratology?[334] Moreover, does this fragile agency rehearse an irreducibly other time, implicitly questioning the dominant narrative of progress? More speculatively, perhaps, does this temporal otherness appear *in place of* the individual subject?

If the cleavage between history and narrative is not a severance, another queer relation appears in its place,[335] which challenges given notions of sameness and difference in temporal-historical terms. More than a displacement of the Subject for its own sake, at stake in rethinking this cleavage is a politicized poetology that enables us to read and tell stories which inspire welcoming others from time zones and places incommensurable with our own: "Only by being displaced and transposed from one spatiotemporal configuration to another does a tradition make some kind of contact with alterity, that field of the "not-me.""[336] Through this queer relationality, realism invites an alliance between text and othered others.

The present presents the indelible paradox of heterochrony, or the perforation of times, transposed in narrative. Pointing to the structural element of perception, realist literature and its criticism allow us to address the heterochroneous and heterotopic heterogeneity in which race, gender, class, sexuality and ethnicity cease to function as identity markers. Rather, the kaleidoscope of perceiving otherness not as undifferentiated nor analogical but as part of a dynamic framework whose vectors are articulated through one another exposes the social factors which performatively structure sociality. Analogy facilitates comparison and thereby stages competition; whereas convergence enables solidarity through understanding interlocking oppressions. If profit

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[334] Cf. Fredric Jameson's *Antinomies of Realism*: "we now have in our grasp the two chronological end points of realism: its genealogy in story telling and the tale, its future dissolution in the literary representation of affect" (10).
[335] Thus, I consider the queer relationality of history and stories in realism akin to Sedgwick's definition of queer performativity in terms of a perverted relationality between text and referent, and her definition of "queer" as a playful relationality to shame.
[336] Butler 12.

displaces love in the 19th century, textual folly carries traces of the displacement and underscores how identity markers are reified in the process of exchange. This perspective is conditioned by a non-linear rethinking of history.

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CHAPTER 6

Literary Agency and Minoritized Knowledges:
A Dialogical Approach to Decolonizing Certain Epistemologies

> We therefore have to rethink the human not from the perspective of its mastery…but from the perspective of its finitude and its possible extinction.
>
> Achille Mbembe, "Decolonizing the University," 42

Ongoing epistemological queries are key to examining a paradigm of un/certainty that ideologically and symbolically underpins structural inequity.[337] Although profound examinations of dangerous colonialist, technocratic and patriarchal paradigms and the need for alternate epistemologies proliferate in the 21st century, concrete alternatives remain elusive.[338] The transdisciplinary value of alternative epistemologies in literature is systematically undervalued by most fields including literary and interdisciplinary studies. I propose literary agency – the operation of the literary beyond its bounds – as a rich topography of subversive epistemological figures and paradigms. Addressing theoretical and literary texts through one another, I show how elements of counter- or ana-grammatical murmur, nonidentity and folly constitute epistemologically decolonizing literary agencies by exposing knowledge as perpetually and inherently partial, unfinished, and transdisciplinary.[339]

Situating the endeavor historically, I chart a trajectory of western epistemological un/certainty from philosophical doubt to decolonizing knowledges. The history of epistemological debates around the desirability and the possibility of certainty has largely fallen in the philosophical domain in the west until the 20th century, when interdisciplinary inquiry into knowledge production conducted by critical studies—particularly Black, feminist, and sexuality

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[337] In her extensive study, Zuboff argues that certainty replaces possession as the totalistic vision of contemporary capitalism (*The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, 379-383).

[338] The primary focus of Preciado's recent *Can the Monster Speak?* is the need to dismantle the current colonialist patriarchal epistemology.

[339] On "ana-grammaticality" see Fred Moten's "Blackness and Poetry."

studies—began gaining a foothold in the academy after the social movements of the 1960's.[340] I show how literary agency disrupts colonial-patriarchal epistemologies by subverting the false dichotomy of certainty and uncertainty joined in perniciously misleading opposition harnessed for profit, thereby offering key modes for decolonizing knowledge.

Decolonizing knowledge necessitates abandoning the twin dreams of mastery and certainty—with radical epistemological ramifications, as philosopher Achille Mbembe and others point out. Although most scholarship on decolonization in the academy has focused on specific fields, particularly education,[341] Mbembe (while sharing this focus) underscores that rethinking the division of academic disciplines is key for decolonization: "To decolonize the university is…a task that involves the radical refounding of our ways of thinking and a transcendence of our disciplinary divisions" ("Decolonizing the University," 37). Literary agencies, while rooted in literature, offer ways to transform epistemologies traversing philosophical, socio-political, linguistic, scientific and educational fields, among others.

Capitalism parcels knowledge into equivalent commodified units of exchange; whereas critical transdisciplinarity posits relationality—in terms of entanglement and connection—as epistemologically primary. Mbembe's article, "Decolonizing the University," addresses current praxes of decolonization in empirical and epistemic terms. Mbembe situates the discussion historically, in relation to a critique of transnational capitalism, and locally in South Africa. This approach leads Mbembe to question the western conception of a human subject as exceptional knower of passive objects, an inquiry situated in the deep time of the Anthropocene (Ibid. 42). He attends to non-human agency as necessary to consider for a deep understanding of history: "Our

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[340] Cf. Wynter 129. The coma separating these fields of inquiry belies their overlap and interconnections on which this text focuses without eliding differences. Moten defines Black Studies as a critique of western civilization ("Black Topographical Life").

[341] See, for instance, *Diversity and Decolonization in German Studies*, edited by Criser and Malakaj.

history is therefore one of entanglement with multiple other species. And this being the case, the dualistic partitions of minds from bodies, meaning and matter or nature from culture can no longer hold" (Ibid. 42). The focus on entanglement and posthuman agency also characterizes Karen Barad's work in feminist quantum physics.[342]

Entanglement implicates open-ended partiality: distinct from uncertainty. Barad's magnum opus, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, opens with an extensive critique of "the uncertainty principle" proposed by Werner Heisenberg, who won the Nobel prize for the development of quantum mechanics (7-8). Barad counterposes Niels Bohr's principle of complementarity in his "philosophy-physics" to Heisenberg's uncertainty (16-22). Citing Bohr's claim that "we shouldn't rely on metaphysical presuppositions of classical physics (which Bohr claims is the basis of our common-sense perception of reality)," Barad develops concepts of posthuman agency. This agency is inspired by Donna Haraway's seminal discussion of situated knowledges, which posits such knowledges as partial and unfinished.[343] Around the same time, Patricia Hill Collins and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick similarly argued that knowledge must be understood as partial in order to produce responsible scholarship that invites dialogue rather than prescribes discriminatory normativity.[344]

The constellation of literary agencies highlighted through this transdisciplinary trajectory illuminates epistemological decolonization by attention to "the literary" in a broad sense. Section I of this chapter, "Speculative Certainty," addresses the historical emergence of certainty as a standard of western knowledge through Cartesian doubt. Two central western thinkers of the history of ideas define the modern episteme as post-Cartesian: Michel Foucault and Stanley Cavell.

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[342] On the impossibility (and necessity) to think beyond the human, see also Wynter 123.
[343] Haraway, "Situated Knowledges."
[344] Collins, "Black Feminist Epistemology," 251-271; Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*.

Second sources underestimate the significance of literature for their epistemological contributions, which erupts fugitively and performatively to disrupt epistemic limits, noted by critical thinkers including Gayatri C. Spivak.[345] Literary agency illuminates how epistemic certainty, undergirding recognition, operates at the cost of minoritization. Section II. "Uncertainty and Sacrifice," shows how epistemic *un*certainty fails to break with processes of minoritization and is accompanied by a capitalization of sacrifice. From an analysis of the Kafkaesque in dialogue with Walter Benjamin and other decolonial critics, to a recent take on Yoko Tawada, literary agency—in the posthuman sense given to it by Barad and Mbembe—reveals standards of certainty *and* uncertainty falling short of situated knowledges.[346]

If this performative approach to literature underscores un/certainty as central to modern western knowledge, Kafka, Benjamin and Tawada expose the economies of sacrifice it ciruclates while hinting at transliterary figurations (of counter-grammar, nonidentity and folly) that resist this sacrificial violence. The term "transliterary" underscores the operation of literary agencies beyond fiction. These works are also transdisciplinary in the sense of being more oriented by and toward interdisciplinary connections than disciplinary mastery. Lastly, Section III. "Minoritized Knowledges," invokes Fred Moten's contemporary analysis, which dizzyingly deviates from (neo)colonialist epistemic paradigms, multiplying extraordinary forces of literary and mediatic agencies to evoke Black study. This approach dialogically illuminates the entangled relationality of transdisciplinary minoritized knowledges.

Consequential transdisciplinarity requires the refusal of mastery, which depends on false standards of certainty. Such refusal entails risks including the loss of funding, prestige, and

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[345] See Spivak, "More on Power/Knowledge." "Fugitivity" is a direct reference to Moten's *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, with which this study is methodologically aligned.
[346] Zuboff argues that certainty as "guaranteed outcomes" is the aim of contemporary forms of instrumentarian power (378).

authority through accusations such as unclarity, incompetence, incoherence, lack of rigor and insanity. These accusations are disproportionately levied against people of color, women, queers and "the rest of us."[347] These risks are not reducible to uncertainty but highlight the stakes and radical scope and breadth of transdisciplinary transformation when it is more than a buzz word.[348] Such transformation embodies thought interwoven with practice irreducible to any dichotomy, offering minoritized epistemic figures and paradigms that most disciplines continue to grope for with little success.

1. Speculative Certainty

> -Passion has a history and it is not ridiculous to pack it into a time capsule!
>
> Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*

The drive for certainty as mastery *under the guise of knowledge* has increasingly characterized the dominant mode of knowledge production for at least a few centuries albeit without uniformity.[349] This section first historically contextualizes the inquiry into certainty as a key yet obfuscated western epistemological standard through Cavell's discussion of recognition; then, it dis-plays the literary agency at work in *The Order of Things*; and finally, it exhibits Foucault's performativity as a subversive endeavor of dead-ly standards of knowing.[350] I read Foucault decolonially not only

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[347] Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw: Men, Women and the Rest of Us*: citing this transgender history, I use the expression to underscore minoritization in excess of identity categories.
It is no accident that a letter against the work of Jacques Derrida circulated among Cambridge faculty in 1992; that (ironically and unrelatedly except by way of the same discrediting logic) the "Jacques Derrida Society" demanded the withdrawal of Gayatri Spivak's retranslation of Derrida's *Of Grammatology* in 2019 together with Judith Butler's preface to it; and that Paul B. Preciado was booed off the stage of the Psychoanalytic Congress in France in 2020 (*Can the Monster Speak*?). All these cases show the costs of fugitive transdisciplinarity.

[348] On the necessity of transdisciplinarity or postdisciplinarity to counter global disaster, see also Fry "Getting Over Architecture."

[349] "In this way instrumentarian power produces endlessly accruing knowledge for surveillance capitalists and endlessly diminishing freedom…[I]nstrumentarian power's command over the division of learning…. usurps the rights to answer the essential questions: *Who knows? Who decides? Who decides who decides?*" (Zuboff 379)

[350] The dashes in words such as "dis-plays" and "dead-ly" activate the polyvalence at work in the text: thus, "dis-plays" underscores how Foucault displays literary agency by playing with it, displacing the mortification of language in the process.

against key Foucauldians, but also against himself in order to suggest that his notoriously "literary" style casts doubt on the division between "literature" and "discourse" that conditions enduring practices and definitions in literary scholarship and beyond (*Literaturwissenschaft*).[351]

The Drive for Certainty

> "If you look at all the great leaders in our century, the great monsters….[Hitler]… you see that they rise to power because they are so certain…" Anthony Hopkins

If one takes history seriously (which has become difficult to do for a number of valid and other reasons),[352] then one can speak of a certain modernity where what passes for knowledge operates through a claim to an un/certain certainty. Cavell's *The Claim of Reason* underscores how the drive for certainty is most intimately bound up with Christian recognition. The connection between certainty and Christianity is an inverse one. Doubt in (the Christian) God sets loose the drive for certainty elsewhere—in the west. Hence Descartes' consequential project of "proving" the existence of the mind and, *on that basis*, of the world with others and God in it. The trajectory of extreme doubt exemplified in the *Meditations* – what Cavell deems to be Descartes' deranged and fallacious skepticism about all knowledge which comes from the senses – along with the certainty attributed to the *cogito ergo sum*, assured Descartes' place in the canon of western knowledge.[353]

The loosening of the Christian hold around the 17th century unleashed the search to establish sure footing in the realms of thought (in place of religion) preserved by the canon. Cavell characterizes this connection in terms of privacy. If Christianity had drilled guilt into the heart of western civilization by dividing and conquering each sinner thereby carving out individuals, the

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[351] I note the German term "*Literaturwissenschaft*," meaning both literary science and scholarship, to underscore their *un/certain* contamination. This decolonial reading is inspired by Spivak's return to Foucault in "More on Power/Knowledge."

[352] Valid critique of dominant historical categories is paralleled by willful ignorance.

[353] Cavell says: "The instances of folly [Descartes] imagines are, accordingly, ones in which human beings do not know that they are flesh…" *The Claim of Reason*, 469 (further citations in text). Kant's project, too, can be said to rely on speculative certainty: as the process of claiming ahistorical *a priori* could be described.

unsustainable promise of salvation leaves holes at the center of each. This hole is a cleft that is thematized by Cartesian body/mind dualism, aiming to reinforce the Church's ability to grant immortality to the soul.[354] It is precisely im/mortality that is at stake in the question of certainty for Cavell.

The conceptualization of the private individual corresponds to conceiving knowledge in terms of penetration of privacy, which leads to its eroticizing in western heteronormative cultures based on the foreclosure of other desires.[355] Cavell says:

> The life of skepticism with respect to (other) minds will next require a history of its imagined overcomings, particularly of its idea that to know or be known by another is to penetrate or be penetrated by another, to occupy or be occupied. This idea would be prepared by the idea, or creation, of the self as private (hence, as said, as guilty). Hence its overcoming will take the form of violating that privacy. Doubtless Descartes is working also here. (470)

Cavell situates Descartes' "innovation" historically, drawing on a distinction from earlier paradigms of rationality that had to do with mathematics, which Cavell associates with shared qualities, in contrast to the privatization and corresponding privation of the cogito that is related to the "convulsions of sensibility we call the rise of Protestantism" (Ibid.).[356] Although Cavell does not connect the symbolism of knowledge as penetration to heteronormativity, his historical move enables so doing.[357]

The desire for "absolute recognition" portrayed by de Sade can thus be seen as corresponding to the drive for certainty in the *Meditations* that arises in the wake of Christian absolutism. Cavell says: "From here you may conclude that the human problem in recognizing

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[354] See Cavell's quote above and Descartes' "Meditations Six," *Meditations on First Philosophy.*
[355] The specifically heteronormative element at work here has to do with foreclosure, not eroticization itself, which is also at work in Plato's texts.
[356] For an alternate yet convergent critical account of western thought see Wynter 122.
[357] Such a reading illuminates Preciado's primary concern with heteronormative epistemology in *Can the Monster Speak?*

other human beings is the problem of recognizing another to be Christ for oneself" (483). Such an absolute standard for recognition is modeled on certainty. The dialectical struggle for recognition to the death at the heart of the secularized Christian paradigm turns on a denial of the very mortality at work in the dialectic.[358] Luther and Sade, in fact, are heroes "undoing libels against the body," the former directly, and the latter "by enacting or literalizing them (so that de Sade, for example, would be seen to be enacting the dictates of nature, if you like, only under a Christian interpretation of nature, of human nature as requiring mortification)" (471).[359] While Cavell connects the problem of certainty as absolute recognition to punishment, he does not raise the question of violence here.

Cavell traces the dramatic struggle for recognition through Othello, without explicit discussion of race or gender as such; yet his analysis invites such an elaboration. Against prior interpretations in line with the character's overt self-presentation, Cavell reads Othello's blackness not in contrast to his purity and perfection but as the very expression of it. Replying to Othello's understanding of his blackness, Cavell responds: "As the color of a romantic hero. For he, as he was and is, manifested by his parts, his title, and his 'perfect soul' (I, ii, 31), is the hero of the romantic tales he tells" (485). This very perfection and purity, according to Cavell, symbolizes the drive for absolutely certain recognition that he reads at the heart of Shakespeare's drama. As we know from Othello, such an absolutist demand for recognition is deadly, since only death guarantees certainty.

This deadly drive, which appears socially and historically conditioned, is shadowed or rather prefigured by an obsession with virginity, which corresponds to privacy that must be

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[358] For alternate queer readings of the Hegelian dialectic of recognition, see Butler's *Subjects of Desire* and Pahl's "A Reading of Love…"

[359] I return to the epistemic role of Sade in the discussion of *The Order of Things* below.

violated for knowledge to attain certainty. At this juncture another minoritized figure is mortified, Desdemona, whom Othello murders unable to verify whether or not she had been a virgin prior to their wedding night. An entire symbolic of wedding sheets as mourning shrouds, the bridal bed as the death bed, etc. open up here to underscore the crossing not simply between sex and death in existential abstraction, but rather as the concrete collision that results from the drive for certainty unleashed by the inability to accept finitude. The daily denials of mundane recognition to which minoritized figures are constantly exposed illuminates why these characters so poignantly symbolize the extremes of the fatal misreading of mortality in absolute recognition.[360]

Considering the gendered and racialized history of the dynamic of Christian and scientific drives for certainty, the question of violence becomes unavoidable. The relation of recognition and mastery shadows each semblance of certainty; in contrast, the relation of literature to life is mediated by knowledge, as is that of literature and philosophy. Cavell asks: "--Is the temptation to knowledge a product of the prohibition of knowledge, or the other way around, the prohibition a projection or explanation of the temptation? (The decisive moment in the conjuring trick.) – For you the claim that the Outsider's knowledge of us is the study of literature is as safe as it is obscure" (477). The last sentence invites a change of positions between writer/s and reader/s, while at the same time underscoring how the externalized literary charge operates in the process of minoritization. Rather than dismissing or discrediting the charge, Cavell questions the disciplinary distinction: "And of course I am counting on what I have said to raise the question of whether, and of how, we know differences between the writing of literature and the writing of philosophy" (478). The persistent question on the boundaries of literature and philosophy slips into specters of madness historicized: "I am not now interested in asserting that these ideas may be sane, but rather

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[360] On race and recognition, see Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* 163-173; and Seloua Luste Boulbina's *Kafka's Monkey and Other Phantoms of African* 15.

in suggesting that not every form of madness is possible, and certainly not typical, in every period; that madness has its history" (469). The discussion of madness and history in *The Claim of Reason* – published in 1979 – cannot but evoke the unforgettable work of Michel Foucault, whose *Madness and Civilization* (originally subtitled "The History of Madness") was published in English in 1965.

I now turn to Foucault to address the clandestine role of literature in relation to historical knowledge in *The Order of Things*. As Gayatri Spivak argues in her return to Foucault: "The next step, since the unquestioned transparent ethical subject—the white male heterosexual Christian man of property—has now been questioned into specificity and visibility, is to measure the plurality of ethics…through 'ability to know' (pouvoir-savoir)."[361] Following Spivak, I pivot from Foucault to decolonization (Ibid., 51).

Ex-Posing Mastery: Foucault's Performance

> Expressing their thoughts in words of which they are not masters, enclosing them in verbal forms whose historical dimensions they are unaware of, men believe that their speech is their servant...
> Foucault 297

My method differs from a straightforward close reading as well as from Foucault's approach. The focus on Foucault's methodology qua archeology and genealogy overlooks the irreducible performative dimension of his work, without which the full range of his impact cannot be accurately gauged. As for my approach, I use term/s loosely, without processing them into branded packages, instead preserving and re-activating their second-hand qualities (or third, fifth and millionth-hand).[362] Although, like most words, the translation of the French "homme" with "man" cannot reproduce all the historical connotations of the word, the gendering of the subject of mastery

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[361] Spivak, "More on Power/Knowledge" 43. On Foucault's "brilliant…construction of… 'madness'" as a catachresis see also Ibid. 42.

[362] This method is aligned with Black study: "…the projects of 'fugitive planning and black study' are mostly about reaching out to find connection; they are about making common cause with the brokenness of being, a brokenness, I would venture to say, that is also blackness, that remains blackness, and will, despite all, remain broken because this book is not a prescription for repair" (Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons* 5).

warrants attention.[363] Cavell and others underscore that normative gender is maintained precisely through gestural claims of neutrality. Philosopher of Black Studies and epistemologies, Sylvia Wynter, draws on Foucault and argues that "the attributes of a perspective that would have to be veiled in order to enable the pronoun 'he' to be used as a neutral term…were not only *male* (the issue of gender) but also *bourgeois* (issue of class) and *ethnic*, and/or 'local cultural,' that is, the issue of *genre* classified in Man's terms, as that of *race*" ("On How We Mistook the Map…" 130). Wynter's analysis is transdisciplinary and does not rely on analogy.

If this analysis relies more on implication than argument, it is to undermine the commodification of knowledge.[364] I read texts through one another, a methodology Barad describes as "diffractive," saying: "My aim in developing such diffractive methodology is to provide a transdisciplinary approach that remains rigorously attentive to important details of specialized arguments within a given field, in an effort to foster constructive engagements across (and a reworking of) disciplinary boundaries."[365] In this light, a diffractive reading evokes performative qua transformative rather than representational praxis.

If men are not the masters of words—and neither are women nor the rest of us, differentiated, perhaps, by not having presumed that we were—then language has no master. This implies that the content and lacunas conveyed in language exceed individual intentions; yet they are historically dependent rather than arbitrary. (Hence Foucault's vehement rejection of structuralism.)[366] Rather than positing a collective subject, I follow the historical agency of

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[363] For a discussion of the exclusionary history of "man" in racialized terms, see Wynter 122-133.

[364] For a feminist critique of argumentation, see Chanter's "Tragic Dislocations" (which I address in detail in "Economies of Sacrifice").

[365] Ibid. 25, see also Barad 28. Mbembe mentions diffraction in a similarly methodological vein and places the focus on reworking disciplinary boundaries at the center of decolonizing knowledge (37-43).

[366] "In France, certain half-witted 'commentators' persist in labelling me a 'structuralist'. I have been unable to get it into their tiny minds that I have used none of the methods, concepts or key terms that characterize structural analysis." *The Order*, xiv.

language radically emerging as the literary. Foucault ex-poses this conditioning of and by language which exceeds the subject and hence exercises a certain excess [of agency]; this is why his influence on theories of performativity cannot be limited to an account of subjectivation. Foucault is overwhelmingly read as contributing to the development of (queer) performativity, yet his own performative stance remains undertheorized.[367]

In the long passage on literature in *The Order of Things*, language *replaces* the subject incessantly articulating a silent historicity irreducible to meaning. Words carry traces that generate meaning but are not reducible to it: "The first book of *Das Kapital* is an exegesis of 'value'; all Nietzsche is an exegesis of a few Greek words; Freud, the exegesis of all those unspoken phrases that support and at the same time undermine our apparent discourse, our fantasies, our dreams, our bodies (Ibid. 298)." If language speaks and writes, what does Foucault himself do? While Foucault's tone is one of impressive assurance, the insistence on the conditioned and conditioning unfolding of language not only undermines the notion of the individual human subject as autonomous master but also invites us to question the posture of the knowing author.[368] Thus, the drive for certainty buried yet active in, perhaps even constitutive of, the subject's claim to knowledge (as possession/certainty) is exposed… If mortality is ineluctably present all along in the modern subject, the deadly drive obfuscates the subject's finitude in its impossible demand for certainty, in turn *taking the place of knowledge*. What remains in its place is a human remainder.[369] The trace of the demand for certainty is thus manifested as a pretense to comprehensibility as completion.

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[367] The first French translation of Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* appeared in 1970, after *The Order of Things*. Lorenzini addresses Foucault's later response to Austin, where Foucault contrasts parrhesia to performativity. However, this discussion does not account for later critical (incl. queer feminist post-/de-colonial) elaborations of performativity.
[368] See Wilson, "Foucault on the 'Question of the Author': A Critical Exegesis."
[369] Cf. Wynter 124.

This drama of the human knower as would-be subject obscures the agency and historicity of language that always exceeds human desires and intentions in unpredictable yet historically, socially and situationally conditioned ways. Foucault addresses and traces knowledge without taking it as an object: that is, by endeavoring to neither reify nor mortify it. Does such an approach transgress the boundary between literature and "the discourse of ideas?" Language can only be a grammatical subject; that is, only within its own domain can language act as subject. Its agency, if the manifestation of its situated historicity can be attributed agency, cannot be subjectivated as such—because language is irreducible to any "as such."[370] Gary Gutting laments that in *The Order* "there is little or nothing of the implicit social critique found in the *History of Madness* or even *The Birth of the Clinic*. Instead, Foucault offers a global analysis of what knowledge meant—and how this meaning has changed—in Western thought from the Renaissance to the present."[371] The tension of a "global analysis...in Western thought" is indicative of the very tension Foucault is playing out not only vis-à-vis the possibility of a conditioned universal or a historical a priori but also, precisely in his performance as a knowing subject that endeavors to ex-pose dynamic embodiment and conditionality.[372] In other words, rather than *arguing* that the limits of the authorial position include his own relation to knowledge that must therefore remain in tension with unstated presumptions taken over by the humanities, Foucault *expresses and thereby* exposes the performative qua transliterary operation of knowledge *performatively*.

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[370] Agency may thus be able to avoid the ambiguity in Foucault's notion of subjectivity as both a center of thought and actions, and as subject to other practices/micropractices of power including confessional technologies and their internalizations, etc., by distinguishing agential status of acting and the sense of self-initiating subjectivity.

[371] Gutting, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on Foucault.

[372] On the "historical a priori," see Foucault's *Archeology of Knowledge*. See also Spivak's "More on Power/Knowledge" for how Gutting and other Foucauldians "blunt" Foucault for the sake of clarity qua consumption (47-8).

Just as Sade ex-posed the mortification of the body in a Christian context, so Foucault ex-poses the mortification of knowledge by simultaneously exposing language in its multiplicity of meanings and dis-playing an *unverifiable performative mastery*. This enables him to point to, and less overtly to exercise, an agency that properly belongs to literature yet whose traces are lodged in all language, therewith exorcising the drive for certainty and unshackling knowledge from its dead weight.

This hypothesis finds uncanny resonance in Steiner's New York Times review of *The Order*. Foucault's style qua methodology I have been tracking provokes the vitriol of the knowledge practitioner as would-be keeper of certainty. Hence the reviewer's recourse to "hammering out" the text, "necessarily simplifying," "abbreviating," for a certainty not given therein: "(Even as one tries to do the job, one is *haunted by the picture of what such masters of lucid depths* as [insert name of individual sovereign master subject] *would make of Foucault's uses of language and of proof.*)"[373] As the unnamed masters are silent – on the uses of language and the certainty of proof – the valiant reviewer is charged to battle the text on his own, which he proceeds to do on all fronts, wrestling from the book an object that is not given – as such (which could be said to set off an entire battery of Foucault reception that ignores the performative valence of his stance undermining the mastery played out therein).[374]

Literary Agency

Having become a dense and consistent historical reality, language forms the locus of tradition, of the unspoken habits of thought, of what lies hidden in a people's mind; it accumulates an ineluctable memory which does not even know itself as a memory.
Foucault, *The Order of Things* 297

Les Mots et les Choses, translated as *The Order of Things*, followed Foucault's groundbreaking

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[373] Steiner, Ibid., emphasis mine.
[374] Spivak, Ibid. 47-8.

studies of madness and medicine and dealt with a more elusive subject that nonetheless spoke to the French mainstream.[375] The role of language in *The Order of Things* can hardly be overestimated, and the transformations affected in and by language in the west organize the project as a whole. Despite the brief appearance of literature in the text, it occupies a singular place within the historical project of book.[376] Foucault dates the "modern episteme" significantly later than Cavell, with a somewhat varied beginning extending into Foucault's present in the mid to late 20th century; yet the modern period drawn by Cavell from Descartes' search for certainty sheds light on this turn of words to things. Foucault asserts that in what he calls "the modern episteme," language is demoted from its highest theological expression to an object of knowledge: "From the nineteenth century, language began to fold in upon itself, to acquire its own particular density, to deploy a history, an objectivity, and laws of its own. It became one object of knowledge among others" (296). The inerasable polyvalence of language radically limits the possibility of certainty, hence, the drive for certainty (which begins in Cavell's "modern" and extends into Foucault's) must circumscribe the illimitable murmur of language and domesticate its role in knowledge.

However, such circumscription cannot finally domesticate language as such. Foucault claims that there are three compensations for the "demotion of language to the mere status of an object" (Ibid.) The first has to do with the necessity of language "for any scientific knowledge that wishes to be expressed in discourse" (Ibid.) The second "is the critical value bestowed upon its study" (297). The third and "the most important, and also the most unexpected is the appearance of literature, literature as such..." (299). Does every "as such" usher in an abyme? To avoid falling in, let's stick to more humble inquiries such as: what exactly *is* "literature as such"?

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[375] According to Steiner, who called Foucault "the Mandarin of the Hour," in a NYT review with the same title.
[376] Freundlib's elaboration of different phases in Foucault's work and attribution of various roles to literature in each phase notwithstanding.

I cite Foucault with minor interjection, not only for the sake of what he says but for *how* it is said. (The following quotations are contiguous.) Foucault continues, providing an answer to the question above: "literature as such—for there has of course existed in the Western world since Dante, since Homer, a form of language that we now call 'literature'. But the word is of recent date, as is also, in our culture, the isolation of a particular language whose peculiar mode of being is 'literary'" (299-300). Literature as such thus refers to an increasing isolation of language in its own domain, the "'literary.'" This domain also exercises its own agency:

> This is because at the beginning of the nineteenth century, at a time when language was burying itself within its own density as an object and allowing itself to be traversed, through and through, by knowledge, it was also reconstituting itself elsewhere, in an independent form, difficult of access, folded back upon the enigma of its own origin and existing wholly in reference to the pure act of writing (300).

Parallel to becoming an object of knowledge, language reconstitutes its mysterious, previously deemed theological, originary power in literature, constituted in opposition to science (*Wissenschaft*): "Literature is the contestation of philology (of which it is nevertheless the twin figure): it leads language back from grammar to the naked power of speech, and there it encounters the untamed, imperious being of words" (Ibid.) This power of speech in literature is historical: "From the Romantic revolt against a discourse frozen in its own ritual pomp, to the Mallarméan discovery of the word in its impotent power, it becomes clear what the function of literature was, in the nineteenth century, in relation to the modern mode of being of language" (Ibid.) Has it become clear? Or does the inquiry, on the contrary, move away from purported lucidity?

> Against the background of this essential interaction, the rest is merely effect: literature becomes progressively more differentiated from the discourse of ideas, and encloses itself within a radical intransitivity; it becomes detached from all the values that were able to keep it in general circulation during the Classical age (taste, pleasure, naturalness, truth), and creates within its own space everything that will ensure a ludic denial of them...

At least two standards of Classical literature appear conspicuously missing from this list of values.

Since by "classical" Foucault means roughly the period between Descartes and Kant, and hence chivalry novels, one might wonder about the absence of beauty and goodness.[377] What takes the place of taste, pleasure, naturalness and truth to "ensure a ludic denial of them" is "(the scandalous, the ugly, the impossible);" the sentence continues:

> [I]t breaks with the whole definition of *genres* as forms adapted to an order of representations, and becomes merely a manifestation of a language which has no other law than that of affirming – in opposition to all other forms of discourse – its own precipitous existence; and so there is nothing for it to do but to curve back in a perpetual return upon itself, as if its discourse could have no other content than the expression of its own form; it addresses itself to itself as a   writing subjectivity, or seeks to re-apprehend the essence of all literature in the movement that brought it into being; and thus all its threads converge upon the finest of points – singular, instantaneous, and yet absolutely universal – upon the simple act of writing (original italics; Ibid.)

Is the subject of this long sentence marked by the pronoun "it," the writing subjectivity that addresses itself to itself? Before further commentary, I cite the last sentence of section "V. Language become object" in the midst of *The Order of Things*: "At the moment when language, as spoken and scattered words, becomes an object of knowledge, we see it reappearing in a strictly opposite modality: a silent, cautious deposition of the word upon the whiteness of a piece of paper, where it can possess neither sound nor interlocutor, where it has nothing to say but itself, nothing to do but to shine in the brightness of its being" (Ibid.) I have cited at length to showcase Foucault's literary style in this passage, as well as the flow of his language on its way beyond the subject. I will note several elements of this trajectory.

Cavell saw Sade as exposing the Christian mortification of human embodiment, as discussed earlier; Foucault reads in Sade's work the limits of representation on the brink of the modern (210). The shifting values attributed to literature "(the scandalous, the ugly, the impossible,)" echo Foucault's earlier evocation of Sade. As Descartes marks a problem for both

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[377] In an alternate genealogy of 19th century literature focused on poetry in "Poetics of Knowledge," Aimé Césaire attached revolutionary agency to poetry qua knowledge.

thinkers, so Sade replies – shifting the question historically from that of certainty in knowledge for Descartes to mortification in language for Sade. While Cavell and Foucault employ different periodizations in approaching representation, and their thinking ostensibly diverges on the relation of language to knowledge, they converge performatively in the doing of the saying.

What is at stake in the impassioned words of language in and beyond the space of literature? If the attribution of agencies to language does not re-establish a sacred beyond, as Butler criticized Foucault for doing elsewhere,[378] the special place carved out for literature in *The Order of Things* tacitly undermines the boundary exhibited by literature "as such" and the discourse of ideas. Rather than laying claim to normative "truth" to count as knowledge, Foucault's language masterfully straddles boundaries between aesthetics and history, invention and scholarship, literature and knowledge. And if his tone is not exactly that of irony, there is, nevertheless, subversion in occupying positions – the scientific/philosophical discourse of ideas vs literary – constructed as contradictory.

Perhaps certainty was a response not only to its lack but also to the oft-noxious necessity scintillating beyond master-controls, a necessity in which history, however (partly) contingent, plays a role: "That literature in our day is fascinated by the being of language is neither the sign of an imminent end nor proof of a radicalization: it is a phenomenon whose necessity has its roots in a vast configuration in which the whole structure of our thought and our knowledge is traced (Foucault, 383)." Such assertions lead the New York Times reviewer to ask in astonishment: "Is this the kind of *thing* to be taken seriously, or does it belong, with a good deal else that has come out of recent French 'post-structuralism' and German 'hermeneutics,' to [in Foucault's words] 'the murmur of the ontological continuum'? Is anything being *said* here, which

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[378] See Butler's critique in *Gender Trouble* of Foucault's introduction to *Herculine Barbin*.

can be grasped and verified in any rational way?" (Steiner, Ibid.)[379] The un-verifiability, the

excess of sense, leads Steiner to question not only the status of Foucault's words *as knowledge*

but even as language. He clarifies: "One asks these questions because Foucault's claims are

sweeping, and because, one supposes, he would wish to be read seriously or not at all." Between

the options given, another way of reading shimmers that refuses both non-reading and the

deadly-serious denial of the mortification of knowledge.

Ludic Lucidity and Lucid Play

"And it seems to me that we do not teach *things*; we teach *how* to know." G.C. Spivak

In concluding *The Claim of Reason*, Cavell raises another certainty alongside the sole absolute

certainty of death. Both are tied to finitude, and here he converges with more recent minoritized

work, addressing the inescapable human dependency on others. Cavell suggests that this

"metaphysical finitude" is interpreted as "an intellectual lack" (*The Claim*, 493). What makes this

finitude metaphysical rather than simply physical and psychical? Is it the mis-reading of finitude

and dependency as a metaphysical lack that seeps into our knowledges and coagulates as the drive

for sovereign certainty and mastery? Although the standard of certainty may be slowly being

displaced from its sovereign position in the production of knowledge, it retains a wide domain of

subterranean mastery in the demand for completion (displacing finitude).

If literature has an agency, played out in relation to knowledge and the subversion of false

dichotomies and claims of certainty, perhaps it also offers a glimpse of a different standard of

knowing. I now move away from the certainty of finitude processed by denial into knowledge

fashioned on human remains (such as Desdemona and Othello's) and move onto the only other

certainty there is: dependency, reminiscent of finite reminders. There is nothing original in this

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[379]Emphasis on "*thing*" is my own.

tradition; akin to language itself, it is all second, third, and millionth-hand knowledge.

Foucault's performative position dis-playing mastery is far from exhaustive. In fact, at a certain tail-end of modernity, at a gateway to Black/feminist/queer performativity, such an approach might be said to usher in other possible positions, present in the works of scholars akin to Spivak, Butler, Mbembe and Moten, whose subversive stance of mastery is evident (also) in more directly vulnerable positions and overt performances. If Foucault treats text as raw material containing a peculiar historical radioactivity in relation to which he, without explicitly calling on other traditions, engages in an ex-position of mastery, his work might provide space for remnants of agency lodged in words. Underscoring such agential performativity, Spivak says: "*Pouvoir/savoir*, then, is catachrestic in the way that all names of processes not anchored in the intending subject must be: lines of knowing constituting ways of doing and not doing, the lines themselves irregular clinamens from subindividual atomic systems—fields of force, archives of utterance."[380] The pretense of mastery relies on an certain standard, thereby generating precarious positions in need of increasingly violent defense. Semblances of these war zones are reproduced in the academy and its carving up of intellectual territories. Such pernicious denial of human finitude and fallibility in turn rejects the tentative literary-historical agencies of language and its secondhand knowledges and reproduces colonialist-patriarchal regimes. In addressing these questions, I consider that situated knowledges involve concrete contextualizing practices and cannot be answered universally without relying on noxiously misleading standards. Lamenting the tragedy of Othello and Desdemona, Cavell closes his voluminous *Claim* by asking: "But can philosophy become literature?" (496). He seems to think that if it did, the endless repetitions of

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[380] Spivak, "More on Power/Knowledge" 41. The system of power/knowledge (*pouvoir/savoir*) thus constitutes atomic deviations as contextualized bias for forms of utterance on Spivak's account, prefiguring Barad's diffraction discussed in the next section.

their sacrifice might be interrupted.

2. Uncertainty and Sacrifice

"The world of those realities that were important…was unfathomable." Max Brod[381]

"Colonialism rhymes with monolingualism." Achille Mbembe

If the Christian cum western notion of recognition is based on the sacrifice of finitude and conceived as un/certain on that basis, the connection between sacrifice and recognition is much older yet continues to wreak havoc in cultural-material terms. This connection can be traced from ancient tragedy to contemporary transnational markets of knowledge.[382] In his study titled *Kafka's Blues*, scholar of Black and European thought Mark Christian Thompson draws on recent readings of Kafka that attend to the social-historical situation of his work, rather than the directly biographical, highlighting the epistemic and epistemological significance of literature in cultural-material terms (5). Kafka and Yoko Tawada's "postmonolingual" work is imprinted with social-historical cum cultural-material traces that illuminate the ongoing economy of violence, exposing the generalization of sacrifice in conjunction with the process of commodification at historical turning points. [383] Yasemin Yildiz connects Kafka and Tawada as harbinger and inheritor, respectively, of what Yildiz calls "the postmonolingual condition."

Recent Kafka scholarship is split about his role in postcolonial discourse. Paul Peters and Jens Hanssen belong to those who see Kafka as a productive interlocuter for decolonization, the latter arguing that his work points to "where the process of decolonization may need to begin;" others dismiss Kafka's relevance for this tradition.[384] Thompson argues that "Kafka's major

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[381] Cited in Benjamin, "Frank Kafka," 802.

[382] Mbembe addresses contemporary capitalism as "knowledge capitalism." (Ibid. 39) I trace the connection between ancient sacrifice and contemporary capitalism in Chapter 3. "Economies of Sacrifice."

[383] Yasemin Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition*. On Kafka as foreshadowing National Socialism, see Arendt, "Franz Kafka: A Revaluation."

[384] Hanssen, "Kafka and Arabs;" Peters, "Witness to the Execution: Kafka and Colonialism;" Stanley Corngold, in

works engage in a coherent, sustained meditation on racial blackness" (3). In dialogue with critical analysis, I show how elements of counter-grammaticality, nonidentity and folly in Kafka's work constitute epistemological alternatives to the overt and covert logic of globalized sacrifice operative through epistemologies of un/certainty.[385] The notion of sacrifice in this context highlights absolute substitutability that I argue undergirds the logic of commodification.[386]

Literary agencies offers modes of minoritized epistemologies that contest epistemic violence. I bring together diffractive feminist materialist methodologies with decolonial epistemologies for a transliterary reading. Kafka's decisive influence on Walter Benjamin's transdisciplinary thought is most notable in the subtle elaboration of figures that undermine dominant terms of being and knowing. Kafka and Tawada work through language as a medium, rather than a reflection of the given, that generates modes of relationality. This literary process in which grammar, identity and logic are transformed, undermines the appearance of ahistorical epistemic uncertainty. Instead, it constitutes the workings of transliterary agency qua minoritized knowledges.

Kafkaesque: Counter-Memory

Kafka's writing is so deeply historical, in the sense suggested by Mbembe's "deep time,"[387] it speaks directly to our historical present. Yet Kafka's worlds are less recognizably historical and more cosmic, or perhaps counter-historical in the sense of histories not written as such. In his 1934 essay, "Franz Kafka," Benjamin argues that Kafka "thinks in terms of cosmic epochs"

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contrast, rejects Kafka's work as typically exoticizing. I will return to the post-/decolonial distinction.

[385] Peters demonstrates the significance of Kafka's "In the Penal Colony" for criticism of colonialism; I address a less overt thematization of sacrifice in Kafka's "A Country doctor."

[386] Mbembe underscores the connection between monolingualism, neo-colonialism and commodification.

[387] Mbembe defines "deep time" as the time of the Anthropocene (42).

imbued with guilt (795-6). The guilt, which permeates these worlds of fathers and officials, is not ubiquitous. Kafka's stories are populated by many animals and stranger, less certain beings. However, Benjamin suggests that it is not these creatures, which gesture beyond cosmoi of guilt in Kafka, but "the assistants" whom Benjamin likens to *gandharvas* in Indian mythology: "mist-bound creatures, beings in an unfinished state" (Ibid., 798). He says: "It is for them and their kind, the unfinished and the hapless, that there is hope," (799) replying to Kafka's postulate: "there is hope, infinite hope, but not for us."[388] This reading aligns Kafka's paradoxical hope embodied by hapless assistants with unfinished knowledge rather than with aporetic uncertainty.

The paradox of this famous line from Kafka's reply to Max Brod, characteristic of Kafka's uncanny literary approach,[389] can also be glimpsed in the opening line of his story "The Silence of the Sirens:" "inadequate, even childish measures may also serve as a means of rescue."[390] Benjamin describes the rescue "which comes to us from that intermediate world" as "at once unfinished and everyday, comforting and silly." (Ibid.)[391] This wonderous combination of qualities is situated in a dynamism of meaning. Benjamin expresses the alignment as follows: "Only then will one come to the certain realization that Kafka's entire work constitutes a code of gestures which surely had no definite symbolic meaning for the author from the outset; rather, the author tried to derive such a meaning from them in ever-changing contexts and experimental groupings" (801). The distinction between context-dependent movement and uncertainty conditions the difference between agency and commodification.[392]

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[388] Max Brod, *Franz Kafka: A Biography*. In "More on Power/Knowledge," Spivak argues that partial not full hope "may be the name of ethical living" (49).
[389] See Yildiz, "The Uncanny Mother Tongue," *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, 30-66.
[390] Quoted in Benjamin, Ibid. 799.
[391] Cf. Boulbina's reading of this opening.
[392] Barad makes a similar argument in the context of quantum physics (115-7).

Benjamin and Thompson's analyses highlight the historical-political significance of Kafka's literary intervention. In a famous image comparing the unfolding of a flower and that of a paper boat, Benjamin likens Kafka's parables and paradoxes to the former: "Kafka's parables, however, unfold…the way a bud turns into a blossom. That is why their effect is literary. This does not mean that his prose pieces belong entirely in the tradition of Western prose forms…. In every case, it is a question of how life and work are organized" (Benjamin 802-3). Benjamin moves from a transformative image of unfolding to the literary and onto the question of social organization. Literary work thus contributes to social reconfiguration. In *Kafka's Blues*, Thompson links the relation of the literary and social organization directly to race, and to Kafka's conception of art and Blackness as mutually constitutive discourses of transformation (5-6).

If the literary reconfigures the social through secondhand knowledge more so than by either direct intervention or reflection, new paradigms are not individual inventions but have roots across exploited minoritized traditions. According to Benjamin, "the literary" constitutes such a temporal-mediating tradition. He writes: "In the stories that Kafka left us, narrative art regains the significance it has in the mouth of Scheherazade: its ability to postpone the future" (807). Scheherazade, as some might remember from childhood, is the bride who must buy her life every night with a new story until she succeeds in turning violence into love (a feminized and racialized abject burden). The agency of Kafka's stories is more temporal than personal, the importance of which for decolonizing knowledge has been underestimated.[393]

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[393] In contrast to such a trend underestimating the transdisciplinary significance of the literary, Thompson argues that "major works of recent Kafka scholars such as John Zilcosky, Rolf J. Goebel, Gerhard Neumann, and others have established postcolonial approaches to Kafka as a preeminent, compelling collective force with which scholars of any critical disposition must reckon" (4). Hansson underscores Kafka's value for the movements known as Arab Spring (197).

Broken out of its association with deconstructive deferral (with which the Benjaminian counter-messianic project is largely at odds), such "postponement" can be read in terms of the future anterior tense. The future anterior, e.g. "what will have been," enables imagining both the consequences of current actions, as well as how such consequences might be altered *in time*.[394] This is characteristic of Benjamin's "counter-messianic" time, which, instead of awaiting rescue from a future (coming of the messiah), seeks rescue among the everyday and historical ruins.[395] Kafka's temporal literary agency converges with Mbembe's "deep time" of the Anthropocene: underscoring fragility and finitude (Mbembe 42).[396] This literary temporal reversal responds (in the future anterior) to Mbembe's call for a reconfiguration of subject/object relations: "To be a subject is no longer to act autonomously in front of an objective background but to share agency with other subjects that have also lost their autonomy. We have to shift away from dreams of mastery" (Ibid., 42). For Mbembe, as for Kafka, sharing agency means sharing with other species as well as with non-living things. Benjamin says: "This much is certain: of all of Kafka's creatures, the animals have the greatest opportunity for reflection. What corruption is in the law, anxiety is in their thinking. It messes a situation up, yet it is the only hopeful thing about it" (810).[397] Again, hope is hapless and "not for us."

Benjamin's reading of Kafkaesque study converges in temporal-political terms with Mbembe's historical argument. As Benjamin indicates earlier, the animals are not the only othered others who are important in Kafka's world. Akin to the barely, if at all, human assistants are the fools who do not sleep because they are busy studying (Ibid., 813). In trying their best not

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[394] Cf. Boulbina 41. Lyotard famously asserts that "the paradox of the future (post) anterior (modo)" is key for understanding "the post modern;" although I focus less on the event of this tense (*The Postmodern Condition* 81).
[395] Butler, "Who Owns Kafka?" online.
[396] Contrary to literary representations of his time, Thompson argues that "Kafka's relation to citizenship, state, and minority status is not that of Goethe" (4).
[397] Cf. Boulbina 63.

to forget and even foregoing sleep for this purpose, the students do forget. "But forgetting always involves the best, for it involves the possibility of redemption." (Ibid.) The non-linear temporality of forgetting invites the transliterary future anterior as the possibility of redemption in counter-messianic temporality.[398] Arguing for the urgency of removing colonial statues, Mbembe says: "History is not…memory. Memory is the way in which we put history to rest" (30). Does putting history to rest require the expiation of guilt? Benjamin quotes Willy Hass, who says: "The most sacred…act of the…ritual is the erasing of sins from the book of memory."[399] If memory puts history to rest, in Benjamin's theory: study (and Black study in the work of Fred Moten) puts the law to rest. In a famous yet unactuated line, Benjamin asserts: "The law which is studied but no longer practiced is the gate to justice." (Ibid.) Such study is connected to the production of radical knowledge.

In conclusion, Benjamin's Kafka essay points to the paradox in the transformative relation between justice, knowledge and literature. The assertation: "The gate to justice is study," is accompanied by the lack of promise of salvation in such study (815). Nevertheless, he argues that Kafka finds "the law of his journey" by bringing in line "its breathtaking speed…with the slow narrative pace that he presumably sought all his life." (Ibid.) This occurs in a short prose piece where "Sancho Panza, a sedate fool and a clumsy assistant" dispatches Don Quixote, "his demon." Benjamin concludes: "Whether it is man or a horse is no longer so important, if only the burden is taken off the back" (816). Kafka's fools embody a counter-logic of folly in which identity dissolves replaced by character.[400] Thus, literature becomes a topography in which emotion, desire and drive are transmogrified by a foolish kind of studying. I now turn to Kafka's

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[398] Butler, "Critique, Coercion and Sacred Life."
[399] Quoted in Benjamin 809.
[400] See Santucci, *Windrose.*

instantiation of such radical knowledge in "A Country Doctor."

Kafka's Folly

"A Country Doctor" is a six-page story published in a short volume under the same title in 1919 that also contains the parable "Before the Law." In an article about Kafka's use of tenses, Dorrit Cohn singles out "A Country Doctor" as using a particularly illogical narrative structure.[401] The story has also been interpreted as Kafka's negative response to Freud.[402] Through a close reading politicizing literary agency as cultural-historical fragments at work in the text, I underscore how the story depicts an economy of sacrifice, foretelling its (neo)colonial capitalization.[403]

The story portrays an irreal or surreal dream-like series of events that defy logical progression at key points. A country doctor (*ein Landarzt*) is called to the sick bed of a boy during a snowstorm. Having recently lost his horse, the doctor faces an impossible journey until two mares and a groom inexplicably appear in his pigsty. The doctor sees the groom's uninvited designs on his servant girl, Rose, and intends to protect her, yet a spatio-temporal aberration seems to force his carriage to the sick patient's door.[404] The thought of Rose's sacrifice continues to haunt him, causing him to feel ill and miss the patient's gaping and worm-infested wound, which turns out to be "Rose-red" (Ibid. 222-3). This "Rose-red" wound keeps the memory of Rose present. The situation deteriorates through a displacement of identities in which the doctor becomes a patient and is himself sacrificed.

This passage occurs by way of concatenated displacements within social, familial, disciplinary, gendered and species-related terms, which are interrelated. The doctor begins to feel

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[401] Cohn, "Kafka's Eternal Present," 146.
[402] Marson and Leopold, "Kafka, Freud and 'Ein Landarzt."
[403] Boulbina's discussion of critical theory and decolonization in *Kafka's Monkey and Other Phantoms of Africa* opens with Kafka's depiction of western refusal to hear exploited voices.
[404] Kafka, "A Country Doctor," 221; hereafter cited in text.

ill "in the narrow confines" of the boy's father's thoughts. Then he says: "I confirmed what I already knew; the boy was quite sound, something a little wrong with his circulation, saturated with coffee by his mother, but sound and best turned out of bed with one shove. I am no world reformer and so I let him lie" (Kafka 222). Toxicity exudes from both parents, saturates the father's rum and the mother's coffee, which mask the boy's wound. In the doctor's view, reform demands that the boy be "turned out of bed." Yet, instead, he continues: "I was the district doctor and did my duty to the uttermost, to the point where it becomes almost too much. I was badly paid yet generous and helpful to the poor. I had still to see that Rose was all right, and then the boy might have his way and I wanted to die too." (Ibid.) Like in English, the German original has no comma to separate the doctor's own death wish, which echoes the patient's. His lament continues: "What was I doing there in that endless winter! My horse was dead, and not a single person in the village would lend me another. I had to get my team out of the pigsty; if they hadn't chanced to be horses, I should have had to travel with swine. That's how it was. And I nodded to the family." (Ibid.) The interchangeability at work here crosses species, families and societies, and operates at the price of sacrificing Rose (223). The doctor never agrees to the terms of this exchange. Rather, he is, himself, substituted for the patient.

Preparing to leave, the doctor notices that he may have been wrong; he feels to have been aided by the horses' whinnying, which seems "ordained by heaven to assist my examination." (Ibid.) The "Rose-red" wound of the patient is now as big as a palm and infested with "rose-red" worms. (Ibid.) The sequence again underscores intensive familial ambivalence: "Poor boy, you were past helping. I had discovered your great wound; this blossom in your side was destroying you. The family was pleased…" (Ibid.) Of course the family is not pleased by the wound but rather by the doctor finally finding it; yet the concatenation is uncanny: "The family was pleased;

they saw me busying myself; the sister told the mother, the mother the father, the father told several guests who were coming in, through the moonlight at the open door, walking on tiptoe, keeping their balance with their arms outstretched" (224). The proliferating series of relatives and guests is not simply nightmarish but uncanny in their mundane pleasure at the scene of the wound. The doctor's meditation decries social confusion of his function with impossible and "sacred ends." (Ibid.) In German and English, five sentences separate the concatenation of family and society quoted above and a song sung by the school choir, which appears outside the window. They contain far more commas and semi-colons than grammatical conventions prescribe in either language. This run-on textuality contributes to the deterioration of logic, marking sacrifice yet simultaneously rifting its logic.

The scene of the doctor's sacrifice uncannily resembles another sacrifice of a healer at the center of the western tradition (Christ): "And so they came, the family and the village elders, and stripped off my clothes…Then my clothes were off and I looked at the people quietly, my fingers in my beard and my head cocked to one side." (Ibid.) Then, a series of shifts occurs involving social, material, vocal, elemental, and animal participation, in one run-on sentence separated by five semi-colons (in English and German). The dialogue that follows underscores a non-human agency and evokes a different figure central to western tradition: "'Do you know?' said a voice in my ear, 'I have very little confidence in you. Why, you were only blown in here, you didn't come on your own two feet. Instead of helping me, you're cramping me on my deathbed. What I'd like best is to scratch your eyes out.'" (Ibid.) The dialogical shift from the sacrifice of the individual to the threat of blinding resonates with the story of Oedipus. Yet, this Oedipal figure is not the classic bringer of knowledge qua sacrifice. Moving from a Christ-like image to an Oedipal one in less than one paragraph involves not only a temporal reversal but also a

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confluence or displacement of identities. An unknown force blows the doctor in, who ends up in the patient's bed.

Few scholars address the remaining page of the story, where the illogical events of the narrative culminate in the doctor's immanent destruction. The dialogue between patient and doctor in which the shift from Christian imagery to Oedipal occurs, continues in an equally enigmatic, illogical and counter-temporal way onto the final page. At the end of it, the patient "lay still," indicating an ambiguous relationality between his life and death (225). The doctor immediately thinks of his own *Rettung*, which means rescue or salvation. The English translation renders *Rettung* as escape, which is what the doctor attempts to do in the remaining half-page of the story. However, it is unlikely that he will ever arrive home or reach his destination. Instead, he laments the collusion of all the elements that conspired to bring him to the sickbed and now lead him astray.[405]

Kafka's story, like his work more generally, brings an economy of sacrifice to the surface. Thereby it is exposed to transformation through the very literary agencies that undermine the logic of substitutability and, moreover, offer alternative epistemologies qua nonidentity, folly, counter-grammar and more. Diving into the 21st century, I turn briefly to related themes in a recent interview with Yoko Tawada, who, in addition to Japanese, is renowned like Kafka as a multilinguist writing in German.[406]

Tawada: "Between Languages"

In 2018, Tawada gave an interview to Alexandra Pereira, who vowed "to ask Tawada polar bear questions she hadn't heard before."[407] These questions echo Tawada's bestselling *Memoirs of a*

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[405] Butler describes Kafka's "diasporic poetics of non-arrival" in "Who Owns Kafka?"
[406] On Kafka's relation to his German, see Cynthia Ozick's "The Impossibility of Translating Franz Kafka;" Stanley Corngold's "Kafka and the Dialect of Modern Literature."
[407] "Between Languages: An interview with Yoko Tawada," Paris Review, Nov. 16th, 2018, online. Further citations in

Polar Bear. This interview marks a change in which non-monolingualism is evidently situated in a globalized "linguascape."[408] Juxtaposed and read through one another, Mbembe's insight that "colonialism rhymes with monolingualism," and Yildiz's description of living in a "postmonolingual condition" underscore that postcoloniality and postmonolingualism do not suffice for the process of decolonization, which must be socially rooted. Thus, my thesis that "the literary" can singularly contribute to decolonizing knowledge through performing minoritized epistemologies is circumscribed.

A circumspection precedes and opens the interview, which I address to underscore finite transliterary entanglements. In her introduction Pereira quotes Tawada: "'I feel in between two languages, and that's big enough,' she told me." The two languages in which Tawada writes are German and Japanese, although she knows three more, including English. The interview begins with temporality: "When do you write?" Tawada: "I look like a person who cannot think when I wake up, because I'm still quite between the sleep and the dream and the waking, and that's the best time for business." The business of writing leaves thought behind. In the second question, the interviewer delves into *Memoirs of a Polar Bear* with the question of responsibility to which Tawada replies: "…but I am not Knut." (Knut is the polar bear protagonist of the memoirs.) "You're not?" "I'm not!" Of course, this tongue-in-cheek back and forth cannot be taken as indicative of a strong notion of identity. Pereira insists: "I noticed the way you switch, in the book, between the words *paw* and *hand*." Tawada's reply maintains the apodictic distance from any posthuman nonidentity: [409] "Yes, it's a story about human and animal rights. The circus was important for the socialists, it demonstrated a control of nature. In the Middle Ages, court cases

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text.
[408] Yildiz 109.
[409] Ausubel claims in her New York Times review that *Memoirs of Polar Bear* "is a study of blurred lines:…between human and animal;" yet her quotations indicate an economy of species exchange and substitution.

were brought against animals. Essentially, though, *Memoirs* is a novel about writing, and it's inspired by Kafka…" She also names Heine and Schulz, staying within a European frame of reference.

The interview gives voice to a poignant gloss of Tawada's multilingualism when Pereira asks whether Tawada considers writing as a multilinguist to be an anarchic act. Tawada replies: "Being multilingual is tricky. I feel more as though I am between two languages, and that feels like enough. To study that in-between space has given me so much poetry. I don't feel like one of those international people who juggles many tongues." This ends the topic of multilingualism in the interview, which moves onto a comparison of Japan and Europe, in which Tawada includes Russia. If Tawada seems to set a clear limit to the posthumanism and postmonolingualism that attracts so many readers to her work, her fiction nevertheless traffics "in the untotalizable where the intending consciousness cannot be privileged."[410]

Yasemin Yildiz concludes her careful reading of Tawada, by pointing to the "expansion of the German-Japanese pairing."[411] Yildiz discusses Tawada's story "Bioskoop," as a turn to race. Yet the analogical form of the analysis betrays the same continuation of a framework of exchange in the story: "Her protagonist leaves Europe to go to South Africa in order to learn a language, just as many Japanese women left Japan for the West for language learning" (141). In the antepenultimate sentence, Yildiz underscores the expansionist tenor of the endeavor: "Tawada finds herself seeking out ever new transnational links and expanding into new linguistic, cultural, and geographical territories" (142). Are these linked as contemporary transnational markets? Yildiz notes: "As in the turn to South Africa in 'Bioskoop,' the Vietnamese-French constellation in the new novel functions as both a displacement and an

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[410] Spivak, "More on Power/Knowledge" 53.
[411] Yildiz 245. Further references in text.

expansion of the Japanese-German pairing" (245). In contrast to the transformative possibilities in the postmonolingual condition, Yildiz's analysis highlights a certain equivalence and exchangeability in Tawada's transnational themes, where the "of" indicates a continuation of the dominant framework.

I do not read Kafka or Tawada's words as "symptomatic" but rather as indexical of an economy of sacrifice coursing beneath the social surface.[412] This indicates how commodification appropriates minoritized traditions without wholly digesting their traces in literary work. Non-identity, folly and counter-grammar remain as epistemological traces of other epistemes in literature, particularly, in postmonolingual writing. These elements contribute to minoritized knowledges, which shows both the sacrifice at work in virtually ubiquitous globalized commodification as well as transliterary resistance to such cooptation.[413]

3. Minoritized Knowledges

"[W]e can affirm that at its core, the project of postcolonial critique is what one could call the interlacing of histories and concatenation of worlds." Mbembe, Introduction to *Kafka's Monkey*

"What I'd like to be able to describe, under duress, in privation, by way of an overabundantly poor critical poiesis, is what it is to be discover a new art form without having produced it."
Moten, "Black Topographical Existence"

In a recent set of talks, Fred Moten brings together literature, media and social political theory as integral parts of a whole.[414] His work is steeped in Black studies (qua study) to the point of blurring distinctions between individuals as separated existents.[415] Paradoxically—in terms of received understanding of individuality qua autonomy—this approach enables voices to resound all the more starkly. My critique of un/certainty in dominant western epistemologies

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[412] At stake in the distinction between symptom and index is the debated issues of complicity qua white guilt.
[413] See Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes," on how complexity resists commodification (37).
[414] Moten gave three talks as the WGS distinguished visiting professor at JHU in February 2021.
[415] Moten, "Black Topographical Life," JHU talk 2/11/21, further citations in text.

draws on social-political situatedness as (dis)location characteristic of the diasporic knowledge producers on the margins of social categories as well as disciplinary discourses. On this minoritized account, knowledge is understood as primarily secondhand, that is, not as the product of an autonomous mind or culture, but as inspired by a situated configuration of intra-acting multiplicity.[416] As our interlocutors show, such minoritized traditions are deeply, consequentially yet paradoxically situated in history, time and (dis)location.

In lieu of concluding, I engage Moten's lectures following the 2021 volume, *All Incomplete*. Incompletion echoes the conception of unfinished knowledge with which this inquiry of minoritized knowledge began. Moten begins with Black thought, as well as some German thinkers (Benjamin in particular). I engage with transdisciplinary minoritized dialogues, where Black, feminist, queer and *othered* studies form the core of the inquiry as interlocuters, rather than disciplines.[417] This concatenation, in Mbembe's words, constitutes the necessary node of contemporary critical studies as poetics of conflagration facing "omnicidal politics." [418] Moten says: "The method/thing of black study—which continually displays, discovers and disburses that paraontological fugitivity whose authenticity is in that it is not its own, which is and is comported towards the animaterial— is anaphenomenological increase, anarepresentational increment" (Ibid. 4). "Animateriality" blends animal and matter, while "ana," which means "up, back and against," questions and qualifies phenomena and representation.[419]

Fred Moten is a poet-scholar. He combs divergent traditions of thought to undermine

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[416] On intra-action, see Barad 96-131.

[417] Such an approach challenges disciplinary rigor as rigor mortis that presupposes separability at the expense of Black feminist queer *othered* thought, while its dialogical form aims to prevent the erasure of irreducible differences.

[418] Omnicide refers to human extinction by human action; I read Moten's phrase as underscoring the political threat to life as such through instrumentalized inequity.

[419] See also Barad on phenomena and representation, 55.

western omnicidal thinking at its core. In literature and its study, language and culture reproduce and reconfigure material-social practice, at once radically open and imbued with historical traces. Shifting the conversation to literary agencies, I work to displace the obsession with auteurs, genres, and history as certain givens to situated performative qua transformative transliterary studies.[420]

Every literary work is a palimpsest. In some, social-historical traces are deeper and broader than in others. In contrast to charges of romanticizing, Moten suggests that by virtue of being exposed to poverty, Black life has a proximate relation to practices and aesthetics of resistance to what he calls omnicidal politics.[421] If Moten's practice is literary, it is also theoretical, critical, epistemological, as well as musical (and perhaps mediatic….), not as additive but as diffractive qualities. These qualities coalesce in Moten's texts, which address political, scientific, mathematical, philosophical, literary as well as everyday practices in terms that displace separation, rationalization, grammar and guilt at the core of the western matrix of domination qua omnicidal sacrifice. This demands the general strike:

> "[A] whole bunch of different bunches of people in a whole bunch of different clubs get together to ride out that lonely wanting to be one, fusing the general strike, as Benjamin, and W. E. B. Du Bois and Saidiya Hartman say all beautifully through themselves, re-fusing in the general antagonism, which turns out to be not only the refusal of the conditions of labor but also the refusal of any already given understanding of the metaphysical foundations of refusal." [422]

I have offered a reading of un/certainty operative in such sacrificial meta-physics. Where does the general strike fall in the distinction between poetic and material violence?[423] Is poetic

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[420] Moten's "Black Topographical Life" extensively engages and diverges from Berlant's rejection of "transformative fantasy that saturates the concept of resistance and protest," in conversation about obesity (Berlant, "Social Death" 767).

[421] Compare Spivak on the epistemic role of literature vis-à-vis the "subject-position of the citizen of a recently decolonized 'nation'" (Ibid. 53).

[422] Moten, "This Unholding's Long Nite Lounge," JHU talk 2/18/21, p. 20.

[423] Ibid. esp. pp. 10-11.

violence the same as material violence? Are these different from physical violence?[424] Mbembe warns against today's knowledge economies, which separate and package insight into digestible, innocuous units and definitions. If "we do not teach *things*, we teach *how* to *know*," to satisfy readers with answers to these questions is not to decolonize knowledge…but risks dissecting and laying it out on a platter served at the neoliberal smorgasbord. It is time for the academy to address how its practices of overt and implicit knowledge production support the matrix of domination through demands for un/certain mastery and "the tyranny of clarity."[425]

In this diffracted light, all the names I have named are fragments of the seas of writing that pre- and post-exists them.

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[424] Butler, "Critique, Coercion and Sacred Life."
[425] Haraway, "When We Have Never Been Human…" Interview, 153. The difference between unclarity due to complexity and less teleologically-driven writing where the process of making connections and discoveries is prioritized over results, versus unclarity from imprecision, is not absolute and underpinned by inequity.

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