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The Queer Freedom of Faggotry: A Schizoanalysis of Twentieth-Century American Faggots

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in

Literature

by

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The dissertation of Aly Bennett Stauffer is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to Emrys, who was beside me the whole time.

And to family and friends who supported me throughout.

And to faculty and mentors without whose guidance I would never have found my way.

EPIGRAPH

. . . but where will the new irruption of desire come from?
Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oepidus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* 378

It is equally polemical to argue that we are not quite queer yet, that queerness, what we will really know as queerness, does not yet exist.
José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* 22

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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The following dissertation takes *faggotry* as an analytic for thinking about queer freedom. By queer freedom, I mean both the freedom to be queer and a queer relation to freedom. Faggotry is a phenomenon of mixing that swirls together people, performances,

things, and so on along queer lines. In particular, faggotry is a mixing of racial, gender, and sexual performances that produces one as an Other (being queer) and also that allows one to experience the world queerly (relation to freedom). Alongside queer theories, such as José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia*, schizoanalysis serves as my guiding methodology. I draw on various schizoanalytic concepts and critiques from Deleuze and Guattari's *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* books *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*.

In each chapter, I study a twentieth-century American novel that is relevant to the phenomenon I describe as faggotry. The chapters are arranged in the order of their movement toward queer freedom, from Burroughs's impossibility of queer freedom to Carson's manifestation of queer freedom. My analysis begins with William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*, in which freedom is not possible for a faggot. Burroughs's faggot, I contend, is socially produced with no possibility of escape, yet Burroughs's text performs the destructive task of schizoanalysis by deterritorializing sexuality. Next, I turn to James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*. In Baldwin's novel, escape repeatedly appears on the horizon of the protagonist's consciousness, but, in my reading, he fails to follow the lines of escape to find queer freedom despite having the conditions for a schizoid breakthrough. After Baldwin, I analyze Richard Bruce Nugent's "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade: A Novel." Nugent's text produces a ground on which queer freedom becomes possible. I argue that this ground is best understood as what Deleuze and Guattari call a "Body without Organs"—the basis for desire. Finally, Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red: A Novel in Verse* presents a red monster who learns to love himself, becoming free, despite a history of abuse and "wrong love." I contend that Carson's red monster learns to quasi-cause himself, thereby effecting the positive tasks of schizoanalysis.

Prologue—Troubling "Bundles": The Queer Gathering of American Faggots

> So queer tables are not simply tables around which, or on which, we [queers] gather. Rather, queer tables and other queer objects support proximity between those who are supposed to live on parallel lines, as points that should not meet.
>
> Ahmed 169

Introduction

Can an outside be imagined? What would it mean to escape the confines of what is and what has been, to fly free into an open future? Can such an escape be sustained, or will it inevitably be reincorporated? These are questions that have troubled thinkers and activists alike. In what follows, I pose these questions where faggots are produced at an intersection of race, gender, and sexuality. Inspired by José Esteban Muñoz's queer utopianism, I answer that the "then and there of queer futurity" is necessarily connected to this "here and now"; it is possible, and it will come from this troubling here and now.

What this means for my work is that I have taken up a contentious term—faggot—and organized my literary analysis around questions of gender, racial, and sexual identity. Only one of my four primary texts includes the word faggot explicitly (*Naked Lunch*), but each deals with the twentieth-century American phenomena of faggots and faggotry. In a hostile world where faggot means a series of bad things, "The Queer Freedom of Faggotry" tracks four different trajectories in response to this negative queer interpellation. Whereas "queer" has been reclaimed and become a positive term for asserting one's difference, "faggot" remains a negative term (with a few exceptions, including subcultures and historical moments such as the

1970s). The interpellation "faggot," as I describe below, begins with negative and sometimes violent or otherwise traumatic enforcement of gender, racial, and sexual norms.

Where this interpellation ends up taking one depends on personal choice—to deconstruct the categories of racial, sexual, and gendered belonging, or to strive for reincorporation within them. This dissertation studies twentieth-century American renderings of this personal choice, in William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (1963), James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* (1956), Richard Bruce Nugent's "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" (1926), and Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red* (1998).

My work draws on (and contributes to) significant bodies of work in the fields of queer, gender, and sexualities studies, American studies, philosophy, ethnic studies, and literature. My project is the first to consider faggots and faggotry as twentieth-century American phenomena. My work troubles the line between gender and sexuality, and describes the reliance of both on racialization (particularly in the context of faggots). I draw on the antisocial thesis in queer theory, and my work contributes to that work as it has changed following José Esteban Muñoz's (and others') compelling critiques. Other scholars of negativity, including J Jack Halberstam, have also been influential on my work.

My project concerns at once the collective performances of faggotry and its personal affective experience. I engage Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* project, in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, as a method for engaging the phenomenon of self-becoming. Deleuze was a social philosopher of difference, and Guattari participated in antipsychiatry movements. Their analysis, which feeds into the project they describe as schizoanalysis, critiques the family and individual basis for understanding the self (which form

the basis for psychology and much post-Cartesian philosophy). Instead, they consider breakages and flows as properly social phenomena that appear without originating in persons or families (as disorders) or states (as mass psychology). This serves as an orienting point for my dissertation not because I am studying the Western systems of self in general or Deleuze and Guattari in particular, but because schizoanalysis helps me to articulate my project for readers at key points.

Faggots and faggotry are at once social and personal phenomena, but if we were to parse the two out from one another, we might consider faggots as social objects (a keystone for fascizing binary genders; the exception that upholds rule) and faggotry as a personal attribute (a nonfascist, queer gathering of "disparate" performances). In these terms, the schizoanalytic task is to break down the blockage produced with "faggot!" and to access the line of escape, faggotry. The task is not to resist or contain the negativity of "faggot!" and to reintegrate the faggot-self into an Oedipal world (a function Deleuze and Guattari associate with psychoanalysis); the task is to facilitate that negativity's destructive resonance in such a way that it opens the breakages-flows of faggotry, connecting the faggot to queer freedom.

In each chapter, I read texts that produce these obstacles and breakages for the racialized, gendered, and sexualized faggot-figure. In this introduction, I outline a linguistic genealogy of faggots as part of the negative task of schizoanalysis, destruction. That is, in the following section, "Coming Undone," I set out to "deterritorialize" faggots (without "reterritorializing" them). This first task of deterritorialization is to disrupt and disassemble the common understanding of who is called faggot and of how they fit into society, without reinscribing or reterritorializing the meaning of faggots. For readers familiar with Deleuze and

Guattari, I hope this provides a useful way of understanding my approach to this project. In any case, I do not tend to use their terminology (with the exception of Chapter 3) or to rely dogmatically on their work as a manual, so I do not expect nonfamiliarity with their names or work to be an obstacle for readers of this study.

My project is particularly concerned with blockages formed with the traumatic word, "faggot." Faggots are traumatically produced; they do not consent to this aspect of their self-formation. Trauma forms a never-ended Present to which the sufferer-survivor perpetually returns. When triggers return one's trauma to the present, the experience of this is not of remembering a past event. Rather, the event has the presence of happening now, even when the physical situation of the trauma is located in the distant past. Trauma is a temporal rupture, in which material conditions (rape, hate speech, and so on) pass away while the affective responses to these stimuli continue as a singular present moment contiguous with these past material conditions. This contiguity or adjacency invests trauma with power because the traumatic event is not bounded by its temporal occurrence. Therefore, trauma functions as a core motor for certain self-becomings. Trauma is, in this sense, constitutive of aspects of selves—for instance, of the self as faggot. This attributes great power to trauma, yet this is not to say that becoming a faggot is a deterministic progression in which one has no freedom. In fact, it is precisely the opposite that I argue here: in becoming a faggot one can fly from those social and interpersonal conventions which hold one in place, thereby becoming free as oneself.

Some subjects do not refuse their expulsion but embrace negativity's propulsive force, allowing their fragmentation from the social group to become their liberation. Although the claim I make in the course of this dissertation is utopian, I acknowledge that this freedom comes

at a cost—often a great one. The cost includes trauma or its threat (the violence associated with performing deviance) as well as exclusion from social conventions which offer safety and comfort in exchange for conformity. To choose faggotry in the face of exclusion is a heroic act.

Community forms precisely at the nexus where community has been traumatically denied. Christopher Nealon describes an early twentieth-century "foundling imaginary [that] share[s] two characteristics: a determined struggle to escape the medical-psychological 'inversion' model of homosexuality that was dominant in the United States in the first half of the century and a drive toward 'people-hood' that previews the contemporary 'ethnic' notion of U.S. gay and lesbian collectivity" (2). The appearance of an "ethnic" collectivity of gay men, an antihomonormative critique suggests, is not inherently liberatory. A collective politicization of homonormativity returns certain deviants to the social fold; others, however, including punks, bulldaggers, welfare queens, and faggots, to draw on Cathy Cohen's vital essay, remain excluded from this fold. Faggots are produced through traumatic exclusion and separation from social normativity. They might become joined in an antinormative resistance to the forces that break them apart, or they might strive to be included in the forces that expel them. The abstract "forces" here are psychical and material realities, from mundane comments and gestures to traumatic events of violence. My research on faggots suggests that at least two general kinds of groups have formed—one reactionary, the other revolutionary.

Coming Undone: A Linguistic Genealogy of American Faggots

Faggotry is a peculiar phenomenon because it is produced as the opposite of what it means etymologically. "Faggot" means "bundle" etymologically, but in its contemporary usage faggot excludes persons from masculinity, racial positioning, and heteronormativity. Where

faggot's etymological cousin "fascist" indicates inclusion in a patriotic State union, the word faggot promotes a hegemonic masculinist union through the constitutive exclusion of particular queers. At the same time, this casting out performs the function of creating a counter-swing, for those outcast as faggots and those who fear such a fate. Actual and potential outcasts strive to reincorporate themselves into the matrix of heteronormative white masculinity, often by passing the identification "faggot" off onto a "less masculine" person ("less masculine" is just as likely refer to racialization as effeminacy). To say that faggot is produced as the opposite of what it means is to say that faggot means "bundle" but acts as an exclusion from the "bundle" of socialized masculinity. As a historical term, then, "faggot" means a bundle of like objects—wood, metal, herbs, words, or people. A "faggot," as a bundled unit, gathers similar things and joins them using a hart-string or binding. This dissertation is itself a faggot of sorts, following that term's historical use in literary publication, in that it joins together multiple textual analyses of literary works. It was only in the early twentieth century that faggot became widely known across the English-language worlds as a derogatory term for under-masculine men, synonymous with pansy, sissy, and queer.

Apart from a few attempts to reclaim the word, the common usage today has remained more or less constant over the past fifty years. Faggot, in this common North American sense, indicates gay men specifically or deficiently masculine men generally (*OED Online*, definition A.II.8.c).[1] This usage became stabilized in accordance with broad epistemological shifts in

[1] C.J. Pascoe's study on the word's use in U.S. high schools takes this as its primary meaning, although Pascoe notes that it might be more commonly used by white-identifying adolescents. This will stand in contrast to George Chauncey's claim about its historical usage, in the 1920s, appearing most prominent among Black Americans (15). Marlon Ross draws on Vershawn

understanding sexualities and genders. When faggot first appeared, in the 1910s, it was used in this way as an indicator of gender deviance almost exclusively.[2] At the same time, it indicated gender deviance generally, rather than the narrower usage common today with reference to masculinity. In contemporary terms, we might say that faggots were first understood as persons whose "sex" and "gender" were misaligned—the inversion model. Effeminate men, masculine women—faggots all, whatever their sexual (in)activity. Sex and gender, terms which are generally taken today to distinguish between biological or physical reality (sex) and social or cultural performances (gender), were still in motion at the time of faggots' appearance; before the eighteenth century "sex" indicated a cluster of traits and performances while "gender" indicated a reproduction function. Like the terms "sex" and "gender," "faggot" gained relative stability in the moment commonly referred to as the sexual revolution (roughly the two-decade span from 1960-1980).[3] By the second half of the century, homosexuality could be discussed as a problem distinct from (if still imbricated with) gender—the inversion model receded and was replaced by the sexual orientation model—and faggots became sexually marked.

Despite the clarity of these two figures, the earlier gendered faggot and the later sexualized faggot, their functioning and their concurrence with broader shifts in the history of sexuality, this account has not provided an explanation for the weighty derogation itself. Why

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Ashanti Young's work to describe how "in particular African American settings, the term 'faggot' is equated with an overinvestment in white men's institutions" (Ross 181). Young describes an intersection of race, class, and gender in his chapter, "Nigga-Gender." Among African American youths, Young explains, "nigga" means hood while "faggot" means school and therefore whiteness.

[2] Definitions and historical thesaurus from the *OED Online*.

[3] For a sexual revolution chronology, see Escoffier xii, xiv.

faggot, and not a different word? Another backward glance, this time etymological, proves instructive. Prior to its emergent, twentieth-century usage, faggots were a common economic identification for bundled wood and other commodities.[4] The deployment of sexuality coincides with the dwindling importance of this economic function, however. The industrial revolution of the late eighteenth century, in particular, seems to have played a key role in motivating this shift in England. Entire job categories and fields of work developed to meet the demands of powering large machines that could run around the clock. Such demand intensified the search for more efficient burnables, like coal, as wood-burning was less consistent and required greater management than coal and its successors. In what has become the United States, Indigenous Nations, and Canada, the shift away from wood-burning was more gradual in many areas. Where the English faced dwindling forests and over-population on limited land, with relatively accessible coal as an alternative, American settler-colonists recorded massive, "unending" forests and land stretching indefinitely into western horizons. The shift from wood to coal and other burnables continued more than a century longer in some areas of the United States, in part because of the continuing incorporation of "new" territories and states whose burnable resources had not yet been systematically exploited and deteriorated, and whose access to coal and later oil was more limited.[5] Because of the ongoing relevance, in the U.S., of wood-burning, the word "fagot" was included on a list of standardized spellings for documents coming out of

[4] Other common usages included bundles of steel and iron (advertised in newspapers), bundles of herbs (in recipes), and a type of stitching (appearing in newspaper columns about the latest fashions).

[5] The problem of dwindling wood resources in the U.S., and specifically Idaho, was addressed in "The Fuel Problem," *Grand Forks Daily Herald*, 2 Nov. 1881, p. 2.

the office of the President of the United States (occupied then, in 1906, by Theodore Roosevelt).[6] Despite this late inclusion in a list of important words, faggot had lost much of its importance in everyday life as a term describing bound pieces of wood. The first condition for the emergent usage of faggot, in its twentieth-century sense, was this evacuation of common usage that coincided with the shifts in resource usage.[7]

At the same time that the economic function of faggots was becoming replaced by other resources, a number of derivative uses appeared which can be divided into two general clusters. In the first cluster, faggot indicates a vacuity or absent presence. A regional usage specific to Ireland, Scotland, and England indicated a "useless" or "troublesome" woman; this usage appeared in the U.S. by way of Irish immigrants (a U.S. newspaper reporting on court proceedings employs the term as used by one Irish-American woman with reference to another). In a "faggot brief," a "faggot vote," and a "faggot muster," faggot most nearly means "dummy." A barrister's use of a faggot brief, to suggest a parallel contemporary phenomenon, is like looking at one's phone without specific purpose, when waiting by oneself in a public or semi-public setting, simply so as to appear occupied. A faggot muster is when non-soldiers ("dummies") were used to fill ranks in order to achieve muster. A faggot vote was created when a wealthy person nominally gave land to an unlanded person, giving the latter the nominal

[6] *Savannah Tribune*, 1 Sept. 1906, p. 8.

[7] A general consensus seems to be that the Yiddish faygele, meaning "little bird," was not associated with faggot prior to immigration from Eastern Europe to the United States. In other words, faygele is a regional cultural variant of faggot that appeared in the decades following faggot's appearance in the United States (by the 1930s), although some blogs and unsupported sources note a potential prior association. According to Sweet, faygele was a "term of endearment for a small child or beloved female. . . . In its queer sense feygele denotes an effeminate and usually homosexual male and is best translated by fairy" (Sweet 117).

right to vote—the right, that is, to vote the way the wealthy person instructed them ("Faggot, n. and Adj."). By appearing to break his land into smaller parts, the landowner could cast many votes instead of only one (in one case, the landowner himself flippantly denied traveling to vote, even though he had turned an election because he had sent so many faggot votes). In the 1890s, a usage that appears connected to a French usage appeared as a structure for social events (often hosted by societies of Christian women). An American English-French dictionary translates "Conter de fagots [as] *to tell idle stories*" (1810). For a faggot party, along similar lines, each partygoer was instructed to bring a faggot, and each partygoer told a story as their faggot burned in the open hearth (vacuity of entertainment).[8] In each of these cases, faggot functions as an absent presence, necessary for specific purposes but without agency or meaning of its own or for itself. In sexual terms, it might follow from these usages that "faggot" identified a person who filled in for (without therefore becoming) one's "opposite" gender.

In the second cluster of derivations, faggot stands for deviance punishable by death. During the years of Protestant-Catholic conflict in Europe, faggot was included in a number of phrases about burning heretics (from the perspective of whichever claim to orthodoxy), metonymically describing the stake at which they were burnt—and, in turn, the heretics themselves. "To fry a faggot" meant to burn a heretic, who would be tied to a stake and surrounded by (bundled up with) bundles of wood. A recanted heretic might be made to carry a faggot or to wear an embroidered faggot as a reminder of their heresy (or, at least, of their morbid motivation for performing a recantation) ("Faggot, n. and Adj."). An advocate of "fire

[8] For an early variation, see "Something New," *Aberdeen Daily News*, 25 April 1890. For a later, more common structure, see "A Faggot Party," *Savannah Tribune*, 5 Nov. 1910.

and faggot" encouragements to orthodoxy, in this way, was described as "faggoty-minded."[9] Faggot was employed both to (literally) scare the hell out of "unconverted sinners" (who could expect, unless they converted, to spend eternity in Hell as a flaming "faggot") and as a symbol of true discipleship (to embrace the faggot meant to remain true to one's beliefs in the face of religious persecution and potential martyrdom).[10] Punishment by "fire and faggot" for socially unforgivable deviance, then, was commonly cited from the Reformation (see John Foxe's *The Actes and Monuments*) through the eighteenth century, and the discourse attaching the perils of sin, heresy, and turning from God to fiery condemnation did not remain metaphorical but appeared in the world with these practices of "fire and faggot" punishment. These early modern usages of faggot receded in England during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but in the U.S. it was transposed from religious deviants to racialized deviants and continued into the twentieth century with the increasing appearance, post-Reconstruction, of lynchings of persons of color.

By the nineteenth century, execution by fire was often described as an "uncivilized" practice associated with "barbarians," yet it was used continually by self-proclaimed "civilized" white and Christian communities to lynch persons of color. This transposition, from religious heretics to racialized persons, happened slowly; racialization took up the discursive circuits of heresy, such that persons of color were conceived as always-already heretics in much the same way that they would later be conceived as always-already criminals. An early twentieth-century

[9] See Palmer.

[10] John Bailey wrote, "to Sing in the Stocks, and embrace Faggots, is highly Glorifying and pleasing to God" (145). Joseph Allene, however, wrote, "What thinkest thou, O Man, of being a faggot in Hell to all eternity?" (97).

account of "the first Auto de Fa in New Mexico" ("the holy father [said] 'Theft, disbelief and the church itself defied! We will have Judaism here next. Away with [the Apache chief] to the faggot fires'") concludes with the defense: "Cruel as these old religious zealots may have been at times, they did a world of good, for they semi-civilized the natives" (McReynolds 183). In this sickeningly nostalgic account, such horrific racist acts were justified by the old logic of purifying heresy from a proto-American land and people. Within white and Christian communities, then, "fire and faggot" had become largely a rhetorical device. In the 1830s, British Parliamentarian Thomas Perronet Thompson critiqued the intolerance of religious non-conformity by invoking the specter of the stake alongside an emergent carceral technology, the treadmill (like a watermill or windmill, the treadmill harnesses power produced by a turning wheel; the wheel turned because prisoners were made to walk on it in place like hamsters). He asks, can we practice religious non-conformity without "the religious observances of other people being forced upon us with a faggot or a treadmill?" (Thompson 107). Both forms of control seem absurd in Thompson's polemical address, as the refusal to observe another religion's Sabbath, he contends, does not make one a criminal or even a heretic. While Thompson's reference to two technologies of control appears to follow the Foucauldian logic of a transition from a disciplinary power "to kill or let live" to a biopolitical "power over life," this applies only to a limited, "civilized" (read: white, affluent, orthodox-hegemonic, normative) population.

For racialized Others, no further evidence of heresy or criminality was necessary than the appearance of their skin color or proximity to a crime, meaning that the threat of faggot torture and execution was a fact of life in a racist country (some towns and counties more than

others, perhaps, but everywhere present regardless). In the *American Citizen*, another early twentieth-century writer notes that there was "comparatively little attention [given to lynching], even in instances where the faggot has superseded the noose as the instrument of torture and death. The burning of the negro wretch at Paris, Tex., some years ago, which so long stood out alone and unparalleled as the acme of inhuman atrocity as illustrated in mob violence, has within a twelve months been relegated to obscurity and forgetfulness in consequence [of the] multiplied repetitions on a more shocking scale. . . . Such is the inevitable outcome of the growth of the lynch law spirit" ("Is Anarchy to be the Outcome?" *American Citizen* 29 March 1901). In the *Plaindealer*, an article emphasizes that white people commit crimes too, suggesting that Black persons were by default perceived as criminals and therefore guilty, and so were lynched for their proximity to a crime without any consideration of their actual involvement: "A man committed criminal assault upon a 11-year-old child at San Antonio recently, and he was weite, too! This should admonish the knights of the faggot and kerosene can that it is at least safe to investigate before dispatching the most conveniently caught Negro upon these occasions. It is not always a Negro" (17 Nov. 1899, p. 4). No logical, rhetorical, or juridical appeal was sufficient, as far as the "lynch law spirit" (i.e. white racist herd mentality) was concerned, because persons of color embodied heresy, criminality, and deviance to the extent that they appeared as persons of color. In the same moment that (in the first cluster of uses) white Christian women were gathering for faggot parties, at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, Indigenous and Black persons were under perpetual threat of the faggot's capital violence. This U.S.-specific usage of the faggot continued into the twentieth century, overlapping with the emergent usage with reference to gender deviance and

carrying a surfeit of the negative intensity associated with the term. In other words, this history ties directly into the emergence of faggot's contemporary usage in the U.S. As Siobhan Somerville suggests in *Queering the Color Line*, "the simultaneous efforts to shore up and bifurcate categories of race and sexuality in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were deeply intertwined" (3). This bifurcation can be found in the genealogy of faggot in this tumultuous moment.

Finally, keeping in mind these two clusters of meaning (vacuity/absent presence and racialized violence/deviance punishable by death), I want to consider two primary sources that record early uses of "faggot" in its contemporary sense, in 1913 and 1914. The earliest uses date from 1913 in connection with a touring vaudeville revue, and by 1914 it appeared in *A Vocabulary of Criminal Slang*, written in collaboration with the police department in Portland, Oregon. In *Criminal Slang*, a sample sentence for the term "drag" employs faggot but has to include a parenthetical point of reference to ensure its meaning will be clear: "All the fagots (sissies) will be dressed in drag at the ball tonight" (Jackson and Hellyer 30). This suggests that the usage was new but in relatively common usage (among "criminal" gender deviants), but the ambiguity as to who the speaker might be (other ball-goers? police?) does not suggest a definite derogation.

By contrast, the earliest recorded use (according to the *OED* and my own research) is unambiguously hostile. Jack Reed, the Road Manager for Gertrude Hoffman's *Broadway to Paris* vaudeville revue, employed the term on numerous occasions in correspondence with J.J. Shubert, the company's General Manager in New York. The revue included a number in which "a male chorus which once apparently composed of women surprises the audience by its vocal

timbre and force" (Philip Hale, "Miss Hoffmann at the Shubert," Boston, Shubert Archive). The chorus "'boys' deceive the house until they begin to sing, and the bit gets over quite strongly" ("Broadway to Paris," *Variety*, 29 Nov. 1912, p. 24).[11] They go on to "make three changes of costume in front of the footlights, while the audience fairly cries with laughter" ("Miss Hoffman's Revue Scores Hit"). Other newspaper reactions were less receptive to the drag number: "The male chorus is the most uncanny collection of freakish spectacle ever invented. If the town had been ransacked for pathological specimens no more astounding vision could have been produced. . . . The result [of the drag number] is funny, but too unpleasant to justify itself" (Louis Sherwin, "Plenty of Beauty in New Show at Winter Garden," *Globe Advertiser*, 21 November 1912).

The drag number was described in reviews most frequently as a novelty or an offense to society. Like drag itself, the transgression appears to be socially accepted on the condition that it remain an exception and a spectacle. In his letters to Shubert, Reed uses "Fagot," "Faget," and "drag" to describe the number, but when he is talking about a specific person (usually a trouble-maker or someone to be released) he uses a phrase like "one of the Fagots." The number had been planned at least by September, when a merchant wrote a note to confirm the company's order of twelve wigs for the purpose (Coyle and Deutschmann, letter of 19 Sept. 1912, Shubert Archive, Box 4142), and early reviews appeared in November 1912 (including those cited above). While many reviewers were titilated by the performances in Boston and

[11] Another review concludes that this is a "new opening" for the male chorus; "How interesting!" ("'Broadway to Paris': New Winter Garden Review is Splendiferous," *New York Tribune*, 21 Nov. 1912, p. 9).

New York, where the show played through January, the faggots became a problem for Reed on the road in the less receptive Midwest.

Reed's correspondence with Shubert reflects his frustration. In February, Reed makes reference to "the 'Fagot' number" and "the 'drag' number" to convey to Shubert which numbers were affected by absent performers. In April, Reed explains to Shubert that they have had to "eliminate 'The Fagot Number'" to shorten the performance time (Jack Reed, Letter, April 7, 1913, CF 108, Box 161, Shubert Archive). A few weeks later, Reed has begun to refer to specific performers as faggots, and not merely as performers in the faggot number. In May, several months into the tour, Reed writes, "I have had to send another of the 'Fagets' home this week; they are getting almost beyond control." He does not specify their disruption, but he goes on to ask for permission "to let another [faggot] out and reduce the 'Drag Number' to eight boys instead of ten" (originally, there were twelve) (Jack Reed, Letter, May 1, 1913, CF 108, Box 161, Shubert Archive). Shubert approves the lower number, as it will help to cut costs in the final weeks of the tour. A week later, Shubert follows up on the issue by writing to Reed, "I am glad that you are getting all of these fairies out of the show. I do not want any more of *that class of people* in any of our attractions" (9 May 1913, my emphasis). Although Shubert avoids the word faggot, like Reed he bundles them together as a "class of people" to be excluded, and, as with the parenthetical use of "sissies" in *A Dictionary of Criminal Slang*, Shubert's use of "fairies" places faggots as gender deviants.

These early appearances of faggot as it approaches its contemporary sense suggest (1) inverted gender performance, (2) a "class" of persons performing in this way, (3) the vilification and exclusion of these gender outlaws, and (4) certain permissible stagings, insofar as they

could be controlled and limited (the crowd's laughter producing this as an exception and thereby giving it its regulatory function). The first cluster of preexistent usages of the word suggests associations of uselessness or conditional use-value (as placeholders). The second cluster associates racist violence that carries the threat of death for deviation from the white masculine norm. These combine to explain the negativity invoked by the term, which surpasses other adjacent terms for gender deviance, such as "fairie." C.J. Pascoe suggests that "faggot" is used more frequently among white adolescent boys, and the early usages recorded in the *OED* appear to pertain exclusively to gender deviance. In *Gay New York*, however, George Chauncey notes that the term might have been used most frequently among queer persons of color in the early twentieth century (15). It is imperative to note the racializing function of the term in its contemporary usage. A faggot is therefore not merely a gender deviant but a betrayer of the species (a "race traitor"). A faggot stands for degeneration and death, even without fire and faggot punishment, since it produces a social blockage in reproductive futurity. This is doubly true for gender deviants of color, whose intersectional position places them at higher risk of becoming the victims of actual violence (in contrast, as we will see in Chapter 2, to David's imagined feeling-under-threat).

Coming Undone: Lines of Escape

It is at this juncture that I want to make a turn that will suggest faggot's line of flight into faggotry. One who is cast out by interpellation as "faggot" is asked to exert greater effort than any other to regain an inside position. Deleuze and Guattari would call this paranoid and fascistic. Conversely, and at the same time, one who is cast out is better positioned than any other to follow the freeing trajectory and to break from the fascicular sociality. Deleuze and

Guattari would call this the schizoid, revolutionary function of faggotry. I am wary of idealizing the latter, or of becoming overly critical of the former. Neither stands fully apart from the other, and each refers to those persons who embody cracks in the gendered, racialized, and sexualized foundation of sociality.

The production of faggots occurs along a gender-normative line. The two trajectories, or "lines of flight/escape" in Deleuze and Guattari's terminology, are two general responses to finding oneself at a faggot-interstice, ejected from gender normativity. First, there is the reactionary trajectory. The "escape" that this line effects is an escape from danger through return to safety and reintegration within the social administration of normative gender. Cast out from masculinity, these reactionary faggots push harder than anyone else to achieve social recognition as masculine men. Larry Kramer's *Faggots* (1978) is a satire of this trajectory, and a great deal of writing employing the term faggot in this way was produced contemporaneously to that novel, during the 1970s. Faggots from the second trajectory called faggots from this first trajectory "clones" because of their efforts to achieve a masculine ideal through expositions of virility and body-building.[12] In opposition to this trend, faggots from the second trajectory formed such groups as "Fags Against Fags" (and its offshoot, "Fags Against Facial Hair"; an article on the group [from *The Soho News* 16 July 1980] notes it might have been called "Fags Against Biceps"), "Faggot Effeminists," "Faggots' International Revolutionary Movement" (or "FIRM"), and "Flaming Faggots" (NYPL Manuscripts and Archives). In particular, a number of

[12] This appears to follow certain earlier usages of faggot: The *Salem Gazette* reports a court case in which a witness was asked to identify a stolen faggot (here meaning a bundle of wood), and the judge "said . . . 'Why how can he prove that's the same faggot—one faggot's as much like another as one egg's like another'" (26 June 1838).

the groups reclaimed "faggot" as a self-identifier while emphasizing resistance to gay normativity and its institutionalization in the early Gay Pride Marches of the 1970s.

The first trajectory forms a line of flight from the "closet" to homonormativity. The second trajectory is less concrete, less singular, and less easily summarized, precisely because it does not react against the expulsion from gender normativity by pushing for reinclusion but rather follows the propulsive force of that expulsion outwards—wherever that might lead a given person. It might usefully be portrayed as a series of cracks and fissures that open up along the fault lines these faggots straddle (between man and woman, Black and white, etc.). Where the "escape" of the first trajectory is a reincorporation, the second trajectory's "escape" is from the technologies whose deployment manages gender, race, and sex as mutually exclusive binary formations. Yet neither trajectory leads to a separate "outside." The first trajectory reinvests itself in normative gender performance, returning to an inside, while the second produces itself interstitially and across genders. The second trajectory produces moments of an "outside"—ecstatic moments—when persons fall between and across the categories, disrupting their coherence. But categories shift dynamically to reincorporate (or further expel) transgressions, and the lines of escape return—to be followed out once again.

The American production of faggots, unintentional and haphazard as it was, brought with it revolutionary possibilities quite contrary to the normative function it was performing. As I began to research texts that included references to faggots, I found that the radical potential I had located did not correspond to historical record. How could it be that, some 65 years after the term's first appearance in its contemporary sense, Kramer's satire on faggots would be necessary to counter their hyper-masculine investments? Why, if faggots held this revolutionary

potential and were already being "classed" together (despite the intentional isolation of constitutive exclusion), did they not materialize as a revolutionary movement? Some few did, as the existence of groups like FIRM and Faggot Effeminists suggests. My deidealization (to borrow a term developed by Kadji Amin in *Disturbing Attachments*) of what had been a utopian fantasy brought with it a nuance to my subsequent research: some faggots were revolutionary, in limited times and places but never completely or coherently.[13] It is not contradictory to say that faggots were and are revolutionary despite the absence of a corresponding revolution. In order to maintain this distinction between revolutionary and reactionary without succumbing to idealizing or paranoid tendencies, I want to reiterate that these trajectories are not, in actual fact, isolated from one another, nor are they the exclusive options. Rather, they provide a useful map on which I can situate my literary analyses of the subsequent chapters.

One final linguistic-genealogical element will help to express the distinction between these trajectories. The faggot served as a fable for strength in unity, much like the infamous Fascist parties claimed in the twentieth century. Both terms mean "bundle," and they share etymological lineage. The "faggot's fabled strength" appears in early American settler-colonists' sermons, Jonathan Swift's poetry, and abolitionist debates about the strength of the United States' union. In the seventeenth century, William Bridge draws on the faggot-fable to describe the strength of Christian community: "who can break a faggot where the sticks are joined together by the common Band? but if the sticks be parted, how easily are they all broken?" (17).

[13] Amin writes, "Deidealization deexceptionalizes queerness in order to analyze queer possibility as inextricable from relations of power, queer deviance as intertwined with normativity, and queer alternatives as not necessarily just alternatives" (10).

Early in the eighteenth century, Jonathan Swift composed a poem about the fractured state of the king's court. In his response, he employs much the same metaphor and explicitly conjoins that fable with the fabled Roman fasces (the faggot-fable fits into a familial metaphor, while the fasces-fable returns the poem to its political impetus). Confronted with the problem of imminent Civil War near the middle of the nineteenth century, James Russell Lowell took up the fable in a different direction, arguing that tying the cord too tightly would only cause the faggot to break into pieces: "Mr. Webster repeats everywhere Æsop's fable of the bundle of rods, and he might select a very handsome fagot as an illustration. . . . But if he has ever been into a shop he must have seen the pack-thread snap by being too tightly drawn around the parcel, and perhaps it might profit him to turn over in his mind this little fact in connection with the fable. . . . If we are to live we must grow. The oak-tree planted in the flower-pot, as Goethe says of Hamlet, must burst it or die" (203). The faggot, in this fable, stands for strength, but only up to a point (beyond which constriction proves counterproductive).

The faggot-fable provides a way of thinking about the trajectories I presented above. In the first case, the reactionary trajectory toward homonormativity builds the strength of the masculinist-patriarchal sociality to the extent that it succeeds in bundling persons along binary gender lines. The bundled herd produces an outcast and subjects that "faggot" to its whims, who (in the first trajectory) becomes the hart-string bundling the masculine herd ever more tightly. The second trajectory is like the bundle which tied too tightly bursts and scatters its pieces in all directions. Unlike those faggots from the first trajectory who react to this scattering, each time they are scattered, by reforming their fascistic unity (ever more insistently), practioners of faggotry feel the freedom of becoming so scattered. Severed from his familial

(Oedipal) and social inheritance, this second faggot embraces the freedom of disconformity and anarchic self-production. Not to replace the Oedipal Father with a father-substitute, but to allow the whole Oedipal regime to shatter.[14] Not to strive for reincorporation but to scatter with the wind and one's will.

Anarchivistic Method

Although faggot functions primarily as a derogation, I use faggotry to indicate the queer gathering of elements and performances which, in the prescribed social order, are prohibited or otherwise constrained. A faggot is ungendered, bi-gendered, or in any case non-binary, because they take up in themselves performances which have been disjoined from one another. Feminine here, masculine there; woman this way, man that way; faggot-confusion. Hence the revulsion, terror, and rejection of faggots, who at once uphold (in their being cast out) and threaten the social order which relies on strictly delineated genders. My study performs a kind of queer gathering in the manner of faggotry. I term this method anarchivistic, because although I gather an "archive" of faggotry it remains an anarchical and non-representative assemblage. This is a study of faggots, not from the "inside" (from which they are cast out, and in relation to which they are "deviant") but from the "outside." Problematically, for the

[14] The question of faggots is not, in my approach, an Oedipal question. Such an approach, which can be found in prominent gay American literary texts (e.g. Edmund White's *A Boy's Own Story*), could build a case for understanding a person's becoming faggot in terms of their relationships with their parent-figures. In Kramer's *Faggots*, for instance, Fred Lemish insistently presents his relationship with his father as a cause of his having become a faggot; at the same time, Lemish notes that one of his lovers had a loving and present father and blamed his mother; in each case, the triangulation of Daddy-Mommy-Me provides sufficient analytical structure for Lemish's self-questioning (57). This Oedipal triangulation proves useful for certain purposes, but these are not the concern of the present project. For a critique of this Oedipal triangulation, see Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*.

purposes of scholarship and scientificity, "outside" is not singular but many—there are many interstices and lines of flight that one might follow. The perversity of faggots is multiple; each moves according to their own distinct, queer rhythm.

Rather than studying those textual objects most flagrantly about faggots, I present a group of texts which outline interstices and form lines of flight along, across, and through which their readers might run to the freedom of faggotry. My readings suggest how one such reader finds themself resonating with the interstices such that they productively irrupt the social order. These texts have been selected for collective production of faggots and faggotry. I have not, in other words, selected those texts that most explicitly focus on faggots and faggotry. Larry Kramer's *Faggots* and Larry Mitchell and Ned Asta's *The Faggots and Their Friends Between Revolutions*, for instance, pertain directly to faggots and are well-suited for a depth-oriented study of faggots. Most of the texts I have selected do not contain any explicit reference to faggots or faggotry. Archives order artifacts according to select arch-principles (organization by subject, author, and keywords, for instance). Some artifacts touch one another that otherwise might not have shared place or time; others which had been together outside of the archive are separated and ordered apart from their already-relation. The same mechanism that enables some possibilities also constrains others. The natural collisions between texts that occur on personal bookshelves are prohibited in many archives. The national, temporal, and other boundaries that spring up to arrange connections between texts can be beneficial, but they facilitate shortcuts that can obscure more rigorous thinkings, more compelling arrangements, and greater readings of those texts. On the other hand, of course, these orders can help to maintain a consistent ground that allows conversation between different studies. By taking

"anarchives" as my guiding organizing methodology, in the place of arches and arboreal patterns, I have striven to maintain a balance between this project's intelligibility to others and its integrity for itself.

The consistent impulse to pursue research, reading, and writing about the word faggot might appear strange, given its cruel common usage. In some sense, the entire project is an engagement with the process by which such a "bad word" as *Faggot!* felt fundamentally true and right to this researcher despite its evident wrongness. I take this moment as an example of the "irruption of desire," to refer back to the dissertation's epigraph from Deleuze and Guattari. In this moment, what Muñoz calls the "then and there of queer futurity" breaks into the present, shattering the here and now's hold on imagination. Muñoz performs this shattering by announcing, "Queerness is not yet here" (1). Yet it can be sensed on the horizon and brushed up against. In response to Lee Edelman's *No Future*, Muñoz argues, "It is equally polemical [compared to arguing that queers have no future] to argue that we are not quite queer yet, that queerness, what we will really know as queerness, does not yet exist" (22). The "then and there of queer futurity" describes this polemical investment in a future that will have become queer in ways we do not now know. Along these lines, a first, deconstructive task of faggotry (according to schizoanalysis) is to embrace this shattering and to follow it into queerness. The generative tasks that follow are practices of queer gathering, taking up texts which for each reader uniquely resonates with some aspect(s) of their difference. This bundle need not be tied tightly together, nor could it—the pieces are too oblong, too disjunctive, too nonfascistic. Each faggot gathers in their own way those materials they find useful, comforting, life-giving, exciting, ...—

productive of their perverse desires. These perverse desires, in response to Deleuze and Guattari, are where the new irruption of desire will come from.

These texts form an anarchive of faggotry, in the sense that each draws attention to and produces interstitial resonances with distinct aspects of the two trajectories for faggots and faggotry. As I have said, only one of the four texts which I read in subsequent chapters even contains the word faggot. My approach has been to gather literary texts whose reverberations—within themselves, in scholarly writing on them, and between myself and all these texts—produce particular, partial breakages that open onto faggotry's lines of escape. Escape from the social ordering of desires pertaining to oneself and others; escape to the personal production of queer desires. Each chapter features literary analysis of a twentieth-century, American "novel" (either so called in its name or as descriptive of its genre) that produces, in various ways, what I call faggotry. Although the word faggot appears only in *Naked Lunch*, the response to finding oneself a faggot can be found in each of them, in distinct ways.

My chapters are arranged not chronologically but according to the part of the story they tell. With the above phenomenon of twentieth-century American faggots in mind, this dissertation presents literary criticism of both trajectories described. Chapters 1 and 2 detail the fracturing experience of queer interpellation as faggot, including the social and personal obstacles that obstruct erotic flows of these particular queer selves. Chapters 1 and 2 also analyze the formation of masculine American sexuality during the 1950s and 1960s, in the period leading up to what is called "the sexual revolution." Both chapters consider the centripetal compulsions of "faggot" interpellation, in addition to the centrifugal expulsions of faggotry. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the latter, centrifugal energies as they open the way for

nonbinary sexual orientation and gender performance. Chapters 3 and 4 detail the suturing and healing that can lead a faggot from pain into pleasure, not by resisting queer interpellation but by allowing it to break down the social constructions of contemporary gender, race, and sexuality. Where resistance leads to reification and entrenchment in the formation of homonormativity (see Chapter 2 in particular), non-resistance leads to freedom and an open future unbounded by the terrors of trauma and social constructions of how one ought to perform oneself. I conclude with an epilogue, "Coming Together," which returns to the question of utopian futurity.

In Chapter 1, William S. Burroughs's fragmentary novel *Naked Lunch* articulates biopolitics and the meaning of normalizing regimes for those who do not conform. Through close readings of particular fragments within the text, and consideration of the text's production as a whole, I contend that sexuality is produced as an imagistic, fantasy-based program (a simulacrum). I employ Burroughs's terminology of "junkism" as an analytic of power in general and sexuality specifically. The figure of the faggot appears explicitly in the text, and I take his commentary on the making of faggots as critical analysis in its own right. I consider popularly discussed scenes from the novel in the context of more obscure fragments that suggest the racializing function of faggot-production. While *Naked Lunch* has had extensive treatment in literary criticism, no study makes this particular approach around the faggot (and sexuality in general). My work contributes a queer reading of Burroughs's novel that serves as a jumping off point for each subsequent chapter. Burroughs answers the question of utopian possibility with a defiant negative; yet his work creates slippages and breaks, flows and stoppages that might open onto a utopian horizon.

In Chapter 2, James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* tells a story about the internal obstacles that keep one self from fully encountering another. I read Baldwin's novel as a repetition of a single decision on the part of the white male protagonist, David: to flee from vulnerability at all costs. I argue that Baldwin's novelistic presentation falsely suggests a psychoanalytic reading, and I instead interpret the text schizoanalytically. While the text can be read psychoanalytically, the schizoanalytic reading prioritizes the social aspects of David's fear and homophobia instead of attributing his affect to his relationship with his parents. In particular, gender deviance and racialization terrify David. From his earliest memories to his last action in the novel's pages, David projects his desires onto Others and disavows responsibility for his own life. The text ends ambivalently, with David shredding a letter, part of which blows back onto him. In my reading, I suggest that the textual markers indicate that David has not really changed and that he is proto-homonormative.

Richard Bruce Nugent's "Smoke, Lilies & Jade: A Novel," which I analyze in Chapter 3, imagines pleasure without final satisfaction or limitation. Alex, Nugent's narrator, ponders Oscar Wilde's assertion that "a cigarette is the most perfect pleasure, because it always leaves one unsatisfied." With this reference to Wilde, I argue that Nugent disorients sexuality from the telos of orgasm. Unsurprisingly, the text ends without narrative closure. The central conflict concludes with Alex refusing to choose between his two loves, Adrian (a white man) and Melva (a Black woman), instead realizing that "one can love two at the same time." The ellipses that Nugent employs extensively in the text provide formal markers of this refusal either to finalize his thoughts or to satisfy his desires in a way legible to sexuality. With his use of ellipses, I contend, Nugent produces textually what Deleuze and Guattari describe as a Body without

Organs—the ground for desire. Alex chooses the pleasures of faggotry, and Nugent offers his reader a model for intercourse without sexuality. Nugent's writing disorients its reader in terms of gender, race, sexuality, and syntax. This chapter joins a few significant publications that treat Nugent's peculiar aesthetics and sexualities.

In Chapter 4, Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red* inverts monstrosity such that the symbols of monstrosity become the conditions for freedom. My analysis addresses the trauma Carson's protagonist undergoes and his preexisting identification as "monster" in terms of the production of faggots. In both Burroughs and Baldwin, the faggot-characters respond to this interpellation by passing it off to another person. Carson's Geryon, on the other hand, accepts and sits with the truth of his redness. Carson portrays Geryon as a character who eventually embraces his monstrosity and breaks from abusive patterns, becoming his own quasi-cause and finding freedom with the very wings that have set him apart as Other. Against the usual order of things, in which the blue Herakles is heroic and kills the red monster Geryon, in this telling Geryon survives the attempt (staged sexually) and inverts the scene. In this way, Carson's text renders the irruptive potential of faggotry. This chapter offers a unique approach to a text that has tended to be considered in terms of hybridity and inverted literary conventions.

Finally, in my conclusion, "Coming Together," I draw on Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia* and Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* to contend that faggots need not disavow the negativity of the word, faggot, in order to overcome the obstacles to their erotic life-flows produced by that word. Rather, faggots become free persons precisely be embracing their faggotry and allowing themselves to irrupt the gendered, racialized, and sexualized expectations that would hold them in constant fear of judgment. Freed from the constraints of predetermined roles, faggots

can choose which attributes, which performances, which clothing, which speech to join in their person. I argue that queer bundling—faggotry—opens one to freedom. Countering the cultural fetishization of genitals, for instance, faggots can imagine all kinds of intercursive configurations that bring ecstatic pleasure. This is "The Queer Freedom of Faggotry."

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Chapter 1—"'*Wouldn't you?*' Yes you would": Biopolitics, Sexuality, and the Threat of Difference in *Naked Lunch*

> A. J. turns to the guests. "Cunts, pricks, fence straddlers, tonight I give you—[. . .]"
>
> Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* 80

William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* is a peculiar text. Situated between two paratexts that address drug use and rehabilitation is a fragmentary and duplicitous "literary" section. The Appendix, entitled "Letter from a Master Addict to Dangerous Drugs," details Burroughs's use and analysis of many drugs, including a long section on opiates and cures from opiate addiction. This is the most stable section of *Naked Lunch*. The Introduction, "Deposition: Testimony Concerning a Sickness," mirrors the focus of the Appendix with sustained attention given to treating "The Sickness," opiate addiction. But if Burroughs was most nearly clinical in the Appendix, his writing in the Introduction is free and bold, filled with unapologetic asides. He proclaims his expertise and proceeds to describe the conflict between "Pushers" and "junkies" in flamboyant terms that approach the language found in the novel proper. For instance, he proposes an "Algebra of Need" according to which this world operates: "In the words of total need: '*Wouldn't you?*' Yes you would. You would . . . do *anything* to satisfy total need" (xxxvii). As in the Appendix, Burroughs's Introduction discusses cures to junk addiction. But then his focus turns to defending some passages which were denounced as "pornographic" (to which I will return below), and suddenly his voice shifts over entirely into the voice of the

"text itself." Because the different parts of the text are so entangled, critics have suggested reading the paratexts as integral to the text itself.[15]

What unifies the integral parts is a critique of junk, and what is at stake for Burroughs is a cure for junk sickness, yet the critique of junk flickers in and out across the pages of the text. The most stable textual element comes last, in the Appendix, followed by the Introduction. The least stable is the novel proper. While compelling arguments can be made interpreting the paratexts (see below), *Naked Lunch* is uninterpretable. Fragmentary observations pull in different directions and resist even the unifying coherence of opposition or contradiction. Phrases are repeated in different situations by distinct characters with divergent effects. *Naked Lunch* tells no story taken as a whole (although it tells many stories, even the same story many ways). Some parts might be skimmed over or excised altogether to give the semblance of story, but *Naked Lunch* resists the kind of interpretation that would make of it a coherent whole. Only the fact of its publication as a novel renders it whole, and even then the lines between the "text itself" and its "paratext" are far from clear. Yet, *Naked Lunch* is a novel. Near the novel's end, Burroughs instructs the reader that the novel may be read in any direction—outside in, back to front, leaping side to side. This is because the real form of the novel is not in its coherence as a whole (even a fragmentary whole) but in the non-fascicular scenes, disrupted moments, and fragmentary sentences which only incidentally (by the incidence of the novel's publication as such) form a single text.

[15] In general, the integral text includes only those textual elements composed by Burroughs himself: introduction(s), novel, and appendix.

Naked Lunch plays two important roles in this dissertation. First, and most generally, it does the schizoanalytic work of destruction for the field of sexuality. I will argue that the field of sexuality can be identified on the novel's pages in Foucauldian terms as "deployed." This deployed sexuality comes undone (is destructed or deterritorialized, in Deleuze and Guattari's language) with Burroughs's extension of the "junk" critique to include all forms of power—including sexuality and biopower. My case for this point relies on the aforementioned pornographic scenes as well as the biopolitical parties Burroughs imagines.

Secondly, and most specifically, *Naked Lunch* contains references to faggots, faggot formation, and the impossibility of faggotry's freedom. Burroughs's faggot is caught in the web of sexuality deployed. This provides a foundation for understanding faggots in the middle of the twentieth century. It also marks the "territorialization" (in Deleuze and Guattari's term) of sexuality with concrete reference to the focus of my study, faggots. The impossibility of queer freedom provides a marker for faggots to overcome in subsequent chapters with their utopian imaginations.

With these two contributions to my dissertation, I engage postmodern theory and literary studies, Burroughs studies, and queer theory. My work intervenes in conversations about narrative interpretation of *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs's relation to queerness, and Burroughs's critique of biopolitics.

Fascinating the Text

Before turning to the parts of the text that play this role, contemporary debates necessitate further consideration of the text. Despite its fragmentation, the novel has a clear and recurrent focus: junkism, or the relations of power as between addict and pusher. For some

critics, this indicates that Burroughs's writing is fascicular—folding in on itself, ordered by a single logic. I contend that his focus in *Naked Lunch* is not fascicular but is rather rhizomatically extensive and inclusive. Burroughs takes "junk sickness" or opiate addiction as sharing a basic structure with bureaucratic, racialized, sexual, political, and other forms of power. These form a multiplicity irreducible to a single logic (despite Burroughs's comment to the contrary in the Introduction). My first task is to demonstrate that *Naked Lunch* gathers the energies of the "junk virus" only to redeploy them as the operative principles for power at large. I am concerned with understanding Burroughs's text as rhizomatic, at least for the duration of my reading.

I describe *Naked Lunch* as rhizomatic, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's use of the word, as a way of understanding the relationship between the "parts" (Introduction and Appendix paratexts, novel text) as well as between the fragments within the novel. A rhizome is most basically a root system. What makes it unique is that it spreads out as a multiplicity rather than growing in an arborescent manner. Rhizomes stand opposed, therefore, to arborescent root systems. Deleuze and Guattari describe the arborescent book as "the classical book." No one would accuse *Naked Lunch* of this designation. Next, Deleuze and Guattari describe the radicle or fascicular root: "This time, the principle root has aborted, or its tip has been destroyed; an immediate, indefinite multiplicity of secondary roots grafts onto it and undergoes a flourishing development" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 5). Like the rhizome, the fascicular root does not grow in a linear way; unlike the rhizome, the fascicular central root retains its significance to the subsequent growths. I draw attention to this possibility because Burroughs's later work does stand accused of fascicular writing (Schneiderman 192). Finally, then, "A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*" (*A Thousand*

Plateaus 25). A rhizome has no central root: "A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 9). Such is the case, I argue, with *Naked Lunch*.

The paratexts, as well as Grove Press's obscenity trial defense, seem to insist on a narrow interpretation of junk as opium.[16] Burroughs is clinical in his critique of what he calls the "*junk virus . . . public health problem number one of the world today*" (xli). His carefully technical description of junk as a "generic term for opium and/or derivatives including all synthetics from demerol to palfium," in the Introduction to Grove Press's American edition (1963), resonates all the more strongly with the inclusion in the Appendix of the aforementioned article Burroughs had published some years prior in *The British Journal of Addiction* (xxxvi).[17] The paratexts, as documented in literary scholarship, were added to the American edition as part of a legal defense strategy against the inevitable outcry protesting the novel's "obscenity."[18] In the

[16] There were two trials, one in Massachusetts and the other in Los Angeles, but only the former targeted the novel as such. The latter targeted booksellers over the text itself. This chapter refers to the Massachusetts trial of the book itself.

[17] Article first published 1956, vol. 53 no. 2.

[18] Taken simply as a preemptive legal defense strategy, the introduction turns the question from whether the novel was obscene (which Burroughs admits outright) to whether that obscenity brought with it any "redeeming social value." An initial, unfavorable ruling was handed down by Massachusetts Superior Court judge Eugene A. Hudson, who based his decision on "the gray area of redeeming social value" established in Roth v. United States (1957) (Goodman 177). Grove Press's lawyer Edward de Grazia appealed the ruling two days later (Goodman 235). Before Naked Lunch was ruled on a second time, the US Supreme Court handed down a decision on another obscenity case appealed from Massachusetts, against Putnam's publication of John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (orig. publ. 1749). In that decision, the court established a revised, three-part obscenity test. The third component stated that an obscene text must be "utterly without redeeming social value." As does Burroughs in his introduction, de Grazia argued that the offending passages were justified because they portrayed unflinchingly the horrors faced by an opium addict. With this new obscenity test, *Naked Lunch* was deemed to have social value and thus could not be censored.

Naked Lunch v. Massachusetts obscenity case, Edward de Grazia led the defense in emphasizing junk addiction as the ground of *Naked Lunch*'s meaning. The offending passages, de Grazia asserted, were justified because they portrayed unflinchingly the horrors faced by an opium addict. This interpretation works well from the publisher's perspective, where the horrors of drug addiction justified whatever obscene content appeared in the fragmented narrative. In Burroughs's words, "Since *Naked Lunch* treats this problem [of the 'junk virus'], it is necessarily brutal, obscene and disgusting" (xli).

Even without this paratextual heavy-handedness, one might argue that the novel as published earlier in France by Olympia Press (1959) facilitated an addict-oriented reading of the text. The novel itself begins and ends with the perspective of William Lee, under whose name Burroughs had published the formally autobiographical *Junkie* (1953).[19] As the eponymous and pseudonymous junkie of Burroughs's first novel, Lee provides the interpretive ground on which many scholars and critics of *Naked Lunch* have suggested understanding the fragmentary, nonlinear, and unsettling text that falls between—even though Lee's perspective drops out for much of the intermediary text. For instance, in Paton's analysis, "The hallucinations [Lee] suffers during withdrawal comprise the majority of the novel's plot, and since his deranged consciousness is the medium for the action, there is nothing that cannot be represented" (50). William Lee's bookending (that is, book-concluding and book-beginning) appearances in *Naked Lunch* seemed evidence to some critics of the entire novel's situation in the drug-addled mind of a junk addict—William Lee. This is a fascicular interpretation of *Naked Lunch*.

[19] Lee also appears in Burroughs's second novel, *Queer*, which was not published until 1985.

The ground of opium addiction "suggest[s] a secondary 'reality' to the novel strangely in line with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's well-known critique of Burroughs' later work as *fascicular* (opposed to *rhizomatic*). In this argument, the 'order' of the world reaffirms itself despite the apparent madness of the text" (Schneiderman 192). The double bookends—textual and paratextual; pseudonymous and autobiographical—provide a clear interpretative framework within which the troubling aspects of Burroughs's prose can find a socially sanctioned ground of meaning. As Burroughs states unambiguously in his Introduction, this ground is drug addiction and its concomitant terrors.

Nevertheless, I contend that *Naked Lunch* is rhizomatic and that this understanding best situates the fragments and scenes pertaining to sexuality and faggots analyzed below. All is connected, in a rhizome, and a textual analysis of a rhizomatic text cannot fall back on a "ground" of interpretation since the ground is the entire sprawling text as if on a broadsheet (*A Thousand Plateaus* 9). The apparent "order" offered by the double bookends serves to challenge the careful reader's trust in formally and paratextually "spoonfed" interpretations as a result of the slippage between Burroughs's voices. In my analysis, *Naked Lunch* breaks down the totalizing interpretive paradigm provided in the double bookends, yet it does so without losing its integrity as a text. Burroughs's voices—in the Introduction, in different narrative sections of the novel, and as Master Addict in the Appendix—merge and mix, becoming "in places, indistinguishable" (Loranger 13). In other words, the distinction between addict and expert, offensive and descriptive, breaks down on the novel's own (para)textual terms.

While their highly motivated application might seem to be grounds for bracketing the paratexts as separate from the novel itself, I agree with those scholars who suggest that the line

between text and paratext cannot be so easily drawn. Loranger notes, "Once the 'Deposition' [the Introduction] was added to *Naked Lunch* it became enough part of the text to be as often cited in critical studies as the narrative itself" (14). In contrast to those critics who rely on the paratexts for a ground of meaning, I contend that the paratexts break down in relation to the novel itself. The paratexts do not retain their usual privileged position, but can be read whenever one wants, as part of the text proper. In the "Atrophied Preface" that appears near the end of *Naked Lunch* (within the novel as such), Burroughs instructs the reader that the text can be cut across and read in whatever order, read out from in or in from out: "The Word is divided into units which be all in one piece and should be so taken, but the pieces can be had in any order being tied up back and forth, in and out fore and aft like an innaresting sex arrangement" (207). In other words, Burroughs invites his reader to play with the words just as he has, chopping things up and reordering them.

A critic commented a few years after the obscenity trial that the challenge "was to 'prove to the court's satisfaction that *Naked Lunch* is a book' (McConnel 93)" (qtd. in Glass 180). Among other problems, the novel includes two prominent "pornographic" scenes that Barney Rosset, the president of Grove Press, suggested omitting. With such a fragmentary text, who was to say which scenes were integral and which might be excised? Burroughs's challenge (as opposed to the challenge facing Grove Press) was to bind together the fragmentary and diffuse texts precisely in their perpetual breaking-down. As Ioren Glass writes, "Rosset and Burroughs essentially let *Naked Lunch* accrete and absorb its proliferating paratexts," which seems to have been a successful strategy for clearing *Naked Lunch* of its obscenity charge (Glass 181). But I

want to add that it also let Burroughs's text include a number of scenes that have only an oblique connection to junk. Burroughs slipped these scenes past the censor (see below).

Furthermore, if it is true that Burroughs invests in the novel's promotion as an expert study of junk addiction, it is equally true that Burroughs conjoins junk addiction with a host of other mechanizations of power and biocontrol. The question of power comes down, finally, to text and reader (not author and text, as Cronenberg's 1991 film about *Naked Lunch* suggests). Burroughs's text undermines itself—and its author—with such alacrity that its reader is left with a simple choice: read and interpret for yourself, or recognize in yourself the operation of another's will. I agree with Bolton's assessment, that "The challenge for readers and critics of Burroughs is to cease relying on external frames through which to contextualize his narratives and, instead, to create contexts spontaneously during the act of reading" (54). Along similar lines Hilfer suggests, "The action of *Naked Lunch* is, quite simply, the moment by moment relation of narrator and reader" (253). The novel's mythological production and publication provide over-inscribing frames with which to constrain *Naked Lunch*'s interpretation and effect. Drawing on prominent Burroughs critic Oliver Harris, Jarvis argues that, "even before it was published, 'an image of *Naked Lunch* would always precede the real thing and, for the image-hungry, replace it altogether'" (Jarvis 183). The challenge is to resist these images and encounter the text on one's own.

To summarize my analysis of the interpretive foundation, the limited sense of junk-as-opium is not sustained even through the course of Burroughs's Introduction. His "Deposition" opens onto rather than closes down the adjacent discursive fields which *Naked Lunch* critiques every bit as much as opiates (Burroughs xxxvi). Junk functions as a strategic conjunction to

describe a technique of power also operative in politics, media and entertainment, science, and sexuality (among other fields). As Loranger writes, "Given, too, that the non-narrative material takes the form of traditional literary or scholarly apparatus which *Naked Lunch* incorporates into its very substance . . . , one might argue that *Naked Lunch* implicates present and future notions of textuality and authorship in its catalogue of addictions, and academic culture in its satire of authoritarian institutions. Even the textual scholar's desire for a stable artifact identifiable as *Naked Lunch* is implicated" (21). Burroughs's "novel" compiles fragmentary observations, partial cut-scenes, and notes toward systematic critiques never fully developed. Whiting writes: "Set between the dry and detached scientific analyses that frame the book, the fragments and routines were locally coherent (if utterly fantastic) but exceedingly difficult to synthesize into a coherent whole" (158). Despite this difficulty, and despite the shifting signified indicated by *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs succeeds in binding together the fragmenting pieces in a way that fascinates readers without thereby becoming fascicular. The rhizomatic result is that the critique of the junk virus spreads out along multiple lines without providing a central ground for interpretation to fall back on. In the next sections, I analyze in particular the text's critiques of sexuality, biopower, and the production of faggots.

"Death Spurts" and the Genital Fetish

> Every technobody, including a dead technobody, can unleash orgasmic force, thus becoming a carrier of the power of production of sexual capital.
>
> Preciado, *Testo Junkie* 45

> The rhizome . . . is a liberation of sexuality not only from reproduction but also from genitality.

Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 18

I want to situate those passages in *Naked Lunch* that were called pornographic on the terms of the deployment of sexuality and the concurrent discursive proliferation and material condensation of "sex." Michel Foucault describes "sex" as "the [purported] explanation for everything" (*The History of Sexuality* 78). It is with the notion of "sex" that we are instructed, as sexual subjects, "there is where the truth is; go see if you can uncover it" (79). At the core of this conversation is the question of power and knowledge production, which does not approach an objective world and discover the facts concealed there but rather actively fabricates those facts and fetishes that provide the greatest technical control over phenomena.

Amidst this technicalizing of the world, sexuality is "one of those [elements in power relations] endowed with the greatest number of maneuvers and capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin, for the most varied strategies" (Foucault, *History* 103). These strategies are wide-ranging and trending toward comprehensive, in a biopolitical world, but they continue to rest on—even as they cover over, obscure, disguise, and objectify—a notion of "sex" that is not to be taken as a given. Foucault writes, "the notion of 'sex' made it possible to group together, in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures, and it enabled one to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle, an omnipresent meaning, a secret to be discovered everywhere: sex was thus able to function as a unique signifier and as a universal signified" (*History* 154). The objective foundation of "sex"—which was not found but founded—allowed an incoherent cluster of phenomena to be bundled together as the basis for disciplinary and regulatory controls.

In accordance with the production of genital organ-machines as the object-origin of sexuality, late-nineteenth century psychologists classified non-genital desires as pathological using the term "fetish."[20] According to Horkheimer and Adorno, a key Enlightenment myth takes rational "understanding" and the correlative production of facts as the overcoming of pre-rational investment in fetish objects.[21] In the rational order, *fact* is true and *fetish* false. Yet these words are not separate (Latour 272). Both signify truths neither entirely constructed nor entirely natural.[22] In other words, genital-oriented desires and drives were viewed as factual and true, while non-genital desires and drives were understood to be fetishistic and false.

Genitals become not only the "proper" objects of sexuality but also the quasi-cause of sex and gender, as the organs that produce desires and drives and provide the outlet for their movement. According to Arnold Davidson, three "stages" "divide the history of sexual perversion . . . depending upon a different understanding of what these diseases were thought to be diseases of" (3). The stages did not unfold chronologically but were often mixed together to varying degrees. The first two stages looked for anatomical abnormalities in the genital organs and then the brain. Neither could prove a connection between pathological anatomy and sexual perversion. The third stage looked instead for psychological explanation. Late nineteenth century psychiatry relied on the second and third stages, at the same time that non-genital

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[20] The currently used *DSM-V* continues to rest on this notion of genital-orgasmic primacy: "The term paraphilia denotes any intense and persistent sexual interest other than sexual interest in genital stimulation or preparatory fondling with phenotypically normal, physically mature, consenting human partners" (685).

[21] See Horkheimer and Adorno, "The Concept of Enlightenment." In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

[22] Latour invents the hybrid term "factish" to "take seriously the role of actors in all types of activities" (306). Genitals could indeed be described as a type of factish, but for simplicity and clarity I retain my use of fetish.

desires were classified as "fetishes." I interpret these stages as a dialectical movement, in which the genital foundation is not superseded or left behind but rather is reinscribed—reterritorialized—as the surface of the sexual field. *Naked Lunch* plays out this reterritorialization to an extreme limit.

By identifying and pathologizing non-genital modes of pleasure and desire as "fetishes," psychology traced the sexual foundation's negative or inverse, obscuring the foundation with its production. If "fetish" names a limit of what can be called sexuality (as pathological or deviant sexuality), the various possible configurations of "sex organs" purportedly form sexuality's primary organizing factor. The psychological classification of fetishes forms a negative dialectic in the following sense: fetish excludes non-genital orientation and intercourse but at the same time inscribes this exclusion on the sexual field, adjacent to (but not level with) genital orientation and intercourse, as a border between sexual and other kinds of intercourse.

The regulative function of "fetish" is to render genitals as the proper locus of desire (as both origin and aim). If genital-oriented, then proper; if non-genital-oriented, then perverse (and a complex network of intermediary and partial options). Sexual functions (drives, urges, acts, desires) reproduce intercourse as generated by and oriented toward genitals—or as perverse non-genital "fetishes"—to form the field of sexuality. This is to say that the historical production of sexuality is founded on the contemporaneous production of "sexual organs." Sexuality is "deployed," in Foucauldian terms, by drawing self-meaning from these pseudo-autonomous organs. Sexuality deployed, then, is the concrete attachment of discursive proliferation on the organ-machines of "sex." The discourses "about" sexuality thus contract

spatially, condensing onto genitals, at the same time that, as Foucault describes in his critique of the "repressive hypothesis," they are exploding and expanding.

In *Naked Lunch*, genitals have become autonomous organ-machines under a biopolitical regime. The two passages from *Naked Lunch* on which I will focus are entitled "Hassan's Rumpus Room" and "A. J.'s Annual Party." Between the two is a scene, "Campus of Interzone University," which will be considered in the next section. As Burroughs notes that these passages "were written as a tract against Capital Punishment in the manner of Jonathan Swift's *Modest Proposal*," there is some degree of confusion from before the beginning of the scenes in question about what they are portraying and what their author intended them to portray. Because this is the precise point in Burroughs's Introduction where it becomes clear that what began as an anti-junk defense of the novel's composition has become something else entirely, it is not at all clear to me how Burroughs's words are to be understood—even at "face value." Is "Capital Punishment," itself capitalized, to be understood as exclusively pertaining to the state's right to kill or let live? Or, since Burroughs does not actually identify the passages as satirical but rather states that their writing was "in the manner of" a text to which the word satire has become incidentally but irrevocably attached, is this another doubling-down of Burroughs's critical method of inviting readers in before returning them to themselves in chaotic self-reflection?

In order to answer this question, it is imperative to recall the overarching concern Burroughs has with power, biocontrol, and need. In these scenes, sexual desire becomes desire for death (the death of another); and sexual pleasure after death situates genitals as autonomous organ-machines functioning separately from the rest of the body. In the two "pornographic"

scenes, orgasm signifies not pleasure but control. For example, using "telepathic pictographs," the Mugwump tells "a slender blond youth" to prepare himself to "'make it all the way.'" The boy screams "No, no!" but, Burroughs writes, "Cocks ejaculate in silent 'yes'" (68). Later the Mugwump "snaps the boy's neck. A shudder passes through the boy's body. His penis rises in three great surges pulling his pelvis up, ejaculates immediately" (70). Once again, but this time in death, the boy reaches orgasm against his will—at the will of another. As Breu writes, the Mugwump is "Burroughs's science-fiction figuration of a posthuman being, completely transformed by addiction. . . . Functioning only in an economy at once pharmacological and sexual, its transformed flesh figuring the promise of transcending death through prolonging life, the Mugwump perfectly embodies the biopolitical economy in *Naked Lunch*" (Breu 212). Burroughs next imagines one boy fucking another, "forc[ing] jissom out the other cock in long hot spurts" (71). Bodies and bodily functions can be bought and sold, taken—commodified and consumed—but not withheld. "Wouldn't you [desire *x*]? Yes you would." Hassan screams "Freedom Hall here, folks! . . . "*Let it be! And no holes barred!!!*" (72). It is here that the passages can become properly pornographic, sans scare quotes. Every fantasy is imaginable, including racialized, nonconsensual, and other problematic fantasies.

As throughout both pornographic sections, sex workers perform these reluctance/nonconsent acts before exploitative crowds. These crowds pre-exist readers but also draw into question readers' relation to the scene. Breu writes, "The novel details a biopolitical culture of sexual predation in which the bodies of teenage youths have become the central commodity exchanged in the postcolonial, yet deterritorialized, space of Interzone. . . . In these [pornographic sections], non-consensual and consensual sex acts are staged for a predatory and

voyeuristic bourgeois audience" (209, 212). The figures in these passages take up racialized positions, in addition to the "teenage youths" Breu describes. A "Negro" tops a Chinese bottom (Burroughs 71). A "little blond French boy" is getting screwed "with red rubber cocks [by 'two Arab women with bestial faces']. The boy snarls, bites, kicks, collapses in tears as his cock rises and ejaculates" (72). "(The author has observed that Arab cocks tend to be wide and wedge shaped)" (71). Following an Aztec ceremony sacrificing a "Naked Youth," "Sharp protein odor of semen fills the air. The guests run hands over twitching boys, suck their cocks, hang on their backs like vampires" (73). Burroughs's account of sexuality is deeply tied up with race and gender. This entanglement extends to Burroughs's reader, with whom the text is in constant negotiation.

Both pornographic scenes consistently move toward "death spurt" spectacles like the Mugwump/youth example described above. Burroughs's insistence on the significance of capital punishment for understanding these passages is best understood in terms of the peculiar death-form found repeatedly in their pages. In each case, the action moves toward postmortem orgasm, figuring the peak of sexual pleasure as it occurs (like all bureaucratic operations, in triplicate) not during life but after death. Eburne writes, "As a kind of consumption, sex results not only in the 'absorption of liquid' but in the irreversible commodification of the (homo- or hetero-) sexual partner. Indeed, 'going all the way' in *Naked Lunch* means literally killing, using up the sexual 'object' in an ultimate ejaculatory moment" (Eburne 75). In his effort to render in literary form what he imagines "is on the end of that long newspaper spoon," Burroughs frames *Naked Lunch*'s "death spurt" spectacles in consumptive terms. In some cases a fee is required to

witness the event, while in others the event is mediated by its appearance on a film screen. In each case the reader is implicated as a literary consumer.

Burroughs's particular fascination with "death spurts," and particularly hanged persons' ejaculatory release, drives the narrative of the pornographic scenes. In an archival document titled "Prison Without Bars," Burroughs provides a more complete explanation of the phenomenon that appears in the sequence from *Naked Lunch* that I analyze below. In that document, a time-traveling journalist and his Mayan guide "flushed out this dcotr on the ksids [sic]" who tells them about an "operation . . . usually performed with ahnging yechniques [by which] the patients nekc is broekn and in orgasm he passes into the other subject [sic]" (Berg Collection, Box 5, Folder 5). The postmortem orgasm functions as a bridge between bodies, in Burroughs's mythical fantasy, rendering the genital organ-machines a liminal site governing the line between death and life. Without this mythical frame for the death-spurt phenomenon, *Naked Lunch* transcribes a film in which more than one character experiences postmortem orgasm—or rather, presumably, doesn't experience the orgasm that ripples across their bodies despite and because of their deaths.

A few pages into Burroughs's account of the "blue movie" that comprises nearly all of the section entitled "A. J.'s Annual Party," Johnny gets an unwilled erection and ejaculates after his threesome partners Mary and Mark hang him and snap his neck (respectively). With Mark's help, Mary "impale[s]" herself on Johnny's postmortem erection before "She bites away Johnny's lips and nose and sucks out his eyes with a pop. . . . She tears off great hunks of cheek. . . . Now she lunches on his prick. . . ." (88). After the necrophilic cannabalization of Johnny, Mark "leaps on [Mary], fucking her insanely" until Mary begs Mark to let her hang him too.

Mark agrees but immediately reneges, tying Mary up so he can retrieve the noose. In the moment before Mary's neck snaps, Mark "sticks his cock up her and waltzes around the platform and off into space swinging in a great arc. . . . 'Wheeeeee!' he screams, turning into Johnny. Her neck snaps. A great fluid wave undulates through her body" (89). Mary's postmortem orgasm suggests that the phenomenon is not limited according to gender-sex, despite many more male-bodied instances. Johnny's full replacement of Mark for the remainder of the film suggests that Mark really has become Johnny through the "death spurt" phenomenon. The revolting joins with the desirable to provoke critical engagement from the reader.

The scene goes on to render genitals as autonomous, plant-like organ-machines. Without breaking the blue film's frenetic pace, Johnny continues masturbating (and so on) until, finally, "great rank buds burst out [. . . .] a plant sprouting from his cock, [his] lips parted in the half-smile of a junky on the nod" (91). The genital organ-machine becomes the seat of life in a second sense with its production of plant life (echoed in other scenes from *Naked Lunch*). The life-death line loses its clear delineation, and human sentience becomes indistinguishable from the pure functionality of plant life or junkism. The final segment of the scene returns to the junky's perspective, and this segment's continuity with other sections of the novel troubles the line between fact and fiction even on the terms of Burroughs's nauseatingly anti-linear novelistic world. From the junky's perspective, we spiral through glimpses of three further orgasm-inducing hangings before Mark, Mary, and Johnny reappear paranthetically, "look[ing] tired and petulant," to take a bow (94). Consistent with the critiques advanced by *Naked Lunch* as

treatment for the "junk virus" and "Human Virus," Burroughs here blurs together discourses operating according to junk's Algebra of Need.

"Hassan's Rumpus Room" similarly is broken up because of junk. Hassan blames the interruption on A. J.: "Pictures of men and women, boys and girls, animals, fish, birds, the copulating rhythm of the universe flows through the room, a great blue tide of life. Vibrating, soundless hum of deep forest—sudden quiet of cities when the junky copes. A moment of stillness and wonder. Even the Commuter buzzes clogged lines of cholesterol for contact" (74). The order is inverted from the paratextual discussion above, with junkies here appearing inside a scene that is "about" something else. They disrupt the order of the scene, just as these scenes disrupt the order of junkism. As Hassan says, "You poopa my party!" (75). No discourse is allowed to maintain its primacy.

In these scenes, power over life mixes with power over death because the locus of life and death is not a sovereign, willing self but a disjunctive organ-machine. In the buildup to the final hanging in "A. J.'s Annual Party," a Sheriff advertises a boy's hanging-orgasm as a "serious and scientific exhibit concerning the locality of the Life Center. [. . .] Only one pound, one queer three dollar bill to see a young boy come three times at least—I never demean myself to process a eunuch—*completely against his will*. When his neck snaps sharp, this character will shit-sure come to rhythmic attention and spurt it out all over you" (93). The Sheriff's framing of his capitalistic spectacle holds together some of the key critiques of power formations in *Naked Lunch*. The Sheriff emphasizes the event's nonconsent. He will essentially exhibit his control over another's "Life Center." The self's will is irrelevant to the process, as genital organ-machines do not follow one's desires but can be manipulated into action by certain material

configurations not restricted by one's willing them or even one's remaining alive. Whose life is prolonged and how death is transcended continues to fall along racialized and gendered lines, even in the "post"colonial mashup of Burroughs's Interzone.

A. J. hails the observers who have gathered to witness the subsequent blue movie: "Cunts, pricks, fence straddlers" (80). Unlike the professor, in the section immediately preceding "A. J.'s Annual Party," who insists that his students present their genitals for confirmation of their maleness, A. J. here opens his remarks by revising the presumption, operative in the interpellation "Ladies and gentlemen," that his audience is comprised exclusively of a clearly delineated set of "men" and "women" from civil society. "Fence straddlers" fall neither on one side nor on the other side of the sex fence but on both sides at once. Like the professor's inversely functioning remark that he wants to be sure there are no "Transitionals" present at his lecture, fence straddlers are admitted to the party even in their discursive exclusion. While this passage is as unstable as any other, reterritorializing the genital fetish I identified earlier, Burroughs's text performs the anti-fascist work of troubling presumptions and playing with discomforting conjunctions.

Biocontrol and the "Fag-Baboon"

Signal flares of orgasm burst over the world.

Naked Lunch 189

Junkism, in its various forms in *Naked Lunch*, is not an individual but a social problem. Burroughs calls it interchangeably the "Junk Virus" and the "Human Virus." Like Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*, Burroughs is concerned with the question asked by Wilhelm Reich: why do the masses desire fascism? ("no, the masses were not deceived, they desired fascism,

and that is what has to be explained") (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 29, 257). For Burroughs, a virus shares with fascism its dependence on other life for replication. In its various social formations (the opium industry, the media-entertainment complex, and so on), the Virus shares a mode of operation.

Burroughs formulates this mode as an "Algebra of Need," which is the technology of power. It functions by producing needs that mechanize mass control—biocontrol, biopolitics. Unlike a disciplinary society in which one acts a certain way under threat of violence, biopolitics draws forth life-energy from persons which then becomes the force according to which their lives are regulated and administered. Burroughs's "Algebra," as I've already suggested, is simple. Needs are produced which provide both question and answer with regards to compelled conduct: "'*Wouldn't you?*' Yes you would" (Burroughs xxxvii). Need dictates life according to social channels that take on a life of their own, apart from any individual or institutional controllers. Whitings describes Burroughs's move in the following way: "In shifting the compulsion from an inner state of individual pathology to an outer conspiracy of forces, Burroughs removes the monstrous from an organic or developmental disruption of nature at the personal level and makes it a pervasive structural feature of the social system" (166). In this way, the disturbing features of Burroughs's writing become essential aspects of the social system under critique rather than exceptions or deviations.

The long scene entitled "The County Clerk," which follows Burroughs's most condensed discussion of biopolitics in the novel, concludes finally when

> Lee decide[s] to play his last card.
> "Mr. Anker," he said, "I'm appealing to you as one Razor Back to another," and he pulled out his Razor Back card, a memo of his lush-rolling youth.

> The County Clerk looked at the card suspiciously: "You don't look like a bone feed mast-fed Razor Back to me. . . . What you think about the Jeeeeews . . . ?"
>
> "Well, Mr. Anker, you know yourself all a Jew wants to do is doodle a Christian girl. . . . One of these days we'll cut the rest of it off."
>
> "Well, you talk right sensible for a city feller. . . . Find out what he wants and take care of him. . . . He's a good ol' boy." (160-161)

This, in a scene, is the connection between the "junk virus" and the "Human Virus." Each person through whom the chains of signification are extended (producing Faggots, Jews, and other Others) becomes infected by the Virus and incorporated into the fascistic social formation. Lee, who is trying to avoid eviction from his current residence, employs the method described by the professor earlier in the novel: he targets another in order to avoid getting fucked himself.

Burroughs has the professor draw a parallel between baboon sociality and the social position of faggots, which is of fundamental importance to my project: "'If a weaker baboon be attacked by a stronger baboon [the professor explains] the weaker baboon will either (a) present his hrump fanny I believe is the word, gentlemen, heh heh for passive intercourse *or* (b) if he is a different type baboon more extrovert and well-adjusted, lead an attack on an even weaker baboon if he can find one.'" A few lines later, "Frontier saloon: Fag Baboon dressed in little girl blue dress sings in resigned voice to tune of *Alice Blue Gown*: 'I'm the weakest baboon of them all'" (79). The "Fag Baboon" identifier is passed along a chain of signifieds until it comes to rest on the "weakest," most passive one.

The Faggot is the supremely dominated and penetrable, gendered and racialized and sexualized. This is the "natural" principle that accompanies the faggot's production: the faggot-name establishes the masculine hierarchy by the repeated displacement of the designation. One starts off the chain by calling another, whom he considers his "dominated," a faggot; this one

then calls the next, his own "dominated," a faggot; and so on, until at last the name comes to rest on the "Fag Baboon"—the least masculine or most racialized of all men, who will fail to pass the name on to another and will therefore be subjected to penetration. Like a game of "hot potato," only one loser is required in order for everyone else to feel they have won. The non-faggot's concern is to pass off the name, each time it is wielded in his direction, to a more compelling candidate for the masculine social collective's passive member (who in his passive designation gives to others their active status). This is the contemporary function of "faggots," and this constancy over the last half-century might go a long way in explaining the gender-normative shift in the gay imaginary.

One becomes complicit in this process even if one tries only to refuse the signifier. To refuse it, it must be passed on. Otherwise it is self-evident that the last, weakest, etc. has been found. While the treatment of the "Fag Baboon" seems disciplinary, each node along the way becomes incorporated into the biologic, in Burroughs's words, or biopower/biopolitics in Foucault's. For Foucault, who takes up the terms near the conclusion of his introduction to *The History of Sexuality*, sexuality serves as a "point where body and population meet" (*Society Must Be Defended* 251-252). Sexuality is an especially dense nexus through which power relations are distributed at the level of both the individual organism and the social body. According to Foucault, the deployment of sexuality accompanies a shift from the sovereign's "right to kill or let live" to a species-body's power over the life of its constituents (*Society* 246-247). In this way, Foucault describes sexuality as not only policed by power but also as a critical vessel for its dissemination, in the manner found in Burroughs's novel. Foucault over-emphasizes the role of sexuality, in my view, or rather under-emphasizes the role of racialization and gendering. In an

American text such as Burroughs's, there can be no question of an isolated "sexuality" existing without race and gender entangled with it. Both of the above, the Fag-Baboon and Lee/The County Clerk, serve as instances of imbricated gendered, sexualized, and racialized biocontrols.

I want to turn now to the political parties in Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*, each of which is a form of fascistic biopower. These four parties dissimulate their fundamental unity, Burroughs suggests, according to the Virus. In *Naked Lunch*'s Interzone, a place Yu describes as "the prototype for the orientalized postmodern city" (48), each of the four political factions Burroughs describes strives to assert itself over and against the others, although each makes this attempt in a different way. Burroughs describes Interzone as "The Composite City where all human potentials are spread out in a vast silent market" (96). In this interstitial place, humans are commodity potentials waiting to be consumed by one biopolitical party or another—if they haven't been already (this is frequently suggested and suspected). This language, of the "vast silent market" of human potentials, is resonant with Burroughs's formulation of the "silent frequency" of junk. Several key figures in the novel, including A. J., Hassan, and the narrator, are deeply invested in one or more political parties. Each figure has multiple back-stories, names, and alleged purposes, so determining who stands for which political faction and how they relate to one another would take a great deal of explanation that, I suspect, would in the end be inconclusive and contradictory, as the narrator tells us in advance it will be: "You can never be sure of anyone in the industry" (133). Although Burroughs clearly identifies and describes each party, he just as clearly insists that "the parties are not in practice separate but blend in all combinations" (151). They blend, too, with institutions and parastate apparatuses. Islam Inc., which appears frequently on the pages of the novel, does not have clear objectives

but is banned from Interzone for its disruptive record. The narrator explains, "Needless to say everyone involved [in Islam Inc.] has a different angle, and they all intend to cross each other somewhere along the line" (145). In other words, the parties are ideologically distinct but practically entangled in particular figures as well as institutions and place-times. As opposed as they appear to be, at times, the variations of fascism are themselves bundled in the obscured organizations that control various parts of the world.

The first two parties strive for physical identity. The Liquefactionists strive to incorporate everyone by absorbing difference: "the Liquefactionist program involves the eventual merging of everyone into One Man by a process of protoplasmic absorption" (133). Inversely, the Divisionists "cut off tiny bits of their flesh and grow exact replicas of themselves in embryo jelly" (149). These two are variants on social fascism or homonationalism. The bodies themselves share an identity, whether through absorption or division. Burroughs describes Divisionists as "moderates" (149) who "are all latent or overt homosexuals" (151). They produce replicas of themselves, spreading through division rather than subsumption. Burroughs's association of Divisionists with homosexuals presciently foreshadows the homonormative and homonationalist subcultures that appeared with increasingly clarity over the later part of the twentieth century. The Senders, who are not always clearly distinct from the first two, emit telepathic waves that control all who receive their signal. Receivers amplify the Sending, which is one-directional and moves from a single source. Each party engages in a fascistic struggle for control, which is to say that each strives to control as many bodies as possible under its social form. The Sender, according to a Bulletin from the fourth faction, the Factualists, "is not a

human individual [but] The Human Virus" (153). Division and Liquefaction are unsustainable for various reasons, often collapsing on their own if they achieve any monopoly.

It is finally Sending, which appears most similar to the impersonal operation of biopolitics, which poses the true threat in the Factualist-leaning account Burroughs provides in the novel's narration. The Senders incorporate bodies not through physical absorption or reproduction but, as a presenter explains "in a flat shopgirl voice" at the National Electronic Conference, through "biocontrol; that is control of physical movement, mental processes, emotional reactions and *apparent* sensory impressions by means of bioelectric signals injected into the nervous system of the subject" (147-148). The Conferents respond, "Louder and funnier!" before "trouping out in clouds of dust" (148). In what may be a meta-fictional moment, the Conferents fail to understand the severity of the problem and so are disappointed by the presentation style (the "sending"). Burroughs's Introduction returns, at this point in the novel, as at once a warning and treatment plan. Rather than the "junk virus" of which he spoke in the introduction, Burroughs writes in very similar phrasing of the Human Virus:

> (All viruses are deteriorated cells leading a parasitic existence. . . . They have specific affinity for the Mother Cell; thus deteriorated liver cells seek the home place of hepatitis, etc. So every species has a Master Virus: Deteriorated Image of that Species.)
>
> The broken image of Man moves in minute by minute and cell by cell. . . . Poverty, hatred, war, police-criminals, bureaucracy, insanity, all symptoms of The Human Virus.
>
> *The Human Virus can now be isolated and treated*. (153)

Despite the clear and optimistic tone of this statement, Burroughs does not go on to explain, in so many words, how it is to be isolated and treated. Rather, it is up to the reader to make the assessment and initiate treatment.

The novel offers multiple perspectives for approaching this question, including the narrator and Doctor Benway. The narrator is introduced on assignment for Islam Inc. to engage the services of Doctor Benway. Although Benway is neither the narrator nor the protagonist, his words often echo Burroughs's speculative paratexts. Doctor Benway is introduced as "a manipulator and coordinator of symbol systems, an expert on all phases of interrogation, brainwashing and control" (Burroughs 20). Benway systematically substitutes techniques that, in the terms of Foucault's work, I would associate with discipline and anatomo-politics, in favor of their biopolitical counterparts. Not brutality but "prolonged mistreatment"; not "deliberate attack" but "deserv[ing] *any* treatment he receives because there is something (never specified) horribly wrong with him." Perhaps most importantly, Benway concludes his soliloquy on biocontrol, "The naked need of the control addicts must be decently covered by an arbitrary and intricate bureaucracy so that the subject cannot contact his enemy direct" (Burroughs 21). Although Benway is figured as a villain from the start, in this way, he mediates the techno-scientific discourse of biopolitical medicine and social control for the reader of *Naked Lunch*—further insisting that the reader take responsibility for their own interpretations over and against the perspectives of author or antagonist.

In response to this relationship between reader and text, Burroughs writes that *Naked Lunch* is "a How-To Book" about how to escape. The text "demands Silence from The Reader. Otherwise he is taking his own pulse" (203). Escape is possible: "Cure is always: *Let go! Jump!*" (201). The "Crime [is] Separate Action," "the crime of separate life" (202). Burroughs's project is resonant with Horkheimer and Adorno, who wrote that "The relentless unity of the culture industry bears witness to the emergent unity of politics. . . . Something is provided for everyone

so that no one can escape; differences are hammered home and propagated" (97). For Burroughs, however, it is the space between this illusory difference that produces slippages. Doctor Benway explains, "'That's the sex that passes the censor, squeezes between bureaus, because there's always a space *between*, in popular songs and Grade B movies, giving away the basic American rottonness, spurting out like breaking boils, throwing out gobs of that un-D. T. [Undifferentiated Tissue] to fall anywhere and grow into some degenerate cancerous life-form, reproducing a hideous random image'" (121). The distinction between A and B films, like other socially managed differences, dissimulates a more fundamental shared trait ("the basic American rottonness"). There is no outside. But there is a way through. Benway suggests that the way forward is not to resist the system directly, but rather to play the system on its own terms—by utilizing as lines of escape the interstices that inevitably form between structures, institutions, and moralistic codes.

Burroughs is passing multiple censors at once, in my reading. Not only does he succeed, by relying on Grove Press's heavy-handed and systematic defense, in publishing his critique of the "junk virus"; he also succeeds at circumventing Grove Press's efforts to censor his critical extension of "junk" from opiates to power as such. He does this not by resisting but by accepting the lines of propagated difference described by Horkheimer and Adorno and working the gap(s) between them. As Whiting writes, Burroughs negotiates "the rules of [monstrosity's] iterability" in the novel (Whiting 147).

To take a specific example from the novel, Burroughs incorporates a pseudo-scholarly analysis of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" into his "pornographic" fragments. Formally, the section entitled "Campus of Interzone University" falls between the

two most evidently pornographic sections, "Hassan's Rumpus Room" and "A. J.'s Annual Party." Following the professor's rambling introductory remarks, which range from an American "Nigra" lynching at "The Old Court House" to a parody of the "pervert" in Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, he begins by ensuring that only "'*male humans*'" are present; "'positively no Transitionals in either direction will be allowed in this decent hall. Gentlemen, present short arms'" (78). As the scene began with a description of the gap between students and lectern, the professor's remarks are rendered suspect on the scene's own terms—all is allowed to pass here, how could such a regulation be upheld? Yet his students obey his order and "wearily unbutton their flies" to demonstrate their observable possession of male genitals, not unlike the reverse procedure intended to ensure no men were competing as women in the Cold War Olympics (78). In typical fashion for the novel, what ensues does not follow a narrative development, remain geographically situated, or even maintain a coherent conceptual focus. Rather, the slim degree of coherence that does exist—in this case, a lecture on Coleridge's poem—serves to gather together disparate and potentially otherwise unpublishable fragments. Unlike the fascicular bundling described above, this thread is one of many connected but heterogeneous threads that form a rhizomatic text.

Simulacra and Stimulation (No Escape for Carl)

> One might then believe in liberated desires, but ones that, like cadavers, feed on images. Death is not desired, but what is desired is dead, already dead: images.
>
> Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 337

In one of his many digressions, Doctor Benway suggests that he knows how to "'make a square heterosex citizen queer with this angle . . . that is, reinforce and second his rejection of

normally latent homosexual trends—at the same time depriving him of cunt and subjecting him to homosex stimulation. Then drugs, hypnosis, and—' Benway flipped a limp wrist" (Burroughs 26). Like many of Benway's claims, his account does not distinguish between conspiracy and reality, fact and fiction, thesis and hypothesis, with the effect that the entire claim appears absurd and exaggerated—indeed flamboyantly so. Wherever he goes, whoever employs him, Benway continues his twisted research and advances biopolitical controls on his employer's behalf.

Late in *Naked Lunch*, in a section entitled "The Examination," Carl Peterson is required to meet with Doctor Benway to address a history of sexually deviant behavior. The meeting takes place in Freeland, a totalititarian "welfare state" in which "some department was ready to offer effective aid" to meet each citizen's any desire. Yet, Burroughs explains in the narration, "The threat implicit in this enveloping benevolence stifled the concept of rebellion. . ." (Burroughs 168-169). Along similar lines, Foucault concludes his introductory volume to *The History of Sexuality* by remarking that "The irony of this deployment [of sexuality] is in having us believe that our 'liberation' is in the balance" (159). The options and provisions of Freeland—that is to say, of 'sexual revolution'—function to constrain precisely in their performative expansion.

The certain terms on which this expansion occurs, for both Carl (a faggot) and biopolitical sexuality, are images and their determinate relation to one another. I want to draw on a passage from another postmodern theoretical text with relevance to understanding the various configurations of images in the deployment of sexuality. Early in *Simulacra and Simulation*, Jean Baudrillard provides an account of images that moves from religious iconography to mass-consumption simulacra. In a section called "The Divine Irreference of

Images," Baudrillard proposes the following "successive phases of the image: it is the reflection of a profound reality; it masks and denatures a profound reality; it masks the *absence* of a profound reality; it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum" (6). The first image is "good," "sacramental"; the second "evil," "maleficence"; the third "appearance," "sorcery"; the fourth "simulation" (6). I have revised these phases to describe four stages in sexuality's deployment. (1) In the first, compulsory moment, the sexuality-image is a pure good—the reproductive heterosexual union of "be fruitful and multiply." (2) Next, the sexuality-image distorts, becoming adultery or non-reproductive joining. The image-ideal remains intact but is inverted. (3) In the third stage, the space held by both the compulsion and its inverse formulation (discipline) is evacuated, but the evacuation is not apparent but dissimulated. In the deployment of sexuality, this is the stage of perversion. Emergent drives, organs, and peculiar attachments define desire in ways that initially appear to sustain the first image-ideal and its inversion, although both are finally buried beneath the proliferating discourses and perverse identifications. It is this stage that Foucault recognizes as "the deployment of sexuality" in its bourgeois formation. (4) The stage is set for the fourth and final moment in the sexuality-image account: simulacra, or sexuality deployed. The compulsion, discipline, and perversity of the first three stages remain, but their remnants are like the map Baudrillard describes from Borges's fable, in which the map has become unified with the terrain it purports to detail (1).

As with Foucault's account of the shift from anatomo-politics and discipline/punishment to biopolitics and power-over-life, Baudrillard's four phases of images and my borrowed account of the four stages of sexuality are best understood not as discrete steps but as

overlapping movements, as the ebb and flow of socially organizing energies that persist because they do not finally form or find a resting point but perpetually swirl about as both map and terrain. In *Naked Lunch*, discipline and regulation appear in their messy happening-together, while in Foucault's writing they are often separated out from one another in the interest of theoretical clarity. I want to consider several further glimpses of the character, Carl, who appears in the first half of the novel and again toward the end, and whose experience demonstrates the contradictory dual-deployment of sexuality as at once disciplinary and regulatory.

The reader first encounters Carl with his presumed sexual-romantic partner Joselito, who has consumption/tuberculosis. Carl has gone with him to see first one doctor and then another. In the first case, the doctor racializes Joselito and treats him as a non-entity: "The [German] doctor flicked a hard, distant glance across Joselito's brown chest. He looked at Carl and smiled—one educated man to another smile—and raised his eyebrow, saying without words: 'Alzo for the so stupid peasant we must avoid use of the word is it not? Otherwise he shit himself with fear. Koch and spit they are *both* nasty words I think?'" (42). The doctor presumes to understand the relation between Carl and Joselito and treats it as an unspeakable but self-evident fact. On the following page, the doctor

> replaces the receiver and turns to Carl. "I have observed these people show amazingly quick wound recovery, with low incidence of infection. It is always the lungs here . . . pneumonia and, of course, Old Faithful." The doctor grabs Carl's cock, leaping into the air with a coarse peasant guffaw. His European smile ignores the misbehavior of a child or an animal. He goes on smoothly in his eerily unaccented, disembodied English. "Our Old Faithful Bacillus Koch." The doctor clicks his heels and bows his head. "Otherwise they would multiply their stupid peasant asshole into the sea, is it not?" (43)

Burroughs here refers obliquely to tuberculosis and its history. Robert Koch isolated the cause of tuberculosis, bacillus Mycobacterium tuberculosis, in 1882 (Martini et al. E241). Burroughs plays on Koch's bacillus to emphasize the biopolitical significance of both tuberculosis treatment and sexuality. In his final comment, the doctor suggests a kind of sexual control different from what Foucault describes as biopolitical. For Foucault, sexuality is a positive deployment for and about the bourgeois subject; sexuality is not, in other words, about policing and controlling the proliferation of a proleteriat-gone-wild. Burroughs's doctor, on the other hand, credits tuberculosis with constraining a population that he suggests might otherwise run rampant.

The doctor's horrifying comments demonstrate the function of ignorance and racism in the impersonal operation of biopolitical sexuality. Burroughs's presentation of the German doctor connects sexuality and medicine to the topic of Nazi systems of race propagation and suppression. Where Foucault emphasizes that sexuality is not primarily about the control of an over-populating underclass (racialized or economically formed), Burroughs's doctor emphasizes that both are active at once, even in a single encounter. In typical connective fashion, the scene concludes with the doctor portrayed as the one actually infected with the junk virus: "Carl slipped him a wadded banknote . . . and the doctor faded into the grey twilight, seedy and furtive as an old junky" (44). Because Carl has read some recent medical literature, he knows that the treatment prescribed by this first doctor—admission to a sanitarium—is not indicated for successful recovery from tuberculosis, and he goes with Joselito to another doctor. The second doctor's "liver sick Indian face was blank as a dealer's," once again situating the

racialized medical operative within the junk virus pyramid (44). He similarly recommends a sanitarium, to which Carl and Joselito then travel.

As they are entering the sanitarium, however, a breakage occurs in Carl's mind that seems like an inverse folding from the addict-oriented interpretation described in the first section to this chapter; similarly to the "pornographic" scenes, junk breaks into a scene otherwise not evidently junk-related. As the commandante processes his prescription,

> Broken images exploded softly in Carl's head, and he was moving out of himself in a silent swoop. Clear and sharp from a great distance he saw himself sitting in a lunchroom. Overdose of H. His old lady shaking him and holding hot coffee under his nose.
>
> Outside an old junky in Santa Claus suit selling Christmas seals. "Fight tuberculosis, folks," he whispers in his disembodied, junky voice. Salvation Army choir of sincere, homosexual football coaches sings: "In the Sweet Bye and Bye."
>
> Carl drifted back into his body, an earthbound junk ghost.
>
> "I could bribe him, of course." (45)

The medical institution here operates according to consumer-capitalist principles, and it is in a fantasy that Carl is taken out from himself into an overdose and then returned to the real junk pyramid of "completely modern" medicine (44-45). As is the judicial bureaucracy in "The County Clerk" scene described above, the medical bureaucracy here exhibits its racialized and capitalist orientations.

Carl does not recover from his fantasy-break. Despite one last attempt to insist on proper medical treatment—"'Chemical therapy?' The scream shot out of his flesh through empty locker rooms and barracks, musty resort hostels, and spectral, coughing corridors of T.B. sanitariums, the Old Men's Homes, great, dusty custom sheds and warehouses, through broken porticoes and smeared arabesques, iron urinals worn paper thin by the urine of a million fairies, deserted weed-grown privies with a musty smell of shit turning back to the soil, erect wooden phallus on

the grave of dying people plaintive as leaves in the wind..."—Carl succumbs to "the silent frequency of junk," apparently abandoning Joselito to his fate (46-47). The following section leaps back into junk pyramid operations in their more overt, opium-based manifestations.

In the final section in which Carl appears, he runs up against the biopolitical bureaucracy—which is to say, the production of regulation—in a meeting with Doctor Benway in Freeland Republic. Freeland Republic is "a place given over to free love and continual bathing"—until Doctor Benway inadvertently disrupts this facade by consolidating the "anomalies," who escape their confinement (Burroughs 20, 35, 42). Sexuality in Freeland is in the third stage described above, perversity. Carl's meeting with Doctor Benway late in the novel troubles the establishment of any narrative chronology, but, as I think has become clear through my analysis to this point, this is hardly the point for Burroughs in any case. As he walks to the meeting, whenever it takes place, Carl passes through the Town Hall Square, which features "Nickel nudes sixty feet high with brass genitals soap[ing] themselves up under gleaming showers." Despite this imagistic openness, "The doctor seemed embarrassed. . . . He fidgeted and coughed. . . . and fumbled with papers. . ." (169). Benway opens a file, which appears to grow in size throughout the scene, and says to Carl that everyone is trying "'To adjust the state—simply a tool—to the needs of each individual citizen.'" Yet he notes that lack of knowledge around "'the matter of uh *sexual deviation*'" functions as a constraint on the state's ability to function in this way. Benway, whose file clearly contains evidence of Carl's earlier visit with Joselito (it is suggested but not made clear that Benway might be the first doctor who Carl and Joselito saw), takes on the first-person-plural language of the state as he tells Carl, "'We regard it as a misfortune . . . a sickness . . . certainly nothing to be censored or uh

sanctioned any more than say . . . tuberculosis. . . . Yes,' he repeated firmly as if Carl had raised an objection. . . . 'Tuberculosis'" (170). Benway goes on to describe the predicament presented by Carl's affliction before returning overtly to "'this uh matter of sexual deviation,'" which Benway says is "'under certain circumstances a matter of uh concern to this department'" but is currently treated only symptomatically—'"Just a professional joke. To say treatment is symptomatic means there is none'" (171). By rendering sexual deviation a fact, following Foucault's and Baudrillard's sketches, and by acknowledging its lack of treatment potential, Burroughs plays the censor (once again) against itself. The acknowledgement of homosexuality, even in its concurrent rejection as aberrant, performs a censor-evading function.

Burroughs's identification of the Divisionists with homosexuals here attains its greatest sense: the homosexual is produced as at once fundamentally identical to others and, just as fundamentally, entirely cut off from them. Despite the liberatory aspect to the early part of their meeting, it seems evident from Carl's treatment and from other references to homosexuality that in the novel's terms, homosexuality is despicable. It is only at this point, several pages into the encounter, that Benway's eyes first move from Carl's chest to "flicker across Carls' face. Eyes without a trace of warmth or hate or any emotion that Carl had ever experienced in himself or seen in another, at once cold and intense, predatory and impersonal. Carl suddenly felt trapped in this silent underwater cave of a room, cut off from all sources of warmth and certainty" (171). Like the professor's description of baboons turning to the weakest "Fag Baboon," the ranging of Benway's gaze (not to mention his overtly homosexual remarks elsewhere in the text) serves to identify the two, to separate them, and to order their relation.

As it happens, Carl has been summoned to Benway's office not because of an ongoing or current offense but precisely because his latent homosexuality is currently dissimulated by his overt heterosexuality. To reiterate this point, the abstract fact of Carl's homosexuality is established over and against the reality of Carl's heterosexual relationship (which goes unquestioned). When Benway suggests a "[psychic] fluoroscopic examination," Carl protests, "'But the whole thing is ridiculous. I have always interested myself only in girls. I have a steady girl now and we plan to marry'" (172-173). In a long winded response suggesting that this is precisely the problem, Benway connects homosexuality to "schizophrenia, cancer, hereditary dysfunction of the hypothalamus" (173). As the doctor is speaking, Carl falls asleep, only to find on waking "with a shock [that the] doctor's voice was strangely flat and lifeless, a whispering junky voice" (173). After submitting his semen specimen for a test whose name changes throughout the section, Carl thinks, "Something was watching his every thought and movement with cold, sneering hate, the shifting of his testes, the contractions of his rectum." He returns to the outside world with a "broken, false grin burn[ing] his face with shame" (174). The regulation of Carl's sexuality has become internalized.

The replaceability of parts (queer/junk, woman/man) comes to the foreground on his next visit. The doctor (not identified as Benway) asks Carl about his military service and how he must have experienced "'long periods when you found yourself deprived of the uh consolations and uh *facilities* of the fair sex. During this no doubt trying and difficult periods you had perhaps a pin up girl?? Or more likely a pin up harem?? Heh heh heh . . ." (175-176).[23] After Carl

[23] This notion, of the displacability of "the desire to love something," is taken to a particular insensity in the account of a fellow inmate in Alexander Berkman's *Prison Memoirs of an*

confesses to this fact, the doctor presents him with a stack of photographs, asking him to "'Pick a girl, any girl!'" After Carl chooses, the doctor says, "'You have good taste, my boy. I may tell you in strictest confidence that some of these girls . . . [...] are really *boys*. In uh *drag* I believe is the word???' His eyebrows shot up and down with incredible speed. [...] Once again Carl experienced the floating sensation in his stomach and genitals of a sudden elevator stop" (176). The discourse abruptly shifts to junk, and the doctor has become "a sweet con dick" with a "glowering super-ego who is always referred to in the third person as 'The Man' or 'The Lieutenant.'" The doctor/dick tells Carl to go along so that he can help him in return. The question at hand, playing on the collision of junky and queer discursive sets, is whether Carl can "'score off [Marty Steel]'" (177).

Just as abruptly, the discourse returns to the doctor's inquisition of Carl's homosexuality, now taking the perspective that it would be "atypical" if Carl had not "indulged in homosexual acts." Carl readily submits his military-service "transgressions," which the doctor just as readily dismisses "'*as irrelevant*'" given the circumstances. Yet Carl's file, which "seemed to have thickened enormously since he entered the room," overflows with evidence of other "'occasions [the doctor continues] When no uh economic factors were involved.'" In other words, the doctor wants to know whether Carl will admit to his voluntary and unnecessary (from the perspective of libido-needing-release) involvement with other men: "A green flare exploded in Carl's brain. He saw Hans' lean brown body—twisting towards him, quick breath on his shoulder. The flare went out. Some huge insect was squirming in his hand. His whole

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Anarchist, who defends homosexuality and describes his own attachments (while in prison) to first a mouse and then another inmate ("Passing the Love of a Woman," pp. 232-236).

being jerked away in an electric spasm of revulsion" (178). Hans, whose presence opposite Carl once again figures a racialized homosexual relationality, demonstrates the genuine desire Carl has—not as replacement, not as false repetition, not as secondary phenomenon, but on its own pulsating terms. Likewise, its suppression occurs swiftly in the manner of Sending described in the previous pages, as "an electric spasm of revulsion." Both assertion and disavowal of homosexuality, the scene avoids censorship by providing its reader with the tools to unravel its secrets.

When Carl wakes up from his unintended slumber during the meeting, he declares his intent to leave: "'It's just that the *whole thing* is unreal. . . . I'm going now. I don't care. you can't force me to stay.'" Yet the room seems to expand as he crosses it, the door receding rather than drawing near, and the doctor asks him, "'Where can you go, Carl?'," to which Carl replies, "'Out . . . Away . . . Through the door . . .'." Just before the scene implodes and the room explodes, the doctor's "barely audible" voice asks, "'The Green Door, Carl?'" (179). As when Carl left the first meeting and found himself accompanied on his route by feelings of shame and guilt, he finds at the conclusion of this scene that no exit but the circumscribed "Exit" is, in fact, no exit. In Burroughs's rhizomatic novel, the faggot remains caught in an impossible trap.

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Chapter 2—Dialogical Confession: Power, Innocence, and Otherness in *Giovanni's Room*

> The root desire of any human being must be, it seems to me, to become whole: to make the self available to the self. But, since no human being can descend to that depth or track that labyrinth alone, our root desire and our only hope is to become whole by making peace, by making love with the depthless conondrum of that self which can be revealed only in the eyes and the arms of another.
>
> Baldwin, TS draft of "Here Be Dragons," Schomburg Archive Box 41 Folder 1

The opening pages of James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* (1956) present David, the novel's protagonist, gazing at his reflection in mundane surfaces at dusk. His mirrored image accompanies existential reflections on how his life found its current shape. Formally, following this narrative frame, the entire novel unfolds as David's search for and account of himself in one long night. By novel's end, assuming the text's adherence to the *Bildungsroman* genre, the reader might expect David to arrive at a new place of understanding and self-development.

At the novel's close David shreds a letter pertaining to his past and walks out hopefully into a new day's sunrise. Despite the progressive structure of David's self-narration, it remains unclear to what extent David has come to a place of self-recognition. Some of the letter shreds blow back onto him in the final phrase of the novel, suggesting that he cannot so easily leave behind where he has been before (169). Although David has gone through the motions, in the novel's pages, of reflecting and confessing in a psychoanalytic manner on how he has arrived at this point, he continues to deny certain aspects of himself. As a result I side with those critics who argue that his reflections have not changed him.

I propose that David's internalization of the titular Giovanni's room is best understood as a dialogical problem. David constructs a psychical fortress to protect himself from the negative imagination he carries with him about what it means to be queer, but he finds that this fortress has become a cage that isolates as much as protects him. I argue that his reflections form a single decision—to recoil from vulnerability at any cost—and that his progressive self-narration obfuscates his decision by projecting onto Others unwanted aspects of himself. Like a backfiring curse, David's projections become the fortress-cage of Giovanni's room. Reading Baldwin's essays against David's narration, I describe the path not taken by David as dialogical confession. For David to dialogically confess, he would need to put aside his claim to innocence and to accept responsibility for his own life. As I have suggested and will demonstrate below, David fails to do this. I contend that Baldwin manifests the price of this failure in David while also rendering the potential for dialogical confession in the reader.

This chapter contributes to my dissertation by analyzing someone who cannot access faggotry because he refuses to escape, instead entrenching himself in the racialized masculinity that feels to him like a fortress. The conditions are present for David to escape, unlike for Burroughs's faggot, but David systematically closes himself off to those "insistent possibilities" (Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room* 42). I argue that David is better schizoanalyzed than psychoanalyzed. Baldwin's novel acts as the fulcrum in this dissertation from unfreedom to freedom. David's failures serve as sketches of a potentiality—"a mode of nonbeing that is eminent"—that will come into existence in subsequent chapters (Muñoz 9).

The most compelling literary criticism on *Giovanni's Room* describes the core conflict of the novel as the problem of love in the face of identitarian investment, and Baldwin's interviews

and essays corroborate this interpretation.[24] Two significant debates bear repeating here because of their frequent appearance and their position relative to my claims. These debates center around two identitarian questions relevant to the novel: blackness and homosexuality.

The foremost problem for many critics involves manifest differences, in terms of American racialization, between Baldwin as the text's author and David as the text's protagonist. Some critics argue that Baldwin decided to put race aside to focus on homosexuality.[25] Henderson claims, "Baldwin chose to mask in whiteface his first explicit treatment of homosexuality" (326). As other critics note, the novel is racially contextualized from the opening paragraph. Reid-Pharr writes, "Baldwin initiates his discussion of race in the very first paragraph, alerting the reader that even though there are no Blacks present, this is yet a race novel" (388). For critics in the vein of Reid-Pharr and Washington, blackness forms a central absence.[26] A third group of critics, also opposed to the claim that Baldwin writes blackness out of the text, interprets the Italian Giovanni and other characters as figural representatives of a racialized Other.[27] Abur-Rahman suggests that Giovanni "operates in the novel as both the figure of the black and the figure of the homosexual [against whom the white characters] define and measure both their humanity and their whiteness" (482). Baldwin has not written a "raceless" novel in *Giovanni's Room*; he has constructed a narrative in which racism and homophobia form a complex central obstacle.

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[24] See Brim 57, Harrís-Lopez 18, Lapenson 207, Shulman 109.
[25] See Henderson 313, Johnson-Roullier 941.
[26] See Harrís-Lopez 24, Reid-Pharr 387, Washington 71.
[27] See Abur-Rahman 482, Skerrett 89, Stockton 173. Ross describes David as "a 'straight' man who flees from his homosexual desire for the dark lover Giovanni" (184).

The second debate problematizes the stable term from the first: what is David's sexuality? Is he gay, bisexual, or queer? Many critics describe David as a (perhaps closeted) gay man.[28] For these critics, David's problem is that his sexuality is at odds with his racial positioning. Grandt writes, David "is the quintessential American white male . . . except for the fact that he is gay" (271). Thomas describes the problem as "a new [mid-century] social type: the masculine gay man" (596). Washington writes, "Just as he commodifies desire, so David also expresses the deeply felt and equally bourgeois conviction that to live as a homosexual is to forfeit masculinity" (91). The trouble with David, in this line of thought, is that his sexuality disrupts his normative gender performance. Thomas writes, "Baldwin suggests how gay men who ignore the liberating potential of effeminacy will pay a steep price for doing so" (598). David is prototypical of the homonormativity that has become mainstream in American culture in subsequent decades in that he strives to retain his white masculine privilege while also sleeping with men (Thomas 607). Other critics raise questions about the coherency of describing David as gay.[29] In statistical terms, David is bisexual; he has sex with women as well as men on the pages of the novel. This second group of critics emphasizes the way Baldwin challenges identity categories consistently in his essays and interviews. Brim writes, "Far from the 'gay novel' it was first derided as and is often celebrated as today, *Giovanni's Room* represents a sustained effort to consider men's sexual and erotic relations queerly, that is, beyond prescribed sexual identity categories and, perhaps most surprisingly, against homosexuality" (57). Brim and

[28] See Grandt 271, Johnson-Roullier 940, Nelson 95, Thomas 596.
[29] See Beemyn 58, Brim 57.

Grandt seem to have one foot in both camps, as each defends the value of categories against their understanding of Baldwin's critique (Brim 74, Grandt 270-271).

Some critics resolve the two debates by putting them in relation to one another, connecting racialization and deviant sexuality. Armengol claims that the novel is about both racial and sexual deviance (671). Armengol draws on Joel Kovel's 1971 *White Racism: A Psychohistory* to demonstrate the close psychological connection between racism and homophobia (679). Similarly, Abur-Rahman writes that Baldwin "employ[s] the intersection of race and sexuality as a conceptual framework for understanding how identity is created, consolidated, and codified in the United States" (477). Abur-Rahman "trace[s] the history of criticism about *Giovanni's Room* to reveal that [the] label 'homosexual novel' and the critical obsession with the novel's white characters have obscured many of the novel[']s underlying critiques of the machinations of power" (478). The novel's white protagonist, for Abur-Rahman, does not eliminate race from the text but rather brings attention to "the *racializing* effects of queerness" (480). Chancy suggests that David's "whiteness is a myth, an illusion, yet [also] an *integral component* of the mask he wears to 'pass' as straight" (157). Others resolve the two debates by claiming that the novel is about neither race nor sexuality. Lapenson, for instance, argues that *Giovanni's Room* "is not about race or even about sexuality [but the] terrors of love" (207). I noted earlier that I find compelling those interpretations that identify love as the novel's core problem, but I diverge from critics who deny the significance of sexuality and race to the novel.

I argue that Baldwin is concerned with race, sex, gender, nationality, and class, and that he portrays investment in these identity categories as obstacles to interpersonal connection and

genuine self-reflection. "Love" and "innocence" stand opposed to one another, in this reading. As Shulman writes, "'Love' thus names [for Baldwin] an engagement to move whites not from ignorance to knowledge, but from innocence to acknowledgment, and so from sterile repetition into the freedom of the unknown" (109). DeGout argues that "The loss of innocence and the effects of self-denial are deep themes in *Giovanni's Room* that subvert the interpretation of the work as a novel about homoerotic love" (434). Brim writes, "The novel offers an overt indictment of sexual and gender categories as constructed, confining, and impoverishing, a problem that Baldwin believed undermined the human capacity to give and receive love" (57). Harrís-Lopez suggests, "Before they can truly love someone else, they must rid themselves of their illusions; failing that, they slip even further into illusion" (18). Harrís-Lopez argues, "Not only is David unable to accept his sexual identity through-out the narrative, but also there is no affirming evidence to suggest that there has been any significant change in his attitude or behavior by the end of the narrative" (29). I agree with Harrís-Lopez, and I suggest that this lack of change contradicts genre expectations, thereby leaving to the reader the decision that David postpones throughout his reflections—to accept responsibility for himself by confessing his need for Others.

Monological Confession (Escape for David?)

As a monological account of what can only be, for Baldwin, a dialogical phenomenon, David's efforts are doomed to failure before the start; he strives to find himself without allowing himself to be found by others. In the terms of this dissertation, he refuses to become intercursive or to connect with others; he is too afraid of what such mixing or bundling would mean. In this section, I want to describe the novel's formal construction and its relation to the

psychoanalytic program of de-repression, which I call monological confession in contrast to the dialogical confession that is, I argue following Baldwin's essays, the only option. The narrative and temporal framing of David's reflections shapes my pessimistic reading of David's hopeful movement out into the sunrise of a new day at novel's close. The problem is posed, then, in the very form the novel takes.

In the novelistic present, the entire novel occurs during one long night of self-reflection. Within that frame, David's reflections span decades. Baldwin employs the present tense for David's narration in the first and final scenes. In between these narrative bookends, with some brief exceptions that serve to remind us of this novelistic present, Baldwin employs the past tense. If we follow the lead of the narrative present, in which David compiles and reflects on his memories in the course of a single night, his past decisions appear separated from his present reflections by their temporal description. In the past he made one choice, but in the present, because he has reflected on this past, he is free to choose differently. I call this the psychoanalytic interpetation.

If, however, we analyze the manner in which David presents his past decisions, the temporal divide between past and present loses its clarity, and David appears in both cases to be fumbling across well-worn paths of a decision he has made countless times before (and which he appears set to make countless times again). By particularizing each event and explaining each failure in terms of unique relationships and conditions, David evades recognizing that a common element across each situation is his fear-based decision to flee. The duration of his time spent at this crossroads, in this reading, appears to be not a single night but

nearly his entire life. I call this the schizoanalytic interpretation, in the mode of Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*.

In terms of its literary form as a novel, the psychoanalytic interpretation of David's temporality prevails. As Henderson suggests, "the [novel's] mode of the confessional invites a psychoanalytical reading" (316). Baldwin's 1954 draft of the novel included Jacques telling David "You ought to be psychoanalyzed, I'm serious"; Jacques "had once told [David] that it had 'liberated' him" (Schomburg Archive, box 14 folder 4, page 19). The novel's conclusion, with David moving into the sunrise bearing "the dreadful weight of hope," might suggest a successful psychoanalytic program, as I have noted (169). Some critics, such as Beemyn, note that the "final scene seems to leave this possibility open" (64). Armengol takes this further by suggesting that in the end "David comes to realize that the hybrid and the dark are, inevitably, a fundamental part of his own identity. David sees, in other words, that the other is an integral part of the I" (689). I agree that this is the readerly trajectory Baldwin has set out, but I do not find it compelling that David has successfully made this integration. More compellingly, DeGout notes that "Baldwin's depiction of David's childhood concurs with the psychological explanations of homosexuality that have developed during the latter half of the twentieth century" (429), yet she also writes that "If David has begun to move toward self-acceptance, this acceptance is never reached in the work" (427). For Henderson, "David reveals himself to be a victim . . . potentially doomed to remain forever in his own specular logic [of the same]" (326). Washington makes a more optimistic interpretation, noting that the novel ends "with the strong suggestion that [David's life] is just beginning. Homosexuality need not be the social death sentence that, throughout most of the narrative, David believes it to be" (82).

I want to suggest that Baldwin's novel operates in a psychoanalytic register only to draw attention to the insufficiency of psychoanalytic confession for David. In the novel's final scene, David moves into the house's bedroom: "*Take off your clothes*, something tells me, *it's getting late*" (167). I interpret the "something" that instructs him to undress as his inner knowing that he has been deceiving himself. The clothing that David wears is both literal and metaphorical. When David "begin[s] to undress," his narration emphasizes the significance of the reflection *about to* occur: "There is a mirror in this room, a large mirror. I am terribly aware of the mirror." Nevermind the already extensive reflection which has brought the novel to this point. In the mirror, David says, "Giovanni's face swings before me like an unexpected lantern on a dark, dark night" (167). David imagines Giovanni being taken from his cell to his execution. He sees his own body in the mirror, "dull and white and dry." After repeating twice "*Mary, blessed mother of God*," the italicized voice of "someone" reiterates, "*It's getting late*." David says, "The body in the mirror forces me to turn and face it. And I look at my body, which is under sentence of death. It is lean, hard, and cold, the incarnation of a mystery. And I do not know what moves in this body, what this body is searching. It is trapped in my mirror as it is trapped in time and it hurries toward revelation" (168). David holds Giovanni as a signifier of mystery and loss, and he redirects mourning Giovanni's execution to reflect on the substance of his own living. In David's own account, he is moving quickly toward revelation, toward finding—at last!—what he has been searching for his entire life: himself.

David's account aligns with the psychoanalytic program in that he "hurries toward revelation" about himself. David focuses on his body's "incarnation of a mystery" that seems the key to his self-discovery. David feels compelled to face himself, but he cannot understand

what the body signifies. As at the novel's beginning, the revelation is trapped within the overlapping reflections. The italicized voice returns to cite a Christian scripture—I Corinthians 13:11, "*When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things*"—which suggests again that this is a moment of potential maturation. David says he "long[s] to make this prophecy come true. I long to crack that mirror and be free" (168). He recognizes that the key is to break with his reflection's cage and to face himself in his own body. As he leaves the house and walks to the bus stop in the early morning light, he feels the aforementioned "dreadful weight of hope."

I contend that David's reflections are actually iterations of the same decision: to turn away from dialogical confession, the kind of genuine self-recognition that requires vulnerability to Others. This decision to constantly flee his queerness in the name of trying to find himself allows David to maintain the feeling-sovereign of white masculine American privilege. Although David lives with Giovanni for a time, he ultimately flees Giovanni's room with the hope of returning to heteronormative life. This flight comes too late, however, as he has experienced the real potential for queer life. As Giovanni says, "'You know very well . . . what can happen between us. It is for that reason that you are leaving me'" (142). Thus, David internalizes Giovanni's room as a paradoxically impossible potentiality. To remain with Giovanni in that room would be to sacrifice David's masculinity, according to his socialization. David chooses instead to produce an internal void that contains his queer romantic desires and blocks him from finding queer love. In other words, I argue, Giovanni's room will never leave David because David never allowed himself fully to enter their shared space, even though he fled from the room precisely to avoid being "trapped" there. Although David fails repeatedly,

in my reading of the text, this repetition opens the way for those of Baldwin's readers who share David's propensity for flight to break from their identitarian cages and become free selves—selves free from internalized fears and self-hatred. In the terms of my dissertation, this is a potential instance of the queer freedom of faggotry.

As David's case demonstrates, the issue is not one of simply recognizing intellectually the tendencies one has developed. David is evidently aware of his tendency to run from his fears. He recognizes, at least intellectually, that past decisions might have been made differently. He knows that his flight across the Atlantic, from America to France, has not allowed him to escape himself; rather, this flight has removed certain strictures on which his self-deception depended as a child, and he finds it all the more difficult to escape his reflection now as an adult. At the conclusion of Chapter One, David acknowledges his tendency to maintain constant motion as a self-avoidance strategy. He says, "I succeeded very well [at running from his deviant desire]—by not looking at the universe, by not looking at myself, by remaining, in effect, in constant motion." He acknowledges that even this "success" was only ever partial, and he "wearied of the motion" (20). His flight to France was an attempt "to find myself," David explains (21). This is a key moment early in the text, which provides an expectation for the novel's trajectory and offers the reader a guiding line to follow.

The protagonist's character development is revealed from the outset, as David tells the reader that the self he found "turn[ed] out to be only the same self from which I had spent so much time in flight" (21). This self, which he both runs from and finds, is haunted by bad words and negative feelings. As we will see when I turn to David's account of a boyhood encounter with another boy, David is terrified of "los[ing] my manhood" (9). His terror is not entirely

unsubstantiated. For instance, he recalls the "frightening . . . drop" he experienced when he witnessed the punishment meted out to a "fairy who was later court-martialed out" from the Army, in which David was serving (20). Even so, his defenses keep his terror more internally than externally produced.

Despite his awareness and recognition of these tendencies, David continues to defer self-recognition. He delays his acceptance of responsibility for past decisions by projecting his failures onto Others—in particular, his former lover Giovanni—who figure those aspects of himself he would rather not discover within himself. It is this pattern of disavowal that finally leads me to interpret the novel's character development trajectory in what might be called a pessimistic manner. By maintaining clear lines between himself and his lovers, David is able to sustain his self-deception even as he goes through the motions of self-reflection and monological confession. As Reid-Pharr writes, "The struggle for cleanliness, the denial of the body that might protect one from the dangers of intimate odor, is precisely the struggle that David faces when he looks into his darker past. . . . David's immersion into the Parisian *demimonde* has as much to do with his desire to understand himself as *not* dirty, as *not* vulnerable and indeed as *not* homosexual as with any real affinity for the people by whom he finds himself surrounded" (390).

At a metafictional level, this "struggle for cleanliness" paired with self-reflection might be understood as Baldwin's critique of the psychoanalytic programs popular among white liberal Americans at the time of the novel's writing.[30] David's identity rests on his ability to

[30] For the specific targets of Baldwin's critique, see Tuhkanen, "Baldwin and Psychoanalysis" 192: "The therapeutic emphasis in this [U.S.] school was on the subjects' adaptation to social

oppose himself to Others. In the same vein, the novel might be understood as a critique of what Baldwin calls that "dubious romance, 'history'." This "romance," in Baldwin's account of American masculinity, begins with Enlightenment ideals of gendered and racialized ownership and concludes with progressive narratives that insistently posit the present as inevitably better than the past ("Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood" 815-816). As Tuhkanen writes, psychoanalysis "offers a mechanism by which Enlightenment modernity can elude its own call for wakefulness, for a sober reckoning of the world as it has been constituted in history" ("Baldwin and Psychoanalysis" 188). Against both history and psychoanalysis, Baldwin suggests, selves are neither sovereign nor individual.

In David's mind, the problem is to find himself psychoanalytically. As Giovanni's dialogue makes clear, in corroboration with Baldwin's essays on masculinity, whiteness, and relationality, this is not the problem with which David should concern himself.[31] David's persistent efforts at self-determination paradoxically undermine his ability to enter into relationship with others. He closes himself off in order to protect his autonomy, but in so doing he ends up preventing his becoming a whole person capable of standing in relation to others. David's self-denial prevents dynamic relationships from developing, in the critique leveled by Giovanni, with either men or women. David is fully aware of his desires for men. In many ways, it is this set of desires for which he provides account in the novel. Yet David repeatedly

realities." As Baldwin writes in "Freaks," "it seemed to me that anyone who thought seriously that I had any desire to be 'adjusted' to this society had to be ill" (826).

[31] See in particular: "Stranger in the Village," "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy," "Preservation of Innocence," "The Creative Process," "The American Dream and the American Negro," "The White Man's Guilt," and "Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood."

disavows these desires by projecting his failures to love onto his lovers, concurrently recognizing and denying the issue. That is, he recognizes the issue but projects it onto his lovers, thereby refusing to integrate the recognition with his self-image. His confession remains resolutely monological.

Reflexive Recoil

> Any real change implies the breakup of the world as one has always known it, the loss of all that gave one an identity, the end of safety.
>
> Baldwin, "Faulkner and Desegregation" 209

My contention that David finally avoids the self-recognition he appears so desperately to be grasping for is supported by a shift in interpretive frame, from progressive/*Bildungsroman* to continuous/repetitive. David's recollections appear continuous with his present, meaning that his present self mediates his recollections of past encounters with Others. David's past is not framed in its own terms—as a series of events happening in their own present temporalities—but through the mediating filter of his present situation, facing his reflection in various surfaces in a large empty house in the south of France. While the narrative voice shifts to past tense for large parts of the novel, I read these reminiscences as not only contained in but also pertaining to David's present moment. Each of David's reflections on the past, I propose, must be understood as being filtered through his troubled present. As I demonstrate, this is significant because it shows that David does not recognize and accept responsibility for his past failures but reinscribes them in his present reflections on the past.

Instead of accepting David's final account of himself, I contend that the trajectory implied by the novel's beginning at dusk and concluding at dawn is yet another self-deception.

David's consistent failures suggest that he is unable to escape the prison he has created for himself (an argument I build on below). After Jacques makes a comment about the garden of Eden, which I analyze in the next section as the diegetic frame for self-recognition, David notes similarly that "the road [of life] has a trick of being most dark, most treacherous, when it seems most bright" (25). I find relevant a phrase Baldwin uses in another context: "the sunlit prison of the American dream" ("Everybody's Protest Novel" 16). In my reading, to believe David's hope that he has changed is to fall into the self-deceptive trap that David has repeatedly sprung on himself throughout the novel.

David perpetually postpones actual self-recognition by claiming that he is always in the process of turning toward it. Consider David's childhood encounter with Joey, which David marks as the beginning of "the flight which has brought [him] to this darkening window" in which his reflections are enfolded in the novelistic present (10). Geographically, he flees from America and its "death-laden plains" (3). He crosses the Atlantic Ocean to reach Europe, which might appear, at first, to be the root of his problem as an American descendent of European settlers. However, his flight to Europe reveals that the problem from which he flees is not primarily geographical but social-historical, or we might say sexual, and his formative socialization emerges from his geographical escape not only intact but strengthened by the trial. His flight generates self-reflection because he is displaced from the familiar social formations with which he had unknowingly been held to account. In France, he finds that "nothing is more unbearable, once one has it, than freedom" (5). David finds, in other words, that his removal from American social formations of race, gender, and sexuality reveals their internal

persistence. This troubles David because he can no longer innocently project outward the conflict he now finds held within his reflection.

Significantly, for the debate about the novel's temporality, David does not follow the psychoanalytic-confessional method through to its proper end—change based on reflection and recognition—but merely takes up its form and uses it to deflect his self-reflection from taking hold in his mind. The Joey encounter reveals that his self-deception is either repeated (multiplied in life and memory, then and now) or continuous (singularly, across instantiations). One summer day when Joey's parents were out of town, David recounts, they spent the day together, and David stayed the night at Joey's place. The "lifetime" of joy that David experienced with Joey "was bounded by [the night]—it ended in the morning" (6). David begins to recount the feelings and sensations that caused him to recoil from Joey in fear, suggesting, perhaps, that David has come to recognize and take responsibility for his decision to run from what he had found in that brief moment with Joey.

However, David's recognition of what he found terrifying in the prospect of his entanglement with Joey (and later others) does not correspond to a psychoanalytic cure. David is aware of what he fears, yet he continues to distance himself from the decisive moment in which he must either reject all the good that accompanies these fears or accept the bad that accompanies feared joys. Stockton notes that "The positive/negative valence of the narrator's attraction to Joey shifts three times—from the seemingly positive discovery of power in a boy's body, to sudden fear (of torture, madness, and even emasculation), to a final wish for 'precisely' what he fears" (170). David perceives Joey's body as threatening, with his narration presenting Joey in racialized terms as a "dark" boy with a "brown [body]" (6-8). David explains, "That

body suddenly seemed the black opening of a cavern . . . in which I would lose my manhood" (9). If he recognizes in himself his desire for Joey, David knows he would lose both his innocence and his manhood. David understands that staying with Joey would expel him from innocence and ignorance, and thus white American masculinity. David has internalized homophobia—a fear of "submission, inherently emasculating, to the desire either *for* or *of* another man" (Edelman 56). The "power and the promise and the mystery of [Joey's] body" bring David to the precipice of recognition, but the possibility of becoming outcast motivates David's self-policing (9). David says, "A cavern opened in my mind, black, full of rumor, suggestion, of half-heard, half-forgotten, half-understood stories, full of dirty words. I thought I saw my future in that cavern. I was afraid" (9). He chooses, therefore, to flee the feelings and abandon the relationship. Harrís-Lopez writes, "Although David labels his encounter with Joey as somewhat of an accident, he nonetheless finds other occasions before Giovanni to engage in homosexual activity. His response to such actions is consistently to minimize their meaning and to absolve himself of complicity by attempting to maintain his image of purity" (21). Contradictory impulses emerge, for David, with both desire and fear factoring into his decision to run. His social fear overwhelms his personal desire, however, in part because David insistently refuses to imagine a world in which his relation to Joey—or anyone "like" Joey—might bring joy and life.

I say that David continues to misrecognize himself, even as he goes through confessional motions, because he refuses Joey not only in the decisive moment, when they were two boys discovering mutual pleasure, but also as an adult reflecting on the earlier decision. From his distantly retrospective position as an adult in France, David claims that he would have stayed if

only Joey had "protest[ed] or insist[ed]" that he stay (9). David's account of his encounter with Joey suggests that awareness of his self-deceptive tendencies has not freed him from self-deception (20).

In his revisionary fantasy, David can imagine the Joey-event unfolding differently only if *Joey* had acted differently. David displaces responsibility for his decision to flee onto Joey, signifying his refusal, even at present as an adult, to make the sort of dialogical confession that would allow him to face himself and another. David confesses a past failure to become vulnerable to another, but in his confession he repeats his failure, doubling down on his reflex to recoil, by refusing to take responsibility for this first failure. While he is "looking" at himself, he refuses to "see" what he evidently knows is there. As Johnson-Roullier writes, "[David's] self-deception made him no more real than the reflection of himself that he watches at the novel's beginning" (949). Had David's confession brought about self-recognition, he would take responsibility for his past failure by accepting that it was his decision to flee—or to stay.

Thus, while David acknowledges his self-deception in the novel's present, he simultaneously continues to deceive himself, enabling this tension between recognition and disavowal to persist. David succeeds, he says, as a "specialist[] in self-deception. . . . by not looking at the universe, by not looking at myself, by remaining, in effect, in constant motion" (20). The lapses of this motion create near-recognitions, but David refuses to confront the images he fears in himself. David's defensively cyclical motion, which motivates his flight across the ocean to Paris, does not allow him to escape because he refuses to engage these further aspects of his reflection. Constant movement is David's defense against coming to know

himself—even as he posits knowing himself as his aim. Never standing still, he cannot be faulted for not having observed what only stillness might clarify.

David constructs his fortress-prison with a rational recognition that is accompanied by a disavowal. David recognizes that the issue from which he flees "is somewhere before me, locked in that reflection I am watching in the window as the night comes down outside. It is trapped in the room with me, always has been, and always will be, and it is yet more foreign to me than those foreign hills outside" (10). David observes his flight's personal motivation, and he seems poised to shift from the life trajectory this flight has created. Yet David's acknowledgment concurrently disavows his recognition. By describing the revelation's inaccessibility, he positions the problem as central to his existence but hopelessly beyond his reach. He flees from a void which he has made off-limits to himself. Situating his formative void as "locked . . . trapped . . . [and] foreign," David effectively continues to deny that this aspect is a central part of himself, precisely in the moment of acknowledging its presence. David recognizes but immediately denies access to this troubling aspect of himself by approaching it with a cold rationality.

Neither/Nor: The Will to Innocence

What does it mean "to know oneself," as David is trying to do? Can one "know oneself" without the corroboration of other knowers? For Baldwin, "one's human value [needs] the collaboration or corroboration of that eye [of the beholder]," and the self that tries to escape this need traps itself in self-deception ("Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood" 817). Baldwin published the essay from which this quotation comes decades after the publication of *Giovanni's Room*, but the essay pairs with the novel in terms of content and the problem posed. The

problem, in each case, is white American masculinity and the blockages it produces to defend its illusory integrity (in the sense of "wholeness" and "self-sufficiency").

In *Giovanni's Room*, David fixates on the problem of "finding" himself, and he draws on the myth of Eden to symbolize one's inner desires. The problem, as he poses it in the text, is the inevitable evacuation of the garden of Eden. The effect of his rumination is a matrix for understanding the epistemology of desire. Jacques, an older fairy David meets in Paris, prompts David's rumination when he muses, "Nobody can stay in the garden of Eden. . . . I wonder why" (25). Jacques's comment, which David interprets as a question, appears in a conversation about why Giovanni left idyllic village life in Italy, which they perceive as Giovanni's Eden. David goes on to tell the reader he has "thought about Jacques' question since," but it becomes clear that his ruminations have not become self-reflective. David casually identifies both Giovanni's and Jacques's Edens (containing "maidens" and "football players," respectively) without pausing to consider the importance of recognizing his own (containing sailors). David's epistemological blindspot is dissimulated by his overt thoughtfulness. It is here that he notes, resonant with Baldwin's image of "the sunlit prison of the American dream," that "the road has a trick of being most dark, most treacherous, when it seems most bright" (25).

David proposes that, "perhaps, life only offers the choice of remembering the garden or forgetting it. Either, or: it takes strength to remember, it takes another kind of strength to forget, it takes a hero to do both" (25). David sets up a mutually exclusive binary (either/or) which he immediately supersedes by naming a third possibility: both. It strikes me as conspicuous that David's matrix of remembering and forgetting this Eden omits the final logical possibility: *neither* remembering *nor* forgetting. David retains his innocence by disavowing his Eden

(refusing to remember) and deploys his privilege by insistently returning to it (refusing to forget). He continues, "People who remember court madness through pain, the pain of the perpetually recurring death of their innocence; people who forget court another kind of madness, the madness of the denial of pain and the hatred of innocence." Most folks are either "madmen who remember [or] madmen who forget," David postulates, while "Heroes are rare" (25). David loves his innocence and refuses to surrender it, putting him in the omitted fourth category of the coward or villain.

David loves innocence and refuses to surrender it, even when he seems to acknowledge his faults. We have seen this already in the decisive moment with Joey, which David continues to disavow in his reflection. At a social level, David neither remembers nor forgets the constellational entanglements that comprise his privileged position in the matrix of desire. Although he notes in the novel's opening paragraph that his "ancestors conquered a continent, pushing across death-laden plains, until they came to an ocean which faced away from Europe into a darker past," David does not *remember* these events (in the manner of the hero or the first "madman") but rather *reproduces* them (3). That is, he does not critically reflect on his ancestral violence, as this would require that he surrender his privileged position along with its historical and ongoing violent fabrication. David's self-investment, as a white American man, prevents him from becoming a "hero," in his epistemological matrix, or even one of his "madmen."

In sexual terms, David recognizes that his deviant desires displace him from his learned identity positions. David refuses to remember his Eden (the possibility of gay love), but he refuses as adamently to forget it (with his pattern of returning to and fleeing from gay encounters). As Harrís-Lopez writes, "To David, his extended affair with Giovanni is another

one of those 'drops,' or drunken lapses, that he can place safely back in the cavern of his mind when necessary in the assertion of 'pure' manhood" (22). The tension of these oppositional pulls conforms to the rise of homonormativity in the white gay community. David postpones attachment in order to retain innocence and power, and in so doing sabotages his ability to be present with the one with whom he finds himself; in the same moment, David postpones rejection of his desire, perhaps because his privileged position as a white American man has allowed his gaze to range unchecked. Baldwin says that their position of social privilege causes "white gay people [to] feel cheated because they were born, in principle, into a society in which they were supposed to be safe" ("'Go the way your blood beats': An Interview with James Baldwin" 67). Since he feels entitled to but fearful of his desires, David tries to retain his privileged positions and his innocence while not rejecting his desire.

As a result, David embodies the prototypical identity of the assimilative white gay man. By trying to assert his gender normativity, David fits into an early part of this depathologization process.[32] Chancy writes that "David attempts to pass [as a white, heterosexual male]; the body he identifies with is a source of privilege that has, for most of his life, been accorded him without question: As his self-perception begins to fail, he ultimately edges toward self-destruction, attempting to regain that illusory, fictive body as the source of his identity" (169). While the identitarian category of masculine white gay men does not yet exist for David, he strives to inhabit the space in which this identity will eventually emerge as a non-deviant subjectivity. Homonormativity is not limited to white persons, but it functions here as a ticket

[32] See Valentine.

for readmission to racial and gender privilege from which David fears his desires exclude him (Baldwin, "'Go the way your blood beats'" 67). Homonormative subjects, then, are those who, like David, neither forget their privilege nor remember its meaning. That is, homonormatives neither abdicate power nor avow its construction; neither renounce nor acknowledge their desires. As Thomas writes, "David attempts to have it both ways . . . David wants to sleep with men, but he wants to do so while retaining the privilege that comes along with being a middle-class white man" (607). In this way, David develops his will to innocence—neither forgetting nor remembering—in order to maintain his ignorance without sacrificing his desire. As Sedgwick writes, the task here is "to pluralize and specify" ignorance as one would knowledge (8).[33]

Fortress/Cage

> And, in the same way that to become a social being one modifies and suppresses and, ultimately, without great courage, lies to oneself about all one's interior, uncharted chaos, so have we, as a nation, modified and suppressed and lied about all the darker forces in our history. We know, in the case of the person, that whoever cannot tell himself the truth about his past is trapped in it, is immobilized in the prison of his undiscovered self.
>
> Baldwin, "The Creative Process" 672

[33] Ignorance in this case is not a lack of knowledge but a form of power that is produced and distributed. As Sedgwick writes, "perhaps there exists instead a plethora of *ignorances*, and we may begin to ask questions about the labor, erotics, and economics of their human production and distribution" (8).

The novel's title invokes the cage which David comes to inhabit, and which, according to my interpretation, David has fully internalized at novel's close: Giovanni's room. This cage is identical to the defensive apparatus David constructs as an identitarian fortress to evade self-recognition. David fears vulnerability, and he produces a will to ignorance that allows his desires to persist without recognizing them as part of himself. Giovanni's room signifies both the possibility of gay love and its refusal. David inhabits Giovanni's room so deeply that he cannot leave its enclosure, in the end, because he repeatedly refuses vulnerability—refuses, that is, to let down his defenses and face himself in open self-reflection. To integrate his self-awareness, rather than continually projecting responsibility onto his lovers, would be to renounce his position in white masculine American power.

Giovanni's Room is a novel about a person who refuses to recognize his reflection for fear of vulnerable exposure. The novel renders reflection in three aspects, which correspond to white American masculinity's defenses against physical, epistemological, and interpersonal penetration. David gazes at his mirror-image in various reflective surfaces without recognizing what he embodies; David recollects past life-events and decisions that have brought him to the present moment without acknowledging his defensive repetitions; and, alarmed by his resonance with "freak" Others, David (re)invests in the social formation of white American masculinity in order to circumvent the troubling realities overlapping in his reflections. The obverse of self-recognition is projective disavowal, in which the more troubling aspects of oneself are cast onto an outsider—an Other—who is understood as embodying the feared reflection. Self-reflection is a dangerous game, given that one cannot in advance ensure that one will like what one sees in the mirror. David's failed self-recognition, in conjunction with his

white-masculine identitarian investment, creates a cage from which he cannot escape without departing from his white power-position within American masculinity. The cage, in other words, is white masculine American identity.[34] David unwittingly flees *into* this cage in an attempt to escape the fears he associates with his desires. His flight across the Atlantic both results from and parallels this attempted escape. Although his identity feels to him like a mobile fortress, David's identitarian investment becomes his prison and he finally internalizes the void created by shoring up potential breakages. In the realm of the novel, according to my reading, this void is figured by Giovanni's room.

David's fears extend the prison created by his first failure (with Joey) until it solidifies in Giovanni's room. When David is confronted by Others who fit his homophobic imagination, he recoils and distances himself from the resonance he feels. Throughout these encounters, David tries to retain his subjectification by masculine American identity. When he is in Guillaume's bar, where he meets Giovanni, David feels repulsed by "*les folles*," gender deviant persons who "scream[ed] like parrots" (26). Describing the gender-transgressors as "parrots," David implies their second-rate mimicry, to be contrasted with "real" cisgender performances. He understands desire as corresponding strictly to polarized genders: "a man who wanted a woman would certainly have rather had a real one and a man who wanted a man would certainly not want one of *them*." David can imagine sexual deviance (a man wanting another

[34] See Grandt, for instance: "It is, in other words, David's clinging to an authentic Americanness that stands between his *what* and his *who*, an Americanness that incorporates both whiteness and heterosexuality" (286). See also Abur-Rahman, Stockton, and Thomas.

man) but not gender deviance (a man not fully invested in and performing normative masculinity).

One parrot-like figure, who sometimes "actually wore a skirt and high heels" in addition to other feminized accessories, makes David "uneasy" because of "his utter grotesqueness"—a "grotesque . . . resembl[ance of] human beings" (27). Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's definition of the grotesque, Tuhkanen reads David's reaction as against a body "promiscuously receptive to exchanges with the outside" ("James Baldwin on the American Express and the Queer Underground" 128). Read in this way, David's resistance to gender deviance forms a wall in his constructed fortress-prison. David's reaction resonates with Baldwin's admonition that "Freaks are called freaks and are treated as they are treated—in the main, abominably—because they are human beings who cause to echo, deep within us, our most profound terrors and desires" ("Freaks" 828). The resonance David feels threatens to break into his self-perception, so he viscerally resists recognizing his reflection in the Other-at-hand. David intellectualizes his reaction from his future position, and as I noted earlier he is aware of a precedent for fearing how "fairies" are treated. But I want to suggest that his response goes beyond this; his refusal to recognize himself in an Other is deep-seated and embodied.

David dwells in the tension between personal and anonymous, attachment and indecision. At a certain point in their relationship, David retrospectively claims, "for that moment I really loved Giovanni." Yet this moment is disrupted when another boy passes between them and David immediately shifts his projection of love and desire from Giovanni to the stranger-boy. David avoids becoming vulnerable and intimate with Giovanni because he feels, as a result of moments like this, that his desire is general and non-specific—his desire is

the desire of sexuality, not the desire for a specific other with whom he desires physical and emotional intimacy (83). David's refusal to remember his own Eden of masculine sailors, which remembrance would cause him to lose his innocence, keeps him from becoming attached to Giovanni in the flesh. But he also cannot forget his Edenic desire; his gaze too often betrays him.

Early in their relationship, David realizes simultaneously that the desire awoken by Giovanni "would never go to sleep again" and that "one day I would not be with Giovanni anymore." David fears his desire, so he forecloses its actual existence with Giovanni by accepting its abstract reality in relation to "all kinds of boys." With the "fearful intimation" that the desire awoken by Giovanni might lead David to become a detestable Jacques-like figure, David says, "there opened in me a hatred for Giovanni which was as powerful as my love and which was nourished by the same roots" (84). David is not entirely wrong here, but—because he assumes the relationship has no future—he mistakenly interprets his defensive invulnerability to intimate entanglement as an objective reality instead of as a subjective mechanism used to keep desire at bay. He imposes onto the relationship his failure to imagine a real future in this direction. David's homophobic imagination and homosexual desire emerge here in the form of love and hate. While David is right to note that his love and hatred of Giovanni are "nourished by the same roots," he does not recognize that the personal feelings he identifies as love and hate correspond to the social formations of homosexual desire and homophobia. This is the neither/nor again, neither relinquishing desire nor avowing it; pursuing desire while disavowing it.

When Jacques and David see Giovanni for the first time, Jacques plans for David to help him gain access to Giovanni; instead, David backs into his relationship with Giovanni by

triangulating his desire through Jacques. David continues to postpone committing to the idea of establishing relational depth with Giovanni. When Giovanni suggests, after talking for a while, that they have become friends, David replies "So soon?" (37). Giovanni mocks him, and David says "I guess people wait in order to make sure of what they feel" (38). Again Giovanni mocks David, but he is unable to unseat David from the logic of postponement by which David refuses agency and perpetually affects boyhood innocence. David maintains this logic to the very end of their relationship. Despite his attempt to refuse attachment—despite his self-deception—by the end of the evening David's desires ("my awakening, my insistent possibilities") have been released. He suggests both that these desires are not specific to Giovanni and that he and Giovanni "remain connected still [in the novel's present]" (42). Projecting into his future from the novel's present, David aligns himself with Jacques's model of erotic encounters by anticipating "last night's impenetrable, meaningless boy" but also expects that he "will see Giovanni again" in these future moments (43).

David is ashamed that he has become "so abruptly, so hideously entangled with a boy," and he longs for his American home—the safety of familiar identitarian society (62). David's concept of "home" is explicitly hetero-patriarchal. He imagines that he has been moving toward self-destruction, and to turn around would be to move toward a normative nuclear family (104). Giovanni, however, challenges David and suggests that home only exists as long as one is away from home; to return to it would be to find that it does not exist (116). Conversely, David's entanglement with Giovanni performs a suspension of the unimaginability (for David) of two men living together and loving one another; two men loving and living together can be unimaginable for David only insofar as he does not experience its possibility. David eventually

reasserts the unimaginable and declares "But I'm a man . . . a man! What do you think can *happen* between us?" Giovanni responds by noting that the unimaginable has here already been imagined: "'You know very well,' said Giovanni slowly, 'what can happen between us. It is for this reason you are leaving me'" (142). David needs the possibility of two men becoming intimate to remain unimaginable because this allows him to distance himself from the intimacy Giovanni offers. David does not want to sacrifice his normative position for the sake of this intimacy between men. Giovanni recognizes, although David cannot in this moment, that David's rejection of Giovanni's love is a refusal to abdicate white masculinist innocence and power.

David's refusal to move into a shared relational space with Giovanni results in the creation of an internal prison, figured by Giovanni's room. When their relationship is on the ropes, Giovanni asks David why he has never been present or opened himself up to Giovanni (137). In that moment David does not have a response, but other moments in David's reflections suggest that this tension between attachment and refusal signify a failure to face self and Other. David admits, "Even at my most candid, even when I tried hardest to give myself to him as he gave himself to me, I was holding something back" (78). David resists becoming entangled with Giovanni at a personal level, and he tells himself that "Giovanni knew that I was going to leave him" (77). By asserting his eventual departure as a fundamental aspect of their relation, David imagines their relation as a temporary atemporality. He describes their relation in Giovanni's room as "occurring underwater," "beneath the sea" (75, 85).

The novel generates this effect formally when, at the moment of their consummation in Giovanni's room, the narration abruptly shifts back to "Here in the south of France." Before the

break, David says "With everything in me screaming *No!* yet the sum of me sighed *Yes*." With the novelistic present breaking into his reflection, David appears to be deceiving himself in believing that his "sum . . . sighed *Yes*" (64). David remembers a feeling of atemporality because instead of entering the relationship David places it immediately in his past. The relationship's future must remain impossible and unimaginable in order for David to avoid acknowledging the intimacy he shared with Giovanni. Giovanni's room "became, in a way, every room I had ever been in and every room I find myself in hereafter will remind me of Giovanni's room. I did not really stay there very long . . . but it still seems to me that I spent a lifetime there" (85). David says that Giovanni has brought him to his room in order for David to destroy it and "transform Giovanni's [life by] first becom[ing] a part of Giovanni's room" (88). David performs the inverse operation and stays in the room long enough to internalize it but not long enough for the room to internalize him—transforming his own life and destroying Giovanni's.

David internalizes his cage in the form of Giovanni's room. As he was leaving the physical space of Giovanni's room, David claims from the narrative present, "Then I wanted to beg him to forgive me. But this would have been too great a confession; any yielding at that moment would have locked me forever in that room with him. And in a way this was exactly what I wanted" (144). Faced with what appears to be a final potential breakage, David feels confined by the possibility of intimacy implied in his staying with Giovanni any longer. He desires this intimacy "in a way," but he feels a claustrophobia that drives his need to get out. Projecting his fear of vulnerability and intimacy onto Giovanni's room, David describes the room as "claustrophobic," with "the courtyard malevolently pressed [against the room's windows], encroaching day by day" (71, 85). When David and Hella, David's former

heterosexual lover, run into Giovanni after David has abandoned him, Giovanni asks David if he remembers where his home is; "'I remember,' [David] said. I started backing away, as though I were backing out of a cage" (130). Ironically, David's attempt to back out of this cage cements Giovanni's room as his internalized prison.

In the act of leaving, David claims he realized that "in fleeing from his body, I confirmed and perpetuated his body's power over me. Now, as though I had been branded, his body was burned into my mind, into my dreams" (144). David's flight from Giovanni's body results from his fear of becoming intimately entangled with Giovanni beyond the merely physical. Giovanni recognizes David's fear as identitarian because David "'keeps talking about *what* I [Giovanni] want. But I have only been talking about *who* I want'" (142). David thinks in terms of categories instead of personal engagement, and it is this structure of (not) relating that prevents him from engaging in dialogue or other forms of intercourse and intimacy. Grandt writes, "Here in this key passage, Giovanni lays bare the fundamental flaw in David's thinking: the white American privileges the conceptual abstraction of identity, the *what*, over the individual concreteness of identity, the *who*, because abstract concepts ensure safety and stability" (282). David's first concern is identitarian compatibility, which is why he can imagine a life with Hella but not Giovanni (141).

David holds onto his resistance to entanglement, believing that this is the only way to save his life. Before they arrive at Giovanni's room the first time, Giovanni tells David his room is quite dirty, like the garbage of Paris has been dumped there. But waking up the next morning, David realizes, "This was not the garbage of Paris, which would have been anonymous: this was Giovanni's regurgitated life" (86-87). David's analysis is right, to this

point—but he continues: "the key to [the room's] disorder . . . . was a matter of punishment and grief. I do not know how I knew this, but I knew it at once; perhaps I knew it because I wanted to live" (87). Giovanni's room might reflect Giovanni's grief, but David deceives himself into believing that this is the reason he wanted to flee. Instead, David reacted to the intimacy of his situation within "Giovanni's regurgitated life." Contrary to his intention, in resisting entanglement David resists becoming fully alive.

David's desires are revealed to Hella—finally, concretely—when she finds him with a sailor. David had left Hella in the house and "went, alone, to Nice." After hooking up with a sailor-on-leave for a few days, David and the sailor "stood drinking together in a crowded bar. We faced the mirror. I was very drunk. I was almost penniless. In the mirror, suddenly, I saw Hella's face" (162). Once again the action occurs in a reflection. David's defenses are down, but his gaze into the mirror is not critical self-reflection but a dwelling in the perpetually postponed moment of desire's consummation. His capital is nearly gone, his intoxication allows his disinhibition, and he finally confesses his desires to Hella (if unintentionally). David defensively tells Hella the next morning, as she packs to leave, that "if I was lying, I wasn't lying to *you*. . . . I was lying to myself" (163). In a sense David is telling the truth; he has never really been honest with her about anything, including his desire for her, which has always been a desire for a particular image of himself. Unsurprisingly, Hella rejects David's conditional apology and refuses to offer him forgiveness (165). While David's apology situates his self-deception yet again in the past, I interpret the final pages of the novel as indicating not his turning a new leaf but rather his continuing to move so as not to find himself—despite his claims to the contrary (20).

Dialogical Confession

Baldwin has often been described as prophetic, a mantle that fits well with Baldwin's description of the artist's role in society as waging "a lover's war." The artist's responsibility, Baldwin suggests in "The Creative Process" (1962), "is to reveal the beloved to himself, and with that revelation, make freedom real" (672). As an artist following his own description of the creative process, Baldwin works to realize freedom both personally and socially by reflecting his beloveds onto themselves. Abur-Rahman argues that *Giovanni's Room* marks the beginning of "the imaginative project that would span [Baldwin's] entire lifetime: that is, the dismantling of dominant theories of race, of masculinity, and of sexuality to reconceptualize and creatively reconstruct a more fundamentally egalitarian US" (485). Reading *Giovanni's Room* in this way as the prophetic intervention of a lover, I contend that the overlapping reflections in the novel creatively generate a potential escape from the fortress-cage of white American masculinity. The line of escape these reflections produce appears as an alternative that is constantly gestured toward but does not occur in the novel's pages. I call this freeing potential dialogical confession.

In the confessional mode—whether literary, religious, or psychoanalytic—the confessor makes a monological address to a reader-listener. For Baldwin, I argue, this approach is insufficient to resolve the problem at hand. Confession cannot remain merely self-reflective, as this allows the confessor to remain locked in the identitarian boxes he finds in the mirror. In contrast to the monological confession David attempts in a psychoanalytic mode, confession must become dialogical.

In his 1965 essay "The White Man's Guilt," Baldwin describes the challenges for such interpersonal meeting: "On the one hand, [a white person] can scarcely dare to open a dialogue

which must, if it is honest, become a personal confession—a cry for help and healing, which is, really, I think, the basis of all dialogues—and, on the other hand, the black man can scarcely dare to open a dialogue which must, if it is honest, become a personal confession which, fatally, contains an accusation" (725). David's reflections (this is to say, the novel itself) form a redoubling "personal confession." David raises a tenuous "cry for help and healing" that acknowledges "an [implicit] accusation" from Giovanni, who is scheduled for execution by guillotine the morning following the novelistic present's ruminations. In a sentence crossed out in Baldwin's 1954 draft, David says, "Yet, if Jacque's hands are bloody, I can no longer pretend to myself that mine are ~~not bloodier still~~ white" (Schomburg Archive, Box 14 folder 4). Although David's movement is incomplete, the novel's dialogical confession transgresses racial, gendered, and national categorial divisions, opening the way to genuine interpersonal engagement and connection.

David's dogmatic refusal to become vulnerable poses a challenge for Baldwin as a novelist. In "Preservation of Innocence" (1949), Baldwin critiques "the brutal and dangerous anonymity of our culture." He suggests that "A novel insistently demands the presence and passion of human beings, who cannot ever be labeled. . . . Without this passion we may all smother to death, locked in those airless, labeled cells, which isolate us from each other and separate us from ourselves" (600). In my reading, David resists Baldwin's troubling of labels and strives to fit within his identitarian category. Giovanni's room becomes, for David, an internal isolating cell. Giovanni says to David, "'You do not . . . love anyone! You never have loved anyone, I am sure you never will!" He then catalogues some things David *does* love: "You love your purity, you love your mirror." In other words, David loves his position within

identitarian society, the purity of his imaginary self-reflection, and his alleged innocence. David cannot become intimate until he vulnerably exits the cage of his identity. But, as Giovanni says to him, "You will never give it [David's symbolically invested phallus] to anybody, you will never let anybody *touch* it—man *or* woman" (141).

The novel, Baldwin says in an interview with Richard Goldstein for *The Village Voice*, "is not really about homosexuality. It's about what happens to you if you're afraid to love anybody" ("'Go the way your blood beats'" 61).[35] For Baldwin, "the American ideal of masculinity" founds itself on defenses against physical, epistemological, and interpersonal penetration. The will to innocence pairs with dogmatic invulnerability to serve as this identity-ideal's strength and protection, although, as I argued above, this ends up becoming not a fortress but a cage. David's investment in white American masculinity prevents him, in the novel's frame, from engaging in love—at the direct cost of having a life with his lover and the indirect cost of his lover's life. For David to confess dialogically would be for him to both remember and forget: to abandon his innocence (to remember) and to acknowledge the Other and admit his need for them (to forget). For instance, with his recapitulation of the Joey event, David would need both to remember the possibility that something could happen between them and to forget his homonormative aspirations. From the narrative present, David needs to acknowledge that he wishes he had stayed, instead of displacing responsibility onto Joey with the comment that he would have stayed if only Joey had protested: "he did not know that this was all he needed to have done" (9). Of course, Giovanni does just that when he asks David to

[35] Roszak makes a complementary claim by suggesting that Baldwin "depict[s] the consequences of a homophobic ideology that demands sexual passing" (89).

stay: "I heard Giovanni's moan behind me. '*Chéri*. *Mon très cher*. Don't leave me. Please don't leave me'" (140). Later, Giovanni continues, "'*if* I could make you stay, I would . . . If I had to beat you, chain you, starve you—*if* I could make you stay, I would. . . . One day, perhaps, you'll wish I had'" (142). David still flees. With both Joey and Giovanni, all David needed to do was acknowledge his desire to stay, despite the threatening associations and despite his fear of vulnerability. To become intimate, entangled with another person, is too great a task for David. Instead, he falls back on the neither/nor, insisting on his innocence and disavowing his need for others, and he ends up with neither Giovanni nor Hella.

Witness

> One's identity as a faggot is not merely a question of whom one desires erotically; it is more fundamentally a matter of one's access to and manipulation of established power in pursuit of gratifying a desire necessarily warped by that abusive power.
>
> Ross, *Sissy Insurgencies* 206

A series of epigraphs begin James Baldwin's draft of *Giovanni's Room*. Each is crossed out and replaced using different writing tools—first pencil, then pen, and finally black crayon. Each inscription suggests a sufferer whose survival tells a story and bears witness. Baldwin's first epigraph was taken from the Book of Job: "I know that my Redeemer liveth." Next Baldwin wrote, "I only am so caged alone to tell. -Theo." The last inscription appears on the published novel: "I am the man, I suffered, I was there. Whitman."[36] Although I interpret David as failing

[36] Schomburg archive, Box 14 folder 4.

in his reflections, I think his confessions do serve the purpose of bearing witness to the problem of white masculine American identitarian investment. David's reflections show the failure of monological confession. His witness is not the positive witness of an exemplar but the negative witness of a cautionary tale.

Baldwin renders David's recurrent potential to break from the cage his failures have formed within and around him. In this way, Baldwin reflects on the troubling self-deception of white masculine American subjects and imagines a breakage-potential that might open such subjects to love and healing. At the level of social discourse, David's disavowed recognition structurally reflects white Americans' refusal to accept responsibility for historical violences, as Baldwin discusses in "Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood." Tuhkanen writes, "Baldwin traces (white) Americans' compromised sense of time and reality to an inadmissible, disavowed historical trauma" ("James Baldwin on the American Express and the Queer Underground" 124). David is a product-participant of this trauma. Baldwin writes, "All countries or groups make of their trials a legend or, as in the case of Europe, a dubious romance called 'history.' But no other country [apart from the US] has ever made so successful and glamorous a romance out of genocide and slavery" ("Freaks" 815). As Ross remarks, for Baldwin, "homosexually inclined men, when manipulating the levers of American imperial power, cannot be considered faggots" (209). In this sense, David's failure to become a faggot is tied up in his failure to release the "American imperial power" he wields as a birth rite.

Although and for the same reasons that he is not a faggot, David is a prototypical homonormative figure; he wants to retain his white masculine American privilege while also acting on his desires, and this requires great self-deception. His persistent avoidance patterns

with regards to relationships mirror those Baldwin identifies at a national (social) level. As a writer, Baldwin strives to "make freedom real" by "revealing the beloved to [themselves]" ("Creative Process" 672). At a personal and social juncture, *Giovanni's Room*, or rather Giovanni's room, locates in white masculine American subjectivity a defensive pathology of innocence that perpetuates inequalities and injustices that are distinctly "American." In the novel's form, Baldwin imagines the self-deceptions by which white masculine American subjects avoid taking responsibility for violent and oppressive American histories. This avoidance perpetuates those violences in the present.

Alongside this troubling repetition, I read David's failures as signifying potential breakages in the identitarian cage that indicate a broader potential in white American society. David's disconcerting refusal to face either himself or the Other challenges the novel's reader to recognize those aspects in their personal reflection that they might want to lock away in their own "Giovanni's room." At stake for Baldwin in this decisive moment of recognition or refusal is the future of American society. Baldwin notes that, unless our divides can be bridged, "each of us will perish in those traps in which we have been struggling for so long" ("Guilt" 725).

David structures his desire toward the identitarian ideal of white American masculinity. The sailor figures this ideal, for David. He projects onto a sailor that he sees an authentic masculinity that he does not feel he embodies himself. The sailor "seemed—somehow—younger than I had ever been, and blonder and more beautiful, and he wore his masculinity as unequivocally as he wore his skin." The sailor catches David desiring him and gives David a contemptuous, knowing look. David "wondered what he had seen in me to elicit such instantaneous contempt," but he rules out his bodily performance. David denies the possibility

of understanding, but in the next moment he acknowledges that "what the sailor had seen in my unguarded eyes was envy and desire: I had seen it often in Jacques' eyes and my reaction and the sailor's had been the same." Once again, David pairs a sort of recognition (the parallel between his and Jacques's desiring gazes) with an external projection and disavowal. He projects his invulnerability onto the boys he desires as well, claiming that even "if I were still able to feel affection . . . it would not have helped, for affection, for the boys I was doomed to look at, was vastly more frightening than lust" (92-93). For David, affection is "vastly more frightening than lust," but his refusal of intimate attachment runs so deep that he constructs the Others who populate his world as the subjects of this fear (rather than himself). Desire posits an impossible gap that can never be transcended; only through dialogical confession, which confronts and disrupts desire through honest and open entanglement with Others, could David become free.

Instead, David's fears trap him in the futures he imagines for himself. He recoils from Jacques and Guillame, two older queers in the Parisian scene. David recognizes "that the contempt I felt for [Jacques] involved my self-contempt," but once again David's acknowledgment does not indicate an actual change in perspective (23). When David is on the verge of a point-of-no-return, about to go home with Giovanni for the first time, Jacques tells him to think about the "imperceptible degrees [by which he] arrived at his present wretchedness." David expresses his disgust with Jacques's quick and dirty flings with boys who he pays, but David's narration disrupts his own effort to distance himself from Jacques. David's reflection is "trapped in the metal" of his chalice, he notices as Jacques talks: "the outline of my own face looked upward hopelessly at me." Jacques tells him his encounters are shameful

because they lack affection: "All touch, but no contact" (56). David, Jacques diagnoses, fears being affected by his relations, and he recommends love as the corrective: "'Love him,' said Jacques, with vehemence, 'love him and let him love you.'" He cautions, "'You play it safe long enough . . . and you'll end up trapped in your own dirty body, forever and forever and forever—like me'" (57). Jacques understands that he figures the future self David is most terrified of becoming, and Jacques spells out the way to avoid the path that leads to this future: embrace love and vulnerable intimacy. Once again, knowing is different from doing; Jacques knows this answer and yet, for some reason, cannot escape himself.

David needs his relationship with Giovanni to fail so that he can internalize Giovanni's room as signifying the impossibility of queer intimacy. Despite his willful ignorance, David repeatedly suggests that he wanted to confess and ask for forgiveness, which would be to render himself vulnerable to another's touch. From the beginning of his relationship with Giovanni, David feels that "I was in a box for I could see that, no matter how I turned, the hour of confession was upon me and could scarcely be averted; unless, of course, I leaped out of the cab, which would be the most terrible confession of all" (47). At various points through the rest of the text, David reiterates the confessional potential in each emergent decision-moment. Even after their breakup, David's run-ins with Giovanni around Paris present new confessional potentials. In other words, David structures his existence in such a way that he constantly feels near to making a confession. At the same time, he only recognizes that his indecision has become decisive after it is too late for Giovanni and their shared life.

In Baldwin's 1954 draft, David says the queers "surrendered their maleness, held it cheap . . . whereas I could make no such surrender, could envisage no such escape" (Schomburg

Archive, Box 14 folder 4). With the landlady of the house in the south of France, David says, "I have something to say to her—to her?—but of course it will never be said. I feel that I want to be forgiven; I want *her* to forgive me." David's self-deception, as usual, quickly conceals the slip he almost makes. He nearly recognizes that the confessions he wants to make are not meant for her specifically. In the second sentence, David has corrected his gaze away from this self-reflexive opening. The crime for which David feels the need to confess, "in some odd way, is in being a man" (70). Understood in terms of identitarian investment, I agree with David's assessment. But David fails to question the meaning of manhood, and so fails to discover the trouble with this identity. Later in the night, he repeats the question: "I might ask to be forgiven—if I could name and face my crime, if there were anything or anybody anywhere with the power to forgive." He feels the locked void inside of himself, but he refuses to take responsibility and in so doing to change his life. He claims to seek external mediation of his "crime," but he rejects every Other's attempt to connect with him in his fortress-cage. His confession to his reader manipulates the confessional act to absolve himself from any future potential for intimacy. He says, "No matter how it seems now, I must confess: I loved [Giovanni]. I do not think that I will ever love anyone like that again" (111). He has failed to become intimate and vulnerable—failed to love—and in the act of recognizing this fact, David mandates his perpetual failure in relation to anyone else.

David's repeated movements toward dialogical confession render the potential for the future to become otherwise than the past. David's decision to flee, again and again, need not set his course. Each return offers a new potential for David to choose differently, although his internalization of Giovanni's room suggests that choosing otherwise becomes more challenging

with each repetition. Genuine encounter with an Other, in what I have termed dialogical confession, exposes one vulnerably to the Other's touch. To refuse this encounter, however, costs one the ability to love. As Baldwin writes, "It is virtually impossible to trust one's human value without the collaboration or corroboration of that eye [of the beholder]—which is to say that no one can live without it. One can, of course, instruct the eye as to what to see, but this effort, which is nothing less than ruthless intimidation, is wounding and exhausting: While it can keep humiliation at bay, it confirms the fact that humiliation is the central danger of one's life. And since one cannot risk love without risking humiliation, love becomes impossible" ("Freaks" 817). In this sense, *Giovanni's Room* is a cautionary tale about the price of not risking vulnerability, as Baldwin suggests in an interview: "*Giovanni* is about what happens to you if you don't tell the truth to yourself. It's about the failure of innocence. . . . It's a telling of David's innocence, the failure of his innocence, and the results of his innocence. The moment he walks out of that room he's condemned to it forever. He will never leave Giovanni's room; the whole earth has become Giovanni's room and will be until the day he dies, because he lied to himself about something sacred—because he wanted to remain innocent" ("An Interview with James Baldwin on Henry James" 55). David's struggle to maintain his personal integrity and identitarian status comes into direct conflict with his human desire for mutual affection and intimacy. The way out, for Baldwin, is dialogical confession—that is, both an assertion of oneself that risks self-reflection (confession) and a revelation of that self-exposure to Others (dialogue).

I interpret Baldwin's rendering a white masculine American subject as a lover's critique, holding a mirror to his unseeing beloved. As a marginal figure within American masculinity,

David's desires constantly threaten to undermine and remove him from his dominant position as a white American man. David makes every effort to counter the threat of an identity breakage because he understands that allowing Giovanni, or another man, to break into his self-conception would mean his disinvestiture from American masculinity and his dominant social position. He feels entitled to this power-position, so he holds onto it even at the cost of his ability to love anyone—costs his lovers share. Although this critique reflects poorly on David, I read the moments of potential breakages in the novel as hopeful, even if David fails to follow the turn through with disinvestment. In my close reading, I described David as a symptomatic white masculine American subject who suffers from dogmatic invulnerability. At numerous points, his identitarian investment is very nearly (but never quite) breached. Although David never makes the turn toward himself and the Other in dialogical confession, the possibility of his choosing differently drives the novel's movement and generates an alternate imagination for his reader.

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Chapter 3—Pleasure in ". . . . . ." [Ellipse]: Sexual Disorientation and the Ecstasy of Faggotry in "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade: A Novel"

> . . . long they lay . . . blowing smoke and exchanging thoughts . . . and Alex swallowed with difficulty . . . he felt a glow of a tremor . . . and they talked and . . . slept . . .
>
> Nugent, "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" 36

Richard Bruce Nugent's "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade: A Novel" was first published in 1926, in the radical small-circulation magazine *Fire!! A Quarterly Devoted to the Younger Negro Artists*. Nugent wrote and drew for the issue while producing it alongside Wallace Thurman, Zora Neal Hurston, Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Bennett, Aaron Douglas, and John Davis (*Fire!!* 3). Although only one issue of the magazine was ever published and it was financially unsuccessful, *Fire!!* has a special place in the literary history of the Harlem Renaissance.

Fire!! came about in part as a response to perceived editorial censorship. Other magazines devoted to Black artistic and intellectual production, such as *Opportunity* and *The Crisis*, were affiliated with organizations (Urban League and the NAACP), and *Fire!!*'s creators thought those other magazines reigned in creativity in order to produce a progressive and upstanding image of African Americans (Cobb 330, Glick 417, Hannah 163-165).[37] Braddock describes *Fire!!*'s creators as "a group of young black artists who were anxious for autonomy beyond the social and cultural obligations of [Alain] Locke's programmatic labors" with *The New Negro* (32). According to Balshaw, it "was a self-conscious attempt to break with the

[37] Some scholars, like Hannah, include the *Messenger* in this list of other magazines (164). Others, like Braddock, include *The New Negro* (30).

orthodoxes of race writing in the period, in thematic and stylistic terms" (311). Hannah adds, "These upstart Harlem artists employed images of burning desire to immolate the more Victorian sensibilities of those who believed that the race should be idealistically represented" (172). It therefore comes as no surprise that *Fire!!* included several controversial pieces unlikely to find publication elsewhere. Yet, as Churchill et al. describe, "*Opportunity* lavished . . . praise" and "*The Crisis* [gave] a nod of approval" (66). *Fire!!* created a space that also distinguished it from other modernist little magazines including *The Little Review*, which had published James Joyce's censorable *Ulysses* (Hannah 166). The producing members of *Fire!!* did try to get the magazine "banned in Boston," but apart from a few critics' complaints the issue went out unchallenged (Braddock 36).[38]

Nugent published drawings and "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" in *Fire!!* without his family name, as "Richard Bruce," because of its scandalous content. "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" is one of the pieces allegedly produced with an intent to upset (along with Wallace Thurman's "Cordelia the Crude"). According to Eric Garber's entry for Richard Bruce Nugent in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Wallace Thurman and Nugent "flipped a coin to determine" which sensational piece each would write: "one on homosexuality, the other on prostitution" (qtd. in Cobb 330). While significant as part of the context for *Fire!!*'s publication, it is possible that this account reverberates too strongly across literary criticism on the text. As a result, critics might

[38] The effort to get the magazine "banned in Boston" in order to ensure its success failed. This failure seems to corroborate Paul's feeling, in Wallace Thurman's *Infants of Spring*, that he could never achieve fame like Wilde's, regardless of his aesthetic and personal provocations: "'Being a Negro, he feels that his chances for excessive notoriety à la Wilde are slim'" (59, qtd. in Glick 423).

over-emphasize its contingent production, in corroboration with Nugent's carelessness about publication and coterminous artistic underproduction. The result is that the text itself is less likely to be considered than its production and provocation. In the close reading that follows, I engage the text on its own sexual, aesthetic, and political terms.

I contend that Nugent's text produces an intercursive aesthetic of faggotry. Intercursivity or intercourse, a keyword for this chapter, indicates the mundane mixing of things that disrupts their conventional boundaries and borders. Although they overlap, intercourse stands opposed to sexuality, which describes a cluster of conventional boundaries and borders. My close reading draws on two critics of Nugent in particular. St. Clair describes Nugent as performing a "dilettante aesthetic" (273), and Glick describes Nugent as a "Black Dandy" (415). St. Clair argues that "Nugent's queerness embraced dilettantism as a political inactivity of the self that deconstructs racist stereotypes of the 'lazy negro' even as it rejects the classist and professionalist ideologies of racial uplift and black bourgeois respectability" (273). What I call faggotry is in the mode of this dilettante aesthetic. Faggotry floats free from those mooring posts that hold one to certain standards in terms of racial, gender, and sexual performance. While these standards are different for Nugent and his character, Alex, in 1926 than they were for James Baldwin (1956), William S. Burroughs (1963), or their characters, the potential for faggotry is present for each of them in the way they assemble themselves. Faggotry names the queer freedom of divergent life that gathers together disparate gender, sexual, and racial performances. Significantly, Alex follows the line of flight faggotry offers where Burroughs's and Baldwin's characters flee in other directions, to the safety of normative structure. As Glavey writes, "What is truly remarkable about the story is that, though it relates

Alex's struggle to understand his desires, it seems that this struggle is unrelated to any prohibition against loving a man, with any sense that such a desire is forbidden or might result in suffering" (85). While my analysis focuses on this aspect of Nugent's present-oriented queer futurity, his work also raises critical questions about the production of class, racial formation, and intellectual and artistic recognition.

I contend that Nugent offers a unique conception of intercourse and ecstasy, which I describe in this chapter as pleasure in ellipse, sexual disorientation, and the ecstasy of faggotry—the coming out from oneself into difference. I articulate my argument in the schizoanalytic terms of Deleuze and Guattari. Nugent's narration performs a pansexual-mulatto political aesthetic, troubling the distinction between binary sexes and races that later in the century would concretize into the base for sexual orientation. His narrator finds himself in love with persons across a gender and racial spectrum, and I contend in my textual analysis that Nugent's formal technique to achieve this pansexual-mulatto aesthetic renders in literary form the pleasures of intercourse—the incomplete coming together and flow between persons. These pleasures are only possible, according to Deleuze and Guattari, on a body without organs, which Nugent's ellipses produce at the levels of both content and form.[39] The body without organs is a zero-level for desire—"what remains when you take everything away" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 151). The body without organs "is that which one desires and by which one desires" (Deleuze and Guattari 165). It is a plane of consistency, "the unformed,

[39] Pleasure sometimes appears as a negatively charged word for Deleuze and Guattari, but in that usage they mean the pleasure of masturbatory climax, which is antithetical to Nugent's text (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 154). I follow Nugent's use of "pleasure."

unorganized, nonstratified, or destratified body and all its flows" (Deleuze and Guattari 43). I employ the term in order to describe the destratification or deterritorialization of intercourse that Nugent achieves in the text. Nugent's aesthetic and formal choices share the text's investment in what I describe as faggotry—the perverse bundling of a person according to their own flows and desires, over and against socially compelled flows and desire formations. Other of Nugent's texts similarly render the mixing of race(s), gender(s), and sexualit(ies).[40] I first describe pleasure in ellipse before turning to the text's sexual disorientation and the ecstasy of faggotry.

Pleasure in Ellipse

> . . . while he . . . Alex . . . was content to lay and smoke and meet friends at night . . . to argue and read Wilde . . . Freud . . . Boccacio and Schnitzler . . . to attend Gurdjieff meetings and know things . . .
>
> Nugent, "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" 34

In "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade," the narrator ponders social norms, contemplates making art he does not make, and finds deep enjoyment in the intercursivity (or, the mixing and unraveling) of life. The text is comprised of seven pages of ellipses-heavy consciousness floating. Grammatically, because of the ellipses, Nugent writes the text in nine paragraph-long "sentences."

Nugent's use of ellipses performs a kind of grammatical edging, drawing the reader to a full stretch while moving toward a never-reached conclusion. The text undulates from one

[40] Consider, for instance, "Narcissus" (*Gay Rebel* 87) and "Bastard Song" (*Gay Rebel* 89-90).

thought to another in a way that suggests the unhurried space-time of finding pleasure in one's existence. "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" begins as it ends, and indeed as it manifests narratively throughout, indefinitely: "*He wanted to do something* . . . to write or draw . . . or something . . ." (33). Nugent leaves standard grammatical sentence structures aside, preferring instead to (dis)join words, phrases, images, and ideas in third-person simulation of a consciousness-flow. He had employed this style before, in "Sahdji," which was published in Alain Locke's 1925 *New Negro* (Nugent, *Gay Rebel* 63-64). Nugent employs the traditional ellipse most frequently, but he also uses extended ellipses of up to twelve dots to distinguish greater from lesser breaks in the narrative space-time.

Nugent's ellipses might appear overwhelming taken all at once on the page, but they draw the reader nearer who is willing to slow down into his writing. Some phrases can be read at pace, without slowing overmuch to accommodate the ellipses: "when he had first come to New York he had [found work] . . . and he had only been fourteen then was it because he was nineteen now that he felt so idle . . . and contented . . . or was it because he was an artist . . . but was he an artist" (34). The content flows together and only the conjunctions redirect the flows. Other phrases demand that the reader pause and allow the thoughts to form as distinct waves, as when Alex recalls telling a neighbor his father had died: "an' how's your father this mornin' . . . dead . . . get out . . . tch tch tch an' I was just around there with a cup a' custard yesterday . . . Alex puffed contentedly on his cigarette . . . he was hungry and comfortable" (38). Multiple

thoughts and space-times come together disjunctively, producing distinct non-overlapping flows.[41]

With his use of ellipses, I contend that Nugent constitutes what Deleuze and Guattari describe as a "body without organs" (BwO), which is to say that Nugent achieves a destratification of intercourse. Deleuze and Guattari favor examples like the masochist, who forms their body without organs by closing up orifices and causing flows to circulate on their body without organs by way of their master or controller (*A Thousand Plateaus* 152). My contention is that Nugent achieves this effect—a body without organs—by employing intercursive literary methods. That is, the form of his writing holds together and pushes apart Alex's thoughts and actions, neither unifying nor separating them. Nugent closes off the gaps between sentences by producing only nine of them in the entire seven-page piece, and he then causes flows of desire to circulate on the full body of the text (taken as a material thing). It might be worth saying that he composed a story without using a single sentence, since his transitions between paragraphs and even his conclusion employ ellipses of various lengths. In this sense Nugent reveals the sentence as the organism of writing; Deleuze and Guattari write, "The BwO is opposed not to organs but to that organization of the organs called the organism" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 158). The organism "is a stratum on the BwO" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 159). In other words, language happens before its structuration into sentences; it is not fragments that violate the sentence but the sentence that takes control over and thereby produces

[41] For my purposes as a literary critic, this makes quotation more challenging than usual, since cogent thoughts spread out across many breaks. I prefer to include slightly longer quotations, although in some cases I have used brackets around ellipses to distinguish my omissions from Nugent's original text.

"fragmentation." Nugent's text sutures the divisions produced by sentences using ellipses and produces the body without organs across which flows can circulate freely.

The significance of the claim that "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" produces a body without organs is that my analysis of Nugent's text describes its focus as desire, and "The BwO is desire; it is that which one desires and by which one desires. . . . There is desire whenever there is the constitution of a BwO under one relation or another" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 165). For Deleuze and Guattari, "It is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight, causing conjugated flows to pass and escape and bringing forth continuous intensities for a BwO" (161). "Strata" here indicates organizations and structures. By allowing the sentence to break down, Nugent encourages the organism of writing to decompose—deterritorializing the written word. Nugent achieves this first at the level of form, but I want to suggest that the organizing structure upon which Nugent works most intently is that structuring desire—perhaps especially, those strata determining who can love who and how. "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade," then, focuses on desire and its organizations, and Nugent's intervention is to render an alternative, intercursive imagination.

This requires understanding Nugent's piece as more than a provocation, more than an attempt to get *Fire!!* censored; Nugent's piece works aesthetically on its own. Alex desires to walk in the night, and he finds pleasure in that undirected activity. Alex proclaims, "to wander in the night was wonderful . . . myriads of inquisitive lights . . . curiously prying into the dark . . . and fading unsatisfied . . ." (35). His enjoyment is drawn from wandering itself, without the eventual aim of reaching a certain point; he simply enjoys wandering through the world. St. Clair notes that Alex is like Baudelaire's *flâneur* except that Alex fails to produce his meandering

experience into art—all "fad[es] unsatisfied" (St. Clair 282). Unsatisfaction does not disrupt his contentment. Multiple flows circulate like waves across the page as he wanders:

> he passed a woman . . . she was not beautiful . . . and he was sad because she did not weep that she would never be beautiful . . . was it Wilde who had said . . . a cigarette is the most perfect pleasure because it leaves one unsatisfied . . . the breeze gave to him a perfume stolen from some wandering lady of the evening . . . it pleased him . . . why was it that men wouldn't use perfumes . . . they should . . . each and every one of them liked perfumes . . . (35)

Following his thoughts on Wilde, to which I return, Alex wonders at the gender norms—organizing structures or strata—that restrict the use of perfumes to women. Not unlike cigarette smoking's unsatisfaction, perfume draws one in, offering a pleasurable whiff that asks one to draw nearer to appreciate the scent more fully. Alex notes about his desire for men to wear perfumes:

> if ever he were to voice that thought . . . express it . . . he would be misunderstood . . . it made him feel tragic and great . . . but may be it would be nicer to be understood . . . but no . . . no great artist is . . . then again neither were fools . . . they were strangely akin these two . . . Alex thought of a sketch he would make . . . [. . .] in truth it was fine to be young and hungry and an artist . . . to blow blue smoke from an ivory holder . . . . . (35)

Alex is at once tragic and mundane; neither an artist (in the sense that he does not create art) nor a fool, neither satisfied nor discontent, his resistant stance is neither political nor apolitical. He feels he would like to break down the stratum of gender norms about perfume, but he does not feel he can without becoming either an isolated artist or a fool (or both). However, while Alex does little to contest the inhibitive social logic of "sex" in this scene, Nugent troubles the sex line by expressing these thoughts and giving Alex the agency to disobey that logic in his own life.

The difference between Nugent and Alex is not well-defined or complete. To return to Alex's thoughts on Wilde, it was Wilde's character Harry (Lord Henry) who, in *The Picture of Dorian Grey*, makes the statement about cigarettes. Alex's attribution presents a useful parallel for the relation between Alex and Nugent in Wilde and Harry. Even though it is "Harry" who says it, it is also Wilde who puts Harry's words on the page. Similarly, the relation between Nugent and Alex is not always clear. Pieces of the text appear autobiographical, although some details surrounding the narrator do not correspond to Nugent's biography. For instance, Nugent's parents and upbringing differ from Alex's, but Alex and Nugent are both underproducing artists who are socially included in artistic circles of the Harlem Renaissance (St. Clair 277-278).

> I take this as Alex-Nugent's intercursive axiom: the most perfect pleasure is unsatisfaction. Intercourse is about flowing between. Alex does not feel discontent (to the contrary) but rather continually turns toward the beautiful and the pleasurable without accepting any particular turn as achieving his aesthetic or erotic goal. This is not a hedonistic pleasure-seeking, then, but the pleasure-seeking of an artistic sensibility. With this unachievable aesthetic ideal, Alex seems critical of the "not beautiful" woman's apparent contentment with herself. I interpret this comment as connected to Alex's intercursive axiom. For Alex, pleasure is an asymptotic movement toward beauty and enjoyment that never reaches an aesthetic or satisfying telos. It is not getting there that pleases Alex but being ever on the way—as represented in the unsatisfaction produced by cigarette smoking. Not on the way (to somewhere) but on the way—on the street, wandering.

Flows of desire circulate across the text's body without organs like the smoke swirling from Alex's unsatisfying cigarette. The cigarette is a useful example of a commodity whose purpose is repeated consumption, and of the way that Nugent/Alex remains connected to a capitalist consumer culture, despite his resistant posture (Glick 422). Cigarettes were first produced in the late nineteenth century as a commodity that significantly increased access to tobacco consumption across class lines. A "fag," as cigarettes are still called in some places, was made up of small bits of tobacco bundled together by paper and could be smoked relatively cheaply and quickly, compared to cigar and pipe smoking. The tie between cigarettes and the working class follows from this material history. For Wilde's Lord Henry, who has time and money for leisure, a cigarette's ease of consumption is part of its unsatisfaction. While pipes and cigars cannot be smoked quickly without ruining the experience, a cigarette is quickly gone and leaves one wanting another following the nicotine buzz. In her analysis of "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade," Glick writes, "To excite the appetite—that is the fundamental goal of both the cigarette and the commodity" (422). Cigarettes are brief, while the duration of pipe and cigar smoking means that one is almost over-satisfied by the extended consumption. I suspect it is because of his leisurely access to cigars and pipes that Lord Henry feels as he does about cigarettes, but Nugent's Alex takes up the line vis-à-vis Wilde and proclaims it his own, as a dilettante. For Alex, the titular and often-referenced "blue smoke" of cigarettes itself is aesthetically pleasing, and he enjoys the inactivity of lounging with a fag between his lips.[42]

[42] It may be worth noting that of the fifteen colors Nugent describes in the text, the most often repeated color is blue (appearing 31 times), followed by red (19 times) and black (16 times). Nugent's drawing by the same name as this text uses just black, blue, and red. Alex ponders how colors feel, and imagines a project he calls "color music," which would make colors

Nugent constitutes a body without organs at the level of the text, but Alex also pursues the body without organs within the text. Alex produces his desires along the lines of the intercursive axiom I described earlier: the most perfect pleasure is unsatisfaction. Alex's desires tumble out as distinct lines that converge only relatively. They have no unifying logic or Oedipal explanation (even though Alex's mother and father both play a role in the text). The body without organs is like a surface connecting multiple lines (a plane of consistency). Deleuze and Guattari write, "The BwO is the field of immanence of desire, the plane of consistency specific to desire (with desire defined as a process of production without reference to any exterior agency, whether it be a lack that hollows it out or a pleasure that fills it)" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 154). Alex's pleasures are unsatisfying but contented, meaning that Alex neither "hollows it out [nor] fills it in" but swirls across the surface. In other words, Alex's desires do not adhere to the available social models for desire and pleasure but rather form rhizomatically, as the body without organs. This allows Alex to experience and imagine desires not within the typical structures of desire.

In addition to desire, Nugent wrestled with—participating in and resisting—the social logic of racial uplift and the New Negro. Nugent performs a dilettante aesthetic, as St. Clair argues, and troubles the logic of racial uplift without conforming to the caricature of Black men

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audible (35). While this project, like the others Alex conceives while smoking, does not become tangible in the narrative, Nugent's writing does something of this kind in the connections he draws between aesthetics and erotics. Alex wonders, "was imagination blue," and also connects blueness to smoke, the night, shadows, and thoughts (35). Red appears frequently in the second half of the story attached to "calla lilies," but the color is also attached to lips, blush, and the cigarette holder. Black is mostly used to describe hair and poppies, but on one occasion each it is used to describe a cape, eyes, and the night. Silver, ivory, white, and green appear six to nine times, with the remaining colors appearing one to three times.

this logic was meant to oppose. Alex is a dilettante, and, as St. Clair writes, "Nugent resignified these pejoratives [attached to dilettantes], embodying a lazy, unproductive dilettantism as a liberating practice that freed him from the politico-aesthetic restraints of uplift and the New Negro" (275). Alex embodies Nugent's dilettante aesthetic, which is a third option to logic and caricature, in his treatment of smoking and art. Along similar lines, Löbbermann writes, "Nugent's lyrical short story 'Smoke, Lilies and Jade,' which, ironically, critics have treated as something akin to a Queer Harlem manifesto, makes visible the differences between the New Negro's modernity and the Black Dandy's modernism" (226). Alex lays on his bed, "puff[ing] contentedly on his cigarette," dreaming about the wonderful things he could be doing and remembering how he came to be who and where he is (33). His activity is defiantly unproductive, and he dwells in a mixed state, "hungry and comfortable," noticing without worrying that he has no money, feeling "idle . . . and contented," an artist among artists without art to sell (33-34).[43] Alex's mixed-state existence and almost defiant contentment combine in resistance to the social logic of racial uplift.

Alex does not resist oppositionally; he resists horizontally. Instead of leading to a culmination, his thoughts spread out and swirl together like the smoke he describes. In his musings, Alex dreams up numerous artistic projects (drawing, music, writing) that never become more concrete than the fleeting potential they form in his mind. Alex finds pleasure in his imagined projects' incomplete rendering. He does not end up with a product, consummating his work with results, but simply moves along in dialectical response to the

[43] Langston Hughes writes in *The Big Sea* that Nugent was in charge of distributing *Fire!!*, but that he would use the earnings before making it back to Harlem ("Harlem Literati" para. 13).

sensations constituting his becoming-present: "his sensuous experience of the image's ephemerality and loss is pleasurable in itself" (St. Clair 282). He cares little for success or audiences, and his artistic underproduction matches that of Nugent himself (St. Clair 276). He imagines his mother saying to him, "I don't see how you can be satisfied" (34). And indeed he appears not to be satisfied, although he is content with his unsatisfaction. Alex does not follow through on his artistic imagination, the "sketch he [thinks] he would make," but that does not stop him from understanding himself as an artist (35). Just as he is content but unsatisfied, so he understands himself as an artist even though he does not produce art. What makes an artist is a mode of becoming-in-the-world, for Nugent-Alex, rather than a material production.

The pleasure Alex finds in unsatisfaction is reflected in what I earlier called Nugent's grammatical edging through his use of ellipses. In the terms of Deleuze and Guattari, Nugent's use of ellipses constitutes a body without organs on which Alex's desires circulate. Alex's meandering thoughts move away from and return to various topics, none of which feel adequate as the story's narrative motivation; in this sense, they are unsatisfying. The recurring reference to "the joy of being an artist and of blowing blue smoke thru an ivory holder inlaid with red jade and green" suggests that the piece can be read as a manifesto not only for queer Harlem but also for the pleasure of unsatisfaction.

Sexual Disorientation

> . . . he climbed the noisy stair of the odorous tenement . . . smelled of fish . . . of stale fried fish and dirty milk bottles . . . he rather liked it . . . he liked the acrid smell of horse manure too . . . strong . . .
>
> Nugent, "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" 36

"Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" is about not sexuality (a stratum on the body without organs) but intercourse (possible only on a deterritorialized body without organs). As I employ the terms, intercourse refers to a broad cluster of phenomena while sexuality refers to a narrow line of phenomena; sexuality is the recent historical structure that produces much contemporary human desire through its social logics, while intercourse is the broader and longer-standing historical field on which sexuality is constructed. On Nugent's textual body without organs it becomes possible for intercourse to circulate, as opposed to sexuality appearing—for intercursive pleasures to form that do not adhere to genitals and the orgasmic orientation as organizers of sexuality. Sexuality relies on images for its production of desire. Images are what finally are desired, in sexuality (Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus 337). By contrast, the body without organs "is the body without an image" (Anti-Oedipus 8). Intercourse, which can only happen on a body without organs, produces deterritorialized and reterritorializing pleasures (pleasures that break down structures and inevitably produce new structures). The text produces a body without organs, primarily through the use of ellipses, and the text circulates intercursive flows on its surface. In this way, Nugent's text does not so much show a queer sexuality as it does queer sexuality.

At the same time that the text's form constitutes a body without organs, Alex constitutes a body without organs on which flows circulate at the level of content. This is to say, Alex breaks down the social logics of sexuality and produces queer, intercursive desires. In the middle of the piece, Nugent writes self-reflexively: "his thoughts just carried and mingled like . . . like odors . . . suggested but never definite" (35). In addition to the formal body without organs produced by ellipses, Nugent's text produces a body without organs through the ecstasy

of pleasure without telos—unsatisfaction as a contented orientation. In the first place there is the textual body without organs, and in the second, the content of Alex's thoughts and meanderings. Deleuze and Guattari write, "Whenever someone makes love, really makes love, that person constitutes a body without organs, alone and with the other person or people" (A Thousand Plateaus 30). As we will find, Alex's thoughts and love-makings also constitute a body without organs. At multiple levels, the text disrupts and queers sexuality.

Sexual disorientation has two senses in this chapter. First, I mean to indicate the disorientation-deterritorialization of sexual intercourse (what it means, how it happens, and who can do it together—which figures racially and in terms of gender in the text). Second, I mean a deterritorialization of gender (racialized and sexual). The third sense, implicit, is that the first two senses bring trouble for the sex-gender organizing structure.

Although I emphasize the text's destratification of sexuality, gender, and race, this is not a radical rupture or sudden break from all social stratifications. Deleuze and Guattari caution against "too-sudden destratification," as would be the case if every organizing structure were overthrown at once (*A Thousand Plateaus* 161, 165). This kind of radical break does not occur in Nugent's text. As Glick notes of Nugent as a black dandy, neither Nugent nor Alex has transcended the capitalist organization of their lives. Glick writes, "the black dandy is as much a product of capitalist modernity as he is a rebel against it" (422). Other structures could be added to capitalist organization. In the other direction, some would suggest that Nugent moves too quickly in destratifying race, in particular. Bauer writes, "Alleged races being, in truth, the historical product of continuous mixings, the premise of (Black, White, or otherwise) racial purity is, for Nugent, a matter of factual ignorance or psychological repression" (Bauer 1040).

Nugent's destratification or unsettling of race, although it might be factually true, risks disavowing race as a significant stratum in both his particular place-time and mine. For this reason, Löbbermann writes, "If Bruce Nugent's Harlem Renaissance project was to queer the New Negro, the imperative today is to write blackness into queerness" (236). In other words, Nugent was faced with social stratifications organized around racial uplift, so he had to destratify race in order to reach queerness; but today his work is known for its queerness (a new stratification), so it is queerness that must be destratified in order to reach blackness. I focus on the destratification that opens onto intercourse, which extends across the three categories of gender, sexuality, and race.

My contention is that Nugent troubles the lines between and across race(s), gender(s), and sexualit(ies) in his intercursive presentation. Wallace Thurman's later *roman à clef* novel *Infants of Spring* presents Paul, Thurman's characterization of Nugent, as holding quite similar perspectives on intercourse to those contained in Nugent's "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade." Cobb notes that "Paul is not bashful about his homosexual experiences—he even offers a startlingly insightful and open account of sexual orientation when asked which kind of sex (straight or queer) he prefers: 'After all, there are no sexes, only sex majorities, and the primary function of the sex act is enjoyment. Therefore I enjoyed one experience as the other' ([Thurman] 47)" (Cobb 339). Paul, as Thurman's version of Nugent, disorients sexuality as it is posed in terms of sex-gender and orientation. Gender is not a binary, for Paul-Nugent, but a spectrum. Sexual desire, accordingly, is for the pleasure that happens when bodies come together in certain intercursive ways rather than for which bodies come together.

Despite Thurman's portrayal and Nugent's own presentation of gender nonconformity, critics have sometimes taken Nugent's unabashed self-affiliation with homosexuality as indicative of how "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" is to be read, again in corroboration with the account of its production as "sensational." As with James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*, these critics describe Nugent's as a homosexual text. Yet the primary narrative development in the text is Alex's discovery that he "can love two"—a white Spanish-speaking man (called both Adrian and Beauty) and a Black American woman (called Melva). A close reading of the text, even if Nugent's autobiographical and fictional descriptions are bracketed for the moment, suggests that Alex is better understood as polyamorous, pansexual, and panracial than as gay (Gerstner 45). As Nugent's "Drawings for Mulattoes" suggests, Nugent is invested in the middle, in the mixing, in indeterminate plateaus.[44] In those drawings, he portrays the racialized and gendered binary contained within a person, not to uphold the binary but to draw attention to its insufficiency and impossibility for one who merges the two. It is striking that the aspect of "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" called "scandalous" is but the tip of the iceberg. Nugent not only replaces desire for one gender and race with desire for another—he questions the truth of monogamy and binarisms as such (white/black, man/woman, queer/straight, one/multiple).

Nugent does not explicitly describe sex acts in the text, although the text has an erotic pulse that seems to draw the sexual into the everyday through Nugent's intercursive aesthetic. When Alex first meets Adrian, they are each walking on a street at night. Even in the description of their first encounter, Alex and Adrian's coming together through the sound of

[44] See Glick 426-430.

their shoes striking the pavement figures an aesthetic ideal for Alex. Their rhythmic resonance—the sound of their heels clicking together, "their echoes mingl[ing]"—makes Alex feel that "they had always known each other." Alex thinks, "he walked music also . . . he knew the beauty of the narrow blue . . . Alex knew that from the way their echoes mingled" (36). Langston Hughes described the story in his autobiography The Big Sea as "a green and purple story . . . in the Oscar Wilde tradition" (Part III, "Harlem Literati," para. 12).[45] While Hughes's comment seems to be directed at the erotic content of Nugent's text, it seems to me that the aesthetic resonance of "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" with Wilde's work is at least as strong as its erotic openness (and perhaps those are not to be separated).

The description Nugent provides of Alex and Adrian's love-making entanglement is along the same intercursive lines. Alex "called him Beauty . . . long they lay . . . blowing smoke and exchanging thoughts . . . and Alex swallowed with difficulty . . . he felt a glow of tremor . . . and they talked and . . . slept." Although Alex notes Adrian's bodily perfection—"his body was all symmetry and music"—the scene culminates in their conversational intercourse and Adrian's fitting his aesthetic ideal (36). Carroll writes that Adrian, "the character Beauty[,] functions as a site of queer desire inseparable from aesthetic longing" (491). This presentation blurs the line between homosexuality and homosociality, destratifying (or breaking down) and reattaching various forms of intercourse that had been separated out from one another with the

[45] Alain Locke suggested that Whitman would have been a less alienating choice than Wilde (qtd. in Hannah 167).

historical production of "sexual intercourse" in the eighteenth century.[46] Alex retains an aesthetic stratum on his body without organs, but there is something else that draws Alex to Adrian.

It is not sexual activity that marks an intercursive love relation for Nugent, but an experience of ecstasy. Alex's pursuit of understanding why he likes Adrian leads him to the discovery that those feelings are like his feelings for Melva; it is this similarity, and not any sexual activity, that leads Alex to understand his feelings for Adrian as ecstasy and love (36). In sexual intercourse, ecstasy is often portrayed as the teleological achievement of orgasm. In the orgasmic-ecstatic event, one feels moved out from oneself in transcendental negation. The self momentarily abandons its concrete bodily grounding, opening one to the experience of feeling-undivided-with-the-world. The moment is fleeting, and the ecstasy unsustainable. Ecstasy itself means "out-being," and Alex connects his relationships with Adrian and Melva because they both draw him out from himself—they each ecstasize him. Nugent writes, "Alex had become confused . . . was it that he was susceptible to beauty that Alex liked Adrian so much . . . but no . . . he knew other people who were beautiful . . . Fania and Gloria . . . Monty and Bunny . . . but he was never confused before them . . . while Beauty . . . Beauty could make him believe in Buddha . . . or imps . . . and no one else could do that . . . that is no one but Melva" (36). Orgasm is often portrayed as the ecstatic end of sexual intercourse, but what—or rather who—brings Alex out from himself is Beauty, even without the orgasmic conclusion. Adrian-Beauty confuses

[46] "Intercourse" had been associated with conversation and roadways, but it began to assume its more limited usage following the production of the term "sexual intercourse" in the eighteenth century.

Alex's self-understanding as does Melva, taking him out from himself and changing him. Adrian is beautiful, but it is not this that draws Alex out.

What draws Alex out about Adrian is the way they entangle. Not arboreously, as trees with roots and branches to be used in certain ways, but rhizomatically, spreading out and curling around. They step together not in a fascicular military time but in the coincidence of a harmonious multiplicity: "Alex walked and the click of his heels sounded . . . and had an echo . . . sound being tossed back and forth . . . back and forth . . . some one was approaching . . . and their echoes mingled . . . and gave the sound of castenets . . . Alex liked the sound of the approaching man's footsteps . . . he walked music also" (36). Nugent includes more physical details in their later encounters, but his attachment to Adrian is aesthetic as much as sexual. The absence of a final sexual climax suggests that Alex's pleasure is to be found in how their smoke and minds and bodies intertwine. While not not homosexual, then, Nugent's text focuses on other forms of intercursive pleasure, still highly erotic though not strictly sexual at all. Where the text does dwell on sex, it is in the sense of gender, pansexuality, or "Edward Carpenter's intermediate Third Sex" (Glavey 99).[47] Alex revises the notion of heterosexual complementarity by suggesting that "he would like Beauty to know Melva . . . they were both so perfect . . . such compl[e]ments . . . yes he would like Beauty to know Melva because he loved them both . . . there . . . he had thought it . . . actually dared to think it" (36-37). The pair are complementary in

[47] Glavey disagrees with my contention, arguing instead that "The text seems more invested in the question of twoness than in the question of gender, a fact hinted at by Nugent's own self-identification as a 'duo-sexual'" (85).

the way that Alex desires and finds pleasure with both, not as a heterosexual pairing in themselves but as equally footed on a spectrum of aesthetic and erotic pleasure-making.

Nugent lures the reader into thinking that Alex will decide between his lovers rather than embracing both. As he falls asleep, Alex's mind pivots between the two names—"Beauty . . . Melva . . . Beauty . . . Melva"—and he dreams of finding both beautiful lovers while searching in a field for his cigarette holder. Although his search retroactively is for his cigarette holder, the dream narration initially seems to suggest, through the ambiguous repetition of "he was searching" without a grammatical object, that Alex is searching for one or the other of his lovers and cannot decide between them. His search first leads him to Adrian's "two strong white legs . . . dancer's legs" and then to Melva's "two small feet olive-ivory . . . two well turned legs curving gracefully from slender ankles." Each lover tells him, "I'll wait Alex." The dream passage concludes in quasi-sexual but unsatisfying terms when "suddenly he stood erect . . . exhultant . . . and in his hands he held . . . an ivory holder . . . inlaid with red jade . . . and green . . . . . ." (37). He stands "erect," holding in his hands the object for which he has been searching, which is not a phallus but a tool that will allow him to smoke his next unsatisfying cigarette. Even with his lovers (and in dreams), Alex is tuned into contentment over satisfaction, contentedly daydreaming a queer future into his present.

In the aesthetic-erotic practice I have suggested Alex performs, it seems he has found the unsatisfaction for which he was searching in the cigarette holder, yet he wakes next to Adrian and wonders "what could it all mean . . . did dreams have meanings." When Adrian stirs, Alex feigns slumber and struggles to keep breathing normally. He feels his pulse pounding and tries to replicate a natural awakening at the feel of one's lover pressing their lips to one's own: "how

much pressure does it take to waken one . . . [. . .] how does one act." Adrian ponders the unknown formation of his own desires: "I wonder why I like to look at some things Dulce [Adrian's pet name for Alex] . . . things like smoke and cats . . . and you" (37). Like Alex, Adrian does not understand the pleasure he finds in Alex. Yet this lack of understanding does not prevent either Alex or Adrian from finding pleasure with the other—or from constituting a body without organs on which that pleasure can circulate. Although and because he is sexually disoriented, Alex is poised to experience the queer freedom of faggotry.

The Ecstasy of Faggotry

> . . . one *can* . . . and the street had been blue . . . one *can* . . . and the room was clouded with blue smoke . . . drifting vapors of smoke and thoughts . . .
>
> Nugent, "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" 39

Nugent's story is identified in *Fire!!*'s table of contents as "A Novel." As discussed above, the ellipses which produce the text's distinctive form render it nearer to poetry than prose, with lines occurring not vertically and organized but horizontally and rhizomatically. The ellipses allow Alex's thoughts to flow together and come apart at the same time. They connect apparently disparate thoughts in Alex's mind while they also push phrases apart with the temporal gap the ellipses effect. As a formal aspect of the text, they produce an intercursive poetics that asks the reader to slow down radically in order to permit thoughts, things, and events to run together both intratextually and between reader and text. Despite its relatively short length of seven pages, the ellipses stretch the temporality of the piece and demand that a reader slow herself in order to approach the page. This use of (dis)junctive ellipses throughout the entire novel makes thoughts swirl together like the titular smoke, forming a textual body

without organs. The chronotopic circulation of the narrator's meandering consciousness constitutes a second body without organs while failing the genre's conventions (deterritorializing the "novel").

The "novel" ends doubly inconclusive, failing the genre in both stylistic form and narrative content. As J. Jack Halberstam suggests in their book *The Queer Art of Failure*, "in losing we will find another way of making meaning" (25). The movement back and forth, with which parts of the novel-poem have been concerned, between love for Melva and love for Adrian, woman and man, black and white, dissatisfaction and contentment, reaches its climactic decision-point in Alex's repeated claim that "one can love two." His failure to choose works as a critique leveled against two axioms of the stratum of sexuality: sexual orientation and monogamy. Alex claims the capacity to love more than one, to orient himself toward multiple others who he loves differently but together. At the same time, Nugent concludes his piece with the ambiguous and unfulfilled ". . . To Be Continued . . ." (39). Even "To Be Continued" is surrounded by ellipses. Nugent never did publish a direct continuation (one might argue, as Gerstner indicates, that his "Drawings for Mulattoes" performs this role indirectly), so the reader is left with Alex's central conflict unresolved (Gerstner 52). Nugent ends the text, as he began it, in the middle—forming a rhizome (rather than a narrative progression) and disrupting interpretive efforts. Whatever critical conclusion might be drawn about sexual orientation and compulsory monogamy from Alex's narration, this is to be held without finality—inconclusively postponed to a never arriving future. As St. Clair suggests, this "disrupts the text's (in)cohesion and any readerly attempt to stabilize the protagonist's sexual identity" (283).

This dissatisfying "inconclusion" maps onto the erotics of unsatisfaction formulated in the text and the sexual disorientation the text performs.

The double ending disrupts and queers the teleological orientation of both narrative and sex. At the same time, Nugent emphasizes the anticlimactic pleasure of intercourse. While the piece renders Alex and Adrian "coming together" in vivid terms, they come together without ever climaxing narratively or sexually. Their intercourse is typified by their entanglement, their running together, their contrasts, their symmetries. The notion that "the most perfect pleasure," as I analyzed earlier, would be so named precisely because it leaves one unsatisfied clashes with the notion, within the sexual rubric, that sex is about climax and satiation. Alex imagines pleasure as most nearly autotelic, with the pleasure of post-sexual intercourse operating as an end in itself. Pleasure, for Nugent's Alex, is to be found in the flow between and across bodies without organs, like the smoke-thoughts-sounds-colors-pleasures swirling across his transcribed experience. While Nugent's writing is often framed in terms of homosexual desire because he employs the word self-referentially, I have argued that an uncomplicated surface reading of either the text in consideration here or Nugent's biography would indicate pansexuality as a more apt descriptor. A more nuanced reading of the piece I analyze here might turn to polyamory, following Nugent's concluding narrative claim that "one can love two." Yet I want to follow this claim into Nugent's textual body without organs and contend that sexual disorientation is not about redirecting desire from one gender to another, nor even producing multiple concurrent desire-flows; rather, Nugent's sexual disorientation spins away from the category of "sex" as such and moves toward the intercursive ecstasy of faggotry.

Pleasure appears not in a penetrative, phallic thrust but in the interstitial ellipses that, at one and the same time, hold apart and bring together thoughts and persons.

Sexuality, in its word-parts, is about the coming together and intersecting of persons. It is often an unequal relation, and has long been figured as such, with an active penetrator and a passive penetrated object, doer and under-goer. Body parts interpenetrate unequally, and complementarity serves as a rubric for which configurations are legitimized. In sex, separate bodies mix only at certain connecting points (genitals joining to produce the nexus of simulated oneness, the ecstatic moment of sexual union). At the same time that sexuality is about coming together, the philosophy of sexual difference (beginning in early modernity and continuing into the present) is concerned with separating out and maintaining distinctions between sexes. I have preferred "intercourse" to "sex" in this dissertation because it emphasizes the sharing of flows and intermixing over the separation and distinction of sexual difference. I have read and analyzed Nugent's "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" because his formal style, the text's content, and Nugent's aesthetic perspective provide a conceptualization and narration of intercourse without sexuality. Nugent renders a body without organs and intercursive flows circulating without the organizing structure of sexuality (though other structures remain). The content of "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" destratifies monogamous expectations for romance and sexual expectations for intercourse. Nugent's writing suggests that satisfaction functions as a channel that regulates intercursive flows. By producing a blockage at that point and pressing into the pleasure of unsatisfaction, Nugent frees his imagination (and, at least ideally, his readers') to produce alternative flows.

The ecstasy of faggotry is where one is drawn out from oneself—or rather, drawn out from various strata—and returned to the body without organs. While Nugent's story violates the political standard for racial uplift set by W.E.B. DuBois and others, it performs the political work of imagining an Otherwise—indeed, multiple layers of otherwise, swirling together in the smoky Now. Written the same year that the Communist writer Mike Gold wrote "Let it be really new!" in the *New Masses*, Nugent's piece seems to say: Let it be really now! Nugent's critics and interviewers have often noted that he and his work feel like they come from another time, making Nugent a figure who draws what Muñoz calls "the then and there of queer futurity" into the here and now. Nugent is an artist-philosopher of faggotry. By refusing to inherit certain knowledge-sets, like the philosophy of sexual difference, Nugent opens a way to new understanding of what it means to exist interstitially, between the poles of binary sexes.

The ecstasy of touching the Then and There, the ecstasy of faggotry. Pleasure in ellipse means a sexual disorientation, in each of the senses discussed above, that opens one to the ecstasy of faggotry—the becoming-drawn-out to the Then and There of a queer future that differs from this Here and Now. Pleasure in ellipse is the pleasure of a body without organs on which feeling-flows swirl like smoke, contenting one without leaving one satisfied according to the stratum of sexuality. "Smoke, Liles, and Jade" constitutes a body without organs on which each of these flows circulates.

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Chapter 4—Feeling Flows and Fire Lips: Quasicausality, Erotic Witness, and the Pressures of Intercourse in *Autobiography of Red*

> Wrongness came like a lone finger / chopping through the room and he ducked.
>
> Carson, *Autobiography of Red* 136

Autobiography of Red: A Novel in Verse is made up of seven pieces, the longest of which this chapter takes as its primary focus. In that most novelistic piece, which is called "A Romance," a mythical red monster named Geryon comes of age sexually and interpersonally in the contemporary world. Opposite the protagonist is a familiar hero from Greek mythology: Herakles (Roman: Hercules). One might initially understand the "Romance" as between Herakles and Geryon, given their interpersonal entanglement, but, as I argue here, the Romance is of a monster with his monstrosity—a faggot with his faggotry.

Before turning to "A Romance," allow me to describe briefly *Autobiography of Red*'s seven parts. The text begins with two "Red Meat" sections and three appendices focused on the Greek poet, Stesichoros. The text concludes with an "Interview" between "I" and "S." Stesichoros's *Geryoneis*, which appears as the second "Red Meat" section, serves as the inspiration for "A Romance." "A Romance" has forty-seven subsections and fills the bulk of the text. Stesichoros has a significant presence in the text, even though one could read the section most nearly resembling "a novel in verse" without encountering his name at all. Carson introduces him in the opening sentences: "He came after Homer and before Gertrude Stein, a difficult interval for a poet. Born about 650 B.C. on the north coast of Sicily in a city called Himera, he lived among refugees who spoke a mixed dialect of Chalcidian and Doric" (3). This

context fits with much literary criticism on *Autobiography of Red*; many critics treat the text as about hybridity and inverting conventions.[48]

Carson's text pulsates with inversions and unconventional joinings. The subtitle, "A Novel in Verse," might just as well be understood as indicating its fresh inversions (novel in-verse) as its genre crosses (which include academic prose, translation, collage, and dialogue—thus going well beyond the two generic terms "novel" and "verse"). This preference for inversion over and against conforming to generic literary codes follows the contrast Carson draws in the preliminary "Red Meat" section between the two ancient Greek poets Stesichoros and Homer (4). Carson's introduction situates Stesichoros in a poetic trajectory moving from Homer to Gertrude Stein, who co-appears with Stesichoros as "S" in the text's concluding "Interview." "S" says, "What is the difference between a volcano and a guinea pig is not a description why is it like it is is a description" (148). *Autobiography of Red* is a description, in this sense, of how redness inscribes one as monstrous and positions one to respond differently to difference.

In contrast to Stesichoros's style, Homer's "epithets are a fixed diction with which Homer fastens every substance in the world to its aptest attribute and holds them in place for epic consumption" (4). Carson writes, "'Consumption is not a passion for substances but a passion for the code,' says Baudrillard" (4). In Homer, and in linguistic code generally, nouns have particular adjective-sets that give them stable ground: "Human knees are *quick*. The sea is

[48] See Rae; Henriksen. Beasley writes, "But Carson's mind, and *Autobiography of Red* itself, are the real monstrous figures here: hybrid, multiple, contradictory, unassimilable, full of deliberate mistakes, deceptions, category errors" (79).

unwearying. Death is *bad*. Cowards' livers are *white*" (4). Stesichoros instead "began to undo the latches" by joining adjectives with unconventional nouns; "Suddenly there was nothing to interfere with horses being *hollow hooved*. Or a river being *root silver*. Or a child *bruiseless*. . . . Or an insomniac *outside the joy*. Or killings *cream black*" (5). In this way, Carson explains Stesichoros in terms of inverting conventions in the text itself, even describing his circumstantial motivation—as he grew up in a refugee community—for playing with the linguistic "latches of being" as he does (3).

Carson's "Romance," which formally is a novel in verse, riffs on a poem written by Stesichoros. The social code against which Stesichoros responds establishes hero (=good) against monster (=bad). In the case of Carson's *Autobiography of Red*, red means monster. The blue hero proves his goodness, in mythologies like Homer's, by conquering the red monster. Blue and red fit together in this social code like good and bad, hero and monster—that is, they fit together antagonistically, in a prescribed order of difference. Carson focuses on Stesichoros's poem about Geryon, a red monster who is conventionally portrayed as the obstacle Herakles (the blue hero) must overcome in his tenth labor in order to claim Geryon's herd of red cattle. Stesichoros's version subverts this expectation by making the monster, Geryon, protagonist of his own story; Stesichoros's Geryoneis tells of the encounter from the monster's perspective ("Red Meat: What Difference Did Stesichoros Make?"). Only fragments remain, which Carson gathers, distributes, and renders in a creative translation ("Red Meat: Fragments of Stesichoros"). Following this scholastic framing (and three Appendices), Carson moves into the monster's story for herself ("Autobiography of Red: A Romance").

In the current chapter, I begin by considering Carson's unique relation between Herakles and Geryon, as the hero (of sexuality) and the monster (of intercourse). Sexuality here means a historical deployment of techniques for achieving personhood (sketched by Foucault in the introductory volume to *The History of Sexuality*), and intercourse indicates a broader historical field of phenomena pertaining to interpersonal entanglement and mixing (as I have sketched it throughout this dissertation). Herakles aligns with sexuality and Hegelian recognition; Geryon aligns with Deleuze and Guattari's schizzes-flows, intercourse, and Audre Lorde's "The Erotic as Power." Next, I contend that Geryon comes to quasi-cause himself, meaning that he accepts responsibility for his life—including those aspects of himself over which he has no control, like his monstrosity. This also includes his childhood sexual abuse, demonstrating that trauma can form one without therefore determining one's future. I draw quasi-causality from Deleuze's *Logic of Sense* and Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, although my use of the term differs in that I intend it as a true affirmation instead of a revealed falsehood.[49] According to Deleuze and Guattari, for instance, Marx's account has capital "arrogating to itself both the whole and the parts of the process, which now seem to emanate from them as a quasi cause" (*Anti-Oedipus* 10). Although their uses appear negative, as a false claim, the fundamental concept applies here: "it must act as if it produced them" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 154). Geryon quasi-causes himself when he acts as if he produces himself, in all his complexity and contradiction. Finally, I consider the form Geryon's erotic

[49] For a discussion of quasi-causality in *Logic of Sense* and *Anti-Oedipus*, see Roffe.

witnessing takes as he produces an autobiography; I reflect on Carson's recording of Geryon's process; and I identify the reader-text relation as a third layer of witnessing.

My approach to this text follows my account of twentieth-century faggotry as reinscribing failed masculinity not by displacing it onto another (repeating the production of faggots by shifting the term along a chain) but by producing the deviant difference of which one stands accused (as "faggot!"). The word "faggot" does not appear in this text, but the central character is a red monster who suffers sexual abuse and "wrong love," developing dependent relations on those who produce him as faggot-monster (faggot as monster), before he learns to release his wings from their protective cover and to fly with his faggotry. As throughout this dissertation, faggot refers to the specificity of an Assigned-Male-At-Birth (AMAB) deviant who exists at one of several intersections of race, gender, and sexuality. To map Geryon in these terms, Geryon is a faggot because his racialized body (with regard to his red monstrosity) is sexualized (in relation to Herakles) and queerly gendered (in his perverse self-reflection). Far from a normative subject of sexuality, Geryon is a perverse monster of intercourse.

Between Hero of Sexuality and Monster of Intercourse

It's okay, said Herakles. His voice washed / Geryon open.

Carson 44

Herakles is the hero of sexuality—the desirable-desiring subject—while Geryon is the monster of intercourse—perverse flows and disruptions. This distinction between sexuality and intercourse is similar to Deleuze and Guattari's distinction in *Anti-Oedipus* between social machines and desiring-machines, or between strata and the body without organs in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Sexuality is an organizing social structure, while intercourse is local flows between and

across. Each depends and falls back on the other (*Anti-Oedipus* 340), meaning that sexuality and intercourse are interdependent. I treat them as distinct here to draw attention to a range of possibilities between them. Likewise, the contrast between Herakles as hero of sexuality and Geryon as monster of intercourse might disguise moments where they share or even switch positions. Deleuze and Guattari write, "The task of schizoanalysis is that of learning what a subject's desiring-machines are, how they work, with what syntheses, what bursts of energy in the machine, what constituent misfires, with what flows, what chains, and what becomings in each case" (338). Where Herakles tends to embrace sexuality and its structures of desiring-production, Geryon practices faggotry and gathers together his perverse flows and disruptions.

Although Geryon appears as a red monster, in line with the Herakles myth, he encounters the blue Herakles not as a conquering hero but as an idealized lover. The hero's myth of vanquishing the monster is reinscribed in sexual terms in Carson's rendering, and as in Stesichoros's *Geryoneis* the story is told from the monster's perspective. Herakles believes himself a "*master of monsters*" (129), but Geryon overthrows the yoke of his narrative dependency on Herakles when he eventually names sex with Herakles "*Degrading*" (144).[50] Geryon then sets out to use his wings for himself, at the narrative climax of the story (145). In this moment, as I discuss in the next section, Geryon turns from dependency and blame to become his own quasi-cause.

To understand how Geryon becomes the monster of intercourse, it is worth returning to the early pages of the novel. Early on, Geryon describes his favorite weapon, peculiarly, as a

[50] Note: in "A Romance," Carson uses italics to indicate spoken words.

cage. His brother mocks him for this: "*You idiot a cage isn't a weapon. It has to do something to be a weapon*. / *Has to destroy the enemy*" (33). But the textual circumstance acts as evidence for Geryon's unsubstantiated and mocked claim. His mother, to whom he is closely attached, has gone out for the night and left the siblings with a baby-sitter. Earlier in the chapter, Geryon had watched his mother walk out the door and produced his first cage-weapon: "Geryon felt the walls of the kitchen contract as most of the air in the room swirled after her. / He could not breathe. He knew he must not cry. And he knew the sound / of the door closing / had to be kept out of him. Geryon turned all attention to his inside world" (30). Geryon experiences the kitchen as a weaponized cage, but he also protects himself from feeling abandoned by producing an internal cage and fully acknowledging his mother's departure only at the moment of her return. As Geryon's brother mocks him for naming a cage his favorite weapon, Geryon's mother returns home: "Just then there was a loud noise downstairs. Inside Geryon something burst into flame. / He hit the floor running. *Mom!*" (33). The "burst into flame" signifies that the cage-walls between inside and out can be let down.

A cage, in terms of the schizzes-flows described by Deleuze and Guattari, stops up certain flows and produces others. If this still appears more defensive than, as his brother says, a weapon must be, it is also the case that Geryon deploys "cagey" tactics to control his external world and maintain his interior integrity. Geryon tries "to keep the baby-sitter's voice out of him," but she asks him if he wants her to read to him before bed and Geryon "knew he would have to let the baby-sitter go through with this in her wrong voice" (31). In order to limit her "wrong voice," Geryon cages her voice by asking her to "*Read the loon book*. [. . .] / This was cagey. / The loon book was an instruction manual for calling loons. At least / it would keep her

wrong voice away / from words that belonged to his mother" (32). Geryon demonstrates a third, external kind of encaging with the babysitter's "wrong voice."

A cage does not enact swift violence on another in the way that a catapult or garrote do (the others' favorite weapons), but I want to suggest that the cage weaponizes certain limits in the way that sexual, gender, and racial identities constrain existence according to varied rubrics, and particularly in the way that monstrosity or being-made-faggot defines one's limits. Consider how Geryon becomes a "fruit bowl" and later contests its identity. When Geryon's brother puts an overturned fruit bowl on Geryon's head, Geryon's actions become identified with the fruit bowl: "The fruit bowl paused," "The fruit bowl was very still," "*No*, said the fruit bowl" (31-32). Later in the novel, Geryon accosts his mother because the bowl never contains fruit: "*How do we even / know it's a fruit bowl?*" (68). His identification as "fruit bowl" puts him in an inverted cage that restricts his vision, sensation, and self-ideation until he contests its identity. Likewise, his monstrous identification might be understood as a cage, separating him from others and reconnecting him by positioning him as their negative—until he contests that designation.

Geryon's early experiences shape his longing to control the line between inside and out that the cage represents—the line governing intercourse, or the flow between entities. Like volcanic pressure, Geryon's surface forms through a complex of forces. Carson details volcanic activity as a description for selves through Geryon's discussions with Herakles and his grandmother at their home in Hades (46ff.). The volcano "cages" its liquid flow just as Geryon "cages" his feelings and raw sensations. Geryon knows the line between outside and inside in a mundane way because he struggles to gain entrance, even after his brother has shown him the

way day after day, to his school (23-24). He knows the line in a traumatic way because his brother has inducted him into a sexual world through "an economy of sex / for cat's-eyes" (28). After his brother performs abuse on him as part of this economy, Geryon "lay very straight / in the fantastic temperatures / of the red pulse as it sank away and he thought about the difference / between inside and outside. / Inside is mine, he thought" (28-29). As he later will with Herakles, Geryon becomes attached to someone who treats him unfairly. His "brother's voice / got very kind" after the abuse, and the next day they "went to the beach," but other times his brother is cruel and unkind (28-29). Geryon inverts and weaponizes the cage as a way to claim his inside and exclude the dangerous outside.

At the same time that Geryon is concerned with controlling the line between inside and out, this is the moment when Geryon first tries expressing his inside to the outside in the form of an autobiography. Geryon's first autobiographical effort occurs the day after Geryon's brother initiated their sexual economy: "In this work Geryon set down all inside things / particularly his own heroism / and early death much to the despair of the community. He coolly omitted / all outside things" (29). Despite his intentions to "set down all inside things" to the exclusion of "all outside things," Geryon accepts as serious "facts" the torments and names his brother gives him (27-29). Geryon's imagination is constrained to his monstrosity. Although he fantasizes his heroism, this inevitably comes in the form of his removal from the community that his monstrous existence threatens. When he later writes an autobiographical piece entitled "*Total Facts Known About Geryon*," his writing focuses on Geryon's role in Herakles's story and ends in Geryon's death (37). Geryon "followed Facts with Questions and Answers," Carson writes, but following "QUESTIONS" there is but one question: "*Why did Herakles kill Geryon?*"

with three potential answers (37). According to the Herakles-myth, the answer is "*2. Had to it was one of His Labors (10th)*" to kill Geryon and take his herd of red cattle (37). His teacher asks his mother at Parent-Teacher Day, "*Does he ever write anything with a happy ending?*" After a moment, Geryon takes the paper back to his "usual desk" to write, "*New Ending. / All over the world the beautiful red breezes went on blowing hand / in hand*" (38).[51] He understands that a happier ending is wanted, and he knows what that might look like for the world, but his own tragic death remains ineffacable. As in his first autobiographical try, the continuance of beauty seems to depend on his (monstrous or/and heroic) death.

Geryon's passive suicidal ideation is temporarily suspended when he meets Herakles and forms a dependent attachment to him. Geryon feels, from the start of their relationship, that something more true than anything he has experienced previously has happened in their meeting. They "were two superior eels / at the bottom of the tank and they recognized each other like italics," Carson writes. They meet at a "Bus Depot," marking their class similarity along with Carson's description of "eels / at the bottom." They first encounter one another when "Geryon / came fast around the corner of the platform and there it was one of those moments / that is the opposite of blindness. / The world poured back and forth between their eyes once or twice" (39). Although this looks even, mutual, and intercursive, Geryon attaches himself to Herakles entirely, forming an unequal/dependent relationship. In this way, Herakles takes the position of "*master of monsters*" and Geryon takes his position of mastered "monster."

[51] This sequence resonates with the accounts of Stesichoros composing his palinodia (Appendix A). Plato and Isokrates (writing near the same time as one another) each suggest that Stesichoros, unlike Homer, immediately understood his blinding (by Helen) and so set himself to writing his palinode (Carson 15-16).

Herakles, on the night of their first meeting, notices Geryon's hands are cold and "put[s] Geryon's hands inside his shirt" (39). Despite this apparent opening, allowing Geryon inside, Herakles keeps Geryon at a distance in temporary togetherness. Even the events of their togetherness, from phrases Herakles uses to the song they sing together as their own, "Joy to the World," are repeated in Herakles's other relationships, suggesting the inequality of the relation (54, 64).

The contrast between Herakles as the hero of sexuality and Geryon as the monster of intercourse comes out particularly strongly with what Carson terms the "Sex Question" (44-45). This chapter marks a change in their relationship. Geryon tries to navigate the sexual-intercursive dynamic between his own needs and the expectations of Herakles. Herakles has told Geryon that "*Sex is a way of getting to know someone*," and also he is "*someone who will never be satisfied*." Geryon contemplates the "sex question": "Why is it a question? He understood / that people need / acts of attention from one another, does it really matter which acts?" (44). Geryon's questions are resonant with Audre Lorde's writing in "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power": "The need for sharing deep feeling is a human need. But within the european-american tradition, this need is satisfied by certain pr[e]scribed erotic comings-together" (59). Lorde and Geryon imagine erotic joinings that look unlike those in the "european-american tradition." In Lorde's writing, the power of the erotic "comes [in the first place] from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person" (56). Geryon and Herakles at times appear to share deeply with one another, but under pressure they slide into separate roles in the realm of sexuality. In the final account, the "european-american tradition" and Herakles are in the (reterritorialized) realm of sexuality, while Lorde and Geryon are in the (deterritorializing)

mode of intercourse. In sexuality, persons strive to achieve those configurations Lorde mentions, those "prescribed erotic comings-together." In intercourse, persons break and flow in divergent manners.

The distinction between their approaches—to sex and to intercourse—now gestured toward in the text, Geryon tries to bridge the gap by asking Herakles, "Do people who like sex / have a question about it too? / but the words came out wrong—*Is it true you think about sex every day?*" (45). Geryon wants to ask if what he is feeling is shared by others, but the question falls out in the wrong way. After this, "Something black and heavy dropped / between them like a smell of velvet" and they shift from their initial mutual recognition of one another ("like italics" [39]) to become "Not touching / but joined in astonishment as two cuts lie parallel in the same flesh" (45). Their relation to one another remains similar, in both cases joining the pair not through communification but through parallelism (italics, parallel cuts), but the meaning of their mutual slanting changes. What they are remains constant—two persons alongside one another—but how they take up their positions modifies their interpretation of that joining. How they take up positions in relation to intercourse and sex, particularly, misaligns.

Geryon slowly reengages his fascination with cages as their relationship continues to unfold. Geryon goes to meet Herakles's family, and, despite their increasing distance, Geryon and Herakles continue to share each other's time and bodies. But his first night at Herakles's family house, in a chapter called "Lava," Geryon wakes up: "Black central stalled night. He lay hot and motionless, that is, motion / was a memory he could not recover / (among others) from the bottom of the vast blind kitchen where he was buried" (48). The night has "stalled," and Geryon has too, leaving him in a kind of body-cage, which Carson calls his "box" (49).

Alongside the two breaks in the night and Geryon, Geryon perceives a constant flow: "There was a steady rushing sound / perhaps an electric fan down the hall / and a fragment of human voice tore itself out and came past, it seemed / already long ago, trailing / a bad dust of its dream which touched his skin. He thought of women" (48). Carried on the flow of the electric fan was a broken piece of speech, torn from its origin, which has passed Geryon already. Following the voice fragment comes "a bad dust of [the voice's] dream." This dust—whatever he nearly hears—touches Geryon's skin and he turns to the following contemplation. Geryon ponders "What is it like to be a woman / listening in the dark? Black mantle of silence stretches between them / like geothermal pressure. / Ascent of the rapist up the stairs seems slow as lava. She listens / to the blank space where / his consciousness is, moving towards her. Lava can move as slow as / nine hours per inch. . . . She wonders if / he is listening too. The cruel thing is, she falls asleep listening" (48). Geryon considers the slow violence of domestic abuse directly following the "Sex Question" and a conversation about volcanoes, merging the two. Where does Geryon know about domestic abuse from, that he has this thought? His mother's phone conversations with her friends (34-35)? His mother and father themselves (34)? Or because he intuits the compromises formed by couples like an adult economy of sex for cat's eyes (28)? Perhaps he senses the prescription Lorde describes and feels he cannot fit within such prescribed "comings-together" (Lorde 59). Congruently with these passages, Lorde's call for collective action in "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" is "as women": "As women, we need to examine the ways in which our world can be truly different" (55). Lorde was touching on the specific organizational force of erotically empowered women; Geryon accesses his own questions by way of an isolated woman. Like the woman he imagines, Geryon (and other

faggots and monsters) feels himself alone; yet, Lorde suggests, his empowerment and hers depend on their coming together collectively. Not all of Geryon's perspectives on sexual intercourse are so deeply troubled. When he sees "A big red butterfly / . . . riding on a little black one," he says, "*How nice . . . he's helping him*"—to which Herakles replies, "*He's fucking him*" (49-50). In contrast to his contemplation the previous chapter "of women," Geryon here appears naïve. Geryon's knowledge of sex and abuse is unevenly slanted toward the latter.

By contrast, intercourse for Geryon is like fascination, something that encages flows, or that lets flows flow by capturing them, providing them with a channel. When he sees "Red Patience," a photo taken by Herakles's grandmother of a volcanic eruption, "he kept going back to it. / It was not that he found it an especially pleasing photograph. / It was not that he / did not understand how such photographs are made. / He kept going back to it" (51). Something about the photograph draws Geryon out. He keeps going back to look at it, fascinated. When they graffiti walls together around Herakles's hometown, Herakles complains that Geryon's designs "*are about captivity, it depresses me*." Geryon continues his childhood obsession with cages; his signature design is a "red-winged LOVESLAVE" (55). Geryon has not overcome his suicidal ideation, even though it withdraws while he is in love. He has found someone whose touch he believes can contain his monstrosity. When he gives Herakles a blowjob, for instance, Geryon feels "clear and powerful—not some wounded angel after all / but a magnetic person like Matisse / or Charlie Parker!" (54). Carson's Geryon turns the mythical violence of Herakles into the mundane agony of "wrong love" (75).

Geryon's intercursivity is not only sexual but also encompasses his experience of the world. Geryon experiences time unusually in correlation with his perverse intercursivity; time

freezing up or solidifying is a familiar experience for him. In the chapter entitled "She," Geryon visits Herakles's mother's room with the intention of calling his own mother (57). However, "when he reached the room / he stopped in a night gone suddenly solid. / Who am I?" (57). Although solidity is often associated with stability, Geryon here wonders who he is, troubling his self-image, in the face of the "night gone suddenly solid." The evening's flows suddenly break, leaving Geryon poised on the verge of entering the room and its life. Carson writes, "He had been here before . . . groping for a switch—he hit it / and the room sprang towards him like an angry surf with its unappeasable debris / of woman liquors, he saw a slip / a dropped magazine combs baby powder a stack of phone books a bowl of pearls / a teacup with water in it himself / in the mirror cruel as a slash of lipstick—he banged the light off" (57). Geryon hits the light and the evening starts flowing again; but it proves too much when he sees his monstrous self, "cruel as a slash of lipstick," and he shuts it back off. As in the early descriptions of his affection for his own mother, Geryon notes a material construction of a woman (Carson's list of the room's contents). Not every or any woman, but this one, Herakles's mother. Carson reiterates familiarity: "He had been here before, dangling / inside the word *she* like a trinket at a belt" (57). This is a familiar position for Geryon—"He had been here before"—and again the evening seems to freeze. This time there is a subtle movement, "dangling," so the night is not as completely solid as before. The content of his initial question, "Who am I?" is succeeded by his second pondering, "inside the word *she* like a trinket at a belt." He does not occupy the position of woman, but "dangl[es] / inside the word *she*" (57). The sentence that places him "inside the word *she*" itself begins with "He," and he does something other than identify with *she*. After a moment "dangling . . . like a trinket," Geryon makes his way back

downstairs without having called his mother (she calls him angry at the end of the chapter). Although Geryon is not transgender in any simple sense of the word, he experiences gender, as he experiences life, intercursively; he is not fixed to a single position but swings, "dangling," across.

Herakles is the hero of sexuality, for whom lovers are replaceable types; Geryon is the monster of intercourse, for whom lovers are singularities. After Herakles has broken up with Geryon and the latter has returned home, Herakles calls Geryon to tell him about a "freedom dream" he has had about Geryon. Geryon notices that Herakles does not really know him because the symbolic freedom-bird in Herakles's dream is yellow, not red. Geryon thinks, "Yellow! Yellow! Even in dreams / he doesn't know me at all! Yellow!" In his dream, Herakles produces Geryon as his complementary rather than contrasting color (most characters are described as yellow in the novel). Geryon also notices his feelings: "Don't want to be free want to be with you. Beaten but alert Geryon organized all / his inside force to suppress this remark" (74). Geryon's investment in Herakles is total, so he continues to feel reverberations from their unjoining, while Herakles has replaced Geryon with another temporary love object. Geryon's suicidal fantasies return following the rupture of his intercourse with Herakles. He photographs "a fly floating in a pail of water— / drowned but with a strange agitation of light around the wings. Geryon used / a fifteen-minute exposure. / When he first opened the shutter the fly seemed to be still alive" (71). The photograph is called "'If He Sleep He Shall Do Well'," echoing Geryon's longing for release from his "wrong love" and wrong life (71, 75). Although Geryon and Herakles share moments akin to what Lorde calls "the erotic as power," Geryon's receptive experience of the world is contrasted with Herakles's highly structured control over it. As the

monster of intercourse, Geryon must learn to quasicause himself in a world apparently dominated by the structures of Herakles's heroism and sexuality.

Quasicausing Red

A healthy volcano is an exercise in the uses of pressure.

Carson 105

The prime descriptor for the pressures that form the line between outside and inside, in *Autobiography of Red*, is the geologic formation of volcanoes. The novel's cover features a volcano, with smoke coming from its peak and dark clouds floating around it. A monster is marked as different by its redness. This redness is not consciously chosen, nor can it be disavowed or dismissed. What is, is. Volcanic formations happen, not because of some benevolent or vindictive governing force, but because pressures build up, flows break open, stoppages form as flows cool, and pressures again build. Herakles's family lives near a volcano in Hades which his grandmother had witnessed erupting some time prior, and it is when Geryon visits Herakles in Hades that the geological image of the volcano fully enters the narrative. In other words, it is alongside Geryon's failing relationship that the volcano metaphor is described.

Caging is not, or not merely, a question of defining and protecting the inside of oneself, as Geryon had earlier thought: "Up against another human being one's own procedures take on definition" (42). The pressures are between persons as well. Selves are subjectivized by internal and external pressures: "Like the terrestrial crust of the earth / which is proportionately ten times thinner than an eggshell, the skin of the soul / is a miracle of mutual pressures" (60). These are the pressures of intercourse (in addition to or beside the "Sex Question" of Chapter X)

(44-45). The pivotal Chapter XXXI, "Tango," begins: "Under the seams runs the pain" (98). A young adult Geryon is traveling in Buenes Aires, and he wakes in his hotel room feeling the need to escape. Carson writes, "It is state-of-mind that discloses to us / (Heidegger claims) that we are beings who have been thrown into something else. / Something else than what? / Geryon leaned his hot forehead against the filthy windowpane and wept. / *Something else than this hotel room* / he heard himself say and moments later he was charging along the hollow gutters / of Avenida Bolívar" (98). Unlike in the early parts of the narrative, Geryon here escapes from the cage and confinement that he formerly valued so highly.

Geryon's escape hits a wall when he encounters a psychoanalyst who asks him to think critically about himself. In his escape from the confines of his rented box-space, Geryon finds a tango bar. His flight took him to this place of music, singing, and dancing, and Geryon finds joy in the "state of pure discovery" in which the musicians played intercursively "as one person" (99). He falls asleep, however, and wakes to a nearly empty facility. The pressures that had been building internally, which drove him forth from his hotel room, are finally given a line of flight (an avenue for becoming present) from a circumstantial parallel: "The cold pressure of the concrete wall / against his back had tumbled him into a recollection" (101). When he returns to the present, after a sojourn to his lonely high school experience and complicated sibling relation, his thoughts are with beluga whales "*in tanks in captivity just floating*." He asks the tango singer, "*What do they think about? Floating in there. All night*." She tells him, "*Nothing*." He says, "*That's impossible*. [...] *You can't be alive and think about nothing*," to which she replies, "You *can't but you're not a whale*. / *Why should it be different?* [he asks] / *Why should it be the same?* [she counters] *But I look in their eyes and I see them thinking*. / *Nonsense. It is yourself you see—it's guilt*. /

Guilt? Why would I be guilty about whales? Not my fault they're in a tank. / Exactly. So why are you guilty—whose / tank are you in? [she concludes] Geryon was exasperated. *Was your father a psychoanalyst?*" (103). It turns out that it is she and not her father who is a psychoanalyst. But Geryon's question is not about cages in a spatial sense; rather, he thinks of the captured whales he saw during a fourth-grade field trip because they were "as alive as he was / on their side / of the terrible slopes of time" (90). Geryon does not feel guilty about the whales' captivity: he shares their feeling of cagedness, caught on the slopes of life. The cage now appears to be what Geryon fears, unlike his use of the cage in earlier childhood as a form of necessary protection.

One is never the origin-cause of one's existence; to quasi-cause oneself is to accept one's past and to align oneself with one's contingent horizons and potential futures. At stake here is the question of power over one's own life. Battis suggests that Geryon "would do best to answer [the question of whose tank he is in by saying] 'my own'" (paragraph 7). Yet Geryon can never truly become his own generative cause, since several of his life "motors" come, traumatically, from the outside. As with twentieth-century faggots generally, the initial production of Geryon as faggot is unwilled; it takes a quasicausal effort to break from the first production as faggot and gain the freedom of faggotry. Geryon has produced his cage-feelings to protect himself by supporting strong lines between inside and outside. These protective cage-lines serve as his defense from their external transgression. They are neither purely his own nor not-at-all his—they are an alloy of external contingency and internal response, his quasi-causing himself. Quasicausality as I use the term here is therefore a "weaker" term than self-definition or self-production, insofar as these terms presume a less restricted agency, yet quasicausality is a "strong" term in the sense that it reroutes supposedly inevitable, externally imposed

trajectories. To describe red is to produce an account of red's self-life-writing (auto-bio-graphy) in the person of Geryon. Geryon produces numerous autobiographies in the course of the "Romance," each of which is indicative of his then-current feeling flows and existential self-production.

Geryon's shift from encagement to quasi-causality has begun already when he does not tell Herakles "Don't want to be free want to be with you" (74). In this moment, he avoids the temptation to re-cage himself in Herakles's familiar structures; instead, he falls back on himself by "organiz[ing] all / his inside force to suppress this remark" (74). Later, in a moment of spectacular slippage, Geryon mishears a question that is significant for how I have described the phenomenon of faggotry as freeing rather than binding (despite its derogatory intent and adverse production). At the end of his long night, Geryon is left in the tango hall with just the tango singer-psychoanalyst and the gnome who is cleaning the place up for reopening in a few hours' time. The psychoanalyst admits that she does not make a living singing tango, because

> *Tango is a fossil*.
> *So is psychoanalysis*, said Geryon.
> She studied him a few moments then said slowly—but the gnome gave the piano
> a shove against the wall
> and Geryon almost missed it—*Who can a monster blame for being red?*
> *What?* said Geryon starting forward.
> *I said looks like time for you to get home to bed*, she repeated, and stood,
> pocketing her cigarettes.
> *Do come again*, she said as Geryon's big overcoat swept out the door but he
> did not turn his head.
> (104)

Geryon anticipates the psychoanalytic delving into psychical depths (was Geryon's comment about psychoanalysis itself a provocation?), so he hears a question about the foundation of his difference. Why is he a red monster? Who made him like this? Would it be his brother, who

inducted him prematurely into a red sexual world through an economy of exchange? His near-absent father? His former lover, Herakles? How would one go about answering such a question? The question, however, has not been posed (the tango singer repeats "*I said looks like time for you to get home to bed*"), and "*Who can a monster blame for being red?*" is not actually the question that will allow Geryon to answer that he is his own quasicause.

Blame raises questions of badness and resentment. The question of one's monstrosity, one's redness, one's difference, is inescapable in a normativizing biopolitical world, in which otherness, freakishness, and monstrosity are produced as obstacles to be overcome in favor of regularity and social norms. In other words, the production of monsters and faggots shores up the biopolitical categories of consistency and normativity by casting them as exemplary deviations. Finding oneself so outcast, one might reasonably feel bad about oneself (feel one's wrongness) or resent the forces that put one there. The frame of cause and effect, presumed in the question of blame as a prerequisite for assigning responsibility, distorts the question by establishing a certain determinism. Blame can allow venting, releasing the buildup of pressures, by displacing responsibility for oneself to another; yet resentment constrains at the same time that it allows this depressurizing, since it produces the new blockages of disavowal. Geryon's projected question produces the motor of his autobiography as a pain-event. Who is to blame? What made me happen this way?

I want to suggest that Geryon's autobiography, as found in Carson's "A Romance," inverts this place for resentment not by ignoring the painful events but by describing how one is produced as a monster amidst these events without their therefore swallowing one up and determining one's life. The question Geryon's autobiography implicitly poses is, "How can a

monster love his being red?"—this is a romance not of red-Geryon and blue-Herakles but of a monster with his redness. In the terms of twentieth-century faggots and faggotry I proposed in the introduction to this dissertation, the question is, can a monster avoid disavowing its monstrosity (on one hand) or passing it on by producing a greater monster than itself (on another hand) or becoming truly monstrous oneself to live up to one's name (on a third hand—in some accounts, Geryon has six hands)? This question, and the question I have posed of Geryon's quasicausality, resonates with Muñoz's *Disidentifications*, a term Muñoz writes "can be understood as a way of shuffling back and forth between reception and production" (25). As with Foucault's "counterdiscourses," Muñoz writes, "Disidentification negotiates strategies of resistance within the flux of discourse and power" (19). Can a faggot direct the formative pressures which produce their flows and blockages toward their own beauty and truth, or will these pressures inevitably pull them under?

Queer Freedom

> I: How about your little hero Geryon
> S: Exactly it is red that I like and there is a link between geology and character
>
> Carson 149

Obstacles can re-route flows and cause them to create new paths of escape, to merge Carson's geologic writing with Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalytic writing. Carson draws on volcanology to figure interiority, and Deleuze and Guattari use the language of breaks, flows, and blockages; their models are remarkably compatible. Pressure produces flows, one way or another—the only question is which pressures run up against which obstacles to produce which flows. Eight years after their affair, a 22-year-old Geryon runs into his ex-lover, Herakles by chance on a trip to South America. After his encounter with the tango singer-psychoanalyst,

"Geryon sat on his bed in the hotel room pondering the cracks and fissures / of his inner life. It may happen / that the exit of the volcanic vent is blocked by a plug of rock, forcing / molten matter sideways along / lateral fissures called fire lips by volcanologists. Yet Geryon did not want / to become one of those people / who think of nothing but their stores of pain" (105). Geryon tries to focus on *Philosophic Problems*, which he is reading, but the text seems only to extend his analytical thoughts. He reads, "'. . . I will never know how you see red and you will never know how I see it. / But this separation of consciousness / is recognized only after a failure of communication, and our first movement is / to believe in an undivided being between us. . . .'" (105). The text reiterates his experience with Herakles, who first felt familiar "like italics" and later felt distant "like two cuts lie parallel in the same flesh" (39, 45). In his youth, his affair with Herakles provided an outlet for pressures that needed escape; yet they were only temporary fixes and Geryon's pressures returned when the stint of his relationship with Herakles ended.

Despite the apparent end of their relationship earlier in the text, Geryon has not fully released himself from his attachments to Herakles. Geryon runs into Herakles while he is browsing in a bookstore later in the day after his reflections on fire lips and *Philosophic Problems*. Herakles is with a new boyfriend, the yellow Ancash, and it is through his relationship with this "replacement" (Herakles has had several intermediary lovers) that Geryon learns to take wing for himself. Herakles and Ancash are telling Geryon about their trip to an active volcano, which they have tape-recorded and which sounds to Geryon like "a hoarse animal / spraying pain from the back of its throat" (108). As Geryon is listening to the recording, Ancash explains, "*Up high the air gets so hot it burns / the wings off birds—they just fall*. Ancash stopped. He and Geryon

were looking / straight into each other's eyes. / At the word *wings* something passed between them like a vibration" (109). They part ways, with Geryon burning because "Herakles' gaze on him was like a gold tongue. Magma rising" (110). Herakles brings up unresolved feelings for Geryon. It is these feelings that Geryon must confront in order to become free.

With Ancash, Geryon's freedom becomes bound up with his monstrosity instead of being opposed to it. When they meet again, a few days later, Geryon and Ancash take up their positions behind Herakles and beside one another (113). The three of them travel to Peru, to visit Ancash's mother, where they sleep on the roof. Although Geryon claims he was fine, Ancash recognizes the lie and tells him he will show Geryon how to stay warm at night. Herakles appears and makes a sex joke of it—"*I could show him some ways to stay warm for the night*"—producing "a moment of thick silence" between the trio (126). Ancash convinces Herakles to leave and Geryon to take his overcoat off: "All of a sudden the night was a bowl of silence. *Jesus Mary and Joseph*, / said Ancash quietly. / He gave a low whistle. Ancash had not seen Geryon's wings before" (127). Ancash treats Geryon's wings with awe and respect:

> Ancash was saying,
> *there's a village in the mountains north of Huaraz called Jucu and in Jucu*
> *they believe some strange things.*
> *It's a volcanic region. Not active now. In ancient times they worshipped*
> *the volcano as a god and even*
> *threw people into it. For sacrifice?* asked Geryon whose head had come out
> of the blanket.
> *No not exactly. More like a testing procedure. They were looking for people*
> *from the inside. Wise ones.*
> *Holy men I guess you would say. The word in Quechua is* Yazcol Yazcamac *it means*
> *the Ones Who Went and Saw and Came Back—*
> *I think the anthropologists say eyewitnesses. These people did exist.*
> *Stories are told of them still.*
> *Eyewitnesses*, said Geryon.
> *Yes. People who saw the inside of the volcano.*

And came back.
Yes.
How do they come back?
Wings. Yes that's what they say the Yazcamac return as red people with wings,
all their weaknesses burned away—
and their mortality.
(128-129)

Ancash warns Geryon that they will need to be careful when they visit the area, since "*There are people around there still looking for eyewitnesses*." Ancash adds, before leaving for the night, "*And listen if you're cold tonight you can sleep with me*. With a look he added, / *Just sleep*." Ancash provides Geryon with two significant pieces of information: red-winged does not mean demon-monster in their current location (it does mean something else), and sharing sleep-warmth can happen with another person without an appended, open-ended "Sex Question" (44-45).

Ancash's story does not transform Geryon from a monster into a hero any more than it resolves his formative traumas, but it does disjoin him from his fated connection to Herakles. This moment proves a tricky one for some critics.[52] Beasley writes,

> The name of the volcano, Icchantikas, as Sophia Mayer points out [in "Picture Theory: On Photographic Intimacy in Nicole Brossard and Anne Carson." *Studies in Canadian Literature*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2008, pp. 97-117], is the name of no volcano, Peruvian or otherwise, but is a Buddhist term for those of incorrigible unbelief in the sutras. The term Carson assigns to the Eyewitnesses—Yazcol Yazcamac—appears, it seems, only in quotations from *Autobiography of Red*. Is the legend as invented and cryptically named as the volcano it supposedly concerns? In Carson's version, Geryon is winged and red not because of his heritage from his grandmother Medusa in the Greek version, but because he is a Peruvian

[52] For Beasley, who has suggested that "This text is trickier, more subversive, more deeply parodic of scholarly authority and readerly and critical passivity than most reviewers and critics yet acknowledge" (77), Carson deceives her reader by mixing myths with evidently haphazard abandon. As an academic, researching facts and establishing literary genealogies seems like a productive approach to textual analysis, and the "false" myth seems like a trap laid for an unwary critic-reader. In any case, it would be worthwhile to consider how Carson assembles this hybrid, "other" culture.

> sacrifice-survivor, a surviving descender into incorrigible unbelief in the Buddhist renunciation of desire. (78)

Geryon often occupies himself with the question of time, and his recognition as a survivor rather than a monstrosity in an alternate space-time from the one with which he is most familiar fits this pattern. Although Beasley suggests that Geryon is a transcultural phenomenon, joining mythologies from various place-times to become a Yazcol Yazcamac, I contend that Geryon need not be understood *as* Yazcol Yazcamac. Rather, the very horizon of this possibility is enough to free Geryon from his fated bondage to the Greek hero myth, in which he appears always-already as a monster. I argue that Ancash's tale does not act as an explanation for Geryon's redness—Geryon has never gone into a volcano and returned, as in the tale of Yazcol Yazcamac—but rather gives Geryon the multiplicity he needs to find the freedom of quasicausality.[53] That is, Ancash's assemblage of myths allows Geryon to shift from being bound to Herakles to become free.

Geryon does not oppose or renounce desire, or Herakles for that matter, but he does become more cautious and apprehensive in his approach to desire. Geryon looks "along the seawall [and] see[s] small twined couples. / They looked like dolls. / Geryon wished he could envy them but he did not. I have to get out of this place, / he thought. Immortal or not" (130). The question of his immortality is here unresolved—that is, the text performs its irresolution—

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[53] Geryon does later fly around, if not into, Icchantikas, and the photograph he takes references the immortality from Emily Dickinson's epigraph to "A Romance" (22, 145). Still, Ancash's myth does not serve as an explanation for who he is or how he became this way. A metaphorical case could be made for the role played by the "fantastic temperatures / of the red pulse" produced when his brother sexually abuses him (28-29). Likewise with Herakles. Yet even here the notion of cause and effect fails, as Geryon was red prior to the abuse and wrong love.

but the eternal threat of desire remains in either case ("Immortal or not"). Geryon is drawn back to Herakles and yet feels he must maintain a distance between them: "In the space between them / developed a dangerous cloud. / Geryon knew he must not go back into the cloud. Desire is no light thing. / He could see the thorns gleam / with their black stains" (132-133). Desire's "cloud" has thorns stained by the less cautious, perhaps even a less cautious and younger Geryon.

Despite this reticence, his awareness that it is not a good idea, Geryon does eventually have sex with Herakles again because he does not yet know *why* it is not a good idea. When Herakles wakes up Geryon is crying. Herakles does not understand how to respond to Geryon's flows of tears. Herakles says, "*Geryon what's wrong? Jesus I hate it when you cry. What is it?* / Geryon thinks hard. / I once loved you and now I don't know you at all. He does not say this. / *I was thinking about time*—he gropes— / *you know how apart people are in time together and apart at the same time*—stops. / Herakles wipes tears from Geryon's face / with one hand. *Can't you ever just fuck and not think?*" (141). Once again Geryon nearly says something too honest-in-the-moment but refrains. This time he tries to articulate the more complex thought. For Herakles, the question is "*Can't you ever just fuck and not think?*" but for Geryon their relationship has never been so simple as just fucking. For Geryon, intercourse includes crying and a host of other breaks-flows; for Herakles it includes lust and fucking.

In his documentation of the event, Geryon takes some form of control—quasicausality—over his experience. The occurrence with Herakles is presented as a description ("why is it like it is") of one of the "Photographs" that appear late in the novel. This photograph is called "The Old Days" (141). The photograph is "of a man's naked back, long and bluish" (141). Geryon is

the photographer, and Herakles the object. The following scene presents a photograph, "Like and Not Like," that is at first less clearly articulated; "It was a photograph just like the old days. Or was it?" (142). In the narrative itself, the photograph appears: "In the photograph the face of / Herakles is white. It is the face / of an old man. It is a photograph of the future, thought Geryon months later when he / was standing in his darkroom / looking down at the acid bath and watching likeness come groping out of the bones" (144). The photographs are taken minutes or hours apart, but how they show their subject changes drastically in conjunction with Geryon's shifting perspective.

At last Geryon understands why it is dangerous for him to be with Herakles. In the subsequent scene, Ancash confronts Geryon about sleeping with Herakles. Geryon eventually confesses he doesn't love Herakles anymore, and Ancash carefully asks, "*So what's it like fucking him now?* / *Degrading*, said Geryon / without a pause and saw Ancash recoil from the word. / *I'm sorry I shouldn't have said that*, / said Geryon but Ancash was gone across the garden" (144). The word for his conflicting feelings, Geryon finds, is "*Degrading*," suggesting the way in which his "wrong love" for Herakles negatively affects his feeling flows and self-perception. Almost a decade after their first meeting, Geryon recognizes that his relation to Herakles puts him in a "*Degrading*," dependent, monstrous position. After Ancash leaves Geryon in the hotel garden, Geryon captures the photograph of Herakles when he appears into the ensuing silence. Herakles realizes what has transpired but does not sway from his self-centric focus. The "cloud" of desire has dissipated, and Geryon can see past the image of Herakles-the-lover to the real, flawed person there (who appears in the sequel, *Red Doc>*, as "Sad But Great").

The climax of Geryon's journey to faggotry occurs following Ancash's request in compensation for having cheated with Herakles. As he leaves the garden of their confrontation, Ancash tells Geryon "*There is one thing I want from you. / Tell me. / Want to see you use those wings*" (144). And Geryon does, flying above the volcano with a borrowed tape recorder: "*This is for Ancash*, he calls to the earth diminishing below. This is a memory of our / beauty" (145). He returns to earth for the final chapter of the "Romance," entitled "The Flashes in Which a Man Possesses Himself": "Herakles and Ancash and Geryon have stopped outside the bakery to stare / at the hole of fire. . . . Pass down an alley then turn a corner and there it is. Volcano in a wall. / *Do you see that*, says Ancash. / *Beautiful*, Herakles breathes out. He is looking at the men. / *I mean the fire*, says Ancash. / Herakles grins in the dark. Ancash watches the flames. / We are amazing beings, / Geryon is thinking. We are neighbors of fire" (146). Herakles remains the hero, his gaze fixed on the beautiful now to which his blue heroism affords him access. Ancash and Geryon, yellow and red monsters Herakles thinks he has mastered, take their stances differently from him. As faggots, the monsters stand in awe of the red pulse flames licking make, and they know at once their insignificance and their real proximity to the eternal pulsations of fire and love. They are adjacent to—not trapped in—the immolating fires of desire. They live in the way of queer freedom.

<u>Erotic Witness</u>

Raising a camera to one's face has effects / no one can calculate in advance.

Carson 135

The novel's denouement follows the climactic moment when Geryon finds freedom as he flies above the volcano. The proximity to fire Geryon finds awe-inspiring raises again

questions posed in the epigraph to "A Romance." The poem by Emily Dickinson that serves as the epigraph for "A Romance" (#1748) reappears in the climactic scene as title and conclusion. The climactic scene, Chapter XLVI, is entitled, "PHOTOGRAPHS: #1748" (145). The photograph Geryon takes, a selfie as he flies above the volcano Icchantikas, is entitled "The Only Secret People Keep"—a reference to the concluding lines of Dickinson's epigraph: "*The only secret people keep / Is Immortality*" (22). The poem begins with "*The reticent volcano*," which "*Confid*[*es*] *his projects pink / To no precarious man*," and goes on to pose the (rhetorical?) question, "*If nature will not tell the tale / Jehovah told to her / Can human nature not survive / Without a listener?*" (22). A tension that runs through *Autobiography of Red* is the question of how persons are formed with others' responses to them, yet Dickinson's question suggests that this social formation of persons may not be comprehensive—some things might not be shared. As with Ancash's Eyewitnesses, Dickinson's poem serves to position Geryon as potentially immortal.

Geryon accepts his wings, which at other times in the text itch and burn at his back as he tries to conceal them, and takes flight. As Ducasse writes, "The 'inside' and the 'outside' have come to terms for a short period of time. The red hero finally recaptures the meaning of the word 'each' he had lost in Chapter II" (paragraph 25). Although he is doing this flight "*for Ancash*," he has regained his singularity as the monster of intercourse. Beasley writes, "In Carson's mythic redefinition of Geryon's monstrosity from Sicily to Andean Peru, the answer to that fundamental question ['*Who can a monster blame for being red?*'] shifts radically" (77). I contend, in closing, that this shift is not only for Geryon, who becomes "immortalized rather than slain," but also for the reader-listener who encounters his self-witnessing.

Autobiography of Red's theoretical resonance with Lorde, as explicated in this chapter, follows from Geryon's ability to become his own quasi-cause and an erotic witness of queer utopian potentialities. This ability emerges because he is not incorporated into the systems which govern persons and populations, as in Foucault's account of biopolitics; he is left constitutively outside the line producing humans as such (which, as Chen and Puar suggest, is a fraught line). Although the placetime of *Autobiography of Red* is hard to determine because Carson blends myths freely, I take the story as a contemporary one (making biopolitics a relevant analytic). With this temporalization in mind, Herakles occupies the categories of white, able-bodied, and Man.[54] By contrast, Geryon is racialized (by his redness), debilitated (by his wings), and genderqueer (e.g. self-identification with "she"). Like Lorde's description of the erotic as a chaotic-creative power to imagine the world differently, Geryon learns to imagine a world in which his red-winged, genderqueer monstrosity is truly beautiful and his self-definition is not limited to human sexuality (as it is for Herakles) but includes the world in which he appears: "We are neighbors of fire" (146).

As she tracks Geryon's coming-into-himself, Carson follows not the Hegelian dialectical formation of subjectivity but the non-struggle of witnessing (Georgis 164-165). In the interview that concludes *Autobiography of Red*, between "I" and "S", S explains to I, "What is the difference between a volcano and a guinea pig is not a description why is it like it is is a description" (148). Description tells why a thing is like itself, rather than telling how it differs from something else. If I take this as my lead for an initial approach to describing the text, I am tempted to investigate

[54] Sexuality is not a problem in the text, but one might wonder whether Herakles' desires are oriented sexually (i.e. to other men and "sameness") or toward monstrosity and domination—or perhaps both, with Carson's mixing.

why Anne Carson wrote the text the way she did. Why is it like it is? Even without the postmodern "death of the author" critique, I am concerned that such a temptation returns me to a penetrative approach—trying to penetrate and understand hidden meanings that lie beneath the surface. Instead, I want to revise this initial framing, to clarify the "it" of "why is it like it is." It is not the text "itself" but the dynamic Me-Text relation (this also displaces the tempting psychoanalytic-biographical reading of author-text). The question then is not why was the book written like it is but why do I experience it as I do. To what do I bear witness in my readings of this novel in-verse? Geryon records pieces of the worlds he experiences, and Carson records his recording. The reader becomes a witness to Geryon's witnessing (or, to Carson's witnessing Geryon witnessing). As Georgis writes, "Geryon's autobiography invites us into his cage and demands that we represent him from the encounter of having been drawn inside and from having been touched by his being. It asks that we recognize him not as a victim of his strange red wings or in resistance to them but in the particularity of his unique responses to injury and loss" (165). It is no longer a question of blame, but of response in the face of contingency.

Witnessing, in the act of composing his autobiography, allows Geryon to release his pain and become the author of his own story. At the novel's narrative midpoint, Carson draws on the image of a whaling harpoon to describe Geryon's relation to power and time: "A man moves through time. It means nothing except that, / like a harpoon, once thrown he will arrive" (81). Tschofen writes, "The simile retains a classical, quasi-fatalism; a man moves inevitably towards his future just as a harpoon moves to its target. Notice, however, that in this version, there is no mention of what precisely his fate is. The transposition is subtle, but highly relevant. Instead of being represented as the victim of an arrow, Geryon is now figured as that arrow,

moving through time towards a future that, though frightening, remains open" (43). In Geryon's case, and in the cases of those faggots he represents, trauma produces movement—but it does not prescribe his destination.[55] Beasley argues that Geryon becomes "survivor rather than victim, hero-Herakles of his own myth, immortalized rather than slain" (77). Geryon as monster-faggot is cast toward the horizon, but he is not left powerless: he can fly. In witnessing his own flight, Geryon bears witness to the power to change the trajectory on which one has been set.

Lorde's words, once again, seem well-suited to describe the kind of witnessing Stesichoros, Geryon, and Carson perform: "Recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world, rather than merely settling for a shift of characters in the same weary drama" (59). The erotic, for Lorde, is the kernel that produces change in the world. The significance of Carson's inversions is that fate loses its inevitability. For Beasley, "Carson frees Geryon from the mythic (and Stesichorian textual) cage in which he's trapped, with her own palinodic act" (78). Although Geryon cannot escape his traumatic sexual past, he learns to become his own quasi-cause, as I argued above. By so doing, Geryon avoids the eternal repetition of his traumatic constitution. Geryon's desire not to repeat, either internally (as "one of those people / who think of nothing but their stores of pain" [105]) or externally (in different relationships), leads him to become a witness as much as Ancash's story does. Witnessing, for Geryon, is an erotic and intercursive act that signifies release from the world into which he was unwillingly inducted and opens expansive new horizons.

[55] Carson's medley of myths lends an almost ahistorical feel to the story, but I take this as signifying the moment of the text's production. Both Geryon and faggots, in other words, have historically specific place-times, even if Geryon's place-time does not map neatly onto any existing world I know.

I contend that Geryon's responsive witnessing brings him to previously unforeseen horizons that prompt the reader's own queer-horizonal production. Consider the shift that brings Geryon into his role as witness. In Huarez, "Geryon kept / the camera in his hand and spoke little. I am disappearing, he thought / but the photographs were worth it. / A volcano is not a mountain like others. Raising a camera to one's face has effects / no one can calculate in advance" (135). Geryon's incomplete disappearance renders him a witness; his withdrawn presence allows him to materially record his witness on camera film while allowing Carson to map his internal fissures in book form. Witnessing opens unforeseen horizons for Geryon and his reader. The final line's incalculability stands in contrast to Geryon's first presentation in the novel: Ducasse notes that "the very first verb attributed to Geryon is 'to learn'; the second is 'thought' and the third is 'studied'" (paragraph 7). Geryon has moved away from this model for experiencing the world by the time of his Buenes Aires travel. Before running into Herakles in the bookstore, Geryon encounters a "yellowbeard" philosopher from Irvine who is there for a conference. They share a table at Café Mitwelt, Geryon attends his talk, and they go out with a group of philosopher-aspirants afterwards. At one point in their conversations, the yellowbeard philosopher tells Geryon he wants to work on an erotics of doubt, "provided . . . One can overcome that rather fundamental human trait . . . The will to know," to which Geryon replies, "I think I can" (86). The yellowbeard philosopher announces a project that is like the obverse of the discursive proliferation Foucault describes in his introductory volume to *The History of Sexuality*: *La volonté de savoir* ("The will to know"). Geryon's response suggests his transition from knower to erotic witness. Where a knower seeks a measure of control and mastery over their object as a non-participant, a witness seeks to describe it from a position within the

happening—for an erotic witness, the happening of living. Geryon begins as a knower and becomes an erotic witness to the chaotic formation of a self-with-a-world (in line with the Heideggerian concept of Mitwelt). His dynamic relation with the world as he encounters it opens not only him but also those to whom he and Carson bear witness—*Autobiography of Red*'s reader-participants.

I find Geryon's witness resonant with the world-relation Lorde describes. Lorde writes, "The erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings" (54). For Geryon and Carson, this distance is described using the geologic phenomena of volcanoes. In response to her awareness of this erotic measure, Lorde suggests,

> As ['empowered,' 'dangerous'] women, we need to examine the ways in which our world can be truly different. I am speaking here of the necessity for reassessing the quality of all the aspects of our lives and of our work, and of how we move toward and through them.
>
> The very word *erotic* comes from the Greek word *eros*, the personification of love in all its aspects—born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony. When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives. (55)

In addition to the gender difference outlined above, a key difference between Carson and Lorde is that Lorde's empowerment is collective while Geryon's empowerment is personal. Yet collective and personal action rely on one another. Geryon's shift is contingent on other people he encounters or intercourses with—which is why he can only quasicause himself—and his witness to queer freedom is always potentially a collective act, even if no one reads his autobiographies. The generative resonances between Carson and Lorde's texts counterbalance their differences. Geryon exists with a radical, erotic openness to the world, which produces

both his dependent tendencies (early on) and his queer potentialities (later). The critical turn in Geryon's life is from dependence to empowerment, in Lorde's language, which signifies a shift in his perspective from wanting to fit in and belong to wanting to find the world where his belonging does not depend on his changing or suppressing himself.

Geryon learns that he does not need to fit himself into a world where he is forever monstrous and outcast, but instead he can follow the divergent flows which produce him as a unique, perverse person. This means that Geryon is able to identify with the position of monster and outcast even while refusing the negativity associated with that positionality. Geryon's unique openness and sensitivity to the worlds around him, some of which he is constitutively not a part, renders him vulnerable to exploitation and the pain of neglect but also capable of love and witnessing. Where Herakles takes parts of the world that are beautiful and assimilates them to himself, possessing them as it were, Geryon records what he finds to be true even if it disturbs him. This is not to say that Geryon has perfected himself. He over-records, for instance, his anguished relation to dependent love. He needs to know the love-flows will still be there in a moment, and so he submits himself to bonds even when they encage him in his fears instead of enabling him in his winged freedom. But once he establishes his quasicausality, Geryon becomes capable of erotic witness, as described by Lorde. As the monster of intercourse, Geryon is uniquely situated—like other twentieth-century faggots—to find queer freedom.

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Epilogue—Coming Together: Faggotry, Queer Bundling, and Sex without Genitals

> Queer gatherings are lines that gather—on the face, or as bodies around the table—to form new patterns and new ways of making sense.
>
> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 171

My aim in this project has been "to become reclaimed by the word faggot," as I scrawled on a loose sheet of paper in my first year of graduate school. Opening myself and my work to faggotry has meant going to some troubling places personally and culturally, but it has also meant imagining new ways of existing and finding pleasure.

Faggotry entails the gathering together and "bundling" of disparate phenomena pertaining to self-assemblage and world-making. As Ahmed writes of queer gatherings in the epigraph, faggotry "form[s] new patterns and new ways of making sense" (171). In this epilogue, I want to draw on concepts developed throughout the dissertation in order to suggest two alternative modes of queer sense-making related to faggotry. First, I use the common phrase "coming together" to describe faggotry as a form of queer bundling. Next, I suggest the radical queer potential of "sex without genitals." Sex without genitals is an intercursive instance of coming together, in which one bundles queerly with (an)other(s) without following the prescribed channels of sexuality.

Coming Together

> Freedom, givenness, potentiality, are notions which presuppose each other and limit each other.
>
> Whitehead, *Process and Reality* 133

Queer freedom is not freedom in a vacuum. Complex histories and pain-filled stories accompany one on the way. What is given often seems so overwhelmingly total. How could there be an otherwise? What is given, however, need not determine how and where one goes. In this dissertation, I have focused on the interpellation, "Faggot!" and its multiple trajectories. I arranged my chapters non-chronologically to suggest a conceptual progression of queer freedom—not unlike a faggot's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Hegel).

The outlook in the first half of the dissertation looked dim. In the first instance, I traced the threat of difference in Burroughs's novel *Naked Lunch*. For Burroughs, I argued, sexuality has been deployed as part of a society of control with a bio-logic method of power. Faggots have nowhere to run, nowhere to turn. Only reincorporation within the society of control seems possible. Next, I examined the connection Baldwin makes between acknowledging otherness within oneself and accepting responsibility for one's actions. I described Baldwin's proffered solution as "dialogical confession," in which one surrenders one's perceived sovereignty and dialogically engages the Other both within and outside of oneself. In Baldwin's novel, *Giovanni's Room*, the potentiality is there—glimpses flicker across the pages—but I claimed in my analysis that his protagonist, David ultimately fails to find his way out of the labyrinth of his fortress-cage. The way is there, but the way is difficult.

The second half of the dissertation took a decidedly hopeful turn. After Baldwin, I analyzed the form and content of Nugent's "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade: A Novel" in terms of intercourse and what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the Body without Organs. Nugent and his narrator, Alex manage to produce the body without organs that is the ground for intercourse. Nugent displaces satisfaction from its usual privileged position within sexuality

and disorients sex. Alex/Nugent is attuned to present potentialities, and I argued that this attunement facilitates breaks in which queer freedom could flow. The faggot content with failure and outsiderness can find queer freedom. Finally, I closely read Carson's *Autobiography of Red: A Novel in Verse*. In Carson's text, I claimed, the red-winged monster-protagonist first learns to quasicause himself and then gains power over his own life. Receptivity and sensitivity opened the protagonist to sexual abuse and "wrong love" as a child, but he regains himself—even while remaining non-sovereign—and flies on the wings that had debilitated him. Here at last, faggots can find the queer freedom of faggotry.

At the same time that this trajectory from Burroughs to Carson is an optimistic one, I follow Muñoz's utopian provocation that we have not yet been queer; what I optimistically described has not yet been here. In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, Muñoz argued that "Queerness is not yet here. . . . we are not yet queer" (1). To say that queerness is not yet here and now, for Muñoz, is to say that queerness is on the horizon as a potentiality, where "a potentiality is a certain mode of nonbeing that is eminent [jutting], a thing that is present but not actually existing in the present tense" (9). The here and now does not yet make manifest the radical meaning of "queer," indeed may not yet even hold the full potential of the term. I draw on this framing to suggest that faggotry functions as what Deleuze and Guattari call "break-flows" between the here and now and the then and there, opening paths to queer futures.

Queer bundling is "not yet here" in a second sense. In bundling, the partial mixing of proximal entities both gives them togetherness and maintains their distinction—much as the (dis)junctive ellipses do in Nugent's piece. As I employ the term, the "coming together" of

queer bundling indicates an intercursive sharing of difference that upholds difference without inherently producing opposition. The term is conceptually a mixture of Whitehead's "concrescence," Nancy's "being-singular-plural," and Deleuze and Guattari's "assemblage." Queer bundling, and coming together generally, is always happening and never finished happening, as Nancy describes with his "unworking community." Community, Nancy writes, is "a workless and inoperative activity . . . a matter of incompleting [community's] sharing" (*The Inoperative Community* 35). The moment one has come together with (an)other(s) in the past tense, a new coterminous "one" functionally replaces the multiples that constitute it. Queer bundling is always not yet here in the sense that it can never be "finished" coming together; the gathering/loosing process is dynamic rather than static.

In this dissertation, I proposed a distinction between sexuality and intercourse that alters the meaning of coming together, from unalloyed bundling (the coming together of multiple like objects into a unity) to imperfect mixing (a coming together without obscuring difference). Intercourse is a historical name for a wide sweep of phenomena. Roadways, for instance, are intercourses between places. Conversations are intercourses between persons. In brief, it seems a drastic reduction to indicate only a certain kind of sexual intercourse by the term. In my work I have striven to revitalize the term "intercourse" as an element of queer imagination about how we come together.

<u>Sex without Genitals</u>

> . . . the rhizome, on the other hand, is a liberation of sexuality not only from reproduction but also from genitality.
>
> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 18

How does one come together as a person, as a faggot? How does one's person come together with others? How does one come together with the world? These are challenging questions, in response to which I want to present some tentative notes based on my work with faggotry.

A fundamental task of schizoanalysis is to switch on each person's unique desiring-machines, which are not entirely separable from the social machines that orchestrate desire. How one comes together as a person depends on which desiring-machines and which social-machines are switched On. Faggot-interpellation, for instance, affects how one comes together—affects one's desires, one's fears, and so on. I have argued that in addition to the fears and trauma produced in faggot-interpellation, faggots are opened to a queer freedom called faggotry.

The queer freedom of faggotry is a specific subset of what I have described as queer bundling. Queer bundling happens as one gathers oneself amidst other gatherers. This is the freedom to be queer. Queer bundling also happens as a mode of coming together of persons and things. This is the freedom to find one another and constitute the queer "we" this discourse presumes exists. Thirdly, queer bundling happens as a mode of coming together with the world. This is the queer relation to freedom. These three layers comprise queer bundling.

How queer bundling is organized has political significance. Ahmed writes, "queer objects support proximity between those who are supposed to live on parallel lines, as points that should not meet" (169). Taking up Ahmed's terms, queer bundling allows "points that should not meet" to join and overlap, and this joining generates queer freedom. Queer bundling of self, persons, and the world produces the potentiality of faggotry.

In closing, I contend that queer bundling produces the potentiality of "sex without genitals." The trouble is that a social-machine over-investment in genitality obscures potentialities for how we come together. "Sexual" intercourse can be good, to be sure, but intercourse oriented only or primarily toward genitals, penetration, and climax—let alone reproduction—obscures other pleasures and potentialities. How can we have ecstatic intercourse with such a narrowly prescribed imagination? The task at hand is to gesture toward some switches, drawn from my work with faggotry, that might facilitate persons' coming together in novel ways.

"Sex without genitals" as I develop it here is an intercursive phenomenon. Intercourse is a rhizomatic occurrence—it happens in the middle, between. A rhizome like the body without organs which forms the basis for desire has only a middle. There is not a hierarchy of body parts and functions as with arborescent structures (e.g. reproduction). There is not a unifying node as with fascicular structures (e.g. genitality). Rhizomatic intercourse does not focus on genitals; it is spread out across the body without organs, not stopping at the boundaries of the organism. Genitals are fragile boundaries of the organism. Genital-oriented sex, as in the contemporary arrangement of "sexuality deployed," privileges the meeting of multiple genital boundaries; it especially privileges the use of those boundaries in climax. In intercourse at its best, by contrast, the body without organs covers the surface of the lovers together as a single plane of consistency (Deleuze and Guattari 30). Intercourse moves toward the ecstatic dynamic of feeling oneself ebb and flow across this body without organs.

We have not yet become rhizomatic in our intercourse; we have not yet become queer in our bundling. Intercourse and bundling happen within history, as historical phenomena.

Faggotry indicates where we might go but also where we have gone. The following brief sketch of faggotry's history is relevant for understanding both past and future—relevant for understanding sex without genitals in our "here and now." The contemporary meaning of "faggot" appeared relatively late in the deployment of sexuality, in the early 1910s. As a historical response to faggot-interpellation, faggotry provides a fascinating case study of both sexual regulation and intercursive transgression. Tracing faggotry across the twentieth century, I noticed two arcs that the term follows (described in the Prologue). First, the early 1910s usage meaning gender deviance provoked a pendular effect by the 1970s. In this pendular effect, pushing faggots out from masculinity provoked an equally energized push toward masculinity. By the 1970s, faggots included those who performed normative and hypernormative gender with deviant sexuality. Some faggots thus became purveyors of gender normativity in their bid to regain masculine privilege. In the second arc, however, the same stimulus provoked an openness to effeminacy and a reconsideration of the meaning of gender. In the first case, faggots respond to expulsion by pushing back toward the masculine center (the pendular effect), and in the second case, faggots respond by loosing their hold on the masculine center and swirling playfully outwards (faggotry). This second arc is worth following further.

In its initial 1910s derogatory usage as well as its 1970s utopian usage—the second arc—faggotry offers a model of mixing and entanglement that sustains difference. Faggot first indicated a co-presence of binary gender performances, designating gender deviance and sexual inversion in the 1910s. In the 1970s, a number of local and national organizations and writers took up the word faggot in the wake of the Gay Liberation Front's perceived failures to break from patriarchal and misogynistic structures. For these groups and writers, some of whom

called themselves effeminists, challenging masculine gender norms became a critical political act. Faggotry for these groups and writers meant sustaining and nourishing gender difference within themselves and in their worlds.

What does it mean to follow the path of faggotry rather than trying to escape back into masculinity? In a document entitled "Principles of Revolutionary Effeminism," the New York-based Faggot Effeminists proposed divestment from masculinity and outlined steps to accomplish this. They assert that the following "dichotomies are inherently sexist" and note that "The racism of white faggots often reveals the same set of polarities": "subject/object; dominant/submissive; master/slave; butch/femme." They conclude, "only by rejecting the very terms of these categories can we become effeminists." The Faggot Effeminists go on to critique cruising and all forms of objectification of persons, and they argue that cross-dressing is a mockery that serves only to uphold masculinism (Faggot Effeminists). It might seem, given this snapshot of a piece of their work, that the Faggot Effeminists are nearly anti-sex in their activism. As Adrienne Maree Brown asks in *Pleasure Activism*, what is the place of pleasure and feeling good in political engagement? I argue that the Faggot Effeminists are better understood as taking intercourse seriously enough to ask of it some important questions. Are Dom/sub relations fundamentally sexist and racist? Is butch/femme inevitably a problematic dynamic? What about the place of drag in queer culture?

In another 1970s text that takes up the word faggot but places greater emphasis on pleasure—*The Faggots and Their Friends Between Revolutions*—Mitchell makes a different suggestion about cross-dressing. Mitchell writes, "Faggot Wisdom: There is more to be learned from wearing a dress for a day, than there is from wearing a suit for a lifetime" (19). I am not

invested in addressing the cross-dressing debate or any of the other questions raised by these groups and writers. Instead, I want to flag the vibrancy of these conversations in this historical moment, when the word faggot happened to be particularly active as a self-designation, as an area for further research and writing. Critiques like the ones leveled by the Faggot Effeminists and Mitchell will enable critical sex praxis.

To say that queer is "not yet here" in this context is to say that we have not yet felt the ecstasy intercourse can bring. To sketch "sex without genitals" in terms of faggotry is to propose that it *is* present as a potentiality.

Faggotry is a way to queer freedom—the queer freedom of self, other, and the world. Rather than become entrenched in masculinism, queers can become reclaimed by the word faggot. Faggots attain freedom by embracing their faggotry and breaking down sexual, racial, and gendered expectations. Within themselves, with others, and with the world, faggots can become the breakages that free flows from their prescribed channels.

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