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The Materialism Of The Encounter: Queer Sociality And Capital In Modern Literature

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**THE MATERIALISM OF THE ENCOUNTER: QUEER SOCIALITY AND
CAPITAL IN MODERN LITERATURE**

by

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DISSERTATION

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION: THE MATERIALISM OF THE ENCOUNTER

The relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour.

Karl Marx

The poem is at last between two persons instead of two pages.

Frank O'Hara

Style, in a great writer, is always a style of life too, not anything at all personal, but inventing a possibility of life, a way of existing.

Gilles Deleuze

In *The Materialism of the Encounter* I argue for the critical importance of queer sociality as a confrontation with global capital, a confrontation in which sexualities emerge as a material history necessary for rethinking the broader experiences of twentieth century modernity. To do so, I draw together a series of transnational texts—Henry James's non-fiction travel narrative *The American Scene*, Djuna Barnes's canonical *Nightwood*, and two neglected novels, Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler's *The Young and Evil* and Claude McKay's unpublished *Romance in Marseilles*—that exhibit a mode of sociality and literary practice I am calling the “encounter.” While the specific parameters of the encounter differ from author to author, there remains a shared desire to negotiate sexuality as material history, a negotiation deeply interwoven with other, fractious modes of social difference and the larger differentiation under capital itself. In reading these texts as materialist, I detail the ways concentrated industrial production and the sites of commodity exchange are a necessary part of a history of sexuality that fostered queer self-cultivation, tracing queer

encounters through the shared spaces of international capital, the port of Marseilles, the bars and cafés of Paris or Berlin, and the streets and parks of New York City. In my readings, I demonstrate how these sites, while enmeshed in the larger dynamics of capital, nonetheless emerge as critical zones of social and sexual understandings, as they counterpoise the material, heterogeneous dimensions of sexual life to the larger abstraction of capital, and specifically to the abstraction of desire from material, social practices.

Furthermore, I show how the critical power of this materialism is transformed into a range of modernist literary practices that become a method not only for confronting the contradictions within capital but for negotiating the myriad social differences of modern life. The literary work, I argue, becomes a manner of cultivating a mode of queer sociality modeled by the formal practices of the text itself, where a criticality emerges through the juxtaposition of disparate elements of material life whose aim is a broader understanding of capital and the economies of desire. In so doing, the queer comportment of these texts works against the reifying tendency inherent in commodity exchange and sexual definition, instead exposing the variety of social and sexual dynamics always already present within capital. I describe such a dynamic as the materialism of the encounter, and emphasize its critical nature in James's interest in sites of male-male cruising, Barnes's negotiation of gender, sexuality, and history, Ford and Tyler's focus on the close proximity of violence, capital, and sexual definition, and McKay's productive and destructive clashes of race, class, gender, and international revolutionary politics. This tension between the formal modernist experimentations of these texts and the larger social domain of capital not only reveals the critical force of the encounter to a specifically queer sociality but also provides

new avenues for understanding modernist formal innovation as an engagement with the uneven terrain of global capital.

A strong example of just such a materialism of the encounter occurs early in Ford and Tyler's *The Young and Evil*. In this scene, the main protagonists Julian and Karel have met up with Gabriel and Louis, two street hustlers, on a snowy night. The four go to a late night diner, in part to discuss the fact that Louis needs \$50 for an abortion. After eating and chatting, the scene continues: "They went outside and stood on the corner of Eighth Street and Sixth Avenue. Louis spoke of the logic of Rimbaud; Gabriel of the rareness of faith, hence the preponderance of betrayals; Julian of a new poem he was contemplating in which time would be an evil to be forgotten; Karel of his uncomfortableness: I can't stand here shading my eyelashes all night" (*Young and Evil* 31). This moment in the novel registers a number of key elements of the materialism of the encounter. First of all, the scene itself is rendered as an encounter between various perspectives, paratactically structured so that the sentence refuses any hierarchical distinction between Louis's observation about Rimbaud, Julian's discussion of his own poetry, Karel's campy remark about shading his lashes from the snow, or Gabriel's reference to betrayals and intimacy. Each perspective contributes equally to the scene as it signals, as a collage, a number of important social registers in the queer experience of modernity. Yet also present in the scene are the more subtle references to money and work (none of them have any), to the specificity of the city (Eighth Street and Sixth Avenue), to the material importance of diners, to the public nature of desire (first discussions of abortions, then the complex set of relations between the men), to the varieties of sexuality rendered through each character (the explicitly queer Jul-

ian and Karel and the masculine, working-class sexuality of Louis and Gabriel), and finally to the latent fears of vice squads policing the activities of gay men, hustlers, and the unemployed. That is, this one scene registers the material history of specific encounters that frame a particularly queer articulation of modernity, from high art to camp to desire to money to the social spaces of streets and diners to the policing of those very streets, all rendered in a collage-like structure. In *The Materialism of the Encounter*, I argue that such scenes, from formal literary practice to the material history represented, indicate a specifically queer materialist negotiation with modernity and an alternate world imaginary.

Materialism, one could say, has always been a crucial dimension of modern queer being in the world, from the streets, bathrooms, drawing rooms and salons to the physical punishment and psychic and bodily intrusions of medicine and law to the sensual, erotic bodies of others. *The Materialism of the Encounter* draws on and expands this history. Yet in addition to these senses, by materialism I also mean the specific examination of life under capital, as Ellen Meiksins Wood suggests, echoing Marx, a method of historical analysis that results in the detailed analysis and exploration of contradictions, resistances, and social possibilities tied to the particular developments of industrial capitalism (*Democracy Against Capitalism*). The intimate connections between the developments of industrial production and the developments of gay and lesbian identities has long been noted in the work of Gayle Rubin, John D’Emilio, Roderick Ferguson, and others.¹ As this analysis has shown, the developments of industrial capitalism, through the process of acquiring more resources (raw materials as well as laborers), upend previously established orders of family, city, and affiliation, as materials and people are pulled from more and more diverse

places. As urban areas become the hub of much of this production, life in cities outpaces that of the countryside for the first time in history. Laborers concentrate around sites of production or distribution, transforming the shape and experience of early modern cities like New York and Marseilles, as arteries of transportation move goods and people around with greater ease and efficiency. However, such upheaval simultaneously produces new opportunities for social affiliation and intimate practice as it brings heterogeneous groups of people together at the site of production, providing them with work and income, and new locations to inhabit. This dialectical dynamic in the concentration of capitalist production, between the disruption of the social and its remaking, is a crucial factor in the material history of modern self-consciousness and, particularly, queer self-awareness. “In divesting the household of its economic independence and fostering the separation of sexuality from procreation,” D’Emilio argues, “capitalism has created conditions that allow some men and women to organize a personal life around their erotic/emotional attraction to their own sex.” He goes on to conclude, “Only when individuals began to make their living through wage labor, instead of as parts of an interdependent family unit, was it possible for homosexual desire to coalesce into a personal identity” (470). That is, capital provides not only a degree of social disruption to family or community but also provides the material framework for the development and cultivation of desire, in fact an alternate desiring economy from the family, with its often specific gender norms and national imaginary. Supplementing Michel Foucault’s position, I want to stress that this initial coincidence between the ascent of the abstraction of wage labor and the emergence of sexual identity is a crucial component of the material history of sexuality.

This dialectical process appears again and again in the texts discussed here. For example, in *The American Scene*, James understood the capitalist transformations taking place in America as “produc[ing] a horrible, hateful sense of personal antiquity,” the feeling “of having been amputated of half my history” (422, 431). When James returned to his home city after a twenty years absence, New York had doubled in population, growing to almost 3.5 million people. More than just an influx of population from increasingly more diverse parts of the world and the United States, beginning in the 1860s, New York underwent enormous transformations in social space. No longer concentrated below 14th street, residents, aided by advances in transportation and spurred by changes in manufacturing, moved northward. City structures moved as well. Beginning with Grace Church and then First Presbyterian Church, a great movement uptown unearthed the city. Retail stores like Lord & Taylor, Arnold Constable, and Steward’s slowly relocated seeking uptown wealthy patrons; followed soon after by a string of hotels: Astor House, The Metropolitan, The Prescott House.² James also notes the way Columbia University, what he termed the “moving university,” changes locations several times. However, within this fluid circuitry of modern development, what he terms the “chaos of confusion and change” of capital, James will seek out alternate circuits of exchange in homosexual desire and male-male cruising sites, circuits deeply connected to the social spaces carved out by capital, yet, to James, functioning at a different frequency, and hence offering a transformation of relational possibilities (357).

The relational transformations imagined by James (and the other authors discussed here) depended on the public spaces of cities that were themselves altered by capital and

through which commodities circulated.³ I argue that these material spaces become a crucial aspect in the conception of alternate modes of sociality. George Chauncey's detailed account of "gay New York" during the first half of the twentieth century provides crucial material history for these developments, noting as he does the increase in cafeterias, diners, and places to lodge built to accommodate the single laborers flooding the city for work, and the theaters, parks, and clubs established for their amusement. Such establishments formed a crucial institutional foundation for the production of gay male culture. As Chauncey notes, "gay men turned many restaurants into places where they could gather with gay friends, gossip, ridicule the dominate culture that ridiculed them, and construct an alternative culture" (163). Furthermore, he notes the way "the city's streets and parks served as vital meeting grounds for men who lived with their families or in cramped quarter with few amenities, and the vitality and diversity of the gay street scene attracted many other men as well" (179). Importantly, Chauncey notes, the development of a particularly gay male life depended on such institutions, and such institutions in turn contributed to the heterogeneous dynamic in the articulation of gay cultural practices, as the scene from *The Young and Evil* suggests, crossing as they did the public and the private, high- and low-brow culture, and the definitional dynamics of sexuality itself. *The Materialism of the Encounter* is indebted to such work and seeks to continue its perspective outside of an American context and outside of a strictly male framework, emphasizing the "vitality and diversity" of queer materialist cultural practices.⁴

In this way, I also draw on the work of Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, Dianne Chisholm, and Samuel Delany, all of who have likewise stressed the connections be-

tween capitalism and public spaces for the development of queer affiliation. Samuel Delany's *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, for instance, outlines the crucial role of social institutions as facilitators of communal interaction and queer bonding. Delany details the adverse effects of policy and zoning changes in New York City in the late 1970s and early 1980s aimed at gentrifying the Time Square area, changes that eliminated the movie houses, bars, parks, open streets, and shops which facilitated any number of male-male erotic encounters. Tracing a similar history along the Bowery, Berlant and Warner argue that such gentrification eliminates the public spaces that help men "to find each other, to map a commonly accessible world, to construct the architecture of queer space" (191). In reinforcing the centrality of public spaces of bars and diners and theaters, this work stresses that the interactions that take place there, the cruising and camping and conversation and sex, are important forms of belonging and queer self-cultivation, a significant alternate mode of sociality. As Berlant and Warner claim, "sexual practice is only one kind of counterintimacy. More important is the critical practical knowledge that allows such relations to count as intimate, to be not empty release or transgression but a common language of self-cultivation, shared knowledge, and the exchange of inwardness" (202). Or as Delany insists, "These *were* relationships" (40, italics original). I argue that through these social spaces, and through the "counterintimacies" developed there, a critical knowledge about capitalist modernity also emerges, one that exposes, as Chisholm argues, "the historical contradictions of current reality—contradictions that renew urban crises repeatedly, yet remain obscured by capitalist aesthetics," an aesthetics illustrated, for example, by the new Time Square (31).

However, while capital provided a material opportunity for some men and woman to explore desires, the texts collected here also detail how the expressions of such desires were increasingly policed. With the first Oscar Wilde trial in 1895, Alan Sinfield argues, the whole complex span of gay signification and representation becomes concretized in the image of Wilde, “the homosexual”—the effeminate, class-based, aesthetic construction that would become the dominate “subcultural myth” of gay male sexuality until the 1970s (138). While such “profiling” will result in heightened anxiety for white, middle- and upper-class men, illustrated by James’s “fearful exposure,” the social disruption wrought by capital is frequently projected onto sexual “deviance” by bourgeois moralist and leftists alike. According to Ferguson, in using the prostitute as the iconic symbol of self-estrangement under capital, Marx implies that capital, like the many laborers to bourgeois sensibilities, intimates “the mobility of vice, the spread of immorality, and the eruption of social transgressions,” and as non-white migrants and immigrants crowded into American cities for work, the disruption of capital took on a particularly racialized sexual dynamic (*Aberrations* 8).⁵ That is, during the 1920s and especially after 1929, left and right moralists systematically mapped people of color, the unemployed, and sexual “deviants” of all sorts onto the chaos of the economic situation, the social instability, dangers, and anxieties about the future. While the United States became the leading economy at the turn of the century, the interwar period saw the global economy grind to a halt. As Eric Hobsbawm summarizes, immediately after the war prices and demand collapsed, international lending dropped ninety percent, isolationist economic policies became the norm as countries attempted to protect themselves from collapsing currencies in Germany, Poland, Hungary,

and Austria, with Great Britain, the United States and others eventually dropping the gold standard. During this period unemployment was astronomical, averaging double digits in much of Europe, the high 20% in America, and over 40% in Germany. Significantly, as Karel Polanyi argues, the League of Nations tied international peace to the economic free markets: the League “realized the interdependence of peace and trade, not only as a guarantee of trade, *but also of peace*” (23, italics original).⁶ Accordingly, one strand of international thinking emerging out of the League suggested that under a crumbling economy and fears of another global war the free market was the best guarantee of peace and prosperity, which, as Ferguson suggests, translated into the conflation of free markets with prosperity and stability, whose underbelly was a strident anxiety toward a racial and sexual Other. This fear of the mobility of vice and social upheaval, often concretized as the person of color, the prostitute, the unemployed, and the homosexual, led to a number of stringent measures in social policing in the United States, particularly those legal restrictions instituted by Jim Crow, the immigration acts of 1921 and 1924, the Committee of Fourteen, established in New York City in 1905 to control the moral order of this growing urban populace, the 1923 law that made homosexual solicitation a criminal offense, and the later 1933 law that banned “the assembly of gay people in public space” (Chauncey 173). While industrial capital affords new material opportunities for self-exploration and creation along lines of desire, policing within medicine, science, and law, made such explorations emotionally, economically, and physically dangerous. All of this becomes the material backdrop, for instance, for *The Young and Evil*, from the vice squads patrolling the city to Frederick’s suspended sentence to fears of having their parties busted.

The Materialism of the Encounter, though, does not only trace these public developments of sexual culture. I also detail how the very constitution of sexual identities, as Guy Hocquenghem argues, is intimately “connected, though not mechanically so, with the advance of Western capitalism,” to the increasingly reified nature of experience and bodily understanding (93). Kevin Floyd, in *The Reification of Desire*, argues that the late nineteenth century substitution of sexual identity for sexual act and the general medical and legal understanding of sexuality as a separate, and yet defining, aspect of a person’s life were part of the larger fragmentation occurring under capital. “What Foucault characterizes as an emerging discursive regime representing sexuality in terms of subjectivities rather than actions,” Floyd argues, “can be understood as mediated by capital in terms of a growing epistemological dissociation of sexual desire from the gendered body, a reification of sexual desire as such” (40). In stressing the mediating role of capital, Floyd situates Foucault’s sense of the extraction and implantation of sexuality within the larger process of the abstraction of commodity exchange. As Marx shows, the commodity fetish is the outcome of the abstraction of the social process of labor, where the social character of labor and production is stripped away. This abstraction produces the exchange-value of the commodity, and in the process transforms the commodity into something that appears *as if* it were an isolated, autonomous thing in objective reality. “The relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation,” Marx argues, “existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour” (*Capital* 320). The *as if* of the commodity fetish faces the laborer as a thing separate from him, concealing the social work of a whole set of material relations and cooperation within its production. In this

sense, the history of sexuality, or more specifically homosexuality, must be understood as *itself* a part of the process of abstraction, already intimated by D’Emilio, existing “not between” people, in acts, behaviors, social spaces, or history, but as Marx notes, *as if* a thing in itself. The definitional terms of the sexual subject, then, as Floyd specifies, are “ultimately inseparable from an ongoing differentiation of social labor, including a gendered division of labor, a division between manual and intellectual labor, and an atomizing, disciplinary specialization of knowledge itself” (6).

I build on Floyd’s work, here, arguing that the abstraction of the commodity does not only result in a separation of desire from bodies but also from the material social spaces used to cultivate and circulate desire. In this sense, I highlight how the texts collected here emphasize the material dimensions of sexual life. To do so, I do not separate sexuality from the social, but, following Marx, turn it back towards the sites of its production in the material scenes of cultivation and development. In this way, like Elisa Glick, I aim to contest “those models of modernity that separate the aesthetic/erotic from the economic” by arguing that the history of sexuality and the critical work of sexuality provide an exemplary opportunity to understand this reifying tendency, to see sexuality as a certain linchpin for understanding the social more generally, and particularly as it relates to the production and control of desire (4). James and McKay are particularly strong at perceiving the confluence of sexual desire and capitalist desires, the way consumerist desires are linked to specific articulations of sexual desire. In this way, I argue that the texts in *The Materialism of the Encounter* trace the *emergent* logic of what Michael Tratner will show to be the dominant mid-century “valuing of desire rather than production in economic the-

ory,” a push for individuals to “indulge their desires” as a way to boost consumption and fuel the economy (2, 3). Expressing or pursuing one’s desire, epitomized in Keynesian policy, assumed economic value. Tratner connects this mid-century indulgence in one’s economic desires to a coterminous emphasis on the indulgence in and exploration of one’s sexual desires, here expressed in the work of Wilhelm Reich. Both perspectives, Tratner stresses, share the same underlying logic: “Not indulging in spending or sexuality would lead to a ‘pent-up’ state that was considered deleterious to the economic or the individual body” (3). The only healthy person is one who pursued one’s desires (economically *and* sexually). Tratner explores the implications of this logic along two incompatible paths. First, he maps out the ways this expression of desire get channeled through specific avenues of acceptability, resulting in what Foucault, building on Herbert Marcuse, calls “hyper-repressive desublimation.”⁷ Conversely, he also links the emphasis on desire to Lawrence Birken, who claims that the turn to consumerism, and hence a focus on individual desires, amounts to a valorizing of “idiosyncratic desire.” While my texts predate the period described by Tratner, my goal is to show how, even in this earlier moment, capitalist production aims to make the individual’s desires “a part of a circulatory system” (14).

Marx hints at this aim already in his description of the cycle of production from the

Grundrisse:

Thus production produces consumption (1) by creating the material for it; (2) by determining the manner of consumption; and (3) by creating the products, initially posited by it as objects, in the form of a need felt by the consumer. It thus produces the object of consumption, the manner of consumption, and the motive of consumption. Consumption like-wise produces the producer’s *inclination* by beckoning to him as an aim-determined need. (230, italics original)

The cycle is as follows: production creates consumption, initially as an object, but ultimately as a need or desire; then consumption produces the inclination of the producer, in a sense, implanting that need or desire. One interesting side effect of Marx's formulation is that he denaturalizes desire—for any object—and situates it within the larger social setting, the larger modes of production, as something we experience and develop as a historical contingency. Such a dynamic helps clarify Floyd's assessment of Foucault's larger project, one Foucault himself partially acknowledges when he describes how “the singular imperialism that compels everyone to transform their sexuality into a perpetual discourse” functions within capitalist modernity (*History* 33). Yet, if capitalist production plays a crucial role in the production and regulation of desire and sexuality, throughout *The Materialism of the Encounter* I trace out an alternate theory of the production of desire, one found not outside the capitalist production, but rather one created in the margins and contradictions and uneven development of capital, found in the streets, the vagabond, the unemployed, the hustler, the prostitute, and homosexual desire, those who live as the detritus of efficacy and progress. In short, a form of desire that strains against the circulatory system of capital, whether that is James's scenes of male-male cruising, McKay's vagabonds and drifters, Ford and Taylor's camp sensibility, or Barnes's Robin Vote.

More must be said about this dynamic of straining against capital. While McKay, Barnes, and Ford and Tyler acknowledge the complicated relationship between the spaces of queer cultivation and the developments of modern capital, James conceives of homosexual desire as wholly outside the realm of the commodity, as a totally different economy. James, in a sense, desperately clings to a sense of an outside to capital that even for the late

nineteenth century was increasingly untenable. Conversely, McKay, Barnes, and Ford and Tyler, writing in the late 1920s and early 1930s, are forced to negotiate a different capitalist reality, a different set of parameters in relation to the public sphere of queer life. McKay's idealized scenes of diasporic bodies "jelly rolling" to international jazz are made possible by capital; Barnes's mobile critical sphere of streets and circuses is the very space through which commodities also circulate. As a result, Michael Warner argues, "gay culture in this most visible mode is anything but external to advanced capitalism" and therefore "demand[s] of theory a more dialectical view of capitalism than many people have imagination for" (Introduction xxxi). By the 1970s, Warner argues, no longer is there any fantasy of an outside of capital: "urban gay men reek of the commodity" (xxxix). And yet this relation to the commodity makes sexuality a key site for the analysis of capital. As Marx notes, the social qualities of the commodity "are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible" (*Capital* 320). The texts collected here negotiate this dual nature of the commodity/sexual subject, tracing back to these social qualities, not to reveal some dynamic outside capital, but to expose that "imperceptible" social dynamic always already within capital, and to transform that social dynamic into a zone of criticality.⁸ This is the mode of materialism I am trying to imagine, a record of what Floyd describes as "the complex history of social and political practice, the panoply of specific articulations of lesbian, gay, antihomophobic and queer struggle, which emerge from within certain 'experiences of constraint'" under modern capital (15).

As such, I see *The Materialism of the Encounter* engaging contemporary queer politics. The images of alternate sexual economies, the insistence on the importance of so-

cial institutions to support the development and self-cultivation of these alternate sexual economies, the detailing of the intertwined dynamics of art and sex, the understanding of the connection between the violence of capital and the violence of sexual definition, the contrasting implications of gender, race, and class on desire, and the desire to imagine something other found in the texts collected here all stands in stark contrast to a narrow focus of contemporary gay and lesbian politics, whose understanding of sexuality and rights, with their increasingly pragmatic emphasis on marriage, the military, and privacy, depends more and more on a reified and privatized notion of sexual/social life—an agenda that ultimately coalesces around the paradoxical neoliberal privatization of social inclusion.⁹ As Teemu Ruskola demonstrates in regards to the legal fight in *Lawrence v. Texas* (which overturned the criminalization of sodomy), “it is only when the state is able to imagine legitimate homosexual intimacies entitled to ‘privacy’ that homosexuals become deserving of ‘dignity’ and ‘respect’ in the public spheres of the liberal polity” (245). Compared to the images of queer sociality developed in my texts, advances in “privacy” seem all but conciliatory to the larger material and monetary accumulation of capital. As Berlant and Warner argue, “one of the unforeseen paradoxes of national-capitalist privatization has been that citizens have been led through heterosexual culture to identify both themselves and their politics with privacy” (193). In contrast to this, *The Materialism of the Encounter* is framed by a queer materialism, by the necessity of the materialism of queer desire. I trace James’s interest in the alternative desiring economy of Riverside Drive and Grant’s tomb; Ford and Tyler’s network of speakeasies, drag balls, cafeterias, and cruising lanes; Barnes’s overall emphasis on the streets where Robin Vote walks; and McKay’s constella-

tion of bars, cafés, and clubs as sites for the production of homo-social intimacy and criticality. I trace a cartography of queer life through the shared spaces of capitalist modernity, arguing that such spaces, while enmeshed in the larger dynamics of capital, nonetheless emerge as critical sites of social and sexual understanding and development. It is my claim that the publicness of queer desire is a historical manifestation, but one cultivated and transformed into a critical perspective on capital more generally.

In this way, too, I also aim to contribute to the growing body of work on queer materialism and queer Marxism. My materialist approach is not to discount the larger, and significant, body of work on loss or shame.¹⁰ Given the quantity of violence, prohibitions, despair, violence, betrayals, fears of arrest, and heartache found in the text collected here, such work is necessary. And yet, similar to Michael Snediker, I am trying to find different resources for political struggle, different areas to explore, and new possibilities of historical understanding and future imaginaries. Failing to address the material dimension of queer being in the world would result, as Berlant and Warner argue, in “a sense of isolation and diminished expectations for queer life, as well as an attenuated capacity for political community” (192). The *Materialism of the Encounter* seeks to demarcate one domain of the historiographic struggle of queer political community, a community that does not rely on unity but on diverse geographies, contradictions, histories, and spaces of interaction, a diversity articulated in a social and literary practice I call the encounter.

But before turning to my sense of the encounter, more must be said first about my use of the term *queer*, as it is both historically specific to some of the texts and anachronistic, even opposed, to others. The historical specificity of the term *queer* provides not an

overarching designation, but specifies a particular type of self-fashioning on the part of some gay men. As Chauncey shows, “while the terms queer, fairy, and faggot were often used interchangeably by outside observers ... each term also had a more precise meaning among gay men that could be invoked to distinguish its object from other homosexually active men” (15). He goes on say that *queer* designated men on the “basis of their homosexual interest rather than their womanlike gender status” and that their “counterparts” were often termed “normal men” rather than heterosexuals (16). This distinction between homosexual interest and gender status is crucial to draw out. The term *queer* certainly functions along this logic in *The Young and Evil*, for instance. Julian and Karel are queers. *Queer* is not only a term they use to describe themselves, but is a term that distinguishes their specific sexual interest in “normal men” like Louis and Gabriel. However, as I gestured earlier, Louis and Gabriel, with their hustler’s temperament, do not adhere to such self-fashion. Like the many men in McKay’s *Romance in Marseilles*, working-class men, drifters, and vagabonds participated in a different sexual economy, one where gender performance “superseded homosexual interest as the basis of sexual classification” (Chauncey 87). That is, while queer men identified through their homosexual interest, what Chauncey calls working-class bachelor culture identified through their class position and their masculine attributes and homosociality. Within such a working-class system, “men had to be many things in order to achieve the status of normal men,” Chauncey notes, “but being ‘heterosexual’ was not one of them” (97).

Yet given this historically specific male self-naming, I nonetheless utilize the term to designate the range of characters and relationships collected here, referring neither

strictly to object choice nor to gender attributes, but to the ways the characters exhibit in various ways the “gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances,” as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes, of our contemporary sense of queer being in the world (*Tendencies* 8). What we would today simply term the sex lives of the various characters found in *The Materialism of the Encounter* all function according to different logics, with different gender inflection, stressing or minimizing object choice, gender performance, or associative relations. While I will occasionally deploy other terms, specifically *gay* or *homosexual*, this anachronistic use of *queer* helps me designate the transformative dynamics of desire at issue here, as I use it to clarify the love shared between Theodosia and Julian, for example, or the dynamic between Big Blonde and Petit Frère, or the capacious nature of Robin’s attachments. In these cases, desire functions both to contour the parameters of specific modes of relationality and to open up new avenues of potential forms of bonding. Just as importantly, I use the term to expand the very domain of sexuality, departing from simple object choice, or even people, to include the integral role city structures play in the proliferation of desire, the intimate relationship to capital, and the proximity of desire to violence. And yet, by also stressing the dissonant nature of Sedgwick’s formulation, *queer* also helps outline the incompatibilities and tensions across sexuality, gender, race, and class, as Barnes and McKay makes clear. McKay’s emphasis on working-class sexual cultures, for instance, distinguishes his political position from what he saw as the corruption of middle-class blacks, hetero- or homosexual, with their integrationist tendencies, emasculated relation to capital, and white-imitative morality. McKay’s sexual system does not function along the simple hetero-homo divide, but is shot through with racial politics and

class tension. “The political promise of the term [queer] reside[s] specifically in its broad critique of multiple social antagonisms,” David L. Eng, J. Jack Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz argue, “including race, gender, class, nationality, and religion, in addition to sexuality” because “sexuality is intersectional, not extraneous to other modes of difference” (1). In this sense, my use of the term *queer* denotes a specific critical dynamic of the encounter: the simultaneous analysis of multiple modes of difference, as they inflect, shape, negate, or run parallel to each other. Yet the two terms are not the same. The encounter is the name for the process by which sexuality is shaped by capital, by social space, through art, in medicine, in law, across class, gender and race. It is also an analysis of how sexuality becomes within the texts collected here a privileged site for understanding capitalist modernity.

The dynamic of the encounter, then, is both a literary practice and a method of social analysis. To begin with method, my sense of the encounter is shaped by two key sources. The first is Sedgwick’s argument for the necessarily contestatory stance one must take in relation to sexual definitions. As Sedgwick argues, “rather than embrace an idealist faith in the necessarily, immanently self-corrosive efficacy of the contradictions inherent to” the definitional dynamics surrounding homo/heterosexual, “I will suggest instead that contests for discursive power can be specified as competitions for material or rhetorical leverage required to set the terms of, and to profit in some way from, the operations of such an incoherence of definition” (*Epistemology of the Closet* 11). This precise method of specifying the material and discursive dynamics of social definition shares an important history with the radical black feminists of the Combahee River Collective. In “A Black

Feminist Statement” they argue that “we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking” (6). Crucial to my sense of the encounter will be this dynamic of interlocking and integrated social registers, whether racial, sexual, class, or gender—and not simply a foundational homo/hetero divide. Opposed to what Lee Edelman calls “queer negativity’s refusal of positive identity,” and hence its privileged critical nature, Sedgwick and the Combahee River Collective emphasize the integrated material terrain of political struggle, whether as in the safe spaces of streets or access to health care, for instance, or as in the discursive spaces of law or narratives of family (Edelman, “Antagonism” 822).¹¹ In short, the Combahee River Collective statement is a strident reminder against the tendency to isolate sexuality as the singular, autonomous object of analysis.¹² As Ferguson summarizes:

These particular feminist formations insist on the historical specificity and heterogeneity of ‘sexuality,’ a specificity and heterogeneity denoted as racial difference. As women of color feminist theorizations of racialized sexuality had many different locations, analyzing the intersectional maneuvers of race and sexuality means attending to the historical specificity and diversity of racialized sexuality’s locations. (“Of Our Normative Striving” 86)

Yet my conception of the encounter deviates from this description of what has been called intersectionality. As Jasbir Puar has pointed out, for all its critical leverage through its integrated analysis intersectionality historically often grounds this analysis in an invariable component, a residue identitarian framework, made explicit by Ferguson as racial difference (“‘I would rather be a cyborg’”).¹³ However, as McKay makes clear in the first pages of *Romance in Marseilles*, racial difference is not a foundational concept in the analysis of

diaspora, but rather is another historically specific dynamic within an integrated analysis, variable and internationally inflicted.¹⁴ Rather, while an integrated analysis, my sense of the encounter shares a critical perspective with Brent Hayes Edwards's "practice of diaspora," where debate, argument, conflict, divergence, and similarity constitute any interchange between all social differences, and with Puar's own sense of "assemblage," where gender, race, sexuality, and national origin are "events, actions, and encounters, between bodies, rather than simply entities and attributes of subjects" ("I would rather be a cyborg").¹⁵ That is, as Ferguson suggests, the encounter seeks to trace the specific histories, the different deployments, of multiple registers of difference, their alternating cadences and valences, while resisting, as Siobhan Somerville suggests, the stasis of any single social register.¹⁶ The encounter is a critical practice that dramatizes this competition, as Sedgwick notes, the conflicts and disjunctions that outline the multiple modes of social antagonism.

Building on the first aspect, the second key source for the encounter is Foucault's sense of the ethos of modernity, for it specifies the method inherent in this critical practice, and links this method to an aesthetic of alternate world imagining. In "What is Enlightenment?" Foucault argues that modern man "is not the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth; he is the man who tries to invent himself. This modernity does not 'liberate man in his own being'; it compels him to face the task of producing himself" (42). Importantly, Foucault goes on to claim, to perform such a task, one must imagine one's historical situation "otherwise than it is, and to transform it not by destroying it but by grasping it in what it is" (41). Foucault begins "What is Enlightenment?" by noting

the way Kant's answer to the question continues to impinge on our present. It is crucial to return to this "event," Foucault contends, both Kant's question and the Enlightenment itself, because they have "determined, at least in part, what we are, what we think, and what we do today" (32). From the very beginning of the essay, Foucault signals the way his return to Kant and the question of Enlightenment is actually a concern of the present. Such a framing, in fact, is a repetition of the manner Kant himself addresses the question—Enlightenment becomes a question of marking historical change: how to "reflect on 'today' as difference in history" (38). Kant departs from previous attempts to think the present in that, as Foucault writes, he "is not seeking to understand the present on the basis of a totality or of a future achievement. He is looking for a difference: What difference does today introduce with respect to yesterday?" (34) In other words, Kant understands Enlightenment as a "way out" of the present that modifies "preexisting relations linking will, authority, and the use of reason" (35). Enlightenment in Foucault's reading of Kant becomes a strategy, as Sedgwick will in turn suggest, that reorganizes preexisting relations, structures of power, and definitional frames, to produce the "way out" of the existing order of things.

When Foucault moves in the essay from Kant to Baudelaire, a figure not readily associated with discussions of the Enlightenment, Foucault performs the formal textual strategies that will become what he calls the "critical ontology of ourselves" (50). If Kant's text is a point of departure for thinking "man's relation to the present, man's historical mode of being, and the constitution of the self as an autonomous subject," the repetition signaled through Baudelaire allows Foucault to formalize the "critical ontology of our-

selves” as a methodology or ethos of historical analysis (42). Yet in turning to Baudelaire in this way, Foucault is attempting to record the singularity of the “event” of Enlightenment modernity while resisting any “monotonous finality” in regards to its conception. Moreover, by tracing the repetition of this attitude, Foucault is also attempting, as he argues in his “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” essay, to be “sensitive to [its] recurrence, not in order to trace the gradual curve of [its] evolution but to isolate the different scenes where they engaged in different roles” (369). From Kant’s “Enlightenment” to Baudelaire’s “*dandysme*” to Foucault’s own “critical ontology,” then, there is the reactivation of an attitude, “an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them” (“Enlightenment” 50). This dynamic is ultimately what Foucault will term *an aesthetics of self*.¹⁷ My sense of the encounter is yet another reactivation of this ethos, the genealogical tracing out of multiple registers of social antagonism, exposing the limits and contradictions as an aesthetic transformation of existing material conditions, an attempt to go beyond them.

Here I want to stress that the encounter as a method is intimately connected to the aesthetic practice of self-cultivation of the sexual subject. Foucault undoubtedly conceived this aesthetic of self in relation to the history of sexuality, specifically the homosexual. As Foucault notes in a 1981 interview, “To be ‘gay,’ I think, is not to identify with the psychological traits and the visible masks of the homosexual, but to try to define and develop a way of life” (“Friendship” 310). This demand to develop a way of life, Foucault goes on to explain, “is an historic occasion to re-open affective and relational virtualities, not so

much through the intrinsic qualities of the homosexual, but due to the biases against the position he occupies; in a certain sense diagonal lines that he can trace in the social fabric permit him to make these virtualities visible” (“Friendship” 311). Such a conception of the homosexual as a site of invisible virtualities hints back, again, to capital and the commodity’s invisible history. The encounter, and the contestatory aesthetics of self on which it is developed, is a strong method of queer material historiography, for it relentlessly interrogates the conditions of possibility of intimacy and affiliation, but not to provide material for “the gradual curve” of gay history, nor because of some “intrinsic” quality of the homosexual. Rather, queer material historiography makes visible the virtualities, the integrated dynamics of social difference, and the social qualities that make up both the “biases” that queer subjects face and the possibility to transform that reality, to develop a form of life, a form of queer world making.¹⁸ “By queer culture we mean a world-making project,” Berlant and Warner argue, “where world, like public, differs from community or group because it necessarily includes more people than can be identified, more spaces than can be mapped beyond a few reference points, modes of feeling that can be learned rather than experienced as birthright” (198).

Two crucial things come to the fore in the aesthetic world-making of the encounter: first, the pedagogical impulse of the encounter, what Berlant and Warner refer to as “feeling that can be learned”; and second, the particular form of the encounter. While critics as varied as Leo Bersani, Jonathan Dollimore, Whitney Davis, and Christopher Looby have noted a theoretical and historical connection between sexuality and aesthetics, far fewer have been interested in the pedagogical connections or the particularly modernist formal

strategies of juxtaposition and collage. As Elisabeth Freeman explains, a major strand of queer work tends “to privilege the avant-gardism of queer subcultures, to celebrate their dissolving and disintegrating work on identity, taxonomy, community, and to claim that queer is always ahead of actually existing social possibilities. Which is to say, on this model, it seems that truly queer queers negate forms, and that formalism, particularly of the literary kind, isn’t very queer” (498). However, as *The Materialism of the Encounter* will show, there is a long history of a particularly queer interest in developing new forms of (literary) expression, from Charles Warren Stoddard to Gertrude Stein to Frank O’Hara to Samuel Delany. Foucault, too, notes the intimate connection between new forms of historical representation and the realities of queer social and erotic intimacy: “What code would allow them to communicate? They face each other without terms or convenient words, with nothing to assure them about the meaning of the movement that carries them towards each other. They have to invent, from A to Z, a relationship that is formless” (“Friendship” 309). The necessity to invent terms and words, forms of expression, is an intimate part of queer historiography. As Naomi Schor, Joan Scott, and others have suggested for feminist theory, queer theory, as Sedgwick has already intimated, has much to gain by embracing a consideration of literary specificity, the subtlety of the detail, the intimacy of relation, especially as queer theory continues to form relations with materialism, black studies, diasporic studies, and globality. The very form those relationships take is itself a form of the criticality such perspectives may make possible, and which the encounter aims to make visible. Outlining the nature of making “invisible possibilities and desires visible” Sedgwick suggests “a kind of formalism, a visceral near-identification with the

writing I cared for, at the level of sentence structure, metrical pattern, rhyme, was one way of trying to appropriate what seemed the numinous and resistant power of the chosen objects” (*Tendencies* 3).

More broadly, there is a general refocusing on the particularity of the aesthetic or literary text, and specifically on form. From Giorgio Agamben to Alain Badiou to Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe to Jacques Rancière, the specific nature of the aesthetic and its formal relationship to larger social system of economy, law, and ethics have been increasingly outlined as a significant contributor to social struggle. Such interest continues in anthologies such as *From an Aesthetic Point of View*, *Reading for Form*, *Aesthetic Subjects*, *American Literature’s Aesthetic Dimensions*, *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*, and *Rediscovering Aesthetics: Transdisciplinary Voices from Art History, Philosophy and Art Practice*. While the focus and interests varies amongst the practitioners within these trends, one key feature of this attention to aesthetics and form is summarized by Ellen Rooney: through close attention to the nuance of texts, literary forms are brought “into significant conflict with the theoretical, ideological, and historical problematics” of the day (“Form and Contentment” 41).

Such a perspective on literary technique would remove it from the domains of hegemony or codification, or the establishment of “taste” and distinction bracketed from social necessity, as Pierre Bourdieu argues, and return it, instead, as Theodor Adorno suggests, to the arena of political contestation and alternate world imagining: “By its form alone, art promises what is not; it registers objectively, however refractedly, the claim that because the nonexistent appears it must indeed be possible” (*Aesthetic Theory* 82).¹⁹ Such

queer projects, for instance, can be found already in José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia* or Graham L. Hammill's *Sexuality and Form*. As Hammill argues, "the aesthetic—broadly conceived—gives form to a history of sexuality in such a way that some changes are rendered significant while others go simply unrecognized. The question of sexuality, that is, urges the problem of historiography" (2). Hammill's connection of the particularity of the aesthetic, form, sexuality, and historiography return us to the nature of the encounter as a genealogical operation, of the cutting up and rearranging of things as a "way out" that will make visible, or render significant, the virtualities of sexuality under capital. This historiographic impulse of the literary, too, is emphasized by Scott: the literary "is a way of changing the focus and the philosophy of our history, from one bent on naturalizing 'experience' through a belief in the unmediated relationship between word and things, to one that takes all categories of analysis as contextual, contested, and contingent" ("Evidence" 411). As I've tried to show, the encounter is precisely this transformative contestation, and here, Scott and Hammill link that to the specific operation of aesthetics and the literary.

The aesthetic form of the encounter plays out among the texts here in a number of ways. From James's *The American Scene* to McKay's *Romance in Marseilles*, the texts are driven less by plot or narrative temporality than by a collage or bricolage aesthetic, a juxtaposition of perspectives, exchanges of dialogue, or a contrast of settings. In this way, one of the main formal components of the encounter is its spatial form. As Joseph Frank outlines, rather than a narrative in the conventional, temporal sense, spatial form focuses on the repeated and continual interplay between parts of a text, whose "full significance ... is given only by the reflexive relations among the units," rather than sequentially over time

(17). *Nightwood* is, after all, one of the novels that helps shape Frank's theory. But this also appears in James as the patchwork quilt form of the narrative, which ostensibly records his path through the United States, but in effect produces a set of interlocking, cross-stitched scenes of American life. As a series of paratactical negotiations of the state of America, James draws out the specific details that comprise each location he visits and its difference from other sites, producing a nonhierarchical reading of various regions, a non-linear mode of exposition, as one need not necessarily read "New York Revisited" to understand "The Sense of Newport" or "Charleston." However, one's reading of James's experience of Philadelphia does in fact retrospectively alter one's perception of the significance of West Point or Hawthorne's house. *The Young and Evil*, for its part, is structured less by temporal motivation than by an intimate relationship and interchange between images of queer and bohemian life in New York City. Constructed through named chapters, the narrative never seamlessly developments from one chapter to the next. Instead, chapters sometimes develop in continuity, sometimes simultaneously, and still others times in a precisely unknowable fashion. Like James, Ford and Tyler often repeat thematic or imagistic content from chapter to chapter, creating meaning not through linear development but through the process of recursive transformation across chapters. And *Romance in Marseilles*, too, while not as "plotless" as *Banjo*, is still significantly episodic, whose narrative structure mirrors the spatial geography of the Vieux Port and diaspora itself.

Yet it is not just spatial form that produces this heterotopic relation, but also the intertextuality prevalent in *The Young and Evil*, in the juxtapositions of space of *Romance in Marseilles*, in the complex metaphors and syntax of *The American Scene* and *Nightwood*.²⁰

Juxtaposition and intertextuality create a similar relational dynamic to spatial form, where meaning is produced through the very process of the encounter. As Susan Gillman and Alys Eve Weinbaum stress, “a politics of juxtaposition convenes stylistically incompatible textual parts and seemingly divergent political questions,” and yet brings those divergent questions into proximity, into new relation (5). Holding together numerous conflicting and contradictory positions is in fact, as the Combahee River Collective statement makes clear, a key part of the history of feminist struggle and the black radical tradition. Metaphor, too, functions as an agent in the production of new relations. As Alan Singer argues, with conventional uses of metaphor, the metaphor “works” because the two elements of the substitution have some contextual similarity, they participate in a field of already accepted possibility. Singer claims Barnes, and I would add James, deviates from this field of expectation, therefore producing metaphors that exhibit a catachrestic movement between seemingly incompatible things. Singer, following Derrida, calls such catachrestic metaphors “the form-giving distortion” of style that ultimately “suggest[s] new criteria of relatedness” (54, 67). This “new criteria of relatedness” is a crucial dynamic of the aesthetic of the encounter.

The encounter then is an aesthetic practice that at once genealogically traces out the competing logics at play as they shape the queer experience of modernity and a way of producing new understandings of that experience through the exposure of the limits of those logics. The aesthetic of the encounter, as Rooney suggests, not only exists as a confrontation with reality, as a critique of “what society must think of itself if it is to continue as it is,” as Adorno puts it, but takes the very form of the confrontation itself (*Aesthetic*

Theory 236). In this way, the encounter shares a certain critical outlook with Heidegger's sense of the "rift-design" of artworks. In "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger argues that art is a specific way truth becomes historical. In a way, art is the opening up of the historical. Yet in so doing, the work of art is also a form of alternate world imagining, a striving toward being in the world. "In setting up a world and setting forth the earth," Heidegger argues, "the work is an instigating of this striving. This does not happen so that the work should at the same time settle and put an end to the conflict in an insipid agreement, but so that the strife may remain a strife. Setting up a world and setting forth the earth, the work accomplishes this striving" (48). That is, the work of art brings a new relation to the world into being, as disclosure, through the self-reflexive construction of the very tension toward world-making, rather than as that tension's resolution. This tension in the form of the artwork of alternate world imagining is, to echo Edwards, the practice of the encounter. The encounter does not seek to resolve social tensions, but to expose their limits as an opening onto the new. Yet, this strife, concretized as the work of art, Heidegger notes, nonetheless is an "intimacy" (61).

The aesthetic of the encounter, I am arguing, is a crucial method for confronting the contradictions, discrepancies, and affinities of an integrated perspective on race, sexuality, gender, history, and capital. As Jordana Rosenberg and Amy Villarejo argue, "The encounter between queer studies and Marxist and historical-material analysis, at its best, offers the possibility for analyzing capitalist culture in its dynamic, geographically diverse, and contradictory articulations" (4). The literary form of the encounter is set to this task, as it is "more immanent and accomplished, ... more elaborate," as Herbert Marcuse argues, "more

essential than in the direct and sensual or direct and historical” sense of representation under capitalist modernity (358). Moreover, as I’ve suggested, this materialist formal strategy, as even Heidegger notes, is historically related to the creation of queer worlds, to the production of new forms of intimacy. To borrow James’s formulation, this new collage form of literary experimentation instills “a certain amount of social training” about the nature of affiliation and desire, a certain type of “intimate intelligence,” as he also calls it, of the material, sexual, and economic possibilities of modern life (*American Scene* 705, 353).

Michael Moon provides a suggestive way of reading the “social training” of the encounter as a form of sexual enculturation, what he terms an erotic “queer theater of initiation,” that will move us from the collage “rift-design” to the question of sexual practice and queer sociality (11). This erotic sense of initiation and imitation is derived in part from Moon’s reading of Henry James’s adolescent aesthetic and erotic education collected in his autobiography *A Small Boy and Others*. In focusing on James’s interest in heroic male images in the Louvre—painting such as *Raft of Medusa*, *Romans of the Decadence*, and *The Falconer*—Moon claims that “James repeatedly reads the exciting and exhausting, pleasurable and frightening, ‘group scenes’ of his initiation primarily as scenes of instruction” in male-male erotic affiliation (54). Moreover, this initiation involves a “desire to ‘trap’ and re-trap ostensibly incongruous combinations of affective and aesthetic tones and registers,” where this attention to the form of aesthetics in James’s recollection of his childhood experiences becomes for Moon, echoing Foucault’s reading of Kant, “an erotic way out” of the current sexual and political climate (8, 44). In *The Materialism of the Encounter*, I build on Moon’s emphasis on the aesthetic quality of James’s sexual intervention into con-

temporary society and his specific understanding of that aesthetic as a reiterative, combinatory act of staging “incongruous” or heterotopic scenes of cultural life as itself an instructive staging of erotic sociality.²¹

The encounter, I’m stressing, is not only a method of reading social forms, derived from the very practices exhibited in the texts collected here, but is also an attempt at alternate world imagining. In this sense, the encounter, too, is an aesthetic practice that initiates and imitates a specific form of sociality (a rift-sociality, one could say), an aesthetic construction that cuts “the world up in different ways socially,” as Samuel Delany argues, “and rearrang[es] it so that we may benefit from the resultant social relationship” (187). As Joshua Weiner and Damon Young have pointed out, “‘homosexual desire’—or what we might now call ‘queerness’—has long been invested as at once the site of a symbolic disruption (which is also an antisocial negativity) and a particular relational inventiveness” (225). However, such a dialectical operation, particularly in aesthetic terms, has long been an investment in thinking about community more generally, from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s minor literature to Jacques Derrida’s sense of friendship to Jean-Luc Nancy’s views of literary communism to Maurice Blanchot’s unavowable community to Jacques Rancière’s community of sense.²² Rancière, for instance, argues that the sensible refers to “the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it” (*Politics of Aesthetics* 12). In other words, what he calls the “distribution of the sensible” refers to the structuring of certain modes of speaking, of seeing, of being spoken of, of being seen as, of knowing, and of experiencing that organize a group as a

group, that defines and delimits what the group shares and how they share it. The distribution of the sensible refers to the specific organization of power and knowledge—a certain concealing or exposing of virtualities, to return to Foucault—whether national, racial or gendered, that pre-code the terms for the articulation of collective affiliation. However, Rancière argues, “artistic practices are ‘ways of doing and making’ that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility” (*Politics of Aesthetics* 13). Because of these links between power, knowledge, and aesthetics, Rancière declares that “the modern political animal is first a literary animal, caught in the circuit of a literariness that undoes the relationships between the order of words and the order of bodies that determine the place of each” (*Dis-agreement* 37). In a way, Rancière refashions Foucault’s sense of an aesthetics of self as the redistribution of the sensible, but helpfully so in the manner that he explicitly makes it a collective dynamic. The collective nature is made apparent when Rancière argues that the aesthetic

is a multiplication of connections and disconnections that reframe the relation between bodies, the world where they live and the way in which they are “equipped” for fitting it. It is a multiplicity of folds and gaps in the fabric of common experience that change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible. As such, it allows for new modes of political construction of common objects and new possibilities of collective enunciation. (“Aesthetic Separation” 11)²³

The encounter continues this collective articulation of the aesthetic but insists on the material and sexual implications of any articulation. Samuel Delany specifies this materialist aesthetic transformation that is present throughout *The Materialism of the Encounter*.

Like Chauncey, and building on the work of Jane Jacobs, Delany develops a queer materialism focusing on the crucial role of social institutions as facilitators of communal

interaction and self-cultivation. For Jacobs, “The more successfully a city mingles everyday diversity of uses and users in its everyday streets, the more successfully, casually (and economically) its people thereby enliven” a network of support and interest, “instead of vacuity” (111). Jacob’s key point is to distinguish between “vacuity” and heterogeneous use and users as necessary for successful urban living. Aaron Betsky, in *Building Sex*, too, stresses the crucial role of mixed-use architecture in fostering alternate forms of habitation. Developing on this, Delany notes that the policy and zoning changes in New York City in the late 1970s eliminated the material spaces that fostered the interchange between a heterogeneous mixture of people in Times Square. Noting the current “vacuity” of gentrified Time Square, Delany argues that “life is at its most rewarding, productive, and pleasant when large numbers of people understand, appreciate, and seek out interclass contact and communication” (111). There are two key features in Delany’s conception of urban habitation. First is the heterogeneous nature of interactions, the varied and often conflicting exchanges that occur when diverse people come together. Second is his formalization of this dynamic as what he calls “contact.” Contact, for Delany, is a very specific social practice, one he adopts from Jacobs. As opposed to the “motive-driven” dynamic of what he terms networking, contact appears more “social and ... random”; it “crosses class lines”; it is “intercourse—physical and conversational”; and it is “associated with public space and the architecture and commerce that depend on and promote it” (129). That is, Delany conceives of a successful articulation of sociality as a heterogeneous series of contacts, ones inextricably linked to the “architecture and commerce” that facilitate or inhibit them. Yet Delany is specifically interested in what this form of sociality means for a sexual life. He argues

that a precise understanding of the material effects of capital (the elimination of bars and theaters) is required to see how contact becomes “of paramount importance in the specific pursuit of gay sexuality” (193). A crucial implication of Delany’s analysis is his stressing of the social dimension of desire, the way material spaces of capital play a formative role in queer cultivation: “We must begin with the realization that desire is never ‘outside all social constraints.’ Desire may be outside one set of constraints or another; but social constraints are what engender desire; and, one way or another, even at its most apparently catastrophic, they contour desire’s expression” (187).

If Delany stresses heterogeneous interclass contact as fundamental to queer sociality, he mirrors this heterogeneity in the form of *Times Square Red*, *Times Square Blue*. Divided into two parts, “Times Square Blue” and “...Three, Two, One, Contact: Times Square Red,” Delany’s book employs a variety of techniques to chronicle the situation of the Times Square Development Project, techniques that range from personal interviews, photographic documents, and autobiographical narration in “Blue” to more academically researched and argued material in “Red.” The variety of techniques function, as Delany notes, “in different ways, at different focal lengths, along different trajectories and at different intensities” (xiii). Such a convergence of different material and perspectives (trajectories and intensities, as Delany says) is a crucial instantiation of his sense of contact, and my sense of the encounter, a literary transformation that, as Chisholm suggests, becomes a strategy “for making legible, if not visible, the paradox of late metropolitan modernity” (*Queer Constellations* 7). Out of Delany’s work I argue for a critical queer sociality, one intimately linked to the material spaces of cities, and one constituted as a clash of hetero-

geneous parts, whose tensions and comings together form an intimacy that simultaneously reveal new possibilities within the paradoxes of modern capital. The encounter of queer sociality reconceives social attachments based not on identity or origin, nor on refusing the question of sociality altogether (destroying it, in Foucault's words), but on understanding the complex manner history has "set the terms" (in Sedgwick's words) for the very possibility of attachment. Delany is not only a model for the type of analysis I will produce in *The Materialism of the Encounter* but is also an exemplary example of the alternate world imagining of the aesthetics of the encounter.

If *The Materialism of the Encounter* seeks to open new avenues of political thinking by stressing a materialist perspective on the cultivation of sexuality, I simultaneously aim to engage the "antisocial" debate in queer studies.²⁴ The "antisocial" perspective of queerness has often focused on the theoretical work of Lee Edelman and Leo Bersani. For Bersani, a critique of dominant heteronormative culture must acknowledge how same-sex desire, or desire for the same as he calls it, "might revolutionize our understanding of how the human subject is, or might be, socially implicated," since "*homo-ness itself necessitates a massive redefining of relationality*" (*Homos* 73, 76, italics original). Such a redefining would involve "a provisional withdrawal *from* relationality itself" (*Homos* 7, italics added). This nonrelational aspect of Bersani's thinking about desire can be traced through his work in *The Freudian Body*. There, Bersani finds in Freud's repetitive, contradictory, and incomplete attempts to track down sex and sexual pleasure an "ontology of sexuality [that] is unrelated to its historical development" (*Freudian Body* 40). This ontological approach becomes the basis for his most ardent political claims about (homo)sexuality.

Tracing Freud's attempts to define sexual pleasure, Bersani arrives at an understanding of sexuality that has masochism as its basis. Because we derive sexual pleasure from the heightened tension of stimuli from the world, masochism allows us to survive our contact with the outside world, and in fact enjoy it. Yet aggression becomes an equal component of sexuality because "the destruction of the object appears to be inherent in sexual excitement itself" (87). Situated in the space between the pleasurable self-shattering sensation of overstimulation and the extinction of that excitement through the destruction of the object, sexuality, for Bersani, emerges as an "epistemological catastrophe." Put differently, this masochistic "shattering experience is, it would seem, without any specific content—which would be our only way of saying that the experience cannot be said, that it belongs to the nonlinguistic biology of human life" (40). Bersani's ontological interpretation of sexuality exists in a "*nonhermeneutic psychic 'field,'*" a gap between the body's libidinal investment in inflecting self-shattering pressure on itself and the mind's ability to account for that pleasure (101). He ends *The Freudian Body* with the following directive for queer political criticism: "Criticism makes manifest the ontology of human desire by tracking down the threats to its visibility in art" (111). This results in a choice between the threat of a narrativized sex, a sex devised, extracted, and implanted into bodies, or its resistance in a mobile, unrepresentable pleasure that problematizes power, and "isolates the human subject in a socially and epistemologically 'useless,' but infinitely seductive, repetition" of self-destruction (90). However, as Bersani intimates in *Homos*, such a isolation of the subject in its own self-destruction will become what he and Adam Phillips will later refer to as

“impersonal narcissism,” a narcissism that would involve a redefinition of relationality, and in the end would result in “more life rather than less” (*Intimacies* 98).

Bersani’s narcissistic, socially useless ontology of sexuality and its potential to re-define sociality bears a remarkable, and barely remarked upon, similarity to the narcissistic inutility of sociality of Jean-Luc Nancy. For Nancy, Being, following Heidegger, is never individual but always a “co-originary and coextensive” being-in-common and being-self (xxxvii). Like Bersani, Nancy distinguishes the exposure of this ontological being-with from its concealment in specific types of narratives (unity, leader, or nation). While Nancy uses several terms to describe this exposure in Being, the most central figure for this coextension, the one that becomes most central to his critique of the history of community, is death. Nancy argues that community shares an inseparable relation to being-toward-death, and hence the subject exposed to death “is not ... a subject” (14). Nancy writes, “the impossibility of making a work out of death is inscribed and acknowledged as ‘community,’” where “only the limit is common, and the limit is not a place, but the sharing of places, their spacing”—or, what is called elsewhere, their “areality” (15, 73). As such, community or “Being *in* common means ... *no longer having, in any form, in any empirical or ideal place, such a substantial identity, and sharing this (narcissistic) ‘lack of identity’*” (xxxviii, italics original).

Nancy’s aversion to idealizations of community, of communities formed around leaders or through the immanence of work, is historically related to events of the twentieth century: two world wars, the Holocaust, fascism, and Nazism.²⁵ Speaking of Bataille, Nancy writes, “whatever the interest accorded his thought ... what has not yet been suffi-

ciently remarked is the extent to which his thinking emerged out of a political exigency and uneasiness—or from an exigency and an uneasiness concerning the political that was itself guided by the thought of community” (16). Undoubtedly Bersani, too, is guided by political exigency and unease toward homophobic violence, the historical ignoring of the AIDS epidemic, and the narrow political efforts of national gay and lesbian groups. My interest in drawing out this comparison to Nancy, however, is to highlight the manner that Bersani transforms sexuality into an ontological fact of being, into the unworking Nancy attributes to Being as such. This ontological, “unworking” perspective on queerness is shared by Edelman, who claims that the ethical and political value of queerness lies in its radical negativity, in its total rejection of the social. As Edelman notes, “neither liberal inclusionism, with its ultimate faith in rational comprehension, nor the redemptive hope of producing brave new social collectivities can escape the insistence of the antisocial in social organization” (“Antagonism” 821). The persistent antisocial aspect of the social, for Edelman, remains “queer negativity’s refusal of positive identity” (822). Yet as Tim Dean acknowledges, Edelman’s sense of queer negativity is a historical development, the result of bourgeois fears about the social implications of same-sex desire: “Homosexuality can be viewed as threatening because, insofar as we fail to reproduce the family in a recognizable form, queers fail to reproduce the social” (“Antisocial” 826).²⁶

However, more to the point, my interest in accentuating this shift to the ahistorical, aneconomic ontology of sexuality is to draw out how it results in the abstraction of sexuality from the myriad material practices that foster it and the forms of representation it may take, isolating it in a manner that mirrors the very abstraction of the commodity. As Marx

notes, through the process of abstraction “we see in [the commodity] no longer a table, a house, yarn, or any other useful thing. Its existence as a material thing is put out of sight. Neither can it any longer be regarded as the product of the labour of the joiner, the mason, the spinner, or of any other definite kind of productive labour” (*Capital* 305). As a result, this abstracted, desubjectivized perspective of sexuality, as José Esteban Muñoz argues, distances “queerness from what some theorists seem to think of as contamination by race, gender, or other particularities that taint the purity of sexuality” (“Thinking beyond Antirelationality” 825). In its mildest form, such an avoidance can be read as a dematerialization of the history of sexuality and in its most corrosive form becomes an attempt to position sexuality outside other forms of difference while at the same time to elevate “the excessively small archive” of white, European male writers, to twist a remark by J. Jack Halberstam, as the most exemplary model of queer criticality (824). As Juana María Rodríguez points out, “while much of this sounds reminiscent of the feminist sex wars of decades past, the extent to which the anxieties of sexual representation continue to haunt the current political moment should not be underestimated” (336). Instead, I attempt to historicize sexuality within the larger definitional machinations of the twentieth century. I seek not an ontological basis for the critical power of sexuality, but a historical development, one deeply influenced by other modes of difference, shaped by and contested through advancing industrial capitalism.

In *The Materialism of the Encounter*, I expose the ways such particularities, to use Muñoz’s word, transform our sense of sexuality, producing *sexualities*, as Ferguson reminds us, and the political implications of those distinct manifestations of desire. However,

my interest in queer sociality does not avoid Miranda Joseph's claim that collectivity or community is often deeply complicit with capitalist reification; nor is it to ignore the way Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages* demonstrates how community can codify specific racialized and class-based conceptions of the "good" sexual subject. It is rather to understand how the various texts collected here "cruise across economic, social, and racial grids of power," as Chisholm argues, "defying boundaries between private and public spheres and appropriating dominated space for perverse pleasure." And yet, despite Chisholm's claim that such "ventures are less about keeping apace or ahead of the city's developments than navigating the historical contradictions of current reality," *The Materialism of the Encounter* is an attempt to trace an alternate queer experience of modernity through these material spaces, in the cross-stitched contradictions of various forms of social difference and antagonism generated through modern capital, and, as Foucault suggests, to foreground the aesthetic attempts to see at the limits of current reality a "way out" (*Queer Constellations* 31).

Such a project "calls out not only for redescription," to borrow Berlant's claims for intimacy, "but for transformative analyses of the rhetorical and material conditions that enable hegemonic fantasies to thrive in the minds and on the bodies of subjects" (286). This requires first of all a turn to historical materialism, to a precise understanding of the dialectics of capitalist developments, their connections to definitional dynamics and punitive measures for sexual subjects and their transformations of social spaces that were necessary for sexual self-cultivation. Second, it requires an integrated analysis of multiple modes of social antagonism and difference. Finally, it required a shift outside the confines of American literary history, to account for a broader internationalism, spanning what has histori-

cally been called the transatlantic and the wider domains of North Africa and the Soviet Union. All of the texts collected here and all of their authors were transnational. Even the very composition of the texts transpires in an international context, with Barnes writing *Nightwood* in England and Charles Henri Ford typing the manuscript while the two were in Tangiers and McKay writing *Romance in Marseilles* as he moved between France, Spain, and Morocco. Such a broader context, Michelle Ann Stephens argues, specifies how “the transatlantic world produces and organizes wealth, political power, and state forms of empire and capital, while simultaneously creating spaces for resistant identities, communities, and cultural forms” (182). Yet as James Smethurst remarks, “black radicals have strained at the political and cultural limitations of [the transatlantic], which fetishizes the relations between the enslaver and the slave and the colonizing nation and the colonized society at the expense of international links between the dispossessed” (“The Red Is East” 356). Here, the broader international scene presents a different lens through which to contextualize queer modernity, as North Africa and the Soviet Union play significant roles as viable alternatives to capitalist Western culture. While it is well known that McKay traveled to Russia and North Africa and wrote and edited the *Masses/Liberator*, Barnes and Ford, too, extensively traveled in North Africa, and Tyler was a short-lived contributor to the *New Internationalist* and a participant in the Writer’s Party. The broader international context facilitates a clearer understanding of the queer encounter of modernity, as it moves through the streets of New York, Paris, or Berlin, but also among the docks of Marseilles, creating a heterogeneous network of contacts across nation, race, class, gender, and sexualities.

I begin to outline the specificity of this materialist critique of capital in chapter 2. Here I turn to perhaps an unexpected text, Henry James's *The American Scene*. In this travel narrative James explicitly connects the "attendant forms" of American cultural life under capitalism with specific "modes of contact and conceptions of life." The appearance of the word "contact" is both a fortuitous connection to Delany and, I would say, a clear historical perspective in queer critical practices. Because of James's interest in these social scenes of American life, *The American Scene* has garnered considerable attention for what it tells us about nation, race, gender, and class at the turn of the century. However, I aim to address something more specific in the text. When James uses the metaphor of a secret garden when praising the Presbyterian Hospital, describing its charming aspects as "approachable only by those in the secret," he does more than link the experience of the hospital's architecture to a rarified aesthete's manners or feelings; I argue he subtly references the actual secret gardens, streets, and parks where men cruised other men. In fact, James's New York itinerary contains numerous historic sites of male-male cruising. The appearance of cruising within *The American Scene*, both as literal sites and as a conceptual trope, I suggest, tells a different story about Jamesian style and the representation of desire within modern capitalism. While James's style has become a privileged focus for discussions of sexuality, particularly his resistance to the representation of desire, I argue that in *The American Scene* James develops a literary style intimately related to the specificity of homosexual desire and the material network of male-male cruising, a style that allows him to articulate these counter-scenes of public sexual life as alternative forms of sociality to an increasingly pervasive commodity culture of America, one he recognizes as damagingly

connected to a punitive will to know. James accentuates this alternative by utilizing a highly schematized framework for his analysis of the “attendant forms” within the American landscape, where praise is conveyed in a language rich with homoerotic desire and variegated sociability and condemnation is proffered in a language of heterosexual desire and formless commodity logic. In composing such textual encounters, James aims to instill “a certain amount of social training” about the nature of affiliation and desire within modern, capitalist America (*American Scene* 705).

Continuing with a rereading of canonical texts, in chapter 3 I turn to Djuna Barnes’s *Nightwood*. The issue of sociality or collective expression has a long history in Barnes scholarship. Yet as diverse as this scholarship is, in both method and ideology, a recurrent theme persists: *Nightwood* lacks a clear articulation of communal affiliation. More recent queer readings of the novel continue this trend, though with a much different political import. Under the rubric of the “anti-social thesis” in queer theory, such readings claim that Barnes, through her ornate formal strategies, does not seek to represent a queer underworld as a type of collectivity, because so doing would mean trafficking in the oppressive language and tropes that are found in the legal and psychological discourses of the larger social context of the novel. Accordingly, a reading of the asociality of *Nightwood* is bound to its politically queer resistance. Against the grain of such readings, I argue that *Nightwood* is a strong model of queer historiography and literary imagining, for it persistently interrogates the intricately interwoven definitional dynamics of gender and sexuality, as it traces their manifestation in art history, literary citation, and the “reproductive futurism” of Felix and Nora. In complex prose reminiscent of James, Barnes uses elaborate and

cascading imagery and metaphors to detail the catachrestic vibrations between gender and sexuality within the larger differentiation of the social under modern capitalism, a prose styling that simultaneously produces new relations out of these encounters. The queer sociality emerges through a shared aesthetics of self that involves a renewed desire for relationality, where *Nightwood* stages the encounter of what historically counted *as* forms of affiliation, and in the process produces an aesthetically oriented collective sensibility, what Matthew terms a “secret brotherhood,” at once transient, intimate, and public.

Shifting from the international scene of *Nightwood* to New York City, I return to the material network of queer modernity in America in chapter 4 with Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler’s *The Young and Evil*. While Ford and Tyler are known within modernist studies as the editors of two important early twentieth century journals, *Blues: A Magazine of New Rhythms* and *View*, as well as for later work in art (Ford) and film (Tyler), remarkably little attention has been given to *The Young and Evil*. This neglect may be due to the idiosyncratic style of the novel, with its avoidance of conventional punctuation, its explicit treatment of queer desire, its camp vernacular, its surrealist images, its elliptical and stream-of-consciousness narrative, and its promiscuous narrative point of view. Furthermore, unable to secure publication in the United States, the novel was ultimately published in Paris by Obelisk Press, and immediately refused entry into America and Britain. Today the book is out of print. Yet it is this rich textual practice and perhaps its absence from the history of aesthetic and political debates that make the novel so important for thinking about queer sociality. For the few critics who have addressed *The Young and Evil*, these particularities of style and content have been the center of attention. Yet as important as

these readings are for linking textual practices to social practices, they tend to minimize the concrete material history represented in the novel, and the concrete material spaces of the city that are integral to the development and cultivation of the novel's vision of queer sociality. Focusing on its formal practices and heterogeneous content, its emphasis on urban institutions and sites of interaction, its recognition of the dangers and violence attendant to social and sexual definitions, I argue that *The Young and Evil* insists on the complexly interwoven, often contradictory, nature of capitalist development, social spaces, desire, and aesthetics. Like James's *The American Scene*, *The Young and Evil* should be read as a particularly queer record of an aesthetic intervention into modern America. The novel modifies its material archivist tendency—its understanding of modern capitalist spaces of interaction—by insisting that the aesthetic and very often a camp sensibility have the power to redefine relational possibilities. We see this in Theodosia “finding queer,” in the alternate sexual economy of the bars, in the reinvention of the friendship between Karel and Julian, in the drag ball, and in the fight in Julian's apartment. This differently arranged social world becomes the queer materialist imaginary of the novel, the production of a counterpublic, at once a product of and a response to the material changes of New York City.

Finally, in chapter 5 I move from New York City, a crucial American manufacturing and consumer city, to the most significant port city of the Mediterranean, Marseilles. Claude McKay's unpublished *Romance in Marseilles*, like *The Young and Evil*, facilitates a recovery of a queer modernity in a little addressed text. Many of the contemporary readings of McKay's earlier novels, *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*, have emphasized McKay's

interest in the flotsam of capitalism, the excessive waste of production, the workers on the dock, the vagabonds, the drifters, whose black masculine homosociality epitomize a resistant community at the core of racist capital. Yet, in *Romance in Marseilles* McKay opens up a number of other important avenues of political thinking, avenues of integrated and contradictory lines, so that, as he suggests in *The Negroes in American*, one is left to tarry with a complex of issues and positions, whether material, racial, gendered, economic, or sexual. The various characters of the port all have different perspectives, exist in different places within the social matrix of international politics, of French politics, of global capitalism, of racism, of gender hierarchy, and of sexual stigmatization. All these avenues appear in the conversations that happen between them and the social spaces that provide for these interactions. *Romance* becomes for McKay the site where the means of life—and the meaning of life—are openly negotiated and contested, where the mediation of capital is exposed and analyzed in its rawest form as it crisscrosses the lives and bodies of the inhabitants of Marseilles. And as his title makes explicit, desire plays a central role in the cultivation of new means of life. Like James, McKay explicitly presents contrasting sexual economies, one he links through the marriage plot of Aslima and Lafala to bourgeois heterosexuality and the violent exploitations of capital and the other to the mixed racial homosociality of the drifters and vagabonds. The specificity of these forms of desire are emphasized in the material spaces of exchange, the bars, cafés, and streets that make up the material domain of social cultivation. What we see in *Romance in Marseilles* is the dramatization of the desire of diasporic life, a critical ethos of modern diasporic life, whose en-

counters outlines both the incommensabilities as well as the moments of fidelity and intimacy of global political struggle.

Throughout *The Materialism of the Encounter* I elucidate the queer experience of modernity. I present a highly diverse constellation of texts, the woefully under-appreciated *The Young and Evil*, the unpublished and neglected *Romance in Marseilles*, and different readings of canonical figures in James and Barnes. As a result, I provide additional resources for an encounter between queer studies and modernist studies apart from the well acknowledged terrain of Marcel Proust, Jean Genet, Oscar Wilde, or even Gertrude Stein, Walt Whitman, E. M. Forster, Radclyffe Hall, Virginia Woolf, or Hart Crane. And at the same time, my focus on the materiality of sexuality—McKay's interest in the dock workers on the edges of capital, Ford and Tyler's mixture of high art and camp, Barnes's historiographic approach to gender and sexuality, James's interest in cruising sites—might suggest ways other such seemingly divergent authors could come together. That is, by creating my own encounters between *The Master* and the "most popular woman never read" with two novels actually nearly never read and currently out of print, I hope to create a space where a queer materialism might speak to a range of texts too often slotted within tight historical or disciplinary or conceptual frames, a space of modernity that avoids simple divisions between high culture and low culture, hetero and homo, or class, as well as one that fractures unified perceptions of gender or race or nationality.²⁷ The necessity of this encounter is perhaps epitomized by Ford and Tyler's *The Young and Evil*, a heterogeneous style of camp, fragmentation, parataxis, and promiscuous narrative point of view, whose archive of queer cruising, homophobic violence, fears of vice squads, and whose in-

intimate negotiation of capital and the attendant violence of sexual definition, mark it as a site of profound insight into modernity and modernism. And yet the text languishes in obscurity in queer studies and modernist studies alike. Similarly, I would hope to draw out new ways of reading Nella Larsen, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sherwood Anderson, H.D., Jean Toomer, Marianne Moore, or Langston Hughes, but also different types of writers and different kinds of texts: travel narratives, interviews, pulp, lists and notes, marginalia, and letters. I hope also to draw out new ways of understanding a typically modernist formal strategy of montage, collage, and spatial form. Rather than seeing it as an avoidance of historical consideration in favor of a continuous present, I have tried to show, particularly through a reading of Foucault, that it can provide a substantive contribution to historical thinking, one different from that often associated with Walter Benjamin, but a historical thinking nonetheless that cuts through simple capitalist progress, revealing an intimate desire for a materialist analysis that would open new social vistas.²⁸

The Materialism of the Encounter is, finally, itself an attempt at world making, a bringing together of texts that do not so much amount to a consistent depiction of capital, nor of sexuality, but instead to an altered sense of sexuality as material history, one that provides a different history of sexuality and a different relation to capital. Louis Althusser emphasizes this incoherence of the encounter when he claims that one cannot be a materialist and coherent at the same time (qtd. in Goshgarian xiv). As G.M. Goshgarian summarizes, Althusser saw a rift between Marx's materialism and his Hegelianism, one the messy work of reality, the other a false unity of idealism. At the end of his life, Althusser chose to explore the messy "materialism of the encounter," or what he later renamed "aleatory ma-

terialism.” What Althusser refers to as “*an almost completely unknown materialist tradition in the history of philosophy*,” one based on the materialism of the encounter instead of “a materialism of necessity and teleology,” turns out to sound remarkably like the “gray” matter of Foucault’s genealogy as it seeks to trace the minute deviations of Epicurus’s falling atoms which, “breaking the parallelism in an almost negligible way at one point, induce *an encounter* with the atom next to it, and from encounter to encounter, a pile-up and the birth of a world” (167, 169, italics original).²⁹ I too aim to trace the messy work of the materialism of the encounter that gives birth to worlds, and hence have taken the phrase as the name for the integrated and contestatory ethos of the particularity of queer historical materialism. Moreover, as Althusser notes, “every encounter is aleatory, not only in its origins (nothing ever guarantees an encounter), but also in its effects” (193). The encounters collected here are as fleeting as they are significant. And this, following Berlant and Warner, perhaps also marks the encounter, in all its nuanced meanings, as a crucial indicator of the historic fragility of queer world making.

¹ For a general overview of the experience of modernity and its sexual and gendered dynamics, see Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; Berman, *All That's Solid*; Felski, *Gender of Modernity*; Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*; D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*; Foucault, *History of Sexuality*; Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Bravmann, *Queer Fictions of the Past*; and Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure*.

² For work on the social transformation of New York City, see Domosh, *Invented Cities*; Lemon, *Liberal Dreams*; Spann, *New Metropolis*; Still, *Urban America*; Pred, *Spatial Dynamics*; and Scherzer, *Unbounded Community*.

³ There is certainly a privileging of urban environments in queer ethnographic and literary studies, which I admittedly continue. For work on nonurban areas see, for example, Herring, *Another Country*; Tongson, *Relocations*; and Mary Gray, *Out in the Country*.

⁴ While D'Emilio and Freedman argue that by the 1920s “women were engaged in the public world, not vicariously through the moral uplift they provided for husbands and sons, but as workers, consumers, and, finally, as voters (233-34), as far as I know, no work comparable to the specificity of Chauncey’s exists for the specificity of homosexual women. But see Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*; McDowell, *Gender, Identity, and Place*; or Wilson, *Sphinx in the City*.

⁵ See also Trask, *Cruising Modernism*.

⁶ In many ways this connection between peace and free markets is an outcropping of the British philosophy that Empire was needed for stable advancement of economy and nation.

⁷ Marcuse’s sense of repressive desublimation appears in *One-Dimensional Man*. Foucault merely gestures toward “hyper-repressive desublimation” at the end of *History of Sexuality*, in a dismissive tone. Foucault is, of course, suspicious of any economic repressive logic of sexuality. However, Tratner’s rereading expands Foucault’s thinking to see the connection between economics and sexuality as productive or extractive.

⁸ Glick, too, argues for the privileged position of the homosexual for understanding this mediation: “The well-known formulation of homosexuality as an ‘open secret’—a paradoxical synthesis of invisibility and visibility—links the logic of the queer to the logic of the commodity, making gay and lesbian identity a privileged emblem for capitalism’s contradiction between hidden, inner relations and the visibility of outward appearance” (3).

⁹ See, for instance, Eng, *Feeling of Kinship*.

¹⁰ See for example, Love, *Feeling Backward*; Halperin, *Gay Shame*; and Viego, *Dead Subjects*.

¹¹ To be clear, I agree with Edelman on the persistent, constitutive antinomies of the social. I am not endorsing a liberal procedural democratic view of the social, where antagonism is perceived as negative or “anti-social.” As will become clear, I only oppose the reified notion that queer sexuality remains isolated as that antagonism.

¹² For more on the intersectional problematics within queer politics, see Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens.”

¹³ Looking at Kimberlé Crenshaw's work on intersectionality, Puar notes, "what the method of intersectionality is most predominantly used to qualify is the specific 'difference' of 'women of color'" ("I would rather be a cyborg").

¹⁴ As Jafari Allen argues, too often in analyses of sexuality, blackness is considered "unchanging, and bound to the United States, while other groups are cosmopolitan—traveling, changing their minds and sex partners" (216).

¹⁵ According to Edwards, the practice of diaspora "relentlessly underlines the inescapable, nearly mundane, gaps in comprehension: the impossibility of translating a racial consciousness through some foolproof or stable system" (*Practice of Diaspora* 212).

¹⁶ Somerville stresses the need "to recognize the instability of multiple categories of difference simultaneously rather than to assume the fixity of one to establish the complexity of another" (5).

¹⁷ For more, see Foucault, *Care of the Self*. As Judith Butler summarizes, "To make oneself in such a way that one exposes those limits is precisely to engage in an aesthetics of the self that maintains a critical relation to existing norms" (*Giving an Account* 17).

¹⁸ Yet the criticality of the aesthetic of self has been dismissed by materialist like Terry Eagleton as a "privatized hedonism" attempting to fill the void left by the dearth of more conventional materialist politics:

It is difficult to read the later Roland Barthes, or even the later Michel Foucault, without feeling that a certain style of meditation on the body, on pleasures and surfaces, zones and techniques, has acted among other things as a convenient displacement of less immediately corporeal politics, and acted also as an ersatz kind of ethics. There is a privileged, privatized hedonism about such discourse, emerging as it does at just the historical point where certain less exotic forms of politics found themselves suffering a set back. (7)

Yet Eagleton woefully misunderstands the dynamic at hand.

¹⁹ Robert Kaufman shows that for Adorno, the quasi-conceptual aspect of the Kantian aesthetic escapes pre-existing rules and orders of being, "allowing new (and not necessarily utopian) aspects of contemporary society to come into view." He goes on to say: the aesthetic experiment "constructs and/or makes available . . . , among other things, the intellectual and emotional apparatus for accessing, and to that extent the social material of, 'the new'" (375).

²⁰ In "Of Other Spaces," Foucault claims heterotopias are sites in which disparate modes of being and interacting converge in a single place. Examples of such sites, Foucault notes, are prisons, beaches, and theatres. Libraries, cemeteries, and museums also constitute heterotopias, yet with these there is also a trans-temporal convergence. In each of these examples the structures of relation established by and through these sites "are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another" (23).

²¹ Roland Barthes would provide a related formulation: "Neither culture nor its destruction is erotic; it is the seam between them, the fault, the flaw, which becomes so" (*Pleasure of the Text* 7).

²² See also Agamben, *Coming Community*; Lingus, *Community*; Gasché, *Of Minimal Things*; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Esposito, *Communitas*; Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*; and Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*.

²³ Such a formulation is strikingly similar to Nancy's sense of "literary communism" as what takes place where different pieces touch each other without fusing together, where they slide, pivot, or tumble over one another, one at the limits of the other – exactly at its limit – where these singular and distinct pieces fold or stiffen, flex or tense themselves together and through one another, unto one another, without this mutual *play* – which always remains, at the same time, a play *between* them – never forming into the substance or the higher power of a Whole. (76, italics original)

It is also close to Deleuze and Guattari's sense that a minor literature is able "to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility" (17).

²⁴ For the contours of this debate, see *Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory*.

²⁵ As Nancy argues,

immanence, communal fusion, contains no other logic than that of the suicide of the community that is governed by it. Thus the logic of Nazi Germany was not only that of the extermination of the other, ... but also, effectively, the logic of sacrifice aimed at all those in the "Aryan" community who did not satisfy the criteria of *pure* immanence, so much so that ... the suicide of the German nation itself might have represented a plausible extrapolation of the process. (12, italics original)

²⁶ A corollary to the resistance to reproduce is also a refusal to reproduce the means of production. As Foucault notes, at least initially, the management of reproduction was meant "to ensure population, to reproduce labor capacity, to perpetuate the form of social relations: in short, to constitute a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative" (*History* 37). The refusal of sexual reproduction is also the refusal of capital reproduction.

²⁷ See Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*; Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*; Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*; DuPlessis, *Genders, Races, and Religious Cultures in Modern American Poetry*; Eysteinsson, *Concept of Modernism*; Huysen, *After the Great Divide*; or Williams, *Politics of Modernism*.

²⁸ For more on Benjamin, see Osborne, *Politics of Time*.

²⁹ While Althusser traces the philosophy of the encounter through the work of figures as diverse as Machiavelli, Rousseau, Heidegger, Epicurus, Hobbes, and Spinoza, his ultimate interest is the work of Marx. One example he uses of the "underground current" of the encounter within Marx's work is the "*aleatory character*" of the meeting between finance and labor-power. As Althusser claims, "'it just so happens' that this encounter took place, and 'took hold,' which means that it did not come undone as soon as it came about, but *lasted*, and became an accomplished fact, the accomplished fact of this encounter, inducing stable relationships and a necessity the study of which yields 'laws'" (197, italics original). Althusser's point is that this *taking hold* is not the result of a necessity, nor a teleology, but

a chance encounter whose “laws” are produced only after it has taken hold, rather than before as a determining agent. Althusser continues:

All this is said—in veiled terms, to be sure, but it is said—in the formula that Marx uses in his frequent discussions of the “encounter” [*das Vorgefundene*] between raw labour-power and the owners of money. We can go even further, and suppose *that this encounter occurred several times in history before taking hold in the West*, but, for lack of an element or a suitable arrangement of the elements, failed to “take.” (197-98, italics original)

The elements of capitalist production that “took hold” as a recognizable structure, that is, did not “exist in history *so that* a mode of production may exist” (198, italics original). This aleatory nature of historical development, which Althusser attributes to Marx (in veiled terms), is the underground current of the materialism of the encounter, the tracing of the chance encounters between atoms which, if taking hold, produce worlds. Althusser’s crucial point is that “instead of thinking contingency as a modality of necessity, or an exception to it, we must think necessity as the becoming-necessary of the encounter of contingencies” (193-94).

**CHAPTER 2 CRUISING HENRY JAMES: QUEER SOCIALITY AS A CRITIQUE
OF CAPITAL**

What might be, credibly, the conditions of the
life “socially” led?
Henry James

Throughout *The American Scene*, this question of the “life ‘socially’ led” permeates nearly every observation Henry James makes about his return to the country in 1904. It sends him again and again to the “attendant forms” of American cultural life—hotels, markets, homes, libraries, and parks—seeking to understand “the way in which they determine and qualify manners, feelings, communications, modes of contact and conceptions of life” (*The American Scene* 477, 401).¹ Because of James’s interest in these social scenes of American life, *The American Scene* has garnered considerable attention for what it tells us about nation, race, gender, and class at the turn of the century.² Yet when James uses the metaphor of a secret garden when praising the Presbyterian Hospital, describing its charming aspects as “approachable only by those in the secret,” he does more than link the experience of the hospital’s architecture to a rarified aesthete’s manners or feelings; he subtly references the actual secret gardens, streets, and parks where men cruised other men. James’s New York itinerary contains numerous historic sites of male-male cruising, places in fact he “distinctly ‘liked’” (511). As George Chauncey shows, Riverside Drive, Grant’s tomb, the Ramble in Central Park, the park next to City Hall, the Bowery, as well as Washington Square, were known cruising spots beginning in the 1890s and were fashionable by the 1920s. These streets and parks in turn mapped out a recognizable, if also secret, terrain

for the exploration and creation of particularly queer “modes of contact and conceptions of life.”

The appearance of cruising within *The American Scene*, both as literal sites and as a conceptual trope, tells a different story about Jamesian style and the representation of desire within modern capitalism.³ While James’s style has become a privileged focus for discussions of sexuality, particularly his resistance to the representation of desire, I argue that in *The American Scene* James develops a literary style intimately related to the specificity of homosexual desire and the material network of male-male cruising. Despite the fact that such cruising spots were themselves shaped by the developments of capital, and were often the very routes through which commodities traveled, James articulates these counter-scenes of public sexual life as alternative forms of sociality to an increasingly pervasive commodity culture of America, one he recognizes as damagingly connected to a punitive will to know.⁴ He accentuates the power of his alternate homosexual desiring economy by utilizing a highly schematized framework for his analysis of the “attendant forms” within the American landscape, where praise is conveyed in a language rich with homoerotic desire and variegated sociability and condemnation is proffered in a language of heterosexual desire and formless commodity logic. This historical and material dimension of James’s queer cultural analysis and literary production is one of the most startling aspects of *The American Scene*.

The American Scene is of course written in James’s elusively promising later style. As James claims in the Preface, he is “incapable of information, incapable alike of receiving and imparting it,” in the manner found in “newspapers, reports, surveys and blue-

books” (354). Instead, James turns to the pursuit of a new literary form to accomplish what Ernst Bloch deems the “more elaborate, more essential,” critical work of the aesthetic, a point James makes clear when he foregrounds the pressing “question of literary representation” within contemporary society in the Preface (358, *AS* 354).⁵ The literary trope of the *scene* is, for James, that more elaborate form for addressing modern America, as it involves a “reckon[ing] with a complexity of forces,” the continually shifting collage-like aesthetic attuned to the disparate elements that shape sexual culture, “laying down again every inch of the train of association with the human, the social” (705, 536).⁶ As such, James’s conception of the *scene* mirrors my sense of *the encounter* as both foreground a necessary tension in the genealogical work of tracing out the “complexity of forces” shaping cultural life. Moreover, James’s style—typified by his syntactically complex prose, his complicated positioning of narrative point of view, his temporal compression and elongation, his indirect articulation, his heavily loaded vocabulary—becomes itself a manner of cruising, a calibrated play of explicitness and innuendo, of establishing connections and dropping them off, of subtle formality and careening urgency. In composing such textual scenes, James aims to instill “a certain amount of social training” about the nature of affiliation and desire, a certain type of “intimate intelligence,” as he also calls it, of the encounter between material, sexual, and economic possibilities of modern America (*AS* 705, 353). This intimate intelligence conveyed by James’s scenic associative style, not unlike a knowledge of the secret gardens and streets of male cruising, becomes, following Michael Moon, a “queer theater of initiation” that introduces others to an alternative desiring economy and sociality, one where “nothing profitable, nothing directly economic, *could* be

done at all,” but which nonetheless “put you . . . into a mood in which appreciation became a positive wantonness” (373, 369, italics original). In short, James’s “question of literary representation” entails a deep investment in “determining and qualifying” desires and interest in queer scenes of cruising as a critique of capital.

James’s interest in the particular *forms* of cruising come to the fore by contrasting them to the pervasive *formlessness* he encounters throughout his trip. One of the clearest moments occurs when he visits the Waldorf-Astoria. The hotel, for James, becomes a theater in the production of a particular conception of life and mode of contact. Upon leaving the street, James notes, the “hotel-world quickly closes round” so that the visitor “is transported,” as the hotel seeks to produce a new, “complete scheme of life” (441, 440). James continues: “Here was a social order in positively stable equilibrium. Here was a world whose relation to its form and medium was practically imperturbable” (443). Such a concordance between form and medium results in the effect that the hotel is “blissfully exempt from any principle or possibility of disaccord with itself” (442). Before James’s eye, the hotel-world “sat there, it walked and talked, and ate and drank, and listened and danced to music, and otherwise reveled and roamed, and bought and sold, and came and went there, all on its own splendid terms” (441).

James carefully reads the theatricality of the hotel in dialectical terms that anticipate the Frankfurt School: as a scene in which the apparent diversity of the hotel’s activities—it roams and dances and eats and sells—“manages to be at the same time an inordinate untempered monotony” (442).⁷ This monotony, reproduced as the perceived impossibility for disaccord, becomes what James will ambiguously call the pervasive *form-*

lessness of the hotel, where “the general and the particular, the organized and the extemporized, the element of ingenuous joy below and of the consummate management above, melted together” (443). Formlessness here, obviously, describes not *lack* of form, but the way the space of the hotel reflects a “scheme of life” as an “untempered monotony,” one where goods, services, people, and pleasures are seamlessly and indistinguishably shuttled along the circuitry of capitalist exchange, all without the possibility of disaccord. James’s reading of the hotel can be understood as part of the larger effects of capital accumulation. “The circulation of capital,” Marx notes, “suddenly presents itself as an independent substance . . . which money and commodities are mere forms which it assumes and casts off in turn.” The accumulation of capital, he goes on to explain, “becomes value in process, money in process,” eliminating the form of commodities altogether and entering “into private relations with itself”: money “begets money” (*Capital* 335).⁸ In other words, modern capital accumulation is a homogeneous flow that, through the process of abstraction already present in the commodity, “casts off” all other particular forms within circulation. Like Marx, James sees the various iterations of dancing, eating, buying, goods, services, and pleasures as temporary “mere forms,” which, “however blazingly new,” fail “to affect us as doing more than hold[ing] the ground for something else, some conceit of the bigger dividend, that is still to come” (*AS* 472). This self-same flow of capital is what James perceives as the “untempered monotony” reflected in the attendant form of the Waldorf-Astoria, a self-same exchange that destroys any manner of distinction or particularity: “gradations, transitions, differences of any sort, temporal, material, social, whether in man or in his environment, shrank somehow, under its sweep” (605). “What prevails,” James

concludes of this economic underpinning of social forms, “what sets the tune, is the American scale of gain, more magnificent than any other, and the fact that the whole assumption, the whole theory of life, is that of the individual’s participation in it” (550). Through its production of this “complete scheme of life,” the hotel’s formlessness becomes symptomatic of “the whole theory of life” under the emerging form of capitalism in twentieth century America.

James elaborates “the individual’s participation” in capitalist production during his visit to the market on Rutgers Street, where he perceives the creation of a new poor who are made to appear seamlessly within the cycle of production/consumption. As he moves through the market James notes that “the wants, the gratifications, the aspirations of the ‘poor,’ as expressed in the shops ... denoted a new style of poverty; and this new style of poverty, from street to street, struck out the possible purchasers ... and made them, to every man and woman, individual throbs in the larger harmony” (468). Several key levels of analysis occur here. First, James’s analysis is based, again, on the way the attendant forms of the shops “expressed” a new manner of being and relating. It is not a matter of the individual’s innate expression of want or need, but the manufacturing of it, the qualifying and determining of it, by the shops, specifically, and by capitalist production and commodity-logic, more generally. That is to say, James is attuned to the way production interpellates subjects, both in their aspirations and gratifications, within the larger frame of capitalist exchange. James mirrors, in this way, Marx’s articulation of the cycle of production in the *Grundrisse*:

Thus production produces consumption (1) by creating the material for it; (2) by determining the manner of consumption; and (3) by creating the products, initially

posited by it as objects, in the form of a need felt by the consumer. It thus produces the object of consumption, the manner of consumption, and the motive of consumption. Consumption like-wise produces the producer's *inclination* by beckoning to him as an aim-determined need. (230, italics original)

In language very similar to that of James, Marx argues that production not only determines manners (of consumption) but also one's inclination toward an object—the desire for a mode of contact, one could say. For James, the “actions” of the shops, “which were the shops of the ‘poor,’” perfectly illustrate this circuitry, as “one's jostling fellow-pedestrians” are “struck out” and transformed into the throbs of the machine of production/consumption. “Wants” are implanted then “gratified” by the logic of production. Second, such interpellation *appears* total, where “every man and woman” is seamlessly fit into the closed frame of the larger harmony. This larger harmony, however, reaches far beyond the market itself, as James earlier in his return makes use of a manufacturing metaphor to describe New York more generally, calling it “an enormous system of stem-shuttles or electric bobbins” (AS 418). Not only is each pedestrian “struck out,” itself a possible manufacturing metaphor, the market, now the market/factory, is extrapolated to the whole of New York, which, of course, was itself a crucial manufacturing and clothing center at the turn of the century. Beginning with the attendant form of the shops, James ties the Rutgers Street market, via this manufacturing metaphor, to all of industrializing New York and its engine of capital, ultimately detailing the way capital “penetrate[s] society in all its aspects,” as Georg Lukács notes, interpellating pedestrians into this “complete scheme of life,” obliterating differences and constructing the inclinations of a “new poor” (*History* 85). Finally, James notes that the collective experience of this “new poor” is a public experience, shared among “fellow-pedestrians,” as opposed to an isolated or private one, even

though the *result* of this process is the production of “individual throbs.” As such, this transition from collective, group experience to isolated, “individual throbs” mirrors the very nature of the commodity itself, where the social character of labor and production are stripped away, leaving the appearance of an isolated, autonomous thing. Just as the commodity is struck out of the social dynamic of labor and returned as the “mere form” of an isolated thing in itself, for James, the pedestrians on Rutgers Street are struck out, abstracted, and reinserted as “individual throbs” in the circuitry of capitalist production/consumption.

While hardly class-based in his critique, James displays a precise understanding of the social effects of modern capital in his analysis of the Waldorf-Astoria and the Rutgers Street market, the specific manner in which it interpellates desires and gratifications, all within its own internal system of value and profit. Yet James’s most significant observation about this specifically modern “scheme of life” is the way he connects the production of “inclination” to the larger sphere of sexual discourse and policing, what Foucault will describe as “the singular imperialism that compels everyone to transform their sexuality into a perpetual discourse” (*History* 33). If the advances of industrial capitalism produce a “new poor,” they also contribute to producing “the homosexual.” According to John D’Emilio, “In divesting the household of its economic independence and fostering the separation of sexuality from procreation, capitalism has created conditions that allow some men and women to organize a personal life around their erotic/emotional attraction to their own sex.” He goes on to conclude, “Only when individuals began to make their living through wage labor, instead of as parts of an interdependent family unit, was it possible for

homosexual desire to coalesce into a personal identity” (470). Chauncey’s detailed account of New York frames this cultivation through the various social spaces established and converted to accommodate laborers flooding the city for work, many of the same parks, streets, and pubs that James will envision as “outside capital.” Yet as importantly, Chauncey notes, the development of a particularly gay male life depended on such institutions, and such institutions in turn contributed to what James would call the *delicate* articulation of gay cultural practices, existing interstitially between the public and the private, high culture and low culture. That is, while concentrated industrial production provides the opportunity for the exploration of new forms of affiliation and alliance, particularly around a sexual life, such opportunities were checked by increasingly stringent social, legal and medical policing, emphasized, for instance, by the Wilde trials starting in 1895, by the popularity of work in the new field of sexology, and by the creation of the Committee of Fourteen in New York City, an early vice-squad, two years after James’s visit.⁹ James’s awareness of this danger permeates his assessment of the homes of the nouveau riche along the Jersey shore.

He writes: “This diffused vagueness of separation between apartments, between hall and room, between one room and another, between the one you are in and the one you are not in, between place of passage and place of privacy, is a provocation to despair” (*AS* 493). Here, the formal features of the architecture are “diffused,” lending a formless indistinction between the spaces of the home. Following his analysis of the Waldorf-Astoria, one could say everything “melts together” in a scene of conspicuous consumption, adhering to what James calls the law of visibility, both from within and from without, which

must show the resident “other apertures, corridors, staircases,” with the whole space itself “yawing, expanding, ascending, descending, and all for the purpose of giving his presence ‘away’” (494). No longer simply linked to the abstract machinations of the logic of capital nor to the display of consumption and wealth, formlessness now clearly provokes “despair” about giving away one’s presence, an exposure or outing that occurs with the loss of differential distinction.¹⁰ James ties this despair to the history of the prosecution of homosexuality in a letter written to Edmund Gosse where James repeatedly decries the “fearful exposure” of Wilde during his first trial. James writes in this 1895 letter with exactly the same sentiment about the exposure of formlessness found in *The American Scene*: “These are the days in which one’s modesty is, in every direction, much exposed, and one should be thankful for every veil that one can hastily snatch up or that a friendly hand precipitately muffles one withal” (*Letters* 12). In connecting issues of exposure, “one’s modesty,” and the Wilde trial, James’s underlying anxiety around formlessness comes to the fore: James expressly connects the formlessness inherent in the circulation of commodities within capitalism to the circulation of knowledge (and punishment) of homosexuality, a conflation that forces him to conceive of the pursuit of homosexual self-cultivation as wholly outside of the circuitry of capital, despite, at times, the evidence of his own analysis. For instance, like his ability to stress the way the commodity logic abstracts and interpellates the poor into a reified and recognizable new social position with specific wants and gratifications, James fears the way the Wilde trial consolidates and interpellates the new homosexual into a social position with supposedly equally recognizable wants and gratifications. That is to say, James intuits a version of Foucault’s claim for the extraction and implantation of

sexuality, but situates this development within the larger process of capitalist production. However, even though James notes how the commodity and the homosexual are “struck out” of diverse social practices, isolated and inserted back into social exchange, the experience of each does not align. And it is the dissimilar encounter between them that will eventually allow him to leverage the particular form of homosexual desire and the scene of cruising as a critique of capital.

James, then, stands as a powerful example of a queer materialism. He provides a strong reading of the dynamics of social life, taking the particularities of social forms as a privileged focus for understanding the material and discursive conditions of sexuality and capital. Yet this Jamesian formal perspective runs against one dominant strand of queer theorizing and praxis. As Elisabeth Freeman argues, this dominant strand of queer work tends “to privilege the avant-gardism of queer subcultures, to celebrate their dissolving and disintegrating work on identity, taxonomy, community, and to claim that queer is always ahead of actually existing social possibilities. Which is to say, on this model, it seems that truly queer queers negate forms, and that formalism, particularly of the literary kind, isn’t very queer” (498). This strand is perhaps best represented in the work of Leo Bersani. In *The Freudian Body*, Bersani argues that sexuality, situated in the space between the pleasurable self-shattering sensation of overstimulation and the extinction of that excitement through the destruction of the object, emerges as an “epistemological catastrophe,” a “shattering experience ... without any specific content,” which “isolates the human subject in a socially and epistemologically ‘useless,’ but infinitely seductive, repetition” of self-

destruction (40, 90). This socially “useless” strand of critical queer work results in “the most politically disruptive aspect of the homo-ness” of Bersani’s work (*Homos* 7).

As the examples of the Waldorf-Astoria and the homes along the Jersey shore illustrate, James certainly does not choose an instrumentalized perspective of sexuality. Such representational strategies fit too nicely into the system of institutional punishment, as the Wilde trial made all too clear for James. Yet James and Bersani are engaged in a similar problematic regarding the readability of sexuality. For James the question seems to be: What might be the forms of representation that resist codification in the systems of criminalization and medicalization, yet while allowing for desire to manifest a crucial role in imagining new social attachments and bonds? James’s answer is clear: the form would not be the oceanic, as Bersani suggests, but the scene of the encounter. Even with Bersani’s more recent turn to a desire for the same as the grounds for a homocritical aesthetic, rather than the oceanic, the result is still a certain type of monotony that is rephrased as “the un-specifiable It of pure potentiality” (Bersani and Phillips 26).¹¹ Discussing James’s “Beast in the Jungle” in the more recent *Intimacies*, Bersani and Adam Phillips emphasize the “concentrated monotony” of James’s style, the way his prose “exists only in a mode of expectancy” (Bersani and Phillips 25, 24). However, though, throughout *The American Scene*, James links any dissolving and monotony—typified by the Waldorf-Astoria and Rutgers Street market—with a turn to the pervasive commodity culture that is part of the exposure and punishment of the sexual subject. Lack of form holds no critical potential for James. And just as importantly, it eliminates the encounter of differential elements so important to his sense of the scene of erotic initiation. As James notes of the formless Wal-

dorf-Astoria, “The rigour with which any appearance of pursued or desired adventure is kept down—adventure in the florid sense of the word, the sense in which it remains an euphemism—is not the least interesting note of the whole immense promiscuity” (*AS* 441). That is, any scene dominated by commodity logic, by “untempered monotony,” is not a scene of “desired adventure,” James’s florid euphemism of homosexual cruising. The crucial difference, James suggests, is wholly a matter of form.

Many of these issues play out for James in a summational remark about the “monstrous organism” of New York (418):

The analogy was in truth complete; since the repetition of such walks, and the admission of the beguiled state contained in them, resembled nothing so much as the visits so often still incorrigibly made to compromised charmers.... The difficulty with the compromised charmer is just this constant inability to convince; to convince ever, I mean, that she is serious, serious about any form whatever, or about anything but that perpetual passionate pecuniary purpose which plays with all forms, which derides and devours them, though it may pile up the cost of them in order to rest a while, spent and haggard, in the illusion of their finality. (447)

In clearly some of the most overwrought, sexualized language in *The American Scene* James articulates a trope of modernity often associated via Benjamin with Baudelaire: the prostitute. For Benjamin, the central role of the prostitute in Baudelaire’s poetry reveals his deep engagement with the newness of modernity, with its contradictory manifestations. As the allegory of capitalist modernity, the prostitute becomes “an embodiment of the commodity” (Benjamin, “The Study Begins” 96). James repeats this allegory in the compromised charmer. Like the commodity, the compromised charmer is merely “playing with all forms” so as to garner profits—a phrase that mirrors Marx’s description of commodities as temporary “mere forms” for capital accumulation. Like the pleasures of the Waldorf-Astoria, whose menagerie of dancing and buying and goods were nothing but an “untem-

pered monotony,” James similarly sees in the compromised charmer an indistinction, a lack of seriousness, of form. Or as Benjamin notes, “This devaluation of the human environment by the commodity economy penetrates deeply into the poet’s historical experience. What results is the ‘ever-selfsame’” (“The Study Begins” 96). Here then the “compromised charmer,” like Baudelaire’s prostitute, becomes an allegory for the beguiled state of capitalist modernity.

Yet a crucial difference between Baudelaire/Benjamin and James emerges in the details of this allegorical treatment. In each case, the prostitute/charmer becomes the site of both capitalist and sexual desire, as implied in James’s choice of the word “spent,” a term denoting both sexual and pecuniary activity. In Benjamin’s dialectical reading of the prostitute as modernity, the prostitute stands in as the site of destructive capitalism, the commodity, *and* as the object of presumably heterosexual desire, a desire that holds a redemptive, heroic futurity. As Benjamin argues, by focusing on the prostitute of urban modernity Baudelaire’s poetry not only breaks, “through its allegorical conception, with the nature of poetic inspiration, and, through its evocation of the city, with the rural nature of the idyll; but, through the resolution with which it makes lyric poetry at home in the heart of reification, it also breaks with the nature of things. Its locus is the point where the nature of things is overwhelmed and transformed by the nature of human beings” (“The Study Begins” 97). This redemptive nature is a crucial assumption in Benjamin’s allegory of modernity: the destruction embodied by the prostitute is redeemed in the heterosexual desire *for* the prostitute.

In contrast to Benjamin's reading of the prostitute, James is suggesting something quite radical: through the figure of the compromised charmer, James explicitly connects the beguiled state of repeated encounters with a destructive, heterosexualized capitalist modernity not with an "epistemologically 'useless'" position of criticality, as Bersani suggests, nor with even a hint of heroic futurity, as Benjamin suggests, but only with sexual policing and the abstraction and containment within the larger harmony of capital. In so doing, James exposes a strand of "reproductive futurism" in Benjamin's dialectic of modernity. To return to James's methodology, the attendant form of this allegory about modernity assumes a privileged heterosexual basis for this redemption, curtailing any possibility, as Lee Edelman argues, for conceiving alternate modes of historical analysis, desire, and social organization.¹² Unlike Benjamin, James sees no redemptive aspect in his allegorical treatment of the female compromised charmer, only destruction.¹³ And James's sexual politics are at the core of this difference. In fact, it is precisely James's sexual politics that allow him to articulate his scenic pursuit of a particularly homosexual cruising as a formidable critique of formless, heterosexual capitalist commodity culture. Despite Michael Warner's assertion that "gay culture in this most visible mode is anything but external to advanced capitalism," James's anxiety about social policing, and the specific manner he connects commodity culture not simply to that policing but to heterosexuality, all result in James privileging homosexual male cruising as an alternative mode of sociality, a realm, in contradistinction to capital, that foregrounds a collage-like encounter that re-associates, that acts as an initiation into, different types of desires and bodies (Introduction xxxi). In this sense, James does adhere to a type of homocriticality advocated by Bersani. James

perceives in the dissimilar fissure in the experience of the homosexual subject a mode of criticality that provides the necessary perspective to address both capitalism and sexual policing. Homosexual desire, for James, appears to have a non-instrumental “interest” in the production of an alternate mode of sociality, one modeled on the scene of cruising. The crucial aspect for this homocriticality is in James’s adamant, and perhaps paradoxical, focus on the heterogeneity of form.

Interested in neither the withdrawal from sociality nor the formless heterosexual capitalist marketplace nor the exposure of the homes of the nouveau riche, James seeks the most favorable conditions for an erotic “life ‘socially’ led.” He is led, then, not to abandon sexuality as constitutive of sociality but to see in it a type of demand. As Foucault argues, “To be ‘gay,’ I think, is not to identify with the psychological traits and the visible masks of the homosexual, but to try to define and develop a way of life” (“Friendship” 310). This demand to develop a way of life, Foucault goes on to claim, “is an historic occasion to reopen affective and relational virtualities, not so much through the intrinsic qualities of the homosexual, but due to the biases against the position he occupies; in a certain sense diagonal lines that he can trace in the social fabric permit him to make these virtualities visible” (“Friendship” 311). Set against the punitive aspects of homosocial and homosexual attachments, James sees the encounter of these virtualities as a critique to both a narrativized sexuality and heterosexual capitalist culture. From this position, James turns to the scenic encounter as the form for the reactivation of these virtualities, what in James’s terms would be the white seams of the social fabric: “The mystery is in the *how* of the process, in the wonderful little wavering borderland ... the place of the crooked seam where, if psy-

chology had the adequate lens, the white seam would show” (*AS* 521, italics original). In this sense, *The American Scene* is an early example of a queer counter public, one linked to the larger dynamics of public discourse, yet constructed differently, producing and exploring new “modes of contact and conceptions of life.”¹⁴ Through his scenic form, James activates these virtualities as a “social training,” an initiation into a new American scene.

In contrast to the formlessness of capitalist desire, James is overwhelmingly drawn to aspects of the American landscape that evoke the scene of the encounter. He is repeatedly drawn to forms that bring to mind terms like the rococo, the perverse, the interstitial, the indirect, and, what will become a central term, the *delicate*, but also temporal moments like late afternoon, autumn, and twilight, to describe this new counter scene.¹⁵ Speaking of the pleasure he finds in the Presbyterian Hospital, for instance, James writes, “if the *direct* pressure of New York is too often to ends that strike us as vulgar, the indirect is capable, and perhaps to an unlimited degree, of these lurking effects of delicacy” (511, italics original). These “lurking effects of delicacy” emerge in James’s description of the hospital as a series of interstitial images. As opposed to the “military drill” of the nascent skyscrapers, James seeks out the “note of mildness” in the hospital, its subtle turns of architecture and orchestration of space where the mildness of the “long, cool corridors” of the hospital is juxtaposed to the “very hot June morning” outside (510). The hospital itself is a kind of interstitial double, as it produces “an after-sense which put on for me, under several happy intimations, the image of some garden,” which was “approachable only by those in the secret” (511). This “after-sense” of the hospital as a secret garden, “where the soil, the very human soil itself, was richest,” appears incompatible with, yet delicately linked to, “the

principle of instant decision and action” required of a hospital (511). This continual interstitial dynamic of the hospital, its apparent doubling of space, and its partially concealed use, are what draw James’s highest praise. He was so attracted to this delicacy of the hospital that he ends his visit by declaring that he “might desire or ‘elect,’ as they say, to become the victim of some such mischance as would put me into relation again” (511).

In conceiving of these “lurking effects of delicacy” of the hospital as a garden, “approachable only by those in the secret,” which is both separate from and connected to the larger architecture and modality of the hospital, James analogizes, it would seem rather expressly, the actual counter scenes of gay male cruising. As Chauncey argues of the early decades of the twentieth century, “gay men met throughout the city, their meetings invisible to all but the initiated and carefully orchestrated to remain so” (204). James appears not only to be referencing this invisible network of sites within the city but also citing it as an exemplary social and aesthetic form. The delicacy of the secret garden of the hospital, where the “human soil ... was richest,” is here contrasted to “the *direct* pressure of New York” whose ends, James notes, were vulgar. This distinction is more profound when linked to the sites discussed earlier. As his encounter with the Rutgers street market reveals, James perceives the market as a synecdoche for all of New York, which is, for him, completely determined by capitalist commodity logic. The direct pressure of New York, then, can be read as the direct pressure of commodity logic as it permeates more and more aspects of social life. What is significant about this pressure, however, is the way it destroys differences and distinction, the way it produces formlessness. The final turn of this contrast between the delicacy of the hospital and the directness of New York more

generally occurs by linking this commodity logic, through the allegory of the compromised charmer, to heterosexual desire, whose ends leave one “spent and haggard” with illusory receipts of profits. Those, it would seem, are the vulgar ends.

In contrast to what James sees as the heterosexual desire of commodity culture, the “several happy intimations” of the hospital appear to function, for James, along a different logic, something like the aneconomic “interest” he found in the New England countryside. For James, the “old tapestry” of nooks and shallows and sequestered spots of the countryside “were in some sort a perversion” that produced an “elegance in the commonest objects” (367, 369). James accentuates the social value of such perversity by speaking, in an odd turn of narrative perspective, as this old tapestry: “see how I lend myself to poetry and sociably” (373). The crucial part of James’s reading of the countryside is his conclusion that such perversion produces an “interest” in sociability that did not “involve a consideration of the millions spent” (367). The “after-sense” garden, then, is a space, known only to those in the secret, whose very formal structures lend themselves to sociably, and whose aims, even after several happy intimations, were inexhaustible, never approaching economic consideration. In his description of the Presbyterian Hospital, James reinforces the centrality of homosexual desire in his creation of a counter public scene—both in the general sense of Foucault’s demand for new modes of relating and in the specific sense of actual gay male cruising, and its mode of contact—contrasting an idealized homoerotic sociality of the delicate to the directness of New York represented as heterosexual capitalist commodity culture.

Yet James does not simply analogize male cruising sites; his itinerary contains a number of well-known cruising spots—Riverside Drive, Grant’s tomb, 5th Ave along the Park, the park adjacent to City Hall, and the Bowery, for instance—and he speaks of them with the same tone as the secret garden of the Presbyterian Hospital. To illustrate, early in his return to New York, James takes a ride up Riverside Drive to Grant’s tomb. As Chauncey points out, Riverside Drive by the 1920s was a well known cruising lane, book-ended by two “especially renowned” monuments where men could meet: the Soldiers and Sailors Monument at 89th street and Grant’s tomb north at 123rd street (Chauncey 182). While the Soldiers and Sailors Monument was built only in 1902, as early as 1896 court records show cases brought against men for having sex in public along Riverside Drive.¹⁶ The point to be made is the convergence between James’s preferred social form, his desired aesthetic form, the reality of gay male cruising as an invisible or shielded network of streets and parks, and James’s itinerary.

James explicitly mentions both monuments. In contrasting the western riverfront to the more concentrated “townside” of the city, James speaks of the riverfront in much the same terms as the New England countryside. Given such a scene, he asks, “what finer warrant could be desired than such felicities of position as those enjoyed, on the Riverside heights, by the monuments erected to the soldiers and sailors of the Civil War and, even in a greater degree, by the tomb of General Grant?” (475) While such an observation, on the surface, merely praises the location of the monuments, with the Hudson along their edge; but as so often happens with James’s comparative analysis, implicit and explicit associations attend the contrast. James’s language here is unquestionably ripe with erotic sugges-

tion and subtle references to an alternative economy of exchange. A warrant after all entitles one to the exchange of goods and services, and there was no finer exchange of goods and services, James notes, than on Riverside Drive. It provides such felicities of position. But crucially, James notes that “such felicities of position” are in stark contrast to the business side of the city, which he compares to “the mere roughness of the satyr pursuing the nymph” (475). Opposed to the violent, “roughness” of capitalist desire, Riverside Drive provides the delicate, alternate exchange economy of male cruising.

As for Grant’s tomb itself, James initially is unsure. Noticing that the tomb was “as open as a hotel or a railway-station,” James is forced to wonder “if a new kind and degree of solemnity may not have been arrived at in this complete rupture of old consecrating forms” (476). Assessing the attendant form of Grant’s tomb, for James, becomes a way of assessing the historical possibility for collective affiliation, here as the act of commemoration. A large open space, where the visitor enters the monument and looks down upon tombs of Grant and his wife residing in a circular pit, the memorial would seem to lack any of the delicacy James has sought out before. However, juxtaposed with a possible, invisible scene of cruising, James’s interest in assessing collective affiliation and this “rupture with old ... forms” takes on different meanings. The rupture, then, may not simply be with the national solemnity for a Civil War general and president but, like the secret garden, the rupture may indicate an emergence of a new kind of organization of desire and sociability, a new warrant, one modeled on the covert network of male cruising, of which Grant’s tomb was a crucial part. From this perspective, despite what appears on the surface to be a

monument at odds with his aesthetic taste, James concludes: “On the whole, I distinctly ‘liked’ it” (477).

While James aims to note a few instances of perverse delicacy he finds in his travels, his main emphasis is the *production* of this rich, erotic social form as the text of *The American Scene*. The perception that the “after-sense” of the hospital or the old tapestry of New England creates “elegance in the commonest objects” again foreground the question of literary representation, and James’s defamiliarizing techniques. Theodor Adorno would call this “after-sense” the nonidentical, an image of the obverse of instrumental reason found in the “instant decision and action” of the hospital, an image of that which does not exist in the “the immediate crudity,” as James often put it, of what is within commodity capitalism, but an image of that which is promised (*AS* 506). “By its form alone,” Adorno claims, “art promises what is not; it registers objectively, however refractedly, the claim that because the nonexistent appears it must indeed be possible” (*Aesthetic Theory* 82). While cruising spots indeed already existed, James seeks to use his scenic literary encounter to initiate a particular type of *desire for relation*, a desire not unlike that which he experienced at the Presbyterian Hospital before the after-sense garden. Such a desire emerges, as Moon suggests, through James’s reiterative act of staging incongruous scenes of cultural life as itself an instructive staging of erotic sociality, one, James imagines, at odds with formless commodity culture and its punitive sexual logics. That is to say, James wants to produce a form of “those shy things that speak, at the most ... but of the personal adventure,” an adventure in James’s euphemistic sense that involves an erotic “interest” in new relations to the “commonest objects” of social life (*AS* 598). These are the “lurking effects

of delicacy” that James will articulate as a privileged aspect of the scenic encounter, effects he attempts to draw out in nearly every structural component of *The American Scene*, from its ambiguous genre to its organization as a series of contrasting but interconnected scenes of American cultural life to its singularly Jamesian sentences.

F. O. Matthiessen dismissed James’s *The American Scene* as “one of the curiosities of our literature” (107). For Matthiessen this curious nature is precisely the result of the ambiguous nature of the work, oscillating as it does between a number of different genres. As a work of travel literature—which is part travelogue, part philosophy, part ethnography, part autobiography, part aesthetic theory—*The American Scene* is, to borrow James’s own terminology, a perversion.¹⁷ Combining these different disciplinary foci, James never reduces one to the other. Instead, he suggests a necessarily frictive dimension to such differences. Like his resistance to the empiricist style of “newspapers, reports, surveys and blue-books,” James suggests that something else is captured precisely by the frictive bringing together of these different disciplinary approaches. As Susan Gillman and Alys Eve Weibaum argue, this strategy of “juxtaposition conveys stylistically incompatible textual parts and seemingly divergent political questions” while simultaneously indicating association and relatedness (5). By pursuing an encounter between genres, juxtaposing the aesthetic consideration of the bell-tower of Giotto, the literary significance of Zola, memories of his youth, reports on a Virginia library, and an amateur ethnography of the people in Central Park, James never reduces such investigations to the same critical nature, but instead exposes the encounter between these “complexity of forces” competing to furnish the “conditions of the life ‘socially’ led.”

This scenic performance of a new counter scene of queer sociality continues in the overall form of *The American Scene*, as itself a series of contrasting but interrelated scenes of American cultural life. Organized along state or regional boundaries, with each section a different region and each section divided into various sites within that region, *The American Scene* is not really a narrative in the conventional, temporal sense, but a spatial form whose “full significance ... is given only by the reflexive relations among the” various scenes, rather than sequentially over time (Frank 17). As a series of paratactical negotiations of the state of the United States, James draws out the specific details that comprise each location and its difference from other sites, never reducing America to a singular identity. Consequently, *The American Scene* also functions through parataxis, producing a nonhierarchical reading of various regions, a nonlinear mode of exposition, as one need not necessarily read “New York Revisited” to understand “The Sense of Newport” or “Charleston.” However, one’s reading of James’s experience Philadelphia may retrospectively alter one’s perception of the significance of West Point or Hawthorne’s house. Similar to Moon’s reading of James’s experience in the Louvre as a young boy, here too James stresses the infinite recombinatory potential of experiencing the American scene, one unencumbered by narrative finality. In this way, James’s spatial form functions as another level of critique of the vulgar ends of heterosexual capitalism. The infinitely recombinatory nature of the form of *The American Scene* lends itself more to the inexhaustible social “interest” of the delicate.

Even narrative point of view adheres to the logic of the seductive yearning of the encounter. No longer the autonomous, coherent, mastering eye of imperial control often

formulated in nineteenth century travel literature, James's narrator, "the restless analyst," is partial, fragmented, and historical—evidenced, for example, by the fractured narrative voice, which oscillates between first-, second-, and third-person perspectives.¹⁸ In using multiple terms—"the story-teller," "the restless analyst," "I," or "he"—James produces a shifting dynamic not only between narrative voices but also between narrator and reader. Such shifting often occurs within a single narrated scene. For example, James will often narrate a scene using the first-person pronoun, a technique that produces a series of readerly expectations, only to end the description or analysis with some summation that begins, "For the restless analyst." In such shifts, one cannot discern if the restless analyst is at the moment another name for the I of the narrator, for James, or if in shifting modes, James is imploring the reader, who, through the effects of such shift, now suddenly finds himself in the scene in the position of the restless analyst. This strategy produces "interest" in the same way James suggests a half-understood foreign sentence does: "recognition became more interesting and more amusing in proportion as it became more difficult" (*AS* 357). James intentionally produces such ambiguous difficulty so as to initiate the reader into a more "interesting" position to the material represented, one marked by a kind of seduction. As Jonathan Flatley argues, James produces such an ambiguous style "to necessitate reading into the text, since it is the breakdown of clear understanding that motivates one to guess at meanings. Such speculations involve an imaginative imitation of the writer, 'getting behind' (as James liked to put it) the writer so as to see the world as the writer does.... This is why Paul de Man insisted that *prosopopoeia*, the creation (*poiea*) of a face or person (*prosopon*), is the master trope of reading" (88). James's shifting narrative point of

view self-reflexively imitates this “getting behind” the writer, one of the “felicities of position,” perhaps, an activity that becomes “more interesting and more amusing in proportion as it became more difficult.” As such, James’s ambiguous style seeks to initiate readers into manners of desire, a style that imitates that very manner of desire in its form.

In addition to the way narrative point of view imitates a manner of relation, Mary Cross stresses a similar relational aspect in James’s style. Cross claims, “Henry James himself might rather have said, as he did of his novels, that the *sentence* is ‘a picture of relationships’” (2, italics added). James’s digressive style, his piling of clause upon clause, image next to image, functions to produce a very particular “picture of relationships.” Such a picture is expressed in this scene:

To recall these fine notes and these loud ones, the whole play of wealth and energy and untutored liberty, of the movement of the breathless civilization reflected, as brick and stone and marble may reflect, through all the contrasts of prodigious flight and portentous stumble, is to acknowledge, positively, that one’s rambles were delightful, and that the district abutting on the east side of the Park, in particular, never engaged my attention without, by the same stroke, making the social question dance before it in a hundred interesting forms. (*AS* 450)

In this one sentence, this one “picture of relationships,” we can find, perhaps, James’s entire critical perspective, his entire aesthetic and social project. Thematically the sentence addresses representation, sociality, and form; it is constructed in James’s singular scenic manner; and James’s positive reference to the east side of Central Park and the even subtler reference perhaps to The Ramble within Central Park connect the sentence to male cruising spots. Returning to attendant forms, James outlines the manner in which “the breathless civilization” of New York is reflected in its material. Yet this very turn to “brick and stone and marble” is in fact to address a certain pleasure found in “the social question” and its

“hundred interesting forms.” Like the various materials through which civilization is reflected, the social question, but more specifically, the pleasure of the social question, comes to James, “by the same stroke,” not as a singular image but as a scenic encounter, as a series of juxtaposed images. This “picture of relationships,” the scene of sociality, James seeks to produce in *The American Scene* is found here as the pleasure of “a hundred interesting forms.”

This pleasure is produced as the sentence itself. While not quite a hundred forms, James’s own description of the pleasure of New York is prismatically mirrored in the form of the sentence. The initial disjunction created by the juxtaposition of the fine and the loud note is quickly coupled to a panorama of the “whole play” of New York: its wealth, energy, and untutored liberty. Yet this “whole play” is itself quickly expanded in the clause following to include the many ways civilization may be reflected. Moreover, the initial auditory experience of New York shifts into an ocular one, from fine and loud notes to the display of civilization’s reflection. Yet this reflection is interrupted by an analogy, delaying the articulation of how civilization is represented. Here James equates the way brick, stone, and marble may reflect a civilization with the more abstract notion of the way “prodigious flight and portentous stumble” may. Such an analogy becomes necessary to draw out the material (brick, stone, marble) and constructed nature of the “reflection” of civilization. Once the sentence resumes with this reflection, rather than finally supplying it, it explodes into “all the contrasts” between sky (“flight”) and ground (“stumble”). Such a scene suggests that civilization is not as it appears, recorded, for instance, in blue-books or newspapers. Rather, it comes together as this shifting cacophony of sounds and kaleidoscope of

images. Shuttled through auditory, visual, and spatial registers, analogies, and fine detail and abstract thought, this heterotopic description of his experience of New York imitates the “hundred interesting forms” of the pleasure of the “social question,” initiating the reader into a delicate counter scene of public life.

By emphasizing the nature of representation in his depiction of New York City James foregrounds not simply the “question of literary representation” but also the invisible network of gay male cruising sites. This return to cruising is fostered by James’s express reference to the pleasure of the east side of the Park. Chauncey catalogues the importance of 5th Avenue, running long the east side of the Park, as a meeting place for men. Furthermore, the coincidence of the reference to the Park and James’s choice of the noun “rambles” may suggestively connote The Ramble area of Central Park, also an important cruising spot where “so many men met on the open lawn at the north end ... that they nicknamed it the Fruited Plain” (Chauncey 182). As with Grant’s tomb or the Soldiers and Sailors monument, James emphasizes the importance of location with his very systematized vocabulary. In addition to a subtle reference to The Ramble, the word “ramble” is laden with subtext. Opposed to the precise “military drill” of New York office buildings, *to ramble* means to walk for pleasure. Within the mixed-use areas of parks and streets, cruising takes on the outward appearance of aimless walks, searching for a shared moment of recognition where idle talk, a look, or gesture, might turn into something else. As James seems to make clear: “I remember certain aimless strolls as snatches of intimate communion” (AS 445).

In addition to the intimacy afforded by these rambles, James's use of the suggestive phrase "by the same stroke" is also significant. James frequently aligns his sense of homoeroticity with physical or metaphorical touching. In Florida James echoes the combined value of aimless rambles and touching: "There comes, to any traveler who doesn't depart and arrive with the mere security and punctuality of a registered letter, some moment for his beginning to feel within him—it happens under some particular touch—the finer vibration of a sense of the real thing" (711).¹⁹ Here, the touch of the "real thing" does not function "with the mere security" or predictability of a registered letter. In an age soon to be dominated by Taylorized efficiency, the "real thing," for James, is never the "mere form" of what is given, "the immediate crudity" of what is. Instead, the real thing emerges in an untimely manner, like on a ramble, through something like the nonidentical that here is equated with the act of touching, and that throughout *The American Scene* is aligned with the counter scene of homoerotic sociality. This touch of homoerotic sociality is further illustrated in a letter James writes to W. Morton Fullerton. After hearing about some trouble Fullerton finds himself in, James wonders "if I mayn't hold out the conception of *help* to you; or rather of my absolutely *holding* out the assurance of it. Hold me then *you* with any squeeze; grip me with any grip; press me with any pressure; trust me with any trust" (*Letters* 169, italics original). Whether the grip, the squeeze, or the stroke, whether along the streets of New York, on the train through Florida, or in a letter, each manifestation of touching signals the critical potential of homosexual desire. As such, James's representation of his encounter with New York, manifested as the pleasure permeating the contact between a "hundred interesting forms," reflected in the very sentence itself—in

theme, in image, and in vocabulary—allows him to declare: “I like indeed to think of my relation to New York as . . . almost inexpressibly intimate” (4S 452).

By understanding the institutional dynamics that impinge on sociality and by claiming that the most successful “mode of contact” was one having “an existence abounding in relations,” James anticipates the work of a number of formative theories on urban habitation (521). For Jane Jacobs, for instance, “The more successfully a city mingles everyday diversity of uses and users in its everyday streets, the more successfully, casually (and economically) its people thereby enliven” a network of support and interest, “instead of vacuity” (111). Jacobs, like James, distinguishes between (quite literal) formlessness, “vacuity,” and heterogeneous use and users as necessary for successful urban living. Yet James can be more interestingly seen as a key precursor to another queer reading of New York City, Samuel Delany’s *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*. Like James, Delany gives a specifically historical argument, based on “attendant forms,” for the imbricated nature of the forms of social institutions and forms of sexual habitation. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, policy and zoning changes eliminated the public commercial spaces that facilitated any number of male-male erotic encounters. Such spaces, Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner argue, allowed gay men “to find each other, to map a commonly accessible world, to construct the architecture of queer space” (191). And these shared environments, this commonly accessible world, leads Delany to argue that “life is at its most rewarding, productive, and pleasant when large numbers of people understand, appreciate, and seek out interclass contact and communication,” and such contact he insists is “of paramount importance in the specific pursuit of gay sexuality” (111, 193). Delany, then, conceives of

a successful articulation of gay sociality as a heterogeneous series of contacts, ones inextricably linked to the “architecture and commerce” that facilitate or inhibit them. Nearly identical formulations about the social necessity of large numbers of contacts, as well as specific references to actual cruising sites, can be found in *The American Scene*. As James notes in Philadelphia, “What makes a society was thus, more than anything else, the number of organic social relations it represents” (*AS* 583); or as he says repeatedly toward the end of his trip, “Character is developed to visible fineness only by friction ... , only by having to reckon with a complexity of forces” (705); and “No kind person ... is a very good kind, and still less a very pleasing kind, when its education has not been made to some extent by contact with other kinds” (705). And this friction and contact has a particular form, the scenic encounter, modeled on the scene of gay male cruising. As Chauncey notes, early cruising areas were rife with cross-class affiliation and intimacy as “the men who sought homosexual encounters in the streets ... were participating in and expanding a street culture already developed by working-class youth” (202). Ultimately, *The American Scene* and *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* should be read as historical bookends of twentieth century queer materialism, where each analyzes the necessary material conditions for the pursuit of an erotic social scene and the institutional structures that could support it.

Yet in translating the question of sociality in America into a question of literary representation, James foregrounds the centrality of a queer collage aesthetic for the “social training” or enculturation into new modes of contact. James’s scenic practice, however, is not just flirty or suggestive or even heavy-handedly erotic, but is also explicitly negotiating

and referencing cruising sites in New York City and using those material sites as a source for his textual practice. This queer practice in *The America Scene*—the aesthetic form of James reading the attendant forms of American cultural life—does not then produce the *mise en abyme* of historical criticism. Rather, as Ellen Rooney and Elizabeth Weed claim, echoing James as it were, the close reading of aesthetic or social form “does not refuse history, but renews it in a more seductive form” (3).²⁰ *The American Scene* is a queer encounter that produces a seductive “intimate intelligence,” but one not predicated on a will to know. Rather, *The American Scene* dramatizes a materialist desire for alternate forms of sociality, marking out a constellation of concerns that inform modes of affiliation across the social fabric, challenging the domains in which the erotic participates. “What indeed would observation be,” James claims, intimating this seductive dimension, “if it were not, just by these armed surprises, constantly *touched with adventure*” (611, italics added).

Such a perspective leads James to assert in a letter to H. G. Wells that “it is art that *makes* life, makes interest, makes importance” (*Letters* 770, italics original). But for James it is scenic form, the encounter, that makes interest, a form that, in its incompatibility and conflict with the formlessness of contemporary social life, produces and describes new modes of attachment and interest, even if these modes remain for James a fragile “shimmer of association” (*AS* 483). To return to Delany, they nonetheless *were* associations. And as he writes in another letter, this time to Henry Adams, defending *The American Scene*:

You see I still, in the presence of life (or of what you deny to be such) have reactions—as many as possible—and the book I sent you is proof of them. It’s, I suppose, because I am that queer monster, the artist, an obstinate finality, an inexhaustible sensibility. Hence the reactions—appearances, memories, many things, go on playing upon it with consequences that I note and “enjoy” (grim

word!) noting. It all takes doing—and I *do*. I believe I shall do yet again—it is still an act of life. (qtd. in Lyons, italics original)

Now explicitly “an act of life,” *The American Scene* creates a political perspective through which to understand the possibilities of social life at the turn of the century. It produces a counter American scene, “life (or what you deny to be such),” one intimately connected to the architecture and spaces of capital. And despite this connection to capital, the reiterative aspect of James’s final line, “I believe I shall do yet again,” signals *The American Scene* as a reiterative “queer theater of initiation,” one that, through its scenic “social training,” attempts to produce “an erotic way out” of a culture dominated by the commodity and a will to know. Or as James says himself: “These are the real triumphs of art—the discrimination in favour of taste produced not by the gilded and guarded ‘private room,’ but by making publicity itself delicate” (523).

¹ Hereafter cited in text as *AS*.

² See, for example, Posnock, *Trial of Curiosity*; Blair, *Henry James and the Writing of Race and Nation*; McWhirter, “‘A provision full of responsibilities’”; Hale, *Social Formalism*; Hsu, “Post-American James”; Banta, “Men, Women, and the American Way”; Globe, “Delirious Henry James”; Buelens, “Possessing the American Scene”; Peters, “Henry James, American Social Change, and Literary Revision”; Buelens, “Henry James’s Oblique Possession”; and Haviland, *Henry James’s Last Romance*.

³ See, for instance, nearly all of Bersani’s work; Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet and Tendencies*; Luciano, “Invalid Relations”; McWhirter, *Desire and Love in Henry James*; Savoy, “‘In the Cage’” and “‘The Jamesian Turn’”; and Ohi, “‘The novel is older.’”

⁴ Here, I follow Stacey Margolis, who argues, “far from hiding homosexuality, [*The Sacred Fount*] depends on the formal specificity of what we would now call gay desire to illuminate more abstract issues of both personal and textual identity” (394, italics original); see also Matheson, “Intimacy and Form.”

⁵ The full quotation reads, “To portray aesthetically means to be more immanent and accomplished, to be more elaborate, more essential than in the direct and sensual or direct and historical presence of this object.”

⁶ One of the ways James emphasizes the scenic, besides the obvious choice of title, is in littering the text with a vocabulary rich in theatrical or pictorial association, often referring to aspects of cultural life as scenes, performances, stages, tableaux, or canvases. Neither James nor *The America Scene* is singular in turning to such tropes. Theatricality in prose is prevalent in nineteenth century Anglo-American literature, and emerges in much of James’s writing, particularly the late works. For the theatrical in James, see Eastham, “‘Conventional Signs and Consecrations’”; for an overview of theatrical tropes in nineteenth century literature, see Litvak, *Caught in the Act*; and Jameson, *Political Unconscious*; for the influence of theatricality on contemporary critical theory, see Kottman, *Politics of the Scene*; Pruchner, “Theater in Modernist Thought”; and Féral, *Rise and Fall of Theatricality*.

⁷ Frankfurt School critics, particularly Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, would see the Waldorf-Astoria as an example of the continuous encroachment of capitalist logic and instrumental reason into every aspect of social life. For the connections between James and the Frankfurt School, see Posnock.

⁸ This is Marx’s M-C-M formulation, which becomes M-M’.

⁹ James himself had read the early sexology work of John Addington Symonds, who, with Havelock Ellis, would publish *Sexual Inversion*, having returned some of “the fond outpouring of poor J.A.S.” to Edmund Gosse in 1895 (*Letters* 12).

¹⁰ Richard Salmon notes that “what is at issue here is not the extinction of privacy per se but rather an extinction of the possibility of difference between private and public spheres.” It should be noted that Salmon is not interested in the sexual logic invested in this “issue,” as James quite explicitly is. Instead, Salmon claims, the issue is “a sustained

and serious engagement with the characteristic conditions of democratic public life” (181, 183).

¹¹ In *Homos*, Bersani claims the privileging of same in homosexual desire “has, as its condition of possibility, an indeterminate identity” (59).

¹² This “reproductive futurism,” the placing of a child as the outcome of this economy and the privileged symbol of futurity, Edelman argues, “preserv[es] in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations” (*No Future 2*).

¹³ There is a considerable amount of sexism in James’s attack of the compromised charmer. In discussing later American progressives like Mike Gold and Max Eastman, who also used of the prostitute as an allegory of capitalist modernity, Michael Trask argues that “female sexuality becomes synonymous with the incapacity for political agency engendered by market culture” (7). While James certainly does not inaugurate such a perspective in regards to female sexuality, I believe James goes even further in his homosocial critique of capital than Gold or Eastman, extending this incapacity not only to female sexuality but to heterosexuality *tout court*.

¹⁴ As Michael Warner argues, counter publics “can work to elaborate new worlds of culture and social relations in which gender and sexuality can be lived, including forms of intimate association, vocabularies of affect, styles of embodiment, erotic practices, and relations to care and pedagogy” (*Publics and Counterpublics 57*).

¹⁵ In contrast to this, Karen Scherzinger stresses the importance of blankness in *The American Scene* as a site for imaginative potential.

¹⁶ See Chauncey, particularly chapter 7, note 58.

¹⁷ Prior to *The American Scene*, James had published several works of travel writing. While James originally published sections of his travel writing in journals, the work prior to *The American Scene* was ultimately collected as *Transatlantic Sketches* in 1875, *Portraits of Places* in 1883, *Foreign Parts* also in 1883, *Essay in London and Elsewhere* in 1893, and *A Little Tour in France* in 1885. *The American Scene* was published as a single collected work first in London in 1907, then in the United States.

¹⁸ For a more complete overview of the subjectivity of the 19th century traveler, see Pratt, *Imperial Eyes* and Gray, *Mastery’s End*.

¹⁹ James’s short story “The Real Thing” (1893) takes up the same issues I’ll address here.

²⁰ The full quotation is: “The new formalism renews a desire to sift through the mass at a different pace, to notice and to make palpable the weight of the individual detail and thus to explore—or perhaps to exploit?—its synecdochic power. Reading in detail does not refuse history, but renews it in a more seductive form.”

CHAPTER 3 *NIGHTWOOD* AND THE AESTHETICS OF “A SECRET BROTHERHOOD”

Not enough attention has been paid to the forms of sociality in Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*, this despite the fact that the novel transpires not so much through plot development, but largely through stagy interactions between characters who come together to share their ruminations on love, loss, history, and any number of other aspects of affiliation and affection. Perhaps the difficulty with addressing attachment in the novel may be attributed to the density and complexity with which Barnes approaches the issue. For what there is of plot, *Nightwood* traces the erotic wanderings of Robin Vote, exposing us to a series of outcasts: Felix Volkbein, Nora Flood, Jenny Petherbridge (each one, at some point, Robin's lover), and Dr. Matthew O'Connor, a figure whom each of the characters turns to for help when Robin leaves. Constructed largely through fragmented and transitory nocturnal encounters, set amongst the detritus of a transnational capitalist modernity, the narrative appears to continually resist any impulse toward elucidation as it presents these stagy interactions only, it seems, through a form of indirection, through ornate and cascading prose that continually shuttle between heterogeneous elements of analogy, imagery, and intertextuality. Yet understanding the manner in which Barnes formulates social attachment in *Nightwood* is crucial for critical queer sociality and literary imaginative possibility, as it provides contour to the historical demands of queer affiliation and gestures toward alternate understandings of the experience of modernity.

During a long disquisition on the night in the “Watchman, What of the Night?” chapter, Matthew famously remarks, “I have a narrative, but you will be put to it to find

it” (*Nightwood* 104).¹ Much the same could be said about locating meaningful social attachments in the novel. This perception of the lack of strong social bonding in *Nightwood* is evident in the history of its critical response, irrespective, it would seem, of ideological perspective or method of analysis. Early scholarship, beginning with T.S. Eliot’s introduction to the novel but continuing to Joseph Frank and Kenneth Burke, focused on Barnes’s style, aligning it with the formal experimentation and tropology of modernism, reading into it similar concerns and parallel structures, most significantly what Frank called “spatial form.”² A rather standard reading of modernist tradition might suggest that *Nightwood* is an exemplar of a tendency to distance the unruly chaos of modernity within the controlling, ordering principle of autonomous literary form. To this point, in his introduction, Eliot writes that “the characters are all knotted together ... by what we may call chance or destiny, rather than by deliberate choice of each other’s company,” and thus reflect “the deeper design” of “human misery and bondage which is universal” (Introduction xx, xxi). These insights into the agency of the characters, the nature of their affiliations, and the broader historical underpinnings of each, were made as Eliot praised *Nightwood* as a “great achievement of a style” (Introduction xxii). Through these early, formalist readings *Nightwood* is not only gingerly slotted into the canon of modernism, the novel becomes a particularly strong voice of what Eliot took as the malady of modernity: universal misery at the loss of tradition and community.

Not surprisingly, the feminist scholarship of the last thirty-five years seriously questions not only the emphasis on style of Eliot’s praise but also his universalizing of the experiences depicted in the novel. Such “attention to style,” argues Shari Benstock, “con-

stituted a way of sidestepping ideological questions that discussion of subject matter might have entailed” (244). Early feminist scholarship took up in various ways the subject matter of *Nightwood*, praising the novel’s frank treatment of lesbianism and its critique of the family and patriarchy, yet, and this is the crucial point, still lamenting the inability to read positive social bonds, particularly between women. As Jane Marcus writes of Robin, “The agency of her desire and its refusal to be fixed as the desired object of lesbian lovers or husband, contained in motherhood, or controlled by T.S. Eliot’s or other critics reading of her as doomed, damned, or pathologically placed as a medical case study is a textual triumph” (237). Yet this same textual triumph leads to a concomitant inability to see social attachments. For example, Judith Lee points out that while *Nightwood* undermines such disciplinary logics as lesbian lover, wife, or mother, it nonetheless “denies . . . the possibility of giving voice to (feminine) silence” (218). In an odd twist of the history of criticism on the novel, neither a formal approach nor one focused on content produces a sustained description of significant social attachments in *Nightwood*.

The number of critics who echo in minor and major keys these alternating sentiments about Barnes’s depiction of social attachment in the early twentieth century is staggering.³ Yet I would like to turn more specifically to two queer readings of the novel, for the debates within (literary) queer politics have placed increased pressure on the value of sociality and the definitions of social attachments. Moreover, taken together these two essays illustrate some of the competing discourses around the politics of queer sociality, and triangulate the core aspects this essay will take up within its investigation of social attachments in the novel: forms of representation, modern capitalism, and gender and sexuality.

To begin with, then, Phillip Brian Harper claims that the historical suppression of sexual politics and queer sociality in the 1930s limits the manner in which Barnes can articulate same-sex affiliation and intimacy, forcing her to submerge any articulation of such a particular collective experience beneath a generalized, or to use Eliot's word, universalized, modernist malaise. As a result, for Harper, two salient points emerge in *Nightwood* around the question of communal bonding. First, the novel depicts the bonding between women and their sexual attachments as incomplete and ineffective. Similar to Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, *Nightwood* uncritically depicts relationships between women as either loss or narcissism. Nora, after all, appears to confirm both suppositions when she says that "a man is another person—a woman is yourself, caught as you turn in panic; on her mouth you kiss your own. If she is taken you cry that you have been robbed of yourself" (*N* 152). Given such a narcissistic depiction of same-sex attraction and Nora's inconsolability after Robin leaves her, Harper suggests the novel fails to articulate an "effective" interpersonal bond between women. Second, Harper claims that Barnes transfers the "sexuopolitical" aspects of the novel—its gendered, same-sex sexual dynamics—into a generalized malaise about the twentieth century, hence removing from the novel the specificity of queer women's experiences within modernity. Nonetheless, Harper goes on to claim, the political unconscious of the text, "the specific sexuopolitical import of her text beneath the representation of a generalized existential malaise," is evident: *Nightwood* simultaneously exhibits the larger historical suppression of queer women's relation to each other and to modernity as it is itself involved in that very suppression (75). Ultimately, he will con-

clude that the women of *Nightwood* are incapable “of forging an effective collective feminine subjectivity through their relations with one another” (74).

While Harper’s reading functions under the assumption that a critical queer reading of the novel should entail a collective and historical engagement, Scott Herring, in his more recent reading of *Nightwood*, claims that the ornate formal strategies of the novel allow “nonnormative subjects [to] escape the imperative to embrace a collective sexual history by putting a stranglehold on this pervasive ideal,” asserting that Barnes “dismisses sociality *in toto*” (155, 182). Turning first to her early journalism, Herring claims that Barnes begins here to work out the formal strategies that will be developed and focused in *Nightwood*. Herring draws a parallel conceit between this early journalism and the later novel, one where Barnes, for example, promises to take readers slumming to bohemia or Chinatown, but then, through formal strategies of deferral or analogy or in some cases simply describing something else entirely, fails to reveal the promised object, a kind of literary bait and switch. In this sense, in *Nightwood*, though not actually using this analogy, Herring sees Barnes’s formal technique as equivalent to Frau Mann taking Felix to the party hosted by Count Onatorio Altamonte in the opening chapter, a party that never really happens, hosted by a person who is not really a Count. Through such a technique, Herring asserts, Barnes does not seek to valorize a queer underworld, to represent the unrepresented or oppressed, as Joseph Allen Boone suggests in his reading of the novel, because so doing would mean trafficking in the very language and tropes and oppression that are found in the legal and psychological discourses of the larger social context of the novel.⁴ “It would instead be more accurate to say,” Herring continues, “that she was suspicious of

prescriptive identity categories and the communal compulsions that structured them” (155). Yet like Harper, though with different political significance, the final assessment on sociality in the novel is the same: “This night is deeply anticomunitarian” (181).

Despite this nearly uniform assessment of the lack of significant social bonding in *Nightwood*, quite literally right in the middle of the novel is the following observation from Matthew. At this moment in the story, Robin has just left Nora, and she, in desperation, seeks out Matthew for comfort and advice about the night, which, as Nora notes, ““does something to a person’s identity”” (*N* 87). ““Let a man lay himself down in the Great Bed,”” Matthew says, referring to the night, ““and his “identity” is no longer his own, his “trust” is not with him, and his “willingness” is turned over and is of another permission. His distress is wild and anonymous. He sleeps in a Town of Darkness, member of a secret brotherhood”” (87). It is this declaration of “a secret brotherhood”—a speech act, as it were, spoken to a woman whose “distress is wild” and whose “willingness” and “trust” have been turned over to Robin and spoken by a figure whose own “distress is wild” and whose “identity” is not his own—that seems utterly missed by so many critics. The night, to be sure, produces a transformation in the individual, stripping identity, trust and will. Yet in so doing, the night also produces a collective encounter between such figures, a transformed sociality, “a secret brotherhood.” Such a dynamic explicitly emerges at Count Onatorio Altamonte’s party, when Felix inquires as to whether the Count is really a Count, and Frau Mann replies, ““Am I what I say? Are you? Is the doctor?”” (28) In coming together precisely through this shared ambiguous identity, the characters in *Nightwood* articulate what Michel Foucault terms the ethos of modernity. Modern man, Foucault argues,

“is not the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth; he is the man who tries to invent himself. This modernity does not ‘liberate man in his own being’; it compels him to face the task of producing himself” (“Enlightenment” 42). That is, modernity for Foucault requires the alteration of identity, trust and will, rejecting any “hidden truth” of “man in his own being.” Instead, as Foucault suggests, a new sensibility emerges: the task of producing oneself, an aesthetics of self. Importantly, Foucault goes on to claim, to perform such a task, one must imagine one’s historical situation “otherwise than it is, and to transform it not by destroying it but by grasping it in what it is” (“Enlightenment” 41). To grasp one’s present, one must be sensitive to what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick terms the historical “contests for discursive power” that shape the present (*Epistemology* 11). This in turn requires sensitivity to the encounter between different competing elements, so as not to “trace the gradual curve of evolution but to isolate the different scenes where they engaged in different roles” (Foucault, “Nietzsche” 369). The ethos of modernity for Foucault becomes a strategy, as Sedgwick will in turn suggest, that reorganizes preexisting relations, structures of power, and definitional frames, to produce the “way out” of the existing order of things (“Enlightenment” 35).

The queer sociality of *Nightwood* emerges in the sharing, or brotherhood, of this aesthetics of self, in the re-conception of social attachments based not on identity or origin, nor on refusing the question of sociality altogether (destroying it, in Foucault’s words), but on understanding the complex manner history has “set the terms” (in Sedgwick’s words) for the very possibility of attachment (*Epistemology* 11). These forms of sociality, specified in *Nightwood* as what I’ll term the encounter of a shared aesthetics of self, present an

history of the present by mapping out the competing logics of identity, sexual definition, history, and representation, that frame the very definitions of relation. Most importantly, the encounter of a shared aesthetics of self in *Nightwood* produces a method of critique that is attuned to the pervasive, intertwined, and multiple dynamics of broadly conceived social definitions, rejecting any autonomous, even if supposedly critical, understanding of sexuality. As David L. Eng, J. Jack Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz argue, “the political promise of the term [queer] reside[s] specifically in its broad critique of multiple social antagonisms, including race, gender, class, nationality, and religion, in addition to sexuality” precisely because “sexuality is intersectional, not extraneous to other modes of difference” (1). *Nightwood* presents an extraordinary model of just such a critical queer being in the world, one that, as Brian Glavey suggests, provides a way to understand the encounter between the negativity of critique and the utopian imaginings of social transformation. But it is still Barnes’s rich literary practices where this critique is most evident. Here, Barnes’s emphasis on intertextuality and on elaborate and cascading imagery and metaphors detail the catachrestic vibrations between gender and sexuality within the larger differentiation of the social under modern capitalism, a focus that stresses the inseparability of the sexual, the gendered, the economic, and the social. To invert Jane Marcus’s reading, then, it is not the incoherence of *Nightwood* that is a triumph of critique, but the manner in which Barnes specifies and outlines the range of social demands experienced by gendered-same-sex affiliation, especially as it relates to modern capitalism. With only a few exceptions, Barnes’s critique of capital has been severely overlooked.⁵ Through a collective aesthetic of self that involves a renewed desire for relationality, *Nightwood* stages the encounter be-

tween what historically counted *as* forms of affiliation, and in the process produces an aesthetically oriented collective sensibility, at once transient, intimate, and public.

While characters such as Nora retain a type of national specificity—her face conjured images of the America West in the minds of others—*Nightwood* is a significantly international novel, comprising a set of mixed nationalities: American, Irish, German, Italian, and of course Count Altamonte who is “related to every nation” (17). In addition, the novel transpires in a transatlantic context. It begins in Vienna with the birth of Felix, son of a Christian German and a Jewish Italian. Later, Felix finds his way to Berlin where he meets up with the circus performers and is introduced to Matthew and Nora, only to inexplicably arrive in Paris, where the Doctor lives. In Paris, Felix meets Robin, an American, and their eventual marriage initially takes them back to Vienna. After leaving Felix, Robin’s relationship with Nora sends her throughout Europe and America, again settling in Paris. The subsequent affair with Jenny ultimately takes Robin back to the United States, where the novel ends. As a result of all this movement, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg argues that “everyone in *Nightwood* is homeless, afloat” (277). Yet this drift should not be read in a pejorative sense, but as part of the criticality of Barnes’s transformative imagining. Such drift, that is, should be read in stark contrast to the increasingly strict logics of national sovereignty and citizenship in the 1930s, logics at once supported and undermined by the tenuous movement of global capital after the First World War. In other words, the movement of the characters in *Nightwood* mirrors the turbulent interwar years, where isolationist economic policies and national self-interest grated against the needs of global policies to stabilize currencies and unemployment. In this sense, Nora retains here national specificity

despite her movement while Count Altamonte appears to be the embodiment of transnational flux. Yet more specifically, while the characters do appear unmoored from predictable markers of “home”—the family or the nation—it is through this very drift that Barnes accentuates the need to analyze the structures and assumptions within available forms of affiliation, privileging neither an isolationist (nationalist) mentality nor a borderless free-for-all of global capital. Such an analysis emerges in Barnes’s treatment of the various forms of attachment.

The first way Barnes accomplishes this is by interrogating the structure of the family as the primary source of intimacy and social stability. This form of intimacy manifests most explicitly in the desires of Felix and Nora, in their wish to produce a “museum of their encounter” with Robin. In both cases, the “museum” takes the form of the private couple, one future-oriented, with a “child” as the key expression for both their bond and the future. In critiquing this form of attachment, Barnes exhibits the ethos of engagement with the standard narratives of intimacy and communal attachment often centered on the family, especially with its assumptions around gender, privacy, and sexuality. In this manner, Barnes actualizes, as Sedgwick notes, “the most productive strategy (intellectually, emotionally)” for addressing the discourses of intimacy: “to *disarticulate* them one from another, to *disengage* them—the bonds of blood, of law, of habitation, of privacy, of companionship and succor—from the lockstep of their unanimity in the system called ‘family’” (*Tendencies* 6, italics original).

Orphaned from his own Jewish history and denied recognition by Christian history, Felix “hunted down his own [social] disqualification” by obsessing about “what he termed

‘Old Europe’: aristocracy, nobility, royalty” (12, 11). “He felt,” we are told, “that the past might mend a little if he bowed low enough, if he succumbed and gave homage” (12). This homage to the past was not only historically oriented, it also involved a projection into the future, a future that, in Felix’s view, took the form of a son. As Felix tells Matthew, “to pay homage to our past is the only gesture that also includes the future.” When Matthew replies, “and so a son?” Felix answers, “for that reason” (43). Yet this son must bear considerable social responsibility: he must be one “who would feel as [Felix] felt about the ‘great past’” (42). And so when Felix meets Robin, “it was as if the weight of his life had amassed one precipitation” (46). In preparation for a son, Felix, at the beginning of his romance with Robin, literally takes her to sites of monumental history—museums and galleries—seeking to produce the spark of resemblance between the site, his desire for inclusion in such history, and his desire for a son with Robin. After their marriage they briefly go to Vienna where he continues his indoctrination, taking her to the *Kammergarten* (the former Habsburg residence) and talking to her endlessly about Emperor Francis Joseph and Charles the First.

Yet, we are told, in his “effort to acquaint [Robin] with the destiny for which he had chosen her—that she might bear sons who would recognize and honour the past”—Felix merely repeats “the tragedy of his father” (49, 48). Like Felix, the son would love the past as he did, and so such love would mean that the future would include Felix as well, in the form of his son and his love. However, in making the child the logical outcome of his desire for inclusion in official, monumental history, Felix reinforces a particular type of sexual economy as the only legitimate method for access to social and historical represen-

tation, one Lee Edelman calls “reproductive futurism.” This “reproductive futurism,” the privileging of the child as the bearer of future social cohesion, Edelman argues, “preserv[es] in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations” (*No Future 2*). Barnes’s reference to a son as a precipitate is telling in this regard. On the one hand, imagining sexual reproduction as simply a chemical reaction potentially moves reproduction outside of the “natural” domain of heteronormativity. That is, any number of combinations of liquids could produce a precipitate; there is no “absolute privilege.” And more abstractly, if a precipitate, any homage to the past, could result from a variety of liquids, then the future could also result from any combination or form of “communal relations.” Yet Barnes is clear Felix does not see it this way. Instead, the image of a solid forming out of liquid may be an apt metaphor for Felix’s reactionary response to his disqualification and to the indeterminant flux of modernity, seeking to find some secure ground as “all that’s solid, melts into air,” as Marx and Engels said. While his relationships with others, particularly with the circus performers and Matthew, do not follow this logic, with Robin, Felix is unable to conceive of any mode of affiliation but the heterosexual reproductive family, the bastion against the encroaching assault of modernity, as the agent for future historical representation and social organization, a future that would in turn retroactively, and tautologically, validate such a structure of intimacy and security. As Roderick Ferguson argues, “Basing the fundamental conditions of history upon heterosexual reproduction and designating capital as the disruption of heterosexual normativity did more than designate the subject of modern society as hetero-

normative. It made the heteronormative subject the goal of liberal and radical practices” (*Aberrations* 10). That is, Felix counters his own disqualification by “rendering unthinkable,” in Edelman’s words, any genuinely alternate social alchemy. Instead, he counters his disqualification by turning to patriarchal nationalism, one that mirrors many of the economic policies of the period. And this, we are told, is his “tragedy.” The novel’s most poignant critique of this logic is not Robin’s leaving Felix and their son Guido, but the image of Robin “standing in the centre of the floor holding the child high in her hand as if she were about to dash it down” (*N* 52). But at this moment she does not dash it down. That would have to wait.

In Nora’s case, she literally creates her own museum dedicated to her relationship with Robin by collecting eclectic items from around the world. Initially such collecting appears to be a reclaiming of the forgotten or repressed, a revaluing of their “disqualification,” in Felix’s terms. Here is how their apartment is described:

In the passage of their lives together every object in the garden, every item in the house, every word they spoke, attested to their mutual love.... There were circus chairs, wooden horses bought from a ring of an old merry-go-round, venetian chandeliers from the Flea Fair, stage-drops from Munich, cherubim from Vienna, ecclesiastical hangings from Rome, a spinet from England, and a miscellaneous collection of music boxes from many countries; such was the museum of their encounter.... (61)

The objects of the home are overwhelmingly commodities associated with the feminine: mass culture, the exotic, entertainment, and sentiment. Like Baudelaire’s rag-picker, their home could be seen as a collection of the refuse of one prevalent conception of modernity where the feminine (and female sexuality) is set against the ordered, mechanized masculine modern. As with Felix’s chemical metaphor, the material of Nora’s home may be ini-

tially read, following Rita Felski, as an example of the way “women drew upon, contested, or reformulated dominant representations of gender and modernity in making sense of their own positioning within society and history” (21). The material of Nora’s home, that is, could be understood as a scene of the encounter between competing conceptions of modernity, and the gendered formulations that attend them.

However, once in Nora’s home these objects lose their critical potential and ossify, becoming a new version of the permanent record of history that the very term museum signifies. Rather than revealing the demands to create new forms of attachment and intimacy, these collected objects function as proof of a specific type of love. As Walter Benjamin notes of the relationship between collector and objects collected, so too with Nora and her museum: it is “not that [these objects] come alive in him; it is he who lives in them” (“Unpacking My Library” 67). In fact, this living inside of her museum was so integral for Nora’s love that “she went about disturbing nothing; then she became aware that her soft and careful movements were the outcome of an unreasoning fear—if she disarranged anything Robin might become confused—might lose the scent of home” (*N* 61). The museum, then, becomes a way for Nora to preserve, to institutionalize, this “scent of home.” But more than simply preserving the *scent* of home, something that one might assume would remain even had she moved a chair or vase, Nora conceives of this *immobile* preservation in contrast to Robin’s nightly wanderings and encounters with others. The “scent of home,” here, becomes reduced to a static domestic couple, whose value and significance is derived from its autonomy and privacy. This perspective couldn’t be further from Benjamin’s interpretation of Baudelaire’s rag-picker as a historical materialist, collecting the de-

bris of transnational modernity, presented and juxtaposed as a dialectical image (“Paris of the Second Empire”). Nor does this collection of objects remain the “things that stand out with uncanny emotional value,” as Dianne Chisholm argues, that “expose the moral impoverishment of political economy,” with its conflation of sexual intimacy with the private, autonomous commodity (“Obscene” 184). The genealogical potential of this encounter is evacuated. Instead, like Felix’s reactionary admiration for “Old Europe” and his desire for the solid grounding of a son, Nora’s apartment stands as a fortress against modernity, against sexual and social uncertainty. In this way, the “museum of the encounter” echoes the residence of Joris-Karl Huysmans’s Des Esseintes who, out in the streets of Paris, “could detect such inveterate stupidity, such hatred of his own ideas, such contempt for literature and art and everything he held dear, implanted and rooted in these mean mercenary minds, exclusively preoccupied with thoughts of swindling and money-grubbing ... that he would go home in a fury and shut himself up with his books” (25). Des Esseintes’s home, here, is clearly marked as a simple turn away from capital, a fantasy space set against the hatred and stupidity of modernity. Similarly, but with a completely counter-valence Barnes establishes the “museum of the encounter” as sanctuary, yet, unlike Huysmans, importantly traces out the strict gender and sexual norms associated with this particular encounter with capitalist modernity.

That is, the eccentricity, the obscurity, and the forgotten of the “museum” became for Nora and Felix, as it would for Des Esseintes, “ardent aspirations towards an ideal, towards an unknown universe, towards a distant beatitude, as utterly desirable as that promised by the Scriptures” (Huysmans 75). Yet in so doing, Nora and Felix embrace a

protective logic that is inseparable for the very logic they find threatening. They turn to the supposedly safe arenas of domestication, reproduction, and autonomy that they feel is under threat by the disorienting dynamics of modernity, without any critical perspective that those very arenas are produced, managed, and fostered *by* capitalist modernity. “One of the unforeseen paradoxes of national-capitalist privatization,” Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner argue, “has been that citizens have been led through heterosexual culture to identify both themselves and their politics with privacy” (193). And so, while the museum of the encounter stands as a fortress against the chaos of modernity, the museum actually reproduces the very core of this chaos in the form of the commodity fetish. As Marx argues, the commodity can no “longer be regarded as the product of the labour of the joiner, the mason, the spinner, or of any other definite kind of productive labour. Along with the useful qualities of the products themselves, we put out of sight both the useful character of the various kinds of labour embodied in them, and the concrete forms of that labour” (*Capital* 305). That is, the commodity erases the material conditions of its own emergence, its history as a product of communal labor and interaction, and its value as a useful object. Similarly, especially with Nora, the museum, set against the streets where Robin wanders, attempts to erase the social dimensions of (Robin’s) desire, the material sites that foster it, and the innumerable other “laborers” who help produce it. Instead, to use Marx’s words, Nora’s desired relationship with Robin has “absolutely no connexion with [its] physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom” (*Capital* 321). The domestic, private couple, whether heterosexual or homosexual, becomes for Barnes complicit in the larger reification of the social under capital, where the ideal of the couple stands as a

commodity fetish. Such a conception transforms the museum into a type of social bonding that, in Jean-Luc Nancy's words, "played back to itself, through its institutions, its rituals, and its symbols, the representation, indeed, the living offering, of its own immanent unity, intimacy, and autonomy" (9). By keeping things as they were, Nora exhibits a desire to "play back" their intimacy through the static collection of objects of their home. And Nora's fear of disturbing those objects was actually a fear of disturbing the unity, autonomy, and privacy, she had envisioned for their love. To reject the museum is to reject the unity and autonomy (in Nancy's words) or the immaterial, distant beatitude (in Huysmans's words) of the commodity; it is to reject any denial of the social character of desire and intimacy.

Furthermore, like Felix, whose son functions as the social institution and symbol that reinforced his own sense of futural historical intimacy, Nora and Robin share a "child" of their own in the form of a doll. Though this "child" is shared between two women, the function of the "child" suggests a version of the melancholia of gender, the internalization of heterosexual regulation, outlined by Judith Butler.⁶ And this regulation, together with Edelman's critique of the child, becomes a kind of melancholic "reproductive futurism." "When a woman gives [a doll] to a woman," Nora tells Matthew, "it is the life they cannot have, it is their child, sacred and profane" (*N* 151). With Felix, his son (ideally) embodies the future he desires; with Nora, the doll embodies the impossibility of a future (reproductively conceived) between women lovers. However, in conceiving of the doll—their child—as the "life they cannot have," Nora remains under the shadow of "reproduc-

tive futurism” since she cannot imagine any form of attachment or affiliation—a “life”—with Robin without the futural mediation of a “child.”⁷

Nora’s inability to imagine a life with Robin is in part the result of her conception of same-sex desire as socially nonreproductive, inutile. As we have seen, Nora describes female same-sex relations in narcissistic, near masturbatory terms: “‘A man is another person—a woman is yourself, caught as you turn in panic; on her mouth you kiss your own’” (151). Moreover, to further accentuate this conception, Matthew compares Robin to a paralyzed man on Coney Island who lays in a velvet lined box, above him “‘a sky-blue mounted mirror, for he wanted to enjoy his own “difference”’” (155). Such narcissistic conceptions participate in a long history of female same-sex representation, one that certainly travels through Baudelaire. In his then banned poem “Lesbos,” Baudelaire establishes the lesbian as the site of narcissistic aesthetic autonomy: “Lesbos, isle of sultry swooning nights which drive the deep-eyed virgins, enamored of their own bodies, to fondle the ripening fruits of their adolescence in their glasses, in sterile ecstasy; Lesbos the isle of sultry swooning nights” (268).⁸ Much like Matthew’s conception of Robin regarding herself in a mirror, Baudelaire situates female same-sex desire within the realm of representation and aesthetics, one turned on itself, excessively self-absorbed, eroticize yet sterile, its own justification (“Let greybeard Plato frown with his reproving eye; you are redeemed by the very excess of your embrace”).⁹ This redemption in the refusal of social utility (their sterile ecstasy) is for Baudelaire the power of the aesthetic here allegorized as female same-sex desire. And it is this historical conception, among others, that Edelman embraces as the radical negativity of queerness. However, Nora is unable to trace the gene-

alogy for her own conception of desire, unable to see the historicity of same-sex desire, and hence the very social dimensions of desire. While Nora appears unable to perceive the double bind between her conception of same-sex bonding as socially inutile and her desire for a future with Robin (the “child”), Robin certainly does.

Robin refuses both the construction of same-sex desire as inutile *and* the future predicated on a child. In a repetition of the scene with Felix, Nora comes home one night to find Robin “standing in the middle of the room in boy’s clothes, rocking from foot to foot, holding the doll she had given us—“our child”—high above her.” After a moment, Robin finally “hurled it to the floor and put her foot on it, crushing her heel into it” (*N* 156-57). In leaving Nora (and Felix and Jenny and the others), Robin simultaneously rejects the limits of reproductive futurism embodied in the child as well as the socially inutile negativity of historically conceived same-sex desire. However, as importantly, in drawing out such a clear parallel between Felix and Nora around the issue of a “child,” Barnes provides one of the crucial genealogical strands within the novel. On the one hand, Barnes highlights a paucity of imaginative options when thinking about relationality, even among supposedly nonnormative people, and thus the difficulty of getting out from under the shadow of patriarchal nationalism. On the other hand, the parallel or repetition, as Foucault notes, provides the opportunity to outline the crucial differences that emerge for specifically gendered same-sex desire. Nora and Felix face qualitatively different issues relating to family and nation, different sets of gendered histories in relation to the commodification of desire, and different associations to sexuality and capitalism. Therefore, Robin must be seen as exposing the limits of the intimacy and collective sensibility in the narrow, codi-

fied, and reified modes articulated by Felix and Nora. As Robin simply says in one of her few but typical statements: “I don’t want to be here” (60).

The criticality of an aesthetics of self becomes clearer as we continue to trace Robin as an agent that disarticulates the competing narratives of relationality, gender, and sexuality. Nearly all the characters in *Nightwood* exhibit in various ways the “gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances,” as Sedgwick notes, of queer being in the world (*Tendencies* 8). There is the circus performer Frau Mann, whose equipment and costume renders her “as unsexed as a doll” (16); Felix, whose clothing style is “tailored in part for the evening and in part for the day” (11); Felix’s mother Hedvig, who possesses the “masterly stroke of a man” (8); and Matthew, “the bearded lady” (107). Yet, as I’ve been suggesting, it will be Robin, “a tall girl with the body of a boy” (50), who is the primary vehicle for the contestation of sexual and social definition. Interestingly, though, of all the characters in *Nightwood*, Robin is given the least amount of dialogue, uttering perhaps a dozen lines, frequently only a sentence or two at a time, and sentences generally no longer than a handful of words.¹⁰ Compared to Felix, Nora, and Matthew especially, Robin is nearly silent.

This silence is emphasized in our first encounter with Robin, when she is unconscious, sprawled on a bed, rendered in the characteristically overemphasized scenic style of the novel.¹¹ In Barnes’s contorted prose, the encounter overflows with many of the markers of affiliation and intimacy already on display—privacy and publicity, visibility, gender, and desire:

On a bed, surrounded by a confusion of potted plants, exotic palms and cut flowers, faintly over-sung by the notes of unseen birds, which seemed to have been forgot-

ten—left without the usual silencing cover, which, like cloaks on funeral urns, are cast over their cages at night by good housewives – half flung off the supporting of the cushions from which, in a moment of threatened consciousness she had turned her head, lay the young woman, heavy and disheveled. (37-38)

From the very outset, the scene is charged with multiple points of signification, shuttled through cascading clauses and a digressive appositive: death and nature and sex, repression and forgetting, domestication and violence, and ghostly presence all vie for conceptual coherence. Because of this complexity of signification, Scott Herring claims that “readers are given no information about her identity” (183). Yet, quite the opposite is happening. The sentence is structured in reverse, making the reader encounter this long list of objects and images, the historical “inventory of the individual” as Benjamin would have said it, sliding between and around the clauses, before we finally get to the “actor” and the “action” of the utterance, only to find it in the passive voice, as if all this material acts upon the as yet unnamed Robin (“On Some Motifs” 316). Here, rather than the fantasy of the isolated individual of private volition, someone who could possibly have an uncontested identity, Robin is genealogically rendered through the objects of the room, objects which themselves contain elaborate historical signification (an imagined birdcage quickly transforms into a funeral urn). However, like Herring, Monika Kaup argues that such a description renders Robin unlocatable: “The more links there are in the chain of signifiers surrounding Robin, the more unlikely it is that any of these metaphors will be taken literally, referentially” (101). While I have argued for the critical power of disarticulating narratives of family in the cases of Nora and Felix, in this description of Robin, what I am trying to describe is a different critical operation from simple indeterminacy. In contrast, I want to think referentially here, for without it, Barnes’s analysis fails to specify the histori-

cal parameters of social attachment. I'm more interested in Robin as the literal site of the encounter between completing discourses around issues of the legibility of desire, gender, and sexuality, as it plays out in a genealogy of exotic plants, funeral urns, and good housewives. That is to say, this opening scene of Robin provides the historical specificity of Barnes's cartography of social possibility, the contestations for material and rhetorical power, rather than any "discovery" of some origin or truth about Robin. Such an opening scene reinforces the sense that, as the narrator notes, Robin "was unable or unwilling to give an account of herself" without at the same time encountering such a scene as this (54).

But before turning to a closer look at this scene of Robin, I want to note that before Felix and Matthew even arrive at the hotel where Robin is unconscious, Barnes has already established a genealogical encounter associated with Robin. As Daniela Caselli notes, the hotel where Robin is staying, the *Hôtel Récamier*, may be a reference to Jacques-Louis David's 1800 painting *Madame Récamier*. However, while Caselli importantly notes this intertextual reference to David, she continues this generalized interpretative reading by arguing that "the reference inscribes [the representation of Robin] within a modernist canon of never virginal, never original" (165). In contrast to a simple play of signification suggested by Caselli, I find this reference to be an important part of Barnes's larger gendered historiographic criticism functioning in the novel. David's neo-classical portrait of Juliette Récamier, who was a successful socialite and wife of a powerful financier for the First Republic, is starkly minimal in color and organization. Madame Récamier lies upon a chaise longue in three-quarter profile, wearing a simple long white gown, a lamp at her side, in an otherwise bare room. The contrast between the dark, ambiguously formed background and

Récamier's reclined, pale body and white dress produces an odd effect where she appears to float in space, despite the presence of the sofa. This composition evokes a seductive yet austere idealized feminine beauty, a sterile *odalisque* unencumbered by adornment or relation to this world.¹² Hence, though this portrait of Madame Récamier will sharply clash visually with the "portrait" of Robin that Felix and Matthew see, even before Robin is introduced in the novel, she is situated within the history of feminine representation, one that hints at the connection between the feminine and the commodity. As a further significant subtext, Madame Récamier, like Robin, appears to have held considerable power over all who knew her. Théophile Gautier once described her as having "indescribable attraction, like the poetry of the unknown" (qtd. in Schnapper). Such a description bares an uncanny similarity to Felix's description of Robin as having "'an undefinable disorder, a sort of 'odour of memory,' like a person who has come from some place that we have forgotten and would give our life to recall'" (N 126).

Barnes continues this negotiation of the painterly representation of female beauty and sexuality immediately after the initial description of Robin with the explicit comparison of Robin to "a painting by the *douanier* Rousseau" (38). The "portrait" of Robin, then, is quite literally bound between these two references to the representation of female sexuality, the first by David and the second by Henri Rousseau. In situating Robin among exotic palms and cut flowers, the "painting by the *douanier* Rousseau" may be a reference to Rousseau's 1910 work *The Dream*. Like David's *Madame Récamier*, Rousseau's *The Dream* depicts a woman upon a sofa, again in three-quarter profile. However, in contrast to Rousseau's austere, neo-classical painting, Rousseau's primitivist portrait accentuates "the

dream” of a lush materiality of female sexuality. The painting depicts a naked woman upon a lounge situated inexplicably within a jungle setting. She appears nearly off the edge of the frame, dominated by verdant vegetation, ripe fruits, lions, birds, and snakes. A dark figure, perhaps another woman, appears in the center of the painting playing a flute of some sort. As such, Rousseau’s painting evokes a stylized fantasy of the fecundity of women, of their seductive materiality, of their connection to the exotic mysteries of the wild and the racialized Other. Yet like David’s portrait of Récamier, Rousseau’s portrait intimates a lack of connection or relation to the world even as it traffics in gender, sexuality, and commodity fetishism. As Louis Althusser notes, Rousseau’s paintings “show us isolated individuals who have no relations to each other wandering about: *individuals without encounters*” (184, italics original). If Rousseau and David have presented images of women without encounters, it is Barnes who most assuredly has. While Rousseau’s painting is visually much more aligned with the first description of Robin above, the contrasting styles of David and Rousseau, taken together, mark a crucial dimension of the encounter with the history of the representation of female sexuality, a key dynamic in Barnes’s formal reading of the history of the present.

Returning now to Barnes’s description of Robin, this tracing out of the history of the present continues. If we follow the development of the reference to the singing birds, we see that their ability to sing (or, in this case, haunt) is the result of a certain forgetting. The birds have at least two reinforcing meanings. On the one hand, they signify another way to approach the representation of history that is so prevalent in the novel, a way that is in contradistinction to Felix’s monumental history. Here, because their cage is left uncov-

ered at night, the birds (like other key nocturnal figures in the novel: Jews, queers, and the circus performers) might represent the detritus of history omitted from its official representation. One of the more telling definitions of history in the novel, mixing as it does sexuality and gender, comes from Matthew: “Legend is unexpurgated, but history, because of its actors, is deflowered” (*N* 18). In this formulation, history requires a form of expurgation that is akin to deflowering. In one way, such a formulation may simply mean that life loses its ornate bloom as it is degraded, as Matthew will say later, into proof of history; but in another way, of course, such a sexualized term as “deflowered” implies that official history functions along much the same logic as Felix’s “reproductive futurism.” And to return to Ferguson, the “actors” of history are thus necessarily heteronormative. It is appropriate, then, that this first scene with Robin should be haunted by unofficial history, even more so as she is referred to as “something not yet in history” (48). On the other hand, the singing birds are the result of a mistake by the agents of “silencing”—in this instance, “good housewives.” Here, Barnes explicitly links “good housewives”—and by extension, the domestic sphere of the private, heterosexual couple—with the silencing of all sorts of other forms of unsanctioned, unexpurgated social attachments. In other words, the policing of “good” housewives is designed quite literally to cover over and silence all other forms of desire and affiliation. Furthermore, the passage quickly transforms the birdcage into a funeral urn, linking the sound of the birds with loss and mourning, the two quintessential affects of twentieth century queer theory. Far from failing to provide a sense of Robin, Barnes constructs this first scene to accentuate Robin as a site of a whole series of encounters. From the representation of female sexuality to conceptions of history to the policing

and silencing of queer attachments, Barnes provides a precise reading of the discourse of female sexuality and social intimacy.

Yet Barnes, like James, is not interested in simply exposing these issues; her style also aims to produce new attachments. The style of *Nightwood* allows Barnes to construct a genealogical encounter between otherwise isolated or separate spheres of mid-twentieth century capitalism. Robin Blyn's recent "*Nightwood's* Freak Dandies: Decadence in the 1930s" elaborates a connection between the style of the novel and perspectives on capitalism in the 1930s. Blyn first turns to Matthew's discussion of Nikka, the *Cirque de Paris* performer, outlining the way Nikka's self-performed decadence, what Blyn terms his "aesthetic individualism," resists the discourses of social utility by continuing the ideals of aesthetic autonomy. However, Blyn notes, such autonomy, and the resistance it affords, are dependent ultimately on the logic of the perceived autonomy of the commodity. Hence, Blyn concludes: "Barnes's novel thus reveals the anarchic, subversive individualism that Bourget and Calinescu celebrate in *Decadence* as a product of liberal capitalism; from the perspective of *Nightwood*, the subject of 'aesthetic individualism' is, inevitably, the commodity fetish" (510). Unlike Herring or Kaup, Blyn connects the supposed unlocatability of Barnes's style, its social and geographic nowhere-ness, and ultimately its politics of resistance, to "the very work of the commodity fetish as it was conceived in the 1930s" (505). Yet, this reading has deleterious results for sociality: it results in "a freak show aesthetic of indeterminacy" (512). But Barnes, I've been arguing, does not adhere to either simple indeterminacy nor to an uncritical relation to the commodity fetish.

Yet such a reading, however, does bring to the fore the implicit connection between interpretations of *Nightwood* as unlocatable or indeterminant and the antisocial strand of queer thinking: both (perhaps unknowingly) adhere to the logic of the commodity. To situate same-sex desire as the symbolic or ontological other of sociality, as its inutile negative, as Edelman does, is to abstract same-sex desire, and desire in general, from the myriad practices and forms of representation it may take, isolating it in a manner that mirrors the very abstraction of the commodity. Again as Marx notes, through the process of abstraction “we see in [the commodity] no longer a table, a house, yarn, or any other useful thing. Its existence as a material thing is put out of sight. Neither can it any longer be regarded as the product of the labour of the joiner, the mason, the spinner, or of any other definite kind of productive labour” (*Capital* 305). If, however, it is a historical narrative that positions same-sex desire as a threat to the social through the very attempts to represent it—a process that Edelman himself will call “homographesis”—then Barnes concretely illustrates through her genealogical style that conceiving of same-sex desire as the other of sociality is to mystify the history of its production and experience.¹³ Instead, *Nightwood* attempts to historicize sexuality within the larger machinations of the twentieth century. In contrast to this increasingly reified world, Barnes repeatedly and explicitly insists on the interdependence of economic, sexual, and gendered understandings of the social, rejecting any “politics” of the commodity fetish as it is represented in the “aesthetic individual”; the inutile, narcissistic lesbian; the idealized feminine beauty of David; the private couple; or the “reproductive futurism” predicated on the heterosexual family and child. In each case, the protective or disruptive power comes from, as Blyn notes, the power of commodity fetish-

ism. In rejecting this view, *Nightwood* stands opposed to any critical practice and theory of sociality that, as José Esteban Muñoz argues, attempts to distance “queerness from what some theorists seem to think of as contamination by race, gender, or other particularities that taint the purity of sexuality” (“Thinking beyond” 825). In this manner, the style of *Nightwood* must be read as richly descriptive of the encounters of sociality, mapping out alternate possibilities by linking, in the broadest terms, the social, the economic, the sexual, and the historical.

If Barnes’s style and her treatment of Robin foreground a genealogical encounter with the pervasive dimensions of gender and sexuality under mid-twentieth century capitalism, the novel also enacts a desire for alternate possibilities, one such possibility is what Matthew terms a “secret brotherhood.” We see this most clearly with Felix and the circus performers. For the circus performers like Frau Mann, whose title was Duchess of Broadback, a critical ethos emerges, as with Robin, through an engagement with the multiple discourses around gender, sexuality, and the body. We are told that Frau Mann’s work on the trapeze transforms her body: we learn that “her legs had the specialized tension common to aerial workers” (*N* 15); that “something of the bar was in her wrists” (15); that “the bulge in the groin where she took the bar ... was as solid, specialized and as polished as oak” (16); and finally that “the span of the tightly stitched crotch was so much her own flesh that she was as unsexed as a doll” (16). Such a self-creation, the result, it must be emphasized, of her “trade,” “preserved her,” as “the needle that had made one the property of the child made the other the property of no man” (15, 16). In so doing, Frau Mann exhibits a form of labor that, as Marx suggests, “at the same time changes [the worker’s] own

nature” (*Capital* 344). In other words, the labor of Frau Mann’s aesthetics of self, one clearly engaged with the materiality of her life, establishes a mode of criticality and resistance that is not predicted on autonomy or isolation, but on transforming both “the external world” and one’s “own nature,” as Marx suggests (*Capital* 344). In fact, one could say that the critical labor of Frau Mann is unalienated, and that it takes on the character of “work” outlined by Hannah Arendt, and developed by Matthew Tinkcom and Meg Wesling to illuminate camp and drag performance. As Tinkcom summarizes Arendt’s distinction between labor and work: “labor is characterized as the ongoing, repetitive, dull task of scratching out a life from the world, but work appears in the acts by which humans create for themselves something recognizably outside of themselves by which they can know their relation to labor” (11). In Frau Mann, we see how the work of an aesthetics of self, by enumerating the completing discourses of the self, resists the dynamics of capitalist alienation, the reifying of gender and sexuality and labor within the experience of sociality, and which, in Wesling’s words, “introduces myriad forms of social activity that go beyond subsistence and reproduction” (108). Frau Mann’s critical work in the world produces external relations by which she comes to understand herself in relation to the world, a relation that produces a future set of possibilities, but a future not predicated on, rather literally, “reproduction.” “To make oneself in such a way that one exposes those limits,” Butler argues, “is precisely to engage in an aesthetics of the self that maintains a critical relation to existing norms” (*Giving an Account* 17). In this way we see how Barnes is invested in the materiality of the encounter, in the making of social relation different from

what exists. And this is a crucial aspect of her literary imaginative possibility and depiction of a queer experience of modernity.

Felix too recognizes the importance of this aesthetics of self when he declares, “One’s life is peculiarly one’s own when one has invented it” (*N* 125). Denied access to the monumental history he adores, Felix constructs his own sense of self, like his father before him, out of the collection of fragmented objects in his home and the rumors told to him from an aunt. Like his father, he assumed the title of Baron, and held a fraudulent coat of arms had he ever needed “proof” of his identity, and a portrait of his “grandparents,” who were really nothing more than “two intrepid and ancient actors” who happened to pose for a cheap painting found in a resale shop, and whose “likeness was accidental” (9-10). Yet, importantly, unlike his father, who, we are told, “cut off from [his] people by accident or choice, finds that [he] must inhabit a world whose constituents, being alien, force the mind to succumb to an imaginary populace,” Felix “had neither to be capable nor alien” among the circus performers, even though their desires utterly diverged from his own (5, 14). In sharing a dynamic of self-cultivation, Felix is able to share an intimate bond with the circus performers: The circus performers “took titles merely to dazzle boys about town, to make their public life (and it was all they had) mysterious and perplexing, knowing well that skill is never so amazing as when it seems inappropriate. Felix clung to his title to dazzle his own estrangement. It brought them together” (14). It is important to note, then, that Felix and the circus performers are brought together not because they “resemble” each other, as Nancy argues, “as a portrait resembles an original,” but through a shared interrogation of their historical situations (33).¹⁴ In this way, just as Felix creates a

family out of a forgotten portrait, he and the circus performers create social attachment, not from a shared identity, but through the same process of self-creation. They each enact a genealogical ethos similar to Robin's, one also given a particularly social and historical resonance through its focus on issues of secrecy and exposure, naturalism and performance, commerce, intimacy and excess—all of which were already the markers of early twentieth century discourses of (homo)sexuality, and explicitly entwined with the sexualized phrase “to dazzle boys about town.”

This aspect of “dazzling” is crucial for Barnes's reconception of the material sociality of desire. As Glavey points out, syntactically, Barnes equates the circus performers' dazzling of boys about town with Felix's dazzling of his estrangement. While Glavey is interested in dazzling as an aesthetically empowering “provisional self-defense,” I am interested in the way such syntactical symmetry results in a new parallel structure of desire (752). If the circus performers' “dazzling” carries a sexual connotation so too through the parallel structure does “dazzling” one's estrangement. That is to say, Barnes equates the desire for “relations” with boys about town with Felix's desire for historical and social intimacy. In both cases, Barnes suggests, desire is intricately *bound* to the question of sociality and history, rather than standing outside them, and that this social desire is performed publicly, “inappropriately,” and mysteriously (that is, outside of preexisting forms). Moreover, the aesthetics of self practiced by Felix and the circus performers produces the possibility for new forms of desire, for imitative and initiative potential, a type of futural projection. As Muñoz argues, “Queerness as utopian formation is a formation based on an economy of desire and desiring. This desire is always directed at that thing that is not yet

here, objects and moments that burn with anticipation and promise” (*Cruising Utopia* 26). We see in the syntactical parallel a shared desire for a queer promise of a materially transformed external world and self. And so this is Barnes at her most explicit about reformulating sociality along the axis of an aesthetics of self: by conceiving of desire as an integral part of reinvesting in one’s estrangement from the dominant nationalist or medical or social logics *Nightwood* neither rejects sociality nor accepts its preexisting forms. Rather, it engages social contingencies as a particular practice of aesthetic life that allows Felix and the circus performers to create an intimate form of social attachment: “It brought them together.”

Here, no longer confined to the immobile, private spaces of the home or the teleology of marriage or child, nor the autonomy of the commodity, the encounter takes place in public, in streets and cafés, suffused with desire for relation. What we find here, as Berlant and Warner argue, is a transformation of the “possibilities of identity, intelligibility, publics, culture, and sex that appear when the heterosexual couple is no longer the referent or privileged example of sexual culture” (187). The material spaces of cities become a recognizable terrain for meeting, learning, sharing, sex, and gossip. *Nightwood* is just such a series of encounters. Streets, taverns, cafés, churches, salons, circuses, all function as sites of Barnes’s genealogical analysis of the present, which becomes at the same time, anticipatory images of sociality. And, yet, these material sites are also part of the development and expansion of capital. While they provide a critical, mobile counterpoint to the “museum of the encounter,” they are not outside capital. Instead, these sites provide the material framework to dramatize a collective aesthetic of self, a form of sociality that, as Paul

Gilroy suggests, produces its “own critical, intellectual, and moral genealogy in a partially hidden public sphere of its own” (38). This genealogy, however, is not separate from capital, but nonetheless illuminates a critical perspective of the particularly queer experience *of* capital through the encounter a narratives of family, privacy, reproduction, the future, and labor.

Moreover, we can connect this “partially hidden public sphere” and the circus performers desire to make their public lives mysterious and perplexing to Matthew’s declaration of a “secret brotherhood.” While anonymity is necessary for the secret brotherhood, it is not an ontological condition of queer negativity. Rather, it is the result of historical parameters of existing forms of relation. As Matthew notes: ““We wake from our doings in a deep sweat for that they happened in a house without an address, in a street in no town, citizenized with people with no names with which to deny them. Their very lack of identity makes them ourselves”” (N 94). For the circus performers, the taking of titles, the production of an aesthetics of self, is about *not* making oneself readable or recognizable in explicit opposition, as Matthew suggests, to issues of denial or exclusion. This is the opposite of Edelman’s desire to embrace such exclusion as the foundational antagonism of the social. Instead of the negation of the social, what is unreadable within preexisting structures of definition is that which is created anew, and this, as Foucault suggests, is a crucial, critical, dynamic of (homo)sexuality, the production of a way of life. Such a life involves anticipation and desire for new forms of encountering the shared material of social life. We see this in the various comings together of the novel, between Felix, Matthew, Nora, and Robin: an intimate desire to develop a way of life through the sharing of one’s life, but a

life one has invented, as Felix notes, outside of the preexisting markers of nation, gender, family, and sexuality.

Nightwood, then, far from indeterminant or lacking legibility, consistently creates situations where new relations can be understood. And while Barnes expressly ties these new relations to social space, her main avenue for expressing these relations is the form of the novel. Alan Singer suggests metaphor is central for this. For Singer, with conventional uses of metaphor, the metaphor “works” because the two elements of the substitution have some contextual similarity, they participate in a field of already accepted possibility. Barnes, however, deviates from this field of expectation, therefore producing metaphors that exhibit a catachrestic movement between seemingly incompatible things. Singer, following Derrida, calls such catachrestic metaphors “the form-giving distortion” of Barnes’s style that ultimately “suggest[s] new criteria of relatedness” (54, 67). This “new criteria of relatedness” is produced not simply by metaphor, but, as I’ve tried to show, by a series of formal techniques like juxtaposition, syntactic structure, and intertextuality. A focus on relatedness, then, helps clarify the genealogical import of Barnes’s intertextuality, the significant references to the history of representation in art and literature; it elucidates the slide from birdcage to funeral urn in the description of Robin, a catachrestic movement that involves a whole series of other catachrestic connections to gendered and sexuality; and ultimately, by focusing on relatedness, *Nightwood* can be read as a text that strains against the reifying tendencies of capital, a push-back that adheres to the larger project of providing a “new criteria” for understanding the interrelated dynamics of the social, gender, sexuality, and the economic, transforming the conventional field of possibility for the so-

cial. For Jacques Rancière, this genealogical transformation in an aesthetic of self is the foundation of any reconceptualization of the social. *Nightwood* can be read as a work that, in Rancière's words,

is a multiplication of connections and disconnections that reframe the relation between bodies, the world where they live and the way in which they are 'equipped' for fitting it. It is a multiplicity of folds and gaps in the fabric of common experience that change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible. As such, it allows for new modes of political construction of common objects and new possibilities of collective enunciation. ("Aesthetic Separation" 11)

Like the taking of titles, Barnes's overall formal style could rightly be described as a "multiplicity of folds and gaps in the fabric of common experience." *Nightwood*, finally, is a crucial model of sociality, not only because Barnes is a keen reader of the contemporary conditions of relatedness (family or nation) but also because she emphasizes the aesthetic possibility to transform relationality, to provide a horizon of collective engagement with things and people and places that might otherwise express only the reification of modern life, what Eliot called the panorama of "human misery and bondage." This aesthetic intervention, to be sure, is also a material intervention. As Marx suggests, "what distinguishes the worst architect from the best bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality" (*Capital* 344). *Nightwood* stands as a crucial model, a queer promise, for materialist and literary possibility, producing an encounter with the desire for new modes of relating.

To see *Nightwood* as a desire to develop a way of life, one that is shared with others, is to re-examine literary possibility and the construction of modernity. In tracing out the ways Barnes produces a genealogical social analysis, combining the economic, the sexual, and gender, I hope to show how Barnes importantly contributes to questions of his-

toriography and sociality. Moreover, in reintroducing the issues of collective experience into Barnes's work, we may begin to eliminate the teleological perspective reproduced in much of the thinking on Barnes, thinking that often focuses on her later resistance to post-Stonewall gay solidarity and on her New York reclusiveness. Instead, *Nightwood* may have more to do with the early Barnes who, as Phillip Herring shows, was deeply associated with the collective work of the Provincetown Players; or her work with *Little Review*, the anarchist, lesbian journal run by Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap; or her association with any number of communists and socialist like Burton Rascoe, the editor of *McCall's*, who originally funded her trip to Paris. In so doing, we might more easily see Barnes's engagement with the pressing concerns of sociality in the twentieth century. I have tried to understand *Nightwood* as a book about sociality, yet a form of sociality that refuses the normative strictures of the private couple or the nation, a position that has much broader implications in the contexts of the national myths of fascism and Nazism; the institutional codification of the body and its pleasures in medicine and psychiatry; and hegemonic tropes tied to love and friendship. In this way, I not only focus on same-sex attachment, but on the range and delicacy of the depiction of affiliation and intimacy in the novel across a range of characters: all elaborate a complex articulation of the possibility of meaningful relationships through a shared aesthetics of self. Yet more than simply a trait shared among the characters, *Nightwood* bringing together the materials for a renewed desire for relation, so that the narrative, like the Great Bed, forms a "secret brotherhood."

¹ Hereafter cited in text as *N*.

² See Burke, *Language as Symbolic Act*, and Frank, *Idea of Spatial Form*.

³ For only a recent sampling, see Faltejskova, *Djuna Barnes*; Caselli, *Improper Modernism*; Warren, *Barnes' Consuming Fictions*; and Bombaci, *Freaks in Late Modernist American Culture*.

⁴ According to Boone, "Barnes transposes those who generally exist on the margins (of society, of texts) to center stage" (235). However, he goes on to say, "the abandonment experienced by every citizen of *Nightwood's* inverted universe comes to define the entire human condition, which is to say that the novel transforms queerness into a universal principle" (238). As with Harper, though with a different outlook, we are left with generalized, universal, human condition.

⁵ For exceptions see Chisholm, "Obscene Modernism," and Blyn, "*Nightwood's* Freak Dandies."

⁶ As Butler argues, "the dispositions that Freud assumes to be primary or constitutive facts of sexual life [the incest taboo] are effects of a law which, internalized, produces and regulates discrete gender identity and heterosexuality" (*Gender Trouble* 82).

⁷ Freud describes melancholia as the shadow of the lost object falling upon the ego. See Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia."

⁸ The original: "Lesbos, terre des nuits chaudes et langoureuses, / Qui font qu'à leurs miroirs, sterile volupté! / Les filles aux yeux creux, de leurs corps amoureuses, / Caressent les fruits mûrs de leur nubilité; / Lesbos, terre des nuits chaudes et langoureuses" (Baudelaire 269).

⁹ Again, the original: "Laisse du vieux Platon se froncer l'œil austere; / Tu tires ton pardon de l'excès des baisers" (Baudelaire 269).

¹⁰ The narrator indicates that Robin spoke much more ("Robin spoke of [Nora] in long, rambling, impassioned sentences"), though none of this is represented for the reader (75).

¹¹ In the opening "Note" to Barnes's *The Book of Repulsive Women*, Douglas Messerli remarks that Barnes's style in *Nightwood* is "heavily reliant on the 18th and 19th century tableau vivants" (8).

¹² It should be noted that the less famous François Gerard also painted Madame Récamier in 1802.

¹³ As Edelman argues, "homographesis, in a gesture that conserves what it contests, defines as central to 'homosexuality' a refusal of the specifications of identity (including sexual identity) performed by the cultural practice of a regulatory homographesis that marks out the very space within which to think 'homosexuality' itself" (*Homographesis* 14).

¹⁴ Nancy's whole formulation of sharing is key here: "The like-being bears the revelation of sharing: he or she does not resemble me as a portrait resembles an original.... A like-being resembles me in that I myself 'resemble' him: we 'resemble' together, if you will" (33).

CHAPTER 4 AN ARCHIVE OF QUEER SOCIAL DESIRE IN *THE YOUNG AND EVIL*

I turn now to Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler's *The Young and Evil*, for, despite its neglect by queer studies and modernist studies alike, the novel makes a profound case for the encounter of experimental form and queer sociality for understanding capital. Steven Watson, in his introduction to the reprint of the text, notes that the novel belongs to another era. To fully appreciate its formal and thematic uniqueness, Watson insists, we need to suspend our "post-Beat, post-hippie, post-punk, post-gay liberation" sensibility (vii). Such a presentist sensibility would muddle the significance and scope of the novel's vision of queer habitation in New York City in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Only with a properly historical eye that connects social and textual practices can we come to terms with the importance of the novel. The novel, indeed, presents a startling exploration of queer life, one at once attuned to the social exploits of modern capitalism and the punitive and often violent restrictions on homoerotic life *and* deeply invested in the possibilities of the city, of public life, of sex, of art, and of transformative imaginings. As a historically precise record of queer life in the early twentieth century, the novel cannot be overestimated as an archive of the experience of queer modernity and as a document attesting to the desire for a socially transformative literary imaginary.¹

Yet despite Watson's assertion that "without the contributions of Tyler and Ford, our present cultural landscape would look quite different," *The Young and Evil* has received nearly no critical attention (xxviii).² This is even more peculiar given that Ford and Tyler are hardly obscure literary or artistic figures. As poets, critics, editors, novelist, and

general men about town, Ford and Tyler were deeply involved in the production and distribution of modern and avant-garde work in America, particularly in the 1930s and 1940s. As the editors of *Blues: A Magazine of New Rhythms* (1929-30) and later *View* (1940-47)—both of which published the writers Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, Paul Bowles, Louis Zukofsky, William Carlos Williams, Henry Miller, Jean Genet, and Jean-Paul Sartre; the critics Meyer Schapiro, Kenneth Burke, and Marshall McLuhan; the artists Max Ernst, Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, Marc Chagall, René Magritte, among many others—as well as their own collaborative and individual work as writers and critics, Ford and Tyler could (and should) be seen as occupying a formative role in American cultural history.³

Given this central role, the difficulty of situating *The Young and Evil* in literary history may be due to the idiosyncratic nature of the novel. Like *Nightwood*, the novel is driven less by plot than by a collage aesthetic, a depiction of interconnected scenes of queer and bohemian life in New York City. Through these scenes we learn about the love lives and artistic struggles of Karel, Julian and their acquaintances as they seek out money, food, cigarettes, alcohol, abortions, haircuts, or a bed to sleep in; characters who hustle in sex and poetry alike, who debate art and philosophy, who camp and cruise. In detailing the lives and erotic encounters of gay men, straight women, vagabond hustlers, bohemian artists and poets, drag performers, working-class men, designers, police officers, muses, the unemployed, academician-smashing communists, and johns looking for sex, *The Young and Evil* exhibits in various ways “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances,” as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes, of queer being in the world (*Tendencies* 8). We find Harold Forte “who illustrated books and bathrooms” and who

“made he said oh hundreds and hundreds of dollars and having lived in the lap of luxury in a house which he ‘did’” (*The Young and Evil* 63);⁴ K-Y who “was expansive and somewhat worthy of love. Artists drew her body. She did portraits of children” (59); Theodosia “with her disquieting beauty, sarcasm, violated eyes” (35); and the hustlers Louis who “is dirt mixed with diamond-dust” (204) and Gabriel who is “debonair, destitute, devouring” (196). Moreover, the idiosyncratic style of the novel continues with its avoidance of conventional punctuation, its explicit treatment of queer desire, its camp vernacular, its surrealist images, its elliptical and stream-of-consciousness narrative, and its promiscuous narrative point of view. That is, the neglect of *The Young and Evil* may be attributed to its heterogeneous queer avant-garde practices: the Wildean quips (“He hadn’t thought about hygiene and morals, both being easy to neglect” (19)); the bawdy double-entendres (“If you insist on being impenetrable perhaps I could come by without risk of hurting your feelings” (25)); the heavy camp (“Karel shrugged and pursed his lips. Someone had told him don’t purse your lips but he had said where would I be if I had never pursed my lips?” (28)); the avant-garde typographical play;⁵ the knowing references to Stein, Barnes, Amy Lowell, e. e. cummings, Balzac, Wyndham Lewis, Eliot, and Pound; and the literary criticism (“I approve of [Ernest Hemingway] Julian said but only because he sits on Sherwood Anderson’s right hand as well as he can” (135)).

For the few critics who have addressed *The Young and Evil*, these particularities of style and content have been the center of attention. Sam See, for instance, argues that the tension between queer social practices and high modern literary technique is a stylistic representation of the fraught construction of modern queer community.⁶ Christopher Looby,

on the other hand, connects the novel to gay epistolary practices—*The Young and Evil* began as (was inspired by) a series of letters from Tyler to Ford—practices that, rather than seeking to universalize gay desire, aim to provide alternate avenues for the historically particular expression of homosexual intimacy and desire. Juan Suárez, though, provides perhaps the most thorough consideration of *The Young and Evil*, one that connects his historically attuned reading of queer art practices to more contemporary debates about queer sociality. For Suárez, the novel's heterogeneous formal and thematic style and its explicitly queer comportment are not only contributing factors in its neglect but are also necessary components for understanding the history of queer representational strategies.⁷ Suárez importantly connects the novel's heterogeneous representational strategies to a larger history of male homosexual cultural production (figures such as Jean Cocteau, Marcel Proust, Oscar Wilde, Charles Demuth, and George Platts-Lynes), one marked by a self-conscious mixing of gay street culture with official galleries and salons, surface with depth, the public with the private, low art with high art. Despite this impulse toward combination, though, the novel, for Suárez (as it does for See), exhibits a foundational tension between its camp and high modernist sensibilities. "Camp [in the novel] is a language of communal identification," Suárez argues, "usually practiced in public spaces, whereas experimental modernism is associated with private spaces, introspection, and the portrayal of individual interiority" (195). Such a divide between public and private, communal and individual, Suárez claims, is not only textual but also constitutive of queer being in the world, illustrated, for example, by Julian's struggle between the public superficiality of a drag ball and the depth and authenticity of individual modernist interiority. Suárez extends

his reading of this tension between the communal and individual through the many broken relationships within the novel, noting the often destructive, exploitative, and violent nature of desire. Given this destructive reading of desire and the perceived intransigent line separating camp from modernist sensibilities, Suárez, like Joseph Allen Boone, sees the novel as fundamentally fragmented, where a desire to combine low and high, the street and the gallery, camp and poetry, while signaling a specifically queer life, fails to produce either enduring social or sexual bonds, and therefore fails to present a viable alternative political community within the modern city.⁸ As Suárez argues, “Queer desire lacks a communal dimension, and without the political leverage this provides, cruising, desiring, having sex, fantasizing, and camping out cannot be sublated into an articulation of community or of an alternative polity” (205). However, the queer radicalism of the novel, for Suárez, echoing Lee Edelman, resides in exactly this resistance to positivist representations of community.⁹ “It is precisely in the insistence on dissolution and undoing,” Suárez concludes, “and not in any form of coalition of marginals, that the particular queerness and (coextensive with it) political radicalism of *The Young and Evil* reside” (182).

As important as these readings are for linking textual practices to social practices, they also tend to minimize the concrete material history represented in the novel, and the material spaces of the city that are integral to the development and cultivation of the novel’s vision of queer sociality. Addressing the connections between this material history and the novel’s exploration of queer desire and sociality provides a different understanding of the heterogeneous style of the novel. From the very first chapter, in fact, *The Young and Evil* documents the material network of social spaces necessary for the creation of queer

sociality. The chapter opens at the Round Table (an actual NYC bar), and the coded language of mythical creatures (satyrs, naiads, “Lesbians”), fairy-tale characters (fairy princes, little red riding hoods, and wolves), as well as discussions of tea parties and offers of tea, all function to establish the bar as a site where patrons develop a shared way of life through the reprocessing of cultural symbols, marking out the expressly constructed nature of the encounters and, importantly, the public nature of their desires. That is, desire, contra Suárez, can also be understood as the connective tissue of the social membrane of the queer public spaces in the novel; desire becomes destructive in the novel, as I suggest later, only when it is privatized. Such material spaces—the bars, speakeasies, clubs, and cafeterias of New York City—play an integral role in the social dynamic of the novel, acting as an anchor and reminder that such establishments, in the words of Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, allow queers “to find each other, to map a commonly accessible world, to construct the architecture of queer space” (191). And again, as George Chauncey shows, such material spaces in the early twentieth century were fundamental for the construction of these shared spaces of desire and for the production of male-male desiring culture. As importantly, Chauncey notes, the development of a particularly queer life *depended* on such institutions, and such institutions, to connect back to Suárez, in turn contributed to the heterogeneous dynamic in the articulation of queer male cultural practices, crossing as they did the public and the private, high and low. In other words, the connective dimensions of desire established in the novel’s very first chapter as well as its gay argot, “a vernacular previously unknown to the pages of American literature,” according to Watson, highlight the particular material self-cultivation of the encounter (viii).

In many ways, *The Young and Evil* reads as a map to a modern queer social world. In addition to bars like the Round Table or the Doll's House, we find evaluations of various tearooms around town; we learn that Third Street, where Julian lives, is where the "beautiful boys [who] grow out of dung" would "install themselves narrowly and until 11:15 their trousers must be adjusted over the exclamation point" (*YE* 74-75); we hear about the communist cafeteria where Karel picks up a fighter and Frankie's cafeteria where he exchanges poetic advice and addresses with a police officer-poet; we partake in the cruising places of Broadway, 72nd Street, Riverside Drive, and "Fourteenth street which at five o'clock is a most vulgar street, invariably alive with the sex-starved" (29); we visit various speakeasies and clubs and a drag ball in Harlem (most likely the Hamilton Lodge ball).¹⁰ And yet while the novel details these public scenes of social desire, it also documents the increasingly strict policing of social behavior, and the frequent violent outbursts of homophobia. From Frederick's suspended sentence for solicitation to Gabriel's running from men who called out "hey faggot" to the sailor's gay panic to the collective fears of having their parties busted, the novel archives the various social and legal parameters that made the creation of queer life difficult, particularly as a result of the restrictions instituted by the Committee of Fourteen, the 1923 law that made homosexual solicitation a criminal offense, and the later 1933 law that banned "the assembly of gay people in public space" (Chauncey 173). In short, the novel chronicles the specific material practices of a diverse range of queer people who fashioned their artistic, ideological, and sexual lives through the complex matrix of cafeterias, of parties, of modern poetry, of campy insults, of prohibitions, of violence, and of the street life of New York City.

The Young and Evil, then, provides an especially rich example for a queer materialism, dramatizing the contradictory and diverse aspects of modern life as the conditions for the construction of queer sociality. In this sense the heterogeneous nature of the novel, its panoply of formal practices, must be understood as a type of queer encounter with capitalist modernity, a type of queer constellation, as Dianne Chisholm terms it, of specific locations and practices shaped in and by historical development, an encounter of queer life that details the overlapping, complicit, and contradictory nature of urban space, desire, capitalism, and aesthetics. Set at the cusp of the singular economic failure of twentieth century capitalism, when New York City would see 33% unemployment, when the League of Nations attempted to tie peace to the free market, when financial capital began to take over industrial capital, when vice squads patrolled the city attempting to manage the social disruption of capital by clamping down on the unemployed, the vagrants, the hustlers and prostitutes, when the Committee of Fourteen raided parties and bathrooms, when prohibition staggered along, *The Young and Evil* stands as an archive of the material encounter of a queer modernity.

From the epistolary beginnings of the novel to its material, formal practices and heterogeneous content, its emphasis on urban institutions and sites of interaction, its recognition of the dangers and violence attendant to social and sexual definitions, *The Young and Evil* insists on the complexly interwoven, often contradictory, nature of capitalist development, social spaces, desire, and aesthetics. This last emphasis on the aesthetic is key here, as it has been for all interpretations of the novel. *The Young and Evil* should be read as a particularly queer aesthetics of self. As Foucault argues, homosexuality should be un-

derstood as a historical impetus to “define and develop a way of life” (“Friendship” 310). Developing a critical queer way of life as an aesthetic project is, as Looby points out, fundamental to the novel. And yet this project is not simply empiricist in nature. The novel modifies its material archivist tendency—its recording of modern capitalist spaces of interaction—with a literary practice that itself attempts to foster and develop new manners of relating, to contour desire’s expression. The aesthetics of the encounter—with love, loss, violence, cynicism, art, poetry, philosophy, politics, camp, poses, and material space—constructs constellations that cut “the world up in different ways socially,” as Samuel Delany argues, “and rearrang[e] it so that we may benefit from the resultant social relationship” (187). We see this in Theodosia “finding queer,” in the alternate sexual economy of the bars, in the reinvention of the friendship between Karel and Julian, in the drag ball, and in the fight in Julian’s apartment. This differently arranged social world is the queer materialist imaginary archived in the novel. What we find is what Julian called a scrap-book. Faced with the diversity of social practices at a drag ball, Julian observed: “They all ought to be in a scrap-book Julian said. Would blood, paste and print make them stick together?” (YE 155) *The Young and Evil* becomes that scrap-book of the queer encounters with modernity, the production of a counter public, cut up, rearranged and pasted together, at once a product and a response to the material changes of capitalism. And despite Watson’s warning, it is this rich textual and thematic practice and its absence from the history of aesthetic and political debates that make the novel so important for thinking about queer social life within capitalist modernity today.

In a stunning series of encounters in “Chapter Four: The Fight,” we see clearly both the archival tendency of the novel and its queer reconfiguration of sex, capital, violence, and the social possibilities of aesthetic imaginings. I want to move through the chapter in a somewhat laboring manner to emphasize these archival transformations that take place, at the end of which I will return to more analysis. “Chapter Four” begins, then, with a campy discussion of sex and hustling between Karel and Julian at Julian’s apartment. Here, Karel recounts his sexual adventures from the night before: “There was an old thing there in evening clothes who whispered something in my ear and since I couldn’t pretend to be awfully shocked we went upstairs.... To my amazement I was told to go back and send Vincent up and to my utter exhaustion when Vincent came down there was a second request for me” (38). To compensate for his sexual exhaustion, as well for his repeated taking of the stairs, Karel is given a bracelet (“My jewel boxes will be bursting if last night should be repeated often” (38)). The chapter begins, then, as Delany suggests, with a clear moment of inter-class, sexual contact. The man in “evening clothes,” with enough money to proffer gifts, is clearly distinguished from the flopping, unemployed writer Karel. Moreover, in contrast to Henry James, this opening moment of the chapter, and the explicit depiction of sexual exchange and recompense, situates sex, and the bar where it took place, clearly within the realm of the economic, albeit, like James, as an alternative economy of gift-giving as opposed to strict payment. This opening scene of the chapter is key not only for the novel as a whole but for the way it establishes the foundation for the archival transformation that will take place in rest of the chapter.

As Karel and Julian continue to gossip about the night before, Louis and Gabriel show up, and the scene expands on this theme of sex and the economic as the conversation quickly turns to Louis's need of money for an abortion for an unnamed woman he has impregnated. This shift and introduction of Louis is key for a number of reasons. First, Louis is broke. There is never any indication in the novel that he works or even looks for official work. Instead, he hustles, flops, and begs for support. In fact, no one in *The Young and Evil* works, except for the dancer Santiago and the illustrator and interior designer Harold Forte. They all exist, like Claude McKay's vagabonds, as the unruly other of capitalist efficiency and order.¹¹ Second, that Louis exists as this vagabond and the fact that he has impregnated a woman highlight the particular range of desire and self-fashioning functioning in the novel. The tough but appealing Louis ("dirt mixed with diamond-dust") may be read as what Chauncey terms a working-class bachelor, a group of men whose sense of self functioned along lines of masculine gender performance rather than a strict hetero-homosexual dynamic. Third, the shift in the nature of desire from Karel's gift exchange at the bar to Louis's sexually reproductive economy marks a subtle but significant queer critique of capital, of the reproduction of the means of production. That is, the sexual economy of Karel at the bar does not reproduce a labor force, does not sustain existing social relations, and hence, as Foucault notes, does not "constitute a sexuality that is economically useful" (*History* 37). And finally, Louis's introduction to the scene also produces a drastic shift in tone, from playfully gossipy to crass. Describing his manner of acquiring money from people in the street, Louis provides a series of examples: "McAllen I think your poetry is lousy but I need a buck" or "the beautiful thing is the response of some of the cunts Louis

continued” (YE 40). This initial distinction in sexual economy, in sexual definition, and in economic consideration will form the crucial encounter of the chapter.

To further emphasize the difference in approach to sex and economics presented by Karel and Louis, the scene outlines the repercussions of Louis’s approach. As Louis is about to head off for a bath, Edwin, the boyfriend of a woman who loaned Louis money, shows up to collect. Edwin’s entrance to the scene sets the tone: “Edwin stepped in. Is Louis here? he asked. He was dressed in what could be called only a costume. His overcoat was open showing buff-colored pants, a velvet jacket, open collar and black windsor tie. He also had a jaw. His flat face was set to express anger but his lips were too pouty for him to appear more than poetic” (42). Here again the scene shifts in tone, becoming full-on camp hilarity. Since Louis has no money, the two agree to fight. In so doing, the scene slowly accretes more and more thematic relevance, as gay sex for gifts shifts to reproductive sex and the necessity of an abortion, and finally coalesces in a scene of violence. Yet the violence of the fight between Edwin and Louis is tempered by the campy, comic rendition of it. At the start of the fight, Edwin calmly removes much of his “costume,” laying it “in a neat pile on the table,” revealing a “muscular back and good arms” (42, 43). The fight becomes very much a show, with timed-out rounds as in a boxing match, and brief rest periods between. As it turns out, Edwin was a boxer in the navy. After soundly beating up Louis, Edwin, Gabriel and Julian exchange a bit of banter: “I hope I haven’t hurt him. But he insulted my Love, you see... I’m afraid I don’t see said Gabriel. I see said Julian but I’m sure I *don’t* know your face” (44, italics original). And with his declaration of attention on Edwin’s muscular back and good arms instead of his face, and in fact instead of the

economic situation that brought Edwin there in the first place, Julian moves the scene from the violence associated with Louis's economic exploitation and sexual reproduction back to the campy realm of same-sex desire, emphasized at the end of the fight when we are told that "Edwin was apparently more satisfied than he intended to be" (43). It is this crucial shift in tone and register, as I'll elaborate at the end of the scene, that marks the archival reconsideration of the novel.

Shortly after the eroticized fight over money, the scene shifts to a discussion of poetry: "Edwin said I'd give him a dollar myself if I had it but I have to work for my living. In those clothes? Gabriel asked. I write poetry too" (44). Seemingly shifting registers rather drastically, from sex, economics, and violence, to poetry, the scene slowly exposes the importance of such an encounter. After a few enigmatic witticisms about the merits of prose over poetry, the conversation becomes self-reflexive about language and meaning, which quickly becomes about social definition when Karel asks, "How would it feel he said to Gabriel for you to consider meaning instead of being meant?" (45) Picking up on this shift from poetic meaning to social meaning, Gabriel tells the story of the material significance "of being meant." Gabriel recounts a time when, as he was walking along the street, a carload of men "called out hey faggot!" (46) Panicked he ran and was chased, narrowly escaping into a bathroom. Gabriel's fear was not only about physical violence but sexual violence as well: "I suppose I would have been raped by those bastards" (46). Here, in a distorted mirror of the eroticized campy violence between Edwin and Louis, Gabriel details the systemic homophobic violence faced by the men in the novel, violence that can

befall even those who are “mistook,” as Gabriel says.¹² But this moment is also crucial for introducing the poetic into the encounter, an aspect the rest of the chapter will elaborate.

As the night ends, Louis, Karel and Gabriel leave Julian’s apartment, and he lays in bed and begins to wonder: “But where was paradise? What if he had something in his eye?” (48) This initial speculation concerning his eye quickly turns to fact, “what if he had something in his eye there was something in” (48). This imaginative musing about his eye sends Julian out into the night to find Karel. At Karel’s place, Julian finds him in bed with Louis. Even though Julian asks to be taken to the doctor, the conversation quickly shifts to breakfast. From here, Julian and Karel head to a diner where they meet a few men, one of whom recognizes Karel and asks him to analyze his poetry. Two important things should be noted in this latest thematic alteration. First, Julian’s imagined eye problem sends him to Karel, where the two head out to a diner. In other words, the work of Julian’s imagination (his eye problem) is linked not only to the bonding between Julian and Karel but to the network of social spaces afforded single men to dine together and to meet other men in the late hours/early morning with little social stigma. Second, while at this diner, explicit discussions of poetry return, but here, rather than leading to the violence of sexual definition and/or institutional prohibition, they act as small talk as men cruise each other. In exchange for his critique, the poet-police officer will later give Karel his address. In both instances, an eye problem and a poem, the aesthetic act is situated as the catalyst for public homosocial relationships. In this way, the chapter has come full circle, returning to an alternate sexual economy, one where sex is exchanged for advice about poetic craft rather than bracelets, and one where Karel gives rather than receives. Yet the scene is still not

without its relation to capital, they are after all in a space of consumerism, nor without sexual violence, as a “man at the table leaned over to Julian and said I would like to rape that girl there before everybody’s eyes” (54). The scene ends with a series of men returning with Karel and Julian to the waitress’s apartment where they play strip poker. “Finally everyone left the girl’s apartment except Karel and Julian and the three slept in one bed,” the narrator tells us, “Julian having forgotten about breakfast and all about his eye” (54).

In a very short sequence of events, the chapter dramatizes the range of practices and attitudes under capital, the complexly interwoven dynamics of sex, money, pleasure, poetry, and imaginative speculation, the violence of gender/sexual definition, and the importance of public institutions for male bonding. As if turning a kaleidoscope, the chapter details the range of queer life: the possibilities of an alternate sexual economy in the bars and diners, Louis’s exploitative use of others for his personal gain, the increasingly reified nature of sexual definitions, and the physical and sexual violence that may attend each. The chapter, to be sure, does not equate all these aspects of modern life. The campy fight between Edwin and Louis is not the same as the gang chasing Gabriel; nor is the poetry that can lead to social stigmatization the same as the poetry that can lead to someone’s address. The point, instead, is first to detail the encounter between it all, the contradictory manifestations of modern life, then to show the crucially important alteration of perspective between Julian’s admiration for Edwin’s arms during the fight and the systemic, material violence of sexual definitions, an alteration from being meant to the process of meaning. Most importantly, however, the chapter suggests the agent of that alteration of perspective is something like the aesthetic or camp performance. It is through this aesthetic perspec-

tive, after all, that returns the chapter to the creation of an alternate sexual economy. We can return to the series of Julian's questions that send him out into the city: "But where was paradise? What if he had something in his eye?" (48) While hardly paradise, retaining as it does gendered sexual violence, the chapter begins and ends with an emphasis on the public, material spaces of social bonding and the alternate sexual economy that they foster. And these alternate economies, Ford and Tyler suggest, have speculative imagining as their impetus, imaginings, as Delany claims, that might be a way of materially altering the social landscape "so that we may benefit from the resultant social relationship" (187). It is important to note, too, the circuitry of the aesthetic in this scene: Julian's aesthetic construction (his eye problem) is the catalyst for the encounter of poetry, violence, economics, and shared public space, a catalyst that produces material social contacts and exchanges that, in turn, resolves Julian's eye (or I) problem. That is, the aesthetic begins apart from the social (Julian alone in his apartment), only to be inserted as the vehicle of social transformation, which in turn negates its existence as a separate sphere (the bar and then three in bed together). This dynamic will return in Karel's letter to Julian discussed later.

It is also important to note that the last image of the chapter, of Karel, Julian, and the waitress in bed together, is itself an encounter of inter-gender queer bonding different from the male homosociality of the rest of the chapter. Another such encounter produces some of the most lyrically beautiful passages in the novel: "finding queer" between Theodosia and Julian. Shortly after arriving in New York and settling in a new place, Julian finds himself alone. Here, he thinks back over his youth, one suffused with punishment, isolation, and ostracization. In many ways, this scene records Julian's genealogy.

Yet when the scene shifts from moments of punishment and isolation to an encounter with Theodosia and her realization of Julian's queerness, the focus becomes one of representing queer awaking, queer learning, and queer love. Here is the narration of Theodosia learning that Julian is queer. The passage warrants a lengthy quotation:

Theodosia with her disquieting beauty, sarcasm, violated eyes. Theodosia walking in sunlight, walking in morning, walking in sun paths, walking, walking and walking and saying of age: I am not old enough, I am too young. Theodosia walking in sunlight, walking on dead grass, bearing her body through the sunlight over the dead grass. Theo. Theodosia drinking the morning, drinking the noon, Theo in moonlight, in darkness, walking, walking and saying he is queer. I wonder. Theo bearing wonder. Theodosia finding queer, saying I love you. In strange smoke-thick yellowed air of speakeasies, over wine, over liqueurs, over smoke, over dreamings, Theodosia chanting words like broken music: I love you. (*YE* 35)

But before turning to this scene, I want to make a quick detour through another moment of queer learning and queer love. In altering terms through a persistent repetition and slight alteration of syntax, this scene invokes the style of Gertrude Stein. Stein's style is prevalent in *The Young and Evil*, illustrated, for instance, early in the novel when Karel and Julian have a drink in a hotel: "This is good gin Julian said pouring the two tumblers again half full, pouring again two half full, pouring half full again two, being used to corn whiskey" (17). But more explicitly and specifically this scene with Theodosia echoes Stein's "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene." Published ten years prior to *The Young and Evil*, Ford and/or Tyler would undoubtedly have seen the piece, either as part of *Geography and Plays* or its reprint in *Vanity Fair*, if not from Stein herself, since Ford was a regular in Stein's salons in Paris. Turning to Stein's work allows for a clearer understanding of the ways Ford and Tyler aim to cultivate a type of queer bonding as a specific aesthetic practice, one that not only records the act of realizing queer love but acts as a mode of initiation

into queer love. “Miss Furr and Miss Skeene” is after all suffused with a pedagogical impulse. “Helen Furr and Georgine Skeene,” Stein writes, “were regularly living where very many were living and cultivating in themselves something” (566). The prose portrait is dominated by terms such as *learning*, *cultivating*, and *working*. Such markers, far from situating sexuality in contradistinction to community or a social network of material practices, place it more than anything else as a practice that one develops and learns from others (“living where very many were living”). In short, sexuality in “Miss Furr and Miss Skeene” is a social process. This process of self-cultivation is mirrored in the very textual practice of the portrait: “They were quite gay, they were quite regular, they were learning little things, gay little things, they were gay inside them the same amount they had been gay, they were gay the same length of time they had been gay every day” (Stein 566). Stein’s repetitive, pedagogical orientation to cultivating gay attachments parallels Michael Moon’s sense of initiation and imitation in Henry James. For both Moon and Stein, this practice of altering the connotative and denotative registers of the material of queer life, producing at times multiple or contradictory meanings, what Moon calls a “desire to ‘trap’ and re-trap ostensibly incongruous combinations of affective and aesthetic tones and registers,” becomes of mode of imitation and initiation into queer desires (8).

The Theodosia scene, then, like “Miss Furr and Miss Skeene,” should be seen as an aesthetic initiation into and imitation of queer desires. The emphasis on Theodosia walking indicates a physical manifestation of her emotional and psychic movement, as she seeks to come to terms with what she has learned. This too is matched by the overlay of sunlight and darkness. Initially she is in the sunlight of her previous notions, drinking the morning

and the noon. Yet, as the realization sets in, the clarity of the sunlight shifts to the darkness of her brief confusion, and the resistance in her claims for loving him: “finding queer, saying I love you.” However, in a subtle shift in word order that has dominated the passage, Theodosia’s claims of love shift from a protest or denial to a proclamation: “Theodosia walking in sunlight of morning bearing her pale not virgin body over spent dreamings, bearing her pale not virgin body and slim limbs, walking and walking in sunlight and saying queer, I love you” (36). Theodosia, emerging in the morning of a new day, “walking in sunlight,” importantly recognizes Julian as queer, but the subtle shift in word order from “finding queer, saying I love you” to “saying queer, I love you” is as significant. Here the grammar of the sentence establishes the referent of “you” as “queer.” In finding Julian queer, Theodosia also finds that she loves queer, and hence loves queerly.

Like Stein’s rewriting or overwriting of the term *gay*, Ford and Tyler similarly transform the relational potential of the term *queer*, and use that transformative act as a mode of cultivation and initiation. It is important, as Watson suggests, to note the historical specificity of *queer*. As Chauncey notes, *queer* designed a specific self-fashioning on the part of some men based on their homosexual interest. The term *queer* certainly functions along this logic in the novel. It is the appellation for Julian’s (and to some extent Karel’s) self-fashioning, a fashioning that also specifies his interest in Louis or Gabriel. Yet in the Theodosia scene the term also broadens out, taking on more capacious meanings and possibilities. Here, *queer* also comes to designate the possibility of love for Theodosia, to designate a transformation in relationality. The scene, in other words, is not simply about some empiricist recognition of a fact about Julian, but is also about the production of

Theodosia's capacity for love, her ability to become queer in her love. In declaring, "queer, I love you," Theodosia, through this alteration of syntax, "creates a conceptual space," as Boone argues, "for imagining a truly queer bond of love to exist" (254). Both Julian's and Theodosia's capacity for love, that is, are transformed as the alteration of syntax, grammar, and structure.¹³

Yet this declaration of queer love is itself a material act: "Theodosia will say I love you. She will say more surely: I love you through the blue smoke and yellow air of speakeasies" (*YE* 36). Here the subtle shifts in word order and structure are equally important. In the long passage above, the two declarations of love ("finding queer, saying I love you" and "Theodosia chanting words like broken music: I love you") bookend the public space of the speakeasy, yet separated first by a period and then by a colon. Grammatically, the sentences separate the public sphere from the act of articulating love. Yet in the second, repeated utterance of this sentiment, Theodosia "will say more surely" that love functions *through* the public space of the speakeasy. In so doing, the novel reiterates the crucial role of public institutions for queer encounters and queer initiation. By minute, yet crucial, alterations in syntax and construction, the scene transforms, in the words of Berlant and Warner, "the material and ideological conditions that divide intimacy from history, politics, and publics" (203). The queer love between Theodosia and Julian exists as an aesthetic practice, yet one squarely in the realm of social and material history.

This aesthetic possibility is emphasized at the end of the scene when Julian claims, "Theo will be walking, walking, walking, bearing her pale slim not virgin body her white slender limbs through my after-dreams somehow always" (*YE* 36). Here Julian's "after-

dreams” of queer bonding stand in stark contrast to the “fabrication” or “convenience” of love he dismisses later in the novel. “He was unbelieving when he saw lovers who were lovers in the complete sense and who slept night after night in the same bed. He was quite sure,” we are told, “their love was a fabrication or a convenience or a recompense and he did not believe in their love as love” (72). Interestingly, he turns to a poem for confirmation of this belief, an unattributed Laura Riding fragment: “We shall say, love is no more / Than walking, smiling, / Forcing out ‘good morning’, / And were it more it were / Fictitiousness and nothing” (73). Yet Julian’s “after-dream,” while aesthetically constructed, is not “nothing.” Instead, like James’s “after-sense” garden, Julian’s “after-dreams” of a queer encounter constructs the nonidentical, an image of the obverse of habitual existence of “Forcing out ‘good morning,’” an image of that which does not exist in reified difference of capitalism (as Theodosia initially remarks, “I almost believe, except there is a difference and if you are? then there IS a difference” (36)). Yet this initially perceived difference is overcome by the textual practice of the scene, transforming Theodosia’s resistance into confirmation, from negation to assertion. The queer love between Theodosia and Julian becomes possible through the formal practice of the encounter, a transformation across bodies, across pleasures, across material spaces. And this “after-dream” remains, too, as the textual practices within the scrap-book that is *The Young and Evil*.

Echoing the more assured queer love of the speakeasy, the novel provides another important encounter at the Hamilton Lodge drag ball in Harlem, yet one that does not sit easily as a utopian image. As Chauncey notes, the Hamilton Lodge ball was the most extravagant and most attended ball in all of New York City, drawing thousands of guests and

hundreds of drag queens, becoming a foundational institution for queer sociality. “Among outsiders,” Chauncey argues, “Greenwich Village’s reputation as a gay mecca eclipsed Harlem’s only because it was a white, middle-class world—and because Harlem’s singular reputation as a black metropolis took precedence over everything else” (245). The interracial dynamic of the ball is a crucial component of this encounter. As Suárez notes, there is an “uncomfortable colonizing edge connected with the imbalance in power and privilege between slummers and demimondaines” and the black residences of Harlem who frequented the balls (192). This imbalance of power manifested in several key ways. As Chauncey shows, many Harlemites were hostile toward white homosexuals and queens, essentially blaming them for any presence of sexual deviance within the black community of Harlem. As a result, black drag queens, homosexuals, and other attendees to the ball who lived or worked in Harlem experienced a different type of racialized homophobia. Others, however, found the inclusion of whites an opportunity to reverse the power privilege of racism, as whites entered a scene controlled by black men, and where the ball presented “whites as an object of spectacle for blacks” (Chauncey 261). Racial tensions, too, bubbled to the surface during drag performances, as whites and blacks competed for awards, prizes, and celebrity. Yet, nonetheless, the Harlem location of the ball also afforded a degree of freedom for all participants. The Committee of Fourteen did not commission its first report on Harlem until 1928, nearly twenty-five years after its establishment.¹⁴ The relative autonomy given to Harlem by the sexual vice squad—because of racism, rather than despite it—permitted the establishing and flourishing of a queer counter scene. Because of these explicit and implicit racial, sexual, and gendered ne-

gotiations, the balls existed not as an idealized site, but as a material site of the integrated aspects of queer sociality, a sociality that attracted, in the words of Abram Hill, “effeminate men, sissies, ‘wolves,’ ‘ferries’ [sic], ‘faggots,’ the third sex, ‘ladies of the night,’ and male prostitutes” (qtd. in Chauncey 257). And it is this encounter that plays out in the scenes at the Hamilton ball.

When Julian and Frederick arrive at the ball, they meet up with other Villagers and the conversation quickly turns to campy banter and insults (“Mary what you look like in that outfit he said to Julian. Look at her!” and “He had large eyes with a sex-life all their own” and “When are you going to remove your mask and reveal a row of chamber pots” (*YE* 153)). The campy banter at the ball, as with the opening scene of the novel at the Round Table, is not used as a form of double speak, shielding the participants from the prying eyes of a straight audience. Rather, campy banter and even insults function to mark out a shared sphere of self-knowledge and cultivation. As Andrew Ross argues, “Camp cultivates an attitude toward the participation of the producers,” where the camp performance accentuates the creation of the performer in relation to others, a type of interpersonal aesthetics of self (68). In this way, we can see the exaggerations, the excess, the re-appropriation of past cultural artifacts, and the coding of camp as a foregrounding of the process of meaning-making, rather than the product of “being meant,” as Karel said. We might see, in turn, a parallel between camp performance and what Marx noted as the social importance of the imperfection of any product. As Marx argues, “It is generally by their imperfections as products, that the means of production in any process asserts themselves.... A blunt knife or weak thread forcibly remind us of Mr. A, the cutler, or Mr. B.,

the spinner” (*Capital* 348). Combining Ross with Marx, camp is the work of an aesthetics of self that produces an “imperfect” representation of gender or desire or history by which the performers come to understand the very means of production of those social dynamics.¹⁵ We see a detailing of this criticality of camp when Julian and K-Y hit the dance floor.

As the narrator notes, “the dancefloor [*sic*] was a scene whose celestial flavor and cerulean coloring no angelic painter or nectarish poet has ever conceived” (*YE* 152). Hinting back to the “impossibility” mentioned in the Round Table scene that opens the novel, another scene dominated by camp criticality, the dance floor becomes a place both never conceived before and quite materially present in the bodies and sounds of the space.¹⁶ It becomes a space where the very “impossibility” of the place becomes another name for the new critical relations cultivated by the space. Once Julian and K-Y are on the floor the narrative voice transforms into a stenographer, archiving the multitude of voices, innuendos, explicit sexual banter, gossip, and bitchy insults of the scene:

and I want to have the texture of
it look you Up and downN one
meets no end of celebrities all having nothing to do with
sex it’s a false landscape only art giving it full colors
picked me up on Eighth Street and did me for trade in Christopher Street some
books aren’t even read things
about the Village because they are bound to be ninety percent
lies there a new place called Belle’s Jeans it must be horribly vulgar if
I had your money (157, text original)

Like so much of the novel, the banter on the dance floor is permeated with talk of sex, publicity, aesthetics, the city, money, and local businesses or establishments where one could meet others. Yet unlike “Chapter Four” above, where tone and theme oscillated across a whole chapter, here the textual proximity of sex and art and commerce, for instance, is

much closer, often enjambed across lines. The enjambment and line breaks work to reinforce the multiplicity of connections (and gaps) that the recorded voices on the dance floor produce. Since each line may represent another voice among the crowd, the paratactic style of the text renders each voice equal, no minor formal feature for representing the racially and gender mixed ball, where Jim Crow ruled just outside the doors. While this specific extract retains certain geographic references, the Village and Eighth or Christopher Streets, that carry a certain white assumption, the scene as a whole, spanning nearly ten pages, contains a menagerie of places, voices, topics, opinions, locations, sexual innuendos, and philosophical musings, where isolating the speaker proves difficult if not impossible as enjambment connects line to line, and hence dramatizes the crossing of racial and gendered lines.

Returning to this particular passage above, lines three and four continue the play between the role of the aesthetic, an aesthetics of self, and their relation to desire. As the lines stand with the break, one voice says, “one meets no end of celebrities all having nothing to do with,” where the break could signal a shift in voice and the next one declares, “sex it’s a false landscape only art giving it full colors.” However, the potential enjambment of the lines could read: “one meets no end of celebrities all having nothing to do with sex” which is followed by another voice saying, “it’s a false landscape only art giving it full colors.” Here, camp banter and formal experimentation in poetic form produce a charged encounter between the manufacturing of personality (celebrity), the connection between such a performed personality and sex, the proper medium for the representation of desire (whether sex or art), and lastly the tension between celebrity and art. The presenta-

tion of the lines makes any disambiguating impossible. Neither sex nor art can be said, unequivocally, to be the proper mode of representing desire, nor could it be said that art trumps celebrity. Rather, one of the admittedly tautological things to come out of this encounter between camp and experimentation is that the encounter between camp and experimentation illuminates the fraught construction of art, personality, and desire in their “full colors.” That is, this moment resists any fixed divide between camp and modernist practices, and instead insists that the very encounter, their precarious proximity, is the most fruitful way to document the contradictions, tension, gaps, and overlays of queer modernity. In short, as the enjambment and paratactic form of the drag scene indicates, there is no privileged form, whether celebrity or art or literature or Christopher Street or Belle’s Jeans depicted here, only the encounter itself that provides the “full color” of an alternate understanding of capitalist modernity.

This tension continues and takes another form as Julian rides the train home. As euphoric as much of the drag ball appears, the chapter, as Suárez notes, assumes a distinctly somber tone at the end. As Julian prepares to leave the ball, he observes, “This is how dolorous things can be in high fettle. The hall was the garden of Eden afterwards and the lights were out” (167-68). For Suárez, this turn marks the fundamental divide in the novel between camp and modernist art, community and individuality. “In Julian’s eyes,” he argues, “the camp scene at the ball lacks the depth and authenticity that only self-conscious art might provide” (Suárez 198). For Suárez, such a conclusion is derived from Julian’s assertion that he is “not a fairy doll”:

A doll does not believe in itself he thought it believes only in its dollness I have the will to doll which is a special way of willing to live my poetry may merely be a

way of dolling up and then it may be the beginning of ego I think I would be practically nothing without my poetry unless a DOLL my homosexuality is just a habit to which I'm somehow bound which is little more than a habit in that it's not love or romance but a dim hard fetich I worship in my waking dreams it's more a symbol of power than a symbol of pleasure not a symbol inducing pleasure but exemplifying it not a specific symbol no I am not a fairy doll. (*YE* 170, text original)

For Suarez, the assertion that poetry is “the beginning of ego,” and hence the rejection of the artifice of “dollness” and the heterogeneous nature of the drag ball, signals “the Arnoldian notion of culture as the realm of order and authenticity” (199). To rephrase the sequence from the drag ball, in Suárez’s view, dolling is a false landscape only art giving it full color.

However, as I’ve just tried to show, the passage from the ball refuses any clear preference between art and artifice, individual and communal. To claim that camp lacks authenticity that only art provides dismisses or overlooks the way this very matter was addressed in the ball, in the passage cited above. Again, the enjambment and line breaks in that scene negate any simple either/or construction. The line where camp ends and art begins is never clearly drawn. And turning to the passage of Julian on the train, the form of this passage likewise makes any disentangling impossible. Rather than enjambment, Ford and Tyler here turn to continuous text without punctuation to achieve similar results: “I have the will to doll which is a special way of willing to live my poetry may merely be a way of dolling up and then it may be the beginning of ego.” Whereas line breaks in the drag ball permitted tentative articulations, syntax here helps, as dolling may be a way to live poetry, something akin to a traditional avant-garde desire to move art into life; or poetry itself is a form of dolling or artifice; or poetry is the beginning of individuality or “authenticity.” However, the conjunction between these last two options is *and* not *but*.

The conjunction *but* more often signals an alternative (I was going to try this, but I tried that) whereas the conjunction *and* signals an addition (I tried this and I tried that). This distinction is crucial because, like the drag ball as a whole, so much of this passage from the train attempts to produce an encounter between supposedly discrete or autonomous spheres, an autonomy emphasized by the appearance of the very term “fetich.” As Marx shows, the commodity fetish is the outcome of the abstraction of the social process of labor, where the social character of labor and production is stripped away. This abstraction produces the exchange-value of the commodity, and in the process transforms the commodity into something that appears *as if* it were an isolated, autonomous thing in objective reality. “The relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation,” Marx argues, “existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour” (*Capital* 320). The *as if* of the commodity fetish faces the laborer as a thing separate from him, concealing the social work of a whole set of material relations and cooperation within its production. On the one hand, then, in recognizing that homosexuality is *itself* a part of the process of abstraction, “a dim hard fetich,” Julian can be seen as making an argument *against* individuation: “I am not a fairy doll.” As a fetish, homosexuality lacks pleasure, for it is abstracted from the plethora of connections to people, spaces, practices, and, importantly, oneself, aspects the novel as a whole has taken great pains to represent as enmeshed and integral to each other. It exists “not between” people or in relation to oneself, as Marx notes, but *as if* a thing in itself. The passage illustrates a telling combination of Foucault’s sense of the extraction, and hence abstraction, of sexuality and Marx’s understanding of the commodity fetish, a combination emphasized by

Kevin Floyd's claim that the definitional terms of the sexual subject are "ultimately inseparable from an ongoing differentiation of social labor, including a gendered division of labor, a division between manual and intellectual labor, and an atomizing, disciplinary specialization of knowledge itself" (6). In linking the "dim hard fetich" to "a DOLL my homosexuality" Julian connects homosexuality to the larger process of reification of the early twentieth century. And it is against the grain of this reification that much of *The Young and Evil*, and Julian's protestation, should be read.

However, the passage *at the same time* also proposes living poetry as dolling. In so doing, Ford and Tyler connect the development of this particular mode of queer being in the world, dolling, with a mode deeply associated with the commodity. This connection between dolling and the commodity can be explicated by turning to a scene from Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem*, where a new "doll baby" appears with Billy Biasse:

Billy Biasse was there at a neighboring table with a longshoreman and a straw-colored boy who was a striking advertisement of the Ambrozone Palace of Beauty. The boy was made up with high-brown powder, his eyebrows were elongated and blackened up, his lips streaked with the dark rouge so popular in Harlem, and his carefully-straightened hair lay plastered and glossy under Madame Walker's absinthe-colored salve "for milady of fashion and color." (91)

In addition to the suggestion in *Home to Harlem* that the doll baby might have been hired for the night, the McKay passage clearly situates the boy in the realm of the commodity. His heavily done up appearances, his long, well-drawn eyebrows, his lipstick, and his straightened hair, all place him squarely in the realm of artifice. He was, after all, "a striking advertisement" for a cosmetic store. The doll baby or fairy doll, then, is historically associated with commerce and artifice, with the traffic in any number of goods and services, and with cosmetics and effeminacy. In differing ways, both Karel and Julian are associated

with dolling. The night of Karel and Julian's party, Karel brought "his box of beauty that included eyelash curlers, mascara, various shades of powder, lip and eyebrow pencils, blue and brown eyeshadow and tweezers for the eyebrows" (*YE* 55). And yet Julian links dolling to living his poetry, and hence dolling can be seen rather literally as an aesthetics of self. That is, the commodity logic of modern capital provides a framework in which dolling can be understood as a form of self-creation, the cultivation and development of a particularly queer way of life, and thus cannot be rejected any more than camp can ("where would I be if I had never pursed my lips"). In this way, returning to the scene of Julian on the train, the *and* in the passage becomes a small but crucial way to detail the encounter of a queer material life. The *and* in this encounter highlights the critical particularity of the queer subject's place in modern society, one that, as Elisa Glick argues, connects "the logic of the queer to the logic of the commodity, making gay and lesbian identity a privileged emblem for capitalism's contradiction" (3). We should see this *and* or the continuous text from the train or the enjambment from the drag ball or any number of other techniques within *The Young and Evil* as an attempt to make visible, as Foucault notes, "relational virtualities" inherent in the contradictory nature of capital. And this, rather than any dematerialized anti-sociality, is the radical potential of queer being in the world.

Christopher Looby has linked this impulse toward aesthetic transformation in *The Young and Evil* to a particularly gay male relationship to letter writing. For Looby, with its beginnings in the letters sent by Tyler to Ford, the novel is part of an epistolary history of gay literary practices going back to Charles Warren Stoddard's *For the Pleasure of His Company*.¹⁷ What Stoddard inaugurates, according to Looby, is a desire to transform the

novel as a genre, to make it amenable to the representation of queer life, a desire clearly repeated in *The Young and Evil*. The genre of the novel, Looby claims, is generically thought of as a low, popular form of art with a long history of narratives about infidelity, seduction, and betrayal. However, the genre also has firmly placed heteronormative conventions of romance, love, and sentimentality. The transformation of these conventions is at the heart of Stoddard's novel. In *For the Pleasure*, the plot details a queer affiliation between two characters, one a "bachelor" and the other a young woman whose nickname is Jack, a dynamic that will be echoed in the queer love of Theo(dosia) and Julian. Jack and the bachelor are "chums" who each decide to write a novel, allowing Stoddard the opportunity for self-reflexive discussions of the form of the novel. Jack wants to write a love novel. The bachelor, however, wants a work that breaks the conventions of the love novel, in fact does not depict love at all, but depicts a rather promiscuous social life of people and events, detailing nothing as so important as marriage or love. In a sense, it is a novel that performs and asks for a new genre and style of queer literary practice. Looby importantly notes the crucial role of letter writing as the medium for these self-reflexive moments in the novel. In linking this to *The Young and Evil*, Looby provides a genealogy of the complicatedly public and private nature of the epistolary in queer writing: "It links their text broadly to the history of the novel as genre, with its long involvement with epistolary, and more particularly to the novels that have been discussed here [*For the Pleasure* and Edward Prime-Stevenson's *Imre*], most of which insistently invoke and cite and sometimes include the private letters that ostensibly allowed the sexually dissident characters to express themselves more candidly and to position the novel's discourse in relation to proto-

cols of publicity and decency” (419). We see such a moment of public and private interchange, and of demanding new forms of representation, in the letter Karel writes to Julian.

The letter arrives after Julian and Karel’s party, and after the two share a night together with Louis. In the morning Karel decides and announces that he is moving in with Louis uptown. As with Stoddard’s bachelor, the letter begins with a correction of the form of representing relationality: “It is not that. That wasn’t the making of it” (*YE* 85). The two indefinite pronouns at the start of Karel’s letter open an interpretive gap around the issue of bonding, the relationship between Karel and Julian ostensibly one of the *its* referenced in the two sentences and/or the process of *that* that was or wasn’t the making. Moreover, the vague, nonreferential *that* that ends the first sentence then begins the next results in a tension between a continuity produced structurally by such proximity and the nonreferential nature of the pronoun. Is it the same *that* or another *that*? The correction, then, can be seen as either a correction of the process of *that* (the making of their relationship) or to the image of *it* (the relationship itself) that is created. However, each pronoun switches places within the grammar of the two sentences, at once both subject and object. As such, the letter makes no distinction between process and thing: the *making* of it and *it*. In short, the opening line of Karel’s letter to Julian not only cites the history of gay epistolary but returns us to Stein’s stylistic pedagogy, to the cultivation and learning of queer encounters as an ambiguously public process of initiation.

But before continuing, it is important to note the context of the letter, its spatial relation to other chapters. Like James’s *The American Scene*, *The Young and Evil* operates according to a spatial logic, where the individual chapters do not necessarily build on one

another in a temporal sequence but comment on each other in a relational mode. We see this in the way chapters structurally parallel each other or exist in ambiguous temporal relationship, either sequentially or simultaneously. Since “Chapter Eight: Letter” begins with a correction, “it is not that,” the most logical interpretation of the pronouns, as I’ve just suggested, is to Karel, Julian, and their relationship. However, the pronoun could also fruitfully refer to the material of the preceding *chapters*, for they too deal expressly with sexual and social bonding, and they are, following the conventional use of pronouns, the most immediate antecedent. One possible antecedent occurs in “Chapter Six: The Sailor.” In this chapter, after Louis and then Karel leave Julian’s apartment, he wanders the streets alone, noticing all the trade in the streets. Dejected he returns home to his bed. There, his mind wanders to a scene of “a sailor in a blue suit with a white sailor hat on the back of his head” approaching a beautiful younger girl on the beach (77). The matter-of-fact narration underscores the nature of the encounter: “When he got to her he leaned on the beach with his left thigh and elbow,” “he had green eyes and the color of his hair was the bright gold color of the short silk threads of his eyes and brow,” and “she let her knees fall into the sand by him” (77). With no words spoken between them, the scene ends unceremoniously: “They were warm to each other, he was pure. She was beautiful, it was sad to see the sailor-boy have to piss afterwards and walk away” (77).

While the scene has a certain parallel to the relationship between Julian and Karel (Karel having just unceremoniously walked away with Louis uptown after the three had slept together), placed alongside Chapter Seven, the two together note a certain prosaic, pragmatism to sex and desire, a love that Julian had already dismissed as “a fabrication or

a convenience or a recompense” (72). Such artlessness is chronicled in “Chapter Seven: Napoleon and the Merry-Go-Round,” in the failed sexual encounter between Gabriel and Theodosia. In a kind of surrealist tragicomedy, Gabriel arrives at Theodosia’s apartment after drinking all night and all morning. Unlike the matter-of-fact narration of the sailor scene, this incident is heavily charged with erotic energy and imagery. As Gabriel arrives, he “took long breaths and walked heavily towards the bathroom door. It was opened two inches and one eye of Theodosia looked at him. She didn’t say, as usual, just a minute. Gabriel stopped with his lips apart and looked at the slit showing her one eye” (83). When Theodosia emerges the two stumble to the bed in desperate recompense for previous losses (Gabriel’s loss of Louis, Theodosia’s long list of life losses). However, the scene does not end well. Once on the bed together, Gabriel draws up her evening dress and moves his face between her legs, only to throw up on her.

In contrast to the preceding two chapters, then, we can see “Chapter Eight: Letter” as a correction not only to Karel’s relationship with Julian but also to these preceding narratives of sex, love, and intimacy. As with Stoddard, a new social and literary form of relationality is necessary, the love plots of the past and the form of their expression do not match the needs of Karel and Julian’s present moment. This necessity to create a relationship is made explicit by Karel in his letter: “Oh it isn’t a world for scissors, for mallets; but for needle, thread and for paste: it is such a world for we were only being yes apart, not together, and that is the making of it. The making of us” (85). We can read this confirmation of “being yes apart” as a recognition of the lack of available narratives to describe their burgeoning relationship. We can also see this recognition as the initial step in the construc-

tion of a new form of relationality, an encounter that must reject the images that preceded it. This last point of rejecting conventional forms of intimacy is stressed by Karel when he notes that being initially apart is the necessary ground for “the making of it.” And this “making of it” requires the exposure of new “relational virtualities,” the material construction of new encounters using needle and thread and paste.¹⁸

Like the scene between Julian and Theodosia, new forms of queer encounters emerge in a specific aesthetic and material practice. Whereas Theodosia marks the institutional needs of queer love (speakeasies), Karel expressly notes the constructive nature of it, “the making of it.” Yet in both, the process of aesthetic construction provides both the conditions for unmaking as well as making, for not us and for us. This is further emphasized at the very end of Karel’s letter. After moving in with Louis, Karel admits that this has positive dynamics for all: “it is good too for I am loving him, I am finding out again with someone entirely different oh so much so that there is nothing now but the writing of it. So here” (77). Like Julian’s scrap-book, the “oh so much” that Karel is learning is archived as the letter he is writing: “There is nothing now but the writing of it.” But the reintroduction of the vague *it* at the end of the sentence opens up further possible readings. Traditionally, the pronoun would replace the last noun phrase mentioned, either the love Karel has for Louis or the many things that have been learned, or perhaps both. Yet it could also be the *it* that started the letter, the *it* that is shared between Karel and Julian, where the process of making it, the *that*, now becomes “the writing of it.” This collective and transitory *it* produces, like Theodosia’s “queer, I love you,” a bond between any number of referents, for it is not the concreteness of the *it* that matters, its denotative meaning,

but the relational meanings it acquires through the very process of *writing* it, the process of aesthetic construction. The aesthetic, then, Karel is explicitly suggesting, becomes a manner of archiving desire and attachments (finding out “oh so much”) and of producing an encounter between people (“There is nothing now but the writing of it. So here”).

If the epistolary in *The Young and Evil* harks back in a genealogy of literary and social practices of gay men, the novel’s theorizing of desire, aesthetics, and sociality foreshadows later work. This interest in the aesthetic as an archive of desire and the production of relations between people invokes the queer literary practices of Frank O’Hara.¹⁹ Turning to O’Hara, as with turning to Stein, allows us to see more clearly, through the encounter of another context or set of terms, the queer aesthetic sociality of *The Young and Evil*. O’Hara’s closing lines of “Having a Coke with You,” with his emphasis on the *writing* of queer bonding, surprisingly echo Karel’s letter: “it seems they were all cheated of some marvelous experience / which is not going to go wasted on me which is why I’m telling you about it” (194). Like Ford and Tyler, O’Hara is equally invested in the possibilities of the city, in mixing campy observation with modernist sensibilities, and in some relation to the commodity. But most importantly here, O’Hara’s “Having a Coke with You” stresses the fact that the poem itself is the production and archive of some form of erotic encounter. Like Karel’s letter, and *The Young and Evil* generally, O’Hara’s poem is both the recording of desire’s permutations in the streets of New York, in modern art, in gay imagery of St. Sebastian, *and* in the sharing of *it* as writing, as a poem. These archival aspects of the aesthetic are formalized in O’Hara’s campy manifesto “Personism.” There, O’Hara claims one aspect of Personism is its interpersonal comportment: “One of its minimal aspects is to

address itself to one person” (248). From this interpersonal dimension O’Hara adds something more: “It was founded by me after lunch with LeRoi Jones on August 27, 1959, a day in which I was in love with someone (not Roi, by the way, a blond). I went back to work and wrote a poem for this person. While I was writing it I was realizing that if I wanted to I could use the telephone instead of writing a poem, and so Personism was born” (“Personism” 248). Here then is the crucial addition: unlike the “mere crudity,” as Henry James would say, of the immediacy of the encounter represented in the sailor/girl or Theodosia/Gabriel, O’Hara, like Ford and Tyler, sees the creation of sociality as the use of desire as the agent in aesthetic construction. Personism, here, is the sublation of interpersonal desire into the poem (“I could use the telephone instead”). Importantly, as O’Hara notes, the poem archives this desire without its satiation; it retains the “overtones of love without destroying love’s life-giving vulgarity” (“Personism” 248). This “life-giving vulgarity” is the energy to produce new modes of relating, transformed and archived as the aesthetic, which is then returned to the social in the form of sharing it as the poem/letter/scrap-book: “The poem is at last between two persons instead of two pages” (“Personism” 248). This, it must be noted, is the same structural logic as Julian’s imagined eye problem. Turning to O’Hara, like Stein or Stoddard, allows us to see the anti-empiricist, pedagogical impulse of *The Young and Evil*, an impulse that seeks to produce new forms of relating through the encounter of the aesthetic that would at once initiate others into such forms *and* archive that dynamic energy to be shared with others.

As much as I have stressed the imaginative possibilities of *The Young and Evil*, the novel is not without its share of violence, betrayals, fears of arrest, and heartache. The

novel, in fact, achingly details the violent entailments of social (sexual) definition, as we already saw with the examples of Gabriel or the woman in the diner. “I am waiting for the day Louis said when I can destroy all definitions. But until then said Karel they are the most that matters” (*YE* 112). How much these definitions matter is also illustrated in the scene where Karel and Frederick are attacked by a group of sailors in what appears to be a moment of “gay panic,” and are picked up by the police for solicitation.²⁰ In addition to these moments of direct violence, the novel also archives the prohibition and loss associated with gender norms. These moments are articulated clearest in the stream-of-conscious narratives that occur when Karel and Julian remember their youth. One such moment occurs for Karel when “someone is it Grandmother is it Mother snatched SNATCHED” his doll from him—“because, I know, only little girls”—placing it in a closet outside his reach (23, text original).

And in one way the novel ends on a resoundingly violent and heartbreaking note. After leaving Karel and stealing many of his things, and even setting up a robbery with a gangster to steal the rest of Karel’s and Julian’s things, Louis meets up with Karel in the street to talk, a cold sleet beginning to fall. While much of the novel transpires in the streets and clubs of the city, Louis does not want to talk in public, instead demanding, “I want to talk to you privately” (209). Back in Gabriel’s room, Louis and Karel briefly discuss their failed relationship. However, the scene quickly shifts tone, as Louis suddenly demands that Karel give him his suit. “Hurry up,” Louis says, “I don’t want to wait” (212). At this Karel begins to break down, he “felt sorry for himself now and a little sorry for Louis” (212). As Karel pleads with him, suddenly “Louis kissed him furiously. The em-

brace swooped them together again” (213). This embrace is short-lived, though, as Gabriel calls for Louis from the other room. When Louis returns, the furious embrace is replaced with a furious demand for money, and when Karel has none to offer, Louis returns to the suit, forcibly removing it from Karel: “He did not resist having his topcoat taken off, then his jacket, then his vest and, lastly, falling over on the bed, his trousers. Louis leaned over and Karel saw him kissing him before he felt the bite. Then Karel screamed” (215). These are the last lines of the novel.

Like so much of the novel, this last scene binds together desire, violence, publicity/privacy, and economics. And also like so much of the novel, it provides a last turn of perspective on the conditions of queer sociality. At this particular moment, as Suárez has suggested, queer desire appears violent, exploitative, and destructive. Yet this representation of desire must be placed in context. This final scene, rather than emblematic of queer desire as a whole, pessimistically details the trajectory of an increasingly reified and privatized world under capital, and the deleterious influence this has on social and sexual possibility. The scene is even more devastating when we consider the overall arc of the novel. This last scene stands in stark contrast to the sexual economy of the opening chapter, and the many scenes I’ve noted, where the material existence of a variety of bars supports the public display and circulation of desire, self-fashioning, art, and social belonging, which all function as crucial critical encounters with modernity. But here in the last chapter, by contrast, Louis and Karel are isolated, set off in the privacy of Gabriel’s room. Again, Louis does not want to be in public. Furthermore, and more tellingly, Louis’s approach to his relationship with Karel, as it has been throughout the novel, is clearly designated as

vampire-like. This final scene, then, of Louis literally biting into Karel echoes Marx's famous line about the "vampire-like" nature of capital: "Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks" (*Capital* 362-63). The final scene allegorizes, in other words, the vampiric aspects of capital and the quite literally injurious results of abstracting sexuality from social practice. The express connections between violence, capitalism, and Louis go all the way back to the fight in Julian's apartment in the fourth chapter, a scene that, after all, contrasted Louis's sexual economy to the social desire of Karel. Here we see those two alternatives in a more visceral encounter. But here, separated from the group and its camp strategies, the violence of Louis, of desire, of capital, is merely exploitive and destructive. And yet this is not *the* image of queer sociality or queer desire. Rather it is an image of desire removed from the shared public spaces of bars and speakeasies, confined to the private space of a bedroom, organized according to sexual and economic propriety, governed by violence and exploitation. And it is such an image, such an organization of sexual life, that is certainly destructive *to* the queer sociality imagined in much of the novel.

As a document of the developments of capital and its relationship to queer encounters, *The Young and Evil* is stunningly prescient, and remains a crucial part of the material history of the present, one that should remain "between two persons" instead of out of print. The novel is at its most important in its alternate world imagining, transforming the material conditions of modern life into an expression and opportunity for critical encounters. Aesthetics, materiality, and sociality are at the heart of those critical encounters. It is important to note, too, that this heart expands far beyond the pages of the novel. As I have

tried to stress, we can see a collective approach in and through the numerous citations and intertextual moments. Stein, O'Hara, Laura Riding, but also the vast set of names that appear throughout the pages—Sherwood Anderson, Djuna Barnes, e. e. cummings, Amy Lowell, Balzac, Eliot, and others—provide a constellation, within the material pages of the novel, of a far reaching encounter between people.²¹ These encounters between people are precisely the social valence of the novel's critique of the commodity logic of capital and sexual definition. The numerous encounters outlined here—from Theodosia and Julian to the drag ball to Karel and Julian—produce a queer constellation that foregrounds the broader material context and structures of feeling of the particularly queer experience of modernity. The heterogeneous and idiosyncratic style of *The Young and Evil* is fundamental in this, as it forcibly evokes, as Marx noted of the imperfect product, the very process of social production—the people and practices of collective life—especially the shared aspects of desire, art, urban spaces, capitalism, and violence, returning us to the *material* terrain of the politics of the encounter.

nores Eliot's related concern of the way the mythical acts as an exemplar of a tendency to distance the unruly chaos of modernity within the controlling, ordering principle of autonomous literary form. For Eliot, mythical criticism was a "way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" ("Ulysses" 177). Eliotic myth is most certainly a reactionary aesthetic practices set against economic and social change. It is a "containment strategy," as Fredric Jameson argues, one that should be understood as a bourgeois "protest and a defense against" an historical life-world increasingly fragmented and disjointed. Such a strategy, Jameson concludes, "ends up furnishing a powerful ideological instrument in the perpetuation of an increasingly subjectivized and psychological world" (221). As such, even as a refashioned sense of myth, See's aestheticizing mythic approach works against what I see as the collective and materialist tendencies of the novel.

⁷ Suárez also suggestion that homophobia plays a role in the novel's neglect. He notes several instances of general homophobic attitudes among modernist and avant-garde artists, but also specifically a particularly nasty scene from Orson Wells, who refused to continue with a rehearsal when it became known that Ford and Tyler were in the audience.

⁸ Boone claims, "As exciting and revolutionary as it was, the ferment of queer attitudes and behaviors in the 1920s and 1930s lacked any organized or conscious *sexual* politics beyond the politics of pleasure or the politics of art" (265).

⁹ In claiming that "queer desire lacks a communal dimension" Suarez continues the literary and political thinking associated with the "anti-social thesis" in queer theory. While citing Leo Bersani, Suárez's line of thinking aligns more with the anti-social theorizing of Lee Edelman. As Edelman notes in his contribution to "The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory" forum debate, "Neither liberal inclusionism, with its ultimate faith in rational comprehension, nor the redemptive hope of producing brave new social collectivities can escape the insistence of the antisocial in social organization" (821). The persistent antisocial aspect of the social, for Edelman, remains "queer negativity's refusal of positive identity" (822).

¹⁰ Later in the novel when Julian and Frederick go to the drag ball, the destination is 155th Street, which is the site of the historic Hamilton Lodge.

¹¹ See for example Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*, and Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black*.

¹² Gabriel's reference to being mistaken as a "faggot" connects to his more working-class self-identification, who, again as Chauncey shows, took efforts to distance themselves for any effeminacy.

¹³ And this queer transformation of Theodosia is represented not so subtly by the alteration of her name: Theodosia and Theo.

¹⁴ See Schwarz, *Gay Voices*, and Chauncey, *Gay New York*. As Chauncey notes, the origins of the drag ball at the Lodge are rather nebulas, with some accounts noting a shift in managers in the mid-1920s as the source for the transition from an ordinary masquerade ball dating back to the 19th century to a formal drag ball. By the 1930s, the ball was famous.

¹⁵ For a connection between camp and capital, see Tinkcom, *Working Like a Homosexual*, and Wesling, "Queer Value."

¹⁶ Here is the first line of the novel: “Well said the wolf to Little Red Riding Hood no sooner was Karel seated in the Round Table than the impossible happened” (*YE* 11).

¹⁷ Henry James, too, would play a role in this history.

¹⁸ Again, Julian will repeat this sentiment at the drag ball when he wonders, “would blood, paste and print make them stick together?” (*YE* 155)

¹⁹ It should be noted, too, that Stoddard’s late 1800s wish to write a novel where “one day I met this person, and the next day I met that person” is stunningly similar to O’Hara’s “I do this, I do that” poetry (qt in Looby 418).

²⁰ The scene is rather confusing. Initially it seems Karel and Frederick had no contact with the sailors before being attacked. Yet, later in the scene Karel notes, “the audacity, the cussedness Karel thought as one had tried to hit him before that one sailor had his fly open the white showing,” suggestion perhaps some interaction had taken place (*YE* 183).

²¹ This collective comportment of the novel is, of course, linked to the production of the novel itself. While there is some discrepancy about the authorship of the novel—according to Watson, “Ford claims primary authorship of the novel, granting Tyler the status of co-author in acknowledgment of the inspirational role Tyler’s letters played” (xx); while Chauncey quotes Tyler from a *Greenwich Village Weekly News* article stating that he was “working like mad on” *The Young and Evil* (242)—the nebulous nature of authorship, far from hindering the novel, is part of its social imagining. Raymond Williams’s reconception of authorship helps us bridge the production of the novel with its thematic and textual explorations, from Stoddard’s desire for a new form of the novel to the violence of capital. As Williams argues, co-authorship raises an issue that “goes beyond conscious co-operation—collaboration—to effective social relations in which, even while individual projects are being pursued, what is being drawn on is trans-individual, not only in the sense of shared (initial) forms and experiences, but in the specifically creative sense of new responses and formations” (195). Williams suggests that co-authorship is not only a negotiation between writers but also a negotiation with material history and literary conventions. Yet within this negotiation, one is still able to imagine “new responses and formations” to these material literary histories.

CHAPTER 5 A QUEER ROMANCE OF MATERIALISM: MCKAY'S *ROMANCE IN MARSEILLES*

Claude McKay's slim volume *The Negroes in America* is an untimely document, not the least for the fact that the manuscript was not published in English until the late 1970s.¹ Written shortly after McKay spoke at the Fourth Congress of the Third Communist International in 1922, the text is a series of brief critical mediation on life in America, with chapters on "The Workers' Party and Negroes" and "Negroes in Art and Music." Amongst these sociological and political sections is the telling chapter "Sex and Economics." Here, the untimeliness of the text comes to the fore in McKay's perspicacious analysis of post-emancipation working conditions for former slaves and poor white workers. According to McKay, the established former slave owners maintained control of the South by dividing black workers from white worker under the guise of racist fears of sexual violence perpetrated against white women. Such a strategy, McKay argues, fostered "a war between the races over sex" that facilitated lynching laws and Jim Crow and kept black worker and white workers, men and women, from recognizing their shared experiences (*Negroes in America* 76). Most telling about his analysis is McKay's refusal to stop at race. Because blacks *and* white women are restricted in their interactions and development under this racist patriarchal logic, McKay concludes that "the Negro question is inseparably connected with the question of women's liberation" (*Negroes in America* 77).²

I begin my discussion of *Romance in Marseilles* with this barely seven-page chapter in a little discussed manuscript because the context of its production and its clear critique of racist, patriarchal capitalism clearly place it within the realm of a materialist

sexual politics. But more to the point, I claim, like *The Young and Evil*, this little known novel by McKay, ostensibly about romance, must be understood as part of his larger critique of capital, on par with the transnational, revolutionary context of the Third International and his critique of post-Reconstruction America. And like *Negroes in America*, *Romance in Marseilles*'s untimely claim that gender, race and implicitly class and sexuality, were inseparable anticipates some of the most important intersectional critical work today. This rewriting of the domains of race, class, gender and sexuality has also occupied many of the recent critics of McKay's work. Considerable research has been done outlining the important connections between leftist and communist thinking and African-American critical thought, notably that of Kate A. Baldwin, who argues that the exchange between Red and Black "becomes a site of intervention and theory, a place where dialogue between Soviet reception and black identity proceeds, a location where specific crossings materialize into alternative myths of black self-consciousness" (16).³ Moreover, work focusing on McKay's explicit internationalism, his Caribbean radical tradition, and his insistence on negotiating the diversity of diaspora has helped move him outside the confines of American literary traditions, specifically the Harlem Renaissance, toward a larger understanding of his global political thinking, placing him alongside Marcus Garvey, Cyril Briggs, Jesús Colón, Wilfred A. Domingo, Hurbert Harrison, C.L.R. James, and George Padmore.⁴ Such a broader context for McKay's work, Michelle Ann Stephens argues, specifies how "the transatlantic world produces and organizes wealth, political power, and state forms of empire and capital, while simultaneously creating spaces for resistant identities, communities, and cultural forms" (182). Finally, several critics have centrally taken

up issues of sexuality as a formative feature of McKay's thinking.⁵ All this work helps to distinguish McKay's specific contribution to radical political thinking and literary history, a contribution that fits neither with the social uplift of bourgeois blacks in America and the NAACP, nor with any back to Africa philosophy, nor does it fit smoothly with even the grass-roots organizing of African Blood Brotherhood, People's Education Forum, International African Service Bureau, or the Harlem street corner orators (though McKay will later be interested in Father Divine and Sufi Abdul Hamid, who would supposedly go on to inspire Ralph Ellison's *Ras the Destroyer*). As McKay's biographer Wayne Cooper claims, "Neither in his politics nor in his relationship to American Negro leaders was McKay in step with the times" (292). Instead, McKay contributes to our much more current thinking about the "inseparable" ties between global capital, race, class, sexuality, and gender.

While considerable recent work has been done on McKay, very little attention has been paid to his unpublished manuscript *Romance in Marseilles*. *Romance* is, by McKay's own admission, "very different in style and mood from the preceding" novels *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*, a shift that he believed would "set the tone for future work" (qtd. in Cooper 269). Begun in 1929 and reworked over a span of three years, *Romance* was written as McKay moved between France, Spain, and Morocco. Initially titled *The Jungle and the Bottoms*, then *Savage Loving*, the novel received mixed responses from editors who saw it. Eugene Saxton, for instance, wondered if the themes were appropriate for American audiences. Another, according to Cooper, thought the novel's concerns were out of tune with "depression-ridden New Deal America" (Cooper 288). Set in Marseilles, *Romance* is ostensibly the story of Lafala, whose affairs take him from Africa to Marseilles to New

York and back. Briefly, the story is as follows. Lafala has stowed away on a shipping boat set for New York after the prostitute Aslima steals his money. Humiliated, Lafala leaves Marseilles. While passing across the Atlantic, he is discovered and jailed in a water closet. There, due to freezing temperatures, he develops frostbite on his feet, and when he finally arrives in New York, doctors hastily cut off his feet. As Lafala recovers from the surgery, his cruel case is taken up first by the sole African-American in the ward, Black Angel, then by a Jewish lawyer. The lawyer wins Lafala a considerable settlement, as well as a pair of prosthetic cork feet. Yet at the final settlement, the shipping company's lawyer divides Lafala from his lawyer, claiming that Lafala is entitled to more money than his lawyer has allotted him. Enticed by larger sums of money, Lafala drops his lawyer and enters the hands of the shipping company. Here the shipping company sends Lafala back to Marseilles, en route to Africa, as they renegotiate the settlement.

Once back in Marseilles, Lafala returns to his previous haunts, now a new man of fortune and misfortune. He takes back up with Aslima, initially aiming to humiliate her in return for his previous humiliation and later injury. However, Lafala falls for Aslima again, this time she seemingly returns the admiration. Because Aslima's "protector" Titin grows jealous of her time with Lafala, she claims that she is wooing Lafala only to get at his sizable fortune. The veracity of this plan is never fully known. Nonetheless, Lafala and Aslima begin one of the novel's clear romances, one that develops into thoughts of marriage and returning to Africa together. At this moment in the narrative, though, Lafala quite literally drops out, getting picked up by the police on back-charges of stowing away on the ship. Here, the narrative begins to circulate through a heterogeneous cast of characters of

Marseilles's Vieux Port. The narrative too shifts from a single trajectory concerning Lafala and Aslima to a disparate narrative following Babel, Big Blonde and Petit Frère, St. Dominique and Falope, Aslima, La Fleur, and others. In Lafala's absence, the narrative details the conflicting perspectives and interests of those who live at Quayside. St. Dominique and Falope have a pointed discussion of race and class struggle; Babel outlines a philosophy of vagabondism; Big Blonde and Petit Frère go on a date that quickly transforming into an examination of gender, capitalism, prostitution, class struggle, and violence; the relationship between Aslima and Titin becomes strained, each accusing the other of foiling her plan. In other words, in the absence of a singular focal point, whether Lafala or Lafala and Aslima's romance, the narrative engages in what Brent Hayes Edwards terms the "practice of diaspora," the debates, conflicts, convergences, and misunderstandings that characterize the lives of those living at and off the Vieux Port of Marseilles (*Practice of Diaspora*). This practice is what I argue the second, more significant, romance of the novel details. To emphasize the primacy of this latter romance, when Lafala is finally released from prison with the help of St. Dominique, the narrative quickly, and somewhat abruptly, ends with Lafala leaving for Africa alone in the early morning hours. Aslima, enraged by a lost love and/or lost fortune, provokes Titin until he kills her. Her death ends the narrative.

Like *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*, then, *Romance* focuses on "the outcasts and outlaws of Civilization," those folks who live among the margins, by choice or by pressure, because of race or class or gender or national origin or sexuality (*Romance in Marseilles* 89).⁶ Many of the contemporary readings of *Home* and *Banjo* have emphasized McKay's interest in the flotsam of capitalism, the excessive waste of production, the workers on the

dock, the vagabonds, the drifters, whose black masculine homosociality epitomize a resistant community at the core of racist capital. *Romance* certainly treads this ground, too. As James Smethurst suggests, *Romance* is a cautionary tale against bourgeois, heterosexual romance, with its attendant dynamics of privacy, nation, capitalism/imperialism, and racism (“The Red Is East”). Yet McKay also opens up a number of other important avenues of political thinking, avenues that intersect, merge, branch off, run parallel or perpendicular, so that, as he suggests in *The Negroes in American*, one is left to tarry with a complex of issues and positions, whether material, racial, gendered, economic, or sexual. Babel, Lafala, St. Dominique, Big Blonde, Aslima, La Fleur, Falope—they all have different perspectives, exist in different places within the social matrix of international politics, of French politics, of global capitalism, of racism, of gender hierarchy, and of sexual stigmatization. All these avenues appear in the conversations that happen between them and in the social spaces that provide for their interactions. *Romance*, in this way, takes up the challenge, as Siobhan B. Somerville stresses, “to recognize the instability of multiple categories of difference simultaneously rather than to assume the fixity of one to establish the complexity of another” (5). The task is to outline the precise dynamics at hand. As Minkah Makalani argues, “If diaspora represents a transnational formation, a condition and an ongoing process, and a project that must actively be pursued across the multiple structures of race, class, gender, and color, we are inevitably led to ask how those multiple realities were understood and experienced” (17). *Romance* provides an important series of portraits.

To understand these portraits, I want to return to Edwards’s notion of the practice of diaspora. For Edwards, McKay is neither interested in focusing on the proletariat as the

source of political power nor is he proposing something like an international consciousness. Instead, the practice of diaspora Edwards finds in *Banjo* is one “haunted by difference,” where the novel “relentlessly underlines the inescapable, nearly mundane, gaps in comprehension” that occur between the various figures who populate Marseilles (*Practice of Diaspora* 217, 212). However, as Edwards suggests, these gaps and shifts, this “*décalage*,” in comprehension “do not come across as frustrating dead ends, but instead as precisely the most vibrant and creative moments” (*Practice of Diaspora* 216). The debates, exchanges, misunderstanding, insults, as well as mutual understandings, momentary fidelity, and companionship result in what I will refer to as the critical ethos of the international political encounter McKay is creating. As Foucault argues, such an ethos becomes “a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them” (“What Is Enlightenment” 50). Such a process is inherently genealogical, cutting up and juxtaposing that which is considered unified perceptions of race or sexuality, for instance. Such an emphasis on genealogy, Susan Gillman and Alys Eve Weinbaum stress, can create “a politics of juxtaposition [that] convenes stylistically incompatible textual parts and seemingly divergent political questions” (5). Moreover, drawing attention to the “divergent political questions” that appear in *Romance* helps to further contextualize the black radical tradition, seeing it as neither historically consistent nor as autonomous from other domains of resistance.⁷

Such an approach differs strongly from the one other sustained examination of *Romance*, Gary Edward Holcomb’s *Claude McKay, Code Name Sasha*. Holcomb’s explicit

goal is to produce a “new grammar” that would provide the logic for the “close relationships between sex radicalism, black insurgency, and leftist anarchism” (19). “Revolutionary mergings” is the term he uses to explain these relationships. As important as this desire is, it also exposes a crucial problem. In trying to read the various “mergings” of the novel, Holcomb has a theoretical and practical tendency to “merge” historically distinct and politically variable terms. Terms like race, queer, Marxist, anarchist, internationalism, nationalism, gender (and more) all merge seamlessly together in Holcomb’s analysis, as if they were from and heading to one and the same place. As I’ve stressed, undoubtedly such a set of terms is intersectional. But even McKay’s claim that race and gender are inseparable does not mean that they are equivalent. It simply means one can’t exclude either while analyzing the conditions of American racism. Furthermore, and more damaging, because his emphasis is on merging, Holcomb glosses over the specificities, incompatibilities, and problematics in McKay’s formulations. This is significant because *Romance* is at its most important when it emphasizes not only the momentary convergences but also the prevalent divergences of diaspora, as Stuart Hall and Edwards have stressed, its constitutive inability to be summed up or seamlessly “merged,” even under the banner of revolution.⁸ Instead, as Amy Villarejo argues, part of the efficacy of intersectional critique “comes in the dissonance or lack of fit between theory and practice, between conception of the world and iteration of being-in-it” (83). *Romance* persistently shows this.

“Black internationalism,” Baldwin argues, “does not equate itself with an easy mobility that cancels out national boundaries but rather with a framework in which to contemplate linkages between peoples of the African diaspora and their nonblack allies” (4).

Romance in Marseilles, then, is a romance of just such internationalism, one that exceeds even the bonds between the African diaspora and nonblacks to include differences in class, sexuality, gender, and inter-African difference. Such a framework exposes not only the integrated dynamics of any number of social registers but also their divergences and historical specificity. Between St. Dominique, Lafala, Big Blonde, Diup, Aslima, La Fleur, Babel and the others there are as many disjunctions as there is commonality and connection. But it is through these encounters that McKay depicts a different type of romance in Marseilles. If, as Ellen Meiksins Wood argues, “material life and social reproduction in capitalism are universally mediated by the market, so that all individuals must in one way or another enter into market relations in order to gain access to the means of life,” then *Romance* becomes for McKay the site where the means of life—and the meaning of life—are openly negotiated and contested, where the mediation of capital is exposed and analyzed in its rawest form as it criss-crosses the lives and bodies of the inhabitants of Quayside (7). And as his title makes explicit, desire plays a central role in the cultivation of new means of life. Yet *Romance* does not present a general theory of desire, but a specifically articulated critique of its channeling into bourgeois romance and championed in its expressly working-class formulations.⁹ The specificity of these forms of desire are emphasized in the material spaces of exchange, the bars, cafés, and streets that make up the material domain of social cultivation.

What we see in *Romance* is the encounter of diasporic life, a sociality that, as Paul Gilroy argues, produces its “own critical, intellectual, and moral genealogy in a partially hidden public sphere of its own” (38). We get a critical genealogy of modern diasporic life,

whose perspective outlines both the incommensabilities as well as the moments of fidelity and intimacy. There is no better metaphor for McKay's vision of critical sociality than his favorite image of the shoreline of Marseilles: "Port of the fascinating, forbidding and tumultuous Quayside against which the thick scum of life foams and bubbles and breaks in a syrup of passion and desire" (36).¹⁰ The waves crashing against the shore of Marseilles, an apt synecdoche for desire itself, becomes a concentrated image for McKay's social imagination: of the "scum of life" growing and expanding in foams and bubbles, rolling together toward the shore, only to break apart in a thick fluid of passion, and roll out.¹¹ This is the image of McKay's sociality, a mixture of race, gender, class, nation, capital, suffused with desire, continually undulating, forming and breaking apart against the shore, only to recede and form again.

Romance I

On the surface, *Romance* is the tale of Lafala and Aslima, a story that allegorizes a number of myths of international criticality. Lafala is a child of Africa and Aslima of North Africa, and the love plot highlights an internationalism that bridges Africa and the Middle East. But *Romance* is not the only global romance from the late 1920s. W. E. B. Du Bois's 1928 *Dark Princess* treads much of the same material. In *Dark Princess*, Du Bois imagines an African and Asian internationalism born, quite literally, out of the marriage between Matthew and Kautilya, a marriage that results in, as Alys Eve Weinbaum argues, "a baby cast as the messiah of a new world in which Pan-Asia and Pan-Africa are united in common cause against white world domination" (28). Through such a narrative, however, Du Bois transforms the revolutionary potential of global solidarity against op-

pression into an internationalism predicated on a bourgeois notion of marriage, gender subordination, and sexual reproduction, a notion, Weinbaum stresses, that unintentionally continues the U.S. racist views of citizenship and belonging.¹² *Romance* indeed contains a similar conceit about bourgeois romance, but depicts a much different trajectory, not the least because Lafala and Aslima do not marry and Aslima is killed by her pimp at the end.

Lafala, first of all, never comes to political consciousness. In many ways the narrative depicts him as naïve, a poor judge of character, and easily manipulated by others. If anything, Lafala displays a significant lack of agency, beginning most obviously with the loss of his feet. In acknowledgement of European colonization of Africa, Lafala was born in “one of the parceled regions” of Africa, “and was therefore either a colonial subject or a protected person,” it is never actually said which (*RM* 26). This ambiguous position under colonial power marks Lafala as a type of free agent, one occupying a tenuous position within national and legal frameworks, an issue that is played out as Lafala later wrangles with the shipping company. Prior to traveling to the US, “Lafala had gone on wandering impressionably from change to change like a heedless young pilgrim with nothing but his staff in his hand and playing variations on the march of legs” (2). Lafala was, then, like many of McKay’s vagabonds whose lives “had been limited to the flotsam and jetsam of port life, people who went with the drift like the scum and froth of the tides breaking on the shore, their thinking confined to the immediate needs of a day’s work down the docks or a trip on the boat or any other means of procuring one for flopping, feeding, loving” (103). Yet after returning to Marseilles without his legs and with a fortune, all this changes.

This transformation from vagabond to bourgeois sensibility, it must be noted, begins across the Middle Passage, where Lafala is thrown into a freezing water closet, resulting in having “his greatest asset” removed (5). Lafala’s transformation, then, is not voluntary, but imposed. Lafala’s legs are deeply associated with Africa. As the novel begins, Lafala, in the hospital, thinks back to his earliest days in Africa as a boy, and “visualized the glory and the joy of having a handsome pair of legs” (1). His legs, and this attendant image of wholeness, were an integral part of his early life. “The older tribesmen,” we learn, “appraised the worth of the young by the shape of their limbs” (1). That is, sailing across the Atlantic quite literally results in severing his closest connection to Africa and community, his “feet that were accustomed to dig themselves into the native soil, into lovely heaps of leaves, and affectionate tufts of grass,” which along with his status as colonial subject, rendered him “without family, without country” (2, 13). Such a beginning to the narrative establishes, as Holcomb notes, the shock of the Middle Passage, the legacy of slavery, and the black body as commodity: “The sole material profit available to a colonized subject like Lafala is the prospect of trading a portion of his own flesh and bone, for Lafala’s body is his only asset in an imperialist-capitalist society where the black subject serves solely as a labor commodity” (182). That is to say, in crossing the Atlantic, Lafala transforms from mobile vagabond, whose “dancing legs would carry him all over,” existing on the limits of capital, to a completely integrated, yet disintegrated, part of imperial capitalism. However, Lafala was not only brutalized, the money he wins from the shipping company transforms him, as is repeated over and over in the narrative, into a new man. On the way back to Marseilles, he gets seasick for the first time, his body “out of tune with the

sea and the boat” (35). Later, when he returns to the local bar Tout-va-Bien, an old habitué named Rock jokes that his crutches resemble ““a cane ... like them Englishmens”” (46). Even Lafala has to admit to this transformation, claiming he has ““a little civilization in my pocket”” (46). Lafala, then, becomes, at the hands of the shipping company, a member of what McKay took to be the reviled black middle class. He is absorbed into the “civilizing machine,” as Edwards termed it, the apparatus of modern capital (*Practice of Diaspora* 224). As Aslima notes, “seems like it wasn’t his feet but his fortune is his real misfortune” (115).

For her part, “Aslima was a child of North Africa,” from the place “where savagery emerging from the jungle meets civilization” (58). Unlike Lafala’s initial freedom in his native country and later his chosen vagabondism, Aslima “was born a slave.” And this origin stamps her earliest memories:

She held in the child’s chamber of her mind a picture of the Djemaa el Fna, the great wild square of Marrakesh: the elegant white-robed-and-veiled women exhibiting the margin of their rich colored dresses, the dainty shuffle of their painted feet in bright embroidered slippers; the merchants and peddlers and purchasers, haggling over a thousand odds and ends, the story-tellers, the snake-charmers and boy dancers clapping hands and chanting to the unceasing monotonous beat of the drum; the muezzin calling, the marabouts praying and the weird noisy rituals of religious-frenzied groups.... (58-59)

The substance of Aslima’s memory becomes a telling image of McKay’s conception of capital. The market square of Djemaa el Fna is a mixture of gender and commodity fetishism of “painted feet” and “thousand odds and ends,” of ritual, and of exoticism, all under the “monotonous beat of the drum” of capitalist exchange. In many ways, this, too, would be the very image of Aslima. She was, we learn, brought “up in a fine spirit of materialistic interest” (59). McKay’s association of women, or more specifically the prostitute, with

capital is well documented in his other novels.¹³ Here, from her birth, Aslima is associated with the marketplace, with the movement of goods and services, and with commodification, all emerging between savagery and civilization, a set of association repeated throughout the novel. First with Marrakesh then with Marseilles, Aslima comes to embody the sites of exchange and possibility. “Down at Quayside,” we learn, “there was a colored colony whose complexion was highly emphasized by two of its notorieties who strove in rivalry there. They were the two wenches know as Aslima and La Fleur Noire” (36-37). Not only is Aslima associated with the “character” of Quayside, she and her relationship with La Fleur get associated with the very economy of the port, its exchange of goods and services, its competitive markets, and most of all its complexion, gender, and sexuality. As with the Marrakesh market, Aslima become associated not simply with capital, but with the site of its exchange, the place of embodiment.

McKay’s specifically gendered understanding of the prostitute’s relation to capital clearly comes to the fore by turning to an unpublished poem called “Boy Prostitute,” sent to Alain Locke, perhaps in the early 1920s after the two met in Berlin. While Aslima was “a born whore,” and her earliest memories those of the marketplace, the boy in McKay’s poem is the victim of capitalist exploitation.

Oh, had he lived in high Renaissance days,
 He might have stirred the mighty Angelo—
 And Raphael might have put angelic rays
 Around his golden head, and made it glow
 With beauty everlasting like a star.
 His figure would adorn an alter place,
 And mortals feeling beauty at the bar,
 Kneeling to God, would turn toward his face,
 But in this full [???]-[???] age,
 He lacks the wisdom of the unholy-wise

That around him out contending for a wage.
 He turns to easy opportunities,
 Selling himself a whim perverse to please,
 He gains his fast sensation of disease.¹⁴

Written in Shakespearean sonnet form, the first two stanzas establish the boy as an other-worldly, holy figure, the object of adoration and sympathy. The poem begins with an abrupt shift away from modern capital: “Oh, had he lived in high Renaissance days.” Had he lived in different times, this boy’s “beauty everlasting” would have been muse to Michelangelo and Raphael; he would be adored like a shrine in “an alter place” where “mortals” could luxuriate in his presence. While the first two stanzas establish this idealized scene of the past, the last two stanzas shift to the present, away from the “holy” toward the profane, material world of labor. In the present, the boy is out of place, untimely, as he “lacks the wisdom of the unholy-wise,” those who are out “contending for a wage.” Without this knowledge, the boy “turns to easy opportunities / Selling himself,” yet earning only “sensations of disease.” As such, the poem functions as a type of untimely reminder, a lamentation, of the specific “holy” knowledge of male beauty and eroticism uncorrupted by labor and the marketplace. The poem comes to a pained juxtaposition between the past and the present, between a classical idealization and the material realities of twentieth century capitalism, between a holy adoration of male beauty and a debased disease of carnality. The boy, McKay suggests, is a victim of circumstance. He was not born into it. And this is the crucial difference with McKay’s thinking about sexuality and capitalism: lacking the unspecified wisdom of the unholy, the boy’s (idealized) untarnished erotic possibility is lost, debased by the “easy opportunities” of the market.

For Aslima, there appears no alternative, no moment of innocence, no idealized desire or sexuality; she is from the beginning only the commodity. And like the commodity, she moved from place to place, from Marrakesh to Casablanca to Algeria and finally to Marseilles, where she earns the name “the tigress” for her “vigorous, rough-tongued and reckless” demeanor (*RM* 60). In this way, McKay’s depiction of Aslima follows a long tradition: from Marx to Balzac to Baudelaire and Benjamin, the prostitute becomes, as Roderick Ferguson argues, “the sign for the gendered and sexual chaos that commodification was bound to unleash” (*Aberrations in Black* 9). She is the racialized, gendered, rootless embodiment of the threat of capital. And yet, Aslima was also “a near-native thing” in Lafala’s eyes, “a burning brown mix of Arab and Negro.” This was important to Lafala because there was “salvation in native things,” “a way back” (*RM* 3). She was, to reinforce Lafala’s lack of agency, “like a magnet ... [that] drew Lafala” to her (4). Through such a formulation, Aslima embodies the contradictions of the commodity, both dislocated autonomous thing and residue leading to the “way back.”

The romance between Aslima and Lafala has two distinct phases. The first phase comprised their relationship prior to Lafala’s leaving for America, and their romance is the impetus for that departure. To be precise, there really was no romance during this first phase. While they spent day and night together, “eating drinking and sleeping together,” Lafala was to Aslima like many others, a client (4). One day he awoke to find that she had stolen all his money. As Aslima would claim later, ““You know all we girls treat a stranger like that when we can get away with it. It’s the law of Quayside”” (42). Yet Lafala, embarrassed at having been taken advantage of by a woman, soon to be an “object of ridicule and

an object of pity at Quayside,” set off for America rather than face this emasculation (4). Structurally, this first phase demonstrates how, in Ferguson’s words, “the prostitute proves capital’s defilement of man. She symbolizes man’s dehumanization or more specifically, man’s feminization” under capital (*Aberrations in Black* 8). The impetus that will eventually lead Lafala to lose his legs, another moment of emasculation, was this initial moment of defilement at the hands of capital, a prostitute.

The second phases of their relationship begins when Lafala returns to Marseilles, now a man of money. His initial impulse in seeking out Aslima and all of Quayside was to exact a measure of revenge. “There was a time,” we learn, “when she was the only person in Marseille who stirred in him a feeling of hatred and revenge” (*RM* 75). If Aslima and the shipping company had stolen his manhood, he was now a new man and he sought to impose this on others. And yet when he sees Aslima again, “Lafala’s rancour was fairly swept away” (40). While Lafala appears taken with Aslima in a quant romantic way, his attraction to her is marked by a much different logic after his return. Initially they simply shared a mutual vagabond life of dancing, eating, drinking, and sleeping together. The image of them during the first phase was as “little brown and black birds together,” an image that reinforces their freedom of vagabond movement (4). But after his return “even minus legs he felt fortunate with the fresh buoyant dawn in his face that he was free now to think about love instead of the depressing possibility of whether or not he would have today’s daily bread. How good it was to be able to live comfortably” (95). In Lafala’s mind, love and comfortable living were now opposed to his previous vagabond life of procuring just enough “for flopping, feeding, loving” (103). Such a sentiment is repeated by Babel, who

claims, “the vagabond life was alright for a man without property or position, but responsibility and vagabondage could not go together” (144). With the responsibility of his new wealth, the upwardly (semi)mobile Lafala now thinks of comfort, love, and a return to Africa.

The bourgeois turn in his relationship with Aslima is reflected in the expression of it. Whereas before they danced and drank and ate out in public among others, now their relationship is primarily confined to the privacy of Lafala’s apartment. This is the result of two symbolic factors. First, Lafala’s cork feet make it difficult for him to get around. Quite literally his freewheeling vagabond days have been violently removed. His dancing days, once so well known, are gone. The publicness of his life, while still there, is minimized. With the cutting of his legs and the resulting money, his sphere of social interaction becomes more limited to the private realm. Second, because Aslima may or may not be pulling a fast one on Lafala and/or Titin, she needs to see Lafala only in private. She cannot risk others interfering. Her plan is initially almost lost when La Fleur sees the two of them together at the cinema and reports her findings to Titin. Moreover, the time she spends with Lafala takes her away from her other clients. As Titin notes, ““It would be better you go and hustle some money elsewhere”” (79). In essence, after his return, Lafala’s money and his loss of vagabondage render the two a simple, monogamous domestic couple, sheltered from the eyes of others.

It should be noted that marriage was not Lafala’s first thought. He initially only imagined returning to Africa with Aslima as his companion. However, when Lafala attempts to book two tickets to Africa through his white shipping company representative, he

is quickly persuaded toward marriage. In discussing the situation with Lafala, the representative's comments produce a telling chain of association: "Just the thing for a lad of your age to do... now you're crippled... with your money... a nice colored girl to help you start life in your own home.... Just the thing" (97). Marriage, here, for the white representative, becomes the logical culmination of Lafala's larger social transformation since losing his feet, a transition from a mobile vagabond to an economically upwardly mobile bourgeois "gentlemen," as Rock joked. The elliptical stammering or pausing in the representative's speech produces a chain of equivalence between each utterance, so that getting married, being crippled, having money, a colored girl, one's own home all amount to the same thing. Again, it is key to note McKay's ideological critique in this association. The black bourgeoisie, for McKay, lack true political agency because they seek to imitate the white bourgeoisie. Yet, as McKay makes clear in the case of Lafala, such an imitation is in fact the result of a crippling, a castration in some regard, of the masculine independence and sovereignty of black mobility. Such a crippling is equated with acquiescing to white, bourgeois heterosexual capitalist culture. Nevertheless, Lafala agrees it is a good idea.

Such a configuration had been foreshadowed in much of Lafala and Aslima's relationship. To return to the first phase of their relationship, the dynamic between them was described as the play of two birds, "happy little brown and black birds together" (4). Yet afterwards, the dominant image of the two is that of two pigs, adopting as they do the pet name "pig." This metaphor, too, is apt, as it strikes a stark contrast to birds, as pigs have far less movement (Lafala on his cork feet), often kept in pens (Lafala's apartment). The image of a pig, of course, too, carries the unmistakable link to capitalism and the phrase

Capitalist Pigs: folks fattened up on excess and self-indulgence, unknowingly furrowing in mud and their own feces. The choice of pet name seems at times both unknowing and ironic. Aslima, already clearly established as the symbol of capitalist exchange, admits to being a pig: “I’ve been a pig all my life” (54). Yet in the new romance with the new, moneyed Lafala something has changed. As she goes on to say, “But with you I don’t feel like it’s just a mud bath. I feel like we’re clean pigs” (54). Like Lafala’s observation that comfortable living permits one to think about love, Aslima suggests that bourgeois loving removes one from the dirt and filth of Quayside. Money makes you clean. The crucial point, though, is that love—here the heterosexual, private couple—is unmistakably linked to economics.¹⁵ Michael Maiwald points to a similar theme in *Home to Harlem*: “Romance in Harlem turns out to be inseparable from economic relations, so that sexual relations become another medium to contest, subvert, or ratify one’s economic position” (834). While living “sweet” does not apply to either Aslima or Lafala, the transition from birds to pigs, from vagabonds to domestic couple, all facilitated by money, is evident. After Lafala and Aslima decide to spend the whole day together, Aslima says, “Why not, big pig? It’s the life.” And then she falls into an ecstatic chant: “Oh, pig-pig-pig, piggy-pig. We are all pigs” (*RM* 57).

Yet by introducing the marriage plot into *Romance*, McKay does something that doesn’t appear in his other texts. The depiction of Aslima, or generally women, as the embodiment of the disruptive, amoral dimensions of capitalism is not new, neither in McKay’s work nor in the thinking of Leftists more generally.¹⁶ As Heather Hathaway argues, “McKay’s investment of female sexuality, particularly in the space of the city, with

the capacity to render men irrational and to corrupt their ethics,” in much the same way industrialization and capitalist exploitation supposedly did, is translated as a “pervasive threat to male authority” (62). As such, when the white shipping company representative suggests marriage, this can be read as white male control of non-white sexuality under the guise of assuring that Aslima was “protected against any untoward incidents” while traveling back to Africa (*RM* 97). In suggesting marriage, the representative exhibits a form of racist patriarchy outlined in *The Negroes in America*. Rather than a prohibitive injunction, though, the representative attempts to recuperate white heteropatriarchy from the disruptive potential of uncontained racial sexuality by normalizing and neutralizing the relationship between Lafala and Aslima. And by convincing Lafala of the validity of marriage, “what we see here,” in Ferguson’s words, “is a partnership between an emerging indigenous black elite and state power over the regulation of a subaltern black population,” one whose “tactics of sexual and gender regulation [derive] from the itineraries of imperialism” (“Of Our Normative Strivings” 98). While Ferguson is describing post-emancipation American politics, his analysis illuminates how the white representative in *Romance* ushers racial sexuality into the confines of bourgeois notions of home, family, and property, all of which subtly function to buttress already established structures of white power. Falope, for his part, outlines the issue in nearly the exact manner: “‘I can’t understand you, Lafala,’ said Falope. ‘You must be spoiled by civilization. What you’re planning to do isn’t right at all. It isn’t African. It’s a loving white way’” (*RM* 151). But Lafala is undeterred: “Oh nothing could tear him away from her now. No fear of protectors, nor white respectability, nor

native dignity. He would stick to her and be a contented pig in a pen, wallowing with joy in the mud” (165).

While McKay depicts Lafala as a complicit figure in white heteropatriarchal imperialism, Aslima becomes the tragic figure. As Eugene W. Holland argues, this narrative of a man of standing marrying a (reformed) prostitute can be traced back through a romanticism of Rousseau and Hugo where the prostitute gives up her career for true love, an act that only confirms patriarchal conditions and renounces the freedom of female sexuality. Aslima initially seems suspicious of the idea: ““Big pig! Now it’s your turn to take your revenge on me. See me quitting Quayside to go back with you to the bush”” (*RM* 56). Marriage, in this frame, is allegorically and literally a victory for bourgeois control of the market, the re-establishment of the family and tradition under threat from the changes of modernity. It is an attempt to combat the volatility, the “recklessness,” of market capitalism, of the free flow of commodities, which are here concretized in the sexuality of a female prostitute. This victory is represented in no finer way than Aslima’s shift away from the appellation “Tigress.” Early in the second phase of their romance, Lafala jokingly refers to Aslima as Tigress, but she quickly corrects him, ““No. I’m just a chummy pig. Scratch me and see how I’ll lie down at your feet”” (76). What better control than to have it all lay at your feet? It is no surprise that marriage was the proposal of the white representative of the very company that brutalized Lafala in the first place. As Titin succinctly puts it: ““Who thinks about marriage down here but idiots?”” (117) Marriage is a continuation of the process of control that began with the removal of Lafala’s vagabond feet, a process where Lafala now links up with the white representative to control Aslima’s sexual free-

dom. While McKay has rightly been criticized for his gendered bias in conceiving an alternative to capital, a issues that also permeates *Romance*, in the example of Aslima McKay subtly returns to *The Negroes in America*, emphasizing the shared oppression between blacks and women, and the often complicit role of black men, under racist patriarchy. McKay in a way works both sides of the argument: he not only pejoratively equated Aslima with capitalism, he also shows how she is the victim of white, bourgeois narratives of marriage that seek to control non-white sexuality. Aslima is asked to relinquish her agency and her sexuality for “love” and marriage back “home” in Africa. It is the tension in this sacrifice, I believe, that is represented in her final outburst against Titin. When she learns that Lafala has left for Africa without her, “life was no longer desirable” (171). She implores Titin to kill her, and her final provocation returns her to the freedom of a little brown bird: “She threw up her hands like a bird of prey about to swoop down upon a victim and pitched headlong to the door. He shot the remaining bullets into her body cursing and calling upon Hell to swallow her soul” (171).¹⁷

Romance II

If *Romance* charts the destructive dimensions of the romance between Aslima and Lafala, it also proposes a romance of a different sort, a proposal that links the style and perspective of *Romance* to a queer genealogy of literary alternate world imagining. This alternate conception of romance transpires in the bars, clubs, and cafés of Marseilles. In stressing the shared spaces of such venues, McKay implicitly ties material, shared spaces with the romance of collective cultivation. Yet these places are not all the same. The Café Tout-va-Bien, the Seamen and Workers’ Club, and the Petit Pain each organize a different,

and specific, set of concerns, while still participating in the larger structure of life at the Vieux Port. These different spatial domains provide a topological register for McKay's exploration of sociality, a type of brick and mortar actualization of the encounters displayed within the sites and within the novel.¹⁸ Moreover, in contrast to the privacy of Aslima and Lafala's romance, these public spaces facilitate a much different sexual economy. What we find here, as Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner argue, is a transformation of the "possibilities of identity, intelligibility, publics, culture, and sex that appear when the heterosexual couple is no longer the referent or privileged example of sexual culture" (187). Here, no longer confined to private spaces, monogamy, or the teleology of marriage and home, the spaces of the bars and cafés are suffused with desire, making them an integral part in the cultivation of sociality.

But before turning to the specificity of Marseilles, McKay establishes and undermines a series of assumptions about sociality and belonging in the opening section of the novel. After being removed from the ship in New York City, Lafala is confined to a hospital where the doctors remove his feet. There, McKay begins a dialogue across diasporic racial subjects. In the hospital, Lafala is joined by only one other black patient, Black Angel.¹⁹ However, "Lafala had never liked him although they were the only Negroes in the ward. The other black patient irritated him" (*RM* 7). Lafala further distinguishing himself by referring to Black Angel as an "American black" (8). As one of the first moments of the novel, this distinction between Black Angel's American blackness and Lafala's African blackness establishes that there will be no simple racial solidarity or kinship in the novel. In fact, part of Lafala's disregard for Black Angel was visually based—"Lafala was really

handsome” while Black Angel had an “objectionable mug” (7, 8). McKay foreshadows this visual hierarchy within the already charged register of race in the opening pages of the novel. As Lafala lies in the hospital bed, his feet removed, he “visualized the glory and the joy of having a handsome pair of legs” (1). In many ways, Lafala’s contempt for Black Angel continues the visual hierarchy of his village where “the older tribesmen appraised the worth of the young by the shape of their limbs” (1). In short, the first racialized scene in the novel introduces division and intra-racial hierarchy rather than unity or shared understanding.

Black Angel, though, hardly feels the pangs of kinship with Lafala or any other blacks. When Black Angel offers to put Lafala in touch with a Jewish lawyer to try his malpractice case, Black Angel claims, “I don’t trust no nigger lawyer. They’ll sell you out everytime.... Race nothing in this heah hoggish scramble to get theah, fellah, wif the black hogs jest that much worsen” (9). In a telling use of a porcine metaphor, Black Angel declares that hustling takes precedent over racial solidarity. Black Angel’s lack of racial sympathy continues later when he throws Lafala a party in Harlem, remarking afterwards that the party would be remembered “all them days that he’s gwine spend chasing them chimpangees when he scootles back to jungle-land” (22). That is, neither Black Angel nor Lafala recognizes any shared culture or history between them, and moreover, both have expressly negative impressions of the other. Despite Black Angel’s criticism of black lawyers as even more exploitative than white lawyers, what draws him to Lafala was, in fact, the belief that there “was a fortune in Lafala’s misfortune” (21). McKay links this “hoggish scramble” to a number of other racial issues. While the white press was quick to report the

scandalous story of Lafala, the black press did not run the story until after he was awarded a large settlement, the headlines pasted with fantastical amounts. Because of this sudden rise in press attention, Lafala begins to receive a number of letters asking for monetary donations, one such organization epitomizing both the racial and gendered dynamic at play in McKay's formulation of the "hoggish scramble": the Christian Unity of Negro Tribes, or as it was also known, CUNT. In the end, when the shipping company persuades Lafala to drop his lawyer with the promise of "more money," and hence drop Black Angel's cut of the deal, Black Angel enters the scramble, now suddenly as "a race man." "I think Ise worf it,' Black Angel said, for all I did.... Ise a race man and Ise with you alright against the lawyer. But I think I done earned what was promised me" (32). Through this initial dynamic between Lafala and Black Angel, as Somerville stress, McKay deprivileges race as a supposedly stable category through which questions of diasporic solidarity and fidelity can be explored, seeing race, instead, as itself a site of contestatory encounters.

Yet for all the complicated tension in racial consciousness between Black Angel and Lafala, Lafala and his lawyer initially strike up a close bond. Though the timing seems tenuous, Holcomb points out that the connection between a Jewish lawyer and a black client could possibly reference the Scottsboro case of 1931, where the legal branch of the Communist Party USA came to the aid of the Scottsboro boys. As Holcomb asserts, the legal branch of the CPUSA "was popularly and laudably identified among African Americans as a group of white Jewish lawyers" (183). Such a connection to Jewish communist is made explicit when Lafala's lawyer claims, "a lawsuit of that kind was like a strike" (*RM* 15). The analogy between legal proceedings and labor negotiations is telling as it exposes

the connection between class, race, and collective struggle and the asymmetrical power dynamic between Lafala and the shipping company.²⁰ When Lafala expresses concern that the lawyer's generosity is due to their 50-50 share of the financial settlement, a concern that certainly applies to Black Angel, Lafala's white nurse responds, "'But there's more to it than that,' she said. 'he's human'" (23). Perhaps there is also a degree of this humanness in the nurse's relationship with Lafala. She does, after all, permit Lafala to kiss her hand.²¹ And it is she who saves Lafala from being prematurely sent back to Africa, calling the lawyer to rescue him from the departing ship.

In ways never manifest between Lafala and Black Angel, "a pretty friendship sprung up" between Lafala and his lawyer (16). To show his gratitude for the hard work of the lawyer, Lafala makes a girdle for him in the tradition of his "tribeswoman," a symbolic gift of a shared diasporic experience. As the lawyer notes, "'the girdle is very pretty. My wife appropriated it at once. It carried me back to very ancient times when my people were also divided into tribes and wore girdles just as your people do today'" (16). This is McKay's depiction of diasporic communication at its most vibrant and creative, the production of relation across times and peoples, not through simple symmetry but actually through asymmetry and difference. While the American Jewish lawyer and the African vagabond Lafala share vastly different social and political perspectives, a similar or shared experience of oppression, diaspora, and struggle momentarily unite them. This shared experience of oppression is highlighted by a moment of anti-Semitism when the lawyer arguing the shipping company's case reprimands Lafala's lawyer, "'I'm not here to listen to a lecture from you, Mr. Jew'" (28).

The opening part of *Romance*, then, establishes a number of the characteristics and dynamics that will play out in the rest of the novel. Between Black Angel and Lafala there is no simple racial solidarity. While it is the lawyer Lafala who is generous because of money, it is actually Black Angel who is running a hustle, putting the lawyer on to the case and taking Lafala out to a party in Harlem because “he was made to understand he would receive 500 dollars if the suit were successful” (31). This tension between Black Angel and Lafala and the momentary bonds between Lafala, his lawyer and nurse, highlight a crucial dynamic in McKay’s internationalism at play in *Romance*. In shifting the story from New York back to Marseilles, McKay accentuates the role the city itself plays within this inter-racial, cross-class international encounter.

Marseilles stands as a significant site in McKay’s cultural imagination. As he writes in his autobiography *A Long Way From Home*, “It was a relief to get to Marseilles, to live in among a great gang of black and brown humanity” (277). McKay arrived in Marseilles in 1926, after leaving Russia and traveling through Europe, particularly Berlin and Paris. Yet this relief is not without tension. As McKay describes in *Romance*, Marseilles was “like a fever consuming the senses, alluring and repelling” (*RM* 36). The dialectical dynamic of Marseilles receives some of the best prose in the novel:

Magnificent Mediterranean Harbor. Port of seamen’s dreams and their nightmares. Port of the bums’ delight, the enchanted breakwater. Port of innumerable ships, blowing out, booming in, riding the docks, blessing the town with sweaty activity and giving sustenance to worker and boss, peddler and prostitute, pimp and panhandler. Port of the fascinating, forbidding and tumultuous Quayside against which the thick scum of life foams and bubbles and breaks in a syrup of passion and desire. (36)

Here Marseilles itself becomes a synecdoche for both the tensions of passion and despair that characterizes McKay's thinking about sociality and for the larger material spaces that facilitate his desired form of sociality. As a home of dreams and nightmares, Marseilles refuses any idealization, any simple conception of "home" or unity or community. This refusal is reflected in the cast of characters, the panhandlers, workers, organizers, prostitutes, and drifters: Diup from Senegal, Rock from the United States, Aslima from North Africa, St. Dominique from Martinique, Falope from West Africa, Babel from the West Indies, Big Blonde presumably from France, Lafala from an unspecified colonial parcel in Africa—each arriving in Marseilles for different reasons, sustaining off different means, searching for different things. There exists among these folks as much strife and disagreement as fidelity and shared perspective. The docks, shores, cafés and bars of Marseilles are a world unto themselves, or rather, a microcosm of the social forces of global capital. While Edwards argues that life of the Vieux Port in *Banjo* "ends up being portrayed not in juxtaposition to modern civilization, but as resistive expression that evades the 'civilizing machine,'" in *Romance* McKay shifts away from a (semi)autonomous black male culture to a more heterogeneous collection of Quaysiders whose relation to the "civilizing machine" is less clear-cut (*Practice of Diaspora* 224).²² Instead, as the microcosm of the larger forces of capital Marseilles exhibits all the tensions, convergences, and mis-fits that characterize McKay's social encounters.

This is evidenced in the very specific articulation of working-class sexuality in the novel. As Leah Rosenberg argues, Marseilles has a long history of sexual association. "At least since the eighteenth century," Rosenberg notes, "northern Europeans have associated

the Mediterranean with sexual license. A tradition of literary and social text has defined the Mediterranean as part of a ‘sotadic zone,’ a site of homosexuality” (227). However, as George Chauncey argues, the “working-class bachelor subculture”—the sailors, laborers, day workers, and transients of various types —“neither understood nor organized their sexual practices along a hetero-homosexual axis” (65). That is, while there may be in fact a tradition of texts associating Marseilles with homosexuality, working-class men, particularly those who populate many of McKay’s novels, did not conceive of themselves as homosexual. Working-class men actively sought to distance themselves from the effeminacy often associated with the image of the fairy as *the* homosexual. Instead of sexual definition, working-class men organized their erotic lives along strict gender lines, which “superseded homosexual interest as the basis of sexual classification in working-class culture” (Chauncey 87). Their sexual world, that is, was governed by their class position and their masculine attributes and outlook. As A. B. Christa Schwartz argues, McKay’s emphasis on working-class sexual cultures further distinguishes his political position from what he saw as the corruption of middle-class blacks, with their integrationist tendencies, emasculated relation to capital, and white-imitative morality. This class-based understanding of sexual life is crucial for understanding the sexual economy of *Romance*, its prevalent but by no means pronounced role in the conception of desire and politics.

The bars, clubs, and cafés of Marseilles all play an integral part in the desired-filled encounters of diaspora. The Café Tout-va-Bien was the locus of activity for the seamen and vagabonds of Quayside. It was the place of assumed rendezvous, the site of carousing, dancing, and fighting for the drifters. It was a place where Diup and Rock were sure to

meet up with someone for a drink. It was the location where St. Dominique would find sailors and dockworker whom he might convince to join the Seaman's club. It was also a confirmed site for sexual traffic, as both La Fleur and Aslima were as regular as any other resident of Quayside. Yet it was also a place where "honest working folk" could meet (*RM* 66). It was, in short, a place very much like Marseilles itself, appealing and amusing, depressing and degrading. And it is the site of two key scenes of desire and diaspora.

The first occurs early in Lafala's return to Marseilles, on his second visit to Tout-va-Bien. The scene introduces us to the first local Quaysiders, two "old comrades of the boats," Rock and Diup (39). The scene is key for the way it establishes masculine performance, as well as an underlying male-male sexual knowledge, as fundamental to the vagabonds of Quayside. Rock and Diup stroll into the Tout-va-Bien "with their arms over each other's shoulders, Rock and Diup, the funny fixtures of Quayside" (46). After conversing with some friends, Rock and Diup engage in a friendly competition of who could do the splits while dancing. Such competition was crucial in working-class culture, Chauncey argues, as "manliness in this world was confirmed by other men and in relation to other men" (80). After both fail at the splits, Diup claims, "It ain't natural to us.... The split is women's business" (*RM* 49). Rock's quick response goes a long way to clarify what might be meant by "funny fixture": "A woman's business is anybody's business.... Ain't nothing a woman do you can't find a man to do. If you haven't a way, make one they say. Every white, black and brown a man at Quayside knows that. And the womens know that too" (49). At this, "a little white unprosperous-looking" pimp interjects that it is not natural for men to do "women's business." The white pimp's comment, like those of the white

shipping company representative, signals an attempt to police non-white, non-normative gender and sexuality. Rock pointedly replies, “I don’t believe in laying down no laws for nobody, for the biggest law makers are the biggest law breakers under cover” (49). Rock’s comments highlight the pervasive awareness of the lassitude of male working-class sexuality. Black, brown, white, man, and woman knew it. And Rock’s reference to “if you haven’t a way, make one” also hints at the dominant fairy-trade structure of such sexuality. As Chauncey argues, when a working-class man sought out a fairy for sex, such actions had no bearing on his masculinity, nor did such choices come to the exclusion of seeking out sex from females. Object choice played no part, so long as there was a strict role differentiation (active/passive, etc) and gender distinction between the partners. Furthermore, Rock’s response to the white pimp exposes the hypocrisy in white morality. The phrase “under cover” may equally reflect a “secret” as much as a sexual reference to acts performed “under covers” of a bed. In this way, the *Tout-va-Bien* becomes a material space not only for Rock and Diup’s physical intimacy, their competitive nature, and their *queer* disposition, but also for the contestation of sexual normativity and white racist morality as well as the tracing out of Rock’s obvious knowledge of the vagaries of sex in the Vieux Port.

The second scene occurs much later in the narrative, near the end. After Lafala and Babel are released from jail with the help of St. Dominique and Falope, Lafala “hosts” a rousing party at *Tout-va-Bien*. “All the old habitués were there,” we are told, “the low-down gangs of old-and-hard youth, girls and men, white and brown and black, mingled colors and odors come together, drinking, gossiping, dancing and perspiring to the sound

of international jazz” (140). Here the café becomes of hot mingling of sensual bodies, as differences come together, in an idealized moment of collective convergence. “Everyone was close together in a thick juice melted by wine and music. There was little room for foot play. Just all together, two in one swaying to swaying, shuffling around, bumping and bumping up and down belly to belly and breast to breast” (142). The bar radio plays tunes from around the world, “the masterpieces of Broadway, Piccadilly and Monmartre” (140). The crowd itself danced an international step: “The beguin was there, always living this heady Martinique dance, blood cousin to the other West Indian folk dances, the Aframerican shuffle and the African swaying” (141-42). Here the party becomes a material genealogy of diaspora. In a type of reprise from *Banjo*, McKay articulates this collective internationalism through music and dancing. The party brings a heterogeneous group of people to the café, men, women, young, old, brown, black and white, all “close together in a thick juice.” The party even functions as a type of historical record, bringing out all “the old habitués.” And while the image McKay presents is one of melting together, the scene also articulates distinct lines of development and history, tracing the various iteration of dance step from Africa to the Caribbean to America, all dancing in time with music from France, England, and America. That is, even as there was “little room” in the café, McKay nonetheless finds the space to juxtapose these lineages through music, through dancing bodies, and importantly, the sensuality of “bumping and bumping up and down belly to belly and breast to breast.” Even usually reserved St. Dominique felt the music penetrating “into his marrow and bone, tickling his joints” (142). Lafala too felt the urge to dance: “He had never felt the desire so strongly since his accident. The beguin rhythm caught him by

the middle, drop to drop. The music swelled up and down with a sweep and rushed him off his feet” (142-43).

Despite the apparent euphoria of the scene all is not as harmonious as it might seem. In a previous depiction of “close, indiscriminate jazzing” found in *Banjo*, we learn that “the magic thing [that] had brought all shades and grades of Negroes together” was “money” (*Banjo* 45). McKay, then, is not oblivious to the contradictory nature of such a party. It is after all the fact that Marseilles is a key port city, drawing a diverse international group of workers, that makes possible any converges of diasporic sensibility or perspective. Capital is at the root of both the dispersion of black, brown, and white bodies around the globe and the mechanism that might bring them together again. The dynamic bringing things back together is not simply the material space of Marseilles, but Lafala’s new wealth, amassed as the result of his brutalization at the hands of racist capitalism. “It was all at Lafala’s expense” we are told, “and Babel believed that Lafala would have a back-breaking bill to pay” (*RM* 145). The scene, in other words, is far from utopian, despite its pitch, because the money Lafala uses to throw the party comes from the larger economic system that cut off his feet. Lastly, the *Tout-va-Bien* itself was a vexing site, particularly for St. Dominique. On the one hand, it was of course the site where the workers he sought to introduce to the union club congregated. However, because of his union organizing, he had a conflicted relation with the owner of the café. The owner did not like St. Dominique because his union organizing and political discussions upset his business. “The café,” after all, “was sometimes used as a meeting place by politicians in good standing to harangue the voters of Quayside. And on such occasions the proprietor made plenty of

money selling plenty of liquor” (114). St. Dominique’s organizing was bad for business. Moreover, as we are told, “one was never sure to what side [the owner’s] sympathies leaned, but suspected they leaned to the strong and cruel” (48). This cruelty is illustrated by the owner’s tendency to stoke fights so that he could get at someone he didn’t like. This played out with St. Dominique after Lafala disappeared. The proprietor had roused the café to such a pitch accusing St. Dominique of Lafala’s disappearance that they were on the cusp of attacking him. It was only Big Blonde who averted the violence. Because of this, and despite the tickle in his joints, St. Dominique “resolved not to dance in the mulatto’s café” (142). That is, while the *Tout-va-Bien* plays a crucial role in the alternate world imaging of the novel, the café remains deeply enmeshed with the violence of capital. From the sensual bodies dancing together to the proprietor’s capricious temperament and tendency toward the physically cruel to the materiality of the café amongst the docks, the *Tout-va-Bien* accentuates the dialectical encounter with capital that typifies McKay’s political thinking, foregrounding the particularity of such encounters as a means of grasping social possibility within capitalist modernity.

The *Tout-va-Bien* is not the only material place to provide an encounter of diasporic sociality. Quayside also housed a Seamen’s and Workers’ Club: “Besides its gorgeous breakwater and Quayside where all drifters and bums, the outcasts and outlaws of Civilization congregated like wasps together in love and hate feeding and buzzing over the scum of the Vieux Port, Marseille possessed also a Seamen’s and Workers’ Club” (98). The Club, however, was located “in the drabest and least interesting proletarian and factory quarter of Marseille” (98). This initial distinction between the usual grounds of the

“drifters and bums, the outcasts and outlaws,” what orthodox Marxists might call the lumpenproletariat, and the Workers’ Club marks McKay’s larger critique of the subtle racism of organized international communism and its misunderstanding of black diasporic vagabondism, a point McKay makes explicit through a series of conversations and debates at the Club.

The first scene occurs when St. Dominique brings Lafala to the Club. While there, St. Dominique introduces him to the president, a “very polite person from the middle class,” a former professor who now aims to “serve the cause of the ignorant workers as conscientiously as he had once instructed young students” (102, 103). This scene with the president of the Club is suffused with irony, underscoring the self-righteousness of some white communists and their condescension toward blacks. As the president leads Lafala through the Club, he begins his lecture, represented alternately as direct dialogue and ironic free indirect discourse: “Lafala’s being there with his yellow and white comrades was a symbol of the all-embracing purpose of the new social ideal. Lafala’s race represented the very lowest level of humanity, biologically and spiritually speaking” (103). Represented as free indirect discourse, this last observation, presumably from the lecture by the president, ironically adds objective weight to his bourgeois condescension, his own ignorance of race within class struggle, and his blatant racism. Whatever subtly there was in the scene comes to a head when the president, learning that Lafala plans to return to Africa, says, now in direct dialogue, ““You must help us over there as much as you can. We need the cooperation of your people. For the white workers alone cannot create a new soci-

ety if the Capitalists have vast reserves of ignorant black and brown workers against them” (104).

At this moment the scene opens up into one of the most pointed, and specifically racialized, debates about class struggle and collective representation. Significantly, the debate occurs not between the president and Lafala, but between the two best friends St. Dominique and Falope. After the president’s reference to ignorant black and brown workers, Falope asks, ““What about the vast reserves of ignorant whites?’ ... ‘They may be even more dangerous than the backward colored. Why not try to convert them first?’” (104) This reference to the dangers of ignorant whites is not only a reference to failed class-consciousness but also to violent racism. McKay makes this point clearly in *The Negroes in America*. There he argues that “in the South Negroes are indiscriminately exploited and oppressed by the oligarch and lynched by the white proletariat; in the North they are exploited and ostracized by the plutocracy and boycotted by the white proletariat” (*Negroes in America* 82).²³ Falope, in other words, expressly brings up the Party’s systematic lack of insight into race and its own racism. Yet for his part, St. Dominique tries to banish questions of race from the centrality of class struggle. ““Our movement is a bigger thing,”” claims St. Dominique. ““Each group of workers must stay where it is but all fight the battle of the class struggle for a new society”” (105). In so arguing St. Dominique reproduces a standard Leftist tendency “to treat race as a façade masking the more fundamental class struggle,” as Makalani argues, “or to claim that as workers, black people’s liberation would issue seamlessly from socialist revolution” (23-24). When Falope expresses reservation about the dictatorship of the proletariat, St. Dominique tries to assuage his critique by

pointing to “the intelligence in Russia” (105). Falope, however, dismisses both the hierarchy of class struggle over racial concerns and the “intelligence” of party leaders when he responds, “Oh the leaders are all well-educated men,” said Falope. ‘Like our president here.’ The president smiled” (105). Here, Falope sarcastically turns the screw of his critique of the racist policies of the party and the president.

Despite the official policies of the party, the Club did function as an important site of exchange.²⁴ The place itself had multiple uses: “The hall was a vast affair: lecture and reading room, billiard room, theatre, bar and restaurant, office, phonograph and piano”; “There were piles of pamphlets and newspapers in several languages, European and Asiatic” (102). While no one in *Romance* is described as Asiatic, in noting Asiatic texts at the Club, McKay highlights the important role Asian radicals played in international politics. It was after all Sen Katayama, the leading Japanese communist, who helped convince Comintern officials to include a discussion of race at the Fourth Congress and who facilitated McKay’s entry into the proceedings when no one else would.²⁵ As a site of education, leisure and dining, the Club also provided an additional, surely unplanned, service. While Big Blonde had “no interest in the workers’ union,” he often found himself there. “Because of his quixotic habit of getting into difficulties, he was often in trouble with the police” and used the Club as a hideout until things cooled off (123). This “quixotic habit” of Big Blonde’s is subtly linked to a time when he “broke up the furniture in the saloon of the loving house of La Creole, because a boy companion of his was insulted there” (124). In this way the Club functioned in both official and unofficial capacities. True, while the president exhibits racist/imperialist tendencies, the Club also affords the occasion where St. Domi-

nique and Falope engage in pointed discussions of race and class resistance. In fact, the conversation between the two that begins at the Club continues throughout the novel, expanding to racial consciousness, national identity, and hybridity. Furthermore, in noting the existence of Asian texts at the Club McKay expands the reach of political perspective, tracing a non-white genealogy of radical politics. Finally, Big Blonde's use of the club as a hideaway, as a respite for a sexual dissident who perhaps has retaliated against a homophobic insult, is made possible precisely *because of* the Club's lack of perspective in relation to the activities of the Vieux Port.

The final key encounter of this alternate romance of Marseilles occurs at the Petit Pain, a late night café Big Blonde takes Petit Frère to for a date. The material site of the café, like Tout-va-Bien, reflects and facilitates the encounter of diaspora, the debate, conflict, learning, and misunderstanding. It also involves, like the scene of Rock and Diup, an explicit depiction of a working-class erotic system, one that will come into conflict with the sudden appearance of capital. Like the Seamen's Club, the Petit Pain was located far from Quayside, "in a narrow and somber alley" near the railroad station (153). And like the Tout-va-Bien (and all of Marseilles) the café was a mixture of menace and retreat: "there was something a little sinister and something very alluring in this café, but difficult to define. It was a quality strangely balanced between the emotions of laughter and tears, ribaldry and bitter-sweetness" (153).

But the separateness of the bar from the rest of Quayside is itself also significant. Unlike the Seamen's Club, whose distance from the docks reflects a lack of understanding about the realities of Quayside, the separateness of Petit Pain highlights another aspect of

McKay's thinking about the form of the encounter as a series of interconnected enclaves of semi-autonomous self-cultivation. First of all, the café has a "uniformly pale atmosphere," likely a subtle reference to the predominant whiteness of the clientele and the overall assumption about the nature of the establishment (154). Second, the café appears to be what we would simply call today a gay bar. There are few other patrons, but those who are there appear clearly marked as hustlers and johns: "Two men of middle-class respectability were throwing dice for a game called 'Pigs' with three lads evidently of the slum proletariat. Two fine and handsome sailors were sipping cognac and sugar with a young man slickly dressed in black like a professional dancer" (154). The references to professionalism and the game of "Pigs" hint at the nature of the relationship among the men, as it echoes the game of "Pigs" played by Aslima and Lafala, and Aslima's profession. Moreover, the diversity of class position among the patrons suggests if not slumming than the crucial nature a clearly marked "gay" bar affords for cruising, meeting up, and general social cultivation.

The separateness from the rest of Quayside also provides Big Blonde and Petit Frère with a level of privacy. Big Blonde was a white Quaysider and occasional dock-worker, who did not often visit the common haunts like the Tout-va-Bien. He was a "broad-shouldered man, splendidly built but with the haunting eyes of a lost child," with "a singular and foreign air of refinement about him" (123). He was a working-class masculine man whose affections leaned toward young men. In this way, Big Blonde can be read as a rather typical working-class Wolf and his object of interest punks or fairies. As George Chauncey notes, "The erotic system of wolves and punks was particularly widespread ... among ... seamen, prisoners, and the immense number of transient workers" (88). Petit

Frère confirms the gender distinction at play in this working-class dynamic, as he “was fascinating with his pale prettiness and challenging deep dark-ringed eyes and insolent mouth” (*RM* 148). Their very names *Big* and *Petit* further emphasize the strict coded system within working-class erotics. And while fairies and punks were a part of the erotic system of working-class culture, they were a subordinated aspect, one that reinforced the larger gender relations in society. As such, one of the reasons Big Blonde takes Petit Frère to the Petit Pain is because “he didn’t want to impose Petit Frère” on the other working-class men of Quayside (156). Big Blonde’s reticence to bring Petit Frère to the Tout-va-Bien or some other place signals a desire not to infringe on the masculine sphere that such places exhibited. In this way the separateness of Petit Pain may have as much to do with whiteness as it does the gender hierarchy of working-class sexuality.

Shortly into Big Blonde and Petit Frère’s date, however, the rest of the Quayside gang arrives, “adding to the uniformly pale atmosphere a touch of that exotic color for which Marseille is famous” (154). The gang arrives because they want to question Petit Frère about a conversation he overheard between Titin and another man about Aslima’s plan to con Lafala out of his money. As Petit Frère describes all he knows, two young women pass by the door to the café, and seeing Petit Frère, enter to talk to him. Here a rather somber night of coffee and checkers between Big Blonde and Petit Frère shifts dramatically. As the two young women fawn over Petit Frère, St. Dominique has a hard time understanding ““why the girls are so affectionate with their little brothers,”” turning to Babel to remark, ““I should think they would be jealous”” (156). It is not surprising that St. Dominique would see the “little brothers” and “little sisters” as some sort of rival unions.

St. Dominique, after all, repeatedly shows a remarkable misunderstanding of sex work. It was rumored that he “often told the seamen that [brothels] and all forms of prostitution would be abolished under Communism” (126). However, Babel is quick to correct him. As Babel explains, they are not jealous of each other because they “are all young and jolly and working together at the same trade.” “But,” St. Dominique adds, “the little brothers steal business away from them.” To which Babel jokes, “and their men too sometimes” (157).

Apropos of this conversation with St. Dominique Babel suddenly begins to sing a song called “Moon-struck”:

I was stricken by the moon,
I was smitten by the moon,
Crazy for the fairy moon,
It lighted my heart and it caused me to roam
Far away from my loving wife waiting at home. (157)

In this song, Babel appears to be singing an ode to vagabondage, to the wondering spirit. Yet in the context of his conversation with St. Dominique about fairies stealing women’s men, the pull of the “fairy moon” has much different meaning. As Chauncey notes, in working-class circles, “the relationship between a fairy prostitute and his male customers emblemized the central model governing the interpretation of male-male sexual relations,” precisely because it did not interfere with the gendered dynamic central to their system of masculinity and homosociality (69). Babel’s song, then, is not simply about vagabondage, but a broad paean to what Chauncey terms working-class bachelor culture. “Embodying a rejection of domesticity and of bourgeois acquisitivism alike,” Chauncey argues, “the bachelor subculture was based on a shared code of manliness and an ethic of

male solidarity” (79). The fairy moon draws men away from the domestic home, from wife, from stasis, and from bourgeois morality. And the song quickly sparks the others to hum along. A communal chorus to the fairy moon ensues.

Babel and Big Blonde begin to dance with each other. In a further acknowledgement of the pervasive range of working-class sexuality in the novel, when Lafala jokes that Babel should “look out the moon madness don’t get you too,” Babel pointedly responds, “I’m crazy all ways bar none” (*RM* 158). Babel and Big Blonde, dancing together at this moment, appear throughout *Romance* as mirror images of each other, a further note of the encounter of race, class, and sexuality. Like Big Blonde, Babel is described as “big and aggressive” (145). More specifically, Big Blonde was one of Babel’s closest friends, and this intimacy comes to the fore when Babel affectionately puts his arm around Petit Frère. Big Blonde “removed it playfully, saying: ‘Keep your hands off that, old man’” (157). Yet this mirroring first appears much earlier, back before Babel returned to Marseilles from Genoa. As he tries to concoct a plan to get to Marseilles, Babel meets a “slim sailor boy” whom he convinces to help him get back to Marseilles by describing “in thick splashing colors the pleasures of Quayside” (111). The boy, in his turn, “wanted a pal along with him and felt that Big Babel was about the best person with whom he would like to be in Marseille” (111). While the scene is an explicitly pleasure-filled wolf-punk dynamic like Big Blonde and Petit Frère, an equally telling sign appears in the reference to Babel as “Big Babel.” This is the one and only time Babel is called by this name, and should be read as a clear echo of Big Blonde. In what may be an odd tick of McKay’s imagination (or

perhaps a secret name code), the working-class wolf in *Home to Harlem* likewise shares the B.B. initials with Big Blonde and Big Babel—Billy Biasse:

Billy Biasse was there at a neighboring table with a longshoreman and a straw-colored boy who was a striking advertisement of the Ambrozine Palace of Beauty. The boy was made up with high-brown powder, his eyebrows were elongated and blackened up, his lips streaked with the dark rouge so popular in Harlem, and his carefully-straightened hair lay plastered and glossy under Madame Walker's absinthe-colored salve "for milady of fashion and color." (91)

To reinforce the dynamic between Billy Baisse and the boy, Zeddy asks, "'Who's the doll baby at the Wolf's table?'" When Zeddy's girlfriend asks why Billy Biasse is called Wolf, Zeddy knowingly laughs, "'Causen he eats his own kind'" (*Home* 91-92).

As with the scene from the *Tout-va-Bien*, music and homosociality, and now a specific articulation of working-class sexuality, produce an idealized sociality, one that brings together race, class, and sexuality at the same moment of St. Dominique's misunderstanding. Moreover, the idealized setting in Babel's "Moon-struck" song hints back to another moment of idealized sociality, "The Moonshine Kid" song sung by the children of Lafala's village. In that instance, "The Moonshine Kid" song produced an image of gestalt for Lafala, of children "participating in ... leg play, running and climbing and jumping, and dancing in the moonlight in the village yard" (*RM* 1). Lafala remembered "lying down naked under the moon and stars while his playmates traced his image with pieces of crockery" (1-2). The dominant image of "The Moonshine Kid" is one of wholeness, community, and self-determination—quite literally the drawing of one's own image. And so too at *Petit Pain* is the creation of another image of dancing, one removed for the Edenic fantasy of original Africa, yet one no less idealized in its cultivation of male working-class homosociality.

However, if the party at the Tout-va-Bien was produced in no small part by Lafala's money, at the Petit Pain, the emergence of the economic has a much different valence and outcome. As the men drink, sing and dance, an old woman enters the café attempting to sell various wares. "She was," we are told, "prematurely grey and her skin wrinkled and her mouth twisted and she looked like an old cocotte to whom time and people had been cruel" (158). Unlike the young female prostitutes who just prior moved easily among the men, here the woman presents a far more menacing figure. She dangles before the group a small doll to purchase. Babel, seemingly angered by both the intrusion of a woman and commerce into his vagabond homosociality, tells her "she was in the wrong place" (158). Babel's reference to the wrong place, here, suggests undoubtedly McKay's long held dichotomy between homosocial vagabondage and women/capital. The woman has, and will, break up the party. For her part, the woman, picking up on the homosocial bond and the specific presence of Petit Frère, responds, "Indeed I am, there's no doubt I am when you have that thing there between you," she said fixing Petit Frère with a malevolent finger" (158). After trading insults with Petit Frère, the woman says, "and you're so pretty, like a doll.... You all ought to buy him a doll. He'd be more darling with one in his arms" (158).

The reference to Petit Frère as a doll echoes back to the scene in *Home* with Billy Biasse and his companion, whom Zeddy called "doll baby." In that scene, the boy is described in unmistakably economic terms: he "was a striking advertisement of the Ambrozie Palace of Beauty" (*Home* 91). And the economic connection to Petit Frère was already suggested by Babel in his conversation with St. Dominique. Petit Frère may in fact

hustle for money. This, however, is not new to either Babel, Billy Biasse, Big Blonde, Zeddy or any number of the other folks in McKay's corpus who traffic in rent boys. The difference, suddenly, is the inclusion of the old woman who debases the idealized dynamic, reducing Petit Frère to a "little sucking pig," a dominant image of capital in the novel (*RM* 158). Juxtaposing this moment with McKay's poem "Boy Prostitute," we see how the woman introduces the realm of exchange that destroys the idealized beauty that would inspire Michelangelo or Raphael; gone is the transcendental beauty that parishioners would look to instead of God. Now, boys like Petit Frère are only advertisements for beauty supplies and cheap little dolls—mere commodities. And these references to beauty supplies and dolls tie Petit Frère to a feminized world of capitalist exchange and to the surface of the commodity fetish, much like the old woman herself at this moment. In short, the emergence of the woman with her dolls shatters the scene where Babel and the other were creating their own image, what Edwards might have called their "resistive expression," pulling the men into a commodity exchange that was, to be sure, always already present in the scene, a commodity exchange that, as Marx says, strips "the social character of men's labour" (*Capital* 320). This in fact *is* the end—the violent end—of the scene's social character. After this initial exchange with Petit Frère, the woman leaves, and despite Babel's attempt to resuscitate the party, the mood is broken. While Babel begins to sing again, the woman reemerges, walks straight to Petit Frère and wipes "a paper full of filth" in his face: "'There! That is your life.' She cried" (*RM* 159). At this, Big Blonde jumps to his defense, hitting the woman and sending her and her goods sprawling on the floor. This climatic moment of violence, against Petit Frère, against the woman, ends the scene.

While individually each of the scenes from *Tout-va-Bien*, the Seamen's Club, and *Petit Pain* articulate a moment of diasporic sociality, often explicitly suffused with desire, taken together they present the various encounters crucial to McKay's larger social philosophy. While not as "plotless" as *Banjo*, *Romance* is still governed primarily by amassing a collage of sections and parts, which do not so much move forward toward a conclusion as establish a shifting series of relations, whether thematically, narratively, or geographically. We can link this technique to the spatial forms of the preceding chapters. There, too, the aim is less a seamless narrative than narrative's undoing through the exposure of gaps and discontinuity. Such a technique results in what Elizabeth Freeman might call an "erotic friction" between the elements of the novel. That is, what is crucial about these various encounters presented in *Romance* is not simply their explicit consideration of working-class sexuality, as important as that is, but rather McKay's broader perspective of the contestatory nature of diaspora and the formal techniques this engenders in his work, techniques that become, in turn, a type of eroticism. "And this erotics," Freeman argues, "is itself a kind of historicism, a way of confronting the historicity of subject and politics that finds its queerness in method rather than in object" (499). In this manner, *Romance* is, in one crucial way, less interested in the objects of the narrative in themselves than the nature of the relations *between* them. *Romance* most certainly takes up race and gender and class and capitalism in significant manners, yet none of these are themselves stable objects of analysis, as Somerville stresses, but deeply dependent and intersectional historical configurations. And it is precisely the method of analysis, the form of *Romance*, that permits McKay to give contour to the encounters with racist capitalist modernity that illuminate

what Foucault called “relational virtualities,” alternate forms and modes of sexual habitation, the possibilities for social life found in the contradictory nature of capitalism and the material spaces of its development (“Friendship” 311).

The importance of *Romance*, like *The Young and Evil*, resides in this untimely depiction of sexuality as a confrontation with capital, as a material domain that is crucial for thinking through sociality. And despite the novel’s absence from critical consideration, this untimely method resurfaces in our contemporary moment as a necessary lens through which to understand capital. As with *The American Scene*, we see one major strand of this confrontation in the Jamesian distinction between bourgeois romance, and its often complicit relationship to imperialist capital accumulation, and queer sociality as a public practice of cultivation and criticality. McKay’s counter romance to capital, the queer romance of materialism, emerges in the shared public sites where dialogue, debate, and momentary clasps of affiliation provide the perspective to understand and contest the manner racist imperialism folds together narratives of home, desire, and intimacy as a mode domination. McKay, however, is clear that such criticality does not exist apart from capital. Capital is, after all, a necessary agent that brings together, along the shore of the Vieux Port, the various diasporic subjects who populate Marseilles. Yet McKay’s method of the encounter provides the necessary perspective on this dialectical nature of diaspora, providing contour to the nature of capitalist development, its spatial possibilities, and its foreclosing of sexual, racial, and class-based narratives of belonging.

¹ The English version of the text is a retranslation. It appears that McKay's original English manuscript no longer remains, and the text originally commissioned for a Russian audience was immediately translated.

² Two years prior, W. E. B. Du Bois made a similar, but less forceful, claim, asserting that gender was "next to" race as the key problems of the twentieth century. See Gillman and Weinbaum, *Next to the Color Line*.

³ See also Smethurst, *New Negro*; Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left*; and Carew, *Black Red and Russians*.

⁴ See Hathaway, *Caribbean Waves*; Walters, *At Home in Diaspora*; Rosenberg, "Caribbean Models."

⁵ See Schwarz, *Gay Voices*; Maiwald, "Race, Capitalism, and the Third-Sex Idea"; and Tuggle, "'Love So Fugitive.'"

⁶ Henceforth cited in text as *RM*.

⁷ For work on the black radical tradition, see Robinson, *Black Marxism*; Edwards, "Dossier on Black Radicalism"; and Moten, *In the Break*.

⁸ Stuart Hall characterizes diasporic experience as "the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity," "the instability, the permanent unsettlement, the lack of any final resolution" to cultural identity (80, 73).

⁹ With a clearer sense of working-class culture, Cooper's claim that "McKay... did not seriously challenge the rule that [homosexual topics] were not to be discussed openly in creative literature" does not stand up (75).

¹⁰ As Benigno Sánchez-Eppler and Cindy Patton argue, "place is also a mobile imaginary, a form of desire" (4).

¹¹ This formulation of the contradictory nature of Marseilles encapsulated in breaking waves is also found in *Banjo* and his autobiography, and repeated throughout *Romance*.

¹² As Weinbaum argues,

With its hallucination of Brahmin royalty, royal blood, and its vision of the golden child as the incarnation of a new interracial alliance, *Dark Princess* reinscribes the orientalism we might expect it to challenge, while simultaneously making what may be called a 'racial origin mistake,' an essentializing argument about racial genealogy and belonging that is on a structural level a mere revamping of that mad by advocates of racial nationalism in the US context. (36-37)

¹³ For work on *Home* and *Banjo*, see Maxwell, Schwarz, Stephens, Rosenberg, Maiwald, and Hathaway.

¹⁴ This poem was later altered and expanded into "Patient," written around 1923 while McKay was in Paris receiving treatment for syphilis. "Patient" is part of a series of poems written during his treatment called "The Clinic," all of which are collected in his *Complete Poems*, edited by William J. Maxwell. "Boy Prostitute," however, was not included as a separate poem, and exists only in handwritten form. This omission is significant for materialist queer historiography, for queer literary history, as well as for McKay's oeuvre. It is

also significant that the poem exists as a material record of the erotic epistolary exchange between McKay and Locke. Some words were illegible.

¹⁵ This link between marriage and economics is mirrored elsewhere in the novel. As Aslima and Titin debate the best way to fool Lafala out of his money, Aslima suggests, in order to guarantee her economic situation, that Titin marry her. Aslima is afraid that after she swindles Lafala out of his money and gives it to Titin, he in turn will swindle her. But only after Titin begins to fear he is the one getting swindled does he relent and agree to marry Aslima: “Finally he promised to marry her if she succeeded. If she really wanted marriage he had no objection so long as she was successful over Lafala” (*RM* 141).

¹⁶ In discussing later American progressives like Mike Gold and Max Eastman, two colleagues of McKay’s at the *Liberator*, Michael Trask argues that “female sexuality becomes synonymous with the incapacity for political agency engendered by market culture” (7).

¹⁷ In a bizarre reading of this final scene, Holcomb claims Aslima died “for the only thing worth struggling for in the brutal Marseilles underworld: *romance*” (223, italics original).

¹⁸ In such a formulation, McKay may be building off of Lenin’s support of ethnic self-determination under the broader banner of sovietization. As Baldwin argues, “the ambiguity between the support for black self-determination and the call to disband ethnic particularity through affiliated countercultures to combat imperialism and racism was an enabling one” (10). Yet McKay broadens the scope of self-determination beyond class or nationality. According to Cooper, while in Casablanca, McKay witnessed a form of distinct, yet complimentary, social organization similar to what he experienced in Jamaica. Each of these becomes crucial sources for McKay’s conception of sociality.

¹⁹ Black Angel earns his name because Lafala has a dream that he died and went to heaven. In the dream, Lafala believes he is being ushered before the Lord, when he is awoken. When he opens his eyes he sees a “Black Angel” standing over him.

²⁰ In a further emphasis on the disjointed nature of diaspora, St. Dominique will claim later that race has little to do with Lafala case: “‘It’s a stinking proletarian case, from Marseille across the ocean to New York and back’” (*RM* 136).

²¹ It must be noted that when Black Angel also tries to kiss her hand, she retorts: “Insolent nigger” (*RM* 8).

²² In “Dossier on Black Radicalism,” Edwards notes a tension between “the autonomy of black radical groups” and their desire to engage other modes of difference (2).

²³ See also Kelley, *Race Rebels*.

²⁴ It should also be noted that the Seamen’s Club was not the only organizing establishment in Quayside. The various white pimps and criminals of Marseilles had the Domino Association, a group that, from all appearances, had far greater organizing skills and political muscle: “It was an international association, a kind of loose federation of men of common mind and ideals who kept in touch with one another by secret correspondence, keeping tab on their protégés, boycotting or hounding into submission or out of existence those who were refractory” (*RM* 85).

²⁵ For the history of McKay’s inclusion at the Comintern, see Cooper; for the theoretical and practical links between black and Asian radicalism, see Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*.

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ABSTRACT**THE MATERIALISM OF THE ENCOUNTER: QUEER SOCIALITY AND
CAPITAL IN MODERN LITERATURE**

by

MICHAEL SCHMIDT**May 2013****Advisor:** Dr. Barrett Watten**Major:** English**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

In *The Materialism of the Encounter* I argue for the critical importance of queer sociality as a confrontation with global capital, a confrontation in which sexualities emerge as a material history necessary for rethinking the broader experiences of twentieth century modernity. To do so, I draw together a series of transnational texts—Henry James’s non-fiction travel narrative *The American Scene*, Djuna Barnes’s canonical *Nightwood*, and two neglected novels, Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler’s *The Young and Evil* and Claude McKay’s unpublished *Romance in Marseilles*—that exhibit a mode of sociality and literary practice I am calling the “encounter.” While the specific parameters of the encounter differ from author to author, there remains a shared desire to negotiate sexuality as material history, a negotiation deeply interwoven with other, fractious modes of social difference and the larger differentiation under capital itself. In reading these texts as materialist, I detail the ways concentrated industrial production and the sites of commodity exchange are a necessary part of the history of sexuality, tracing queer encounters through the shared spaces of international capital, the port of Marseilles, the bars and cafés of Paris or Berlin,

and the streets and parks of New York, that fostered queer self-cultivation. These sites, while enmeshed in the larger dynamics of capital, nonetheless emerge as critical zones of social and sexual understandings. In my readings, I demonstrate how the texts collected here counterpoise these material, heterogeneous dimensions of sexual life to the larger abstraction of capital, and specifically to the abstraction of desire from material, social practices.

Furthermore, I show how the critical power of this materialism is transformed into a range of modernist literary practices—primarily collage—that become a method not only for confronting the contradictions within capital but for negotiating the myriad social differences of modern life. The literary work, I argue, becomes a manner of cultivating a mode of queer sociality modeled by the formal practices of the text itself, where a criticality emerges through the juxtaposition of disparate elements of material life whose aim is a broader understanding of capital and the economies of desire. In so doing, the queer compartment of these texts works against the reifying tendency inherent in commodity exchange and sexual definition, instead exposing the variety of social and sexual dynamics always already present within capital. I describe such a dynamic as the materialism of the encounter, and emphasize its critical nature in James's interest in sites of male-male cruising, Barnes's negotiation of gender, sexuality, and history, Ford and Tyler's focus on the close proximity of violence, capital, and sexual definition, and McKay's productive and destructive clashes of race, class, gender, and international revolutionary politics. This tension between the formal modernist experimentations of these texts and the larger social domain of capital not only reveals the critical force of the encounter to a specifically queer

sociality but also provides new avenues for understanding modernist formal innovation as an engagement with the uneven terrain of global capital.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

I graduated from Wayne State University with a B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. My research interests include twentieth century literature, modernity, literary theory, Marxism, gender, and sexuality. I have presented papers in America, England, Germany, and France, where my work was published as a conference volume entitled *Modernism and Unreadability*. At Wayne State, my work has received a number of awards, including the Terrance King Memorial Award for Outstanding Dissertation Project, the Humanities Center's Dissertation Fellowship, and the Graduate School Summer Fellowship. I also spent three years working at *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts*, first as the Editorial Assistant, then as the Managing Editor.