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Possibility, Singularity, Disqualification:
Experimental Fiction and the Queerness of Language in Use

By

Howard Fisher

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

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in

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of the

University of California, Berkeley

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Possibility, Singularity, Disqualification:
Experimental Fiction and the Queerness of Language in Use

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Howard Fisher

Abstract

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This study conceptualizes the formal difficulty of certain modernist novels by focusing on the way their construction of conversation represents how people occupy positions in a social world. Works by Gertrude Stein, Robert Musil, and Djuna Barnes share puzzling formal features (most notably frequent digressions that exceed their relationship to surrounding material and textual lacunae, especially in the transcript of a conversation) that cultivate an indeterminacy around how peculiarities of characters' speech invoke typical social qualities. The dissertation argues that this rendering of conversation cultivates an understanding of sexuality as a multivariable social phenomenon. These novels show how sexualities, as thinkable identities, emerge and recede from view as other bits of information about a person shift around verbal utterances. Specifically, these novels generate insights on shades of sexual difference that depend on a context-bound orientation to language to be known and responded to. "Possibility," "singularity," and "disqualification" are terms these novels use to draw attention to such elusive pragmatic phenomena.

The project draws on the tools of close reading and linguistic anthropology to conceptualize how fictional structures critique the relationship between social identities and language use. In a similar if more illustrative way than linguistic analysis, novels' sequencing of and commentary on conversation model how distinctive discursive signals index or "point" to motivating factors in the surrounding world. In particular, the concept of indexical indeterminacy clarifies the way works take discursive context—the structuring framework that gives interaction a generic form and functional trajectory—to be collaboratively achieved one utterance at a time.

This project intervenes in theories of modernist difficulty and the history of sexuality. Although queer theory has exploded a homo-heterosexual binary as the basis of a sexual politics, it has done so by dissolving sex as a coherent social practice. Scholars of sexuality understand that ostensibly identical acts can mean opposing things to different people, yet they still acknowledge the mark of sexuality to be distinctive and determining. The dissertation points toward a solution to this impasse. The experimental works studied here instruct us to think about sexuality in terms of both its enactment in discourse and the cultural literacies required for people to take up language use as indicative of sexual difference as a variety of public knowledge.

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INTRODUCTION

Experimental Fiction and the Queerness of Language in Use

Consider the following perplexing scene of conversation from Robert Musil's *The Man without Qualities*. While on an excursion to the Austrian countryside, Agathe asks her brother Ulrich whether he would be unhappy with her if she were to commit a crime. Ulrich has been stuck in a quandary regarding how even formally identical moral propositions can mean opposite things when spoken by different people or, for that matter, when spoken in the country versus the city. Hence his frustrated appeal to a lack of common ground from which to voice a response: "What do you expect me to say to that?!"¹ At this point Agathe airs the deed she has been contemplating, "I'd like to kill Hagauer." Ulrich's confusion as to what his sister means by claiming to want to kill her husband takes a very special form. No sooner has Agathe's maritidal wish completed its journey through Ulrich's ear than he seems to lose track of its sound. "The words had entered his ear lightly and softly," the narrator informs us, "but when they had passed they left behind something like broad wheel marks in his mind. He had instantly forgotten her tone; he would have had to see her face to know how to take her words, but he did not want to accord them even that much importance." ("Die Worte waren leicht und leise durch sein Ohr gegangen, aber als sie vorbei waren, ließen sie im Gedächtnis etwas zurück wie eine breite Radspur. Er hatte die Betonung sofort vergessen, er hätte das Gesicht sehen müssen, um zu wissen, wie die Worte zu verstehen seien, aber er wollte dem auch nicht einmal so viel Wichtigkeit beimessen.")²

The exchange between Ulrich and his sister exemplifies a multifaceted understanding of language characteristic of a certain experimental strain of early twentieth century novels. The passage first describes Agathe's utterance as an object that traverses a physical space. The space subjects language to laws that lend it a quantum of force—*lightly, softly* Agathe's words touch Ulrich. Of course, Musil's narrator is also commenting on phonation, the production of speech sounds and their combination into words, referring expressions, and semantically whole statements. Ulrich understands this aspect of meaning as though it were hitched to the sounds that caress his inner ear, but then attention shifts to a more elusive phenomenon resembling "broad wheel marks" in Ulrich's imagination. As mental representations, such traces point to something that Ulrich knows logically must have been in place during the words' production and may linger in such nearby details as Agathe's tone or her facial expression. One word for this something might be "context," if by this one means a framework, more pragmatic than semantic, that is yet involved in constraining how words refer to things and people in the world. Ulrich, however, seems to understand that context itself can be indeterminately constrained, potentially opening onto ever more intricately interrelated factors. This is evident, for instance, in his hesitation to act in a way that would lend Agathe's words "*even that much importance.*"

¹ Robert Musil, *The Man without Qualities*, 806. All English translations correspond to this edition except where indicated. In the following chapters I will provide the German in parentheses or in a note when differences are salient to my argument.

² Robert Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 742.

If the passage's perplexed listening and deferred response typify experiments in novel form, these features are insufficient to distinguish *The Man without Qualities* from the writing of other times and places, such as that of Laurence Sterne, whom Musil admired. This study instead argues that Musil's novel, alongside works by Gertrude Stein and Djuna Barnes, are in large part significant within European and Anglo-American literary culture because their attention to the pragmatics of speech in scenes of convoluted conversation entail critiques of the social forms of sexuality. In particular, a novel like Musil's takes interest in how people use language to signal their relative proximity to such forms, often in highly implicit ways, while also constructing new relations and identities—what the novel calls possibility, or *Möglichkeit*.

For instance, Agathe's utterance strikes Ulrich as unaccountable because it contradicts all he knows about her, including her acquiescing to marrying Hagauer and her having served as the obedient counterweight to his prodigality with respect to their father. Yet the novel goes on to show that an utterance's being overheard allows variables lost to its addressee to wait in the wings of a conversation, and that these variables can reintroduce themselves later in conversation. Such elliptical meanings can impinge upon how an utterance functions as an emblem of a person's social identity. During their exchange, Ulrich and Agathe enjoy the hospitality of a farmer and his wife. Their hosts speak a German-Slavic dialect and cannot understand the semantic aspect of the siblings' conversation. Yet something about the man and wife's reactions alerts Agathe that the married couple has taken her and her brother to be quarreling lovers. Agathe seizes on the coincidence as though she thinks the couple might be on to something: "'They took us for lovers!'" she said. Impetuously she slid her arm in his, and a wave of joy welled up in her. 'You must give me a kiss!'"³ Agathe's completing the intimate picture may affirm her commitment to leaving her husband by emphasizing a previously obscure aspect of her relation to Ulrich. Perhaps she points out that the characteristics that make the siblings complement one another, far from figuring them as polar opposites, in fact ought to entail some intimacy between them—an intimacy that necessarily excludes Hagauer. In short, then, the novel, by juxtaposing scenes of talk, explores the contextualizing logics that Ulrich hesitates to reconstruct. Musil's chapter conveys a lesson on sexuality and sociolinguistics: sometimes the presence of a side-channel of communication within a conversation can constrain the significance of pauses that up until a certain point had been indeterminate, the crux of a practical impasse that stalled the production of a response. Interlocutors can then play off side channels, implicitly affirming aspects of them to assert claims about their mutual relations that could not be made otherwise. Subsequent sections of Musil's novel show how, after enough time has allowed for several conversational anomalies to occur, the siblings can count upon them as the basis of an implicit, shared knowledge—about who Agathe is, about who they are for one another. In other words, while the dissertation's point of departure is the representation of conversation in experimental fiction, its main subject is novels where thinking on language, the history of sexuality, and the life of literary publics converge.

OVERVIEW

Possibility, Singularity, Disqualification: Experimental Fiction and the Queerness of Language in Use proposes that an experimental tendency runs deep in the novel tradition, one that

³ Musil, *The Man without Qualities*, 810.

depends on a pragmatic orientation to language for its structuring poetics. Although the project focuses on works produced in the first three decades of the twentieth century and their ramifications through literary and sexual publics, the dissertation begins in the eighteenth century. Chapter 1 presents a reading of Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-1767) to conceptualize novelistic experimentation. The chapter pays special attention to how the novel's digressive structure leaves the significance of flashbacks, interpolated narratives, and authorial addresses stranded until characters' discourse implicitly picks up on features of digressions as conceptually important for understanding their identities. To describe these structures, the chapter also introduces several concepts from linguistic anthropology. The most important are indexicality and "the indeterminacy of contextualization." Indexicality, which I'll discuss in more detail in the next section, refers to semiotic processes in language not primarily involved in forming semantically complete propositions. Instead, indexes include linguistic features that point to some aspect of an utterance's context, lending language use such dimensions as motivation and directionality. "Contextual indeterminacy" captures how participants in interaction collaboratively construct the context that gives an interaction a generic form and functional trajectory. Analyzing Sterne's digressive style with linguistic anthropology's tools, I schematically lay out an experimental poetics to illustrate how indexical structures operate implicitly in discursive interaction to bind together affects, bodily practices, and social knowledge into configurations that resemble the complex phenomena we know today as sexualities. Indeed, *Tristram Shandy* functions as a limit case of identity's discursive immanence insofar as Tristram's concern for his family members' "hobby-horses," their erotic obsessions, allows one to find conceptual order in even the idiosyncratic behavior of an eccentric cast of characters. Beginning in the eighteenth century allows the dissertation's inquiry to gain distance on some ideas particular to modern sexual systems, including the assumption of a homo-heterosexual opposition and a gradation of intelligibility that corresponds to a political hierarchy of normative and non-normative desires. *Tristram Shandy* instead allows contemporary readers to focus on a more general distinction between those intimations of desire that are presumed upon, responded to, and acted on and those that are not. Thus even though a reader can recognize characters' erotic "hobby-horses" as coherent potentials in characters' interactions, characters fail to actualize all in practice. Others are only realized through the most unpredictable of coincidences. In this respect, *Tristram Shandy* exemplifies experimental novels' refusal of an inert conceptual economy for understanding characters and events.

Chapters 2 and 3 form a pendent pair that explicate some ways experimental works engage with sexuality as a complex structure of identity that can involve several other social factors. The subject of Chapter 2 is Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans*. Written between 1902 and 1911 and first published in 1925, *Americans* arrives to us as an artifact of a modern market for sexual classificatory systems, of which Stein was an enthusiastic consumer. But whereas sexologists like Otto Weininger mapped formal categories onto existing practices and gendered embodiments, Stein's *Americans* reconstructs the conceptual divisions people project from their repetitive behavior, going so far as to approximate what linguistic anthropologist Michael Silverstein calls the "diagrammatic" structure of ritual interactions at the level of sentential structure. This produces a discourse that appears at first blush to be perfectly abstract in its ordering logic, but at every turn implies a relation to ongoing social experience. More specifically, Stein's analysis of how repetition ramifies across a social world entails an understanding of how contingent and ephemeral strategies of identification (what Stein's narrator calls "singularity") manifest alongside more

robust social formations. In the chapter's conclusion, I elaborate on how Stein's novel has been able to garner what *Tristram Shandy* lacks despite its incisive social satire: a public that links its ability to make sense of a text's implicit meanings to its own generative habits, including particular sexual practices and identities.

Focusing on Musil's *The Man without Qualities* (1930-1943), Chapter 3 builds on the previous chapter's emphasis on social forms that cannot be explicitly avowed but are nonetheless immanent in the structure of social interactions. Musil's narrator intervenes in the process by which interlocutors collaboratively produce a text to dramatize how unthought possibilities insinuate themselves into exchanges at moments when incongruous qualities of characters' speech suggest that several generic frameworks of conversation (talk between colleagues, siblings, and lovers) interpenetrate each other. I connect this compositional method's temporal structure to the way linguistic anthropological theory analyzes how forms of utterance fall into meaningful relations with social contexts in the iterative unfolding of conversation. I then discuss how such incongruous utterances put a strain on the legal and affective frameworks of kinship that structure the relation between Agathe and Ulrich. Although unspeakable possibilities become a point of orientation in the siblings' interactions, the novel's final, unfinished volume tends toward a stark distinction between an intimately shared social world and public discourse.

Focusing on "disqualification" in Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* (1936), chapter 4 considers the mutual constitution of sexual identities, publics, and literary canons. Barnes's disqualification refers to the suffering that social misfits experience when a single glaring aspect of character undoes one's overall fitness for social positions like nobility, love, or motherhood. That is, disqualification organizes the shameful effects of a sexual system that designates certain desires and practices as excessive, decadent, and pathological. Though enshrined in modern gay and lesbian canons for centering disqualification, Barnes's work is not ideologically tied to contemporary conceptions of queerness in any single, straightforward way, e.g., through rejection of narratives of normative psychic development or frank representation of subaltern culture. I show this by pointing to a feature of the work that is likely to be as strange to readers today as it was for Barnes's contemporaries: the disjointed, lyrical way her characters talk. I draw on Michael Warner's distinction between publics and counterpublics to demonstrate how the indeterminate logical links between characters' utterances dramatize the strenuous discursive work of making suffering collectively meaningful. The chapter then draws on letters between Barnes and her friend Emily Holmes Coleman to further illustrate my point that disqualification is primarily a linguistic condition. Like her characters, Barnes understands that other people in her field take the way she writes to signal a private feeling that is unbecoming for the allegedly generous, universal spirit of an artist. In addressing Coleman, she tries to cultivate a context in which these supposedly unaccountable feelings can become the basis for a social solidarity.

The dissertation's four chapters weave several thematic strands into a more comprehensive inquiry. First and foremost, they trace a literary practice of experimentation that evolves by incorporating aspects of social difference. This practice presupposes a distinction between semantic and pragmatic orders of signification, and the project's engagement with linguistic anthropology allows me to explicate how literary structures demonstrate this distinction. The novels' various characters and plots all emphasize the problem of how to affirm a "cultural-conceptual" knowledge of sexuality that emerges from interactions in only implicit, ephemeral ways that people cannot always refer to. Between chapters 3 and 4, the project articulates a public/private distinction based less on the opposition between the state and civil society, mediated

distance and physical intimacy than on the difference between emergent identities and those that are maximally presupposable. Following Michael Warner, I consider publics as “world-making projects,” or what I refer to as processes of cultural emergence. The novels use terms like “possibility,” “singularity,” and “disqualification” to conceptualize how people tacitly articulate such processes in their talk. Finally, the dissertation shows how novels themselves contribute to such processes, arguing that sexual subjectivities emerge from the tensions between authors’, publishers’, and different reading publics’ ideologies about the relation between a work’s way of discussing sex and its aesthetic worth. For example, chapter 4 reconstructs how Barnes, in arguing about her novel’s relation to literary realism with friends and would-be publishers, struggles to draw attention to a way of thinking about sex that unsettles her literary group’s tendency to think of desire as a uniparticular, generalizable passion. For Barnes, realism should analyze sexuality as an aspect of a person’s social class that can yet work against a person’s smooth inhabiting of a class position. Thus she also implies, in her conversations with Coleman, that different sexualities can entail differing commitments to more and less narratively robust accounts of sexual practice—differing investments in causally or sequentially connecting sex to other aspects of life.

HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODS

Why 1902 to 1936?

Despite the illuminating historical scholarship in gay and lesbian studies of the last three decades, an enduring myth tells us that prior to the Second World War, coherent communities organized around sexual difference were virtually nonexistent. On the contrary, American and European cities in the first third of the twentieth century were in fact home to complex social worlds predicated on non-heteronormative sexual practices and identities and centered on same-sex relations and gender expression as their most publicly visible aspect. These worlds included physical spaces such as clubs, bars, cafes and salons; a conceptual map of the kinds of people one finds in these places; and rituals like drag balls for enacting culturally shared sexual selves. Arguably, early-century sexual worlds were more integrated into the ostensibly normal, public lives of urban spaces than their contemporary analogues.⁴ I select this period between the turn of the century and conservative state and civil reactions after the Great Depression because its sexual systems resemble those of the present in complexity and visibility yet were organized according to different assumptions that prove difficult to reconstruct from sexual terminologies (fag, fairy, queer, gay, etc.) without considering their mooring in more or less typical social contexts and relations. In short, study of this period can challenge thinking about how our present orders itself.

In particular, the seamless overlap between worlds in the early decades of the twentieth century required not only a conceptual vocabulary of sexual difference, but also implicit and highly articulated practices for signaling one’s own and others’ alignment with different groups of people. In certain respects, these practices were broadly public. Scholarship has

⁴ New York City can hardly serve as a representative case, but the robust literature on the city nonetheless allows one to observe startling transformations in urban ecologies across the twentieth century. On the complexity of early-century gay male worlds, see Chauncey, *Gay New York*. On the shifting relation between sexuality and public life, see Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*. For an analysis of the mutually shaping forces of gentrification and the social field of sexuality, see Patrick, “The matter of displacement.”

documented a boom in literary representations of sexual difference, especially in novels. These works functioned to satisfy an economically exploitable popular curiosity about the other sexual world e.g., “the pansy craze” assiduously documented by George Chauncey.⁵ However, the same works often publicly articulated a homosexual sensibility, including what Christopher Nealon has called a sense of “feeling historical.” This term refers to the way novels created both a sense of historical continuity (by constructing a lineage of same-sex erotic practice) and a feeling of historical specificity that made a relation to past, present, and future part of the pleasure of sex and an implicit valence of any allusion to it.⁶ Since the publication of Nealon’s study, other writers like Heather Love and Kadji Amin have drawn attention to “backward” sexual desires and practices, i.e., identities that became less intelligible and less politically viable over the course of the century as struggles over the terms of possible sexual futures became increasingly entrenched.⁷ Although the texts I explore across the dissertation’s chapters require me to consider the implications of both publicly intelligible, future-oriented sexualities and those that face cultural erasure, I am primarily interested in an underexplored aspect of the literature of this period: namely, how a subset of works coming out of specialized corners of the literary field focused less on the ethnographic depiction of sexual worlds than on what the day-to-day superimposition of sexual worlds implied about the more general relations between language, culture, and art.

Stein, Musil, and Barnes all had ties to a liberal cultural elite that was confronting a crisis of humanistic values that in many respects presaged subsequent posthumanist philosophies—those understanding the inanimate byproducts of human activity to have at least as much agency in the world as people themselves. Whereas intellectual historians sometimes conflate this crisis with modernity writ large, I conceive of it as a discourse that inflected the way these writers were likely to have encountered the stakes of the complex sexual worlds they participated in. Here “Liberalism” implies a hegemonic economic and political system constructed around the presupposition of a rational-critical subjectivity. This subjectivity provided the grounds for a capitalism that could supposedly work to the benefit of all without state interference. In the intellectual climate around the First World War, scientific materialism and philosophical irrationalism shook the foundations of this tradition, leading even members of the classes that flourished under this system to question its ideological implications or lose faith in the idea of an ordered universe. According to David S. Luft, scientific materialism constituted a method of empirical knowledge that emphasized the material, contingent aspect of human reason, entailing “an understanding of the body as a biological reality (and as the reality of the self), and a new understanding of the soul as feelings grounded in the body.”⁸ A more radical formation, philosophical irrationalism traced the human behavior to the instincts and other determining structures less susceptible to empirical analysis. Against liberalism’s rational subjectivity, which could reconcile subjective experience with the existence of multiple minds through the idea of a transcendental ego, irrationalism emphasized the inherent nothingness of human forms of behavior and the directionlessness of history. In a culture in crisis, sex and sexuality became contested objects and central figures in attempts to reconcile the automatisms of the body and soul with the reasonableness of the mind. In 1886, Richard von Krafft-Ebing had already written in

⁵ See especially Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 321-29.

⁶ Nealon, *Foundlings*, 23.

⁷ See Love’s explication of the backwardness embedded in political and aesthetic modernisms, *Feeling Backward*, 5-10. Cf. Amin’s analysis of the “making retrograde” of male pederasty in France. *Disturbing Attachments*, 19-28.

⁸ Luft, *Eros and Inwardness in Vienna*, 2.

Psychopathia Sexualis that “all ethics and, perhaps, a good part of æsthetics and religion depend upon the existence of sexual feeling.”⁹

The crisis in liberal thinking that gripped the educated elite early in the twentieth century created the conditions for the popularization of sexological studies and Freud’s model of the unconscious, developed a decade earlier, and gave rise to new attempts at sexual classification, such as Weininger’s. Although Stein, Musil, and Barnes knew these works, their entry points into the discourse of sexuality were more idiosyncratic, integrating aspects of multiple traditions. Their elite educations allowed them to participate in breakthroughs that threatened liberal assumptions. In William James’s Psychological Laboratory, Stein undertook experiments in automatic writing, concluding in an article for *The Psychological Review* that her classmates’ particular reactions to the experimental designs were manifestations of each participant’s character, understood as independent complexes of memory embodied as habits.¹⁰ Musil wrote his doctoral thesis in Psychology and Philosophy on the physicist Ernst Mach, who asserted that concepts of inert substance, like mass, were really reductions of thermodynamic processes, or temporary equilibriums in the movement of energy. While not formally trained in scientific, materialist schools of thought, Djuna Barnes had firsthand experience of the women’s suffrage movements in New York through her work as a journalist, including reports on the police’s use of force-feeding to counteract hunger-striking protesters. These political events likewise threatened liberal thinking insofar as they drew attention to the extreme cruelty of state-sanctioned torture and the attribution of free thinking (the foundation of political agency) to only certain bodies and classes. But these writers were not simply interested in laying waste to existing systems of thought. Their work questioned whether sexual impulses and behavior followed a logic resistant to descriptive forms; what made such logics legitimate; and how different channels of linguistic meaning were involved in arbitrating the line between culture and its outside. Such a project is exemplified in the way *The Man without Qualities* juxtaposes the character Diotima’s compulsive pursuit of extramarital sex with both Ulrich’s fascination with Agathe and the murderer Moosbrugger. In Luft’s words, even a proponent of irrationalism, “might think of irrational impulses as ultimately susceptible to lawful regularities, which may be utterly obscure from a subjective point of view.”¹¹ These writers used novels to construct the point of view from which even apparently violent, sudden eruptions of behavior could be understood to participate in a complex but nonetheless ordered system. In some cases, the intellectual foment of the period allowed such projects to come to fruition; in others, such as Barnes’s, her literary field’s commitments to an older humanism made it difficult for her peers to understand how her novel was at all consistent with the cultural project of art.

Why language-in-use?

The following chapters sustain a dialogue between the methods of linguistic anthropology and fictional texts that work on language to bring out its pragmatic function with respect to

⁹ Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 1.

¹⁰ Contrary to James and her lab partner and friend Leon Solomons, Stein denied that such a thing as automatic writing existed. She rather understood that the semi-consciousness of her subjects was a state willfully entered to facilitate the translation of past experience, possibly unconscious, into motor movements for the purpose of creation. See Meyer, *Irresistible Dictation*, 221-29.

¹¹ Luft, *Eros and Inwardness*, 9.

sexuality. In a way that speaks to these novels' historical moment, linguistic anthropology deemphasizes the rational individual as linguistic agent, including the idea that the most common or important thing people do when talking is intentionally form descriptive propositions about things in the world. Instead, linguistic anthropologists focus on the multiple meanings that happen in language use, arguing that some meanings do not conform to models of predication or reference. When people describe states of affairs in the world, formal features of their discourse signal a different kind of information concerning distinct tiers of context. A particular tone or qualifying particle can indicate a speaker's attitudinal stance, or "footing," toward another's contribution to an interaction. In academic discourse, a pervasive syntactic pattern or lexical range can imply adherence to a theoretical perspective that endures beyond particular conversations. Simply the license people take in addressing others can invoke still more pervasive structures of distinction, such as age, race, or status in one or other field of cultural production. All of these phenomena, often occurring simultaneously in the same utterances, depend on indexicality.

In a 2019 lecture, linguistic anthropologist Michael Silverstein describes how "individuals periodically give off indexical signals that gradually cumulate over the duration of an encounter, allowing us to make cumulative sense of who, that is, sociologically speaking, what they are, as presenting as identifiable persons in their contributions to an interactional event."¹² Put a little differently, what linguistic anthropological analysis calls "context" constitutes a shifting structure of relations between signs introduced into discursive interaction and pertinent bits of information that ground the meaningfulness of language use. Through a linguistic anthropological lens, identity categories like sexuality also constitute conceptual structures participants invoke in discrete interactions that render their contributions "interdiscursively" coherent, i.e., in some way consistent with interactions at some other time.

Linguistic anthropology's attention to implicit semiotic processes that exceed individual acts of reference and single interactions offers conceptual purchase on how experimental novels construct relations between sexual practice and other social variables by widening language's indexical channels. That is, linguistic anthropology allows me to distinguish the novels from other twentieth century investments in the sexual unconscious on the basis of how fictional works resituate the unconscious in a variety of contexts beside individual bodies and histories. It allows me to consider how novels engage what Silverstein refers to as the "sociocultural unconscious" that implicitly enables communication without becoming the topic of a denotative text.¹³

I am also sensitive to special reasons for needing to justify the use of linguistic anthropology in light of my focus on sexuality. Specifically, theories of performative speech acts, now normalized within studies of gender and sexuality, might seem to render linguistic anthropology's subordination of denotation and predication, or "constative" speech acts, redundant. While recent studies suggest a consilience between performativity and linguistic anthropological approaches, J.L. Austin's theory of speech acts nonetheless incorporates

¹² Silverstein, "Getting & Getting Across the Message" (lecture).

¹³ Michael Silverstein poses a question about how identities are indexically presupposed in language use that captures how some novels think about sexuality, "How can we see that language as used manifests such cultural concepts, ones specific to a sociohistorical *group*, notwithstanding the 'freedom' we think we manifest in saying what we want, as a function of what we, *as individuals*, 'really' believe we want to communicate about? Is there, in short, a *sociocultural unconscious* in the mind—wherever that is located in respect of the biological organism—that is both immanent in and emergent from our use of language?" Silverstein, "'Cultural' Concepts and the L," 622.

assumptions about language not conducive to an analysis of experimental literary texts.¹⁴ Most notably, Austin derives the concept of “context” from lexical items intrinsically suggesting a “social scene.” For instance, Austin supposes that explicit primary performatives, such as “I do,” “I give and bequeath,” and “I bet,” invoke generic cultural frameworks (“accepted conventional procedures”) that computibly entail certain discursive effects and presuppose certain felicity conditions (even when these are not fulfilled in practice).¹⁵ This account of pragmatics assumes the effability of linguistic function, i.e., introduces the dubious idea that if you can do it, you can say it. By the same token, the theory commits itself to a circular explanation of the relation between denotation and context.¹⁶ Austin assumes one can recover any contextual feature that bears on the pragmatics of language from lexical items. He supposes this to be the case for verbal and pronominal deictics (go/went, he/she, now/then, etc.) as well as for performative verbs. Austin’s argumentation is circular because he supposes that certain signs have a self-evident relation to a particular context, and this context predictably stabilizes the illocutionary force of an utterance.

Although linguistic anthropology finds that a given sign, one or more contextual variables (including cultural scripts of behavior), and the effects of an utterance in which the sign appears may normatively coincide, in practice participants iteratively construct these relations across turns at talk. In other words, linguistic anthropologists understand context as a collaborative process better analyzed in phases as “contextualization.” This strikes me as a more promising starting point for analyzing novels, given how a work’s multiple instances of imagined conversation create opportunities to consider how conceptual structures effectively invoked in one interaction may be undermined by the contingencies of another. More specifically, works that focus on sexuality take interest in meanings arising from coincidences of para-linguistic as well as linguistic signs, such as gestures, affects, and contingencies of the environment. (Recall the eavesdroppers on Agathe and Ulrich’s conversation.) Moreover, the works I discuss illustrate how the interaction between persons whose habits suggest relations to multiple sexual worlds can cause performative utterances to misfire even when all the putatively requisite “felicity conditions” are accounted for. Linguistic anthropology’s tools for analyzing contextualization provide a more nuanced frame for thinking about the role of linguistic creativity in social life, allowing me to trace gradations of sexual meaning between the unintelligible, intimately shared, and public.

Why “queer”?

My project draws on queer social analysis to understand novels’ range of critical frameworks for questioning how sexualities integrate other social identities. My most overarching claim is that experimental novels of the early twentieth century constitute an expansive body of thought on language and sexual behavior, social control, and social forms of sexuality, such as marriage. People working in academia will recognize these themes in queer studies’ critiques of identity and heteronormativity. Indeed, the critical energies running through experimental novels correspond to a more general shift in the public sphere of the last decades of the twentieth century

¹⁴ On the compatibility between linguistic anthropology and speech acts theory in the context of gender and sexuality studies, see Milani, “Queer Performativity,” 8.

¹⁵ For the original formulations, see Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 5, 14.

¹⁶ On these two assumptions, see Silverstein, “Indeterminacy of Contextualization,” 66-68.

that reframes identity politics. However, one of the problems that vexes understanding of this queer shift is that much knowledge of it arrives already filtered through retrospective academic accounts. According to an historical narrative that became increasingly coherent in the 1990s, political organizations like Queer Nation and ACT-UP in the U.S., OutRage in Great Britain, and Homosexuelle Aktion Westberlin in Germany shifted the focus of their efforts from securing rights for subordinated sexual constituencies toward dismantling a racist sexual system. Rather than basing collective identity on an essential core of qualities, constituents of these groups supposedly underscored their various differences from a heterosexual mainstream.¹⁷ In the '90s the preferred term was "heterosexist," but scholars in the field of queer studies now treat the same phenomenon under the slightly broader term, "heteronormativity," which designates the primary structural condition of sexually stratified societies in the logical and moral priority invested in sexual arrangements between people of dichotomous genders, which are defined most starkly (but not exclusively) in opposition to same-sex sexualities.

No sooner did people begin to notice the shift from sexual deviance to queer politics than an array of viewpoints destabilized its implications, and contests over the meaning of "queer" continue to be the site of productive intellectual tensions and material struggle in the present.¹⁸ In hindsight, the shift can appear so socioculturally uneven and temporally dispersed as to never have amounted to a coherent historical event in the first place. For instance, one can locate many of the social-critical energies that writers of the '90s associated with a queer politics in the gay and lesbian liberation movements it was thought to displace. Indeed, in view of my interest in indexical channels of conceptual communication, one of the most salient insights to emerge in the second half of the twentieth century consists of liberationists' figuring sexuality as a knowledge they describe in terms of a relational "capacity" as opposed to either a narrative of the self or an essence. Already in 1970, Carl Wittman in his "Gay Manifesto" wrote of sexual difference in terms of "capacities," defining homosexuality as "the capacity to love someone of the same sex."¹⁹ Wittman introduces this idea to de-pathologize and historicize sexuality, but he also contends that social change beyond gay men's and women's positive re-evaluations of self would require abandoning capacities for relational sense making that limited others' agency (male chauvinism and antifeminist homosexuality in particular). On the one hand, in grounding his manifesto from in a gay social position, Wittman implies that some aspects of sexuality may be too entrenched in subjectivity to succumb to willful alteration, however collectively fierce. Eve Sedgwick similarly observes in 1990 that, "For some people, the preference for a certain sexual object, act, role, zone, or scenario is so immemorial and durable that it can only be experienced as innate; for others, it appears to come late or to feel aleatory or discretionary."²⁰ On the other hand, Wittman's manifesto tends toward a future-facing vision of sexuality. He understands sexualities to consist of strata of

¹⁷ For versions of this narrative, see for instance, Morrison, "Proposing 'Queer Rhetoric(s).'", Seidman, "Identity and politics," 139-62; and Slagle, "In defense of queer nation," 85-102. For a contemporary analysis and critique of Queer Nation's tactics and rhetoric, see Berlant and Freeman, "Queer nationality."

¹⁸ A non-exhaustive list of concerns would include the following: prioritizing the theoretical uncoupling of sexuality from a homo-hetero binary; the radicalization of queer critique's anti-heteronormativity as anti-normativity as such; the fate of gender and trans* identifications after queer theory's reframing of sex and sexuality (gender as trigger for desire vs. effect of sexual subjectification); and the racial and national presuppositions of queerness. For an argument that weaves together a number of these lines of inquiry as they converge around the afterlife of queer theory, see Wiegman, *Object Lessons*, 306-37.

¹⁹ Carl Wittman, "Refugees from Amerika: A Gay Manifesto" (New York: The Red Butterfly, 1970), 3.

²⁰ Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 25.

more or less hardened habit. While some of these may be too deep to touch, others may be sanded away by shifting conditions, such as the need to politically organize with others. My most basic footing in a queer analysis corresponds to the practice of conceiving the process of stratification of identities, desires, and practices in relation to their phenomenal aspects—what is manifest of them in something like a linguistic utterance.

The writings of Stein, Musil, and Barnes require such a method that is sensitive to simultaneous, temporally accumulated, and potentially conflicting conceptual points of orientation for sexuality. This is another way of saying that their works are not queer in any single, straightforward way. Some of the sexualities they write about are indeed anti-heteronormative; one thinks here of Agathe's anti-marriage to Ulrich or Robin's abandoning her husband Felix and their child Guido. Other characters, like Stein's Julia Dehning and (sometimes) Ulrich, think they are bucking social conventions in their choices of partner or sexual promiscuity but in doing so only confirm their firm footing in other, secure social positions. Still others seem indifferent to heteronormativity *per se*, such as Jenny Petherbridge, who simply wants whatever she thinks other people already have. Finally, some, like Felix and Matthew O'Connor, suggest sexualities structured around the inhabitation of affects, relations, and temporalities associated with dominant heterosexualities, but in trying to make themselves adequate to those norms, they produce eccentric, inassimilable variations. In light of this variety, I locate their works within the history of queer social analysis through their ways of conceiving sexualities as capacities for interacting with others, including people's capacity to interpret and respond to language use. That is, these novelists understand sexualities to be both an aspect of identity that distinguishes people from each other and a part of the way people make sense of *other* aspects of identity in a politically polarized context.²¹ More specifically still, their writing anticipates queer ways of knowing by taking up the paradoxical actuality of utterances that emanate from indeterminate social locations. The chapters that follow trace developments in an aesthetic problem of how the negative, unintelligible excesses of speech become charged with particular meanings, forming the presupposable ground of further speech.

Language ideologies are among the most important of these novel's methods of sexual differentiation. Any ideology can be understood by how it inflects the way a person holds themselves in speech, but language ideology refers more specifically to shared practices of sense making that establish intermediate logical connections between linguistic forms and macrosocial forms. Drawing on the work of Kathryn A. Woolard, Tommaso M. Milani defines language ideologies as the products of "historically and socioculturally situated processes that create *indexical ties* between, on the one hand, certain features, genres, styles, registers or varieties of languages, and, on the other, broader sociocultural images of their speakers/writers."²² Language ideologies can refer to a specific group's rationalizations of their own or others' language, or of some aspect of that language. For instance, members of linguistic and cultural minorities might feel strongly that avoiding the use of loan words from other languages serves the interest of preserving theirs. Language ideologies also encompass a group's representations of the relationship between language and culture in general, such as assumptions of monolingualism that

²¹ Cf. Michael Lucey's formulation of sexuality as "an effect exerted on certain practices by a shifting structure of relations between a mobile and expansive set of other sociologically pertinent properties. I take sexuality to be both one sociological variable that we use to identify ourselves and others and the effect of a cloud of other variables." Lucey, *Someone*, 1.

²² Milani, "Queer Performativity," 9.

equate a culture with a unified language.²³ The choice of a queer theoretical lens allows me to formulate the stakes of experimental texts in terms of how they reorient our thinking about sexuality around language ideologies as a particular kind of indexical capacity. In this way, my analyses of experimental writing suggest how we might redraw our present maps of sexual difference. In particular, these works carry implications for how different subaltern cultures relate to dominant ones and to each other.

HOW THIS STUDY RESPONDS TO SCHOLARLY DEBATES

On the significance of experimentalism in literary history

Scholarship often conceives the significance of the most distinctive works of the period of between 1902 and 1936 by referring to their shared experimentalism, yet scholars struggle to reconcile the ostensible unity of experimentalism with the disparate formal strategies of their corpuses and to specify the stakes of experimentation. Let me start by rehearsing some common propositions about experimental writing. First, critics suppose experimental texts to foreground the materiality of language over mimesis of an extra-textual world. As Gerald Prince puts it, experimental writing prioritizes the “being of writing” over “the writing of being.”²⁴ For this reason, some call experimental writing metadiscursive, meaning that an experimental work reflects on the formal conventions it cites (often by exaggerating them to new extremes).²⁵ By the same token, experimental writing supposedly works against the protocols readers habitually use to parse their culture’s textual artifacts, calling upon them to inhabit perplexity as a strategy of reading opposed to positivist interpretation. An experimental text challenges a reader to stay grounded in signs, juggling multiple possible frameworks of sense making, instead of moving as quickly as possible from signs to a representation of a human social world, adjusting this representation only when new information contradicts one’s incumbent understanding. Despite their assumed self-conscious strangeness, experiments in writing draw critics’ attention for exercising a high degree of formal constraint, even to the point of being programmatic. They supposedly foreground a finite set of structural tools and combine these to various effects. Finally, experimentalist literature is commonly agreed to be a historically bounded phenomenon that correlates to the emergence of literary avant-gardes, subsections of the literary field consisting of writers whose artistic ambitions are largely indifferent to the field’s immediate commercial interests, whose principle readership consists of other writers, and whose economic wealth comes largely from sources besides the contemporary success of their writings.

Now, each of Stein’s, Musil’s, and Barnes’s works and lives correspond to these propositions in at least some way. Stein’s *Americans* professes not only to represent the lives of individuals, but also to furnish the conditions of possibility for describing all potentials of human nature. “Soon there will be a history of every kind of men and women and of all the mixtures in them.”²⁶ The narrator begins with a few differentiating properties and spends nearly a thousand

²³ On the range of phenomena one might understand as language ideological, see Paul V. Kroskrity’s discussion of their various levels of organization in Kroskrity, “Language Ideologies,” 501-11.

²⁴ Prince, “Recipes,” 207-12.

²⁵ On this aspect, see especially Motte, “Experimental Writing, Experimental Reading,” 1-2.

²⁶ Stein, *The Making of Americans*, 176.

pages programmatically combining these to descriptively render ever new idiosyncrasies of character. As Musil translator Burton Pike writes in his preface to the posthumous papers of *Man without Qualities*, “the novel does contain coherent individual threads and incidents, but Musil firmly rejected the idea of a plotted narrative whole.”²⁷ That is, the sequence of chapters does not provide the connective logic needed to determine the significance of individual chapters. *Nightwood* similarly lacks a central organizing sequence of actions; the novel consists largely of juxtaposed conversations that comment on events that have already happened elsewhere. All three writers regularly hosted or attended salons that included avant-garde artists and social reformers, including Barnes’s appearances at Natalie Clifford Barney’s in Paris and Musil’s at Eugenie Schwarzwald’s in Vienna.

Of course, the critical profile for experimental writing is a typology, not an account of the significance of any one text or group of texts. By themselves, these propositions fail to sufficiently explain why someone would adopt an experimental method of composition or how different methods might be related, let alone why a reluctant reader of today should wade through a difficult text from a distant moment in history. For this reason my dissertation refines some of the most common assumptions about experimentalism and abandons others entirely. Although one could argue that twentieth century Europe saw the height of experimental writing’s proliferation, I aim to conceive of experimental literature primarily as a poetic strategy that acquires its significance with respect to particular social contexts and aesthetic ideologies. Avant-gardism does not get one sufficiently into range of these contexts since “the avant-garde” is only coherent at a significant remove; no one avant-garde necessarily has the same interests as another. Avant-gardes are more usefully thought of as fringe networks of writers and readers within distinct social groups. I therefore go about determining the stakes of experimental forms by considering the tensions between particular works and the conditions of their publicness, not between artistic schools and a presumably monolithic cultural space. As it turns out, views on sexuality constitute one of the main axes of differentiation between particular works and the shared values of a literary group.

As for poetic form, claims that experimental writing champions the materiality of language and the indeterminacy of meaning similarly lack any one necessary entailment. I address this by first taking up Warren Motte’s idea that foregrounding the materiality of language can minimize any assumed opposition between the structure of texts and the structure of human social environments. In both, people can find themselves adrift in a sea of signs. Indeed, recent scholarship outside of novel studies has taken notice of intellectual investments in the written word as a mode of language-in-use. For instance, Tristram Wolff has argued that the essays of William Hazlitt, famous for a style that supposedly imitates spoken language’s spontaneity, in fact work to foreground those features of spoken language that are generic, measured, and performed. “What enables Hazlitt so readily to assume continuities between literary writing and sociable ways of speaking,” Wolff writes, “is a version of the belief that language, whether literary or not, is active in and constitutive of the world around it.”²⁸ In light of such work, I make the claim, somewhat distinct from Motte’s, that experimental writing may participate in something resembling a representation of a social world insofar as it reflects on the functionality of signs in that world. In other words, because the materiality of the signifier is in part a function of its social circulation, such materiality may contribute to representation rather than function as an obstacle to it. My use

²⁷ Musil, *The Man without Qualities*, xi.

²⁸ Wolff, “Talking with Texts: Hazlitt’s Ephemeral Style,” 45.

of linguistic anthropology to foreground indexical semiotic channels offers a way to group otherwise formally distinct experimental works together around such a poetics.

My focus on specifically nonsemantic orders of meaning in experimental works' critiques of sexuality also helps provide a much-needed corrective to prior accounts of sexual politics' relation to aesthetic form. Much feminist and GLBT-affirmative criticism has assumed that since non-normative sexual and gendered practices and identities are of necessity socially marginal, their existence is inimical to the novel's dominant representational order of realism. According to this thesis, representations that deny a sexual group social value are also supposed to deny that group representation as real. Experimental writing, by contrast, supposedly enables more multifaceted accounts of human sexual experience, but only by relinquishing the consistency presumably required for representation or by subversively valuing representation's implicit negativity, the excesses and spectrality of what can be explicitly stated.²⁹ By contrast, I argue that experimental works' ways of modeling indexical processes contribute to representations. They may center experiences other kinds of novels would have difficulty drawing attention to (because of ideological conventions of plot or assumptions about language), but rather than upholding these experiences as valuable because socially negative, experimental novels are more likely to trace how these experiences become coherent as people cite them through language use. Nonreferential indexicality plays a pivotal role in these works' ways of modeling how emergent ideologies (cultural representations) that link language to sexual identities can interrupt the smooth operation of other semiotic process. Our mistake, in short, has been to conflate realism with referentiality and representation with a narrowly defined realism.

In chapter 1, I will elaborate my claims regarding the relationship between linguistic anthropology's tools for analyzing indexical processes and narrative tools for representing and commenting on language use by drawing on the writing of Mikhail Bakhtin.³⁰ Rather than posit a direct genealogical link between early-century texts and later disciplinary formations, I argue that novels' structures practically demonstrate insights into language use that are sufficiently similar to linguistic anthropology's analytic principles to make the latter useful in describing the former. For the moment, I illustrate the implications of my adoption of linguistic anthropology for the study of experimental writing by revisiting some moments from Theodor Adorno's "The Essay as Form" ("Der Essay als Form"). In this piece, Adorno is concerned with how a certain kind of writing involves constructing a context around the ideas a composition puts forward, so that context could be said to be as much a product of the writing as a set of given factors preceding the writing. Although Adorno's writing on the essay does not directly concern novels, his ideas have informed criticism on experimental fiction in the German-speaking world and continental

²⁹ These assumptions about sexuality and realist representation are put forward, for instance, in Miller, *Bringing out Roland Barthes*, 45.

³⁰ While Bakhtin does not focus on experimental writing in particular, his formulations elucidate such assertions as Joseph Frank's attributing a "reflexive reference" to spatial forms in prose fiction. Frank's "reflexive reference" can be confusing because it does not correspond to conventional understandings of reference, but to the way a linguistic utterance's meaning is inflected by its spatial proximity with other language. Bakhtin's concept of "internal dialogization" clarifies that while these textual relations could be said to have a temporality of interaction, they lack time insofar as they do not descriptively refer to and predicate about a sequence of causally linked events. Thus Frank calls this aesthetic strategy "spatial form." Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature, 229; Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 284.

Europe.³¹ Reflecting on Adorno's thought can therefore tell us about how linguistic anthropology clarifies examinations of experimental writing.

Adorno sometimes seems to conceive language's meaningfulness in ways that border linguistic anthropological thinking, especially the latter's ideas of indexicality, metapragmatics (or the work users of language do to collaboratively calibrate a context for their use), and "cultural concepts" (the logics that implicitly mediate between language and context as opposed to those with denotative content). For Adorno, the essay champions the contingency of truth and places value on the study of cultural ephemera. Rejecting the assumption that a culture's products are wholly contained by that culture, an essayist treats them as artifacts, found objects without single, determinable origins or functions. This notably includes the concepts associated with the essay's primary subject matter. Adorno writes that in the essay, concepts

gain their precision only through their relation to one another. In this, however, the essay gets some support from the concepts themselves. For it is a mere superstition of a science exclusively concerned with the appropriation of raw materials to believe that concepts are in themselves undetermined, that they are first determined by their definition. Science requires the image of the concept as a *tabula rasa*, in order to secure its claim to domination; the claim to be the sole power at the head of the table. Actually, all concepts are already implicitly concretized through the language in which they stand. The essay begins with such meanings and, itself being essentially language, it forces these meanings on farther; it wants to help language, in its relation to concepts, to grasp these concepts reflectively in the way that they are already unconsciously named in language.³²

On the one hand, Adorno clearly describes the essay's relationship to the concepts it manipulates via a contrast with the definitional operations of "science." He likely refers here to the logical stipulation debated among thinkers like Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell earlier in the century. In a purely logical system, linguistic expressions do not refer to things in the world, or else they only do so with the support of propositions, as in "Let x equal..." Whereas Adorno associates scientific discourse with its explicit propositions, he supposes conceptual terms in an essay to mean only by virtue of their implicit juxtaposition with other concepts. This systematic relation, moreover, is given by the fact of language. The essay takes the materiality of language as sufficient evidence that something is meant by a concept. On the other hand, it remains less clear what Adorno includes under the term *concept* and what constitutes the relationship between concepts and the artifacts essayists take as points of departure for writing.

In keeping with the idea that essays disavow a world independent of mediations, Adorno sometimes writes of concepts as though they were constituents of objects: "The essay freely associates what can be found associated in the freely chosen object."³³ ("In Freiheit denkt er zusammen, was sich zusammenfindet in dem frei gewählten Gegenstand.") But here, as elsewhere, he suggests that concepts only incidentally constitute certain objects and can mean independently of them: "the artifact is a monad, yet it is not; its elements, as such of a conceptual kind, point

³¹ See references to Adorno's writing on essay form in Harrison, *Essayism*, 14; Ercolino, *The Novel-Essay*, 28-30.

³² Adorno, "The Essay as Form," 160.

³³ Adorno, 159.

beyond the specific object in which they gather themselves.”³⁴ Even if we assume Adorno thinks of concepts as names for properties of objects, this does not resolve the matter completely, for naming does not consistently feature in Adorno’s writing as something concepts do. Sometimes concepts *acquire* names as an effect of language, as in the passage above, i.e., concepts are “already unconsciously named in language” (“bewußtlos in der Sprache schon genannt”). What kind of context, then, is language? For instance, does Adorno mean language as a grammatical system, or language as it circulates in the world—perhaps in the vicinity of the central object?

One does not miss the mark completely in saying that Adorno ascribes the essay a linguistic anthropological work in its consideration of linguistic forms as expressions of cultural conditions. In a passage where Adorno likens the essayist’s appropriation of concepts to a traveler in a foreign country, he intimates that the “unconscious naming” of concepts has less to do with intentional acts of stipulation than with the collective social processes by which intelligible linguistic forms become logically linked with other variables. The traveler, Adorno writes, “will read without a dictionary. If he has looked at the same word thirty times, in constantly changing contexts, he has a clearer grasp of it than he would if he looked up all the word’s meanings; meanings that are generally too narrow, considering they change depending on the context, and too vague in view of the nuances that the context establishes in every individual case.”³⁵ Insofar as the passage refers to situations of verbal exchange, the fine “nuances” that context introduces to a concept might include non-linguistic phenomena. To the extent that the passage invokes a scene of reading, context incorporates a textual surround. (Adorno’s equivocation might be a way to bring a reader closer to the essay’s significance by obscuring the difference between social experience and textual interpretation.) However, though this example apparently suggests that conceptual terms’ “context” is culturally given in either case, the context emerging from the essayist’s configuration of ideas is not always culturally typical. Adorno asserts that an essay constructs an open-ended context for an artifact’s constituent properties. This is consequential for some experimental novels’ work on sexuality because it suggests that there might be patterns of meaning constitutive of identities implicit in a culture that are yet difficult to cite or otherwise act on in language, or else they may only be intersubjectively shared by people under special circumstances. In other words, a particular state of culture does not function as the ultimate container for an object—an idea Adorno expresses in terms of totality and the artifact’s non-identity with itself. The essay’s capacity for insinuating the hidden potentials in culture make it, in Adorno’s view, the paradigmatic form of immanent criticism of cultural artifacts. The essayist composes the context for the artifact from found concepts, but these configurations, however concepts may compile or change relations, never imply an overarching whole. Instead, configurations illustrate the process of cultural emergence through language: the essay shows how old forms combine to produce new meanings of a similar or higher order of complexity.

One easily understands why Adorno has inspired studies of experimental literature. He reserves a decisive critical function for literature that redeems its circumscribed position with respect to other fields of cultural production. Yet his ambiguous style, which emulates the essay’s implicit deployment of conceptual terms, presents a limit for the analysis of works whose formal differences may indicate distinct critical projects. I respond to the problems Adorno leaves literary scholars by drawing on linguistic anthropology to specify the contextualizing process of “naming”

³⁴ Adorno, 162.

³⁵ Adorno, 161.

through different indexical structures. I distinguish among literary texts in terms of the indeterminacies of contextualization of certain signs, or how the stipulation or illustration of a quality (of a person or thing) involves the indexing of potentially more than one context. Moreover, contextual indeterminacy clarifies how the salience of one context or another shifts from the point of view of progressively unfolding configurations of signs. Put into Adorno's terms, linguistic anthropology's analysis of language-in-use delineates how a work provisionally projects its image of totality from the relative consistency of configurations of signs across utterances. One can thus specify how the various formal features attributed to experimental novels (undifferentiated structures with no necessary beginning or end, digressions without immediate relevance to other material, frequent narrative asides or meta-reflections on writing, and textual gaps) contribute to or erode the indexical relations between a sign and contextual knowledges. Linguistic anthropology likewise allows us to understand why Adorno hesitates to equate concepts with words themselves: he imagines concepts as mental representations of relations between signs and contextual variables. Concepts-as-words generally presuppose such relations but only contingently relate to a given contextualizing logic.

Despite the resonances between the kinds of implicit linguistic knowledge Adorno refers to as "unconscious naming" and what linguistic anthropologists like Michael Silverstein's call "cultural concepts beyond lexicalization," further difficulties of "The Essay as Form" lead me to supplement Adorno's emphasis on essayistic style. Specifically, while Adorno describes how an essayist appropriates the meanings of a culture, he supposes the unthought possibilities of meaning emerging from the essay to resolve in the text. Granted, Adorno's images for writing are complex. He imagines the essay as a work of subjective artifice that transforms the writer into a space: "the thinker does not think, but rather transforms himself into an arena of intellectual experience."³⁶ Adorno attributes agency to the operations of a thought process given experiential form as a space of linguistic signs. He continues, "In the essay discreetly separated elements enter into a readable context; it erects no scaffolding, no edifice. Through their own movement the elements crystallize into a configuration. It is a force field, just as under the essay's glance every intellectual artifact must transform itself into a force field." Adorno attributes an essay's unorthodox contextualizations to no one; relations among elements are readable ("lesbar") but not recognizable according to any known code. Rather, the meanings of concepts are projections of an essay's coordination of contextualizing frameworks, made salient by configuring linguistic forms that would normally index them.

The paradoxical tension between the cultural contexts of experimental writing and its ambitious intellectual horizons has represented an intellectual blind spot for studies that align the essay's unorthodoxy with specific political formations, such as feminism, yet describe the agency of experimentation as anarchic, a panacea to exploitative cultures that needs no other support than the critic's clarifying gesture.³⁷ By contrast, linguistic anthropologists tend to insist that cultural concepts linking linguistic forms to a social world are always the property of historically determined groups, even if this group can only be defined in relationship to texts. Hence my dissertation argues that even the most hermetic of experimental works, those concerned with the construction of their own poetics, can be historically determined in relation to their publics.

³⁶ Adorno, 161.

³⁷ For an example of how experimental form comes to carry extremely far-reaching cultural consequences for feminism, see DeKoven, *A Different Language*, xviii.

Drawing on Michael Warner's concepts of publics and counterpublics, I demonstrate how experimental novels become linked to each other by their relation to queer counterpublics. These publics comprise circulations of discourse that are often marked by explicit terms for distinct identity formations, e.g., the publics of women's literature, gay and lesbian literature, kinship literature, etc., but they largely work to disaggregate the ideological structures, most notably narrative structures and language ideologies, that keep these identities from dissolving into other distinctions. Publics, in other words, have real and utopian aspects.

On reading for sex

If my study intervenes in the criticism of experimental texts, it also thereby stakes a claim within queer theory by conceptualizing a relation between sexual practices, discourses of sexuality, and aesthetics through ideologies of language. One defining critical gesture of queer theory in its deconstructive mode has been to illustrate the incoherence of distinctions between sex and eroticism, as well as between homosexual and heterosexual categories. But this critical habit sometimes impedes clear thinking about how sex as a practice can float more or less freely of both genital acts and erotic idealizations as well as how sex (however construed) comes to indicate a sexual identity. My reconstruction of experimental fictions' ways of conceiving sexuality as an interactively emergent, social phenomenon aims to keep both sex and its contexts in focus long enough to understand the social poetics that bind them together or pull them apart. To show where I see this framework's value, I draw attention to the way Sharon Marcus, in *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*, invokes queer theory's deconstructive gesture to helpfully uncouple Victorian women's sexualities from the category of lesbian while also inadvertently obscuring how sexual distinctions, e.g., women's marriages vs. sapphism, inhere in cultural artifacts. I focus on Marcus's work because its combination of queer theoretical insights with archival research on a particular place and time (Victorian England between 1830 and 1880) strikes me as a welcome shift in the study of sexuality that also confronts the field with the ambiguities that come with this territory. Ultimately, my position with respect to Marcus is less one of disagreement than that of an admirer who observes that some of a writer's most powerful intellectual insights might only become apparent in the relation between individual pieces of writing and their contexts. In this dissertation, I use linguistic anthropology to center the kinds of meaning that one can only notice by reading across several of Marcus's interventions.

Marcus's ambitious work juggles two corrective imperatives. On the one hand, she insists on the strangeness of Victorian culture from the perspective of contemporary sexual systems and taxonomies. Her book, "makes a historical point about the particular indifference of Victorians to a homo/hetero divide for women."³⁸ On the other hand, she wants to combat the assumption that Victorian women's relationships with women were sexless, indistinguishable from what we today might call intense friendship. She also wants to carve out a conceptual space to discuss the normative parameters of marriages between Victorian women. That is, above all else, Marcus emphasizes the compatibility between heterosexuality and female homoeroticism in Victorian culture. These differing priorities sometimes lead Marcus to adopt a confusing rhetoric that employs the contemporary category of lesbian to describe Victorian women's relationships. For

³⁸ Marcus, *Between Women*, 13.

instance, she rearticulates one of her central claims, “Victorians did not oppose female heterosexuality to lesbianism and thus considered a woman’s erotic interest in other women compatible with her roles as wife and mother.”³⁹ With the term *lesbian*, Marcus here centers intense affect as a way of tracing continuities between otherwise distinct kinds of relationship and does not necessarily adumbrate sex. There are, of course, things besides sexual practice and affect that might define lesbian identities; Marcus elsewhere reminds us of this. In the third chapter, therefore, Marcus resolves the troublesome tension between “Victorian women’s bonds” and “lesbianism” by positing a more general distinction between eroticism and sex.

For Marcus, eroticism is constitutive of any sexuality but logically prior to sex: “Erotic dynamics can lead to sexual excitement or activity, but even when they do not, they remain qualitatively different from the more neutral responses people have to the majority of people and things in their environment.”⁴⁰ By contrast, her definition of sex is highly restrictive, “‘Erotic’ and ‘sexual’ are not used here as interchangeable terms. The erotic and the sexual can and do intersect, but only the sexual refers to acts that involve genital arousal.” Given Marcus’s debt to queer theory’s deconstruction of identification and desire, one reasonably assumes that she does not posit an absolute distinction between eroticism and the sexual. First, she leaves open the possibility that the sexual can mean things other than genital arousal; rather, sex’s *potential* to include genital contact distinguishes it from eroticism. Moreover, Marcus suggests that this way of parsing the matter is a historically specific one that is immanent in Victorian relations and practices, such as women’s looking at and deriving excitement from fashion plates.

Between Women argues that the coherence of Victorian womanhood (able to hold together women who lived sexual lives with men and those who cultivated marriages with other women) depended on a distinction from sexualities not sanctified by marriage or defined by the same gendered fantasies. In her other work Marcus contends more strongly that Victorian culture founded a sexual hierarchy on degrees of imbrication between sexuality and moral idealism. Discussing British reviews of French novels that alluded to sexual relations among women, she finds, contrary to the theory that Victorian morality placed women’s sex firmly outside social reality, “Victorian critics perceived the lesbian not as a ghost but as a sign of the real, as the embodiment of a desire that could never transcend materialism and sensuality.”⁴¹ So if eroticism is, as Marcus suggests, “in the eye of the beholder,” then such conceptual distinctions are not to be found in cultural artifacts themselves, but in women’s relation to them. Thus Marcus’s claims in *Between Women* presume some prior engagement with certain practical problems: How does a kinship ritual like marriage both depend on sex and transform it into a spiritual act? How do erotic relations between women and men and between women not only resemble one another in certain respects, but also mutually presuppose one another? To what extent did literary representations of women’s sex in fact focus on genital arousal and lack spiritual entailments for readers, and to what extent was this division an invention of British critics eager to distinguish themselves from their French counterparts, or of French writers eager to claim same-sex bonds as a sign of their license to depict the real in the face of moral censure? Could sex be in the eye of the beholder as well? *Between Women* focuses more fundamentally on demonstrating the variability of relations between Victorian women (of the middle classes). But her body of work is most interesting when it

³⁹ Marcus, 112.

⁴⁰ Marcus, 112.

⁴¹ Marcus, “Comparative Sapphism,” 253.

incorporates insights about the relation between distinct social classes, literary publics, and sexual cultures.

My dissertation constructs the necessary tools for analyzing the cultural mediation of sex by examining experimental fiction's ways of modeling how sexualities emerge from discursive interactions that cite embodied behavior alongside other bits of culturally specific information. As my first chapter demonstrates, even early novels like Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* methodically show how characters, in practically responding to others' behavior, form judgments about others' identities. Given their exaggerated eccentricity, one would be daft oneself to take Sterne's characters as representative of a culture's sexualities. However, because *Tristram* is a sometimes reticent and often unreliable cultural interpreter, the novel often calls upon its reader to make inferential leaps about the implications of a characters' words or gestures. (On more than one occasion, for instance, a reader wonders whether characters are having sex.) The unfolding of a raucous exchange may affirm or destabilize a reader's inferences. So the narrative address of *Tristram Shandy* does rely upon something like readers' available language ideologies. If Marcus argues that Victorian women acted in ways twenty-first century readers might associate with heterosexual masculinity, her claim depends on illustrating resemblances between female friendships and marriages, or between the erotic language of women's fashion and pornography. In chapter 2, I center experimental writing's resources for thinking about how resemblances within a culture that one might construct after the fact are grounded in patterns of activity in that culture. I show how Stein's *The Making of Americans* develops a theory of iconism (relations of resemblance based on similar quality) grounded in the indexicality of persons' speech and actions, which cite interactions having taken place at other sites. Thus repetition, Stein's most productive formal principle, becomes a way of illustrating how the similar presuppositions of a person's behavior become the basis of social identity.

Finally, Chapters 3 and 4 reflect on how publics amplify and concretize the distinctive meanings of sex in texts. Marcus argues that Victorian readers were adept decoders of allusions to sex between women even as they denigrated works containing such allusions as callously faithful to social fact over moral ideals. Moreover, when British critics looked across the Channel, they apparently scrutinized not only French aesthetic commitments to materialism and realism, but also a different class composition of novel readership. My study clarifies the decisive role of publics in such circumstances. Neither Victorians' relative facility at ferreting out veiled references, nor their morally idealist aesthetics distinguishes them from people in other cultures. Rather, the difference begins with a readiness to incorporate specific points of orientation for contextualizing a set of signs and thereby render a practice intelligible. Marcus in fact notes that while many novels in British canons of sapphic literature "represented lesbianism in complex, sometimes elliptical and equivocal ways, nineteenth-century critics and authors ignored those complications by citing them as signs of lesbianism."⁴² So "decoding" turns out not to involve the British critics' unburying of particular references to lesbian sex that writers had supposedly hidden amidst ambiguous diction, but a double mediation. This includes a language-ideology allowing the British readers and subsequent writers to understand equivocal signs to point to the same thing: bonds between women that were morally flawed because baldly material. Such ideological frameworks cohere in readers' relationships to each other vis-à-vis texts: British critics risk navigating dangerously direct representations of taboo subjects that they might better distinguish themselves and, by proxy, their

⁴² Marcus, "Comparative Sapphism," 255.

audiences from debased sexualities and spurious aesthetic practices, employing complex rhetorics of indirection to assure distinctions remain intact. Thus texts, as anchors of public discourse, function as mere moments of crisis and rearticulation for cultural practices of sense making.

CONCLUSION

Possibility, Singularity, Disqualification claims that linguistic anthropology's analysis of social indexicality offers a needed theoretical framework for specifying the implications of experimental forms (often grouped under a broad rubric of avant-garde modernism); that such a theory draws attention to the projective, implicit, and often indeterminate "representation" of sexuality in certain novels; and that experimental fiction can therefore speak to how literary texts move through a social world, eliciting new modes of attachment as they go.

The dissertation offers a concept of sexuality as a social phenomenon without a single, organizing axis of difference. Instead, it conceives sexualities as culturally specific matrices for making meaning, with consequences for social organization. A social group may not be defined by sexuality, yet familiarity with certain sexual sensibilities may be an important condition of group membership. (In chapter 4, for instance, we will see how Barnes and her friend Emily Coleman stand in an odd relation to other members of their literary group because of desires that fail to ramify in the quasi-universal scope of aesthetic appreciation.) Yet sexualities are not reducible to prescriptive codes for progressing logically from contextually isolated semiotic phenomena to generalizable concepts. Instead, experimental fiction teaches that sexualities are embodied capacities, or habits, that provide people generative principles for adapting to novel situations.⁴³ Linguistic anthropologists sometimes speak of people's "indexical competencies," or their ways of contextualizing emergent signs in interaction (highlighting other variables as salient) and leveraging context to entail specific consequences for the people involved. My dissertation argues for understanding sexuality as such a kind of competence.

To think about sexuality in this way suggests a continuity with queer social analysis in some respects and a divergence in others. Like much gay and lesbian history, the novels I study focus on minority practices. They illustrate the suffering marking sexualities that incorporate incongruous social variables and that issue from social relations defined by disqualifying others. Thus for Stein's narrator, to be noble is "to give up pleasure when it was a cruel one" (89). However, not all of the practices foregrounded in these works contravene dominant ones or expose the definitional incoherence of a sexual system, as does much queer theory. Nor do these texts advocate a sexual liberalism. To the contrary, they focus on how people almost invariably come to new situations with well-worn capacities and experience new horizons of possibility as the spontaneous unhinging of speech and action from the contextual ground on which they thought they stood. The novels frame such uncouplings as more or less culturally pervasive (happening in the context of a crisis of the state or a particular love affair) and more or less consequential (producing total bewilderment or happening one link at a time, as it were, and resulting in misfires within particular conversations). That being said, experimental works do tend to suggest people

⁴³ In chapter 2, I will begin engaging with some aspects of Pierre Bourdieu's way of analyzing social fields, and in chapter 4 I discuss his concept of habitus with respect to fictional characters' ways of making sense of and responding to each other's speech.

exercise agency over their sexual identities through participation in publics. Either implicitly, in their indeterminate poetics, or explicitly, in the conversations they depict, novels show how public circulation of discourse allows people to speak and act in ways that exceed the expression of group membership or a singular self.

The dissertation proposes a dynamic way of thinking about experimental novels that looks at forms within public circulation. I thus offer an alternative account to formalist explanations or historicist readings that examine linguistic indeterminacy within a fixed social context. I focus on how the indeterminacy of contextualization ramifies in the publication process—when the expectation that fictional characters be representative can chafe against a work’s interest in sexuality as a multivariable phenomenon inhabited in interaction—and in the long arc of their reception, when a displacement of context can explicate meanings immanent in the work but difficult to conceive at the moment of publication. In particular, the chapters that follow together trace the shifting divide between two competing language ideologies within the overlapping discourses of fictional rhetoric and European and American sexual counterpublics. One of these ideologies centers the agency derived from narrativizing sexualities, so they are grounded in particular contexts and other aspects of social life. The other is concerned with sexualities that are neither nameable, nor narrativizable. The tension between these two impulses, often sharing space in the same discourses and the same texts, continues to mark thinking about the relations between sex, politics, and art.

CHAPTER ONE

Tristram Shandy and the Indeterminacies of Contextualization

This study reexamines twentieth century texts by Gertrude Stein, Robert Musil, and Djuna Barnes to show how their experimental structures imply pragmatic theories of language that transform the novel as a tool of social analysis. These works understand meaning not as a property of linguistic forms, but as a potential of forms' use. For these authors, such an understanding of language supports critiques of how people inhabit sexuality in discursive interaction. Their writings represent sexuality as an identity produced interactively by semiotically joining practices, including distinctive uses of language, with other implicit factors. In particular, they embark on sustained considerations of this discursive process's obscure, fleeting, and often unclaimed effects for the consistency of social relations. Subsequent literary and sexual counterpublics can then take up semiotic patterns of identity implied in novels' interactive structures as points of orientation within countercultural projects. Experimental fictions thereby come to imply sexualities incompatible with or simply indifferent to heteronormative accounts of the social world.

The current chapter lays a foundation for this reexamination by reading Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy: Gentleman* for early evidence of an experimental practice and pragmatic conception of language in the novel tradition. I argue that the experimental habit of Sterne's writing discloses itself when the narrator Tristram conceptualizes a character by interpreting speech as an instantiation of social identity. Tristram has a jarring habit of launching explanatory digressions from the middle of characters' sentences. When he later returns to a conversation to comment on the digression's salience for characterization, his interpretation's reaching for coherence buckles under the weight of the digression's variety. An initial if inadequate understanding of *Tristram Shandy*'s experimental form takes shape around the question of how far the frequency and tenuousness of talk's contextualization ruptures the illusion of a coherent fiction, and if they do, what other logics of sense-making enter awareness.

The following introduction discusses features of *Tristram Shandy* that have attracted scholars interested in the novel's modernist and postmodernist fates to demonstrate how conceptions of sexual identity inform debates about literary history. I point out some problems with the way Sterne criticism construes sexual meaning to instead emphasize the interrelation between digressive structure and sexuality based on what linguistic anthropologists call indexical channels of communication—defined roughly as nonsemantic features of an utterance that constrain the array of contextual factors salient to an interaction. The following sections then reconstruct some of the novel's indexical channels to illustrate how Sterne conceives sexuality within a pragmatic modality. I pause briefly throughout to connect Sterne's innovations to later works, underscoring common features of experimentations with indexical forms.

Sterne's eccentric characters and parody of various literary conventions (drama, history, reference work, philosophical tract, travelogue, pedagogical guide, sermon, romance, etc.) within a digressive structure have given his work a contentious place within the history and theory of the novel. One perspective supposes the novel's tortuous form to recalibrate realism to an idiosyncratic

family's social dynamics.¹ By foregrounding spontaneous logical connection at a formal level, the novel gives shape to eccentricity's intrinsic self-difference and, moreover, to its regular deviations from social life's normalizing structures. This view of *Tristram Shandy* corresponds to Tristram's rhapsodizing on the discourses that take place between his father and uncle:

I believe in my soul, (unless my love and partiality to my understandings blinds me) the hand of the supreme Maker and first Designer of all things, never made or put a family together, (in that period at least of it, which I have sat down to write the story of)—where the characters of it were cast or contrasted with so dramatic a felicity as ours was, for this end; or in which the capacities of affording such exquisite scenes, and the powers of shifting them perpetually from morning to night, were lodged and intrusted with so unlimited a confidence, as in the SHANDY-FAMILY. (188)

The passage plays on a tension between the characters' construction by a supreme being (apparently one with a screwball sense of humor) and their historical determination. Tristram's claim of "dramatic felicity" promises to show that his family's "whimsical theater" behaves according to certain rules calculated to entertain and amaze. Even Tristram's peculiarity as a storyteller (his "partiality") contributes to the novel's realism of eccentricity insofar as his peripatetic style follows a certain pattern. And while Shandy Hall's residents may strike one as so bizarre that they could only have been set on earth readymade by a comic god, they purportedly astound from the point of view of a particular historical "period." Tristram defines this period in part through the coincidence of place and time that brings characters into contrast. Critics who focus on the novel's representational ambitions further ground the novel's aesthetics in eighteenth century epistemologies by linking characters' eccentricity to theories of social sentiment and the recuperation of learned wit over judgement.²

Other scholarship questions the novel's dramatic felicity, arguing that the work's ultimate narrative incoherence portends the novel forms' poststructuralist crisis of representation. If *Tristram Shandy* traces the dynamics of eccentric selfhood, disjunctive generic logics underscore the improvised, nonce quality of this subjectivity. *Tristram Shandy* supposedly foregrounds the impossibility of grounding narrative authority in any one genre's epistemic assumptions on a purely rational basis. According to Helene Moglen, for instance, the novel's manipulations of conventions to construct a narrative implicitly reconstructs the workings of power in the authoring of truth: "Sterne chooses to look directly into the chasm that marks the divergence of fantastic discourses from those of realism, not ultimately to connect them through some clever sleight of mind but rather to map the interaction of their constructive and deconstructive strategies."³ Moglen in particular underscores the role of gender subordinations in creating coherence out of otherwise incommensurable textual material.

¹ Patricia Spacks describes *Tristram Shandy*'s social mimesis in terms of a realism of consciousness: "One would not ordinarily describe [Tristram] as a realistic character. The attempt to perform and represent the disorder of consciousness, though, suggests a principle of realism more profound than any previously established." Spacks, *Novel Beginnings*, 272.

² On the novel's reworking of the relation between the faculties of judgement and wit, see Alter, "Tristram Shandy and the Game of Love," 317. I am indebted to John Mullan for an understanding of Sterne's uses of sentimentality. Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 147-200.

³ Moglen, *Trauma of Gender*, 88.

Both critical positions underscore truths that orient this chapter's argument. Sterne's novel both extends and interrogates the epistemic claims of novels because it taps into the form's self-reflexive use of speech genres. But rather than turn genres against their representational function, *Tristram Shandy* renovates realism to represent the social world as a discursive space. The reflections on conversations that often initiate Tristram's digressions develop a fictional technique, already widespread by the novel's publication, of using instances of language use to illustrate characters' identities. Sterne's novel demonstrates that when people talk, they reproduce their social selves, and that any social self involves a habitual relation to language's generic structures. In Sterne's case, genres comprise logics for epistemically grounding formally distinctive speech in conceptual knowledge of the world; such knowledge in turn lends discrete utterances social pragmatic force. In a sentimental tale, eccentric speech might manifest a corrupt moral character, in a travel narrative, however, it more likely functions as an expression of local custom. By illustrating that people as well as texts inhabit genres, understood as both formal patterns and immanent, structuring knowledges, *Tristram Shandy* can proceed to construct the differential distribution of genre in a represented social world.⁴

Tristram Shandy's digressive structure contributes to its play with genre because differences of generic competence (among characters, between a character and Tristram) come to the surface around a digression's logical transitions. The novel's attitude toward language as a social medium proceeds from the understanding that reading a narrative, like listening to a conversation, involves keeping track of implicit information from one moment to the next and connecting this reservoir of knowledge to new material. When setting the stage for the affair between his uncle Toby and the widow Wadman, which I will analyze more closely in this chapter's third section, Tristram remarks, "I declare, I do not recollect any one opinion or passage of my life, where my understanding was more at a loss to make ends meet, and torture the chapter I had been writing, to the service of the chapter to follow it, than in the present case: one would think I took a pleasure in running into difficulties of this kind, merely to make fresh experiments of getting out of 'em" (439). When Tristram agonizes over the work of making ends meet, he refers to his story's exaggerated inclination toward digression and how the meaningfulness of apparently unaccountable passages between the characters depends on his providing the implicit logic that connects interaction to other events. Tristram defers a chapter's exposition of action until he can give an account of some other circumstance. *Tristram Shandy*'s experimental form therefore ensues from the way some passages of novels contextualize other passages. The art of digression involves discovering ways to forge implicit inroads of communication between context and represented interaction.

The idea that novels perform a reflective work on the generic, social dimension of their medium, is familiar. Mikhail Bakhtin, in "Discourse in the Novel" and "The Problem of Speech

⁴ In the next chapter, I elaborate on the concept of "metricalization." We could say genres are metrically regimented insofar as they carry normative expectations about how stretches of language mean with respect to other language, but the regimentation of form also entails regimentation of contextualization—of how implicit knowledge gives text cohesion. On genre's doubly regimenting work, Silverstein writes, "metrical anchoring of the constituent features of discourse one to another cumulating in entextualization is in effect an implicit 'meta-' phenomenon in respect of indexicality more generally, thus serving a metapragmatic functionality that helps indirectly to regiment the various (text-external) contextualizing indexical meanings in the very discourse in which the metricalized entextualization unfolds over discourse time. Textual and thus discursive genres can thus be defined on the basis of normativities of metricalization, as can guidelines implicit in discursive style. Silverstein, "Denotation," 143.

Genres,” advanced a strong claim for the centrality of social discourses to novelistic art. “Heteroglossia,” the principle of linguistic systems’ internal social stratification, allows writers to establish correlations between generic stylizations of language and positions in social structures:

all languages of heteroglossia, whatever the principle underlying them and making each unique, are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values. As such they all may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically. As such they encounter one another and co-exist in the consciousness of real people—first and foremost, in the creative consciousness of people who write novels.⁵

By “dialogic interrelation,” we might take Bakhtin to describe how implicit, intermediate logics allow different frameworks of conceptual knowledge (“world views”) to operate immanently in exchanges of formally distinct, though possibly semantically equivalent, language. Bakhtin understands novel form to organize generically distinct speech habits into a totality by modeling the overlaps and discontinuities between utterances’ projections of contextualizing knowledge. For Bakhtin, such a comprehensive, differential consideration of the implicit relation between language and society distinguishes the “transmission” of language from the novelist’s “representation” of it. While the odd linguistic scenarios represented in *Tristram Shandy* possess an unlikely empirical truth, Sterne’s novel nonetheless poses the question of whether even eccentric utterances might exist within an organized whole and interrelate in identifiable ways.

Bakhtin’s account of language’s internal differentiation also specifies Tristram’s function as an unreliable narrator. If for Bakhtin language-as-social-discourse pervades the novel medium, seemingly straightforward narrative utterances likewise point to particular conceptual knowledge, a typical way of organizing a social world. This “hybrid” aspect of novel narration, where a position in a work’s represented social world refracts an authorial remark’s logical structures, announces itself especially clearly at junctures between narrated actions:

Pseudo-objective motivation is generally characteristic of novel style, since it is one of the manifold forms for concealing another’s speech in hybrid constructions. Subordinate conjunctions and link words (“thus,” “because,” “for that reason,” “in spite of” and so forth), as well as words used to maintain a logical sequence (“therefore,” “consequently,” etc.) lose their direct authorial intention, take on the flavor of someone else’s language, become refracted or even completely reified.⁶

Bakhtin ranks Sterne among the foremost practitioners of the parodic stylization of objectified narrative logics. Specifically, Sterne’s novel presents Tristram’s generic competences to objectify “opinion.” The excessiveness of Tristram’s interpretations from the point of view of what characters say to each other, like the interpretations of the characters themselves, often imposes a dubious consistency between context and speech. Tristram’s indicatively opinionated style of narration (it’s in the title, after all) brackets the scandal of distorting partiality to direct attention

⁵ Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 291.

⁶ Bakhtin, 307.

toward how it operates over time and in concert with other signals. Tristram, as an authorial voice, implicates himself in the linguistic and social processes the novel models through interactions among other characters.

Let me pause here to mention how similarly digressive and internally contradictory structures become the formal starting point for the later writers' works. To be clear, I do not propose a series of direct influences on literary form. Stein and Musil, if not Barnes, knew Sterne's fiction intimately. More importantly, however, Sterne opens up channels of meaning that are already intelligible within the enterprise of novel writing as grounds for experimentation. Sterne gives novelists a set of structural components for manipulating language as a social medium and a set of compositional strategies for using novels to illustrate contradictory social processes. For example, Steven Meyer, in his study on the relations between Stein's writing and empirical science, connects Stein's formal play with language's materiality—the physical force its use necessarily involves—to the way punctuation in *Tristram Shandy* foregrounds how the meanings of words depend upon their manifestation as uttered sounds within structured social discourse.⁷ Meyer points to the following passage from Volume IV, in which Tristram's father Walter, after too hastily fastening his breeches with a single button, asks the maid Susannah about Mrs. Shandy.

—And how does your mistress? As well, said *Susannah*, as can be expected—Pish! Said my father, the button of his breeches slipping out of his buttonhole.—So that whether the interjection was levelled at *Susannah*, or the buttonhole,—whether pish was an interjection of contempt or an interjection of modesty, is a doubt and must be in doubt till I have time to write the three following chapters, that is, my chapter of *chamber-maids*—my chapter of *pishes*, and my chapter of *button-holes*. (230)

The passage reflects on language to underscore its directionality (at Susannah or the buttonhole) and pragmatic force (contempt or modesty) in social space. The disjointed rhythm of Tristram's narrative discourse, marked by dashes, draws attention to how pragmatic meaning depends on the utterances' orientation toward circumstances in the surrounding world. In the narrated scene, such immediate and chance factors as the loose button number among these variables, but they also encompass more overarching conditions, including the social fact of chamber-maids. To comic effect, Tristram promises to explicate serially all the social structures sedimented in language that usually go without saying. Yet Sterne and Stein also offer serious-minded critiques of the logics that mediate between explications of sociological knowledge and linguistic patterns (Tristram's juxtapositional strategy) to produce social understanding.

Although Musil's writings seldom mention Sterne explicitly, scholarship has established links between the two writers via the practice of "essayism," understood as an often satirical concern with "Diskursarten," or discursive types that differentially mark social identities and institutions. In one diary entry, Musil recalls the scene of Tristram's conception, in which Mrs. Shandy interrupts Walter during sex to remind him to wind the clock, a gesture invariably marking their conjugal rituals.⁸ The entry mentions the exchange within a consideration of how an

⁷ As Meyer puts it, echoing William James, "Both Stein and Sterne conceive of the 'connective support' holding their words together as neither 'extraneous' nor 'trans-empirical.'" Meyer speculates that the passage from *Tristram Shandy* may be the source of the title for *Tender Buttons*. Meyer, *Irresistible Dictation*, 44-45.

⁸ Musil's diary also suggests that he associated Sterne's storytelling with the satirical affectation of ignorance that would warrant detailed digressions about language. For mentions of Sterne, see Robert Musil, *Tagebücher*, 584, 902.

utterance's linguistic forms can enact multiple and incongruous social relations at once because a form's appropriateness to context is correlational, implicit in its ongoing use. "Essayism," writes Geoffrey C. Howes, "brings various discourse types together, but not, for instance, to mutually support them through their complementary strengths, but to permit, through their combined weaknesses, a glimpse onto those regions of truth that cannot be ascertained from extant conceptual and representational systems."⁹ Sterne and Musil share a negative aesthetics that communicates new truths by accumulating language's failures. Such failures take place at the level of those practical cultural logics that would allow such utterances as Walter's "Pish" to function as a response to something else.

So far I have established how *Tristram Shandy* conceives social identities by modeling discursive genres to explain why it figures anachronistically, but nonetheless tellingly, in literary histories of twentieth century experimental fictions. But Sterne's work does not explore just any aspect of identity; Tristram concerns himself especially with characters' erotic lives. Tristram, in defending his digressive art's aim to "make ends meet," also perpetrates a sexual pun. By the same token, the generic differences that contextualize characters' behavior entail conceptions of sexual difference. The literary-historical and aesthetic debate about how to place Sterne's writing therefore overlaps with a historiographical debate about the appropriateness of modern frameworks for conceiving sexuality to earlier periods. In Moglen's view, for example, the selfhood Sterne's experimentation assembles and deconstructs anticipates Freudian and Lacanian models of individuation. Moreover, *Tristram Shandy* figures sexuality as an aspect of identity that gives order to otherwise eccentric behavior. Criticism on the relation between Sterne's compositional method and theories of sexual personhood take cues from Tristram's attention to "hobby-horses," a thinly veiled double entendre for a prostitute denoting more or less compulsive habits of body, mind, and speech. Tristram explicates the value of the hobby-horse as an epistemic device in the following passage:

A man and his HOBBY HORSE, tho' I cannot say that they act and re-act after the same manner in which the soul and body do upon each other: Yet doubtless there is a communication between them of some kind, and my opinion rather is, that there is something in it more of the manner of electrified bodies,--and that by means of the heated parts of the rider, which come immediately into contact with the back of the HOBBY HORSE.—By long journies and much friction, it so happens that the body of the rider is at length fill'd as full of the HOBBY HORSICAL matter as it can hold;---so that if you are able to give but a clear description of the nature of the one, you may form a pretty exact notion of the genius and character of the other. (61)

In "*Tristram Shandy* and the Game of Love," Robert Alter draws on the same passage to show how Sterne figures sexual acts as a channel of communication. The double meaning of "intercourse" as communicative channel and erotic exchange appears in the way the "heated" mounting of the horse creates a circuit for the flow of electrified current. As Alter writes, in Sterne's novel, "the sexual act is itself an elemental act of communication which also provides a dramatic image for other kinds of communication."¹⁰ Notably, the paradigm of communication

⁹ The translation is mine. For the original, see Howes, "Ein Genre ohne Eigenschaften," 2.

¹⁰ Alter, "Game of Love," 317.

exemplified here does not mediate between persons, but between a person's identity ("a" man) and practices of body and mind. Thus the rider's mounting of his pet passion ends with his being filled with "hobby-horsical matter," a figure for the way the erotic quickening of humors in advance or aversion becomes an embodied habit and emblem of identity. Sex epitomizes other communication not only because in exchanging sexual acts, people supposedly share a state of arousal, but also because they presumably thereby understand a principle of translation between experience extended in time (the "long journies") and the forms of each other's practice.

Alter's meditation on the relation between the novel's ribald humor and its meandering structure explicates eccentricity's sexual dimension, signifying hobby-horses' relevance to disjointed discourses among characters with different obsessions. (One thinks here of Walter's preoccupation with naming children, Toby's with military-technological history, or Dr. Slop's with his obstetrical instruments.) Characters may misunderstand each other, but digressions putatively bring eccentricity to order through the explanatory figure off the hobby-horse. Yet Alter's study predates much scholarship in sexual historiography and queer theory, which should sensitize us to his formulation's problems of. Most significantly, Alter's bypasses the issue of how sex in an eighteenth-century British text becomes intelligible to later readers. For instance, Alter tends to reduce textual allusions to sexuality to "the act and organs of generation" even as he acknowledges that characters' sexualities encompass diverse practices: "in every instance either the charge of impotence is dubious or the condition temporary, for everyone in the book has a store of sexual energy, however deflected, refracted or transubshandeated."¹¹ This paradox—that sex constitutes a single preoccupation and diffuses itself into many forms—disappears when Alter argues for readers' necessary recognition of Sterne's sexual double-entendres. Alter wants to lend (or wants Sterne to lend) sexual meaning a reliable unity that can sustain a collusion between text and reader: "Sex, then, is the hobbyhorse we all ride, willy-nilly, and precisely because we are all in this same saddle, communication can take place through the artful manipulation of our common sexual preoccupation."¹² Alter remarks not only on the way readers inevitably discover a sexual connotation to characters' interactions, but also on eccentric characters' relations to each other via a sexual narrative that connects their actions logically. This sexual "understory" would give the work its wanted coherence.

Because *Tristram Shandy* foregrounds structures of identity that cohere in social interaction without being actualized socially, it cannot invest faith in "sexual energy" as a reliable channel of communication or the single source of preoccupations. Granted, the answer to the question of how and to what degree Sterne's characters share sexual experiences also depends on how reciprocal and reflexive an act one takes communication to be. *Tristram Shandy* does integrate characters into a social whole to the extent that Toby, Trim, Walter, Slop, and the others manage to sustain some minimally coherent interactions (until they don't). In this respect, Sterne's parody of narrative reason shows the necessary, generative pitfalls of interacting with one sexuality from the practical premises of another. Toby's and the widow's exchanges offer a humorous example. The pair's sexualities, as shifting effects of interaction, depend on how the two characters consecutively manipulate tokens of bits of information about who they are socially and the nature of their interest in one another. This information includes such otherwise dissimilar things as European military history, the wound Toby received in the War of the Spanish Succession, differential knowledge of

¹¹ Alter, "Game of Love," 316.

¹² Alter, 316.

maps, conceptions of personal honor, and ideas about marriage. The novel's digressive structure generates uncertainty around such scenes by underscoring the implicit, circuitous paths by which such information becomes relevant to conversations. Interactions play on the lack of mutual intelligibility of characters' contextualizations of utterances and, at times, among members of the novel's public. For Sterne, that is, one's reading a sexual identity presupposes one's own, and through his novel, desire to make sex cohere disclose themselves as desire for a particular genre. *Tristram Shandy* therefore inspires no faith in reductive sexual explanations like Tristram's and instead illustrates the social life of generic logics, including the ramifications of interpretive error. The novel commits itself instead to mischief, the creativity of bodies' signifying capacities, and the contingencies that intercede in signification's timing. Ultimately, then, *Tristram Shandy* shows that certain positions in social structures only become knowable—only emerge as a matter of shared concern—when speakers inhabit them incidentally through incongruous interactions. Most if not all of Sterne's characters participate in erotic life through conceptual schemas of relation so virtual that one must call them possible instead of actual.

The end of *Tristram Shandy*, Volume I offers a glimpse of how some sexual identities remain stranded as virtual projections from discourse. To contextualize a conversation between Mr. Shandy and his brother Toby, Tristram promises to give an account of the wound Toby received at the battle of Namur. Six chapters deep into Volume II, Tristram finally returns us to the conversation that first motivated the excursion into his uncle's past. Responding to Mr. Shandy's question as to why Mrs. Shandy prefers a woman midwife to the obstetrician Dr. Slop, Toby offers the following:

“My sister, mayhap, quoth my uncle *Toby*, does not choose to let a man come so near her
 ***** Make this dash,—‘tis an Aposiopesis.—Take the dash away, and write Backside,—
 ‘tis Bawdy. —Scratch Backside out, and put *Cover’d-way* in,—‘tis a Metaphor;—and, I dare
 say, as fortification ran so much in my uncle *Toby’s* head, that if he had been left to have
 added one word to the sentence,—that word was it. (81)

This passage exemplifies Sterne's practice of foregrounding textual artifice (interrupting a character's utterance to contemplate the available typographic and lexical choices) to make a yet stronger claim on the way language use mediates judgments of social identity. The passage lists items that might fill the blank to render Toby's utterance “what ‘tis,” i.e., intelligible as accomplished social action. Tristram here posits an intersection between two kinds of knowledge. On the one hand, the passage assumes an acquaintance with the practical norms that allow a reader to use distinctions between asterisks, em-dashes, and en-dashes to consistently differentiate between a narrator's omission, a character's reticence, and Tristram's cadence of speech, respectively. Interestingly, Tristram supposes the conditions lending certain words such moral values as “bawdy” in certain contexts to be interchangeable with those lending typographical signs stable gestural meaning. Presumably, both types of signs suggest social conventions: when one uses them appropriately, one uses them in the same context as others do; when one causes offense, one has failed to respect some important nuance of the situation. On the other hand, Tristram refers to a knowledge that determines which uses of language character can warrant. To constitute social action, Toby's utterance wants not only semantic completion, but also coherence as a pragmatic gesture that proves consistent with the digression's contextualizing information.

Now, while the passage might give the impression of proceeding through several corrections toward the most characteristic form, Tristram declines to say whether his uncle completes his sentence, so that the elaborateness of the digression does not culminate in a finer determination of what Uncle Toby actually says. Instead, it drives a wedge between the two kinds of knowledge Tristram's description implies. "Cover'd-way" may seem an apt metaphor in the situation, but there are reasons to believe Toby is not always the kind of person who consistently produces apt turns of phrase. Can one truly deduce regularities of character from other regularities? Tristram's interpretation links prior knowledge about Toby to his utterance using a logic patently not in evidence. At the same time, Tristram's over-reading offers a glimpse of how sexuality can manifest as a shaping force for language. When Tristram pivots between the possibilities of one abstraction of female form (the crass anatomy of a backside) and another (the art of feminine architecture), he suggests that his uncle's utterance inadvertently signals information about the consistent organization of his erotic world across various relations. As a representation of sexual character, Tristram's description involves readers in a paradox: The more context Tristram unfolds, the more necessary it seems that the particular itinerary of a character's hobby-horse (its range of constituent factors and typical situations of expression) will emerge. Yet Tristram's overzealous interpretations foreground that each new encounter (largely because it involves multiple people) generates its own ways of linking what knowledge of a character we glean from digressions to the forms of talk, further deferring sexuality's coherence. This paradox ultimately displaces a distinction between necessary and incidental meanings to center the difference between more and less coherent ones. Meanwhile, the frequency of digressions suggests that the novel, at least, withholds compelling reasons to favor one or another way of achieving coherence. Elsewhere Tristram even directs us to the aesthetic value of textual gaps, positively relieving us of the need to make digression and interaction cohere by allowing lacunae in the transcript of Toby's speech to remain consistent with his inclination to say less. (The technique of drawing a blank where imagined persons in a novel's represented world lack the competence or experience necessary to interpret another's behavior will show up in Stein as well.) While Tristram devises ever new strategies to achieve coherence out of conceptual excesses he can neither redeem nor ignore, other features of textual material keep the positive implications of excesses in play.

Up until this point I have described the ideological and erotic aspects of narrative coherence using the aesthetic language of genres. *Tristram Shandy* demonstrates how the same utterances can mean differently for different participants and observers—differences that follow from generically specific practices for aligning contextualizing knowledge with particular uses of language. However, because I argue that the critical insight of Sterne's novelistic experimentation pertains not only to fictional discourses, but to all social discourses, a more encompassing conceptual framework is in order. Recently the historiographical problem of cultural knowledges implicit in social relations has generated interpretive methods focused on interaction. In histories of sexuality, these critical interventions coalesce around a re-commitment to Michel Foucault's conceiving sexuality as an interpretive process exerted on certain practices and, in consequence,

to understanding sexuality as a relational effect achieved in history.¹³ Let me now connect these methods to the dissertation's engagement with linguistic anthropology.

As a way of attending to cultural meanings, linguistic anthropology understands language to accomplish several things at once. In the act of using language to refer to and predicate about things, speakers also give off signals about the circumstances motivating their speech; their individual orientations toward those circumstances; and how they understand factors occurring elsewhere to bear on the social interaction unfolding here and now. Such factors can notably include culturally specific understandings of the world. Linguistic anthropological inquiry centers indexicality as the semiotic feature of language allowing it to fulfill multiple functions. Following Charles Sanders Peirce, linguistic anthropologists think of indexicality as the way a sign points, by virtue of its formal features and for certain interpreters, to some aspect of context that causes, adjoins, or temporally or spatially attends speech.¹⁴ Because this sense of context includes conceptual schemas of knowledge, linguistic anthropologist can analyze indexical patterns in discursive interaction to conceive the immanence of cultural belief.

The digressive form of *Tristram Shandy* anticipates linguistic anthropology's understanding that "context" is in theory infinitely expandable or contractible. *Tristram* feels licensed to deviate from his own life's story so frequently because context might include any number of variables, however near or far in space, close or remote in time. In practice, then, indexicality becomes a matter of selectively highlighting relevant features of context for language use, often as a necessity of getting on with conversation. And for this reason, linguistic anthropology takes context to be both immanent in and emergent from the interactive exchange of utterances by focusing on the collaborative construction of talk's contextualizing frameworks. To reuse a formulation from Michael Silverstein I cited in the introduction, "individuals periodically give off indexical signals that gradually cumulate over the duration of an encounter, allowing us to make cumulative sense of who, that is, sociologically speaking, what they are, as presenting as identifiable persons in their contributions to an interactional event."¹⁵ While Silverstein comes at this situation from an analyst's point of view, participants in interaction also engage in such cumulative sense-making by responding to one another in ways that entail judgments of how sociocultural factors "out there" manifest in speech.

Linguistic anthropology helps one consider how, in *Tristram Shandy*, hobby-horses—enduring if mutable habits of body and mind—function within an ongoing contextualizing process. When *Tristram* pauses to consider the possibilities of his uncle's utterance, the novel interprets indexicality for readers—first by elaborating how different signs assume conventional frameworks to count as gestures and then by judging which gestures would be consistent with Toby's behavior

¹³ As Valerie Traub puts it in a memorial essay on the work of historian Alan Bray, "That erotic behavior might not signify in or by itself implicitly links the problem of representation to the issue of social embeddedness. The combined effect of this connection is to emphasize the uncertainty of sexuality's power of signification...that there is nothing fully dispositive about eroticism to convey particular meanings; erotic acts operate only unreliably as a trigger for articulation." Traub, "Friendship's Loss," 343. For an argument that revisits the centrality of interaction in Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, see Clark-Huckstep, "History of Sexuality and Historical Methodology," 196. See also Andrew Israel Ross's response to reviews of his book. *Public City/Public Sex: Homosexuality, Prostitution, and Urban Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris*. Ross, "Author's Response," 2.

¹⁴ Peirce's examples of indexes are quite diverse, running the gamut from a fragment as a piece torn from something, to a weathercock as an indicator of the direction of the wind, to a bullet hole as a trace of the bullet. See Peirce, *Collected Papers*, vol. II, 137, 161, 170.

¹⁵ Silverstein, "Getting & Getting Across the Message" (lecture).

at other times. This method reflects indexicality's two aspects of *presupposition* and *entailment*. Tristram proposes indexical signs that would point to some pre-existing condition (in the form of some conceptual knowledge about Toby readers presumably share by this point). Thus connected to the interaction, contextualizing knowledge achieves some relational effect, such as Toby's relative inexperience compared to his older brother Walter. We can understand entailment under the analytic principle that indexically presupposing knowledge is never interactionally neutral; it invariably contributes to the generic structure of a conversation in some way: reinforcing its metrical regimentation, contesting it, transforming it by adjusting to assimilate new knowledge.

By centering an incomplete segment of interaction, however, *Tristram Shandy* draws attention to how a possible contextualization converges around an utterance even when the indexical form that would warrant the contextualization hinders entailment. In foregrounding how Tristram's narrative logic makes more or less of language use than interaction warrants, Sterne's art exploits what Silverstein calls the "indeterminacy of contextualization." The excessiveness of Tristram's examination of Toby's words reflects the way, according to Silverstein, models of language use as culturally coherent action unfold within a framework of minimal and maximal presuppositions and entailments:

Indexical structure is a structure of event characteristics which are immanent in and emergent from interactional happenings. Alas, we can only study indexical structure by a kind of minimax method that involves examining text/transcription so as to determine the various relevant segments in which indexes function: for any identifiable sign-form, we ask, "Given a certain functional effect, what is the minimal/maximal 'context' presupposed by that form so as 'regularly' to effect some minimal/maximal entailment?" For any proposed or identifiable sign form, we ask, "Given a certain presupposed 'context', what is the degree of regularity (or compulsiveness) with which some minimal/maximal entailment can be effected, relative to the presupposed 'context'? What we can call the *interactional text* (as distinct from the propositionally-centered *denotational text*) is laid down in realtime *discursive interaction*—and is subject to constant realtime reorganization as a cultural object.¹⁶

Over the course of exchanging linguistic signs, participants in conversation give off indexical signals that invoke features of context as relevant to the interaction. Such signals only appear in the relation between exchanged utterances, hence "emergent" in Silverstein's terms. Here indeterminacy concerns the scope of an indexical gesture. When Tristram embarks on a long digression, the novel supplies a maximum of presupposable context, the broadest scope of indexable material. The experimental project of the text is to explore, through the interaction among characters and Tristram's commentary on them, how far and how "compulsively" indexicality must be stretched or ignored to make the novel cohere as an interactional text. When Tristram interrogates the indexical possibilities around the semantic gap in Toby's utterance, the novel acknowledges the compulsive force exerted by context on language use, pressuring it to signify coherently even where indexical signs are lacking.

Before proceeding, let me pause to specify this chapter's claim about the relationship between Sterne's novel and linguistic anthropology. Obviously Sterne would not have used the

¹⁶ Silverstein, "Indeterminacy of Contextualization," 58.

terms I use to describe linguistic structures, but his novel's organization nonetheless communicates a practical understanding of the principles of language use linguistic anthropologists would later name. Sterne's novel wants especially for readers to enjoy the confusion and hilarity that ensue when the collaborative work speakers perform to establish the pragmatic orientation of talk signals multiple interpretive frameworks to link their contributions.

More generally, the idea that literary structures share certain features with everyday social discourses impinges on conventional literary-historical thinking about context and our critical sense of literary language's specificity. Conceiving contextualization as a process can sometimes bump up against literary scholars' predisposition to imagine context as a stable set of historical conditions that inflect the denotative form of a literary artifact. One feels responsible to context because one supposes it to *cause*, *determine*, or *constrain* something about the literary work. This is certainly true, but linguistic anthropology asks one to also consider how the complex structure of a work, as a particular kind of utterance that coordinates other utterances, entails claims about its relationship to its contexts.¹⁷ In concluding this chapter, I discuss how *Tristram Shandy* both presupposes the discursive and cultural normativity of sentimentalism and entails something about the relationship between sentiment and sexuality. Moreover, linguistic anthropology, alongside some insights from queer studies, allow me to think about how a text's public circulation inevitably accentuates or attenuates certain indexical links between the work and one or more of its contexts. This is essentially my claim concerning the relation between *Tristram Shandy* and the twentieth-century texts. Later writers, working amidst a crisis of liberal values and using similar fictional structures, recontextualize the structure of Sterne's fictional engagement with eccentric "hobby-horses" as salient for thinking on discourses of sexuality.

If *Tristram Shandy*'s structure emphasizes how Tristram's opinions and the characters' responses to each other wrest the indeterminacy of contextualization into coherent action, this strain constitutes the novel's representation of sexuality as a kind of "interactional text," a particular cultural process playing out in discourse. Thus the novel's experimental structure evolves around how contextual, "hobby horsical" knowledge transforms as characters invoke it in contradictory ways across interactions. The pervasiveness of logical distortions at all levels of the novel's discourse offers a picture of a social world comprising a force field of opinion, in which partial understandings vie with others in an utterance's uptake. The novel's "literary parody," in Bakhtin's words, not only unmasks the ideological operations of narrative, but also links all genres' distinct indexical logics to the potentially compulsiveness habits of hobby horses.¹⁸ Early in the novel Tristram remarks on his father's compulsive beliefs by likening opinions to "guests,

¹⁷ Bakhtin emphasizes the extent to which meaning's constitutive relation to language use might lead us to see novels as social uses of language in the world, distinct only in the complexity of the utterance and the protracted time of response. Part of what, for Bakhtin, gives a novel the character of an utterance like any other is that it coheres only insofar as it follows from other utterances of similar complexity and anticipate responses, first in readers' uptake and, second, in the form of other novels. He writes, "The novel as a whole is an utterance just as rejoinders in everyday dialogue or private letters are (they do have a common nature), but unlike these, the novel is a secondary (complex) utterance." Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 62.

¹⁸ Bakhtin uses "literary parody" in a narrow sense to refer to novels' sometimes exaggerated uses of narrative conventions for constructing a coherent tale: "Literary parody serves to distance the author still further from language, to complicate still further his relationship to the literary language of his time, especially in the novel's own territory. The novelistic discourse dominating a given epoch is itself turned into an object and itself becomes a means for refracting new authorial intentions." Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 309. Cf. Alter's remarks on Sterne's parody of novel form in Alter, *Partial Magic*, 31-34.

who, after a free and undisturbed entrance, for some years, into our brains,—at length claim a kind of settlement there,—working sometimes like yeast;—but more generally after the manner of the gentle passion, beginning in jest,—but ending in downright earnest” (45). Stubborn opinions and impulsive passions are mutually implicated through their interpretive function and habitual structure. Tristram’s bringing lengthy digressions to bear on nodes of elided discursive interaction interrogates the extent of opinion’s power to make substance of absence. In short, sexuality becomes the site, rather than the obstacle, for Sterne’s work to conceive the indeterminacy of contextualization as a creative force for authorizing culture.

In a final section to this chapter, I explore two related implications of Sterne’s fictionalization of social discourse’s incongruous, minimally-coherent structure as an effect of the cross-cutting erotic worlds immanent in language. First, I reopen a critical debate on the cultural work *Tristram Shandy* performs on sexuality and sociability by transforming the conventions of sentimental literature. Whereas sentimentalism generally refers to a theory of moral feeling that postulates a communication of abstract values governing behavior without the aid of denotational language, it also comprises aesthetic conventions for conceptualizing embodied signs. These were brought to their widest circulation in the eighteenth century to both represent events of sentimental communication and involve private readers in an imagined social world based on universal feeling. The affective language of sentiment effectively mediates readerly publics’ orientation to literary form. Thus Sterne makes sexual passion public by positing it as a paradigm social sentiment. But the reverse is also true: Sterne particularizes sentimental reading as a sexuality through Tristram’s excitable opinions. Sentiment as a compulsive framework for understanding human interaction is but one hobby-horsical response that wants to know the intersection of several erotic worlds.

The transformation of sentimentalism carries various consequences for different kinds of readers. As audience to an uncertain ribald narrative (one in which we are often unsure whether “ends” ever meet), the novel’s public finds itself enticed to read inferentially from interaction toward conceptualizing characters’ desires. In principle, Tristram’s unreliability only underscores a sentimental reader’s grounding in capacities for indexical interpretation. Scholarly work on the sexual closet has made us aware of the pleasures of reading fiction as a spectacle.¹⁹ In a context where sentimentalism and moral idealism are normative, however, *Tristram Shandy*’s impasse of interpretive function entails a readerly body that is excitable but not necessarily empowered. The difficulty of adopting the most available mode of readerly response is evident in eighteenth century critics’ peculiarly extreme responses to Sterne’s work, including attempts to remake *Tristram Shandy* into a paragon of sentimental norms and strategies that mirror back the work’s ambiguous address by excoriating its moral failure in terms so overwrought as to suggest some intimate if uncertain knowledge about the novel’s true meaning.

At a significant historical remove, a reader’s impossible position as a lost disciple of eccentric eroticisms whom Sterne hands an unwarranted authority can register as a doubt about one’s indexical competences and a wariness about projecting desire onto the text. Later I attend to an especially confounding exchange between the lovers Trim and Bridget. Around such passages, a reader can likely supply many possible signs that would allow the interaction to cohere, but one hardly knows which would be appropriate to these characters. For the same reason, however, the novel’s ambiguities destabilize one’s usual sexual concepts, including the assumption of a homo-heterosexual opposition and a gradation of intelligibility that corresponds to a political hierarchy

¹⁹ See Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 80.

of normative and non-normative desires. *Tristram Shandy* instead allows contemporary readers to focus on a more general distinction between intimations of desire that are presumed upon, responded to, and acted on versus those that are not.

For some of Sterne's early twentieth-century readers, including other novelists, enticing gaps in characters' discourse entailed positive implications, and these readings must in turn shape how we evaluate *Tristram Shandy* today. Later texts resembling *Tristram Shandy* take interest in how characters might communicate the particular, nonce value of interactional impasses despite the particularity of the ephemeral, incongruous contextualizations that produce them. Stein's, Musil's, and Barnes's works develop tools for thinking about how people come to count on such short-lived forms of incongruity as the context for further utterance. This chapter's readings testify to the difficulty of doing so.

"BEGUILING A WOUND:" DIGRESSION AS INDEXICAL STRUCTURE

Any discussion of fictional experimentation faces the problem of how to account for the element of contingency. When we think of scientific experimentation in empirical epistemic traditions, we may imagine a set of control mechanisms that an observer adjusts to varying degrees to test for unknowns that appear with some regularity under the created conditions. Fiction precludes the empirical experimental model's openness to chance as long as it involves giving form to a positive idea.²⁰ Early practitioners of fiction like Sterne's contemporaries Henry Fielding, Samuel Richardson, and Tobias Smollett claimed to engage in such form-giving. As a case-in-point, consider Fielding's characterization of his Miss Bridget Allworthy: "She was of that species of women whom you commend rather for good qualities than beauty, and who are generally called by their own sex, very good sort of women—as good a sort of woman, madam, as you wish to know."²¹ Through the second-person address, narration instructs us to associate Miss Bridget with a concept of womanhood that the text stipulates, but it also defines this concept ostensibly to suggest some readers' possible acquaintance with it. As Catherine Gallagher has argued, fiction's historical emergence as a distinct discourse coincides with such explicit emphasis on the way characters' proper names stand for categories of individuals in the world, or "a non-referentiality that might be understood as a greater referentiality."²²

²⁰ According to Stefano Ercolino, this is the problem Émile Zola encounters when attempting to put his strong theoretical statements about naturalist literary production into practice. Despite Zola's aims to exchange a structuring principle of plot for a mere selection of scenes from social reality, once the novel introduces characters based on a concept of the social division of labor, it can only proceed according to how it has categorized imaginary persons. Plot persists in a normative ideology that governs the relation between represented scenes. Ercolino argues that this ideology, rather than reflecting facts intrinsic to the represented world of the work, is an expression of the advanced capitalism that also shapes Zola's position in the literary field. See Ercolino, *The Novel Essay*, 2-9.

²¹ Fielding, *Tom Jones*, 4.

²² Gallagher argues that the historical emergence of fiction involves a shift between modes of reference in narrative forms. In mid-eighteenth-century England, a reader could safely assume that the names of persons in a plausible narrative either referred to individuals in the world, or were at least allegories of persons living or once living. By the century's end, new conventions of describing persons' thoughts, speech, and actions made it possible for publics to assume that names of persons in a plausible narrative referred to categories of persons in the world. See Gallagher, "Rise of Fictionality," 341-45.

Through the invention of Tristram, Sterne authors a different fictional practice that declines to attach a determinate value to names of fictional in the first instance. The eccentricity of Sterne's characters introduces an ambiguity that gives his distinctive approach its sense of contingency. Although *Tristram Shandy* features recognizable social kinds of persons (doctors, pastors, men of business, and servants), the strange, apparent spontaneity of characters' whims draws their referential scope into question. Sterne's characters confront readers familiar with the constitutional rules of fiction with some basic conceptual problems of identity: Does eccentricity refer to an intrinsic inconsistency that flouts self-regulation? Or does eccentricity involve a more or less regular deviation from a rule or particular category? In the latter case, how does one know which standards are appropriate for determining strangeness? In either case, how does one compare deviations over time?

As we shall see in the next chapter, the narrator of Stein's *The Making of Americans* tends to think about eccentricity in time: characters elicit a sense of "singularity" when their behavior signifies a social value that is still emerging into the world of the characters and thus goes unrecognized. "It takes time to make queer people, and to have others who can know it," Stein writes (*MA* 21). To be "singular" is to be not yet queer, not yet intelligible within a pattern of deviation. Both Stein and Sterne before her focus on the ways eccentricity matters in the meantime, beginning with how it provokes explanation—typically in ways that require slowing down narrative time to reflect on how social rules tend to encompass several instances.

Notice that predicating deviant or unexpected behavior of a character does not undo the presupposition of a *semantic* coherence introduced by the name. All instances of the name, "Toby," carry an assumption of equivalence, so names still function as what philosophers of language sometimes call "referring paradigms."²³ Eccentricity simply indicates that the categorical referentiality of names cannot function as a primary epistemic device since the name may turn out simply to designate a pattern of loosely related effects. Instead, "character" primarily includes indexical processes of signification. The distinctive form of the characters' behavior in interaction (often linguistic) provides the novel its experimental instrument. The object of its experimentation—what it tests for—is the degree of compulsion by which competing norms render that behavior coherent as social action. In principle, then, eccentricity in *Tristram Shandy* involves not simple deviance, but potential allegiance to multiple norms. Moreover, because the novel concerns social interactions, many of the relevant norms resist formalization as propositions, consisting instead of conventions governing social practice.

Of course, one could argue that all novels are experimental in this sense insofar as the "horizontal" form of narrative necessarily suspends evaluation and puts ideas to the test by refracting them through represented events. The humorous elements of *Tom Jones* indeed depends on a similar technique. When Fielding's narrator introduces Miss Bridget, the trait "prudence" stabilizes her referential function. But when we observe her eavesdropping on her guileless brother, the novel reorients us to how one might embody prudence: "This served many good purposes. For by such means Miss Bridget became often acquainted with her brothers' inclinations without giving him the trouble of repeating them to her."²⁴ Miss Bridget's lack of scruple in social reconnaissance passes as just another instance of her cautious reason. Thus the progression of

²³ Gallagher, 355.

²⁴ Fielding, *Tom Jones*, 21.

events confronts typical qualities with circumstance, bringing out particularity and fashioning transformations in meaning.²⁵

But my claim is more specific than this, for certain novels base character not only on stipulated qualities, but also on how the collaborative structure of their actions invokes any economy of properties with regularity. The former model tests how a particular sequence of events transforms the value of an idea, e.g., how far Miss Bridget can go in acting prudently before her prudence becomes a narrator's facetiousness. Here the absence of reasons to question the parsing of events or the salience of a property limits contingency. Because the Squire's ignorance of his sister's watchful eye constitutes a structural feature of this scene of domestic spying, the moral connotations of Bridget's act (her "good purposes") go uncontested. We see Miss Bridget as she presumes herself to be—unless we take her conduct to unfold in the eye of her accomplice, the faithful servant Deborah. Like Fielding, Sterne tests the extent to which events reconstitute a concept of character. However, his work also demonstrates how far different conceptual values, including values stipulated of names, determine the shape of events as events or, on the contrary, to what extent the eccentric, nonce relational structures of interaction draw the conceptual economy of the represented world into question. In other words, the experimental framework of Sterne's novel permits (and sometimes performs on itself) an examination of how Tristram's story coheres as an "interactional text."

To illustrate this, I reconstruct the way the novel follows a fragment of contextual knowledge—here, Uncle Toby's participation in the battle of Namur and the wound to his groin he received there—across several discursive interactions to test how characters invoke it in language and what its invocation entails. In this respect the narrative structure of *Tristram Shandy* implies a practical understanding of the social, semiotic processes linguistic anthropologists call "entextualization," the way knowledge (often of a cultural, group-bound kind) emerges by degrees from linguistic exchange to render the interaction coherent as an event type parsable into discreet phases. Entextualization allows speakers to understand and proceed with what they're doing by constructing an interactional form consistent with forms at other times and places. Linguistic anthropologists like Silverstein sometimes describe entextualization as cultural practices of pointing, or ritualized "index types" for making objects and events "out there" in the world relevant to discursive interaction. Your and my hailing one another as "bro" functions as a form of second-person address within a ritual of greeting, but this form differs from others by presupposing an essentialized characteristic—of male gender, or of a certain nonchalance stereotypically associated with this maleness. Brought into interaction through our indexical tokens, this framework of distinct qualities can set our conversation apart as a space of good-humored "men's talk." Yet how exactly our using the greeting makes these distinctions salient for us depends on the symmetry of indexical forms in and across encounters. The framework of greeting mediates our identities over time by generating qualitative resemblances from similarly entextualized exchanges of indexical tokens.

Maximally coherent indexicality functions normatively, meaning that once an interaction entails a quality of a person, the feature acquires the status of an implicit, presupposable fact for those concerned in further interactions. In practice, however, "contextualization" *happens* and thus depends on the contingencies of the moment. Anthropology's practice-oriented models measure

²⁵ For Bakhtin, the idea of narrative as a crucible for character constitutes a precondition for the modern Bildungsroman. See Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 11.

presupposable “context” relative to some achieved, participatory event structure, or as Silverstein puts it in the presupposing-and-entailing language of indexicality, “Segments of interactional text [the grouping of *this discourse* as distinct from *context*], at any phase of discursive interaction, are projections of presupposables relative to the entailing potential of the occurrence of some indexical sign token in discursive realtime.”²⁶ If “bro” normatively entails stereotypical values as features of our relation, there are ways of spoiling this effect by drawing into question the form’s possible presuppositions (the gender or familiarity it assumes). You might utter the form in a voice pitched higher than mine or tersely in response to my offhand use. You would have thereby put me in the position of trying to understand the set of additional presuppositions brought into play by your breaking symmetry. In *Tristram Shandy*, the twists and turns of the digressions figure character as a net effect of a theoretically limitless world of conflicting presuppositions. In examining how an interaction invokes a segment of context (Toby’s wound) to some effect that neither the wound nor Toby’s stipulated qualities account for, one observes this virtual world unfold. Toby’s obsessive passion emerges as a supplementary context in conjunction with such a practical excess.

No sooner has Toby’s wound been introduced into Tristram’s tale than the attention called to the indeterminate boundary between “context” and event prompts a reader to question the logic of textual segmentation that posits some narrated events as causes of others. Tristram first mentions Toby’s wound as to explain his uncle’s feminizing “modesty”: “A blow!---Yes, Madam, it was owing to a blow from a stone, broke off by a ball from the parapet of a horn-work at the siege of *Namur*, which struck full upon my uncle *Toby’s* groin” (54). We might understand Toby’s restraint in responding to his brother’s strong opinions to represent one form of modesty. By the same token, we expect any allusion to his wound to entail Toby’s modesty in interaction with others. Yet Tristram’s more involved narration of Toby’s recovery will suggest that his wound motivates the performance of several qualities.

Walter Shandy gives Toby a room in his London residence until his wound heals, and there Toby entertains many visitors. These well-meaning guests believe in a talking cure, supposing that talk of the wound’s origin will “beguile the pain of it” (63). The callers’ believe that representing something in language moves one from a lived experience toward an abstract, logical reconstruction of it. This contextualization of language contrasts starkly with the one Tristram implies when conveying the aftermath of Toby’s treatment. The similarity between the experience of battle and talking about it shows up formally in Tristram’s report. The following passage relates the perplexity Toby experiences in his bedside interviews by structurally assimilating the disorder of Toby’s term words for features of the siege’s topography to the chaos of the battlefield:

What rendered the account of this affair the more intricate to my uncle *Toby*, was this,—that in the attack of the counterscarp before the gate of *St. Nicolas*, extending itself from the bank of the *Maes*, quite up to the great water-top;—the ground was cut and cross-cut with such a multitude of dykes, drains, rivulets, and sluices, on all sides,—and he would get so sadly bewilder’d and set fast amongst them, that frequently he could neither get backwards or forwards to save his life; and was oft times obliged to give up the attack upon that very account only. (68)

²⁶ Silverstein, “Indeterminacy of Contextualization,” 62.

The passage establishes Toby's ineffectual accounts of the siege as a continuation of his experience there by accumulating puns that mediate between his desperate verbal maneuvers and martial ones, between the verbal space of the story text and the plan of the battlefield. The consistency with which the puns link the discourse playing out in Toby's chamber to the structure of the fort constitute what Michael Silverstein calls a metapragmatic representation. *Metapragmatics* broadly refers to how, when people act in certain ways, they can also implicitly signal expectations for how other participants could or should respond. Implicit signaling happens iteratively at the level of formal patterns, which over the course of conversation form a picture of contextual features shaping the kind of interaction participants share: "The presupposed interactional text at every phase-point of discursive interaction is of the nature of an interpretation or *metapragmatic representation*—projected from the radial perspective of the interactional here-and-now—of the basis for the indexical forms 'in play' in that phase."²⁷ In other words, one differentiates and evaluates each contribution, or "phase point," in conversation based on the representational work it performs to establish co-occurring signs as action in context. Tristram's punning constitutes a metapragmatic representation by ignoring the words one might imagine Toby to have said on such occasions and substituting them with an understanding of how Toby's stuttering speech conjures prior events. By thus framing his account of Toby's wound within this metapragmatic structure, Tristram suggests that Toby's incoherent stories represent the events at Namur in a similar contextualization. This virtually present representation suggests the permeability of context and discursive interaction.

Because conceptions of a character in *Tristram Shandy* emerge as effects (often exaggerated ones) of a contextualizing logic running through a discourse, a change in a character's relation to the generic languages that effect contextualizations potentially alters the significance of the textual material already allocated to him. Nowhere is such a transformation clearer than in Toby's advancing his medical treatment by treating himself to heavy doses of literature on fortification. To lessen the strain that overtakes him in the throes of explanation, Toby aspires to talk through the siege as dispassionate master of his subject, where mastery corresponds to an altered sense of the scope of the accident and his place within it. Weeks after acquiring his first map of Namur, Toby can produce a discourse that ranges far beyond his involvement at the siege: "my uncle *Toby* was able to cross the *Maes* and *Sambre*; make diversions as far as *Vauban*'s line, the abbey of *Salsines*, &c. and give his visitors as distinct a history of each of their attacks, as of that of the gate of *St. Nicolas*, where he had the honour to receive his wound" (72). The wound's re-entextualization as a function of Toby's being present at a particular moment in military history entails its transformation from a personal injury to a virtual badge of honor.

This transformation sets the terms of the novel's experimental structure by figuring character as a collaborative construct forged not only at the nexus of different properties (Toby's being Walter's younger brother, the seriousness of the wound, the sort of talker he is, the extent of his education), but also at the intersection of the contextualizations different interlocutors bring to bear. Toby's evolving relationship to military history can therefore achieve both ideological and social effects that coincide with the novel's understanding of sexuality. If Toby's reading habits couple his personal experiences to European history to broaden the presuppositions that allusions to his accident bring into play, his wound likewise becomes a site of history. Interactions alluding to that history can also therefore elicit bodily excitation. Toby's discourses with his manservant

²⁷ Silverstein, 60.

Trim, once a Corporal in the same company, introduce the possibility that the wound functions as such a stimulating point of intersection. Specifically, Toby's hobby-horse first emerges in his and Trim's peculiar, affectively rich discourse as a presupposition installed by a widened set of entailed relations co-occurring with allusions to the wound. Besides the knowledge of fortification Trim acquires from discourse with Toby and access to his master's charts, Tristram points to "what he gained HOBBY-HORSICALLY, as a body-servant, *non Hobby-Horsical per se*" (77). Tristram's careful formulation suggests that the hobby-horse inadvertently results from Trim's borrowing his master's tools of learning. Without denoting the hobby-horse's substance, he only implies that whatever Trim gleans alters the nature of his relation to Toby, so that it exceeds what one would expect of members of their class. Tristram's circumlocution indicates something about the hobby-horse as conceptual knowledge. In contrast to the quality "modesty," one draws hobby-horses by marking their relevance to language use.

In the following exchange, Trim persuades Toby to cut short his treatment and abscond to Toby's private residence, where they might erect a model fort. Here Toby's hobby-horse emerges from an indexical structure as the supplementary knowledge necessary to interpret how the two men bring tokens of their shared learning "into play" during the interaction to reorganize their relation as master and servant:

I think—quoth Corporal *Trim*, with humble submission to your Honour's better judgment,—that these ravelins, bastions, curtins, and hornworks make but a poor, contemptible, fiddle faddle piece of work of it here upon paper, compared to what your Honour and I could make of it, were we in the country by ourselves, and had but a rood, a rood and a half of ground to do what we pleased with: As summer is coming on, continued *Trim*, your Honour might sit out of doors, and give me the nography—(call it ichnography, quothe my uncle)—of the town or citadel, your Honour was pleased to sit down before,—and I will be shot by your Honour upon the glacis of it, if I did not fortify it to your Honour's mind.—I dare say thou would'st *Trim*, quothe my uncle.—For if your Honour, continued the Corporal, could but mark me the polygon, with its exact lines and angles,—that I could do very well, quothe my uncle.—I would begin with the fossé, and if your Honour could tell me the proper depth and breadth,—I can to a hair's breadth, *Trim*, replied my uncle,—I would throw out the earth upon this hand towards the town for the scarp,—and on that hand towards the campaign for the counterscarp,—very right, *Trim*, quothe my uncle *Toby*,—and when I had sloped them to your mind,—an' please your Honour, I would face the glacis, as the finest fortifications are done in *Flanders*, with sods,—and as your Honour knows they should be,—and I would make the walls and parapets with sods too;—the best engineers call them gazons, *Trim*, said my uncle *Toby*;—whether they are gazons or sods, is not much matter, replied *Trim*, your Honour knows they are ten times beyond a facing either of brick or stone;—I know they are, *Trim*, in some respects,—quothe my uncle *Toby*, nodding his head;—for a cannon-ball enters into the gazon right onwards, without bringing any rubbish down with it, which might fill the fossé, (as was the case at *St. Nicolas's Gate*) and facilitate the passage over it. (78)

Who or what compels whom here? The stratified forms of address ("your Honour" vs. "Trim," a nickname received in the service) give the exchange a relational scaffold. By themselves, the consistency of these forms would indicate that the men's relation remains stable throughout the

exchange and largely conforms to the decorum required between master and servant. Within the framework of master-servant, both men use referring expressions for fortifying structures (glacis, fossé, scarp, counterscarp, etc.) to presuppose reading on the subject. They similarly allude to the siege of Namur in connection with Toby's wound, such as Trim's alluding to a time "before" and Toby's mentioning of St. Nicolas's Gate. These references orient the two men's shared knowledge by relation to Toby's confinement and its cause, the wound. Around the specialized terms, the two engage in a miniature game, in which Trim first uses a term and Toby subsequently confirms or amends his usage. The embedded structure suggests that differential knowledge re-motivates the division of labor implied by the relation of master and servant. Trim will dig and build; Toby will mark and command.

However, certain nodes in the interaction upend this construal of the division, the most obvious being Trim's dismissing Toby's insistence on a terminological formality ("gazons" vs. "sods") as more than necessary from the point of view of what each man supposedly knows the other knows and wants. From Trim's indecorous rebuff of finer words, the interaction looks very different. Rather than submit himself to a test of knowledge as he offers suggestions, Trim stimulates his master's peripheral awareness of the passion they presupposedly share and thus piques his imagination to what that shared knowledge allows them to accomplish collaboratively. This model of the exchange would account for Toby's dilatory response to Trim's discourse: "My Uncle Toby blushed as red as scarlet as Trim went on;—but it was not a blush of guilt,—of modesty,—or of anger;—it was a blush of joy" (79). One could say, then, that the men's speaking in tandem entails the compelling force of this passion, the hobby horse, as a now presupposable context. More precisely, insofar as the wound lies in the background of this exchange as a temporal marker, the conversation assimilates the hobby-horse to the schema of bodily and historical knowledge the wound can presuppose.

This conversation exemplifies an experimental practice of characterization through implicit indexical structures. In a novel like *Tom Jones*, when a reader catches the "prudent" Miss Bridget Allworthy eavesdropping on her brother, what happens? In Fielding's novel, the conceptual categories that stabilize a character tend to reabsorb contradictory narrated events to specify their sense. In *Tristram Shandy*, by comparison, the meaning of interaction exceeds the terms explicitly stipulated as a presupposition. The strange intimacy Toby and Trim share around the arts of fortification complicates the signifying relation between the wound and Toby's modesty. The passage above rather demonstrates how an accumulation of indexical material alters how "compulsively," in Silverstein's words, the invocation of the wound entails certain qualities. As a way of getting character into view, then, the digression that carries Tristram through Toby's past does not demonstrate coherent conceptual values; the structure of the digression instead models the indeterminacy of contextualization.

THE UNTOLD SOCIAL LIFE OF HOBBY-HORSES

So far I have reenacted how the novel's digressive structure moves a fragment of knowledge across interactive boundaries to demonstrate the way context's conceptual relevance for character transforms as it is presupposed. I have shown how Toby's passion for the art of fortification becomes an increasingly coherent, virtually real object of shared knowledge insofar as his relations with others embody this knowledge to exceed what Tristram states about Toby. The digression on Toby's wound shows more than is adequate to Tristram's characterization of Toby as possessing an "extream and unparallel'd modesty of nature," allowing other conceptual

possibilities to come into play (54). If the novel's experimentation ended with Tristram's digressions, it would distinguish Sterne's work from other novels, but it would not account for its stranger features, including the many elisions and the insights they offer into how the passions Toby shows in his relation to Trim become relevant to a broader set of interactions.

I turn now to what happens when Tristram brings his story back to the point at which he embarked on the digression. The novel's proceedings around the junctures between digressions and the events they supposedly contextualize implicate readers in the novel's central paradox. Tristram's narrative contains gaps in the denotational text of characters' interactions ranging from single words to whole conversations. At times a reader cannot be sure of the kind of gap one faces. It might suggest a flaw, or lacuna, in Tristram's transcript of a conversation, or it might suggest an elision Tristram introduces either for propriety's sake or to assert artistic license. Whatever the nature of a particular gap, Tristram will, on the one hand, refer to the digressions around it to supply an appropriate element consistent with character. On the other hand, when Tristram indicates a digression's relevance to a denotational text, such as in the production of speech between the Shandy brothers, he inadvertently calls attention to how an overabundance of presuppositions obviates a *maximal* completion. In other words, the relation between digression and absence foregrounds that the absence, understood as an index, can signal a range of presuppositions and entail a range of effects. In consequence, the more Tristram assures us of our power to make a determination of discourse's relation to character, the more one questions the compulsion to hazard it.

Returning to the exchange between Tristram's father and Toby, consider once more the indeterminate contextualization of obscured utterances. In this chapter's introduction, I described how Tristram lists several items that might fill a titillating absence in his uncle's remark about Mrs. Shandy. In considering Toby's choice of words, Tristram adumbrates the possibility that Toby uses his intimate knowledge of fortification to render regions of female bodies intelligible to himself, effectively extending the range of interactions relevant to his hobby-horse. Tristram first introduces Toby's utterance not only to fixate on a lexical selection, but also to question the logic that frames facility with words a salient emblem of character:

—My sister, I dare say, added he, does not care to let a man come so near her ****. I will not say whether my uncle *Toby* had completed the sentence or not;—'tis for his advantage to suppose he had,—as, I think, he could have added no ONE WORD which would have improved it.

If, on the contrary, my uncle *Toby* had not fully arrived at his period's end,—then the world stands indebted to the sudden snapping of my father's tobacco-pipe, for one of the neatest examples of the ornamental figure in oratory, which Rhetoricians stile the *Aposiopesis*.—Just heaven! How does the *Poco piu* and the *poco meno* of the *Italian* artists;—the insensible, more or less, determine the precise line of beauty in the sentence, as well as the statue! (81)

In what sense might Toby's language use be complete? In what sense incomplete? Sterne orchestrates a juncture of transcript both to test not the appropriateness of one or another lexical item to a conception of Toby's character and interrogate whether a gap in a *denotational* text requires filling at all to achieve coherence of *interactional* text. Tristram steps in to underscore how Toby's silence might either effectively signal something for which there is no one word, or

more weakly function as a placeholder for a word he gropes toward but omits out of ignorance or modesty. Significantly, then, the textual gap aligns itself with the contested ways of conceiving Toby's character. Tristram has instructed us to interpret Toby's modesty as an index of his wound. Yet the wound organizes a series of interactions, where its invocation achieves different entailments, sometimes with positive implications for Toby as a hobby-horsical speaker. This is all to say that the margin of the implicit, the "insensible, more or less," makes more or less encompassing versions of context salient to the brothers' exchange about Mrs. Shandy. Tristram delights in this indeterminacy as an example of the excessive way embodied knowledge finds itself inadvertently invoked in speech. We can understand the poetic possibilities of Toby's quietness all the more when Tristram offers "cover'd-way" as a lexical choice, for our narrator tries to cram the entire indexable, virtual truth of the digression into a single lexical term.

Tristram's attempt to reconcile the possibilities of indexical presupposition in the background of a conversation with an imperfect denotational form will play three main roles in this chapter and subsequent ones. First, the passage initiates a pattern whereby Tristram attempts to "translate" non-verbal semiotic behavior and indexical signification into a more perfect propositional form. This pattern links Tristram's opinions to sentimentalism as a language ideology, a belief that mediates between affective states around speech and the moral values of speakers. Second, this pattern helps contextualize the understanding, pervasive in Robert Musil's *The Man without Qualities*, that even rigidly organized societies leave room for possibility, or *Möglichkeit*. Musil's narrator will sometimes supplement what characters do say with reports of what they did not say but might have if the indexical relation between linguistic form and context had been realized slightly differently. For both Sterne and Musil, modeling conversation as an interactive event requires considering how characters mean more than they manage to enact through the collaborative form of interaction. Thirdly, when Tristram introduces further "translations" of a conversation to clear up ambiguities in his summations of characters' identities, he only reproduces a different, though similarly indistinct conception of character within a different indexical structure.

The exchange between the Shandy brothers that follows the above passage transposes the different ways the digression bears on Toby's utterance (those Tristram describes) into the form of a conversation. That is, having suggested how this juncture in the conversation may presuppose a minimum and maximum of context, the novel moves to explore how characters effect different interpretations. I have remarked how Tristram, either by explicitly referring to something said or through the indexical structure of his own speech, metapragmatically represents the character's utterance. Walter's response to Toby suggests a more constrained metapragmatic representation. According to Tristram, the snapping of his father's tobacco pipe would render Toby's silence an instance of *aposiopesis*. In other words, Walter's violent gesture interprets Toby's sudden pause as a sign of his younger brother's ignorance. The interpretive work continues when Walter repeats Toby's words, this time using the verbal gesture (represented with the em-dash) that, for Tristram, would signal Toby's unwillingness or inability to go on:

—"Not choose, quoth my father, (repeating my uncle *Toby*'s words) to let a man come so near her——" By heaven, brother *Toby*! You would try the patience of a *Job*;—and I think I have the plagues of one already, without it.——Why?——Where?——Wherein?——Wherefore?—Upon what account, replied my uncle *Toby*, in the utmost astonishment.—To think, said my father, of a man living to your age, brother, and knowing so little

about women!—I know nothing at all about them,—replied my uncle *Toby*; and I think, continued he, that the shock I received the year after the demolition of *Dunkirk*, in my affair with the widow *Wadman*;—which shock you know I should not have received, but from my total ignorance of the sex,---has given me just cause to say, That I neither know, nor do pretend to know, any thing about ‘em, or their concerns either.—Methinks, brother, replied my father, you might, at least, know so much as the right end of a woman from the wrong. (82)

Walter seems to suppose Toby’s turning up a blank in speech to betray a lack of practical competence, not of an abstract morphological conception. In a subsequent passage, Walter will step into a disquisition on what he calls the “come-at-ability” of women’s bodies, insinuating that such a requisite competence for a man of Toby’s social standing would involve being able to discern aspects of people as especially salient if one wants to respond appropriately to a situation (83). Toby’s confession of ignorance ratifies his brother’s accusation of inexperience. We might attribute his acquiescence to his supposed modesty. So conversation up to this point illustrates the force of one contextualizing logic—the reservoir of indexical meaning running between the wound and Toby’s modesty. One can no longer attribute this logic to Tristram alone; its circulation as a shared conception allows the novel’s characters to couple one event to the next as so many enactments of another’s identity.

Yet Toby, in affirming his brother’s suspicions, mentions his affair with his former admirer the widow Wadman alongside an offhand allusions to the destruction of Dunkirk. This connection suggests that one cannot characterize his practical relation to women as modesty’s happy ignorance; some positive framework of knowledge links different situations together for Toby. Introducing Dunkirk at this point in the exchange seems to offer a contrary contextualization, a different metapragmatic representation of how the present conversation fits into a larger interactional text. By its translations of presuppositions between one discursive interaction and another, the novel illustrates how this feature of Toby’s conceptual landscape—whatever its exact shape—is immanent in talk even where its indexical forms are neither explicitly claimed by Toby, nor taken up by Walter. The incongruity between the brothers’ presuppositions in contributing to the conversation indicates, in other words, that the actual exchange does not exhaust the possibilities introduced by a gap in the denotational text.

Clearly Sterne’s novel takes shape around the idea that understanding a person as a social type (or an eccentric variation of one) involves determining the kinds of conceptual knowledge a person possesses, and such knowledge includes a person’s representations of the relation between text and context when responding to others in conversation. *Tristram Shandy* associates such practical knowledge with sexualities. Through the figure of the hobby-horse, Sterne’s novel invites readers to imagine subjectivity to involve an erotic habit that determines the social relations and affections a person develops. For this reason, *Tristram Shandy* becomes interesting from the perspective of recent methods that draw on models of interaction to write the history of sexuality. Returning to Foucault’s theory of sexuality as a powerful technique emerging from the European Enlightenment, Clark-Huckstep asks how thinking of sexuality through interaction might change the way we understand the effects of disciplined knowledge formations in relation to other social processes of sexual subject formation: “The process of interacting is one that is simultaneously affective and performative of ‘knowing’... What was the act of telling the self like, and in what

economy did the words of the informant have purchase and perform work? What were its limits?”²⁸ Sterne’s Toby is not an historical subject in Clark-Huckstep’s sense, but *Tristram Shandy* nonetheless confronts a reader with the problems of reconstructing traces of language as indexes of conceptual knowledge. Such implicit conceptual distinctions seem to be what Clark-Huckstep has in mind when he writes of the affective dimension language as having an “economy.” Here one observes a convergence between Clark-Huckstep’s historical methodology, linguistic anthropology, and fictional poetics. For Sterne, Silverstein, and Huckstep, someone constructing the sexual system of a specific social group would have to contend not only with abstract patterns of knowledge (what Silverstein calls “-onomic” knowledge, as in “taxonomic” systems), but also with the practical, “cultural-conceptual” logic that anchors an economy to lived relations.²⁹

In the case of Uncle Toby’s conversation with Walter, however, we are not concerned with the knowledge of a sociocultural group merely, but with how the brothers refract their shared knowledge through very different dispositions. How, then, is a reader to locate affect amidst Toby’s presumed knowledge and his and others’ linguistic signs? To what extent, for instance, should one construe Toby’s confused response to Walter’s reaction (to the initial blankness of the younger brother’s speech) as gentle indignation toward Walter’s presupposition that a man of Toby’s age should know something particular of women? As I have already begun to show, one might formulate some conceptual values informing Toby’s habits. A national pride, a conception of European empires and their antagonisms, and an understanding of his own wounded body as participating in their history all shape Toby’s relations to people, things, and events—not least of all events of language use. Perhaps, too, an element of gynophobia attends these formative presuppositions. A reader is left to simply observe how these variables relate to each other in any given interaction to entail particular relational effects. Sterne’s work neither permits a final verdict on who Toby “really is” sexually, nor does it deny the possibility of an underlying sexual selfhood. As we shall see, *Tristram Shandy* renders the relation of such erotic worlds as Toby’s to others’ intelligible in the form of an incongruous indexical structure. Here sexuality achieves representation in the relation between inconsistent but not mutually exclusive presuppositions within discursive interaction. In other words, the best one can do to understand the characters’ “sexuality” is consider it as a processual system of interpretations that do not take the form of a coherent conceptual economy facilitating mutual understanding, but instead exert a perpetual strain on economy.

I have mentioned how Musil’s *The Man without Qualities* performs a theoretical work on possibility by coupling it to a systematic observation of cultural-conceptual excesses to forms of language use. In *The Making of Americans*, Stein will use a similar strategy of representing sexuality virtually by constructing moments of interaction in which an anomaly appears in the smooth surface of *other* kinds of indexed relations, including such other interactional texts (ongoing cultural processes of subjection and disidentification) as race and class. Stein takes this strategy to an extreme by formalizing the accumulated consistency of indexed relations through repetition of denotational text, so that a proposition’s semantic value becomes indistinguishable from its relation to adjacent propositions. Within the painstakingly iterative structure of the novel, eccentric forms of relation, “singularities” in Stein’s idiom, resemble fragmentations of repetitive structures, “pieces” characteristic of other subjectivities that confront interpreters as frustratingly

²⁸ Clark-Huckstep, “*History of Sexuality and Historical Methodology*,” 190.

²⁹ Silverstein, 621.

inert stumbling blocks. Like *Tristram Shandy*, *The Making of Americans* carries implications for how sexuality plays out over time. Sterne, however, finds a different way to illustrate the indexing of remote, eccentric sexual possibilities through forms of non-action, as we shall see.

SENTIMENTALISM AND THE SEXUAL “SOMETHING” OF COLLABORATIVELY PRODUCED IDENTITY

Because *Tristram Shandy* figures hobby-horses as a practical variety of contextualizing knowledge evident in interaction, a reader becomes aware that a character can competently navigate some erotic situations but not others. The differential distribution of sexual knowledge can produce eccentric effects in interactions that manifest when characters struggle simply to be themselves. Eccentricity as a discursive effect can lead to impasses in conversation, and participants may find these difficult to exit since, though they may sustain a minimally coherent sexual interaction, they cannot necessarily communicate which signals are the sexually pertinent ones.

The conversation between the Shandy brothers around Toby’s non-utterance formalizes interactions that index incongruous contexts; the brothers conduct a conversation without clearly speaking within the same contextual frame. In the chapters that describe Toby’s and the widow’s affair, the novel experiments with the possibility of sustaining such a structure over several interactions. Sexual “hobby-horses” entirely shed their form as a determinate set of habits proper to a particular person and appears instead as a virtual, not-yet-embodied potential emerging from an interactional text. The dynamic structure that emerges between Toby and the widow involves participants’ metapragmatically manipulating conversation’s contextualizing frame by turns. Characters speak and act as if a common principle organized their conversation, introducing presuppositions while implicitly working around what the other has presupposed. Tristram’s presenting the affair under an elaborate conceit that likens love-making to a military campaign underscores the conflict of sexuality—in this case, between incongruous interpretations. When Tristram represents Mrs. Wadman as a war horse standing “ready harnessed and caparisoned at all points to watch accidents,” he mixes his metaphors to condense a general’s strategic prowess and vigilance with the figure of the hobby-horse as an uncertain force that can rear its head at any moment (445).

The clearest example of an incongruous presupposition in the affair occurs when Toby promises to put the widow’s finger on the very spot where he received his wound—by showing her on a map. Around the same juncture, however, one becomes aware of Tristram’s increasingly intrusive contextualizations of what “really” goes on between the two in the way of a social interaction. Therefore, before commenting on conversations between Toby and the widow, let me offer some more general claims about the narrative structure of this section of the novel. Tristram’s role underscores the salience of sentimentalism as a social and linguistic ideology, but the strained logic of this ideology continues to be double-edged. Tristram claims to draw on his special knowledge to render the characters’ amorous interactions coherent. Yet illustrating coherence requires confirmation in ever new instances of discourse, so Tristram’s alleged explanations of the desultory affair simply reproduce its twists and turns. A reader consequently becomes aware of ways of making sense of the exchanges’ interactional text through sexual contextualizations that Tristram’s sentimentalism does not account for.

At the affair's outset Tristram leaves ample room to question the nature of the widow's interest by remarking of Mrs. Wadman's view of his uncle, "That the first moment Widow Wadman saw him, she felt something stirring within her in his favour—Something!—something/—Something perhaps more than friendship—less than love" (439). Tristram refers to this indeterminate something as "a secret." Now, Tristram's installing a broadly inclusive presuppositionality to the widow's actions ("perhaps more than friendship—less than love") might be enough to assure one of the sexual nature of her kept knowledge. As we shall see, at times Tristram comes close to positively affirming that the widow's interest hinges on what exactly happened at the battle of Namur and how extensive the damage to Toby's groin. Tristram piques a readers' prurient interest while also seeming to invite us into his confidence as to what the secret is, assuring that subsequent material will be read in the dim light of this confidence. However, Tristram's attributing a secret to the widow also links Mrs. Wadman's secret to Toby's dialogue with Walter insofar as both interactions center on practical, hobby-horsical knowledge incompletely actualized in talk. Thus even as Tristram assures a reader of the determinate shape and object of the widow's desire, one cannot be certain if, when, or how this knowledge will become relevant.

In yet another of Tristram's "translations," he introduces the idea that the widow's desires focus on an extremely particular object, yet it remains indeterminate. The following passage appears after two paragraphs of asterisks that obscure a question from the widow, to which Toby now responds:

—You shall see the very place, Madam; said my uncle Toby.

Mrs. Wadman blush'd—look'd towards the door—turn'd pale—blush'd slightly again—recovered her natural colour—blush'd worse than ever; which for the sake of the unlearned reader, I translate thus—

"L—d! I cannot look at it—

What would the world say if I look'd at it?

I should drop down, if I look'd at it—

I wish I could look at it—

There can be no sin in looking at it.

—I will look at it." (514)

Tristram renders Mrs. Wadman's reaction within a six-lined metrical structure that matches, to a hyperbolically exact degree, the ebb and flow of her humors. Like Tristram's previous comments on character' talk, his comparative "learnedness" depends on the consistency with which his denotative model captures how segments of significant events contribute to a discursive interaction. Thus the widow's blanching gains directionality and force when juxtaposed with a glance. More than previous instances, however, Tristram's substituting the widow's blushes for propositions hinges on Tristram's on interpreting individual signs (the initial blush) to indexically presuppose moral principles. When Toby later fingers the map, Tristram describes the widow's wordless response (a shake of a head, the wave of a finger) as conjuring the shade of "the goddess of Decency" (529). Such a stabilizing framework of contextualization allows the repetition of the shifter token "it" in Tristram's translations to suggest that each successive blush offers some clue as to both the nature of the widow's desires and the reasons for her reticence. The widow's desire materializes in distinction to her consideration of its moral correctness. Of course, the wall of

asterisks preceding the passage imposes an artificial limit on how consistent Tristram's model can be with the widow's question by placing what "it" presupposes beyond view. But this only underscores the role of sentimentalism in overcoming this limit.

In the sections of the novel that concern Toby and the widow, the discourse of moral sentiment plays a decisive role in making ends meet between interactions. *Tristram Shandy* invokes sentimentalism as a belief in a social instinct that facilitates communication of moral values without the aid of a denotational language. It also describes a set of literary practices that refract the non-verbal language of feeling through detailed linguistic rendering of fictional characters' expressive gestures—their sighs, cries, tears, tremors, and pregnant glances.³⁰ In *Tristram Shandy*, Tristram's verbal depictions of moral sentiments share a procedure with his interpretations of desire: in both cases Tristram makes a body's implicit knowledge compatible with language by reading an embodied sign as though it possessed propositional value. At one point in Volume VIII, the widow approaches Toby under the pretense of having a mote of dust in her eye and locks him in an entrancing gaze. Tristram uses the occasion to literally put words in the widow's eye:

'twas an eye full of gentle salutations—and soft responses—speaking—not like the trumpet of some ill-made organ, in which many an eye I talk to, holds coarse converse—but whispering soft—like the last low accents of an expiring saint—“How can you live comfortless, captain Shandy, and alone, without a bosom to lean your head on—or trust your cares to?”

It was an eye—

But I shall be in love with it myself, if I say another word about it. (466)

Tristram's interpretations are as doubtful as they are verbose. This passage anticipates the excessive specificity of Tristram's interpretation of the widow's blushes insofar as the identifiable entailment (the sustained gaze) pales in comparison to the wealth of meaning Tristram discovers. In both cases, the indeterminacy of presupposable material surrounding interactional frames belies the specificity of denotational structure. Tristram's interjections eclipse elaboration of the presuppositions and entailments of the lovers' turns at talk. Tristram even recognizes as much. He remarks of the widow's blushes, “This requires a second translation:—it shews what little knowledge is got by mere words—we must go up to the first springs” (514). Like Tristram's previous digressions, his “second translation” offers further examples of interaction to wrest consistent conceptualizations of character from the mere fact of their ongoing discourse.

The accumulation of translations implies a presuppositional maximum to the widow's desire and entails her sexuality around Toby. An especially credulous reader might even find himself investing the widow's desire with a more specific form—perhaps a phallic fixation. Although, as John Mullan proposes, *Tristram Shandy* mocks readers determined to ignore this implication, but to see a fascination with anatomy as the single appropriate dynamic, i.e., the one that would make all her behavior cohere interactionally, would miss this section's most significant insight into sexuality as a social phenomenon.³¹ A reader's conception of Mrs. Wadman changes

³⁰ On sentimentalism as both a set of literary conventions for constructing wordless exchanges and a discursive reflection on the meaning of feelings, see Chandler, “Languages of Sentiment” 23.

³¹ Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 187.

as she accommodates Toby in their discourses. Note how the interview in the widow's parlor unfolds in a characteristically digressive fashion. In Chapter XVII, Tristram brings Toby and Trim to the threshold of the widow's home. He leaves Chapters XVIII and XIX blank. After Tristram presents the widow's blushing response, the ensuing chapters fill in some information related to the widow's interest in Toby, and Tristram only then reintroduces the missing chapters. So while Tristram's dancing around what the widow wants to know about Toby seems first to tease a reader's prurience into attention, the piecemeal reintroduction of contextualizing variables is enough to cast doubt on the "thingy" status of sexuality and direct attention elsewhere. The section's digressive structure conceives love-making as the total force field of possibilities produced by mismatched semiotic activity. Let me examine two ways developments in the conversations between Toby and Mrs. Wadman generate an understanding of sexuality as a phenomenon that emerges from the incongruities between and within interactions.

First, the novel gives us reasons to suspect that the widow's feelings toward Toby are much vaguer than we might gather from Tristram's translations. In fact, toward the end of Volume IX, Tristram reveals that the widow shared her secret with his mother months before the parlor scene, and it has since circulated widely among the Shandys' servants: "In a word, not an old woman in the village for five miles round, . . . did not understand the difficulties of my uncle Toby's siege, and what were the secret articles which had delay'd the surrender" (537). The secret, rather than affirm the specificity of the reader's knowledge, functions as a way to formalize how limited information moves across interactions and contexts in tandem with positive reports, becoming a focal point for the exchange of opinion as people "understand" it in a manner similar to Tristram's sentimental interpretations. While Tristram consistently suggests that love for Toby is somewhere in the mix for the widow, the widow's secret provokes from Walter the unkind remark, "That the devil was in women, and that the whole of the affair was lust" (537).

An earlier hint from Tristram that the widow might lack terms for her desire gives traction to this reading of the secret. Tristram further conveys Mrs. Wadman's fascination with the special "something" she vaguely detects in Toby through the conceit of a woman rifling through the panniers of a herd of donkeys:

"I have nothing, good Lady, but empty bottles;" says the asse.

"I'm loaded with tripes," says the second.

—And thou art little better, quoth she to the third; for nothing is there in thy panniers but trunk-hose and pantofles—and so to the fourth and fifth, going on one by one through the whole string, till coming to the asse which carries it, she turns the pannier upside down, looks at it—considers it—samples it—measures it—stretches it—wets it—dries it—then takes her teeth both to the warp and weft of it—

—Of what? for the love of Christ! (516)

The passage moves through a series of discoveries culminating in the proverbial woman's testing of a mystery that gains in power for its lack of substance. Note the echo between this passage's use of a shifter token of indeterminate reference, "it," and Tristram's previous translation of the widow's gestural responses into a denotative text. Bringing the matter of presupposables to the referential plane in this way—referential deictics being one of the more obvious places in language indexes operate—captures how people interact practically with their own and others' sexuality without necessarily being able to name the edges of their experience. Thus Tristram's translation

of the widow's blushes preserves an essential ambiguity in her regard for Toby, further undoing its specificity in tandem with his introducing each new detail.

Second, note how the shape of the widow's secret is implicated in and reconstituted by her interactions with Toby. Mrs. Wadman's sexuality may in fact be structurally "eccentric" like Toby's insofar as her identity only emerges as a possibility through adjustments of stance toward her prior behavior, Toby's utterances, and a set of stronger presuppositions imminent in the background of their conversations. Toby visits the widow's parlor to discuss marriage. As it turns out, she can at best signal her own reasons for marriage in contrast to at least one listed in the Book of Common Prayer—the procreation of children: "what compensation for the many tender and disquieting apprehensions of a suffering and defenceless mother who brings them into life?" That begetting children should please God is, the widow will add, but "a fiddlestick" (526). To call the divine's will a fiddlestick might be a way to acknowledge its general validity but to designate procreation as somehow irrelevant to the current conversation. Or the widow's delicate approach to addressing her motives with Toby could anticipate his perceived modesty while signaling that if his wound has rendered him unable to produce children, she would make no bones about it. In short, Mrs. Wadman's own hobby-horse is caught up in the difference between what officially goes without saying about men and women's relations and what she can't quite put her finger on—verbally speaking.

In fact, the widow generously accommodates Toby from the beginning. Her wooing involves claiming the broadest possible set of presuppositions for the attentions she shows him, so creating the greatest likelihood that he will return her affections. She approaches Toby on the Bowling Green to inquire into his labors there, earning herself a special right to detailed tours of his maps while availing herself of the opportunity to exchange caresses of hand and eye. Whereas Tristram's sentimentalism is unbelievably specific, the widow's uses of sentiment depend upon the inherent ambiguity of the body's language and thus on the necessity of prolonging contact to achieve significance. First Tristram reconstructs the itinerary of their hands over the surface of the map: "In following my uncle Toby's forefinger with hers, close thro' all the little turns and indentings of his works—pressing sometimes against the side of it—then treading upon it's nail—then tripping it up—then touching it here—then there, and so on—it set something at least in motion." (448). But as bodies collide, the scope of this "something" gets no narrower:

This, tho' slight skirmishing, and at a distance from the main body, yet drew on the rest; for here, the map usually falling with the back of it, close to the side of the sentry-box, my uncle Toby, in the simplicity of his soul, would lay his hand flat upon it, in order to go on with his explanation; and Mrs. Wadman, by a manoeuvre as quick as thought, would as certainly place her's close besides it; this at once opened a communication large enough for any sentiment to pass or repass. (448)

The widow's competence in love-making begins simply by broadening the range of communicative channels. From the vantage of eighteenth-century Britain's discourse of politeness as a way to realize social inclusiveness in talk, the widow's strategy is doubly ironic. On the one hand, one may get the sense that the widow's politeness, a prized feminized virtue, prevents her from getting what she really wants. On the other hand, the passage plays on the widespread social anxiety that formal politeness (largely meant to bracket the passions) may in practice convey

seductive pleasures.³² The passage therefore raises the possibility that communication unfolds below the threshold of mutual understanding and interactional coherence. As far as we know, Toby and the widow's interactions never achieves closure. But does this also mean they do not participate in the same sexuality?

Insofar as sexuality refers to a minimally coherent interactional process, the answer must be negative. In fact, in the universe of *Tristram Shandy*, people can only enact certain identities by deferring interactional closure—through practices that delay the coming-to-coherence of the framework of participant roles. Such frameworks organize signs as enacting presupposing-and-entailing work with regard for those roles and the people involved in interaction. An open-ended framework is integral to the representation of hobby-horses as they emerge in interactions between people. Thus the question can arise whether the widow, in giving Toby such a wide birth in their impassioned communication, has inadvertently admitted some of its incidental props and scenery as essential features of their discourse. When Toby, in conversation with Walter, links his affair with the widow to the demolition of Dunkirk, a condition of the treaty of Utrecht, he places it within the context of the military history of which he understands himself to be a part. His showing up to the widow's house to propose in full regimental uniform might suggest that he understands the widow's attentions to his wound as tokens of her capacity to appreciate this history. When representing her questions about Toby's groin to Dr. Slop, Tristram draws attention to what he calls her particular "accent": "there is an accent of humanity—how shall I describe it?—'tis an accent which covers the part with a garment, and gives the enquirer a right to be as particular with it, as your body-surgeon" (528). If from one point of view this accent supplies a pretext to the widow's detailed inquiry, Toby takes it up as the sign that places the widow above ordinary womanhood.

When Toby abruptly issues a marriage proposal, and the couple's conversation about matrimony threatens to run aground, she brings the exchange back to what he knows best: the battle of Namur and his wound. Thus Toby has ample room to take her gesture of concern as a shared understanding of the historical and ideological gravity of a wound to the body of a soldier for the crown. In fact, we encounter a conversation that echoes those of earlier volumes' digressions in its being structured like a battlefield:

When Mrs. Wadman went round by Namur to get at my uncle Toby's groin; and engaged him to attack the point of the advanced counterscarp, and *pêle mêle* with the Dutch to take the counterguard of St. Roch sword in hand—and then with tender notes playing upon his ear, led him all bleeding by the hand out of the trench, wiping her eye, as he was carried to his tent—Heaven! Earth! Sea!—all was lifted up—the springs of nature rose above their levels—an angel of mercy sat besides him on the sofa—his heart glow'd with fire—and had he been worth a thousand, he had lost every heart of them to Mrs. Wadman.

—And whereabouts, dear Sir, quoth Mrs. Wadman, a little categorically, did you receive this sad blow? (529)

The two lovers can sustain discourse only so long as the widow's "categorical" questions do not impinge on the broad conceptual theater that gives the exchange excitement for Toby—as broad indeed as earth, heaven, and sea. Here we see especially clearly the different extremes of indexical

³² On politeness, see Mee. *Conversable Worlds*, 7-12.

significance they construct from their exchanges and thus how this particular exchange runs contrary to an interpretation that equates meaning with maximally coherent action. Conversations between Toby and the widow are representations of sexuality precisely insofar as their discourse indexes a context both too broad and too narrow to determine their hobby-horses.

Sterne's exaggerated way of overlying the forms of one context with those of another underscores how indeterminacy of contextualization sustains relations. We can understand the productivity of incongruous presuppositions embedded in Toby's and the widow's speech in terms of what Michael Silverstein calls "defeasibility," or "the 'cancellability' of presuppositions." Defeasibility refers to the way one set of interactional norms gives way to another such set. It captures how the continuous accumulation of indexes over the course of an interaction can reach a tipping point that metapragmatically re-segments the interaction, altering what participants have been doing up to that point in exchanging signs. Commercials frequently construct defeasible frameworks for audiences. A narrative about a parent's missing a child's piano recital becomes a pitch for a new migraine medication. Sometimes (though such instances are rarer in the twilight of broadcast television), when a defeasible framework "tricks" us into believing we have returned to our regularly scheduled programming until we realize that we in fact are still stuck in a commercial break.

In Silverstein's view, to model defeasibility requires an analyst to consider, at any given point in an interaction, how a contribution to conversation can metapragmatically shape the interaction in multiple directions at once, so that the value of an utterance as conceptual work depends on a projection of different contextualizations' net effects. He presents defeasibility within an analogy of a game in which one participant responds to another by carrying the conversation forward as it currently coheres while laying the groundwork for its later transformation:

Using the must-have-been retrospective or anteriorizing logic of 'contextualization,' players in the game play out their contributions by making it all the more plausible, at a temporally LATER point in discursive interaction, that what seemed to be one course of interactional textualization at an EARLIER time in discursive interaction, is really a very different one after all (that is, must have been rather a different one, or will have been a different one if the game is to go on, or must be different if dire consequences do not loom...) ³³

Defeasibility consists of an open-ended event structure in which a later reckoning of accumulated indexicality assimilates earlier partitions of indexical signs as phases in an interactional text. Thus the game analogy underscores how, from the perspective of the more "recently" cohering interactional text, a participant appears to have had a strategy for deferring interactional closure until some future point; what has now past was actually happening all along (or what is now emergent will have been happening all along).

But how does one reconcile the actuality of the logical past (the retrospective or "anteriorizing" modeling of events in the game analogy) with the real sense of contingency in the present, signaled by Silverstein's "ifs"? Silverstein's answer is simply that one doesn't; modeling language use as social action requires collapsing discrete moments of framing. Earlier in the same writing, Silverstein elaborates on the temporality of contextualization:

³³ Silverstein, "Indeterminacy of Contextualization," 72.

In general, we may say that we can *model* ‘contextualization’—as opposed to being subject to it, or experiencing it as participants—only in the logical ‘past’ (or ‘perfect’) and ‘future anterior’ (English *did* and *will have done*): insofar as linguistic forms contribute to discursive interaction, it is their HAVING ‘contextualized’ some aspect of a textual figure, that a model tries to capture.³⁴

In the analytical method of linguistic anthropology, to model language as social action means reconstructing its coming-to-coherence around some generic structure of practice. Models always track progress toward a certain figuration of given contextual variables. Linguistic forms “contextualize figures” when a sufficiency of indexicality allows participants’ responses to understand one another within some determinate, shared framework of participant roles, e.g., debate, competition, gift exchange, etc. And who speakers are, sociologically, influences whether participants are able to inhabit specific roles within such frameworks while also being at stake in each stance-taking.

Now, such contextualizations of talk as a culturally coherent event share a structure much with novelistic narration that both represents and comments on characters’ dialogue. To take a nineteenth century example, George Eliot’s narrator in *Middlemarch* constructs such a model when, after Mrs. Cadwallader tells Sir Chettam that Dorothea will wed Casaubon, making Celia his best marriage prospect, the text embarks on an explanation of the sort of cultural event she will have effected by intervening in others’ affairs. The narrator supplies a host of “minute causes” indexed in Mrs. Cadwallader’s choice of topic, some of which appear as concepts in the narrator’s discourse (her “high born” lineage, which motivates her self-appointment to the office of “diplomatist of Tipton and Freshitt” and gives the scope of her concern a patronizing comprehensiveness that embraces “all the lives which have the honour to coexist with hers”).³⁵ The narrator performs a metapragmatic, cultural-conceptual work by reconstructing how such values emerge in the linguistic exchange’s identity ritual, so we see how Mrs. Cadwallader reproduces these values for herself and the victims of her good advice.

We have seen how Tristram halts time to gloss other characters’ uses of language. Tristram’s “translation” does what other novels do when they by turns show and model an interactional text. Unlike Eliot and her acknowledged precursor Fielding, however, Sterne does not give characters’ discourse the dignity of completed action. By placing Toby’s so-called “mistake” over the map after a prolonged deferral of narrative action that introduces many potentially salient components, the novel stresses the logical weakness between forms of language and the particular meanings Tristram’s anteriorizing logic puts forward. Instead of specifying appropriate contextualizations, *Tristram Shandy* models a phenomenon that emerges in the midst of overlapping frameworks of interaction. If eccentricity (with its sexual implications) appears as an effect of incoherent interactions where incompatible contextualizations compete for salience, defeasibility names the condition under which the self-difference that manifests as eccentricity might be nonetheless productively inhabited in discourse across turns of talk. But this approach to representation also strains defeasibility’s definitional reliance on completed contextualization since to inhabit multiple frameworks of action at once can resemble stalled or suspended activity.

³⁴ Silverstein, 72.

³⁵ Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 60

Silverstein stops short of considering the undoing of speech as a discursive dynamic sustained across interactions in which each contribution fails to move the interaction closer to coherence of presuppositions. In contrast, such a defeasible dynamic characterizes what takes place when Toby responds to the widow's caresses over the map by showing up to her house in his regimental uniform and with a marriage proposal in mind, and when she, in turn, ignores his proposal to inquire further of his wound. In effect, *Tristram Shandy* calls attention to the doubly virtual nature of some contextualizations—both their indexical projection from linguistic forms and the contingent modality that lends them the status of suppositions about what “might” have happened or what might yet happen. People who participate in sexuality can likewise sustain their interaction through the suspension of several contexts around a not-yet-coherent indexical structure. As we shall see, though, such suspensions can only be sustained for so long, and in Sterne's novel they tend to dissolve into nonsense or risk reduction to anatomical elements—what Yorick calls “a cock and bull story.”

Just when the book seems to close on the Toby-Wadman affair, the novel introduces a final translation in a chapter that consists of a single sentence: “My uncle Toby's Map is carried down into the kitchen” (531). Maps have functioned as the couple's favorite prop, serving as a shared token for different presuppositions about what they see in each other. Let me underscore three things about how the novel comments further on the relation between defeasible interactions and sexualities by transposing the conversation in the parlor into a scene of reading that unfolds between Trim and Bridget in the kitchen. First, we should now recognize that sex involves a metapragmatic component, so signs contribute not only to one person's action, but also to a presupposed conceptual framework that potentially shapes how all participants' contributions might qualify as action. Second, in the process of collaboratively constructing a framework of action, participants might index conceptual knowledge about an absent someone, but bringing the knowledge to bear in the midst of an unsettled interaction will carry entailments for participants. Here allusions to others' sex become indistinguishable from practicing it. Finally, some indexes so depend on the nonce, defeasible interaction in which they appear that one cannot model them in the logical past as what such-and-such a speaker effectively did. The asterisks that hold the place of obscured signs in this chapter will underscore how the significance of a move in an interactive game depends radically on the signs around it.

Now for the scene in question: the servants' conversation in the kitchen picks up almost exactly where Toby and the widow's leaves off—with a tour of a map that is also the setting of a bodily encounter. Although Trim and Bridget do not miss a beat where their masters' exchanges repeatedly stall, their interaction proves similarly elaborate in its range of presuppositions and entailments. After Trim suggestively shows Bridget on his own body where his master received his wound, the two proceed as follows:

We thought, Mr. Trim, it had been more in the middle—said Mrs. Bridget—

That would have undone us for ever—said the Corporal.

—And left my poor mistress undone too—said Bridget.

The Corporal made no reply to the repartee, but by giving Mrs. Bridget a kiss.

Come-come-said Bridget—holding the palm of her left hand parallel to the plane of the horizon, and sliding the fingers of the other over it, in a way which could not have been done, had there been the least wart or protuberance—‘Tis every syllable of it false, cried the Corporal, before she had half finished the sentence— (532)

When Tristram places Bridget's hand on his body, the labors of referring to prior events and enacting social relations coincide to contribute to an interactional text that possibly entails a sexual relation between them. But one struggles to say how the events of the siege, the scene upstairs, and the servants' intimacy overlap from moment to moment. When Trim gives Bridget a kiss in response to her remark about what would have been the sad case of Mrs. Wadman, does he suggest that their masters' relation is a "done deal," as it were, and move to open a new chapter on their own? Or has he been presupposing from the beginning that his and Bridget's words have little to do with any contentious point in their masters' affairs? When Bridget moves to make her mysterious gesture, does she then contest the presupposition of a discontinuity in the pairs' relations, or does she follow suit by continuing to inhabit a version of the masters' amours? The masters' relationship mediates the interaction between Trim and Bridget—either as a questionably fulfilled enabling condition or as a prototype for bawdy parody. Like Tristram's earlier translation of the widow's blushing responses, the passage equates the significance of Bridget's gesture, possibly a sign of mensuration, with sentential structures. But the description's fascination with the surface of Bridget's body also underscores that the propositional value of Bridget's gesture exists *for* Trim. For once Tristram's sentimentalism does not pull the reader out of the interactive structure of events, so the gesture continues to acquire significance through its potential reorganization in the iterative time of discourse. At this juncture, the novel achieves a sense of defeasibility by introducing a series of gaps that require a reader to project how a range of presupposables might be brought to bear on the interaction to produce different entailments.

Following Bridget, Trim apparently responds with a gesture of his own, but a line of asterisks forces interpretation to search both forward and backward to understand the gesture as a functional node of the interaction. Tristram writes, "It was somewhat unfortunate for Mrs. Bridget, that she had begun the attack with her manual exercise; for the Corporal instantly..." (532). After the rows of asterisks, a new chapter continues the exchange:

It was like the momentary contest in the eye-lids of an April morning, 'Whether Bridget should laugh or cry.'

She snatch'd up a rolling pin——'twas ten to one, she had laugh'd——

She laid it down——she cried; and had one single tear of 'em tasted of bitterness, full sorrowful would the Corporal's heart have been that he had used the argument. (533)

By describing Bridget's gesture as an "attack," Tristram's description continues to draw on the analogy with Toby and the widow's campaigns to frame the servants' duel. Putting aside the question of whether Bridget's volley against Toby is aimed at Trim or strikes him only incidentally, how does one imagine his response to constitute a reaction to her "manual exercise"? And how does her rolling pin figure in her interpretation (a metapragmatic one) of what Trim is up to? Tristram's resorting to the odds suggests that he momentarily loses authority over context, but he suggests we might link her affect (whatever it is) to her choice of weapon. Is the pin an instrument of self-defense? Against what sort of onslaught? Does it possess signifying value because of some other sign in play that it resembles? Tristram's referring to an "argument" might provide a further clue. It takes us momentarily back to Volume I, where Tristram elaborates a series of rhetorical maneuvers, including the *Argumentum Baculinum* (argument based on threat of force) and *Argumentum Tripodium* (argument of the third leg, one of Tristram's sophomoric puns). So even

if one were to account for a presuppositional maximum that encompassed the near entirety of the work as the utterance's context, the contextual salience of multiple rhetorics would still playfully dangle possibilities before us. The tension between contextualizing frames is essential to what happens in the way of a defeasible interaction. The interaction's strange eroticism depends on its potential non-coherence: Bridget's laughter and tears plays out sequentially what can't coincide in a single action.

For Sterne the excitement of sexuality depends too much on the specificity of shifting social relations and is too embedded in a contextual surround to be conceived other than as a collaborative structure of contextualization. The textual gaps in characters' discourse serve an important purpose in this regard; they provoke a reader's testing of how different presuppositions might shape the significance of an absence given its particular functional position within an emergent form of discursive interaction. The interactions between Toby and the widow illustrate how people can sustain an entire relation through an indeterminate framework for construing action and without a clear sense of sexual subjectivity entering into play. Sexuality also takes place *across* interactions, which gives it the shape of what Silverstein would call an emergent, cultural-conceptual phenomenon. The juggling act of presuppositions achieves its hilarious climax in the interaction between Trim and Bridget. If all action is also contextualized and contextualizing interpretation, their conversation shows how interested and therefore how creative interpretations of context can be. Each nod toward prior interactions also embroils them in an erotic skirmish.

How one uses the novel's insight into the discursive production of sexuality forms a major stake of the twentieth-century novels that pick up on Sterne's tools for representing sociality's processual structure. Sterne's novel cannot sustain incongruous effects for long, and they collapse back into the negative space of others' opinions. Toby's denial of any knowledge whatsoever of women signals that the strange intimacies of this passage in his life are lost amidst the demands of a wider field of social relations. To be sure, many features of the passages I have cited, including the nonce quality of Trim and Bridget's kitchen conversation, may only appear salient in the backward light of later semiotic activity within the form of the novel that sensitizes us to public frameworks creating sexual meanings from descriptions of practice. The twentieth-century novels pick up on this nonce quality as the tenuous intelligibility that would make stretches of discourse sexually meaningful. In analyzing *The Man without Qualities*, for instance, I will refer to how characters similarly communicate with contingency rather than against it. At some moments in Musil's work a character will wince in doubt when an unwanted coherence of interactional text causes him to instantiate a very different sort of social habit from the one he regularly acts as though he had. At other times, characters struggle to keep contingency alive long enough to enjoy a freedom from compulsive presuppositions immanent in their actions. In chapter 4, I revisit the concept of defeasibility to draw attention to the volatile contextual frame organizing interactions in Barnes's *Nightwood*. Sometimes characters like Nora Flood and Matthew O'Connor describe the circumstances of their lives that strike one as too embodied, too particular to one concatenation of experiences and cultural landmarks to be intelligible to anyone but themselves. At others, they address one another as though their experiences ramified across all of life and within a universal human history. Rather than signal the failure of communication between characters, the instability of contextualization around their talk signals its approach toward a counterpublic condition, one in which embodied experiences (even ones indexing highly nonce structures) can orient the reflexive circulation of discourse.

But these problems were not concerns that *Tristram Shandy*'s eighteenth century readers could share. Readers reacted to the possible salience of sex in his work, but no public existed to debate the particular meanings of characters' behavior. We might surmise that Sterne exploited this lack, so accusations of the novel's licentious content would always raise the question of the accuser's prurience. In bringing the chapter to a close, however, I will also show how Sterne's work helped create a public defined by its relation to sex as a communicative phenomenon that could assert claims on others' understanding. I draw out Sterne's strategy for constructing sexuality's social dimension and how *Tristram Shandy* created space in the form of the novel for later writers. Sterne makes sex emblematic of the entire language of social feelings by which one moves from embodied signs to moral truths. As I mentioned in the introduction to the chapter, Sterne's presenting sexuality as a conversation does not necessarily render a particular character's sexuality more knowable to a character or a reader. We may get close enough to detect an erotic potential in the signs Bridget and Trim exchange, but we can never say exactly what they know by what they do. Yet the defeasible contextualizations that vie for salience around their interaction are nonetheless refracted through Tristram's sentimentalism, which constrains the possible significance of affective states like Bridget's ambiguous tears. In that passage, the logic of sentiment grounds Trim's relative moral and erotic closeness to Bridget. Sterne's connecting sentimentalism to sexuality forms a precondition for the other novels by beginning to realize something like a sexual field, or a total, structured space immanent in language use. Such a structure, which Sterne's novel models in the interactions between eccentricities and Tristram's normalizing (though no less idiosyncratic) knowledge, forms a presupposition of the twentieth century texts.

SEXUALITY AND SOCIABILITY

I opened this chapter by briefly rehearsing the contentious place of *Tristram Shandy* in literary history. Debates about *Tristram Shandy*'s experimentation center on the question of how a work's internal contradictions position it within an economy of contemporary writing practices. Do the novel's nods to eighteenth-century discourses of sentimentalism also, in their refraction through Tristram's opinion and their juxtaposition with hobby-horses, signify an alternative that only becomes recognizable from the vantage of a later social medium? Debates about the extent to which Sterne's cultural field can explain his work's deviations from literary precedent are also, in their own way, controversies over how eccentricity signifies in time. *Tristram Shandy*'s indeed adopts an eccentric stance toward the sentimental conventions it both invokes and flouts.

I have shown how Tristram's opinions invoke sentimentalism to construct narrative out of indeterminately linked discursive events. When Stern creates a narrator who interprets the exchange of such embodied signs as blushes, tears, embraces, and sighs, he presupposes a reading public competent in how literary works lay claim to moral truths beyond language. But sentimentalism extends beyond literary practices that develop formal resources for representing embodied states as signs of the necessary human bonds thought to undergird harmonious sociability. Nearly a century before the spread of Auguste Comte's writings would bring the word *sociology* to English, sentimentalism referred to a powerful social theory that posited organized

human groups as extensions of affective social ties like friendship.³⁶ Moreover, sentimentalist accounts of society took sympathetic affects to mediate understanding, distinguishing only loosely between faculties of feeling and judgement.³⁷ In consuming sentimental writings, then, a reader affected by linguistically mediated representations of the body's eloquence was supposed to have understood the literary work and, by extension, to have shared a social bond with the author.

Although Sterne wrote for a public with competence in reading sentimental literature, and while certain features of *Tristram Shandy* activate this capacity for reading toward affectional harmony, the novel occupies a vexed relation to reading as a practice of intimate social belonging. Tristram's sentimental reading apparently clarifies eccentric habits only to introduce space for doubt as he searches for new logical support through further "translations." The tensions between the novel's indexical structure and Tristram's opinions convey doubts about the power of sentimentalism to mediate between discrete bodily signs and moral rules. The combination of enthusiasm and uncertainty echoes across Sterne's writings, becoming especially pronounced when the figure of Yorick (the pastor of Tristram's village) returns as the narrator of *A Sentimental Journey*. There Sterne's storyteller writes of sentimental reading:

There is not a secret so aiding to the progress of sociality, as to get master of this *short hand*, and be quick in rendering the several turns of looks and limbs, with all their inflections and delineations, into plain words. For my own part, by long habitude, I do it so mechanically, that when I walk the streets of London, I go translating all the way; and have more than once stood behind in the circle, where not three words have ben said, and have brought off twenty different dialogues with me, which I could have fairly wrote down and sworn to.³⁸

In composing Yorick, Sterne amplifies associations already implied in *Tristram Shandy*. First, in a way that resonates with Tristram's authorial function, Yorick bases a sentimental writer's role on the act of translating wordless signs into a verbal interaction. Second, somewhat contrary to sentimentalism's function as a readily available "shorthand," translation's "mechanization" by "long habitude" corresponds to its status as a secret. The translator's principles are as wordless and as embodied as the phenomena he records. By the same token, attentive translation acquires its subtle resemblance to a state of sexual arousal, already implied in the dialogue of "limbs" and their "inflections." (The criss-crossing of sensitivity to good manners with sexual communications returns in Yorick's and the Marquesina's fumbling when they meet in a hallway: "I made six different efforts to let you go out—And I made six different efforts, replied she, to let you enter.") Contrasting Sterne with Samuel Richardson, Mullan offers a concise account of *Sentimental Journey*'s recasting of sentiment as a special perversion: "The contradiction taken to its logical conclusion in *Clarissa* was that the body was both 'sensible' and sexual; Sterne escapes the contradiction by making his narrator confess an utter susceptibility to feeling—by creating a narrator who can interpret every vibration as the symptom of a finally innocent sensibility."³⁹ The eccentric compulsiveness of Yorick's susceptibilities registers in the various meanings he procures

³⁶ Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 2.

³⁷ Mullan, 7-8.

³⁸ Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey*, 47.

³⁹ Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 189.

from interaction. Although his translation works mechanically in an automated sense, this does not predetermine its outcome. Translation does not reduce meanings; it multiplies them. The paucity of verbal signs explodes in an abundance of “dialogues.”

The earlier *Tristram Shandy* already illustrates how the body’s moral communications overlap its supposedly private passions, knowable only to those who experience them, and thus amoral. But in the earlier work, the intelligibility of the body’s eloquence also contributes to the central paradox arising from the indeterminacy of contextualization: The more Tristram proliferates digressions to suggest stable links between embodied signs in interaction and conceptions retrieved as “context,” the narrower the difference between necessary meanings and accidental ones. This paradox fundamentally alters the novel’s address. The experimental tensions between digression and sentimental modes of metapragmatic “explanation” invite a reader to occupy a relation to the text that is coded as social without allowing one to comfortably occupy a single affective response. *Tristram Shandy*’s transformations of sentimentalism correspond to the problematic public existence of the passions. Its particular solution posits a virtual relationship to social organization, one inhabitable in the public circulation of interpretations of confounding moments of interaction.⁴⁰ If the novel represents sentimentality as a phenomenon particular to some persons and relations, it also thereby “publicizes” sexuality by introducing it as the interpretive framework that might explain the causes and effects of a differential distribution of feeling. In this sense, to particularize social habits like sexuality is not necessarily to treat it as private since particularities may be conceptually tractable under a more general discursive framework without being constrained by some other social bond.⁴¹ To close the chapter, I further unravel how *Tristram Shandy* transforms sentimentalism in ways that anticipate later works.

Like Yorick’s “mechanical” deciphering of body language, Tristram gets carried away by his interpretations of others’ embodied signals, sometimes going so far as to insert himself into the interaction he analyzes. Such compelling moments of affection seize other characters as well. In their compulsiveness, expansion on bodily posture, and productiveness for social relations, depiction of sentiment overlap with the novel’s representation of behavior inflected by characters’ hobby horses. The outcome of a disagreement between the brothers Walter and Toby illustrates the point. The intolerance of one man for the other’s hobby-horse issues in an outpouring of sentiment that tacitly acknowledges a different pleasure through its equal motive force and productively distorting vision. The swift arrival of Dr. Slop launches Toby on a non-sequitur about the remarkable speed of the sailing chariot, in provoking Walter’s wrath against Toby’s “saps, mines, blinds, gabions, palisades, ravelins, half-moons, and such trumpery” (90). Note how, in the exchange that seals the brothers’ reconciliation, Toby’s verbosity slides seamlessly into their voluble sensibility to one another’s hurt feelings:

⁴⁰ According to Jon Mee, eroticized communication in Sterne’s writing resonates within eighteenth-century English culture’s “conversational turn” away from conceiving sociality as an affective bond and toward practices of talk mediated by the circulation of texts. Mee, *Conversable Worlds*, 79.

⁴¹ In Chapter 4, I develop the historical specificity of this sense of publicness, which runs through the writings of Immanuel Kant, Hannah Arendt, and Jürgen Habermas. For the time being, note that Kant tended to define publicness and privacy not through degrees of social importance or scope, but through a contrast between the free uses of reason and the constrained uses of reason exercised in the context of a civil post or office. See Kant, “Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?” 11.

I need not tell the reader, if he keeps a HOBBY-HORSE,—THAT A MAN’S HOBBY-HORSE is as tender a part as he has about him; and that these unprovoked strokes, at my uncle *Toby*’s could not be unfelt by him.—No;—as I said above, my uncle *Toby* did feel them, and very sensibly too.

Pray, Sir, what said he?—How did he behave?—Oh, Sir!—it was great: For as soon as my father had done insulting his HOBBY-HORSE he turned his head, without the least emotion, from Dr. *Slop*, to whom he was addressing his discourse, and look’d up into my father’s face, with a countenance spread over with so much good nature;—so placid;—so fraternal;—so inexpressibly tender towards him;—it penetrated my father to the heart: He rose up hastily from his chair, and seizing hold of both my uncle *Toby*’s hands as he spoke:—Brother *Toby*, said he,—I beg thy pardon;—forgive, I pray thee, this rash humour which my mother gave me.—My dear, dear brother, answer’d my uncle *Toby*, rising up by my father’s help, say no more about it—you are heartily welcome, had it been ten times as much, brother. But ‘tis ungenerous, replied my father, to hurt any man;—a brother worse;—but to hurt a brother of such gentle manners,—so unprovoking,—and so unresenting;—‘tis base:—By heaven, ‘tis cowardly.—You are heartily welcome, brother, quoth my uncle *Toby*,—had it been fifty times as much. (92)

Despite being “inexpressible,” the tenderness that passes between the brothers gives vent to voluble utterances, most neatly captured in the rhetorical amplification of Toby’s offering himself for further abuse. Like Toby’s hobby-horse, fraternal feeling emerges as a presuppositional excess to discursive interaction. Toby presupposes his passion for military technologies when he finds occasions to speak of the sailing chariot in otherwise unlikely circumstance. When Toby turns “without the least emotion” from *Slop*, toward his brother, sentiment as a form of inhabited knowledge similarly transforms the significance of Toby’s placid countenance into one full of feeling. In its abrupt eruption and strain on interactively established discursive structure, then, sentimentalism, a conceptual movement toward others through shared affect, is as eccentric as hobby-horses. The novel localizes sentiments by illustrating their uneven distribution across social relations and thus the extraordinariness of their sudden eruption. So the close juxtaposition of a scene of shared sentiment with the bridling of Toby’s hobby-horse positions sentimentality as just one particular way of relating to others. At the same time, a less equalizing operation takes place.

While the sympathy between brothers and Toby’s hobby-horse resemble one another in form, one apparently supersedes the other. Although the brothers’ exchange of impassioned responses indexes a common understanding of their mutual esteem as brothers, one nonetheless wonders whether this also entails a tacit and reciprocal understanding of distinct inclinations. The characters treat each other’s eccentric passions with latitude because different ways of feeling, though implicated in the body’s capacity for signification, never risk becoming intelligible to each other. Tristram states early on, “so long as a man rides his HOBBY-HORSE peaceably and quietly along the King’s highway, and neither compels you or me to get up behind him,—pray, Sir, what have either you or I to do with it?” (12). The novel’s foregrounding characters’ talent for innocence opens onto the possible analysis of a sexual field—an analysis of how some presuppositions displace others to compulsively shape interactions.

Even critics as different as Moglen and Mullan agree that in *Tristram Shandy*, men claim sentimentalism as their communal prerogative. Toby’s hobby horse passes intact so long as it does not disturb the priority of fraternity. One must understand Tristram’s translations to partake of this special mode of relation as well. Insofar as it frames Tristram’s opinions as a competence

comparable to a hobby-horse, the novel indeed warrants Moglen's suggestion that the women characters are constituted as distorted, already obscured by the sentimentalist's logic. Moglen explicates the net effect of the novel's simultaneous conceptual leveling of sentiments and its illustration of subordinations among particular feelings: "Sterne continually emphasizes the significance of an erotic affectivity that, underlying and resisting language, is central to the construction of community. And although the community that he wishes to construct is male, the aspirations and the impulse are not gendered, and refuse the hierarchicalizations of social difference."⁴² In Moglen's view, sentimentality's function of suppressing differences between men serves an ideology that preserves the sanctity of male bodies and minds even in the face of their radical reconfiguration in discursive interactions with women. In consequence, the erotic possibilities that shape one's language use stake no final claims on an interlocutor's meaning.

I would only qualify Moglen's claim by adding that Tristram's sentimentalism stands apart insofar as it both supports a particularly effusive, already undermined opinion and inadvertently enables a more encompassing vision of opinion's work. Tristram's doubtful translations attempt to inscribe his vision of a broader social understanding in the form of a denotative text. Whenever Tristram proposes to validate one translation by elaborating further on, we should not expect this translation to gel. Tristram extends a line of credit with readers and then starts racking up bills he can't repay. (The analogy isn't arbitrary; Tristram at several points alludes to his mounting debt.) Yet the ineptness of Tristram's metapragmatic interpretations—both the vagaries of his translations and the gaps he introduces into his representations of characters' discourse—might also preserve ambiguities in the conceptualizations they supposedly reproduce in a way that associates the contingency of social bonds with their regular operation. The problem remains how a reader is to adopt a position on Tristram's doubleness—his search for economy and this economy's telling decomposition.

The reorganization of the structure of sentimentalism as a form of metapragmatic explanation also affects sentimentalism as a bond between reader and author. By foregrounding the figure of a writer whose interpretations are manifestly incomplete, *Tristram Shandy* uncouples sentimentalism from a pedagogical imperative. Sentimental fictions concerned themselves with possible differences between represented examples of fine feeling and the capacities of imagined publics, and they often included passages that guide readers in appreciating scenes of sentiment. In his letters, Richardson struck up dialogues with readers on the proper uses of sentiment in his works.⁴³ Regardless of whether Tristram's translations are comically overwrought or their wisdom merely clandestine, the ambiguity disqualifies his style of sentimentalism for imitation. In contrast, Tristram's authorial voice conjures the reader as comparatively competent, capable of drawing inferences where Tristram does not and, moreover, willing to risk implicating themselves in characters' passions to do so.

In a letter to a friend, Sterne writes in 1768, "a true feeler always brings half the entertainment along with him. His own ideas are only call'd forth by what he reads, and the vibrations within, so entirely correspond with those excited, 'tis like reading *himself* and not the *book*."⁴⁴ Sterne remains a sentimental author because his meanings are supposed to depend on a

⁴² Moglen, *Trauma of Gender*, 107.

⁴³ On Richardson's correspondence with and hospitality for female admirers and readers, see Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 4, 159.

⁴⁴ Sterne, *Letters*, 411.

compatibility between the representations a reader brings to the work and the ambiguous “vibrations” of the text.⁴⁵ Reading becomes a reflexive process in multiple senses, involving compulsion and self-examination in equal measures. The inferential capacity that allows a reader to presume to share a moral framework with characters can also facilitate the appreciation of bodily excitations. A similar invitation to readers to go Dutch appears in *Tristram Shandy* eight years earlier. “The truest respect which you can pay to the reader’s understanding,” writes Tristram, “is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself” (87). This formulation serves as a prelude to Tristram’s instructions to imagine the tempestuous bustle that ensues after Dr. Slop appears at Shandy Hall covered in mud: “let him imagine the doctor wash’d,—rubb’d down,—condoled with,—felicitated,—got into a pair of *Obadiah’s* pumps, stepping forwards towards the door, upon the very point of entering upon action” (88). In such a passage, the staccato dashes suggest the whirlwind force of events’ rapid succession as much as they signify the moral urgency of rescuing the besmirched doctor from embarrassment. Insofar as these dashes are not really signs of particular forces, but inviting absences, reading becomes a reflexive bodily excitement, too.

The knowledge that the novel’s form of address presupposes a reader to have in hand involves an indexical competence in moving from the temporal relations between verbal signs (here, the intervals implied by the dashes) toward the embodied and conceptual relations between persons in an imagined social interaction. Tristram’s doubtful competence cannot instruct readers how they are so to move. We might say, then, that *Tristram Shandy* establishes a sociality with a reader who is pruriently excited but willing to suspend judgment long enough to enjoy an expanded sense of erotic possibility, to discover their competency in navigating nonce meanings thought to be the whims of others. Robert Alter writes of how Sterne’s sexual double-entendres work on the imagination in an analogous way. Once a reader becomes aware of the possible sexual dimension of any one such term as “account,” “backwards or forwards,” “case,” “cabbage,” and “digression,” other signs get absorbed into the sexual function to the point of altogether altering an original conception of its boundaries. For Alter, “The reader’s judgment has indeed been surprised by his imagination.”⁴⁶ Similarly, once a reader becomes aware of a represented conversation’s vaguely erotic shape, this eroticism becomes attached to further and further contextual variables. The novel’s approach to representing Toby’s affair with the widow serves as a case in point here. Thus the novel’s textual gaps do not always have the precise suggestive force they seem to possess. In fact, the indeterminacy of contextualization draws Mullan’s perspective on the sexual undertones of the novel’s many elisions into the ambiguity of the knowledge a reader is supposed to have: “the marked omission which is the novel’s pretense of tact actually compels the reader to supply the meanings it never quite specifies.”⁴⁷ If this means that a particular elision (say, the lines of asterisks that follow a report of Trim’s response to Bridget’s ambiguous gesture) must have a determinate pragmatic function, it seems doubtful. This would ascribe language a power it simply lacks on its own. Such gaps always confront a reader with the experimental question of how

⁴⁵ References to “vibrations” in Sterne’s writing allude to David Hartley’s materialist theory of affectivity, so we must imagine that the “ideas” Sterne attributes to his readers could include passionate excitement as well as the more conventional inferences of appropriate moral norms. On this connection, see Chandler, “The languages of sentiment,” 23.

⁴⁶ Alter, “Game of Love,” 320.

⁴⁷ Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 187.

compulsive any one contextualization is. *Tristram* may be complicit with this compulsion, and a credulous reader may be inclined to follow suit, but no reader can proceed completely undisturbed.

Drawing on the conventions of sentimentalism, then, *Tristram Shandy* forges a sociality with its reader that involves both passions and moral faculties yet leaves a reader little room to inhabit a straightforward affective relation to the text. At best, the sociality *Tristram Shandy* offers condenses around the coincidence of several affects, as in Trim and Bridget's kitchen encounter. With the extraordinary success of his novel, Sterne did not understand himself to have disseminated a narrative representation merely. Sterne's letters suggests that he wished to author a more complex mode of sentimental interpretation associated with the intersection of presumably incongruous affective responses. In a 1761 letter to his friend, the actor David Garrick, Sterne writes, "I laugh 'till I cry, and in the same tender moments cry 'till I laugh. I Shandy it more than ever, and verily do believe, that by a mere Shandeism sublimated by a laughter-loving people, I fence as much against infirmities, as I do by the benefit of air and climate."⁴⁸ The questionable sincerity of Sterne's faith in all readers' ability to suspend the text's sexual suggestiveness long enough to renegotiate conceptual frameworks matters less than his imagining this renegotiation in the form of an antinomy of affect. Sterne believed himself to have enticed readers into inhabiting ambiguous passions.

The contradictory positions the novels contemporary critics adopted epitomize the paradoxical publicness of Sterne's writing. Such critics lacked the conceptual resources to reconcile sentimentalism with suggestions of bodily interaction. *Tristram Shandy* enjoyed an energetic, international literary existence from its first publication, inspiring both honest imitations and fraudulent sequels.⁴⁹ However, the British empire of literary merit (the world of critics frequently addressed and dismissed by *Tristram*) received Sterne's novel with a mixture of distorting praise and ironic attacks. Readers tended to praise *Tristram Shandy* only with heavy qualification, locating its chief merit in depictions of moral receptiveness wherein intimations of common humanity correct a crude feeling. The same critics often mourn how circumscribed and diluted by innuendo such moments tend to be. Mullan alerts us to the secondary market for republished selections of *Tristram Shandy*, thanks to which such moments as the quiet communion between the likeminded Toby and Trim "came to be taken as the epitome of, not the exception to, Sterne's style."⁵⁰ The novel's experimental form, by which short chapters link together to create contextualizing figures (oftentimes playfully rearranged), apparently made the work all too easy to appropriate.

Another set of responses couched themselves within the voice of a negative, morally shrill criticism brought to so high a pitch as to suggest its opposite. The anonymous Pamphlet *The Clockmakers Outcry Against the Author of the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* refers to Sterne as "a forerunner of *Antichrist*."⁵¹ On the one hand, critics' voicing responses in kind with the volatile medium of parody implicitly recognizes what Bakhtin would call heteroglossia's "parodic stylization," i.e., that novels invest authority in the relation between social positionings indexed in language, not in any one position. On the other hand, such commentators' ambiguous mode of responses did not foster public discussion of the implications of coupling sexual

⁴⁸ Sterne, *Letters*, 139.

⁴⁹ For an account of *Tristram Shandy*'s fate in Germany, see Large, "'Sterne-Bilder': Sterne in the German-Speaking World," 68-84.

⁵⁰ Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 155.

⁵¹ *The Clockmakers Outcry*, 10.

suggestiveness with sentimentalism's high moral ambitions. Instead, they further entailed the economic exploitability of "obscenity" and "suggestiveness," which the commercial success of *Tristram Shandy* had made painfully evident to moralizing critics.⁵²

While the contradictory responses *Tristram Shandy* received reflect different facets of its paradoxical demands on readers, no one critic reckoned with the novel's subordination of sentimentalism to a public discourse of sexuality. Only later writers took up Sterne's project of modeling the relations between eccentricities through representations of discourse as an ambition worthy of being added to. If Sterne figures semiotic exchanges among impassioned bodies as the foundation for the novelistic representation of sexualities, the twentieth century novels I examine in the chapters to follow pick up on sexuality as such an emergent phenomenon—one produced through attempts to contend with incongruities in interactional structure. Certainly the fact that *Tristram Shandy*'s characters remain immune to the incongruous presuppositions of their conversation and these incongruities' disorienting effects simply marks the limits of all parody. One does well to understand these novels' relations to *Tristram Shandy* as attempts to take seriously Tristram's tendency to produce spontaneous order out of the possibilities surrounding speech but without relying on the normative schematizations of sentimental translations.

The common denominator in the later works' uptakes of Sterne consists in using the indexical structure of novel form to examine the long-term consequences of phenomena constrained in time like the possibilities produced by the overlap between Toby's fanaticism for military history and the widow's prurient curiosity, but to do so without wresting possibilities from their inchoate state. I will focus intensively on this problem in the following two chapters on Stein and Musil, respectively. Like Sterne's novel, Stein's *Americans* invents a writer for whom conceptual economy is both a passion and the cause of further problems. The narrator's ostensive project is to give "a history of every man and every woman who ever were or are or will be living and of the kind of nature in them and the way it comes out from them," but as I have already suggested, it also aims to understand how economies adapt to phenomena only indirectly deducible from them (MA 176). *Americans* ultimately develops ways to describe partial, incomplete, or meaninglessly inert phenomena within a communicative economy, one presupposed by and embodied in instances of language use. Realizing possibility by following its consequences acquires a political dimension, for it shows how certain practices of self-making struggle for existence in interaction with others. Like Sterne's Walter in response to Toby, Stein's characters index inhabitable social forms of behavior in the act of blocking others. But unlike Sterne's Tristram, Stein's narrator is eager to bring such moments back into view at a later point to contextualize some other elided phenomenon, thus generating a class of forms that have the property of being singular, or non-actualized.

Many passages Musil composes around imagined scenes of discursive interaction carry forward what Sterne accomplishes when Tristram wants to see a blank or hesitation in a character's speech as possessing a positive indexical value. Such a practice of finding a social value in a character's non-action resembles the moments when Musil's narrator looks past represented

⁵² As Mullan writes, "*Tristram Shandy* provoked more parodies and denunciations than any other novel of the eighteenth century, yet its antagonists were also parasitic upon the fashionable literary phenomenon of its day. Texts purporting to demonstrate its degeneracy attempted to do so by amplifying or explicating the 'obscenity' of innuendo—by being more bawdy than the original." Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 150. Mullan clarifies that in some cases opponents of Sterne's writing exploited its appeal for specific ends, such as by identifying fanatical censure with a minority perspective, such as Methodism.

speech to what might have been said. It is as though this authorial figure, to see the residual effects of subjection as a discursive event, had to momentarily turn away from the description of actualized character. But this is not always the case, for Musil's characters do sometimes manage to enact possibilities by using language in ways that indexically presuppose a speaker's identity with incongruous positions in a social structure—such as when Agathe responds to Ulrich in a way that positions her as his twin and as his lover, or as a bourgeois woman somehow unfit for marriage. As one might expect, the entailed effects of such utterances in discursive interaction tend to pass quickly but resound urgently since once they are recognized as having taken place, ignoring them becomes a work of its own.

CHAPTER TWO

Singularity and the Feeling of Doing Something in *The Making of Americans*

Some experimental fictions, far from embracing free-ranging play with form, meticulously track down the places uncertainties of meaning accomplish social work. The previous chapter conceptualized an experimental practice of novel writing based on the non-referential, indexical meanings running between contextualizing knowledge and peculiarities of fictional characters' speech, e.g., repetition, cadence, lexical variety, and uttered sound's co-occurrence with other semiotic modalities. Experimental novels, I proposed, structure themselves around a paradox regarding how such linguistic signs' pragmatic force both presupposes and entails social identities like sexuality. On the one hand, the more uncertain the pragmatic force of an utterance's entailments in an interaction, the more indeterminacy points to the particular, if eccentric, identity of a character like Uncle Toby. On the other hand, the consistently uncertain margin of indexicality's contextual inclusiveness (what Sterne's Tristram calls "the insensible, more or less") diverts attention from the maximal coherence of the presupposed, eccentric "something," toward an ongoing, collaborative process of contextualization. Sterne's writing conceives identity as an erotic, conceptual knowledge ("hobby-horses") immanent in language use as a possible presupposition yet difficult to entail completely or reliably. This conception sets the stage for later novelists' handling of sexualities defined by a relation to social indexicality and for sexual counterpublics that include novel readers to take up the indeterminacy of contextualization to articulate their relation to other publics.

This chapter delineates how a later experimental text, Gertrude Stein's long novel *The Making of Americans: Being the History of a Family's Progress*, takes up social worlds' interactive structures to develop critical frameworks for knowing and communicating the possible content of implicit indexical meanings. Stein's writing develops the way novels conceive the range of social norms operating in language use by adding a temporal dimension in which new norms emerge. The chapter will significantly complicate the last chapter's account of indexicality to address different tiers of contextualization, ultimately positing an interrelation between linguistic anthropology's theory of ritual interaction's diagrammatic mapping of cultural concepts and Stein's aesthetics of repetition.

Like Tristram's interest in "hobby-horses," Stein's authorial narrator explicates a conceptual economy that structures the novel's represented world. Although *The Making of Americans* begins as the story of two American families, the Dehnings and the Herslands, abstractions of "kind" soon eclipse individual characters' lives. The novel professes not only to represent the sorts of people one would find in a particular historical period, but also to encompass all possibilities of human nature. "Soon there will be a history of every kind of men and women and of all the mixtures in them," writes the narrator; "sometime there will be a history of every man and every woman who ever were or are or will be living and of the kind of nature in them and the way it comes out from them" (176). The narrator's pronouncement ramifies in the novel's

dense descriptions of kinds, which distinguish people's ways of eating, sleeping, loving, etc.¹ The narrator's conceptualizing kinds from "natures" that "come out" through action serves as this chapter's point of departure. For the imagined author of *Americans*, repetition carries an immense epistemic weight: "There are then many things every one has in them that come out of them in the repeating everything living have always in them, repeating with a little changing just enough to make of each one an individual being" (191). A few lines later, the narrator continues: "some keep on copying their repeating in their talking in the moving of their hands and shoulders and bodies in living." One talks, one makes movements with one's body, and the patterned repetition of talking and moving establish the appropriate relationship to a kind. Observe, then, that while Stein's narrator conceives kinds as enduring essences "mixed" in particular persons, kinds are immanent in people's distinct forms of behavior.²

The novel describes the conceptual work of linking together discrete instances of behavior to construct kinds as "diagramming." A little more than half way through the novel, the narrator pauses to reflect, "More and more in living I come to know enough of each kind of them to make groups of them. Sometime I will be able to make a diagram. I have already made several diagrams. I will sometime make a complete diagram and that will be a very long book that will tell all about each kind there is of men and women" (580). An early moment of characterization exemplifies what the narrator means by the relation between "kinds" (aggregates of properties) and "groups" (sets of individuals who share properties): "Some men have it in them in their loving to be attacking, some have it in them to let things sink into them, some let themselves wallow in their feeling and get strength in them from the wallowing they have in loving, some in love are melting—strength passes out of them..." (158). After continuing this list for several lines more, the narrator posits an identity between groups and a character by repeating certain terms in the list: "David Hersland in his loving was of his kind of man having loving beginning in him having loving as getting strength from wallowing." David is a kind of man insofar as he resembles certain others, and different relational structures of action ("attacking," "sinking," "wallowing" in loving) mediate this resemblance. Experienced readers of fiction will likely find this way of specifying character both familiar and strange. Such readers understand that characters' names refer not to historical individuals, but to categories of people in a social world. Yet the terms predicated of David significantly complicate one's ability to determine his referential scope. After all, what would qualify love as "wallowing" as opposed to "attacking"? One could posit equivalents for David's wallowing by rendering it through a contemporary therapeutic discourse: David Hersland, when in love, satisfies his libido by narcissistically indulging in extravagant desires. Or through the idiom of the relationship advice column: David is the kind of guy whose passion is easily fed

¹ Stein's terminology of kinds is indebted to her reading of Otto Weininger's *Sex and Character*. Weininger's misogyny and antisemitism can make Stein's affinity for his writing difficult to understand, but Leon Katz points out that Stein draws on Weininger's interest in character as a "drama of emergence," a phenomenon that manifests in the interplay between persons' behavior and common dimensions of personality. Katz, "Weininger and *The Making of Americans*," 18.

² Jennifer Ashton argues, "when Stein abandons her early experience-derived model of representation, her aim is not to improve her representation of experience, but rather to construct the logical conditions of its possibility." Ashton, *From Modernism to Postmodernism*, 32. Unlike Ashton, and contrary to the narrator's initial pronouncements, I argue that the construction of such a framework in *Americans* is still coextensive with the representation of an imagined social universe and thus anticipates linguistic anthropology's interest in the relations between distinct orders of indexicality.

in the exciting, early stages of a relationship. The passage, of course, offers no resources to favor any rendering over another.

For the novel's epistemology of repetition, however, it does not matter that the description's terms for action's qualities are strange. At the expense of qualitative precision, the passage underscores the context in which David's behavior refers by unequivocally positing an identity for him and other men who love similarly. Description here depends on ostensive definitions (pointing to other people as members of a category), not illustrations of exemplary properties.³ Only in light of their behavior does the texture of his actions appear salient at all. Such definitions-by-pointing signal the relevance of linguistic anthropology to Stein's experimental composition. Like a linguistic anthropologist, Stein's narrator assumes that knowledge of kinds depends on reconstructing frameworks of qualitative difference presupposed when people interact with others. That is, *Americans* focuses on how, when people participate in social discourse, another conversation takes place at the level of a culture's conceptual economy. For the narrator, coordinating these semiotic processes requires reconciling the durational, iterative form of interaction with immediate intuitions of quality. The peculiar result is a narrative discourse that foregrounds the indexical structures of discourse at the level of sentential structure and in the relation between sentences within a paragraph.

To illustrate how Stein models the way people's semiotic behavior points to concepts of kinds by adopting stances of likeness and contrast toward others, I refer to linguistic anthropology's analysis of ritual poetics. Over repeated interactions of similar structure, peoples' exchange of indexical tokens generates iconic resemblances between potentially different sets of participants through their relative stances, or footings, within the common communicative framework. In other words, if indexes signify via implicit relations of causation, consubstantiality, or contiguity, ritual poetics helps one understand how qualitative resemblances emerge from similar habits of indexing. Often leaving readers to speculate on what characters say to one another, Stein's narrator draws attention to a middle stratum of linguistic meaning that mediates between the social pragmatic force of utterances in the same interaction (such as a person's being aggressive, unobtrusive, or indifferent) and macrosocial concepts of persons. Hence the novel alternately describes repetitive activity among several characters, qualitatively distinct forms of generic behavior, and divisions of kind. Moving between these indexical orders, *The Making of Americans* constructs the range of inhabitable categories of personhood a society produces through people's distinctive use of signs.

If *Americans* constructs a theory of social identity in general, its retracing the collaborative making of social norms takes shape around a particular phenomenon called "singularity" and the narrator's ambivalent relation toward conceptual economy. The novel's early sections concern the marriage of Julia Dehning and Alfred Hersland. This plot introduces the activity of distinguishing among kinds as not only a philosophical project, but also a socially necessary skill. Characters weigh others' social habits as emblems of embodied prestige, e.g., Alfred's faculties for aesthetic

³ Hilary Putnam describes the implicit claims of such ostensive definitions, "Suppose I point to a glass of water and say 'this liquid is called water' (or 'this is called water,' if the marker 'liquid' is clear from the context.) My 'ostensive definition' of water has the following empirical presupposition: that the body of liquid I am pointing to bears a certain sameness relation (say, x is the same liquid as y , or x is the same_L as y) to most of the stuff I and other speakers in my linguistic community have in other occasions called 'water.'" Stein's narrator's terms are "rigid" in this sense of marking a sameness relation among styles of doing on different occasions, despite a lack of criteria. Putnam links such ostensive definitions to the concept of indexicality. Hilary Putnam, "The Meaning of 'Meaning,'" 141.

appreciation, possibly the outcome of an eccentric home-schooling in California. “Twenty years ago,” writes the narrator, “it was still the dark ages in America and lectures on art did not grow on every tongue that had tasted the salt air of the mid-Atlantic. It was a feat then to know about hill towns in Italy” (22). Julia wants not only a life full of beautiful things, but also the rare distinction that comes with a sensibility capable of appreciating them. On this point, the narrator states matter-of-factly that a class framework informs her feelings about Alfred’s aesthetic capacities: “To a bourgeois mind that has within it a little of the fervor for diversity, there can be nothing more attractive than a strain of singularity that yet keeps well within the limits of conventional respectability a singularity that is, so to speak, well dressed and well set up” (21). Here Stein’s narrator demonstrates a facility for certain social and linguistic interpretations that I proposed, in the last chapter, we call “metapragmatic.” Metapragmatics refers to rules of use that lend individual signs more or less determinate pragmatic force in interaction. Linguistic anthropology stresses the collaborative nature of such rules; participants implicitly negotiate them to (ideally) achieve a progressively more cohesive metapragmatic frame for their language use. The passage provides a metapragmatic representation insofar as the narrator explains what the attribution of a certain quality, “singularity,” means in certain contexts (the United States at the end of the nineteenth century) and for certain people (young women who have grown up outside cities, away from other members of their social class). Interposed into scenes of the couple’s courtship, the narrative aside might further suggest that when Julia indexes her bourgeois curiosity in responding to Alfred, she performs a social work on the qualities that constitute his identity, domesticating his singularity.

Rather than positively refer to any one property, however, the term singularity comes to mark a crisis regarding how our narrator will handle interactions in which the entailed framework governing social pragmatics—what effectively happens as a social, discursive event—does not exhaust the possibilities of character. “Singularity” holds together Alfred’s perceived qualities as a suitor with the impression of something everywhere implied but not directly deducible from others’ observations. The slippage from socially entailed qualities to those that become salient in being obscured manifests in a startlingly literal way where Alfred’s side of the exchange with Julia is conspicuously elided, recalling passages of *Tristram Shandy* where a flawed transcript of conversation raises doubts about the appropriate contextual frame governing how qualities of speech count as qualities of character. First narration supplies Julia’s ruminations on the match: “Alfred Hersland brought with him the world of art and things, a world to her but vaguely known” (22). Then, without the barest disclosure that Alfred has made Julia a marriage proposal, narration continues: “Not many months from this first meeting, Julia gave her answer. ‘Yes I do care for you,’ she said. ‘and you and I will live our lives together, always learning things and doing things, good things they will be for us whatever other people may think or say.’” The relative paucity of knowledge about Alfred outside the elaborateness of Julia’s interpretations provokes the suspicion that his qualities presuppose an excess to what the other characters effectively make of them.

In the following passage, the narrator develops the complication of how Alfred’s qualities signify by suggesting that understanding other characters’ failures to fully realize Alfred’s qualities would require a shift in social context, a different public of onlookers. The narrator signals this context through a peculiar mode of address:

Now singularity that is neither crazy, sportish, faddish, or a fashion, or low class with distinction, such a singularity, I say, we have not made enough of yet so that any other one can really know it, it is as yet an unknown product with us. It takes time to make queer

people, and to have others who can know it, time and a certainty of place and means. Custom, passion, and a feel for mother earth are needed to breed vital singularity in any man, and alas, how poor we are in all these three.

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

One could say much about this passage, and I will return to it in the sections to follow. For now, observe that singularity, before it describes a particular class of people, points to an indeterminacy underlying Alfred's speech and action by commenting on what they could mean, not what they actually mean. There is a singular kind of people, "singulars," without instances to point to since the type's members only show up in their receding from the novel's representable world. If unfavorable circumstances obscure singularity's distinctive potential, it nonetheless asserts a claim on a social world as a positive want of requisite materials: the embodied knowledge needed to entail it in practice and the resources, including time, to assemble this knowledge from available resources for conceiving identity. Alfred stands in a paradoxical relation to "singularity" because he both instantiates it and marks the limit of its actuality. To put this into the terms of an indexical structure, the characters' interactions presuppose singularity, bringing it into play as the focus of the pragmatic performance of their identities, without entailing it as a factor irreducible to something else, such as Alfred's fitness for membership in the Dehnings' social group.

The asymmetry between social knowledge's pragmatic aspects as presupposition and entailment suggests that singularity relates to the novel's formal repetition through the way slowing down narrative time allows one to consider how possibilities emerge into a social world in the midst of metapragmatic norms' reproduction. In contrast to Julia's incorporation of Alfred's singularity into her middle class context, the narrator elsewhere links singularity to values at odds with smooth repetition: freedom, eccentricity, queerness (47). By modeling the ritual production of knowledge in the structure of predication, the novel facilitates observations of formations and deformations of patterns across vast stretches of textual space that correspond indexically to distinct regions of social space. From repetition, the narrator comes to construct a framework for understanding singularity as a potential reorganization of the rules of use governing the linguistic enactment of identity—a potential given negatively in a person's appearing to do nothing and, in consequence, in one's appearing not to be anything in particular. In the chapter's second section, I will link the use of obscurity and indirection in the novel's early passage to the ideology of the "open secret," which gives such negative implications a positive sexual content. The narrator's particular interest in singularity and repetition displace this ideology to better foreground how the implicitness of indexical meanings contribute to the formation of new knowledge and new kinds of language users.

Note, in this latter respect, a key difference between Stein's narrator and Sterne's Tristram. On the one hand, both authorial figures want to say more than is warranted about how characters' social identities bear on their language use in particular interactions. On the other hand, Stein's narrator is not unreliable in the way Tristram is. The former figure offers fewer and less complete

metapragmatic discourses as the novel progresses, whereas Tristram's sentimental "translations" of characters' embodied semiosis become increasingly verbose and strained in their overreaching for precision. Yet the stakes of interpretation are arguably higher for Stein's narrator, who is at once adept at understanding social pragmatics but worries about being intelligible in "a generation that knows not Joseph." Tristram, by contrast, is an especially excitable sentimentalist in a community of equally eccentric, often sentimental men.

The novels' different stakes correspond to a shift within the field of sexuality. As I have already begun to show, Stein's novel's interest in the social poetics of resemblancing coincides with an aesthetics of cultural-conceptual emergence, often adumbrated in the narrator's periodic addresses to a group of strangers. This aesthetics offers up the indeterminacy of contextualization around repetition (the uncertain way repetitive language presupposes preceding text to entail resemblance or distinction) as a point of orientation for a not-yet coherent public that might orient itself against the epistemological pleasures and pitfalls of the open secret. In the chapter's conclusion, I argue that this aesthetic strategy, founded on a linguistic-ideological relation to singularity, exploits the constitutive incompleteness of character in fictional discourse to incorporate processes of emergence into a representation of a social world. Scholarship of the past two decades on *Americans* has rarely thought of the novel as showing concern for how people use signs in interaction. This is understandable given the novel's infrequent presentation of characters' speech. Once scholars acknowledge the discouraging circumstances of the novel's production and reception (how little it is read outside academic circles; its protracted period of incubation from 1903 to 1911; and its belated, anticlimactic publication of 500 copies in 1925), they tend to argue that its indeterminacy undercuts the purported aim of description, undermining representation to foreground the irreducible materiality of the signifier.⁴ Rather than assuming that the materiality of language contradicts representational ambitions, I develop an understanding of representation as an order of cultural concepts projected from indexical structures.

One clear problem with Stein's repetition any representational value is that it ignores the kinds of pleasure various publics have found in *Americans*. Stein's repetition not only renegotiates the relationship between indexicality's implicitness, language ideology, and fictional representation, but also transforms the modes of pleasure fiction enables. Stein's novel anticipates and rewards two impulses that often find themselves at cross-purposes but might coincide in experiences of beauty: holding nonce economies of kinds stable in one's mind to make conceptual sense of repetitive language and to relax one's attention to appreciate the ebb, flow, and rupture of patterns of syntactic parallelism and intonation. I'll briefly discuss the role of sexual literary counterpublics in reading practices that respond to these two imperatives.

STEIN'S DIAGRAMS: RESEMBLANCE AS AN INDEXICAL EFFECT

⁴ For instance, Melanie Taylor writes of the novel's descriptions: "In the absence of any conventional sense of origin, and hence closure, an openness to the repetitive and often monotonous rhythms and patterns in the writing is vital to the processing of a text in which any enduring mimetic sense derived from individual words is limited." Taylor, "Poetics of Difference," 30. Taylor's reading of *Americans*, informed by theories of performativity, contributes to a critical tradition that tends to understand Stein's writing as poststructuralism *avant-la-lettre*. While I would certainly agree that sonic rhythms contribute to the novel's aesthetics, the assumption here seems to be that the lack of mimesis based on individual words is a lack of any mimesis at all.

When people use language descriptively, how do we recognize that their speech shares a context with the described object? How far in time and space can the contextual relation stretch before words lose their power to refer? Such questions plagued Stein. In her lecture “The Gradual Making of *The Making of Americans*,” she gives her predicament a specifically temporal form: “When I was up against the difficulty of putting down the complete conception that I had of an individual, the complete rhythm of a personality that I had gradually acquired by listening seeing feeling and experience, I was faced by the trouble that I had acquired all this knowledge gradually but when I had it I had it completely at one time.”⁵ Whereas Stein’s “conception” of a person is complete when she “puts it down” as a denotational text, the context that allows the conception to refer is durational, comprising several modes of experiencing a personality’s “rhythm,” which, as we’ll see, involves a person’s coordinated action with others. Readers of *Americans* might ask how Stein’s repetitive style responds to knowledge’s uncertain grounding in social space. More specifically, how might a social context be immanent in denotative language? And how does repetitive form foreground context’s consistency from moment to moment?

Stein’s novel addresses her problem by using lexical and syntactical repetition between sentences within a paragraph to represent the cultural frameworks of knowledge that characters co-construct in their interactions. This claim might strike others as counterintuitive given the novel’s infrequent portrayal of discursive interaction. Initially it might appear more correct to say that the novel presents taxonomies of ways of eating, loving, educating, succeeding, etc., which then stand between the reader and a represented social world like an obscuring wool. Admittedly, comically dense sentences like this one give the impression that Stein is more interested in satirizing systematic knowledge than in developing the critical tools to connect conceptual knowledge to social practice: “I will now give some description of a considerable number of men and women of kinds connected in kind with the kind of men and women of which Alfred Hersland was one” (545). The narrator can sound like an anxious graduate student whose excessive attention to correct formal distinctions encumbers her ability to communicate. To be sure, the narrator’s doubtful intelligibility as a speaker and a social type defines the novel’s project, but chalking up the work’s formal difficulty to a critique of scientific discourse neither explains why *Americans* is so long, nor specifies how radical its aesthetic experiment is.

My claim that repetitions in narrative discourse correspond to characters’ social-pragmatic work is easier to accept if one bears in mind the many things that happen in any scene of language use. The novel’s attention to characters’ utterances does not necessarily involve a regard for how acoustically distinct or lexically patterned uses of language function as emblems of social group membership (such as regional accents, slang registers, or indexes of occupational affiliation). The novel’s repetitions instead bring into focus processes at once more encompassing than word use and less pervasive than regional identities, though they might mediate the latter. Specifically, repetition centers how any use of language acquires a social pragmatic value (one incorporating concepts of action and of collective identity) when considered within an interactional frame alongside other language. In fact, *Americans* takes novels’ explanations of characters’ discourse as instances of social behavior so far as to invert the conventional handling of interaction. The novel iteratively explicates the imagined social world’s entailed conceptual economy (normally implicit except those occasions when a narrative authority intervenes) and foregrounds the

⁵ Stein, *Lectures*, 147.

interactive, indexical order of semiosis through the implicit social relations structuring sentences (normally the unit of predication).⁶

Beside the novel's programmatic statements that the repetitive narrative discourse mirrors the repetitions of a characters' behavior, description rarely focuses on single characters; rather, it tends to imply how stipulated qualities of persons emerge from relations between characters. The characterizations of Mrs. Fanny Hersland and her favored servant Madeleine Wyman represents a fairly neat example. The following paragraph appears in the section of the novel that first introduces Madeleine. Just before this, the narrator offers background information on Madeleine's family history and recapitulates information regarding how Mrs. Hersland loses a sense of identity when she moves west after marrying Mr. Hersland. Around the same paragraph, the narrator also provides conceptual knowledge on how qualitative gradations of a given property, such as kinds of "sensitive being" or "stupid being," distinguish kinds of people. (Think here of the varieties of "loving" invoked around David Hersland.) In other words, the narrator supplies a wealth of presupposable context that produces several entailments over the course of Madeleine's and Mrs. Hersland's earliest interactions: "This is now a beginning of the history of her, Mrs. Hersland talked a great deal to her. Madeleine always listened to her. This is now a history of their talking to each other. This is now a history of how they owned each other" (253). One could say that the incongruities between what the sentences describe and how they do so emphasize the negotiation involved in collaboratively achieving a metapragmatic framework. The paragraph makes explicit where there is implicit, pragmatic work going on in the new relationship without explicating what is presupposed and how it is entailed.

Still, one wants to understand more specifically how Stein's repetitive prose is at all like the kinds of interactions implied everywhere but so conspicuously missing from the novel. In what follows, I illustrate how resemblances between sentences in *Americans* mirror distinct phases of interactional text in the space-time of ritual interaction. Like Stein's diagrammatic juxtapositions of particular persons' entailed relations (Madeleine's listening to Fanny Hersland, the women's owning one another) with explications of kinds with distinctive ways of doing (attacking, wallowing, etc.), linguistic anthropological fieldwork involves establishing some correlation between a pattern of indexical presupposition and some implicit contextual variable by comparing moments of interaction that draw upon similar cultural conceptualizations. That is, if language use matters because its formal particularities invoke concepts of quality to guide social practice, linguistic anthropology reconstructs how "-onomic" schema of qualitative distinction and similarity emerge in time, becoming salient by degrees for participants. The analytic of ritual provides the model of models; it outlines the coincidence of semiotic processes by which

⁶ In "Poetry and Grammar," Stein writes of the difference between sentences and paragraphs that "Sentences are not emotional but paragraphs are," and that in *Americans* she tried "to break down this essential combination by making enormously long sentences that would be as long as the longest paragraph." Stein, *Lectures*, 223. Teasing out what Stein means by "emotion," Astrid Lorange writes that "it is in the broader context of the paragraph that sentences engage in, or demonstrate, a kind of sociality, and in doing so, achieve on behalf of the paragraph an 'emotional balance.' This emotional balance could also be called a *social context*, or an affinitive relation of sentential ideas. Here the paragraph is conceived, as in a landscape, as the total space and time, space of time, in which a complex of relations emerges." Lorange, *How Reading is Written*, 107. In the rest of this section, I develop the relation between emotion and social context by taking emotion as a paradigm of the metapragmatic interpretations emerging from metrical contrasts between sentences.

resemblances between people *take place* when they presuppose concepts of kind in adopting some relational stance toward each other.

The diagrammatic semiotics of ritual

A closer look at Michael Silverstein's account of ritual poetics lays a foundation for how repetitive narration in *Americans* corresponds to the ways resemblances between people emerge from interaction. Ritual involves a dialectic interplay between two modes of signification: the icon and the index. Broadly speaking, participants in ritual performances both project and call into the present a conceptual order of essential qualitative value by inhabiting concepts relationally in metrically-organized, indexical semiosis. Metricalization here refers to how a body's semiotic capacities include implicit ways of acknowledging other semiosis by parsing signs in similar or contrastive patterns.⁷ Metricalization involves iconic signification first and foremost because it comprises impressions of sameness and difference in formal features of utterances. However, metricalization also involves an indexical, "co-textual" phenomenon that concerns how formal relations between utterances within an interaction suggest relations of presupposition and entailment. It thus plays a pivotal role in allowing interlocutors to begin the collaborative, metapragmatic work of establishing a non-textual context relative to their current interaction.

The dense interrelation of signs in ritual texts illustrates the dialectic of icon and index—the transformation of quantity of one kind of semiosis into a qualitatively different kind—especially clearly. As participants' calls and responses generate patterns, people assume their places in a higher conceptual order. Silverstein describes ritual's effects as follows:

The very hypertrophic orderliness of metricalizations thus bounds the performed text of ritual, giving it a semblance of formal plenitude-in-itself. In and by this property of seeming to self-entextualize, to stand as formally autonomous totality, a ritual text as a whole traced over space-time projects as its contextualization that which it dynamically figurates along a "cosmic axis," an axis of knowledge or belief.⁸

Over the next few paragraphs I will expand on the ideas condensed here. When Silverstein mentions a formal plenitude, he refers to metrical patterns of signs in rituals like the Eucharist, including the words spoken, the order and pace of speech, the gestures made with respect to words, the texts and objects used, the physical spacing of speakers, and whether they sit or stand. Such tight metrical forms cordon off the ritual from other, less conspicuous semiotic patterns. By the same token, they index similarly parsed patterns of semiosis, thereby producing a temporal axis of

⁷ Silverstein writes that the metricalization of text defines its "measurability in the linear chronotope of the unfolding of discourse in terms of recurring, equal-valued segments of whatever characterizable kind, whether phonological, morphological, lexical, or syntactic." He continues on the same page: "all these phenomena are explicitly attended to by those concerned with the aesthetics of language, such as poets and narrative artists, to be sure. But all pragmatic evidence suggests that they are intuitively attended to by ordinary users of language in the very locally engaged formulation and interpretation of discourse, where people function as 'co-textuality maximizers,' as it were, to yield a determinate overall text relative to which non-co-textual contextualization can be construed." Silverstein, "Denotation," 143.

⁸ Silverstein, "'Cultural' Concepts," 626.

a ritual's repetition. But ritual does not simply invoke a chain of similarly patterned embodied forms; it also indexes the knowledge that gives the enacted relations a conceptual coherence more enduring than the individual enactments. The Eucharist, says Silverstein, enacts the primary relation between Jesus and the Apostles. Ritual not only cites certain concepts (the Christ, the lamb of God, the covenant) as relevant to a particular place and time; more specifically, ritual's metricalization mediates this process through what I referred to, in the last chapter, as cultural-concepts that anchor concepts of quality and kind to participants' roles in interaction.

Let me elaborate a bit further on the logic by which ritual manifests knowledge to create resemblances across interactional space-time. Ritual performance constructs indexically presupposing links that "figuratively" map concepts onto participants occupying similar functional roles in interaction. From the perspective of any one ritual enactment, however, resemblances emerge gradually through the thickening indexical value of metricalizations. Silverstein writes, "Ritual works in a kind of pictorial or iconic (specifically, diagrammatic) mode. Ritual as enacted traces a moving structure of indexical gestures toward the knowledge presupposed to be necessary to its own effectiveness in accomplishing something."⁹ Silverstein's allusion to diagrammatic signification draws on the semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Peirce. For Peirce, diagrams are complex icons; they signify analogically through similar relations among parts.¹⁰ To participate in ritual is thus to assume a place in a relational scheme of practice-oriented activity that analogically resembles another set of relations through a series of indexical presuppositions. Resemblances emerge as participants use signs that presuppose conceptual knowledge anchored to the world through practice, e.g., the Eucharist's function of consecration.

If Peirce describes indexicality in terms of causation, contiguity, or consubstantiality between an object and its sign, we might momentarily group indexicality's different aspects under signs' function as evidentiary traces of what they signify. The logic of ritual illustrates the paradoxical agency enabled by this "evidence." To take one of Peirce's examples, a hole in a wall can only index a bullet if someone also finds the hole to presuppose the existence and use of firearms. The logic of presupposition suggests that knowledge is not just a contingency for oneself as interpreter; knowledge also constitutes the sign as a sign. I make the index mean by virtue of my knowing. But if I recognize the sign as an index, the object indexed also appears to both precede and define my subjectivity insofar as it conditions my office as interpreter. By the same token, a participant in ritual can inhabit conceptual knowledge by performing a metrically regimented action that presupposes that knowledge in order to be effective. A diagrammatic icon emerging through ritual is "a moving structure," in Silverstein's words, because a performance's metrical and practice-oriented exchange of signs entails a reorganization of the quality and consistency of participants' identities around their co-indexed knowledge. At one order, participants in the Eucharist contribute to (even if just by witnessing) a highly organized scene of transubstantiation. At another order, in presupposing that this is what they do, they constitute ties to each other and the church by virtue of their diagrammatic resemblance with Jesus and his apostles. The ritual transforms the public whose semiotic work constitutes it.

In the last chapter, I pointed to realist novels (Fielding's *Tom Jones* and Eliot's *Middlemarch*) in which a narrator will sometimes pause the story to comment on a character's language use as a variety of "identity ritual." Such passages refer to social properties (moral

⁹ Silverstein, 626.

¹⁰ Peirce, *Collected Papers*, 143, 146-50.

qualities, affiliation with a noble house) to illustrate how characters presuppose and entail such properties in interacting with others. In the terms of ritual poetics, narration explicates such frameworks of knowledge as the focus of indexicality's figurating work in certain segments of interaction. In alternately listing qualities and then predicating practical entailments of characters across formally repetitive sentences, Stein's novel apparently picks up on this common fictional practice. Initially, we could say that Stein's novel models the practical frameworks of activity that mediate characters' relations in and across discursive interaction by assimilating the structures of sentences and paragraphs to the relative consistency of those interactions' metrical co-textuality. However, Stein's narrator does not assume the authority to specify how stipulated properties are implicit in a paragraph's metrical divisions such that formal similarities and differences between sentences constitute diagrams (indexical icons) of kinds. A reader must infer a rule of contextualization to reconcile a given conceptual term or terms with patterns in metrical structure. Before examining some further examples from *Americans*, I elaborate the reasoning that would allow a reader to draw such inferences from Stein's paragraphs and how they encounter the indeterminacy of contextualization in the process.

Metrical footing: the inhabitation of social kind via positioning in talk

Silverstein's examples of ritual practice include not only highly regimented practices like Christian liturgy, but also structures of a more nonce, everyday sort. In conversing, people exchange indexical tokens of knowledge that slowly manifest a conceptual framework of kinds of persons and then, as metrical (co-textual) indexicality thickens, further entail the framework relative to discourse's social-pragmatic aims—what in the way of cultural activity interlocutors accomplish. That is, everyday talk follows metrical regimentation like any other genred text, but participants must do some work to establish an appropriate genre. Such a transition from relatively nonce structures to regimented ones characterizes Silverstein's discussion of a video-recorded conversation between two graduate students (Messrs. A and B), one from the University of Chicago's School of Social Service Administration and the other from its Law School. The men's strangeness to one another prevents them from easily falling into a pattern that indexically presupposes any one framework of knowledge. Instead, they must collaboratively find a common ground in speech before they can begin to orient their identities vis-à-vis one another. This process involves a nonce metrical framework of question and answer, where each man's supplying autobiographical details accommodates the other's supplying complementary information.

The transitional moment arrives when the two men discover their educations at different Jesuit institutions (Georgetown University and Loyola College). The general question about schooling that occasions the discovery presupposes the culturally relevant framework of time that separates context from metrically unfolding co-text. The difference between prior and current education at difference institutions subsequently orients deixis (referential indexes) as the entailed contextual ground of "now" vs. "then" and "here" vs. "there." This conceptual division of time also entails a pragmatic framework of "conversation between professionals-in-training" as the exchange's appropriate genre.¹¹ Like participants in Christian liturgy whose sacred knowledge manifests in religious rite, the two men transform the meaning of their mutual presence by using

¹¹ Silverstein, "'Cultural' Concepts," 632.

expressions whose denotative values indexically presuppose a social world organized in a particular way and the speakers' positions within it. How, then, will knowledge about the world, now entailed as relevant to the current interaction, come to further regiment the interlocutors' stances toward one another—to constrain the meaning of their adopting those stances? How will the participants produce a diagram within which their stances in conversation somehow resemble their differential alignments with the scheme of presupposed knowledge?

In the last chapter, I discussed the defeasibility, or the undo-ability of contextualization, to show how interactively establishing “figurations” of identity can be the crux of both conflict and play. In Silverstein's example, Mr. A, the lawyer-in-training, proceeds as though his and Mr. B's current discursive standings as future lawyer and future social worker sustained the status asymmetry of their undergraduate trainings. However, his interlocutor undoes this contextualization by remarking on some recent reforms in Jesuit education, effectively questioning the relevance of undergraduate “old school” ties as the appropriate context in favor of highlighting their negative and positive experiences (for the students of law and social work, respectively) of education at Chicago since that time. The crux of the conversation as an everyday example of ritual's diagrammatic work concerns how these different contextualizations take place in dialectic relation with the emergence of characteristic qualities perceptible as practice-oriented interaction. If at first the conversation resembles Mrs. A's lawyerly interrogation of Mr. B, it shifts toward Mr. B's procedural interview of a distressed Mr. A after the recontextualization.

Whereas Silverstein refers to talk's “figuration” of conceptual knowledge, others like Asif Agha sometimes describe discourse's diagrammatic, cultural-conceptual effects as “metrical iconism,” or how contrastive forms across turns in discursive exchange become interpretable as attitudinal stances between contrastive social identities. Such suggestive contrasts help explain the phenomenon of free indirect discourse or “voicing” in novels, i.e., the way unattributed utterances in narrative discourse can seem to emanate from particular points of view within the described social world. They also, I argue, characterize the way sentences in Stein's paragraphs generate representations of distinct social kinds in interaction. Agha's emphasis on the centrality of metrical contrast to voicing effects helps one to see this:

Voicing contrasts are made perceivable or palpable by the metrical iconism of co-occurring text segments—the likeness or unlikeness of co-occurring chunks of text—which motivate evaluations of sameness or difference of speaker. Such entextualized contrasts are wholly emergent and nondetachable: They are figure-ground contrasts that are individuable only in relation to an unfolding text structure (hence emergent) and are not preserved under decontextualization (hence nondetachable).¹²

Here Agha describes the fictional phenomenon of voicing to develop Erving Goffman's understanding of how metrical contrasts contribute to practices of “footing.” For Goffman, footing involves the ways people use signs to align themselves with participant roles in coordinated social

¹² Agha, “Voice, Footing, Enregisterment,” 40.

action (a move from iconism toward social indexicality).¹³ Agha contends that footing can also describe alignments with a broader range of conceptual systems, including the macrosocial orders Silverstein discusses (a move from social indexicality to a higher-order, cultural iconism). Stein's novel, I propose, artificially isolates the normally nested contexts of metrically regimented language, indexed distinctions of participant role, and concepts of kind to both insist upon their interrelation in social life while also emphasizing the imaginative work required to make them compatible. A demonstration of this should convince us that despite the novel's apparent concern for trans-historical concepts of kind, it projects a dynamic social world—one that is rule-bound but where repetition does not necessarily secure a conceptual economy.

The passage on Mrs. Hersland and Madeleine Wyman showed that *Americans* sometimes describes repetitive patterns in and across interactions between people. Records of relationships take the form of metrical shifts between sentences.¹⁴ Making sense of these shifts requires more than comparing two sentences as co-referential propositions. One also considers how a wide variety of phenomena (syntactic parallelisms, transpositions of phrase, deixis, lexical variety, and more) produce indexical links between a sentence and those around it. From a paragraph's metrical structures, one can infer each character's footing toward the others within a social genre of action. From footing's specific structure, one can further produce connections between specific characters and concepts of kind. A scene from the section on Alfred Hersland's childhood further exemplifies how slight variations across sentences create the sense of an interaction that repeats ritualistically even as its participants alter their footings within it. The passage I have in mind concerns some conflict about whether Martha Hersland, Alfred's sister, should join her brothers in their regular bouts of play. Following the passage, the narrator introduces some conceptual background on Alfred: "He was then a little beginning to have in him the feeling that he was a good citizen, that he was the oldest son, he did not know then yet very specifically why she should go in, she did not know then yet very specifically why she should go in" (534). "Oldest son" and "good citizen" exemplify partitions in macro-social frameworks of knowledge. The narrator implies that such distinctions are immanent in the interaction insofar as they exert some normative force on the young characters' behavior. But because narration inserts this contextualizing knowledge after the description of the interaction, a reader who wants to understand the passage as a social happening must infer how and when such concepts are presupposed and entailed in ways that move the interaction forward. In this respect, the thematic focus on interactions among children underscores that people can wield social knowledge to specific ends without having a very distinct idea of why their words produce the effects they do.

Here is the passage I have in mind:

¹³ "A change in footing," writes Goffman, "implies a change in the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production and reception of an utterance. A change in our footing is another way of talking about a change in our frame for events." Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, 128. Goffman shows that the participant roles of speaker and hearer are inadequate to the variety of ways people align themselves with other people through language. He conceptualizes further roles of "animator," "author," and "principal" to account for how people might use language for parody (parroting it without committing belief to it); to affirm that they have selected the linguistic forms used without necessarily sharing the sentiments they represent; or to defend the ideas of others who are absent or who cannot speak for themselves. Note that these roles are less "social roles" in a culturally specific sense than functional roles in any communicative framework.

¹⁴ For a discussion of intonation patterns in *Americans* that gives a sense of how a reader might construct metrical patterns from written prose, see Pound, "The Difference Sound Makes," 29-31.

They were very often together in a vacant lot playing or hanging around together somewhere and often enough they would be chasing around in the Hersland orchard and garden. Sometimes there some girls would be with them. Sometimes then Martha Hersland would be with them. Alfred and David were very often playing hide and go seek with Albert Banks and the Roddy boys and sometimes some others, in the Hersland orchard and garden. Sometimes some girls would be with them, sometimes then Martha Hersland would be with them. Sometimes then they stayed a long time in the orchard, later then Alfred said to Martha he would tell her father, she had no business to be playing. Sometimes he would be angry and later he would threaten her. (534)

The passage reconstructs a ritual by which certain people (Alfred and David Hersland, Robert Banks, the Roddy boys), in performing certain acts (playing, hanging around, playing hide and go seek) in certain places (the Hersland orchard and garden, somewhere, an empty lot), extend the same generic framework of play in interdiscursive space-time. The rest of the passage accounts for what happens when some girls, including Martha, appear on this scene. The presence of “some girls” might factor into this pattern in a more restrictive way since it occurs in correlation to play in the Hersland orchard. Between the second, third, and fifth sentences, the passage’s shifting metrical structure entails an increasingly strong mutual entailment between Martha’s, the other girls’, and the boys’ involvement. When the same proposition repeats, the apposition more closely equates Martha’s presence with the girls’ attendance. This might alter the sense of “then” from one of synchrony to one of logical sequence. In other words, Martha’s presence, initially an insignificant coincidence, gradually figures as a likely consequence of the recreation of the framework of play itself.

The passage’s metrical shifts, though ambiguous, nonetheless suggest that it records a conflict in how to draw the line between presupposed context and new “co-text.” That is, one detects some controversy over the degree to which Martha’s appearance on the scene constitutes some encroachment on an established precedent and over what, exactly, lends the precedent its consistency. In light of Martha’s increasingly conspicuous role in the passage’s repetitions, certain metrical features of the intervening sentences come into relief. For instance, differences between the first and fourth sentences (the change from another indexical token “they” to named, gendered constituents and the repetition of “very often” in parallelistic relation to “sometimes”) might index the boys’ sense of priority vis-à-vis the girls’, especially Martha’s, putative encroachment. By the end of the passage, the implied interactional framework of the described scene clearly changes from play to sibling rivalry across gendered lines, installing a difference between boys and girls (as opposed to age, for instance, since Martha is older than David, Jr.) as knowledge necessary to understand the play’s parameters. Note here the way pronoun deixis—“he would tell *her* father”—reinforces the way metrical contrasts index differential footings within the argument.

How, then, are concepts of “kind” implicit in the transformation of praxis from play to an angry altercation? We might say Alfred’s “good citizenship” is on display in that he excludes Martha with an idea of class propriety in mind. Alfred and David are indeed associating with working class boys for whom public contact with girls is apparently a non-issue. However, the passage offers insufficient ground to support such a maximally coherent interpretation. In fact, any consistent metapragmatic representation of the passage will likely involve more concepts than the narrator offers. After all, on what presupposed ground might Martha insist on her attendance at the children’s play? And what exactly does Alfred’s double standards about inter-class sociality

entail? In the next section, I will return to the question of how the indeterminacy of contextualization functions under the novel's overarching interest in singularity. For now, simply observe that the passage's manner of unfolding implies that any interpretation would involve degrees of coherence of the concepts of social kind presupposed and entailed across the paragraph. The example shows that the narrative discourse describing "bottom natures" and "kinds" merely foregrounds the iconic pole of a diagrammatic process. It also illustrates how the novel's concern for indexical indeterminacy coincides with the historical specificity of its ideas of kind.

The interactive premise of predicated quality

If certain passages of *Americans* harmonize the metrical relations among sentences with the interactional framework suffusing the acts described, another kind of narrative discourse typically introduces a character by stipulating the kind to which he or she belongs, often by citing comparisons to other people who manifest similar or different kinds of "being." For instance, the narrator first introduces Alfred Hersland: "I am thinking now of six of them that have such a kind of nature in them like that in Alfred Hersland and these have it very differently in them than he had it in him" (523). Such passages will likely strike a reader as the most hopelessly abstract and essentialist, but they nonetheless figure within the novel smaller by drawing attention to our different class statuses." In other words, predicated social qualities are essentializations of footings within metrically organized interactions, and our ways of experiencing such qualities can in turn be "essentially" linked for us to social structures. Or, as Silverstein puts it, "the categories of identity we can inhabit in the microcontexts of interaction are licensed or authorized by conceptual partitions of macrosocial space associable with values. Like all schemata of value, these are made convincingly real to us from cultural essentializations."¹⁵ By making signs that align one with particular positions in an interactional framework, one also presupposes a higher order of social space to authorize footing vis-à-vis others. This is to say that indexicality involves simultaneous presuppositions and entailments at distinct tiers of context. Terms for kinds of "being" in *Americans*, such as varieties of "attacking being," "resisting being," "stupid being," "loving being," suggest that Stein is especially interested in the essentializations that mediate between metrical footings in interaction and qualities of people (what Silverstein, writing in a Goffmanian idiom, sometimes calls "principles of recruitment to role"). The novel's repetitions drive home the point that, like interaction's metrical structure, frameworks of social quality are contrastive and therefore highly interested sites of cultural mediation. Social interactions are cultural texts where one has the opportunity to make one's distinction felt and therefore elicit others' belief in the structures in which one's distinction matters.

Americans illustrates how Stein (or an observer like her in certain ways) contingently invests belief in essences while retracing behaviors that point, indexically, toward common values. I turn to the novel's description of the musician Arragon, notable for his distinctive brand of "passionate being" that contrasts with Alfred's. At first the narrator describes Arragon as having "passion in him but it was not poignant in him but brilliant and emotional and sentimental" (578). Further on the narrator adds a qualification: "Now I am describing a musician Arragon who was a man having in him as I was saying passion but this was not poignant in him although to himself

¹⁵ Silverstein, "'Cultural' Concepts," 639.

and to mostly every one it was poignant in him because he had so much weakness and sensitiveness and romance in him” (579). And finally: “Arragon had attacking passion in him but as I was saying it was not very poignant in him,” and, “it made him a pretty good musician, it was rich but not poignant in him and he made up for it in him by weakness and sensibility and feeling himself to be really a great one and by having moments of really inspired feeling” (579). What it means to be “poignantly” passionate and why this differs from being “brilliant, emotional, and sentimental” are unclear. Yet as terms multiply, one’s picture of Arragon does undergo refinement as the idea of passion that is not “poignant” falls into relations of correlation and contrast with other terms.

Juxtaposing this passage with linguistic anthropology’s account of ritual specifies how it does and doesn’t function as a representation of a social world. We lack a represented framework of interaction in which Arragon, by responding to others in certain ways, performs a contextualizing work by indexing values “out there” in the world as relevant to himself in an interactional present. The description of Arragon feels abstract because the odd terminology fails to make up the logical distance between individual words and the contexts lending them power to refer, though they remain semantically distinct. Narration nonetheless takes shape around different tiers of indexicality. We learn, for instance, that Arragon’s “attacking passion” “made him a pretty good musician” (579). “Being a musician” consists of occupying a position in a macrosocial framework of essences but is associated with “attacking passion,” a quality that emerges relationally in interaction. Understanding the narration through indexicality’s multifunctional, tiered work suggests that Arragon “is” a musician in the restricted sense that his ability to sufficiently enact “attacking passion” for others entails a cultural identity.

When the description marks how Arragon’s qualities exist for particular people (“himself” and “mostly every one”), one might get the further impression that narration differentiates belief in Arragon’s “poignancy” among the relatively uneducated members of his community from its own, more comprehensive account of how he effectively achieves this quality through a sufficient demonstration of other properties. If this is true, however, the passage also emphasizes how the contextual frame of the implied interaction also delimits narrative subjectivity I’s overall project of representing a dynamic social world in which kinds emerge from people’s activity as a variety of cultural product. Linguistic anthropology helps one grapple with the fact that essentializations, despite the intellectual risks of reductionism they carry, are a necessary aspect of social life.

One might think of essences as a conceptual leverage necessary to interpretively respond to social behavior. One regularly uses them in characterizing others’ linguistic performance. If someone says, “The way so-and-so interrupts conversation to correct my grammar is really aggressive,” this might also mean, “So-and-so is trying to make me feel

, so that narrative discourse depends on characters’ distinctiveness for its distinction. The gesture of referring always involves an indexical back-channel of communication that implies particular contextual surroundings. Stein’s novel is thus a representation of social activity insofar as the narrator’s referring to people and forming predicates about them invoke a context that is congruous with the presuppositions of the described character’s behavior. The narrator’s drawing diagrammatic resemblances to others when describing Arragon is remarkable in this respect. For example, the narrator prefaces Arragon’s “attacking passion” by recapitulating an earlier distinction between “resisting” and “attacking”: “I am remembering that I mean by attacking being those having it in them that emotion is poignant like sensation” (579). The narrator then elaborates “attacking passion” by comparing named and anonymous characters who share this quality: “In Redfern it was poignant but not rich enough to sustain him, in Mr. Hersland it was poignant and

rich but not steady” (579). Description grounds narrative discourse in knowledge of a particular social world.

Narration’s incantatory prosody, which resembles uttered language, likewise echoes the indexical structure of characters’ implied behavior. Frequently Stein’s narrator marks segments of discourse with verbs of “saying” and deictics like “now,” “later,” and “I.” The narrator remarks, “Now I am describing a musician Arragon who was a man having in him as I was saying passion but this was not poignant in him” (579). Such markers cordon off stretches of predicative material into discrete acts that imitate the way interactions build up structures of indexes to achieve interdiscursive coherence. The narrator’s discourse underscores its similarity to the cumulative and diagrammatic structures of identity people inhabit in interaction by presupposing other discourse. Paradoxically, the more the absence of characters’ discourse prevents our understanding how terms of social quality refer, the more reason we have to suppose that there is an interactive order to refer to. This mode of writing lends “representation” the tacit projection particular to indexicality. Stein inverts the conventional view of interaction by diagrammatically explicating the imagined social world’s conceptual economy and allowing the interactive order of semiosis to go without saying.

SINGULARITY AND OTHER EMERGENT PHENOMENA

So far I have been illustrating how *The Making of Americans* reconciles the iterative, interactive order of social life with an enduring, conceptual order of kinds by focusing on the diagrammatic poetics of everyday ritual. Rather than producing what characters say, Stein’s novel attends to the essential qualities that “come out” when people adopt a stance toward others or a broader social context. When linguistic anthropologists discuss how metrical contrasts in discursive interaction index relational footings, and how talkers are then “recruited to a role” through their footings, they refer to *emergent* meanings. As an epistemic concept in philosophy, emergence describes complex phenomena that may depend on lower order properties and principles but are neither reducible to them, nor expressible in their terms.¹⁶ In linguistic anthropology, emergence refers to how the dialectic interplay of indexicality and iconism in discursive interaction allows metrical forms of behavior to count as culturally-conceptually coherent action.

The final section of *Americans* gives a condensed formulation of how qualitatively distinct kinds emerges within repetition. The narrator avers, “When some one has done something that one might do that thing again” (917). Taken in context, the ambiguous referent of “that one” accommodates both the same person (that same someone) and different persons (*that* one, over *there*). An act done creates a norm for the actor and for others, entailing the potential for identity of persons through common action. The authorial voice continues, “When some one has done something and some other one has then done something and it is a similar thing and they both then have not been doing something, they have similarly not been doing something then, they might be doing something and not doing something together.” Both propositions frame the question of kind’s emergence as the potential continuation of a pattern of action. One is what one might do;

¹⁶ According to Stefano Ercolino, theories of emergence spread rapidly in European intellectual circles at the beginning of the twentieth century as debates raged about whether the sciences of Chemistry and Biology were reducible to knowledge of the physical world. Ercolino, *The Novel Essay*, 30.

by extension, one is like or unlike others in doing something. But a new order of emergent phenomena comes into view when repetitive activity's mediation of identity starts to draw into question the relational footings entailed by non-action. Whereas the narrator seems confident that similar juxtapositions of action and rest lend each person's behavior formally equivalent completeness as social kinds of "doing," the narrative voice is less certain that repetitive metrical structures of likeness and contrast necessarily entail participants' recruitment into the same framework of socially specific activity.

As the language of "recruitment" suggests, the emergence of cultural knowledge from footings in talk happens *for* particular people and involves some constraint. Recall Silverstein's formulation of the indeterminacy of contextualization: "Given a certain presupposed 'context', what is the degree of regularity (or compulsiveness) with which some minimal/maximal entailment can be effected, relative to the presupposed 'context'?"¹⁷ Compulsion turns out to be a murky matter. One might be compelled by one's prior experience to acknowledge some other person's unusual form of behavior without being compelled by circumstances to respond in ways that accord the behavior much social significance. Thinking back to Tristram's sentimentalism, interpretive responses to behavior can also constitute junctures where desire comes into play—when people are apt to reproduce what they want to see. Cultural-conceptual mediations of social activity are often productive of interested belief.

In the following sub-sections, I discuss the role of language ideologies in constraining how a world of conceptual value emerges from language use. To draw on some formulas I mentioned in the dissertation's introduction, language ideologies comprise diverse situated patterns of language use and interpretation; they include beliefs by which people invest features of their own and others' language use with culturally specific meanings. In Paul Kroskrity's terms, "Language users' ideologies bridge their sociocultural experience and their linguistic and discursive resources by constituting those linguistic and discursive forms as indexically tied to features of their sociocultural experience."¹⁸ If language ideologies allow people to make determinations of language use's social-pragmatic import and for those judgments to remain largely implicit, they also work to naturalize the boundaries of sociocultural groups via shared knowledge-making practices.

First I examine the open secret as a language ideology foregrounded in *Americans*. The open secret defines certain forms of speech as covert or overt and then aligns communication about different kinds of knowledge to one or the other channel, so that one can speak about some things in very vague terms while still communicating relatively specific meanings simply by switching from an overt register to a covert one. The open secret allows Julia Dehning and her father to discuss Alfred Hersland as Julia's potential future husband without making certain conceptual distinctions relevant to their discussion of his behavior's implications for their family. It allows the Dehnings to eventually accept Alfred into their fold despite his more ambiguous qualities. The narrator's discussions of singularity, in contrast, entail a linguistic-ideological investment in metrical forms of discursive interaction that appear fragmented, uncooperative, or inassimilable to genred practice as indicative of a desire for publicness. A constitutive relationship to singularity moreover entails a desire for other people through the implicit forms of intimacy that come with public circulation. In other words, rather than presupposing eccentric behavior to possess

¹⁷ Silverstein, "Indeterminacy of Contextualization," 58.

¹⁸ Kroskrity, "Language Ideologies," 507.

specifiable if implicit content, singularity reconceives social eccentricity as a figure for the erotics enabled by the very implicitness of cultural-conceptual emergence.

The open secret as language ideology

Whereas the novel often precludes certain understanding of how characters inhabit the explicitly specified social kinds through their behavior, the early staging of Julia and her father's evaluations of Alfred involve unspoken conceptual meanings that seem to point distinctly to sexuality. In the novel's descriptions of these early interactions, some categorical meanings are positively predicated of the characters' speech and actions, especially in terms of class and gender. However, one quickly gets the impression that there is more to these interactions than the narrator can tell. Or rather, what the narrator does tell presupposes some conceptual excess that, through its consistent if implicit invocation, a reader might come to identify with a character's sexuality.

For instance, narration remains just less than explicit in suggesting that Julia desires Alfred as a spouse because his appreciation of artistic beauty promises not only to reveal new knowledge of the world, but also to impart a more embodied relation to knowledge than she has previously inhabited. The phrase that first adumbrates the significance of Alfred's appearance on Julia's horizon is "the wisdom of all culture," where wisdom covers everything left out of young women's formal education, possibly including all things sexual (22). Earlier the narrator tells us that at finishing school Julia "learnt very well all the things young girls of her class were taught then and she learnt too, in all kinds of ways, all the things young girls always can learn, somehow, to be wise in" (20). Julia's way of eroticizing aesthetic taste, figuring it as a relation between bodies as opposed to a transcendental condition, almost becomes explicit through a startlingly literal comparison between her fondness for Alfred and her consuming him: "It was not strong meat that Hersland offered to her, but her palate was eager, this had the flavour of the dishes she longed to have eaten and to have inside her. To her young crude virgin desire the food he offered to her was plenty real enough to deeply content her" (22). Let me momentarily sidestep the narrator's faint suggestion that Julia, in contenting herself with Alfred's weak aesthetic sauce, stumbles upon a powerful idea about the close-knit relation between pleasure, understanding, and the social world. Instead, note how the limits of Julia's understanding correspond to the class-specificity of her desire. Leading up to the narrator's discussion of singularity, we learn that Julia's fondness for Alfred's fine sensibility is the closest a person like Julia can ever come to escaping the constraints of her cultural formation: "When singularity goes further and so gets to be always stronger, there comes to be in it too much real danger for any middle class young woman to follow it farther. Then comes the danger of being mixed by it so that no one just seeing you can know it, and they will take you for the lowest" (21). Fully committing to her idea of Alfred as holding "the key to a new world" would require Julia to compromise her class position. Here, what one wants to call Julia's sexuality appears both as a function of her age, gender, and class and as a knowledge that just barely exceeds what these necessarily entail.

Recall how *Tristram Shandy* plays a similar game with its readers by constructing interactions among characters that point so consistently in one direction that the precise sexual quality of meaning appears obvious. Then subsequent interactions will retroactively highlight the uncertainties running through previous ones, prompting a reader to ponder how the characters always do both more and less than we infer. By the time Stein wrote *Americans*, however, this

game was certainly more difficult to play because the the open secret had constrained linguistic channels of indirection. Anne-Lise François, providing an overview of the open secret, initially defines it as “a way of imparting knowledge such that it cannot be claimed or acted on.”¹⁹ Invoking Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and D.A. Miller’s analyses of how the open secret inflects literary practices of indexing male homosexuality, François goes on to describe criticism’s tendency to see the open secret as a conservative discursive paradigm, a “mode of communication that reveals to insiders what it simultaneously hides from outsiders or, more specifically, protects them from what they do not wish to know, from what it is in their power to ignore.” If one were to translate the open secret into the idiom of linguistic anthropology, one might think of it as an ideologically-laden practice of using indirection in which an incongruity between the conceptual knowledge an utterance normatively presupposes and what it entails within a particular interaction installs a supplementary contextual variable as a condition of the utterance’s interpretation.

The way *Americans* draws attention to what remains unsaid suggests a narrative consciousness that is familiar with the practices of open secrecy, especially with the ways circumlocution can communicate a non-normative aspect of a character’s sexuality. Mr. Dehning’s objections to Julia’s attraction to Alfred involve sexual classifications insofar as they revolve around some quality the father thinks both he and his daughter cannot or should not understand. At first Mr. Dehning’s paternal concern simply looks like prejudice against Alfred: “It was always there that Mr. Dehning did not like young Hersland, and the noblest words and the best acts, never, in any kind of a distrusted person, give any evidence against his condemnation. It is never facts that tell, they are the same when they mean very different things” (26). What is Mr. D. prejudiced against? It’s not that Alfred’s flawless conduct when meeting the parents might itself indicate an ulterior motive. Rather, “the facts” of Alfred include qualities that are not easily made relevant to the kinds of social interactions that Julia’s husband can expect to face regularly, and this uncertainty is sufficient to suggest particular kinds of stigma.

Initially Dehning worries that Alfred’s conspicuous aesthetic tastes will be a liability in his profession as lawyer, remarking to his daughter, “It’s foolish in a man who wants to make a success making a living, it’s foolish to do things that make other men feel they don’t want to trust him” (24). Further remarks from Dehning suggest, though, that Alfred’s shortcoming relates only indirectly to his fitness for his class position. The problem lies in other people’s perceptions, and Mr. Dehning worries that other men will perceive Alfred unfavorably because they will find him to be unlike other men. “Literary effects and modern improvements are alright for women,” he continues, “but with Hersland it ought to be different, it ought to be that he has the kind of sense he needs in his business. I don’t say he hasn’t got good sense in him to make a success in him” (25). An emphasis on pleasure and subjective experience is enough to brand Alfred a different kind of being and possibly disqualify him as a son-in-law despite his possessing all the properties one would expect from a man in his position. I am not implying Mr. Dehning has the privilege to avoid saying that Alfred, if not in fact a homosexual, is sufficiently like one to raise doubts about his prospects. Rather, his indirect approach to the implications of Alfred’s behavior presupposes that these implications correspond to some region of knowledge not easily communicated between members of families like the Dehnings, or at least between fathers and daughters. When Julia replies with equal vagueness to her father’s concerns, “I know papa just what you mean,” she reproduces these constraints (23). The metrical symmetry of the boundary in speech, separating

¹⁹ François, *Open Secrets*, 1.

father and daughter, entails the open secret as a language ideology, which may retroactively incorporate the implications of other circumlocutions and other distinctions (expectations of gender, of men who conduct business publicly) to specify some sexual content.

Given the prevalence of the open secret in this section of the novel, the narrator's reflection on singularity (in the passage I quoted at length in the introduction) seems at first to dispel the tension between what the characters say and what they mean by supplying the conspicuously missing contextual information only a true "insider" could offer. Insofar as the narrator addresses singulars as kin, one might expect this additional explication to involve an affirmation of sexual difference and its implications for social organization. However, because the narrator's discourse places singularity firmly outside the novel's economy of social kinds, it resembles less an address than a eulogy, were there such a thing as a eulogy for someone yet to be born. If the open secret as language ideology reproduces social relations by insulating them from the coherence of certain meanings, the passage's insistence on singularity as an "as yet unknown product" suggests that the open secret, in constraining uncertainty, might obscure certain emergent kinds of meaning.

In chafing against the limits of shareable knowledge, singularity undermines the communitarian impulse of the narrator's address to "brother singulars" in ways that complicate the narrator's authority and thus anticipate the novel's subsequent method of characterization. Structurally isolating the predication of kinds from metrical structures of repetition becomes a way to deemphasizing deemphasizes presupposition's compelling influence on perceptions of likeness and difference to focus instead on emergence in its relation to language use's different contextual tiers. With the novel's subsequent descriptions, the novel seems to ask: What if one's primary relationship to language did not involve finding a maximally coherent presupposition for every indeterminate relation between signs? What if instead we considered every sign as a potential point of origination for praxis? Diffusing the epistemic pressures of the open secret while retaining an indicatively sexual aspect, a structured relation to signs predicated on singularity presupposes a desire for the time and space to answer these questions. Because a reader cannot know how metrical contrasts in paragraphs accomplish presuppositional work with respect to a given set of concepts, we become more sensitive to how our own searches for openings of communication between metrical co-text and context implicate us in the aesthetics and erotics of emergence.

Singularity, or the feeling of someone's doing something

Shortly after we read that Julia and Alfred do finally marry, we also discover that the novelist is having difficulty imagining the text as public. "Bear it in your mind my reader, but truly I never feel it that there even can be for me any such a creature, no it is this scribbled and dirty and lined paper that is really to be to me always my receiver" (33). In the absence of readers who might invest the text with their imagination, the writer sees the "work" reduced to its most sordid material aspect. On one account, *Americans* amounts to a story about how family likenesses are communicated, told by a writer who struggles, but this would overlook the sexual valences of how the novel imagines communication. When the author-narrator gets worried that readers will not be able use the knowledge that the novel's repetition produces, the writer's negotiation around despair comes into relief against a desire for an intimacy mediated by beauty:

Disillusionment in living is finding out nobody agrees with you not those that are and were fighting with you. Disillusionment in living is the finding out nobody agrees with you not those that are fighting for you. Complete disillusionment is when you realise that no one can for they can't change. The amount they agree is important to you until the amount they do not agree with you is completely realised by you. Then you say you will write for yourself and strangers, you will be for yourself and strangers, and this then makes an old man or an old woman of you.

This is then one thing, another thing is the perfect joy of finding some one, any one really liking something you are liking, making, doing, being. This is another thing and a very pleasant thing, sometimes not a pleasant thing at all. (485)

Here the fictional address constitutes itself as a linguistic channel closed off to social entailments, including those of a sensuous, erotic kind, due to incompatible presuppositions. The passage figures "disagreement" as something that may not be apparent at first but is slowly discovered as a contrary and particularizing pattern of behavior. It's not them; it's you. (Elsewhere the narrator associates old age with an imposed slumber of the senses brought on by the receding of the world with which a body's sensibility is calibrated.) This incompatibility is only contingent, though, and unidirectional. For the passage also suggests how the very hermetic quality of a piece of writing can mediate forms of sociality, including sexual practices, insofar as liking the same obscure thing can entail liking someone or being like someone. Moreover, the passage leaves open the possibility that the looked-for terms of understanding, while founded on shared pleasure (such mediated connections are nothing if not "pleasant"), might not be what one thought it was. "Perfect joy" might be too daunting or disorienting to face. Like frameworks of aesthetic value, then, sexualities—even eccentric ones—require the public transmission of presuppositions in order to be enacted, however briefly, and these presuppositions may include language ideologies that allow one to realize certain timings, or metrical divisions, within social semiosis.

I have already remarked on how the narrative discourse's indexical grounding in the world of characters suggests something about this particular narrator's interest in the novel's representative social world. On the one hand, the narrator is invested in the particular staying power of the middle-class family cultures of the Dehnings and the Herslands: "Middle class is sordid material unillusioned unaspiring and always monotonous for it is always there and to be always repeated" (34). The very monotony with which some might reproach the middle class is interesting since its culture's "unaspiring" talent for being no more than itself constitutes its greatest achievement. Monotony implies a constant disciplining work. On the other hand, the narrator wants to understand how compelling attachments to a world of lived relations are also attachments to language, so that lapses in one's phenomenological relationship to language might also indicate shifts in a social world. "Categories that once to some one had real meaning," the narrator writes, "can later to that same one be all empty. It is queer that words that meant something in our thinking and our feeling can later come to have in them in us not at all any meaning" (440). The same paragraph continues to build an analogy between the meanings of words and the affective valences of social discourse: "Sometimes one reads a letter that they have been keeping...and it is all full of hot feeling and the one, reading the letter then, has not in them any memory of the person who once wrote that letter to them." Just as one might realize that a well-worn word no longer refers to anything, one might read an old letter and find oneself unable to understand how the intense feelings running through it correspond to a particular situation

involving another person. In both cases, a loss of meaning follows a failure to make repetition repeat: a failure to entail a social world as one puts language into a distinct metrical structure.

Bearing in mind the narrator's interest investments in repetition, observe how the novel's later sections recast some of the qualities initially predicated of singularity ("queer, mixed, strange") in terms of metrical phenomena. Echoing the way singularity suggests an absent or incipient context that lies just beyond a person's observable actions, the narrator periodically refers to a group of "puzzling" people, including Alfred Hersland, whose behavior implies a set of social practices and not-yet-coherent conceptual values. The narrator calls this "the flavor group." The passage that reconsiders Alfred within the context of this group marks the shift from predicating kinds on the basis of coherent genres of action to a finer analysis of metrical dissonance:

I was describing the being in Alfred Hersland that made of him to me to very many knowing him a part of being. He has in him only one kind of being but as I was telling pieces of it get separated off from other pieces of it by not being completely acting, flavors, reactions, by-products get disconnected and keep on going in him and things get all disarranged in him so that this one is a part of a one living, the bottom in him resisting and engulfing is not rich or thick or solid or ample or active enough in acting to make a complete being in my feeling in him, and always then that is there as being in him. These that to me in their living were silly ones not having any existing not from doing silly things but from there not being any connection between what they were seeing and doing and feeling and saying and always it all went on at once and kept on being all the being in them; these then are like this to me now, they are in a way of the flavor group which group as I was saying have it in them to be believing that flavor is existing without anything to be making a flavor without anything being a flavored thing. (589)

Members of the flavor group hold a common "belief" simply insofar as they exist in ways that manifest distinct qualities without indexing a higher-order identity—"a flavor without anything being a flavored thing." In accounting for the resulting incongruity between qualities of persons in-action and qualities of action as emblems of social identity, the passage produces a method of describing emergent phenomena in terms of metrical patterns of doing (solid, melting, reacting, etc.). The narrator previously employed similar terms, but these were predicated of a practice, or variety of doing, such as "loving," as the "cultural-conceptual" meaning of one person's metrical footing towards another's language use. Here, the terms characterize the very act of sign-making without reference to such a framework of genred practice, or "complete acting," as if an illocutionary potential were being dispersed. Moreover, the narrator puts these terms to use to describe a variety of problems in parsing patterns in discursive interaction. If this first group appears "disconnected," another, similar group consists of persons in whom "everything...is going at the same rate in them only the action is so vaguely in them that things in them do not keep in connection and these then are not to themselves inside them in the way of making themselves to themselves inside them to be themselves in them. These then live in a life but they do not make themselves important to themselves in it" (590). In short, if such persons appear not to come to socially identifiable formedness, their actions do not therefore elude description. The narrator's terms render the incongruous, incomplete typological effects of the flavor group's repetitive action in terms of the repeated forms' number, relative exclusivity and simultaneity, integrity and interpenetration, frequency of repetition, and intensity.

“Being a process caught in motion, of course,” writes Silverstein, “‘society’ as a macrosocial form might be reconceptualized from the semiotic point of view as a perduring virtual communicative economy.”²⁰ *Americans*’s uncoupling description of embodied semiosis from frameworks of social practice to describe the flavor group certainly eludes understanding in terms of an economy of inhabitable kinds. This does not mean, however, that the narrator simply ignores a social space’s constrained meaning. If this were the case, there would be no field of action in which qualities of language could appear to “go.” Instead, when couched within the novel’s more pervasive metrical structure, descriptions of the flavor group foreground the paradoxical status of “strong” forms of emergence (those that publicize new practices) compared to the forms of emergence characterizing all social interaction. Clearly, emergent practices and the concepts of social kind they presuppose are likely to be difficult to respond to, and because emergence (dialectic semiosis toward higher complexity) is a collaborative process, some emergent forms may not initially resemble emergence at all. To conceptualize the relation between these two senses of emergence, it helps to take a step further into linguistic anthropology’s rich vocabulary for the phenomenological aspect of language use.

In anthropology, the term *qualia* belongs to a set of conceptual tools that respond to the question of how social groups construe distinct impressions about people’s semiotic performances as instances of the same quality—even when these experiences cross sensorial modalities.²¹ We might therefore understand qualia as belonging to processes that essentialize metrical contrasts in discursive interactions, so distinct footings within a discourse can be understood as moves in a cultural genre of practice. Nicholas Harkness thus defines qualia as forms of behavior that “focus attention (in various modalities) on the pragmatic ‘feeling of doing.’ Qualia emerge as points of orientation in social action and shape how such action is apperceived as a kind of practice conforming to material affordances and limits; in this way practice can be linked to groups and become productive of certain kinds of knowledge of ‘the way things are.’”²² Qualia describe situated intuitions of how the texture of human behavior, the feeling of someone’s doing something, correlates to prevailing conditions, to “the way things are,” giving qualia value within the set of constraints that constitute a social space. Suppose you and an acquaintance plan to rendezvous for a meal. Minutes before your prearranged meeting, your acquaintance texts you to say that he can’t make it. In reporting this series of events to others, it might occur to you to refer to this person as having been “flakey.” Even such a simple attribution of a quality is interesting for what it presupposes. Like such other terms as “basic” and “sketchy,” “flakey” is patently a metaphor that posits resemblances between social consequences of a behavior in context, physical texture and composition, and character. The resemblance acquires descriptive efficacy only if your interlocutors can accept how use of the term introduces a set of assumptions that settle the following uncertainties: the way the use of different communication technologies index aspects of communicators’ relationship; the ways certain communication media are well or poorly suited for different genres of message; the extent to which the particular message implicitly recognizes or fails to recognize these other norms. All of these factors, and probably more, come into play to give you the immediate, unpleasant impression of your acquaintance’s having done something that you can with little reflection represent as his “being a flake.”

²⁰ Silverstein, “‘Cultural’ Concepts,” 639.

²¹ Harkness, “Softer soju,” 12.

²² Harkness, “Pragmatics of Qualia,” 574.

Stein's terms, "vague," "disconnected," "reactive," "solid," "ample," things' "going" at the same or different "rates" are qualia inasmuch as they presuppose a universe of action shaped by the material constraints of a field where repetitions of action are measurable and countable. However, insofar as these terms describe linguistic events without being predicated of an intelligible practice, they resemble Peirce's notion of "degenerate indexes." Signs rarely exist by virtue of only one type of relational logic; all indexes involve some degree of iconicity insofar as the existential relation constituting the index also produces a qualitative similarity. One can construe all of Peirce's examples of indexes in terms of such modifications: the weathercock is like the wind in magnitude and direction of force; the volume of the knock at the door echoes the force behind the knock. Subsequently Peirce introduces a degenerate class of indexes although he does not take these up in detail. He writes, "Any individual is a degenerate index of its own characters," meaning that the qualities that bear an iconic significance within indexical relations may signify independently of the actuality of that relation. We might understand degenerate indexes to suggest a distinct class of qualisigns (qualities that are signs by virtue of resemblance merely, for which Peirce often uses colors as examples) because they still retain an existential relation to something else, such as a practice. These resemblances are not interpretable as purely logical possibilities (the way a yellow truck resembles a yellow flower). Rather, a degenerate index signifies as a resemblance under a particular set of unknown conditions, forces, or impositions.

Stein's qualia presuppose a set of constraints on signifying acts akin to an economy of kinds inhabitable in practice, but the nature of the constraints is not fully given in the apperception of the act. The indeterminate context projected outward from such signifying acts as their presuppositional ground is given in the structuring condition of the space but given nowhere in its totality. Hence these "degenerate" qualities suggest the way the initial emergence of a new cultural space can be suspended in a cross-current of other cultural meanings. The characteristic metrical dissonance of the flavor group, which invokes multiple frameworks of doing, is puzzling because the indexes of social value emergent from their behavior all go "at the same rate." This lack of subordination prevents certain of those qualities-in-action from coming into relief as essentially salient to an interaction in ways that constitute an emblem of social identity. In such moments, the narrator describes someone's having done *something*.

Insofar as it renders the dynamics of signification describable with respect to an indeterminate framework of practice, *Americans* both extends and complicates pragmatic interpretations of the social world as a process of conceptual mapping. Even within the indeterminate margins of contextualization, linguistic anthropology's modeling of social space according to rules of use tends to reduce the unknown to the known, potential for creativity to the absence of compulsion. Silverstein is clear on this point; the meanings of an interactional text salient to linguistic anthropology are "efficacious," where efficacy depends on some minimal closure of interaction's generic frame.²³ In other words, social-indexes emerge for participants from formal contrasts of signs, but when they effectively mediate social action, they are no longer emergent. To conclude the chapter's discussion, I link Stein's emphasis on the diffuse efficacy of

²³Silverstein, "'Cultural' Concepts," 631n. According to the analyst's principle of coherence, there must be at least one interactional context capable of accommodating all indexes as part of the same event. We might understand Stein's interest in singularity as a critical intervention into the extended temporality of this ideal context's coming-to-coherence. On this point, see Silverstein, "Metapragmatic Discourse and Metapragmatic Function," 37.

forms of non-action to the multiple reading practices it requires of readers and the kinds of aesthetic pleasures it therefore makes possible.

TOWARD THE ACTUALITY OF EMERGENT FORMS

I have shown that Stein's *Americans* approaches the representation of social space by structurally isolating distinct tiers of emergent phenomena that consist of dialectic interplays between icons and indexes: relational footings apparent from metrical contrasts between sentences; essentializations of those footings as manifestations of participants' recruitment to roles in culturally specific types of activity; and conceptual knowledge of qualitatively distinct kinds of people that bring patterns in social role alignment into relief. I have also illustrated how Stein's novel constructs a certain ideological stance toward the public meaning of fragmentary semiotic patterns—a stance realized in (metrical) contrast to the open secret. Whereas the open secret emphasizes the conceptual coherence of covert meanings, attention to “degenerate” qualia foregrounds cultural emergence. In drawing the chapter's discussion to a close, I argue that the novel's language-ideological work also effects a shift in fictional aesthetics, weaving the sexual implications of singularity into the kinds of relations a reader can take up in response to the novel. Specifically, the indeterminate metrical modeling of interactional space-time in *Americans* adopts a footing with respect to fiction's defining relation to categorical forms of reference and its modes of aesthetic pleasure.

Social kinds, characterization, and fictional aesthetics

I have shown how Stein's narrator adopts a manner of observation capable of holding apart qualities-in-action that signify alignments with frameworks of practice indexically “in play” in social interaction from the actor's inhabitation of a social identity. By positioning the coherence of identity as of personhood as a contingent eventuality of language use within the frame of a fictional narrative, Stein reinterprets fictional reference, a problem within the history of the novel genre and its terms of aesthetic engagement. The problem of fictional reference begins with a question about the kinds of truth one can ascribe to propositions involving imaginary persons. In “The Rise of Fictionality,” Catherine Gallagher reconstructs an historical shift by which the proper names of fictional characters come to refer to categories of persons rather than to individuals: “The fictionality defining the novel inhered in the *creation* of instances, rather than their mere selection, to illustrate a class of persons.”²⁴ This broader mode of reference displaces fictional texts' truth claims from the veracity of a proposition about a particular person to the *plausibility* of a proposition about a member of a class—about whether any person of such-and-such a kind would do such-and-such things under the given circumstances.²⁵

²⁴ Gallagher, “Rise of Fictionality,” 342.

²⁵ Note the consilience between fiction's practice-oriented framework for fictional plausibility and the way linguistic anthropology takes cultural conceptions of kind to be immanent in interaction. Silverstein writes: “‘Who’—what kind of person in a social partition [a macrosocial knowledge schemata] made relevant in this genred mode of entextualization [interactional, metricalized ritual performance] can inhabit a particular interlocutory role using such-and-such expression forms?” Silverstein, “‘Cultural’ Concepts,” 639.

Fictional plausibility is aesthetically productive because it is inherently paradoxical. The constitutive transparency that makes fictional characters different from the people with whom readers share their lives also renders characters paradoxically bottomless since there is in theory no end to what might be said about them. Thus principles that would ground judgments of a fictional text's plausibility (or lack thereof) quickly lose themselves in shifts in centers of authority (other characters, the narrator, the thoughts of the character herself) and in the increasing individuation of character wrought by these shifts. Pursuing the truth of fiction beyond character's constitutional incompleteness leads Gallagher toward a more subtle analysis of the conditions under which a reader engages with the paradox of fictional probability.

The conditions of fictional reading Gallagher mentions include the cognitive and affective states of non-belief she calls "ironic credulity" and "optimistic incredulity." An ironically credulous reader of fiction, by definition absolved from belief, is free to consider the conditions under which she *could* believe what she reads. The second, which Gallagher calls "optimistic incredulity," refers to how the safety of contingently investing belief in a story that constitutionally excludes referential truth removes the risk of asking, "What if I did believe? How might I best navigate the world of signs with which a novel presents me, as though they had a claim on the one I inhabit?" Together, these determine the pleasures of reading since they pave the way for the imaginative probing of the logical breaks constitutive of fiction, such as by identifying with characters, speculating on alternative courses of action, and even the kinds of imagined attempt at intervention that might get one in trouble at movie theaters ("No, don't do that!"). Most important of all, a reader of fiction, in navigating this paradox, supposedly encounters what she already is, "a flexible, durable subject with multiple enunciative capacities."²⁶ By "enunciative capacities," I take Gallagher to mean a reader's existence as a unified subject despite adopting different footings toward language in a way that contrasts sharply with characters' fragmentation into utterances attributed to them and utterances about them. In this respect, the term might also encompass a reader's supposed ability to consistently keep track of and navigate between frames of reference indexically projected from language. Already we might start to compare this account of reading fiction to the experience of encountering metrical patterns in paragraphs of *Americans* alongside the narrator's litanies of conceptually distinct kinds.

Although Gallagher's account of reading fiction draws explicitly on Lacanian psychoanalysis, in aesthetic terms the subjective effects of "suture" resemble something like a

²⁶ Gallagher, "Rise of Fictionality," 360.

theory of the fictional sublime.²⁷ A confrontation with the incalculable (because constitutionally incomplete) possibilities for conceptualizing characters' actions issues in a satisfying encounter with the transcendence of a reader's reasoning mind over a sensuous relation to language because it can grasp the text in its totality despite its gaps and never lose sight of the conditions of entry into the fiction. Hence Gallagher describes a fiction reader's necessary experience of "the elation of a unitary unboundedness" that is also "an equally idealized immanence" since the embodied particularity of persons, as opposed to that of characters, is supposed to be self-sufficient, requiring no mediation through language.²⁸

One might say that Stein intervenes in fictional aesthetics by exploiting the indeterminacy of contextualization to incorporate the generative processes of cultural emergence under characterization's sublime incompleteness. Hence in investing in and divesting from conceptual contextualizations of a paragraph's metrical patterns, we readers become aware of our ability to transcend the contingent relations among signs, even to generate entirely new contextualizations. However, one might also point to how Stein's writer-narrator struggles with the social embeddedness of her medium and how this suggests that any consideration of implicit conceptual content presupposes the interpreter's implication in a certain social world. By the same token, narrative addresses in *Americans* impinge on a fiction reader's sense of freedom by first implying that we may not be adequate to the text's ideology of language and then proliferating openings for us to enter into this ideology. In short, then, grasping the cultural entailments of *Americans* requires one to wrestle with the specificity of implicitness and indeterminacy in language use. For Stein, indeterminacy does not invoke the open secret to constrain knowledge (while holding that knowledge's implications for oneself at arm's length), nor do ideological uses of uncertainty suggest that knowledge is at its least coercive when it is most explicit. Rather, by thinking about linguistic indeterminacy in social-indexical terms, *The Making of Americans* foregrounds how practices of indeterminacy reflect interested investments in textually-mediated language as a sustainable channel for culturally emergent forms of public sexuality. As an aspiring public text, *Americans* involves a socially situated use of aesthetic freedom.

²⁷ Kant's analytic of the sublime gives an account of a paradigmatic situation of aesthetic judgment in which a sensible intuition "unsuitable for our faculty of presentation, and as it were doing violence to our imagination" becomes the enabling condition for a satisfying encounter with the human mind's superior faculty of reason—superior because it lies above sense (129). Gallagher's account of fiction's constitutive incompleteness recalls many parameters of the mathematical sublime, intuitions that confront a sensible subject with "a feeling of the inadequacy of his imagination for presenting the ideas of a whole," as in the case of absolute magnitudes, such as infinity (136). In such instances sublimity describes the state of composure reclaimed in grasping infinity through a supersensible idea. That being said, important differences destabilize the analogy between fiction and the objects that present sublimity. First of all, despite Kant's drawing on examples such as the pyramids and St. Peter's cathedral in Rome, it remains debatable whether Kant believes that aesthetic objects can produce the experience of the sublime since their forms, however large, are given by human hands. By the same token, it is unclear whether the play of possible characterizations in Gallagher's account of reading fiction ever produces the displeasure that elicits sublime feeling since reading is always framed by a set of conventions that free the reader from judging the truth of propositions about named persons. Kant, on the other hand, describes the objects of sublime affect as commanding "admiration or respect" that "deserves to be called negative pleasure" (129). This seems less important, though, when one takes into consideration that sublimity describes only the mind of the subject and not the objects that serve for the presentation of sublimity. I therefore place the emphasis of my comparison on the kind of reflexive pleasure Kant describes in his analytic of the sublime with respect to the supposed subjective effects of aesthetic engagement with fiction's perplexing possibilities. See Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 128-59.

²⁸ Gallagher, "Rise of Fictionality," 361.

From sublime aesthetics to an aesthetics of emergence

Since the mid-twentieth century, the cultural significance of indeterminacy in Stein's writing has been a major dividing point for literary criticism. Whereas one set of respondents claims that Stein rejected social mimesis to construct the logical conditions of possibility for representation, others locate historical resonances of Stein's work.²⁹ Although the former tradition has generated valuable insights on the importance of indexical meaning across Stein's writing, I am more concerned at this juncture with how those adopting the latter perspective have relied upon different language ideologies to connect experimental prose to historical context. If I am right that *Americans* aligns itself with a specific set of stakes involving the relationship between the indeterminacy of contextualization and sexuality, then we should be able to understand how it resists some of these readings.

Sometimes critics who align themselves with feminist or queer political projects use Stein's texts to claim the authority to name her sexuality and to illustrate the influence of homosexuality within literary history.³⁰ Indeed, it might be possible to read the passages on "singulars," "queer people" who "fly to the kindly comfort of an older world" as veiled references to the conditions surrounding Stein's quitting her medical program at Johns Hopkins to pursue a writing career in Paris; the always uncomfortable, often hostile atmosphere of higher education for women; the unhappy unfolding of Stein's relation with Mary Bookstaver under the historical conditions of the closet; and the uncertain frame of reference that accompanies emigration. This way of reading Stein's work corresponds to a political imperative to publicly confront sexual shame that produces its own language ideology. In this study's introduction, I described this ideology in terms of the tactics of activists who emphasized the political salience of "coming out."³¹ Such tactics are part of a strategy to agitate around the political conditions deeply embedded in sexuality by dramatizing the strong affects that arise when sexuality becomes topical in discourse. They implicitly associate the "publicness" of discourse with people's ability to name and describe their sexual experiences.

Readings that rely on this ideology rarely, if ever, correspond to the beliefs about language Stein's texts explore or the ones they extend to readers. Earlier I suggested that singularity, before it refers to a distinctive quality of a social group, holds space for questions about the relation between uses of language and the timeframe of cultural emergence. If the passage indexes the historical particulars I list above, it acquires these indexical values through its commitment to these questions—a commitment that takes shape as a refusal to couple representation to explicit categorical reference. *Americans* contests the very way the language ideology of the open secret

²⁹ For examples of the former, see Ashton, *Modernism to Postmodernism* and Wendy Steiner's discussion of "entity" in Stein's later writing in Steiner, *Exact Resemblance to Exact Resemblance*. For an early articulation of the social values of Stein's indeterminacy, see DeKoven, *A Different Language*, 6-24. Marjorie Perloff focuses on the relationship between linguistic indeterminacy in Stein's writing and the ideology of modernism in Stein's work in an important orienting voice for subsequent commentators like Ngai and Lorange. See Perloff, "Grammar-in-use."

³⁰ See Astrid Lorange's reconstruction of various attempts to decode Stein's sexuality through her writing, especially the figure of "the cow." Lorange, *How Reading is Written*, 196-201. Although Ulla Dydo's continues to be an important source on Stein's avant-garde network, her tendency to read texts reductively in relation to the Stein archive has perpetuated practices of historical criticism that ignore much of the way Stein's writing mediates shifts in the social field of sexuality, for instance, through literary practices. See Ulla E. Dydo, *The Language that Rises*.

³¹ See Berlant and Freeman, "Queer nationality," 90.

construes the relation between the explicit and implicit in language as separate orders of knowledge. At the very least, the novel shows that implicitness in no way contradicts the publicness of meaning since participants in a public discourse require ways to signal their footings in relation to each other's utterances, as well as other kinds of shared knowledge, across time and space. Supplanting categorical reference with diagrammatic figuration as the guiding principle of producing, reading, and enjoying fiction, *Americans* prompts one to imagine oneself as being in the company of other readers who are not yet a public to the extent that they are accumulating distinctions with which to interpret the world.

A more recent voice in another critical tradition, Sianne Ngai argues that Stein's novel recalibrates the component affects of sublime feeling to communicate an historical feeling. Drawing on Gilles Deleuze's notion of "difference without a concept," Ngai calls attention to the way indeterminacy in the work provides the formal ground for conveying the experience of "stuplimity" (a portmanteau of stupidity and sublimity): "The negative experience of stupefaction arising from a relationship to language founded on a not-yet-qualified or -conceptualized difference...raises the significant question of how we might respond to what we recognize as 'the different' before a value has been assigned to it or before it becomes qualified—as 'sexual' or 'racial' difference, for instance."³² Pace Ngai, while a reader of *Americans* struggles to understand characters with certainty, one can clearly conceptualize this uncertainty as operating within a social theory of repetition. The narrator remains reticent on how qualities of language suggest qualities of character while insisting everywhere that character does come to coherence. Ngai's claim that indeterminacy in *Americans* is consistently unqualified lies even closer to the point. She associates the experience of stuplimity with the loss of history under modern capitalism; stuplimity is still "sublime" insofar as the constant erosion of meaning that accompanies the creation and dissolution of markets leads to a painstaking search for methods of forging connection that can transcend successive waves of semiotic "stuff." To be sure, Stein's narrator is concerned with the modes of enduring sociality beyond middle class families. One detects notes of both vitriol and envy toward the Dehnings, an industrialist family, when the narrator calls singularity "an unknown product." But conflating the search for coherence with so pervasive a condition ignores the novel's interest in the endurance of middle class values and sexual publics' historical formation. By the same token, Ngai overlooks the possibilities of positive pleasure in reading *Americans*.

Sexuality, sociality, and the pleasure of possibility

Stein authors an exhaustively long work that, to be enjoyed, requires readers to respond to the call to realize the historical limits of indexical competence while also taking stock of the social poetics of their own interpretive work. To respond in this way is to realize the multiple kinds of creativity that run through normativity: its adaptive maintenance of consistency and its potential deformation. Several recent reading practices suggest ways of responding to the work that incorporate its commitment to representation of a coherent social world that includes emergence as a structuring feature.

I have in mind here various practices of giving public "relay" readings of the novel. To center the ways that these public interpretations presuppose and entail the language-ideological

³² Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 252.

relation to emergence I have described, I refer to a reading that took place at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 2011.³³ Several local writers divided the responsibility of reading the text aloud in the museum's lobby, producing a sonic architecture. This reading reproduces the novel's commitments to coherence insofar as a listener passing in and out of range of the recitation would have to judge (without necessarily having to decode) to what extent she was listening to the same text. At the same time, the alternation of readers (with presumably different indexical competencies) both underscores the narrator's "beginning again" when words start to lose their meaning and introduces the potential for eccentricities to emerge in vocalizing metrical patterns.

To be sure, the individual and collective identities of readers perform an even more specific kind of work here. Looking through the list of names, one notices a distinct correlation with participants in the New Narrative group founded in San Francisco in the late 1970s around Robert Glück's writing workshop at Small Press Traffic Bookstore. One might think about the New Narrative as a movement that linked the literary experimentation of the period (mentions of New Narrative often appear alongside allusions to the Language poets) to queer politics, especially its renewed understanding of identity as a socially constructed site of both pleasure and political domination.³⁴ In effect, members of the group recontextualized acts of literary experimentation (especially the emphasis on the materiality of the signifier) in relation to the writer's body, itself a repository of history and public meanings.³⁵ In this respect, though one would fail to define the New Narrative group according to a single sexual identity or single axis of sexual difference, the social network that ran through the SFMoMA reading of *Americans* might be understood to have emphatically recontextualized, within a diagrammatic structure, the sexual dimension of the narrator's address and interest in repetition. In other words, the collaborative recitative work of certain writerly bodies associated with ideas about the close interrelation between culture, the body, and writing, is likely to bring into relief the way Stein's narrator emerges from a patient sifting of a monotonous sea of signs as a body in want of further realization, of public intelligibility.

In the next chapter, I'll discuss the same question of the ramifications of marginalized sexual subjects' claims on others' knowledge in terms of the very different aesthetic medium of Robert Musil's *The Man without Qualities*. To posit that forms of non-action may index alignments to emergent practices and identities is also to suggest that these forms might assert some ethical claim on us. Talking about the nature of this claim will require further ways of describing how cultural identities "live" in language use and the various ways culturally emergent identities can

³³ San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, "Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans*." See also, Triple Canopy, "The Making of Americans: Annual marathon reading."

³⁴ Glück writes of Language Poetry's subtractive approach to the exploration of language's creation of meaning, "I experienced the poetry of disjunction as a luxurious idealism in which the speaking subject rejects the confines of representation and disappears in the largest freedom, that of language itself. My attraction to this freedom and to the professionalism with which it was purveyed made for a kind of class struggle within myself. Whole areas of my experience, especially gay experience, were not admitted to this utopia, partly because the mainstream reflected a resoundingly coherent image of myself back to me." Glück, "Long Note," 27.

³⁵ In *Someone: the Pragmatics of Misfit Sexualities*, Michael Lucey draws together some of Pierre Bourdieu's insights on fields of cultural production, including the distinctions between "autonomous/heteronomous" producers and "orthodox" and "heretical" forms of production. Lucey uses these distinctions to conceive how a producer might revolutionize the relevant conceptual space of values within a field by appealing to an outside constituency that it doesn't routinely address or to a minority position within it. Lucey, *Someone*, 50-55. New Narrative might be said to comprise producers who are autonomous in their avant-garde dedication to the craft of writing and to other writers but who achieve significant heretical, discontinuous effects within this space by addressing a heteronomous sexual public.

manifest in discursive interaction—as, for instance, a distinctly salient footing towards others that can't be inhabited, or as an inadvertently achieved, unwanted becoming. In Musil's novel, the question of practical reasons takes the form, "Wie soll man antworten?" How should one respond? The novel stages moral crisis around the indeterminacy of contextualization through a distinct narrative time that slows down indexical processes to trace a sign's trajectory across a field of social forces as surrounding discourse redraws the boundaries of conversation's cultural framework of action. This method generates a distinct narrative terminology of possible actualities (those events that appear likely to cohere from the perspective of one moment in discursive context,) and actual possibilities (consequential inactions built into the structure of a conversation that promise—or threaten—to reorganize its meanings).

CHAPTER THREE

“How should one respond?” Possibility in Robert Musil’s *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*

Always there are many many millions of every kind of men and women and this makes many stories very much realer, there being so many always of the same kind of them. It makes it realer then when in a story there are twelve women, all alike, and one hundred men, all alike, and a man and a woman completely resembling the one to the other one of them and always then it makes circuses more interesting for always then each one doing something in a circus is a kind of men or women and each one is completed, concentrated at the moment each one has the music stopped and does the hard thing one has been preparing all his life that makes a living for that one, makes the living of that one.¹

A world of qualities without a man has arisen, of experiences without the person who experiences them, and it almost looks as though ideally private experience is a thing of the past and that the friendly burden of personal responsibility is to dissolve into a system of formulas of possible meanings. Probably the dissolution of the anthropocentric point of view, which for such a long time considered man to be at the center of the universe but which has been fading away for centuries, has finally arrived at the “I” itself, for the belief that the most important thing about experience is the experiencing, or of action the doing is beginning to strike most people as naïve. There are probably people who still lead personal lives, who say “We saw the So-and-sos yesterday” or “We’ll do this or that today” and enjoy it without its needing to have any content or significance.²

Contrary to what one might expect, some experimental fictions take interest in repetitive social activity and the highly formalized meanings repetition generates. In the last chapter, I discussed how Stein’s *The Making of Americans* connects two distinct senses of emergence associated with repetition. The first concerns the process by which a people’s regular forms of activity project a conceptual economy of kinds as behavior’s orienting background. The second sense of emergence involves how the diagrammatic reproduction of repetition periodically generates new regularities of form that suggest a different conceptual map of a social world. Because they are constructed from old forms, such “singularities” are inherently uncertain and may resemble inaction rather than a cultural type of doing. By the same token, some semiotic activity may be difficult to respond to, requiring creative strategies to cite in and across contexts—strategies that may include nonce taxonomies for behavioral effects, but rarely names for identities. Stein’s narrator underscores, in the first of this chapter’s epigraphs, how highly formalized, rehearsed behavior nonetheless garners great interest and may even prove integral to the experience of surprise, as opposed to say, astonished non-responsiveness or mute curiosity.

¹ Stein, *The Making of Americans*, 385.

² Musil, *The Man without Qualities*, 158.

Through readers' ways of taking up meanings in Stein's novel, singularity operates as a metonym for the sexual and public dimensions of an excited but patient attention to formal repetition.

With this chapter I further develop how experimental novels model the implicit semiotic processes that certain sexual identities depend on to become intelligible and interdiscursively actualized. I will focus on how Robert Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (*The Man without Qualities*, 1930-1943) constructs what I think of as systems of "para-sexual" indexical effects, instances of talk when a character's atypical sexuality becomes relevant to a practice though the practice itself may not entail a sexual relation. By accumulating enough of these moments, Musil's novel can minimally foreground implicit links between them and thus communicate the conditions for how certain (sexual) possibilities are immanent in a culture without ever being named.

Before moving into some examples, however, I should indicate some shifts in focus between the last chapter and this one. From the second epigraph, one sees that where Stein's narrator takes repetition to culminate in intricately ritualized, public forms of behavior, Musil's understands human activity to generate non-human forms that are as ideal as they are immanent. One obvious question is how *The Man without Qualities* imagines the kinds of experience a culture makes possible to take on an independent form, so that they can be said to exist whether people inhabit them or not. The somewhat incongruous phrase, "ideally private experience" moreover suggests Musil's amplification of some cultural stakes his text shares with Stein's. A private experience, considered ideally, might orient a kind of publicness, the free use of reason being one distinguishing mark of public contexts. The disappearance of private life in the abstract gives any discourse about personal experience a quite narrow, particularizing resonance.³ (Recall here the disillusionment Stein's narrator feels about being unintelligible to potential readers and hence the novel's articulation of a narrative "I" through attention to a given social world's forms of repetition.) Yet the passage anticipates how Musil's novel orients itself toward this cultural condition's ethical implications, for under it, rightness or appropriateness of action corresponds to action's coherence within a formal system of meanings, not with the intrinsic value of any one meaning. In such a context the stances people take in responding to purely private forms of meaning will likely be urgent, strained cultural events.

In this chapter's first section, I discuss how Musil's novel explores possibilities, or *Möglichkeiten* (meanings not-yet-formalized or culturally emergent) as culturally immanent actualities manifesting at the interstices of various other, more highly formalized contexts of experience. For a concept of possibility, Musil draws on some principles of Christian mystical thinking, especially as they have been incorporated into modern practices of essay writing. In the introduction, I mentioned some aspects of essayistic practice in discussing Adorno's "Der Essay als Form." Essays loosen language forms from the spheres of activity that normatively give them ideological content by juxtaposing them with other forms that bear a differential relation to that

³ Across the previous chapters, I have been engaging with a Kantian tradition for conceptualizing the difference between public and private contexts. In this tradition, the distinction between public and private has more to do with degrees of constraint on reason than with the generality or particularity of experience because both publicness and privacy correspond to ways of accessing general orders of meaning. Privacy simply designates those general situations where reason is constrained within a single sphere of activity, field of production, or social function. We might understand, however, that the epigraph from Musil begins to theorize how the relation between the two sets of distinctions shifts under certain cultural conditions: when private languages of formalized experience increasingly set the terms of public thought and action, attempts to reflect on the wider significance of experiences outside private spheres of activity are bound to resemble a "pure privacy," or meaningless, eccentric formalism.

context. Through incongruous conceptual assemblages, essays make the conceptual excesses of language felt, allowing new contextualizations to emerge.

I argue, however, that theories of essayistic form that hinge on semantic meanings of words incompletely account for the ways *The Man without Qualities* incorporates essayistic modes of thinking into a novel. Musil's novel gives at least equal attention to other kinds of meanings that exist in language and are not reducible to words, most notably voices. To understand how voices can become formally bound to particular contexts and meanings, I will draw on the linguistic anthropological concepts of register and enregistered voices in their distinction from entextualized voices. Briefly, registers describe culturally situated patterns of language use that index certain qualities regardless of the social qualities of a speaker or the circumstances of a particular interaction. Beside their implicit, indexical forms, registers also constitute social groups' narrative logics for describing the pragmatic effects of language use; they give integrity and structure to the stories we tell ourselves and others about what people are doing when talking. Registers help people define what acts of language use qualify a person as, for example, "being polite" or generally define behavior as "appropriate" to a context. We might say that registers comprise metapragmatic phenomena that constrain the turns a discursive interaction can take and the kinds of sense people can make of interactions. The concept of register offers a lever by which to understand how Musil's novel puts possibilities into motion by constructing linguistic exchanges where the qualities of characters' speech suggest that several different narratives about contextual consistency have gotten crossed.

Musil's way of assimilating the essays' juxtapositional strategy to experimental fiction's indeterminate, indexical structures grants a special importance to sexualities as cultural identities communicated along indexical channels. Hence scenes where characters' sexualities come into play often construct paradigms of possibility. If registers allow linguistic forms to signal social qualities consistently across contexts (in ways pointing above or beyond the people who use them), metapragmatic explanations in *The Man without Qualities* also draw attention to meanings that apparently emanate from a nonexistent, or as yet unoccupied structural position. In other words, language's subjection to patterns that give it meaning and integrity that is largely indifferent to people's particular uses might also suggest that positions exist in language despite their not being explicitly commented on or otherwise taken up by interlocutors. I have in mind such moments as when narration supplements the reflections of Ulrich's lover Bonadea on their clandestine meetings by explicating what the form of these reflections could mean, not what they actually meant in context. Here is the passage that outlines Bonadea's reflections:

One feels oneself very clearly like a stage set in the glare of artificial light; what one has before one is stage eyes, a stage mustache, the buttons of a costume being unbuttoned and the whole scene from the first entrance into the room to the first horrible moment of being sober again all takes place inside a consciousness that has stepped outside one's own head and papered the walls with pure hallucination. Bonadea did not use precisely these words—her thought was only partly verbal anyway—but even as she was trying to visualize it she felt herself at the mercy of this change in consciousness. "Whoever could describe it would be a great artist—no, a pornographer!" she thought, looking at Ulrich. (279)

The description of Ulrich's and Bonadea's sex is emphatically not Bonadea's even as it bears some logical relation to the thought attributed to her. Within the conventions of fiction, such a narrative

operation seems paradoxical because it both extends the representation of a character (drawing attention to fictional persons' unreal transparency by offering up their thoughts) as it violates plausibility. In particular, so incisive a reflection on sex-as-performance is difficult to square with Bonadea's limited linguistic resources, not to mention the compulsiveness she associates with her sexuality and the corresponding surprise and shame she feels toward the adulterous affairs she can't seem to exit.

However, we might take the narrator's metapragmatic discourse to outline a cultural understanding—one compatible with Bonadea's mostly unreflectively practiced relation to her sexuality—that possibly runs through the lovers' discourse but that they cannot index fully as part of conversation's collaborative work. Consider, for instance, the implicit correspondences between Bonadea's intuition of sexuality's *Gesamtkunstwerk* mode of consciousness and Ulrich's earlier realization that his culture's conditions have rendered his intellectual achievements as so many formal operations: "without much exaggeration he was able to say of his life that everything in it had fulfilled itself as if it belonged together more than it belonged to him. *B* had always followed *A*, whether in battle or in love. Therefore he had to suppose that the personal qualities he had achieved in this way had more to do with one another than with him" (157). Bonadea first happens upon Ulrich's by chance after he has been mugged and beaten. At the very least, the passage on Bonadea's thoughts around sexual scripts recontextualizes the relation by suggesting that Ulrich, in making the most of a chance encounter, has actually acted according to a well-rehearsed formula. Bonadea's remark on needing a pornographer's skill to express her experience of sex adumbrates the understanding that sexualities, like experiences inhabited in language, presuppose processes of normativization resembling enregisterment. To widen the realm of possibilities a degree further, the passage might signal how the two characters, despite the incalculable distance between their unuttered thoughts, are nonetheless working through similar questions about the kinds of constraint that mediate between a person as a user of signs, certain culturally authorized kinds of experience, and social identities.

One might understand the section of the previous passage that leads up to the sentence, "Bonadea did not use precisely these words," to constitute an evolution of "free indirect discourse." Anne-Lise François suggests that such unattributed utterances unsettle a difficult-to-shake Enlightenment habit of locating thought's perfection in explicit verbalization. She effectively argues that an utterance's contingent, artful separation from discursive interaction can be a way of insisting on their possibility, on their being immanent in what is uttered: "Rather than simply 'echo' or give a secondary, ghostly voicing to speech that has already been vocalized, or, on the contrary, failed to take place, such sentences make available for silent reading experiences that may not want, need, or be capable of louder articulation."⁴ The remarkable and difficult thing about Musil's novel is, however, that characters sometimes, often inadvertently, produce utterances that both presuppose and entail truths that the novel elsewhere implicitly tags with the kinds of modal stipulation François describes (can't, won't, needn't be uttered). In the dissertation's introduction, I considered a moment in which Ulrich's sister Agathe says something difficult to place—that she wants to murder her husband. For Ulrich, an unattributable utterance

⁴ Anne-Lise François, *Open Secrets: the Literature of Uncounted Experience* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2008), 16. Throughout this chapter I attempt to make François's insights about the literary particularity of unclaimed language compatible with a more general understanding of linguistic meanings that depend on addressivity and vocalization.

rides on a familiar vocal signature. He struggles to formulate a response, for though he is fairly confident that Agathe does not want Hagauer dead, he is unsure how his reaction may further entail the excess of meaning Agathe has invoked. The moment once more raises the ethical problems of consistent meaning but in ways that incorporate issues of voice and sexual difference: Who is speaking? From what kinds of experience does the voice emanate? How does an utterance's addressing me implicate me in the parameters of that experience?

Part III of the novel, which focuses largely on conversations between the siblings, shows how refracting essayism through language-as-utterance coincides with characters' realizations of the erotic charge of possibilities. That is, if the presupposed context of Agathe's speech increasingly coheres as several non-normative aspects of her sexuality (one that *wants* to feel connected to others and compelled by a belief in the meaning of social forms), the sibling's conversations come to entail some erotic dimensions of their relation. This felt closeness to the incongruous redoubling of relations in incest constitutes what I alluded to as a "parasexual" phenomenon emerging around possibility. Neither Ulrich nor Agathe acts as though they have had sex, yet the possibility that they might is persistently implied in Ulrich and Agathe's interacting in ways that accommodate her unspecifiable desires.

Musil's handling of the siblings' relationship strikes me as a valuable borderline case that proves certain novels' commitments to understanding sexuality as an effect of the accumulation of contextual variables around social practices, including practices of talk. It also underscores the difficulty of placing some texts in sexual histories. In the conclusion to the previous chapter, I touched briefly on how the uptake of a text like Stein's *Americans* by a subsequent avant-garde with a different understanding of experimentation's stakes can recontextualize the work to bring its sexual meanings into relief, effectively recalibrating how the work's various presuppositions "count" toward its structural reliance on concepts of sexuality (to motivate its project, to organize ambiguities in its taxonomy of kinds). Like *Americans*, *The Man without Qualities* addresses a reading public in ways that presuppose a public's prior knowledge of meanings that risk coming into contact with strong social taboos. In its recontextualizing the ecstasy of mystical thinking within modern sexual systems, Musil's novel resonates with work by writers of the same period, such as George Bataille, and with the work Bataille would inspire among participants in queer literary movements.⁵ Yet *The Man without Qualities* has never been taken up within a sexual counterpublic as Bataille's has. There are of course several reasons for this, some of which involve the constitutive constraints of later literary and sexual publics as well as circumstances around the publication of Musil's novel. As I argue somewhat speculatively by way of conclusion, these several factors add up to an interesting example of the failure of certain public meanings—the unavailability of certain presuppositions (about the experience of sexuality under modern forms of control, about the ways sexualities exist in language, about mysticism as an approach toward a greater truth that is also a more encompassing sociality, about essay writing as a tool to access meanings buried in culture) to enough people at the same time to become a point of orientation for some pre-existing or new public discourse. This failure marks the fragile world that Ulrich and Agathe build around themselves.

⁵ All of these texts are interesting in part because they resituate sexuality within nonmaterialist cosmologies and epistemologies and therefore represent a line of thinking on sexuality that lies alongside nineteenth and early twentieth-century moral and sexological discourses that understand sexuality (especially in its non-conjugal forms) to express a biological reflex or reflect a failure to enter into cultural meanings. For studies that focus on the articulation of livable sexual difference as part of the histories of these discourses, see especially Love and Nealon.

Within the terms of fiction, *The Man without Qualities* constructs a theory of possibility as both a kind of knowledge and a mode of being in the world (insofar as knowledge structures practice). But what does “the world” mean for Musil’s text? The novel offers several very different metaphors to convey the sense of a world, but the idea of a field as a space of intelligible human activity runs through them all: the eye and the corresponding circumference of one’s vision (der Kreis, das Gesichtsfeld); the domain of one’s professional work (Fachbereich); the forest (der Wald) as the system formed by the trees that constitute it; and the arena of combat (das Schlachtfeld). Insofar as character comprises qualities or properties (Eigenschaften), the novel presents characters as, in part, intelligible according to the activity within a field. As the last term, *Schlachtfeld*, suggests, though, the formal values that constitute a field are not monolithic or irreducibly substantial; on the contrary, they manifest the net effects of conflicting forces. To understand this, Ulrich thinks, is “to see the moral norm no longer as a set of rigid commandments but rather as a mobile equilibrium that at every moment requires continual efforts at renewal. We are beginning to regard as too limiting the tendency to ascribe involuntarily acquired habits of repetitiveness to a man as his character, and then to make his character responsible for the repetitions.” (272). Not a set of formal laws, nor even a system of averages between extremes, a field encompasses a constantly shifting structure of activity that contextualizes the meaning of people’s behavior.

For his particular understanding of how possibilities are immanent in the contradictory structures of fields, Musil plumbs a tradition of mystical thinking. Readers will likely be familiar with the concept and practice of immanent critique, often associated with Marx and his interpreters among members of the Frankfurt School. As a way of freeing thought from a culture’s limitations, immanent critique proceeds by locating contradictions in an ideological premise and developing these into an alternative. The way in which Musil’s novel does not attempt to seek a logical premise for possibility outside a given culture certainly resembles immanent critique in some respects. Of course, immanence also names a theological doctrine holding that divinity is not external to the universe, but pervades and sustains it. The writings of Christian mystics like Meister Eckhart, concerned with the revelation of divine truths residing within everyday ones, informed later writers like Musil. Musil draws on mystical contemplative practices and techniques for his understanding of how language and writing could participate in the communication of un-lived truths into the terms of actual, historical truths.⁶

Niklaus Largier has mapped the genealogy that connects practices of mysticism like Eckhart’s and twentieth-century critical thought, including works by Georg Lukács, Theodor Adorno, Georg Simmel, and Michel Foucault. According to Largier, mysticism gives writing a particular structure of time that is not “messianic” in the sense of pointing beyond the temporal

⁶ Michael André Bernstein glosses the novel’s digressiveness as follows: “To an extent unprecedented in Western Literature, large stretches of the book contain neither a forward-moving action nor inward character development. In their place, we are often given extended sections of pure intellectual-moral speculation, reflections that exist less to illuminate the private passions of a character than to follow the inner logic of a concept with its own independent claims on our attention. This is a kind of novelistic ‘essayism,’ a term that exactly translates Musil’s loan-word *Essayismus*.” Bernstein, *Five Portraits*, 131.

horizon of historical conditions of production or presaging a modernist *tabula rasa*, a wiping clean of the cultural slate. Largier rather suggests that in Musil's novel, mysticism refers to a way of acquiring a felt relation to the possibilities of the present in ways consequential for that present:

Wirkliches und Mögliches werden so gewissermassen koextensiv vorgestellt, und es ist die Form des Essays die dies in einer spezifischen Zeitgestalt denk- und erfahrbar werden lässt. Solches ist selbst dort der Fall wo das »Mystische« scheinbar ausschließlich mit dem »Gefühl« verbunden wird, geschieht dies doch nicht um der Erneuerung einer Privilegierung des Gefühls willen, sondern mit dem Ziel, die Frage nach der Möglichkeit kritischer Reflexion und Intervention angesichts einer etablierten Rationalität zu stellen und damit das sogenannte »Wirkliche« herauszufordern.⁷

When Largier mentions “das Wirkliche” (the real, the actual) or “eine etablierte Rationalität” (an established rationality), we might take him to refer to the kinds of systematic logics that give persons and actions intelligible value within a given field of activity. Mysticism involves a felt relation to these logics. A little further on, Largier specifies that mysticism stands for “einen Rekurs auf Nichtwissen und Bildlosigkeit” an appeal to unknowingness and nonpictorial representation, “in dem Denken und Fühlen, Intellekt und Affekt das Wirkliche kritisch unterlaufen und es zu einer substanzlosen Materie machen, die neu wahrgenommen und bearbeitet werden kann.”⁸ This is to say that mysticism engages with language in ways that perform a kind of regression on the conceptual structure of a given reality, decomposing language's ability to signify fully formed images. One way to understand mystical uses of language is through how the ambiguous materiality of the written signifier (its tonal quality, volume, directionality, etc.) underscores the inherent ambiguity of all language.

For Musil, like many other modern writers, the essay provides the paradigm of mystical writing. In a chapter titled “The earth too, but especially Ulrich, pays homage to the utopia of essayism,” narration depicts Ulrich at his moment of crisis regarding whether he can truly own his intellectual achievements or whether they belong to a reality that is more or less indifferent to him. The chapter proceeds to connect the question of meaning's context to the essay as a form of thought and a method of writing:

It was more or less in the way an essay, in the sequence of its paragraphs, explores a thing from many sides without wholly encompassing it—for a thing wholly encompassed suddenly loses its scope and melts down to a concept—that he believed he could most rightly survey and handle the world and his own life. The value of an action or a quality, and indeed its meaning and nature, seemed to him to depend on its surrounding circumstances, on the aims it served; in short, on the whole—constituted now one way, now another—to which it belonged. This is only a simple description of the fact that a murder can appear to us as a crime or a heroic act, and making love as a feather that has fallen from the wing of an angel or that of a goose. But Ulrich generalized this: all moral events take place in a field of energy [in einem Kraftfeld] whose constellation charges them with meaning. They contain good and evil the way an atom contains the possibilities of

⁷ Largier, *Zeit der Möglichkeit*, 20.

⁸ Largier, 25.

certain chemical combinations. They are what they will become, so to speak; and just as the word “hard” [Hart] denotes four entirely different essences, depending on whether it is connected with love, brutality, zeal, or discipline, the significance of all moral events seemed to him to be the function of other events on which they depended. (270)

This passage brings together several thematic strands I have been threading through previous chapters as well as this one: the idea of a field as a systematic relation among actions; sex as an act that, while intimately personal, draws much of its meaning from a broader field; and language as a system of meanings that depends for its coherence on the meanings that magnetize events in a field. It further suggests that an essay works by holding an idea, like the word “hard,” at equal distance from all contexts (including other concepts) to suspend in its definitional closure. In other words, the essay constructs an epistemological ground from historical experience by presupposing an inhabitable perspective somehow above, beyond, or between particular fields of activity.

Following the above passage’s focus on words, Largier’s descriptions of the essay form imply that essayistic writing erodes concepts’ *semantic* content. The essay, though it takes up concepts as its medium, deploys them for what their juxtaposition might offer to the senses, and not for their “Inhalt,” or denotation and reference. Largier refers to the literary-formal basis of an essay’s mediation between possibility and reality (or actuality) as figuration, drawing attention to possibility’s emergence from the “produktive Inkongruenz,” or productive incongruence, between ideas.⁹ Incongruence results from figurative comparisons that never allow a reader to feel at ease about what, precisely, undergoes comparison.

To illustrate what I understand Largier to mean by incongruence, I revisit an oft-cited example of Musil’s method of constructing comparisons—the moment in which the novel’s authorial voice likens the man of reality (“Wirklichkeitsmensch”) and the man of possibility (“Möglichkeitsmensch”) to kinds of fish: “der Mann mit gewöhnlichem Wirklichkeitssinn gleicht einem Fisch, der nach der Angel schnappt und die Schnur nicht sieht, während der Mann mit jenem Wirklichkeitssinn, den man auch Möglichkeitssinn nennen kann, eine Schnur durchs Wasser zieht und keine Ahnung hat, ob ein Köder daran sitzt” (17). Such comparisons provide no positive definitions, yet they nonetheless cause meaning to circulate within the confines of a particular network of relations. The figures of likeness delimit *Wirklichkeitssinn* and *Möglichkeitssinn*, yet any attempt to reconcile the various parts of the comparison will find itself torn between what Largier calls “immer neue Bifurkationen.”¹⁰ I take this to mean that the passage as a whole sets up a figure that compares the *Wirklichkeitsmensch* to the *Möglichkeitsmensch*, but that the predicate of each term is also a figure. Within this embedded and reflective structure, each added idea makes itself susceptible to multiple interpretations, to which other parts of the figure cannot be assimilated. For instance, the term *bait* (Köder) combines within itself both the enticement of sustenance and the threat of entrapment. The two-sidedness of *bait* receives emphasis in the context of the *Wirklichkeitsmensch*, for whom the potential danger goes unnoticed, thus extending the fish and the bait as a figure for a dangerous, though delicious, self-deception. However, the connotations associated with bait recede around the *Möglichkeitsmensch*, where the image of the fishing line (Schnur) engages the imagination in a completely different way. Here the image of a fish’s towing a line might call to mind a logical sequence and its implications. Rather than locating

⁹ Largier, *Zeit der Möglichkeit*, 84.

¹⁰ Largier, 94.

both *Möglichkeitssinn* and *Wirklichkeitssinn* in relation to the same set of concepts, then, the figure multiplies meanings as it organizes the component terms of the images in relation to different fields in different instances, refusing the logical priority of any one.

If the essay form constitutes the mode by which Musil's novel investigates possibility, and if the novel's commentary on characters' utterances is part of this investigation, how might the practice of figuration extend to its concern for language-in-use? As we have seen, in addition to passages like this one, the narrator will sometimes hold up a character's utterance and encourage readers to imagine how it might correspond (indexically) to a context. In the following sections, I argue that the novel's essayism involves the taking up and figural redeploying not only of the semantic contents of individual words, but also of the "cultural concepts beyond lexicalization" that normally constrain indexicality. When narration digresses to comment upon characters' speech, it holds apart for comparison not only the spoken words and their semantic meanings, but also an utterance and its indexical presuppositions and entailments at the order of inhabitable qualities—the story the character implicitly tells about who he or she is. If the essay form in general is both timely (constrained by its relation to a certain sense of the real) and timeless (purely aesthetic, without content), the novel's construction of indexical figures involves an understanding of how the logics of a field render certain positions within that field unutterable—unable to be indexed in the use of language—and of how the imaginative form of the essay makes both the utterable and the unutterable available in writing.

POSSIBILITY AND TALK

Previously, in discussing a passage from *The Man without Qualities* concerning Bonadea's remarks to herself, I mentioned how narration will sometimes juxtapose the form of a character's utterance with some elaborate presuppositions that, though they may be implicit in the utterance, are kept at bay by the uncertain status of *other* contextualizing variables, e.g., the linguistic resources that would allow the character to articulate presuppositions verbally or the moral framework that would allow them to engage with those presuppositions soberly. In this way, the novel further withdraws the already incomplete pragmatic value of an un verbalized utterance from actualization in social interaction without refuting its validity as a possibility. A different kind of narrative discourse comments on moments where an utterance's place in the formal patterns of language that constitute an interactive text produce multiple discursively-communicated social identities, multiple voices. In the last chapter, I discussed how the linguistic forms of interlocutors in a discursive interaction can, over turns of talk, fall into metrical patterns of similarity and contrast and how these, in turn, accumulate indexical values of footing, or attitudinal alignment. We might think of voices as one kind of metrical iconic effect that can emerge in discursive exchanges to connect forms of language to types of social persons. In Musil's novel, moments of ambiguous voicing represent a social-pragmatic variety of incongruity that extends the novel's interest in essayism and possibility into experimental fiction's indexical structures. Contrary to the instances already described, someone *has* said something, but a single utterance manifests so inconsistent a set of presuppositions that it provokes a difficult entailment that looks like inaction despite its verbalized form. Through such uncharacteristically characteristic moments, possibilities insinuate themselves into the everyday practice of conversation.

A dialogue between Ulrich and Count Leinsdorf represents one of the most precipitous of these insinuations and exemplifies nicely how the qualities that a person habitually indexes through discursive performance can be suspended between contexts, recalling the way essayistic form putatively suspends lexical concepts in an array of other terms. Recall that Ulrich, against his better judgment and personal inclination, has found himself in the position of secretary to the Parallel Campaign (die Parallelaktion). A dubious patriotic project and brainchild of Count Leinsdorf, the Parallel Campaign aims to anticipate and outdo the commemoration of German Emperor Wilhelm II's thirtieth year of reign by declaring the entire year of 1918 a celebration of Austro-Hungarian Emperor Franz Josef's seventieth year of power. Ulrich's joining the campaign aligns him with the circle of aristocrats, state officials, artists, and persons of vague renown in charge of planning the national fete.

In the scene I am thinking of, Ulrich presents the Count with a summary of proposals from various interest groups regarding what the Parallel Campaign's more precise political and cultural aims ought to be. It appears among several exchanges that satirize cultural projects that would resolve the political contradictions of the times by isolating certain values and raising them to a universal esteem. In this instance Ulrich shares with the Count a set of proposals that are all rooted in an enthusiastic cultural and political nostalgia, which he has dubbed "Back to...!" The Count apparently misconstrues Ulrich's objection to the proposals: rather than understanding these attempts to mend the present by returning to another time as impossibly contradictory, he wonders how one is to select which of the past ideas to institute.

Ulrich attempts once again to bring his view of the problem to the Count's attention by changing tack. He frames his opinion of the projects' utopianism within the terse correctness of a *Beamptensprache*, an officialese: "That's possible, but how should one deal with it? 'After careful consideration of your esteemed letter of such-and-such a date, we regret that we do not regard the present moment as suitable...'? Or 'We have read your letter with interest, please supply details on how restoration of the world as it was in the Baroque, Gothic, et cetera, et cetera, is to be effected...and so on'?" (251). ("Das wäre möglich; aber wie soll man antworten? Ihr Geschätztes vom Soundsovielten reiflich erwogen, halten wir derzeit den Zeitpunkt noch nicht geeignet...? Oder: Mit Interesse gelesen, bitten wir Sie um detaillierte Bekanntgabe Ihrer Wünsche für Wiedereinrichtung der Welt in Barock, Gotik, und so weiter?" [233].) Ulrich's initial question—how should one respond?—points to the difficulty of producing a response to the proposals that points up the flaws of their presuppositions while implicitly communicating its own. His tentative approach involves constructing sample utterances that construct a picture of the responder as one possessed of certain qualities in a world that operates according to certain rules. As a form, this "picture" (a metrical icon) consists of several coordinated acts in language that together imply a speaker who is as indifferent as he is polite: the vaguely reference to the applicant's esteemed letter and the precise date of its receipt, the assurance that it was read with care, the absolute denial that refuses to be definite by both dismissing the proposal and opening the dismissal to contingency, the expedient elision of grammatical person, etc. etc. Note that Ulrich's contrived responses take more interest in the structure of these gestures than with actually referring to the letters in question, so that his question places emphasis on the generic medium of communication. Note, too, how the German refrains from using diacritical marks to distinguish the miniature performances, so that the thrust of Ulrich's strategy depends on the coherence of generic metrical patterns.

With impressive economy, then, Ulrich conjures a vast bureaucratic apparatus whose promise of efficiency justifies its scrutiny of technical details. The presuppositions communicated

by these utterances are more damning to the proposals than any one thing Ulrich says, for it exposes the contradictions of the proposals' attitude toward history in pretending to take them seriously. According to the proposals, as Ulrich would have it, the reality is essentially singular and unchanging, so arriving at another point in history becomes a question of simply rearranging ("wiedereinrichten") the conceptual furniture, so to speak. By subjecting the proposals to a bureaucratic realism, Ulrich asserts an implicit claim to the contrary: that the material constitution of the here and now does not make for an easy departure from the here and now.

As an example of the relation between possibility and a represented utterance, the passage places Ulrich's fairly explicit construction of a "character" in speech and his provisional alignment with it alongside an utterance that presupposes a more ambiguous range of qualities and involves a less certain footing between them and the language user.¹¹ The Count's response to Ulrich also involves an ambiguity about how it aligns itself with Ulrich's utterances and the metapragmatic question that frames them. The actual words Count Leinsdorf speaks carry all the illocutionary force of an objection while appearing to fall short of one:

Ulrich was smiling, but Count Leinsdorf felt he was treating the situation with a little too much levity, and twiddled his thumbs with renewed vigor to ward it off. His face, with its handlebar mustache, assumed a hardness reminiscent of the Wallenstein era, and then he came out with a most noteworthy statement:

"Dear Doctor," he said, "in the history of mankind there is no voluntary turning back!" (251)

The description of the Count's response sets events occurring around the Count's body alongside his words, implying that the coordination between the two is salient to understanding the Count's response to Ulrich. The utterance apparently indicates an agreement with Ulrich's objection to the proposals, yet the utterance's paralinguistic cues suggest a tension between some or all of its non-semantic features (facial expression, phatic emphasis, intonation, and volume) and the semantic meanings of the Count's words. The utterance's agreeable alignment with Ulrich's also seems incongruous with what we know about the Count as someone staunchly committed to the rights of the aristocracy and Catholic traditionalism. The utterance is difficult to understand pragmatically because it is hard to imagine all its aspects being spoken by the same person at the same time.

No sooner has his Grace uttered these words than they want explanation. The authorial narrator commences a metapragmatic discourse that not only explains the Count's failure to produce a cohesive utterance, but also vindicates the Count's words as a pragmatically coherent use of language that effectively carries the conversation forward. However, this discourse, rather than adopting a single point of view or objective logic, continues to deploy metrical icons to

¹¹ In the ensuing discussion, the term "speaker" is not necessarily co-referential with the grammatical first-person, the presumed "I" of an utterance. Rather, the term speaker refers here primarily to the figure of personhood indexed by a text segment's metrical iconism—by its formal distinctiveness from the text around it. The linguistic anthropological terminology has the potential to cause confusion for anyone familiar with Ann Banfield's work on represented speech and thought because she uses "speaker" and "self" to distinguish, respectively, between the referent of the grammatical first person and the person (or type of person) to whom the expressive content of an utterance is to be attributed. In drawing on linguistic anthropology, I am implicitly arguing that voicing effects cannot be adequately addressed by referring to system-grammatical distinctions because there can be multiple "I's" in play. See especially Banfield's analysis of "the echo question" in Banfield, "Represented Speech and Thought," 434-38.

explain the complex semiotic process unfolding both around and through Leinsdorf. To understand how the passage exemplifies an example of essayism that issues from represented utterance, it will therefore help to get clear on what constitutes a “picture” or “image” of a social kind of speaker projected from metrical form and why some pictures should be both coherent and explicit and others less so. Moreover, what understanding of fictional characterization comes into focus when a reader determines that Ulrich uses language that is “official” and “polite” in ways that seem less than polite, even sardonic? In what follows, I’ll consider these issues through the linguistic anthropological concept of registers and enregistered voices.

Registers, their domains, and their ranges

The linguistic anthropological term *register* aims to conceptually coordinate several phenomena relating to how kinds of agential subjectivity exist in language and culture. In this respect, the term helps one grapple with the particular way Musil’s novel conceives qualities to exist independently of people. Registers first and foremost encompass patterns of speech forms, often distinctive words, which index a language user’s alignment to a role within a cultural type of social happening that is also socially stratified. One finds a ready example of register in the speech forms one might refer to in describing someone’s speech as showing “deference” or “politeness,” e.g., their “please and thank-you’s.” In some languages, different second-person pronouns distinguish registers of deference; in others, third-person pronouns and special forms of words allow one to speak in ways that show deference for people (and objects associated with them) regardless of whether they are present or not in the discursive co-text. Those unfamiliar with register as a technical term may indeed associate it with distinctions in the “formality” of speech. However, the phenomenon extends far beyond a continuum that includes such terms as “polite,” “deferential,” and their opposites to encompass any discourse that marks signifying behavior in a stratified way. Some American Englishes, for instance, contain sports-caster registers or registers of “oinoglossia,” or wine talk.¹²

In addition to formal patterns, registers encompass the structured attention people within a speech community pay to those forms when reporting on the pragmatic effects of others’ speech. Such reports include issuing judgments of appropriateness that mediate between otherwise incommensurable factors, such as the denotation and connotation of a word, the denotation and connotation of a sentence in which that word is used, the speaker’s linguistic performances on other occasions, and the specific generic shape of the occasion of use. We could say, then, that registers are evident in the narrative logics of a linguistic community’s metapragmatic discourses. Asif Agha has generated a body of work that establishes the empirical foundation for studying enregistered narratives. His research consists of interviews with speakers of languages, such as Lhasa Tibetan, that include lexical registers (repertoires of word forms) for achieving deferential effects, which people reflexively refer to in describing others’ speech. Lexical registers and their normative effects constitute “honorific speech.” Agha observes of Lhasa Tibetan speakers’ narratives about language use,

¹² On sports announcer talk, see Agha, “Voice, Footing, Enregisterment,” 46-50. On “oinoglossia,” see Silverstein, “Cultural Concepts,” 640-44.

When language users describe honorific usage, they often formulate extended narratives about the uses of honorific forms. Such narratives are peopled by social beings of different kinds. They describe *social personae* as engaged in pragmatic acts of language use. In such types of metasemiotic work, the boundary between language and non-language is erased, yielding *stereotypic constructs* that motivate one in terms of the other.¹³

On the one hand, stereotypes that constitute narratives of language use are reductive. They enact “functional leakage” to erode distinctions between different orders of language and between linguistic and non-linguistic phenomena. When language users invoke stereotypes as part of metapragmatic narratives, they also speak reductively by selectively drawing on certain qualities of language use or of personhood and not others to form indexical associations across functions. Thus registers bring persons and language together in logical relations of causation, consubstantiality, or contiguity that may be very slight, such as when one implies a more than correlative connection between two things simply by speaking them aloud together, as in, “She is a vegetarian and lives in Berkeley.” Agha finds that the stereotypic constructs that motivate enregistered narratives explain what a person does when using language in at least three ways: by producing hierarchical topic/comment structures that ground the narrative, for instance, in the “self-evidence” of forms of utterance or in the “self-evidence” of a person’s identity; by grounding the authority of the narrator through the narrator’s habits of speech or the narrator’s special knowledge; and by invoking logics that connect entities of different kinds, such as by holding up utterances as “emblems of identity” or by citing a person’s past behavior to justify a judgment about the appropriateness of his novel utterance.

If registers are culturally imbedded phenomena, and if their deployment in interaction implies some reductive distortion, what kinds of factors come into play to constrain their use?¹⁴ This seems important to ask given that, in the example from *The Man without Qualities*, Ulrich’s utterance clearly involves his reflexive use of a deference register, yet the Count’s response may metapragmatically reinterpret Ulrich’s use insofar as he finds Ulrich to speak with “a little too much levity.” How might the stereotypes the Count associates with the metrical patterns of Ulrich’s utterances be different from those Ulrich might want to highlight as salient to their discussion of the proposals? Agha draws attention the fact that registers have “domains” (a criterial population of people who can use enregistered forms with varying degrees of reflexivity) and ranges (the variety of kinds of speakers, actors, and relationships achievable through their deployment) that presuppose acquaintance with certain people, places, and events. In using registers, people perform their knowledge of these contexts, yet because stereotypes about the kinds of people that exist and how they talk are unevenly distributed among talkers, and because people invoke the same stereotypes to create impressions of likeness to different social types, participants in interaction may need to undertake some metapragmatic work.

¹³ Asif Agha, “Stereotypes and registers of honorific language,” *Language in Society* 27 (1998): 168. Emphasis mine.

¹⁴ On the cultural specificity and productivity of constraining stereotypes about language, Agha writes: “In one important sense, such [narrative] shaping is inherently a re-shaping: Honorific language has properties that are independent of—indeed inconsistent with—honorific stereotypes. To this extent, honorific stereotypes appear manifestly to simplify and distort independently identifiable features of honorific structure and function. At the same time, stereotypic (re)valorizations imbue language with higher-order pragmatic values, discernable as the effects of usage together with lower-order ones.” Agha, “Stereotypes and registers,” 167.

One of Agha's research questions concerns how lexical forms that native speakers recognize as having one effect can also produce other, sometimes opposite effects, e.g., a register of deference used to communicate thinly veiled aggression. His main example involves Lhasa Tibetan speakers' perceptions of users of the Khampa dialect. In the Lhasa dialect, the lexical register of honorific speech includes items used to refer directly to the object of deference or to other things associated with it (such as a beloved possession) as well as special verb forms. Invoking deference therefore requires coordinating the forms of multiple structures around the object of deference. Compared to the Lhasa dialect, the Khampa dialect does not conventionally employ as many honorific forms, so when Khampas speak Lhasa, they are likely to use honorific forms inconsistently. This lack of coherence might strike "a Lhasa ear" as eccentric, even childish, since children also have to be initiated into the consistent use of honorifics. However, other kinds of knowledge and experience come into play to shape Lhasa uptake of Khampa usage. In particular, when speakers of Lhasa Tibetan want to explain to Agha the effects of the mixed use many Khampas make of honorific forms, they sometimes draw upon romantic images of Khampas as a close-knit community of outlaws and brigands—an image in part motivated by Tibet's anticolonial history. Thus when narrating the pragmatic effects of Khampa use of honorific lexica, native Lhasa speakers, insofar as they take such stereotypical associations into account, re-evaluate mixed honorific forms as indexing a freedom from attention to form that may involve more or less political connotations. The example first refers to two iconic personae (what Agha sometimes calls "characterological figures" or "figures of personhood") that emerge in attempts to hear and respond to lexical forms: the "typical Khampa speaker of Lhasa" who uses mixed forms and the "Lhasa ear" for whom these mixed forms are both perplexing and amusing. The example goes on to show how people use these can reflexively and unreflexively in discursive interaction. The Lhasa-Khampa example of deference registers binds together children, Khampas, and anyone else who might use Lhasa honorific forms inconsistently (such as cultural outsiders like Agha) into a system of relations that allows each to be indexed by the habits of the other. Thus the register, in its narrative form, is salient to a much wider range of interaction types than merely those that involve deference and communication between Khampa and Lhasa speakers. For instance, a Lhasa speaker who is competent in this register and wants to sound "freer" in his speech might use mixed forms that sound "like a Khampa" rather than dropping deference forms altogether. Elsewhere Agha refers to such uses as "interactional tropes." We could say that registers are effective because they are at once part of the meaning of history and so manifest that history even as people deploy them creatively and in improvised ways.

When the Count responds to Ulrich's use of a register of polite speech to produce the impression of an overly solicitous bureaucratic functionary, he not only invokes a register of his own, but also seems to insist upon a less reflexive, less provisional, and less tropic alignment between language user and figure of personhood. That is, without exactly saying so, the Count treats his words as if they had a more legitimate relation to himself than Ulrich has to his impromptu use of a register. The hardness of Count's features are said to "recall" the time of Wallenstein, suggesting that such things as a particular tenseness in one's facial muscles coupled with a certain style of facial hair can, for a certain domain of people, conjure up people and the stretches of history they occupy. The way in which these resemblances emerge in the audition and production of speech furthermore suggest that they are involved in effecting a certain register. In the chapter that introduces the Count, narration draws attention to similar details: "He wore a low collar because of a tendency to goiter, and a handlebar mustache, either for the same reason or

because it gave him a look slightly reminiscent of certain portraits of Bohemian noblemen of the Wallenstein era” (91). In fact, whenever the narrative interpolates a person of noble lineage, it gives attention to such details to point up the way aristocratic hairstyles exist in a temporality that subjects them to multiple moments of uptake. For instance, the narrator observes how devoted imperial subjects will imitate the facial hairstyle of a sovereign, which subsequent nobleman in turn adopt when they need to activate the loyalty of their people. The Count has apparently found something objectionable about the way Ulrich playfully frames his use of register and prepares to respond by “being himself” insofar as he would presuppose his footing within this deep well of prestige to bring Ulrich back to the task at hand. In this respect, the utterance that the Count actually produces contravenes this register effect in its seeming to emanate from a place in social space and time that is strangely unaccounted for. The curiosity here concerns the relation between one set of metrical values (those involving facial expression, tone, phatic communication) and the enregistered, indexical ones (those that coherently presuppose a point of view on history that contrasts the point of view Ulrich has provisionally adopted). The potential for inadvertent or unwanted meanings, in addition to improvised ones, lies at the crux of what Musil’s narrator takes to be “remarkable” about the Count’s utterance, warranting further digression.

The incongruence of different voices

Reflexive and creative uses of register imply some contrast between relatively stable meanings of forms (such as metrical icons of social “personae”) and those that depend on some local features of an interaction to achieve a “tropic” effect. I observed that one only determines how the features of Ulrich’s language use cohere as a token of a register if one acknowledges that those features come into relief against other segments of text that bear on the register’s specific effects. Registers normatively index personae or figures of personhood, but figures can emerge in speech in other ways. What Agha sometimes calls *personae* he elsewhere refers to as *voices*. In the terminological adjustment between *personae* and *voices*, we get a better view of the relation between the stereotypical structure of registers and another variety of metrical iconism. Register tokens and voicing effects of this second, more nonce kind exert a torsion on one another. Agha argues that registers can become newly productive in the varying contexts of their use because

enregistered voices are encountered in social life only as fragments of entextualized voicing effects, and the two voicing effects may or may not be congruent. In actual events of language use, enregistered voices may exhibit various types of congruence/non-congruence with more implicit nonce images of personhood (entextualized voices) that are less easily reportable out of context.¹⁵

Agha’s shift from *registers* to *enregistered voices* corresponds to the more general adjustment from personae to voices. Whereas previous discussion centered on the relation between two phenomena of distinct form that follow similar stereotypes (the explicit narratives about enregistered forms and the implicit logics people use to entail certain qualities in interaction), here Agha takes up two phenomena of similar form but with distinct contextualizing logics: a class of

¹⁵ Agha, “Voice, Footing, Enregisterment,” 47.

voices discernable through their historical link to registers and a more fleeting class of voices having a contingent relation to registers. He affirms that while we might like to secure our stereotypes about language by attributing them an existence independent of language use, they in fact only abide in use as one kind of voicing effect among others. More specifically, what Agha refers to as the potential non-congruence between enregistered voices and an “entextualized voices” (so called because they only cohere within the co-textual metricality of a particular discursive interaction) seems promising for understanding the more and less coherent kinds of social icons that contribute to the effect of an *uncharacteristically characteristic* utterance in Musil’s novel.”¹⁶

The necessity for speakers to effect some degree of alignment with the models of language use implied by register opens onto the possibilities indexed by incongruences in metrical iconism. Agha’s example of incongruous voicing effects involves a man who is a member of the Lakhota tribe of North American native peoples. The Lakhota language has speech forms that index the gender of the speaker. In the example, the man uses a stereotypically female lexical form of the Lakhota language alongside male speech forms to communicate his surprise at seeing his very young nephew out on his own. The incongruence conjures the persona of a male speaker who speaks from a place occupied by a woman within a stereotypically female scene of feminine care: “The man’s use of female speech is tantamount to an interactional trope, the performance of an affective, caring persona often associated with women speaking to young children.”¹⁷ In other words, incongruous voicing effects occur when two different kinds of context bear on the component segments of an utterance such that different segments index distinct figures of personhood and the relational work accomplished is not reducible to either context. One of these contexts is thoroughly interactional: it includes linguistic as well as nonlinguistic signs, such as the clothes and surroundings of the man in Agha’s example, and other utterances the man has made. (Agha calls this the “construable context” or “co-text.”) In the case of the register of feminine care, segments of the utterance signify as a voice when compared against a generic situation stereotypically linked to the register. The figure of personhood that emerges from this text depends on the tension between these various juxtaposed signs. Incongruous voicing effects therefore set different figures of personhood side by side within a more complex figure.

To understand the pragmatic effects of incongruous voices, one might suppose, as Agha does, that the embedding of an enregistered form within an interactional co-text produces some tropic variation on the persons, events, and situations the register presupposes. That is, the entextualized voicing effect (a man addressing his young nephew) frames the enregistered form in a way that selectively entails certain criteria of the stereotypical scene (that it involves care for children) and not others (the gender of the person providing the care). Indeed, Agha describes his

¹⁶ Agha’s main example of an entextualized voicing effect comes from Mikhail Bakhtin’s reading of the following lines from Dickens’ *Little Dorrit*: “O what a wonderful man this Merdle, what a great man, what a master man, how blessedly and enviably endowed—in one word, what a rich man!” Here a narrator describes the host of a fantastic banquet, but the several hyperbolic exclamations might rather create the impression of a chorus of appreciative guests (or of one extremely unctuous guest). These exclamations do not correspond to the speech of any named characters. They constitute voices (figures of personhood available for inhabitation on such an occasion) and nothing more, and they do so largely in contrast with what is immediately around them. In this case, a caesura renders the contrast more evident. After the choir momentarily ceases, a voice emerges that seems like it must belong to a person with a very different outlook on the banquet insofar as it makes the many epithets offered up to the host seem superfluous by reducing them to a single quality. See Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 304.

¹⁷ Agha, “Voice, Footing, Enregisterment,” 48.

example as a man's occupying a woman's place in a typical kind of interaction, and he later generalizes this to suggest that in instances of tropic use, "entextualized voices differ from, yet dominate, enregistered ones."¹⁸ Agha's example of non-congruous voicing effects remains straightforward for clarification, and the fact that Lakshota verbs index the gender of speaker makes it possible to reconstruct relation between certain text segments and certain organizing contexts. However, Agha is aware of how quickly complexities arise. In unfolding his example, he gestures toward the difficulty of grounding interpretations of the gender of the speaker in the interaction itself: "in the absence of an evaluation that links a register token to surrounding or entextualized semiotic effects—for example, without evaluating whether the one using the male forms is everywhere, in every co-textual semiotic respect, a 'man'—we can never evaluate the usage as appropriate in any meaningful sense of the term."¹⁹ One might understand, in other words, that the example assumes a maximal coherence of presuppositions of male gender across interactional texts that is belied by the indeterminacy of contextualization. The same juxtaposition might just as easily bring together two scenes of interaction in ways that draw into question the speaking persona of the entextualized voicing effect as well as the enregistered voicing effect such that the utterance as a whole cannot take either set of conditions as its ground (thereby complicating the question of "appropriateness"). The concurrence of enregistered voices with entextualized voicing effects might be understood to index a relationship to a context that is not empirically given in patterns of indexicality occurring elsewhere, requiring a listener to imaginatively construct a context capable of accommodating all the indexical values the utterance puts into play. This is how I propose we understand the relationship between Count Leinsdorf's tone and gesture (a manner with stereotypical, enregistered values) and the response he issues to Ulrich (an interactional co-text). In such an instance, incongruences between figures of personhood index possibilities.

A nobleman's voice

Agha's example of an incongruous voicing effect implies that certain regions of social life (certain unexpected interactions, like a nephew's manifesting alone out of the blue) are relatively uncharted and cannot be easily navigated by inhabiting a register to assume a footing in an interaction. His emphasis falls on how speakers find new ways of effecting social ties by creatively manipulating stereotypes about language to effect an interactional trope. In Musil's novel, by contrast, incongruence in voice does not actualize an interactional trope to a determinate and felicitous effect. While characters in Musil's novel sometimes adopt provisional footings via a register, the incongruences that emerge in the process often manifest contradictory contexts that a culture must keep systematically separate to remain what it is. Characters experience the possibilities of incongruous voices as an unwanted becoming or an unanswerable entailment.

In its broadest outline, the digression following the Count's utterance reconstructs its incongruent indexing of voice by addressing two things: first, how the Count, in responding to Ulrich in speech, is compelled to find an enregistered voice that will produce a contrary alignment to the voice Ulrich has used. Second, it illustrates how certain aspects of this register get refunctionalized in ways that reflect a set of cultural tectonic shifts between the contexts where the Count travels. I will reproduce the digression in full, beginning with the utterance in question:

¹⁸ Agha, 49.

¹⁹ Agha, 48.

“Dear Doctor,” he said, “in the history of mankind there is no voluntary turning back!”

This statement surprised no one more than Count Leinsdorf himself, who had actually intended to say something quite different. As a conservative, he had been annoyed with Ulrich, and had wanted to point out to him that the middle classes had spurned the universal spirit of the Catholic Church and were now suffering the consequences. He was also on the point of praising the times of absolute centralism, when the world was still led by persons aware of their responsibilities in accordance with fixed principles. But while he was groping for words, it suddenly occurred to him what a nasty surprise it would be to wake up one morning without a hot bath and trains, with an imperial town crier riding through the streets instead of the morning papers. And so Count Leinsdorf thought: “Things can never again be what they were, the way they were,” and as he thought this he was quite astonished. For one assumed that if there was indeed no voluntary going back in history, then mankind was like a man driven along by some inexplicable wanderlust, a man who could neither go backward nor arrive anywhere, and this was a quite remarkable condition.

Now, while His Grace had an extraordinary knack for keeping apart two ideas that might contradict each other so that they never came together in his consciousness, he should have firmly rejected this particular idea, which was inimical to all his principles. However, he had taken rather a liking to Ulrich, and as far as time permitted, he enjoyed explaining political matters on a strictly logical basis to this intellectually alert young man who had come to him so well recommended, whose only drawback was his middle-class status, which made him something of an outsider when it came to the really great issues. But once one begins with logic, where one idea follows from the immediately preceding one, one never knows where it may all come out at the end. And so Count Leinsdorf did not retract his statement but merely gazed at Ulrich in intense silence. (251)

(»Lieber Doktor,« sagte er »in der Geschichte der Menschheit gibt es kein freiwilliges Zurück!«

Diese Äußerung überraschte vor allen Dingen Graf Leinsdorf selbst, denn er hatte eigentlich etwas ganz anderes sagen wollen. Er war konservativ, ärgerte sich über Ulrich und hatte bemerken wollen, daß das Bürgertum den universalen Geist der katholischen Kirche verschmäht habe und nun an den Folgen leide. Auch wäre es nahegelegen, die Zeiten des absoluten Zentralismus zu preisen, wo die Welt noch von verantwortungsbewußten Personen nach einheitlichen Gesichtspunkten geleitet worden ist. Aber mit einemmal war ihm während er noch nach Worten suchte, eingefallen, daß er wirklich unangenehm überrascht sein würde, wenn er eines Morgens ohne warmes Bad und Eisenbahn aufwachen müßte und statt der Morgenblätter bloß ein kaiserlicher Ausrufer durch die Straßen ritt. Graf Leinsdorf dachte also «Was einmal war, wird niemals wieder in der gleichen Weise sein», und während er das dachte, war er sehr erstaunt. Denn angenommen, daß es in der Geschichte kein freiwilliges Zurück gebe, so glich die Menschheit einem Mann, den in uheimlicher Wandertrieb vorwärtsführt, für den es keine Rückkehr gibt und kein Erreichen, und das war ein sehr bemerkenswerter Zustand.

Nun besaß zwar Se. Erlaucht eine außerordentliche Fähigkeit, zwei Gedanken, die einander widersprechen konnten, mit glücklicher Hand so auseinander zu halten, daß sie in seinem Bewußtsein nie zusammentrafen, aber diesen Gedanken, der gegen alle seine Grundsätze gerichtet war, hätte er ablehnen müssen. Allen er hatte eine gewisse Neigung

für Ulrich gefaßt, und soweit ihm seine Pflichten Zeit ließen, bereitete es ihm großes Vergnügen, diesem geistig regsamen und ihm so gut empfohlenen Mann, der bloß als Bürgerlicher ein wenig abseits von den wirklich großen Fragen stand, politische Gegenstände streng logisch zu erklären. Wenn man aber einmal mit Logik beginnt, wo ein Gedanke von selbst aus dem vorangehenden folgt, weiß man zum Schluß nie, wie das endet. Graf Leinsdorf nahm darum seine Äußerung nicht zurück, sondern sah Ulrich bloß eindringlich schweigend an. [233])

Previously I observed that the Count seems to have understood Ulrich's use of a register token in a particular way, and the explanation largely bears this out. Whereas Ulrich temporarily adopts the bureaucrat's overweening solicitude to make a point, the Count takes the very "levity" of Ulrich's playful troping as evidence of a congruence between Ulrich's regular voice and the register token as two emblems of middle-class identity. In responding to Ulrich, then, the Count wants to invoke a figure of personhood that represents a contrary set of values. The passage's attention to the Count's begrudging acceptance of Ulrich's *bürgerlich* background reinforces the understanding that events in the Count's body (his volume, tone, gestures) contribute to the production of a politically and culturally conservative figure of personhood. The passage traces how this intention is first de-animated (or uninhabited), reifying it as a register stereotype, and then reabsorbed into a larger cross-current of presuppositions. To this point, consider how the passage involves the modalities of different verbs in a description of an enregistered voice-in-production. This is difficult to even notice in the English because the passage involves two forms of the German subjunctive that reflect different footings—different relations of identity and distantiation—between the one reporting and reported facts about a speech event. The first paragraph's second sentence initially seems to retrace the Count's thought process as he tries to find a voice with which to respond to Ulrich. (I imagine here that the Count is giving himself a little pep talk to remind himself who he is.) The shift in footing would thus create the impression that narration slides from lesser to greater enunciative proximity to the Count just as the Count becomes increasingly confident about how he will gather his linguistic resources to embody a voice.

Once this first contrast of footing becomes apparent, however, the modal shifts between indicative and various forms of subjunctive within the second and third sentences (between the independent and the dependent clauses of each) take on a contrary, centrifugal significance, introducing some contingency into the relation between the Count and his most commonly inhabited register. The subjunctive forms of the first sentence (*habe*, *leide*) suggest, though, that the Count introduces a caveat or rhetorical hedge into a consideration of what he will say, such as, "as one might say." The third sentence's subjunctive form intensifies the sense of objectifying distance. The phrase "*auch wäre es nahegelegen*," suggests that what follows it (a further consideration of what the Count might have said), if spoken, would prove characterologically congruent with the other things the Count might have said. But the subjunctive undercuts this logical sequence by suggesting that the conditions for the Count's issuing the utterance will *not* be met. Narration therefore frames the segments of this explanation neither as factual claims about the kind of person the Count is, nor as a rehearsal of the Count's thought process. They rather constitute a presentation of the narrative logics in which the Count is caught as he searches for words ("*während er noch nach Worten suchte*"). That is, the digression metrically unfolds according to the stereotypic logic of the register in which the Count could best embody a conservative figure of personhood. Even as the register as a narrative and the voice it motivates

achieve sharper definition as a presupposition, the digression as a whole casts doubts on the register's indexical entailments in interaction.

In reaching for a voice with which to answer Ulrich's, his Grace encounters an impasse. Having formulated a linguistic subjectivity distinct from Ulrich's, the Count finds himself unable to inhabit it. The Count's fondness for such modern creature comforts as a warm bath (implicitly aligned with his fondness for Ulrich) conflicts with the historical conditions he would call up as the indexical ground of the imperial register. Each asserts a kind of claim on the Count in this moment of utterance, and the resulting incongruity of voice presumably indexes these incongruous contexts in some way. Previously we have learned that although Count Leinsdorf is a member of a landed class that upholds its ideological interests through a racial mythos (an idealized military past, a steadfast faith, and the cultivation of supposedly exclusive qualities of leadership), he has improved his estate by building factories on it and by implementing investment strategies that might contradict his unwavering support of Austrian interests if not his sense of feudal stewardship. In this earlier description we see as well how the Count walks a fine line between opposing moral conditions that correspond to bodily conditions insofar as they are difficult to inhabit fully at the same time:

Devout as His Grace was, as a man permeated with a sense of responsibility who, incidentally, also ran factories on his estates, he never closed his mind to the realization that the human mind these days has in many respects freed itself from the tutelage of the Church. He could not imagine how a factory, for example, or a stock exchange deal in wheat or sugar could be conducted on religious principles; nor was there any conceivable way to run a modern, large-scale landed estate rationally without the stock exchange and industry. When his Grace's business manager showed him how a certain deal could be made more profitably with a group of foreign speculators than in partnership with the local landed nobility, in most cases His Grace had to choose the former, because objective conditions have a rationale of their own, and this cannot be defied for sentimental reasons by the head of a huge economic enterprise who bears the responsibility not only for himself but for countless other lives as well. (101)

Notice how the Count's sense of the nobility's feudal responsibility informs his business conduct even as it sheds its religious cast when the Count acts in different contexts (on his estate, for other members of the Austrian nobility, and internationally). Observe, too, how the passage indexes this footwork of maintaining implicit boundaries between contexts through the metrical opposition of contradictory terms (the Count's factory enterprise's being both "incidental" and "exemplary," his religiosity's "devoutness" or "sentimentalism"). Indeed, the narrator further on comments on the remarkable transduction of noble qualities that takes place whenever the Count is put in a position to publicly promote Christian principles in ways that contradict his professional conscience: "Whenever he opened his mouth to make such pronouncements, it was as though an electric contact had been opened, and he flowed in a different circuit" (101). Revisiting this earlier passage suggests that both the Count's religiousness and his "business ethic" correspond to different contexts, or fields and that when he moves to speak he finds himself indexing both.

Returning to the Count's response to Ulrich, one sees that the difficulty of understanding it corresponds not to a semantically contradictory proposition, but to two incongruously entextualized voices. Yet when the voices (and the stereotypical contexts in which they cohere) coincide within the same utterance, the result exceeds both contexts. The second of the passage's

long paragraphs reconstructs something of how the conflict between contexts that plays out on the threshold of the Count's speech resolves in the interaction with Ulrich. It observes that the Count tends to view Ulrich as his feudal protégé in a way that suggests the utterance preserves something of the Count's racial presuppositions. However, the Count entails this patronizing stance toward Ulrich through their discussions of contemporary politics. A pragmatic landlord, the Count also fancies himself a *Realpolitiker*, one who understands the political field to be generated by conflicting forces and who seeks particular aims by rationally navigating contingencies through forming temporary alliances, "on a purely logical basis." The Count's silence in response to his own pronouncement may therefore constitute the truer expression of his paradoxical position at the intersection of currently irreconcilable contexts by taking on the consequences of how modern forms of rationality subject one to the winds of chance.

The Count remains silent because he has stumbled upon a position in a social structure that constrains his speech but that is not easily taken up by others as grounds for further action—a possibility disclosed interactionally as an asymmetry in presupposition and entailment. Attention to the Count's utterance requires one to consider how each of its formal aspects might contribute to the construction of a characterological figure in relation to a register and in relation to an immediate co-text, allowing attention to rest on such details as the Count's posture, his tone, and his words as aspects of a characterological process unfolding in language. The sum of formal features of the utterance only cohere in relation to an indeterminate historical and cultural context that is immanent in the utterance itself. Elsewhere the novel hints at a maximal presupposition about what this context might involve if actualized; the Count's capacity for combining within himself seemingly incongruous things goes so far as to include the union of his racialized nationalism with socialism: "He was firmly convinced that even true socialism fitted in with his view of things. He had had from the beginning, in fact, a deeply personal notion, which he had never fully acknowledged even to himself, to build a bridge across which the socialists were to come marching into his own camp" (91). Part modern demagogue, part capitalist, part cultural relic, the Count is all of these and none of these.

So far I have tried to extend Musil's essayistic practice of producing incongruous figures to the novel's manner of juxtaposing fictional utterances with some culturally inhabitable figures of personhood in ways that do not cohere under the auspices of one or another register, in effect suspending characters between multiple contexts. As I move to examine the relationship between possibility, the novels' representations of language-in-use, and sexuality, I will consider how sexualities, too, might be divided across enregistered and entextualized phenomena. Some sexualities can be readily enacted through metrical icons that stereotypically align participants with functional roles in a relationship (think here of Ulrich and Bonadea); others may number among that sexual register's range; and still others may involve a register without being widely recognized as part of its practiced range. This latter category might involve the practices of people who invoke a sexual register but who must do so within an entextualized structure entailing some degree of negation or incongruence of voice to fully communicate sexual meanings.

"WIE SOLL MAN ANTWORTEN?": SEXUALITY AND SOCIOLINGUISTIC INCONGRUENCE

Concepts of register and voice allow one to think about cultural types of experience "out there" in the world as certain sensory calibrations. When the Count invokes a figure of personhood

that resounds within the history of the Holy Roman Empire, this persona cannot remain indifferent to the conditions under which he enacts it. Leinsdorf's fondness for hot baths proves too incongruous with his self-image of feudal statesmanship not to impinge on his otherwise oppositional stance toward Ulrich. Through its work with and on registers, *The Man without Qualities* gives us a way to imagine not only how embodied practices are socially and historically distributed, but also how their earlier forms cohere long after people have ceased to consistently inhabit them.

In an early chapter that discusses how cultural types of experiences circulate publicly through print media, the novel similarly provides a sense of how desires might take the form of a narrative matrix that links registers' weak logics into complexes of sense-making:

It seems that the bona fide, practical realist [Wirklichkeitsmensch] just doesn't love reality or take it seriously. As a child he crawls under the table when his parents are out, converting their living room by this simple yet inspired trick into an adventure. As a boy he longs for a watch; as a young man with a gold watch, for a wife to go with it; as a man with watch and wife, for a promotion; and yet, when he has happily achieved this little circle of desires and should be peacefully swinging back and forth in it like a pendulum, his supply of unsatisfied yearnings does not seem to have diminished at all. For if he wants to elevate himself above the daily rut, he resorts to figures of speech. Since to him snow is evidently unpleasant at times, he compares it to a woman's shimmering bosom, and as soon as he begins to tire of his wife's breasts, he likens them to shimmering snow. He would be horrified if the beaks of his wife's nipples actually turned to coral, or their billing and cooing turned out to come from the horny beak of a real dove, but poetically it excites him. He is capable of turning everything into something else—snow to skin, skin to flower petals, petals to sugar, sugar to powder, powder to drifting snow again. (145)

Like other cultural realities, sexuality depends on a circumscribed consistency of poetic logics that selectively highlight certain qualities of things in linking them to a larger context: a "little circle of desires." This image of culture implies an understanding of moral rules that centers the role of meaning in generating practical relationships. For Musil, cultural coherence depends neither on a set of positive laws defining desire, nor on strictures on taboo objects. Rather, it consists in a constant transformation through a limited variety and application of poetic devices. The logic that binds wife to watch and that which links snow to breast are clearly different while also operating within a larger, indeterminate economy. Watch, wife, and promotion are linked by metonymy and amplification whereas breasts, snow, flowers, etc. suggest substitutions of partial resemblance. Here the cultural value of an object is defined largely by the nature of its interrelation with other things. The weaker the link, the greater the presupposed difference between things, yet the more leeway for further substitution. Acceptable or appropriate moral conduct—staying attached to the circle of desires—depends largely on remaining consistent in how one incorporates aspects of new phenomena (and not others) into the circle.

As the novel develops, it becomes increasingly invested in the moral implications of lives that involve apparent ruptures in continuity. The novel's third section "Ins Tausendjährige Reich (Die Verbrecher)," or "Into the Millennium (The Criminals)," consist largely of Ulrich's conversations with his estranged sister Agathe. My examination of these conversations will trace a shift in focus from essayistic chapters and metapragmatic discourses on possibilities of

characters' conversations toward an incipient ethics of conversation. The sibling's dialogues involve struggles to understand the larger truth behind Agathe's sudden break with her husband Hagauer. Sexuality becomes an increasingly salient framework for constructing Agathe's identity and manifests in ways that align sexuality with possibility's structure as a presupposition that generates inert or elliptical entailments. In accommodating these presuppositions in their interactions, Agathe and Ulrich develop a conversational practice in which weak or putatively incongruous logical links between the metrical form of an action and some other cultural practice (to wills, to funereal rites, to children's games) function as ways to index aspects of Agathe's identity that, for her, might be most real and constraining. For Ulrich, such interactions feel like moral crisis insofar as they recruit him as a co-conspirator in the production of an increasingly coherent translation of possibilities into actualities. Indeed, while Agathe's sexuality does not focus on brother as its most essential variable, she nonetheless depends on him to enact it. These entailments in turn reorganize the culturally embedded properties that orient his sense of self. The recontextualizing work of the siblings' conversations leads to Ulrich's heightened state of sensitivity to the meanings of practices in which he participates, which I refer to this as the siblings' "para-sexual" mode of relation.

The morality of the next step as a logic of praxis

The third part of *The Man without Qualities* opens with Ulrich's returning to his ancestral home to settle his father's estate, where he comes face to face with Agathe for the first time in five years. The section's first twelve chapters consist largely of Ulrich and Agathe's conversations about the morality of their modern European society. The various formulations they give to this problem find common ground in the understanding that ethical judgements—those concerned with determining right and wrong, just and vicious action—must establish the context in which the action resolves. The novel therefore frames the particular matter of Agathe's erratic conduct within a larger conversation about the uncertain value of actions that has some important things in common with this study's engagement with the indeterminacy of contextualization as a condition that mediates all public meanings. If "appropriateness" of action depends upon the degree to which it is constrained by a salient set of factors, the problem, from the actor's point of view, is that the salient factors and the act's relation to them are only settled after the fact and are subject to constantly shifting renegotiations.

During a daytrip with Agathe to the countryside, Ulrich characterizes the moral predicament of their culture as "the morality of the next step" ("die Moral des nächsten Schritts"). This is what he says:

The morality of our time, whatever else may be claimed, is that of achievement. Five more or less fraudulent bankruptcies are acceptable provide the fifth leads to a time of prosperity and patronage. Success can cause everything else to be forgotten. When you reach the point where your money helps win elections and buys paintings, the State is prepared to look the other way too. There are unwritten rules: if you donate to church, charities, and political parties, it needs to be no more than one tenth of the outlay required for someone to demonstrate his goodwill by patronizing the arts. And even success still has its limits; one

cannot yet acquire everything in every way; some principles of the Crown, the aristocracy, and society can still to some extent restrain the social climber. (803)

The morality of the next step presupposes that human beings' primary mode of existence in the world is an active one. Ulrich's example of a corrupt financier explicitly links his conception of right action to the ability to turn one's given resources to profit. Not a straightforward consequentialism, however, the morality of the next step involves the problematic way in which ends recontextualize means to form a series of logically consistent and morally justifiable actions. Ulrich suggests that the formation of such series has constraints; in fact, he at least feigns to claim that they conform to quite calculable conventions. One might think as well of how Count Leinsdorf holds up different standards of conduct for himself as landlord and lawmaker, on the one hand, and as a member of the aristocracy, on the other. Because these rules are conventional (in that they depend on what everyone else concerned is doing), they are unevenly distributed across fields—in the church, for instance, versus the arts. For this very reason, however, every act has the potential to rewrite the relations between fields and thus to reorganize the scope of their concern. The novel therefore takes a special interest in limit cases. Later Ulrich will remark: "the most moral of all propositions is: the exception proves the rule!" (811).

I now want to return to a conversation between Agathe and Ulrich that I alluded to in the introduction to the dissertation and that in many ways represents the relationship between possibility and incongruous voices around the sibling's interactions. Framed by the conversations on the "morality of the next step," Agathe's initial question to Ulrich on their country outing—"Would you be angry with me if I committed a crime?"—resonates within a context that gives "crime" particular implications. Earlier Ulrich muses that, "a person could be happy even as a result of a crime, because it gives him a certain ballast and perhaps keeps him on a steadier course" (806). The indelible mark of a person's self-authorized, criminal action is, in other words, more constant than the usual person's strictest principles. As one might expect, though, Agathe often gets impatient with Ulrich's moralizing and wants to know how his moral principles place him in relation to her. In this respect, Agathe's claim to want to kill her husband Hagauer not only confronts Ulrich with the problem of retracing language to its presuppositional ground, but also implicates him in the way a crime first authorizes its own agency and that is then ratified as others as it is taken up socially. At first Ulrich is hesitant to look at Agathe for clues as to how to interpret her utterance. Only after pretending to take her words literally does he glance up at her, at which point he realizes that the best way to take Agathe seriously is to treat the utterance as though it has some figurative content:

"There's something wrong here, you see; on this frontier between what goes on inside us and what goes on outside, some kind of communication is missing these days, and they adapt to each other only with tremendous losses. One might almost say that our evil desires are the dark side of the life we lead in reality, and the life we lead in reality is the dark side of our good desires. Imagine if you actually did it: it wouldn't at all be what you meant, and you'd be horribly disappointed, to say the least...."

"Perhaps I could suddenly be a different person—you admitted that yourself?" Agathe interrupted him.

As Ulrich at this moment looked around, he was reminded that they were not alone; two people were listening to their conversation. (806)

Ulrich responds to Agathe's utterance as though it corresponded to some as-yet undetermined presuppositions about what Agathe wants. If she committed the murder, he suggests, she would have incompletely enacted her self-understanding. Agathe seems less sure that such an understanding currently exists, which is why so desperate an act holds attraction for her. Yet the scene's orchestration suggests that the siblings' work of calibrating their talk to some indeterminate factors gives their interaction an intelligible form. By the end of conversation, the eavesdropping couple seems convinced that the siblings are lovers who have fought and made up. In other words, the interaction plays out in such a way that the expansion of time and the incorporation of more participants alters which features of Agathe's utterance (her words, her facial expression, the affective dimensions of Ulrich's and her own subsequent responses to the initial utterance) are ultimately understood to accomplish some presupposing and entailing work.

Without really meaning to, Agathe, in prompting Ulrich to put his moral understanding into the implicit terms of a conversational structure, touches on a question Ulrich himself posed about the greater significance of the "morality of their time." He wonders: "So there is something in our minds and in our souls, a morality of the 'next step'—but is that simply the morality of the five bankruptcies, is the entrepreneurial morality of our time so deeply rooted in our inner life?" He continues: "Or is the morality of the careerist a monstrosity prematurely born from deeper currents?" (804). The siblings' conversations indeed bear out a different theory of praxis—one that differs from the "morality of the five bankruptcies" in that it, rather than foregrounding the redeeming "ends" of action, defines the value of action in the way it points behind itself to truths that may exist outside of time and a particular field. In this respect Agathe participates in a sexuality with Ulrich without its ever being fully entailed in relationship to him. Ultimately, when pressed to describe his moral positions, Ulrich responds, "I think we have nothing definite to demand of one another—all of us, I mean; we really shouldn't demand action from one another; we should create the conditions that make action possible" (805).

Melancholia and the negativity of certain sexualities

As a fictional entity, Agathe concentrates the novel's themes of morality and possibility by introducing the problem of incongruous presuppositions indexed in the metrical structure of a life. One gets the sense that until recently, Agathe has passively acquiesced to others' arranging her life for her while remaining mostly indifferent to others' ideas of the good. Therefore, if Agathe's maritidal wish seems to adumbrate radical beliefs about women's sexual and political independence from men, this is significantly complicated by her admitted lack of ambition and her habituation to a comfortable middle-class life. When Ulrich badgers Agathe about why she remarried if she does not love her husband Hagauer and why she did not instead do everything possible to guarantee her independence, such as by pursuing formal education, her reply is a dim, "I've told you already: I'm lazy" (742).

Agathe's leaving her husband appears morally suspect because she so suddenly and positively responds to a new set of unknown demands. Logically, her actions strike one as underdetermined, lacking sufficient presuppositions to balance so drastic a step. Agathe is indeed surprised by her own actions; she sometimes even feels guilty that she isn't running off to a lover. Only upon leaving her husband's house to care for her father on his deathbed does Agathe decide

that she will never return. More precisely, she makes a decision in realizing that what she is escaping. Here are her thoughts as her train departs: “At this moment, though an instant earlier she had still been expecting to be away from home no longer than circumstances absolutely required, she made the decision never to return, and her mind became agitated like a heart that realizes suddenly that it has escaped a danger of which it had been wholly unaware” (788). In the German, a caesura underscores the logical rupture that this “decision” involves: “—nahm sie sich vor, nicht mehr zurückzukehren” (725). The belated realization of change that defines Agathe as a fictional character corresponds to a narrative problem; the difficulty of reconciling past and present action promises no future that does not involve some waste of meaning. Within the novel’s modeling of conversation as a matrix for cultural meanings, this difficulty registers in Ulrich’s impressions of Agathe as an especially difficult person to read. Upon the siblings’ reunion, he remarks to himself, “It was an expressive face, but nothing in it was emphasized, nothing combined in the way that normally suggests traits of character” (735). The description’s attention to phenomena of fragmentation is remarkably similar to that Stein’s narrator brings to bear on members of the “flavor group,” whose behavior suggests an absent characterological ground or “bottom nature.” As Ulrich sits and exchanges utterances with his sister, he becomes aware of an incongruous (often ambiguously gendered), though not unpleasant, form that responds to him but betrays little of the invisible world from which responses emanate.

Like Stein’s *Americans*, *The Man without Qualities* sometimes flirts with some readers’ inclination to develop understandings of characters’ sexualities as they construct psychodynamic frameworks to understand representations of characters’ affect. In Freudian psychoanalysis, the melancholic subject incorporates an ideal object of desire into herself by proliferating the psychic experience of its loss. One might therefore understand melancholia as a “loss of loss” insofar as the object, only ever having been imaginary, was never lost in the first place, so that its non-presence generates an unfinishable work of mourning.²⁰ Recall here the way singularity as an absent quality only manifests in its disappearance from the world of *Americans*. When the narrator discloses the tragic loss at the heart of Agathe’s first marriage, the novel similarly invokes melancholia as a ready framework for understanding the conspicuous underdetermination of her actions as well as the self-reproach she sometimes feels about leaving Hagauer. Before acquiescing to marry Hagauer at her father’s suggestion, Agathe had been married to a childhood friend, who remains unnamed. This young man contracts Typhus during their honeymoon. The marriage is over in a matter of weeks. For Agathe, the short period of her first marriage is the last time she can remember being happy such that her leaving Hagauer comes in retrospect to seem like the resumption of a development prematurely cut short, yet the way loss defines this period of her life troubles her ability to draw on it for a representation of a whole self. One cannot deny, therefore, that the sections on Agathe conform in some ways to the narrative structure of melancholia. As a logic of subjection, the melancholic insists upon the integral value of what was lost, which lies beyond the subject’s powers of representation, by multiplying encounters with loss itself.

Although the third section of *The Man without Qualities* is so constructed that one must ask whether Agathe’s rash behavior reflects a melancholic’s repetition compulsion, her relationship to her past and to loss exceed melancholia in several directions. Most obviously, Agathe’s reflections on her first marriage resemble less a re-encounter with an un-representable

²⁰ See especially Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 45-47.

object (in the form of her husband) than a new encounter with the ephemerality of the lost object. Agathe looks at her locket portrait of her dead husband:

With some confusion she noted the incongruity that she, at twenty-seven, still loved the boy of twenty-one: he had grown much too young for her! She asked herself: “What feelings would I have to have if, at my age, this boyish man were really to be the most important thing in the world to me?” They would certainly have been odd feelings, but she was not even able to imagine them clearly. It all dissolved into nothing.

Agathe recognized in a great upsurge of feeling that the one proud passion of her life had been a mistake, and the heart of this error consisted of a fiery mist she could neither touch nor grasp. (826)

Melancholic self-reproach takes shape around having been careless, inadequate to the loved object yet incomplete without it, but it does not typically admit confrontations with one’s misrecognitions. Agathe’s realization of her having been “misled” (“*einem Irrtum erliegen*”) takes place against the background of two developments. First, enough time has passed so that Agathe, though she has a clear memory of her past thoughts and feelings, can no longer recall how they fit into a landscape that includes another: “Agathe unwrapped from the tissue paper of memory some sayings that she—thank goodness for her cleverness—had preserved in it. My God, that was almost worth saying, she thought, but she could not really be sure of even that unless she also recalled the garden in which it had been spoken” (825). Second, and more importantly, something about Agathe’s present conversations with Ulrich allows Agathe to understand her past as no longer part of her. These conversations of course take place in their father’s house, where some of those past events unfolded, and this juxtaposition drives home for her how distant those memories are from her present predicament: “After having been so long merely the unnoticed other side of events, the furniture and walls, the peculiarly confined light, now became in this moment of recognition strangely tangible, and the quixotic things that had occurred here assumed a physical and completely unambiguous pastness, as if they were ashes or burned coal” (825). Agathe’s relationship with Ulrich has recontextualized her prior happiness, so that she no longer understands particular people and places to form part of its presuppositional ground. To be sure, some ideality is involved here to the extent that Agathe retains a memory of her capacity for feeling. As we shall see, her relationship to herself also continues to involve some negativity insofar as enacting some aspects of her identity leads Agathe to efface other relations. Yet these acts of disfigurement do not so much reproduce loss to hold a place for something unrepresentable as they involve rearranging a set of social relations to accommodate a capacity that is also a real constraint.

Agathe’s negativity—her distaste for most social forms of sexuality—does not reflect a melancholic structure of psychic subjectivity and a retreat into an unreal desire; rather, it represents a way of coping with the practical limits of a particular cultural reality. Although Agathe has not decided to leave Hagauer for a lover, she has had several other sexual partners. These affairs do not satisfy her, however, because she understands them to take part in what we might think of a cultural register called “unfaithfulness” that really has nothing to do with her situation:

she had shown little talent for unfaithfulness; lovers, once she had got to know them a little, were no more masterful [*nicht bezwingender*] to her than husbands, and it soon seemed to her that she could take the ritual masks of African tribal dancers as seriously as the love

masks put on by European men. Not that she never lost her head; but even in the first attempts to repeat the experience the magic was gone. The world of acted-out fantasies, the theatricality of love, left her unenchanted. These stage directions for the soul, mostly formulated by men, which all came to the conclusion that the rigors of life now and then entitled one to an hour of weakness—with some subcategories of weakening: letting go, going faint, being taken, giving oneself, surrendering, going crazy, and so on—all struck her as smarmy exaggeration, since she had at no time ever felt herself other than weak in a world so superbly constructed by the strength of men. (792)

The passage's comparison between African and European rituals does not so much presuppose the reality of any one cultural group over another (and therefore the exact measure and quality of consideration they deserve) as it triangulates Agathe's peculiar position as a participant-observer in her own culture. The limits of Agathe's personal investment in European middle class sexuality focuses on the way it occupies a space apart from "real life" as an exceptional indulgence. One thinks here of Bonadea's similar understanding of, but different relation to, the theatricality of her and Ulrich's sex. Agathe objects not to the theatricality itself, but to the way her place in sexual play remains relatively unchanged from her relationship to other contexts. This is not to say, either, that Agathe longs for a degree of agency she currently lacks. Whatever her sexuality might consist of, it involves an expectation that her partner be "masterful" (bezwingend). This does not necessarily mean that she wants an especially seductive or skillful lover; rather, she wants to be so compelled by an interaction that she does not need to be seduced. One might say that she wants to be absorbed, as Bonadea is, in a spectacle; she wants sex to feel natural and real while still being virtually connected to others through it. Moreover, for Agathe, this absorption is not different from an experience of her own strength because it dissolves the boundary between people.

If Agathe is able to "be herself" with Ulrich, this follows from the way their conversations about morality, especially how to overcome the ambiguous context of moral action, effectively hold steady a set of presuppositions that are also salient to Agathe's sexuality. Speaking of the visions of saints, which Ulrich has been reading about, he describes a state of moral harmony that resembles Agathe's way of imagining a release from sexual boredom: "There's no need to be a saint to experience something of the kind! You could be sitting on a fallen tree or a bench in the mountains, watching a herd of grazing cows, and experience something amounting to being transported into another life! You lose yourself and at the same time find yourself" (827). I would now like to move to discuss some of the entailments that these conversations hold for the siblings and how they allow the ideal, "conceptual" value of Agathe's sexuality to take an interactional, relationally-realized form.

The social life of possibilities

I have already suggested the ways *The Man without Qualities* signals that Agathe's sexuality is not normative insofar as it cannot be enacted while occupying the enregistered subjectivities available to her. Yet this sexuality does emerge into formedness and social meaningfulness as an excess of other, incongruous frameworks of interaction. For instance, the circumstances around their father's will and testament are complicated and obscure, but the relational effect Agathe achieves in rashly altering it clearly brings her closer to Ulrich. At one point Agathe stood to inherit some money from an aunt, but because their father wanted to divide

the family's wealth equally between the siblings, he arranged things such that Agathe's inheritance from him would ultimately go to Ulrich and her regular allowance would, until the aunt's death, be subtracted from the legally required amount parents must bequeath to biological kin. As it turns out, the aunt's money dried up before her death. A codicil reverts Agathe's inheritance to what it would have been before the aunt's bequest. Agathe wants to assure that she has no material tie to Hagauer after their divorce, so she plans to alter the will to appear as though there nothing remains of the legally required share of Agathe's inheritance; she will also destroy the codicil. The siblings' conversation about this plays out at an emotional pitch that strikes one as belonging in a different kind of novel. Their resorting to humorously transparent allusions because they are once again being overheard by a third party (this time their father's manservant) only underscores that the scene unfolds according to a register of intrigue.

What interests me about this scene is how the obvious forgery seems doomed to fail and, moreover, how the novel's logic of consistency does not require keeping track of the crime's unpromising outcomes. In subsequent published and unpublished chapters, Musil only constructs the beginning of a threatening legal response from Hagauer. Instead, the chapter becomes most significant as a turning point in Agathe's and Ulrich's relationship. By renouncing what remains of her legal share of the inheritance, she effectively puts property she would share with Hagauer into Ulrich's hands. Moreover, the two have agreed that Agathe will join Ulrich in Vienna instead of returning to her husband. In reflecting on his uncertain conversations with Agathe after he returns to the capital, Ulrich acknowledges how they can appear to be consistent with each other as part of a larger "scheme": "They had agreed that for the moment it would be for 'the time it will take to get the divorce,' so that Agathe would have a refuge and counsel. But now, in thinking about it, Ulrich also remembered an earlier remark of his sister's about wanting 'to kill Hagauer'; this 'scheme' had evidently been working in her and taken on a new form" (869). What Agathe's words or actions could not previously index becomes increasingly intelligible in accomplishing another undermotivated act. (At first Ulrich attempts to dissuade Agathe from the forgery by arguing that it is entirely unnecessary, simply unheard of.) More to the point, the cumulative fact of Agathe's identity is entailed for Ulrich in a way that unsettles his brotherly relationship to her. The possibility of Agathe's sexual subjectivity emerges from the incongruity between several things: her legal marriage ties, her involvement in a conspiracy with another man, and the fact that this other man is a brother with whom she shares certain moral presuppositions and a curious linguistic habit.

Let me turn to another example that shows even more clearly how the increasing coherence of Agathe's eccentric sexuality recontextualizes the meaning of the knowledge the siblings share as brother and sister. The passage I have in mind appears before their father's funeral as they are preparing the body for viewing. When the two exchange impersonations of their father and Hagauer, the narrator pauses to comment on how invoking the past by affecting the voices of others does an implicit kind of conceptual work: "Can the memories of two people talking of a past familiar to both not only supplement each other but coalesce even before they are uttered? Something of the kind was happening at this moment. A shared state of mind surprised and confused both brother and sister, like hands that come out of coats in places one would never expect and suddenly grasp each other. All at once they knew more of the past than they had supposed they knew" (762). The siblings seem to have experienced how a linguistic exchange, as a practical condition, projects as its own ground an intersubjective interpretation of the world that is mental ("a shared state of mind") but not the property of any one mind. Ulrich remarks to himself

more than once that he and his sister rarely share the same thoughts and feelings while nonetheless being in total accord. We might think about this accord as consisting of a metapragmatic framework that is also an embodied habit: a simile relates this particular mental state to a strange and special costume and the meeting of obscure limbs in a shared gesture. In touching on bodies' potential, not-yet-uttered capacities for relation, the chapter already suggests an erotic potential within implicit forms of understanding.

The chapter continues to describe how the siblings remove their father's insignia, the emblems of his imperial service, and replaced them with the replicas with which he will be buried (another way the novel draws attention to how people do not own their qualities). These decorations meant everything to the lawyer and bureaucrat; they signify his life's work. Agathe wonders if she and her brother might leave their own emblems on their father. She proposes to Ulrich, "How about each of us writing something nice on a piece of paper and putting it in his pocket?" (767). Agathe seems to allude to some practice that Ulrich would know about. What kind of ritual is this? "Something nice" seems vague. How might the nature of the ritual constrain what qualifies as "niceness" on this occasion? And what might the siblings' use of the practice of writing "something nice" entail with respect to their father? Primed for such an allusion by the siblings' previous recollections, Ulrich recalls an occasion when he and Agathe continued a tradition they had developed of burying pieces of themselves (fingernail clippings, bits of hair) by writing a few words on slips of paper and walling them up in the mortar of a new structure on their father's property. Agathe throws in a few lines from her math textbook; Ulrich writes his name. While for Ulrich this practice is about "making an appearance in posterity," effectively conveying his qualities into the future, for Agathe it had a different significance: "the burial had been an end in itself. She had the feeling that she was hiding a part of herself, permanently removing it from the supervision of a world whose pedagogical demands always intimidated her even though she never thought very highly of them" (767). The ritual of burial or immurement removes the emblems of one's identity from relation, from their tension with and circulation within a world of competing values, even as it deposits oneself into the midst of things. When Agathe moves to reenact the ritual, therefore, she apparently suggests that she and Ulrich do so in contrast to the Imperial insignia's reclamation for further use. By the same token, the ritual entails an understanding of the relation between the dead and the living as one of immanence. At the same time, the practice's reenactment will presumably carry forward Agathe and Ulrich's relation into the present, entailing something about their most prized qualities and their relationship to each other.

Although Agathe first proposes they write something, she ultimately chooses a gestural language. Here is how Agathe proceeds and how Ulrich reacts:

It was this incident to which Agathe was alluding now, and Ulrich gave no answer for the longest while, but smiled in a way that was meant to deter her, for repeating such a game with the dead man seemed taboo to him. But Agathe had already bent down, slid from her leg a wide silk garter that she wore to relieve the pull on her girdle, lifted the pall, and slipped it into her father's pocket. And Ulrich? He could hardly believe his eyes to see his childhood memory restored to life. He almost leapt forward to stop her, just because it was so completely out of order. But he caught in his sister's eye a flash of the dewy fresh innocence of early morning that is still untainted by any of the drab routines of the day, and it held him back.

“What do you think you’re doing?” he admonished her softly. He did not know whether she was trying to propitiate the deceased because he had been wronged, or doing him one last kindness because of all the wrong he had done himself. He could have asked, but the barbaric notion of sending the frosty dead man on his way with a garter still warm from his daughter’s thigh tightened his throat and muddled his brain. (768)

What does Agathe think she’s doing? Ulrich knows the game well enough, but he is unsure whether the garter replaces the insignia taken from him or insists on his error in placing so much importance on enduring signs by shifting emphasis away from emblems of identity and toward a more strictly relational mode of social meaning. Ulrich’s confusion about the force Agathe’s gesture exerts on their father incorporates the overarching question of how Agathe’s manipulation of signs redraws the trajectory of their earlier games—that is, whether the placing of objects and values outside of time always had some residual, real entailments. Navigating this confusion draws Ulrich’s attention to the incongruities among the variables Agathe’s gesture encompasses: the math text and the silk garter; the hereafter of Christianity and the metaphysical space presupposed in the act of setting things aside; youthful defiance and pious appeasement; warm flesh and cold flesh. As Ulrich’s reasoning is drawn down, into a confrontation with the sensuality of details, he is also aware of how Agathe’s gesture implicates him in possibly enacting some aspect of her identity. If there is a strong element of desire here, it follows not only or even primarily from the erotic nature of the ritual object itself (an object of a specific material that clings closely to Agathe’s body), but from the way the use of this object within an incongruous interactional trope defers coherent conceptualization in a way that demands Ulrich’s response. This effect echoes the way Ulrich experiences himself as adrift within a field of fragmentary bodily sensations; incapable of his characteristically orderly thought and speech, he is all throat and brain.

Some sexualities cannot be communicated directly through the stereotypical logics through which a culture works, yet there is a way that these sexualities come to be enacted within interactional-textual structures (that is, across social space and time) as people linking together moments where language use manifests incongruous presuppositions. The way Ulrich and Agathe turn excess and meaninglessness into consistency as their discourses accumulate presuppositions allows *The Man without Qualities* to think about the mystical work of translating possibility into actuality through the complexity and immanence of social identities. The actuality of Agathe’s desire manifests as an imposition on the social form of the sibling’s relationship—on what it presupposes as in the way of shared knowledge and commitments and on what invoking these can entail for them. To close the chapter, I want to meditate on the ways Musil’s reframing of mysticism resonates with some practices in queer fictional production. In particular, the way Musil’s novel recasts the asceticism of the holy life as a way to make peace with an unsatisfying modernity and renew a commitment to being in the social world has much in common with a negative aesthetics that takes acts of disfigurement as integral to relation-making. And yet Musil’s novel has never been systematically taken up by the literary publics that understand the assumptions behind such aesthetic practices as a point of orientation for their further circulation. I am less interested at this juncture with contemplating the unrealized possibilities of this connection than I am in understanding why this is so and what the absence of this integration might tell us about the constitution of extant sexual publics.

THE LIMITS OF SOME SEXUAL AND LITERARY PUBLICS

Toward the end of the section of *The Man without Qualities* from which I have just been drawing, before Ulrich returns to Vienna from his father's house, the narrator issues a disclaimer:

But whoever has not already picked up the clues as to what was going on between this brother and sister should lay this account aside, for it depicts an adventure of which he will never be able to approve: a journey to the edge of the possible, which led past—and perhaps not always past—the dangers of the impossible and unnatural, even of the repugnant: a “borderline case,” as Ulrich later called it, of limited and special validity, reminiscent of the freedom with which mathematics sometimes resorts to the absurd in order to arrive at the truth. He and Agathe happened upon a path that had much in common with the business of those possessed by God, but they walked it without piety, without believing in God or the soul, nor even in the beyond or in reincarnation. They had come upon it as people of this world, and pursued it as such—this is what was remarkable about it. (826)

This passage ties together many of the themes of this chapter. It alludes to Christian mystics and the lives of saints, which Ulrich has been reading, and to the extreme experiences these accounts record. It likens the mystic's explorations of possibilities to a journey for a truth that pervades the world and can be realized through contemplative practice. Finally, it ties these to the vague sexual meanings that accumulate around the siblings, suggesting that their search for the true poetic principles that bind together seemingly disparate things involves them in a relation, something “going on between them” that is less than licit—or would be, if it weren't for the state of exception the two construct around their interactions. It also does more than suggest; it divides its public into those who understand and those who do not and are therefore better off discarding the fiction. However, in doing all of this, the passage also foregrounds a problem in the relation between, on the one hand, the novel's interest in possibility as a practical reality that emerges in conjunction with sexual meanings and, on the other, its status as a public text. Like Sterne's *Tristram*, Musil's novel, far from ascribing the siblings' relationship any particular sexual content, fixates on the indeterminate “something” they share. As I have shown, it remains doubtful whether the siblings themselves have a clear understanding of what their relation can entail; they only possess a practical sense of the constraints each has to respect when responding to the other. In this respect, the passage sensationalizes a line between those who know and those who cannot, perhaps exciting prurient curiosity, while also acknowledging the barriers that likely keep most readers from affirming their participation in a public who could imaginatively inhabit the siblings' interactions. This would be a public that recognizes itself in the erotic experience of navigating the incongruous meanings of certain social practices.

In the conclusion of the last chapter, I briefly mentioned some ways actors in a literary field try to effect changes in the equilibrium of values in their field by hailing actors in a different field.²¹ We might understand Musil, through *The Man without Qualities*, to have attempted to achieve a revolution in the kind of meanings communicable through a novel by soliciting the recognition and aesthetic attention of a broader readership existing at the intersection of spirituality and sexual practice. In this way, the novel would give a concrete form to feelings and interests that

²¹ See Lucey, *Someone*, 50-58.

were already implicit in the social world. Part of what interests me about the sexual possibilities that Musil's novel makes thinkable and communicable is how they have gained relatively limited traction among publics whose self-sustaining discourse is predicated on some interest in coming to terms with axes of sexual differentiation. In the next chapter, I will discuss in more detail how such specifically sexual *counterpublics* may not consist of people of a single sexual persuasion but are nonetheless marked by the social stigma that many non-normative sexualities bear.

Histories of mysticisms across cultures reveal a wide range of eroticisms, and experimental writing has found ways of making mysticism's minimization of the relation between creature and creator productive by, for instance, unsettling clear distinctions between writer and fictional work, the fictional world and the world where the fiction circulates.²² One example of this kind of writing would be Robert Glück's 1994 *Margery Kempe*, which refracts an obsessive, inter-class relationship between two gay men through the story of Margery of Kempe (the first autobiographer in English) and her passion for Christ. One effect of Glück's interweaving of these narratives is to refigure sexuality as a way of experiencing both history and—under the right circumstances—dissolution and union into trans-historical forces. Reflecting on his and other New Narrative artists' interest in mystical understandings of sex as an approach to spiritual love, Glück writes,

I wanted to write close to the body—the place language goes reluctantly. We used porn, where information saturates narrative, to expose and manipulate genre's formulas and *dramatis personae*, to arrive at ecstasy and loss of narration as the self sheds its social identities. We wanted to speak about subject/master and object/slave. Bataille showed us that loss of self and attainment of nothingness is a group activity. He supplied the essential negative, a zero planted in the midst of community. His concept of transgression gave us lots of fuel.²³

Now, while Glück refers to Bataille in connection with the spiritual deformation of social selfhood, one might easily recognize some similar thematic strands running through Musil's work: pornography as a place to go to learn about inhabitable sexual subjectivities; transgressions that author a new context for selfhood; identities that are immanent in social interaction but not socially "enregistered"; and the ability to collaboratively sustain implicit meanings in conversation as an experience of intersubjective unity. The preference for Bataille raises the question, then, of why literary movements canonize certain authors and texts as integral to their understandings of what it means to write with the body exposed and the kinds of treatments of sex as a public act (love, lust, or otherwise) that count as field-changing literature. More is in play here than the key ingredients of sexuality, mysticism, and transgression of dominant moralities.

As Michael Warner discusses in *Publics and Counterpublics*, publics are by definition oriented toward increasingly broader circulation among strangers, but in practice their discourse is constrained by prior conditions: "A public seems to be self-organized by discourse but in fact requires preexisting forms and channels of circulation. It appears to be open to indefinite strangers but in fact selects participants by criteria of shared social space (though not necessarily territorial

²² According to Ignacio Götz, this minimization has historically been the basis of charges of heresy because it presupposes a compatibility between sensuous nature and knowledge of the divine. By the same token, mystics tend to interpret asceticism (*askesis*) as a disciplined approach or preparation for God's love rather than as renunciation. See Götz, "Sex and Mysticism," 10-15.

²³ Glück, "Long Note," 30.

space), habitus, topical concerns, intergeneric references, and circulating intelligible forms (including idiolects or speech genres).”²⁴ So while the topical concerns and intergeneric references of Musil’s novel (mystical writing, essay, social criticism, fiction, etc.) seem salient for many contemporary sexual publics that overlap with literary publics, other factors intervene. Differences of national language would name one obvious example of a division within social space that may separate a novel from the publics that are capable of using its meanings. Another such division concerns language’s social stratification according to stereotypes and registers. Keeping with the New Narrative example, it is interesting that while the group’s many collaborators drew broadly on twentieth century sources for their genealogy, they tended to look to German writers (Lukács and Benjamin in particular) for their poetics while looking to French sources (Althusser, Foucault, Kristeva) for their social theory and concepts of sexuality. It may be important to consider, then, that particular publics (especially heteronomous publics, or those that work across fields) may be partly defined by enregistered distinctions linking particular speech genres to broader linguistic and national traditions.

Then again, even a generation of writers whose initiation into the literary field took place around 1976 and who were well-versed in early-century German thought would not necessarily have been able to read Musil’s novel with their own social and literary projects in mind. The novel’s incompleteness and delayed publication both reinforce some of its most powerful social insights while also determining its fate within histories of sexuality and literary fields. Part III of the novel was unfinished at the time of Musil’s death, and the original three parts were only fully translated into English in 1961. In 1938, Musil withdrew twenty chapters of material—much of it about Ulrich and Agathe—from publication. These as well as the chapters Musil was working on up until his death, were only made available in 1995. On the one hand, the novel’s incompleteness has a way of inflecting its poetics: since the order of much material is uncertain, one is freer to consider how juxtapositions of interactions reinforce certain presuppositions that may be immanent in the background of characters’ conversations. Because many of the social consequences of the novel’s action are never settled, including the outcomes of Agathe’s forgery and the results of the Parallel Campaign, one must be content with focusing on the cultural implications of the forms of interaction—in how they shift the conceptual center of the novel’s maelstrom of activity. On the other hand, this very incompleteness has practical consequences insofar as the novel’s delayed public circulation means that it was not broadly available at the time when, later in the century, many literary publics were taking shape around an understanding of sexual deviance that was historical without being melancholic and that imagined the variable dimensions of sexuality in an expansive way. *The Man without Qualities* itself represents a limit case within the history of the relation between experimental fiction and sexual publics because it has all the qualities that would make it of interest but never found the context in which those values were salient.

How are a literary work’s indexical forms caught up in the circumstances around its publication, its coming into relation as language with other uses of language, with authors, with different kinds of readers? In the next chapter, I will show how this particular dimension of signification can be an especially fraught site for writers who aim to achieve a revolution in form in relation to a sexual public because of the way some literary avant-gardes conceive themselves as being disinterested or universal in their orientations. Like other novels in this study, Djuna

²⁴ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 106.

Barnes's *Nightwood* reflects a concern for the differences between sexualities that can be communicated narratively versus those articulated through social indexical channels. More than the others, however, both its structure and its history emphasize the precarious conditions of publicness for some sexual meanings. First I will discuss how *Nightwood*'s representations of characters' conversations attempts to construct a theory of disqualification that can link together the disparate presuppositions of people who experience shame because they try to lay claim to a position within a social structure without being able to entail all the requisite qualities or because they possess one idiosyncratic quality that unfits them for that position. Then I will examine how the necessarily odd forms of these conversations become a potential site of Barnes's own disqualification from her place in the literary field when they come up against others' ideas about how represented discourse functions as an emblem of quality in literary realism.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Disqualification of Djuna Barnes

For some people, it is important that sex be embedded in contexts resonant with meaning, narrative, and connectedness with other aspects of their life; for other people, it is important that they not be; to others it doesn't occur that they might be.¹

Unlike other works discussed in this study, Djuna Barnes's 1936 *Nightwood* already represents, for some people today, an important landmark in gay and lesbian literary culture.² However, during the years Barnes spent struggling to publish her work, the displeasure of both professional editors and friends trained itself not on the novel's frank handling of sex, but on its structure. According to editor Cheryl J. Plumb, only later, as T.S. Eliot combed the text in anticipation of censorship, were allusions to things like Matthew O'Connor's swallowing pubic hair during oral sex brought up for possible softening.³ People like T.R. Smith, the editor at Liveright who rejected Barnes's manuscript three times, instead objected to O'Connor's long speeches, which he found boring. Barnes's friend Emily Holmes Coleman, who was instrumental in introducing Barnes to Eliot, similarly told Barnes that she "had trouble with conversation. Your people speak to themselves."⁴

Given *Nightwood*'s reputation as a pillar of lesbian and gay culture, readers today may be surprised to find themselves sharing Coleman's and Smith's impressions. The novel gives readers more than just choppy dialogue to worry about. The work presents its most important events (Felix and Robin's marriage, Matthew's arrest for public sex, the good years of Nora and Robin's relationship, Nora's confrontation with Jenny) in the most unceremonious of synopses and as grist for the characters' subsequent reflections. And though all characters are implicated in each other's lives (often through Robin), one only glimpses the remainders of their already exhausted stories as unspoken presuppositions in the interactions between conversational pairs. This retrospective and piecemeal explication of events through dialog obscures chronology, thwarting even expert attempts to assemble fragments of interaction into a larger whole.⁵ But as Colmean suggests, the novel's most unsettling feature concerns the way characters speak in ways that do not obviously

¹ Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 25.

² For instance, the Heather Love's field statement on queer modernism is a nod to *Nightwood*. See Love, "Modernism at Night." In an earlier wave of queer literary theory, Judith Roof centered *Nightwood* as a primary example of a literary work that refused narrative structures of normative sexual development in Roof, *Come as You Are: Sexuality and Narrative*.

³ See Plumb, Introduction to *Nightwood*, xxii.

⁴ Letter from Emily Holmes Coleman to Djuna Barnes, 27 August 1935. Unless otherwise noted, all references to Barnes's correspondence are provided courtesy of the Djuna Barnes Papers collection at the University of Maryland's Hornbake Library.

⁵ For instance, Georgette Fleischer notes how criticism of *Nightwood* throughout its revival in the 1970s consistently muddles the circumstances of Nora's and Robin's breakup. Robin does not exactly leave Nora for Jenny; it is more accurate to say that Nora separates herself from Robin on the ground that Robin has misrepresented their bond to Jenny. Fleischer, "Politics and Poetics of 'Nightwood,'" 419.

correspond to another's discourse. For example, Matthew's conversations with Nora confront readers with a constantly expanding and contracting contextual scope, chaining together utterances that either mean in ways so personal as to be opaque, or else resound so broadly within eternity, the universe, and the human condition that one would feel hard pressed to respond.

For instance, Nora construes her relationship with Robin as an encounter with mortality itself: "Love is death, come upon with passion; I know, that is why love is wisdom. I love her as one condemned to it."⁶ Matthew responds in a lyrical apostrophe that condenses several allusions (to the New Testament, Montaigne, and early-century popular music) and thus risks flying over a reader's head, let alone Nora's:

Oh Widow Lazarus! Arisen from your dead! Oh lunatic humour of the moon! Behold this fearful tree, on which sits singing the drearful bird—*Turdas Musicus*, or European singing-thrush; sitting and singing the refrain—all in the tear-wet night—and it starts out *largo*, but it ends like *I Hear You Calling Me*, or *Kiss Me Again*, gone wild. (115)

This mock-epic invocation addresses Nora, perhaps imploring her to imagine her mournful predicament on a more person-sized scale, only to introduce a context of equally eccentric proportions. Matthew's response confusingly brings together several allusions to construct a new backdrop for Nora's relation to Robin, but it also mobilizes these points of reference within the musical structure of the address. That is, Matthew not only mockingly describes a plaintive tempo, but also possibly performs it for Nora to suggest some shared knowledge about the affective stations of the lamenting body. If the address happens *for* someone, the juncture challenges one to understand that a character's speech might do all of this without accomplishing anything completely or necessarily. Certainly it doesn't take a philistine to ask how characters' disjointed talk relates to sexuality as the basis of social or political solidarity. Critics' insistence aside, what's so queer about uncertainty, disorientation, and difficulty? Coleman, like other of Barnes's contemporaries, understood such scenes in terms of the intrusion of Barnes's eccentricity into the medium of fiction, alerting her friend of her "deadly introversion" that was "almost pathological."⁷ Too long, too abrupt in coupling allusions, too unbalanced in turns at talk, the discourse of Barnes's characters became a sign of her peculiarity and possible grounds for her exclusion from the literary field. Decades later, the cultural significance of *Nightwood* continues to be controversial—not for its depictions of sexual practice, but for the ambiguous discourse in which the value of those practices is suspended.

Placing Barnes's eccentricity into context without refuting it, this chapter argues that *Nightwood*'s enduring significance for sexual cultures revolves around its meditation on the work of constructing a public medium through which otherwise unintelligible sexual knowledge can be at least provisionally inhabited and communicated. In the last chapter, I discussed how Musil's characters Agathe and Ulrich serve this function for one another while failing to constitute a public because of some properties of *The Man without Qualities* and of the contexts through which it circulates. In *Nightwood*, if characters' utterances seem logically strained and obliquely addressed, this follows from the novel's interest in the discursive effort required to stabilize a

⁶ Barnes, *Nightwood*, 115.

⁷ Letter from Emily Holmes Coleman to Djuna Barnes, 27 August 1935.

context that encompasses an indeterminate number of people who are not always sensibly present to each other, but whose collectivity is implied in the form and temporality of speech. *Nightwood*'s scenes of interaction specifically take shape around the urgency of uncoupling self-understanding from public spectacles of shame—a social narrative that the novel refers to as “disqualification.” But if disqualification refers to a structure of experience that mediates between and thus transforms the identities of different characters, it also describes the predicament of the novel itself. Barnes's way of routing public knowledge through the circulation of affect marks her text in a way that compromises its relation to the novel as an historical genre and its possibilities for public circulation. In this respect, Barnes's importance to the history of sexuality includes not only her depictions of identities and relations, but also the work she undertakes within the publication process to assimilate her literary group's experimentation with the limits of universal human knowledge to a sexual counterpublic project. *Nightwood*, as both textual artifact and cultural event, becomes an opening to reconsider how literary publics, in Michael Warner's words, furnish “resources for interiority and contexts for self-elaboration.”⁸

Allow me to schematically lay out Michael Warner's concepts of publics, which I refer to through this chapter. In the title essay of *Publics and Counterpublics*, Warner clarifies why publics are such elusive social entities.⁹ As reflexive, virtual effects of discourse, publics are particularly difficult to pin down; they emerge in the orientation of one utterance to another within a projected temporal pattern of circulation. Yet publics exert an immanent shaping force on both linguistic form and the habitus of individual speakers—one's practical sense of what one does in using language. For this reason, Warner can isolate several marks of public speech, three of which prove especially relevant to the conversational structures of *Nightwood* and to Barnes's unhappy relation to the conditions of her publicness. First, because publics form based on relations to a discourse, public speech constitutionally addresses itself to indefinite others who move in and out of range of the address. One knows neither who is paying attention, nor how they may differ from oneself. By extension, we find ourselves participating in public speech when we recognize that an utterance hails us while being partly directed to someone else. Consider here how Matthew's repertoire of allusions might invoke a public context. In receiving a public discourse, one does not expect to appreciate all references since the discourse is not for oneself alone. Of course, this by itself does not render Matthew's address any less strange, for it is still difficult to infer, from the range of allusions, the kind of public he invokes and who might be in attendance.

Second, being oriented to reach strangers, publics inflect the social identities of their participants in a peculiar way. While in principle public speech extends itself to anyone, in practice its circulation is arbitrarily closed by the sedimentation of social identity in language use. Here I reproduce a passage I cited in the last chapter in longer form:

⁸ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 31.

⁹ Warner's treatment of publics as contexts that inflect the meaningfulness of speech, as opposed to a quality of discourse, reflects his intellectual debts to Hannah Arendt's thinking in *The Human Condition* and Kant's “What is Enlightenment?” In these texts, Kant and Arendt define publicness as an existential condition that facilitates the free use of reason in contrast, in Kant's view, to the constraint particular to official stations and, in Arendt's, to the “privation” (necessity, biologically or culturally conceived) that attaches to private life. For Warner, both of these formulations have the benefit of conceiving the distinction between public and privacy as distinct from the contrast between state and civil society. See especially Warner, 44, 59.

A public seems to be self-organized by discourse but in fact requires preexisting forms and channels of circulation. It appears to be open to indefinite strangers but in fact selects participants by criteria of shared social space (though not necessarily territorial space), habitus, topical concerns, intergeneric references, and circulating intelligible forms (including idiolects or speech genres). These criteria inevitably have positive content. They enable confidence that the discourse will circulate along a real path, but they limit the extension of that path.¹⁰

Here Warner helps us imagine how the horizon of estrangement integral to public speech comes up against social difference. Consider the role that differences of disciplinary idiolect play at public university talks open to “the public.” In principle anyone may attend these events, and certainly most could recognize their structuration into an introduction by a facilitator, remarks by a speaker, and a period for questions from the audience. Yet sometimes a visitor from outside the academic space (or from a different partition within it) will use the ideas circulated there differently, such as by responding to a discussion on aesthetics as though the speaker were doling out advice on how to live, or by citing a concept that was current within the academic public at one time but has long since been displaced. In these moments academic participants will struggle to respond to the contribution; a real boundary to communication is felt. Warner insists, however, that the meaning of social discourses are not mechanistically determined by the social paths that first enable their circulation. Participation in a public remains a distinct aspect of identity that modifies other aspects. This is as true for the most intimate experiences of subjectivity as it is of the most rigidly constrained professional habits. Public existence animates one with an interest in others and a sense of their virtual presence. They alter how one hears one’s own thoughts. Stated differently, publics, rather than being the opposite of privacy, become the means of its construction. This also allows one to think of privacy as a privilege because privacy assumes the autonomous social space that first enables public discourse’s circulation.

The transformative potential of publics leads to the third point from Warner that will be important moving forward: publics have a particular politics for people whose private lives entail a stigma or who experience privacy as subordination. On the one hand, publics represent the possibility of changing the terms of subjectivity by setting oneself within an imaginary world of others who share one’s predicament if not one’s social category. To name just one instance of the role of publics in producing affects, Deborah Gould has given an account of how ACT UP, by staging actions around the biopolitics of the virus’s toll on queer life, broadened the affective stances that the family, friends, and lovers of people who died from HIV-related illness could adopt to include anger.¹¹ Warner implies that the affective sense of “movement” that runs through such projects depends on the crucial difference between publics and social positionalities since feeling is contingent on active participation, not ontology.

On the other hand, specifically *counterpublic* formations remain marked by the subordinate status of the people included in their circulation. For this reason, counterpublic discourse does not extend easily into stranger sociability:

¹⁰ Warner, 106.

¹¹ See Gould, *Moving Politics*, 220-55.

Like all publics, a counterpublic comes into being through an address to indefinite strangers. (This is one significant difference between a counterpublic and a community or group.) But counterpublic discourse also addresses those strangers as being not just anybody. They are socially marked by their participation in this kind of discourse; ordinary people are assumed not to want to be mistaken for the kind of person who would participate in this kind of talk or be present in this kind of scene.¹²

A particularized being defines counterpublic discourse as a residual stigma marking speech, often through the indexical channels of linguistic meaning I have referred to in previous chapters. In fact, Warner centers such marked and marking indexical features as integral to the political import of counterpublics' forms of reasoning. In other words, Warner understands that any social hierarchy implies a hierarchy of rational and expressive faculties that takes the form of a language ideology—a belief about language that serves the interest of those who can monopolize the privileged semiotic resources.¹³ For Warner, the ideal of rational-critical debate particular to the bourgeois public sphere routinely brackets matters close to the body as irrelevant in placing the sovereign opinion of civil society on the same footing with the state. In contrast, “publics more overtly oriented in their self-understanding to the poetic-expressive dimensions of language, including artistic publics and many counterpublics, lack the power to transpose themselves to the generality of the state.”¹⁴ Counterpublics are not necessarily predicated on stigmatized identities; their subordination depends primarily on the relative statuses of forms of discourses. By the same token, subalternity does not a counterpublic make. The public speech of a subordinated social group only constitutes a counterpublic when people use marked speech in publics ways and thus implicitly contest what counts as public speech (and the kinds of privacy it enables).

For instance, anthropologist Rusty Barrett has determined that several forms of slang used by groups marked by sexual and gender difference involve puns that place common words or the household names of international celebrities, into a new evaluative framework, e.g., Mahalia Jackson as a substitute for the Philippine Tagalog adjective *mahala*, meaning expensive. As Barrett notes, “While these queer argots certainly have indexical potential for conveying queer identities, they may also do much more.”¹⁵ The publicness of these evaluative frames is one condition of this “more.” Although queer argots can mark community boundaries, their forms and interpretations of culture circulate more broadly (in part because their meanings are often transparent to any speaker of the matrix language). The communication of private life-worlds through argots—and an outsider's understanding that these life-worlds have positive content even when one lacks the linguistic and cultural resources to construe the pragmatic meaning of a particular instance of argot use—presupposes the public circulation of discourse.

¹² Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 120.

¹³ As Paul Kroskrity writes, a social group's members' “notions of what is ‘true,’ ‘morally good,’ or ‘aesthetically pleasing’ about language and discourse are grounded in social experience and often demonstrably tied to political-economic interests. These notions often underlie attempts to use language as the site at which to promote, protect, and legitimate those interests. Nationalist programs of language standardization, for example, may appeal to a modern metric of communicative efficiency, but such language development efforts are pervasively underlain by political-economic considerations since the imposition of a state-supported hegemonic standard will always benefit some social groups over others.” Kroskrity, “Language Ideologies,” 501.

¹⁴ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 116.

¹⁵ Barrett, “Queer Argots,” 220.

Warner's framework can help twenty-first century readers appreciate how differences between *Nightwood*'s characters manifest in the difficulties they encounter when calibrating the shared presuppositions—the counterpublic medium—necessary for the communication of private sexual knowledge. Felix, Matthew, Nora, Robin, and Jenny represent no one social category. We might describe them as rich and poor, formally employed and itinerant workers, Jewish and gentile, male and female, gender normative and gender transitive in their identifications, and homo- and heterosexual. More troubling still, these characters only correspond to contemporary social categories of gender and sexuality in highly qualified ways. O'Connor inhabits a position somewhere between frameworks for making sense of cross-gender identifications, but his invoking—often in close juxtaposition—discourses of inversion, his strong affinity for motherhood, his identifications with other World War I soldiers, and his apparently increasingly unintelligible identity (“I’m the last of my line, the fine hairline of least resistance”) make it difficult to place him exactly (117). We might similarly understand Nora as a cisgender woman who loves a gender non-conforming woman, but such a way of parsing the attraction depends on what Matthew calls a “formula,” a cultural narrative that describes and explains the gender-deviant body. The characters’ conversations tend to reify this kind of explanation by placing them within analogies with other, incongruous myths. Reflecting on her relationship after separating from Robin, Nora tells Matthew the following: “‘Man,’ she said, her eyelids quivering, ‘conditioning himself to fear, made God; as the prehistoric, conditioning itself to hope, made man,—the cooling of the earth, the receding of the sea. And I, who want power, chose a girl who resembles a boy.’” (114). Nora’s account of her love bewilderingly collapses the mythical and the natural-historical into the personal, specifying her relation with Robin under processes of cultural and evolutionary adaptation to give her affective experience consistency and definition as a combination of fear and hope. At the same time, Nora’s description of herself accomplishes a less certain work in addressing Matthew. In foregrounding how Nora’s love figures inconsistently alongside other logics of adaptation (such as in breaking metrical parallelism between “made”/“made”/“chose”), her utterance may suggest that she rejects her previous feelings and the beliefs that enable them, or that she doubts these but continues to use them for lack of a more precise language.

What absence of shared social criteria, to use Warner’s term, does this uncertainty suggest? In her introduction to *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick suggests that there are things about ourselves that we (the sexual counterpublic of her address) know or need to know about sexuality but lack ways to refer to, and this lack of theoretical paradigm motivates the invention of “nonce taxonomies.” We might understand the “nonce” quality of these taxonomies to correspond to the way their significance is bound by particular contexts of discursive interaction in ways similar to how Nora’s invocation of certain about the attractions of deviant gender to frame her feelings of longing for Robin means something specific when addressed to Matthew. Sedgwick goes on to formulate a list of differential axes that, if taken seriously, might “disrupt many forms of the available thinking about sexuality” in part because they confront us with the limits of our ability to point to and describe sexual meanings.¹⁶ The epigraph to this chapter reproduces one of the sexual differences Sedgwick mentions; it specifically schematizes sexualities that differ by the degree to which narrative connects sex to other contexts.

To add a layer of specificity to my argument, I want to suggest that *Nightwood*’s enduring sexual counterpublic interest consists in its explorations of how people, in interacting with each

¹⁶ Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 25.

other, adopt uneven footings toward existing models of sexual narrative either to construct new ones, or to distance themselves from narrative altogether. Matthew, for example proliferates more narratives than any other character—about himself, his experiences in the Great War, and historical figures like Ludwig II. But Matthew also uses narratives in a highly unorthodox way. One might say that he narrates entirely for pragmatic effect and with minimal regard for referential truth, and this ironically means that his stories rarely achieve the particular effect he seems to want. Responding to a story he tells about administering medical care for Catherine the Great, one of his perennial listeners scolds him: “Remember your century at least!” (135). Robin’s chief function in the novel consists of shattering others’ allusions of narrative coherence by violently disavowing her place in relationships (her marriage with Felix, her household with Robin). Nora seems like she at one time did not consider that she might be implicitly weaving a sexual narrative but has since realized that she was and subsequently reevaluates her relationship to all narratives (as she co-constructs one with Matthew). Structured around characters’ discursive interactions, *Nightwood* experimentally traces the way different footings toward narrative strain publicness’s constitutive relation to discursive genre’s pragmatically regimented logics (its metrical structures) and thus complicates characters’ abilities to orient themselves affectively within interactions.

If the concepts of publics and counterpublics allow one to think about circulations of discourse as enabling contexts for feeling, including capacities for sexual feeling, “disqualification” names a simultaneously narrative and affective structure of shame around which her characters’ discourse takes shape and that stands to be recontextualized by their discourse’s public resonances. In the first section to follow, I elaborate how Barnes’s characters index a residual awareness of disqualification through the habitual reproduction of shameful spectacles among themselves. In the subsequent section, I isolate some of the ways conversations in *Nightwood* reflect a process of counterpublic emergence by which characters transform their self-understandings (their affective interpretations of the situations they occupy) as they implicitly alter their relations to each other via their footing within narratives about shame. To conclude the introduction, I want to illustrate how the novel prepares us to understand the connection between various socially marginal ways of using narrative and disqualified sexualities.

Sometimes in *Nightwood*, a character or the narrator refers to a person as “impossible.” To be “impossible” is to be nonexistent, nowhere on the map of viable social positions. But one also calls “impossible” those people whose speech seems hopelessly eccentric. The narrator remarks of Felix Volkbein’s inheritance of both a Jewish ancestry and his father’s feigned aristocracy, “From the mingled passions that made up his past, out of a diversity of bloods, from the crux of a thousand impossible situations, Felix had become the accumulated and the single—the embarrassed” (9). This passage emphasizes the ambitious social project (some might say eccentric or crazy) of Felix’s family. For Felix, as for his father, imitating the aristocrat’s embodiment of national-historic spirit is the most honest mode of inhabiting a Jewish man’s search for a spiritual home. Moreover, the affective charge of Felix’s relation to this project and the way it coincides with biological reproduction anticipate how the novel understands sexuality as a form of social difference that involves inhabiting other kinds of difference. Felix’s version of nobility privileges fine feeling and conduct above racialized consanguinity, but it nonetheless requires the generational communication of a body capable of the correct sensibility: he can only honor the past, he feels, if he produces a son who similarly honors the past. Finally, the passage foreshadows how the novel presents awkward social interaction as an historical phenomenon, the precipitation of a social identity built up over time.

Felix's embarrassment on account of his "impossible" way of speaking is one aspect of the suffering Barnes calls "disqualification." Shortly after the previous passage about Felix comes another:

His embarrassment took the form of an obsession for what he termed "Old Europe": aristocracy, nobility, royalty. He spoke any given title with a pause before and after the name. Knowing circumlocution to be his only contact, he made it interminable and exacting. With the fury of a fanatic he hunted down his own disqualification, re-articulating the bones of the Imperial Courts long forgotten (those long remembered can alone claim to be long forgotten), listening with an unbecoming loquacity to officials and guardians for fear that his inattention might lose him some fragment of his resuscitation. (9)

The passage paints the disconcerting picture of an attempt to overcome one social stigma through highly articulate displays of knowledge that only succeeds in marking itself in another way—in Felix's case, as a "fanatical" discursive habit. Felix speaks authoritatively of the imperial past, but anxiety stalks him everywhere because the opportunities to renew his connection to that past are few and far between. In the last chapter, I brought up register formations as culturally situated logics that structure the way people index knowledge and make it relevant to themselves in the midst of practice-oriented activity (including language use and other practices that may be involved in sex). Registers also describe the logics people might use in constructing narratives about another's participation in communal practices. We could say that only by circumlocution can Felix act according to a cultural narrative that centers on the lives he understands as enduringly meaningful and includes his own. The Baron's circumlocution provokes a disqualification that follows from his Jewishness but is not determined solely by it. It is not that the official keepers of imperial history find a Jew's claim on so much of their special knowledge indecorous. "Interminable" and "loquacious," Felix is primarily marked by an excess of talk.

Much of the discussion to follow will focus on how the characters' conversations reshape their verbal and affective habitus around an emergent public awareness of each other as constituting a social horizon for discursive activity. The concept of habitus, one of Warner's borrowings from Pierre Bourdieu, allows us to imagine how publics are incorporated at the individual level as dispositions, or generative principles, as opposed to normative rules. Writing on the "practical sense" of habitus, Loïc J.D. Wacquant describes the way implicit social knowledge allows people to respond to the kind of public speech's regularly renewed situations: "The 'practical sense' *precognizes*; it reads in the present state the possible future states with which the field is pregnant. For in habitus the past, the present and the future intersect and interpenetrate one another."¹⁷ When people respond to social interactions by using language, they assert claims of continuity with other situations that warrant bringing social knowledge to bear on the emergent situation. Making a link with Michael Silverstein, we might understand the activation of habitus to involve a *metapragmatic* interpretation that reckons a set of prior events as belonging to the same ongoing text while assimilating the new. A regular feature of discourses marked by disqualification involves a presupposition of continuity that others may have difficulty perceiving. In one stretch of conversation I will revisit in more depth further on, Matthew responds to Nora's mourning her breakup by telling three anecdotes, one about himself, and Nora responds as though

¹⁷ Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 22.

all three were stories about Robin. Based on the exchange's abrupt shifts it can appear as though Nora reacts to a completely different situation or fails to respond at all when in fact she anticipates a framework of equivalence that the characters co-construct.

In previous chapters, I indicated ways experimental novels contribute to long arcs of sexual counterpublic formation through more immediate interventions in the literary field, e.g., through the aesthetic ideology of sentiment (Sterne), through forms of readerly address taken up as performance practices (Stein), and by affirming the enduring significance of ephemeral signs nurtured by negativity (Musil). In this chapter's final section, I analyze the conditions of publicness around *Nightwood* more extensively. By examining several correspondences with Coleman leading up to the novel's publication, I reconstruct how the aspects of the text that contribute to its imagining of counterpublic emergence risk being dismissed according to a dominant mode of literary publicness. In other words, being public is desirable, but not enough for Barnes; she wants her readers to be special in some way. Perhaps she wants to feel that, were she to meet them, she would enjoy talking to them. In the letters, Barnes performs a discursive work in addressing Coleman as though she and others ought to understand themselves as participating in a sexual counterpublic discourse through their passion for literature. Barnes's vexed relation to the literary field and its understanding of narrative complicates the assumption that the literary field's subordinated status necessarily means it welcomes other marginal uses of language. The uptake of *Nightwood* among sexual counterpublics of the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries may have likewise contributed to those publics' incorporation of a tension between narrative and non-narrative "orientations" to identity as a structuring aspect of their internal stratification.

DISQUALIFICATION AS A PUBLIC SPECTACLE OF SHAME

One way to sum up *Nightwood* would be to call it the story of a particularly harsh instance of someone's getting dumped—a dumping so severe that it continues to haunt the dumper, Nora, long after the relation's inauspicious end. This admittedly coarse description allows one to pose the question of how Barnes invokes a context to frame the breakup as a particular kind of socially determined happening. To illustrate the specificity of the context *Nightwood* constructs around characters' conversations to give them consistency as social interaction, I analyze its allusions to disqualification against the backdrop of Silvan Tomkins's affect theory, which has informed cultural studies of gender and sexuality interested in the affective politics of shame.¹⁸ Tomkins understands shame as the affect that allows the social human organism to realize communal boundaries: "Shame-humiliation is the negative affect linked with love and identification."¹⁹ Shame consists essentially in a refused identification that takes the form of broken eye contact internalized into the shamed person's avoidance of another's gaze. This shame response might resemble, for instance, the embarrassment we imagine Felix to experience in aristocratic circles.

If Tomkins's writing on shame proves valuable for parsing moments in novels where affect is involved in the maintenance of social boundaries, shame proves an incomplete framework for

¹⁸ Some key points of reference would be Didier Eribon's Discussion of Insult in *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self*. See also the collection *Gay Shame*, edited by David Halperin and Valerie Traub. On Tomkins's importance, see Sedgwick and Frank, "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold," 93-122.

¹⁹ Tomkins, *Shame and Its Sisters*, 139.

characterizing disqualification in *Nightwood* because its characters do not share the same norms for social interaction. For instance, O'Connor's response to being surprised by Nora's visit while at home wearing makeup, wig, and nightgown might exceed a shame based on violation of communal norms: "the doctor had snatched the wig from his head, and sinking down in the bed drew the sheets up over his breast" (69). One might observe two shames here. On the one hand, the doctor's shame attaches to his wig; on the other, it concerns his naked breast. From the narrator's gloss of this moment one learns that Matthew is expecting a different kind of nocturnal visitor, so we can minimally say the reflexive responses correspond to simultaneous presuppositions about who the guest might be and the kind of situation the arrival might bode. But do his cross-purposes necessarily correspond to two sets of communal norms? For whom? Rather than a paradigmatic instance of shame, such a moment more closely resembles passages of *The Man without Qualities* in which a character, finding himself speaking in more than one register, risks actualizing nothing in the way of socially meaningful communication. In setting this complex affective performance before Nora, the novel further asks whether all the norms implied by Matthew's compound gesture are taken up in her response.

Nora's response to Matthew foregrounds the first of three further criteria that define how disqualification divides social space in *Nightwood*. Disqualification differs from shame in that another's response constitutes a completely negative evaluation of the shameful act or behavior. The offending act does not even constitute a transgression of communal norms; it fails to rise to the level of social intelligibility at all. Thus Nora, upon seeing Matthew in bed, thinks the following: "He dresses to lie beside himself, who is so constructed that love, for him, can be only something special; in a room that, giving back evidence of his occupancy, is as mauled as the last agony" (69). Having previously contextualized Matthews strange response upon Nora's arrival, *Nightwood's* narrator stresses how Nora's unvoiced response eclipses some possibilities implied by his shame reflex. Nora will proceed to address Matthew as though his female costume signified a kind of sexual being whose imperfect construction, including the abstruse signals his body gives off, could not sustain a regular erotic life that includes others. Disqualification recruits even Matthew's disheveled living quarters to speak to this supposed isolation.

Nora's implicit judgment of Matthew underscores that disqualification, even more than Tomkins's shame paradigm (with its emphasis on reflexive psychic and somatic processes mediated through sight), takes the form of a powerful spectacle. In the passage about Felix I cited in this chapter's introduction, disqualification marks off impossible identifications. A later passage inverts the relation between disqualification and impossibility, so that possibility produces the disqualification of the spectator. This later passage concerns the theatrical magic of the travelling circus, which Felix visits in pursuit of particular sensations: "The emotional spiral of the circus, taking its flight from the immense disqualification of the public, rebounding from its illimitable hope, produced in Felix longing and disquiet. The circus was a beloved thing that he could never touch, therefore never know" (11). The circus holds up marginal and extreme forms for admiration, setting them apart as a spectacle that defines the public by representing the place where normal life ends and something strange and different begins.²⁰ If Felix is shamed for his eccentric habits

²⁰ Remarking on this same passage, Rachel Potter emphasizes the way disqualification condenses an ambiguity in modern conceptions of sovereignty. Thus Potter links the circus's dazzling extremity to the political state of exception by drawing on later passages in which Matthew likens a king to a beloved dog who gets away with soiling the household furniture. I would only emphasize here that *Nightwood* tends to work through a pragmatic logic that belies the symbolism of states of exception. Potter, "*Nightwood* and Disqualification," 185.

of speech, we could say the circus public is humbled into everyday existence. But Felix emphatically does not share the circus's beloved aspect; he rather seems to attach himself to the circus to experience the effects of his disqualification on others. In fact, the esteem that attaches to the circus performers only exists before and for a public. Like Felix, the performers only lay claim to an unreliable social currency that falls to those marked as eccentric. In the same chapter, Felix's friend, a trapeze artist known as the Duchess of Broadback (Frau Mann), tells him that a Count is having a party: "he is fond of impossible people, so we are invited" (12). Early passages on Felix suggest that disqualification not only captures the multilateral effects of an asymmetric ascription of socially valued properties communicated through explicit forms of spectacle; it also implies a public valence to more intimate disavowals. This will allow us to consider how moments of refused identification in Nora and Robin's relationship might presuppose a public.

Third and finally, we might take disqualification to involve a variation of the contagiousness Tomkins attributes to shame. If disqualification refers to a shameful discursive interaction in which certain possibilities are studiously ignored, it also implies opportunities for subsequent recognition and re-encounter. Tomkins distinguishes shame as the affect most likely to create feedback loops of sensory response between people: "the visual appearance of shame in the other can evoke shame through reintegration in which the visual message is unconsciously translated into motor messages which produce an imitation, as a yawn may produce a yawn. The feedback of this imitation is then experienced as shame of the self."²¹ A person's negative response to something done resolves in the doer's averted gaze, which then causes the onlooker to feel not only ashamed *of* another, but also ashamed *for* another. Around disqualification, the contagiousness of shameful feelings can, under certain conditions, produce a revised evaluation of one's own and others' manifest qualities in interaction. This aspect of disqualification in *Nightwood* helps one apprehend a shift in Nora's self-understanding after she has thrown Robin out of their apartment. The re-evaluative avenues for new identifications and boundaries also set the stage for understanding how the characters' search for resolutions to shame outside of a spectacle might coincide with modes of counterpublic belonging.

Allow me to now introduce some more involved examples of the aspects of disqualification discussed so far. Around Nora and Robin, one observes how a systematic disqualification of certain desires and strategies of embodiment causes the lovers to suffer an ambient doubt about the reality of their relation and a corresponding difficulty when making claims on one another. Intimations of such difficulty run through the conversation that ensues upon Nora's nocturnal visit to Matthew in chapter five, "Watchman, What of the Night?" Toward the end of Robin's and Nora's living together, Nora detects that Robin is cultivating an independent nightlife. Going so far as to spy on her, Nora eventually learns that Robin has developed ties to a particular other woman, Jenny Petherbridge. The conversation in chapter five occurs between the episode involving Robin and Jenny and the breakup. The chief question Nora poses to Matthew is why Robin goes out to cultivate a separate life. Their conversation begins to build upon the novel's previous discussions of disqualification when the two speak of the night in ways that invoke not only specific social contexts (parties, places of drink, adultery, and other illicit affairs), but also presuppose a way of knowing and inhabiting a self. Night and sleep form major nodes in a figural language for talking about ambiguous and doubtful embodiments of value around which scenes of disqualification take shape.

²¹ Tomkins, *Shame and Its Sister*, 154.

For Nora, Robin's nocturnal "sleepwalking" not only refers to her questionable sociality; it likewise names the way Nora experiences the relationship's reorganization of social bonds as an impasse for her practical capacities. Nora and Robin build a home together where they become all the family they want. During this time, Nora has a dream about Robin's joining her in her grandmother's bedroom, suggesting a renegotiation of kinship boundaries. In the fantasy space, Nora also recalls an instance when her grandmother appeared dressed as a man, indicating the disorienting possibilities of this renegotiation: "a man, wearing a billycock and a corked moustache, ridiculous and plump in tight trousers and red waistcoat, her arms spread saying with a leer of love, 'My little sweetheart!'" (56). For Nora, the difficulty of finding terms of belonging for Robin produces a picture she finds absurdly incongruous in both its gender-transitive implications and conflation of otherwise distinct relations of forebear and lover. Despite Nora's recoiling from this image of her grandmother, it stands out as the one detail she recognizes as a memory. Later on, the novel points up how this earlier memory signifies not only as another instance of overlapping relational models, but also in how this simultaneity confronts Nora with the uncertain consistency between past and present: "all I knew was that others had slept with my lover and my child. For Robin is incest too, that is one of her powers. In her, past time records, and past time is relative to us all" (129). If the disqualified person's presumed failure to exist involves a self-difference contained within an indeterminate social relation, Robin's slippage between different structural positions—grandparent, child, lover, husband, father—more specifically uncouples the logic of generations from a sequential order to accord the past a non-mechanistic agency. The past "records" and elucidates the present according to its models, but in a way that restructures one's constitutive relations around the incorporation of a new bond. Disqualification, as a structure of refused identity, haunts this process insofar as Nora cannot imagine taking an active interpretive stance on it as opposed to her simply receiving a "leering," unwanted advance.

Even as Nora recognizes her bond to Robin as love, she apperceives its difficult principles of coherence negatively, as a spectacle that collapses relational boundaries into properties of persons. In her dream, Nora looks down on a theatrically-lit Robin, whose miraculous sleep prevents her from joining Nora in the same chamber: "Nora looked down into the body of the house, as if from a scaffold, where now Robin had entered the dream, lying among a company below." The scene continues further on: "A disc of light, that seemed to come from someone or thing standing behind her and which was yet a shadow, shed a faintly luminous glow upon the upturned, still face of Robin" (55). The dream's resemblances to the circus's staging of extremes confirm this vision as an imaginative reconstruction of disqualification's affective structure. Throughout "Watchman," Nora attributes an estranging distance to Robin: "I can't stand it, I don't know how—I am frightened. What is it? What is it in her that is doing this?" (74). In certain moments, the difficulty of identifying with Robin appears to Nora as an impenetrable privacy that either will not join with hers or else lashes out unthinkingly. Yet other details of the dream, such as the strange company surrounding Robin, suggest that the implicit presence of a wider public constitutes Robin's strangeness.

One passage in particular, though it appears in a later conversation between Nora and Matthew, elaborates the affective, spectacular, and public dimensions of disqualification around Nora and Robin's breakup. It concerns an interaction that appears at an indeterminate point in the relationship, though one gathers that Nora is just about at her wits' end. Echoing Robin's voice,

Nora finds herself causing Robin shame in a painful exchange that ensues once they leave the bar where Robin has been carousing:

“One night she ran behind me in the Montparnasse quarter, where I had gone looking for her because someone had called me saying she was sick and couldn’t get home (I had stopped going out with her because I couldn’t bear to see the ‘evidence of my eyes’), running behind me for blocks saying, with a furious panting breath, ‘You are a devil! You make everything dirty!’ (I had tried to take someone’s hands off her. They always put hands on her when she was drunk.) ‘You make me feel dirty and tired and old!’

“I turned against the wall. The policeman and the people in the street collected. I was cold and terribly ashamed. I said, ‘Do you mean that?’ And she said she meant it. She put her head down on one of the officer’s shoulders. She was drunk. He had her by the wrist, one hand on her behind.” (120)

This exchange constitutes an event in the two women’s relationship insofar as it organizes their relative stances around shame’s reflexive spectacle, but in a way that involves the crowd. When Nora speaks of the “evidence of her eyes,” she recognizes that there is something productive, and not entirely kind, about the way she observes Robin when out socializing at night. Indeed, Robin feels Nora’s response to the situation around her drunkenness to have the force of a judgment behind it, one that coats interactions in a moral dirt they might not otherwise have. In this respect, Nora’s feeling “terribly ashamed” can be understood to echo Robin’s feeling “dirty and tired and old.” Observe how the affective distance between the women as Nora turns against the wall, averting her gaze, also constitutes their identities via the wider interaction materializing around them. While Robin is detained, Nora recedes from view to become an onlooker again. In this way, Nora implicitly finds herself grouped with the spectators. The novel even entertains the uncomfortable sense that Nora identifies with the unscrupulous officer who exploits the situation to cozy up to Robin. After the recollection Nora remark, “She was mine only when she was drunk, Matthew, and had passed out. That’s the terrible thing, that finally she was mine only when she was dead drunk” (120). At the least, the image of Nora’s watching over a sleeping Robin exemplifies the many ways the characters are sensitive to unresponsive privacy. Nora’s awareness of her eyes’ power to produce evidence moreover suggests that while we know certain norms of kinship shape Nora as a character, the virtual presence of anonymous publics makes these norms salient and determining. The examples around Nora and Robin illustrate *Nightwood*’s overarching interest in disqualification as a recurrent interactive structure reconstituted through public spectacles of shame. The public dimension of disqualification allows it to function, in Warner’s words, as a “resource for interiority and context for self-elaboration,” orienting Nora’s interpretation of her own and others’ signifying behavior as she practically responds to it. This publicness is unmarked, so that when Nora takes up a relation to another within a structure of disqualification, her otherwise sharp self-awareness temporarily recedes from view.

Having unfolded some ways disqualification gives a public face to the problems in Nora and Robin’s relation, I want to begin considering how the conversations that recount scenes of shame suggest an emergent counterpublic. In the same conversation in which Nora misses Matthew’s reasons for donning a *déshabillé*, Matthew casts doubt on the supposed isolation of sleep. “We are continent a long time,” he tells Nora, “but no sooner has our head touched the pillow, and our eyes left the day, than a host of merry-makers take and get. We wake from our

doings in a deep sweat for that they happened in a house without an address, in a street in no town, citizenized with people with no names with which to deny them. Their very lack of identity makes them ourselves” (75). This formulation of sleep is one way the characters suggest that people might relate to one another and to a world of strangers through a public social knowledge yet be unable to shed a primarily pragmatic mode of signification in doing so. Unlike Nora, but in a way that creates a symmetry with the architectural language of her dream, O’Connor figures sleep as an intensely social activity. Sleep marks one with an indelible distinction (what O’Connor calls a “guilty immunity”) precisely because its content is communicated implicitly and without being referred to by name. Matthew’s counter-narrative of sleep puts Nora’s suffering into a new context, interpreting her loss as an effect of a way of looking that cannot encompass the collective conditions of feeling’s consistency. The counterpublic awareness toward which Matthew gestures presupposes the prevalence of disqualification and thus includes both Robin and Nora despite their different emplacements within shame’s affective structure. Across their conversations, Nora and the doctor assemble an alternate set of presuppositions for public speech, so that the characters’ apparently disjointed conversations shape public self-understandings as the characters find their footing in discursive interaction.

NIGHTWOOD’S EMERGENT COUNTERPUBLIC DISCOURSE

On 20 April, 1934, after having suffered a series of publishers’ rejections, Barnes wrote to Emily Coleman of *Nightwood*, “They all say it is not a novel; that there is no continuity of life in it, only high spots and poetry.” Hopefully we can see how Barnes’s perseverance might have taken root in how the affective structure of disqualification gives the novel a conceptual backbone. This conceptual context takes the form of an indexical structure, a system of presuppositions and entailments that routinely points to disqualification as a socially productive spectacle. But Barnes’s novel is not only continuous, but also lively because characters’ stance-takings in conversation also suggest a reorganization of disqualification, or at least a reevaluation of their functional place within this context. As characters respond to one another in mutually presupposing if elliptical ways, their self-understandings take on a new, collective shape that resembles a sexual counterpublic in its attempt to hold together erotic embodiment with an ideal wholeness that is progressively realized in its orientation toward strangers.

One observes such shifts in self-understanding in both Nora and Matthew between “Watchman, What of the Night?” and chapter seven, “Go Down, Matthew.” After breaking with Robin, Nora realizes that Robin’s failure to stay accountable to any one relation (Robin’s “sleep”) is less a stubborn privacy than an incompletely lived sociality, one whose failure involves Nora: “I didn’t know, I didn’t know that it was to be me who was to do the terrible thing! No rot had touched her until then, and there before my eyes I saw her corrupt all at once and withering, because I had struck her sleep away” (121). Nora recaptures the force that shapes her response to Robin and lends her lover the appearance of degradation. Nora’s previous disqualification now rebounds in a renewed identification, as though the sleep that hung over Robin had been their love: “She is myself,” she says to Matthew, “What am I to do?” (108). Meanwhile, Matthew, who

previously describes himself as “seeking my people who have never been made,” finds himself newly at home amongst the crossed purposes of Nora, Robin, Felix, and Jenny (81). Though O’Connor withes Nora would adopt a different attitude toward her and Robin’s break, as we shall see, some understanding has developed. He is “curious because no one has seen me for a million years, and now I’m seen! Is there such extraordinary need of misery to make beauty? Let go Hell; and your fall will be broken by the roof of Heaven” (105). The doctor’s continued interest in Nora and the others similarly suggests the characters’ implication in each other’s lives through the aftermath of disqualification, a “fall” into a state of grace, a goodwill freely given and universally guaranteed. Granted, the two characters are clearly implicated in this understanding in different ways. Whereas Matthew’s curiosity points toward an ethics grounded in an understanding of people’s different orientations to historical narrative and its conceptual fulcrum, communal practice, Nora’s guilt continues to claim the relation with Robin as its primary context. By the end of “Go Down, Matthew,” the tension between an insolubly particular desire that acquires its defining edges through an implicit gesture toward indefinite strangers generates the characters’ counterpublic habitus.

If the difficulties Felix, Nora, Robin, and Jenny face in their relationships presuppose disqualification as context, Matthew anchors the counterpublic framework in which these experiences ramify. Matthew’s distinctive habits of speech include a way of addressing more interlocutors than he may actually have and a penchant for raising his voice to conjure this larger audience. One such linguistic performance occurs toward the end of “Go Down, Matthew” when O’Connor, exhausted from conversation with Nora, drunkenly launches himself on a story at his favorite neighborhood café. Leading up to this passage, the narrator signals that the café’s regulars know the doctor’s discursive habits well. They value his stories as spectacular rants, and they patiently expect his tirade when they see he is drinking. Once thoroughly lubricated, Matthew lays into his audience: “‘What people! All queer in a terrible way. There were a couple of queer *good* people once in this world—but none of you,’ he said, addressing the room, ‘will ever know them. You think you are all studded with diamonds, don’t you? Well, part the diamonds and you’ll find slug’s meat.’” After hurling more abuses at the crowd, he concludes: “Oh it’s a grand bad story, and who says I’m a betrayer? I say, tell the story of the world to the world!” (133). This passage is fascinating to think about as an imagined instance of public address. Warner distinguishes public speech specifically from gossip: “gossip is never a relation among strangers. You gossip about particular people and to particular people. What you can get away with saying depends very much on whom you are talking to and what your status is in that person’s eyes. Speak ill of someone when you are not thought to have earned the privilege, and you will be taken as slandering rather than gossiping.”²² Here, Matthew contends not to be a “betrayer” because he addresses an audience to whom his story already pertains; he broadcasts no special information. At the same time, the “world” he addresses is not a straightforwardly public one, and therefore might claim a special knowledge in other respects. Other scenes in *Nightwood*, which I turn to next, suggest that patronizing this café might be enough to brand someone with a sexual difference, and this mark constitutes Matthew’s address to his audience as counterpublic. At the same time, the framing of Matthew’s talk underscores the differences of evaluation that divide the uptake of publicly circulated narrative. Whereas Matthew claims to be representing a kind of shared truth, his public recognizes his speech as a sign of exceptional eccentricity. This scene, one of the last in the novel,

²² Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 78.

therefore offers a belated sense of the contexts to which Matthew pitches his speech and his precarious footing within them.

Nightwood makes the speech genres that circulate at the café productive by granting them a shaping force in Matthew's and Nora's conversations about the meaningfulness of sexual practice. If Matthew's reply to Nora in "Watchman, What of the Night?" involves showing her the error in conceiving the night in terms of negativity, vicious secrecy, and degeneracy, the social context of the café figures here as a way of insisting that the ambiguous forms populating the night take shape according to regular principles, though one may not have ready ways to describe these principles. Here Matthew centers his own negotiations of identity. Playing upon his previous comparison of the night to a house without an address, he tells Nora, "We go to our Houses by our nature—and our nature, no matter how it is, we all have to stand—as for me, so God has made me, my house is the pissing port" (77). Matthew's "nature" centers on a particular relationship to a shared practice; it refers to the manner in which he turns public out-houses, places where men seek sex with each other, into his hearth. Matthew frequently alludes to his domestic wish for "children and knitting," so this sense of nature suggests a way of indexically citing and bodying forth certain relations and qualities through structured interaction with others. One's uncertain relation to others within these potentially transformative practices places sex and, by extension, Nora's and Matthew's talk, within a counterpublic medium.

Matthew's explanation of his nightlife in the *pissoirs* leads into a discussion of some contested aspects of using these favored places of assignation. Note how the unity in dissonance with which Matthew describes the outhouses resembles the uncertain path of public discourse without the recourse to rational forms of debate to organize participants:

And do you think that those circular cottages of delight have not brought me to great argument? Have you ever glanced at one when the night was well down, and seen it and what it looked like and resembled most, with its one coping and a hundred legs? A centipede. And you look down and choose your feet, and ten to one, you find that you have picked a bird with a light wing, or an old duck with a wooden knee, or something that has been mournful for years. What? I've held argument with others at long tables all night through about the particular merits of one district over another for such things, of one cottage over another for such things. And do you suppose I was agreed with, and had any one any other one's ideas? There was as much disagreement as there might have been, had we all been selecting a new order of government. (78)

Matthew's description anticipates the scene at the café by alluding to argument over "long tables," as though sex in the outhouses and stories exchanged at the café were two aspects of the same practice of articulating one's sense of self alongside others. We might say that these debates involve people's narratively invoking different registers to come to terms with the range of presuppositions that might be indexed in practice and with how the discernment of a narrator might also reveal something of his own presuppositions. Matthew reports having said in the heat of one such debate, "If you think that certain things do not show from what district they come, yea, even to an *arrondissement*, then you are not out gunning for particular game, but simply any catch, and I'll have nothing to do with you!" (79). Matthew does not frequent the outhouses only in search of someone to exchange genital acts; he wants an interaction that is more meaningful within his own history and perhaps more enduring (a partner with a "light wing" won't do). Moreover, Matthew

does not claim to have been a discerning judge of others (the results of public sex seem aleatory at best). He only contends to be and, on occasion, to have found something particular that he tries to account for after the fact. This something determines what he thinks and who he will listen to. In this respect, the arguments Matthew describes and his adventures in the outhouses do not follow from generalizable premises regarding the kinds of subjectivities that exist and how to know them; they rather contribute to a more collaborative work of constructing these premises. While the comparison to political consensus-building may initially seem to suggest that Matthew insists that everyone ought to enjoy pursuing the same “game,” the analogy with the political field rather figures the process of formalizing the contextual parameters of dissent—the way political opponents might agree to disagree. Matthew in particular aims to expand frameworks for understanding the range of variables people bring to the same practice, including race, body size, *arrondissement*, and “atmosphere and sea level.”

In the midst of typifying this scene of table talk for Nora, Matthew seamlessly slips into an address to his absent audience, “you gentleman, sit here and tell me that the district makes no difference—is there no one who knows anything but myself?” (80). Matthew’s indexing these conversations and the practices they involve when in dialog with Nora metapragmatically figures their conversation as part of the same interactional text, and this entails several consequences for how their conversation continues to unfold. Most obviously, Matthew’s contextualization centers the uncertainty with which people articulate erotic practices into sexual meanings as salient for understanding what has transpired between Nora and Robin. It likewise invokes narrative as crucial for such articulations. More subtly, Matthew’s invoking his arguments at the café gives an ethical dimension to Nora’s disqualification of Robin. We can imagine that the public game of sifting among signs for meaningful distinctions becomes necessary and valuable against the backdrop of a disqualification that renders normal relations uninhabitable. And as with Nora vis-à-vis Robin, these games tend to reproduce the contradictions that structure disqualifying spectacles—most notably with respect Matthew. Matthew’s centrality in these scenes constitutes one side of a spectacle. In O’Connor’s final appearance, an anonymous bystander comments on his drunken raving: “‘Funny little man,’ someone said, ‘never stops talking—always getting people into trouble by excusing them, because he can’t excuse himself.’” (134). “Someone,” that is, someone who can afford an unmarked privacy that makes “excuse” superfluous, takes Matthew’s failure to know and thus explain himself as a sign of his inability to make correct judgments about others. That is, certain members of Matthew’s public find his criteria too specific to be anything other than his, and they view his obsession with narrative details as implying an undue permissiveness toward eccentric conduct. Moreover, they understand this permissiveness as an excess of talk. Bringing Matthew’s position within counterpublic discourses of male sexuality to bear on Nora and Robin effectively construes Nora’s rejection of Robin as a similar kind of betrayal of trust, a failure to turn one’s own marked status into a goodwill toward others.

A still further entailment of *Nightwood*’s superimposition of discursive contexts involves the sense of “trust” Matthew adumbrates to suggest an alternate condition in which Nora’s and Robin’s sexualities might exist independently of their desires for one another. To put this differently, the women’s separation raises the question of how a counterpublic supplies the conditions for disqualified lovers to inhabit a meaningful sexuality without being able to enact it relationally. “Go Down, Matthew” is structured around this problem; it consists of an argument between Nora and Matthew about whether Nora ought to write to Robin. By writing Nora hopes not only to reopen a closed channel of communication, but also to “set the record straight” in light

of Nora's new understanding in way that might coax Robin back into some interaction. The relation acquires absolute significance for Nora, as she cannot imagine a future for herself without Robin: "Once, when she was sleeping, I wanted her to die. Now, that would stop nothing" (108). Even Robin's death would not alter Nora's desire; she is the only addressee who matters.

If Nora insists that she requires Robin for a sense of selfhood, the doctor instructs her to understand this sense of self to precede the relation. He contends that the women's separation involves a reduction of their self-orienting desires into a prior condition of possibility and describes this condition as potential for continuity immanent in the world. "In time," he says in response to Nora's insistence that she must write, "everything is possible and in space everything forgivable; life is but the intermediary vice. There is eternity to blush in. Life laid end to end is what brings on flux in the clergy—can't you rest now, put down the pen?" (107). In his allusion to "life laid end to end," Matthew condenses his understanding of social practices as rituals for inhabiting essential qualities (here expressed metaphorically through the transmigration of souls) with his way of distinguishing among modes of narrative sense-making with the terms "history" and "legend," a record of time record and its untold supplement. The novel introduces Matthew while articulating these terms: "but think of the stories that do not amount to much! That is, that are forgotten in spite of all man remembers (unless he remembers himself) merely because they befell him without distinction of office or title—that's what we call legend and it's the best a poor man may do with his fate" (14). For Matthew, people construct historical narratives around the qualities of its actors, formalized as offices or titles. We might recall here the way enregistered narratives topicalize "figures of personhood," socially pertinent qualities stereotypically coupled to forms (including linguistic ones) that give integrity and reason to individual actors' semiotic behavior. Legend, on the other hand, involves a logic of causation but does not ground itself in the formalized logics a culture authors. Legend may therefore be difficult to remember since one lacks ways to report certain kinds of events beyond those events' happening. In adumbrating the notion of legend in the figure of lives laid "end to tend," Matthew reconceives legend as being more than simply the waste of history; he suggests it may involve different principles of continuity and integrity. Interpolated at this juncture in the conversation with Nora, Matthew's utterance offers another way to think about the grace or beauty he alludes to elsewhere. He suggests, in other words, that the meaning of Robin's wandering life already exists without Nora's help since its form is implicit in the gaps of Nora's narrative understanding.

Even as Nora and Matthew remain entrenched in their different orientations toward relationality, their different attitudes toward narrative knowledges and types of collectivity become paradoxically interdependent within the structure of their conversations, so that these differences depend on each other achieve coherence. One observes the increasing interdependence of public and private contexts in Barnes's frequent use of embedded anecdotes and reported speech. In discussing Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, I borrowed the concept of defeasibility from Michael Silverstein. Defeasibility refers to the way the practical principle that allows a discursive interaction to cohere can be displaced after the fact, leading participants to retrospectively reinterpret (in the metapragmatic sense of recontextualization) what was going on in a conversation in the way of a social happening. Defeasibility characterizes the structure of interactions in which participants extend a "happening" by deferring the closure of its contextually-determined character. To recall some more of Silverstein's formulation:

players in the game play out their contributions by making it all the more plausible, at a temporally LATER point in discursive interaction, that what seemed to be one course of interactional textualization at an EARLIER time in discursive interaction, is really a very different one after all (that is, must have been rather a different one...)²³

Defeasibility is a paradoxical phenomenon. While the game analogy correctly points to the artifice required of participants to worry the shape of discursive interaction, he aligns defeasibility more properly with a “potential for creativity” given in indexical semiosis. This more properly structural availability of creativity is incorporated into pragmatic analysis as an anteriorizing perspective on what participants accomplish in the way of social interaction (the “must have been” interpretation of the temporally later results of the deferral). The paradox involves the equal claims to validity of, on the one hand, the limited sense our cultural resources allow us to make of a particular node of interaction and the anteriorizing meanings with which people imbue it. Barnes mobilizes this structural paradox of language to illustrate how contradictory contextual framings can be productive of new interpretations. Nora and Matthew’s conversation’s reflexive structure comments on Nora’s and Robin’s relationship; their exchanges of narrative bring out the immanent potentials of the other’s contributions by contradicting, correcting, or extending them.

One of the narratives the doctor offers centers on a crisis of identity with his penis, which he calls Tiny O’Toole. I focus on this passage as an example of how the novel’s private narratives signify publicly when framed by a discursive exchange. Specifically, the story represents an instance of how counterpublic meanings develop in *Nightwood* by transforming a moment of shame into a social discourse. Observe how, throughout the account, the indeterminacy of certain signs corresponds to a shifting contextual frame. It begins with a mandate from Matthew’s spiritual leader, Father Lucas: “Be simple, Matthew, life is a simple book, and an open book, read and be simple as the beasts in the field; just being miserable isn’t enough—you have got to know how” (110). We might understand Father Lucas to address himself to the misery of mankind’s fallen condition. At the same time, it seems he somehow or other picks up on the fact that Matthew is a young man who has special reason to suffer. What pushes understanding in this direction is that Father Lucas’s injunction implicitly sets up a contrast with Nora’s earlier way of positing reading and thinking as action’s opposite (“If I don’t write to her, what am I to do? I can’t sit here forever—thinking!”), so that the sexual topos of the framing conversation can seem similarly implicit in the embedded narrative (106). Matthew’s misery accrues a particular significance when framed by Nora’s predicament about how to take up a position of agency. Up until Matthew’s storytelling, she has not paid especially close attention to his words. This changes when Matthew, just before introducing Father Lucas’s mandate, relates a brief encounter with an old prostitute. As one reads further in Matthew’s account of himself, one wonders whether Nora’s renewed attention implies that she takes up a special solicitation to recognize herself in Matthew’s stories, or whether she listens with the compromising identification particular to public discourse. The specifically counterpublic import of the conversation emerges from this tension.

Matthew takes Father Lucas’s challenge to a quiet church to pose his question to eternity. The entextualization of this story redistributes the functional roles of disqualification to align Matthew with aspects of both Nora’s and Robin’s parts in its spectacular structure. Although the

²³ Silverstein, “Indeterminacy of Contextualization,” 72.

passage describes Matthew's plea to a supreme being, it also unfolds an implicit exchange between Matthew and Tiny that allows Nora to locate herself in the exchange. Matthew narrates,

"Kneeling in a dark corner, bending my head over and down, I took out Tiny O'Toole, because it was his turn, I had tried everything else. There was nothing for it this time but to make him face the mystery so it could see him clear as it saw me. So then I whispered, 'What is this thing, Lord?' And I began to cry; the tears went like rain goes down on the world, without touching the face of Heaven. Suddenly I realized that it was the first time in my life my tears were strange to me, because they just went straight forward out of my eyes; I was crying because I had to embarrass Tiny like that for the good it might do him.

"I was crying and striking my left hand against the *prie-Dieu*, and all the while Tiny O'Toole was lying in a swoon. I said, 'I have tried to seek, and I only find.' I said, 'It is I, my Lord, who know there's beauty in a permanent mistake like me. Haven't I said it so? But,' I says, 'I'm not able to stay permanent unless you help me, oh Book of Concealment! *C'est le Plaisir qui me bouleverse!* The roaring lion goes forth, seeking his own fury! So tell me, what is permanent of me, me or him?' And there I was in the empty, almost empty church, all the people's troubles flickering in little lights all over the place. And I said, 'This would be a fine world, Lord, if you could get everybody out of it.' And there I was holding Tiny, bending over and crying, asking the question until I forgot, and went on crying, and I put Tiny away then, like a ruined bird, and went out of the place and walked looking at the stars that were twinkling and I said, 'Have I been simple like an animal, God, or have I been thinking?'" (111)

This narrative signals Nora's relation to Robin as its context in more than one way. These contextualizations materialize through Matthew's characterizing Tiny as "lying in a swoon" and "a ruined bird." Such allusions to the spectacular sleep of the disqualified and Robin's supposed turpitude make Matthew's utterances oddly figural in their use of synonymy and metonymy. Nora, however, ratifies that enough discourse has passed between her and Matthew on this subject to constrain the figural referents of these signs. Immediately after Matthew's narratives, she remarks, as though no logical breach has occurred, "She was beautiful, wasn't she?" (112). This intuited continuity is astonishing if one is inclined to think that, despite Nora's sudden attention, Matthew's story is too personal, too specific to serve as a response to Nora's predicament in writing to Robin. Yet Nora responds as though it could only speak to her situation. Matthew's relation to Tiny is likewise an erotic one that defines the limits of the body through its capacities for excitation and pleasure with another.²⁴ The dialogue in the church places Matthew over Tiny, crying for himself as the victim of a self-inflicted violence that resembles the way Nora weeps for Robin: "She is myself. What am I to do?" (108). The more overarching structure of disqualification enables the analogical relation between Nora and Robin, the Doctor and Tiny to emerge. Matthew's tale reinterprets Nora's and Robin's breakup by centering the tension between Matthew's self-characterization as "a permanent mistake" and the injunction to determinatively delimit one's identifications by answering the question, "What is permanent of me, me or him?"

²⁴ As Jane Marcus points out, one cannot entirely abandon the possibility that Matthew alludes to having been masturbating during the church scene. See Marcus, "Laughing at Leviticus," 186.

The passage from “Go Down, Matthew” deserves further scrutiny, then, because it minimizes distinctions between the tale, the teller, and the circumstances of the telling to downplay differences the explicitly sequential logics of narrative and the implicit (pragmatic) meanings Matthew associates with legend. In doing so, it also reorients Matthew’s thinking toward a counterpublic horizon to determine his position in responding to Nora. Between sobs, Matthew takes stock of “all the people’s troubles” that form the background to his own. His peripheral awareness here develops presuppositions introduced at two other junctures in the conversation. One is his previous story about encountering a prostitute in London; another is a series of remarks about the “inferior writhing” of Jenny Petherbridge. When located in conjunction with these points, the story unsettles Nora’s assumption that her suffering could be a kind of wisdom, much less an ennobling one, in the absence of an analysis of how her suffering already implicates her in the lives of others besides Robin—others with whom she might be reluctant to acknowledge a shared determination. In short, the chapter marks the development of the novel’s interest in disqualification into a counterpublic awareness that mediates the relations between characters yet cannot shed its relation to particular attachments. The antinomy between these two conditions never dissolves; it only continues to define the relations between characters in new ways. If Matthew cultivates a public habitus that neutralizes shame, he also suffers most for want of actual relation and for listening without being heard. Nora’s relation to Robin develops further before the novel ends, but the final chapter shows Robin and Nora reunited in different states of inarticulateness.

Yet there is a way of understanding the characters’ final states of inarticulateness as a metaphor for implicit modes of communication that run through explicit narratives. Back in New York, Nora hears her dog’s barking at an unseen presence and seems to know that Robin is nearby. After the dog runs off to find Robin, Nora flies through the night to meet them, hitting her head on a doorjamb and falling unconscious. At this point Robin gets down on all fours and startles the dog by engaging it in a play of gestures and nonverbal sounds:

Then she began to bark also, crawling after him—barking in a fit of laughter, obscene and touching. Crouching, the dog, began to run with her, head-on with her head, as if to circumvent her; soft and slow his feet went padding. He ran this way and that, low down in his throat crying, and she grinning and crying with him; crying in shorter and shorter spaces, moving head to head, until she gave up, lying out, her hands beside her, her face turned and weeping; and the dog too gave up then, and lay down, his eyes bloodshot, his head flat along her knees. (139)

To “bark in a fit of laughter” suggests a communicative form that is full of pragmatic potentiality yet skirts the category of human language. To be sure, some readers have found this passage to poignantly reverse Freud’s narrative of human sexual evolution.²⁵ I would argue, however, that what seems like a symbol of sexual regression condenses the embodied, affective terms in which the publicness of the characters’ relations could be imagined. Consider, for instance, how Nora’s unconsciousness makes a reader’s attentiveness more salient; the unfolding scene can be meaningful for her only insofar as it is meaningful for us. After all, for whom does Robin’s barking sound obscene and touching? It has not been this narrator’s way to supply such frameworks of

²⁵ See Fleischer, “The Politics and Poetics of *Nightwood*,” 419.

erotic, moral, and affective interpretation. For Barnes, there is a kind of publicly transparent communication that is especially relevant to relations defined by disqualification, and she ultimately imagines this communication entirely abstracted from semantic meanings.

DISQUALIFICATION AND COUNTERPUBLIC LONGING IN THE LETTERS OF BARNES AND COLEMAN

Nightwood presses and molds a specifically contextual type of indeterminacy into a representation of how people in a particular corner of the social world inhabit subjectivities in speech. When Matthew and Nora converse, the gestures embedded in their speech oscillate between extremely narrow and inclusive indexical signals. From this indeterminacy, the possibility of inhabiting a counterpublic channel of address emerges. For these characters, this possibility in turn points toward an exit from the abjection of disqualification's non-position in spectacle. In short, then, Barnes's way of modeling how uncertainties accrue social consequence across discursive interactions certainly participates in the fictional experimentalism I lay out in previous chapters, but her writing also exemplifies how a novel becomes the site of a shift in the kinds of knowledge that public discourses can carry. If Barnes's novel focuses on the forging of new public capacities in speech, a specific social context and a special kind of reader are required for indeterminacy to become meaningful in this way. In this section, I examine several conversations between Barnes and her friend Emily Coleman to consider how Barnes hails a public sensibility that exists immanently, but in highly implicit ways, in her social group's practices of attention and evaluation. In other words, Barnes's letters develop a social habitus—a set of dispositions that projectively maps lines of continuity with previous discourse and possible responses—to forge a way of being public.

Because letters impose no form beyond what they owe as responses to another, reading Barnes's correspondence with Coleman allows one to observe how an incongruous conceptual terrain forms as the relationship unfolds in writing. Barnes and Coleman's social circle consists largely of young artists who commit themselves in one way or another to shaping a new aesthetics for a new world. It also includes their wealthy supporters (most notably Peggy Guggenheim), who channel economic capital toward the production of artistic works of uncertain value.²⁶ Even in their disagreement on particular artists and works, members of this group share a classical aesthetic framework that allows them to take up beauty's universal horizon (its claim on fundamentally human capacities for feeling) as a way to mark divisions in the social world. At the same time, this social group, while sexually permissive in some ways (many members are married and involve in several other affairs at once), does not readily take sexual practice to be a pertinent variable for the realism of social forces incumbent for the novel. In this context, Barnes encounters a similar predicament as her characters insofar as she must reconcile her partisan tastes and particular sexual experiences with the centrifugal current that her art must ride as public product. The problem of how to index these different allegiances sometimes marks Barnes's address to Coleman. Barnes

²⁶ In *The Field of Cultural Production*, Bourdieu suggest that the literary field constitutes both a dominant and dominated space, characterized by the unstable value of its products despite its access to the means of production (since the field partakes in the production of belief in aesthetic worth as well as of material goods). Barnes's sub-group within the literary field is prone to understand itself as serving dominated interests in this way. However, its members tend to conceive these interests as either unworldly, disinterested or as involving a broadened analysis of material domination. See Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 164.

has a peculiar manner of addressing Coleman as though the two women were to be judged in the eyes of a broader, unmarked public. In this regard, the letters' exposed privacy only underscores a divided habit that is integral to how Barnes responds to her friend.

The letters I examine come from a period between fall 1935 and spring 1936, shortly before Eliot selected *Nightwood* for publication at Faber & Faber. Between the two friends, questions of conduct in managing interpersonal affair, professional matters around promoting one's work, and the conditions of a shareable beauty that gives artworks value all coincide without their having any way to point to how they create meaning across these regions of activity. Coleman is singularly committed to bringing Barnes's work to print, but this dedication comes into relief against a sustained criticism of the novel, the title being as yet undecided. Coleman believes that the manuscript suggests a knowledge it fails to communicate completely, but that this knowledge is so important that anyone who detects it will forgive Barnes's weaknesses as a writer. In Coleman's words to Barnes: "Anyone with an ounce of creative talent—and many who have none at all—falls in love with your book, because they love the 'light' in it so that they forget what form it is in. It ought to be as moving as *Lear*: it could be—in some state, where your gifts were harmonized."²⁷ Coleman presupposes the power to "move," or to evoke passions, is the most important quality of a literary work. These passions constitute a truth that practically anyone can access, regardless of whether one knows that (or how) the novel stimulates them. One might understand, therefore, that Coleman's letter invokes a universalizing horizon for the meaning of aesthetic works, and that readers of Barnes's can discern this horizon despite the novel's imperfect form. Coleman mentions, as an example, the doctor's digressive "monologues," some of which she has cut from the sample for Eliot. But Coleman attributes these weaknesses to a prior cause: the "initial misconception" of not foregrounding the relation between Nora and Robin as a tragic event. "You can't," she asserts, "write about passionate feeling (Nora's) and scatter it all over Felix, Robin, Guido, the Doctor. *It can't be done*. Eliot will see this; it will madden him."²⁸ Coleman locates the failure of *Nightwood* in its dilution of universally appealing passions by relating them to a set of characters to which they lack intrinsic relevance. Coleman's criticism involves an interesting contradiction. On the one hand, she understands that worthy art can communicate feelings independently of a reader's ability to construct aesthetic experiences that convey affect, and the fact that beauty can be thus intuited from even an imperfect artificial structure testifies to its universal value. On the other hand, a literary structure that emphasizes the extension of a feeling among various persons supposedly attenuates its exemplary significance. Some passions, she implies, can only be universally understood if appropriately expressed through certain subjects or contained within certain relational contexts. Barnes responds to Coleman's criticisms by relating conversations she has with other people. In general, her point seems to be that opening up a relational context to circulation can in fact transform the passions that lovers feel. But like the narratives Matthew O'Connor presents to Nora, Barnes's responses take the long way around to address a point.

Barnes is living in New York City at this time while Coleman is in London. Barnes writes of being somewhat down on the American social scene and keeps mostly to herself, but one of the few people she will see is her former boyfriend, writer Charles Henri Ford. Ford and Barnes have drifted apart since they were lovers, and Ford's political affinities have shifted in a way that has

²⁷ "The Letters of Barnes and Coleman (1935-1936)," 109.

²⁸ "Letters of Barnes and Coleman (1935-1936)," 109.

altered his view of Barnes's writing. Barnes records this in the following report to Coleman on January 1936. The anecdote echoes Coleman's emphasis on general and particular meanings in her estimate of Barnes's novel: "Had dinner with Charles Ford a few nights ago, he has gone completely proselyte on Marx, says that because my writing has no *universal* scope or interest in the contemporary scene and contemporary social conditions is the reason that I am not read or wanted."²⁹ Although Ford's views likely differed considerably from those of Coleman, a Christian believer whose faith strengthened with age, they nonetheless share a set of orientations for evaluating aesthetic works and thus offer comparable criticisms of the novel that would become *Nightwood*.³⁰ Unlike Coleman, Ford believes that *Nightwood* communicates no universal truth whatsoever, yet he intimates that this would be a sign of aesthetic worth. Like Coleman, he suggests that the novel fails to invoke a unifying context in which its renderings of human feeling and action appear as tokens of particular social classes—a "scene" or a set of "social conditions." In other words, Barnes's centering the representation of social groups in her rehashing of Ford's criticism explicates the positive value that Coleman adumbrates in the idea of Barnes's novel indecorously scattering a feeling across a diverse cast of characters. In continuing this anecdote, Barnes will suggest ways her novel might generate representations of social stratification, if not economic class.

To some extent Barnes affirms Ford's characterization of her as an idealist writer, but her further remarks suggest she takes interest in alternate modes of history and social analysis:

I answered that I was afraid that I *did* like good and evil, that I was, admittedly, a complete egoist, I was only interested in beauty, art and religion, that the purely happy and contented state of the native, say of Tahiti (before we got in there) of Bali (before we got in there) was, as Melville found, too damned heavenly and perfect for endurance³¹

From the perspective of today's sophisticated frameworks for describing the operations of racial capital, Barnes's description of imperialist violence can strike one as unconvincingly vague at best. At its worst, her description might indicate a white guilt that contributes to her romanticized view of indigenous cultures—a view that conveniently enables an historical narrative of "good and evil" while foreclosing a more nuanced encounter with the past and a stronger political commitment in the present.³² However true this may be, it cannot explain how Barnes's anti-narrative of modernist progress relates to the affirmatively "egoist" quality of her art. Barnes's claim as to the happiness of displaced societies seems to me a clue that her "egoist" art aspires to communicate the destructiveness of her Euro-American culture by plumbing ubiquitous experience with negative affect. The yoking of "egoist" art to matters of projective and collective investment of belief ("good

²⁹ "Letters of Barnes and Coleman (1935-1936)," 135.

³⁰ Ford and Coleman are not alone in their assessments of Barnes's writing. Barnes notes that her current boyfriend, writer and painter Peter Neagoe, offers her similar advice to "take my times, and the problem of my times in this the country of my birth, and write a sociological novel not as I wrote *Nightwood*, which is, he feels too personal, romantic and subjective." "Letters of Barnes and Coleman (1935-1936)," 136.

³¹ "Letters of Barnes and Coleman (1935-1936)," 136.

³² Christopher Nealon is especially attentive to the racial politics of an emergent historical consciousness around sexuality among Euro-American white writers. His work suggests that Barnes's writing is part of a larger tendency to invest hope in primitivist fantasies that pre-colonial cultures are universally less punishing of non-normative desires. See especially Nealon's discussion of Willa Cather in *Foundlings*, 83-92.

and evil,” “beauty,” “religion”) gestures toward a kind of identity-political formation whereby one discovers a collective longing for a different social organization through a struggle simply to occupy one’s supposed class. This is to say that Barnes seems to understand that cultural conventions constrain the kinds of feelings people of different social strata can intelligibly inhabit in their daily lives. For her, therefore, class struggle involves finding ways to insist upon what she sometimes calls “psychology,” or the social opacity of certain meanings, as an aspect of social realism.³³

Let me pause to reflect on what the implications of Barnes’s conversation with Ford signify within the correspondence with Coleman. Across the letters, Barnes cites some parameters of novels’ aesthetic worth to respond to Coleman’s criticisms of her manuscript. In particular, the criticisms Barnes faces unfold within the ambit of a conceptual space defined by universal truths and those that pertain to class structures of a social organization, most readily apprehended in terms of economic classes and the nation state. Barnes alludes to a problem of how one defines social classes and to what degree class struggle mediates the terms of universality (who can lay claim to what properties and affective capacities). Yet she struggles to present this problem to Coleman, especially when it comes to the process of achieving a new consensus that causes one’s unhappiness to signify a social discontent. This difficulty points to the fact that Barnes is in the process of reaching such a consensus with Coleman as she attempts to secure her precarious foothold in the literary field. She is caught, in other words, in a crisis of having to speak to Coleman in ways that presume their mutual social positionings while also addressing her friend as though they were somehow more or different than the positions they occupied.

One of Bourdieu’s statements on the self-discipline involved in the occupation of a structural position helps elaborate the difficulty Barnes confronts as she writes. Barnes’s attitudes toward Ford and Coleman recall Bourdieu’s claim that the struggle of agents to appropriate positions in a social space involves requirements of *habitus* and *habitat*. The nominal recognition of others of a class is not enough; one must also operationalize the putative qualities that correspond to the position. “At the risk of feeling *out of place*,” Bourdieu writes, “individuals who move into a new space must fulfill the conditions that the space tacitly requires of its occupants. This may be the possession of a certain cultural capital, the lack of which can prevent the real appropriation of supposedly public goods or even the intention of appropriating them.”³⁴ Here Bourdieu would prompt us to imagine someone who finds himself in the economic position to

³³ Some of Barnes’s further comments on the conversation with Ford strengthens the understanding that she is invested in the question of the contradiction between contemporaneous principles of social classification. At the time, Barnes is writing a book (never published) about the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. Ford wants to know what Barnes could be thinking in trying to build a career by writing about someone so deranged (Ford’s word is “*détraqué*”). Barnes answers that “she was not only the very bottom of his Marxian problem, (financial damnation) but *something* else beside. I asked him why he thought the bums in the park were bums in the park. He answered ‘for economic reasons only.’ Then I threw my hands up and said, ‘that’s the answer to you, my poor adolescent if you think that the bums in the park are there *only because of lack of money* you have muffed the whole great skeleton of the past, and have shelved the problem of man’s psychology. Money is a very great problem of man’s environmental tragedy, but it is *not all*, and that all is what the artist must strive to find; nearly all of you rest on too easy a tabulation.’” See “Letters of Barnes and Coleman (1935-1936),” 134. In claiming that Ford has clumsily mishandled the “skeleton of the past,” Barnes seems to imply that he has left out the problem of how objective economic conditions can produce novel subjective conditions, so that the issue of economic classes (what people have) is inseparable from psychology (what people think and want).

³⁴ Bourdieu et al., *The Weight of the World*, 128.

befriend people who enjoy visiting art museums but whose failure to respond appropriately to artistic works prevents him from enjoying all the benefits of that friendship, including recognition as someone who “goes to museums.” Barnes, in contrast, was poor in economic capital; she relied on Peggy Guggenheim’s friendship and patronage (consistently available but never guaranteed). Barnes had also accumulated significant debts from privately publishing *The Lesbian Almanac*, which is why she despairs when Coleman speculates that her new novel might have to be similarly paid for.³⁵ Instead of artistic taste, the goodwill of people like Guggenheim depended on Barnes’s role as a producer within the cultural field that she had temporarily gained access to with her previous work. She was now finding that the limited success of that work was not enough to fulfill the conditions of her station in the field in perpetuity. That is, Barnes is at risk of being displaced from her social position and struggles to negotiate the terms of her continued occupancy.

In her letters to Coleman, Barnes seems eager to demonstrate, by rehashing her responses to others in the same field, that she knows what others expected of her as a novelist and that she possesses the properties necessary to satisfy these conditions in a distinctive way. In addition to requiring Barnes to index her way of handling class particularity by foregrounding the affective and social structure of disqualification (essentially about how a society manages social boundaries as it manages the relational inhabitation of properties), her struggle involves soliciting Coleman’s recognition that she and Barnes are similarly at odds with the field they occupy. In this respect, Barnes’s tacit understanding of her precarious social position also reflects the structure of disqualification and counterpublic longing *Nightwood* explores. She experiences her “official”—that is, private—role as a novelist as a shameful privation. Like her characters who desire positions they are rigorously denied, Barnes is consistently reminded that she possesses all but a few of the qualities necessary to be a novelist, plus a few more that others do not know how to respond to, yet these properties happen to be the most decisive. And like her characters, Barnes seeks a new social context for this shame, so that it will mean something different.

The hypothesis that Barnes might similarly claim her status as a novelist with respect to a counterpublic horizon makes salient two additional features of her exchange with Coleman: her contradictory desires regarding how and where her text circulates and her emphasis on sexuality as a dimension of identity where one might look to learn about how people understand their social-structural positions. As I have explored across this study, in the critical idiom of certain novels, terms like “possibility,” “singularity,” and “disqualification,” mark off an emergent conceptual space for organizing social relations that one can, given sufficient repetition, signal through incongruous indexical maneuvers. Such a difficult form of indexically marks Barnes’s relation to

³⁵ “Letters of Barnes and Coleman (1935-1936),” 117.

her imagined public.³⁶ Reading the same letter from November 22, we learn that Coleman has shared copies of Barnes's manuscript with people who are now making social calls on Barnes as a mutual friend of Emily's. Barnes has recently lunched with one of these people and quickly realizes there is little to talk about. She's clearly annoyed by having her work given to a stranger. In a subsequent reply, Coleman shares her frustration at Barnes's attitude:

The only thing we ever fight about is this!! The beastly selfishness of it. How *can* you Djuna? Why do you write at all? And your writing is not appreciated by so many people that you can afford to be snooty with someone who genuinely loves it. That good writing is reserved for a chosen few: well, I don't see it. Love and beauty are for those who want it. I see that the trouble is that you think of the book (as ever) as *yourself*. You don't want Sonia to have *you*. Well, your book is no longer you—it is an entity apart from you.³⁷

Coleman clearly thinks Barnes is being elitist in begrudging the social claims of certain readers. This take on Barnes's oddly reclusive authorship follows from the prior distinction between the supposedly universal beauty of the passions and partisan sentiments. Perhaps Sonia is one of those people who, despite lacking creative talent of her own, nonetheless recognizes the human significance of Barnes writing despite its formal imperfections. In this respect, it makes sense that Barnes's rejecting certain readers should appear to Coleman as a betrayal of beauty and a lapse into an excessively particular and embodied order of meaning.

Barnes's reply insists on the way that the novel's unpublished status marks her text with private meanings, which will be implicit in the work if it circulates publicly. Between her emphasis on the personal mark on her text and her apparently low esteem of the public she calls "the world," Barnes gestures vaguely toward the possibility that a text might take on a meaning that is not-yet-universal. "And now let's get this straight once and for all," she writes,

I am *not* selfish in not wishing Sonia and others (for it's not only Sonia, it's almost anyone else, in fact anyone but my best friends and *any* stranger who might be instrumental in publishing it) to see my book. Of course I think of the book as "myself" which is exactly what it is UNTIL IT IS PUBLISHED. Then Sonia and the world can see it, have it all over the place and be damned. Its condition is all that I am arguing about, it is naked now, even

³⁶ Publication was an arduous process for Barnes. Beginning in the 1970s, *Nightwood* underwent a series of critical re-evaluations that resituated the novel's difficult form within a struggle with dominant frameworks of knowledge, most notably following its coming to the attention of several feminist writers. Since then, especially in the 1990s, debates around the novel have made allusion to the role of Emily Coleman and T.S. Eliot's influence in shaping Barnes's work. On the one hand, these debates have usefully corrected the false estimate of Eliot's role in removing material from Barnes's manuscript. These cuts, imputed to Eliot, formed a cornerstone of accounts that aligned his editorial role with a masculinist and homophobic power, functioning as what Georgette Fleischer terms "patriarchy's trojan horse." On the other hand, the emphasis on clarifying Eliot's role obscures the way his conditional support was consistent in certain respects with the position of those who treated the novel's aesthetic merits with skepticism and highly qualified praise. These accounts have ushered in a precariously founded view of publication as an unmitigated good for Barnes. For examples of critical reevaluations, see especially Marcus, "Laughing at Leviticus" and Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank*. For a corrective to the incomplete editorial histories popularized in these accounts, see Fleischer, "Politics and Poetics of 'Nightwood,'" 411.

³⁷ "Letters of Barnes and Coleman (1935-1936)," 124.

when it is dressed (printed) the world and his mother can have it and light fires with it for all me, so it's not trying to keep "beauty away from those who love it."³⁸

Barnes seems impossibly difficult and self-contradictory. She will share the manuscript with anyone who can help publish it, but she does not consider publication to be the happy step toward shared truth Coleman imagines. In fact, she associates the work's broader circulation with the likely destruction of its aspect as commodity, not readers' recognition of its beauty. She understands the manuscript to be an extension of herself, yet she says she is not being selfish in wanting to control its circulation. Moreover, if Barnes believes that the novel's meaning will exceed the context of her life upon publication, this context is not totally discarded as irrelevant, but is rather newly "dressed" with the mark of publicness. A loosening from the conditions of Barnes's life does not guarantee the novel's universality; such a rupture only marks the intimate meanings of her text with additional qualifications. Recall here the way Warner describes counterpublic participation to be at odds with the anonymity of a public address's stranger sociability. Only the meaning of an author's utterance within the circulation of a public's discourse is supposed to matter. A counterpublic discourse, on the other hand, presuppositionally takes up dimensions of meaning typically associated with privacy's intimate, embodied, and representative functions, thereby constructing new contexts of privacy as it contests dominant ideologies of linguistic comportment. For Barnes, a work's publication does not ramify universally to produce an unmarked privacy; it rather enfolds personal experiences in a new habit oriented toward circulation to produce a new and conspicuous privacy. Barnes's attitude seems counterpublic, in other words, insofar as her reasons for wanting to control the novel's circulation have to do with wanting to hold in focus the proximity between its textual meanings and a particular, embodied sensibility for as long as possible.

Because of (and not despite) the sexual liberalism of Barnes's social group, she struggles especially to draw attention to the value of preserving certain unintelligible, "pathologically" private, eccentric meanings for a work. To recall another of Warner's asserts that one distinction of a counterpublic utterance is its implicit, structuring relation to dominant modes of self-presentation in language. To recall one of his formulations on counterpublics, "ordinary people are assumed not to want to be mistaken for the kind of person who would participate in this kind of talk or be present in this kind of scene."³⁹ Barnes's situation is distinct in the way people (even her friends) find her writing unintelligible without remarking on how it might partake in a disreputable pathway of circulation. Barnes's group understands and accepts an exceptionally broad range of sexual practices, but they require her to incorporate those practices into her writing in specific ways—such as by subordinating them under the presumably universal experience of tragic, ill-fated love. With *Nightwood*, Barnes seems interested in giving shape to a general experience, but it is not an experience her group recognizes since characters' sex can't straightforwardly as love. For the same reason, Coleman and others view Barnes as harboring private sentiments that are not those a writer is supposed to have. With this in mind, consider the ways Barnes defends her own case as a writer while responding to some implicit the contradictions between the norms of her and Coleman's literary field and Emily's comportment in her love life. It is as though she insists that

³⁸ "Letters of Barnes and Coleman (1935-1936)," 128.

³⁹ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 120.

one's inharmonious relation to the field were transposable into sexual interactions, and that this transposition ought to make her friend more receptive to the counterpublic orientation of her work.

At the time, Coleman was involved with two very different men (both married). Much of the friends' exchange between November and December 1935 touches on whether Coleman should focus her energies on the newer relation, which might be more satisfying to her. Coleman seems concerned with the kind of obligation created by an affair that excludes sex and what sex with another man might add under these circumstances. One of these men is the twenty-two year-old poet George Barker, and the exchange touches on his prospects as an artist. We learn that Barnes has done some investigating among literary critics and other writers to figure out what the young Barker's artistic sensibility is worth. The correspondences also foreground what this sensibility might mean for Coleman. "He made me show him one or two of my poems," she writes. "That afternoon I experienced such excitement that I nearly faint thinking of it. I don't mean that he thought they were successful, but he was in my world, and I was in his, for a few minutes."⁴⁰ Some questions arise as to how Coleman's feelings for Barker might imply the conversation going on elsewhere about his place in the literary field. Is Emily aroused by the intimacy momentarily occasioned by her creative powers, even if these do not seem to impress Barker much? Or is she implicitly recognizing that a communion of the senses through art is something she *ought* to want but does not actually need? Is this section of the letter questioning Barker's fitness as a lover to a woman who is also a published writer or Emily's commitments to the capacities for feeling valued in her field (since she seems to have gotten something out of the encounter without its being reciprocal)? In other words, this passage indexes some of the literary field's values, including its distinction between particular sensations and universal feelings, to entail something about who Emily is socially in her relationships with men.

If Barnes finds Coleman's failure to factor her desires into her practical calculation annoying, she also resolves to aid her friend in understanding where she might look for them. One intervention involves provisionally uncoupling sex from both sin and aesthetic pleasure:

You can't, you simply can't, put sex out of life, it won't have it—it's a law of nature, and how sinful it is to follow that law, well, that is the individual's problem, according to his belief. I do not say you may not have been wrong in forcing Peter, perhaps you were. *Perhaps* he has a *right* to be lifted up and slain, it may be what he needs. You can't know the pattern of your history and fate until it has been committed, and it's the lack of pattern in your life with Peter that's probably going to drive you into some other, even though of lesser value—with Peter you seem to mill and mill and make no design, and when that happens there is only one design to make, that is a bloody one.

And a little further on:

If Peter were your right torture, it does seem that you would be turning in that orbit, and not running off into another...*unless* you are simply being impulsive (you love poetry so much that you might follow that instead of your true love) and wanton

⁴⁰ "Letters of Barnes and Coleman (1935-1936)," 111.

and childish. This I can not know, *you* can, if you look into the matter clearly and with some of that cold blooded blue pencil faculty of yours.⁴¹

In chiding Emily for trying to “put sex out of life,” Barnes seems to have understood that her friend indeed thinks too much of how other literary types might respond to her affairs instead of what she herself feels. (Later Coleman confirms this understanding in reporting her boredom at Barker’s responses to her poetry, even as she affirms his good literary taste.) She suggests that both a belief in sin and a belief in the universal possibilities of poetic meaning impinge on Coleman’s sense of her sexual reality. If Barnes refers to this sexual self as an independent “nature,” this nature is something one assembles from one’s “history” to project one’s “fate.” One moreover “commits” this nature in interaction with others. In other words, Barnes implies that sexuality is a practical reality that one only commits and commits to in relation to others in ways that may encompass a public in its address. She prompts Coleman to recognize that if she desires to inhabit such an imaginary space of shared experience through her relations with men, she does so in her own way, and this allows her to take pleasure in her time with Barker despite her knowing it is not “right” in a generalizable sense. (Barnes refers to Coleman’s voluptuous enjoyment of her admittedly misfit encounters with Barker as her being “engrossed in misery.”)⁴² Barnes may also hint that Coleman would be a better reader of her novel if she were to come to terms with this. In conjuring the image of Coleman as a constructive reader, liberal with her editor’s ink, Barnes suggests her friend assume the same posture toward her life. Note as well the echo of Coleman’s shrill assertion that the kind of meaning Barnes wants to make in her novel “can’t be done” in Barnes’s insistence that “you can’t, you just can’t” take sex out of life.

Across the letters of Barnes and Coleman, the two women struggle to alight together upon a conceptual space of overlap between their own eccentric desires and the ways of social belonging that their group upholds. This struggle includes a tendency to insist upon the possibilities inherent in unsatisfactory relations, Barnes’s “engrossing misery.” If sexuality figures in both Barnes’s novel and the friendships that suture her to a literary field, this follows from the way sexuality, as a way of relationally enacting other aspects of identity and knowledge, such as economic class, sometimes entails difficult incorporations of social properties. From my condensed reconstruction of the corner of the literary field in which Barnes was caught up, one sees that the novel’s indexical structure does not simply exist in an extended analogical, or allegorical, relationship with this field’s conceptual coordinates, including its intrinsic principles of classification (young and mature writers, geniuses and people with talent, writers and patrons, writers and publishers, ordinary readers and specialized ones) as well as the terms organizing agents’ activity (the material world and eternity, genres of prose and verse, “the self” and “the universe”). Rather, these social relations and the values circulating among them provide the context where the novel’s meanings begin to resolve. Between Barnes, Coleman, and their intimates, the novel provided the occasion to work out whether sexual knowledge and familiarity with the threat of disqualification it can entail become a presupposable condition for the appreciation of aesthetic works. Across Barnes’s correspondences around her novel, one sees her nudge (or shove) her interlocutor into an uncomfortable awareness of social relations, so that those not necessarily inclined to recognize

⁴¹ “Letters of Barnes and Coleman (1935-1936),” 115.

⁴² “Letters of Barnes and Coleman (1935-1936),” 138.

sexual difference in themselves might see their interests—such as in promoting challenging art—as being consistent with the needs that arise from disqualification.

GENRE AS AN ASPECT OF “FEELING HISTORICAL” WITH SEXUAL COUNTERPUBLICS

T.S. Eliot’s preface to the 1937 American edition of *Nightwood* represents one of the few characterizations of the novel that Barnes met with approval. Although the preface remains at the center of debate about his relation to Barnes and her writing, it plainly shows that Eliot’s understanding of the work’s relation to the novel genre underwent clarification:

In describing *Nightwood* for the purpose of attracting readers to the English edition, I said that it would “appeal primarily to readers of poetry.” This is well enough for the brevity of advertisement, but I am glad to take this opportunity to amplify it a little. I do not want to suggest that the distinction of the book is primarily verbal, and still less that the astonishing language covers a vacuity of content. Unless the term “novel” has become too debased to apply, and if it means a book in which living characters are created and shown in significant relationship, this book is a novel. And I do not mean that Miss Barnes’s style is “poetic prose.” But I do mean that most contemporary novels are not really “written.” They obtain what reality they have largely from an accurate rendering of the noises that human beings currently make in their daily simple needs of communication; and what part of a novel is not composed of these noises consists of a prose which is no more alive than that of a competent newspaper writer or government official. A prose that is altogether alive demands something of the reader that the ordinary novel-reader is not prepared to give. To say that *Nightwood* will appeal primarily to readers of poetry does not mean that it is not a novel, but that it is so good a novel that only sensibilities trained on poetry can wholly appreciate it. Miss Barnes’s prose has the prose rhythm that is prose style, and the musical pattern which is not that of verse.⁴³

It is surprising to find Eliot favorably describing *Nightwood*’s rendering of human communication, the formal requirement where others say Barnes’s writing has most failed. In fact, Eliot places the modeling of communication at the center of his understanding of the novel project in general and suggests that Barnes has met this constraint in a new way. Specifically, by describing people’s “daily simple needs of communication” as noise, Eliot indicates, first, how something about *Nightwood* makes a reader aware of how language involves the act of phonation in its meaningfulness and, second, that any one noise is insufficient to produce communication. To be “alive,” Eliot implies, linguistic utterances want a structuring medium. If a novelist generally supplies this medium, however, Barnes’s novel also distinguishes itself in its method of achieving coherence—a method that places special demands on readers. Perhaps when Eliot contrasts Barnes’s “astonishing language” to the writing of a news journalist or government official, he alludes to the way *Nightwood*’s narration, rather than straightforwardly clarifying the represented utterances of characters, participates in the same process of contextual alignment. He certainly draws attention to the processual logic of Barnes’s writing by describing it as both prosaic and

⁴³ The New Directions edition reproduces Eliot’s preface to the first American edition. Barnes, *Nightwood*, 3.

musical. Whatever mode of meaning Eliot imagines, engaging with it supposedly sets lovers of *Nightwood* apart from ordinary readers in their peculiar trans-generic interests. All of this might sound like a backhanded compliment, but the preface touched Barnes in a way other official pronouncements did not. "Thank you for your beautiful preface to *Nightwood*," Barnes wrote to Eliot, 11 December 1936, "No critical appreciation has ever given me so much pleasure; it makes my life a little less terrifying."

In introducing this chapter, I bracketed the way readers have taken up *Nightwood* within the history of sexuality to foreground how the work's difficult indexical structures of talk might form part of that history. Queer-affirmative studies have focused on the novel's way of complicating the category of gender inversion by centering characters' partial commitments to and embodiments of masculinity and femininity; its problematizing melancholic attachments to the reproductive family; its revision of Freudian narratives of sexual development; the positive implications of cultural decay; and more.⁴⁴ In centering the communicative medium that constitutes human sociality, I have tried to bring into focus the novel's way of projecting a publicness that would allow these other aspects of identity to be inhabitable in language, not just conceptually distinct. This aspect of *Nightwood* inflects how we understand Eliot's terms to ramify in time, such as how the idea of a reader whose "sensibilities are trained on poetry" but who reads novels or one who will give something that other readers won't overlaps with the novel's trajectory across literary and sexual fields. To what extent have reading the reading publics that have kept *Nightwood* in circulation organize themselves around these terms?

In her article "'My History, Finally Invented': *Nightwood* and its Publics," Laura K. Wallace helpfully traces the outlines of the various reading practices that constitute the novel's modernist, lesbian, feminist, and queer-academic publics. Wallace contends that the interests of different social groups inflect these practices in ways that produce the qualities of the novel, especially the significance of its challenging structure:

Readers in each public make sense of *Nightwood*'s difficulties through the lens of that public's expectations. In modernist publics, readers reject the book's pretention or embrace its poetic experimentation. In lesbian publics, readers reject the book as pretentiously modernist or praise it for reflecting the experience of women under patriarchy and queer people navigating heteronormativity. In queer academic publics, critics often admire *Nightwood*'s undecidability.⁴⁵

Obviously the responses of members of a given public are not straightforwardly determined by a social position; such estranging refraction of perspective is, as Warner argues, parts of what it means to participate in a public. Even when they disagree, however, a public's constituent utterances presuppose certain conceptual coordinates as an orienting background for continued circulation. This is apparently what Wallace means by "expectations." Hence the modernist reader's "pretention" can name an excessive formal complexity that cannot be redeemed as aesthetically valuable while a lesbian public's "pretentious modernism" marks any concern for

⁴⁴ For an example of a study that analyzes *Nightwood*'s manipulations of discourses of inversion, see Gallagher, "Vision and Inversion in *Nightwood*." Loss and melancholic attachment functions as theoretical starting points in Smith, "A Story beside(s) Itself." For a more recent view on this topic, see also Wilson, "*Nightwood*'s Unhoused Fictions." For an analysis that links *Nightwood* to discourses of decadence, see Heise, "Degenerate Sex and the City."

⁴⁵ Wallace, "*Nightwood* and its Publics," 73.

aesthetic distinction that is excessive from the point of view of the sexual-political field. We could say, then, that according to Wallace's schematization, public circulation still operates according to the salient properties in literary, sexual, and academic fields.

I have tried to explicate how *Nightwood*'s characters grope toward a counterpublic mode of discursive interaction that risks resembling mere noise. On the one hand, I cannot avoid being implicated in this respect in Wallace's estimation of an academic public's high valuation of indeterminacy. On the other hand, if the academic emphasis on the novel's undecidability has any enduring significance beyond itself, it lies in the possibility of understanding how a novel's publics might constitute themselves not only according to different interests, but also by incorporating distinctions that have currency in other fields. One glimpses these "heteronomous" processes only incompletely by citing the opinions of different readers, whether of praise or disparagement. This is why the difference between publics and counterpublics can feel muted in Wallace's account.

When members of a sexual counterpublic assimilate the properties of a literary work into the terms by which their discourse circulates, sometimes the faculties required for nuanced reading can appear to be subordinated. How else could a novel like *Nightwood*, which expresses a deep ambivalence about the possibility that love between women could be owned or acted upon, become the enabling fulcrum in a well-known pickup line among women? ("Have you read Barnes?")⁴⁶ Rather than simply representing the abandonment of ambiguity in favor of an ideologically motivated instrumentality, the obscuring of textual properties in the use of a literary work can be, in certain cases, a sign of the historical process of their incorporation, the shift of public life into more embodied and practical terms. In particular, studying the emergence of counterpublic modes of speech from indeterminate indexical structures in *Nightwood* allows one to observe how a counterpublic feeling of good-will has been constituted among sexual counterpublics of the late twentieth century with regard for differences of textual genre and what Wallace, following Christopher Nealon, calls "feeling historical." To attain such a feeling is, in Nealon's words, "to convert the harrowing privacy of the inversion model into some more encompassing narrative of collective life," the former model being associated in Nealon's formulation with an anomalous and timeless psychosexual condition.⁴⁷ We might say, in other words, that feeling historical names the structuring experience of moving between frameworks of subjectivity that coincides with counterpublic formations. As I mentioned in this chapter's introduction, literary critics like Sedgwick have participated in this project by, among other methods, reconstructing dimensions of sexual knowledge that resist referential frameworks for representing a social world. Sedgwick understands that sexualities differ according to the ways and degrees by which people presuppose sex to correspond to "contexts resonant with meaning, narrative, and connectedness with other aspects of their life."⁴⁸ Given the expansive taxonomizing impulse of Sedgwick's list, consider the grace required to posit the importance of a resistance to narrative for some without necessarily entailing conservative ideological effects. To be sure, for some more recent methods of studying sexuality (and I include my own here), sexuality would be altogether unthinkable without the willingness to explicate the connection between specific practices and a host of other variables indexed by these practices as the ground of their meaningfulness. What purpose, then, could this good will serve?

⁴⁶ See Wallace's account of Susan Sontag's encounter with Harriet Sohmers over *Nightwood*. Wallace, 72.

⁴⁷ Nealon, *Foundlings*, 8.

⁴⁸ Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 25.

In *Nightwood*, relays of “meaning, narrative, and connectedness” among aspects of a life are the effects of public narratives, or myths, on self-understanding, yet characters’ interactions also alter how they inhabit these myths. Previously I mentioned how Nora, for instance, sometimes understands her desire for Robin via a discourse of gender inversion that transforms the invert’s body into an object of desire. Further on in the same exchange, Matthew chides Nora, not for her investments in this narrative, but for accepting Robin’s halfhearted attempts to play along:

“Remorse,” said the doctor, “sitting heavy, like the arse of a bull—you had the conceit of ‘honesty’ to keep that arse from cracking your heart; but what did she have? Only your faith in her—then you took that faith away! You should have kept it always, seeing that it was a myth; no myth is safely broken. Ah, the weakness of the strong! The trouble with you is, you are not just a myth-maker, you are also a destroyer, you made a beautiful fable, then put Voltaire to bed with it.” (117)

In drawing attention to Nora’s “conceit of ‘honesty,’” Matthew alludes to the way Nora had exculpated herself for the difficulties in the relationship by insisting that she, at least, was consistent in her behavior. By marking Nora’s honesty as a conceit, O’Connor links Nora’s very ability to achieve this consistency to her investments in a myth that lends the meaning of her behavior an enduring integrity. In breaking with Robin, then, Nora divests faith in Robin’s fitness for this narrative, rendering her and Robin’s love a satire fit for Voltaire. Disqualifying Robin and refusing to live with her, Nora has also failed to appropriate a myth as a kind of practical schema that allows subjectivity to cohere.

That Robin’s refusal of seamless integration into narratives of sexual meaning might be an aspect of her own sexuality strikes me as a profound example of the implications of Sedgwick’s point on people’s differential footings in narrative logics. Robin’s resistance can appear to be a rejection of publicness altogether, but Robin’s detached, negative sexuality can also look like the *most* public, the most inclined toward stranger sociability insofar as it responds to disqualification’s pervasiveness. Nora recalls words Robin has said on more than one occasion: “She would come back to me after a night all over the city and lie down beside me and she would say, ‘I want to make everyone happy,’ and her mouth was drawn down. ‘I want everyone to be gay, gay. Only you,’ she said, holding me, ‘only you, you musn’t be gay or happy, not like that, it’s not for you, only for everyone else in the world’” (128). Like the ambient goodwill Matthew feels in his conversations with Nora and others, the gayness Robin refers to claims the indefinite horizon of a public while presupposing disqualification as a salient feature on that horizon. But to orient herself toward the strangely impersonal horizon of public love, Robin would keep Nora’s shattered myth close to her. As Nora remarks, “she was a long way off and waiting to begin. It’s for that reason she hates everyone near her” (128). Robin confronts the other characters with the possibility that, though publicness enables an enduring kind of privacy that can be grounds for social solidarity, it risks costing one certain other relations, pleasures, and meanings. To be a myth-maker *and* a destroyer is to know that some aspects of oneself are not as easily transposed into the medium of a counterpublic happiness as others. As the one who remembers Robin, Nora reminds us that bearing witness to the birth of a public love can be painful. This paradox foregrounds the harsh reality that one’s public interests and one’s private interests may be at odds with one another.

Ultimately, then, Barnes separates herself from a Kantian tradition that tends to see publicness—predicated on the unconstrained use of reason—as logically prior to privacy.

Publicness is constrained because reason itself is initially culturally constrained, which for Kant and Arendt is the same as privacy. Conscious of the challenge of writing about certain kinds of relationships and meanings in such a public medium, Barnes implicitly posits (through the figure of Robin) counterpublic meanings that exist in language but are at odds with language's putatively most rational aspects—aspects *Nightwood* examines through the lens of narrative.⁴⁹ To understand language as divided not only by public and private contexts, but also by different ways of accessing these contexts through language, is to read the story of Nora and Robin's doomed love as revolving around the feeling of being historically and linguistically out of step with oneself as an aspect of being caught up in the emergence of a counterpublic. What is more, to say, with Sedgwick, that "we" "know" that such unnamable feelings as Robin's are readable is to suggest that contemporary sexual counterpublics are internally riven by their members' degrees of responsiveness to different generic logics for self-elaboration.

⁴⁹ Note the contrast between my understanding of Robin's function in novel and such critical claims such as Joseph Frank's that Robin is not "in" the novel at all because "character implies humanity and she has not attained level of the human." Frank, *Widening Gyre*, 32.

CONCLUSION

Thinking Sex with Matthew Stadler's *Allan Stein*

It's odd, describing this exchange, for the more meaningful it became, the less there was Denis and I had to say, and the less we spoke the more powerfully the night ruptured, so that the billowing places where, for example, Allan or Stéphane came rushing in—that is, the idea of Allan or Stéphane (for they dwelt equally in these uncharted interstices between the pleasantries of conversation, those silences and sighs where crushed thoughts could breathe and become huge)—these opened up, and we had only to be still and courteous to allow them to inhabit us or be inhabited. This is not a critique of language. I could have recorded every idea that was said or implied. It is a critique of “normal conversation,” that pinched and narrow grid in which we take refuge every day. George desired it, “a decent conversation,” as a barrier to our monstrous desires and all the deranged echoes their articulation might bring. What a gift, by contrast, to find Denis, whose appetite for this particular vertigo was generous and keen.¹

Possibility, Singularity, Disqualification has advanced several ways we might think about the cultural meanings of sex—in semiotic, interactional terms; as a socially situated practice; as reflected in the structure of novels; as an event that happens for and before publics. In drawing on linguistic anthropology, I have argued that sexualities, as patterns of sexual meaning, can be conceived as indexical logics that connect an utterance in a discursive here and now to other bits of presupposable information to anticipatorily open “lines of force” for possible future action.² Taking cues from the practical forms of social life (as opposed to explicitly normative or juridical principles), I have moreover argued that some sexualities only achieve salience for interaction in the interstices between an utterance, its social uptake, and the generation of further utterances—as though they hid in the folds of the fuzzy logic of practice. These identities are immanent in the structures of conversations, but they are only questionably “enacted.”

This dissertation has shown that some novels adopt experimental practices that draw attention to the implicit social processes playing out in language use—and to the implications of this implicitness. Each chapter has asked what becomes thinkable if we cease to conceive narratives as logical sequences of cause and effect and read character as the effect of a potentially defeasible framework of discursive interaction, structured around indexical presuppositions and entailments. One way I have answered this question is by reconstructing a bit of how various publics have picked up on the indeterminacy of contextualization (the “more or less” of social indexicality) to articulate new parameters of selfhood, including new affects. For some publics, the very difference between genre, e.g., narrative vs. non-narrative, constitutes a distinction that is at least as important as (or possibly inextricable from) terms like homo- and heterosexual.

¹ Stadler, *Allan Stein*, 162.

² Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 22.

Rather than use this space to lay out the consequences of this project for the field of literary studies and queer studies (something I tried to accomplish preemptively in the introduction), I want to suggest some ways that the dissertation's lessons on language and sexuality allow us to notice how some sexualities are embedded in our contemporary literary world. As Gayle Rubin observed in her 1984 essay, "Thinking Sex," thought about sex might mean learning to observe a society's patterns of sexual behaviors and responses to those behaviors. It can likewise mean learning to inhabit certain affects and avoiding others, such as moral panic.³ With this in mind, I turn to the writing of Matthew Stadler, whose novelistic production in the 1990s tended to focus on questions of love between adult men and male youths. Stadler's choice to write about sexualities structured around age, often in the first person, seems calculated to confront readers with the impossibilities of thought for our culture.

To be sure, when I teach Rubin's essay, students are generally excited about the political orientation of her call for a sociology of sexuality, yet most are uncomfortable with her allusions to some adults' erotic attraction to youth and her empathy for men whose lives have been destroyed by moral crusades against the boogeyman of pedophilia. Admittedly, Rubin does not always contextualize these remarks, so taking students' concerns seriously often involves gathering together insights from several other places. For instance, it involves observing how the term "pedophilia" can conflate several things that might be thought of as distinct: a psychiatric disorder defined in terms of sexual urges towards and fantasies about prepubescent children, attractions that focus on pubescent and postpubescent minors, and a person's acting on any of these impulses.⁴ It further involves asking students to consider how desire, as a space of fantasy, can involve some creative adjustments when acted out in practice, so that sexualities focused on youth may be enacted by people who are in fact similar in age—or by people born years apart but who are adults nonetheless. Finally, thinking about men's love of boys means coming to terms with the sexuality of young people themselves. But these caveats would only go part way to prepare a reader for Stadler's *Allan Stein* (1999), whose adult protagonist, a high school teacher, is obsessed with two boys: Gertrude Stein's late nephew Allan Stein and a living fifteen year-old named Stéphane. The added difficulty presented by this coincidence of desires involves the sense that there is something anachronistic about the narrator's attraction to youths insofar as it centers a relational habit that is unintelligible from either point of view of past or present social forms of sexuality. Preliminarily, one could say that Stadler's literary production represents a contemporary uptake of what Heather Love has described as the early twentieth century's "backward modernisms"—practices and affective orientations marked by sex and gender deviance that do not conform to contemporary ideas about progressive sexual politics (often because they reflect investments in aesthetic practices and social arrangements that were seen as ethically and politically retrograde even by the standards of their own time.)⁵ I will go on to describe Stadler's engagement with earlier sexual forms in terms of his narrator's suspension between the intelligibility of contemporary gay

³ Rubin makes the affective boundaries of thought on sex most clear in her discussions of the "domino theory of sexual peril" and her claim that twentieth century U.S. culture lack a concept of benign sexual variation, i.e., all sexual differences are stark, life-altering, and likely to be incompatible. See Rubin, "Thinking Sex," 14-16.

⁴ There is also the possibility of one's being distressed by one's own impulses or those impulses' excluding the desire to be acted upon. Recall that among Sedgwick's axes of implicit sexual variation is the understanding that "many people have their richest mental/emotional involvement with sexual acts that they don't do, or even don't want to do." Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 25.

⁵ For an outline of Love's backward modernist corpus, see especially, Love, *Feeling Backward*, 4-9.

identities and the kinds of male pederasty once common in the U.S. and France earlier in the century, and I will pause periodically on the way to this understanding to highlight how some of the dissertation's conceptual tools help bring the narrator's alignment with this difficulty position into focus.

The circumstances of the narrator's involvement with Allan and Stéphane are convoluted (we discover rather late in the novel that the narrator's name is Matthew). After being falsely accused of molesting a boy student, Matthew is placed on paid leave; during this time the student in question approaches him, and the two become sexually involved. To gain some distance on this sticky situation, the narrator concocts a harebrained plan with his friend Herbert, a curator at an art museum. Herbert has been researching the possibility that Allan Stein, whose portrait was painted by Pablo Picasso, was also the model for Picasso's *Boy Leading a Horse*. He wants to know whether any sketches survive from Allan's sitting for Picasso, and whether these can be linked to studies for the other painting. The narrator will travel to Paris to pursue the research in Herbert's place while Herbert takes a much-needed vacation. Stéphane Dupaigne is the son of the Dutch-French family who hosts our narrator during his undercover research trip—a family with a rather interesting structure. We might observe at the outset, then, that this plot places the narrator's and Stéphane's involvement within an intertextual array of cultural objects and a public that allows that array to cohere. It also locates these with respect to several kinds of sexuality and kinship practices.

Specifically, Matthew's sexuality only becomes distinct and thinkable with respect to certain experimental principles of writing and image-making that inflect narrative subjectivity. The plausibility of the plot hinges on its characters' attitude toward identity: Herbert and Matthew understand that as a practical reality, people's identities are effects of an ongoing regularity of conduct sedimented from recurrent types of situations, and this allows people to inhabit those identities by deploying knowledge appropriate to interacting with others in those situations. Whenever our narrator, acting as Herbert, meets someone new in Paris, he must quickly discern the contexts in which Herbert and this someone have crossed paths and signal awareness that this context exists without wading so far into it that the conversation too quickly exhausts the narrator's capacity to respond. (Here Herbert's widely published fondness for the work of an artist name Jeffries becomes an Achilles' heel for Matthew.) Along the way, he learns that these interactional choreographies have to respect certain boundaries—limits that are often obscure and only made explicit after Matthew strays close to one. For instance, trying to get ahold of a copy of Stein's *The Making of Americans* for his research (a rare commodity in France), Matthew-as-Herbert indicates to a book dealer that he will accept an abridged edition. He quickly realizes he has made an error; people expect Herbert to be uncompromising—even unpleasantly demanding—when it comes to his work. In this respect *Allan Stein* conveys some lessons that seem drawn directly from Stein, Musil, and Barnes. Like Stein and Musil's novels, Stadler's adopts the aesthetic category of character in a way that entails theoretical insights about the restricted and contingent ways in which people's social properties belong to them. Recalling Barnes's analysis of disqualification, the precarious position of Stadler's narrator in Paris underscores that properties are not easily translated across contexts in the form of indexical presuppositions. Different situations call for specific weightings, or calibrations, of qualitatively distinct knowledges, so that "being someone" means not only displaying the requisite knowledge, but also linking it with the most pertinent variables while excluding certain other variables. It is not only the case that the novel's structure presumes a certain interpretation of the concept of identity; many of the characters speak and act

in ways that presuppose an alignment between the specific consistencies of their social identities and aesthetic practices. When the narrator finally gets his hands on a copy of *Americans*, he is surprised to find a writing that is difficult but nonetheless familiar: “The writing was strangely familiar, like an internal voice that had been overheard, an awkward, private voice” (98). We might imagine here that Stadler’s narrator identifies with the hermetic publicness of Stein’s writing, which I previously linked to the way the authorial voice constructs indeterminate accounts of social interactions as a way of addressing a public that is likely not to be reached in the foreseeable future.

In citing from Stein’s work, *Allan Stein* not only places itself in an intertextual relationship, but also implicitly invokes a public around this intertextuality. Because the narrator comes to Gertrude Stein and Allan Stein through Herbert, the juxtaposition of his pursuit of Allan and his pursuit of Stéphane centers the question of Matthew’s relationship to the category of gay men. Herbert is gay, a fact implicitly communicated in the license he takes in singling out and poking fun at the rich gay industrialists whose charity supports his museum. That is, like many of the other characters we’ve met throughout this study, Matthew’s sexuality manifests as an indeterminate and supple footing toward another social position. So if Matthew takes a special pleasure in reading what Herbert reads, to what extent does that entail his gayness, too? This question lies at the crux of some of the novel’s most experimental intervals. One of these appears in the epigraph above. It concerns a conversation between Matthew and another man, Denis, in which gayness becomes a point of orientation for both men to articulate some other aspects of their sexualities. In an earlier exchange, while Matthew is talking with Herbert, he similarly launches into a reverie about how the conversation invokes his past and presages some things to come in his interactions with Stéphane. Reflecting on his talks with Herbert, Matthew remarks,

All the time the boy was *here*, hidden by a thought, behind a thin distraction, the noise of a conversation, in that gap between words when silence extends one beat too long.

I enjoy the noise of a good conversation, particularly with Herbert, who has opinions and a stylish way of talking, so that even when he is silent my mind is occupied by him.

The passage continues a little further on:

Adrift in my chameleon instabilities—I could become as easily a society matron as a loud sports guy in the next second, should the right acquaintance walk through the door—I never knew from which blurry edge the next bright color would bleed; Herbert was a swath of singular hue (the dusty pink of Travertine marble in the languid heat of Rome, late summer, late afternoon, for example, so antiquated and pleasing was his effect on me), a familiar resting place that imbued me with a clear, if slightly outdated, identity. (16-17)

The dissertation’s previous chapters have prepared us to notice several things about this passage. First, the narrator talks about conversations as possessing aesthetic dimensions, including formal properties that give them genre—time and place, color, metricality e.g., the relative significance of vocalization and silence. One also catches sight of the “chameleon sensibility” that allows certain people to blend into different conversational habitats. The implication seems to be that though the narrator understands himself to be different from Herbert (in terms of time), interactions with Herbert nonetheless allow him to inhabit himself approximately through the indexical excesses, the noise, of their conversation. One might think here of Eliot’s description of Barnes’s

Nightwood as producing a kind of noise, but we might also think about this passage in relationship to Musil's *Möglichkeit* and Stein's discussion of the "flavor group," whose behavior seems to mash together pieces of many other socially intelligible forms in a way that suggests a different kind of situation, a different genre of discourse. Matthew's growing obsession with Allan Stein is like this, too; it presupposes the kind of aesthetic pleasure that someone like Herbert can take in Stein's impenetrable prose, but it uses it differently. Matthew's curiosity about art and the lives of its makers has become too embodied for it to be an emblem of gay identity.

Possibility, Singularity, Disqualification has sought to teach that when we seek to determine a desire's content, we often miss the indexical structures that make that content salient—available to be entailed for people in interactions with others. Our narrator's connoisseurship of certain kinds of conversation and their effects on him frames his attraction to Stéphane. That said, various ideas about the eroticism of youth crop up in *Allan Stein*. The novel represents more than one way of being engaged with sexuality and the way youth figures in sexuality. It also represents more than one language ideology underpinning the channels of semiosis through which people signal (or respond to others' signals about) sexuality. Consider what happens when the Dupaignes inquire into Herbert's (Matthew's) interest in Allan Stein, who would presumably hold less interest for an art historian than other members of the prestigious Stein family. Miriam and Serge Dupaigne, Stéphane's parents, are hosting dinner. In addition to Matthew, there is Per, Serge's childhood companion who lives close by and is practically a part of the family. Matthew hesitates to answer Serge's question about his interest in Allan, so Miriam chimes in. "All boys are important," she says; then she continues while Matthew sits in astonished admiration:

"This is one of the features of the Picasso Herbert speaks of, the most erotic and moving aspect of it—that it is a boy. He has a tremendous power because he is nothing yet, no one, and so he has the power in him to be a god, like all children do, you see? If Picasso had painted a man leading the horse, just imagine it. This man would be someone, some man who will never be a god at all, just a man, without the limitless power this boy has." Oh God bless her. A mother knows so much most men will never know. It didn't matter if Allan was or wasn't important, he was a boy, and that was sufficient. Per and Serge looked at each other and laughed, not maliciously, not really *at* what Miriam had said but around it, with it; their laughter was easy and meaningless, the way children hold hands. This pair intrigued me, and so did Miriam, who drifted in and out of their orbit. (82)

There is a lot going on in this passage. Miriam's response suggests a commitment to the idea that eroticism depends on some symbolic content that distinguishes the object of desire. For her, children in general and boys in particular predictably symbolize an ideal potentiality. Interestingly, her utterance entails something specific for the others present; Serge and Per's affable alignment to it also enables some form of complicity among themselves. Thus the utterance allows the narrator to notice something about the family: whatever sexuality sustains the Dupaignes' kinship structure, it seems true that Miriam is more Stéphane's mother than Serge's wife. And this allows Matthew to inhabit some aspect of his identity in relation to these people.

Certainly Matthew is drawn to Stéphane's teenage disregard for the adult world, but it remains unclear whether he shares Miriam's investment in the power of boyhood, or whether her "knowledge" is another color in relation to which he can inhabit some other aspect of his identity. For instance, Matthew's attributing Miriam's views to her position as mother suggests that the

feelings he has for boys presuppose some gendered structure. While out shopping with Miriam, our narrator gives some further hints that while he doesn't take boys to be female men, the distinction from manhood may require femininity to be effectively entailed: "Not only is the great dick kept right there on center stage with the mom around to admire it, but the boy's disappearance into brutal, ugly manhood is halted by her too. With mom holding on, he stays a boy. Their relationship is sufficient: She loves him, and he loves her loving him. I like to get involved in this sort of thing, loving him with her, or loving her for loving him or loving him as her, or, most pleasing of all, loving him and having her love me *and* him" (177). Moments like this allow one to say, then, that while Matthew shares Miriam's affective investments in boyhood as a sign for a potential (one they compare to the privation of manhood), he experiences this investment in a completely different way. These meanings requires some practical social maneuvering on his part; for a symbolic logic to cohere, he has to "get involved" in certain relations.

Sometimes Matthew's footing with respect to the Dupaignes seems unsure. In such moments, he senses that the situations he is in contain potentialities that might exceed both what he is capable of managing as Herbert and what his own desires entail. Shortly after the narrator's arrival in Paris, the Dupaignes throw a party for him. One of the guests is Denis, the gay man Matthew will later befriend and who runs a local gallery. The fact that men like Denis move through the Dupaignes' social circle seems to be one of the reasons Herbert's museum has called on them to host him. Denis apparently knows this, and shortly after his arrival, he and Matthew-as-Herbert have established a "faggish complicity" (126). At one moment, shortly after this, the narrator worries that maybe there is some social boundary he was not aware of that divides these men from the family—one that runs between them, Miriam, and Stéphane. How far can a male friend of the family's go in showing avuncular pride in Stéphane before it is perceived as something different and less welcome? At one point, Denis makes a provocative gesture:

"Very much the man now," Denis said, running his hand along the boy's back, praise and hand accepted. Miriam smiled. That is, she didn't smile; she was supposed to smile, as a token of her amusement, her good feelings about Herbert, Denis, and the evening, but she didn't and already the evening was going wrong. First, Denis had ambushed me with his ambiguous confidences, and now I'd looked to Miriam for her scripted smile and in its place was an empty vacancy, like a whitewashed billboard or a plate." (127)

Matthew can seem monomaniacally self-centered in his concern that everyone follow a certain social script, but the passages I've already visited prepare us to consider what informs his anxiety at this moment. Drawing on some of the language we've acquired from Bourdieu and Warner, we could say that at the Dupaignes', Matthew's limited discursive habitus—the maps he has for navigating social situations as Herbert—is a constant problem. Moreover, we know that there is a still more constrained set of contexts where Matthew's habitus overlaps with Herbert's and where he can progress through an interaction with ease while remaining himself. In this respect, Matthew's remark is less about Miriam's failure to conform to his expectations than a statement of his awareness that his maps have holes in them. Some of these holes have to do with his awareness that he may be called upon to display knowledge that he in fact lacks; these he can largely anticipate and avoid. Other holes open at the points of contradiction between what is possible for Matthew as Herbert and Matthew's own inclinations, and the above passage seems to mark one of these moments. Matthew reflects retrospectively on Miriam's expressionless reaction:

“I read the blank look as something meaningful or menacing, but this was little more than a fantasy triggered by my desire that she smile in the first place, as a gesture for my scene” (128). The scene that Matthew concocts is “his” in that it plots an imaginary course within and around uncertain social boundaries. He needs to be a gay man in order to fit into this scene, but he worries how close he can get to Miriam and Stéphane while maintaining this status.

Drawing on queer theory as well as linguistic anthropology, the dissertation has insisted that many sexualities can only be thought about by paying attention to the shifting overlap between a set of social practices and a set of implicit interpretive frames (what I have on different occasions called people’s practical capacities or indexical competences). This approach enables one to consider sexualities as they float more or less freely of genital acts. Despite the uncertainty of conversations like the one explored above, Matthew’s sexuality is most coherent when he conversationally establishes a certain footing toward Miriam. Compare this to what happens when Matthew has sex with Stéphane. Although their relation achieves the coherence of an act, it is more and different from what Matthew expected. After the two have a fight, they meet in the bathroom where Stéphane penetrates Matthew’s mouth. This is how Matthew describes the event:

It wasn’t the kind of sex I had imagined. If he’d been a weapon, he might have killed me. Obviously there was nothing to say. I don’t think his impulse was violent, but rather the territory of our exchange was lawless and immoderate, unspeakable. Our bodies were dumb, irreversible. We lay there for a long time, folded over on each other, until I felt his erection stir again and move against my leg, and then he got out of the shower and went to his room. I don’t know what connects anyone to anyone. My body felt like an accident, a wrong turn. (219)

We can think about the “lawless territory” of Matthew’s interactions with Stéphane in terms of the difficult work of metapragmatics. In his interactions with the Dupaignes and their friends, disguised as Herbert, Matthew is sometimes able to index certain variables (aesthetic sensibilities, genders, homosexuality, ideological investments in youth) and contingently inhabit them for others in ways that they seem to acknowledge. For instance, sometimes he and Miriam share what seems like a secret complicity in both relishing and making light of Stéphane’s enduring attachments to his boyhood. Alone with Stéphane, he seems not to know whether any of these variables or others are in play, so that specific meanings of gestures are stranded, difficult to contextualize. On the one hand, Matthew doesn’t know whether it is true to call Stéphane’s forceful gestures violent. On the other, he does know that sex with Stéphane doesn’t leave room for speech—not because Stéphane is a sexually inexperienced young man, but because there is no language for reflecting on the meanings of these acts. Clearly Matthew doesn’t feel at home in his skin at such moments, but insofar as both he and Stéphane are willing to renew the exchange, they entail a hope that the two will retrospectively construct at least some nonce framework for their actions, so that their sex might cohere as some pattern that also sustains the relation.

It is useful to compare the possibilities opened by this unsettling scene of sex to another that is disturbing for very different reasons. Matthew’s research on Allan Stein eventually brings him into contact with a circle of artists, art brokers, and art collectors; through this circle, he hopes to gain access to Allan’s widow, who may possess the drawings he wants. One of the widow’s gatekeepers is a wealthy collector named Harry Pym-Gardner. While at a dinner party at Harry’s on the same evening he has sex with Stéphane, Matthew feels bored. The conversation also turns to Jeffries, so he begins to grow nervous. On the pretense of needing to use the bathroom, he sets

out to enjoy some snooping around Harry's large apartment. While Matthew is going through the bedroom, Harry enters, and after exchanging a few words, the host removes both men's clothes and fucks Matthew. The disturbing thing about this encounter is that it blindsides Matthew (and a reader) whereas Harry acts as though he is following up on a flirtation that began when Matthew (Herbert) arrived. It seems as though Matthew may have been sending and receiving signals without being aware of it. Says Harry: "We could barely keep our hands to ourselves, could we?" (229). Moreover, their sex seem so fluidly mechanical, that once it gets going, there doesn't appear to be a way of stopping it: "With his left hand up to muzzle my cock, he reached in the drawer with the right, unleashed a condom, and rolled it on himself in a gesture as practiced and swift as the butler's pour, and then he buggered me for a few riveting minutes" (229). Like sex with Stéphane, sex with Harry is forceful; Matthew is pinned down by Harry's large body, literally riveted to the bed. But Harry apparently calculates his movements, so that the sex does not feel rough. Matthew remarks on this to Harry afterward: "'Thank you,' I said, rather pathetically, when Harry was finished. 'I mean that was very nice, Harry, very well done.'" (229). Being so closely juxtaposed, this passage and the one involving Stéphane together establish some conceptual coordinates for thinking about the questions of choice and coercion that come up around the intersection of sexuality, youth, and desires that cannot be easily referred to. There are sexual situations where consent is a problem because there is not yet anything definite to consent to, and there are situations where consent is a problem because the mechanical formalities of flirtation and sex (what we might think of as an effect of their cultural enregisterment) overdetermine its meanings for one or more of the people involved.

Earlier in the novel, our narrator gives us a way to think about how enregistered forms of sexuality claim a cultural and public horizon. The remarks I refer to occur on the same evening as Matthew's conversation with Denis—a conversation in which the two apparently achieve an understanding that the world they share is a sexual one but doesn't center on gay identity—but they appear before this conversation. When Denis promises to take Matthew (Herbert) out to some gay bars, Matthew launches on an internal rant:

I don't know why conservative, drunk ex-husbands in tract houses watching TV news exposés are so easily convinced the gay demimonde is sex-saturated and glamorous. In fact it is just as tacky and crass as the worst G.I. Shenanigans bar in the most sexless highway strip mall of the most forlorn suburban development where *they* go, and if the terrific gains of gay liberation continue apace we'll soon be joining these straight potbellied swingles on the margins of those twelve-lane highways that seem to go on forever and ever into a false dusk of sodium-vapor lights and revolving billboards, that permanent orange glow of America's well-armed nighttime, with its televised cops coursing across their grid of streets blurring the videotaped faces of prostitutes and kids who get stuck out there with straight men wanting dates, all of them clueless about love except for their conviction that it's magical and someone else has it. Gay men have got exactly the same bars, except ours are in enviable high-rent districts of the city, where you can actually see the guy who pulls a gun on you rather than being picked off by the high-powered rifle of a night-goggled sniper. As the Enlightenment proceeds, however, to its final and totalizing end, the bright light of sexual liberation will shine out of the cities to reach the town and sprawl, and everything will shift so that perversity will be allowed to thrive in that purgatory too. (153)

Even as Matthew drips with disdain for gay bar culture, he continues to index his implicatedness in it, his dependence on it for his intelligibility to himself. At the same time, the passage frames Matthew's tension with Herbert in a new way. The practical impossibilities that come with inhabiting Herbert's identity are not just inconvenient from the point of view of Matthew's desire to get close to Stéphane; they also circumscribe his ability to mean within a certain vision of universal enlightenment. In turn, the passage also foregrounds the irony of phrases like "brutal, ugly manhood," brutality and barbarism being qualities historically attributed to "backward" desires like Matthew's. For Matthew, then, when gay liberation loses its ability to distinguish its cultural capital from that of a dominant culture (the "bright light" of sexual liberation now blending with highway lights), the bankruptcy of modernist ideas of progress becomes especially palpable.

Through passages such as this one, *Allan Stein* aligns the allure of Allan's boyhood with the historical conditions of gay liberation, and the fragments of his unexceptional adulthood with liberation's complicated, often disappointing aftermath—a context in which ideas of formal and cultural equality appear politically dubious. In *Disturbing Attachments: Genet, Modern Pederasty, and Queer History*, Kadjie Amin considers the development of modern queer social movements as implying a repudiation of some sexualities as viable battle lines for political struggle. Amin focuses on pederasty (sexual practices between older and younger men typically mediated by unequal economic and status relations) as a form that for many, especially in France, was as important to the idea of liberation as the viability of same-sex bonds generally before it was "made retrograde."⁶ And yet, Amin argues, vestiges of older practices and structures of feeling run through contemporary forms in ways that destabilize our conceptions of a more just, inclusive future. Modern pederasty in particular erodes concepts of equality, political autonomy, and the consistency of sexual identity that grounds the stability of rights-bearing personhood. On this Amin writes, "Modern pederasty names a genealogical overlap between the seemingly incompatible notions of pederasty as a nonreciprocal act of sexual subordination that does not confer a sexual identity and homosexuality as a sexual identity capable of cementing a long-term reciprocal relationship. It becomes all but illegible once pederasty—in the repressed form of pedophilia—is cast out of the definitional orbit of homosexuality altogether."⁷ This "seeming incompatibility" bears strikingly on passages from *Allan Stein* like the previous one, in which the narrator operates at the outer edges of homosexual definition without being able to positively affirm a commitment to some other set of cultural coordinates. One recurrent index of Matthew's peculiar investment in pederasty's structures of feeling is his receptive role in sex with young men, including Stéphane.⁸ Whereas one might be inclined to understand this detail as a way for Stadler to anticipate and soften a reader's possible disgust with the idea of an older man's domination and sexual use of a young man, it acquires additional significance with respect to the retrospective, historical longing Matthew develops for Allan. In taking the sexual position conventionally accorded the younger partner in pederasty, Matthew may enact a formative tie to a structure of sexual meaning that gay culture has rendered impossibly retrograde.

⁶ Amin, *Disturbing Attachments*, 24.

⁷ Amin, 41.

⁸ Pederasty enters the novel as a salient cultural practice through Matthew's conversations with Denis. Here we learn that there might be other men who share Matthew's orientation to youth. Amin allows us to understand that the distinction Denis establishes between Matthew's practices and African practices involving men and boys is also a distinction between emerging and older forms of pederasty in Europe. Cf. Amin's remarks on *caïdisme* and the racial dimensions of pederasty as an aspect of its being made retrograde. Amin, 49-50

Ultimately, *Possibility, Singularity, Disqualification* is about what it means to be a member of a post-liberation public and to look back at an earlier moment of cultural production while knowing that one can neither own nor entirely disown what one reads there. This is a large part of what it means to inhabit an identity that may be regularly presupposed but not entirely entailed. Indeed, I have argued that anyone who takes seriously one's own longing to know past sexual worlds will want critical tools to consider the kinds of implicit distinctions that existed and that may continue to operate through the contestations of the present. Linguistic anthropology's frame of language-in-use has been a crucial ally because it doesn't allow us to sit comfortably with our nostalgia for very long. It treats uncertainty as a living thing that happens in time when the present incorporates pieces of the past that stand poised on its outer edges.

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