THE TERMS OF OUR CONNECTION: AFFILIATION AND DIFFERENCE IN THE POST-1960 NORTH AMERICAN NOVEL

Jennifer M. James

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ABSTRACT

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In this dissertation, I consider a neglected legacy of the long 1960s (1959-1975): the struggle to form lasting connections across seemingly irreparable social divides. Through a comparative analysis of North American novels by James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood, Linda Hogan, Tim O'Brien and Susan Choi, I identify a common story their works all share: the narrative of affiliation. These novels of affiliation, I argue, represent the creation of lateral bonds of attachment among individuals of different races, ethnicities, genders, sexualities and classes. As a transgressive and unruly form of interpersonal relationship, affiliation works to bridge divisions by joining together the contradictory feelings of erotic desire and friendship. Defining an overlooked sub-genre of the post-1960 North American novel of development, this project illuminates the heterogeneous bonds of solidarity that undoubtedly arose during the sixties, yet have been continually silenced by national discourses of identity and multiculturalism. In the wake of neo-liberalism, 1960s collective projects for social change, including the New Left, the civil rights movement, Black Nationalism, feminism, and the Asian American movement, among others, appear historically and ideologically separate, and even antagonistic. In stark contrast, this dissertation illuminates the common ethics of affiliation that aligned these disparate movements and was built from collaborative, immanent and provisional attempts at repairing suffering and disparity. Positioned not within, but alongside the fraught history of the sixties, this project offers a new portrait of the adjacent, subterranean modes of experimental living that animated the era.

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For my parents, Mike and Diana James,

whose tall-tales of the sixties continue to haunt my imagination.

INTRODUCTION

On August 15, 2009, Frank Rich published a *New York Times* Op-Ed commenting on the anniversary of the Woodstock Festival and the third season of the celebrated, 60s-themed television series *Mad Men*. Explicitly connecting the sixties with the "oughts," Rich writes of witnessing a moment akin to the 1960s, a "pivot point of our history, with a new young president unlike any we've seen before, and with the promise of a new frontier whose boundaries are a mystery. Something is happening here, as Bob Dylan framed this mood the last time around, but you don't know what it is."[1] As Rich's article suggests, the study of the Sixties is like entering a seemingly undiscovered, yet paradoxically well trod, territory. The "something that is happening here" in 2012 holds an uncanny resemblance to the raucous horizon of possibility we associate with the sixties. Yet this "new frontier" is in fact, not quite new, but a moment of re-vision, where we are looking back with a new perspective on the conflicts over race, class and gender that animated the era. As the hopes and disappointments of the 2008 presidential election have proven, we are faced with a crucial need to enrich our understanding of the ways social life has transformed since the sixties. I aim to provide the beginnings of such an account in this dissertation.

This dissertation addresses the overlooked psychic and affective experiences that contribute to the development of non-normative interpersonal, familial and communal structures of relation during the sixties. In the following pages, I approach fiction as a dynamic space to explore an alternative cultural imaginary of affiliation I believe animates the period. Attending to this neglected legacy of the long 1960s (1959-1975), this project analyzes how novels of the era represent its struggles to form lasting affiliations across seemingly irreparable social divides. Through a

[1] Frank Rich, "'Mad Men' Crashes Woodstock's Party," *New York Times*, 15 Aug 2009, 18 April 2012. http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/16/opinion/16rich.html?pagewanted=all.

comparative analysis of novels by James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood, Tim O'Brien and Susan Choi, I identify a common story their works all share: the narrative of affiliation. These novels of affiliation represent the cultivation of lateral bonds of attachment among individuals of different races, ethnicities, genders and sexualities. Defining an overlooked sub-genre of the post-1960 North American novel of development, these texts illuminate subversive modes of companionship and crossing that were central to collectivity during the era, yet have been continually silenced by national discourses of neo-liberalism and multiculturalism. Together they demonstrate that cross-difference circles of solidarity envisioned in the 1960s and after develop concomitant to transgressive modes of interpersonal relationship that joined together the contradictory feelings of erotic desire and friendship.

The novel of affiliation illuminates the common affective and relational desires that animated seemingly separate and distinct leftist and minoritarian movements. During the 1980s, the insurgence of group-based identity politics in part developed as a means of resisting the celebrated rise of liberal individualism; these movements crucially revived a sense of community and identity for marginalized groups during a period when conservative legislatures demolished key structures of redistribution and equal protection that had been forged during the long 1960s. However, the political nature of these identities, which focused on shared genealogies of inheritance and essentialist notions of the family, culture and the self, made the creation of viable modes of cross-difference solidarity often difficult to visualize. In contrast to this identitarian memory of the sixties, I hope to illuminate the decade's enduring queer politics of intersectionality that has its genesis in intersubjective bonds of affiliation.

In its emphasis on what Kimberle Crenshaw terms a politics of intersectionality, my reading of affiliation is indebted to a Black feminist genealogy that continues to remind us that the hard "lessons" of the '60s don't easily mesh with national political agendas. Looking back to the work of

Audre Lorde, for example, illuminates the power that comes from confronting the uncomfortable tensions that emerge when different races, ethnicities and genders come together. A reappraisal of Lorde's early 1980s writings can provide a window into the way the 1960s haunts us in the cyclical recurrence of the politics of difference in North America. Those hegemonic structures of power that Lorde fought against in the early eighties were part of a conservative reprisal against the revolutionary legacies of the sixties – mainly the Reagan era's systematic destruction of equality-seeking social welfare programs at home and the resurgent imperial power of the United States abroad. Lorde's poetry and theory are central to what Roderick A. Ferguson calls a "queer of color critique" that emerged from lesbian identified black feminists in the mid-1970s, which gives power to this dissertation's comparative analysis of racial, gender and sexual formation during the 1960s and after.

On August 27, 1983, a quarter of a million people participated in the second "March on Washington for Jobs, Peace and Freedom," which commemorated the original mass demonstration led by Martin Luther King twenty years before. Among those who attended was Lorde who had been recruited by the National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gay Men to speak. She accepted with trepidation this momentous offer to be one of the first out lesbians to testify to the shared values inherent in the civil rights and gay liberation movements at this historic public forum. In her remarks, Lorde made a strong claim for the necessary bonds of solidarity between gay and straight African Americans in their continued pursuit for a more just and egalitarian society. After first recognizing how the black civil rights movement had pledged to support the burgeoning gay rights movement, of which two legislative bills were proposed in Congress at the time, she continued: "not one of us is free to choose the terms of our living until all of us are free to choose the terms of our living… We know we do not have to become copies of each other in order to work together. We know that when we join hands across the table of our differences, our diversity gives us great

power."[2] Lorde called for a collective commitment to ensure each individual's freedom to "choose the terms of our living" that surpassed the sameness of becoming "copies of each other" in order to productively confront the differences that she elsewhere termed a "creative and necessary force for change."[3]

Throughout the early 1980s, Lorde set out a politics of diversity that grew out of the tensions that come when collective differences "spark like a dialectic."[4] Her poetic and political vision of diversity developed in tandem with an exploration of political afterlives of the 1960s. For Lorde writing in the late 1970s and early '80s, "learning from the 60s" involved grappling with the problem of how best to achieve solidarity while retaining singularity, of cultivating what she calls an "interdependency" built from the acknowledgement of "mutual (nondominant) differences." Only then, she argues, can "interdependency become unthreatening."[5] Implicit to Lorde's claims was an interdependency forged through intersubjective encounters. Her essay on the "Uses of the Erotic" makes this idea plain in arguing for the necessity for our corporeal erotic life, constituted within the subject/object relationship, to be explicitly and creatively utilized for the struggle against oppression: "when we begin to live from within outward, in touch with the power of the erotic within ourselves, and allowing that power to inform and illuminate our actions upon the world around us, then we begin to be responsible to ourselves in the deepest sense."[6] To cultivate an energizing and non-threatening sense of solidarity with the other is to courageously and self-reflexively utilize the "power of the erotic" to shape ethical action in the world.

Rich with intellectual meaning and strategic force, the essays collected in Lorde's 1984 *Sister Outsider* testify to a crucial and often overlooked aspect of the civil rights, feminist and third world

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[2] Audre Lorde, "march for dream; words from lorde," *Off Our Backs*. 13.9 (October, 1983): 13.
[3] Lorde, "Learning from the 60s," in *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984), 135.
[4] Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House" in *Sister Outsider*, 111.
[5] Lorde, "Master's Tools," in *Sister Outsider*, 111.
[6] Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic," in *Sister Outsider*, 58.

liberation movements of the 1960s: the cultivation of bonds of solidarity that necessarily incorporated the erotic in order to bridge social differences. Lorde's 1984 claims for the power of the erotic to help reconcile individual and collective divides reckons with the arrested efforts to achieve the mutual yet competing goals of social justice and protection of individual freedoms in the sixties. As David Harvey argues, these failures clearly contributed to the New Left's political downfall. By the mid-1970s, violence, in-fighting and conservative revival broke down the vitality of leftist and radical movements for revolution. Capitalizing on the balkanization of these collectives, market-driven and governmental institutions re-routed the society's lingering desire for individual liberation and neutralized this impulse within an economic structure of neo-liberal citizenship. Harvey posits that the rise of the neo-liberal citizen conflates citizenship with consumerism and a market-driven individualism, silencing public debate and political engagement since 1970.[7] Michael Omi and Howard Winant add that neoliberalism implicitly revises 1960s movements for racial equality in particular, claiming that this discourse has flattened the consciousness raising power of race as a political category: "it has, in effect, buried race as a significant dimension of its politics. It has attempted to close the Pandora's box first opened – in contemporary terms – during the 1960s."[8]

1960s collective projects for social change, including the New Left, the civil rights movement, Black Nationalism, feminism, the Asian American movement, appear historically and ideologically separate and even antagonistic in the wake of neoliberalism. However, our understanding of them as distinct, rather than concatenate, is shaped by a neoliberal logic that remembers these movements not as ideologically rigorous and contentious collectives but identitarian, personal disputes. Wendy Brown writes of this logic: "neo-liberal rationality, while

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[7] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 43-46.
[8] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (London: Routledge, 1994), 152.

foregrounding the market, is not only or even primarily focused on the economy; rather it involves extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action, even as the market itself remains a distinctive player."[9] The extension of these "market values" into our memory of these movements obscures their interdependency, through what Michael Rothberg argues is a "zero-sum logic of calculation and competition" that pits one movement against the other.[10] Bringing together fictions of the era, in an archive more disorderly than the nationally bounded multicultural canon, this project demonstrates that each of these movements manifested from a common impulse to collectivize across differences and do away with the paranoia, alienation and apathy of the Cold War fifties.[11]

Foreshadowing the language of Herbert Marcuse's 1964 *One Dimensional Man*, The Port Huron Statement captures this desire for change on the level of what is called "human relationship." Here, the organizers of Students for a Democratic Society testify to their common-held belief in the generosity of humanity, the need to cultivate "fraternity and honesty" and to better recognize the inherent interdependency of "man and man." This revised conception of human relationship was founded on a non-egotistical, yet singular sense of self "rooted in love, reflectiveness, reason, and creativity."[12] Although SDS and the New Left have been rightly criticized for not taking up questions of race, ethnicity and gender from the start, their utopian vision of human interdependence and communalism clearly reflects the decade's greater revitalization of social affiliations. The New Left's emphasis on affiliation being built through participatory democratic processes of consensus building, debate, and silent civil disobedience, offered a path to

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[9] Wendy Brown, "Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy" *Theory and Event* 7.1 (2003). http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v007/7.1brown.html

[10] Michael Rothberg, "Against Zero-Sum Logic: A Response to Walter Benn Michaels" *American Literary History* 18.2 (2006). http://alh.oxfordjournals.org/content/18/2/303.full?sid=34e21d6a-6584-484e-a993-99c1daded46c#fn-5

[11] Terry H. Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995), 62.

[12] Students for a Democratic Society, *The Port Huron Statement* (New York, NY: Students for A Democratic Society, 1964), 7.

egalitarianism; yet, in practice equality was difficult, if not impossible to achieve, even within the ranks. Unfortunately, organizations like SDS, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and other organizations failed to prevent the resurgence of a white patriarchal status quo within the movement. And yet, these failures also fueled the development of various counter-movements. One might consider, for example, Stokely Carmichael's 1966 radicalization of SNCC to found the Black Power movement in North America, Mary King and Casey Hayden's 1965 proto-feminist memos protesting the gendered "caste" system within SNCC or Black lesbian feminist Margaret Sloan-Hunter's editorship of *Ms.* and founding of the National Black Feminist Organization in 1973 after working with Martin Luther King, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and CORE. Although the terms and constituent bodies may have altered, the founding spirit of what historian Terry Anderson calls "the movement" was to build community and work collectively for social change.

It seems this mystical, and sometimes erotic, feeling of connection that we associate with the 1960s continues to haunt North American society. Recent historians and cultural critics' reassessment of the impulse to collectivize exists in stark opposition to 1970s and 1980s histories of the sixties as an era of naïve and narcissistic solipsism. As Todd Gitlin reflects in 1993: "the genies that the Sixties loosed are still abroad in the land, inspiring and unsettling and offending, making trouble…For better and worse, the ideas and impulses remain, transposed into other keys, threatening, agitating, destabilizing."[13] The movement, more generally was animated by this tentative, utopian impulse. Anderson quotes feminist activist and historian Sara Evans: "above all the term 'movement' was self-descriptive. There was no way to join; you simply announced or felt your self to be part of the movement – usually through some act like joining a protest march. Almost a mystical term, 'the movement' implied an experience, a sense of community and common

[13] Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam, 1993), xiv.

purpose."[14] Anderson's work demonstrates that collective political participation in the era cannot simply be measured by documentable acts like paying membership dues, subscribing to a radical journal, or even getting arrested for civil disobedience. Instead, the ineffable richness of "the movement" came from this awakening of a "mystical" feeling in individuals who sought a "sense of community." Among activists like Evans, the experience of solidarity was intimate and intra-generational; as feminist King describes it, there was an "intense feeling of interdependency" and "spirit of comradeship."[15]

As an era defined by movement, historical discontinuity and change, the sixties are particularly difficult to periodize and demand a flexible and dual-temporal framework of literary and cultural analysis. Historians Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin addressed this problem in their 2008 study by terming the period the "long 1960s" (1959-1975). In this project, I extend the boundaries of historical periodization even further to explore how those structures of affiliation that defined the era still animate feelings and actions in the present. Divided into two sections, the dissertation's first part traces the development of novels of affiliation written between 1962-1973. The second section analyzes the ways the literary legacy of affiliation has been transposed and diluted in historical novels published after 1990. These authors' memories of the sixties are suspicious of affiliation's capacity to repair injury, oddly returning to the genealogical structures of healing, which earlier generations had worked to resist. This flexible historicist method derived from cultural memory studies hypothesizes a practice of holding together literary and historic ambivalences in productive tension, thereby resisting the assignation of a teleological or redemptive moral conclusion to the Sixties.

Since the mid-1980s, when the decade's history began to be composed, accounts of the decade have intimated a central paradox: the Sixties is either a decade of wounding and rupture or of

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[14] Sara Evans Qtd. in Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties*, 102.
[15] Mary King Qtd. in Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties*, 85.

hope and revolutionary optimism. This polarity illuminates the social and ideological divides that shaped the era, and continue to impress on our present political landscape. As Bill Clinton stated in 2004, "if you look back on the sixties and, on balance, you think there was more good than harm in it, you're probably a Democrat, and if you think there was more harm than good, you're probably a Republican."[16] This influential dichotomy is seen, for example, in the title of Gitlin's 1989 historical account of the decade: *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage.* During the late eighties and early nineties, a number of books (mainly non-fiction mass market histories) nostalgically looked back to the Sixties as an era of hope for social equality and liberal reform. These titles used diction connoting aspiration and dreams: *Dream Time: Chapters from the Sixties* (1988)*, Street of Dreams: The Nature and Legacy of the 1960s* (1989), *Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s* (1994). Yet the tone shifts in the nineties, when texts began to "[Make] Peace with the Sixties," as one title suggests, and mourn the death of the dream in titles such as *The Year the Dream Died: Revisiting 1968 in America* (1997).[17]

By the turn of the new century, however, historians began to decry the death of hope and revise this nostalgic tale into a story about national division, warfare and frightening instability. Books like *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (2000), *Shaky Ground: the '60s and its Aftershocks* (2002), *Decade of Nightmares: the end of the Sixties and the Making of America* (2006), *America's Uncivil Wars: the Sixties era from Elvis to the fall of Richard Nixon* (2006) all invoked a discourse of damage in their historical narratives about the sixties and its contemporary "aftershocks." In the wake of the events of September 11, 2001, the rhetorical transformation of "dreams" into "nightmares" illustrates historians' reappraisal of the decade as an incubator for the New Right, which found its apex in the administration of George W. Bush and his neo-conservative doctrines. This historical record attests

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[16] Bernard von Bothmer, *Framing the Sixties* (Amherst: U of Masssachusetts P, 2010), 1.
[17] The majority of scholarly histories published after 1985, coincided with the 20th, 25th, 30th and now 40th anniversaries of 1968.

to the extreme emotional and political roadblocks that must be navigated if one hopes to pragmatically encounter this past and reanimate it for new ends. This study of the culture of affiliation and difference in North America seeks to resist an active national forgetting of the decade's efforts to forge a viable ethic of communal difference.

The mainstream historical record illuminates a critical whitewashing of the history of the 1960s struggles to bridge racial and ethnic divides. Writing in 1989, Carlos Munoz, Jr. describes how efforts to compose a "national" American history of the era have critically overlooked the rise of the Chicano movement, for example. Munoz faults Gitlin and others for overemphasizing the importance of the New Left and "white middle-class youth" in the historicization and commemoration of the era. Echoing the work of historian Clayborne Carson, who in 1981 published a groundbreaking study of SNCC that highlighted the internal conflicts and divisions that energized the civil rights movement, Munoz's *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Generation* set a new standard for historians of color to revise the history in light of those movements that failed to be recognized as iconic. By the nineties, a new historical narrative began to emerge that re-inscribed people of color into the history of the sixties and was often written from the subject position of specific ethnic, racial or minoritarian groups. In his 1993 *The Asian American Movement*, William Wei argues, for example, that this movement to diversify the history of the era resisted what he called the "dichotomous nature of race relations," which has contributed to the social invisibility of the Asian American Movement, for example.[18] While this trend to expand the history of the 1960s beyond a black/white divide provided a crucial revision of the historical record, it often has had the effect of framing the history into separate siloed experiences of distinct minorities, rather than offering a connective historical account of the era.

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[18] William Wei, *The Asian American Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1993), 4.

The popular trope of remembering the sixties as simply the cradle of North American multiculturalism does a true injustice to the ways interpersonal and collective relations were situated outside of and in stark opposition to national and familial forms of assimilation and conformity. Building upon Michael Rothberg's conception of "multidirectional memory," this project seeks to look for the crossings and the horizontal "discursive spaces" in which groups and individuals in the 1960s and after conceive of themselves as marked by time and history. Rothberg writes: "the model of multidirectional memory posits collective memory as partially disengaged from exclusive versions of cultural identity and acknowledges how remembrance both cuts across and binds together diverse spatial, temporal, and cultural sites."[19] Due to its multidirectional and comparative scope, my project uncovers a collective memory of the 1960s that is able to capture the diverse anti-nationalist and global dimensions of efforts at affiliation, which are necessarily "disengaged" from an "exclusive" or "unique" understanding of cultural identity. Not segregated within separate minoritatian histories, nor envisioned as the wellspring of a transcendent multicultural nation, novels of affiliation illuminate the negotiation of gender and sexuality that shaped the intersecting and connective struggles of racial and ethnic minorities during the era.

Although we remember the sixties through the teleological lenses of political success or failure, the feelings and affects surrounding "the movement" were shaped by the smaller everyday excitements, failures and disappointments that comprise any collective. My methodological attention to these minor losses and small opportunities therefore builds on the work of Kristin Ross who in *May '68 and Its Afterlives* approaches the "afterlives" of May 1968 by highlighting the uprising's chaotic sense of dislocation from traditional social institutions and resistance to any pre-existing form of sociality. Similar to Ross's pragmatic, yet politically animated, account of France in 1968, Marianne DeKoven's 2004 study, *Utopia Limited*, takes a neutral stance in the contentious and

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[19] Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2009), 11.

what she calls "polemical" debates about the 1960s in the service of articulating the era's shift from modernism to postmodernism. Highlighting the theoretical contradictions and everyday struggles of the era, DeKoven writes that the "modern utopian impulse" is "still a motivating force for progressive change, but it has become 'limited': muted, partial, local, diffuse, multiple, skeptical, complicit, displaced, and significantly re-functioned."[20] Like DeKoven and Ross, my readings attend to the displaced and limited hopes for sixties revolution.

This project provides an archive of the adjacent, subterranean experiences of experimental living that circulated in tense agonistic relationship to political ideologies of the era. While the New Left, Black Nationalism and other movements might have failed to enact lasting change or body forth radically different *political* structures, the hopeful desire to contest suffering and repair the loneliness of Cold War containment, which in part inspired these initial collective actions, cannot be overlooked. As Lauren Berlant asked in a 1994 essay " '68 or Something," "Apart from providing a basis for the paternalistic virtue dominant cultures claim when dissident movements fold, what does it mean for a movement, a politics, a social theory to fail?"[21] Writing in 1994, Berlant dares us to take on a risky feminist politics informed not by the failure of, but the continued presence of '68's utopian potential. However, as Berlant reminds us in her repeated use of the terms "failing/utopia," to look back to the radical promise of the sixties is to also grapple with the very substance of political failure, and the peril that might come if we forget these failures. Complicating the binary of success/failure, the fragmentary texts included in this study demand a practice of being with failure, without a knee-jerk reaction of redeeming or comprehensively restoring the revolution that might have been.

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[20] Marianne DeKoven, *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2004), 25.
[21] Lauren Berlant, "'68 or Something" *Critical Inquiry* 21. 1 (Autumn, 1994): 124-155.

This stale refrain of the sixties as success or failure, comedy or tragedy, illuminates how our memories of the decade are easily produced from narrow, and linear mythologies of the era, which in part develop out of political and economic hegemonies. Ironically, the popular amnesia surrounding the more heterogeneous, resistant and anti-nationalist aspects of 1960s America in part emerges from a glut of cultural depictions and mythologies of the "Sixties." This dissertation seeks to complicate the mythologization of the era by developing a new cultural memory of 1960s affiliations. Here I build on the work of Marita Sturken, who in her analysis of the "tangled memories" of the Vietnam War, AIDS, and the Gulf crisis argues for scholars to dismantle the prominence of "national" memory cultures in the hopes of developing a more nuanced understanding of what she calls "cultural memory": "the cultural negotiation through which different stories vie for a place in history."[22] The novel, as a literary genre, is a particularly powerful representational vehicle through which these "different stories" can be plotted within and against each other.

Novels of the 1960s therefore provide a rich representational field to detail the subjective and corporeal experiences of social relation during the 1960s. They offer new insights into the psychic dynamics of affiliation as well as what Paul Connerton calls the "incorporating practices" that contribute to our collective memory of the era. Connerton argues for an awareness of the ways habitual embodied acts work in "conveying and sustaining memory."[23] The conflicts and hopes of the long 1960s played out not simply in public, but often more dramatically in the private realm where individuals worked through the erotics underlying the era's political impulse towards affiliation. This project thereby offers a portrait of the kinds of embodied experiences often missing within ideological or "historical" accounts, while at the same time attending to the ways our personal life, has been and will continually be political. The period's novels of affiliation represent an

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[22] Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1997), 1.
[23] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1989), 104.

embodied and erotic experience of the era, which can serve as a crucial field of transmitting memories not easily translated through ideological or historical discourses. Axiomatic to this project is a conception of fiction as a powerful vehicle to better represent historical "truth," especially one of bodies and affects. As Roberta Culbertson argues about the narration of trauma by survivors, "the reclaiming of the self [in the narration of traumatic experience] comes at a price--the transcendent, the wild power of the body do not precisely yield up their secrets: they are tamed. We lose, in other words, certain dimensions of the truth in the telling of it."[24] This literature that is formally experimental and self-reflective brings us closer to what Dori Laub refers to as the events of the decade "from the inside," while at the same time highlighting our critical distance from the era, to better bear witness and ethically respond to the difficult and embodied realities of the past.

The binarism inherent to 1960s memory culture, in part, is an effect of what remains an artistic and political field mainly defined by intra-generational debates that exacerbate the tendency towards competitiveness.[25] The lack of a dynamic inter-generational dialogue about the sixties is ironic, since the decade itself was defined by a dramatic break from familial tradition and a rejection of the older generation that came before. In theory, if not in practice, the traumas induced by these familial ruptures may have led, in part, to contemporary society's incapacity to remember the decade's movements within genealogical or generational structures of transmission. The rise of adoptive and interracial bonds of solidarity in the movement suggests the need to revise our

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[24] Roberta Culbertson, "Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Re-establishing the Self" *New Literary History* 26.1 (1995): 195.

[25] As Maya Lin has explained, she perceived the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund organizers addressing her not only by her race and gender, but also by her status as a "child." Although Marita Sturken has deeply enriched our understanding of Lin's extraordinary legacy in understanding how Vietnam memorialization is dependent on certain gendered and racial exclusions, Lin's status as a member of a younger generation seems critical to her commemoration of the war within the use of such a creatively open aesthetic. Only in the past fifteen years has Lin's generation born of the decade begun to compose histories, fictions and films considering the era, authors such as Jeffery Eugenides, Junot Diaz, Jennifer Egan, and Jhumpa Lahiri have written novels that re-frame the long 1960s within longer and more transnational historical arcs of collective experience.

understanding of the inter-generational family as the primary site where memories are transmitted over time and generation. Our culture's resistance to remembering the sixties within an inter-generational framework might also function to set in relief the era's vision of kinship and futurity as anti-reproductive and anti-national. As Jose Munoz rightly suggests, the 1960s represented the future through an ephemeral invocation of a utopian political longing that had no specific referent, nor intended addressee. The words of Morris Dickstein, a scholar who came of age in the 1950s, reflect the capacious boundaries of the collective in the sixties, no longer defined simply by one generation:

> Yes, the sixties survive as more than a memory, more than a reference point or a cautionary tale. They survive in us, survive in those who experienced them most intensely. The sixties generation was not my generation, but it continues to fascinate me nonetheless. I expect we'll hear from it yet, for noisy and visible as it was, it hasn't fully had its say… the exiles of the sixties, who are also exiled from their own colorful youth, should continue to bring a distinct ethos to bear in their individual work. Utopian hopes may be disappointed but can rarely be forgotten. The gates of Eden, which beckoned to a whole generation in many guises, still glimmer in the distance like Kafka's castle, unapproachable but unavoidable.[26]

Writing in 1977, Dickstein reminds us in his self-naming as a "survivor," the generation of the sixties was porous. It was a generation that seemed to be open to various vectors of affiliation, for many in earlier and later generations remain "fascinated" by its animated fervor. In this view, the "utopian hopes" of the era seem to surpass any normative designation of "wave" or "generation." This project illuminates the critical necessity to identify with the affects and ethos of the "sixties generation," while at the same time critically positioning oneself in a distanced, yet amicable relationship to the era from a generation removed.

As Dickstein bore witness to the "exiles of the sixties" in 1977, I enter this cultural tradition as a daughter born in 1979. Feeling indebted to and influenced by this history, and an inheritor of its legacy, I have found it essential to inhabit a reparative position towards the antagonisms and differences that define my parents' generation. Today our society is over-run by various and

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[26] Morris Dickstein, *Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 276-7.

competing memories of the 1960s, all of which generally fall short of catalyzing renewal in the present. This fact might reveal to us the need to sometimes strategically forget past memories and histories of the decade that have developed since the mid-1980s. To remember the period anew, we must actively and self-reflexively negotiate the identitarian "culture wars," the feminist "backlash" and the rhetorical power of American multiculturalism, not in the hopes of rehearsing tired debates but with the goal of working through the rifts and competitions they have inspired. In fact, memory cultures have inherent affiliative effects. As Marianne Hirsch and Alondra Nelson have argued, the transmission of memory between mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, or a combination of the two, also serves as a fruitful starting point to build new forms of extra-familial and horizontal bonds of attachment.[27] Conversely, my attention to the affiliative legacy of the 1960s is not to reject the generational model of memory transmission, but to supplement this paradigm with an emphasis on the ways adoptive forms of affiliation challenge genealogical models of history and memory.

Today, as the memory of the 1960s is re-animated in the "post-racial" age of Barack Obama, it is more important than ever to relinquish our the fantasy of this past originating a multicultural and multiracial generation that will redeem us our political trespasses. The general disappointment inspired by Obama's 2008 election campaign serves as a bellwether for the necessity to be self-reflective and moderate in rekindling the transcendent hopes and dreams of the sixties. And yet, the Occupy movement bears the trace of the 60s in a much different fashion, and in some ways works to deconstruct the neo-liberal "success" of the Obama presidency. Unlike the utopian rhetoric, spiritual animism, and mixed-race heroism of the Democratic victory of 2008, Occupy takes on the somewhat anarchic, communitarian, and *chaotic* mantle of the sixties.[28] As Nicholas Mirzoeff writes,

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[27] See Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997). See also Alondra Nelson, "The Factness of Diaspora" in Barbara Koenig, Sandra Soo-Jin Lee, and Sarah Richardson (eds.) *Revisiting Race in a Genomic Age* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2008).

[28] The Occupy movement's emphasis on face-to-face dialogue, improvisation and a sustained struggle against logistical worries and everyday obstacles instead evokes the messy work that any truly "intersectional" politics

in dialogue with Judith Halberstam's study of the aesthetics of queer failure: "When we occupy, we are in and out at once–in occupation and out of place, in a nature we have chosen and out of the one allocated. For Halberstam, to be queer is precisely to be out of place, being where one is not supposed to be, refusing normativity. If we follow the spatial implications, to occupy is queer, a way in which we can live otherwise."[29] This project thus "occupies" or "queers" the sixties by means of refusing the normative linearity of history and daring to feel interpolated by the affiliations of the era – to position oneself not within, but beside this history.

The Left's enthusiastic embrace of the "hope" of 2008 was due in part to the society's consuming desire for the multicultural transcendence and hope for bipartisan collaborations symbolized by Obama's rise to fame. Evocative of what Alison Landsberg calls a "prosthetic memory," Obama's election night speech of November 7, 2008, which subtly invoked rhetoric and imagery from the civil rights movement, inspired a kind of longing for the Sixties precisely because of its branded, commodified and flexible circulation within mass media. Whether Black, White, Asian, Latino, Baby Boomer, Generation X or Y, if you voted for Obama you could be part of a larger public feeling that redeemed the losses and deaths that civil rights and Black nationalism had endured decades before. If it serves as a prosthetic memory – a memory of the past that is not one's own and thus inspires an awareness of the inherent distinction of the past from the present – the utopian feeling of togetherness inspired by Obama's election stabilized, rather than upended, a contemporary multicultural nation. However, Landsberg argues, that "prosthetic memories," as

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demands. Its affiliation with the politics of intersectionality can be indexed, for example, in Angela Davis's October 2011 invocation of the words of Audre Lorde, quoting her on the steps of the Philadelphia City Hall as part of the Occupy Philadelphia protest movement: "The Unity of the 99% must be a complex unity. Movements in the past have primarily appealed to specific communities, whether workers, students, Black communities, Latino communities, women, LGBT communities, indigenous people. Or these movements have been organized around specific issues." In an attempt to reframe the political discourse around common goals and values, rather than competitive efforts at recognition or redress, she calls for the movement to work towards: "justice, creativity, equality, freedom!" http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0X7zC19xco

[29] March 27, 2012. http://www.nicholasmirzoeff.com/O2012/author/admin/

inauthentic and non-essentialist cultural productions, can unhinge the entrenchment of multicultural formations, if their formal attributes inspire a corresponding ethics of differentiation and distance.[30] The radical potential depends on the subject's self-reflexive and vigilant awareness of the ethical difference between herself and the "Other." More often than not, memories invoking the discourse of a national multiculturalism re-inscribe neo-liberal strategies of individualism, market-driven "togetherness" and kinship, without doing the difficult work of empathy and repair that might make such a diverse community possible.

"Stumbling Towards Repair" uncovers the forgotten efforts of affiliation across difference in the 1960s and after. By attending to the fragmentary, partial and incomplete stories of affiliation that mark the literature of the 1960s, this project works against the commodification of sixties memories seen in various consumer venues, including the media coverage of the Obama campaign; the 2009 Ang Lee film *Taking Woodstock*; or the success of *Mad Men*, and the Banana Republic "Mad Men" Collection that accompanies the production. The power of the 1960s novel of affiliation is its formal resistance to becoming fully reincorporated into a national mythology of the decade, whether it be multicultural or "mid-century modern." Instead, its fragmentary complexity and tendency towards failure defends against a facile consumption of memories and narratives as healing salve or redemptive truth. Unable to be contained within paranoid, neo-liberal or market-driven frames of textual reception, these novels instead teach us a new practice of reading, which accepts partial failures and is open to the destabilizing alterity that comes from acts of empathy across social differences and generations.

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[30] See Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia UP, 2004).

The Development of the Post-1960 Novel of Affiliation

In the early 1970s, Adrienne Rich composed a series of poems entitled *The Dream of a Common Language*. Metaphorically signifying the book of poetry as a room we are invited to inhabit, for a time, Rich writes "no one sleeps in this room without a dream of a common language." Published in 1978, the title of this collection articulates the crucial and unavoidable need to craft a common figurative language to capture what she calls elsewhere the "drive to connect." Akin to the work of her friend and interlocutor Audre Lorde, Rich conceives this "dream of a common language" as born from a collective experience of "crisis" and from the everyday realities of eros, "this secret circle of fire/ where our bodies are giant shadows flung on a wall."[31] As Lorde explains to Rich in a 1979 interview, the only way to "fight old power" is "by creating another whole structure that touches every aspect of our existence, at the same time as we are resisting," which includes the fount of possibility implicit to the erotic.[32] In Rich's vision of lesbian sexual attachment, she echoes Lorde's desire to build a "whole new structure," in which the erotic is not the goal but the catalyzing vehicle through which a new way of life is born.[33] This way of life, which Rich ironically says is "something deceptively simple," does not fantastically avoid the violent crises of our society, but confronts them; by adopting this improvisational way of being, individuals may be better able to endure loss and fragmentation thanks to a new social connection built from self-reflexive conversation in which, as Rich imagines, the "truth breaks moist and green."[34]

The collaborative work of Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde resonates with the era's broader literary explorations of sexual relationship, friendship and collectivity that took place in North America. In the novels I study, with which these poets are in implicit conversation, the narrative of

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[31] Adrienne Rich, *The Dream of a Common Language* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978), NEED.
[32] Lorde, "An Interview: Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich," in *Sister Outsider,* 102-3.
[33] Rich, "Origins and History of Consciousness," in *The Dream of a Common Language* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978), 7-9.
[34] Rich, "Cartographies of Silence," in *The Dream of a Common Language*, 20.

affiliation provides a fictional space in which authors re-imagine the mutual composition of these seemingly distinct social forms. I define affiliation in this project as an asymmetrical interpersonal relationship that combines the contradictory feelings of erotic desire and friendship. These horizontal bonds are not egalitarian, but asymmetrical for they continually negotiate the uneven histories of race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. Informed by a lesbian-feminist tradition of queer theory that has its roots in the work of Rich and Lorde, my project extends Edward Said's conception of affiliation to demonstrate how horizontal bonds of affiliation emerge from the meeting of two subjects, a relational encounter inherently structured by gender and sexuality. Like the difficult relationships Rich portrays in *The Dream of a Common Language*, affiliation seems most successful when characters are able to cultivate a critical loving distance that comes from acts, and sometimes failures, of communication, dialogue and pragmatic interpretation. These narrative subversions are evinced not simply formally, but also in the text's surface representation of characters' often futile attempts at mourning, care-taking and mutual recognition.

My conception of affiliation as resembling a continuum of sexual desire and friendly care, which can occur both within same-sex and cross-gender relations, does not seek to flatten out the complexities of homosexual existence, but to provide a thicker understanding of the destabilization of compulsory heterosexuality that occurred during the 1960s and after. In her 1980 essay, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," Rich explicates the continued and urgent need to reevaluate the stakes of lesbian existence as a means to revise heterosexuality. Here, Rich quotes Lorde's conception of the erotic, writing:

> But as we deepen and broaden the range of what we define as lesbian existence, as we delineate a lesbian continuum, we begin to discover the erotic in female terms: as that which is unconfined to any single part of the body or solely to the body itself; as an energy not only diffuse but, as Audre Lorde has described it, omnipresent in "the sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic," and in the sharing of work; as the empowering joy which "makes us less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which

are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial."[35] Rich suggests that to be part of a continuum that includes both sexual and non-sexual lived experience is a state of existence that re-defines the erotic more generally and opens up the possibility to change the "social relations of the sexes," but to do so in respectful awareness of the risks and violences implicit to lesbian existence. Thus, while Rich seeks to extend our definition of the "erotic," she warns against the lesbian continuum becoming a placeholder for any form of woman-identified bond, including female friendship, or for a solipsistic liberal practice of 'life style choice." She reminds us that the "lesbian continuum" must be grounded in a deep political consciousness that would warrant against what would become a neo-liberal discourse of individual choice. While Rich has been critiqued for instantiating an essentialist conception of lesbian sexuality, this project's elucidation of the erotics of friendship between men and women complicates this critique.

These texts' invoke a thoughtful attention to the constructedness of sexual difference, and the necessity to upend the epistemological assumption that heterosexuality equals sexual reproduction. Mixing the feelings of identification and desire, these bonds reveal the fallacy of a dichotomous understanding of homosexuality and heterosexuality, desire and identification – etiologies that depend upon strict patriarchal conceptions of sexual difference. As Ti Grace Atkinson and the Radicalesbians in 1970 wrote: "In a society in which men do not oppress women, and sexual expression is allowed to follow feelings, the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality would disappear."[36] Furthermore, the narrative of affiliation's implicit

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[35] Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," in *Blood, Bread and Poetry* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 53-54.

[36] Radicalesbians, "The Woman-Identified Woman," in *We are Everywhere: A Historical Sourcebook in Gay and Lesbian Politics*, eds. Mark Blasius and Shane Phelan (New York: Psychology Press, 1997), 397. While some may shudder at the radical use of "lesbian" to identify a political stance, rather than simply an authentic or full-bodied sexuality, rhetorically the sign of lesbian for Radicalesbians was a space of radical resistance available to any woman dedicated to the political dismantling of patriarchy.

deconstruction of the Oedipal family myth, which opens up a capacity for "sexual expression to follow feelings," may point to heterosexuality becoming, as Judith Butler suggests, "volitional or optional."[37] As Butler writes in *Gender Trouble*, "Lesbianism that defines itself in radical exclusion from heterosexuality deprives itself of the capacity to resignify the very heterosexual constructs by which it is partially and inevitably constituted."[38] For Butler, writing a decade after Rich, it is critical to reveal the constitutive presence of heterosexuality within lesbian existence, while also reading "straightness" through the lens of queer experience, revealing compulsory heterosexuality to be itself a kind of fiction, even at the same time that it is instrumentalized to uphold the status quo.

From the 1950s through to the early years of the gay liberation movement, novels depicting interracial heterosexual worlds frequently invoked key plots and imagery that pre-figured what today we might call "queer." This emergent literary convention reflects a historical shift in the sexual norms of post-war society in North America, when culture increasingly incorporated a variety of gendered and sexual modes of relation. At mid-century, men and women expanded social and sexual mores beyond the normative genealogical and juridical frameworks of race and family. The circulation of more explicit sexual iconography and cultural representation invokes the shifting borders between erotic, sexual and "platonic" relations. As Steven Seidman argues in *Romantic Longings: Love in America, 1830-1980*, "in the postwar period eros was, in effect, transfigured into a site of individuation and social bonding."[39] No longer simply a means to achieve romantic loving intimacy, sex served as a vehicle for social affiliation and the development of new forms of subjectivity. Seidman goes onto claim that homosexuals and heterosexuals shared the same "broad intimate culture," while paying homage to the fact that homosexuals clearly were subject to more dramatic forms of oppression, discrimination and stigmatization. My own project illuminates how

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[37] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 155.
[38] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 164.
[39] Steven Seidman, *Romantic Longings: Love in America, 1830-1980* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 124.

interracial, interethnic and cross-class relationships were also deeply stigmatized and policed for threatening the sanctity of a white bourgeois heterosexual norm.

According to philosopher Herbert Marcuse, the eroticization of the public sphere was key to anti-capitalist structural revolution. In *Eros and Civilization* (1955), Marcuse argued that if we could return to a pre-genital state of corporeal eroticization, the body could serve as a vehicle for political transformation, inspiring a subsequent reevaluation of traditional genealogical structures of intimacy that were tied to the maintenance of the capitalist nation-state. He writes: "The body in its entirety would become an object of cathexis, a thing to be enjoyed – an instrument of pleasure. This change in the value and scope of libidinal relations would lead to a disintegration of the institutions in which the private interpersonal relations have been organized, particularly the monogamic and patriarchal family."[40] Marcuse's call for a re-distribution of pleasures and feelings of connection is also integral to what he calls the "Great Refusal:" a collective structural resistance against the narrow, one-dimensionality of capitalist society, which could only come about from a complete abnegation of social norms. José Muñoz makes a similar claim in *Cruising Utopia*, where he argues that Marcuse's conception of the "Great Refusal" was queer in the sense that it called for "the rejection of normal love that keeps a repressive social order in place."[41] In particular, Muñoz wonders if the "surplus" or excess of queer art can "stand against the coercive practicality of the performance principle," the principle that neutralizes the more productive tensions that come from the conflict between the reality and pleasure principles. As Munoz work suggests, in looking back to Marcuse, it might be fruitful to sidestep the all-encompassing aspects of utopianism, in favor of those minor, localized efforts of resistance that are intimated by Marcuse's theorizations.

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[40] Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 201.
[41] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*: *The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York UP, 2009), 134.

The development of cross-gender bonds of affiliation in the post-1960 North American novel works to subvert the "compulsory" heterosexual matrix that ordered the social world. Setting out an alternative psychic structure of relationship that is flexible enough to confront various forms of sexual and racial difference, 1960s efforts at affiliation prefigure the psychoanalytic theorization of intersubjectivity. Jessica Benjamin defines "intersubjectivity" as a practice "of mutual relating" characterized by a "reciprocal dynamic of destruction and survival, rupture and repair." [42] Benjamin's work is indebted to a period from 1976-1982, when feminist psychoanalysts, such as Julia Kristeva, Nancy Chodorow, Dorothy Dinnerstein and Carol Gilligan sought to creatively revise Freud's conception of the pre-oedipal phase to new ends: the proposal of a relational theory of subject formation. These theorists' focus on the contestatory and triangulated nature of the pre-oedipal opens up, for Benjamin, a re-conception of dyadic bonds between any two subjects as creatively conjoining the forces of erotic desire and identification. Benjamin's work in object relations theory takes us one step further, illuminating the inherent instability of gender and sexual roles within the relational encounter, thus figuring the potential for a queer theory of intersubjective bonds not only between same-sex partners, but between partners of different sexes.

Thanks to the early work of relational psychoanalysts including Chodorow and Dinnerstein, and later object relation theories of D.W. Winnicott and Benjamin, subject formation is no longer defined as a process of separation from the mother. Nor is it defined as clearly bifurcated along gender lines according to Oedipal rivalries. Their theories enable us to complicate the vertical and unidirectional lines of inheritance envisioned by Freud. To conceive of the self as relational from our primary stages of development, moreover, intimates a continuous process of maturation built from a practice of self-fashioning that is sculpted by a plenitude of relationships that cross and intersect each other throughout our lives. Benjamin's turn towards intersubjectivity therefore

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[42] Jessica Benjamin, "Mutual Injury and Mutual Acknowledgement: Lecture in Honor of Sigmund Freud's Birthday" (paper presented at the Columbia University Seminar on Cultural Memory, May 6, 2009), 4.

further reflects the sometimes understated importance of the work of British psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, whose more ambivalent conception of a maternal figure made up of good or bad part-objects sets the stage for an adult practice of "reparation," an activity that seeks to hold in tension the ambivalences in others, and in ourselves. For Klein, reparation is the subject's "over-riding urge to preserve, repair or revive the loved objects."[43] Developing her theories of reparation in the 1950s, Klein's work was published in the United States in the early 1960s and poses an important counterpoint to the rise of Erik Erikson's popular work on "identity" and the U.S. inauguration of "ego psychology." Leerom Medovoi in *Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity* (2005) reads the U.S. culture of adolescent rebellion in the 1950s and '60s as reflecting the psycho-social emergence of "identity" as an organizing principle in mid-century society. My project, however, looks at the concomitant insurgence of affiliation as a competing psychosocial framework propelling a new transnational movement of literary experimentation in the 1960s and after.

In this dissertation, I define the post-1960 novel of affiliation as a sub-genre of the novel of development, or Bildungsroman, which has for centuries been rooted in what Northrup Frye calls a fundamental literary exploration of "human character as it manifests itself in society."[44] The novel of affiliation diverges from the Bildungsroman's generic convention of plotting self-development as a masculine, linear and autonomous experience. Instead, it represents the improvisational development of subjectivity as emplotted within and alongside the creation of social bonds of affiliation. In this way, the novel of affiliation bears similarities to novels of female development, which according to Abel, Hirsch and Langland focus on a character's "inner life," emphasize smaller

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[43] Seeing "depressive anxiety," guilt, and the urge for reparation as simultaneous within the self, where guilt is the necessary precursor for reparative tendencies to occur, Klein posits the process of reparation as productively emerging from, and counter to, the aggressivity and destructiveness of the "death drive." Melanie Klein, "The Theory of Anxiety and Guilt," in *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works* (New York: Delta Books, 1975), 35.

[44] Northrup Frye, *Educated Imagination and Other Writers on Critical Theory, 1933-1962* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 2006), 83.

epiphanies or "flashes of recognition" rather than steady plot progression, and most notably, illuminate female characters' greater attention to social relationships, to the point of depicting "collective protagonists," such as Nel and Sula.[45] In the novel of affiliation, of which *Sula* is one, action and plot are often framed around the expression of characters' "inner life" in relationship to each other: in scenes of sex, artistic collaboration or intimate conversation. In fictions of female development the "flashes of recognition" central to the plot often occur in protagonists' private moments of contemplation, as seen in the climactic scenes of Henry James' Isabel Archer or Kate Chopin's Edna Pontellier. Perhaps most dramatically, however, the novel of affiliation envisions this amorphous and improvisational development of the self to not only be applicable to women, but also to men – even straight, white men.

Narratologically, the novel of affiliation deconstructs traditional plots of Bildung, fraternity and marriage – which have often been used to uphold fantasies of national union and healing – and re-assemble their remnants to depict individuals of diverse backgrounds trying to forge alternative loving bonds. In this sense, my analysis of the novel of affiliation's convention of breaking apart and piecing together new narratives reflects a feminist tradition of re-reading the novel of development as composed from what Susan Fraiman calls "plural formations" of both character and plot. In her 1993 *Unbecoming Women*, Fraiman illuminates how authors like Burney and Austen integrated and revised plots of female development from domestic conduct books, reflecting young women's ambivalent and subversive relationship to these coherent life narratives. I join Fraiman's desire to expand our understanding of the Bildung to account not simply for character but for "a story of a cultural moment" that can better illuminate the kinds of de-centering that come from an "enactment of growing up as a persistent relatedness."[46] It is this "persistent relatedness" that

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[45] Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland, *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* (Hanover: UP of New England, 1983), 10-12.
[46] Susan Fraiman, *Unbecoming Women* (New York: Columbia UP, 1993), 144.

novels of affiliation illuminate, but within an explicitly more complex sphere of raced, gendered and sexualized social bonds. As interior characterization becomes defined by gender and sexual ambivalence, so too does the discursive representation of characters' interactions illuminate these intersecting structures.

In turn, the emplotment of affiliation often emerges as not dyadic, but triangulated, a pattern suggestive of Eve K. Sedgwick's conception of homosociality. Its flexible incorporation of identification and desire therefore resembles the erotic triangle that Sedgwick explains can be "a sensitive register precisely for delineating relationships of power and meaning, and for making graphically intelligible the play of desire and identification by which individuals negotiate with their societies for empowerment."[47] Building on Sedgwick's work in *Between Men*, Sharon Marcus in her recent study *Between Women*, traces these interconnected plots in the Victorian novel. She argues that while marriage is the primary plot device within the novel, female friendship offers a "narrative matrix" that works as a "springboard for the adventures that traditionally constitute our notion of the narratable."[48] Notably, in *Sula* for example, the marriage plot becomes decentered, diverting from the novelistic tradition Marcus' book explores. Instead, the main thrust of the novel comes from the more dynamic and suspenseful story of Nel and Sula's friendship, a story that might be deemed more dramatic in the era of feminist collectivizing. The heterosexual institutions of marriage and family actually provide a necessary obstacle to the emplotment of affiliation.

In the novel of affiliation, the characterization of protagonists depends on the concomitant representation of other comparable or minor characters, what Alex Wolloch describes as an "adumbration of inner qualities [that] emerges only through the social juxtaposition of different

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[47] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985), 27.
[48] Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007).

people."[49] Wolloch's study of the novel and characterization sets out a dynamic of "one vs. the many," in which the protagonist's formation is dependent on minor characters being instrumentally flattened, where "their functionality is built into [the protagonist's] freedom."[50] However, in the novel of affiliation of the 1960s, in which singular personhood and community formation are central political themes, authors often pose multiple protagonists or displace the major vs. minor hierarchy in order to flesh out not just one central, but multiple self-reflective psychic interiorities. If Austen's Elizabeth Bennett emerges as a self-reflective protagonist par excellence thanks to the flattened compression of the "minor" characters around her, Morrison's affiliative protagonist Sula only emerges as a psychological being in relationship to an equally complex portrait of her best friend Nel.

In the 1960s, novelistic efforts to envision affiliations across differences therefore emerge in concert with a cultural movement to re-evaluate the relational basis of human subjectivity. Early 1960s novels of affiliation, including Harper Lee's 1960 *To Kill a Mockingbird*, J.D. Salinger's 1961 *Franny and Zooey*, Mary McCarthy's 1962 *The Group*, Baldwin's 1962 *Another Country*, the subject of my first chapter, and Ken Kesey's 1964 *Sometimes A Great Notion*, begin developing the formal and thematic conventions of this novelistic sub-genre. Later novels written in the late 1960s and early 1970s by Baldwin (*Just Above My Head*) and John Updike (*Rabbit Redux* and *Couples*), as well as texts on which I focus including Morrison's *Sula* and Atwood's *Surfacing*, build on the previous texts and often utilize the framework of affiliation to reflect on the movements of the prior decade. No longer solely charting a filial or Oedipal model of self-development, the psychological terrain of this fiction is shaped by increasingly extra-familial dynamics of race, society and most importantly, for my purposes here, interpersonal affiliation. Central to this task, as Rich and Lorde's work attests,

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[49] Alex Wolloch, *The One Vs. The Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003), 54.
[50] Wolloch, *The One Vs. The Many*, 123.

was a revitalization of the sensual and erotic conventions of the novel, explicitly incorporating sexual imagery and descriptions of sex scenes in their fiction. This turn towards not simply an erotic, but a sexualization of the genre functions to destabilize the boundaries between plots of romance and friendship and the distinctions between the public and private provenance of the novel.

The psychic emphasis on intersubjective affiliations in these post-1960s texts also reflects the rising importance of siblings and non-parental figures in our psychosocial development. Relational psychoanalysis is in concert with an evaluation of siblinghood as a primary relation that must be taken into account in formulations of the self. As feminist psychoanalyst Juliet Mitchell, for example, proposes, siblinghood might provide an avenue to subvert the dominance of reproductive kinship:

> Siblings do not on the whole reproduce, but they can cherish, show concern and care for. Social groups not constructed along the apparent binary of reproduction rely on managing the violence unleashed by the trauma of threatened replication; representing seriality is crucial. Life and death, sex and murder, the mechanisms of 'reversal into its opposite' and the splittings of love and hate are all expressions of the psychic representation of the sibling-lateral relationship.[51]

Mitchell articulates the importance of sibling-lateral relationships as an analytic construct from which the "postmodern subject" comes into being. The archetypal struggle of siblings to negotiate what she calls "life and death, sex and murder… the splittings of love and hate" pivots around a more basic navigation of the crisis of differentiation inherent to sibling life, what Mitchell calls the "trauma of threatened replication." This dynamic is reflected in the novel of affiliation, which builds out from the founding myths of fraternity and brotherhood, where adoptive lateral bonds importantly incorporate the feelings of filial duty and a familial care. Thus, the "splittings of love and hate" that comprise these asymmetrical and often volatile relationships echo the "trauma" or potential loss of individuality and concomitant struggles against conformity that characterize sibling

[51] Juliet Mitchell, *Siblings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 31.

bonds. In turn, if the novel of affiliation emerges as a sub-genre of the novel of development, it is also complicit with an American literary tradition of the novel of fraternity.

American Revisions

During the tail end of the sixties, Edward Said joined French critics Gaston Bachelard and Roland Barthes, among others, in exploring the epistemic and ontological basis of literature. In his 1973 *Beginnings,* Said questioned the linear, generational model of artistic creation, writing instead of the text as a contingent, improvisational and social form. He writes of the relationship between authors and their influences as one of "adjacency," comparing the author to a wandering man "essentially between homes": "The text itself stands to the side of, next to, or between the bulk of all other works – not in a line with them, nor in a line of descent from them."[52] The lateral relationship between authors and texts prefigures his social theorization of affiliations in the 1983 *The World, The Text, the Critic*. Here, affiliation is defined as a horizontal form of relation that results from common "social and political convictions, economic and historical circumstances, voluntary and willed efforts."[53] For Said, however distinctive affiliation might seem, it is constituted in dialectical relationship to filiative or genealogical systems, such as the family, race, and the modern nation. In particular, Said argues that adoptive forms of affiliation are complicit with more traditional, linear structures of "filiation," and in the novels that make up this project the work of building ties across nations, families and races, and within generations, is represented alongside characters' struggles to break away from inherited tradition. Although in *The World, The Text, The Critic* Said argues that affiliation results from "convictions," "circumstances," and "willed efforts," the post-1960 novel of affiliation gives voice to the contradictory affects and desires that bond individuals of diverse

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52 Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Columbia UP, 1975), 10.
53 Said, *The World, The Text, The Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1983).

families, races, and cultures together.[54] Informed by the queer feminist theoretical tradition traced above, my project extends Said's conception of affiliation to show how this adoptive and extra-familial relation is shaped by such social differences as race, gender and sexuality.

Both on the level of individual textual analysis, and on the meta-critical field out of which the novel of affiliation emerges, this project amplifies Said's influential claims. The novel of affiliation develops out of a collection of intersecting discursive and textual archives. These archives are brought together in the world of the text, through a somewhat improvisational aesthetic process that Morrison refers to as turning a "piece into a part" of a greater whole. In doing so, the novels formally mirror what Said calls the ethical work of "re-assembl[ing] the world."[55] He defined this ethics as tied to a position of "worldliness," a capacious stance that allows for psychic feelings of division while also staving off an immobilizing sense of self-fragmentation that is a frequent effect of exile. In the context of his autobiography, "worldliness" connotes a cosmopolitan identity, which carries with it multiple loyalties and responsibilities.[56] Said therefore expands "wordly" to more broadly signal a mode of literary criticism that aims to cast off traditional allegiances and inherited duties and be open to the freedom and counter-movements that define criticism itself.[57]

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[54] Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 25. See also Ivy Schweitzer, *Perfecting Friendship: Politics and Affiliation in Early American Literature* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2006).

[55] Said, "Preface to the Morningside Edition," in *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, xi-xiv.

[56] The political issue that most passionately affected him, however, was the 1967 Arab-Israeli war that ended in Israeli victory and a revival of Palestinian nationalism – a cause in support of which Said would devote much of his intellectual life. In an autobiographical article published in the May 1998 issue of the *London Review of Books*, the author writes: "In the US, however, my politics were rejected – with a few notable exceptions – both by anti-war activists and by supporters of Martin Luther King. For the first time I felt genuinely divided between the newly assertive pressures of my background and language and the complicated demands of a situation in the US that scanted…" In this account of the political environment out of which his criticism emerged, Said describes how "Palestinian justice," and by extension Arab-American identity were inassimilable within the U.S. centric discourses of liberation that circulated among his students and peers. See Edward Said, "Between Worlds," *London Review of Books*. 20.9 (7 May 1998). 21 April 2012. http://www.lrb.co.uk/v20/n09/edward-said/between-worlds.

[57] Bruce Robbins, "Homelessness and Worldiness" *Diacritics* 13.30 (Fall 1983): 72. Bruce Robbins reviewing Said's text writes in the fall 1983 issue of *Diacritics*: "In places [affiliation] is a synonym for 'system,' a term which is never used with approval. Yet the coinage itself is a move in the direction of neutrality, and in other places 'affiliation' seems entirely neutral…" Robbins concludes, however, with the claim that Said's

My reading of affiliation in the 1960s and after therefore engages in the burgeoning study of a hemispheric and transnational study of American literature. Bringing Said's work to bear on the field of American literature compels a dynamic investigation into the status of comparativism within the study of "multicultural American" literatures, with which this project engages. Many novelists that make up this project have often been conceived as representative of separate and distinct identity formations. Under a national rubric, these authors have been read with a critical focus on identity formation and self-development that ends with national assimilation or belonging. This was especially true for African American writers such as Morrison and Baldwin, who early in their careers battled popular assumptions that they spoke for or on behalf of African Americans as a race, or that their novels could be read as evidentiary sociological accounts of a true and universal experience of Black American life.[58] Atwood's 1972 *Surfacing*, was seen to index a particular North American feminist identity, a narrow interpretation that was resultant from a similarly "symptomatic" bent of feminist critics of the day. However, by reading novels like *Another Country* and *Surfacing* as not identiarian but affiliative, this project is better able to account for the transnational scope of American literature and the post-1960 novel in particular.

In the catalogue of novels I focus on, authors depict affiliation not as a national, but a "wordly" phenomenon constituted from each character's common condition of alterity. The authors that turn to the novel of affiliation each, in their own ways, take part in an international literary movement to revitalize the subversive potential of the novel as a genre. In animating a new turn to formal experimentation in their novels, authors like Atwood joined contemporaneous postmodern experimental novelists in Europe, including Alain Robbe-Grillet and Marguerite Duras,

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conception of worldliness in the end lives within the work of the critic who is responsible for the local and historical specificities of the text without collapsing this particularity into an abstract universalism or a transcendent humanist romance

[58] For example, texts like Baldwin's breakout 1956 novel *Go Tell it on the Mountain* were understood by many readers in the 1960s and after as indexing a knowable and easily accessible cultural milieu of Harlem, rather than an assemblage of competing forms of meaning and intimation.

and their development of the "nouveau roman," Doris Lessing's form-disrupting maximalist 1962 novel *The Golden Notebook*, and the meta-fictional work of Italo Calvino. The literature I study in this project is shaped by a generation of authors who traveled and collaborated abroad, and were attentive to the U.S. as a national imperial power during this period of the Vietnam War. There work attests to Amy Kaplan's assertion in *The Anarchy of Empire* that "cultural phenomena we think of as domestic or particularly national are forged in a crucible of foreign relations."[59]

Engaged in revising an Anglo-American literary tradition, the North American novel of affiliation builds on the novelistic genre of the quest or adventure tale, which has since Cooper and Melville, necessarily incorporated plots of friendship and brotherhood. Several critical studies in the past fifteen years have explored how friendship during the antebellum period, for example, served as a figure for articulating national struggles over civic duty, republican egalitarianism and liberal democracy. In *Perfecting Friendship: Politics and Affiliation in Early American Literature*, Ivy Schweitzer argues that "equality and likeness are requirements for and thus constitutive elements of perfect friendship, which produce a fiction or illusion of interchangeability."[60] Schweitzer puts novelists such as Catherine Sedgwick in the context of an early American ideal of friendship built from the Classical notion of "philia" and made possible by a fundamental homosocial fraternity, without which the terms of equality become dramatically destabilized. Schweitzer's feminist analysis illuminates the way gender and racial difference limits the horizon of potential affiliations, while at the same time showing the idealistic terms of friendship to often mask more menacing and coercive structures of power implicit to the colonial nation and its emphasis on republican duty. This study of the racialized and gendered struggles over affiliation in the early years of the nation offers a critical precedent for the ways race and gender are intimately negotiated in the 1960s and after. In particular, Schweitzer's study of Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie* prefigures the ways in which affiliation across

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[59] Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2005), 1.
[60] Schweitzer, *Perfecting Friendship: Politics and Affiliation in Early American Literature*, 28.

differences in the 1960s was an antiauthoritarian practice of subverting norms of liberal individualism, national unity and the sanctity of the genealogical family.

Developing during the early years of the civil rights movement, the 1960s depiction of affiliation is deeply tied to the democratic discourse and spiritual rhetoric of civil rights. Novels like Baldwin's *Another Country* prophesize and reflect on the underside of the decade's legislation of equal rights and federal programs to alleviate structural inequalities in housing, health care and education: many remained cut off from the redemption promised by civil rights, even in the heyday of the late 1960s and '70s. The movement's more radical vision of a racially integrated community was never fully manifest, in part because this Christian rhetoric was too easily incorporated into facile discourses of democratic participation and liberal individualism that overlooked the face-to-face and intersubjective practices necessary to repair sorrow and alienation. The idealism of a transcendent prefect "equality" being achieved among citizens of different races is thus complicated by the formal and thematic conventions of the narrative of affiliation, which illustrate how any sustainable mode of solidarity must begin with a self-reflective awareness of the psychic and social asymmetries that shape our lives with others.

The novel of affiliation often reveals a pattern of partitioning, parodying and compressing myths of marriage and fraternity. Post-1960 literature in America was in part dedicated to the disruption of founding literary myths, a formal project to revitalize the novel to which Baldwin, Morrison and Atwood were each dedicated in divergent ways. For over a century, the psyche has been defined by, and modeled after, literary myth and its depictions of familial relationship; as Marianne Hirsch writes, "the myths we read and take to be basic determine our vision of how individual subjects are formed in relation to familial structures."[61] James Baldwin, in a 1964 essay "Nothing Personal" for example, writes of American racial myths: "it is, of course, in the very nature

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[61] Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989), 2.

of a myth that those who are its victims and, at the same time, its perpetrators, should, by virtue of these two facts, be rendered unable to examine the myth, or even to suspect, much less recognize, that it is a myth which controls and blasts their lives."[62] Morrison, similarly, has long been understood to draw on a variety of mythological traditions in her fiction, and writes in one essay of the need to "disassemble myths" of the "Black woman" in particular.[63] Finally, the adjacent work of Margaret Atwood, under the tutelage of critics Perry Anderson and Northrup Frye, would pioneer the mythic analysis of Canadian literature in her 1972 scholarly study entitled *Survival.*

In particular, authors incorporate plots that had gained mythological status in American culture, such as Richard Wright's depiction of African American male violence in *Native Son*, in order to reevaluate and make space for the portrayal of adoptive, marginal relationships often neglected in the literary tradition. The primary myth revised in the novel of affiliation was the subject of Leslie Fiedler's 1960 study *Love and Death in the American Novel*: the myth of a homoerotic interracial fraternity. Fiedler's analysis of what he calls the "archetypal relationship that haunts the American psyche" begins with James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* and focuses on the white male protagonist's "flight" into the wilderness alongside his darker-skinned male companion.[64] This founding figure of interracial affiliation, which is dependent on a stable gendered division of family and society, is dramatically revised in the long 1960s. Fiedler's portrait of affiliation depends on the symmetry of patriarchal fraternity and the fantasy of a private Eden untouched by public duty or domestic responsibility. Affiliation in the post-1960 novel, however, depicts female, cross-gender, and/or interracial relationships that highlight the era's intimate struggles to redefine the boundary between public and private.

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[62] James Baldwin, "Nothing Personal," in *Collected Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1998), 694.
[63] Toni Morrison, "To Be a Black Woman: Review of *Portraits in Fact and Fiction*," in *What Moves at the Margin* (Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 2008), 100.
[64] Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Dalkey Archive Press, 1960), 12.

In its expansion of the plots of inter-racial fraternity, the novel of affiliation further illuminates how race and ethnicity structure kinship and sociality. By highlighting the necessary and inevitable negotiation of the universal authority of white masculinity, these authors illuminate the cathexis of racial and gendered difference that constitute affiliation. In fact, if the narrative of affiliation fails in these novels, its failure is usually tied to the enduring vitality of white masculine privilege, which throughout this collection has a rabid potential to derail intersectional efforts at social justice and egalitarian forms of relation. My readings build on the work of Robyn Weigman, who in *American Anatomies* highlights the psychic terrain through which race and gender are produced after 1960. Weigman's re-reading of Fiedler's concept of interracial fraternity demonstrates how sexual difference is structured within and concomitant to racial difference. As Omi and Winant argue, the transformation of the racial landscape in the United States that occurred during the 1960s has had radical effects. During the civil rights era, the "ethnicity paradigm" of racial justice, which modeled a structure of assimilation and cultural pluralism, naively believed in the nation's powerful capacity to incorporate "difference" while at the same time bring about what they call an equality of "result," rather than simply opportunity. Often still, the conception of race relations within the cultural framework of ethnicity invoked the hopeful image of a multiracial nation, where assimilation would be complete through consanguine and reproductive means. Rebuking the conflation of race with ethnicity, these critics call for "racial formation" as a tool to better understand the "sociohistorical processes by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed and destroyed."[65]

This novelistic sub-genre reflects a shift in North American racial formations, specifically in the way individuals "inhabited" and "transformed" conceptions of race in their interpersonal relations and chosen bonds of kinship. Baldwin or Choi's novels, for example, illuminate race as a

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[65] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd. Ed. (London: Routledge, 1994), 55.

dynamic social formation represented through the invocation and subversion of cultural figures and literary tropes, and thereby undermines biologically essentialist conceptions of race as phenotype or direct inheritance. The authors that make up this project illuminate that race is structured not simply sociohistorically, but figuratively, what Hortense Spillers calls a uniquely "American grammar." Furthermore, in these novels, race is a form of social difference envisioned within the terms of sexuality, identification and desire.

In my view, social difference is a useful theoretical paradigm to better understand the disparities and, sometimes violent, asymmetries that shape our social landscape and interpersonal encounters with others. In this sense, I build on the definition of difference articulated by Roderick Ferguson and Grace Hong in their recent *Strange Affinities*: "Not a multiculturalist celebration, not an excuse for presuming a commonality among all racialized peoples, but a cleareyed appraisal of the dividing line between valued and devalued, which can cut within, as well as across, racial groupings."[66] Similarly grounding my analysis in a genealogy of women of color feminists, my project attends to the asymmetry and suffering that emerges when characters dis-identify, misrecognize, and/or project fantasies onto, each other. In particular, I look at scenes where intersubjectivity across races and genders is challenged, revealing how those material and lived dynamics of relation and desire pose great challenges to our attainment of interracial and cross-gender forms of solidarity. My analysis does more than highlight barriers to solidarity: the following chapters propose a cyclical and self-reflexive practice that characters engage in to "repair" the violence that adumbrates social differences. In its representation of affiliation as a means to ameliorate disparity, the novel of affiliation does not redeem history, but works to make manifest the wounds repressed within the social sphere. By making these losses visible, and affectively accessible

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[66] Roderick A. Ferugson and Grace Kyungwon Hong, *Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization* (Durham: Duke UP, 2011), 11.

to the reader, these novels work through loss for the betterment of present and future community formations.

Reading and Remembering Affiliation

My reading of literature of and about the 1960s is animated by a keenly reparative spirit. Despite its connotations of redemption, healing, or restoration, repair is anything but a systematic or conclusive process. In *Repair: The Impulse to Restore in a Fragile World*, Elizabeth V. Spelman argues that repair reflects processes of destruction and failure, as much as of creation and success. She writes:

> To think about repair requires us to recognize our own failures and imperfections and those of the world we live in, to take seriously what we may unreflectively be inclined to regard as the necessary but uninventive and uninspiring work of repairing the damage due to such flaws. It means attending to properties in things – their reparability – and capacities in individuals – their talents for mending – toward the atrophy of which there appear to be powerful economic incentives.[67]

Spelman conceives of repair as an alternative to a capitalist consumer economy that depends on individuals' desire to replace the old with the new, to see objects in the world as in fact being *irreparable* and thus worthy of the junk pile; disposable objects, and subjectivities, bring with it the corresponding consumer desire to purchase the new (and better) model. Instead, the menders and tinkers of the world articulate a practice of repair that reminds us that oftentimes, objects, people and relationships cannot be easily replaced nor mourned. To take part in the cyclicality of repair necessarily invokes a dynamic and imperfect vision of the past – offering a positive spin on the melancholic practice of refusing to let go of lost or ruptured worlds. A practice of creative destruction, or destructive creation, repair therefore depends on careful acts of interpretation that shape the present work of restoration, which is always partial and incomplete. In stark tension with the more transcendent and linear case of redemption, which is enacted from stable systems of moral judgment that bring an "end" to present suffering, repair is cyclical, immanent, and partial. The

[67] Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Repair: The Impulse to Restore in a Fragile World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 138.

indeterminacy and ambivalence that Spelman conveys in her definition of repair echoes Klein's psychoanalytic theory of "reparation."

This project illuminates repair as a primary ethical practice that underlies the era's struggles for affiliation. The novel of affiliation proposes a pragmatic process of reconciliation built from collaborative, iterative and often incomplete attempts at repair. My experimentation with a conciliatory mode of reading animated by an openness to repair is first and foremost indebted to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's late work on affect and Kleinian reparation. In her 1997 essay "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or You're so Paranoid, You Probably Think this Essay is about You," Sedgwick refuses to see the present as merely symptomatic of past failures. She intimates that the real achievement of the reparative reading, which is always transitory, is one's capacity to find hope in ruptures. Seeing interpretation and artistic creativity as a means of bringing things into a kind of "whole," she writes:

> To be a reparatively positioned reader, it can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise. Because there can be terrible surprises, however, there can also be good ones. Hope, often a fracturing, even a traumatic thing to experience is among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organize the fragments and part-object she encounters or creates. Because the reader has room to realize that the future may be different from the present, it is also possible for her to entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn, could have happened differently from the way it actually did.[68]

The reparative reader perceives narrative as fractured – aware of its multiple, contradictory registers, while holding each opposing discourse in a suspended epistemological embrace. For Sedgwick, the text is constituted from fragments, but also has the potential to surprise the reader. The activity of reparative reading occurs in relationship to the formal conventions of the text itself, for some novels might be more open to such a reading than others. Reparative reading is in dialectical tension with what Sedgwick calls "paranoid reading," a mode of interpretation that has its origins in the rise of critical theory after the 1960s. Building off a Kleinian notion of repair that emphasizes the emotional

[68] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performance* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003), 146.

failures and negations intrinsic to psychoanalytic epistemologies, Sedgwick highlights the affective work underlying reparative reading.[69]

When brought to bear on literary and historical texts, reparative reading is what Sedgwick calls a "weak theory," in that it disavows mastery in its self-reflexive awareness of failure. Inspired by Sedgwick's work, David Eng and Shinhee Han's reading of Klein frames the negativity within reparation as a hopeful vehicle to cultivate an "ethical fidelity" to the lost or ruptured object under attack. They write: "For Klein, the infant's psychic experiences pose a mortal threat not just to the loved object but ultimately to its own self as well, its connections to other creatures and things. Reparation thus provides one psychic mechanism of preserving the lost object after, from, and beyond violence, reconstituting and redirecting the negativity of the death drive away from unmitigated guilt and destruction."[70] The self's tendency towards reparation is thus a necessary complement to destructive feelings of enmity and violence – a disposition that comes about thanks to a deferral of the importance of instincts or drives, and by virtue of an understanding of love as not limited to the erotic.[71] In turn, Julia Kristeva writes of the Kleinian version of Eros being "manifested from the beginning as something propelled by a tenderness toward the other and by an overwhelming nostalgia that arises out of the depressive position."[72] According to Kristeva's reading of Klein, the "sublimating positive force" of reparation may suggest a mode of erotic life beyond the psychosomatic, or biologically essential, foundations of the psyche. For Kristeva, this leaves the unanswered question of reparation holding the potential to open up a more polymorphous and non-heteronormative framework of love that is not simply sexual, but also propelled by a "tenderness" or affiliative longing for the other.

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[69] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, 128.
[70] David Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2010), 157.
[71] Klein, *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works,* 36.
[72] Julia Kristeva, *Melanie Klein* (New York: Columbia UP, 2001), 420.

Through a reparative, or what one might call "affiliative" reading of the literature of the long 1960s, the post-1960 novel of affiliation prefigures what today we might refer to as "queer." While the novel portrays experimental love relationships as erotic and affiliative, they are not necessarily *sexual*, nor simply defined by sex acts. The tensions that emerge in *Another Country*, *Sula*, and *Surfacing* illuminate a shift in the historical formation of sex and sexuality during the era, which impacted the constitution of friendship and romance. This project looks for the queer basis of cross-gender bonds in novels of the early 1960s, and therefore calls for a re-evaluation of gay and lesbian bonding and the queer canon. As Catherine Bond Stockton suggests in *The Queer Child*, "queerness" epistemologically emerges after the fact; it is a way of life defined by a pattern of delayed recognition and belatedness. Stockton explains how queerness develops from a kind of "backward birthing mechanism" which "makes the hunt for the roots of queerness a retrospective search for amalgamated forms of feelings, desires, and physical needs that led to this death of one's straight life."[73] Baldwin, Mary McCarthy and Harper Lee, for example, represent non-normative affiliations in the late 1950s and early 1960s that subvert compulsory heterosexuality, providing persuasive evidence for a reading of queerness backwards and sideways in time and space. This project calls on us to reevaluate our assumptions of queer/straight modes of categorization prior to the climactic "coming out" of Queer history in the Stonewall riots of June 1969. According to Patricia Julian Smith in her introduction to *The Queer Sixties*, although the raid on, and subsequent riot in support of, the Stonewall Inn often are considered the key milestones for queer history in the U.S., in fact queer culture "did not, however, begin with these dramatic moments in time; rather, it had flourished with an elaborate and highly developed sensibility, a subcultural vernacular and semiotic system, and cultic veneration of certain figures."[74] In conversation with this 1999

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[73] Catherine Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke UP, 2009), 7.

[74] Patricia Julian Smith, "Introduction," in *The Queer Sixties* (New York: Routledge, 1999), xiii.

collection, my project extends our understanding of queerness beyond simply a "subcultural vernacular," to encompass an imaginary that straddled counter-cultural and mainstream collectivities.

Dedicated to breaking down distinctions of counter-culture and mainstream, public and private, this project reads heterosexual and cross-gender relationships as necessary objects of queer theoretical analysis, thereby troubling anys table origin of "queerness" in contemporary America. Expanding the very signification of "queer," my dissertation intervenes in the ongoing debate over queerness articulating a specific social minority or asserting a universalizing anti-normative, or sexually aberrant, impulse. While I don't reject the productively complex political solidarities that can emerge from individuals claiming a queer identity, my readings of literature of the sixties illuminate how the "universalizing" hypotheses of feminist scholars like Lorde and Rich might need to be more fully explored in our study of queer culture and politics. In turn, to better understand how queerness is both gendered, raced and classed in North America, the terms of "querness" must be expanded to more fully signify the intersecting structures of power that mark bodies, feelings or acts.

As an improvisational form of interpersonal relation, affiliation bridges social differences, and recognizably identitarian collectives, by resisting the heteronormative logic of nation and family. The reading collective that might emerge from novels of affiliation is structured around shared feelings, embodied attention and subversive acts of textual reception that undo the distinction of identification and desire. In this way, the authors who make up this project take part in the literary development of a queer counterpublic, which according to Michael Warner, maintains a meta-critical awareness of its "subordinate status," yet has an oppositional potential beyond the scope of more benign "subcultural" forms. This counterpublic emerges not from an identitarian experience of recognition, but from efforts to build communities through intersubjective crossings and cohabitations. As Warner writes of counterpublics, they "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 of care and pedagogy."[75] What novels like Baldwin's *Another Country*, Atwood's *Surfacing* and Choi's historical novel *American Woman* demonstrate is that heterosexual relationships and familial bonds begin to resemble the same anti-hegemonic, improvisational and transgressive structures of feeling we usually associate with gay and lesbian culture.

The reparative turn in contemporary queer theory and literary criticism has led a number of critics to re-assess methods of formal interpretation and the ideological assumptions we bring to bear when approaching texts. In this project, literature is seen as both structurally coherent yet also indeterminate, as influenced by historical and social conditions but not held fast to their terms. As a reparative reader, I therefore approach the text as writerly and plural, a destabilization that makes any strict symbolic or hermeneutical reading difficult to perform. As Edward Said suggests in his summation of recent trends in structuralism in *Beginnings,* we produce criticism "according to that formula which dictates patient accounts of *how* a work *might* be done rather than the record *that* it is done."[76] Sedgwick's interest in attending to the *asymmetrical* relationships between humans and texts, and between subjects and adjacent objects, is reminiscent of Said's neutral or "propaedeutic" study of literary beginnings; both writers are dedicated to what Said calls the "audacious speculation" that comes when we approach texts with different and non-coterminous ambitions and risks.

The novel of affiliation is defined not simply through structural or authorial convention, but through certain necessary practices of reading. These narratives demand an ethics of reading characterized by a self-reflexive negotiation of thematic and narratological failure, as well as an ability to transform these failures into opportunities for readerly improvisation, adaptation and repair. Constituted by formal patterns of setting out and subsequently foreclosing plots and

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[75] Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 57.
[76] Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, 333.

characters, these novels lead the reader to an inevitable experience of disappointment. Yet this unmooring also creates a plenitude of potential new "beginnings" that have the effect of recalibrating the stakes and epistemological expectations of the act of reading. Since fragmentation and rupture are embedded within the reparative aesthetics of this novelistic subgenre, some readers experience these novels as incoherent and failing to bring the closure hoped for in successful story. The reader's feeling of either disappointment or achievement hinges on a capacity to hold in abeyance the dynamic or static predicates of the plot, or the plot's kernels or satellites, in order to be open to those forms of affiliation that deny linguistic or narratological categorization.[77] The choice of categorizing the death of a minor character, for example, as "satellite" to the more important "kernel" of a love plot depends on the social codes or foundational myths available to the reader to literally make sense of the story she receives. The thematic tension between freedom and conformity, individual singularity and communal affiliation, which the narrative of affiliation invokes, occurs not simply on the level of character and scene, but on the level of plot. The novel of affiliation's "success" depends on a rigorous and patient reading practice that defers the choice to categorize events as either central or marginal to the plot – a practice prone to failure, making these narratives more vulnerable to cultural forgetting.

The popularity of these novels of affiliation proves that their reception was flexible, and open to readers who might not usually be heralded by these text's discursive vocabularies. Without recourse to pre-existing meta-narrative or stable social codes, the reader's proairetic experience of interpretation is fraught. Aristotle defines proairesis as one of the foundational processes of human's cultivation of an ethical sensibility. Roland Barthes' abstract definition of the proairetic in *S/Z* is perhaps the most influential; his proairetic code describes a reader's judgment of what counts as an event or "kernel" of plot within the larger narrative, and in what sequence these events unfold.

[77] See Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1975), 204.

In fact, in the novel of affiliation, the experience of proairesis is often more difficult than first imagined, for the usual movement of Barthes' terms "(begin/end, continue/stop)" is upended in the inherent cyclicality and self-reflexive calls for re-reading.[78] What would in another context appear an ending – the action of death – serves as a moment of initiation or continuation in these novels. In beginning with rupture, the novel sets out organic expectations for mending, closure and redress of these original wounds. And yet, in order for these narratives to illuminate how to truly bear witness to those wounds that may never heal, they must deny a neat and tidy narrative closure.

In the opening section of the dissertation, my first three chapters chart the development of the novel of affiliation during the long 1960s, reading these narratives as necessarily navigating social, psychic and species structures of difference. In the first chapter "Making Love, Making Friends: Interracial Affiliation in James Baldwin's *Another Country*," I begin the work of explaining how affiliation first develops as a negotiation of social differences during the early civil rights movement. My reading of Baldwin's 1962 novel illustrates the limits of the political discourse of "brotherly love" by underscoring the concomitant presence of erotic desire and friendship when bridging racial and sexual difference. Here, I read *Another Country* as an initial model for the way affiliation serves to repair the losses consequent to racist and patriarchal systems of oppression – a model that subsequent chapters expand on and revise. While attending to scenes of sexual intimacy, my reading foregrounds the social practices of conversation, dialogue and ethical responsibility on which affiliation depends. Although the main interracial romance ruptures at the novel's end, I interpret this broken love affair as setting the stage for a more sustainable cross-gender friendship yet to come. Ending on a tentative note of hope, the novel foretells the failures of civil rights, which, I argue, can be reanimated for new political ends.

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[78] Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 51.

In the next two chapters, textual fragmentation becomes increasingly tied to a disjunctive portrayal of the body, history, and place – three tropes through which Morrison and Atwood illuminate the unique challenges women have in building bonds across differences, especially of gender. My second chapter "Cut Adrift: Improvising Black Female Affiliation in Toni Morrison's *Sula*" provides an analysis of the social and psychic differences that impact the cultivation of intra-racial and same-sex affiliation. Here I contextualize Morrison's 1973 novel within the history of the early 1970s to show how this narrative illuminates the affective and emotional challenges foundational to the burgeoning black feminist movement. Concluding in 1965, *Sula* bears witness to the rupture and dispossession that marred collectivity among African American women prior to and in the wake of racial integration. I argue that the fragmentary nature of black female affiliation is reflected in the novel's structure, which is pieced together from chaotic plots of adultery, murder, and artistic creation. My reading thus highlights how the intimate friendship of Nel and Sula is improvisational and melancholic – its precariousness illustrating the psychic struggles that are part of any bond of affection. Ironically, the friendship of Nel and Sula ends in isolating loneliness, a conclusion suggestive of the ways affiliation often skirts the border of solipsism.

For Morrison and Margaret Atwood, affiliation always skirts the border of solipsism. The narrative of affiliation therefore portrays adoptive social relation in dialectic tension with characters' desires for individual singularity and autonomy. For novelists and poets in the 1960s and after, the alienated character's search for community brought with it a necessary resistance to the threats of similitude and conformity.[79] In my third chapter "Improbable Companions: Interspecies Affiliation in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*," I claim that affiliation's reparative potential is limited by its constitutive threats to individual autonomy. Atwood's 1972 novel demonstrates that cross-gender

[79] In his important contribution to an analysis of post-war American poetry, *Beautiful Enemies: Friendship and Post-war American Poetry*, Andrew Epstein makes a similar claim for the mid-century figuration of friendship as demonstrating a broader cultural struggle over collaboration and non-conformity in the era. See Epstein, *Beautiful Enemies: Friendship and Postwar American Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006).

affiliative bonds rely on the maintenance of an imaginative and independent sense of self. Here, I go beyond the earlier chapters' emphasis on human sociality to evince how personal repair requires the development of supportive bonds between humans and other forms of life. While the novel seems to celebrate a fantastic escape from society, which some critics have read as symptomatic of the era's culture of narcissism, my reading shows the heroine's solitary journey as awakening new empathic ties of interspecies affiliation. These unusual forms of companionship are built from non-linguistic modes of communication and embodied care and model the kinds of work necessary to bridge social differences of gender and ethnicity.

The 1960s novels of affiliation developed by Baldwin, Morrison and Atwood share a central project of grappling with the ruptures of the past and envisioning alternative forms of affiliation that struggle to mend these wounds. Lacking periodization, the literary history of the 1960s has just begun to be charted. Until the past 10 years, this archive has often become subsumed under the category of the "contemporary," an a-temporal field designation that has contributed to this literature failing to undergo rigorous historicization. These texts' own referentiality to the events of the decade is never indexical; while focusing on the "present" realities of the decade, this novelistic subgenre illuminates the way the past haunts the present, in particular the historic ruptures and losses that are set in relief in order to be repaired in narrative. The narrative emphasis on the proairetic and hermeneutic codes of interpretation pose an ethical injunction to the reader, which is not dissimilar to the stakes essential to the writing of history. Paul Ricoeur's axiomatic claim that history bears a "narrative character" reminds us of the underlying effort of carving out story from the greater discursive chaos in acts of historical meaning-making. Much debate and contestation has recently occurred around the ethics of defining the "event" as a punctual reference worthy of historical examination or factual delineation. These narratives of the long 1960s reflect an alternative experiential mode of remembering the past, and describing the present, that emphasizes

the everyday and quotidian moments of transition and movement that remain unnoticed or easily overlooked in the historical record.

By the 1990s, when novelists began to compose historical fiction about the era, many implicitly reckoned with the textual legacy of the 1960s novel of affiliation. These historical novels portray the past as fragmented and revised the reparative potential of the 1960s narratives. Looking particularly at novels by a generation of authors including Morrison, O'Brien, Pynchon and Roth who came into adulthood in the 1960s, critic Samuel S. Cohen has argued that the historical fiction of the 1990s has often looked back to the 1960s as emblematic of the rise and fall of the Cold war.[80] The last section of the dissertation explores the afterlife of the narrative of affiliation in novels that take on sixties structures of affiliation in their plot, and more powerfully in their discursive structures. Much post-1990 historical fiction about the sixties diverges from this affiliative past, and turns to capturing individual and familial experiences of those identities written out of the historical record, especially ethnic and racial minorities. Such novels as Gish Jen's *Mona in the Promised Land* (1997), Philip Roth's *American Pastoral* (1998), Toni Morrison's *Love* (2003), Charles Johnson's *Dreamer*, (1998), and Jumpha Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003), among others, compose fictional accounts of the period to illuminate the untold experiences of women and minorities during the era within a genealogical or familial narrative framework. On the surface Tim O'Brien's 1992 *In the Lake of the Woods* and Susan Choi's 2007 *American Woman* seem to articulate the neo-liberal erasure of 1960s efforts at affiliation across differences and the foreclosure of this bond's reparative potential. However, if one approaches these historical fictions as adjacent siblings of the 1960s novel of affiliation, productive similarities emerge.

In their historical novels that look back to the era, O'Brien and Choi incorporate affiliative and generational frameworks of cultural memory. By doing so, they take part in a literary project of

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[80] Samuel S. Cohen, *After the End of History: American Fiction in the 1990s* (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2009).

historical re-vision that expands the discursive field of earlier novels of affiliation to illuminate their lingering effects in a neo-liberal era of multiculturalism. Although 1960s narratives of affiliation sought to counteract institutional inequality and tradition, post-1990 novels sometimes depict these elective bonds as resembling the genealogical frameworks of nation and family that previous texts worked to revise. In turn, the legacy of affiliation illuminates the necessity to not only conceive of friendship outside of the familial sphere, but employ this new flexible interpersonal framework to re-conceive filiative relationships between fathers and daughters, mothers and sons. Invoking a fraught relationship to a 1960s' affiliative past, O'Brien and Choi remember the era through two key experiential fields: the archival and the visual. The earlier turn to self-reflexivity and narrative fragmentation is transposed to the discursive field of their post-1990s historical novels, which generically reflect what Linda Hutcheon calls "historiographic metafiction." In *The Politics of Postmodernism*, Hutcheon claims the postmodern text inherently resists "closure, totalization, and universality" in order to invoke new ethical encounters with the past. She writes: "rather than seeing this paradoxical use and abuse [of closure] as a sign of decadence or as a cause for disrepair, it might be possible to postulate a less negative interpretation that would allow for at least the *potential* for radical critical possibilities."[81] My readings of these meta-fictional novels therefore approach narrative fragmentation as an aesthetic opportunity to position oneself in reparative relation to this damaged past.

Both Tim O'Brien and Susan Choi build out from, and revise, the 1960s novel of affiliation, but in highly divergent ways. These authors' re-vision of visual icons and documentary archives of the decade conversely emphasize the fragmentation of history as factual reality that occurs in the postmodern era – a dislocation that shapes our experience of remembering the era. Their novels suggest that our perception of the sixties as fragmented, dichotomous and polarized might be a

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[81] Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of the Postmodern* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 67, italics original.

"truth" inherently shaped by the cultural memory of the era, which developed concomitant to the rise of postmodernity. My fourth chapter, "Broken Affinities: Forgetting Affiliation in Tim O'Brien's 1994 *In the Lake of the Woods*," explores the damaging effects of veteran alienation on egalitarian adoptive bonds. O'Brien's fiction illuminates the myth of white male fraternity that clouds the reparative potential of the novel of affiliation. Here, I argue that the trauma and violence of the Vietnam war repudiate the progressive gains of the 1960s, thus shattering the possibility of fraternal, interracial or cross-gender affiliations. Telling the story of John Wade and his wife Kathy, this novel rejects friendship and returns to the traditional plot of marriage to heal trauma. I argue that the failure of affiliation to emerge within this marriage – which ends not with healing, but death – suggests a greater historical forgetting of the era's political efforts to bridge social difference.

In my final fifth chapter, I explore the parodic representation of inter-ethnic and feminist solidarity in Susan Choi's 2007 *American Woman*. In this self-reflexive realist novel, Choi re-writes the history of the Symbionese Liberation Army to illuminate the shadowy underside of the group's Maoist ideals: the absence of egalitarian cross-gender affiliations. Her depiction of a Japanese-American woman's alliance with and struggle against the SLA reveals the complex influence of Marxist and feminist ideology on the radical Left. Although the novel employs the structure of earlier narratives of affiliation, it deconstructs their transgressive idealism, illuminating the ethnic and familial wounds that must first be addressed before any alternative inter-racial or cross-gender collective can be cultivated. In a concluding scene of reunion at the former Manzanar Internment camp, the estranged relation between the protagonist and her father is mended thanks to a renewed affiliation that develops from the realization that they share a common history of anti-imperial resistance.

Through tentative acts of re-reading and interpretive repair, these chapters trace the emergence of the novel of affiliation in the 1960s and after in North America. In their cyclical and

inconclusive narrative structures, these novels invoke a reading process emblematic of the improvisational bonds of affiliation emplotted in the texts themselves. As characters turn together to re-member the loss and violence of the past, so too do the readers of these novels participate in a circle of memory that transcends identity and generation. In his 1979 novel *Just Above My Head*, James Baldwin self-reflexively elucidates the novel's role as a medium of the past:

> The burden – the role of memory – is to clarify the event, to make it useful, even, to make it bearable. But memory is, also, what the imagination makes, or has made, of the event, and, the more dreadful the event, the more likely it is that the memory will distort, or efface it… This may be why we appear to learn absolutely nothing from experience, or may, in other words, account for our incoherence: memory does not require that we reconstitute the event, but that we justify it. This cannot be done by memory, but by looking toward tomorrow, and so, to undo the horror, we repeat it.[82]

According to Baldwin, the "burden" of memory is to justify or redress the wounds of history that cannot be repeated. For many who lived through the '60s, the struggles of the era have become distorted, erased. Thus to "learn" from these experiences, we must bear the burden and make it known, not by repeating its horrors but by repairing them through ethical action. Only then will the incoherence of this past be translatable in the present. One alternative definition of "burden" is "a refrain or chorus of a song." Like a question "unbearably, endlessly, and variously repeated," the textual refrain of the novel of affiliation asks us to make "bearable" the decade's ruptures through renewed efforts at affiliation. The following pages endeavor to begin this work.

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[82] James Baldwin, *Just Above My Head* (New York: Delta Trade, 2000), 554.

CHAPTER 1

Making Love, Making Friends: Affiliation and Repair in James Baldwin's *Another Country*

In July 1957, James Baldwin stepped onto American soil for the first time in nine years. The previous autumn on the Parisian Boulevard St. Germain, he came upon a newspaper photograph of white protestors abusively spitting on a fifteen-year-old black girl for daring to enter her recently integrated school in North Carolina. This violent yet powerful image inspired Baldwin to return to the U.S. to bear witness to and participate in the nascent civil rights movement. His writings published between 1957-1963 express a surprising hope in the movement's ability to counteract such racial persecution. In his 1961 essay entitled "Notes for a Hypothetical Novel," the author reflects on the suffering and early deaths that marked the lives of many of his childhood friends in Harlem, noting that he "has not known many survivors." Burdened by this sorrowful past, Baldwin argues that the writer's task is to imagine a renewed world that can bridge divisions of class and color: the "problem the writer has which is, after all, his problem and perhaps not yours is somehow to unite these things, to find the terms of our connection, without which we will perish."[83] Here then, Baldwin frames fiction as an inventive force to avert the violence that systemic racial discrimination often incurs.

The author's journey to "find the terms of our connection" necessarily navigates the utopian ideals of "brotherly love" and "beloved community" that emerged out of mid-1950s civil rights discourse. In "Notes for a Hypothetical Novel," he explains that as a novelist, he seeks to go beyond the movement's redemptive rhetoric and rediscover the country in a "real sense": "Now this country will be transformed. It will not be transformed by an act of God, but by all of us, by you and me."[84] In his 1962 novel *Another Country*, Baldwin thus departs from a longstanding American intellectual

[83] James Baldwin, *Collected Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1998), 229.
[84] Ibid., 229-30.

tradition of depicting interracial fraternity as offering a sure path to national redemption. Instead, his deeply secular novel presents cross-gender bonds of affiliation as an alternative means of repairing those social wounds that may never fully heal. As is evident in the final lines of the essay, and in the "hypothetical novel" made manifest in *Another Country*, this collective transformation begins with literary attempts at repair: "We made the world we're living in and we have to *make it over*."[85]

Baldwin's first goal upon his return in 1957 was to travel to the south to document the movement firsthand. On his first trip across the Mason Dixon, he met and interviewed Martin Luther King, publishing a biographical portrait of the leader in *Harper's* in 1961. Prophetically entitled "The Dangerous Road Before Martin Luther King," the article foresees King's potential iconicity and martyrdom and testifies to King's moving dedication to openly embrace the enemy.[86] His authorial perspective on the leader was influenced by King's own writings about love and understanding published in the late fifties. King and his early partners in the Montgomery Improvement Association and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), particularly Bayard Rustin, Stanley Levison and Ella Baker, collaborated to develop an American political philosophy of nonviolence built from Judeo-Christian theology and the writings of Mahatma Gandhi, among others. Together they posed a transcendent and integrative ethics of love that they believed would eventuate the removal of geographic, social, and economic barriers to racial equality.

Seeking to achieve not simply legal desegregation, King and others argued for a truly integrated "beloved community" and posed "love" as the ethical stance that would "cut off the chain of hate" overtaking the country, especially the Jim Crow South.[87] In his 1958 article, "An

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[85] Ibid., my emphasis.
[86] David Leeming, *James Baldwin* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 178.
[87] Martin Luther King, *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James Melvin Washington (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 8. See also Harvard Sitkoff, *King: Pilgrimage to the Mountaintop* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008), 25-87.

Experiment of Love," King claims that "brotherly love," or *agape*, would allow individuals to rise above the erotics inherent to this dialectic cycle of hate.[88] The leader diverges from popular mid-century philosophies that heralded the revolutionary potential of eros, privileging platonic "brotherly love" to be a more powerful expression of "understanding, redeeming good will for all men, an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return…. When we love on the *agape* level we love men not because we like them, not because their attitudes and ways appeal to us, but because God loves them."[89] This spiritually acceptable notion of brotherly love functioned for King as a theoretical ideal and also a tactical strategy. As a patriotic invocation of a divinely ordained America, his call to political brotherhood allied civil rights activists with the nation's Christian founders.

As a gay black man, Baldwin was critical of the hetero-normative foundations of the mid-century political rhetoric of redemption. He writes in "Down at the Cross," "If the concept of God has any validity or any use, it can only be to make us larger, freer, and more loving. If God cannot do this, then it is time we got rid of him."[90] His distrust of any religious ideology's power to bring about collective justice and individual freedom led him to challenge both Martin Luther King's and Elijah Mohammed's projects of religious revolution. As he writes in "The Fire Next Time," "I told Elijah that I did not care if white and black people married, and that I had many white friends. I would have no choice, if it came to it, but to perish with them, for (I said to myself, but not to Elijah), 'I love a few people and they love me and some of them are white, and isn't love more important than color.'" Here Baldwin seems warily aligned with those sinners who betrayed their racial and religious allegiances when they loved "a few people," posing himself outside the circle of purity and redemption. His confession of having had interracial relationships is intimately linked to

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[88] King, 17.
[89] Ibid., 8. See Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (New York: Routledge, 1987). See also Marianne DeKoven's analysis of Marcuse as a force for the New Left in *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2004).
[90] James Baldwin, "The Fire Next Time," in *Collected Essays*, 314.

the unsaid quality of his love, further attesting to the unavoidable collusion of interracial and queer love during the era. To see both interracial and homosexual relations as perverse or not virtuous illustrates how these are mutual practices and reciprocal ways of feeling queer, practices that resist the legislation of racially pure heterosexuality and its requisite reproduction.

However inspired he might have been by King's movement of nonviolent protest, Baldwin nonetheless remained critical of the kind of love that could bring about an honest and egalitarian interracial community.[91] Scholars, such as James Melvin Washington, also criticize King's conception of agape as separate and distinct from eros, arguing that he simplifies the contradictory depictions of love in the New Testament while also discounting Ander Nygren's canonical theorization of *Agape and Eros*. Nygren argued that eros was just one type of love that worked, like agape, to bring an individual closer to the divine. He understood eros and agape as inclusive and equal forms of love.[92] King's narrow representation of *agape* as a spiritual demonstration of "understanding" and *redemptive* "good will" to those who may well be in a hostile relation to the nonviolent subject, obfuscates the crucial presence of erotic desire in encounters with racial difference.[93] Baldwin's *Another Country* builds on King's rhetoric to articulate a more transgressive conception of the civil rights "beloved community," one that restores the catalytic power of sexual desire to the cultivation of new interracial bonds. Subverting transcendent notions of national union and fraternity, the novel portrays the immanent and sometimes profane struggles that men and women experience when attempting to cultivate bonds of affiliation across racial divides.[94]

In this chapter, I read *Another Country* as exemplary of a developing novel of affiliation, in which transgressive love relationships constitute the work of bridging strict boundaries of sex and

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[91] King, 20.
[92] See Anders Nygren, "Agape and Eros," in *Eros, Agape and Philia: Readings in the Philosophy of Love*, ed. Alan Soble (New York: Paragon House, 1989).
[93] King, 19.
[94] This is also resonant in Baldwin's early civil rights essays, including "They Can't Turn Back" (1960), "In Search of a Majority" (1960), and "The Dangerous Road Before Martin Luther King" (1962).

color that limited life for many under de facto segregation. The textual strategy of initial loss, fragmentation and subsequent repair that Baldwin brings to his 1962 novel is part of a broader literary trend that I believe emerged during the long 1960s. Through the interweaving of multiple characters and subplots, the post- 1960 novels of affiliation portray asymmetrical bonds of relation among characters in order to provide a fictional framework for imagining the work of collective repair. To do so, these bonds necessarily combine "sociable, friendly" feelings with the more unwieldy energy of erotic desire.[95] Both celebrated and reviled during its day, *Another Country* elucidates a complex spectrum of interracial feeling that foregrounds the intimate transgressions that underlie the era's public struggles for civil rights.

The novel's focus on interracial community signals a unique period in the author's literary career, which was more broadly dedicated to representing African American collective experience. Baldwin's first novel, *Go Tell it on the Mountain* (1953), primarily focuses on the black Christian community in Harlem; in his 1956 *Giovanni's Room*, he turns to the exilic setting of Paris in order to depict the claustrophobic love affair between characters Giovanni and David. In 1963, the murder of Medgar Evers, the Montgomery church bombing, and the Kennedy administration's feeble legislative response to political leaders, caused Baldwin's tentative idealism after the publication of *Another Country* to give way to a mix of rage and ambivalence. By the time he publishes *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* in 1968, the next novel to follow *Another Country*, Baldwin has given up on the literary project of imagining an interracial community.[96] In its place he offers a scathing depiction of white liberalism that matches his renewed interest in the force and limits of Black Nationalism. It

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[95] Etymologically derived from the French term of the same name, "affiliation" originally signified the creation of adoptive bonds of kinship; it later came to be defined as the "sociable, friendly," or "sympathetic" feelings these bonds inspire. "Affiliative," *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989).

[96] See James Campbell, *Talking at the Gates: A Life of James Baldwin* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1991), 163.

is not until the 1979 publication of *Just Above My Head* that we see the author returning to the subject of civil rights, yet remembering the movement as a lost and failed dream.

In my reading, Baldwin's novel painfully evokes the violence and suffering that mark twentieth-century American race relations, while nevertheless resonating an eerie optimism unique to the early 1960s. The novel begins by depicting the suicide and funeral of early protagonist Rufus Scott; this death symbolizes the wound of racial violence that the narrative attempts to repair and mourn. The alienation tragically marking Rufus' life, death, and memory was sadly familiar to many mid-century American readers. By reading for affiliation and repair, however, this essay recasts the novel's familiar story of estrangement to illuminate the way this death inspires a nexus of intimate and often consuming bonds that develop among the cast of surviving characters: Rufus's sister, Ida Scott; his best friend, Vivaldo Moore; his former lover, Eric Jones; and his friends, Cass and Richard Silenski. The unusual interconnected love stories that emerge are emblematic of Baldwin's novelistic method that re-assembles the fragments of linear plots of romance and friendship in order to represent those relationships that defy categorization. Highlighting the failure of the naturalist and sentimental literary modes to achieve national redemption, *Another Country* opens up a new form of relationship formed from an awareness of the impossibility of complete understanding or mutual recognition. The interruption of these mythologies, inherent to the novel's structure, highlights the inevitable fragmentation and *mis-recognition* that occurs when attempting to sustain any affiliation across difference.

On the one hand, Rufus's tragic loss of self can be read as evidence for the urgent necessity of 1960s political movements for group identity, which sought to heal the alienation of the oppressed through collective and personal liberation. Conversely, my reading of *Another Country* highlights how bonds of affiliation aim to alleviate alienation by transgressing group categories of race, gender and sexuality. To hold in abeyance the contradictory elements that comprise Baldwin's

fragmentary narrative of affiliation is to be open to what Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick calls the "fracturing" hope that shapes our reading of fiction outside identitarian or "symptomatic" frames. In her 2003 *Touching Feeling*, Sedgwick writes, "hope, often a fracturing, even a traumatic thing to experience, is among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organize the fragments (…) she encounters or creates."[97] In this reparative spirit I interpret *Another Country* beyond the logics of identity to salvage its subtle gestures of affiliation.[98]

Eros, Suspicion and the Specter of Miscegenation

In a 1960 address "In Search of a Majority" presented to mainly white undergraduates at Kalamazoo College, and later published in *Nobody Knows My Name*, James Baldwin suggests that the main barrier to integration is the pernicious foreclosure of sex between individuals of different races. Ironically during a time of racial segregation, Baldwin asserts that the very catalyst for cultivating bonds of affiliation across races and genders can also pose the most danger to its survival. Daring his audience to conceive of integration as one of sexual union, the author invokes the specter of interracial marriage, asking: "Would you let your sister marry one?"[99] Baldwin's query of the audience's feelings about their white sister marrying a black man is meant to inspire a moment of self-reflection, a testing of the limits of "brotherly love" by framing this bond within the biological terms of reproductive intimacy. Inherently resistant to the codification of blood kinship and racial

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[97] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity,* 146.

[98] Baldwin's depiction of the psychic struggles that shape these tentatively hopeful ties echo the work of psychoanalytic theorist Melanie Klein, who asserts in 1937 that the subject's central developmental task is to bridge the forces of love and hate through a practice she terms "reparation." This articulation of the self as unable to let go of "bad" objects of desire challenges the normative heterosexual origins of traditional Freudian psychoanalysis. See *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works* (New York: Free Press, 1984), 306.

[99] Here Baldwin frames marriage as a relationship that goes beyond the freedom of individual choice in adoptive affiliation; instead once affiliative bonds are publicly codified as "marriage" they assume the reproductive burden of filiation.

purity, Baldwin represents the challenge of race relations as a confrontation with one's desire for complete interracial union:

> Love does not begin and end the way we seem to think it does. Love is a battle, love is a war; love is a growing up. No one in the world – in the entire world – knows more – knows Americans better or, odd as this may sound, loves them more than the American Negro. This is because he has had to watch you, outwit you, deal with you, and bear you, and sometimes even bleed and die with you, ever since we got here, that is, since both of us, black and white, got here – and this is a wedding. Whether I like it or not, or whether you like it or not, we are bound together forever.[100]

This depiction of a "growing up," implies a fall from innocence into a new and more discomforting knowledge that both races, black and white, "are bound together forever" in a kind of wedding. Baldwin's uses of imagery of marriage and union testify to the erotic dynamics that make interracial love both a "battle" and a transition into the responsibility and duty that comes in maturation. Without a self-reflexive engagement with the violent loss of innocence assumed in interracial hterosexuality, bonds of affiliation between races will not likely succeed. Baldwin shows that if integration was conceived in the hopes of building an interracial community, it also ironically harbored the possibility of sexual desire sullying the sanctity of these public fantasies of reunion.

The term "love" in *Another Country*, like much of Baldwin's writings, is paradoxical – it works as a sign of sexual desire and of sexual acts, but also signifies emotional bonds of attachment and connection. Baldwin uses the term for the first time in an early scene of artistic reception between protagonist Rufus Scott, an African American jazz drummer, and his future white lover, Leona. Revealing the aesthetic connotation of eros that is characteristic of this and other narratives of affiliation, this retrospective scene looks back to a past moment when Rufus was playing out on stage in a spot in Harlem. Here Baldwin underscores the collaborative exchanges that are foundational to the novel's jazz aesthetic, portraying Rufus in musical and affective dialogue with his fellow band members as well as the audience. Interpreting the lead saxophonist's melody, Rufus

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[100] Baldwin, *Collected Essays*, 220.

apprehends the solo as an erotic, and seemingly unanswerable, question: "He stood there, wide-legged, humping the air, filling his barrel chest, shivering in the rags of his twenty-odd years, and screaming through the horn *Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?* … This, anyway, was the question Rufus heard, the same phrase, unbearably, endlessly, and variously repeated."[101] The lyric, excessive style of this sentence punctuated with sexually connotative gerunds ["humping," "filling," "shivering" and "screaming"] attempts to capture the improvisational and embodied quality of the performance. On the one hand, the repetition of the imagined lyrics of the instrument "Do you love me" draws attention to this black musician's need for love and recognition. Yet, it also can be heard in a different timbre, ironically posing the question as a *rescinding* of love, a contemptuous withdrawal of the intimacy the audience desires in exchange for mere "hurled" "outrage." By the close of the scene, the band is "soaked" with sweat, ending the set on an air of odorous exhaustion.

As the first erotic scene of the novel, it foreshadows more explicitly sexual acts to follow, while challenging the reader to be self-reflexively aware of her desire for the text as mere wish fulfillment. It also acts as a stage for the love affair to unfold between Rufus and the character Leona, a young blond woman standing in the audience and meeting his gaze with an enticing curiosity. While the music's question "Do you love me" is on the surface a question Leona seems posed to answer, she is portrayed as intellectually incapable of receiving the song as anything other than simply melody. Baldwin refuses to describe her as active listener or interpreter, stating simply that she visited the club in Harlem, because "she liked the music."[102] Perhaps in another world, for which Leona seems to long, her simple desire for pleasure outside of intellectual or aesthetic interpretation could have led to sexual freedom and liberation. However, the shattering power of Leona and Rufus' fated erotic desire will tragically break down linguistic communicability between these characters whose social world shackles their private lives. If their love could have existed in a

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[101] James Baldwin, *Another Country* (New York: Vintage International, 1993), 8.
[102] Baldwin, *Another Country*, 12.

one-night-stand, refusing the futurity assumed in their initial sexual encounter, the story of Rufus and Leona may have ended much differently than Baldwin imagines.

At their first meeting, Rufus already seems aware that Leona might be plagued with "ignorance and indifference," a fact that leads the reader to perceive Leona as naïve and vulnerable to a greater eventual fall at the end of this affair.[103] Baldwin poses Leona as an easy read, her dialect quickly signals to Rufus that she is Southern, suggesting Rufus might be the character most capable of interpretation in this first section of the text. However, the destruction of their love affair amounts to a failure of reading and communication; neither Rufus nor Leona ever adequately listens to or hears the other due to their inability to work beyond the logic of suspicion that frames their love.[104] They are caught in a subject/object relationship constituted from binary oppositions that entrap them in stereotypical social codes from which they desire to break free. To move beyond the erotic call of love centered on self-interested, narcissistic desire, heard in the intonation of the phrase "do you love *me*? [my emphasis]," will require a sustained look at the novel's hyperbolic representation of love and its relationship to paranoia.

Baldwin's narration of the story of Rufus' rise and fall builds on the symmetrical logic typical of the social realist traditions that the author sought to revise. His depiction of a black protagonist plagued by aggressive violence and hyper-masculinity alludes to Richard Wright's 1940 *Native Son,* a text that focuses on the tragic underbelly of African American urban life, partly in order to incite social and political action. In particular, the story of Rufus and Leona echoes Wright's infamous characterization of Bigger Thomas, an African American chauffeur who murders the daughter of his white employer. For Baldwin, *Native Son* serves as a foil to his own aesthetic project. Writing about Richard Wright's fiction in his essays "Everybody's Protest Novel" and "Alas, Poor Richard," the author describes the horrible scenes of violence in *Native Son* as revealing the racialized subject's

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103 Baldwin, *Another Country*, 52.
104 Baldwin, *Another Country*, 9.

"terrible attempt to break out of the cage in which the American imagination has imprisoned him for so long." Baldwin describes this "cage" as ordered by "sexual myths" that fill the black man with a rage "of a man being castrated," yet these representations of violence and sexualized anger appear "gratuitous and compulsive" because the root history of these ugly feelings is never revealed. In the place of naturalist instinctual drives, Baldwin inserts a more particularized representation of the ways racial oppression impacts families and individuals differently based on their gender, sexuality and generation.

In developing his own modernist style, Baldwin saw it critical to interject sexuality into the site of "gratuitous and compulsive" violence found in the American realist tradition of Richard Wright, John Steinbeck, John Dos Passos and others. Dedicating his fiction to the task of reanimating the complexities of "life, the human being," in African American fiction, Baldwin castigated the majority of African American novels for refusing to depict the real mysteries of human experience. He frames this lack in terms of sex and psychology, writing that there lies "a great space where sex ought to be; and what usually fills this space is violence."[105] Eroticizing the violence, within the interracial union between Leona and Rufus, Baldwin binds Rufus' fate to the intertextual legacy of social realism and the mythic scripts of miscegenation out of which characters like Bigger Thomas emerged. The first scene of sexual encounter between the characters sets the tone for the novel's broader depiction of interracial desire as negotiating sexual stereotype and gendered hierarchy. Here, Baldwin describes their sexual act in symbolic terms of rape. Focalized solely through the perspective of Rufus, the scene demonstrates the dangers of interracial seduction in a segregated society, which are both enticing and frightening.

After their initial meeting in the jazz club, Rufus takes Leona to a party at his friend's apartment over looking the Hudson. As the night comes to a close, Rufus and Leona fall into a

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[105] Baldwin, "Alas, Poor Richard," in *Collected Essays,* 251.

battle of mythic proportions, having sex on the balcony while the party winds down inside. This spectacular display of sexuality, that takes place beneath an open sky and in front of a picture window, demonstrates the dangers involved in any relationship between a Black man and a white woman in the late 1950s and early 1960s, at the tail-end of Jim Crow. As is evidenced in this passage, Baldwin enfolds their intimate, seemingly private feelings within a public discourse of racial subjection and miscegenation:

> Rufus opened his eyes for a moment and watched her face, which was transfigured with agony and gleamed in the darkness like alabaster. Tears hung in the corners of her eyes and the hair at her brow was wet. Her breath came with moaning and short cries, with words he couldn't understand, and in spite of himself he began moving faster and thrusting deeper. He wanted her to remember him the longest day she lived. And, shortly, nothing could have stopped him, not the white God himself nor a lynch mob arriving on wings. Under his breath he cursed the milk-white bitch and groaned and rode his weapon between her things. She began to cry. *I told you*, he moaned, *I'd give you something to cry about*, and, at once, he felt himself strangling, about to explode or die. A moan and a curse tore through him while he beat her with all the strength he had and felt the venom shoot out of him, enough for a hundred black-white babies.[106]

At first, Rufus' open eyes perceive the "alabaster" face of Leona as spiritually "transfigured with agony," emitting a kind of ecstatic grace that corresponds to the reserved image of "tears" in the corners of her eyes. The term "agony" is particularly allusive. Originating from the Greek word "agon," meaning conflict or struggle (either physical or mental), Leona's "agony" foreshadows the private conflicts that will develop within their interpersonal relationship. The "integration" of bodies demonstrates the potential violence found in interracial heterosexuality. The limits of this integration come in the unintelligibility of Leona, whose cries and moans are unrecognizable. Like Rufus, the reader can't understand her words, and thus is refused complete access to the emotional and sensual tenor of this act.[107] The porcelain fragility of Leona is soon broken, as Rufus begins to perceive her not as virgin, but whore – a "milk-white bitch" that he curses under his breath. Baldwin

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[106] Baldwin, *Another Country*, 21-22.

[107] She becomes the embodiment of the victimized white female character within the sentimental tradition – at one point Leona a friend of Rufus' jokingly refers to her as "Little Eva."

interjects a threatening masculine quality to Rufus' whispered utterance "I told you I'd give you something to cry about," referencing multiple potential events: rape, domestic violence, and sadomasochistic fantasy. Calling attention to Leona's "innocent" feminine whiteness, Baldwin thus hyperbolically represents Rufus as the opposite, a Black man embodying the stereotypes of sexual perversion, guilt and animalism. Both characters share an agony built from a dialectical exchange of pain and pleasure, a sexual coupling intensified by a racialized and gendered hierarchy of power. Although white women and black men are set apart as binary opposites, under this symbolic "rape" economy they are equally subject to suffering from white patriarchal oppression.

Aligned in the etymological origins of her name to the mythological goddess Venus, Leona invokes an American-made mythology of forbidden love that has its genus in those faraway backwaters of Virginia. A white Southerner, she symbolizes the extreme version of violent white supremacy that the novel's representation of interracial affiliation seeks to work through. Before the narrative of affiliation can unfold in *Another Country*, Baldwin must first confront the reader with its opposite: the tragedy of interracial romance that turns on what Robyn Wiegman calls the "rape mythos." In *American Anatomies*, Wiegman argues that after Reconstruction, American society conceived this myth that locked the black man into the hyper-masculine position of rapist whose ultimate target was the idealized figure of white femininity.[108] Wiegman writes that "by offering the dominant culture a very powerful means through which not only black men but neither black population could be disciplined as innately – if no longer legally – inferior, the myth of the black man as rapist became, as Richard Wright would later depict, that 'death before death came.'"[109] For Wright and Baldwin, the "death before death" of the "black man as rapist" is figured in the symbolic

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[108] Yet, once integration entered the scene of possibility, the myth of friendship between Black and White men took the place of interracial "intimacy" found in the scene of lynch mobs violent emasculation of the black man.

[109] Robyn Wiegman, *American Anatomies* (Durham: Duke UP, 1995), 14.

white lynch mob's emasculation of the black man, the primal scene of what Baldwin calls the rage that comes from a "man being castrated."

Baldwin renders Rufus' subconscious and unsaid desires with nightmarish images that harken back to a racialized mythology of rape in American culture. The character seems positioned as the aggressor (using his "weapon" against the "white bitch"), but as this scene foreshadows, he will eventually become a psychological victim of this horrible inheritance. However eroticized, Rufus' feeling of being "strangled" in the sexual act, about "to explode or die," is suggestive of the dread inspired by the public discourse of lynching that has seeped into the character's psyche. Baldwin ironically combines the sadomasochistic fantasy of a lynch mob "arriving on wings" in the heat of the sexual encounter with the image of a "white God," a reminder that religious theology will never serve to redeem these horrors.[110] Whatever collective agency might be imagined for Black and White men within the civil rights discourse of "brotherly love," in *Another Country* the presence of interracial heterosexuality and white femininity dampens the potential of political redemption. Upending what Wiegman calls the "rape mythos," Baldwin demonstrates that the civil rights movement must confront the reality of women being the ultimate victims of racial subjugation. Instead of transcendent union, Baldwin therefore invokes the trope of miscegenation in order to highlight how interracial bonding is inherently gendered. Emphasizing the corporeal experience of interpersonal relation upon which democratic egalitarianism depends, the novel frames interracial affiliation as a material and embodied struggle between individuals.

The final sentence in the scene captures the social limitations of their interracial desire, which Baldwin names as an anxiety over blood kinship in the essay "In Search of a Majority." Baldwin concludes the scene with an animalistic sexual climax, interposing the image of a "hundred black-white babies," the fantastic product of Rufus and Leona's venomous union. This hyperbolic

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[110] Klan's doctrine of lynching saw it as a performance of redemptive violence to pay back losses incurred in slavery's fall. See Albion Tourgée, *The Invisible Empire* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1989).

image of mixed race offspring signifies the irrational fears that underlie anti-miscegenation discourse, which sought to retain the distinct purity of each race. Later, at the end of the scene once they are getting ready to return to the party, Rufus hides his "dull, mysterious dread" by joking with Leona, saying "I don't know what you going to say to your husband when you come home with a little black baby." Leona counters this with her own reality check: "I ain't going to be having no more babies… He beat that out of me, too."[111] As the scene shifts back into a dialogic narration between the characters, the specter of Rufus' positionality as a rapist disappears: the common enemy becomes the white man who can "beat" either character at will.

The transgressive quality of Rufus and Leona's sexual union, reflected in the aberrant archetypes of this and other explicit scenes, nonetheless falls short in sustaining their love affair. Theirs was a passionate love, but it was one where jealousy and violence overshadowed their love in a city less than welcoming to interracial couples. Seemingly overcome by his instinctual fate, Rufus's sadistic fantasies during sex mirror his own abusive tendencies that will emerge later in their relationship, when an "uncontrollable" domestic violence eclipses their bond.[112] Thus, in their sexual relationship structured around strict binaries of race and gender, Rufus and Leona are tragically tethered to each other as objects of desire and instinctual drive. As Baldwin writes of Rufus at the end of his affair with Leona, "he was flesh: flesh, bone, muscle, fluid, orifices, hair, and skin. His body was controlled by laws he did not understand. Nor did he understand what force within his body had driven him into such a desolate place."[113] The self-shattering transcendence that might come in erotic union is therefore limited by the cage of "sexual myths" that over-determines their feelings and actions. Baldwin characterizes their interracial love affair as therefore bound to the

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[111] Baldwin, *Another Country*,

[112] This abuse is further complicated by the fact that the reader is never privy to the focalized psychic experience of Leona.

[113] Baldwin, *Another Country*. 54.

unintelligible forces of the erotic body, foreclosing any capacity for linguistic dialogue or sustained emotional attachment between the characters.

Like Baldwin's essayistic interpretation of Bigger Thomas, Rufus' martyrdom cannot serve to animate an interracial "beloved community" precisely because his story insists on a narrow conception of human subjectivity that is "categorization alone" and "cannot be transcended."[114] Read in the context of the discourse of identity that has shaped our reading of the novel for the past fifty years, Baldwin's attack on protest literature provides us with a prototype for a new way of reading. Baldwin's meta-textual usage of the social realist plot reflects a narrative strategy of 1) compressing stock, and often mythic, storylines, 2) deploying these abbreviated versions early on in the novel, and then 3) orchestrating their failure for new narrative ends. In opening the novel, rather than concluding it, with the tragic death of an African American protagonist, Baldwin refuses the moralistic epistemologies upon which the social realist tradition rests. In fact, Rufus's early death fuels the development of a more ambivalent narrative of affiliation that is built from a combination of fragmentary plots of friendship, marriage and mourning. This complex web of character and subplot asks the reader to continually re-acclimate to the novel's shifting and disconsolate world.

In its multiplicity, this novel pushes against the ideological undercurrents of American "protest literature," to account for the differences and singularities that constitute any truly diverse human community. Resisting strict ideology, *Another Country* calls for a new practice of reading that works to hold competing narrative threads in abeyance without reconciling them to any conclusive textual system. As an experimental and provisional form, this novelistic subgenre can emerge only if the reader is open to an ambivalent depiction of character and plot. Thus in its structure and figural

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[114] Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel," in *Collected Essays*, 18.

detail, these narratives self-reflexively signal the text's potential to be received as literature rather than mere protest.

Rufus's suspicious apprehension of the world, due to "having the gates of paranoia close on him," illuminates how failed acts of interpretation can lead to tragedy.[115] In the most dramatic scene of Rufus and Leona's incapacity to ethically listen to, or interpret each other during a heated argument, Rufus asks Leona: "Why don't you tell the truth? I wouldn't have to beat you if you'd tell the truth."[116] The obvious tragedy of this statement is that despite the reality of the couple's shared victimization within a segregated patriarchal society, Rufus's jealousy clouds his perception to the point of paranoid delusion. As symptomatic of the broader epistemological crisis in the novel, "truth" is revealed only under the threat of violence, a structure of meaning that reinforces binary opposition and is an extreme articulation of what literary critic Paul Ricoeur calls a "hermeneutics of suspicion." Baldwin's pedagogical representation of Rufus as a violently suspicious reader sets ethical stakes for both the implied reader and other characters of the novel.

Escaping from the narratological abyss created by Rufus' tragic suicide, the reader's reception of the subsequent stories of affiliation must forestall any desire to perform what Eve K. Sedgwick terms "paranoid reading," the likes of which seem to hamper Rufus. According to Sedgwick, "paranoid reading" is a mode of critical inquiry that seeks stability through the discovery of close, symmetrical interpretations of story, character and plot. Instead, Baldwin's *Another Country* requires us to take up an alternative reading practice built on an agile navigation of what Melanie Klein calls the paranoid and depressive positions of human subjectivity. To perform a "reparative reading" of the novel asks us to be open to its gestures towards narrative coherence, while refusing the comforting stasis of "symmetrical epistemologies."[117] Faced with the tragic ending of Rufus and

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[115] Baldwin, "The Fire Next Time," in *Collected Essays*, 325.
[116] Baldwin, *Another Country*, 53.
[117] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 126.

Leona's love affair, the reader endures a kind of emotional nadir; entering a depressive position, which this death inspires, might therefore make available new practices of reparation that will hold together the fragments of story-line that are soon to follow.

Another Country's Readers and the Ethics of Accountability

The plot of Rufus' downfall manifests not only in the character's incapacity to resist the "natural" forces of sexual desire and the paranoia it can inspire, but also in his symptomatic failure to voice his own suffering at the hands of racial oppression. As Judith Butler writes in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, "This failure to narrate fully may well indicate the way in which we are, from the start, ethically implicated in the lives of others… the ways in which we are, from the start, interrupted by alterity may render us incapable of offering narrative closure for our lives."[118] Butler's study of narrative ethics reminds us of the ways narrative is an achievement that is often foreclosed to those whose subjectivities are "interrupted by alterity," a troubling reality captured both in the plot and discourse of *Another Country*. While Rufus' death does not inspire material acts of redress or political movement, his memory inspires others to practice a more pragmatic accounting for the psychological and relational consequences of racial persecution.

After Rufus's love affair with Leona implodes and he is on the brink of death, his white friend Cass Silenski futilely attempts to comfort him in a Greenwich Village bar. Her demonstration of kindness results in Rufus wondering to him self "why this woman was talking to him as she was, what she was trying to tell him." The scene of their conversation, which directly precedes his suicide, ends with Cass stating "I've always thought of you' (…) 'as a very nice person.' She gave his arm a little tap and pushed a crumpled bill into his hand. 'It might help if you thought of yourself

[118] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham, UP, 2005), 64.

that way.'"[119] Rufus can never fully explain his predicament to her, as his world is as opaque to her as hers is to him; his fears and desires are therefore invisible to her, although they are dramatically represented to the implied reader of the novel. The saccharine sentimentalism Baldwin brings to Cass' attempts to ply Rufus with a handout, a pitiful recognition of his being a "nice person," stands in for the collective delusion of innocence that will soon be destroyed after Rufus' suicide. Cass' pathetic gift of money to Rufus achieves the opposite effect intended; instead of demonstrating his true value in the world, it highlights to Rufus his further alienation and feelings of estrangement.

To better understand the persecutory conditions that contribute to Rufus Scott's downfall, it is helpful to situate the tragedy of his life in juxtaposition to Cass, a character who also falls victim to a different but related kind of ruin by the novel's conclusion. Her characterization serves as a meta-textual invocation of the limits of sentimental reading practices that underlie the "protest" literature Baldwin seeks to revise. Cass' full name is Clarissa, and like Clarissa Dalloway, she is a liberal reader of literature and of the world, always observing the movements of others in the hopes of aiding them in projects of healing or self-improvement. The city she sees around her is embedded within a symbolic system of racial signification, to which she has partial access as a white character. Her journey in the novel is thus to become more aware of the cruel complexities of this world, which, until Rufus' death, were invisible to her. Cass is not only a partial "receiver" of the pain of others, but also the implied reader of the one book that is produced within the narrative: her novelist husband's mystery novel, which she unsurprisingly dislikes.

Appropriately, Baldwin introduces the reader to Cass through Rufus' focalized perspective. On a Sunday in Washington Square Park, Cass spends the afternoon with Rufus, Vivaldo and Leona. Baldwin describes Rufus' perception of Cass, writing: "Rufus turned and there she was,

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[119] Baldwin, *Another Country*, 80.

sitting alone on the rim of the circle, frail and fair. For him, she was thoroughly mysterious."[120] Baldwin represents Cass as a conundrum. She is "mysterious" and "frail" and seems peripheral, sitting on the "rim of the circle." Writing that Rufus "could never quite place her in the white world to which she *seemed* to belong," Baldwin suggests that Rufus identifies with Cass – a stranger who has an appearance of belonging to a collective identity while at the same time failing to assimilate into its close circle of embrace. As a woman Cass is a stranger to the public world of homosocial fraternity, yet her victimization does not end in literal death, but social death. Nevertheless, in his representation of these characters as both failed authors and readers, Baldwin illuminates the limits of narrative accountability for figures of alterity.

Introduced to Leona, the other white female character, for the first time, Cass shows "amusement" and "affection," jokingly asking the group: " 'Give an account of yourselves," (…) "*Why* haven't you come to see us?"[121] The term "account" here refers to the demand for self-narration in response to a particular scene of interpolative address, but also alludes to a monetary "account," a personal financial reserve. Baldwin's representation of accountability illuminates the improbable fantasy of speaking in an *immediate* common language, as simple and direct as a monetary exchange. In constantly interrupting or undercutting the giving and receiving of "accounts" in the novel, Baldwin suggests his suspicion of valuating any account as true. Baldwin's representation of this ironic statement echoes the epigraph of the novel. Quoting a passage from Henry James' preface to the New York Edition of *Lady Barbarina*, the epigraph reads:

> They strike one, above all, as giving no account of themselves in any terms already consecrated for human use; to this inarticulate state they probably form, collectively, the most unprecedented of monuments; abysmal the mystery of what they think, what they feel, what they want, what they suppose themselves to be saying.

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[120] Baldwin, *Another Country*, 36.
[121] Baldwin, *Another Country*, 37

Situating this citation within the context of the very lengthy paragraph from which it stems, the "abysmal mystery" of what they "think," "want" and "suppose themselves to be saying" references the author's challenge of composing round, fleshed-out characters in terms that readers can understand. James writes in the preceding sentence to this passage: "One can but speak for one's self, and my imagination, on the great highways, I find, doesn't rise to such people, who are obviously beyond my divination."[122] To be beyond divination is thus to be part of what he refers to as a "pre-historic" time prior to human language. Those who "give no account of themselves" are in an "inarticulate state" that is both ominous and monumental in its obscurity. Baldwin's quotation of this passage heralds his debt to the earlier author's efforts at capturing American-ness in the context of what James calls "internationalism." Giving voice to those that make up the other country of Black American experience, which remains silent in James' oeuvre, Baldwin illuminates the irony of who can claim to speak for, and serve as representative of, the American nation both within and outside its borders.

Another Country resists assimilation into a national politics of recognition or redemption; in its pages, scenes of story telling serve both as an injunction to learn about the Other, while also delineating the limits of knowledge. Judith Butler suggests that any request of another to "give an account of one self" must bear witness to the real social violence that shapes these acts. Attentive to the ways self-knowledge is always at the horizon of intelligibility, Butler connects the relational emergence of one's subjectivity to the impossibility of telling a "true" account of one's self. An account of the self is always in part fictional and vulnerable to breaks, its "truth" dependent upon the conditions of power in which it is articulated. For Butler, the possibility of narrative "coherence," stability and closure are always undercut by the relational dynamics that bring both subjects and stories into being: "The purpose here is not to celebrate a certain notion of

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122 Henry James, *The Art of the Novel* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2011), 209.

incoherence, but only to point out that our 'incoherence' establishes the way which we are constituted in relationality: implicated, beholden, derived, sustained by a social world that is beyond us and before us."[123] Butler continues to frame narrative accountability as inaugurating an ethical opportunity, what she calls "a disposition of humility and generosity."[124] In my own reading, I attempt to match *Another Country's* self-reflexive signaling of its partial and incomplete status as *narrative* with a comparable humility when interpreting the text.

The politics of accountability that emerge in *Another Country* point to Baldwin's dedication to working through the ambivalent constitution of race and also gender, an attention to which is necessary for the constitution of affiliations across differences. As Butler writes with Adriana Cavarero, quoting "we are bound to one another by what differentiates us namely our singularity," so too does Baldwin attempt to represent personhood as cut loose from categories of identity or culture – a textual project that is aligned with these feminist theorists writing forty years afterward.[125] The prophetic cadence of second-wave feminism resonant in *Another Country* is subtly figured in the various moments of white women reading in the novel. Whether it is the white Southerner Leona, the New England liberal Clarissa (Cass) Silenski, or the biographical reader to which the text is dedicated, Mary S. Painter, Baldwin makes continual reference to and complicates the sentimental authority of his white female readership.[126] This observation does not suggest that the novel's intended audience was solely white, for Baldwin's widespread rhetorical and novelistic success lies in

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[123] Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 64.
[124] Butler, *Giving an Account*. 42.
[125] Butler, *Giving an Account*, 34.
[126] Although I'm most interested in working through Baldwin's representation of white female readers in the text, it is important to note that there are many white male readers in the novel, mainly Vivaldo Moore and Cass' husband Richard Silenski. These characters are notably, however, not mere readers but also writers and their journeys in the novel are more focused on artistic production, rather than reception. Ida Scott, on the other hand, Rufus' sister, pursues an artistic career as jazz singer, but is thwarted by obstacles unique to her art and subjectivity as a black woman.

his capacity to interpolate multiple readerships, black and white, men and women, through an ambivalent style all his own.

Perhaps influenced by his fluency as an essayist, Baldwin's novelistic approach is highly self-referential, especially in terms of articulating the text's implied readers and their varying degrees of epistemological access to the struggles captured in his fiction.[127] Brian Norman argues that Baldwin's essayistic resistance to gender stereotype led many feminists to turn to his works as prototype for their own writing: "With a focus on personal politics and collective subjectivities, Baldwin's early essays offer a possible location of true political interaction and solidarity among black male anti-racists and (white) women."[128] Baldwin's interest in invoking a "true political interaction" between his readers, which Norman argues is produced by "imperfect analogy" points to the way self-reflexive acts of interpretation are central to the cultivation of solidarity. For example, in *Another Country* the author's somewhat daring representation of women as friends, rather than mere sexual objects, of men illustrates a particularly inventive approach to what Eve K. Sedgwick would later term "allo-identification."

Like many of Baldwin's essays, the representation of Rufus and Cass (and in part Rufus and Leona) serves as a stage upon which he revises the racial and sexual binaries of the sentimental and social realist modes in American literature.[129] Baldwin's description of Cass levies a subtle critique of the myopic reader within the sentimental tradition, which must be overcome in order to inaugurate a more ambivalent affective relationship to the novel.[130] While Cass seems an embodiment of

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[127] See also, Brian Norman, *The American Protest Essay and National Belonging: Addressing Division.* Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2007.

[128] Brian Norman, "Crossing Identitarian Lines: Women's Liberation and James Baldwin's Early Essays," *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal.* 35.3 (2006): 250.

[129] In his own life, white women like Mary Painter served as important allies and interlocutors to Baldwin.

[130] In her reading of James Baldwin's critique of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in "Everybody's Protest Novel," Lauren Berlant defines a 20th century genre of sentimental fiction called "countersentimental narratives." She writes that these narratives are "lacerated by ambivalence: they struggle with their own attachment to the promise of a sense of unconflictedness, intimacy, and collective belonging with which the U.S. sentimental tradition gifts

Northern white femininity, she eventually sheds her veil of sentimental ignorance and "grows" out of the locked cage of racial stereotype. Deeply shaken by the death of Rufus, Cass falls in love with Eric, a white gay man also from the South, an actor and former lover of Rufus. As this plot unfolds, it takes Cass outside the hetero-normative script of nuclear family life, challenging the stability of her identity as wife, and most dramatically as a mother. By the end of the novel, once Richard Silensiki learns of her adultery, which is it self a kind of liberation, Cass becomes victim to the most realistic depiction of (domestic) violence in the novel. Baldwin describes Richard balking at her concern over "the children," and pulling Cass' "head forward, then [slamming] it back against the chair, and [slapping] her across the face, twice as hard as he could," then screaming at her, "Is that it? Did he fuck you in the ass, did he make you suck his cock? Answer me, you bitch, you slut, you cunt!"[131] Characterizing Cass as the object of a visceral patriarchal violence, Baldwin paints the "white world" as upheld by the same power structure that elicits homophobic, sexist and racist slurs. While this moment, which occurs close to the end of the novel, provides the reader with the scene of primal violence implied in Leona's downfall but denied representation, at the same time it highlights how an intense dehumanization can break one's faith in the sentimental goodness of others.[132] As Cass states to Eric the next day, as they walk through the Museum of Modern Art with the other mourners "dreaming of some vanished relationship," "It doesn't do any good to blame the people or the time – one is oneself all those people. We *are* the time. (…) Hope? No, I don't think there's

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its citizens and occupants, whether or not they are politically exhausted, cynically extended, or just plain diffident." Although Berlant does not identify *Another Country* as such a narrative, the concept of the "countersentimental" is helpful to think through how Baldwin's self-reflexive citation of realist and sentimental tropes is critical to telling the story of individuals struggle to cultivate affiliations across racial and sexual divides. Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, Duke UP, 2008), 55.

131 Baldwin, *Another Country*, 376.

132 In the scene of violence, Cass is continually worried that her children will hear their argument, and see her face bloody and wounded after the attack. The children never appear, but the threat of this event breaking their innocent world apart is readily apparent to the reader.

any hope."[133] The cruel realization that she bore some "responsibility" for maintaining the structures of power that contributed to her husband's violence leads Cass to adopt a position of ethical engagement that breaks down any sense of individuality: "one is oneself all those people."

For Cass, hope is limited, and yet her proto-feminist values may give 21st century readers a partial sense of solace, in that her plight eventually becomes identified with a feminist collective, which might bring a more revolutionary tone to the phrase "we are the time." Nonetheless, Baldwin's evacuation of the character's sentimental privilege points to the necessary skepticism that must come with any interpretive, or ethical, position of repair. I agree with Lauren Berlant when she writes, "I love the idea of reparative reading insofar as it is a practice of meticulous curiosity. But I also resist idealizing, even implicitly, any program of better thought or reading. How would we know when the 'repair' we intend is not another form of narcissism or smothering will?"[134] The painful characterization of Cass Silenski illuminates the threat that sentimentalism brings to the capacity for readers to truly inhabit a position of ambivalence when seeking a broader effort at repair. Asking the reader to see herself in Cass' failed attempts to interpret Rufus, Baldwin hints at the reader's own project to go beyond the binaristic logic of symptomatic reading practices and imagine an alternative. This "meticulous curiosity" requires a self-reflective understanding of one's desire for narrative completion, for the false "coherence" of story and plot. To be attentive to the asymmetries of character and relationship, and open to the success and failure of analogies, are central to the reader's reception of the novel of affiliation – difficult tasks that contribute to its potential failure.

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133 Baldwin, *Another Country*, 406.
134 Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2011), 124.

Interracial Fraternity and the Limits of Redemption

In the previous pages, I have shown how the narrative of affiliation in *Another Country* develops in tandem with the foreclosure of realist and sentimental modes, embodied in the figures of Rufus and Cass. Baldwin's parodic representation of these two characters serves as a field through which he explores a more relational subjectivity that is integral to conceiving sustainable bonds of affiliation that are asymmetrical. While his adaptation of these novelistic traditions plays out on the level of character in *Another Country*, Baldwin's citation and revision of the 19th century narrative of male friendship occurs on the level of plot. The author's dedication to formal experimentation and re-working of this subgenre of the Bildungsroman was part of a larger contemporary debate over the political function, and literary status, of the American novel in the public sphere of the 1950s and '60s. Ralph Ellison provides an illuminating perspective on this debate. Although he asserted that Baldwin was "urged on by a nobility – or is it a demon – quite different from my own," Ellison sets out in his 1963 essay "The World and the Jug" a recipe that seems allied with Baldwin's desire to return the "literary" to the novel of protest. Framing true protest as an experience of receiving artistic success or what he calls "craft," Ellison critiques Irving Howe's claim that the Negro American author is burdened by the "sociology of his existence":

> Note that this is a condition arising from a collective experience which leaves no room for the individual writer's unique existence. It leaves no room for that intensity of personal anguish which compels the artist to seek relief by projecting it into the world in conjunction with other things; that anguish which might take the form of an acute sense of inferiority for one, homosexuality for another, an overwhelming sense of the absurdity of human life for still another. Nor does it leave room for the experience that might be caused by humiliation, by a harelip, by a stutter, by epilepsy – indeed, by any and everything in this life which plunges the talented individual into solitude while leaving him the will to transcend his condition through art.[135]

Here Ellison points to a literary project that Baldwin and other 1960s authors would take up in their fiction – to conceive of the experience of race as intersecting with gender, sexuality, and those other

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[135] Ralph Ellison, "The World and the Jug," in *Shadow and Act* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 130.

unique singularities of being that might "plunge the talented individual into solitude." For Baldwin in *Another Country*, the talented individual is also at play. Rather than focus on the realities of solitude, or the use of art as a vehicle to heal alienation, the novel proposes affiliation as a more pragmatic response to the intensity of "personal anguish."[136]

In *Another Country*, Baldwin sets out new fictional frameworks of love between races, which revise a foundational myth of interracial fraternity central to American literature. In 1960, Leslie Fiedler published a groundbreaking study of American literature that explored, as the title suggests, the fantasies of redemption underpinning the representation of *Love and Death in the American Novel.* In this text, Fiedler argues that the founding myth of American literature is built upon scenes of male interracial bonding that plot a symbolic movement from innocence to responsibility. The prototypical (white) protagonist of American literature "has been a man on the run, harried into the forest and out to sea, down the river or into combat – anywhere to avoid "civilization," which is to say, the confrontation of a man and woman which leads to the fall to sex, marriage, and responsibility."[137] Foreshadowing Baldwin's essayistic rhetoric, Fiedler defines the structure of this companionship as a "hierogamos" or "sacred wedding." The wedding or "elopement" of male companions figures a fantasy of reconciliation, where "social conflicts" can be healed.[138] In her analysis of interracial male bonds, Robyn Weigman revises Fiedler's articulation of interracial homosociality through the lens of gender difference. As Weigman articulates, the physical and

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[136] In the wake of the rise of New Criticism in the American academy, such literary critics as Northrup Frye and Leslie Fiedler joined Ellison in conceiving of the novel as not mere representation of experience, but inflected by epistemologies of "self, culture and literature." Together, both critic and novelist sought to reassert the necessity for social and historical contextualization into the study of literature. Ellison, "The World and the Jug," 111.

[137] Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, 26.

[138] Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, 26, 366.

symbolic structure of masculinity serves as the sign upon which a transcendent national collective can be felt. [139]

In *Another Country*, Baldwin shows that the "sacred wedding" between black and white men will never be fully consummated, nor redeem the constitutive violence of American society. The novel's ironic depiction of this homosocial embrace instead is characterized by movements of displacement, substitution and triangulation, which interrupt the symmetrical unity of male friendship that Fiedler so powerfully traces in his study.[140] After the tragic death of protagonist Rufus, the bearer of the social realist literary tradition, Baldwin figures white novelist Vivaldo Moore as the new protagonist of the novel. Symbolic of the liberal dream of a public interracial democracy, upon which the civil rights movement was built, Vivaldo's journey of mourning Rufus falls back on the redemptive myths the novel itself seeks to undo. After Rufus' death, Vivaldo feels guilt over his inability to comfort Rufus and "take him in his arms." His failure to save, or embrace, his best friend neutralizes the Fiederlerian tale of white liberal guilt and reconciliation.

The erotic love Vivaldo cannot exchange with Rufus, he instead experiences with Eric, a white Southern gay man and Rufus' former lover, who like him is also a "stranger" in Manhattan. Baldwin's thwarting of any form of homosociality becoming a viable path to salvation is emblematized in the scene of Vivaldo going to bed with Eric. Vivaldo tells Eric of his memory of a night when Rufus wanted him to take him in his arms, "not for sex, though maybe sex would have happened. (…) I had the feeling that he had wanted someone to hold him, to hold him, and that night, it had to be a man." Baldwin brings a melancholic tone to Vivaldo's regretful confession of his inability to fulfill Rufus's homosexual desires and perhaps deliver him from the alienation that

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139 Weigman, *American Anatomies*, 172.

140 The homosocial male embrace can symbolize repair of national conflicts only because of its oppositional relationship to the structure of heterosexuality and its stabilization within the institution of marriage. According to Fiedler, heterosexual marriage not only offers the reproduction of wealth and the formation of new lines of kinship, but also provides the protagonist's entry into the adult world of responsibility.

contributed to his fall. The character continues to explain, "I was afraid that he wouldn't understand that it was – only love. Only love. But, oh, Lord, when he died, I thought that maybe I could have saved him if I'd just reached out that quarter of an inch between us on that bed, and held him."[141] And yet the author articulates how Vivaldo's liberal cowardice could never maintain such a profane level of transgression, undermining the salvatory potency of "brotherly love." Vivaldo and Eric's sexual union, which symbolically absolves their guilt, proves insufficient in the novel's greater reckoning of the irredeemable damages created by racial inequality. Taken in the context of Baldwin's critique of Martin Luther King's notion of "brotherly love," his portrayal of Vivaldo and Rufus, and later Vivaldo and Eric, is suggestive of a general disbelief that black and white men will come together in *sustainable* bonds of kinship. Without a correspondent radical revision of gender norms, kinship between races will never succeed.

Writing many years after the novel's publication, Baldwin states in the essay "Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood" that "love and sexual activity are not synonymous: Only by becoming inhuman can the human being pretend that they are."[142] Much critical attention has been given to the homosexual encounter between Vivaldo and Eric, yet many of these responses to their love fail to take into account Baldwin's warning that love and sex are not "synonymous." Contemporary critics of Baldwin attacked him for representing homosexuality in a novel about race relations. After 1990, a number of lesbian and gay critics began to re-read and revise scholarly assumptions about Baldwin's oeuvre and depiction of queer love. Cora Kaplan, for example, discusses the innovation of Baldwin's anti-normative representation of love, while also noting the limits he brings to interracial homosexual relations: "the adult male couples in which redemption and tragedy are most centrally located are all what their culture designates as white… cross-class, ethnic, and national differences, rather than black-and-white racial difference, represent the vital heterogeneity as well as

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[141] Baldwin, *Another Country*, 342-3.
[142] Baldwin, *Collected Essays*, 814.

the less positive divisions within same-sex male relations."[143] William A. Cohen engages with Kaplan's claims in a collection entitled *The Queer Sixties*, symptomatically reading Baldwin's inability to represent a viable black gay male subject within his fiction as illuminating the lack of a gay public space or queer mode of signification in pre-Stonewall America, and as symptomatic of Baldwin's privileging of a less than complicated liberal humanism.[144] Cohen rightly articulates the problem of what he calls "too much difference," where flexible encounters between races can only come about within static gender hierarchies, thus neutralizing the transgressive power of homosexuality. Cohen writes:

> (…) taking 'love' as the revolutionary act, this disordering sexual experience enables Vivaldo provisionally to escape limiting categories, even as, in the process, it reconstitutes him as transcendent liberal subject. Vivaldo is 'educated' by Eric as he has been by Ida, but where the latter instructs him in the social blockage to emotional/sexual fulfillment, the former exposes him to the 'liberating' possibilities of 'love'.[145]

As a Christ-figure, Eric is a vehicle for God's redeeming love that delivers Vivaldo into a utopia free from racial violence and accusation. By cleansing Vivaldo from his mark of guilt, Eric therefore redeems Vivaldo's *value* within a white liberal economy, which leads both men to recognize their artistic talent in each other.[146] Yet, Cohen's argument fails to take into account the critique of white liberalism at work in Baldwin's self-reflexive composition of the novel's narrative of affiliation, which is inflected with erotic desire and depends on the destabilization of gender norms. In order to better understand Baldwin's revision of the liberal subject as relational in *Another Country*, it is necessary to turn to his characterization of Rufus' sister, Ida Scott, a character who is never focalized

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[143] Cora Kaplan, "A Cavern Opened in My Mind: Thee Poetics of Homosexuality and the Politics of Masculinity in James Baldwin," in *Representing Black Men*, eds. Marcellus Blount and George P. Cunningham (New York: Routledge, 1995). 34.
[144] William A. Cohen, "Liberalism, Libido, Liberation: Baldwin's *Another Country*" in *The Queer Sixties*, ed. Patricia Juliana Smith (New York: Routledge, 1999), 201-222.
[145] Cohen, 212.
[146] Depicting his overcoming of writer's block at the end of the novel, Baldwin transforms Vivaldo into a successful author and subject of production, ironizing the role of the author within a white literary sphere of publishing.

in the novel, yet sets the tone and action of its emplotment of affiliation. Turning to Ida reveals the everyday struggles of persons burdened with "too much difference," that pose a necessary counter to any redemptive story of liberation that might skim the surface of the text.

Mourning and Misrecognition in the "Beloved Community"

In his choice to open *Another Country* with the loss of Rufus Scott, Baldwin dramatizes the psychic and social damages created by America's history of racial injustice, of which Rufus's suicide is a symptomatic and constitutive part. Like Baldwin's close friend who died in the late 1940s, Rufus grows up in Harlem and finds himself "entirely alone, and dying of it."[147] Eighty pages into the novel, Rufus stands on the rails of the George Washington Bridge and reconciles himself to the terrible logic of the color line: "[H]e was black and the water was black."[148] Unable to envision a society where racial disparity might be overcome and individual differences embraced, Rufus jumps to his death where "the wind, the stars, the lights, the water, all rolled together" in fatal symmetry. After his death, it becomes the task of those who survive him to bear witness to his memory and achieve new heterogeneous and asymmetrical modes of interpersonal relation, which he was symptomatically unable to create.

In his extended description of Rufus' funeral, Baldwin illustrates how King's "beloved community" is often ironically tied to collective experiences of mourning. In fact, this funeral scene sheds light on the essential problems of projection and guilt that impede affiliation among those diverse individuals come together to mourn him. Described in terms of misrecognition, the collective ritual of working through this death is incapable of serving as a transcendent spiritual space for immediate "understanding" or interracial kinship. The scene opens with a young girl who grew up next door to Rufus singing from the pulpit. Her song, which expresses the ineffable

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[147] Baldwin, *Another Country*, 4.
[148] Baldwin, *Another Country*, 87.

emotions raging in the church, is also a performance of collectivity and its uneven reception by the audience highlights the fragmentation inevitable under racial oppression. The only white attendants at the funeral, Rufus's friends Vivaldo and Cass Silenski are interpolated by the lyrics, "*I'm a stranger, don't drive me away*," them selves strangers to this scene. The next line, "*If you drive me away, you may need me some day,*" situates them in the reverse position, warning them not to shamefully overlook those who seek their help and reminding us of the failure of friendship that may have led to Rufus's fate.[149] While Cass and Eric quickly identify with the suffering of this young woman, their identification is met with a concomitant estrangement. Asymmetrically aligned in their individual experiences of alterity as white minorities, these visiting strangers become part of a tense collective defined by the destabilizing experience of mourning.

In this passage, the singer acts as a transitional figure with whom the mass of mourners can identify, a third term through which a collective is born. Yet the audience's limited perspective and the uni-directional movement of their gaze constrains this identificatory moment. Sitting at the back of the chapel and looking up at the pulpit, Cass takes in a distanced view of the family that sits in the front row, noticing the "proud back" of Rufus's sister Ida. From this perspective, the reader can see the singer, but not the congregation's faces. Along with Vivaldo, who had attempted to save Rufus from self-destruction in the novel's first section, "Easy Rider," Cass bears guilt for his suicide: she was one of the last people to speak candidly with Rufus about his suffering on the night of his suicide. Both Cass and Vivaldo project a common fantasy of their acceptance and recognition by Ida Scott onto the anonymous singer. Conversely, their direct access to her song serves to demonstrate Ida's own inaccessibility, setting up the novel's later recurrent image of Ida performing for, and being misinterpreted by, various audiences.

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[149] Ibid., 119.

At the end of the funeral, Ida is shadowed by a literal black veil, a symbol of both the omnipresent specter of death and the unbridgeable racial divides that are symptomatic of the social segregation that contributed to Rufus's death. In bearing witness to his death, this image of Ida pays heed not only to his dramatic loss of life but also, symbolically, to the truth the white characters in the scene cannot acknowledge: Rufus's suicide is simply one link in a long chain of untimely tragedies that defined black life during the Jim Crow era.[150] As the family processes out of the church they go by Cass, who stands at the door. Ida pauses and looks "directly, unreadably at her from beneath her heavy veil. Then she seemed to smile…" and thanked Cass for attending.[151] Visually externalizing the seemingly invisible psychic violence that befell Rufus, Ida's individual subjectivity is set just out of reach beneath her veil. She has become illegible, yet her note of thanks opens a window for further attempts at connection with Rufus' closest friends.

By framing Ida at the border of public mourning and an incommunicable private grief, Baldwin illustrates the way this female character's race and gender destabilize norms of kinship and community. Ida's journey will require a lateral movement of interracial connection with Vivaldo and Cass, outside the ruptured family and the filiative private sphere. In *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life and Death*, Judith Butler argues that in order to mourn those deemed invisible in society, the female mourner has to create new forms of signification to make these losses known. The necessary trespass of linguistic and social norms on the part of the female mourner also poses a threat to the very basis of blood kinship. In her claim that grief interpolates multiple objects of desire and identification in its slippery circulation, Butler illuminates the transgressive quality Baldwin brings to Ida's grief.[152] She is the single character empowered to act as the spokesperson for the family and it is only through her voice that the reader is privy to the Scotts' horror of losing their son. Ida's desire

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[150] See Karla F. C. Holloway, *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories: A Memorial* (Durham: Duke UP, 2002).
[151] Baldwin, *Another Country*, 123.
[152] Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia UP, 2000), 67.

to hit the A train and develop a sense of self peripheral to her immediate family does not free her from making familial demands of friends and strangers. Her adoption of Cass and Vivaldo into her circle of friends highlights the porous quality of the supposedly stable boundaries of race and family. Baldwin tackles the damages created by segregation by offering this picture of adoptive kinship that exposes the impossibility of racial purity.

The kernel for the larger narrative, the story of Ida's unique struggles illuminates the paradoxical, yet interconnected themes of affiliation and estrangement that *Another Country* presents. Moreover, her role as Rufus's ideal mourner makes her the primary catalyst of the novel's journey towards repairing the ruptures symbolized in his death. As this initial scene suggests, however, no one will ever be fully privy to Ida's grief or interiority. As the mysterious center of the text, she is always seen from the outside and thus often subsumed by others' affective projections and desires. Baldwin dramatizes the reader's restricted access to Ida by never focalizing her consciousness; however, this narrative strategy inversely defines the character by her speech, empowering her as a speaking agent. As we try to comprehend the complex character of Ida, we learn to read the text as neither a site of latent nor superficial meaning, but rather as a contradictory collection of ideas and figures that we are compelled to hold together.

In an interview with Jordan Elgrably and George Plimpton in the 1984 *Paris Review*, Baldwin explains that he created Rufus in order to complete the portrait of Ida. The author repeats a story reported in biographies and other interviews with him, suggesting that the intra-racial sibling relationship between Ida and Rufus serves as the field through which a tentative interracial community can emerge: "In order to make the reader see Ida, I had to give her a brother, who turned out to be Rufus.… From the moment Rufus was gone, I knew that if you knew what had happened to Ida, you'd equally understand Rufus.... The principal action in the book, for me, is the

journey of Ida and Vivaldo toward some kind of coherence."[153] The implied reader's excursion towards "some kind of coherence" depends on the creation of textual connections that gesture towards epistemic closure. However, "coherence" also denotes a grouping of concepts that collectively "hang together" in a loose assembly of ideas.[154] As the next section will show, Baldwin's emphasis on "coherence" also speaks to the text's evocation of competing and often paradoxical feelings within the love story of Ida Scott and Vivaldo Moore. Like the disjunctive scene of misrecognition at Rufus' funeral where a nexus of guilt and desire intimately link together those who assemble in the church, Ida and Vivaldo's relationship is triangulated by adulterous and melancholic attachments. However debilitating this triangulation may be to their erotic relationship, it proves fruitful in opening up a space of mutual dialogue that is necessary for their affiliation to bloom.

Trying Dialogues of Affiliation

Originating in the unstable plot of mourning, the narrative of Ida and Vivaldo's affiliation blends the contradictory feelings of erotic desire and friendly love.[155] Emblematic of Baldwin's portrait of love in the novel, their relationship is constituted from trauma and betrayal. For their interracial bond to be sustained, the characters must survive multiple damaging events: the death of a brother/friend, social stigma, jealousy and betrayal, and the outside threat of (sexual) violence. In these ways, the brutal obstacles that destroyed the initial interracial union of Rufus and his white lover Leona also challenge Ida and Vivaldo's union. Lovers but never friends, Rufus and Leona were driven solely by sexual desire, an unwieldy force of attachment that was made more dangerous by Baldwin's invocation of the terms of racial purity in depicting their interracial love as at times

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[153] Jordan Elgrably and George Plimpton, "The Art of Fiction LXXVIII: James Baldwin" in *Conversations with James Baldwin*, eds. Fred L. Standley and Louis H. Pratt (Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 1989), 244.
[154] "Coherence," *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989).
[155] Baldwin includes this haphazard assembly of affects and desires in the plot of Ida and Vivaldo's love affair, as well as in the adulterous plots that develop between Cass and Eric Jones, and between Vivaldo and Eric.

pathological. Caught within the static racial and gendered hierarchies structuring anti-miscegenation discourse, Rufus and Leona's love affair was bound to violently fail.

While a similar antagonism characterizes Ida and Vivaldo's mutual sexual desire, both characters, especially Ida, inherently resist the stereotypical scripts of race and gender that led to the earlier couple's destruction. Modeling what feminist psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin calls "intersubjectivity," their relationship is built upon a difficult practice of linguistic dialogue. The characters shuttle between recognition and misrecognition, separation and connection, and through this destabilizing process form a contingent space of affiliation. Unlike Leona and Rufus who communicated only in vicious debate or violent argument, Ida and Vivaldo talk to one another in a self-revealing way. Even after their relationship becomes damaged from feelings of entrapment, jealousy, and humiliation, Baldwin stages the characters in scenes of linguistic communication. The disjunctive experience of reading the novel self-reflexively demonstrates the asymmetrical landscape of Baldwin's reparative ethics. Inhabiting the dialogic space of ambivalence that opens between the two characters, the reader is better able to avoid an over-identification with the text that might easily obscure the narrative's significant complexities.

Ida and Vivaldo's first night and subsequent morning together frames the erotic as an environment of risky contestation. After eliding their first sexual act in a narrative ellipsis, the author depicts Vivaldo watching Ida sleeping in the early morning. This initial refusal to represent the first key sexual event of their relationship is set against the sexually explicit depiction of Rufus and Leona's romance from start to finish. Although not violent, Ida and Vivaldo's relationship still navigates the perilous hierarchies of power assumed in their interracial heterosexual bond. Here Ida is a "stranger," "unknown [to Vivaldo] precisely because [she] is invested with so much of [him]self."[156] The joke is on Vivaldo, of course, when Ida turns to him and reveals she was in fact

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[156] Baldwin, *Another Country*, 172.

pretending to sleep in order to watch him gaze at her. Her feigned sleep symbolizes her awareness of becoming an erotic object of desire, especially of his white male fantasies. In a gesture echoing Vivaldo's earlier confession that the only black women he had been with before Ida were prostitutes, Ida sings at the end of the scene, while washing dishes, "If you can't give me a dollar, give me a lousy dime."[157] The lyrics satirize her value as a sexual object in Vivaldo's eyes, alluding to the reality that her actions may not engender an equal recompense. This irony points to Ida's tragic inability to receive payback for the loss of her brother, which, like the symbolism framing Rufus' suicide, depends on a redemptive logic of symmetry and correspondence. This melancholic moment therefore accentuates the importance of opening up a new plot of interpersonal attachment, which trades in total personal redemption for continuous and incomplete attempts at repair.

In a 1960 address at the time of *Another Country*'s composition, Baldwin states that as an American writer he is defined by a life of "incoherence," an "incoherence that occurs… when I am frightened, absolutely frightened to death." [158] In 1984, Baldwin revises this statement, describing the novel as bringing the story of Ida and Vivaldo "toward some kind of coherence" that comes close to a "harmonious connection of the several parts, so that the whole 'hangs together'" [159] This change suggests that in Baldwin's work coherence is desired but always just out of reach, an ideal that can only be experienced as an *essai* or attempt. Complete coherence can no longer be sustained in a fallen world where death serves as an everyday reality for many. Comparing the incoherent feeling of "being frightened to death" to the unknown truth about a friend's murder of his mother, Baldwin writes, "No matter what I say I may inadvertently stumble on this corpse. And this incoherence which seems to afflict this country is analogous to that. I mean that in order to have a conversation

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[157] Baldwin, *Another Country*, 179.
[158] Building on this idea, critic Ernesto Javier Martinez contends that the novel's formal incoherence and confusion helps thematize the dual problem of ethics and epistemology under social oppression. See "Dying to Know: Identity and Self-Knowledge in Baldwin's Another Country," *PMLA* 124. 3 (May 2009): 782-797.
[159] Elgrably and Plimpton, 244; "Coherence," *Oxford English Dictionary*.

with someone you have to reveal yourself."[160] In other words, in order for a person to reveal himself in language, he must necessarily stumble upon many symbolic corpses, an inevitable affliction especially for African American writers of the time. Similarly, throughout *Another Country* the reader encounters multiple real and metaphoric deaths, and in order to hold these narrative ruptures in abeyance, she must let go of the expectation for epistemic symmetry or coherence.[161]

In the penultimate chapter of the novel, Baldwin represents Ida and Vivaldo entering into a new kind of honest communication that demonstrates the impossibility of complete coherence. At the brink of their relationship's collapse, this, the characters' final conversation is constituted from interruption and breaks, a fragmentation characteristic of their affiliation more generally. In this scene, Ida and Vivaldo discuss how their racial difference poses difficulties to their romance. In dramatic opposition to Vivaldo's ignorant claim that "suffering doesn't have a color," Ida testifies to the unique burden of losing her only brother.[162] Returning to this all too familiar topic, a topic Vivaldo is not so willing to revisit, Ida expresses her unending love for her brother. Vivaldo quickly replies that he loved him too, but Ida interrupts: "the point, anyway, at the moment, is that *I* loved him.… None of you, anyway, knew anything about him, you didn't know him."[163] In Baldwin's simple choice to italicize the "I," he asserts the primacy of Ida's voice and the unique quality of her love for and knowledge of Rufus that comes from their shared familial and racial background.

Ida's limited account of her grief for Rufus serves as an opportunity to tell the story of her own struggles for self-determination, which parallel aspects of Rufus' alienated trajectory. Like her brother, Ida seeks a career as a jazz musician as a way out of her oppressive environment and as a

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160 Baldwin, *Collected Essays*, 228.

161 Contemporary critics of Baldwin attacked him for this sketchy, incoherent form; others saw the novel as excessive and overwrought, especially Robert A. Bone in his essay, "The Novels of James Baldwin." Bone rhetorically asks "If his people [characters] have no otherness, if he repeatedly violates their integrity, how can they achieve the individuality which alone will make them memorable?" *Tri-Quarterly*, 2 (Winter, 1965): 18.

162 Baldwin, *Another Country*, 417.

163 Baldwin, *Another Country*, 413.

way to free her self from the psychological enslavement that comes from racial subjugation. Singing the blues became her ticket for getting back what she believes is due to her, and she ties her artistic goals to the tragic hope of "settling the score," which can never be fulfilled.[164] As a black woman, Ida can only achieve her dream of redeeming the suffering she and her family experienced at the dangerous cost of sexually subjecting herself to white promoter Steve Ellis. As her career progresses towards a somewhat tragic conclusion, the jazz industry will claim part ownership over her performance, her voice, and her body.

Baldwin dramatizes the unique dangers the artistic path holds for Ida by describing a tragic episode where a black male band member calls her a "white man's whore" and threatens to "tear [her] little black pussy up" if she ever performs again in Harlem. This threat of sexual violence shocks Ida into humiliating abjection and leads to her ironic acquiescence to Ellis's sexual advances that same night. Through Ida's furious speech, Baldwin comments on the gendered and racialized dimensions of Ida's victimization that amount to a kind of social death: "There's always further to fall, always, always (…) I let him have his way." In a gesture that echoes Rufus' jump from the George Washington Bridge, Ida falls to the ground and holds "her hands against her belly, weeping," her feminized body signifying this violent rupture as much as her speech.[165] Here Baldwin substitutes for Rufus's fallen body this image of Ida collapsed on the kitchen floor.

For this couple, heterosexual relation is bound to an inevitable patriarchal violence, a structure that ensnares both characters but has more tragic consequences for the more marginalized figure, Ida. Listening to Ida's horrible confession, Vivaldo in part shares in her experience of abject humiliation. Baldwin writes, his "heart began to beat with a newer, stonier anguish, which destroyed the distance called pity and placed him, very nearly, in her body, beside that table, on the dirty floor." However, even though Vivaldo seems to empathically identify with Ida, he also registers a

164 Baldwin, *Another Country*, 419.
165 Baldwin, *Another Country*, 425-6.

sense of disgust at her victimization and correspondent betrayal of their fidelity. His corporeality becomes destabilized when he remembers the "black whores, with whom he had coupled," making him feel literally nauseous.[166] As he internally categorizes Ida as a whore like all the rest of the black women he had slept with, Vivaldo exposes the real crisis in his self-interested subjectivity: if Ida is figured in the position of the whore, he is no better than the revolting figure of white male supremacy found in Ellis. This powerful scene never lets us forget that Vivaldo's act of bearing witness to this young black woman's abjection unfortunately also serves as a dangerous stage for the engendering of repressed aggression.

In the world of *Another Country*, characters struggle against succumbing to the psychic and physical brutality that seem inescapable within interracial heterosexuality. Emblematic of the novel as a whole, this episode shows that an individual's capacity for empathy is dependent on the maintenance of difference and the recognition of the other's singularity. Giving up this sense of separateness would lead Ida and Vivaldo closer to Rufus's tragic fate: the erasure of difference that results in his suicide, which Baldwin describes as a reunion with the "black" void of the river's depths. To circumvent this ending, each must learn to exist independently from the other. After Ida's revelation, which provokes in Vivaldo anger and pity, but also love, he looks into his coffee cup to learn that "black coffee was not black, but deep brown." In a mundane revision of the dramatic scene of Rufus looking down into the river, Vivaldo thinks: "Not many things in the world were really black, not even the night, not even the mines."[167] Now that he can perceive racial identity as singular rather than stereotypical, Vivaldo sits at the precipice of facing the truth about Ida, the thing he most wanted. What remains to be seen in Baldwin's conclusion of the novel is if Vivaldo can go one step further and confront the difference within him self.

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166 Baldwin, *Another Country*, 426.
167 Baldwin, *Another Country*, 430.

In its refusal to offer a romantic escape from difference, this novel's broken scenes of recognition and forgiveness show interracial intimacy to be inflected by intersecting structures of power that cannot be transcended nor completely understood. Faced with the impossibility of fully comprehending the reasons behind the mixture of feelings that characterize their bond, Vivaldo explains to Ida that he couldn't "understand, not really." The truth of either character will never be fully known, but their attempt at mutual recognition remains.[168] Here then, Baldwin shows that the practice of bearing witness to the other as a separate subject worthy of respect is doubly difficult for lovers. If there is any hope for this fictional bond to survive, Vivaldo must step out of his possessive objectification of Ida, an act that may not be possible within the patriarchal structure of the novel. Nevertheless, the destabilizing combination of "anger, pity, love, and contempt and lust" that "all raged together in him," might precipitate in Vivaldo a loss of innocence that would oblige him to account for his complicity in Ida's suffering, breaking open a more realistic path of love.[169]

Making Friends

In the last pages of the chapter, Baldwin heralds a new kind of loving covenant that rejects the transcendent spiritual ideal of "hearts united" heralded in King's calls for racial integration.[170] Neither simply erotic, nor platonic their love can survive only if the characters can bridge these two dialectical poles. Not seeking perfect integration or equality, Ida and Vivaldo in the end can only attempt to bear witness to and recognize the limits of their knowledge of each other. After confessing to her affair with Ellis that ends in sexual coercion, Ida asks Vivaldo to promise never to be understanding or kind. Vivaldo replies: " 'I promise you that…' And then, furiously, 'You seem

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[168] Although the focalization of Vivaldo's character makes him ostensibly more accessible to the reader, the difficulty of achieving interpersonal coherence that Baldwin plots within the scene conversely demands the reader to hold in abeyance any true account of either character.
[169] Ibid.
[170] King, 118.

to forget that I love you.'"[171] Ida's refusal to speak in the scripted language of "understanding," what Baldwin earlier calls "that love jive," opens up a new affiliative connotation for the love that Vivaldo offers to her in return.[172] The couple is poised to move, then, from the high drama of romance to the pragmatic realities of affiliation, neutralizing their erotic battle marked by a heat and tension that "flashed violently alive between them, as close to hatred as it was to love."[173]

At the anticlimactic conclusion of this narrative of affiliation, the chapter's final scene offers a secularized moment of promise-making, where Ida and Vivaldo vow to remain beloved friends rather than committed spouses. In a partial repair of the rupture left by Rufus's death, Baldwin gestures toward the couple's adoption of each other as nonbiological kin, modeling their bond after Rufus and Ida's initial sibling relation. Echoing the early emphasis on siblinghood in the novel's funeral scene, the lateral bond between blood kin serves as the seed of a broader field of affiliation that crosses categories of social difference at the novel's conclusion. Thus, in this final image, the rocky love affair that was punctured by jealousy and estrangement transforms into a new kind of cross-gender and interracial friendship:

> They stared at each other. Suddenly, he reached out and pulled her to him, trembling, with tears starting up behind his eyes (…) She clung to him; with a sigh she buried her face in his chest. There was nothing erotic in it; they were like two weary children. And it was she who was comforting him. Her long fingers stroked his back, and he began, slowly, with a horrible, strangling sound, to weep, for she was stroking his innocence out of him.[174]

The passage's emphasis on vision symbolizes the couple's role in the broader project of building "another country" based on the dream of mutual recognition. First they stare at each other face to face, but tears quickly blind Vivaldo's eyes, and Ida buries her "face in his chest." Their broken gaze illuminates their inability to transcend difference through a symbolic divine union. Showing how the erotic is always at play in bonds of affiliation, Baldwin intermixes sexual diction in verbs such as

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171 Baldwin, *Another Country*, 430.
172 Baldwin, *Another Country*, 410.
173 Baldwin, *Another Country*, 431.
174 Ibid.

"tremble," "clung," "stroke." The implicit circulation of erotic desire taints the seemingly platonic bond they share, illuminating the erotic remainder that marks their interracial and cross-gender affiliation. In his use of the phrase "two weary children" Baldwin offers a mixed image of youth and rebirth, but also of exhaustion at reaching a new level of maturity. As "weary children," Ida and Vivaldo sit on the threshold of returning to a form of mutual obligation that was lost with Rufus's death. Bearing the weight of a fallen world, they begin to see each other through a fresh perspective defined by duty and a shared sense of personal suffering.

If *Another Country* confirms that the heterosexual romance plot will break under the political burden of repairing racial divides, Baldwin nevertheless imagines sex as a powerful vehicle to achieve new ties of affiliation. The dangerous yet generative power of sexual desire is visible in the description of the "horrible, strangling sound" of Vivaldo's weeping, which revises the novel's initial scene of sexual encounter between Rufus and Leona. There, Baldwin depicts Rufus at the moment of climax, feeling himself "strangling, about to explode or die."[175] Vivaldo's ventriloquization of Rufus's corporeal sensation suggests a capacity for change in the white character: he is no longer separate from, but rather positioned within, Rufus's concomitant victimization and aggression. An unfortunate caution against interracial heterosexuality, Baldwin's alignment of Vivaldo and Rufus reminds the reader that interracial sex is at best dangerous and at worst fatal. And yet, in this passage, Vivaldo finally acquiesces to Ida, allowing her to stroke "his innocence out of him," showing their cross-gender bond to fluidly negotiate the play of dominance and passivity integral to any social hierarchy.

The portrayal of Ida and Vivaldo clinging to each other in an embrace that had "nothing erotic in it" echoes an adulterous erotic scene between the married Cass Silenski and Rufus's former homosexual lover, Eric: "[L]ike children [and] with that very same joy and trembling, they undressed

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[175] The specter of lynching is clearly evident in this erotic image. See Baldwin, *Another Country*, 22.

and uncovered and gazed on each other."[176] While their childlike innocence may depend on their common race and class, the characters' subsequent inability to commit to each other marks a new approach for dealing with what Baldwin calls the difficult "intrusion of the future" that is inevitable in committed romantic relationships.[177] He writes that the origin of Cass and Eric's affair "was that they were two independent people, who needed each other for a time, who would always be friends, but who probably, would not always be lovers."[178] The image of Cass and Eric appreciating each other's independent singularity as friends serves as prototype for the untold conclusion of Ida and Vivaldo's story. In his representation of these cross-gender friendships, linked by the short-lived union of Vivaldo and Eric, Baldwin turns away from the civil rights ideal of interracial brotherhood fulfilling national fantasies of reunion. Although they achieve a similar utopian state of transcendence as Eric and Cass, which Baldwin describes also in terms of childlike innocence, in the end the men's bond cannot sustain the violent challenges of daily life nor fully repair the open wound of Rufus's death. This homosexual one night stand serves as an idealistic wish that the novel defers in the service of a pragmatic ethics of reparation yet to come.

In this turn away from the redemptive fantasies of national fraternity, the novel's narrative of affiliation valorizes the subversive and asymmetrical pairings that sometimes arise between former lovers, best friends, and adopted siblings. In *Another Country*, love relationships are constructed from various permutations of race, sex, and gender. The novel's emphasis on the contradictory feelings of duty, responsibility, and desire that are inevitable in bonds that cross racial and sexual differences thereby queers the seemingly platonic "beloved community" of civil rights.[179] Baldwin's alignment of two cross-gender couples, one interracial and the other adulterous, demonstrates how the transgression of social systems of racial purity is necessarily bound to the allied struggle against

[176] Baldwin, *Another Country*, 291.
[177] Baldwin, *Another Country*, 363.
[178] Baldwin, *Another Country*, 291.
[179] Baldwin, *Collected Essays*, 327.

heterosexual norms. As Baldwin writes in his essay "In Search of a Majority," written at the same time as *Another Country*, "Love does not begin and end the way we seem to think it does. Love is a battle, love is a war; love is a growing up."[180] For Cass and Eric, and Ida and Vivaldo, the challenge that defines their movement towards affiliation is precisely to learn that love is a process that cannot be charted along a predictable trajectory; bonds of affiliation are therefore built from momentary needs and desires. Like Cass and Eric, Ida and Vivaldo seek to repair an injurious world together, even while their erotic feelings for each other make them more vulnerable to its horrors. The impending breakup of their erotic bond does not serve as the end of their relationship, but the beginning of an incomplete story about friendship and survival that leaves the reader with a provisional sense of hope.[181]

While my own reading of affiliation concludes in the scene of Vivaldo and Ida's tentative embrace, the novel itself continues for another five pages. On the one hand, these pages might offer a redemptive iteration of the new country that Baldwin hopes to establish. However, I interpret this short, final chapter as symbolic of what remains un-repaired at the novel's conclusion. Here, Eric's French lover Yves steps onto the New York tarmac after a transatlantic flight from Paris and is hit by "a new and healing light" that emanates from the redeeming force of his gay lover smiling down on him from the observation deck. This transcendent scene of the outsider entering the country and city "which the people from heaven had made their home" suggests a salvation-like conclusion to the novel. Despite this heady symbolism, however, Baldwin imagines the traveler thinking upon his arrival: "le plus dur reste à faire [the hardest part remains to be done]."[182] Yves's wearisome arrival

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[180] Ibid., 220.
[181] While my reading emphasizes the inability of Ida and Vivaldo's love to fully heal the wound of Rufus's death, critics of the time, namely Peter Dane in *Transition* magazine, interpreted this scene as a "moment of reality and truth and healing love made possible by a past in which they have a vitalizing share. Their love flowers out of the grave of Rufus." See "Baldwin's Other Country," *Transition*: *A Journal of the Arts, Culture and Society*, 5, no. 24 (1966): 24.
[182] Baldwin, *Another Country*, 435-6.

connotes his entry into a new society born from a fallen world of contingency and limitation.[183] The uncertain reunion of Yves and Eric echoes the mix of expectation and fatigue that resounds in Vivaldo and Ida's final embrace. Like the contrapuntal reading the scene requires, this imagistic blend of hope and despair, burden and transcendence thus constitutes an ironic rejection of an easy, healing love.[184] After adultery and betrayal, the novel concludes with a fragile image of this homosexual couple stumbling at the threshold of an unknown future. The sustainment of their love may be only possible if they choose to walk alongside each other in mutual attempts at repair.

In *Another Country*, interracial love is constituted from a dialectics of love and hate, desire and repulsion, sex and friendship. The ambivalent dangers that shape this fictional world illustrate that the only transcendence that can be found in interracial affiliation comes in the recognition of a common experience of alterity. The dislocation assumed within the cast of strangers tied together by Rufus's life and death is the space that "another country" inhabits, for the title does not simply denote the invocation of a newly integrated nation, but the imaginative and wearisome world created between loving subjects. From this fraught space of estrangement, affiliation emerges as an unexpected framework for the relational work of repair.

Baldwin's early suspicions of the government's inability to truly legislate the end of racism through policies of de-segregation in many ways proved true. As Deak Nabers argues in "Past Using," Baldwin's efforts throughout the decade help bring to light the ways "the American discourse of civil rights has been remarkably insensitive to the forms of racial disadvantage whose ontology lies in something other than 'code'" or law.[185] *Another Country* underscores the inevitable experiences of alterity found in both legally and structurally segregated societies, which in turn demands new frameworks of community to resist the traditions of national cohesion or filial unity.

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[183] This contingency is symbolized in Baldwin's choice to pose this thought in French, which demands the novel's English-speaking audience to translate and thus work harder to understand its complex meaning.
[184] See Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 66.
[185] Deak Nabers, "Past Using," *Yale Journal of Criticism*. 18.2 (December 2005): 240.

Baldwin's representation of "another country" different, but adjacent to the one he inhabited in 1962 highlights how the origin of the civil rights movement for racial equality surpassed the borders of the nation.

Notably, by 1967, Martin Luther King complicated his early rhetorical allegiance to the mythology of American nationhood, writing "The implications of true racial integration are more than national in scope."[186] Reading King's turn at the end of the decade, in particular his coming out against the U.S. War in Vietnam, cultural historian Nikhil Pal Singh writes: "as King recognized at the end of his life, the redemptive investment in the force of American universalism may not be so easy to sever from histories of U.S. force and violence in which blacks have stood among the casualties and victims."[187] While the post-Reagan reversals of the gains made in the civil rights era may lead us to deem the period a political failure, the conception of anti-nationalist and inherently resistant bonds of affiliation in novels such as *Another Country* might give us pause. Reading novels of affiliation conceived by Baldwin and others has the potential to model new strategies of allegiance and solidarity across differences, which in their asymmetrical incoherence have been forgotten in America's redemptive mythologizing of the era.

While the familiar definition of repair is "to mend or restore," the term also fittingly signifies both a setting out and a return. A measured return to Baldwin's fiction of civil rights brings a renewed appreciation for the significant transformation of interpersonal relations that occurred during the sixties. The inescapable rhetoric of the failure of 1960s political movements to achieve radical structural change obscures the period's lingering social relevance for the United States today. Witnessed in the now fractured hope surrounding the 2008 election of President Barack Obama, our memory of the early civil rights movement persists as a stubborn longing for connection with others

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[186] Qtd. in Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2005), 14.
[187] Singh, *Black is a Country*, 13.

who are different from ourselves. No longer simply signifying an inheritance of broken promises, *Another Country* serves as a cultural archive to which the twenty-first century reader might turn to repeatedly, re-interpreting its pages into new circles of affiliation. To be positioned alongside a hopeful Baldwin writing in Istanbul in late 1961 is thus to see the past as not behind us but adjacent to us, which however wearisome an experience, may compel us to embrace "the hardest part that remains to be done."

CHAPTER 2

Cut Adrift: Improvising Affiliation in Toni Morrison's *Sula*

In the latter months of 1972 and early 1973, Toni Morrison worked diligently to complete the final edits of her second novel *Sula*. Concomitant to the last stages of the novel's composition, Morrison served as an editor of what she describes as her "heart's string for all of 1973," a revolutionary "memory book" aptly entitled *The Black Book*.[188] Morrison envisioned this project as a creative vehicle to intervene in a contemporaneous conversation about Black culture and history circulating during the long 1960s. Crafted from the amateur archives of two elderly collectors Middleton A. Harris and Morris Levitt, the book is less a history than an amalgamation of various scenes, images, and quotidian events of the past, which together create a fertile field for fictional re-vision and interpretation. In a 1974 essay describing the making of *The Black Book*, Morrison writes: "So much Black history and art is not reinterpretation or reevaluation as it should be, but an attempt to defend a new idea or destroy an old one…Because our children can't use and don't need and will certainly reject history-as-imagined, they deserve better: history as life lived."[189] Her emphatic argument for "history as life lived" illustrates the necessity for capturing everyday struggle, rather than monumental events, in the archive of the past. Framing the book within a larger project of collective memory, Morrison conceives its readership as not ideologically bounded, but improvisational and relational. It appears that this vision rang true for many, especially her fellow

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[188] "Toni Morrison," *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 331: Nobel Prize Laureates in* Literature, *Part 3: Lagerkvist-Pontoppidan*, A Bruccoli Clark Layman Book (New York: Gale: 2007), 282-305.

[189] From the moment Stokely Carmichael's coined the term "Black Power" in 1966, the rise of Black Nationalism spurred a collective re-evaluation of what point of origin the Black community should favor in building a new collectivity. In defining Black history through Afro-centrism, and the reclamation of genealogical roots that reached back to the mythic years prior to the Atlantic slave trade, leaders of Black Nationalist organizations, such as the Black Panthers and the Nation of Islam, in turn revised the historical narrative of slavery in America. Toni Morrison, "Behind the Making of The Black Book" in *What Moves at the Margin*, 36.

fiction writers of the time. In a note Morrison sent to her friend and collaborator Toni Cade Bambara upon reading *The Black Book*, Bambara writes: "Hey Girl, Thanks so much. The Black Book is exactly what I been wanting to live with."[190] Framing her reception in terms of affiliation, Bambara's note exemplifies the supportive way history and the past can be "lived with" in the present.

Characterized by its archival disorder, the book holds snapshots, re-produced newspaper clippings, vernacular lexicons, musical scores, dance instructions, lynching postcards, and objects that defy the coded boundaries of these genres.[191] Through an aesthetics of rupture and bricolage, Morrison created a text that defies chronology, mirroring the overwhelming saturation of information found in the archive itself. Refusing an orderly classification of titles and section breaks, Morrison categorized the book by means of epigraph and quotation, thereby discouraging the reader's facile and unmediated access to the difficult histories these textual objects represent. There are clear compositional links between *The Black Book* and Morrison's fiction; for example, the author first learned of the unfortunate events of the life of Margaret Garner when researching *The Black Book*, which she would later transform into the 1987 novel *Beloved*. In turn, there is a formal affinity *The Black Book* shares with the contemporaneous novel *Sula*: both texts represent the struggles and complex temporality of an African American past that is not framed within a coherent filiative genealogy, but rather emerges out of a haphazard collection of uneven bonds of connection within and across generational lines of descent.

Among the many images, texts and scores that comprise the compilation, one photograph stands out as an emblem of the kinds of memorial and affective questions Morrison explored in the making of her second novel. Entitled "H.E. Hayward and Slave Nurse Louisa," this ambrotype

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[190] Random House Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University

[191] Harris and Levitt were introduced to Morrison by common friends; both had compiled an extensive collection of Black memorabilia over the decades. According to his employment records, it appears that Levitt was of Jewish descent and born in Russia in the early part of the century.

photograph from 1858 pictures a Black slave nursemaid gently holding a white infant for the camera.[192] Her gaze is arresting in its direct meeting of the camera's eye, and the almost dangerous intimacy of the embrace is registered in the arms and hands that cross each other. Her face however expresses not simply a daring gesture of recognition, but also a kind of fearful suspicion of the camera. Without an audience, a collaborator, her voice literally remains mute. In this photograph as a not-so dependable index of history, the woman has no "safe harbor" of someone else's company, no peer to aid her in offering an ear or a subtle gesture of care. While on the surface the relationship between the woman and the infant is one of coerced duty and non-reciprocal care, between slave and future master, the caption of the photograph as included in *The Black Book* adds further context to the irreciprocal and desolate quality of this bond. It reads: "Slave and Friend."

The caption's misplaced taxonomic identification of the infant-charge of this young woman as a "friend" illuminates the rupture of signification within which black female friendship is caught. Faced with the possible foreclosure of conceiving of herself as an individual subject worthy of a friend within the slave economy indexed in this image, this anonymous figure invokes the longing that the novel *Sula* seeks to assuage. Although her gaze looks straight ahead, the askance position of her head, her chin resting on the son of her Master's forehead, seems to symbolize a discomfort embedded within the facile intimacy this pose assumes. Perhaps the turning of the head suggests a desire to communicate with someone outside and beyond the photographic frame – an imaginary affiliation left unexpressed, but hauntingly present nonetheless.[193]

This antebellum photograph provides an important historical backdrop for Morrison's literary experimentation with representing Black female affiliation in novel form over a century later. Overshadowing the 20th century vision of Black female affiliation was a 19th century

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[192] From correspondence with New York Public Library Picture Collection.

[193] See Marianne Hirsch's analysis of the Fresh Air Fund photographs in *Family Frames*, 46-7. See also Marianne Hirsch, "Introduction: Familial Looking," in *The Familial Gaze*, (Hanover: UP of New England, 1999), xi-xxv.

instrumentalization of "friendship" within disciplinary forms of racial subjection. Saidiya Hartman writes in *Scenes of Subjection* of the invasive quality of so-called "friends of the race" that sought to embody what one charity manual described as: "the moral support of true friendship--the possession of a real friend, whose education, experience and influence, whose general knowledge of life, or special knowledge of domestic economy are placed at the service of those who have neither the intelligence, the tact nor the opportunity to extract the maximum of good from their slender resources."[194] Caught in the crosshairs of a duteous and obligatory policing of familial and racial purity that these inter-racial charitable bonds performed, Black female friendship must navigate the specter that remains of this history of unjust and coercive forms of affiliation. In her 1973 novel *Sula*, Morrison's depiction of the life-long bond between characters Nel and Sula illuminates the discomforting fact that even within intra-racial forms of community there endures a dangerous vulnerability when attempting any connection with others.

Morrison's turn to composing a novel of affiliation fills this historical absence of African American women's friendship, focusing in on the singular perspective of two friends, whose interconnected lives mark a generational passing of time. Like the disorderly piecing together of *The Black Book*, *Sula* is also structurally fragmented; the synchronic shape of the novel exists in tension with the chronology of its chapters. After its initial invocation of an anonymous voice of the implied author, the novel jumps back to 1919, then makes chapter-length stops at 1920, 1921, 1922, 1923, 1927, 1937, 1939, 1940, 1941, and finally 1965. The dates themselves are often the only citational reference to the official longue durée of United States history. The chapter progression does more than mark a historical timeline; it bears witness to the collective life narratives of the protagonists Nel and Sula. Marking time biographically, through the rituals found in the intersecting lives of

[194] Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection* (New York: Oxford UP, 1997) Chapter 5. Online edition.

Medallion's inhabitants, Morrison recasts the novel to encompass an improvisational form of history as "life-lived."

Morrison's representation of the resistant strategies of attachment and mourning, implicit in Nel and Sula's affiliation, in turn reflects the problem of reception invoked in *The Black Book* and its inclusion of the photograph documenting the failure of Black women's friendship. No longer simply an object of history, the "Slave Nurse Louisa" pushes back against this historical silencing through Morrison's fictional revision. In his introduction to *In the Break*, Fred Moten explains that "objects can and do resist," writing that "the animative materiality – the aesthetic, political, sexual, and racial force – of the ensemble of objects that we might call black performances, black history, blackness, is a real problem and a real chance for the philosophy of human being."[195] Morrison's fictional project of reanimating the past in order to explore the epistemological relationship between subject and object, viewer and viewed, reflects Moten's claims to the force that objects can and do enact on the reader. *Sula* reveals the black feminist politics underlying the animative potential lurking within the archives and "disciplines" of black history. In the light of *The Black Book*, Morrison's turn to composing a novel of affiliation illuminates not just an interest in experimenting with new modes of human relation, but a revision of history and memory through collaborative acts of repair.

Piecing Together a Black Feminist History

Sula invites us into an environment on the brink of violent reckoning. Within its pages, roads are paved, trees are cut, birds die, and floodwaters rise as the Black folk of the "Bottom" bear the passage of time, witnessing their collective heterogeneity disappear into "Middle American" white banality. Our guide through this transition is the novel's co-protagonist Nel Wright, beloved friend of the titular character Sula Peace. Born in 1910, Nel lives through two world wars, de facto

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[195] Fred Moten, *In the Break* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2003), 7-8.

segregation, the civil rights movement and federal integration. Unlike the quickly developing town of Medallion, Ohio, Nel bears these changes by holding onto lost people and landscapes through a quotidian practice of memory and improvisation. At the novel's conclusion in 1965, Nel seems to mourn the loss of social attachment most. Exclaiming "Lord, how time flies," she thinks:

> It was sad, because the Bottom had been a real place. These young ones kept talking about the community, but they left the hills to the poor, the old, the stubborn – and the rich white folks. Maybe it hadn't been a community, but it had been a place. Now there weren't any places left, just separate houses with separate televisions and separate telephones and less and less dropping by.[196]

Here Morrison questions the basis upon which we define community. As witness to the death of the Bottom, and the death of her friend Sula, Nel refuses modernization as she walks on the shoulder of the road as cars drive by. Prior to World War II, the Bottom had been a "real place," where people lived in a tight-knit and interdependent world. For Nel, community is characterized by face-to-face communication, where folks drop by rather than phone each other. Ironically, the "young ones," the later generation of African Americans who had greater access to education and political organizing, speak of "community" but refuse the traditions found in a shared locale – this irony illustrates Morrison's critical stance toward the politicization of the term and its narrow connotations. In this passage, the author evokes an alternative version of community often lost to the "young ones." As a nostalgic witness to the losses incurred during and after civil rights, the character of Nel, like the anonymous narrator of the opening section and the author herself, illuminates the survivor's difficult practice of repairing a damaged world.

In the following pages, this chapter will illuminate how reparative encounters with the past necessarily shape the narrative of affiliation at the center of the novel *Sula*.

Morrison's ironic dating of 1965 as the milestone when the "real place" of the Bottom was lost illuminates the competing forces of progress and nostalgia to which this image of Nel's alludes.

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196 Toni Morrison, *Sula* (New York: Vintage, 2004), 166.

To historians of the decade, this year served as the apex of the civil rights movement. During this year the federal government seemed at the height of its power, as Congress passed the second wave of civil rights legislation under the banner of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society movement.[197] For many Americans, this was "progress." However, 1965 also marks the decade's turn towards dramatic violence. During this year American combat troops arrived in Vietnam, Malcolm X was assassinated, marchers for voting rights in Selma were killed by white supremacists, Daniel Patrick Moynihan and his colleagues in the Department of Labor published the damning depiction of black matriarchy as pathology in "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," and the people of Watts, Los Angeles rose up in what some saw as revolution and others riot.

As a historical way station, '65 denotes a point of escalating national divisions and at the same time indexes presumable victories for social equality. However, for Morrison, this national history seems senseless when one accounts for the centuries of African American experience marred by continual disappointments and struggle. In her depiction of "the Bottom," Morrison sheds light on the experience of living under the constant threat of ruin that seems to surpass any acts of legislative change or governmental intervention. Exposing the ironies of integration, Morrison demonstrates that the federal project of equal rights not only dismissed the sustaining existence of Black communal life during the Jim Crow era, it threatened to destroy the vernacular cultures that made this community possible.[198] While critiquing this progress narrative of integration, Morrison dares us to imagine the constructive forms of communal repair that are born from loss and suffering.

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[197] This legislation specifically included the Voting Rights Act and the 1965 Immigration Act. See Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford UP, 2008).

[198] Tim Libretti makes a similar claim in his comparison of Morrison's novel and John Sayles's *Sunshine State*. Tim Libretti, "Integration as Disintegration: Remembering the Civil Rights Movement as a Struggle for Self-Determination in John Sayles's *Sunshine State*," in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, eds. Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford (Athens: U of Georgia P, 2006), 197-219.

By the time she began composing *Sula* in 1969, Morrison, like many, had become impatient with the federal government's stubborn unwillingness to make good on the Civil Rights Acts passed years before. In hindsight, the movement seemed to require a futile politics of recognition, the success of which was dependent on the moral sympathy of the white majority, Morrison turns inward to portray the struggles of local, vernacular communities as an alternative trajectory for political empowerment. While James Baldwin's 1962 *Another Country* attests to the erotic underpinnings of social differences during the civil rights era, Morrison in 1973 turns to exploring the psychic differences that are more difficult to address through a politics of individual rights and recognition. Focusing on the struggles of African American women since 1920, Morrison illuminates how the singularity of individual differences were often overlooked by static categories of group identity, such as the implicitly patriarchal nationalism heralded by civil rights and Black power movements. Thus, *Sula* echoes Ellison's invocation of the feelings of personal anguish and alterity that can hamper the "talented individual," demonstrating the underside of his claims, that art can sometimes tragically fall outside the scope of what an individual might think to be possible.

Through her novel's revelation of the psychic struggles to balance identification and erotic desire in the relational subject's efforts at differentiation, Morrison therefore reflects on the minor, everyday obstacles that contributed to the failure of these movements for social redress. These are often, in particular, women's burdens: the raising of children, the caring of the sick, or the overlooked efforts to bear witness to unthinkable violence. Opening the narrative from an undated "present" of the early 1970s, the author signals the chaos from which it emerged, when the 1960s social revolutions had collapsed, taking stable histories down with it. In the 2002 Foreword of *Sula*, the author describes the late 1960s as inspiring feelings of exile, melancholia, but also the artistic freedom that comes from a life unexpectedly loosened from the fetters of the past. She writes of this period as:

> Daring especially, because in the late sixties, with so many dead, detained, or silenced, there could be no turning back simply because there was no "back" back there. Cut adrift, so to speak, we found it possible to think up things, try things, explore… In that atmosphere of "What would you be doing or thinking if there was no gaze or hand to stop you?" I began to think about just what that kind of license would have been like for us black women forty years earlier. We were being encouraged to think of ourselves as our own salvation, to be our own best friends. What could that mean in 1969 that it had not meant in the 1920s? The image of the woman who was both envied and cautioned against came to mind.[199]

Like many African American women writers, Morrison turned to fiction as a means to conceive a new future, at a moment where writers had no usable past, nor genealogy to fall back on. Characterizing herself and her female generation as exiles "cut adrift," this passage reflects an interest in turning against tradition, in order to re-animate a new conception of the past. Depicting a world where women "were being encouraged to think of [them]selves as [their] salvation," and "to be [their] own best friends," Morrison's *Sula* sets out the explicit problems of female friendship, self-determination and collective "salvation." As her friend and collaborator Toni Cade Bambara writes in 1970, "Our art, protest, dialogue … now seem to be invested in and are in turn derived from a determination to touch and to unify."[200] In this feminist moment of heightened female collectivity, Morrison turned to portraying pre-civil rights efforts at Black women's affiliation as a way to address the damages of a community in disrepair.

By 1973, multiple black feminist groups had grown within and against mainstream Women's Lib. Responding to the feminist dream of solidarity serving as a means for self-liberation, Black feminist groups such as the National Black Feminist Organization, illuminated the underlying problem of a universal feminist identity foundational to the movement. The often privileged, myopic and even overtly racist rhetoric developed by white second-wave feminists alienated many black women to the movement's larger goals. Their projects were shaped not only by a revision of feminist goals, but by an explicit need to attend to what Kimberly Springer calls "interstitial

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[199] Morrison, *Sula*, xv.
[200] Toni Cade Bambara, "Preface," in *The Black Woman: An Anthology* (New York: Mentor Books, 1970), 7.

politics."[201] Black feminist organizations created a space for the "politics in the cracks," which took root in the gaps and fissures found between and within the more publicly recognized movements, such as civil rights, feminism, and Black power. While their political goals often diverged, these organizations still ran the risk of underestimating "the limits of defining the category *black womanhood* by ignoring the heterogeneity of black women and communities"[202] Despite the apparent sameness of members and political constituents, many Black women's organizations faced surprising difficulties in attempting to maintain a viable structure of solidarity. Ironically, the belief that "the most radical politics come directly out of our identity," first theorized by the Comabahee River Collective in 1977, would lead to discord in the ranks.[203]

Perhaps less hopeful than Bambara's enthusiastic call to "touch and to unify" a newly developing Black female collectivity, Morrison's fiction writing and editorial work explicitly contributed to the political debates of the burgeoning Black feminist movement.[204] Her most direct engagement with these conversations is found in a *New York Times Magazine* article published in August 1971. In "What the Black Woman Thinks about Women's Lib," Morrison deconstructs the popular tenets of feminist community and class-consciousness, reframing the movement within the terms of racial difference. Opening the essay with an image of Jim Crow signage, Morrison re-appropriates the "classifying signs" of "White Ladies" and "Colored Women" to reveal the gender norms implicit to the logic of segregation. Emblematic of an authorial suspicion of stable forms of

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201 One such example of this is attorney Pauli Murray's involvement in establishing NOW in 1966, only to leave in 1967 "citing issues of undemocratic decision making a a limited scope in its membership and coalitions." Other key feminist leaders, such as Aileen Hernandez, Johnson appointee to the EEOC and Margaret Sloan, a founding editor of *MS. Magazine*, would in turn break off from national feminist groups to establish Black feminist organizations. Kimberly Springer, *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980* (Durham: Duke UP, 2005), 2, 33.
202 Springer, 171.
203 Winifred Breines, *The Trouble Between us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement* (New York: Oxford UP, 2006), 133.
204 The second strand of Black feminism came out of New York with the National Black Feminist Organization – this organization grew into the development of the Combahee River Collective, lead by Barbara and Beverly Smith.

categorization and identity, Morrison's essay sets out more basic political goals she sees springing up from the values of the movement, which might be better able to address those challenges of black women that "defy classification":

> If Women's Lib is about breaking the habit of genuflection, if it is about controlling one's own destiny, is about female independence in economic, personal and political ways, if it is indeed about working hard to become a person, knowing that one has to work hard at becoming anything, *Man* or *Woman* – and if it succeeds, then we may have a nation of white Geraldines and white Sapphires, and what on earth is Kingfish gonna do then? (…) The liberation movement… is focusing itself, becoming a hard-headed power base… [Shirley Chisholm and others] see, perhaps, something real: women talking about human rights rather than sexual rights – something other than a family quarrel, and the air is shivery with possibilities. [205]

Morrison's perspicacity in this early essay is most clearly seen in her conception of the movement as speaking for "human rights," which matches her anti-essentialist vision of gender politics as positively affecting not just women, but also men. "Breaking the habit of genuflection" could apply in 1971 to white women and black men, to Chicano farm workers and Asian-American college students. Morrison's expansive appraisal of the liberation movement poses an ethics found in any individual's desire for self-determination, to "control one's own destiny." Morrison's emphasis on independence and self-determination is suggestive of her general distrust of narrow forms of identity and ideology that served to challenge solidarity among black women who were doubly displaced within national political frameworks. Her articulation of the difficult process of "becoming a person" that must resist traditional systems of authority speaks to the greater difficulty feminists had in bridging differences of class, race, ethnicity and sexuality within their ranks. In this chapter, my reading of *Sula* seeks to answer the questions lurking at the margins of the author's subtle critique of feminism: Why did so many efforts at solidarity fail to take root? How can we read Morrison's story

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[205] Setting out the reasons behind black women's "suspicions" of Women's Lib, she argues that black women see the feminist movement as 1) white and thus a re-instantiation of "white power," 2) unable to address the particular needs of black women who "lead a different kind of life," and 3) "the relationship between black women and black men." Toni Morrison, "What the Black Woman thinks about Women's Lib," *What Moves at the Margin*, 22, 24.

of a broken friendship as revealing a divergent form of relation that might more effectively serve as a means of collective resistance?

The "Hard Work of Becoming Persons"

In *Sula*, Morrison sketches the lives of two black female characters Nel Wright and Sula Peace to illuminate how the "hard" and I would argue life-long "work of becoming persons" both creates the opportunity for, and is dependent upon, the development of an intensely intimate friendship – which is tragically broken in this novel. Growing up together in the "the Bottom," Nel and Sula's relationship forms in response to intersecting structures of racist and patriarchal power that characterized Jim Crow. *Sula* is a sparse novel; its intensity lies not in its worldly expansiveness, but in its detailed narration of the mercurial experiences of the everyday. The novel's power lies precisely in that quality for which some reviewers showed disdain: its quotidian representation of a local Black community in the rural Middle West. What one *New York Times* reviewer called "its narrowness, its refusal to brim over into the world outside its provincial setting" in fact provides a microcosmic field to explore female friendship, a bond forged from the small details of daily life and thus vulnerable to neglect and disregard.[206]

Bonded together in adolescence by a series of troublesome events, including a near-assault and their complicity in the not-so-accidental death of a young boy, the girls remain bosom friends until their graduation from high school and Nel's marriage to Jude. However, as the characters mature, they are interpolated into racial and gendered systems of subjection that calcify their identities and cordon off their kinship circles, making it more difficult to improvise new ways of being alongside each other. The novel breaks, then, on the evening of Nel's wedding, an event that symbolizes her entry into the domestic world of duty and responsibility. While Nel chooses wifely

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206 Sara Blackburn, "You Still Can't Go Home Again," *The New York Times Book Review,* 30 Dec. 1973.

service, the more transgressive Sula skips town to begin a ten year solitary journey that remains absent from the text in a narrative ellipsis. Once Sula returns "with a plague of robins" the friends are reunited, yet their maturing friendship fractures after Sula falls into an affair with Nel's husband Jude. By the end, Sula is dead from loneliness and Nel, now a single mother, is left to care for her three young children and reintegrate herself into the community.

While many critics have argued that *Sula*, like Morrison's first novel *The Bluest Eye*, poses self-development as the main organizing principle, the plot of affiliation between Nel and Sula actively offsets the tragic narrative of Sula's downfall. In fact, Morrison's revision of the Bildungsroman illuminates how necessary it is to pose more than one developmental trajectory in conceiving subjectivity as relational. Here Morrison replaces the novelistic trope of political identity formation, used by Alice Walker in her 1977 novel *Meridian*, for example. Instead, the novel employs friendship as a rich structure to illuminate subjectivity as a process of collaborative self-making. As Deborah McDowell rightly asserts: "Not only does the narrative deny the reader a 'central' character, but it also denies the whole notion of character as static *essence*, replacing it with the idea of character as *process*."[207] By doing so, the novel illuminates race and gender to not be inherited traits but qualities that emerge through social and psychic exchange.

Morrison portrays Nel and Sula's bond as shuttling between sameness and difference, highlighting the ways kinship and solidarity are built from social modes of exchange, rather than biology or visual phenotype. Although both Nel and Sula are born in 1910, grow up in the same town, and are "Black women," Morrison illuminates how the characters could not be more different. Racially, Nel "was the color of wet sandpaper" and Sula "was a heavy brown with large quiet eyes, one of which featured a birthmark that spread from the middle of the lid toward the eyebrow,

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[207] Deborah E. McDowell, "Reading Toni Morrison's *Sula* and the Black Female Text," in *Toni Morrison,* ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1990), 153.

shaped something like a stemmed rose."[208] As a mixed-race girl, whose mother sought a life built on middle-class domesticity, Nel's skin was "just dark enough to escape the blows of the pitch-black truebloods," while at the same time resembling the quadroon beauty of her Creole grandmother. The author destabilizes racial identity by demonstrating that the characters' external distinctions symbolize not only their different class and educational backgrounds, but also their singular dispositions. Morrison portrays these physiological distinctions as metonymic of the immeasurable qualitative elements of their intra-racial difference.

In the narrative of their affiliation, Morrison depicts the girls' early life as one of movement and dislocation. Both are in search of self-discovery and a means of liberation from the known world of Medallion; their longing for someplace else, outside their domestic and familial spaces of containment, brings them out onto the streets of Medallion. Imagining their psychic bond to be defined by this condition of alterity, as Hortense Spillers suggests, Morrison's novel provides a more nuanced articulation of black womanhood than any political rhetoric could bring to light.[209] While "alterity" marks one's marginalization within a community, it also re-conceives the self in terms of discontinuity. The author introduces the friends first meeting following a journey Nel takes with her mother, Helene to the Jim Crow south. After a visit to creole New Orleans to attend her great-grandmother's funeral, Nel returns to Medallion and begins to see herself as more than simply "their daughter…" she wanted to be "Me." It is out of the same longing Nel has in "contemplating" the "delicious[ness]" of "faraway places" that inspires her to befriend Sula. As Morrison writes, "The trip, perhaps, or her new found me-ness, gave her the strength to cultivate a friend in spite of her mother."[210] This trip south stirs in her a desire to separate and find her own sense of self, free from her mother's prescriptive gaze. The cultivation of a friend who Helene Wright strictly forbids

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[208] Morrison, *Sula*, 52.
[209] Hortense Spillers, "A Hateful Passion, A Lost Love," in *Black, White and In Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003), 117.
[210] Morrison, *Sula*, 29.

signifies an act of rebellious survival for Nel; while her hopes for travel are never fulfilled in adulthood, her friendship with Sula brings her closer to her childhood dreams of adventure: "toughness was not their quality – adventuresomeness was – and a mean determination to explore everything that interested them."[211] For Nel and Sula, the adventurous exploration of the self necessarily departs from the familial sphere and thus is also in stark opposition to traditional social institutions such as school or church.

In this novel of affiliation, Morrison sheds light on the ways blood kinship cannot account for the various structures of feeling that encompass Black life. Revising the Oedipal origins of self-development, Morrison poses affiliation as a means to imagine one's self outside the deterministic world of family and inheritance. Both Nel and Sula are only children and thus lead more solitary and interiorized lives; their singular status in their mother's lives brings neither special attention nor overbearing nurturing.[212] In fact, these families, in their own ways, are sites of trauma, loss and suffering. Nel's mother comes from a well-to-do family in New Orleans, but her father eventually moves on, leaving her mother to take care of their family on her own. The Peaces, while less respectable and insular, are a family characterized by an unusual sense of love and caretaking. While they adopt many into their fold, they also sometimes conceive of death as a more "caring" solution to human suffering, as is seen when the grandmother Eva Peace sets her son Plum on fire, after she realizes he is slowly killing himself from addiction. These wounds constitute a familial setting that is anything but supportive, fertile ground; to save themselves from these horrible inheritances, Nel and Sula turn to each other.

Substituting a relational structure of inheritance for one of elective affiliation, the characters adopt each other as kin. Morrison explains: "Daughters of distant mothers and incomprehensible

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[211] Morrison, *Sula*, 55.

[212] Without siblings, both girls lack the support and similar perspective that blood brothers and sisters can bring.

fathers…, they found in each other's eyes the intimacy they were looking for."[213] While the cause of this necessity may stem from those "distant mothers and incomprehensible fathers" characterizing the broken parental unit, the author pushes against a cautionary articulation of the girls' subversion as symptomatic of a larger pathology. A single mother herself, Morrison's representation of black maternity speaks to contemporaneous debates over the pathologization of the black mother, challenging the popular discourse prescribing "natural" family patterns and "healthy" parenting skills. As representative of a generation of Black feminists in the early seventies, Angela Davis, for whom Morrison served as editor at Random House, spoke out against the demonization of black mothers by both the white federal majority and Black Power activists. Writing in the *Black Scholar* in 1971, Davis states: "the matriarchal black woman has been repeatedly invoked as one of the fatal by-products of slavery."[214] In the same periodical one year earlier, Linda La Rue criticized the authors of the 1965 Moynihan report for this same myth:

> The term 'matriarchy' Frazier employed and Moynihan exploited was used to indicate a dastardly, unnatural role alteration, which could be blamed for inequality of opportunity, discrimination in hiring, and sundry other ills. It was as if 'matriarchy' were transgression of divine law or natural law and thus would be punished until the proper hierarchy of man over woman was restored.[215]

La Rue's ironic description of matriarchy as a "transgression of divine law" that is unnatural and abberant clearly resonates with the implicit destabilization of traditional kinship in the upside-down world of the Bottom. By representing the bond between two girls, Morrison opens a new structure of interpreting the "Black family" by illuminating the porous boundaries between the Peace and Wright households. Befriending each other, Sula and Nel create an elective kinship that subsequently ties together their families in a rich yet awkward network of responsibility. In a way the affiliation of the characters break down the categorical differences between each family: Nel's

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[213] Morrison, *Sula*, 52.

[214] Angela Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall (New York: New Press, 1995), 201.

[215] Linda La Rue, "Civil Rights and Women's Liberation," in *Words of Fire*, 167.

clean and respectable residence and the "woolly house" of Sula Peace become one fragmentary household, which they both attempt to inhabit. However, Morrison casts the girls' over-identification with each other as intensifying their dutiful feeling of kinship to the point of "unhealthy" co-dependence.[216] This is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in Nel's caretaking of Sula, her arranging for her funeral and visiting of Eva after Sula's death.

The emergence of Nel and Sula's bond of affiliation runs parallel to the characters' break from their mothers. In the summer of their twelfth year, the girls turn to each other in their quest for adolescent independence. As Marianne Hirsch argues in *The Mother/Daughter Plot*, "Sula and Nel are presented as members of a new generation of black women, eager to construct new lives and new stories for themselves. Yet their development and their friendship, and the text itself, revolve around their relationships to the powerful maternal figures…"[217] For Sula, especially, this quest is directly in response to a sense of rejection she feels by her mother Hannah. Directly prior to a key event in their affiliation, in which the girls' enter into artistic collaboration that coincides with the death of a young boy, Sula overhears her mother chatting with her friends about "mother-love", stating: "You love her, like I love Sula. I just don't like her. That's the difference."[218] Unable to understand the complexity of her mother's differentiating "like" from "love," an epistemological question that perhaps can only be understood once one becomes a mother, Sula turns to Nel as the subject who will both "like" and "love" her. You might not like someone, or want to identify yourself in the other, but you still love them. Love in its best form, on the other hand, recognizes

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[216] Like James Baldwin, Amiri Baraka and other African American writers of the period, Morrison refused the political burden of representativeness that the literary market placed on authors of color. In a way, her refusal to offer one central protagonist and one vision of Black femininity curtails any readerly desire for semi-autobiographical authenticity. Morrison explains in her 2002 Foreword to the novel that unlike Baldwin, Wright and other Black male writers, she was not interested in addressing the " 'Problem' of being a 'Negro' writer.''"[216]

[217] Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, 178.

[218] Morrison, *Sula*, 57.

the difference of the other and the separate uniqueness of the individual, which perhaps can only be achieved after an entry into adulthood.

Throughout their relationship, both women shuttle between an erotic desire for and identification with the other, a dynamic characterizing the unruly structure of their queer intersubjective bond. However, their inability to articulate the difference between identifying and desiring leads the characters to a relational dead-end. By over-identifying with each other they also risk the self-shattering experience of incorporation, loss, and disavowal.[219] As Morrison writes, Nel and Sula's "meeting was fortunate, for it let them use each other to grow on."[220] Here its helpful to think of the difference between the more normative "growing up" and "growing on." Sula's refusal to develop "normally" demonstrates how the linear plot of Bildung must incur fractures when addressing the unique struggles and hopes of African American women. Moreover, the affective and arguably erotic relationship that Nel and Sula share is emblematic of the characters' experience of a queer state of horizontal development that Katherine Bond Stockton calls "growing sideways." In my view, the novel's formal invocation of multiple characters, and co-protagonists, as well as its revision of diachronic linearity points to the "sideways" movement of Nel and Sula's growth and affiliation.[221]

Before these characters can take on the task of assembling a sense of themselves as separate and unique selves, they must first unite in a common bond of desire and identification. The danger

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[219] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1990), 61.
[220] Morrison, *Sula*, 52.
[221] In her essay, "Bio-Science: Genetic Genealogy Testing the the Pursuit of African Ancestry," Alondra Nelson coins a term "affiliative self-fashioning" to describe elective intra-generational bonds that support a collaborative practice of self-making, which might be a useful framework for thinking of Nel and Sula's affiliation. While "affliative self-fashioning" comes about through an engagement with technologies of genealogical study, such as DNA testing, Nelson argues that as an elective bond it "attends… to the weight of individual desires for relatedness, for 'communities of obligation.'" As a deliberate practice of creating bonds of "obligation" between individuals that may or may not share a significant quantity of genetic material, Nelson emphasizes the way one's fantasies about shared familial origins are often framed in and through the creation of lateral forms of attachment.

found in their inability to transcend identification and be caught in an overwhelming "sameness" lies at the heart of Nel and Sula's bond, and is the greatest barrier in their psychic maturation. Ironically, Nel (the character who most identifies with the larger dominant group) is more capable of conceiving herself as a singular ego. Sula, as the protagonist who seems to embody difference, cannot let go of her attachment with Nel to the point of confusing her own self-identity with that of her friend. Their collective process of self-making thus seems to be a practice that is constituted by, but also forecloses, the possibility of intersubjectivity. As Morrison writes: "Because each had discovered years before that they were neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them, they had set about creating something else to be." The "freedom and triumph" denied them in the public sphere of the segregated Middle West is thus attained in the intimate space that they find "in each other's eyes." Since emancipation is denied to them, due to their marginalized race and gender, these girls cultivate a practice of improvising "something else to be."[222]

Broken Bodies

On the first page of *Sula*, Morrison caustically invites the reader into an inhospitable world slowly disintegrating. In this introductory section added late in the novel's composition, Morrison introduces us to the lost neighborhood called the Bottom: "It stood in the hills above the valley town of Medallion and spread all the way to the river. It is called the suburbs now, but when black people lived there it was called the Bottom.… There will be nothing left of the Bottom (the footbridge that crossed the river is already gone). [223] Free from character or dialogue, this de-familiarized description frames "that place" as a character in itself. The lost neighborhood can only be recognized by what replaces it: The Medallion City Golf Course. Like the "nightshade and

[222] Ibid.
[223] Morrison, *Sula*, 3.

blackberry patches" that were torn "from their roots," to make way for this public facility, the community has incurred irreparable damage from the steady movement of social progress. No longer a rural black neighborhood, the Bottom has become an "integrated," thus ostensibly white, suburb. Notably, it is a river that once delineated the border of the neighborhood, but now it serves as a barrier to pedestrians, making the "Bottom" literally and symbolically inaccessible. Like an irreparable break with the past, "the footbridge that crossed the river is already gone," its absence serving as a harbinger that soon "there will be nothing left of the Bottom."

The setting of the novel, "the Bottom" is a social environment normalized to, rather than shocked by, violence. As the loss of a whole neighborhood can attest, death can no longer be defined by is exceptionality, but its banal omnipresence, leaving characters to carry the psychic damages for generations. "Tucked up" or "cut off" from the healthy social landscape, this landscape of rupture manifests not just in the realm of human collectivity, but in the psychic and corporeal fragmentation that many characters endure. Like the geographic containment and segregation of the setting itself, the human body becomes a site of fragmentation in the text. Specifically, Morrison employs the trope of amputation in order to illuminate both the necessity and impossibility of immanent repair. As Nel and Sula "grow on" in this environment of rupture, they begin to recognize that they will never be able to fully make whole what has been lost.

The first character we meet in *Sula* is Shadrack, a man shaped not simply by this broken provincial landscape, but by another more destructive environment: the trenches of France. Unable to access the palpable thrill that he had anticipated upon arriving on the battlefront so far from home, Shadrack instead faces dislocation on the level of the body. Within this space of technological violence, is attention is instead drawn to the proprioceptive feeling of "the bite of a nail in his boot, which pierced the ball of his foot whenever he came down on it." This mundane image of an ill-fitting boot shifts quickly to one of the most horrific images of the novel, which we

see through the eyes of a shocked Shadrack: "But stubbornly, taking no direction from the brain, the body of the headless soldier ran on, with energy and grace, ignoring altogether the drip and slide of brain tissue down its back." [224] This grotesque image of a decapitated headless soldier, running paradoxically "with energy and grace" as his insides come undone, seers into Shadrack's now traumatized memory. This horror will eventually land him in the hospital, obsessively alienated from his own body, especially his hands. He returns to Medallion on foot, a man broken after witnessing modern-day violence ripping apart the lives of others.[225]

An unfortunate onlooker to the brutality of Modern life, the character of Shadrack serves as a harbinger of death for the community. [226] As a result of his trauma, Shad tries to control the unexpectedness of death through the creation of an improvised ritual that takes place every January third. [227] Morrison describes this as a parade which sends a message to the townspeople "that this was their only chance to kill themselves or each other." Notably mistitled "National *Suicide* Day,"

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[224] Morrison, *Sula*, 8.

[225] Challenging a romanticized notion of homecoming that would idealize the town of Medallion past the point of recognition, the author sheds light on the long walks and trans-Atlantic returns left incomplete by generations of post-emancipation African Americans; this same plot of peripatetic return lies at the start of Morrison's 1987 *Beloved* with Paul D's arrival at 124. Unlike Paul D's travels in the early 1870s, Morrison poses Shadrack's difficult journey as one that can only be completed through the intervention of a white governing authority that re-assigns him to an abject "Black" identity.

[226] The novel's turn to African Americans fighting in World War I elucidates a dual historical frame upon which Morrison reflects. As a historic precursor to the technological advancement witnessed during the1960s war in Vietnam, the first world war for African Americans was marked by the military adoption of Jim Crow legislation. It also served as a politically powerful event through which groups such as the NAACP attempted to attain racial justice in the years following the war. As race riots and lynchings increased in the summer of 1919, the same year as Shadrack's and many other veterans' returns, the forces of white supremacy were felt more prominently. As Adriane Lentz-Smith writes in *Freedom Struggles*: "the African Americans who served during World War I, or sent their loved ones to serve, packed their histories along with their hopes…laden with the weight of a stillborn citizenship, the load sometimes felt too heavy to bear." Partly what connects these two wars is the rise of soldiers returning from war inflicted with what was originally referred to as "shell shock." Although Morrison refuses to pose an iconic representation of the war being fought during the early '70s, at the moment of the novel's inception, she arguably turns to the first world war in order to invoke a setting that might aptly house a characterization of trauma. Although the Armed Forces were officially integrated in 1948, racism was endemic to the conservative culture of the military. One consequence of this was that Black inductees were more likely to face combat than white recruits. See Adriane Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009), 11.

[227] Morrison, *Sula*, 14.

the ritual seems to elucidate a call to murder as much as suicide, a misnomer that illuminates the town's confusion over the boundaries of the self.[228] Unlike previous January thirds, where Shad's call to death was never answered, the novel's final depiction of National Suicide Day portrays the community's uncanny participation in the parade. Without Sula, they lack a moral touchstone upon which to measure their own acts; her absence ironically inspiring a heightened level of conflict and suffering in others. Walking to the river and filing down into the tunnel that would have bridged Medallion to the wider world, the community finds itself trapped under the river's depths, "in a chamber of water, deprived of the sun that had brought them there."[229] As the tunnel collapses, it brings not only death, but an ironic homage to the shallowness of their hope. One of the only survivors is ironically Shadrack. The sad truth of this place is that that in his folly, he may have the most sincere reaction of them all.

Morrison's repeated use of the figures of self-injury and alienation from one's body illuminate the underlying struggle to delineate the boundaries of the self. Part of the difficulty of surviving in this novel comes about because of the characters' inherent psychic and social confusion over the borders of subject and object, which manifests on the level of corporeality. As Elizabeth Grosz writes, "Human subjects never simply *have* a body; rather, the body is always necessarily the object and subject of attitudes and judgments. It is psychically invested, never a matter of indifference."[230] Out of all the other characters, Sula is most challenged to conceive of herself as a separate and unique individual – a problem that Morrison depicts through constant threats to her corporeality. Befriending each other on the eve of adolescence right after the world war and Shadrack's return, the early friendship of Sula and Nel is crafted from intimate scenes of shared fantasy and improvisation. This private world of co-imagination, however, is always threatened by

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228 See Katy Ryan, "Revolutionary Suicide in Toni Morrison's Fiction," *African American Review*, 34.3 (Autumn 2000): 389-412.
229 Morrison, *Sula*, 160.
230 Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a corporeal feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994), 81.

the invasion of external forces of public violence that can materialize as quickly as Shadrack's headless soldier. Morrison portrays the bounds of Nel and Sula's affiliation as always mutable and porous, where outside characters and objects often break or interrupt their circle of relation. It is in the corporeal and erotic experiences of the everyday that these risks to their bond appear most extreme.

In scenes of amputation, Morrison illuminates how the social conception of a "whole," complete and idealized self is only applicable to those deemed worthy of social value. As inhabitants of a social world of violence and unbridgeable differences, Nel and Sula navigate dramatic moments of risk to the body and the psyche. Like many Black female characters in the novel who exceed the limits of social categorization, social life can be a fracturing experience. Perhaps most notably, black women's bodily integrity is doubly displaced in the novel, in that it is inscribed by violent histories of slave labor and compulsory reproduction. The most memorable amputee in the novel is Eva Peace, a member of the post-emancipation generation and grandmother to Sula. Eva has only one leg, the other seems to have disappeared or as she jokes "walked off" due to an act of self-amputation to gain a necessary monthly income from insurance money. Eva's requisite act ironically symbolizes the illogic of a social world where caring for others necessitates the risking of one's own body to the point of amputation. Morrison denies the reader the vision of Eva's amputation; however she offers a sensorial representation of Sula cutting her own flesh.

Perhaps the first hint of the unusual provenance of Nel and Sula's bond occurs in a scene that underscores the girls' fraught relationship to their own and each others bodies. One afternoon, on the way home from school, they are met by two Irish boys from the other side of town. The boys' predatory intentions are narrated with an eery clarity: "Maybe they could get an arm around one of their waists, or tear . . ." (54). Faced with the unspoken threat of rape by these young men,

Sula shocks them into submission by cutting off the tip of her finger in order to save herself and Nel:

> Sula's aim was determined but inaccurate. She slashed off only the tip of her finger. The four boys stared openmouthed at the wound and the scrap of flesh, like a button mushroom, curling in the cherry blood that ran into the corners of the slate. Sula raised her eyes to them. Her voice was quiet. "If I can do that to myself, what you suppose I'll do to you?'[231]

This cut to Sula's finger serves as a metaphor for the necessary fractures that make the girls' friendship possible. Morrison's narration of the scene emphasizes the linguistic performativity of Sula's body in combination with her voice – this is one of the first times her voice has been focalized since the start of the novel fifty pages earlier. Playing against the stereotypical discourses of the Black female body as pathologically negating linguistic meaning, the novelist depicts this threat to the girls' corporeality as tied to an entry into language. Sula performs the act on the surface of a slate writing tablet, a not so subtle symbol of language-learning and the disciplinary frames language and writing demand. This scene therefore sheds light on the ways the threat of white masculine violence deconstructs language and the cohesiveness of Sula and Nel's bond by playing with the stereotypical discourses of the Black female body as dangerous, pathological and defying linguistic meaning.

On the one hand, this wounding symbolizes a form of corporeal and psychic fragmentation that future civil rights efforts promised to redress. On the other, it is a willful and self-inflicted amputation Sula makes in an effort to assert her subjectivity outside the objective frames of liberal individualism and civil rights. Sula's turn against the self is therefore done in order to materialize the fact of her own personhood – which even after the Civil rights act of the 1960s is depicted as difficult to achieve. In a 1989 interview with *Time Magazine*, Morrison utilizes the figure of amputation in order to illuminate the deleterious impact of American racial disparity on the attainment of personhood: "Everybody remembers the first time they were taught that part of the human race was Other. That's a trauma. It's as though I told you that your left hand is not part of

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[231] Morrison, *Sula*, 54-5.

your body."[232] Echoing Shadrack's monstrous hands, here the trauma of subjection, of the denial of autonomous personhood, is similarly portrayed in terms of amputation. In depicting the confusion over the integrity of one's own body as a scene of racial subjection, Morrison revises an image first invoked by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skins, White Masks*. As Fanon writes, in the infamous scene of encountering the white man's gaze on a train in France:

> On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed and made myself an object. What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood? But I did not want this revision, this thematization. All I wanted was to be a man among other men.[233]

In *The Melancholy of Race*, Anne Cheng argues that Fanon, in the moment of a racialized mirror stage, experiences an "enforced identification" that leads to "self-objectification and violent fragmentation." She explains that "the black body mourns for the totality/ideal bodily ego it has been told it has forever lost *and* never had, for the black body *is* formed by deformation."[234] As Cheng's reading of Fanon demonstrates, the whole body, and its correspondent complete ego, is foreclosed to the black subject, and also to what I would argue is the queer subject, who has always missed the supposed "ideal bodily ego" that s/he never had access to, in that this completeness can only be fulfilled through a white male subjectivity.

In true Morrison fashion, the novel's formal lyricism points to the characters' immanent longings for a repair of inequality and social division that remains materially impossible manifests in the novel's formal lyricism that Morrison uses to portray Nel and Sula's love – a feeling that is echoed in the reader's own discomforting experience of interpretation that the novel demands. Morrison has written of her creative process as being dependent on a kind of aesthetic practice of repair she calls "re-membering." In a 1984 essay entitled "Memory, Creation, and Writing,"

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232 Bonnie Angelo and Toni Morrison, "Toni Morrison: The Pain of Being Black," *Time Magazine* (May 22, 1989).
233 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 112.
234 Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race* (New York: Oxford UP, 2001), 53-4.

Morrison explains "the process by which the recollections of these pieces coalesce into a part (and knowing the difference between a piece and a part) is creation."[235] Here the author articulates the difference of a piece from a part "in the sense that a piece of a human body is different from a part of a human body." While this heteroglossic method illuminates the diversity of parts that make up this novel of affiliation's whole, the author's metaphoric use of bodily fragmentation throughout her oeuvre reveals that the body of the text is never complete, unified, or stable. *Sula's* transgression lies in precisely its resistance to depicting the racialized body as figuring what Sianne Ngai's calls the "animation" of emotion.[236] Rarely if ever can affect be transformed into politically digestible, or even socially effective, speech. Survival in the novel thus depends upon characters' ability to break apart reality and put it back together again into new and subversive forms of affective and linguistic meaning.

Improvising Affiliation

The narrative of Nel and Sula's affiliation begins as a fantasy of complete incorporation, which conversely dramatizes the ruptures that define their friendship. Morrison describes this early space as a "safe harbor of each other's company" where "they could afford to abandon the ways of other people and concentrate on their own perceptions of things."[237] The creation of this fantasy space, outside the social world, gives energy to the already verdant imaginations of each character. For these co-protagonists, this early innocence requires no need for interpretation, for they are within the story each other tells; they are both listener and co-author. While Morrison frames their experience of identification as a structure of mutual regard, she also makes explicit the girls' orientation outwards, where they watch the world fly by knowing that their gaze is shared by some

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[235] Toni Morrison, "Memory, Creation, and Writing," *Thought* 59.235 (December 1984): 386.
[236] Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2005).
[237] Morrison, *Sula*, 55.

"smiling sympathetic eyes." Like "a movie arranged for their amusement," Nel and Sula spend the summer of their twelfth year "looking for mischief."[238] They find it, not surprisingly, at the banks of the river. Here Morison figures Nel and Sula's affiliation as not simply corporeal, but erotic and thus requiring even more self-reflexive moments of interpretation. In this scene, the two characters sit on the banks of the river in a "square of four leaf-locked trees which promised cooling."

Posed again within a frame, that meta-textually indexes the page itself, Nel and Sula enter into sensual and improvisational play that is both artistic and interpretive. Like artists, they had come to this private place to "contemplate the wildness that had come upon them so suddenly." Morrison describes how their "flesh tightened and shivered in the high coolness." Soon, the characters' initial genital excitement evolves into a more expansive aesthetic game that externalizes the girls somewhat unknowing desires onto the ground below:

> When a generous clearing was made, Sula traced intricate patterns in it with her twig. At first Nel was content to do the same. But soon she grew impatient and poked her twig rhythmically and intensely into the earth, making a small neat hole that grew deeper and wider with the least manipulation of her twig. Sula copied her, and soon each had a hole the size of a cup… Together they worked until the two holes were one and the same. When the depression was the size of a small dishpan, Nel's twig broke. With a gesture of disgust she threw the pieces into the hole they had made. Sula threw hers too… Each then looked around for more debris to throw into the hole: paper, bits of glass, butts of cigarettes, until all of the small defiling things they could find were collected there. Carefully they replaced the soil and covered the entire grave with uprooted grass.[239]

Figuring this grass play as a symbol for Nel and Sula's burgeoning sexuality, Morrison brings attention to the characters' evasion of normative heterosexual femininity by ironically including multiple images of the everyday. Into containers of domestic life (a "cup" and "small dishpan") they place "debris," sullying the supposed sanctity of the familial sphere. Although their fantasy turns on a shared desire to ruin, their game also helps them improvise a new creative bond built from the remnants of broken norms. If read through the lens of their collective sexual awakening, this

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[238] Morrison, *Sula*, 56.
[239] Morrison, *Sula*, 57-8.

passage proleptically hails the characters' later entry into established forms of heterosexuality, a rite-de-passage that results in significant damage to their affiliative bond.[240] On the other hand, the erotic element of this scene also testifies to the necessary interchange between identification and erotic desire in the novel's representation of their affiliation, which necessarily destabilizes the process of gender identification.

Some have approached this subversive imagery as evidence of the text's latent homosexuality. Although Barbara Smith, in 1977 notably called *Sula* a "lesbian novel," there is no ostensible sexual relationship between the two characters.[241] Queer theorist Roderick Ferguson argues in *Aberrations in Black* that " rather than naming an identity, 'lesbian' [in Smith's article] actually identifies a set of social relations that point to the instability of heteropatriarchy and to a possible critical emergence within that instability."[242] To interpret Sula as inhabiting the queer position of the black "female-outsider"[243], as Ferguson via Audre Lorde suggests, is to imagine Morrison's novel performing a queer aesthetic that both formally and thematically breaks through the normative genealogical categories of identity, family, and community. While Sula might be the most believable "queer" character in the text, her "queerness" is more fully expressed in the novel's destabilizing narrative of affiliation.

Without reasserting the primacy of "queerness" in a text particularly resistant to naïvely symptomatic interpretations, it seems just to read Morrison's representation of female affiliation as necessarily invoking a queer refusal to give in to the tide of progress and fully let go of what society

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240 Affiliation in *Sula* is usually cast in tense relationship to eros; in fact, the sexualization of Nel and Sula's triangulated relation also brings with it an experience of loss that is exacerbated by a heightened experience of attachment or what Morrison calls a "desire for possession" (131). Of course for these women possession can only end in the loss of self.

241 Barbara Smith, "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism" in *The New Feminist Criticism*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon, 1985).

242 Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Towards a Queer Critique of Color* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2004), 127.

243 Qtd in Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black*, 126.

demands to be foreclosed. Thus, on its most basic level, their erotic play testifies to the ambiguous interchange of identification and desire foundational to what we might think of as the queer aspect of their intersubjective bond. The erotics of this scene point to a subversive mode of experimentation underpinning the novel's portrait of social life. Highlighting the improvisational quality of their affiliation, Morrison further reframes their queer desire as a more everyday activity of remaking damaged goods into a kind of art. Like jazz improvisers that take the musical "cut" as impetus for a transformative recapitulation of previous melodies, both characters alternate positions of interpretative contemplation and more active art-making. Playing with vernacular found objects, Nel and Sula illuminate what Jorge Veneciano argues, is the way American vernacularism is an implicit strategy "for surviving a series of peculiarly homegrown historical conditions."[244] This collaborative mode of improvisation allows the two to come together to take past damage and re-make it through an aesthetic practice of repair.

The image created by Morrison's narration of this aesthetic game around the destruction of a field of grass, thus resembles the text's matrix-like space where vectors of loss, discovery, damage and repair cross each other within the open frame of the novel. Like a spider's web, this scene ties together these two characters, while catching the reader in its snares; both reader and character struggle to differentiate fantasy from reality, destruction from creation. As Nancy K. Miller's work on feminist writing suggests, this scene may reference the writer as weaver, who makes intricate patterns in order to help us read the text "against the weave of indifferentiation to discover the embodiment in writing of a gendered subjectivity."[245] Morrison poses both Nel and Sula in the metatextual position of the [black] woman writer, struggling to articulate the difference found in black women's affiliation.

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[244] Jorge Daniel Veneciano, "Louis Armstrong, Bricolage, and the Aesthetics of Swing," in *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies*, eds. Robert G. O'Meally, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Farah Jasmine Griffin (New York: Columbia UP, 2004), 13, 21.
[245] Nancy K. Miller, *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (New York: Columbia UP, 1988), 80.

Morrison self-reflexively represents Nel and Sula's transition into adulthood as a struggle of artistic expression. Shifting between a subject/object and subject/subject frame, their affiliation illuminates the dyadic structure of the artist to its subject. Throughout the narrative of their affiliation, Morrison challenges the identificatory equality of their bond by interjecting scenes where Sula as artist perceives Nel as the object of her art, and vise versa. While Sula is described as dangerous like all "artists with no art form," it is Nel who is most challenged to embrace her own artistic sensibility. In a way, we might think of Sula's most powerful artistic achievement as molding Nel's aesthetic appreciation of the world. However, the aesthetic, collaborative aspect of their relation presents new problems. Sometimes feelings of distance, what we might call feelings of suspension, are the most accessible path for these characters to access affective union. Yet, this scene at the river demonstrates that the act of perceiving beauty, implying a distance found in contemplation of the other, can lead to dramatic ethical failures.

The majority of this scene in the grass occurs in silence as the characters communicate through embodied action rather than linguistic dialogue. They exchange looks, mimic each other's actions, and take on positions of dominance and submission at different moments in their play. While this refusal to enter into language might signal feelings of pastoral innocence and safety, it also points to an underlying threat the girls face of collapsing into an abysmal sameness. As Morrison suggests in a 1976 interview with Robert Stepto, Nel and Sula represent "two sides of the same person, or two sides of one extraordinary character."[246] Interpreting them as a single character split in two, or two characters that make up a collective whole, Morrison highlights the problem of differentiation in the characters highly intimate relation.[247] This risk of losing a grounded sense of

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[246] Robert Stepto, "Intimate Things in Place: A Conversation with Toni Morrison" in *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Danielle Taylor-Guthrie (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1994), 13.

[247] Like James Baldwin, Amiri Baraka and other African American writers of the period, Morrison refused the political burden of representativeness that the literary market placed on authors of color. In a way, her refusal to offer one central protagonist and one vision of Black femininity curtails any readerly desire for semi-

personhood is seen elsewhere in the text, for example in the three characters that are referred always in the plural name Eva gives them: the Deweys. Outside the bounds of language and the social, their bond, albeit risky, seems to thrive; once others enter and triangulate their identificatory relation, Nel and Sula must begin to engage in difficult dialogues that make their mutuality harder to maintain.

This fact is symbolized by the ending of the scene – where a young boy named Chicken Little invades Nel and Sula's private space and eventually dies due to the characters' inability to take responsibility and ask for help – a refusal to speak that transforms this accident into a kind of murder. Upon arriving at the river, Chicken interrupts the girl's psychic fantasy, bringing them back to the world of social and linguistic codes. While Nel mocks the boy, "holler[ing] at him through cupped hands," Sula protects him, taking on a sisterly role. A farcical reference to the fable based on Chicken Little, who cries "the sky is falling" after an acorn falls on his head, the boy's name suggests a kind of environmental apocalypse. Ironically turning the fable on its head, Morrison shifts the registers of high and low, as Sula helps chicken climb a "big double beech." Morrison writes: "When they were as high as they could go, Sula pointed to the far side of the river. 'See? Bet you never saw that far before, did you?' 'Uh uh.'"[248] With Sula's aid, the boy is offered a new birds-eye perspective that gives him a sense of elation and growth. The reader isn't given an image of what they see afar on the other side of the river, but what lies below: Nel's body that "looked small and foreshortened." Morrison illuminates the overly visual component of this scene by using terms such

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autobiographical authenticity. Morrison explains in her 2002 Foreword to the novel that unlike Baldwin, Wright and other Black male writers, she was not interested in addressing the " 'Problem' of being a 'Negro' writer." Morrison, *Sula*, xii.

[248] Morrison, *Sula*, 60.

as "peer," "squint" and "foreshorten," language that foreshadows the violent underside of aesthetic "looking" that will come with Chicken's somewhat accidental death.[249]

The subsequent loss of the boy, who literally flies out of the hands of Sula, sheds light on the girls' uncomfortable proximity to social and ethical engagement. Morrison states: "When he slipped from her hands and sailed away out over the water they could still hear his bubbly laughter. The water darkened and closed quickly over the place where Chicken Little sank. The pressure of his hard and tight little fingers as still in Sula's palms as she stood looking at the closed place in the water." The imprint of his hand in hers will haunt Sula, but is also transmuted in their odd response to his funeral. Leaving the church, the girls knew "that the bubbly laughter and the press of fingers in the palm would stay aboveground forever."[250] The memory of his laughter, and the intimacy of his small bare hand, will live on in the continuation of the characters' fraught relationship that repeatedly returns to this primary loss. As a precursor to the future rupture incurred in adulthood, when Sula has an affair with Nel's husband Jude, the scene of Nel and Sula playing in the grass poses imagery of mourning that both signifies future loss and the more proximate loss of Chicken Little that will come two pages later. Like a ritual of mourning a loss they have not yet incurred, this representation revises normative narratives of mourning that are built upon a linear arc of sequential events. Instead of grieving the loss of a recognizable object, Nel and Sula are in the strange predictive moment of missing objects, and thus conceptions of themselves, that are in the process of vanishing. In this way, their private mourning play sets the stage for future scenes of these characters encountering loss, which in their public codes may not be fully apprehendable to the young women.

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[249] This shift of perspective leads Chicken to exclaim excitedly, "I'm a tell my brovver," a sing-song phrase the girls mimic back to him through Morrison's repetition of the phrase a line later. To read the girls repetition of the mispronounced term "brovver" is a subtle reminder of the kinship they share with this young boy. Like a younger brother who they wish to protect, Chicken symbolizes an intimate third party who is intertwined within their own adolescent bond.

[250] Morrison, *Sula*, 61, 66.

The Crisis of Mourning

Morrison's depiction of Nel and Sula's facile and incomplete grief for the death of Chicken Little is a cautionary reminder that language may be the only vehicle to express mourning and adequately account for death in this environment of everyday violence. Part of the tragedy of the boy's death is the townspeople's incapacity to be shocked by it enough to seek out revolutionary change as might be imagined in the post-war era of civil disobedience. The scene of his funeral cannot help but invoke the memory of the 1955 murder of Emmett Till, a subject Morrison explored in her now lost 1988 play "Dreaming Emmett." Unlike Mamie Till's decision in 1955 to have an open coffin at the politically catalyzing funeral of her murdered son Emmett, the unnamed mother of Chicken Little in Morrison's novel keeps the coffin closed, refusing an explicit rendering of his death as a martyrdom. Highlighting the distinction between adult political action and adolescent passivity, Morrison juxtaposes the girls' silence with the wailing mothers in the hall, a contradiction symbolizing the novel's broader ethical injunction to speech and action. The author describes Nel as feeling her legs "turned to granite," while worrying over being "convicted and hanged right there in the pew." Sula, on the other hand, "simply cried. Soundlessly and with no heaving and gasping for breath, she let the tears roll into her mouth." The image of tears rolling into the mouth of Sula dramatizes the character's melancholic position, where the character literally incorporates the tears back into her body. It is the mothers in the church who know when and how to make noise, as Morrison writes: "They spoke, for they were full and needed to say. They swayed, for the rivulets of grief or of ecstasy must be rocked. And when they thought of all that life and death locked into that little closed coffin they danced and screamed."[251] It is only later, upon adulthood that either character is able to comprehend the impulse behind these women's cries of grief.

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[251] Morrison, *Sula*, 65-6.

Turning to the second half of the novel, that depicts Nel and Sula's adult relationship, the breakdown of their affiliation in part comes from an inability to mourn loss or recognize the mutual damages they incurred. Unlike their mothers' generation, for Nel and Sula grief and loss are experienced in private and often in silence. Their feelings of loss ironically emerge not through the attainment of motherhood, the loss of a child or communal suffering, but in sexual and romantic crisis. For Nel this takes the form of her marriage's collapse after Sula's adulterous affair with Jude, a point where the plots of friendship and marriage both collapse. Unlike Nel and Sula's almost seamless incorporation of each other, Nel's bond with Jude has always been characterized by a dynamic of triangulation, a subversion that illuminates the potential ruptures of this familial institution. As they dance together at the reception, in the late evening dither of too much wine and too many visitors, Nel's turn to Jude for "one more look of reassurance," ends in her glimpsing Sula slipping away out the door: "When she raised her eyes to him for one more look of reassurance, she saw through the open door a slim figure in blue, gliding, with just a hint of a strut, down the path toward the road… Even from the rear Nel could tell that it was Sula and that she was smiling; that something deep down in that litheness was amused."[252] Describing Nel's vision of Sula gliding past her open door, Morrison foreshadows the difficult underside of their relationship; the permeability of the self that has been created by their unique affiliation poses a problem to the structure of friendship. It is precisely Sula's lithe amusement that brings havoc to the affiliative love the two women share for each other.

The first scene of private grief thus occurs in the wake of this disastrous affair, where Nel curls on her bathroom floor and remembers the crying of these female mourners. In the starkness of her loneliness, she looks back and re-evaluates the women's keening only to realize that it was not just expressing grief, but "a simple obligation to say something, do something, feel something about

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[252] Morrison, *Sula*, 85.

the dead. They could not let that heartsmashing event pass unrecorded, unidentified." At the point when Nel becomes victimized, and as Sula later remarks, inhabits the familiar social role of "the wronged wife," she also becomes versed in obligations to the communities comprised of those living and dead. The "heartsmashing event" for Nel, ironically is not the loss of a child, but the loss of lateral bonds of attachment, which Jude and Sula embody. This scene, the only that Morrison narrates in the first person, imagines Nel in mock dialogue with both Jude and Sula. And yet the most pathetic image in this scene is Nel's *inability* to cry out – Morrison depicts Nel on the floor waiting "for the oldest cry. A scream not for others, not in sympathy for a burnt child, or a dead father, but a deeply personal cry for one's own pain."[253] Not surprisingly, this howl is continually delayed, until Nel acknowledges the loss of Sula, and is on the brink of repairing the damages left after her death.

As these examples suggest, grief for these characters constitutes a state of estrangement, rather than community. While Nel seeks a feeling of grief alone, Sula finds space for howling in the experience of the sexual act. As the partner most defined by her sexual desires, Sula seeks out lovemaking as a way to fill the gaps left over by Nel's loss. However, these encounters are more about loneliness than connection:

> But the cluster did break, fall apart, and in her pain to hold it together she leaped form the edge into soundlessness and went down howling, howling in a stinging awareness of the endings of things: an eye of sorrow in the midst of all that hurricane rage of joy. There, in the center of that silence was not eternity but the death of time and a loneliness so profound the word itself had no meaning. For loneliness assumed the absence of other people, and the solitude she found in that desperate terrain had never admitted the possibility of other people. She wept then. Tears for the deaths of the littlest things: the castaway shoes of children; broken stems of marsh grass battered and drowned by the sea (…).[254]

This image of self-shattering, or what Nel might call "heartsmashing" is similarly depicted in contrasting dictions of "soundlessness" and "howling," where Sula's cries are internalized into the

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[253] Morrison, *Sula*, 107, 108.
[254] Morrison, *Sul*a, 123.

"eye of sorrow" or the "center of silence." Echoing the earlier scene of burial where Nel and Sula hide their symbolically defiled things, Sula can only grieve for the deaths "of the littlest things," not for actual people. Nel's access to social relations, and her seemingly intrinsic ability to care for and converse with others, is foreclosed for Sula whose loneliness is described as so extreme that it defies linguistic meaning, where "the solitude she found" was in " a desperate terrain [that] had never admitted the possibility of other people." Without Nel, whom "she had clung to… as the closest thing to both an other and a self," Sula is left to turn her "naked hand toward" herself, "discover it and let others become as intimate with their own selves as she was."[255]

Looking back, the death of Chicken Little and Sula's adultery with Jude demonstrates the importance of language as the field through which an accountability of loss and violence must be expressed. This new emphasis on language and fraught conversation highlights the intersubjective aspect of their bond. As we've seen, Nel and Sula's early relationship indicates more an intra-psychic experience of attachment, rather than intersubjctivity, where the boundaries of the self are permeable and the need for linguistic communication minimal. Yet upon adulthood, their affiliation necessarily depends on forms of conversation and dialogic exchange, partly because of their entry into a new stage of sociality and collective responsibility. Jessica Benjamin writes of intersubjectivity as a process in which each subject must experience the contradictory interplay of "destruction and survival, rupture and repair." Framing her conception of intersubjectivity on the analytic relationship, Benjamin illuminates the one element that makes this form of relation possible: dialogue. As Benjamin explains in *Like Subjects, Love Objects*: "The manifold ways in which we now try to grasp the meaning of the unconscious in terms of communication between ourselves and the other subject in the room have opened up the dialogic possibilities of intersubjectivity."[256] Being open to the unconscious fantasies and modes of transference that hover over the scene of analysis

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[255] Morrison, *Sula*, 191, 121.
[256] Jessica Benjamin, *Like Subjects*, *Love Objects* (New Haven: Yale UP: 1995), 24.

allows for a richer conversational exchange and may offer a means of historically opposing parties to publicly acknowledge their mutual injuries. The survival of their affiliation begins to depend on the linguistic field of social responsibility and personal accountability.

The boy's death, which the author repeatedly calls the "something new missing," cannot be mourned, nor completely understood, simply by non-linguistic means of visual or corporeal communication. The culpability implied in contemplating rather than acting in the face of violence comes back to haunt Nel at the end of the novel, where Sula's grandmother Eva accuses her of killing him: "Tell me how you killed that little boy." Nel replies: "I didn't throw no little boy in the river. That was Sula." Eva then counters with: "You. Sula. What's the difference? You was there. You watched, didn't you? Me, I never would've watched. (…) Just alike. Both of you. (...) Sula?"[257] By cautioning Nel to think back to how "she watched" the event take place, and was therefore culpable in Chicken's death, Eva triggers a reenactment of the scene for Nel and the reader. Looking back and re-interpreting the event that she had long ago put aside, Nel thinks: "Now it seemed that what she had thought was maturity, serenity and compassion was only the tranquility that follows a joyful stimulation." Nel's realization that she was indeed contented at the sight of Chicken's disappearance highlights the undercurrents of desire and contemplation that took hold of the two girls that day, a sense of contemplation that eclipses their capacity to speak out and metaphorically account for the boy's death.

The reverse of this sense of accountability in the end is revealed to be a problem of aesthetic contemplation and the distance that emerges from a "loneliness so profound the word itself had no meaning." In her article "'Aesthetic' and 'Rapport' in Morrison's *Sula*," Barbara Johnson focuses on these dynamics of human relationship and artistic contemplation, arguing that the negotiation of their complex union may be the driving force of the novel overall: "If aesthetics is taken as the

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[257] Morrison, *Sula*, 168, 169.

domain of the contemplation of forms, implying detachment and distance, and rapport is taken as the dynamics of connectedness, the two words name an opposition, or at least a set of issues, that are central in *Sula*."[258] The bond of affiliation that remains with Nel and Sula, even after death, must necessarily give space to the force embedded in these terms. What becomes clear throughout the narrative is that it is only through the often futile practice of conversation, one definition of rapport, that each character can access the most lasting element of this aesthetic life. As Nel suggests, "Sula… who made her see old things with new eyes… Sula, whose past she had lived through and with whom the present was a constant sharing of perceptions."[259] Their affiliation brings the ability for both characters to "see" the world differently, but not necessarily communicate this vision to each other or to the outside world.

Failures of a Common Language

Upon Sula's return, after her ten-year absence, initially Nel and Sula's relationship blossoms thanks to their entertaining, humorous and even joyful talk. Yet once Sula has an affair with Nel's husband, any real hope for the characters' communicating present suffering or apology is broken. As Nel thinks after this betrayal, "here she was in the midst of it, hating it, scared of it, and again she thought of Sula as though they were still friends and talked things over." For Nel and Sula, the intimacy they find in each other's eyes as girls becomes more vulnerable as they mature into desiring women. As this final scene demonstrates, upon adulthood both characters are unhappily surprised to discover that the friendship, which they thought was " a safe harbor," in fact was always vulnerable to attacks both from within and outside its embrace. Unbeknownst to the characters in girlhood, their bond of affiliation is established through a repetitive experience of loss: of the self, of

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[258] Barbara Johnson, " 'Aesthetic' and 'Rapport' in Morrison's *Sula*" in *The Aesthetics of Toni Morrison: Speaking the Unspeakable*, ed. Marc. C. Conner (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2000), 9.
[259] Morrison, *Sula*, 95.

the other, and of a shared past. This revelation comes to pass towards the end of the novel, in this dialogic scene of conflict.

Three years after their friendship finally ruptures due to Sula's affair with Jude, Nel visits Sula on her deathbed. This conversation is the moment that comes closest to a scene of apology in the novel, yet it is a scene of language's failure, of its evacuation of meaning. Here the characters' dialogue moves from formula to insult, both inadequate forms of "talking things over." Nel's pointed queries about Sula's affair with Jude lead to abstract explanations by Sula that Nel can't fathom; the scene falls finally into a painful exchange of insults that emote envy, jealousy and heartbreak. Their broken dialogue testifies to the tragic inability Nel and Sula have in conceiving of themselves (and each other) as separate and unique subjects worthy of ethical engagement. Picking up where the conversation seemed to have left off years before, their dialogue necessarily attends to the multiple damages to their affiliation. What Nel calls a "difficult conversation," is a conversation that was begun years before.

The scene's structural incoherence illuminates how Nel and Sula's story will fail to find completion; each speech act reads almost like a "piece" of a greater body of relation that can never be fully re-constituted. In short, the characters fail to find a common language to understand each other. One point of evidence of the negative feeling that consumes the majority of the conversation is Morrison's use of negation in the majority of the scene's declarative sentences:

> "You **can't** have it all, Sula." (…)
> "Why **didn't** you think about me? **Didn't** I count?" (…)
> "I **never** loved **no** man because he was worth it. Worth **didn't** have **nothing** to do with it" (…)
> ["We were friends"
> "Oh Yes. Good friends."](…)
> "If we were such good friends, how come you **couldn't** get over it?"[260]

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[260] Morrison, *Sula*, 142-5.

The words "no," "not", "never," "can't" and "didn't' subsume the page. In the midst of this jumble of negative emotions and exclamations, however, the unwieldy and inarticulate affects of love, melancholia and the foreclosed hope of reconciliation seem to linger on. These feelings shadow the only affirmative comment agreed upon by both characters: "We were friends," states Nel. Sula responds: "Oh Yes. Good friends." In the end, this recognition of mutuality – that they were "friends" fails to linguistically signify the contradictory mix of feelings their love encompasses. It is a statement that is simply referential and thus falls short of fully expressing emotion. Encountering the characters in dialogue invokes in the reader a turning back to earlier scenes where Nel and Sula found joy, laughter and freedom in conversation. In the end it is Nel, and not Sula, who withholds forgiveness and outward expressions of love in the face of her friend's death. And yet the circle of this conversation, that seems to ebb and flow throughout the text, continues on even after this final moment of lived exchange. The tragedy of their bond lies in the fact that their reunion, and mutual accounting for the pain of the other, can only come in the partner's absence after death.

However, in the scene's dialogic failure, these lines still embody what Morrison calls a "living language." She writes of language in her Nobel Prize acceptance speech: "Its force, its felicity is in its reach toward the ineffable. Be it grand or slender, burrowing, blasting, or refusing to sanctify; whether it laughs out loud or is a cry without an alphabet, the choice word, the chosen silence, unmolested language surges toward knowledge, not its destruction."[261] The power of this two-sentence exchange is found in the way that the choice word "friends" emits a flare of melancholic feeling that cycles through the text until it finds partial resolution on the last page of the novel. Without turning their artistic skills to the novel's primary medium – that is the literary, "living" language – Morrison shows these characters to never be able to fully avoid the danger lurking in their emotional connection: the injury to the self that comes in the collapse of difference. In its

[261] Toni Morrison, "The Noble Lecture in Literature," in *What Moves at the Margin*, 203.

fragmentation, this broken conversation demands the reader to imagine alternatives left unfulfilled in the novel as a whole. Perhaps their affiliation might have survived in life if the characters had been able to bring back the affective and embodied play of childhood into everyday speech and use these valences for interpretative ends. The work the characters find impossible is therefore left for the reader to perform.

Tentative Circles of Affiliation

In the end Morrison seems to elide an explicit staging of apology or forgiveness in the novel. Ironically, in her own reflection on the novel the author frames *Sula* as a story about just that: forgiveness among women: "The women forgive each other – or learn to. Once that piece of the galaxy became apparent, it dominated the other pieces… The things to be forgiven are grave errors and violent misdemeanors, but the point is less the thing to be forgiven than the nature and quality of forgiveness among women – which is to say friendship among women."[262] My reading has shown that the dialogic work necessary for the completion of forgiveness, the accounting and reception of those "violent misdemeanors" remains to be seen in the text. However, Morrison's articulation of forgiveness as relational, a "nature and quality" – a "friendship among women" – can be seen in the lingering feeling of affiliation that remains with Nel after Sula's death. If the "quality of forgiveness among women" is constitutive of female friendship it is shown to only come as a deferral. In the end, it is the reader who takes on the ambivalences implicit to this affiliative work of repair.

Central to the task of reading for narratives of affiliation is the tricky account of the narrative's generic open-endedness and lack of closure. My reading of the conclusion of *Sula* therefore seeks to balance the formal coherence of Morrison's lyric with the narratological

[262] Morrison, "Memory, Creation, and Writing," 386.

incoherence I find on the level of chronology and plot. As the novel proleptically mourns the loss of African American collectivity to come in 1965, it also ironically grieves for the impending loss of Sula. Unlike many novels with titular female characters, such as *Anna Karenina* and *Madame Bovary*, Sula faces her emplotted death early on. As Morrison explains in 1976, "I wanted Sula to be missed by the reader. That's why she dies early. There's a lot of book after she dies..."[263] Critical to the final denouement of the novel of affiliation is the need for Sula to be missed both by Nel and by the reader. Like Morrison's dedication to the novel, when one misses somebody before they are gone, there can arise a powerful feeling of "sheer good fortune" that comes with the recognition of love.

At the close of the novel, Morrison depicts the scene of Nel finally missing Sula, the moment of recognition the novel has been moving towards since its start. Sula's death serves as a transitional moment in the town's history, and in the narrative as a whole. Seeking to escape the burden of corporeality that plagued her throughout life, Sula yearns for the transcendence that death could bring. Morrison imagines her floating "over and down the tunnels… until she met a rain scent and would know the water was near, and she would curl into its heavy softness and it would envelop her, carry her and wash her tired flesh always." Situating her death as engulfment, which washes her "tired flesh" away – mistakenly replaced with its rhyme "always" – the author analeptically invokes the drowning of Chicken Little where Shadrack responds to Sula that he will hold close this memory "always." Sula's death therefore looks back to the symbolic loss of the young boy, yet also serves as harbinger for the greater apocalypse that will come when the townspeople join Shadrack on an ironically successful "National Suicide Day." More importantly, however, this scene of death invokes the absent presence of Nel. After her passing, Sula smiles and thinks "Well, I'll be damned," "it didn't even hurt. Wait'll I tell Nel."[264] However the characters'

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263 Stepto, "Intimate Things in Place: A Conversation with Toni Morrison," 15.
264 Morrison, *Sula*, 149.

bond might be ruptured in life, Morrison gestures towards a different, incoherent conversation that takes form out of the liminal space of the afterlife.

Twenty years later in 1965, Nel belatedly receives this message when she returns to Sula's grave. After her caustic and destabilizing visit to Eva Peace in the Beechnut nursing home, Nel ends up sadly wandering through the cemetery: "Sula was buried there along with Plum, Hannah and now Pearl… each flat slab had one word carved on it. Together they read like a chant: PEACE 1895-1921, PEACE 1890-1923, PEACE 1910-1940, PEACE 1892-1959. They were not dead people. They were words. Not even words. Wishes, longings."[265] The chant-like repetition of the word "peace," emphatically capitalized here, poses a counter-testimony to the environment of suffering and death that characterizes the town of Medallion, of which Chicken Little's death was an ironically "peaceful" part. In repeating this word, Morrison both heightens its connotation as a "wish" for a future free from suffering, and also complicates the linguistic significance in a destabilizing chain of signifiers. Like the breakdown of simple linguistic referent, history becomes a-linear as well, where time is measured in cycles of birth and death, the "circles of sorrow" that mark the generational passing of the Peace family.[266]

On the last pages, Morrison interweaves the contradictory emotional valences of rupture and repair in her depiction of Nel's visit to Sula's grave. Here Nel finally realizes that after more than 20 years, she had really missed Sula, and not her lost husband Jude. [267] In grief Nel calls out: "'We was girls together,'… 'O Lord Sula,' she cried, "girl, girl, girlgirlgirl." Nel's loud, long cry of mourning, according to the narrator, "had no bottom" and "had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow." Symbolically echoing the earlier bond the women shared, this cry expresses the overwhelming feeling we have been waiting for; yet its belatedness speaks to the limits of achieving any form of

[265] Morrison, *Sula*, 170-71.
[266] Morrison, *Sula*, 174.
[267] Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985), 27.

redress in this novel. Their affiliation can live on only in this unmoored feeling of loss that has no single linguistic referent but only a jumble of repeated words collapsing into each other. Even if Morrison's representation of Nel's long loud cry as the last line of the novel in part seeks to aesthetically repair the fragments that came before, it still portrays this reparation in the unstable shape of a circle: an image of repetition and cyclicality.

Thus, in the end, one cannot take this instance of linguistic rupture as either redemptive or representative of the irreparable broken-ness of Nel and Sula's friendship. The novel's traumatic ruptures do not invoke pure essence or deliberate finality. Rather, I take these formal repetitions as an injunction to re-read and re-engage with the narrative's disparate parts that push against the novel's sorrowful and anti-climactic conclusion. In my view, the novel's improvisational disorder asks us to find the ambivalent middle ground between Sula's dangerous bodily excess and Nel's mean discursive propriety and hold open the possibility for a more just world of dialogic relation. In my view, this might involve an interpretive space where collaboration and improvisation can aid in cultivating a more flexible form of attachment differences that is neither projective nor manipulative, but bounded by a respect for the other as singular being. In its failures, the novel *Sula* demonstrates that affiliation not only makes possible the interpretative work of repair, but that the reverse is also true: stories of affiliation can only exist within narratives that picture repair as an inevitable part of the cycle of coming into relation with others, however similar they may seem.

Like Morrison, I seek to recover hope from the long 1960s without idealizing the era as a key to national redemption. In my work I therefore look to fiction as a register of the era's struggles for new forms of sociality that emerge when individuals are challenged to confront the psychic difference within themselves and go beyond ideology. Morrison's portrait of African American women's collectivity models a form of diversity that begins with the meeting of two subjects, what Lorde might call "the power of the erotic," and is thus comprised from the variations of difference

embedded within seemingly stable categories of identity. Her novel dares us to move beyond an anglocentric conception of multiculturalism and explore new ways of thinking about inter-ethnic and inter-racial solidarity that can account for what Morrison calls the "difficult task of becoming a person." Nel and Sula's story thus illuminates the crucial terms of self-reflexivity, improvisation and interpretation when working through intersecting differences – ethical values that are urgently familiar to any individual who has felt the loneliness of being misrepresented and misunderstood. To take on this task, we might together have to step into what was, in the end, Sula's sole achievement: "hers was an experimental life."

CHAPTER 3

Improbable Companions: Interspecies Affiliation in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*

Early in 1973, Margaret Atwood published a short essay entitled "Travels Back" in the January issue of *Maclean's*. Here the author muses over the loss of place, and corresponding loss of the past, that characterizes her return home to the wilds of Quebec: "Refusing to acknowledge where you come from (…) is an act of amputation: you may become free floating, a citizen of the world (and in what other country is that an ambition?) but only at the cost of arms, legs or heart."[268] Tempering the freedom found in becoming a "citizen of the world," Atwood ties this transnational identity to the symbol of amputation, asserting how one can never fully divorce one's self from sites of origin. To do so would produce a sense of suffering akin to the loss of "arms, legs or heart." However, for Atwood's unnamed heroine, like for Toni Morrison's Sula, psychic and corporeal amputation are constitutive aspects of becoming an ethical subject capable of building affiliations. Analogous to Sula's disjunctive return to the "Bottom," Atwood's return to roots does not imagine home or family as easily accessible truths. Instead, her fiction demonstrates that unless individuals confront their own fragmented psyches through an imaginative process of interpretation, these ancestors will remain cut off.

In Atwood's second novel *Surfacing,* published in 1972, the space of childhood and adolescence becomes a fertile ground for an affiliative repair of human subjectivity that depends on a provisional acceptance of the difference within. The novel's return to roots offers a window onto an alternative set of affiliations, for Atwood's protagonists are shaped not simply by where they came from, but by multiple sites that constitute the transnational subtext of her fiction. Although Atwood's early literary career was overtly dedicated to crafting a uniquely Canadian literary nativism,

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[268] Margaret Atwood, "Travels Back," in *Curious Pursuits: Occasional Writing* (London: Virago, 2005): 12.

her essays and literary criticism point to a paradoxical cosmopolitan approach to national and regional identity. In fact, Atwood's conception of Canada as holding a distinct national culture emerged while living abroad in the United States and Europe. After completing her undergraduate degree in Toronto, Atwood began a PhD in literature at Harvard University and lived in Massachusetts off and on from 1961 to 1967. In a 1981 address at her alma mater, entitled "Canadian American Relations," Atwood writes: "There I was, at one of the greatest universities in the world, studying third-rate poems and dreary journals and the diaries of Cotton Mather, and why? (…) If Old American laundry lists were of interest at Harvard, why should not old Canadian laundry lists be of interest in Toronto, where they so blatantly weren't? (…) It was at Harvard then that I first began to think seriously about Canada."[269] Here the author suggests that it was through reading early American literatures that she began to consider Canadian literature as an art form unique to its place and history. Her commentary is suggestive of the transnational and intertextual field from which particular national literatures develop.

Like Baldwin and Morrison, Atwood took part in a literary counter-public in dialectical tension with the dominant Anglo-American literature on the continent, a patrilineal tradition that goes back to John Winthrop and Cotton Mather. Reading Atwood in relationship to an African American literary tradition, this chapter is indebted to what Edward Said calls a contrapuntal reading: the "simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts."[270] Canadian and African-American authors both resist and revise the "dominating discourse" of Anglo-American interracial fraternity and demand us to reassess our understanding of what counts as "American" literature. Brought together, their novels of the long 1960s point to the hemispheric development of a North American narrative of affiliation that narrates within and against an Anglo-American

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[269] Margaret Atwood, "Canadian-American Relations," *Second Words* (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1982): 383-4.
[270] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993): 51.

national literary tradition. As Martin Luther King intimated in his celebrated 1967 Massey Lecture series in Toronto, Canada has always been in close kinship with Black America, since its mythic position as a site of potential freedom during the antebellum period.[271]

Setting *Surfacing* on the border of the Quebecois wilderness, Atwood points to Quebec's allegiance with a global movement for de-colonization that was forged across national and regional borders during the era. The novel reflects the conflict over national identity and belonging central to the narrative of affiliation. Although her text does little to illuminate the racialized dimensions of empire, against which the majority of these efforts at de-colonization were fought, this novel portrays U.S./Canadian kinship within a colonial and imperialist framework. Atwood's readers at the time of the novel's publication would easily contextualize the setting with the recent 1970 October Crisis, in which the Canada's central government administered martial law in response to "domestic terrorist" activities by the Quebecois Separatist movement, Front de Liberation du Quebec (FLQ). The activities of the FLQ were part of a hemispheric effort in former French and British colonies, such as Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Barbados, to shore up cultural identity and political autonomy for those nations wedged between competing first world imperialist powers. At the same time, the Canadian federal government's dramatic police response to the FLQ was part of a greater trend in the Trudeau administration to squelch any claims for sovereignty or social justice by marginalized groups – in 1969, Trudeau officially denied the rights to sovereignty and redress of Canada's native indigenous communities in support of liberal justice. Although Atwood fails to take up a rigorous narration of the racial systems that shaped Canada's responses to decolonization and indigenous movement, she provides us with a helpful framework to think through these histories within the terms of gender and species.

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[271] Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2004), 1.

From the novel's first page, Atwood invites us into a world in the midst of a disruptive series of transitions, as the first-person narrator states: "I can't believe I'm on this road again, twisting along past the lake where the white birches are dying, the disease is spreading up from the south, and I notice they now have sea-planes for hire."[272] In her figuration of environmental and cultural loss, Atwood prefigures the apocalyptic imaginary Morrison brings to her depiction of the Bottom. The heroine is disturbed by these industrial threats to the environment, her home, what Rob Nixon calls a "slow violence" emblematized in the image of the dying white birches infected by a disease that "is spreading up from the south" – the neo-colonial presence of the United States.[273] And yet, the heroine's journey is a return to "dark," strange origins, to a home that is diseased not simply from without, by external forces of white industrial imperialism, but uncannily from within. In its strange familiarity, the landscape illuminates a greater crisis over psychic, social and national borders that shapes the protagonist's creative movement towards repair. Upon her return, she is met with a "home ground, foreign territory" and must improvise a new engagement to this altered world, in which foreignness might be the only source from which familiar attachments can thrive.

Echoing the vision of alterity posed in Baldwin's representation of affiliation, Atwood illuminates the gendered and linguistic hierarchies that structure an experience of the uncanny. As Julia Kristeva writes in *Strangers to Ourselves*, a confrontation with the uncanny collusion of imagination and reality offers an opportunity to explore the ethical and political dimensions of psychoanalysis. What emerges is a new cosmopolitanism, "cutting across governments, economies, and markets, might work for a mankind whose solidarity is founded on the consciousness of its unconscious – desiring, destructive, fearful, empty, impossible."[274] Rather than the implied brotherhood of filial or monarchic traditions, a politics of "strangeness" welcomes in a new mode of

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[272] Margaret Atwood, *Surfacing* (New York: Anchor, 1998), 1.
[273] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2012).
[274] Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, Trans. Leon S. Roudiez, (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), 192.

solidarity that is self-reflexively aware of its own capacity for destruction and rejection. Kristeva later exclaims that psychoanalysis "brings us the courage to call ourselves disintegrated in order not to integrate foreigners and even less so to hunt them down, but rather to welcome them to that uncanny strangeness, which is as much theirs as it is our own."[275] In *Surfacing* Atwood portrays a character's burgeoning awareness of her own disintegration, a recognition that reveals new situated knowledges of the slow violence lurking within this androcentric imperial landscape. By representing the gendered and linguistic elements of the heroine's psychological journey towards attachment and repair, the novel invokes an interpretive practice that extends beyond its somewhat whitewashed storyline. In order to attend to the broader ethical consequences of this novel's vision of repair, it is necessary to shine new light on the transnational flows circulating just underneath the surface of this insular novel.

Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* traces the story of one woman's incredible escape. Half way through the novel, the un-named heroine runs off alone into the woods that surround her childhood home. Weeks earlier, she had returned to this small Quebecois village in search of her lost father; she was accompanied on her journey by a small group of friends seeking respite from city life: a married couple, David and Anna, and her lover Joe. As the novel progresses, the heroine experiences an unsettling realization that women's subjugation is omnipresent, even in a natural space seemingly free from the confines of civilization. Rather than endure her fracturing feelings of alienation, the heroine turns away from the group and creatively transforms alienation into solipsism.[276] After her friends and lover learn of her father's confirmed death, they decide to go back to the city. While they load the boat for the return journey, the heroine flees into the reeds.

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[275] Ibid.

[276] Atwood's novel thereby mirrors the movement of Morrison's *Sula*, in which solitude and imaginative projection are central to Nel and Sula's path towards affiliation and mutual repair.

They call out her name, but "it's too late, [she] no longer has a name."[277] Watching them depart, she realizes she has achieved her goal: "It's true, I am by myself; this is what I wanted, to stay here alone. From any rational point of view I am absurd; but there are no longer any rational points of view." This statement rejects the social world, celebrating the fulfillment of the heroine's solipsistic desire for solitude. Taking into account the character's profound estrangement, which renders human relation seemingly impossible, how can this story also be one of affiliation?

Surfacing charts the peril that narcissism brings to sustaining bonds of affiliation. And yet, this chapter will demonstrate that the solipsistic retreat into the self ironically renews the heroine's capacity to revitalize human sociality – which like the birch trees that line her island residence, is gravely polluted. Without the maintenance of individual singularity, affiliation is impossible. In Baldwin's *Another Country*, and more dramatically in *Sula*, we have glimpsed the dangers of losing oneself in bonds of affiliation. More than any other novel, however, *Surfacing* emphasizes the necessity to cultivate an independent and imaginative sense of self before any social affiliation can take root. As Atwood stated at Bard College in 2010: " 'the necessity for creative autonomy that transcends doctrine' is the gift all … novelists ultimately need to have, and that is the gift I would wish for you. It will allow you to work in communities, but not to be entrapped by them."[278] In this third chapter of *Stumbling Toward Repair*, I move beyond a focus simply on human community to explore the improbable affiliations that develop between the heroine and non-human beings, showing interspecies affiliation to be an unlikely model for bridging social differences.

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[277] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 181.

[278] Margaret Atwood, "Year of the Flood Blog," http://marg09.wordpress.com/2010/05/23/bard-college-commencement-address-and-mary-mccarthy-award/.

Narcissism and the Challenge to Affiliation

At the time of the novel's composition, during the early 1970s, Atwood became critically aware of the burgeoning feminist movement taking place in the United States and the European continent. While Atwood defined herself as a feminist, she avoided the theoretical debates that captured the political imagination of U.S.-based activists during the era. In response to her reading of the first feminist anthology *Sisterhood is Powerful*, which was published in 1970, Margaret Atwood wrote to fellow author Margaret Lawrence, "I hate groups so much that it would be a real sacrifice for me to join [the Women's Liberation movement], but I might just try it. Yes I can see why you wouldn't want to get to deep into the women's lib theory part of it; but I feel that just writing the truth is in a way a better contribution."[279] Throughout her first published works including her first novel *The Edible Woman* (1969) and her books of poetry *The Circle Game* (1964) and *Power Politics* (1971), Atwood joined authors interested in the personal effects of patriarchal domination in depicting love and domesticity as stages for political resistance. Her blunt statement that she "hates groups" speaks to the portrayal of affiliation in *Surfacing* as endangering the autonomous boundaries of the self. Here, the heroine fears her subjectivity will become subsumed by the ideological requirements of the larger group, and thus becomes alienated to the point of hallucination. The threatening underside of group formation is therefore found in the compulsory assimilation of the one into the many, a process that can destroy individual singularity and freedom. Wary of the loss of individuality that political solidarity can bring, Atwood turns instead to imagine the ethics that would be central to any intersubjective form of solidarity.

Throughout the novel *Surfacing*, Atwood depicts heterosexual love as easily tainted by sexual exploitation and emotional manipulation. During their retreat into the woods, the normative romance between the heroine and Joe is fragmented as the heroine becomes more conscious of his

[279] Margaret Atwood, *The Red Shoes* (Toronto: Harper Flamingo Canada, 1998), 246.

unfair and aggressive demands. Thus, Atwood encapsulates the heroine's alienated escape from society within the story of her faltering relationship. The fictional breakdown of this love affair indexes the struggle between the sexes that played out during the height of the 1970s feminist movement. For example, radical feminist Shulamith Firestone portrayed heterosexual love, as a base, parasitic coupling in her 1970 *The Dialectic of Sex*, echoing Marx's conception of the bourgeois class as parasitic: "So if women are a parasitical class living off, and at the margins, of the male economy, the reverse is true: (male) culture is parasitical, feeding on the emotional strength of women without reciprocity."[280] Here heterosexuality becomes defined as a fraught erotic bond in which men and women are caught in an abusive cycle of passivity and aggression, domination and submission, which resembles the worst asymmetries in nature.[281] This parasitic relation was also seen as central to the increased anxiety over men and women's inherent narcissism that made cross-gender forms of affiliation difficult to imagine. Because radical feminists like Firestone narrowly defined male and female relations as exploitative, they often overlooked the recuperative presence of affiliative love in cross-gender bonds of relationship.[282]

In *Surfacing*, narcissism first appears as a positive response to gender oppression, yet eventually becomes a force that threatens to erase any sense of responsibility or respect for the other. [283] As Jessica Benjamin asserts in her 1988 study *The Bonds of Love*, "the controversy about Oedipus and Narcissus, superego and ego ideal, is really a debate about sexual difference and

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[280] Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: the Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1970), 122.

[281] Harkening to the fundamental inequalities assumed in capitalism, Firestone utilizes an image of asymmetrical relation from the natural world: the parasite. This parasitic image was not only used in Marxist liberation discourse, but also was implicitly found in the early writings of mid-century environmentalists who sought to illuminate the Recent theories on bacteria and other organisms that cohabit within the human body speak back to Firestone's narrow use of this biological entity.

[282] This is not to repeat the anti-feminist claim of the inherent narcissism of the 1960s moment, as Christopher Lasch so strongly articulated in his 1979 *The Culture of Narcissism.*

[283] So too does this form of heterosexuality presuppose a white middle-class frame.

domination."[284] If Oedipus is the symbol of differentiation, categorization and the subject's entry into the law of social (qua heterosexual) relations, Narcissus is its opposite, an unwitting return to a pre-social state of immature oneness with the maternal and its erasure of sexual difference.[285] Atwood's novel illustrates how narcissism eclipses the self's actual capacity to create a place of mutuality, where the loved object cannot be seen as a separate subject, but only an identificatory projection of the self. The heroine's narcissism clearly impacts her ability to relate to others, as her friends and lover become vehicles for the character's self-interested journey of repair. Ironically, the most explicit narration of sex in the text occurs in a scene where the heroine's lover is viewed as an object she must possess in order to achieve her desire to conceive new life. Seducing Joe in the forest under the moonlight, after a number of scenes in which she rejects his advances, the heroine mates with him only to reproduce. Surrounded by flora and fauna, the heroine's journey into nature takes precedence over human sociality; she manipulates Joe into fulfilling her maternal need:

> He's holding back (…) but I'm impatient, pleasure is redundant, the animals don't have pleasure. I guide him into me, it's the right season, I hurry. He trembles and I can feel my lost child surfacing within me, forgiving me, rising from the lake where it has been prisoned for so long, its eyes and teeth phosphorescent; the two halves clasp, interlocking like fingers, it buds, it sends out fronds. (…) I press my arms around him, smoothing his back; I'm grateful to him, he's given me the part of himself I needed.[286]

Taking on the position of dominance, the heroine instrumentalizes her lover, and the sexual act – rendering his emotions mute. Atwood's image of "two halves clasping" could have symbolized the bodies of the lovers entwined in the sexual act; yet within the context of the scene's primary narrative goal, this image more aptly designates the two halves of woman and embryo, where the male body is reduced to its reproductive capacity. As the narrator dramatically asserts, "pleasure is

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[284] Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love* (New York: Random House, 1988), 159.

[285] 1970s and '80s feminist theorists heralded this return to the maternal, to a pre-oedipal state of union rather than separation, as they saw it to be a rich terrain to counteract the primacy of the Odeipal theory and its foreclosure of female agency. Despite its power within feminist circles at that time, the pre-oedipal was still read by many critical theorists as Freud's original description: primary narcissism.

[286] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 173.

redundant"; thus sex becomes an intra-psychic vehicle for the protagonist to reincorporate her past losses and repair herself. Her gratitude for Joe does not stem from the recognition of his human singularity or emotional depth, but simply the physical "part of himself" that will allow her to conceive new life. While the novel explores women's resistance to male exploitation, especially of their maternal bodies, this scene oddly illustrates the reverse: here the heroine regards her lover as simply a tool for her own recuperative needs, a narcissistic position that overlooks his singular subjectivity.

And yet, in the novel's transitional scene of diving and surfacing, the heroine's narcissism begins to resemble the more positive state of the pre-oedipal, where egoistic obsession begins to loosen into a feeling of complex mutuality with the external world. Here Atwood revises the myth of Narcissus, posing the heroine not only looking into the water and seeing her own reflection, but surpassing it to explore what lies below its surface: "my other shape was in the water, not my reflection but my shadow, foreshortened, outline blurred, rays streaming out from around the head."[287] This titular scene underscores how the heroine utilizes narcissism as a vehicle to achieve a different kind of psychic reflection, in which inner and outer worlds asymmetrically converge. Anti-feminist, or traditional, Freudian-based psychoanalysts frequently held that narcissistic unity could only be broken by the interjection of an authoritarian father figure, who disciplines the immature one-ness assumed in the infant's primary union with the mother. Christopher Lasch, building on his 1979 *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, argued in the fall 1981 edition of *New Left Review* that the feminist movement and general legacy of the 1960s social movements was the rise of a "culture of narcissism" which had occurred thanks to the degradation of the patriarchal family and deflected efforts at the true problem: the rise of the corporation and

[287] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 151.

consumer society.[288] However, Lasch's critique of feminist psychoanalysts such as Nancy Chodorow and Jessica Benjamin overlooked this mutuality of the pre-oedipal state, in an over-emphasis on the infant qua male's narcissistic emasculation. In their response to Lasch in the same issue of the *NLR*, Michele Barrett and Mary McIntosh, citing Chodorow and Benjamin, re-frame the concept of the pre-oedipal through the subjectivity and autonomy of the mother herself, onto which the child projects its desires and fears: "More accurately we can say that primary narcissism is here to some extent rehabilitated and given a positive rather than exclusively negative inflection. In this sense the focus of this particular approach is to argue, within a general psychoanalytic perspective, for the revaluation of 'mothering'."[289]

Atwood's revision of the myth of Narcissus positions the heroine not simply as a daughter, but as a woman on the precipice of becoming a mother, a role that will demand her to balance psychic ambivalence and work through various forms of loss and separation. In this sense, Atwood echoes Jessica Benjamin's revision of this psychoanalytic structure, when she asserts in *Like Subjects*, *Love Objects*, that "an effort to demystify the maternal relationship reveals its double-sidedness: a complex struggle of destruction and recognition already well under way in the pre-oedipal dyad."[290] Atwood's representation amazingly enacts a symbolic movement away from Freudian narcissism and towards object-relations psychology, which was inaugurated in part by Melanie Klein's revision of Freud's reading of this state.[291] Klein, like later feminist psychoanalysts who focused on the pre-oedipal, diverged from Freud's emphasis on the oceanic utopian one-ness of infantile narcissism, claiming that from infancy, humans perceive the world as comprised of good and bad parts of a whole, reflective of their own creative and destructive impulses. No longer originating a

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288 Christopher Lasch, "The Freudian Left and Cultural Revolution," *New Left Review*. 1.129 (September-October, 1981): 23-34.
289 Barrett, Michele and Mary McIntosh, "Narcissism and the Family: A Critique of Lasch," New Left Review. 1.129 (September-October, 1981): 46.
290 Jessica Benjamin, *Like Subjects*, *Love Objects*, 99.
291 See Julia Kristeva, *Melanie Klein*, 58.

symmetrical union, the relation between mother and child is dangerously, and productively, asymmetrical. As will become clear in the following scene, the heroine's supposed infantile self-interestedness is tempered by a mature, pragmatic relationship to the varied objects she encounters in the natural environment.

Here, the heroine may project various versions of herself onto the outside world; however, she also is faced with a difficult and mediated experience of perception. In order to make meaning of this dive, the heroine improvises new modes of interpretation that are now possible thanks to a renewed sense of intuition and induction:

> My eyes straining, not knowing what shape to expect, handprint or animal, the lizard body what horns and tail and front-facing head, bird or canoe with stick paddlers; or a small thing, an abstraction, a circle, a moon; or a long distorted figure, stiff and childish, a human… It was there but it wasn't a painting, it wasn't on the rock. It was below me, drifting towards me from the furthest level where there was no life, a dark oval trailing limbs. It was blurred but it had eyes, they were open, it was something I knew about, a dead thing, it was dead.[292]

Underneath the surface, the protagonist does not know "what shape to expect" and holds a stance of anticipation. There is no general law or principle against which to measure this experience; the heroine must therefore induce meaning from this uncanny, yet observable, new world. Setting out an odd series of images that connote the painted objects the heroine might encounter on the underwater rock face, Atwood mixes idea and object, sign and signification. These objects include living forms such as birds, lizard bodies, and animals; symbolic abstractions that she lists as "circles, moons, a small thing"' and finally the most distorted of them all, "a figure, stiff and childish, a human." Like a chain of signification, this list of possible objects on the underwater cliff foreshadows the difficult task of interpretation that will follow. Once the protagonist turns inward, however, she will need to suspend judgment, as straightforward linguistic systems no longer work. Faced with a shifting world, Atwood's heroine must sift through various connotations to achieve some kind of balance between internal and external reality, natural and supernatural truth.

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[292] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 151-2.

In the scene's denouement of the heroine's memory of abortion, the reader learns that the disparate signs are strangely united within an uncanny object that defies signification. Not a cliff painting, it is described as a murky object below her: "It was below me, drifting towards me from the furthest level where there was no life, a dark oval trailing limbs. It was blurred but it had eyes, they were open, it was something I knew about, a dead thing, it was dead."[293] The "dead thing" at the lake-bottom seems familiar; to recognize this object as a lost part of her self, the protagonist must utilize a corporeal epistemology that accompanies the psychic process of memory. Carrying the object to the surface, the heroine imagines its "drowned face" as layered with various symbolic identities. At first, she misinterprets it as the body of her dead brother; soon she realizes, however, that "it wasn't ever my brother I'd been remembering, that had been a disguise" it is her lost fetus she was coerced to abort months before. The author formally highlights this temporal and spatial disjunction by setting forth a series of narrative analepses. In each iterative flashback, the reader accompanies the heroine back to this "drowned face" in the past. As the heroine re-interprets its meaning to repair its rupturing effects, so too does the reader.

Like all narratives of affiliation, *Surfacing*'s inherent self-reflexivity models the kind of ethical work required to sustain affiliation across differences. The novel is constructed out of a series of narrative disjunctives and narrated in the first-person voice of our amorphous heroine. However her consciousness is polyvocal, and thereby frames the character as often incoherent and unreliable.[294] The novel's experimental structure is also indexed in the way new scenes emerge to contradict previous information, muddling the sequence of plot and order of past and present events. For example, throughout the first third of the novel the protagonist offers an account of her

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[293] Ibid.

[294] The multivalent quality of this first-person voice is reminiscent of the tension created in multi-perspectival narrative modes such as those utilized in Baldwin's *Another Country* and Atwood's later 1993 *The Robber Bride,* which revises the plot of female development in *Surfacing* by focusing on the friendship of four women in 1960s Toronto.

divorce, which later is revealed to conceal the truth of the heroine's pregnancy and coerced abortion – a "fact" that is revealed only after the heroine rejects her lover's marriage proposal. This false memory moors the plot of marriage, and heterosexuality, to the plot of reproduction – however, both these plots eventually break down. The storyline of the novel is comprised of the remnants of these broken plots: stock scenes of proposal, marriage, sex and birth, that are reassembled into a much more subversive sequence of events. Faced with this fragmentary structure, the reader's task is to interpret these scenes as either relevant events or ruses to the narrative of affiliation. This proairetic interpretive practice often rests on the reader deciding to believe or disbelieve the heroine's fantastic account of her own experience, a decision inflected by various readerly affects and desires. It is therefore up to the implied reader, as much as the implied author of *Surfacing*, for the novel to be received as one of affiliation.

In this scene of the dive, the protagonist clearly moves from an Oedipal mode of epistemological judgment towards a pre-Oedipal position of intuition and incorporation. While the titular scene begins with the heroine tracing the last steps of her father, who had been on the hunt for undiscovered Native American cave drawings, we soon learn that this initial paternal quest is simply a ruse for the heroine to achieve a more complex recognition of the ambivalence that lies within her self. Even though Atwood was wary of entering into second-wave theoretical discussions, *Surfacing* has been read by some as exemplifying the feminist subject's strategic return to the oceanic state found in the symbiotic bond of mother and child. Adrienne Rich's reading of the novel supports this interpretation, which focuses on the reunion this act of surfacing made possible: the second-sight encounter with her lost mother, what Rich calls "The Mistress of the Animals."[295] Marianne Hirsch has identified this novel as part of the 1970s turn to the pre-oedipal as an at times utopian, mystical space of transformative potential that is essential to a new conception of female

[295] Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 242.

self-development. She writes of *Surfacing*: it "is a novel about a heroine who first, like so many fictional heroines before her, is unable to become a mother, but who revises that inability and finally embraces her own potential maternity. In part, that process of revision rests on a search for a lost authentic self, outside of the institutions of civilization."[296] Rich and Hirsch both articulate the importance of feminine reproduction in their readings of the novel as a new version of female Bildungsroman, and the intergenerational plot to follow clearly evinces this accepted reading.[297] However, it might also be possible to read Atwood's experimentation with female self-development as central to an adjacent goal of imagining an ethics of affiliation that is adoptive and able to cross social differences – a gesture that emerges through narrative's opaque structure.

Picturing a form of life that necessarily breaks down taxonomies, the presence of this fantastic lost object forces the protagonist to confront her own culpability in contributing to the destruction of life without ritual or respect: "Whatever it is, part of myself or a separate creature, I killed it. It wasn't a child but it could have been one, I didn't know it."[298] The heroine's recognition that she "killed it," leads to the more abject knowledge that "they scraped it into a bucket and threw it wherever they throw them."[299] She remembers the horrible feeling that remained after the procedure – "I was emptied, amputated" – and as the novel moves towards its conclusion, it is this

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[296] Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989), 144.

[297] Ellen McWilliams supports this reading of Atwood's articulation of female Bildungsroman, and finds evidence for this in Atwood's dissertation chapter draft that focused on the role of maternity and nature in Victorian literature. See Ellen McWilliams, *Margaret Atwood and the Female Bildungsroman*. Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009. 71.

[298] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 153.

[299] The sacrilegious aspect of this event is mirrored in the act's illegality, which took place in "a house it was, shabby front room… they wanted you out fast" 153). The political ramifications of Atwood's representation of abortion has been faulted for its emphasis on the morally doubtful and illegal aspects of the practice in an era when many feminists fought for reproductive choice. However, the heroine's abortion is *coerced* and therefore demonstrative of the heroine's compromised capacity for bodily and intellectual integrity. In fact, Atwood frames the heroine's process of repair as a journey towards self-determination, inherent to the feminist discourse of reproductive rights. See Judith Wilt, *Abortion, Choice, and Contemporary Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990): 34. See also Carol P. Christ, "Margaret Atwood: The Surfacing of Women's Spiritual Quest and Vision," *Signs*. 2.2 (Winter, 1976).

open wound that the heroine seeks to repair through the creation of new life. The visceral corporeal experience of amputation thus serves as the vehicle for the reactivation of this scene from the past. The abortion further emblematizes the heroine's concomitant victimization and collusion in a system that destroys female agency: she had become "one of them too, a killer."[300]

In an interview circulated a year after the publication of the novel, the author critiques the static stability of the archetypal – and gendered – roles of victim and perpetrator. She states:

> I think there has to be a third thing again; the ideal would be somebody who would neither be a killer or a victim, who could achieve some kind of harmony with the world, which is a productive or creative harmony, rather than a destructive relationship towards the world. Now in neither book is that actualized, but in both it's seen as a possibility finally, whereas initially it is not.[301]

Atwood's final reference to *Surfacing* points to its implicit deconstruction of the binaries of "killer" and "victim" that gives way to a neutral third position at the novel's provisional ending. Atwood confesses that the vision of finding a "creative harmony" is not fully "actualized" in the novel, but only "seen as a possibility" at its conclusion. Rather than encapsulate this neutrality within a single, complete character, Atwood depicts this third position as manifesting in continuous process of affiliation between the heroine and other characters. Expressed as a hopeful possibility that is provisional and incomplete, affiliation emerges in *Surfacing* as an ethical practice of reparation, of holding together the productive and destructive in creative tension.

As this interview evinces, the novel's potential for repairing violent social hierarchy is dependent on psychic and corporeal acts of mediation. Ironically, the character that serves to mediate the divergent worlds of nature and society is Joe – the heroine's lover who follows the character throughout most of her journey. His character appears as an inassimilable element in the heroine's narcissistic voyage. An ignorant witness to the heroine's entire process of remembering,

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[300] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 155.
[301] Graeme Gibson, *Eleven Canadian Novelists interviewed by Graeme Gibson* (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1972), 27.

he tempers the scene's underlying solipsism. Repeatedly asking the heroine "You all right?" he shows some inkling of empathy, which, if cultivated properly, might serve as the seed for a renewed affiliation. The heroine thinks: "I didn't love him, I was far away from him… I was wishing I could tell him how to change so he could get there, the place where I was. 'Yes,' I said. I touched him on the arm with my hand. My hand touched his arm. Hand touched arm. Language divided us into fragments. I wanted to be whole." [302] Although the heroine desires to lead Joe "to the place where [she] was" – a utopian space of union– textual disintegration interrupts this wish. Mirroring the syntactic breakdown that occurs on the page itself, the heroine recognizes how "language divided us into fragments." Desiring wholeness, the heroine retreats inward and away from the social fragmentation that language and intimacy bring. However, the tentative touch of an arm or hand might also serve as the first step in acquiring a new form of communication, which could mediate body and mind, internal and external worlds.

The novel later confirms that a transcendent union with nature cannot be the final solution, but is simply a step in the heroine's greater path to return language to the body and re-animate its potential to mediate difference. Critic Ellen L. Arnold's reading of Atwood describes how the false separation between mind and body is a symptom of the greater violence of industrial imperialism, which can be traced to the "deeper dismemberments of mind and spirit from body that originate in language – in the split of signifier from signified that also separates self from other."[303] The crisis in the heroine's relationship with Joe comes from the dismembering experience of being forced to talk in a language that is not yours – a language of patriarchy. After the heroine refuses Joe's proposal of marriage, he asks her if she at least loves him. She feels confronted by "the language again" that she "couldn't use because it wasn't" hers – a masculine language of categorization and possession that

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[302] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 147.

[303] Ellen. L. Arnold, "Through the Mirror: Re-*Surfacing* and Self-Articulation in Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms," Cultural Sites of Critical Insight: philosophy, aesthetics, and African American and Native American women's writings* (Albany: SUNY UP, 2007), 86.

Atwood describes as "a task, a battle, words mustered… and issued one at a time, heavy and square like tanks."[304] In these failed attempts at cross-gender dialogue, the novel conversely underscores the need to find new modes of embodied communication to sustain their affiliation.

In *Surfacing*, language's intimate link to corporeal amputation dramatizes the heroine's need to develop a new form of mediation that will bring her a new self-awareness. Thus, the text indexes the feminist development of "language in the feminine," which sought to capture women's experience outside the rupturing logic of phallocentrism. Like many political movements for liberation, feminism sought to find a common language in order to re-evaluate personal and collective identity. However, the early identitarian call to bring voice to experience, which Betty Friedan so famously imagined in her 1963 *The Feminine Mystique*, was often challenged by class and racial differences within the movement.[305] Thus, by the early 1970s, literary leaders of the movement began to highlight how women's language had to go beyond rhetoric and become polyvocal and multivalent. In her review of Adrienne Rich's book, *Diving into the Wreck*, published a year after *Surfacing*, Atwood celebrates the poet's capacity to inspire the reader to "decide… what you think about yourself."[306] As Cixous would later write in 1975, " It is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing… It will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate. Hence the necessity to affirm the flourishes to this writing, to give form to its movement, its near and distant byways."[307] In the original French,

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304 Atwood, *Surfacing*, 115, 82.

305 By the end of the decade, liberation movements such as Quebecois separatism, the National Council of La Raz and the Black Panthers further politicized the question, highlighting the necessity to reclaim their "minor" languages and reject the persecutory injunction to assimilate into the white, colonizing discourse of English. The discovery of a new mode of communicating with one's political allies emerged as an underlying goal of many North American movements for solidarity; however this goal was often left unfulfilled by individuals falling into hollow rhetoric and mimicry.

306 Rich's experimental formulation of words as "maps" echoed contemporaneous writings of French theorist Helene Cixous and Quebecois poet Nicole Brossard. See also similar language in Rich's 1972 essay "When we Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision," *College English* 34.1 (October 1972).

307 Cixous, Helene. "Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith and Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1.4 (Summer, 1976): 883.

Cixous employs diction of exploration in the terms "essors" [flights], "passages" [passages, movements] and "voies" [routes, roads], thereby emphasizing the geographic movement inherent to écriture féminine.

In her invocation of what Cixous calls the " working (in) the in- between, inspecting the process of the same and of the other without which nothing can live, undoing the work of death," Atwood frames the fluidity of the natural world as a diverse space to better understand the "process of the same and of the other" that will help her avoid the over-determined unity that comes with death.[308] Written more than four years prior to Cixous' essay, *Surfacing* prefigures the feminist attention to language's empowering capacity for mobility and escape. This mobility emerges in imperfect correspondence with the multiplicity of the natural world:

> The forest leaps upward, enormous, the way it was before they cut it, columns of sunlight frozen; the boulders float, melt, everything is made of water, even the rocks. In one of the languages there are no nouns, only verbs held for a longer moment.
> The animals have no need for speech, why talk when you are a word
> I lean against a tree, I am a tree leaning.[309]

In this citation of a language that has "no nouns, only verbs" the heroine attests to the critical transformation of language from a static representational system into a dynamic process of being. It is through the figure of the animal that the heroine comes to understand this non-mimetic language – animals are words themselves and have "no need" for linguistic speech. Here "word" connotes not a sign, but a proclamation of being, revealing the divine connotations of the term. Further expressing the self-reflective nature of this language, the chiasmus "I lean against a tree, I am a tree leaning," formally captures the reflexive breakdown of signification, while also testifying to the heroine's recognition of the animal and plant world as central to her human subjectivity. If there is repair at work in this passage it arises not from a pre-oedipal oneness with nature, but from the

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[308] Cixous, 883.
[309] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 195.

shuttling across species difference that this chiasmus performs.[310] The metaphoric and discursive flux that occurs in this practice of shuttling back and forth depends on the heroine's recognition of the non-human beings that accompany her on this journey. As the next section will show, it is through pedagogical encounters with other animals that the heroine learns to better recognize her own internal ambivalence – a revision of the self upon which affiliation depends.

The Lessons of Animal Companionship

As the scene of surfacing suggests, it is through various acts of interpretive mediation that the heroine can begin to recognize her self as fluid and multilingual, and resolve her deep-rooted alienation. This reparative process emerges alongside an increased appreciation of the multilingual aspects of the natural environment. In the concluding lines of a late chapter in the novel, Atwood writes: "Around me the space rustles; owl sound, across the lake or inside me, distance contracts. A light wind, the small waves talking against the shore, multilingual water."[311] In this image, Atwood complicates the Romantic tradition of nature as emitting a lucid and comprehensible voice; rather her image of "multilingual water" proffers a sense of plurality to the natural element we usually associate with singleness and transparency. The great inland lake that serves as setting in the novel is neither clear nor easily traversable, a fact that transforms the setting into a living ecosystem. The water in which the protagonist immerses herself time and again is a thick field of ecological meaning, made up of a variety of living "voices" that demand mediation.

Although the heroine finds herself at the novel's transition seemingly alone and unencumbered by social attachments, her re-acquaintance with the non-human beings that

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[310] Many critics have noted Atwood's experimentation with mimetic systems of representation in *Surfacing*. Sally Robinson, for example, argues that the heroine's "metaphorphosis into a languageless being allows her passage into an other world where she hopes to find an other language that will guide her to some kind of 'truth' which is neither tainted by nor repressed within phallocentric systems of signification." See Sally Robinson, "The 'Anti-Logos Weapon': Multiplicity in Women's Texts," *Contemporary Literature*. 29.1 (Spring 1988): 108.
[311] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 192.

constitute this world has just begun. Through interspecies bonds of affiliation, the protagonist acquires new skills of non-linguistic embodied communication. Her engagement with and response to animals and plants in turn aids the heroine in working through the losses of her dead father, mother and unborn child. Thanks to this environmental support, she begins to repair her psyche, fractured by these losses, and revive the seemingly broken promise of egalitarian companionships to come. Thus, the novel's portrayal of human-animal companionship serves as an improbable model for cultivating social affiliations across genders, ethnicities, and nations.

The narrator's reawakened sense of self, which she accesses on her dive, occurs thanks to pedagogical encounters with animals. Many have focused on the Judeo-Christian symbolism of the animals in *Surfacing*, for example the crucified heron that is a not so subtle image of redemption in the novel.[312] However, my reading of *Surfacing* seeks to show how the ordinary presence of a fish might have more to teach the narrator than an animal already captured as icon. The climactic scene of surfacing trauma, in fact, comes about only after Atwood narrates the less discernable encounter between the heroine and a school of fish:

> Pale green, then darkness, layer after layer, deeper than before, seabottom; the water seemed to have thickened, in it pinprick lights flicked and darted, red and blue, yellow and white, and I saw they were fish, the chasm-dwellers, fish lined with phosphorescent sparks, teeth neon. It was wonderful that I was down so far, I watched the fish, they swam like patterns on closed eyes, my legs and arms were weightless, free-floating; I almost forget to look for the cliff and the shape.[313]

Here, as before, the inner and outer worlds collapse so that the narrator first apprehends "pinprick lights" flicking and darting, which then must be translated into the idea and subsequent recognition of these images as fish. She describes these fish as "chasm-dwellers," "lined with phosophorescent sparks, teeth neon." In this scene of the narrator's seemingly private dive, what role do these fish perform? Are they simply imaginary "patterns on closed eyes" – a mirror image of the damaged, shadow self that emerges under the safety of water? Or perhaps might they be *literal* fish – an

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312 See Carol P. Christ, "Margaret Atwood: The Surfacing of Women's Spiritual Quest and Vision."
313 Atwood, *Surfacing*, 153.

important animal accompaniment to the story of a woman's journey of self-repair, her companion species?

Atwood's scene of companionship prefigures the more recent work of Donna Haraway, who in *When Species Meet* describes interspecies encounter as a form of holding "in regard," of responding and looking back at each other "reciprocally" that leads to what she terms "companion species." She writes: "To knot companion and species together in encounter, in regard and respect, is to enter the world of becoming with, where who and what are is precisely what is at stake…species interdependence is the name of the worlding game on earth, and that game must be one of response and respect."[314] Haraway echoes contemporary feminist philosopher Kelly Oliver who in *Animal Lessons* speaks of responsibility as necessary to a new ecologically sustainable ethics: "sustainable ethics is an ethics of the responsibility to enable response, not as it has been defined as the exclusive property of man (man responds, animals react), but as it exists all around us. All living creatures are responsive."[315] Oliver asks humans (the bearers of this ethics) to "enable response" in non-human life and be open to a response that is beyond language. Oliver brings forth the partiality of human language by illuminating the way linguistic communication is contingent on a pedagogical relationship to animal sounds and to what Rousseau calls the "voice of nature." Haraway takes this concept further to provide examples from the field of biology in order to better understand the forms of non-linguistic communication that might be possible between species. These include what she calls a "dance of relating" built from gesture and cue, as well as a practice of "reciprocal induction" that allows us to interact with other species more ethically and respectfully.[316]

In order to cultivate bonds of interspecies affiliation, the heroine must learn a new form of communication based on a corporeal mode of response and mimicry. In the scene of surfacing,

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[314] Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2007), 19.
[315] Kelly Oliver, *Animals Lessons: How They Teach Us To Be Human* (New York: Columbia UP, 2009), 306.
[316] Haraway, 228.

Atwood substitutes an image of cohabitation that emerges from an awareness of collective responsibility for the iconic hunting scene, where one species kills another. Unlike the isolated Bass, this school of fish are grouped together in an interdependent network that the narrator seeks to affiliate with by "becoming weightless and free-floating," melding her own bodily movement with theirs through an embodied practice of shared response. Here, as before, the inner and outer worlds collapse so that the heroine must work in order to translate the image she sees before her as fish. The communicative aspect of this encounter depends on the character's appreciation of all living beings' capacity to be responsive to each other; the fish don't simply react, but respond. By watching the fish that "swam like patterns on closed eyes," she is better able to utilize her *inner* vision that cannot simply deduce meaning from outside stimuli, but creatively induce the surprising objects she encounters.

As newfound companions, the fish have substantial bearing on the extent to which the heroine can self-reflexively confront her human roles as hunter and consumer – this confrontation is tied to the feelings of guilt and responsibility she worked through when remembering the abortion of her unborn fetus. Taken together, these scenes set in motion the character's development of a renewed ethics that respects animals as subjects in their own right, for she can no longer depend on strict species classifications. Three chapters prior to the scene of the dive, Atwood describes the character fishing with her companions. Sitting in the canoe with her friends, she is unable to kill the Bass her friend David has caught; she sees its "neckless head, body" as a "whole" that is not food, but rather an individual complete being. This scene of the dying Bass "either terrified or enraged" serves as an emphatic counter-image to the school of fish the narrator meets later under water.[317] Proleptically signaling this scene underwater, the character has begun to think differently about the killing of animals as sport, and consequently seeks to bring respect to the animals through

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[317] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 129.

improvising rituals lost to industrial society. Her desire to bear witness to these deaths is taken one step further on her solitary retreat – she can no longer manage to eat fish. The heroine's change in perceiving animals not as usable objects to consume, but as beings worthy of honor and respect, is central to the new mode of social affiliation that is glimpsed at the novel's conclusion. For the heroine to repair her broken bond with Joe, she must move beyond an instrumental relation to the external world.

Now attentive to the suffering around her, the heroine achieves a renewed sense of responsibility to the environment and the many species on which her life depends. To position herself as ethically responsible for the beings drifting alongside her, whether human or animal, fish or imagined fetus, the heroine must give up the redemptive goals she had originally brought along her journey. In the beginning of the novel she acts as a daughter in search of spiritual salvation and forgiveness from her father. Maturing on her journey, she later comes to learn there is "no total salvation, resurrection." No longer reliant on religious ideology, the heroine begins to practice the more improvisational work of reparation, an ethical project that seeks to re-cast society, and even ecology, as interdependent frameworks of affiliation. To conceive humans and non-humans as aligned within a common circle of affiliation, one must re-define subjectivity in terms of affect and embodiment as much as linguistic speech. Translation will be necessary, but as Catriona Sandilands writes, it will always be a process of working "through other identities, through other forms of language" that may not be distinctively linguistic.[318]

The heroine's recognition of the many animals that make up her relational subjectivity comes not as a hallucinatory projection, but as an emblem of her underlying relation to other forms of life. Looking into a mirror at the end of her hallucinatory quest for spiritual and ecological repair, the protagonist perceives herself dirt-caked and grimy and thinks:

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[318] Catriona Sandilands, "From Natural Identity to Radical Democracy," *Environmental Ethics*. 17 (Spring 1995): 79.

> This was the stereotype, straws in the hair, talking nonsense or not talking at all. To have someone to speak to and words that can be understood: their definition of sanity. That is the real danger now, the hospital or the zoo, where we are put, species and individual, when we can no longer cope. They would never believe it's only a natural woman, state of nature…[319]

In order for the heroine to find "someone to speak to and words that can be understood" she must deconstruct normative definitions of sanity and selfhood and translate the seemingly incoherent parts of herself. She now embodies the feminine "state of nature" that threatens static notions of subjectivity and consciousness, aligning herself with those other misunderstood beings who are put in the hospital or the zoo.[320] Seemingly unintelligible, the protagonist must also be mediated. Thus when the heroine hears herself make " a noise" that sounds "like something being killed: a mouse, a bird?" she's finally speaking the new language that she sought. The animal that meets the heroine in the mirror answers her desire to find a being who can regard her with fresh eyes – and perceive her reflection as perhaps disorderly and incoherent, but also powerfully transformed.

Interspecies Affiliation and Post-human Genealogy

The complex entanglement of animals, humans and environments in *Surfacing* reflects the braided histories of political and social change that characterized the long 1960s. Although the era is often considered the cradle of the politics of identity, in fact, the decade's seemingly distinct social movements developed within a rhiozmatic web of relation; many of the era's political strategies, discourses, and values grew out from each other like the branches of a tree. The interconnected struggles for feminist and environmental rights, the end of the Vietnam war, nuclear non-proliferation, and moderation in population growth all heralded the urgent necessity to protect the diversity of life on earth. By the end of the 1960s, an environmental movement emerged in alliance

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[319] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 204.
[320] This image thus prefigures the later feminist revision of species categorization that conceived of the body as a host for a variety of life forms. See Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 165.

with New Left organizations such as Students for a Democratic Society and burgeoning counter-culture organizations; all shared the belief that the degradation of the environment was intimately tied to un-egalitarian social values created by industrial capitalism and U.S. imperialism. As historian Robert Gottlieb suggests, one of the most notable activist efforts that survived the New Left's fall is the modern environmental movement. The political movement remained viable perhaps because it in many ways exceeded strict ethnic, gender, and regional identifications, prioritizing shared values over identity.[321] Even today, the amorphousness and multiplicity of environmental activist groups are united by one common ethic: the underlying affiliation between humans and non-humans that co-habit the earth.

Looking back to the long 1960s, it becomes clear that the era witnessed a newfound awareness that the fates of those various species inhabiting the woods of Canada, the cities of the United States, and the villages of North Vietnam were intimately connected within a planetary network of social and ecological interdependence. In *Surfacing* this interdependence shows humanity to be imbricated by non-human forms of biological life, thereby expanding our normative understanding of identity and genealogy.[322] This revision of reproductive genealogy is supported by the novel's portrayal of heterosexuality within a spectrum of female desire. This emphasis on women's desires rejects the reproductive underpinning of patriarchal structures of filiation, which narrowly conceived of identity as something inherited and innate to individual subjects, rather than emerging out of a broader field of relation. In the novel's concluding chapters, the gendered framework of genealogy begins to shift, as the very basis of sexual difference is questioned.

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321 Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement* (Washington: Island Press, 2005), 158.

322 Today, as in the early 1970s, Atwood has revived her interest and dedication to the transnational dimensions of eco-politics; her most recent speculative novel *The Year of the Flood* incorporated historical characters who played a leading role in the early environmental movement, such as Rachel Carson and Diane Fossey. Her current blog (http://marg09.wordpress.com/) showcases posts about Earth Day festivities, off-shore wind turbines, a prison farming project, and the environmental impact of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

This shift in fact begins in the heroine's dive into the lake, where as a kind of indigenous vision quest, she recognizes the animal as biologically and culturally ancestral. Under the water, the character's amphibious actions resemble the frog; her "spine whips" and this primordial process of "remembering the motions imperfectly" ties her to a prior intimacy with this transitional being that seems to transcend gender. The spine serves as an image of motion and a symbol of the basic characteristic that mammals and fish share as vertebrates – an evolutionary trait common to not only multiple species, but multiple classes and genuses. The mediating symbolism of the amphibian – the etymological roots of which come from *amphi* (both) and *bios* (life) –is later reanimated in a scene of the heroine's escape from her human companions:

> The still water gathers the heat; birds, off in the forest a woodpecker, somewhere a thrush. Through the trees the sun glances; the swamp around me smoulders, energy of decay turning to growth, green fire. I remember the heron; by now it will be insects, frogs, fish, other herons. My body also changes, the creature in me, plant-animal, sends out filaments in me; I ferry it secure between death and life, I multiply.[323]

Here again the heroine re-members her animal ancestry. By immersing herself in a swamp filled with the "energy of decay," she becomes empowered by the vegetative "green fire" that helps her transform her father's death into an opportunity for personal regeneration. The specter of the heron, which the group found "crucified" on a tree, is now salvaged to become fodder for the sustenance of "insects, frogs, fish" and eventually "other herons." The death of one in the species may lead to life in another – an image that resonates a recuperative, yet somewhat aberrant, cyclicality. As the protagonist states directly prior to her hallucinatory retreat into nature, "they think I should be filled with death, I should be in mourning. But nothing has died, everything is alive, everything is waiting to become alive."[324] On the one hand this scene figures the protagonist's secular rebirth; the plant matter "smouldering" around her serves as the soil from which the protagonist is re-born as an empowered woman. On the other, rather than imagining herself as the

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[323] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 180.
[324] Atwood, *Surfacing,* 170.

inheritor of a feminist, maternal legacy, the heroine recognizes her connection to a chain of other animals, aligning herself with a primordial and interspecies past. It is through an embodied identification with the swamp, a space of material decomposition, that the heroine can transform dead matter, and emotional lack, into a fertile ground for the generation of new life.

This inductive reasoning does not simply occur thanks to the heroine's experience of embodied memory. To intuit this object as a lost part of her self, she must both psychically and corporeally re-member the past, and re-animate it in the present. The proprioceptive experience of this descent and surfacing highlights the way spatio-temporal categories of near and far, high and low, are foundational to the ethical judgment developing within the heroine. As Paul Connerton argues in *How Societies Remember*: "It is through the essentially embodied nature of our social existence, and through the incorporated practices based upon these embodyings, that these oppositional terms provide us with metaphors by which we think and live." Through what Connerton calls a "mnemonics of the body," the heroine is able to inductively decipher the past event of abortion, the memory of which proves to be central to her journey of not simply individual, but social repair.[325] Atwood's novel demonstrates that in order to revive an ethical relationship to the social world, the heroine must re-activate this corporeal mnemonics, which will provide her with a set of "metaphors by which to think and live" that are now textured by her own experience. Only then will she be able to interpret the abject face, and repair the gaps in her psyche, and in the narrative she tells.

This repair is figured in the cyclicality of a new post-human reproduction: the heroine becomes, at the end of this passage, a vessel for the development of all life forms: plant, animal, and even bacterial.[326] Her regeneration and rhizomatic "multiplication" thus revises the gendered

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[325] Connterton, Paul. *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge UP, 1989), 74.

[326] Atwood takes this scene further to portray those other modes of a-sexual reproduction, such as the "multiplication" of fronds and roots that characterize the rhizomatic structure of plant species. In

assumptions of maternity and birth to articulate a structure of interspecies kinship that subverts teleological notions of human filiation. This subversion of the linear basis of biology and evolution resonates with sociologist Myra Hird's conception of non-linear biology, which highlights those modes of a-sexual reproduction that occur within the human body, such as cellular regeneration.[327] Hird sets out a molar understanding of human embodiment that breaks down the hierarchies assumed in biological classification – enabling her to imagine a coeval relationship between human skin cells and other forms of biological life such as the seahorse, a species in which the male carries and gives birth to its offspring. *Surfacing* therefore charts a path of resistance against the deleterious effects of enlightened Man, by thematizing a post-humanism that emerges out of interspecies bonds of afffiliation.

Echoing the previous image of embryo budding and sending "out fronds," in this transitional scene the heroine ferries her biologically fluid "plant-animal" into a more hopeful, if provisional, future. In her re-conception of this being lost to the "rational" man-made violence of abortion, the heroine repairs the open wound remaining from the event, proving there is no ethical, or even biological, difference between human and animal. The spatio-temporal flexibility inherent to this alternative genealogy also points to the heroine's process of mourning the losses of generations past and yet to come. Like other narratives of affiliation, the working through of loss is integral to the reparation of all social relations. While Baldwin and Morrison present narratives centered on the incomplete and never-ending process of mourning the loss of siblings, friends, and lovers – all lateral bonds of attachment – Atwood turns to mourning the death of the intergenerational bond of parents and children.

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envisioning the heroine "multiplying" under the heat of the sun, the author pre-figures the reproductive modes of cloning, mitosis and meiosis that appear in her later science fiction novels *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *The Year of the Flood* (2009).

[327] Myra J. Hird, "Naturally Queer," *Feminist Theory* 5.1 (Winter 2004): 87.

Indicative of the braided themes of mourning and interspecies affiliation in *Surfacing*, the conclusion of the heroine's mourning process is catalyzed by her newfound recognition of her parents' likenesses in the natural world around her. This capacity to recognize her parents as "guides" not surprisingly depends on the heroine's ability to "immerse [her]self in the other language."[328] At the cabin, she encounters the specter of her lost mother in a group of jays and glimpses the presence of her father in the eyes of what appears to be a wolf. The fear that accompanied this realization quickly fades into a more pragmatic knowledge that the wolf was "what [her] father has become." This realization that her parents may live on in the form of other animals and plants inspires a parallel recognition of the daughter's capacity to "be anything, a tree, a deer skeleton, a rock," inanimate or animate, flora or fauna. Rather than symbolizing the transcendent acquisition of a secret knowledge or ancestral scene of forgiveness, these encounters reframe the primary roles of mother and father within a post-human genealogy. This uncanny portrayal de-emphasizes the genetic, reproductive aspects of parenting to instead underscore the affective and spiritual impact parents continue to have on the heroine, even after death.

Central to interspecies affiliation is the odd way kin can become alien, and strangers can seem intimately familiar; it is within this unhomely space of tension that a new post-human genealogy emerges in *Surfacing*. In her argument that the queer kinship of humans and animals is as much affiliative (lateral, adopted) as it is genealogical (vertical, inherited), Kelly Oliver builds on Merleau-Ponty's theory of a "strange" biophilic collectivity: "once we recognize that kinship is an impossible ideal, and a violent bloody ideal at that, we may be open to the possibility of 'strange kinship' based not on blood or on generation but on a shared embodiment and the gestures of love and friendship among living creatures made possible by bodies coexisting in a world on which we all

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[328] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 170.

depend."[329] Traversing the permeable borders of cell, womb, body and ecosystem, the path of the heroine's survival depends on her ability to "coexist" with animals and plants. The novel's concluding chapter, however, imagines the "gestures of love and friendship" that the heroine learned from other species, to in turn aid in the cultivation of a more sustainable form of humanity.

In the last chapter, Atwood describes the heroine on the precipice of returning to the dislocating space of the city. Faced with the unfamiliarity of buttons and clothes, objects that symbolize her discomfort with the mantles of society, she finds solace in the living entity she carries with her, a post-human "companion species".

> But I bring with me from the distant past five nights ago the time-traveller, the primaeval one who will have to learn, shape of a goldfish now in my belly, undergoing its watery changes. Word furrows potential already in its proto-brain, untravelled paths. No god and perhaps not real, even that is uncertain; I can't know yet, it's too early. But I assume it; if I die it dies, if I starve it starves with me. It might be the first one, the first true human; it must be born, allowed.[330]

As before, Atwood describes this entity as "primaeval," resembling the shape of a "goldfish" that is in the midst of a transformation. Significantly, this image of unborn being holds within it "words" that "furrow potential" into new languages and consciousnesses that might help redefine humanity. Even if not "real," this entity positions her as a caretaker and steward – becoming a "mother" is to also become a translator of that provisional language which ties the human infant to other animals. The hopefulness found in the child she carries within her provides the heroine with a renewed capacity to face the tensions inevitable to her reintegration into civilization and reunion with Joe.

In the novel's last pages, affiliation therefore appears as a tentative effort to surpass social hierarchy and gender stereotype; however this process never fully materializes in narrative. Instead, the hope for social affiliation is depicted as but a momentary realization in the heroine's consciousness. Hearing Joe call out to her, the heroine thinks:

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[329] Kelly Oliver, *Animals Lessons*, 228.
[330] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 206.

> I watch him, my love for him useless as a third eye or a possibility. If I go with him we will have to talk, wooden houses are obsolete, we can no longer live in spurious peace by avoiding each other, the way it was before, we will have to begin. For us it's necessary, the intercession of words; and we will probably fail, sooner or later, more or less painfully. That's normal, it's the way it happens now… but he isn't an American, I can see that now; he isn't anything, he is only half-formed, and for that reason I can trust him.[331]

In these last pages, Atwood returns to language and speech, but from an expanded perspective that helps her avoid the obsolescent "talk" of domesticity and forge a new path. No longer defined by "spurious peace" their relationship will have to be comprised of "the intercession of words" which may fail, but at least will approach a more honest and reciprocal form of attachment. The author's use of terms describing mediation, such as "mediator," "intercession," and "peace," illuminates how language has transformed after the heroine's acts of interspecies communication. Atwood's heroine is now able to recognize the provisional quality in Joe's subjectivity, which might allow her to finally trust him. He now is not an enemy, but "a mediator, an ambassador." Moreover, she senses a regenerated feeling of love for Joe, even if it is described as useless, "like a third-eye or a possibility" – this image illuminates the heroine's acquisition of an intuitive, and irrational, mode of perception, but it also re-frames affiliative love within the transitional space between rupture and repair.

At the end of this exhausting journey, we wait, as do the characters, to see what will surface next. Echoing *Another Country* and *Sula*, *Surfacing* ends with a gesture of mournful anticipation: "His voice is annoyed: he won't wait much longer. But right now he waits. / The lake is quiet, the trees surround me, asking and giving nothing."[332] While I read these final sentences as open-ended and resisting closure, some critics have found fault with the seeming decisiveness of the last words. In her influential eco-feminist reading, Susan Alaimo claims that: "the heroine uses Nature as a consciousness-raising retreat – but in the end, the novel abandons nature to silence… by depicting

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[331] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 207.
[332] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 208.

nature as a world apart, the novel becomes determined by the very matrix of forces it denounces."[333] While I find Alaimo's disdain for this ending instructive in its call to deconstruct the nature/culture binary, I believe the lake's silence indicates something beyond the stripping of value or agency. One must first take into consideration the opposition Atwood creates between the demanding and "annoyed" voice of society, embodied in Joe, and the quiet, supportive presence of the trees that are the reverse: "asking and giving nothing." In context of the novel's narrative of interspecies affiliation, Atwood places the burden on the heroine. Only through a process of mediation, will there emerge a livable space capacious enough to bridge these two extremes. We hope, if anything, that the heroine's memorable refusal to "be a victim" will also bring with it a future deconstruction of nature and culture, life and death, which Atwood calls "the third thing" that isn't made manifest but seen as a possibility. It is not nature's silence that stifles the narrative's movement towards collective repair, but the more disappointing absence of the heroine's voice.

Perhaps, this refusal to actualize the heroine's capacity to serve as mediator points to the inevitable obstacles limiting affiliation across difference. Nevertheless, the inconclusive ending can also demand us to imagine an ethics of responsibility that would account for the duty and reliance that bind humans and other species. In the end, we are asked to step out of the pages of fiction, and improvise a mode of human sociality, not separate from but intimately tied to environmental ecologies. As Atwood writes of Rich's *Diving into the Wreck*: this book is "not a manifesto… it is instead a book of explorations, of travels."[334] Diving into the wrecks of language, ecology, and subjectivity in *Surfacing*, the reader emerges at its close with a momentary vision of the affective and communicative exchanges that are required in forging bonds of affiliation beyond the limits of the

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[333] Susan Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 142.

[334] Atwood, "Review of Diving into the Wreck," *Curious Pursuits*, 15.

human. It is through an embodied and non-linguistic form of interpretation, and the adaptability in subjectivity that this practice brings, that the novel charts this preliminary route of affiliation.

On the Threshold of New Ceremonies

Surfacing sets out questions that help us consider how affiliation is constituted from unsettling affective encounters between various forms of life. The instability of human subjectivity that attends the practices of affiliation is also indicative of the contemporaneous revision of humanism that attended anti-colonial struggles of the era. Integral to Third World movements for liberation during the long 1960s was the raising into consciousness of the drives for life, and resistance to death, inherent to all living beings. This knowledge brought with it the belated recognition of the untold deaths (of slaves, natives, "degenerates") that were engendered by liberal institutions supposedly tasked to protect the "human" rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. As Sylvia Wynter writes in her 1984 essay "The Ceremony Must Be Found:" "The basic law of their functioning must therefore be the interdiction of any ceremony which might yoke the antithetical signifiers and breach the dynamics of order/Chaos, through which the order brings itself into living being."[335] Wynter argues that the chaotic force of death must be displaced onto the other in order for the rational category of the "human" to thrive. Writing a decade after *Surfacing*, in this essay Wynter calls for a reinvention of "our present conflictive modes of group integration" in order to tackle not simply social inequality and subjection, but also the "post-atomic" environmental crisis that threatens the survival of all species. Atwood's novel offers a preliminary manifestation of this "ceremony," where death transforms into new life and humanity seeks to repair its originary conflict with the non-human world.

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[335] Sylvia Wynter, "The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism," *On Humanism and the University*, Ed. William V. Spanos. *boundary 2*. 12.3/13.1 (Spring/Fall 1984): 51-2.

In *Surfacing*, Atwood particularizes this humanistic force of domination within a post-World War II history of U.S. military dominance. The heroine reflects on the destruction of human's capacity for spiritual redemption after the war, stating: "the trouble some people have being German, I thought, I have being human."[336] Living in a fallen world, where good and evil can no longer be easily moralized, the heroine's path is one of becoming aware of her irredeemable guilt for "being human" – a stain left by the Holocaust and the dehumanizing structures of colonial imperialism that were waning by 1960. Implicitly critiquing the contemporaneous war in Vietnam, the novel refers to all perpetrators of violence as "Americans." The global reach of the U.S. is shown to adversely affect not only various human communities, but also greater ecosystems; its polluting systems prove disastrous to woman, plant and animal alike: "they spread themselves like a virus, they get into the brain and take over the cells and the cells change from inside and the ones that have the disease can't tell the difference."[337] In her portrayal of "American" as no longer simply national identity, but a signifier of neo-imperialism, Atwood points to the global reach of U.S. Cold war power, which reached its zenith in the war in Vietnam. Atwood's turn to post-human modes of relation is instrumental to the novel's resistance of those androcentric power structures that make possible global domination.

In her 1986 anthology *The Stories we Hold Secret: Tales of Women's Spiritual Development*, Linda Hogan writes of the power of *Surfacing* in inspiring a new generation of eco-feminists who sought to address the continuing threat to the "survival of all species." Echoing Wynter's planetary scope, Hogan writes of Atwood's text:

> For her, the gods are a cluster of people, deities and beings, inner and outer. Her main character knows that for her own wholeness she must discard and sacrifice old things, even old beliefs, 'Even the guides, the miraculous double woman and the god with horns, they must be translated.' It is this translation we require. Even in women's search for the goddess we need a new translation. We need to interpret our inner lives differently, to translate our

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[336] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 123.
[337] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 139.

> perceptions in a new way. For many women who have searched for the meaning lost to them, it has been ironic, or perhaps it is a paradox, that the methods and techniques being used to achieve spiritual growth have not been enough. It is a step-by-step life process to waking consciousness and it can't be speeded up.[338]

Hogan's description of the shuttling between "inner and outer" worlds that underlies the heroine's journey of repair also helps us understand the figurative power of *Surfacing*. Hogan describes "translation" as a way of interpreting "our inner lives differently," to bring to the surface those "meanings lost to them" so central to "waking consciousness." This "consciousness" is neither essentially feminine nor immediate, but always in the process of becoming – as we have seen in the heroine's difficult path of becoming "awakened" to the repressed truth of her abortion. Similar to the acts of translation that occur within the "miraculous double woman," interpretation must navigate both the intersubjective *and* the intrapsychic planes of human subjectivity without conflating them. To consider interpretation as a form of translation, a figure of mediation for our planetary existence, requires us to be attentive to the different languages, vernaculars, and accents that make up these environments. *Surfacing* employs translation as a critical figure in the heroine's journey towards affiliation, symbolizing linguistic, corporeal and affective processes of mediation. A reminder of the displacement inherent to exchanges across difference, translation emerges in the novel as an embodied practice of dwelling in alterity. To perceive the world through more than one language is to adopt a multiplicity of viewpoints, which requires individuals to acknowledge their responsibility to various human (and non-human) constituencies.[339]

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338 Carol Bruchac, Linda Hogan, Judith McDaniel, *The Stories We Hold Secret: Tales of Women's Spiritual Development* (Seattle: Greenfield Review Press, 1986), xi.

339 In her essay "Translation as Culture," Gayatri C. Spivak writes: "translation in the narrow sense, as it were, is also a peculiar act of reparation – towards the language of the inside, a language in which we are 'responsible,' the guilt of seeing it as one language among many." Spivak highlights the reparative valence of translation, which comes from the realization that the language of one's birth is simply "one language among many." This situated knowledge that your language is neither dominant, nor universally intelligible, highlights the ethics of responsibility required to both inhabit and mediate difference. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak,

Atwood has described *Surfacing* as embodying the linguistic "pressures that are oppressively Canadian. The constant pull of two embattled languages, the threat of extinction, the amorphousness of identity."[340] The "amorphousness of identity" that arises from the "pull of two embattled languages" in 1972 elucidates a distinctive history of bilingualism in Canada, which was highly politicized during the era. It was only three years earlier that the Canadian Parliament passed the Official Language Act in 1969, which ordered that French and English should enjoy equal status; the federal bill was passed as a direct response to the radicalization of language rights in Quebec during the 1960s. Ironically, what remains today of Quebec's 1960s era nationalist movement, which built on the rhetoric of Caribbean de-colonization writers such as Fanon and Césaire, is the province's official protection of French as the primary language of public life.[341] From the first pages of *Surfacing*, Atwood emphasizes the protagonist's awareness of various languages that make up the provincial borderland of the novel's setting, the boundary of which is "marked by the sign that says BIENVENUE on one side and WELCOME on the other. The sign has bullet holes in it, rusting red around the edges. It always did, in the fall the hunters use it for target practice."[342] The violence of competing histories of colonial rule, and the proliferation of linguistic differences, is ironically depicted in a bullet-marked sign of welcome. The protagonist finds solace in the sign's familiarity, yet this is also a symbol of the struggle of two competing imperial powers. In the raucous debates of an "official" French/English Canada, those many indigenous languages, perhaps the true "victims" of colonization, are rendered mute.

"Translation as Culture," in *Translation : Reflections, Refractions, Transformations*, eds. St-Pierre, Paul and Prafulla C. Kar (Amsterdam, NLD: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007), 265.

[340] Atwood, *The Red Shoes*, 289.

[341] Ironically, by the 1980s and '90s, the fight over language rights in Quebec literally took place on commercial signage and storefronts. http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2009/10/22/f-quebec-language-laws-bill-101.html

[342] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 11.

This discomforting welcome connotes the heroine's entry into an environment that requires constant mediation. Before her re-acquaintance with animals and plants, the protagonist continually fails as a translator. As the heroine states: "I was seeing poorly, translating badly, a dialect problem, I should have used my own."[343] Uncomfortable speaking in either English or French, her improper accent often gives her away as an Anglophone minority in the French-speaking Quebecois town. To become versed in multiple linguistic, and non-linguistic, modes of communication, the protagonist must seek out the improvisational qualities of language that will enliven her stilted and ineffective bilingualism. At the height of her quest for repair, once her friends have left the island, the heroine takes part in an improvisational ritual to cleanse her of her ties to these supposedly direct representational frameworks. As a book illustrator, she currently is working, notably, on a translation into English of "Quebec Folk Tales."[344] Thus in her cleansing ritual, she burns this folktale typescript, her drawings, paints and canvases. Finally, the protagonist sets fire to the archival remnants of her childhood – the scrapbooks left to her by her mother. It is in these books that the heroine recognizes the "guides, the miraculous double woman and the god with horns," which "must be translated." Like these guides that have now been immolated into new realms of material being, the heroine begins to express a newly awakened version of her self through non-representational means.

In *Surfacing*, the heroine's recognition of her own culpability in colluding in systems of oppression resembles the self-reflection inherent to what Wynter and David Scott call an "embattled humanism" "which challenges itself at the same time that you're using it to think with."[345] Since interspecies affiliation is conceived in and through socio-cultural structures of power and exchange in the novel, it is critical to stay cognizant of those asymmetries of power that shape

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[343] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 81.
[344] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 57.
[345] Sylvia Wynter, "The Re-Enchantment of Humanism: an Interview with Sylvia Wynter" with David Scott, *Small Axe* 8 (2000): 119-207.

communications across difference. In the novel, the heroine's encounters with nature are clearly influenced by her social status, which exists in tension with the forces that threaten the fragile ecosystem of the novel's setting. Historically, Quebec was a battleground for competing national and European claims for power; caught in these crossing vies for authority were the indigenous populations, which Atwood barely mentions. She invokes the relocation of indigenous peoples in *Surfacing*, but in abstract terms: "I was remembering the others who used to come. There weren't many of them on the lake even then, the government had put them somewhere else, corralled them, but there was one family left."[346] Looking back through the critical lens of adulthood, the heroine is better able to understand the power politics at play that might have caused these "others" to, as she says, "hate" them. In order to perceive these "others" who came before, one must step out of the us/them dichotomy of national forms of imperialism and enter a broader field of connection defined by the common threat of alterity.

While Atwood seems to criticize the deleterious history of colonial expansion that destroyed the culture and vitality of native peoples, ironically, the novel's trajectory towards repair is dependent on the heroine's acquisition of indigenous cultural practices, which have for millennium sought to bring respect to biological ecosystems. Critics have chided the author for poaching scenes of ritual and spiritual rebirth from the literary tradition of the threatened minority cultures. Himani Bannerji articulates the implicit colonialist agenda she sees in the novel's return to the wilderness free from human inhabitants: "The indigenous peoples are either not there or are one with the primal, non-human forces of nature."[347] As Bannerji claims, the return of nature to silence, further silences those indigenous peoples whose symbolic alignment with the natural world often created the conditions for colonial expansion. Atwood's mistake is in invoking native traditions without explicitly giving

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[346] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 122.
[347] Himani Bannerji, *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender* (Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press, 2000), 80.

credit to the unique tribal communities that lived and shaped the natural ecosystem of the Canadian Shield; the intersection of these social worlds must be considered if we are to fully apprehend the changes occurring to the landscape in which they dwell.

Even though *Surfacing* fails to adequately account for the indigenous subject, we must be critical of the essentialist assumptions that underlie narratives of indigeneity, which often tie the "native" to a nostalgic and pristine natural wilderness. Atwood's effort to dislodge static notions of gender and humanity demand us to do the same when considering the history and identity of First Nations peoples in her works. While the novel seems at times to somewhat ignorantly appropriate indigenous culture and iconography, it also upholds an ethics that is central to today's global indigenous movement. This ethics is founded on a respect for and responsibility to all life forms, which manifests in practices of living sustainably with due care for the earth – practices that are supported by the cultivation of structures of affiliation that can work within social and species differences without collapsing them.

In *Death of a Discipline*, Gayatri C. Spivak echoes Hogan's conception of "translating the inner and outer worlds differently" in her definition of "planetarity" that she offers as an uncanny awareness that occurs when home becomes unhomely, *heimlich* turns *unheimlich*:

> To be human is to be intended toward the other… If we imagine ourselves as planetary subjects rather than global agents, planetary creatures rather than global entities, alterity remains underived from us; it is not our dialectical negation, it contains us as much as it flings us away. And thus to think of it is already to transgress in spite of our forays into what we metaphorize, differently, as outer and inner space, what is above and beyond our own reach is not continuous with us at is indeed specifically discontinuous. We must persistently educate ourselves into this peculiar mindset.[348]

If Spivak invokes a politics of resistance in her theorization of the planetary, it is formed from the ethical basis of all humans intending, or responding, "toward the other." Aligning "planetary subjects" with "planetary creatures," Spivak nods to the post-human genealogy taking root in

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[348] Gayatri Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia UP, 2003), 72.

Atwood's *Surfacing*. To better understand the political ramifications of Atwood's novel, which is at times irritatingly lacking a strong political vision, one can turn to the numerous fictional revisions the novel has inspired in the past 30 years. Most notably, Hogan's 2008 novel *People of the Whale* serves as an important example of the relevance this novel holds for thinking through contemporary efforts to build interethnic and planetary forms of solidarity. Hogan's text illustrates the necessary, and often fraught, intersection of political movements for environmental sustainability and indigenous sovereign struggles. Expanding out from the scene of animal-human relationship, Hogan's novel emphasizes the global indigenous roots of interspecies affiliation during the Vietnam era. Transforming Atwood's story of gender-based trauma to capture the verities of veteran experience, Hogan re-appropriates the novel's figuration of indigenous mythologies and re-animates them for new ends.

In *People of the Whale,* Hogan tells the story of Thomas Witka Just, a Native American traumatized by his participation in the U.S. war in Vietnam. Upon his return home years after the official conclusion of the war, Thomas enters into a similar reparative journey as Atwood's female protagonist. In order to ameliorate the fraying social bonds that unite his fictional A'atsika tribe, Thomas must revive his personal, and the tribe's collective, affiliation with other supportive species. Thus, the hero's quest for repair and spiritual rebirth is inextricably bound to the healing of his local and sacred natural environment. Notably, Hogan repeats and revises the most iconic scene of *Surfacing* many times in *People of the Whale* – representing Thomas diving under the water in order to gain wisdom from his ancestral animal the whale. However, this dive is first and foremost a journey made with the goal of repairing his damaged community. Thus, Hogan turns away from Atwood's depiction of narcissism as a catalytic state of repair, in order to highlight the more deleterious effects alienation has on more marginalized indigenous subjects.

Hogan's novel illuminates the transnational dimensions of affiliation in the Vietnam era by representing a multilayered network of intersecting circles of adoptive kinship. Upon adulthood he marries his childhood companion Ruth and conceives a son with her. However his conscription into the army interrupts his development as a familial and tribal leader and sends him up into the sky, which Hogan describes to be the "most unnatural thing for a human." While in Vietnam, Thomas is unable to continue serving America's military project that he believes is set out to destroy not only the Vietnamese people, but his own threatened native community in Washington state. After turning his rifle on his fellow soldiers who were on the brink of massacring a group of Hmong refugees, Thomas goes AWOL and hides with the community who adopt him into their depleted tribe. In her inclusion of this sub-plot set in South Vietnam, Hogan asserts the inter-ethnic ties that connect native peoples in North America and South East Asia. As Hogan describes Thomas' affiliation with the adoptive tribe: "He was again part of a people…these were people of the earth and they'd survived. Like him."[349] This adoption is further thematized in the protagonist's adulterous love affair with a member of the Hmong tribe named Ma, with whom he has a daughter named Lin. On both sides of the Pacific, Thomas' fathering of two children aligns these separate indigenous communities together within one blood genealogy. This kinship endures, however, after Thomas' return to the United States thanks to its corresponding adoptive valence – years later, it is Ruth who takes in Thomas' daughter Lin when she returns to reunite with her traumatized father.

Throughout the novel, Hogan builds on Atwood's representation of interspecies affiliation by emphasizing the importance of the hero's recognition of his animal ancestry on the path of spiritual repair. Upon his return to Washington, Thomas eventually follows in the tradition of his grandfather Witka who "spoke with the whales," as part of the ritual of whale-hunting that had sustained the tribe for centuries. Thomas' ability to understand the language of the whales is

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[349] Linda Hogan, *People of the Whale* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 167.

dependent on his recognition of the animal's corporeal and ancestral familiarity. In Hogan's conception of Thomas translating the whales' message to his people, language is no longer anthropogenic, but a practice that emerges from the animal world and is transmitted through interspecies bonds of kinship. Like Ruth, who was born with fish gills, Thomas Just's subjectivity mixes multiple corporeal, cultural, linguistic and even species identifications. Even while his position towards the whale is affiliative – each are co-habitants of the coastal ecosystem that they share and thus companion species – their relation also resembles an intergenerational bond of relation. And yet, at times, the magical realist style Hogan brings to representing this interspecies corporeality conflates the intrapsychic and intersubjective discursive realms; Thomas' genetic inheritance flirts with a materialist essentialism. However Hogan might over-privilege the indigenous protagonist's birthright of "speaking with animals," upon closer reading, her depiction of interspecies communication is anything but direct or mystically pre-determined. Nor does it invoke what Eve K. Sedgwick might call a gothic paranoia, in which characters reading the minds of the "others" re-inscribe a stable Oedipal family frame.[350]

Thomas' story is also one of linguistic breakdown and interpretive repair. As an indigenous subject, Thomas must perform language differently, bringing with him the situated knowledge that comes from someone who has been at best misunderstood and at worst silenced. In fact, Thomas's renewed capacity to translate the messages of the whales, only after she represents him visiting the Department of the Army to return his medals of honor and turn himself in for the deaths he believe he caused. Here the officials meet him, but refuse to hear his story. He says "I'm trying to tell you I don't want the medals. They hurt my hands to touch them. They are hot. Like fire." The men answer him, missing his meaning: "You are free to go, Sergeant Just," and salute him.[351] The encounter was as Hogan writes: "meaningless" and leaves Thomas newly aware of his need to return

[350] Eve K. Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1990): 187.
[351] Hogan, *People of the Whale*, 266.

home and search out an alternative path of repair. Through this moment of mis-communication and mis-recognition, Thomas is subjected to the ignorance of the nation-state, which has no capacity to recognize the indigenous alliances. Their lack of idiomatic knowledge makes them fall back on a mimetic process Spivak calls "transcoding," which simply converts "one form of coded representation into another, without working through the necessary gaps and dehiscence that comes when modes of representation come up against each other."[352] Hogan demonstrates that in order to survive this inevitable experience of dehiscence, Thomas must acquire new forms of ritual that have been lost to industrial society.

For Thomas to practice a mode of interspecies communication, which is based on a non-linguistic mode of "reciprocal response," reflects his necessary reacquisition of important tribal rituals that exist in stark contrast to the "transcoding" of the nation-state. Depicting these embodied ceremonies with a critical distance, Hogan describes them as "never what those who are not Indian think, wish, hope;" these rituals of repair will never be immediate or transcendent.[353] In support of this remembering of the "old ways," Thomas begins to dwell in the coastal village inhabited by tribal elders. Hogan opens the scene of his arrival at their remote encampment with a description of the wall that protects their home. She writes:

> They live near the wall. A stone wall. It has a whale carved into it and the whale is giving birth to a human. It is their ancestor. There are no names of humans on the wall. Few people know it is there. Even fewer are allowed to go there. When Thomas was a boy the old ones took Ruth and him to that stone wall and told them about the mother of life and all that followed. After the whale, the octopus in all its intelligence was next in the line of creation, then the salmon, Ruth's clan; a spiral, and then the other constellations.[354]

Like a cairn that testifies to the enduring presence of those who came before, this stone-wall pictures the ultimate ancestor of Thomas' tribe: the whale. The scene of the whale giving birth to a human is not rendered in thick description; however it does provide us with a fresh illustration of the

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[352] Oxford English Dictionary "Transcoding." See also Spivak, "Translation as Culture."
[353] Hogan, *People of the Whale*, 291.
[354] Hogan, *People of the Whale*, 278.

posthuman genealogy that has played a part in many indigenous tribal cultures and spiritual traditions for centuries. In this revised scene of Atwood's cliff-drawing, Hogan amends the scientific charting of the evolutionary tree of life to better capture this circle of interspecies affiliations. No longer Darwin's logical chain of branches, the "line of creation" is a "spiral" that is followed by a series of interconnected constellations. Rather than vertical, the picture of evolution is a spiral, where hierarchies are collapsed into diagonal relations of adjacency that resemble Hird's "non-linear biology."

As a macrocosm of the kinds of relations assumed in blood family, this evolutionary tree helps us better understand the uncanny origins of Thomas' feeling of connections to the whale. At the conclusion of his dive Thomas asserts that the animals are "our mothers" and "grandmothers," demanding us to critically redefine what we understand to be genealogy.[355] The spiral's mix of vertical and horizontal trajectories also suggests the necessary presence of affiliative bonds within this chain of relation. Thus it is appropriate that the readers of this carving are Ruth and Thomas, who grew up together as friends, later became lovers, and finally at the end of the novel resemble adoptive siblings. As Ruth states, "He's a brother to me now." While the focus of animal ancestry reveals a web of intergenerational ties, it is the melancholic bond of affiliation between Ruth and Thomas that serves as the practical foundation of interspecies kinship in the novel. While its ending is inconclusive, the final lines testify to the enduring necessity for translators like Thomas to recognize the voices of ancestors whatever form they may take. As Hogan writes: "Some say the spirit world searches for us. It wants us to listen."[356] Published 36 years after Atwood's *Surfacing*, Hogan's *People of the Whale* demonstrates that in order to repair the damages that remain after a Cold War era of environmental and cultural degradation, we must mediate the difference within our

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[355] Hogan, *People of the Whale*, 283.
[356] Hogan, *People of the Whale*, 301.

selves, our communities, and our ecosystems. Only by expanding our conception of ethics to incorporate the non-human world will any planetary form of solidarity be forged.

In her re-vision of *Surfacing*, Hogan illuminates the lasting relevance of Atwood's vision of cultivating interspecies bonds of affiliation as efforts in ecological and communal repair. Thus Hogan's novel reclaims the feminist task of re-vision that Adrienne Rich defined as "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" – opening up these mid-century feminist practices to new vectors of personal and social potential.[357] As the long 1960s has become a distant point on the horizon of our collective memory, many authors have turned back to the period to re-read and re-appraise its struggles for affiliation. This dissertation's concluding chapters trace the disparate shapes and routes these narratives took at the end of the millennium. Like the genealogical spiral etched onto Hogan's rock cairn, a constellation of fictional works bear witness to the historical legacy Atwood, Morrison and Baldwin's novels present. Some novels like Hogan's *People of the Whale*, look back to the era with the goal of expanding the purchase and scope of 1960s forms of affiliation to encompass the transnational and inter-ethnic dimensions of this flexible structure of relation. Others follow a quite different path, such as Vietnam veteran Tim O'Brien's 1994 mystery novel *In the Lake of the Woods*. In the next chapter, I will explore how O'Brien holds fast to the solipsism and alienation that overshadowed the era's hopes for collective repair – a bleak identitarian perspective that transforms the narrative of affiliation into a tragic tale of personal and familial disintegration.

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[357] Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," 18.

CHAPTER 4
Broken Affinities: The Ends of Affiliation in Tim O'Brien's *In the Lake of the Woods*

In the early 1960s, James Baldwin framed the crisis of interracial affiliation that gripped the nation as a struggle of love and maturation: "Love is a battle, love is a war; love is a growing up." Beginning with Baldwin's 1962 *Another Country*, this burden of "growing up" is dramatically placed on the shoulders of the white male protagonist, Vivaldo Moore. Moore's trajectory beyond egoism and towards a more reparative position of masculinity serves as an emblem of the greater challenges of ethical development that the 1960s novel of affiliation invokes. The past three chapters have shown how the viability of affiliations across differences depends, in part, on the subversion, and potential decline, of white masculine privilege. The political stakes of these relationships are tied to the goal of upending the myth of white homosociality that aids in the maintenance of gendered, racial and economic inequality. Building on Robyn Wiegman's theories of interracial male bonding in *American Anatomies*, this dissertation illuminates how affiliation across racial and gendered differences belies the plot of "mythic male union as a counter to the fragmentation and historically shifting 'nature' of masculine identities within the social." She continues that "the proliferation of these images attests to the ongoing crisis of identity in U.S. culture and points to the incoherency that contemporary representations of the masculine simultaneously foreground and allay."[358] Re-reading Fiedler's criticism, Wiegman argues that his claims to an American mythology of the "sacred hierogamos" between white and black men obfuscates the white male fraternity that silently underlies this script. As a shadowy foundation to Fiedler's novels of interracial fraternity, the myth of white male brotherhood in turn clouds the development of the 1960s novel of affiliation.

Central to the work of repair that these novels invoke is a practice of re-reading and re-interpreting characters, events, and histories. The novelists who wrote of, and came of age during,

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[358] Wiegman, *American Anatomies*, 167.

the long 1960s, including Baldwin, Morrison, Atwood and Tim O'Brien, continue to be haunted by the crisis of affiliation and repair through the end of the century. For these authors, and for the culture at large, the era's struggles to bridge longstanding social divides remained an animating presence even during a moment of political conservatism and communal decline. Evidence of their continued fascination, and concern, over the experiments of the 1960s is an interest in later life to re-write their previous novels of affiliation: Baldwin's last novel *Just Above My Head* (1979) looks back and revises the representation of adoptive siblinghood and mourning that *Another Country* sets out; Atwood's *The Robber Bride* (1993) revises the plot of female development in *Surfacing* by focusing on the friendship of four women in 1960s Toronto; Morrison's 1997 *Paradise* and 2003 *Love* both offer fictional re-visions of the 1960s world of affiliation *Sula* is first to depict.

This last section of the dissertation traces two divergent strands of the greater afterlife of the 1960s novel of affiliation. This chapter approaches O'Brien's first novel *Northern Lights* (1975) and last Vietnam novel *In the Lake of the Woods* (1994) to explore how the reparative potential of the novel of affiliation is stymied by the irreparable traumas incurred as a result of the Vietnam war. In the following pages, I will focus mainly on his 1994 historical novel to reveal the cultural mythologies of brotherhood and family life that have contributed to our forgetting of the 1960s impulse towards affiliation. While cross-gender connection violently fails in this text, the meta-fictional narrative at least sets out an ethical injunction for the reader to re-assess the political legacy of these transgressive bonds of relation. In the final fifth chapter on Susan Choi's 2007 *American Woman*, the novel of affiliation returns, but is recast to mend the wounds of the Japanese-American family. While O'Brien's novel charts a path of affiliation's almost irredeemable failure, Choi's novel uses these failures as catalyst for familial renewal.

This chapter turns now to read the first and final novels of Tim O'Brien's series of Vietnam fiction to reflect on the resilience of the American myth of white fraternity. O'Brien's 1975 *Northern*

Lights represents a frontier fantasy of sacred brotherhood as a vehicle to heal, not the veteran, but a surviving brothers' feelings of guilt after Vietnam. By 1994, however, O'Brien's *In the Lake of the Woods* rejects the legacy of the survivor to illuminate how no citizen, man or woman, can avoid the wounds of war. I approach this more disturbing text to explore how the trauma and alienation of Vietnam veterans seemingly renders egalitarian affiliations across races and genders impossible. The rise of the 1960s novel of affiliation reflects the era's efforts to reveal inequity and bridge social differences through the construction of new experimental bonds of attachment. And yet O'Brien's text illuminates the way certain subjects, specifically the white male veteran, seem to repudiate the hopeful gains imagined in 1960s affiliation.

Seven years after his return from the war, Tim O'Brien published his first novel *Northern Lights*. This conventional, realist novel chronicles a fraught relationship between two brothers, Harvey and Paul Perry, who live in rural northern Minnesota, and shares a similar setting to his later fiction of the Vietnam War. This tale of protagonist Paul Perry's rivalry with his younger brother, and concomitant quest for individuation from the burdens of his birthright, builds on a novelistic myth of American fraternity. While contemporaneous authors built on the legacy of Fiedlerian interracial brotherhood to conceive new narratives of affiliation across difference, O'Brien rescinds the adoptive qualities of this bond and returns fraternity to its "natural" place in the blood family. O'Brien therefore reclaims the genealogical family to shore up a damaged national manhood; yet his eerie conflation of nation as family points to the impossibility of upholding the filial, and patriarchal basis, of these social institutions in the wake of 1960s social revolution.

Although the novel is set in what Fiedler describes as the "great good place" of the American frontier, *Northern Lights* portrays brotherhood as anything but utopian. The Perrys are a family on the precipice of disintegration. With a mother lost to childbirth, and a minister father recently passed away, all that is left is the two sons, who have difficulty sustaining their familial

bond. They are held together by the land and home they occupy – a farmstead outside the "dying town" of Sawmill Landing – and the collection of primary memories they share. As the younger brother Harvey states: "I guess we're really brothers, aren't we? Don't know what that means, except it means that some of the same things we remember."[359] Their sibling memory is crafted solely around the figure of their father, whose clear favoritism towards the younger Harvey (whose birth precipitated the mother's death) haunts the elder Paul. Harvey's naïve description of their brotherhood being forged through remembering "some of the same things" conversely highlights those memories that are punctured by individual experiences of trauma, jealousy and envy. Tragically their brotherhood is in fact characterized by those events they did not share: Paul's memory of his brother's birth, and mother's death, and Harvey's memory of Vietnam.

In the novel, visceral bonds of blood siblinghood only arise under extreme conditions of suffering and potential death. O'Brien's representation of these two brothers illuminates the fraternal divides that the National Selective Service created. Harvey was drafted, fought and was wounded in Vietnam, while Paul was too old to be drafted and thus feels a sense of guilt for "shirking" his national duty. O'Brien thus frames Paul's quest for self-knowledge and masculine identity within an adjacent goal to make up for failing to "save" his brother, or prove his manhood, in the incomprehensible violence of the war. The novel stages a re-enactment of the shared battle the brothers never experienced together, a confrontation with the forces of nature which reconnects them to a mythology of frontier American masculinity. The majority of the plot portrays the brothers taking a cross-country skiing trip that is characterized by the unrealistic dangers of the natural elements. During the journey, Harvey, the younger, more virile and "heroic" veteran figure, succumbs to pneumonia. His brother on the brink of death, Paul is forced to face his own fears in order to save them both. Successfully hunting for food and surviving a blizzard, the protagonist

[359] Tim O'Brien, *Northern Lights* (New York: Broadway 1999), 250.

achieves heroic deeds that align him with the figure of what Richard Slotkin calls the hunter, who takes on the "Indian-like myth of sacred marriage and creation" with the wilderness.[360] Like this archetypal hunter embodied in the Romantic figure of Daniel Boone, Paul makes himself anew, capitalizing on his instincts for violence to catalyze personal redemption and fraternal salvation.

Paul's harnessing of the survivalist instincts of the hunter allows him to fulfill his familial *qua* national duty that he had originally shirked. Freed from his debt, Paul rejects a shared future with his brother to recommit instead to the filial authority of his marriage. As the novel closes, the brothers symbolically break their genealogical ties to the landscape and the tight-knit community in which they grew up. This act opens the door for Paul Perry to step into his own inherited role as father. On the night of their decision to sell the family's homestead, Paul makes love to his wife, fantasizing that their union will lead to the conception of a future son: "he thought son, son, son, son. He would be kind to his son. Have him read all the classic books and the *Atlantic Monthly,* and give him just enough of everything and not too much of anything."[361] Envisioning the future generation of Perrys, Paul not so subtly evokes the cultural imaginary that empowers this masculine lineage: the "classic books" of American boyhood and fraternity that emerge early in the American literary tradition. Paul's fantasy not so subtly illuminates an authorial desire to inscribe the novel into a similar tradition of classic books, which in their "innocence," as Leslie Fiedler suggests, are "almost juvenile. The great works of American fiction are notoriously at home in the children's section of the library, their level of sentimentality precisely that of a pre-adolescent." After re-enacting his Leatherstocking fantasy as an effort for self-repair, Paul Perry is now ready to give up these stories to the entertainment and education of his son. Although this adolescent tradition of American fiction was revised in the development of the novel of affiliation, O'Brien returns to it

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360 Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier 1600-1860* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1973), 464.
361 O'Brien, *Northern Lights*, 350.

with a conventional vengeance in *Northern Lights*. This representation of the fraternal quest for redemption concludes, then, with a return to the figure of the father, upholding the authority of filial kinship that contemporaneous novels of affiliation sought to undo.

O'Brien's depiction of the limits of fraternal cohesion works to revise the ideals of fraternity seen as foundational to early American democracy. In *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville argued that in a democractic society, bonds of fraternal blood kinship were characteristically egalitarian, no longer hampered by the competition and disparity fueled by patrilineal aristocracy and the right of primogeniture. He writes romantically that democracy "cements brothers' closeness not through self-interest but by shared memories and the unhampered harmony of their opinions and tastes. It divides their inheritance but allows their hearts the freedom to unite."[362] He goes on to explain that generally "social ties are loosened" under democracy but "natural ones" are tightened; "it draws families more closely together while separating citizens."[363] Dana Nelson's 1998 study, *National Manhood* questions Tocqueville's characterization of this founding American brotherhood, arguing that early "national manhood" was anything but united.[364] For Nelson, this bond appears vertical, imagined within the genealogical and heterosexual family and retraining the trace of pre-revolutionary filial authority to the king, and also ostensibly horizontal, evocative of a homosociality of civic "equals." She reveals this horizontal field of fraternity, however, to be at root fragmented, competitive, and stratified by class, one that was dependent on the exclusion of other races and the purification of white womanhood and feminine domesticity.

By the 1950s, this nostalgic conception of blood siblings being "unhampered" by competition for parental or social recognition proves false: competition and incoherence within fraternity was higher than ever thanks to the rise of the "Company Man" and what Marcuse called a

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[362] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Gerald E. Bevan (New York: Penguin, 2003), 682.
[363] Tocqueville, 683.
[364] Dana Nelson, *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (Durham: Duke UP, 1998).

one-dimensional society. As Wilson C. McWilliams argues in his 1973 study *The Idea of Fraternity in America*, fraternal bonds are the most imperfect, the "most fraught with ambiguity."[365] National brotherhood's social equation with blood relation, and the family's reduction to "blood kinship," points to a general disintegration of those relational affects and feelings of responsibility that animate true kinship. For McWilliams, a founder of Berkeley's Free Speech Movement, fraternity was an elective affinity similar to affiliation. It was a bond that included "intense interpersonal affection" and an element of volition or choice, was imbued by a shared set of social values, and was "closely related to the development of 'ego identity.'"[366]

In light of this intellectual history of democratic fraternity, O'Brien's turn inward to depict blood kinship thwarts the general struggle of the long 1960s to consciously cultivate "fraternity" beyond families of origin. In the latter years of the war in Vietnam, the United States witnessed a waning of national power and familial stability, but a resurgence of alternative social bonds. Under the shadow of the natural landscape of the novel's setting, all actions and events seem abstract and divinely ordained by *unchosen* filial duty and instinctual drive. The novel fails to envision dynamic efforts at affiliation precisely because it frames these bonds as "natural," determined and therefore out of one's control. This "natural" quality of the fraternal bonds in *Northern lights* exists in stark contrast to the social movements for liberation, including civil rights, the Black Panthers and feminism, which were both ideological and pedagogical in their cultivation of "brothers" and "sisters" within the movement. If anything, it was not a fantasy of shared blood, but the circulation of erotic desire that made these new political solidarities feel fated and intimate.

Northern Lights thus reveals the mythological norm lurking on the margins of 1960s transgressive novels of affiliation that explicitly bridge social differences: the founding tale of white national fraternity. Unlike his contemporaries, O'Brien conceives of horizontal bonds as evocative

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[365] Wilson C. McWilliams, *The Idea of Fraternity in America* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1973), 18.
[366] McWilliams, *Idea of Fraternity,* 7-8.

of a national body politic. Novels by Baldwin, Atwood and Morrison invoke "another country" of interracial affiliation adjacent, yet resistant, to the "majority" Anglo-American nation. In contrast, by the mid-1970s, O'Brien's representation of a white male siblinghood illuminates the threat this counter-movement posed to the imagined authority of the blood family. O'Brien's fictional return to this anachronistic vision of blood kinship in his 1994 novel *In the Lake of the Woods* illuminates the culture's unbending melancholic attachment to American white male fraternity, which was reanimated in the 1980s by the rise of the New Right.[367] However, the author's turn to historiographic metafiction in this text opens up a more self-reflexive articulation of this nostalgia, illuminating its inherent failures and exclusions. As Baldwin writes: "most of the white people I have ever known impressed me as being in the grip of a weird nostalgia, dreaming of a vanished state of security and order, against which dream, unfailingly and unconsciously, they tested and very often lost their lives."[368] My turn to reading the 1994 *In the Lake of the Woods* will reveal how cross-gender affiliations after the war in Vietnam were challenged by a lingering melancholic desire for that "mythic male union" and the forms of "security and order" that it promised to support.

Veteran Alienation and the Failures of National Fraternity After War

Published almost twenty years after *Northern Lights*, O'Brien's 1994 *In the Lake of the Woods* returns to the primal scene of Northern wilderness and the crisis of masculine identity invoked in the story of Paul and Harvey Perry. They share some fundamental themes: one man's quest for revelation and forgiveness; the languishing of marital intimacy; and the exploration of apocalyptic nature and a

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[367] Building on Dana Nelson's definition of national manhood as evocative of a rise in the corporate identity and competition, O'Brien's representation of the Perrys' bond is vulnerable not only to internal pressures, due to the family's traumatic history, but also to external inequalities. The incursion of the Vietnam war, of which neither brother was causally "responsible" for, and the failures of the economic marketplace of late capitalism, which overshadow their small town life, increase the characters sense of competition and disillusionment.

[368] Baldwin, "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy," in *Collected Essays*, 270.

uniquely American primordial past. However, while the plot of fraternity, as a sub-genre of the novel of development, is the central driving force of *Northern Lights*, *In the Lake of the Woods* primarily invokes the genres of mystery, tragedy and romance, which in their fragmentation elucidate a shadow narrative of fraternity that the previous novel depicts. As a dislocated text that evokes multiple contradictory scenes, the novel resembles both a collection of stories and an unruly archive, both of which are formed from a non-linear accretion of objects and information.

In this post-1990 novel, O'Brien tells the story of John Wade's tour of duty in Vietnam, in which he participated in the My Lai massacre and later covered up his actions by forging new military documents. While in Vietnam, Wade fails to bond with his fellow soldiers and takes on an alter-ego he names "Sorcerer." Returning home and marrying his college sweetheart, Kathy, John enters politics and rises steadily to Lieutenant Governor of Minnesota. During his campaign for the U.S. Senate the truth of his misdeeds is leaked to the press, and his wife learns for the first time of the real story of his experiences in Vietnam. Because of his defeat and marital problems, the Wades take a trip to northern Minnesota. Their vacation is cut short, however, when Kathy Wade disappears. The main plot of the novel follows the story of the search for Kathy and accounts for John Wade's feelings of loss and guilt over the death of his wife. When the search is called off, and John becomes a more serious suspect in her presumed murder, he takes a boat out into the lake and never returns. While the novel bears most striking similarities to the historical mystery genre, its thematic focus on filial breakdown, narcissism and death, conversely points to the story which the novel both engages and obscures: the 1960s narrative of affiliation.

In his book-length study of the author's oeuvre, Mark Heberle calls this postmodern novel "a series of asynchronous fragments" that demands a reading practice that is flexible, and thus comparative, as opposed to one which seeks a stable system of referential meaning.[369] As an

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[369] Mark Heberle, *A Trauma Artist: Tim O'Brien and the fiction of Vietnam* (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2001), 228.

historiographic metafiction, the novel incorporates varying narrative modes. These include: the novel's eight *speculative* chapters he entitles "Hypothesis," in which the varying causes of Kathy Wade's disappearance are evoked in a modal "might have been" style; the eight chapters that begin with "The Nature of …" that are *memorial* chapters in which O'Brien narrates flashback scenes and short narrative vignettes from the years prior to 1986, including tales of Vietnam, of Wade's subsequent political career, and the couple's marriage; and finally, the sixteen chapters that begin with "how" "where" or "what," for example "Where They Looked" or "How He Went Away," which provide scenes that make up the *mystery* of the novel and come closest to depicting verifiable facts of what preceded and followed the disappearance of Kathy Wade.

Spanning the years 1986-1993, the duration of the novel's main story-line mirrors the seven years it took O'Brien to complete the novel.[370] From 1986, when O'Brien began the novel, to 1990, when he would return to complete his work on *In the Lake of the Woods*, the United States witnessed a series of events in which the nation worked through various contested memories of the Vietnam War. The rise of public memory of the war began in the erection of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in 1982 and was later documented in "realist" films released during O'Brien's composition of the novel. These include the early *The Deer Hunter* (1978), *Platoon* (1986), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), *Casualties of War* (1989) and *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989). Marita Sturken argues that these "docudramas," in their invocation of a realist aesthetic and autobiographical claim to authenticity, ironically construct a " 'real' experience of the war, through which one acquires the truth."[371] In *Tangled Memories*, she claims these films inadequately represent the war by following one sympathetic character's painful experience of lost innocence that would inspire "viewers to mourn and feel redemption for the war." In his novel, O'Brien refuses to depict these scenes of mercy, forgiveness

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[370] He put the novel on hold while writing *The Things They Carried* in the late 1980s, which was published in 1990 to wide critical acclaim.
[371] Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 99.

or revelation. Unlike the protagonists of *Platoon* or *Casualties of War*, whose heroism is dependent on their disidentification with their group, O'Brien's depiction of John Wade reveals this mythology's underlying incoherence.

In the Lake of the Woods suggests that the most powerful form of memory is not nationalistic, but rather a collection of various personal points of view. The postmodern novel therefore narrates the past not as history but as memory, which can shift and transform from one page to the next. By depicting the war and its domestic aftermath as a postmodern collapse of objectivity and history, the author chooses fantasy and speculation over his contemporaries' preference for documentary realism. Even though *Northern Lights* was written during the final months of the war, this early novel takes an adjacent perspective of the survivor who witnesses the struggles of veteran life: the reader is only witness to his suffering through the eyes of Harvey's older brother Perry. *In the Lake of the Woods*, on the other hand, is narrated metatextually through the perspective of *two* veterans: the protagonist, John Wade and the researcher/narrator of the historiographic metafiction, who was a veteran of the war in Vietnam. Remembering the war from this varying and unreliable veteran perspective, the novel therefore depicts the military collective as not mythic essence, but a social formation fraught with contradiction.

In his novel about the breakdown of a marriage in the wake of Vietnam, O'Brien suggests that this domestic tragedy is in part due to the failures of military collectivity, both on the homefront and on the battlefront. Imagined through an affective experience Benedict Anderson calls a "profoundly self-sacrificing love," the military works thanks to a fantasy of genealogical coherence. An incorporating body, the military collective is defined by de-individualization, where differences are overcome by soldiers' imagined fraternity with each other.[372] These feelings of "self-sacrificing

[372] Like Baldwin's representation of cross-racial affiliation originating in the broken sibling bond, fraternity in literature and films about Vietnam often symbolizes the duty and loyalty that defines loving friendship during wartime.

love" in turn become the emotional strategy used to bond men during training. Ironically, the love for country also is instrumental in enforcing the soldier's will to kill in combat. Historian Joanna Bourke notes that in the 20th century, "killing as a response to negative emotions like hatred contained none of the power and pleasure of killing as a response to dreams of love and friendship."[373] *In the Lake of the Woods* reminds us that military combat training's dependence on the "dreams of love and friendship" can dramatically backfire, bringing about a crisis of guilt in the protagonist. Ironically, to learn to kill justly for one's country, soldiers must repress the underlying guilt one imagines for killing another human being – a psychic quandary that O'Brien's 1994 novel dramatizes.

In O'Brien's depiction of John Wade, fraternal duty towards one's comrades goes dramatically awry – the character's feelings of love facilitate extreme violence *against* his own military corps, where the body of his friend and comrade substitutes for the enemy. As a result of Wade's orphaned sense of alienation, the character's inability to fully incorporate into the military's circle of kinship, which is further tainted by the prospective massacre, is symbolized in a tragic attack on the collective.[374] O'Brien describes the scene of John Wade killing PFC Weatherby at the height of the massacre many times, but here in this first iteration he emphasizes the confusion that may have led to his killing. This is a man who John Wade notably loved "like a brother." However, while his affective position towards Weatherby may match Anderson's conception of the bonds of familial loyalty necessary for national collectivity, the protagonist can't seem to match his feelings with appropriate acts:

> He found a young woman laid open without a chest or lungs. He found dead cattle… Sorcerer didn't know where to shoot. He didn't know what to shoot… If a thing moved, he shot it. If a thing did not move, he shot it. There was no enemy to shoot, nothing he could

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[373] Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face to Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 158.

[374] From childhood, Wade sets himself apart from the affiliative group, as he also does within his filial family unit.

> see, so he shot without aim and without any desire except to make the terrible morning go away. When it ended, he found himself in the slime at the bottom of an irrigation ditch./ PFC Weatherby looked down on him. // "Hey, Sorcerer," Weatherby said. The guy started to smile, but Sorcerer shot him.[375]

Caught "in the slime" that is created when perpetration and victimization become one, John Wade's actions become manically automatic: "there was no enemy to shoot" so he shot everywhere, "without aim and without any desire" to kill except to kill the event itself and make "the terrible morning go away." The body of Weatherby is thus aligned synchronically with the body of a young woman eviscerated that we see in the first sentence of the passage. We become one with the perception of Sorcerer himself, whose distraught affect shapes our entry into the scene. Klaus Theweleit refers to the visceral symbols of mire, slime and pulp in his study of masculinity and the rise of Nazism in Germany after World War I. In *Male Fantasies Vol 1.*, Theweleit describes slime as the abject remainder left over from the breakdown of hierarchy and military dominance that contributes to the individual soldier's wartime suffering. In the wake of U.S. defeat in Vietnam, and the disintegration of the corporal body of the nation, Wade is described as caught in "slime" at the bottom of this ditch. Theweleit writes: "if the man uses weapons against the mire, slime, or pulp, he is killing himself; for these substances are on and within his own body, in the places where his own dams have started to crumble."[376] The scene of Wade emerging from this muck illuminates his incapacity to individuate himself from the enemy and from his collective: he is all these abject things at once. This collapse of identity and reality logically leads him to turn on his comrades, the closest thing to his own self, and kill a friend he confesses to have loved, "like a brother." In this scene of Wade looking up at Weatherby, but killing him anyway, O'Brien thereby eviscerates the corporal unity of the adoptive fraternal bond, posing this event as an embodiment of the internal

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[375] Tim O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods* (New York: Penguin, 1994), 63-4.
[376] Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies: Women, Floods, Bodies, History* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987), 403.

disintegration at the heart of the nation. In destroying his symbolic brother, Wade's own sense of self and identification with the mythical family of the nation ruptures.

In his representation of Wade's killing of Weatherby as a scene of broken recognition, O'Brien further personalizes and makes intimate this scene of social fragmentation. This fragging of Weatherby revises the common understanding of the act; usually highlighting a subordinate's attack on his commander, for John Wade, the fragging takes place laterally between two equals in rank. This question of hierarchy remains as a trace in O'Brien's description of the positions of the two characters, Wade below and Weatherby from above.[377] The specter of social hierarchy and inequality thus illuminates the military's incapacity to forge egalitarian lateral bonds that are based on a framework of dialogue and intersubjective exchange. The death of his fellow comrade thus suggests that the genealogical authority underlying military collectivity is dangerous. An over-identification with the patriarchal family shuts down a self-reflexive negotiation of interpersonal conflict and group differences that is central to individuals surviving the violence of war.

The figure of 'friendly fire" is overlaid by various archetypal myths of brotherhood and military life. The killing of someone so close to Wade, whom he confesses to have "loved" "like a brother," highlights the primary division of the military cohort after war: the victims and the survivors. The guilt of the survivor ties back to the Biblical representation of brotherhood in the story of Cain and Able, for example, that is defined by mutual wounding and deceit, and the guilt that these wounds create in the other. Katherine Kinney, in her article on O'Brien's 1979 Pulitzer Prize winning novel *Going After Cacciato*, argues that the trope of "friendly-fire" indicates an over-investment in narrating Vietnam as an internal struggle between Americans that occludes the

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[377] A culturally specific term originating in sixties military slang, the etymological root of "fragging" is derived from a kind of grenade that was designed to burst into fragments upon impact. "Fragging," *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989).

external reality of U.S. imperialism abroad.[378] By refusing to depict the scene of Vietnam combat as a screen onto which we might project our parallel memories of the era, O'Brien illuminates the dangers of forgetting the common anti-imperialist goals of the era's "domestic" movements for liberation and the "foreign" struggles for de-colonization in Vietnam. [379] Both were deemed the enemy of the U.S. state, although in varying degrees. To see John Wade's killing of Weatherby as a sign of the irrationality of war, in which outside and inside, domestic and foreign collapse, thus requires us to confront the ideological bases for the war itself, where anti-war activism at home was seen as complicit with those other enemies of the state in North Vietnam, Cambodia, Ecuador, and the Congo, to name a few.

While the non-veteran protagonist in *Northern Lights* can access a healing rebirth in the wilds of his rural home, John Wade's defining experiences in war make him incapable of becoming fully inscribed into a narrative of fraternal redemption. Although Wade shares some characteristics with Richard Slotkin's conception of the American archetypal hunter, his unnatural use of violence is inassimilable with the mythic idealism of the "noble Indian" or frontiersman. Instead, Wade is depicted as a devolved hunter, who tracks humans rather than animals, a training he learned under the cultural war machine of Vietnam-era militarization. As O'Brien's essay "The Violent Vet" attests, the veteran characterized as "murderer" or "war criminal," becomes a symbolic field through

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[378] Here O'Brien revises a plot device he used a decade earlier in *Going After Cacciato*, in which a company decides to kill their commanding officer, to the horror of soldier Cacciato, who subsequently goes AWOL. The novel imagines what might have happened to Cacciato and his troop by harnessing the imagination of his fellow solider Paul Berlin, who tells a fantastic tale about the troop's escape from Vietnam, imprisonment in Iran, and arrival in Paris. See Katherine Kinney, "American Exceptionalism and Empire in Tim O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato,*" *American Literary History* 7.4 (Winter 1995): 633-53.

[379] While O'Brien's novel rarely addresses the social movements for equality on the U.S. stage, mainstream cultural memories of the war often present the military company as a microcosm for the nation's crisis over social oppression during the Vietnam era. Critic Milton J. Bates, for example, argues in *The Wars we Took to Vietnam* that the "cultural product" of the war combined various U.S.-based conflicts over race, generation, class, and gender that form the basis of our historical understanding of the long 1960s. Despite the efforts in basic training to neutralize individuality and cultural background in support of identification with a national military community, combat troops undoubtedly brought their own assumptions and social beliefs to bear in the relationships they fostered with comrades on the ground and away from the bureaucratic force of military life. See Milton J. Bates, *The Wars we Took to Vietnam* (Berkeley: U California P, 1996).

which the American public seeks to purify itself. This vision of the veteran as an unwieldy threat to the safety of the family, and by extension, the state conversely illustrates the state's inherent vulnerability in the aftermath of the loss of the war. As the nation's first "living room war," the war in Vietnam was defined by the cultural interpenetration of battlefront and homefront, a collusion that reveals the waning stability of the state's territoriality.

If John Wade is the veteran "everyman," the "Violent Vet" onto which U.S. citizens projected their fears and desires, he is also the abnormal exception that this stereotype unfortunately obscures. The conflation of the myth of violence and the realities of wartime atrocity within John Wade creates a discomforting character that the reader is constantly questioning. To understand John Wade's "innocence" or "guilt," his round uniqueness or flat stereotype, is the hermeneutic basis upon which the novel depends. This central quandary demands a method of reading that goes beyond a hermeneutics of suspicion; instead, O'Brien crafts a narrative that is discursively heterogeneous, in which the reader is teased and welcomed to situate herself *along side* this split and unlikable character. To enter *In the Lake of the Woods*, where the subject/object divide is explicitly murky, the affiliative reader can only bear witness to the incoherence at the root of John Wade's perfidious embodiment of Veteran stereotype and icon. As the next section will attest, the character's inability to assimilate back into a national body politic where redemption might be possible is due, in part, to his participation in the most iconic event of the war: the My Lai Massacre. O'Brien's concatenation of Wade's familial breakdowns to the events at My Lai illuminates a melancholic attachment to the "normal" and ethically pure white manhood, a myth the novel subtly seeks to uphold.

Breaking Open the Archive of My Lai

In *In the Lake of the Woods*, O'Brien confronts the most abject event to which Ha Thi Quy and others testified: the 1968 My Lai Massacre, in which hundreds of civilians were killed in Thuan Yen Vietnam by the American military unit know as "Charlie Company." In interviews, O'Brien has hinted that he became impassioned to include the My Lai Massacre in *In the Lake of the Woods* while doing research in the Library of Congress for a 1994 trip O'Brien took back to Vietnam. The archival scraps of testimony from the trial of Lieutenant Calley and other congressional records that are included in the novel's "Evidence" chapters were in fact discovered within the context of his own journey. The author's belated return to this history therefore illuminates the almost unintelligible nature of the event itself, which was ostensibly erased from our public memory for decades after the war.

Interspersed among the novel's three main discursive modes (*speculation*, *memorial*, and *mystery*), O'Brien includes seven chapters he entitles "Evidence," which serve as the most meta-fictional elements of the novel as a whole and create a final mode we might call *evidentiary*. These chapters are key to the novel's structure that is framed by a fictional veteran-turned-author researching and writing both a record and an invented story of the Wades's disappearance. Emblematic of the narrator's laborious research, these archival chapters include a vast survey of sources and citations, such as quotations from fictional characters about the disappearance of the Wades, cited passages from manuals on magic, biographies of presidents such as Woodrow Wilson, actual testimony from snippets of fictional and historical interviews.[380] The novel's internal

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[380] Chapters progress thus: 1) How Unhappy They Were; 2) Evidence; 3) The Nature of Loss; 4) What He Remembered; 5) Hypothesis; 6) Evidence; 7) The Nature of Marriage; 8) How the Night Passed; 9) Hypothesis; 10) The Nature of Love; 11) What He Did Next; 12) Evidence; 13) The Nature of the Beast; 14) Hypothesis; 15) What the Questions Were; 16) Evidence; 17) The Nature of Politics; 18) Hypothesis; 19) What Was Found; 20) Evidence; 21) The Nature of the Spirit; 22) Hypothesis; 23) Where They Looked; 24) Hypothesis; 25) Evidence; 26) The Nature of the Dark; 27) Hypothesis; 28) How He Went Away; 29) The Nature of the Angle; 30) Evidence; 31) Hypothesis.

representation of its own fictional archive of sources self-reflexively represents accuracy as a problem – a textual element that complicates the historicity the novel purports to represent. Although *In the Lake of the Woods* was awarded the Society of American Historians' 1994 James Fenimore Cooper Prize for its "significant contribution to historical understanding," its authentic portrayal of "people and events of the historical past," and its display of "skills in narrative construction and prose style," the text is much more than a historical novel.[381] This self-reflexivity is found in the novel's 123 footnotes, some of which include lengthy ramblings that document the research challenges the narrator faced in piecing together this mystery, a project that began three years after the couple's disappearance and ended in 1994.

For O'Brien, his renewed concentration on the legacy of My Lai is part of a decades-long personal trek he began over thirty years earlier in 1970. While on his tour of duty in 1969, O'Brien's company fought in the very same rice fields as Charlie Company, sadly unaware of their slaughter of 504 civilians that had taken place underneath his feet a year before.[382] After learning of the massacre on his return to the States in 1970, and realizing his own geographic and temporal proximity to this horror, the event became for O'Brien a kind of limit case of the war. In his publishing career, this desire to confront the traumas of Vietnam began shortly after his return. In the early 1970s, while working towards a doctoral degree in government at Harvard, O'Brien spent two summers interning as a reporter for the *Washington Post*. At the *Post*, he covered the war and veterans' affairs, publishing articles on topics such as the 1972 draft lottery, protests by Vietnam veterans against the war, and failed peace efforts during the Johnson presidency. In October 1973, O'Brien reviewed New Journalist John Sack's book *The Man-Eating Machine* – a non-fiction account of the leadership role of Lieutenant William Calley that seeks to demonstrate the normalcy of murder in the military machine. Highly critical of Sack's privilege in reporting on rather than fighting in the war, O'Brien calls the

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[381] Society of American Historians. http://sah.columbia.edu/content/information-1
[382] Tim O'Brien, "The Vietnam in Me" *New York Times Magazine*, October 2, 1994.

book "simplistic demagoguery," closing the short review with the testimonial conclusion: "I submit that William Calley is not normal."[383]

A self-described "soldier against the war," O'Brien fell into the quandary of being drafted into service for a cause he did not believe in. Highly concerned about how his own veteran autobiography fueled the marketing and reception of his novels as "war literature," he situates his texts with a critical distance from his own life story through moments of self-reflexivity and paratextual commentary. This review of Sack's unpopular book helps contextualize a later authorial anxiety of speaking for a representative "veteran experience." Many in the Vietnam Veterans Against the War movement and other anti-war groups would argue that the "war criminal" embodied in the figure of William Calley was not an exception, but an example of the military's systemic violence, insanity and obfuscation of the rules of war. O'Brien sought to complicate this political rhetoric that portrayed war as inherently criminal. In a 1979 critique of contemporary filmic and televisual depictions of the Vietnam Veteran, O'Brien writes: "It's just too damned easy to chalk it all up to insanity. Madness explains everything, right? No need to examine messy motives, because crazies don't *have* motives. No need to explore history, because lunatics operate *outside* it. No need to engage issues of principle or politics, because maniacs don't *think* about such things."[384] Here O'Brien sets out his own fictional mission to explore the motives behind the war, asserting the ethical necessity to re-examine and expand the historical narrative of the U.S. intervention in Vietnam. Throughout his fictional career, the novelist has therefore sought to document how war is not an insane and evil system through which individuals are molded, but a social world made up of competing acts, perspectives and moralities.

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[383] O'Brien, Tim. "Simplistic Demagoguery: *The Man-Eating Machine* by John Sack" *The Washington Post*, October 23, 1973. B6. Sack was a minor player in the decade's "New Journalism" movement.
[384] O'Brien, "The Violent Vet," *Esquire* (December 1979): 100.

In an anniversary collection entitled *Facing My Lai*, published four years after *In the Lake of the Woods*, O'Brien is interviewed for an essay on the fictions of war. Here he posits a code of measuring war crimes against the majority of Vietnam veterans that he asserts are quite normal. "There is an axiological line," he says, "a line between rage and frustration on the one hand and murder on the other. Although I experienced exactly what those people experienced in the same place, we didn't cross the line. The question then becomes why?"[385] Characteristic of his ambiguous style, he leaves the reader with the question "why" – a futile question that demands readers to continually re-envision the past as an open chapter of history. For author and reader alike, My Lai is a historical mystery – a mystery of human motivation, affect and emotion. The facts, the body count, are not at issue here – collectively Americans and Vietnamese have agreed upon the historical fact of the massacre's existence as an event. However, the motivation and causes behind these atrocities are unidentifiable, even to the actors themselves. This interest in exploring the murky psychic and social reasons for violence necessitates the author to detach the event from historical "fact." Thus, O'Brien fictionalizes the past as story, or as he says, "particularizes it."[386]

Departing from the iconicity of William Calley, in *In the Lake of the Woods* Tim O'Brien turns to creating the character John Wade that offers an adjacent perspective to the Massacre. Although he kills two individuals at My Lai, these killings seem to occur under duress; the character never blindly or passionately followed the orders of his commanding office. It is through the bleary eyes of a traumatized young Wade that the reader witnesses the atrocity at My Lai. One third of the way through the novel, O'Brien narrates the event in a chapter he calls "The Nature of the Beast." Exemplary of the repeated scenes of flashback in the novel, this descriptive passage of the event is framed as traumatic repetition. The author writes:

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385 David L. Anderson, *Facing My Lai: Moving Beyond the Massacre* (Lawrence, KS: UP of Kansas, 1998), 174.
386 Anderson, *Facing My Lai*, 172.

> He would feel only the faintest sense of culpability. The forgetting trick mostly worked. On certain late-night occasions, however, John Wade could remember covering his head and screaming and crawling through a hedgerow and out into a wide paddy where helicopters were ferrying in supplies. The paddy was full of colored smoke, lavenders and yellows. There were loud voices, and many explosions, but he couldn't seem to locate anyone. He found a young woman laid open without a chest or lungs. He found dead cattle. All around him there were flies and burning trees and burning hootches. Later, he found himself at the bottom of an irrigation ditch. There were many bodies present, maybe a hundred. He was caught up in the slime. PFC Weatherby found him there.[387]

Invited into the nightmarish consciousness of the character, the reader sees what John Wade sees: the horrendous vision of death on the ground where women are eviscerated, cattle are dead and flies are swarming, a scene unrolling before the character under the shadow of a lavender and yellow sky. The novel's emphasis on setting and its collapse of domestic and foreign landscapes show cause and effect to be difficult to mark. This collapse in time and space can also be seen in the cyclicality of O'Brien's autobiographical returns to Vietnam, and is integral to the author's experimentation with postmodernism, which Frederic Jameson describes as overwhelmingly defined by a "spatial logic" that lessens the referential power of "time, temporality and the syntagmatic" in art and history.[388] Without a clear temporal marker for this atrocity, the event seems projected onto this abject literary landscape. This particularized history, conceived from the character's experience of the event, thus depends not only on a fictional intervention in history, but on an expansion of the spatial field that surrounds this event.

This grotesque scene collapses bodies into the landscape, breaking down seemingly "natural" hierarchies. As the novel progresses, these images of war create the primary backdrop through which we are asked to understand John Wade's post-war life. Setting the present action of the novel near another more pure body of water, the Lake of the Woods in northern Minnesota, O'Brien transfers the apocalyptic violence found in the bloodied paddies of Vietnam into the water-bound domestic world. Against this liminal environment, the author nevertheless constructs a patchwork

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387 O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods*, 109-110.

388 Frederick Jameson, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1991), 25.

narrative that asks the reader to achieve interpretative resistance to the novel's abject setting and character. Though the protagonist tries to erase this bestial event from his public life by altering his military record, the memory and the *suspicion* remain. In his 1998 essay "The Mystery of My Lai" published in the edited collection *Facing My Lai*, O'Brien speaks out against the idea of history healing the wounds of war and bringing closure to a generational divide: "I don't think that the wounds should be healed. We live in this weird culture where we think everything can be helped and healed, even if somebody goes out and shoots someone… Stories are a way to somehow keep memory alive, to keep picking at the scab."[389] In his figuration of narrative as a vehicle for memory being "kept alive," which he compares to the feeling when we "keep picking at a scab," O'Brien articulates an artistic strategy to tell stories that are open-ended and inconclusive. The unreliability O'Brien brings to the protagonist John Wade ostensibly keeps the wound open and ready for continued remembering and re-interpretation.

Ironically, O'Brien's textual concern with evoking history in order to redress its untended wounds fails to remember the 1970s collective efforts to bear witness to the horrors of My Lai. The organization of the 1971 Winter Soldier Investigation by Vietnam Veterans Against the War provides a historical counter-example to the lack of communal practices to work through these atrocities, and the trauma that ensued. This movement is situated in tension with O'Brien's argument that all veterans are generally "normal," by highlighting the testimonies of soldiers who felt they had often crossed the line of ethical military engagement, or were asked to do so by their superiors. In this public event later documented in an official report, traumatized veterans testified under oath to the atrocities they committed and were trained to enact on the battlefront.[390] For

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[389] O'Brien, "The Mystery of My Lai," *Facing My Lai*, ed. David L. Anderson (Lawrence: UP of Kansas, 1998), 177.

[390] Historian Andrew E. Hunt interviewed many veterans who participated in the event, one such veteran who testified to horrors he himself had committed in order to gain this level of recognition. Quoting Scott Camil, a Jewish-American vet who grew up in Florida, Hunt illuminates just how strong the desire for public

veterans who both committed "war crimes" in Vietnam and later demonstrated against the war, the VVAW offered a space for dialogue and individual's confrontation with their own guilt. While the group never became as diverse as other movements during the period, it attempted to encourage racial, class and even sexual diversity, although not quite successfully. By 1972, the group was known to have more than 20,000 members, but many of these were still white middle class veterans.[391]

Psychologist Robert J. Lifton worked with the VVAW and has written extensively of his experiences with the organization fostering collective dialogues called "rap groups."[392] In his study of Vietnam veteran trauma and recovery that veterans experience two main forms of guilt: "static guilt" and "animating guilt." He defines static guilt as fixed within a pre-existing institutional structure, writing that it "is cut off from the life process – held in a state of separation and inner disintegration as well as stasis – that is, a death-dominated condition" "Animating guilt," however, is life-affirming and "propels one toward connection, integrity, and movement."[393] He goes on to articulate how in order to animate guilt one must create a connective, and I would argue, affiliative

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recognition was for many veterans: "The real reason, in my heart – not the reason I told people – but the real reason that I did this was because I was looking for recognition. We didn't have any parades. We didn't have shit. I wanted recognition, and I had lots of documentation from Vietnam because of my job as a forward observer." Andrew E. Hunt, *The Turning: A History of Vietnam Veterans Against the War* (New York: New York UP, 1999), 57.

391 Hunt, *The Turning*, 143.

392 The overemphasis on the desire for recognition in a national sphere belies the economic and social disenfranchisement that many veterans faced upon their return. By the 1980s and after, Vietnam veterans no longer had access to a viable social collective such as the VVAW; instead their means of attention and redress was privatized into what Martha Minow calls "victim talk," a form of discourse that reified individual trauma and upheld national military and governmental structures that had previously been proven inadequate to the task of rehabilitating suffering veterans. In her essay "Surviving Victim Talk," Minow argues for a discursive field beyond "victim talk." Quoting feminist theorist Wendy Kaminer, Minow writes: "Kaminer reports that the recovery movements rely on a pervasive fascination with victimhood and with essential helplessness as a primary source of identity. She explains that victimhood "offers absolution and no accountability, and instead of imposing the capacity to act, it confers entitlements to sympathy, support, and reparations." Arguing for a system of political reparation that is constructed around action and accountability, rather than sentimentality and entitlement, Minow calls for a particularized vision of individual action and suffering that cannot be captured in the bargaining chip of "victim testimonials." See Minow, "Surviving Victim Talk" *UCLA Law Review* (1992-1993): 1411-1445. Minow is careful to not undermine the necessity for recovery movements support of victims' rights and the positive outcomes they can bring, a position I also echo.

393 Robert Jay Lifton, *Home From the War: Neither Victims nor Executioners* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973), 127-8.

circle, whether it be a larger social network or a resistant cohort of like-minded individuals. Highly critical of the negative force ideology and totalizing "metanarratives" have on the self, Lifton argues that these institutions are always in a necessary cycle of life and death:

> Contemporary animating institutions are notoriously short-lived, emerging as they do in a 'Protean' historical situation. Like the rap groups, they are likely to be always in crisis, always in question. Absolute stability (literal immortality) is pursued at the cost of the animating principles themselves. Affinity can then become exclusivity, elitism, and a demand for sameness. Presence can turn into forms of anti-reason and suppression of individual autonomy and give rise eventually to cultism. Self-generation can fall to authoritarian control by self-appointed generators whose obsession with keeping the institution going replaces the earlier animating ethos.[394]

The cyclical process of these "animating institutions," or what I might call circles of affiliation, makes them often difficult to sustain; rather than stabilizing them into a static form of ideology, Lifton suggests that collectives are necessarily defined by crisis, especially during a "protean" historical situation such as the long 1960s. Notably, these "institutions" are not what we might think of as institutional today; they are instead emergent forms of collectivity that seek to question inherited, what we might call "filial" institutions, such as nation, state, or family. Thus, they are able to counter the individual's desire for achieving what Lifton calls "literal immortality," and substitute "symbolic immortality" as a more appropriate force for the transformative practice of living towards an unknown future.[395]

Tragically in O'Brien's novel, the main characters are overly dependent on static institutions that fail to cultivate the "animating ethos" so integral for the collaborative work of repair. Eclipsed by his experience in war, John Wade cannot perceive life and death as meaningfully linked through narrative or everyday struggle. Instead, the difference between life and death seem to collapse, making it difficult for the war's truths to be translated into communicative speech or responsible action. It is no surprise then, that marriage, the family, and federal politics become the vehicles for

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[394] Lifton, *Home from the War*, 383.
[395] Lifton, *Home from the War*, 213-14.

the protagonist's doomed attempts at self-transformation. Symptomatically without the recourse of creative alliances, the protagonist has no path for improvisation or re-animation. Despite the real power of Lifton's conception of group therapy and the VVAW rap groups of the era, *In the Lake of the Woods* erases this history of veteran affiliation. These failures conversely point to a more distributive political effort in which all U.S. citizens, male and female, would be asked to take part in a process of reconciliation.[396]

After the war, John Wade's encounters with fellow veterans seem to inspire abject fear and aggression after the truth of his participation is brought to light. The character's wartime dis-identification with the larger social group becomes hostile when he falls under suspicion for killing his wife and is tracked by fellow veteran police officer Vinny Pearson and his superior County Sheriff Art Lux. Wade's tense interaction with Pearson, the only other Vietnam veteran with whom he has contact in the present discourse of the novel, leads him to aggressively call Pearson "our great white albino deputy fetus," repetitively referring to him as such throughout the novel. A character with "Swedish blood," Pearson is described as having skin so white it appeared as a "smooth, almost colorless quality, pallid and sickly," an image that leads Wade to imagine him as a "huge white fetus," the horror of which makes Wade "look away" – he literally can't face him. O'Brien's use of this odd slur paired with the racial description of Pearson's skin having an almost albino-like pallor gives shape to John Wade's underlying discomfort in being interpolated into a collective with Pearson.

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[396] Psychologist Robert J. Lifton has considered these competing forces within the self and witnessed their expression in Vietnam veterans first hand. Collaborating with leaders of the Vietnam Veterans against the War movement, he worked in the late 1960s and early 1970s to bring a new sense of collective activism and therapy to those soldiers who faced an uphill battle on their return to native soil. Lifton's 1973 study *Home From the War* traces his observations of a group of veterans who made up one of the first veteran-organized "rap groups." The rap groups were composed of mostly male Veterans who shared common experiences and emphasized active listening, reminding one of the concomitant development of feminist "consciousness-raising" groups. These groups, built upon a common gender identity, inspired scenes of collective witnessing to an individual's traumatic experiences that would inspire a cathartic personal account of trauma. The overlaps between the feminist and veteran psychotherapy movements paradoxically illuminate the common interests and strategies shared by these communities defined by their separateness. See also Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

O'Brien frames Pearson as the stereotypical working-class veteran, who serves to police the bounds of the collective identity, separating the criminals from the innocents. Perhaps referencing the historical reality of the dwindling working-class in the decades following the Vietnam War, Pearson is described as an amateur cop who has never left Angle Inlet besides to go to war; he is referred to by his fellow Detective Lux as " a rube" or hick.[397] In this depiction, Pearson's abject personality arises thanks to his extreme phenotypical whiteness not matching up to the social privilege assumed in white national manhood. Pearson is an emblem of the Middle American citizen that John Wade seeks to escape – his desire to gain political success on a national scale is one example of holding onto a sense of middle-class normalcy without having to deal with the pressures of the marketplace. In his recent study, *The Possessive Investment of Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*, George Lipsitz articulates that the kind of American heroism that was heralded during the 1980s conservative patriotic revival was precisely to revive or re-appropriate the "possessive investment of whiteness" that had come under threat during the Vietnam era.[398] The consequences for those white veterans denied access to social privilege were compounded by the wounds they incurred in war, causing many veterans to "drop out" of accepted institutions of public life. Although conservative veteran-turned-politicians like John McCain have heralded their heroism at missing the social revolutions of the sixties, because as McCain quips he "was tied up" at the time, the home front was more than Woodstock, be-ins and free love.[399] No longer able to ascend the post-war economic ladder, veterans were faced with an America drastically changed.

On the other hand, Vinny Pearson also serves to inspire in John an impulse towards self-reflection, as we see this encounter bring about a renewed articulation of morality within John,

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[397] O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods*, 129.
[398] George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*: *How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple UP, 2006), 73.
[399] Bernard von Bothmer, *Framing the Sixties: the Use and Abuse of a Decade from Ronald Reagan to George W. Bush* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2009), 1.

which comes about alongside his renewed conflict over remembering the events that took place on the night of Kathy's disappearance. O'Brien describes Pearson's interpretation of Wade as the guilty perpetrator not only of war crimes during the My Lai massacre, but of the worst domestic crime imaginable, the murder of his wife.[400] Yet the character's paranoid interpretation of Wade reveals the veterans' common intimate knowledge of the horrors that happen during war. O'Brien writes, "Vinny's fingers twitched. The thought came to Wade's mind that the two of them shared some intuitive understanding about the nature of the human animal. Things that were possible, things that were not. He felt relaxed and dangerous."[401] In this encounter, the protagonist projects onto Vinny the supposed "intuitive understanding" of the "nature of the human animal" that is seemingly familiar to all veterans.

The one character who seems inimical to this "nature," and chooses not to participate in the fictionalized massacre in Vietnam is Richard Thinbill, a member of the Chippewa tribe whose name parodies his inability to be the "silent Indian" and keep safe the secrets of his comrades. Defined by the power of his voice, Thinbill testifies to the truths that Wade and others seek to forget. He is also the character who years later reveals the truth of Wade's participation to the press – an "outing" that leads to his loss of the election and further fall. O'Brien's insertion of this fictional character into the historical archive illuminates the disjunction between the historical record's static authenticity and the moral or ethical injunction to revise or alter history through acts of cultural memory. While Thinbill speaks publicly of the truth of Wade's complicity, thus changing the historical narrative of the event itself, Wade does the exact opposite by altering the paper military records with typewriter and glue. Thinbill seems then to give voice to the guilt that Wade is unable to shake loose.

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400 The irony of their collective recognition of the horror that might come from the "human animal" during war time and after is that Kathy's death belies the other forms of racially motivated violence that occurred against Asian-Americans during and after the war. See Lipsitz, 97.
401 O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods*, 237.

In refusing Thinbill's appeal to "tell somebody" and "talk," Wade in turn threatens the affiliative bond they have shared up until the war's breaking point. Directly following the actual massacre, Thinbill comforts John during a subsequent emotional breakdown he suffers when confronted with the idea of coming clean about the events. Seemingly unaware of the causes of Weatherby's death, Thinbill demonstrates a comradely support to Wade, an ethic of care that exemplified their friendship earlier in their tour of duty. For example, O'Brien makes a point to show Wade correcting Lieutenant Calley, when he demonstrates bigotry against Thinbill, reminding the Lieutenant that Thinbill was not an Apache, but a Chippewa. However, when faced with the choice to align himself with either the honest "native" or the boy-next-door turned war criminal embodied in Weatherby, Wade rejects Thinbill's pleas and ironically affiliates with the archetypal figure that he instinctively sought to reject. The protagonist's inability to sustain a friendly alliance with Thinbill during war thus emblematizes the character's refusal to confront the difference or foreclosed remainder within him self, a difference that might have saved him and his wife from death. In the novel, O'Brien illuminates how the veteran's failure to create sustainable friendships outside the filial bonds of the "pure" nation is part of the character's refusal to bear witness to and confront his own part in the suffering of others.

In the face of Wade's failures to affiliate with his friend Thinbill and his wife Kathy, one might take O'Brien's novel as a complete negation of affiliation. However, the fragmentary narrative form does provide us with a collection of scenes that gesture toward affiliation, which are incomplete yet provide a rationale for conceiving this novel as offering a kind of narrative of affiliation. The most notable of these is the burgeoning friendship that emerges between John Wade and the owner of the cabin that he and Kathy stay in while visiting Angle Inlet. Claude Rasmussen and his wife Ruth become a kind of surrogate family for John after his wife's disappearance; they aid John's search for his wife, provide him with food and emotional support, and perhaps most

importantly bring him company. An older man and longtime donor to the Minnesota state Democratic party, who is ostensibly part of the "greatest generation" like John's father, Claude is the first person to witness the scene of drowned plants and broken pots left over after the night of Kathy's disappearance. Confronted with this truth of John's mental instability he chooses to support the protagonist.

Coming of age as a fatherless son, Wade was denied the stability associated with masculine filial continuity. In his friendship with Claude, he is able to partially repair this primary loss, and the more dramatic deaths that come after. John Wade's possible suicide, at the conclusion of the novel, subtly looks back to Paul Wade's tragic death forty years earlier, when he took his own life in the 1950s. While not explicitly mentioned in the novel, O'Brien implies that John Wade's father served in World War II, an experience that may have led to his alcoholism and depression. United in their common experience as traumatized veterans, this image of paternity suggests that the feeling of kinship between father and son might be defined by extra-familial bonds to the nation. O'Brien highlights, therefore, how this seemingly "natural" genealogy that connects family to nation, father to son, has malignant and murderous properties. Like Paul Perry in O'Brien's *Northern Lights*, Wade's marriage and attainment of the patriarchal role of the husband is an attempt to redeem this tainted patrilineal relationship his father and all that Paul Wade psychically represents. O'Brien's depiction of John Wade's circle of attachments therefore illustrates a mid-century collapse of the stability of the nuclear family, a collapse that begins decades prior to the end of the war in Vietnam.

What emerges during the subsequent search for Kathy is a new circle of affiliation that embraces John and inspires a "rising freshness inside him. Not quite optimism, but a kind of health, a clarity that had not been there for a very long while."[402] One can't help but read this "rising freshness," which Wade feels while sitting on the boat in the company of the Rasmussens and

[402] O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods*, 230.

Kathy's sister Pat, as oddly resembling the rejuvenating feeling of animation that Lifton articulates. Yet this recognition of life's reparative capacity only comes about in the presence of an adoptive circle that is lateral, yet guided by the symbolic authority of the father figure Claude. One of the most hopeful gestures at the end of the novel therefore comes in Wade's conscious recognition of his friendship with Claude: "Watching him, Wade was struck by the notion that he had a genuine friend in the world. Unique development, he thought."[403] However, this articulation of a friendship between the two characters does not make its way out of the filial tradition on which the novel more generally depends – they resemble a father/son relation as much as a friendship.

Unlike Richard Thinbill, this friendship is not dependent on John coming clean. Instead Claude provides John with a boat to take on his final trip into the lake, which presumably offers him the possibility of escaping to Canada. O'Brien describes Claude writing to John in a letter he leaves on the boat: "No matter what, you were in for a lynching. People make assumptions and pretty soon the assumptions turn into fact and there's not a damn thing you can do about it. Anyhow, I've got this theory. I figure what happened was real-real simple. Your wife got herself lost."[404] Claude's belief in Wade's innocence, which depends on his ability to see how "people make assumptions," ironically comes from a place of class and racial privilege, a privilege that Wade has both desired and at times profited from for decades before his lost election. With Claude Rasmussen on his side, for a brief moment Wade is able to rise above the class and racial struggles inherent in his experiences as a veteran and be redeemed into a filial tradition of American manhood, untainted by the specter of Vietnam.

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[403] O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods*, 244.
[404] O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods*, 279.

Marriage and Affiliation

In our contemporary memory, the generation of soldiers who fought in the war in Vietnam seem to find it tragically difficult to assimilate back into the domestic world of love and family. The home they returned to was drastically different, however, than what many had imagined an "adult" life to be. Rather than portray a 1940s era vision of post-war healing, embodied in films such as *The Best Years of Our Lives* or the post-Vietnam film *Coming Home*, O'Brien sullies marriage's capacity to redeem veteran suffering and atrocity. His meta-fictional novel interrupts the linearity assumed in post-war sentimental romance, where wartime chaos is neutralized by a subsequent return to the harmonious domestic sphere. The novel's use of the genre of tragedy illuminates the pitfalls of John Wade's urgent need to marry and stitch himself back into an exceptional American genealogy.

Despite the protagonist's contact with foreign lands and peoples, an experience that might dislodge a myth in national exceptionalism, John Wade is a character whose decisions seem to crystallize around an anachronistic vision of American domesticity. With the rise of a 1960s cultural imaginary of adoptive affiliation came a correspondent waning of the economic and social viability of the American nuclear family. John's nostalgia reflects the novel's moment of publication and composition: the 1980s and early 1990s. During this period of conservative resurgence, as Stephanie Coontz argues in *The Way We Never Were*, the 1950s nuclear family was invoked as the key to social stability and economic prosperity. Coontz writes in 1990: "conservatives believe that if they can demonstrate the traditional family is alive and well, although endangered by politics that reward two-earner families and single parents, they can pass measures to revive the seeming placidity and prosperity of the 1950s."[405] Coontz retorts this mythic vision of 1950s obscures the gender and racial inequities and systemic Cold War ideology of repression and containment that upheld this

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[405] Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 23.

whitewashed dream of domestic bliss. Mary Caputi joins Coontz in arguing that this post-Vietnam mythologization of the fifties harkened back to the nation's utopian roots.[406]

In the Lake of the Woods opens with a scene of domestic disillusionment: the reader is greeted with an unhappy couple lying together on a porch, looking out on a lake. In a 1996 *Ploughshares* interview, O'Brien claims this scene was the seed for the narrative overall."[407] The first pages of the novel picture John and Kathy Wade surrounded by a fog of unhappiness that O'Brien speaks to in this interview. The author writes: "At night they would spread their blankets on the porch and lie watching the fog move toward them from across the lake. They were not yet prepared to make love. They had tried once, but it had not gone well, so now they would hold each other talk quietly about having babies and perhaps a house of their own. They pretended things were not so bad."[408] From the first scene, it is clear that the intensity of their love has waned; noting explicitly that they could not "make love," O'Brien signals the end of their love affair – and presumably their marriage. Their erotic intimacy broken, they instead try to hold onto a sentimental vision of nuclear family life. However, as the novel progresses the reader learns that this fantasy of having babies and building houses rings hollow.

Notably, O'Brien's depiction of the Wades' marriage is upheld by a corresponding figuration of national fraternity. Ann McClintock reminds us of the way that the feminine domestic sphere, embodied in the institution of marriage, is the representational vehicle through which American national identity is expressed: "All too often in male nationalisms, gender difference between women and men serves to symbolically define the limits of national difference and power between men. Excluded from direct action as national citizens, women are subsumed symbolically in to the

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[406] As cultural theorist Mary Caputi claims, the New Right's "mission was thus to reconnect us to a past that would then be projected onto the future, to return us to an innocence that would become the innocence of our future." Mary Caputi, *A Kinder, Gentler America: Melancholia and the Mythical 1950s* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2005): 2.
[407] Don Lee, "About Tim O'Brien," *Ploughshares*, 21.4 (Winter, 1995/1996): 200.
[408] O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods*, 1-2.

national body politic as its boundary and metaphoric limit."[409] O'Brien's novel, however, seeks not only to represent the nation-state, but also to critique its power. Central to the novel's affiliative or what Said calls "worldly" impulse is the desire to revise the historical narrative of the war in Vietnam that depends on a skeptical outlook about the viability of American nationalism. In its shifts from Vietnam to Minnesota, national boundaries are traversed; but at the same time, the nation is revealed not as natural, but as an object of representation and critique. Even while O'Brien demonstrates a generational nostalgia for barbeques and baseball games that are the saccharine script of American public life, he also seeks to disrupt this nostalgia by uncovering the violence that makes these privileges possible – a violence that comes back to haunt the inhabitants of *In the Lake of the Woods*.

In his study of affiliation and filiation, *The World, The Text, The Critic*, Edward Said writes that the "filiative scheme belongs to the realms of nature and 'life,' whereas affiliation belongs exclusively to culture and society."[410] Said explains that the power of filiation depends on structures of religious and social authority and genealogical bonds of family that are understood to be "natural" but in fact require ideology and cultural rites to be envisioned as such. O'Brien brings this tension to his depiction of the wedding ceremony of John and Kathy Wade. Here the author foreshadows the couple's future failure to ratify the institution's "natural" *divine* authority. The setting resembles the earlier essay's suburban-backyard as a fantasy-space where innocence can be redeemed – a space foreshadowing the un-harnessed environmental "force of life" that will emerge later in the novel. The ceremony takes place in the "discretely landscaped yard" of Kathy's parents home, the trees

[409] Ann McClintock, "Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family" *Feminist Review* 44 (Summer, 1993): 62.
[410] Edward Said, *The World, The Text, The Critic*, 20.

festooned with balloons and Japanese lanterns.[411] Evoking innocent imagery of white suburbia, this scene in the broader context of the novel achieves more sinister narrative ends:

> Altogether, things went nicely. The minister talked about the shield of God's love, which warded off strife, and then recited – too theatrically, John thought – a short passage from First Corinthians. Oddly, though, it was not the solemn moment he had once imagined. At one point he glanced over at Kathy and grinned. "And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge" – Her eyes were green and bright. She wrinkled her nose. She grinned back at him – "and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains…" A lawn mower droned a few houses down. A soft breeze rippled across the yard, and spikes of dusty sunshine made the trees glow, and pink and white balloons danced on their strings. "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." Then the minister prayed.[412]

The hollowness of the couple's commitment to each other is visualized in the scene's constant series of interruptions. Ironically, we are not witness to the Wades' vows as narrated dialogue; instead we see their smiling faces and "wrinkling" noses, which brings an immature and clichéd air to the "solemn moment" of promise making. Characteristic of the novel's aesthetic of fragmentation, even the sentences are broken up by dashes, separating the narration of the sermon from the focalized interiority of John Wade. These dashes and shifts from indirect to direct discourse demonstrate the characters alienation from marriage as a sacred and "natural" rite. Neither character seems to believe they have access to a redemptive, spiritual covenant, represented in the direct quoted dialogue of the minister. Instead, the imagery of divine love illuminates the forms of knowledge this social institution is tasked to erase: the genocidal acts in Vietnam.

O'Brien concludes the passage with the well-known textual citation from First Corinthians: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." On the one hand, this emblematic script of marriage presages the characters' attainment of marital intimacy: to see each other "face to face" captures the fantasy that

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[411] O'Brien's chapters that retrospectively look back to the origins of the disappearance of the Wades provide an additional point of evidence for this claim: they all begin with the term "Nature," the last chapter of which describes the literal nature of the novel's main setting in Angle Inlet, Minnesota.
[412] O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods*, 45.

love will lead to mutual knowledge and recognition. However, the passage's diction of prophecy, when contextualized within the novel's motif of magic and revelation, also points to the dangers of the use and abuse of knowledge. John Wade's hubris in the novel is his paranoid belief in his own omnipotence. Wade tells himself he can predict the future and even stop death from visiting his company: "in Vietnam, where superstition governed, there was the fundamental need to believe – believing just to believe –and over time the men came to trust Sorcerer's [my] powers."[413] This psychic survival mechanism had its origins in childhood. Wade turned to magic to find solace after his father commits suicide, and thus these tricks are part of the character's longer history of "magical thinking" where the character seeks control over life and death. O'Brien in fact foreshadows the larger revelation of truth that Wade cannot control, and will eventually lead to the characters' destruction. As the protagonist carries Kathy over the threshold of their new apartment, she states optimistically "We'll be happy... I know it," but the direct discourse dialogue quickly shifts into the internal focalized monologue of Wade. Wade reminds us that he will use his tricks to "guard his advantage. The secrets would remain secret – the things he'd seen the things he'd done. He would repair what he could, he would endure, he would go from year to year without letting on that there were tricks."[414] To "repair" his past and thus endure his marriage, Wade must perform the trick of his life, and pretend that his innocence is factual reality.

By narrating scenes of massacre alongside images of the Wades' marriage, O'Brien interrupts plot, but also opens up a rowdy and disjunctive space for telling new and particularized stories about the afterlife of war. Even in describing the characters' intimate recognition of each other at the ceremony, where John looks into Kathy's eyes that were "green and bright," O'Brien ties this amorous image to the realistic "truth" of the massacre. The figure of Kathy's eyes invokes a prolepsis to a later chapter that includes a lengthy narration of the massacre, which O'Brien

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[413] O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods*, 37.
[414] O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods*, 46.

describes as made up of colors that were "very bright and real," enlightened not only by the "bright and warm" sunlight, but also by the tracer fire that went on for hours.[415] In this same scene, as part of his "mind-cleansing tricks" Wade imagines "Kathy, her curly hair and green eyes…," thinking "about the difference between murder and war." The passage continues: "Obvious, he decided. He was a decent person. No bad intentions. Yes, and what had happened here was not the product of his own heart. He hadn't wanted any of it, and he hated it, and he wished it would all go away."[416] In tying this scene of battle to the eve of their wedding, the image emerges as a metaphor for the character's greater redemptive force. John will imagine his wife as a kind of angelic guide necessary for absolution, rationalizing his innocence by remembering the true "product of his own heart," his love for his wife.

As John Wade begins to lose faith in himself, after the "disappearance" of his wife into the woods of Northern Minnesota, the reader in turn begins to seriously question his innocence. The symbol of revelation found in the representation of their wedding turns up in the most horrific scene of violence in the novel: the speculative murder of Kathy Wade at the hands of her husband. Central to our belief in this act of murder is the stability of Kathy as an ironically ignorant source of potential forgiveness. His act of drowning her eyes with boiling water appears to be an attempt to save his innocence by ensuring she will never know the truth: "Her eyelids snapped open. She looked up at him, puzzled, almost smiling, as if some magnificent new question were forming. Puffs of steam rose from the sockets of her eyes."[417] One point of evidence to support the judgment that Wade does indeed kill his wife is O'Brien's emphatic description of his desire to clear his name and bring silence to those "magnificent new questions" that continue to form despite his attempts at escaping the past. If Kathy remains symbolically blind to what occurred in Vietnam, Wade can

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[415] O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods*, 214.
[416] O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods*, 212.
[417] O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods*, 273.

continue to believe in his magical powers to order nature and revise history. To fully receive this murder as truth, however, would depend on the reader inhabiting the very paranoid position of John Wade, a man who has not given up on the sacred ideal that everything can be put back into easy correspondence. In her essay " Paranoid Reading, Reparative Reading," Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explains that paranoia "is drawn towards and tends to construct symmetrical relations, in particular symmetrical epistemologies."[418] Wade's hermeneutic system is dependent on the sacred revelatory nature of his wife Kathy, as the character explains: " because you asked once, What is sacred? And because the answer was always you."[419] The tragic outcome of this post-war marriage develops from Wade's inability to perceive complication and embrace ambivalence in his wife and in the larger world.

O'Brien's depiction of the paranoid protagonist subtly articulates the interpretative pitfalls of fixing women to realms supposedly antithetical to human reason, such as the divine and the "natural." Close to the end of the novel, O'Brien composes a scene where John Wade fantasizes about the spiritual absolution of his wartime guilt, the animation of which depends on Kathy's archetypal femininity being projected onto the Minnesota wilderness. This depiction of a synchronic essential femininity is integral to the paranoid psychology of the protagonist. After traumatically reliving his participation in the massacre at My Lai, re-activated by his present crisis over losing the election and his wife, John Wade walks to the edge of the lake and dives to the bottom:

> She was there or she wasn't. And if she wasn't she was elsewhere. And even that didn't matter. Guilt had no solution. It was false-bottomed. It was the trapdoor he'd been performing on all these years, the love he'd withheld, the poisons he'd kept inside. For his entire life, it seemed, there had been the terror of discovery…. And to be loved he had practiced deception. He had hidden the bad things. He had tricked up his own life. Only for love. Only to be loved. The cold pressed into his rib cage. He could taste the lake. Eyes closed, deep, he glided by feel along the water-polished pilings beneath the dock. He could sense her presence. Yes, he could. The touch of her flesh. Her wide-open eyes. Her bare feet, her empty womb, her hair like wet weeds. Amazing, he thought, what love could

[418] Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, 126.
[419] O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods*, 302

> do. He let out the last of his air, pushed to the surface, hoisted himself onto the dock, dressed quickly, and trotted through the snow to the cottage.[420]

Conjuring up the open eyes of his wife in this underwater projection, John attempts to purify himself by rationalizing that his actions were "only to be loved." The image of Wade's narcissistic and "false bottomed" guilt, illustrates the character's disavowal of juridical efforts at redress – the proof that would result if the police discovered Kathy's body on the lake floor "didn't matter" to John, what mattered was the register of her spiritual presence he intuits by taste and touch. Analeptically reminding the reader of an earlier image of a Vietnamese "woman laid open without a chest or lungs" witnessed in the previous scene of massacre – whose flayed body refuses identification or recognition – this passage aligns the wife's body with the ultimate victim of the Massacre, collapsing the identity of both women into a universal feminized sameness, a sameness projected onto the lake itself. The imagery O'Brien brings to this scene of remorse reflects an earlier passage where Wade's love for Kathy is described in similar incorporating terms: "there were times when [he] wanted to open up Kathy's belly and crawl inside and stay there forever. He wanted to swim through her blood and climb up and down her spine and drink from her ovaries and press his gums against the firm red muscle of her heart."[421] In a frightening manifestation of the fear of being engulfed by an abject maternal body, O'Brien shows that in the eyes of John Wade erotic love can only end in the complete union of bodies that collapses subject and object, erasing individuality.

Later, when the protagonist loses himself "in the tangle" that was a "vast ongoing freeze, everything in correspondence, an icy latticework of valences and affinities," O'Brien shows how John Wade, and the detectives on the search for him and his wife, wrongly seek out a latticework "of valences and affinities" where "everything is in correspondence." This network of affinities reveals to the reader, however, not a dizzying landscape of infinite correspondence, but a space where

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[420] O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods*, 242-3.
[421] O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods*, 71.

differences cease to make meaning or signify individual singularity. The pathological, and seemingly narcissistic, dependence on these "symmetrical epistemologies" works against every character's ability to work out the truth of Kathy's disappearance. This is especially true for John Wade himself. Without intellectual humility and a capacious interpretive practice, John Wade becomes just another "fucker with no cards up his sleeves," a simplistic character who places his faith in a system of knowledge built upon a shaky irrational and gendered hierarchy crafted from magical revelation.

The Lake's Ethical Injunction

In the Lake of the Woods is a historical novel suggestive of the potential erasure of affiliation in post-1990 America. Emerging from an indeterminate and repressed history of My Lai, this meta-fictional novel implores the reader to depart from the surface of the text, and imagine what might be possible if marriage could confront the mutual problem of difference in sustaining cross-gender bonds of affiliation. Similar to the researcher's response to this story's archival disorder, the novel's lack of closure elicits a reading experience that continues even after the pages end, animating further speculation. The narrator makes clear literature's waning power to adequately represent the historical past: "For me, after a quarter century, nothing much remains of that ugly war. A handful of splotchy images… And yet a quality of abstraction makes reality unreal… Maybe erasure is necessary."[422] Living with a past made of "splotchy images," the narrator's compulsion for researching the truth does not make "reality" any less "unreal." As he sadly states at the close of the novel: "there is no end, happy or otherwise. Nothing is fixed, nothing is solved… All secrets lead to the dark, and beyond the dark there is only maybe."[423] O'Brien's depiction of narrator and protagonist both seeking to escape from and possibly forget the past conversely demands his readers to do the opposite. As Timothy Melley argues in his essay on the novel as a warning against

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[422] O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods*, 297.
[423] O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods*, 301.

historical amnesia: " O'Brien develops a profoundly amnesic character to critique the collective forgetting that has erased My Lai and other massacres from American historical consciousness."[424] Faced with a narrative dead-end, the reader is inspired to remember the horrors of war in order to make amends to its victims and work towards a more just future.

In its refusal to stage dialogic scenes of friendship or affiliation, the novel therefore serves as the ultimate challenge to the 1960s novel of affiliation. No longer is it enough to foster a conversation about the necessity to forge bonds across racial, ethnic or gender differences. By the 1990s the representational project seems to have shifted towards meta-textually invoking the memory of the 1960s as a site of contestation. Refusing to read the novel as merely another articulation of the discourse of the sixties as "failure," my interpretation seeks to focus on the moments where the text pushes back and challenges us to revive the 1960s modes of social experimentation. While the novel refuses to depict John and Kathy Wade entering into an inter-subjective space of dialogue and communicative exchange on the level of plot, it makes up for this emplotted absence in the novel's discursive excess.[425] Utilizing a fragmentary and speculative discursive frame, where the wounds of memory remain dangerously exposed, O'Brien reanimates the iconic history of Vietnam for new political ends.

In this sense, the reader is asked to do something that the characters in the novel cannot perform. John Wade "knew he was sick," as O'Brien writes, but attempts to tell his wife how he feels and even what he did ("I've done things") unfortunately can't work: Kathy is not able to bear

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[424] Timothy Melley, "Postmodern Amnesia: Trauma and Forgetting in Tim O'Brien's *In the Lake of the Woods*" *Contemporary Literature* 44.1 (Spring, 2003): 112.

[425] In a 1997 interview with the literary critic Tobey Herzog, O'Brien spoke of his fears of composing such an experimental and inconclusive novel: "I was afraid of doing it, of writing a book without an ending – or seemingly without an ending." Despite O'Brien's authorial anxiety over creating a novel "without an ending," *In the Lake of the Woods* proved to be the top selling novel of O'Brien's career. Tobey C. Herzog, *Tim O'Brien* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), 145.

this truth for him, responding glibly "it doesn't matter."[426] The author later asserts, "It was in the nature of their love that Kathy did not insist that he see a psychiatrist, and that John did not feel the need to seek help." By framing the domestic sphere as a space inhospitable to dialogue or confrontation, the novel therefore underscores the implicit difficulties that result when private heterosexual marriage must serve as the sole site of what Irene Kacandes calls "interpersonal witnessing." In her study *Talk Fiction*, Kacandes articulates how the narration of a character listening or what she calls "her cowitnessing, becomes the means as [Dori] Laub puts it, by which the story comes to be."[427] Kacandes' implicit choice to use the feminine pronoun "her" to denote the female agent of this listening is no surprise, for historically women have often served as the listeners or "cowitnesses" for acts of testimony.

In the absence of articulate forms of communication between the characters, the setting of the scene voices what they themselves cannot seem to say. O'Brien describes the couple in the first pages, prior to the revelation of My Lai or the event of disappearance thus:

> All around them, the fog moved in low and fat off the lake, and their voices would seem to flow away for a time and then return to them from somewhere in the woods beyond the porch. It was an echo, partly. But inside the echo there was also a voice not quite theirs – like a whisper, or a nearby breathing, something feathery and alive. They would stop to listen, except the sound was never there when listened for… And it was then, listening, that they would feel the trapdoor drop open, and they'd be falling into that emptiness where all the dreams used to be.[428]

Like the feedback loop of memories that is experienced by many trauma victims, the voices of John and Kathy Wade echo, "flowing away" and then "returning to them" from someplace unknown. Appended to their voices is a third voice that "whispers" and breathes like an animalistic other. Is it the voice of the unintelligble witness of My Lai? Is it invoking what O'Brien calls the "collective

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[426] O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods*, 74-5.
[427] Irene Kacandes, *Talk Fiction: Literature and the Talk Explosion* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2001), 105.
[428] O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods*, 2.

conscience" that the stereotypically insane veteran is forced to stand in for?[429] Or is it the conscience of John himself, coming from his alter-ego 'The Sorcerer?" The representational power of this breathing whisper lies in its ability to echo multiple events of the past. This murky voice, which surpasses any stable form of signification, makes listening or bearing witness to the other an inexhaustible task. In its postmodern fragmentation, this whisper is thus both analeptic and proleptic evoking multiple acts and victims: John and Kathy Wade, as well as those left behind in Vietnam, namely a deranged fellow soldier and a Vietnamese civilian whom Wade killed when he mistook the elderly man's hoe for a rifle.

This image of the domestic couple sitting in witness to a specter of the past suggests the double bind that comes when the domestic world is charged with the work of public testimony. As Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer have argued, "with the liminal figure of the mute, desubjectified witness who can only testify outside language, we reach not only the limit of the human but also the limit of the historical and the legal archive."[430] Like the "mute, desubjectified witness" the voice of the fog seems to both demand a forum for truth telling, while also denying the discursive and *affective* frameworks necessary to communicate these truths. There is danger not simply in speaking the horrors of war within the frame of marriage, but a greater danger in "re-activating" the emotional and corporeal experiences of the trauma itself. What follows then is the text's formal articulation of testimonies that cannot be sustained on the level of plot, neither in the marriage nor the mystery plots that comprise the majority of the novel's narrative. Instead of "interpersonal witnessing," *In the Lake of the Woods* depends on the narratological strategy Kacandes calls "textual witnessing" – where textual motifs like ellipsis and apostrophe demand the implied reader to receive the story tragically ignored by fictional characters. This meta-fictional shift in narrative degree opens up the private

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[429] O'Brien, "The Violent Vet," 100.

[430] Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, "The Witness in the Archive: Holocaust Studies/Memory Studies" in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, eds. Susannah Radsone and Bill Schwarz (New York; Fordham UP, 2010), 398.

storyline of talk between characters into alternative vectors of textual circulation that reach out into the public sphere.

While the vanishing world of "Angle Inlet" succeeds in carrying off the Wades into an extra-national realm of fantasy and escape, it cannot erase the reader's desire to wonder over the truth of their motives and fates. The last lines of the novel interpolate the reader into this unfulfilled wish, while framing it as suspiciously impossible: "Can we believe that he was not a monster but a man? That he was innocent of everything except his life? Could the truth be so simple? So terrible?"[431] The final questions of the novel consider truth to be something "simple" and "terrible," a form of knowledge that manifests on both an intellectual and *affective* level of signification. The narrator suggests that perhaps the "true absolute" may simply be "sorrow."[432] However, if the novel requires the reader to be implicated in the story and thus bear witness to its incomprehensible truths, this answer is not enough. Part of the impetus to creatively re-member the My Lai Massacre, and the war in Vietnam more generally, comes from an urgent cultural need to transform this seemingly forgotten, "private" event, into public knowledge.

As the novel demands a fictional practice of historical repair, it also serves to illuminate the modes of witnessing that might make this possible in the world beyond the text. A successful testimonial practice must involve an element of triangulation, where the circle surrounding the author/receiver dyad becomes necessarily interrupted by the presence of what Jessica Benjamin calls "the moral third." Often in the aftermath of trauma, the psychic life of perpetrators and victims, of those who are powerless and those who hold power, begins to alter so that neither individual can hold open a fruitful space of empathy for the other. Benjamin has argued that it is up to third parties or outside legal or social institutions to create the neutral means through which exchange between enemies can occur. In O'Brien's novel, the domestic sphere is forced to bear the weight of

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[431] O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods*, 303.
[432] O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods*, 302.

this larger collective – a responsibility that should fall to the state. Here the federal government is symbolically absent from view, besides the archival citations of testimony from the Trial of Lieutenant Calley; like Calley's trial, the inordinate suffering forced upon the victims of the U.S. War in Vietnam seems to have fallen out of public memory. The fact that the truth of John Wade's participation in possible war crimes is revealed in the smear-campaign surrounding his Senate race reveals the U.S. government's impotence to effectuate justice for the victims of these crimes.

Despite the scene of recognition that occurs between Claude and John Wade, an adoptive paternal relationship, in the end the novel poses the loss of affiliation as a tragedy that leaves characters to dissolve into an infinite, and forgotten, nothingness – a fate that necessarily calls us back to re-consider the reasons behind affiliation's failure and to pose various alternatives. In Jacques Derrida's *The Politics of Friendship*, he articulates how friendship has often been too closely tied to filial frameworks, which has circumvented more heterogeneous and improvisational conceptions of affiliation. Posing a series of questions, Derrida writes:

> How have [the great philosophical and canonical discourses on friendship] prevailed? Whence derives its force? How has it been able to exclude the feminine or heterosexuality, friendship between women or friendship between men and women? Why can an essential inventory not be made of feminine or heterosexual experiences of friendship? Why this heterogeneity between eros and philia?[433]

In this passage, Derrida underscores the elision of sexual difference in the philosophical conception of friendship as based on fraternal consonance, affinity and reciprocity. Challenging the necessary split between eros and philia, Derrida speaks to the incommensurability of erotic desire and ethical friendship within O'Brien's extreme depiction of veteran life, where heterosexual bonds of marriage cannot also be a framework for cross-gender affiliation. By excluding the possibility of friendship between men and women, and also among women, O'Brien's narrative collapses under the weight of a fraternal tradition no longer viable. The novel's erasure of affiliation thus reflects its continued

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[433] Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 1997), 277.

dependence on what Derrida calls "fratriarchy," a state structure of power constituted from a genealogical notion of family and an androcentric vision of human society.

Although Derrida sees friendship as only possible in its constant deferral, in our spectral efforts to be with the other in a state of extreme solitude, the 1960s novels of affiliation speak to an intersubjective and "mutual," rather than deferred, vision of friendship, an affiliation comprised of acts, what Ivy Schweitzer calls "doing good things for each other."[434] Although a narrative of affiliation is pointedly absent from this novel, when read in the context of the 1960s novels of affiliation, certain scenes appear as permanent traces of this dynamic cultural imaginary that entered into dormancy during the conservative revival of the 1980s. Brought into connection with characteristic scenes of dialogue and witnessing that occur in novels like *Another Country*, O'Brien's representation of conversations between John Wade and Kathy's sister Pat seems to flicker as one impression of the affiliations that came before. Other than Claude, Pat is the only other character that serves as an interlocutor to John. Upon her arrival to help in the search for her sister, the characters enter into a seemingly honest conversation. Unhampered by erotic desire, which O'Brien has shown to be tainted since the war, the protagonist and his sister-in-law can be frank with each other, even to the point of argument. Unlike the claustrophobic insularity of the Wades' marriage, Pat and John's bond is defined by triangulation – they are joined together by their common relationship with the lost and presumably dead character Kathy. Once Pat arrives on the scene, Wade can't seem to fantasize his way out of a guilty conscience so easily; he recognizes "resentment in her eyes, the suspicion, whatever it was."[435] Unlike Kathy's gaze, Pat's eyes, and her character

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434 Schweizter, *Perfecting Friendship*, 70.
435 O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods*, 190.

more generally, seem to be defined by a complexity of affect, rather than a stable site of transcendence.[436]

While Pat refuses to back down in the face of John Wade's despondency, she does not vilify him as a monster. She shows him care, even while also demonstrating her anger – for example, O'Brien portrays her as taking his arm while they walk. During their conversations about John's marital troubles, they get closer to the truth of Kathy and John's infidelities than the couple themselves were ever able to reach: "They looked at each other with the knowledge that they had come up against the edge of the permissible."[437] Pat goes onto tell Wade the "truth" about Kathy's unhappiness; unfortunately for Wade, he can't return her honesty by revealing his own. The only occasion when John Wade considers telling the "truth" about Kathy's disappearance is notably in the company of Pat and the Rasmussens. The potential confession he could have, but didn't in the end perform, was not to the murder of Kathy but to the more abstract truth that he had done things, but he couldn't remember what exactly happened that night. Looking across the beach to Pat and Detective Lux, John wonders "if he should walk over and demand the handcuffs. He didn't know shit. Blurt out a few secrets. The teakettle and the boathouse. Just once in his life tell everything. Talk about his father… He didn't know shit. He didn't know where he was or how he'd gotten there or where to go next."[438]

Although Pat and John Wade's relationship neither adequately saves nor mourns the loss of Kathy, their exchange provides a glimpse of what it might look like for men and women to address each other as adoptive kin. Pat and John are tied together not by erotic desire, but by a shared duty to others. They are more than acquaintances, but not quite friends, and this familiarity does not

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[436]Her gender performance also mirrors the character's de-centered subjectivity; she is less feminine than Kathy and almost butch. O'Brien describes her as the "taller, more muscular version of Kathy" who had the gumption to already go through two divorces and a "long string of live-in boyfriends."
[437] O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods*, 185.
[438] O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods*, 238.

provide transcendence but rather asks them to experience those everyday feelings of care for the other that come with mutual responsibility and accountability. Expanding the memorial project encompassed in *In the Lake of the Woods*, this chapter has sough to re-inscribe O'Brien's representation of the war in Vietnam within a broader cultural imaginary of affiliation. By doing so, this project imagines cross-gender bonds of affiliation as staging a potential confrontation not only of racial and gendered oppressions, but the imperial violence that continues to inform these struggles. In a dynamic cross-gender affiliation, built upon the framework of intersubjectivity, no topic is, in fact, sacred, but always open for discussion, critique and re-evaluation. And yet, the Wades' story attests that white bourgeois marriage, as a utopian space of romantic equality, cannot uphold this framework. Pat and John's potential affiliation remains dormant perhaps because it too closely resembles the myopic insularity of John and Kathy's monoracial marriage. As the narrative of affiliation invoked in Linda Hogan's *People of the Whale* alternatively suggests, within the context of the Vietnam war, affiliation can not be simply a private relationship, but must demand recognition as a public structure of feeling that could serve as a stage for redressing those seemingly irreparable wounds that are more vulnerable to the tide of history. If O'Brien suggests any possibility for reparation, it would therefore emerge in the tentative bonds that tie men and women together in the private sphere of kinship, but also in the public space of the law.

Conjured from broken affinities, and disruptive archives, the novel's remnants of 1960s affiliation asks us to depart on a journey towards what we might call a hetero*social* public sphere, in which individuals of varying races and genders could more adequately pay due care to the voices of those survivors who remain silent in the novel: the men and women of Vietnam. Paying attention to the ways the war is remembered as simply a staging ground for the Vietnam generation's crisis in masculinity productively, this chapter reeals the sacred mythology of white fraternity that undergirds the American nation and makes democratic forms of reparation often impossible to attain. Split

apart by a traumatic archive recording the violence of the My Lai Massacre, *In the Lake of the Woods* represents a community hopelessly fragmented by a traumatic history that bears down on present efforts at affiliation. For the tragically paranoid protagonist John Wade, repair of the past can only be expressed in its dissolution – where the magic of the Lake in the Woods can make My Lai disappear. However, in its discursive complexity, the novel invokes a conditional space of remembering the massacre, its domestic aftermath, and the war that conditioned its occurrence – a spiral of history to which the reader will inevitably return.

CHAPTER 5
A Far-Off Horizon: Visions of Affiliation in Susan Choi's *American Woman*

Late in Susan Choi's 2007 *American Woman*, a character named Pauline looks up at a frieze of wanted posters above a bar in the Western Rockies and whispers, "There I am." Tracing the rise and fall of 1970s Leftist radicalism, the novel is roughly based on the story of Patty Hearst. Her fictionalized persona, Pauline, is accompanied by a companion named Jenny Shimada who looks measurably at the poster's features and compares them to the real-life presence sitting next to her. As Jenny thinks, the image of Pauline "repositioned her slightly," making her appear "hard," quite different from the thoughtful woman who slides a hand into hers as they make their exit from the scene.[439] Figuring the literal transformation of the character into an icon posted on the wall, Choi illuminates the back-and-forth practice of reading that is necessary to appraise history from mythology, reality from stereotype in this historical novel. This scene of reading a visual icon as an experience of adjacency and affiliation exposes some of the ways affiliation and repair are represented in post-1990 historical fiction about the 1960s. Although in this post-1990 novel of affiliation, extra-familial and adoptive bonds may not hold the same idealistic purchase as seen in the works of Baldwin and Atwood, this chapter explores how the 1960s affiliative impulse remains an important catalyst for collective repair.

On April 15, 1974, members of the Symbionese Liberation Army, including the recently kidnapped Hearst, robbed the Hibernia Bank in San Francisco at gunpoint. Since her kidnapping two months earlier, no one outside the cadre had visual evidence of Hearst being alive. The surprising appearance of her face on the bank's surveillance camera confirmed a truth that seemed incomprehensible to many – no longer simply a captive victim, Hearst had become an active

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[439] Susan Choi, *American Woman* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004), 279.

participant in the organization's militant unlawful activities. The shock of her transformation, which doubtless results from the group's practices of torture and brainwashing, challenged the American public's understanding of who and how one becomes a radical militant. This figure's drastic shift in identity – from a beautiful, white heiress engaged to be married to a sullen revolutionary now versed in automatic weapons – is illustrative of a broader cultural anxiety over the measurement and classification of identity in the early 1970s after the "implosion" of leftist movements for national liberation.

This quick and unforeseen shift in Hearst's persona, which was influenced by juridical discourse and popular mainstream media, is tied to the extensive visual record of her story. This archive of images that documents her story ranges from a formal portrait of Hearst taken prior to her kidnapping [figure 1] – which pictures her as a young, blond enfolded in the accoutrements of upper-class California life – to the blurry, shadowy figure of Hearst – now re-named Tania – walking across the bank's lobby holding a rifle [figure 2], to finally the static mug-shot of Hearst created by the FBI on their "Most Wanted" poster of September 24, 1974. Although critic Nancy Isenberg argues that the slippery representation of Hearst as a "postmodern legal subject" is made possible thanks to her objectification as a woman, which allows her to mirror multiple stereotypes and connotations, it is not simply Hearst's sullied femininity that serves to hold together the contradictions in this story. Even after her adoption of Maoist revolutionary strategy within the SLA, which led to her conviction, the heiress's racial and class privilege endures despite these defiling events. Her whiteness proffered a variable, unmarked identity that was instrumental to a successful life "underground;" for over a year Hearst lived and traveled in the U.S. without being discovered, hers an assimilable American image that protected her from detection and trumped her exceptional celebrity status. Furthermore, her class privilege provided a level of freedom to which many people of color serving time for similar charges would never have had access: after serving 22

months of her seven-year prison sentence, Hearst's sentence was commuted by President Jimmy Carter in February, 1979.[440]

At first glimpse, the dual-portrait representation of Hearst on this iconic FBI Wanted poster inspires a kind of double take in the viewer. As is evident when comparing Figures 1 and 3, the smiling frontal image of Hearst in the poster is actually cropped from the older image of Hearst and her fiancé. By returning this cropped image to its initial purview, constructed as a means of surveillance and arrest, the contradictions embedded in the image of a white upper-class female celebrity as a wanted criminal are heightened, destabilizing transcendent national ideals of class, racial and heterosexual privilege assumed in the previous photo. Symbolized in the static two-dimensional quality of the mug-shot, the historical event itself seems caught in the freeze frame of Hearst's public iconicity – a transcendent sense of celebrity that endured even after Hearst's conviction, sentencing, commutation and pardon. However, upon closer look, within the second image on the wanted poster, that depicts Hearst from a left, adjacent perspective, the lexical origins of this story become muddled. As the caption points out, these photos (or at least the right frame) were taken at an unknown time and place, casting a spectral dimension to the images. By its highly mediated context, one can only be led to imagine that this photo was made (or found) thanks to the reconnaissance efforts of the FBI.

What lurks around and within these two photos, which signify the criminalized object the "wanted" poster indexes, is the haunting presence of disciplinary power – the same power that seeks to classify, to mark, to name persons as legal or "criminal." However, if we look to the in-between margins, to the place between the photos, or the absent boxes where identificatory fingerprints should be, there emerges an alternative set of untold subjectivities and experiences that have yet to be accounted. In fact, Hearst's criminality was always a matter of affiliation; the presumption of her

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[440] Douglas O. Linder, "Patty Hearst Trial," 30 April 2012. http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/hearst/hearstdolaccount.html

"choice" to become attached to the SLA is central to our conception of her as a "collaborator." The blank white line that separates these two photographs on the poster symbolizes the differences entangled within the social narrative of radical militancy at the tail end of the sixties, of which she is simply a character. If there is a Barthesian punctum, or what Hirsch and Spitzer call a "point of memory" within the digital reproduction of this poster, it exists in the margin between the two photos of Hearst herself. Here is where our eye is drawn and where we are asked to hold together these seemingly contradictory elements and form a coherent reading.

Perhaps more importantly, this limn represents the horizon of accounting for those marginal and overlooked lives that were a constitutive part of the history of radical inter-ethnic movements for solidarity during the long 1960s. As Hirsch and Spitzer write: "points of memory produce piercing insights that traverse temporal, spatial, and experiential divides. As points multiply, they can convey the overlay of different temporalities and interpretive frames, resisting straightforward readings or any lure of authenticity."[441] Seen in the juxtaposition of these two photographs of Hearst, the "points of memory" demand us to position ourselves within multiple and competing perspectives that extend her story beyond the icon to reflect those lives with which she intersected. Perspective is integral to the telling of history and the remembering of the past and in Susan Choi's *American Woman*, as in novels of affiliation that came before, it is structured by a self-reflexive negotiation of the terms of desire and identification that reflect its social function.

In *American Woman,* Susan Choi turns back to an event she witnessed obliquely as a five-year old child watching the evening news: the infamous saga of the Symbionese Liberation Army and their abduction of California heiress Patty Hearst. The novelist's naïve and second-hand experience of observing the arrest of Patty Hearst is mirrored in the narrative approach she takes to fictionalizing this history of early 1970s militancy. Choi's novel explicitly seeks to revise the notion

[441] Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, "Testimonial Objects: Memory, Gender, Transmission," *Poetics Today* 27.2 (2006): 358.

of history as iconic event, focusing on the adjacent story of a Japanese-American radical named Wendy Yoshimura whose life history sets in relief the forms of exclusion and erasure implied within the identity "American Woman." To do so, Choi's turn to telling the affiliated story of Yoshimura, who became Hearst's fellow-conspirator and later friend and confidant, illustrates an artistic interest in remembering those heterogeneous lived experiences that lurk next to the historical icon. A self-described Korean and Jewish American woman writer, Choi has stated that it wasn't Hearst that she was particularly interested in depicting in the novel, but rather the impact the figure had on those around her. As she states in a 2008 interview: "I was fascinated by the diameter of her impact crater, by the people she burned—not by her."[442] In turn, the history of Yoshimura emerges through an affiliative historical archive; she is "discovered" only in relation to Hearst, and thus her story can be told only if we take into account this iconic figure that both shadows and enunciates her historical presence.

Asian American Visibility

The politics of visibility have long been understood to structure Asian American collective experience and identity. Here, Choi's thematic and formal emphasis on the terms of visibility creates a rich symbolic field to explore the historical formation of Asian American collectivity and identity in the long 1960s, an era that is subsumed by iconic images of the civil rights movement which often erase the varied adjacent movements for liberation that occurred throughout the era. As historian William Wei argues, the Asian American movement has suffered from what he calls "social invisibility." Similarly, Daryl Madea in *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America* calls for a reevaluation of this historical period in order to account for Asian-American political hopes and practices that began in 1968 within a transnational framework of not simply civil rights, but third

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[442] Failbetter.com, 23 Sep 2008, 30 April 1012. http://www.failbetter.com/28/ChoiInterview.php.

world liberation. He writes of the way Asian American movements adapted the language and discourse of Black Power which "provided points of conjunction around which African Americans and Asian Americans could connect political and cultural movements.… Only by envisioning white people as the center of the 1960s movements can we see the late 1960s as a time of racial separation."[443] The reified focus of an American Black/White divide flattens the global political dimensions of the 1960s, a myopia metonymic of a longer national erasure of the unique but affiliated experiences of discrimination, exploitation and dehumanization that ally Asian American histories to other racial and ethnic minoritiarian pasts.

In Choi's novel, and her oeuvre more generally, the question of Asian American visibility is often articulated through the author's invocation of stories about paranoia and suspicion, a narrative framework that is reminiscent of the history of Japanese American internment and scape-goating during World War II. Moving away from a paradigmatic conception of history as iconic event, Choi instead aims to achieve a comparative articulation of the history of the early 1970s, expanding the era to incorporate World War II as a critical pre-history of Asian-American radicalism. Interestingly, the text's diachronic expansion of those milestone events that signify the early 1970s is matched by the novel's discursive emphasis on setting and focalization. Choi's approach of crafting historical narrative alongside an affiliated and more iconic past resembles the aesthetic of "piecing" or suturing foundational to reparation. *American Woman* suggests that to inhabit an adjacent position towards an Asian American past, one must take part in a parallel practice of examining the politics of visuality and perspective. Her narrative's formal representation of scenes of perception captures the constant instability that characterizes the protagonist's experience of living underground. By constantly changing the position of the narrative gaze, from high to low, left to right, near to far, Choi creates an unsteady discursive terrain that consequently makes the reader shift perspectives, questioning her

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[443] Daryl J. Maeda, *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2009), 15.

reception of this story as reliable "history." This realist use of free indirect discourse brings with it a flexibility that Norman Friedman finds in the "multiple selective omniscience" of the narrator, in which a heterodiegetic narrator tells the story through various internal points of view.[444] This embellished and sometimes overwrought narrative style allows Choi to grapple with the fraught relationship between textuality and visuality in the novel's remembering of this marginal Japanese-American woman's past.

In *American Woman*, Choi transforms historical figure Wendy Yoshimura into the fictional protagonist Jenny Shimada, a fictionalization of the character that is emblematic of the novel's distanced, parodic relationship to these historical events. As Choi describes, "As a novelist, I saw [Yoshimura] as the key to telling the story; a step to one side of what seems like the middle of the story."[445] This "step to one side" of the historical icon evidences the intimate distance Choi brings to her characterization of this marginal figure. Using free indirect discourse, the author cautions against our facile access to her story as factual, or emotional, "truth." And yet, her focalization of this Asian American female character bodies forth a new perspective on the history of the long 1960s. By its title, the novel situates itself in relationship to a canon of Asian American women's writing, in particular Gish Jen's *Typical American*. As Rachel C. Lee argues of Jen's novel, "though [Jen's characters] can approach a 'typical American' identity, their stories become remarkable precisely because Americanness is always a limit that they cannot reach – an infinitely receding identification."[446] Like Jen's female protagonist Helen, Choi's Jenny (a possible play on the author Jen), also comes to perceive her sense of Americanness as an "infinitely receding identification," and

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[444] Qtd. in Gerald Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2003), 76.
[445] Lynn Andriani, "Antiwar Activism, Starring Patty Hearst: PW Talks with Susan Choi," *Publishers Weekly*, 23 June 2003, 30 April 2012, http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/authors/interviews/article/27335-antiwar-activism-starring-patty-hearst.html.

[446] Rachel C. Lee, *The Americas of Asian American Literature: Gendered Fictions of Nation and Transnation* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999), 71.

finds that her own personal affiliations with other women are more instrumental to her sense of self than any ethnic narrative of assimilation.

Choi's novel is divided into four parts: the first part provides the reader with a snapshot of Shimada's year in hiding prior to her association with the fictional group The People's Liberation; the second part documents the summer Jenny spends in a farmhouse outside the Hudson Valley town of Ferndale while she harbors the three remaining members of the militant group. Part three narrates the burgeoning friendship of Jenny and Pauline, the fictionalized Patty Hearst, and the planning and aftermath of the cell's botched armed robbery that accidentally ends in the murder of a local white storeowner. The tragic murder serves as the final urgent impetus for Jenny and Pauline to flee, and during their peripatetic escape back to the West coast, the friendship becomes more intimate, yet concludes in the end, in their capture by the FBI. Finally, part four portrays Jenny's life after her arrest and imprisonment, when she comes to terms with the losses she incurred and injuries she performed, ending with the somewhat anticlimactic reappraisal of her father's own militant experience during the period of Japanese-American internment.

The narrative arc of *American Woman* depicts Jenny moving from alienation and estrangement, into affiliation, only to be brought back into isolation during and after her imprisonment. The core of the lengthy realist novel thus resembles a narrative of affiliation that fails, a plotting reminiscent of the movement Morrison brings to Nel and Sula's story. Distinct from Morrison's portrayal of Nel and Sula's friendship, however, Jenny and Pauline's bond ends in a betrayal that leaves no possibility for spiritual or aesthetic reparation, although feelings of melancholic attachment may endure. Interestingly, in light of the preceding development of these 1960s novels of affiliation that imagined these erotic, yet friendly bonds bridging social differences, and animating a correspondent effort of repair, Choi's novel rescinds the hopeful potential of these bonds. Instead, the legacy of inter-ethnic or cross-gender bonds of affiliation is transposed to revive

the fractured filial relationship between Jenny Shimada and her father Jim. Out of the failures of erotic female friendship, a new movement of reparation is invoked within the genealogical family and the interethnic Asian-American community that comes to Shimada's aid during her trial.

We first meet Jenny through a somewhat surprising channel of narratorial point of view: the watchful and desiring male gaze. This realist novel opens through the eyes of Rob Frazer, a friend and collaborator who seeks out Shimada to persuade her to aid and abet the three surviving members of the fictionalized SLA – Patty Hearst/Pauline, and the characters Juan and Yvonne. Tracking Jenny down in a small Hudson Valley town, Frazer waits at the train station for her arrival. It is through this stable masculine view of the environs that the reader first comes to recognize Jenny Shimada in a crowd of train passengers:

> He could see on the river's shifting surface signs of the deep currents, pulling slowly and powerfully against each other. Upriver the archived silver thread of a bridge… When the train did come, it exploded into view very suddenly. Frazer watched its ridged silver top come to a halt beneath him, and then three people, each interestingly foreshortened by his bird's-eye perspective, emerge from different parts of the train and move into the station. The train, having no one waiting for it, pulled away. One of the people was Jenny."[447]

Here Choi focalizes the narrative's point of view through Frazer, giving the reader a picture of the scene before him, a landscape that evokes the American Romance of the 19th century Hudson Valley School. From this vantage point, Frazer embodies a supposed omniscience; he sees people and the world as empirical, or as the author puts it, "he believes in the inflexibility, predictability, knowability of people. They never stray far from their familiar realms of being. The most shocking act, closely examined, is just a louder version of some habitual gesture."[448] Although Choi at first frames the narrative through an American archetypal participant-observer, she does so only to inversely break the discursive mode with a fragmentary shift of perspective, which undermines any readerly capacity to know the world in stable terms. Unlike Frazer's pompous and *inflexible* certainty, the implied narrator herself emerges as an agent who can *flexibly* conceive of multiple prerogatives through a

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447 Choi, *American Woman*, 25.
448 Choi, *American Woman*, 4.

mobile and shifting experience of point of view. In contrast to Frazer's methodical yet dimwitted tracking of Jenny, the protagonist artistically transforms the landscape into a cinematic set, a space that she navigates with ease. Only Jenny is able to sit at the edge of the cliff with a strange comfort, a position that allows her to look down on the town with a sense of spatial proportion and see the farmhouses as "miniaturized."

In *American Woman*, Choi's formal experimentation with narrative voice and point of view provides a more nuanced articulation of the Asian-American woman at the center of the novel, highlighting the aggregate tensions of gender, racial and ethnic differences that impact her life. Colleen Lye writes of the need to account for not simply a transhistorical conception of race as "racial formation," but a more particularized and historicized understanding of "racial form." In Lye's view, Choi joins other Asian American authors in "disaggregating the Asian American subject from any *one* of the customary textual categories from which it is so often adduced: author, narrator, character, thematic subject matter, and, less often, reception and interpretive community. We might conceive the Asian American subject as the product of the articulation of the links between two or more of these textual categories."[449] David Eng, in his recent *The Feeling of Kinship*, makes a similar claim for the figurative, rather than syntagmatic, understanding of racial history.[450] The textual strategy of free indirect discourse sets the partial omniscient narrator and Jenny herself apart from the male-dominated gaze of desire and manipulation.

For the male characters in the text, including Frazer, the FBI agents who are on the trace of Jenny, and the militant leader Juan, the protagonist is seen respectively as an object of desire, suspicion or idealization. Too closely proscribing strategy and everyday activities within class ideology, the group falls into an inevitable de facto patriarchy that undermines any viable solidarity. The clear purveyor of ideology in the cadre is the character Juan, a Vietnam veteran and former

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[449] Colleen Lye, "Racial Form," *Representations* 104.1 (Fall 2008): 94.
[450] See David Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2010).

Middle-American track star who marries his high school girlfriend, Yvonne, and joins in a fight against the capitalist establishment. Ostensibly learning his military skills in the U.S. Army, Juan falls into the trap of masculine stereotype and overt aggression. Performing his machismo for the sake of the three women who share this underground life, he speaks in militant cliché: "I never underestimate pigs, and pigs should never underestimate me. Let them come here. I'll cook them for breakfast."[451] His character embodies the group's fundamentalist belief system; even though their words may signify love, harmony and equality, the use of this more narrow discourse creates the opposite effect.

In Choi's depiction of the SLA, what one historian called an emblem of the "anti-sixties," the over-emphasis on Marxist ideology overwhelmed any pragmatic negotiation of the contingencies of everyday life.[452] The SLA's conception of the world as an abstract capitalist system figured a politics similar to what Robert Young calls an "orthodox Marxism:" "A Marxism that adheres first and foremost to economism, the reductive singular explanation of all human phenomena through economic determinism, whereby all human life and history, all aspects of culture and ideology are merely the reflection of economic relations."[453] An adoption of orthodox Marxism, according to Young, would make difficult the accounting of those adjacent structures of oppression that shape and are shaped by economic disparity. Symptomatically, the remaining leaders of the People's Liberation Army perceive Marx as orthodox truth rather than a system of representation that requires interpretive mediation. Ironically, while seeking liberation, they have become entrapped within their own revolutionary ideology. Stuart Hall has written that to consider subjects "recognizing" their own false consciousness as "a moment of absolute authentication is probably the most ideological conception of all…. The point at which we lose sight of the fact that sense is a

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[451] Choi, *American Woman*, 165.
[452] William Graebner, *Patty's Got a Gun: Patricia Hearst in 1970s America* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2008), 35-36.
[453] Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*, 2nd Edition (London: Routledge, 2004), 10.

production of our systems of representation is the point at which we fall, not into Nature but into the naturalistic illusion: the height (or depth) of ideology."[454] As Hall's comment suggests, the members of the SLA/PLA have "lost sight" of the ways reality is structured through various systems of representation; like Frazer, they have fallen into a "naturalistic illusion" created by an overdetermined trust in their own empirical knowledge.

This blindness to the importance of interpretation plays out on the biological levels of race and gender. For Juan, Jenny has become a literal embodiment of Pan-Asian revolutionary potential. As Juan says to her, "you've got brown skin… You owe your people your leadership. You can't go on denying your race. You don't just owe the revolution in general, you owe your people in particular." In a critique of the false symmetry of race equating a subaltern radicalism, Jenny responds to Juan by replying: "Human beings are my people… just because I'm a Japanese woman, you can't define me in terms of just that." Jenny's pointed rebuttal proves one single belief system is inadequate for understanding her own subjectivity and those other ethnic minorities to which she has become phenotypically aligned. Interrupting the ideological unity of Juan's reading, Jenny creates the rupture that opens the door for renewed political struggle. Choi's particular use of "human beings" serving as Jenny's imagined community does not simply rehearse a transcendent humanism. The text's deconstruction of objectivity and uni-directional perspective questions the implicit epistemological authority of "humanism," a euro-centric tradition that Third World radical groups developing concomitant to the SLA were working to deconstruct. Questioning Juan's essentialist claim that her "Third World perspective's a privilege," Jenny counters with a revolutionary vision grounded in anti-colonial and anti-imperialist histories of suffering and transnational migration, which make the "third world" anything but a site of privilege. In her retort: "Stop saying I'm from the Third World when I'm from California," the character sarcastically points

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[454] Hall, Stuart. "Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Post-Structuralist Debates." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 2.2 (June 1985): 105.

to the struggles over difference and self-reflexivity underlying the more precarious modes of solidarity cultivated within the Third World Liberation movement.[455] In fact, Jenny does not have the privilege to believe in an ideology outside of or transcendent to its lived articulation.

This reassertion of the myopic, and frankly anachronistic, filial orthodoxy of "the People's Liberation Army," an interesting revision and substitution of the California-based Third World Liberation Movement, further highlights the patriarchal order Choi brings to her depiction of the radical group. As Jenny posits at the end of novel, during her flight with Pauline back west, "Radicalism… was like Catholicism, with its extreme self-referentiality, its strict liturgy, its all-explaining view of the world, its absolute Satan, and its deadly sins, of which surrender was one – the very worst arguably."[456] This transformative potential of 1960s radical movements, by the early 1970s had given way to an overly "Catholic" ideological piety. No longer expressed through affiliative and improvisational acts of solidarity or intersubjective dialogue, the radical activism of groups like the SLA had condensed into a caricature of its previous dynamism. In part, this was due to the ways their tactics were assimilated into a burgeoning visual culture that often flattened out personal motivation or political intent. Acts of radical militancy, such as bombing and kidnapping, were used by radicals to achieve "visibility," and in the worst cases infamous "notoriety," but playing into a politics of public recognition made these groups easily coded as "domestic terrorism" by the state. What radical devolutions such as the Weathermen and the SLA demonstrate is that the 1960s efforts to overthrow the filiative traditions of the past had become ironically authoritarian. No longer breaking tradition, they were now a moralizing totality that Choi describes as a system of "punishment and redemption" from which few could escape.[457]

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[455] Choi, *American Woman*, 140.
[456] Choi, *American Woman*, 283.
[457] Ibid.

Artistic Visions and the Craft of Affiliation

Weighed down by multiple epistemological lenses, Jenny's interior complexity and ethical agency return in scenes where the character practices a more figurative and artistic sense of vision. When the novel is focalized through the internal perspective of Jenny, it changes the reader's perception of her as distant target, instantiating a more intimate and identificatory proximity to the character. Under uncompromising and paranoid conditions, the author depicts the protagonist's subjectivity as malleable and adaptive, changing from one situation to the next in order to survive. In fact, Jenny is the canniest participant/observer in the novel. To endure life underground, and emerge from hiding with her sense of self in tact, Jenny must learn to appraise events and individuals from multiple and often contradictory perspectives. Her self-reflexive and discerning perception of the landscape and its inhabitants illustrates the creativity necessary for survival that contributes to Jenny's ability to outwit her comrades-turned-captors. This aesthetic eye is not so subtly reflected in Choi's choice to give Shimada artistic alter-egos during her year in hiding: as Iris Wong, she refurbishes moldy domestic interiors, specializing in turn-of the century painting techniques; as Alice Chan, a Manhattan artist, she comes to the Hudson Valley to improve her landscape painting.[458] The visual artistic talent of these improvised identities is suggestive of Jenny's implicit search to animate a sense of self outside the bounds of racial subjection or stereotype.

As a makeshift and self-taught artist, paradoxically dependent on her artistic craft for survival, the protagonist views the world as fodder for art. Similar to the novel's descriptive passages where the Hudson Valley is portrayed as a pastiche of 19th century painting, Jenny perceives the world as marked by varying representational fields. Choi illuminates the protagonist's artistic visual sensibility by depicting Jenny constantly identifying and subsequently describing the horizon lines that border the valley landscape. Classically, landscape portraiture must include clear horizon

[458] The fact that Wendy Yoshimura herself became a painter of watercolor still-life portraits makes this choice even more poignant. See http://www.wendyyoshimura.com/pages1/home.html.

lines to ground visual perspective while also emphasizing the unavoidable limitations of sight. Jenny's newfound awareness of the "unfurling landscape" gives her a sense of pleasure. For example, the focalized description sometimes notes the tree-lines shifting in her sense of vision, or the perception of the mansion in which she works looming like a "shaggy King Lear" rising in front of her from a different vantage point. This suturing effect of shifting shots from one perspective to the opposite illustrates the text's self-reflexive constructedness as discourse. It also is metaphoric of the character's own developing consciousness of the social hierarchies of power that order and limit her freedom. Once Jenny moves in with Juan, Yvonne and Pauline in their safe house, her opportunities for creativity are dampened; at increasing risk of being caught due to her affiliation with the three more infamous militants, Jenny feels literally and metaphorically incarcerated.

Here, on the farm trapped with a dangerous and untrustworthy set of "kin," the protagonist fantasizes a return to that precarious "birds-eye-view" she experienced in the year that preceded their meeting. Now more than ever does she understand this omniscient mode of perception to be one of privilege and limitation. In a momentous scene where Pauline manipulatively asks Jenny to participate in the group's robbery of a local storeowner, Choi highlights Jenny's sense of fear again in visual terms. Walking out onto the hilltop field that surrounds the farmstead, Jenny looks onto her temporary home, again with a distanced perspective, and thinks "the house looked like a toy left behind in the grass." Choi continues: "There was a hawk turning slowly above them; Jenny watched it, feeling the way she might have on a boat, watching the horizon to keep from throwing up as the boat pitched and rolled. Clinging to a belief in the tranquil apartness of that faraway point, from the tumult she found herself in."[459] Jenny sees the bird circling, dive into the grass, and then rise back up again. Here again the horizon line is referenced, but now Choi more pointedly frames it as a symbol of that "faraway point" that grounds the protagonist in the midst of a tumultuous, and

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[459] Choi, *American Woman*, 222.

corporeally destabilizing, sense of unease. Giving into the group's demands, because of her fear that Pauline is in mortal danger if she fails to help, Jenny lets go of the "belief in the tranquil apartness" of the horizon. Her gaze returning to earth, as she stares at the "blank patch of ground" where the hawk used to be, Jenny gives up on the possibility of a future without violence or coercion and becomes resigned to the contingencies of her circumstance.

In this act of forging a bond with Pauline, Jenny has in turn become fully interpolated within the group's coercive system of kinship, where intimate relationships are tasked to do the work of collective formation. Like the group's ideological narrowness, the circle of affiliation Jenny finds herself embraced in is characterized by social practices of shame, coercion and conformity. The group, for example, would practice "ego reconstruction," a devolved version of consciousness-raising, where one person would be the target, sitting in the center of the circle as their surrounding comrades would barrage them with opinions, feelings and loyalty tests to inspire political awakening. This "game" was in part a "discipline testing the self," a "combat with words and also destructive and passionate love. (Though they never said this; they would say 'kill the ego.')" Most dramatically, they use sex as a means of indoctrination and valuation; Pauline feels most a part of the group, and less a victim, when she is literally invited into bed with Juan and Yvonne. Despite the narrow and humiliating framework of these erotic "educational" practices, Pauline and Jenny both perceive the group as an intimate adoptive family, where conflict heightened the rapport and strength of the cadre: "Even discord, in the large-group context, increased intimacy."[460] This depiction of strife as having a correspondent intimacy suggests a kinship modeled not on affiliative choice, but on blood-family ties or domestic contractual relationships, where duty is no longer a self-reflective ethical practice but an assumed burden.

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[460] Choi, *American Woman*, 267.

A key event in Pauline and Jenny's burgeoning friendship, Jenny's choice to join her in the group's risky plans highlights the ways their affiliation is constructed around an oddly mutual sense of care, identification, and intimacy in the face of danger. Once Jenny has forged a companionate bond with Pauline, her paranoia and alienation seem to be relieved. In a moment of narrative transition that shifts the terms of affiliation from confinement and conformity to a more liberating dyadic relationship, Choi's use of the trope of vision registers this change. Here the pair flees from the cadre, after the botched robbery flares into violence and murder. Leaving Juan and Yvonne injured and vulnerable, they begin their peripatetic trip back to California that leads to their subsequent reintegration into society. Driving away at a frightening speed, Jenny refuses to look back at the metaphorical wreckage left behind. The narrator provides the reader with a series of juxtaposed images of their flight: first Juan runs out "with his sleeves rolled up, hands white with lather, Yvonne's tears a damp patch on his shirt pocket," but the protagonist "didn't look back to see him." Instead, she focuses on a more expansive potential horizon. "The pinhole that had been her vision dilated: grew huge" so that she could see the "road stretched away endlessly," as the two young women travel someplace into a provisional future.[461]

Here, finally, Jenny's sense of estrangement seems to withdraw; no longer is she identified by her "strangeness… her lone Asian face;" she has a companion from which to "fulfill this desire for acceptance." After her militant group in California fell apart, and she was forced to flee to the East coast, the protagonist was overwhelmed by keen feelings of separation. Choi writes: "She pretended her longings were purely pragmatic: A companion would give her the gift of another perspective. Two were more likely than one to make crucial corrections, to compensate for extreme paranoia, or extreme tendencies toward the sense of invulnerability."[462] Now, as Choi had foreshadowed earlier, this affiliation has given her a new, more flexible entry into the American landscape and the greater

[461] Choi, *American Woman*, 232.
[462] Choi, *American Woman*, 69, 70.

world. Even though Choi frames the protgonist's desire for companionship under a "pragmatic" pretense, the affective intimacy invoked in Jenny's affiliation with Pauline provides her with an emotional support she has most required, but most often failed to cultivate.

Pauline and Jenny's early affiliation develops as a defensive need to forge a sibling-like alliance that could help them counter the debilitating claustrophobia of life within the People's Liberation Army. However, upon their escape from the group, their adoptive bond becomes complicated by the presence of erotic desire and feelings of jealousy and possession. On closer look, their identificatory relationship reflects a growing sense of erotic desire. Choi incorporates a latent homoeroticism in the depiction of their relationship, the unspoken queer aspect of their bond seems to symbolize a narcissism and tendency towards similitude. On nights when they fight or are feeling more distinctly the pressures of living underground, "they'll crave some explicitly sexual battle. Possession of the other and erasure of the self."[463] On the road they sleep in the same bed, often "their bodies twine together at the center of the bed. There have already been nights with frost but even when it's not cold they still wake up touching, sometimes tightly spooned."[464] It is this physical, erotic intimacy that unites the women together, and creates a longing that stays in Jenny even after their arrest. However, while the characters may desire each other, this feeling of intimacy emerges within an extreme state of exception.

In *American Woman*, either lesbianism is figured as a sexless emotional escape from an alienated "on-the-run" subjectivity or it stands in as a sexual strategy for feminist consciousness-raising, which Jenny and Pauline begin to cultivate upon their return to the West coast. Their queer transgression comes from opening up a more self-reflective awareness of the pitfalls of the PLA's liberation ideology and underlying chauvinism that both characters fell victim to. At the end of their trip, the characters' final hideout in the Berkeley Hills becomes a site of women's consciousness-

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[463] Choi, *American Woman*, 281.
[464] Choi, *American Woman*, 280.

raising and counter-cultural community. After reading feminist books, the women discuss sex and orgasms, noting lesbianism's political utility and implicit sexual value. Their cultivation of a feminist collective free from the aggressive force of Juan or Frazer, however, does not provide them with a renewed understanding of the way gender implicitly orders racial systems of oppression that shape their bond. Instead it seems to provide them with a naïve, privileged sense of emotional wellbeing, which in the world of the novel seems just another form of bourgeois retreat. As Choi writes, their serenity made them "a touch intoxicated, not stupid," but at least numb to the continued threat of police discovery.[465] As Jenny and Pauline fail to come to terms with their own implicit differences of race and class, so too does the novel constrain its depiction of the ways the character's psychic struggles are shaped by the intersections of race, gender and sexuality.

Choi's memory of the early '70s excavates the overlooked story of Wendy Yoshimura as an ethnic and racial minority, yet the interior focalization of Jenny rarely touches upon her experience as a woman, even though she often is positioned as a feminized object of others' desires. The protagonist's sexuality remains ambivalently bisexual, yet Choi does not flesh out this sexual identity as tied to an experience of Asian American womanhood. These paradoxes underplay the question of lesbian *sexuality*, which remains relatively unrepresented in the novel. Grace I. Yeh has situated their bond within a genealogy of interracial fraternity that looks back to the novel of affiliation's roots in Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel.* She writes: "like Queequeg and Ishmael when they also share the same bed spooning, or Huck and Jim, cross-racial homoerotic intimacy becomes possible when these individuals are in the wilderness or outside of the spaces and histories ruled by social and sexual mores."[466] Echoing the overly private representation of interracial homosexuality in Baldwin's

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465 Symbolically, it is not within the more violent radical group of the People's Liberation Army that Choi emplots the event of Jenny and Pauline's arrest by the FBI, but in a domestic safe-haven founded in feminist counter-culture. Choi, *American Woman*, 310.

466 Grace I. Yeh, "Wendy Yoshimura and the Politics of Hugging in the 1970s," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 13.2. (June 2010): 210.

Another Country, Choi seems to perceive homosexual acts as necessarily outside the bounds of the political. However, these representational limits also reflect Choi's self-conscious denial of any verifiable access to the historical character's internal struggles and intimate motivations. The sexual aspects of queer desire remain latent in the novel, yet their broader political effects can be seen on the surface of text, but in a diluted and transposed form. As will become clear, the subversive desires evoked in Jenny and Pauline's love are retooled to revise the Asian American family, in which vertical Oedipal relations are neutralized by the animation of horizontal adoptive ties.

Feminist Re-Visions

I came to this text after hearing it termed a "feminist novel" at an academic conference held at Columbia University in 2008, celebrating a paradigmatic seventies novel, *Fear of Flying*. Yet this branding belied the fact that *American Woman* is as much a "feminist novel" as a novel about the limits or failures of Anglo-American feminism. While on the surface the title of the novel appears self-evident, it holds within it a deeper irony: neither the terms "woman" nor "American" are ever certain in this text. Upending categories of identity, *American Woman* demonstrates how the creation of sustainable bonds of affiliation across racial and class differences is often challenged when ideology narrowly proscribes, or is mutually exclusive from, modes of intimacy and everyday life. On the one hand, Choi seemingly overlooks the rich histories engendered by the title; absent is feminism's struggles over class, racial and ethnic difference, and in particular the development of a radical movement akin to the Combahee River Collective, which was founded in the same year as Hearst's arrest. The failure of feminism to interrupt the rise of a neo-liberal individualism, which plays a central role in Pauline's celebrity, and the odd inability the novel's characters have in perceiving their private lives as a field of *feminist* politics, may suggest a sense of historical amnesia.

And yet, Jenny's cultivation of a multivalent perspective that can perceive psychic and social difference is suggestive of the underlying gender critique within the novel. The lives and struggles of Asian American women, Trinh T. Minh-Ha points out, were rarely taken into account within the Anglo-American feminist movement. In a passage that articulates the terms of difference, Minh-Ha writes: "difference remains within the boundary of that which distinguishes one identity from another. This means that at heart, X must be X, Y must be Y, and X cannot be Y. Those running around yelling X is not X, and X can be Y usually land in a hospital, a 'rehabilitation' centre, a concentration camp, or a res-er-va-tion."[467] Framing the novel's discursive field in the terms of Third World feminist difference, Choi illuminates the continued necessity to take seriously the modes of seeing and reading that are tied to a politics of difference, where X can also be Y. The continued relevance of the Third World feminist perspective twenty years later illuminates how difference still is easily subsumed into the symmetries of identity or nationalism, a privilege available to those whose hard work and diligence ends in the achievement of neo-liberal rights and multicultural recognition. Perhaps most powerfully, Choi envisions a 21st century feminist aesthetic that is able to self-reflexively account for the subjectivities absent from the heart of second wave feminism: Asian American women. Even while Choi invokes the failures of feminism, she frames these failures as catalysts for political re-evaluation and redress.

Notably, upon their arrest, the rupture of Jenny and Pauline's affiliative bond signals an inescapable return to the terms of social difference that both characters' believed themselves to have transcended. Their separation inspires in Jenny a worried anxiety for the fate of Pauline, which manifests in long letters she composes to her while in jail awaiting trial. Once Pauline is reunited with her family, and their ostensible legal privilege, however, she turns on Jenny and names her as an accomplice to the murder of the New York storeowner, a betrayal she had pointedly promised never

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[467] Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Difference: 'A Special Third World Women Issue," *Feminist Review* 25 (Spring 1987): 15.

to do. Now faced with the stereotype of performing as a "model minority" in prison, Jenny angrily felt herself becoming a "member of a despised category." Within the bureaucratic penal system, Shimada began to think of herself as racially stigmatized and further estranged from the nation from which she had revolted years before. Worst of all, she realized that "the rift that she had felt open up between herself and Pauline, which at first seemed entirely intimate, a rift between two individual persons, would come to seem increasingly social, inevitable and ordained." Here Choi finally reveals the fallacy undergirding their loving friendship, that their intimacy was shaped by an increasingly public, social world divided by ethnic, racial and economic inequalities. Pauline was imprisoned, yet "redeemed, or rather [was] shown to require no redemption," while Jenny would get off, but hold the taint of her guilt for years to come.[468] By realizing that Pauline's white, upper-class femininity privileges her a life outside the terms of guilt and forgiveness, Jenny comes to a renewed interest in investigating paths of reparation outside their inter-racial bond of affiliation. Cut off from the redemptive vision of radicalism, and from the healing embrace of a multicultural nation where all minorities could attain a "model" status, Jenny returns to an ethnic and familial past through which she begins to heal her present.

While Jenny and Pauline's relationship is reflective of the terms of affiliation witnessed in earlier 1960s narratives, its breakdown inspires in her a renewed ethics of self-reflection and a practice of taking on multiple, contradictory perspectives. Jenny Shimada's ability to draw her own self-portrait comes, in the end, only after her literal incarceration; where she materially confronts state structures of subjection and becomes acutely aware of the impossibility of remembering, and adequately accounting for, life as linear or causational: "decades from now she would remember this time in the most broken-up, episodic, disjointed way, but the great change taking form would be clear, like a superimposition of a cell, dividing and dividing, eventually swallowing all that lay near it.

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[468] Choi, *American Woman*, 355.

While the change was occurring she'd hang between two farflung places, as if on a wire."[469] Finally, Jenny's loss of her radical life and collective proves to expand her sense of vision – a cognitive capaciousness that sets her apart from the metaphorically "blindfolded" Pauline and her narrow-minded SLA colleagues. Memory imagined like a "superimposition of a cell, dividing and dividing" invokes replication, rather than generational development, and through this symbol Choi imagines Jenny's act of reflection as made up of a never-ending wave of fragmentation and splitting. Caught between "two farflung places," the temporal spaces of past and future, here and there, Jenny tenuously hangs onto the wire that holds the two in place: the ever-changing present. Her flexible capacity to improvise new strategies for survival therefore brings with it a new multi-directional framework to better understand her life story – a trajectory that leads her to reassess the origins of her birth, but from a new affiliative vantage point.

Looking back on their relationship underground, Jenny Shimada remembers her same-sex affiliation as eerily transcendent, but also tainted by an intuitive sense of its hollowness – a realization that comes only after the fact. She knows, after the arrest and Pauline's selfish and duplicitous "confession" of Jenny's false leadership role in the group to the police, that their love ends in betrayal. Choi illuminates the unreliability of memory and calls attention to history's uncomfortable mimetic relationship to visuality in the novel:

> They might have driven for almost two weeks; later on, Jenny couldn't remember how long the trip was… Looking back [their journey] does not unscroll smoothly. Moments stood out because something had happened, others because nothing had happened but sublime coexistence between the whipped hair of the woman beside her, and the glimpse of her own eyes in the rear view staring back like a critical stranger's. The lurid sunset, the wind suddenly cold though the day had been hot. An emblematic moment, neither resolved nor contented nor perhaps even hers. Perhaps the persnickety car, bought from a little old lady who kept it garaged since 1961 – perhaps this car has carried them across an invisible border into somebody's movie. That would be why the wind and the hair and the critical eyes seem so familiar.[470]

[469] Choi, *American Woman*, 358.
[470] Choi, *American Woman*, 284.

Here the author represents Jenny and Pauline's affiliation as one of adjacency, where Pauline's "whipped hair" is syntactically juxtaposed to Jenny's own eyes looking back at her in the rearview mirror. Yet the picture of the two women on the move is also interrupted by the presence of a modifying clause at the end of the sentence, "like a critical stranger," which splits Jenny's focalized voice to illuminate a dizzying hindsight that confuses dream and reality, past and present, memory and imaginary. In characterizing their intimacy as a state of "sublime coexistence," Choi illuminates the characters' heightened, transcendent sense of connection that comes from sharing in the everyday risks of living "underground." Yet the text also, more pointedly, warns of the unusual conditions of its emergence. The dangerous velocity of their intimacy must be tempered by acts of contemplation and mutual dialogues that explore those "lost continents of life" that brought the two characters together prior to their life underground.[471]

In this passage, Choi depicts the past, and the activity of memory, as analogous to the quick glances a driver makes in a car's rearview mirror. The road behind them cannot easily be glimpsed, but the memory of Jenny's eyes staring back at her remains. In fact, her memory of the road is shaped by other images of a broader cultural imaginary. The "lurid sunset" heightens the sense of their geographic mobility as promising metaphoric entry into a cinematic world, which casts this passage as a space in which past and present, material reality and visual image collapse. That this memory of affiliation evokes a visual simulacrum affects the way we can read and re-member this past. On the one hand, this image conflates mythology (the cinematic) with reality (the historical duration of their trip), yet it also demands us to position ourselves in the objective vantage point of the "critical stranger" who is more capable of self-reflection and interpretive adaptation. Compelling us to slow down, the passage asks us, like Jenny, to think further if this sunset is someone else's dream, or taken from a movie made for our enjoyment.

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[471] Choi, *American Woman*, 358.

A literal warning against the emergence of the simulacrum, this scene testifies to the limits of postmodernity's capacity to do the work of historical redress. Choi suggestively alludes to this meta-critical effect by evoking an epigraph to Jean Baudrillard's "Vanishing Point" in his study of postmodernism in *America*: "Caution! Objects in the mirror might be closer than they appear."[472] Despite our attempts to erase the vestiges of America's persecutory past, these objects remain and are actually "closer" to the present than we like to imagine. As Baudrillard metaphorically writes of the experience of "being on the run" in postmodernity: "Speed is simply the rite that initiates us into emptiness: a nostalgic desire for forms to revert to immobility, concealed beneath the very intensification of their mobility."[473] Underground, Jenny is faced with an emptiness that comes from the loss of attachments, the intense "mobility" of events and peoples that she cannot hold onto. A return to realism, beyond the postmodern simulacrum, therefore allows us to reanimate this "nostalgic desire" for new ends, what Svetlana Boym calls appropriately "reflective nostalgia": "Nostalgia, like irony, is not a property of the [lost] object itself but a result of an interaction between subjects and objects, between actual landscapes and the landscapes of the mind. Both are forms of virtuality that only human consciousness can recognize."[474] *American Woman* compels us to stop the speeding smooth scroll of time and dwell in the "reflective nostalgia" of the present and reconsider the conditions of Asian American radicalism's emergence and retreat.

Like the historical subject Wendy Yoshimura herself, the horizon line of history is almost impossible to pinpoint in this passage; its representation can only come from shuttling between multiple points of view. In the end it is a mix of sight and body sense that makes this "an emblematic moment, neither resolved nor contented nor perhaps even hers." Not indexical, but "emblematic," this memory captures the aura of their time on the road, which cannot be easily

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[472] Jean Baudrillard, *America* (New York: Verso, 1989), 1.
[473] Baudrillard, *America*, 7.
[474] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 354.

assimilated into a monumental chain of events. The novel therefore poses a cautionary tale of the untold damages left behind by the linear narrative of "progress." In her careful description of this scene, Choi echoes Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in which he argues that the deconstruction of our assumptions of "historical progress" must be paired with a concomitant practice of breaking apart the "homogeneous empty time" of the past and holding it up for further reflection. Choi's depiction of Jenny regarding the past through the rearview mirror, and finding her own eyes looking back at her, revises Benjamin's iconic image of the Angel of History. Benjamin describes the Angel being caught in the storm of progress steadily moving him forward, but keeping his gaze on the damage of the past: "This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward."[475] For Jenny, the momentum of progress has left much of her own story behind. The recognition of her self in the mirror symbolizes an urgent need to reassess the character's own personal history as a woman and a minority, which led to her estrangement from history and community.

The protagonist's look in the mirror compels us as readers to do the same: to hold up the still untold history of Asian American women in the long 1960s for further reflection. For us to perceive the marginal histories of Asian American radicalism and feminism as potential "reality," we must practice a back-and-forth practice of reading.[476] The crisis of resolution, the displacement felt in the realization of one's estrangement from the world, like being caught on a wire – this is also the struggle the character faces as a lover, friend and blood relation. The struggle for affiliation in Choi's

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[475] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations,* trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 258.

[476] As Sara Blair argues in "The Photograph's Last Word: Visual Culture Studies Now," we must begin to cultivate a "parallactic understanding" of the relationship between word and image, "a movement between viewing and reading as critical practices." Blair continues: "How to resolve distinct fields of view— the agency of image technologies versus that of social narratives; the force of socioeconomic relations versus that of everyday practices of memory and self-representation—looks to be a defining challenge for visual culture studies in the coming decades." Blair, Sara. "The Photograph's Last Word: Visual Culture Studies Now," *American Literary History*. 22.3 (Fall 2010): 692-3.

novel is imagined as one of both viewing and reading people and historical circumstance. Faced with the impossibility of ever fully resolving these distinct perspectives, for the protagonist and reader of *American Woman* the task is to look and look again, to read and re-read the scenes and memories the text offers of a no longer forgotten past.

Returning to the "Farflung Frontier"

In a uniquely realist fashion, *American Woman* performs a feminist re-vision of Asian-American radicalism at mid-century by dilating the lens of history to capture what came before. Invoking what Adrienne Rich calls a creative effort of "looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction," the novel offers a dynamic portrait of Japanese-American familial ties as constituted within national and transnational histories of racial and ethnic difference. After the lessons learned from the novel's depiction of adoptive bonds of relation, the Shimada family is set as the object of affiliative repair, a journey left uncharted in the end. In the novel's diverse scenes of looking and being looked at, of setting out and seeking return, Choi demonstrates the inadequacies of traditional subject/object and masculine/feminine structures of relation when accounting for intersecting disciplines of power. We are left, however, with a glimpse of a structure of reproductive kinship unloosed from the Freudian specter of the deficient Oedipal father and castrated daughter. Thanks to a more ambivalent representation of gender, the Shimadas can begin to move forward as not simply kin, but friends and comrades. While Jenny Shimada's trip through various circles of affiliation may have failed to create lasting affiliative bonds with new friends and lovers, she is able to utilize the sense of vision she acquired on this journey to renew her emotional attachment to her father.

To claim this novel as part of a feminist project of collective re-vision requires us to expand our understanding of the 21st century consequences and effects of feminism not just for American

women, but also for men. Joining Jenny in looking back at the Japanese-American father, now re-integrated into a broader Asian-American community thanks to his daughter's aid, may intimate a new subject of Third World feminism. Like Jenny, Jim Shimada was threatened by racial, and in part sexual, invisibility. As his daughter sought out tentative paths of liberation outside of the narrow nationalist logic of recognition, so too did Jim in his youth at Manzanar. Denied his citizenship and treated as an enemy alien, Jim returned this national betrayal by refusing to fight against Japan, a resistance that sent him to a high security prison for radicals. In a way, Choi's depiction of the Shimadas frames this inheritance of social alterity not as a reason for their estrangement, but as a catalyst for reconnection.

American Woman expands the subject of feminism beyond an essentialist notion of white femininity to encompass both Asian American women and men. By doing so, Choi implicitly asks us to think further about the objects and events we recognize as constituting a feminist, and queer, past. As Rich did twenty years before in her essay "When We Dead Awaken," Choi's novel concludes on a note of a new story: "We all know that there is another story to be told. I am curious and expectant about the future of the masculine consciousness."[477] To take seriously a future portrait of "masculine consciousness" would ask us to return to the forms of displacement and asymmetrical affiliations foundational to the 1960s novel of affiliation, and utilize them for fresh political ends. By "stepping to one side" of second wave feminism, Choi's novel calls forth a reparative genealogy of feminism and acknowledges our continued affiliation with those generations that came before.

Along these lines, I see Choi's novel recasting the 1960s novel of affiliation for the surprising reparation of filial bonds. *American Woman's* re-vision of this sub-genre suggests that the partial failure of adoptive forms of attachment during the long 1960s might have resulted from the society's

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[477] Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision," 25.

rapid turn away from the difficult task of repairing the damaged families that characters like Jenny Shimada had sought to escape. The protagonist's rejection of her familial past comes back to haunt her, and thus in her quest to repair her self, she must return to her own history and mend the broken genealogies of her Japanese-American past. As a multiethnic Korean-Jewish American writer born in the late '60s, Choi began her publishing career by focusing on the lives of Korean American protagonists, first in her novel entitled *The Foreign Student*, and later in her most recent book *A Person of Interest* published in 2008. In a 2007 article, Choi notes that the original impetus to write her second novel *American Woman* came from her realization that Wendy Yoshimura was a daughter of Japanese internment. The turn to tell an adjacent story of Japanese-American history therefore mirrors the cultivation of an inter-ethnic Asian American community within *American Woman*. Posing the Shimada family within the embrace of a larger Asian American collective, Choi re-frames their filial relationship within these adoptive terms of connection. Jenny's trial, for example, becomes a site of inter-ethnic solidarity, where various Asian American local groups provide financial assistance for her defense and attend the trial to show communal support. Through his daughter's loss, Jim is now accompanied by "Japanese and Filipino and Korean and Chinese faces, the tight-knit people" he always avoided. "They clustered resolutely around him, invited him to eat in their homes, brought him casseroles when he demurred."[478] While the threat of imprisonment brings Jenny a new sense of Asian-American subjectivity and community, it at the same time opens up a multi-ethnic and cross-difference structure of relation for her father, a man long estranged and isolated after internment.[479]

Returning, in the final pages of the novel, to the Manzanar Internment Camp in the central California desert, the site of her family's rupture, the narrative concludes with Jenny cultivating a

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[478] Choi, *American Woman*, 359.
[479] The Asian-American collective that arose in support of Wendy Yoshimura's defense prefigured the broader Japanese American Redress movement that would develop in 1979.

renewed attachment with her father, Jim. Here, Choi turns to emplotting their familial relationship that has skirted the edges of the narrative of Jenny's multiple affiliations. The protagonist's capacity to enter into an honest engagement with the difference within her self, gained from political and personal loss, allows her to approach her father not as a failed parental figure, but an adjacent subjectivity with his own unique struggles. No longer bound by an affective inheritance of guilt or debt, father and daughter attempt to cultivate new bonds of friendship that neutralize the inequality, humiliation and wounds implied in their inter-generational bond. Choi's choice to end this novel with a return to a Japanese-American father/daughter relationship rent asunder by internment, invokes a tradition of Asian-American women's writing from the daughter's perspective. Here the author joins other writers, such as Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, in portraying Manzanar as a site of fraught and dissoluble father/daughter ties of kinship, where daughters attempt to salvage the humiliated emasculation of their fathers under concentration.[480] Throughout her childhood and adolescence, Jenny's relationship to her father was fragmented, due to his post-war trauma, an absent wife/mother, and experiences of dislocation and disenfranchisement after the war. Upon their reunion, father and daughter find new common ground as co-collaborators in a radical anti-imperialist project that bridges their generational divide. In the context of the Asian American literature of internment, Choi's potrait of a Nisei radical serves as a vehicle through which to repair this earlier plot of familial disintegration.

Driving through the foothills of the Sierras on the way to a reunion for former internees and their families, the Shimadas look down on the camp together and experience a sense of what Choi calls "visibility," the horizon so austere that its difficult to achieve any "sense of scale." Ironically, this expansive perspective was denied to those internees whose senses were limited by a

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[480] Shirley Geok-Lin Lim, "Feminist and Ethnic Literary Theories in Asian American Literatures," in *Feminism Redux: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, eds. Warhol-Down, Robyn and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2009), 352.

disempowering experience of subjection. Shifting the narrative point of view from the ground (of incarceration) to a higher ridgeline (of heightened privilege), Choi's depiction of the scene enriches our understanding of internment as a state of limited perspective and concealment. No longer are father and daughter separate objects in the cross-hairs of these disciplinary regimes of power – they now symbolically sit next to each other, as separate subjects adept at utilizing a kind of "rigorous mind" that allows them to better "appreciate" these austere landscapes. The desert surrounding the camp is therefore not simply spatial, but also temporal – a landscape of memory. It feels to Jenny as if they'd come upon some "far-flung frontier", a revision of what the character previously called the "farflung places" her life was caught between; she now seems better able to locate herself in relationship to the seemingly contradictory foci of New York and San Francisco, Manzanar and her own prison. Perhaps, they have returned to "the past," for as Jim Shimada dramatically states, "it all looks exactly the same."[481]

Noticing how the land and horizon "seem to go on forever," the Shimadas are brought together by their shared reception of this lieu de mémoire. In his recent study, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Raciliazation of Intimacy*, David Eng comments on the relationship between visuality and affect, in the context of second-generation Japanese-Americans' endeavors to repair psychic and familial breaks in the wake of internment. A third-generation Sansei filmmaker and artist, Rea Tajiri creates in her documentary film *History and Memory: For Akiko and Takashige* (1991), according to Eng, an "extended meditation on the nature of a picture – the ways in which images might come to (re)negotiate a relationship between affect and language in order to underwrite new historical meaning."[482] Going further in his interpretation of the film in the context of an affective queer temporality, Eng claims that the filmmaker uses sets of "dialectical images" in order to portray a form of affective kinship that exceeds liberal political conceptions of visibility and invisibility,

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[481] Choi, *American Woman*, 367-8.
[482] Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship*, 170.

representation and denial. Eng argues that a sequence of abstract images of flowers taken from two separate, yet corresponding sites (one in the yard of Tajiri's mother, the other at the grave of her absent grandfather Kimoko) creates a feeling of "displaced connections in which the positing of a correspondence depends upon not just formal structural analysis, but also the apprehension of difference – of a break, a displacement, an absence."[483]

In this final scene, Choi imagines the protagonist's ability to apprehend difference, and inhabit absence and breaks, a practice also central to the reader's acknowledgment of this place as a fraught site of memory and affiliation. As the characters approach the gathering, Jim Shimada quickly re-joins this ethnic group that since his internment had seemed impossible, an eager reanimation that is contrasted with Jenny's cooler reaction to this scene. Lagging behind her father upon their arrival, her belated entry into the group subtly illuminates her generational distance and wayward relationship to this ethnic heritage. In this moment of delay, she seems to question the smooth reunion of past and present. Existing in the space of displacement "between two far-flung places," Jenny is able to hold in abeyance these competing moments that her father cannot easily perform. These connections that Jenny as a second-generation survivor performs, what Eng calls the practice of "affective correspondences," are made manifest thanks to the work of "psychic reparation" that re-orders our relationship to the past and that in-between space that "might have been."

As a representation of the practice of "psychic reparation," this scene registers the narrative's changing relationship to history. Choi gives us no internal representation of what Jenny might be thinking and feeling, nor a reason for her delay. The narrative's return to a more externalized, and therefore distanced, realist mode stitches the text back into a diachronic framework of memory and history. Although Choi's use of a hyperrealist style has been metatextual throughout the novel, its

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[483] Eng, *The Feeling of* Kinship, 186.

return to a stable picture of reality highlights the failures of a postmodern spatialization of time that has the capacity to erase the historicity of particular events from our field of vision. Emblematizing Eng's concept of finding difference embedded within the "affective correspondences" between the past and the present, this scene of return implicitly asks us to interrupt the smooth unrolling of the past on the page before us, and consider the absences, exclusions and violent displacements that this barbeque memorializes. Benjamin, in writing of a historical materialism akin to memory, explains that we must hold onto "the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop. For this notion defines the present in which he himself is writing history."[484] Remembering the past in the present, we stand with Jenny in the mid-1970s, looking back thirty years earlier to a history of national exclusion, displacement and dehumanization. Interpolated into this narrative mise en abyme, we as readers of the 2007 novel, in turn, look back thirty years to a different yet related history of loss. In the end, this novel asks us to look not simply behind us into the past, but beside us in the present, to those adjacent experiences of suffering and estrangement that often miss our gaze.

Conclusion

My reading of *American Woman* concludes at a point of contradiction: if the 1960s novel of affiliation illuminates how interpersonal relationships serve as a vehicle for psychic and social repair, what can be made of Choi's return to the family and rejection of more heterogenous or adoptive forms of sociality? To be sure, the portrayal of a chosen bond of horizontal affiliation between father and daughter deconstructs our normative assumptions about the family as defined by inherited, dutiful, vertical relationships. And yet, however healed this fictional family might seem, it still inevitably bears the irreconcilable trace of the dehumanizing forces of state oppression that injured the

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[484] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 262.

Shimadas under internment. Choi's turning back to World War II makes clear that in order to identify the root of those ruptures that 1960s bonds of affiliation sought to repair, we must expand the lens of history and attend to the slow violences that characterize the modern U.S. nation-state since the turn of the 20th century. The injuries the novel of affiliation often unsuccessfully works to repair are not tied to punctual events, but constitute a protracted accumulation of psychic, familial and social damages.

These novels of the 1960s look back to earlier policies of segregation, containment and militarization that destroyed any stable familial or national romance. In each novel of affiliation included in this study, the "natural," private bonds between parents and children disintegrate under the force of state violence and oppression. For the blood families in Baldwin's *Another Country*, Morrison's *Sula*, and Hogan's *People of the Whale*, intergenerational bonds fail to survive the everyday violences of racial and ethnic segregation – a fact that is symbolized in the deaths of a number of children: Baldwin's character Rufus Scott, Morrison's Plum, Chicken Little and eventually Sula, and Hogan's child of the reservation, Marco Polo. For the protagonists of *American Woman*, Atwood's *Surfacing* and O'Brien's *In the Lake of the Woods*, relationships with previous generations are weakened if not lost in the wake of the violences of World War II. Nevertheless, out of the remnants of these broken genealogies, a new generation works to mend the psychic and communal wounds that these familial failures have left behind. And most often, this generation is comprised of daughters who seem to practice acts of proto-feminist survival.

In Choi's surprising return to the father, the author illuminates the incoherence and sense of dislocation underlying the seemingly inviolate figure of white patriarchal power. The dream of the perfect father is no longer viable in the 1960s and after; by extension, the nation-state, to which this father is a symbolic agent, can never be redeemed. We are left with the injunction to think further about how heteroegeneous forms of public affiliation, what I call "heterosocial" structures of

relation in the previous chapter, might be cultivated and sustained. Decentering the purchase of patriarchy and filial genealogy, heterosociality must be considered within a broader history of feminist and queer critiques of heterosexuality, which open up new modes of being with others who are different from ourselves. In part, a heterosocial public sphere would depend on rendering mute the Oedipal drama in which the American nation has long been entrenched. Dana Nelson articulates that in the 19th century, "national manhood was symbolically and structurally oedipalized... national manhood promised its citizen/representatives the right to stand for (the authority of) the F/father, but it effectively left them in the space of the son, vulnerable and anxious."[485] The vision that Baldwin, Atwood, Morrison, Hogan and Choi leave us with is not the anxious, emasculated son, but the resourceful daughter who denies the inheritance of castration and instead dwells in ambivalence. Their novels' representation of cross-difference forms of affiliation poses new stakes for building more sustainable bonds of solidarity among diverse genders, races, ethnicities and social classes. For these bonds to thrive, however, individuals must learn how to confront the violent incoherence that shapes the terms of our connection. Encountering these novels of affiliation therefore teaches us a new way of reading and dwelling in the asymmetries and incoherences of social life.

To best attend to the gaps and confusions that shape our connections with others, in turn, we must take up the burden of memory to which these novels attest. For the characters in Choi's *American Woman*, as representative of the post-1960 novel of affiliation more generally, to remember the past is to take part in a practice of repairing its remnants in the present, and bearing witness to those losses that can never be redeemed. This burden combines a recognition of the overlapping frameworks of the familial and the social, the intimate and the public – a shuttling between various relational poles that Jenny Shimada performs when she re-discovers her personal past to be shaped by intersecting structures of power and histories of oppression. In order to perceive the traces of

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[485] Nelson, *National Manhood*, 22.

public violence in the private sphere, Jenny must acquire a capacious sense of vision that is not simply diachronic or linear, but synchronic or horizontal. Thus, Choi portrays memory as an experience of adjacency, where the linear causality of the past is tempered by a correspondent sense of present location and scale. By situating herself alongside those individuals who are crystalized in her memory, Jenny is better able to realize how the injuries her father incurred under internment are conversely tied to the economic and racial privileges that characterized Pauline and contributed to their earlier affiliation.

Approaching the sixties from a generous yet critical vantage point, this dissertation perceives the contested history of the 1960s as setting the terms of our connection in the present. Like Choi's protagonist who looks back to the past through the rear-view mirror, where objects might be closer than they appear, the reader of the novel of affiliation must learn to attend to the historical paradoxes that shape present suffering. After the events of September 11, 2001, North Americans witnessed the uncanny return of entrenched miliary conflict and dehumanizing policies of exclusion and containment, which many had thought were long resolved. With the global war on terror enduring on and the Guantanamo Bay Detention Center still in operation, the Vietnam War and Japanese internment no longer seem distant memories, but tangible and proximate experiences. In revising Walter Benjamin's Angel of History, the post-1960 novel of affiliation reconceives the ethical struggles of the long 1960s as thus not behind us, but adjacent to us. Unlike Benjamin's isolated angel, who faces the storm of progress symptomatically alone, the melancholic protagonists of Baldwin, Morrison, and Choi perceive the past as a fractured, yet never to be forgotten, friend. These novels' promise of a renewed ethics of affiliation across differences urgently depends on our friendly reconsideration of this strange and chaotic past. As a thoughtful yet skeptical companion, in the end, this history accompanies us as we stumble along an unknown and difficult path towards repair.

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