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Impossible Map: Queer Orientations in Contemporary Literature

By

Mary Deane Wilson

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

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Professor Lyn Hejinian, Chair
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Abstract

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This project reconsiders literary engagements with space through a queer theoretical lens. How, I ask, do writers challenge the social and generic constraints that propel narratives along familiar routes? What is the role of desire in narratives that re-route or queer the quotidian, urban, or social navigations they set in motion? The texts I examine (by Samuel Delany, Renee Gladman, Thomas Pynchon, and Kazuo Ishiguro) unfold in worlds upended by material and social crises. Their geographies change, their landmarks vanish, and their subjects are confronted by energies greater than their own. These agential spaces often obscure the "human" story that James Wood, among others, takes as the proper subject of fiction. In the process, they invite us to develop new modes of reading that dissociate desire from the "human" subject and find it instead in the frictions and movements the text constructs.

Each of the texts in my archive constructs what I call an impossible map: a setting whose boundaries, distances, and proximities cannot be articulated by any static representation. The impossible map is neither *improbable*, given that it resembles the real but for its changeability, nor *unknowable*, given that it is, in most cases, relentlessly articulated. The material world we encounter is not a thing but a *process*, a gathering of intensities and affects that partake in the feelings we associate with getting our bearings but never allow us to "get" them. I refer to this process as orientation. One of the wagers of this project is that reading for orientation allows us to encounter subjects that are, like the worlds they traverse, given to a certain waywardness. Another is that getting lost might have its own politics and pleasures. The texts I study engage in more local and embodied efforts than those we might associate with Jameson's challenge for the postmodern novel, namely, to produce an "aesthetic of cognitive mapping" capacious enough to account for the complex dimensions of multinational capital. These texts commit themselves to spaces and intervals where Jameson's "positioning" is indistinguishable from the more indeterminate effects of movement and change. They struggle to map even the shortest trajectories, and they seek—with an abundance of affects that include something like pleasure—new traction in the experience of getting lost.

The texts I examine allow me to develop a reading process that accounts for literature's agential spaces and wayward desires. Each of my chapters centers around a different form of momentary orientation, understood as an instance of directionality that does not cohere into a stable map. *Chapter 1* considers how cruising is activated by the figure of the *periplum* that informs Samuel

Delany's peripatetic defense of New York's gay cruising scene in *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (1999). *Chapter 2* tracks how Thomas Pynchon's 9/11 novel *Bleeding Edge* (2013) animates a tension between "loss" and "getting lost" that forsakes the cognitive map and troubles the myriad affective, political, and spatial connotations those terms have come to designate. My third and fourth chapters explore two texts that resist the "the end" that Peter Brooks and Frank Kermode, respectively, identify with narrative and apocalyptic desire. *Chapter 3* zooms in on the figure of "turning" in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* (1995), where discrete acts of turning around frustrate the decisive "turning point" the crisis-weary city longs for. *Chapter 4* carries this line of argument into the more speculative terrain of Renee Gladman's Ravicka novels (2010-2017), a series of four cross-genre texts that investigate a fictional city in crisis. Taking its cue from the narrator of Gladman's second book, I argue that Gladman transforms the "circumstantial" and thus inadmissible evidence of crisis into a narrative method that privileges the accidental, wayward, and circuitous orientations that texture subjects' encounters with social and urban space.

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INTRODUCTION:

THE IMPOSSIBLE MAP

Early in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*, the protagonist arrives at a hotel, gets on the elevator, and strikes up a conversation with the porter who is carrying his bags. "You know, you really ought to put those down," he says, referring to the two bags that the porter continues to hold throughout their ascent.[1] The porter then launches into a long discourse on the origin of his habit of bag-holding, and their conversation continues uninterrupted for the surprising duration of four pages, at which point the protagonist—a pianist named Ryder—realizes there's a third person in the elevator (which they are still on). She joins the conversation, and after a total of six pages Ryder and the presumably sweat-drenched porter finally exit the elevator.

The absurdity of this scene's temporal expansion dawns quickly on the reader. The porter's dialogue proceeds with a level of detail that seems wildly out of place given the circumstances: he is holding two heavy bags, elevator rides are generally brief, and we would not expect him to deliver a long, unhurried account of the porter trade's declining prestige while on board the very machine whose speed has led to that decline. By the second paragraph of his discourse we are already asking: "Why is this elevator ride taking so long?" We grow more puzzled when a third person is discovered in the elevator. At this point we are led to wonder: how large is this elevator? Does it contain corridors, hidden nooks, false walls? Apparently not. "I noticed that the porter was gazing past my shoulder at some spot behind me. Turning, I saw with a start that we were not alone in the elevator. A small young woman in a neat business suit was standing pressed into the corner behind me."[2] The woman was simply *behind* the protagonist, and she appears—as do so many people in this novel—when he turns around.

In narratological terms, we might say that diachronic time and narrative space have been perverted beyond reasonable limits. Or, employing Bakhtin's notion of the novel's double "chronotope," we might conclude that the event of reading—or the time required to do so in the real world—is wildly out of step temporally and spatially with the event being narrated. Yet we can't escape the concomitant sensation that something strange is happening to space-time, that some elongation or distortion has been effected in the building that contains the elevator, in the city that contains the building, and in the nature of the materiality that the novel presupposes. The critical distance required to distinguish story-time from diachronic time, or the chronotope of the represented world from that of reading, does little to dispel our disorientation. Ishiguro's elevator scene circumvents the reader's incredulity (How could Ryder's ride take so long? How could he not have seen her?) by conjuring a state of mild anxiety. If Ryder didn't see the woman, we think, what else has he missed? What else have we—who rely upon Ryder's (*writer's*) gaze as he relies upon the porter's—been prevented from seeing? The fact of anxiety here signals that we have momentarily

accepted the fictive space the novel presents to us through the focalization of the first-person narrator, which in turn forces a credulous acceptance of the narrator's perspectival limitations. The elevator ride becomes the narrative equivalent of a moving box with no windows: we sense time passing, we feel a drop in the pit of our stomach, but we have no external reference point to mark our progress.

In short, the world represented by Ishiguro's novel does not signify as it should. The novel is peripatetic, but its unnamed city is not Teju Cole's New York, Mrs. Dalloway's London, or even Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County, and no map could possibly articulate its boundaries. Rooms change in size and appearance. Long journeys are undertaken to buildings that turn out to be minutes away from where the journey began. We come to accept disorientation as a consistent feature of the narrative. We are affected. Yet the affects that attend our disorientation do not always remain within the expected domains of anxiety, frustration, or fear. At times the novel's anxious progress brightens into moments of unexpected comfort, as an exhausted Ryder "realizes" he has only a short walk to reach his bed, or "turns" to discover a full breakfast buffet on the back of a city bus. Disorientation, which for Maurice Merleau-Ponty marked "the living experience of vertigo and nausea," is transformed into an occasional blessing, while the "horror" we feel at the awareness of our contingency is lessened by sheer repetition.[3]

The Unconsoled situates the reader within what I call an impossible map: a setting whose boundaries and distances cannot be articulated by any static representation. The impossible map is neither *improbable*, given that it resembles the real but for its changeability, nor *unknowable*, given that it is, in most cases, relentlessly articulated. It is part of the text we are reading. It is a line, a figure, a barrier we confront at every turn, and its only reliable feature is that it will not be reliable. There are many texts that are impossible *to* map (Beckett's *The Unnamable* comes to mind). The impossible map is distinct from these, as it appears when a text insists on its spatiality while purposefully breaking the boundaries it creates. This excessive emphasis on spatiality leaves the reader and critic in an interesting double bind where space is at once a central fact of the text and the element that is most resistant to factuality. The material world we map in such a text is not a thing—not a city or building—but a *process*, a gathering of intensities and affects that partake in the feelings we associate with getting our bearings but never allow us to "get" them.

I will refer to this process, broadly, as orientation. Disorientation is admittedly the better name for its result, but I find the former more compelling for its slippery refusal to be definitively verb or noun, process or state. As Sara Ahmed has shown, orientation is always caught between singular and plural, between orientation toward and orientation among, so that it functions as a desire that can never be firmly localized. Orientation *toward* may imply an intention that partakes in the movement of desire towards a singular object; orientation *among* may imply the more stationary efforts of subjects who situate themselves within multiple points on a grid of social or geographic space. The person who tries to "get" oriented is presumably starting from a state of disorientation, and there is no guarantee that they will transcend that state. Texts that construct impossible maps require us to make that effort. They are difficult, and the difficulties we face go beyond the interpretive efforts of reading, as they pull us into strange intimacies with the fictional protagonists who, like us, must struggle to get their bearings.

At times these texts hold out the promise that their efforts might succeed and then retract it. The result is a curious mix of pleasure and pain. Take, for example, K.'s journey to the eponymous castle in Kafka's unfinished novel, on which *The Unconsoled* is loosely modeled:

> The castle up above, now curiously dark, the place that K. had hoped to reach today, was retreating into the distance again. As if suggesting that this was only a temporary farewell, however, a bell rang there with a lively, cheerful note, although the sound was painful too, and made his heart quail momentarily as if threatened with getting what it vaguely desired. But soon the clang of this great bell died away, to be succeeded by the faint, monotonous sound of a smaller bell, perhaps also up at the castle or perhaps in the village.[4]

The unaccountable difficulties K. experiences when trying to reach the castle make it seem almost plausible that the castle, rather than K., is actually "retreating." Yet the pain K. feels at the sound of the castle bell is caused not by the retreat of the castle but by the promise (or "threat") of a desire fulfilled, and this pain only dissipates when K.'s desire is rendered diffuse by the appearance of a second smaller bell whose precise location is unknown. Where before there were two points on the map—K. and the castle he wishes to reach—the smaller bell introduces a third, roving point that attenuates the chain of desire and prepares K. for his return to the village, a site in which failure and comfort are now confusedly mixed.

This passage illustrates two points that the following chapters will expand upon. The first is that questions of spatial orientation are not easily excluded from questions of desire. K's "painful" realization that the castle may be in reach underscores how orientation gets caught up in the drama of desire, whether we figure that drama as a movement of desire towards its object or the discovery of other, consolatory objects along the way. The second is that disorientation is not always a source of displeasure. While the experience of being lost, diverted, or cut off from end points and the means to reach them is often attended by fear or frustration, it may also give rise to other responses: the pleasures of tarrying, the novelty of the unexpected, or the relief that follows the cessation of effort. In some cases, it may even give rise to a perverse desire for disorientation itself.

Among the pleasurable disorientations this project will tarry on are moments when the loss of one's bearings becomes a condition to seek out or linger in, a condition that opens onto strange affinities, generative passivities, or unlikely forms of political resistance. In Renee Gladman's *Event Factory,* the protagonist experiences being turned around as a queer call to intimacy that effectively softens the city around her: "The city was a maze. I wanted to rub my face in it."[5] In Thomas Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge*, characters flock to an online game-world that provides the coveted experience of "getting constructively lost"; some go even further, pursuing an "abyss" in a digitized world, "a horizon between coded and codeless" that banishes the romance of the derivé and the utopian dream of a virtual commons to the scrap heap of 20th century ambitions.[6] And in Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*, moments of passive transit, following, or diverging offer brief respites from the protagonist's impossibly harrying schedule, whose absurdities dramatize the time-crunch particular to a post-Fordist or late capitalist economy.

We might say that the negative valences that attend disorientation in the wake of the postmodern era have begun to make room for more complex entanglements of desire, affect, and directionality. While my project does not aim to articulate a post-postmodern history of disorientation, the texts I study—which date back to the eve of the twenty-first century—do engage in more local and embodied efforts than those we might associate with Fredric Jameson's challenge for the postmodern novel, namely, to produce an "aesthetic of cognitive mapping" capacious enough to account for the complex dimensions of multinational capital.

For Jameson, the cognitive map proposes an equivalence between the ability to imagine one's position within urban or geographic space and the ability to locate oneself within the broader structures that condition social and economic life, both of which capacities are rendered elusive under the conditions of late capitalism. Orientation within the cognitive map is at once spatial and ideological, a precursor to agency. Jameson tasks literature with staging attempts at orientation that might restore agency to subjects who have lost it. Whereas he saw this project as a necessary step in the effort to reestablish "our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act" in times of social confusion, the texts I study commit themselves to spaces and intervals where "positioning" is indistinguishable from the more indeterminate effects of movement and change.[7] They struggle to map even the shortest trajectory, and seek—with an abundance of affects that include something like pleasure—new traction in the experience of getting lost.

What would such traction look like, and what does it aim to produce? To return to Ishiguro's elevator scene, one has only to recall Jameson's damning account of the elevator in the hotel Bonaventure, which in his view reifies and replaces "the narrative stroll," to see how fully Ishiguro harnesses and then reworks the nostalgia for this quintessentially narrative form of movement. The porter who holds Ryder's bags and converses at a leisurely pace inserts the nostalgic temporality of the "stroll" into a space that can no longer make space for it, as if to affirm Jameson's assertion that the "mutation in the object" has yet to be accompanied "by any equivalent mutation in the subject."[8] Yet the narrative itself mutates to accommodate the subject's failure to adapt; indeed, the entire novel may be read as an experiment in accommodating the outdated, contradictory, and self-defeating desires that persist under late capitalism, while demanding that we tarry with their uncomfortable an unassimilable remnants.

To wit, the porter's desire for the missing "narrative stroll" may also be read as an instance of what Lauren Berlant calls cruel optimism; by holding the bags for the duration of an elevator rider, he clings to an outdated ethos of pride in a profession that no longer confers pride as a reward for physical strength.[9] The narrative humors this fantasy. It seeks to replicate the plodding temporality of an absent architecture (a flight of stairs) yet succeeds only in confirming its absence. The result, importantly, is not an attempt at cognitive mapping but a more local interruption of space by desire—an impossible map. It demands that we inhabit our confusion, not to dispel it, but to see what new forms of relation we might generate in its midst.

This project follows an intuition that the affective demands placed upon the realist character are increasingly being *dis*placed onto the worlds that narrative constructs around them, and that spatial orientation offers a rich site of engagement with the affects and desires that exceed the privileged interiority of the fictional subject. In this sense, my project is in somewhat oblique conversation with recent scholarship that seeks to decenter notions of character in its consideration of literary effects. Some of these studies turn away from the human to consider the force that objects exert. Jane Bennett's conception of vital materialism, for instance, posits a "distributive agency" based on the premise that objects have their own "liveliness," and that "the notion of agency is always a human-nonhuman working group."[10]

Others turn to theories of affect in order to locate emotions and intensities that cannot properly be attributed to character or to the identifications that may occur between character and reader. Sianne Ngai, for example, considers *tone* as a site of "objectified emotion, or unfelt but perceived feeling" that hovers somewhere between text and reader.[11] Tone, writes Ngai, captures those aspects of "a cultural object's affective bearing, orientation, or 'set toward' the world" that are

"never entirely reducible to a reader's emotional response to a text or reducible to the text's internal representations of feeling (though it can amplify and be amplified by both)."[12]

Rachel Greenwald Smith takes the effort to decenter character a step further in her case against what she calls the "affective hypothesis," "or the belief that literature is at its most meaningful when it represents and transmits the emotional specificity of lived experience."[13] Smith suggests that the popularity of the affective hypothesis has risen in tandem with the establishment of neoliberalism as the dominant political culture in the United States. She makes a compelling analogy between, on the one hand, a political structure that casts emotion as another privatized resource to be owned and managed, and, on the other, a valuation of literature that "imagines the act of reading as an opportunity for emotional investment and return."[14] Her readings seek a counterpoint to this uncomfortable alliance by foregrounding the "impersonal feelings" that circulate throughout literary texts. These impersonal feelings, she contends, depart from the "market model" of private ownership and challenge aesthetic and political notions of subjectivity by emphasizing how affective connections can be unpredictable, even ungovernable.

Smith's boldest intervention emerges in her consideration of agency as yet another feeling that neoliberalism harnesses in its production of individuals as "entrepreneurial actors in a competitive system" (2). Smith takes up the assumption that underpins Jameson's theory of cognitive mapping, namely, that orientation acts as a precursor to agency insofar as "the incapacity to map socially is as crippling to political experience as the analogous incapacity to map spatially is for urban experience."[15] This misses, Smith argues, how neoliberalism traffics in the production and exploitation of agency by encouraging subjects to locate themselves by means of various social and economic orientation devices. Of the cognitive map, she writes:

> This model of how literature works both politically and affectively… comes under stress in the context of neoliberalism, where subjects are encouraged to act as rational agents in all spheres of life. There are disorienting aspects of neoliberalism, to be sure, but neoliberal subjects are also constantly provided with forms of location, transparency, and information, and are expected to use the agency these experiences offer in order to make smart entrepreneurial decisions. Neoliberalism therefore entails the cultivation of subjects who can locate themselves effectively within certain situations, who can take stock of the rules and operating functions of a given system, and who can productively claim agency in relation to that system.[16]

While the "given system" Smith names here is not identical with the ideological map that Jameson had in mind, she nevertheless raises an important challenge to the understanding of how orientation, as an index of agency, "works both politically and affectively."[17]

Under these conditions, she writes, "works of art that make readers feel as if they are in a position of agency in relation to the textual systems they produce look less like opportunities for the cultivation of political action and more like reverberations of neoliberalism's tendency to mobilize feelings in order to cultivate a particular sense of the self as a free, rational agent." We must therefore recognize a tension, she concludes, "between the need for forms of mapping to penetrate the obscurities of global capitalism and the possibility that some forms of mapping merely reproduce feelings that reinforce neoliberal norms and expectations."[18]

Perhaps one of the pleasures of being disoriented is, as I have suggested, the pleasure of being relieved of the burden to locate oneself and act rationally in accordance with these expectations. While my project shares these scholars' apprehension that character has commanded too broad a scope in considerations of literature's effects, it departs from them in its turn to orientation as a way to sound out literary effects that transpire in the space between character and world. In short, orientation does not abandon character.[19] It does, however, grant an agency to what might be called "setting" that allows us to consider desire as an externalized feature of the text. Orientation and desire might be understood as collaborative extensions. Desire may propose an orientation that space destabilizes, as when a protagonist encounters a wall that blocks them from the point they wish to reach. Yet orientation can also propose its own structures of desire, which may or may not be held or professed by the characters who populate the texts in question. They may plot a course for characters to follow, resist, or intervene in, but they need not begin with a desiring character as their starting point.

In this sense, while my archive's departures from and within postmodern and neoliberal tropes of spatial relation animate the chapters that follow, my primary argument is more formal than historical. The impossible map does not seek to name a new genre, and it does not describe in blanket terms the texts (by Samuel Delany, Pynchon, Ishiguro, and Gladman) discussed in the following chapters. Instead, it functions as an invitation to consider questions about reading, spatiality, temporality and desire in contemporary texts that bend the material worlds they inhabit, while yet remaining marginal to traditional genres—such as science fiction and magical realism—that center practices of world-building, often in the service of legible allegories.

Reading for orientation, as I'll describe it, requires that we bracket the stability of what Jameson calls "positioning." We turn instead toward more processual forms of directedness: to the threads of desire that subsist in, arise from, and get derailed by the spatial encounters that organize narrative. Reading for orientation does not mean gaining it, nor does it entail the discovery of some "hidden" map that might alleviate our confusion. It might be a kind of surface reading, in Stephen Best's and Sharon Marcus's terms, in that it allows surfaces (of the wall, of the screen, of the road) to take on new affective force. Yet it also performs acts of following that stick *close* to protagonists in order to track—as if from an ant's eye view—the movements they make in their fictional worlds. My hope is that these acts of following will offer a corrective to what Eve Sedgwick calls "the occupational tendency to under-attend to the rich dimension of space" while avoiding the occupational peril, which Sedgwick also identifies, of converting spatial descriptors of "beneath and beyond… into implicit narratives of, respectively, origin and telos."[20]

What emerges in the texts I study is a form of disorientation that is not a refusal of the endpoint of meaning but its suspension, one that opens the text to fleeting affects that hover between spatial uncertainty (the feeling of being lost) and temporal readjustment (the feeling of loss). Such disorientation may seek to get its bearings, but when it does so, it is liable to turn to unstable landmarks, lost objects, or sites that are desired but not yet present. It may be subject to the utopian projections of hope or fall prey to the crueler optimism of self-deception, but in either case it dovetails with the qualities of excess and malleability that characterize desire. It shares desire's capacity to map a trajectory of aims, intentions, or end points, but it also shares the opportunism of a desire that, as Berlant reminds us, often "takes what it can get."[21] Its mantra is, per K.,"if not the castle, then the village."

I propose, in sum, that orientation is one of the ways that narratives sound out the overlap between space, time, and desire—both the desires we bring to a moment or place and the desires that emerge there. Orientation, I suggest, is a felt dimension of the body that names a resonance between the desiring body and the material geographies, objects, or routes it encounters in time.
It may name little more than a moment in a text when finding our bearings becomes a primary effort of reading, or when forms of directedness take on the intensity and malleability of desire.

Like Sarah Ahmed, I come to the question of orientation from an interest in sexual orientation, and I find in Ahmed's assertion that sexuality is "lived as oriented" a compelling starting point for this work.[22] Yet my project remains open to structures of desire other than the sexual, including more local and contingent desires that might cause subjects to find themselves directed, misdirected, or caught in the sort of impasse that Berlant describes as "a space of time lived without a narrative genre" (199). How, I ask, does desire organize itself when the object of its attachment is not only cruelly denied but wholly absent, or permanently out of reach? How do texts map desires for which no map can exist?

One of the risks of thinking spatial orientation together with desire is that it may require some "inventive" (as Brian Massumi has it) engagements with the critical literature that circles around these terms.[23] Orientation—understood as the quality of being directed towards, within, or among something—is a facet of literature that has long been subsumed by concepts that include it but cannot explain it. Most prominent among these is the category of space, which was brought to the forefront of literary studies by writers associated with the spatial turn, yet few of these theorists directly address the role of orientation in their treatments of social, urban, and literary space. These theorists include Michel de Certeau (who barely mentions it), Henry Lefebvre (who states its importance but fails to theorize it), and Jameson, who, as we've seen, laments its disappearance but stops short of considering how disorientation might be a pleasurable or generative experience.

There are good reasons for this neglect, not least among them the reason that orientation is a slippery thing. What I have named as "the quality of being directed towards, within, or among something" seems already to split off in different directions, as each branch threatens to accrue associations that take us further from our stating point. Orientation is already *intention* (towards), *location* (within), and *sociality* (among). If we dwell on the first (intention) we see the category of time creep in by way of "expectation." In other words, orientation is not always, or not only, about space. Time also enters into the intentional structures that posit a person or object as close, distant, or within reach. Yet if this is a definitional dilemma, it is arguably not so different from the one that perplexed literary theorists, who have often found that categories of time are not so easily sidelined in considerations of literary space.

Frank Kermode's study of apocalyptic thinking, *The Sense of an Ending* (1967), which holds that crisis provides the specter of a collective end in order to relieve the indeterminacy of life "in the middest," helped establish how projected temporal endpoints work to orient social desire along temporal axes of certainty.[24] Kermode proposes apocalyptic thinking as a recurrent template divorced from historical particularity. The lament over end times, he notes, has been sounded throughout history in response to all manner of social upheavals, and its recurrence seems to underscore our persistent need for "fictive concords with origins and ends" that might give life meaning.[25]

A number of scholars have put out calls to rethink the bewitching narrative of crisis that Kermode's work uncovers. These include Donna Haraway's injunction to "stay with the trouble" in times of ongoing environmental crisis, and to embrace the "thickened present" in ways that resist the comforting narratives of apocalyptic or salvational end points.[26] Haraway's intervention asks, in other words, that we accept the discomforts and entanglements of life "in the middest," that we eschew the apocalyptic narrative that Kermode identifies, and with it the impulse to see crisis as a turning point that will resolve for good or for ill.

In *Postmodernism* (1991), Jameson famously suggested that the obsession with time and duration that dominated the period of high modernism had given way, in the postmodern era, to a psychic life dominated by categories of space. The features that attended this spatial hegemony—the proliferation of surfaces, the auto-referentiality of culture, and the increasing elusiveness of a "cognitive map"—are now well known, and so often rehearsed that Jameson himself came to bemoan the alluring dualism of his original distinction. Little more than a decade later, Jameson seemed almost to have tired of space, at least the kind distinct from "time." In "The End of Temporality," he notes that "statistics on the volume of books on space are as alarming as the birthrate of your hereditary enemy," and goes on to regret that, despite Kant's assertion of the mutual imbrication of space and time, "it is not so easy to be moderate or sensible in the force field of modernism, where Time and Space are at war in a Homeric combat" and "each one, as Hegel said about something else, desires the death of the other."[27]

Jameson's defensive posture may be understood as a response to the flood of agreement and dissent his arguments occasioned. Following his declarations (first published in a 1984 article in the *New Left Review*), the combat between space and time spread to the field of postmodernism as well, and numerous critics responded to his pronouncement by arguing for the centrality of lived and historical time to the postmodern novel. Among them, Linda Hutcheon's account of "historiographic metafiction" made a case for the postmodern novel's continued sounding of alternative histories, and Ursula K. Heise's work in *Chronoschisms* (1997) turned to the more discrete modes of temporality that became fractured and condensed by technological advancements. Heise too emphasizes the mutual imbrication of the categories that Jameson saw in Hegelian contest. "It is doubtful," she writes, "that a fundamental reconceptualization of space could occur without corresponding changes in the notion of time, since time and space are not really so much conceptual opposites as complementary parameters of experience."[28]

Orientation does not resolve this contest, but it might find its way to some less embattled outposts. Critical approaches to space as a feature of narrative must inevitably acknowledge that literature is a temporal medium. While they often do so grudgingly, the processual nature of orientation welcomes this admission, as it offers a way to think how space unfolds and arranges itself around the subjects who encounter it. My pairing of orientation and desire further ratifies this acknowledgement of temporality by insisting that the spaces of literature may be present as intention before they are presented—or represented—as setting. By the same token, certain spatial orientations may be felt in the stretches of time they anticipate. Michel de Certeau's distinction in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980) between space and place, where the former is a stable relation of elements and the latter is lived and "written" by those who inhabit it—is useful for thinking how these orientations are felt.[29] Time is a system (like distance), but a place is full of stuff. Nothing moves as the crow flies except the proverbial crow, and anticipation may be raised by a bend in the road, just as anxiety may be lulled into boredom by a highway in Ohio. While there are benefits to teasing apart the elements

of time, expectation, and distance that conspire to produce these affective geographies, it is ultimately the fact that they *do* conspire that renders them affective.

My hope is that attending to orientation as a *feeling* for space might extend the insights of the spatial turn and its accompanying field of everyday life theory (de Certeau, Lefevre) into a time when, as Berlant observes, "everyday life theory no longer describes how most people live."[30] In this respect, orientation's vexing tendency to slide between location and direction, or state and process, becomes a generative ambiguity. The "here" of location always gives way, for better or for worse, to a desired "there," and narrative is a place where these extensions are continually staged as intentions that unfold into journeys, trajectories, and plots. One of my wagers is that reading orientation as a process inflected with desire will activate the constructions of space in literature beyond their status as mere representation and mobilize the dead matter of "setting" beyond its position as background.

My chapters touch upon several theories of desire that have informed literary, queer, and psychoanalytic discourse. They refuse to treat any of these theories as authoritative, however, for the simple reason that theories of desire often imply their own distinct narrative structures. It matters whether desire is formulated as a Lacanian "lack" that supersedes its object, or a Hegelian "journey" that assumes other objects will appear along the way. In two chapters, I engage the matter of desire's narrative by engaging with Peter Brooks' *Reading for the Plot* (1984), which traces a "narrative of desire" in 19th century literature that corresponds to the Freudian movement from the pleasure principle to the death instinct. Brooks demonstrates that in its exemplary form (in the novels of Balzac and Zola), the narrative of desire unfolds when the desire that sparks the narrative—typically felt by the male protagonist—grows and then diminishes as it moves towards "an end which is the consummation (as well as the consumption) of its sense-making." This leads Brooks to posit narrative desire as the "desire for the end."[31]

Brooks' argument, informed by Kermode's study of apocalyptic thinking, has its problems. But what interests me is how well it works, how well Freud's narrative of the pleasure principle and death drive map onto the Victorian novels Brooks studies. As Dorothy Hale notes, Brooks' stated intention is not to offer a theory of narrative but rather to demonstrate that "Freud's masterplot" is itself a narrative theory. But she concedes that the reader may be forgiven for concluding otherwise: "The sheer intellectual surprise and excitement of Brooks's execution of this superimposition, may convince the reader that Brooks has in fact mounted a powerful theory of narrative, despite his philosophical opposition to such authoritative discourse."[32]

I think that Brooks' imaginative powers have less to do with our misreading than Hale implies. Freud is himself an excellent narrator, and even setting aside the richness of Brooks' readings, we (and he) cannot help but see that Freud's masterplot makes itself readily available to a theory of narrative, just as narrative—the realist tradition in particular—makes itself available to Freud's "plot" of desire. While it is fascinating to parse the means and ends of the successful realist plot, however, such a reading can only culminate in a masterful articulation of how characterological desire, to echo Smith, offers a "return" on the reader's investments in the form of meaning.[33] If we accept that orientation collaborates with the directions and trajectories that desire assumes, instead, "Freud's Masterplot" begins to look less like a brilliant act of superimposition and more like an imposition, one whose assumptions of mastery demanded tactical acts of resistance from texts and readings that stray from the course.

My pairing of orientation and desire owes a debt to Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology,* in part because Ahmed evinces a certain wariness about articulating desire—whether queer,

heteronormative, or unmarked—as a stable teleological feature that guides a fictional protagonist in a particular way. Ahmed's capacious and generative account of how spaces act upon and are shaped by the subjects who inhabit them builds upon the insights of phenomenology, queer theory, critical race theory, and theories of affect to demonstrate how "orientations are organized rather than casual, how they shape what becomes socially as well as bodily given."[34] Ahmed begins by taking "sexual orientation" as an occasion to pose a deceptively simple question: "what difference does it make who or what we are oriented toward in the very direction of our desire?" The direction in which desire tends, she argues, creates "desire lines" that queer subjects may experience as a feeling of being "out of line," divergent, disoriented. Moments of disorientation—including the ordinary turns and rearrangements that texture daily life—can thus stage "vital" openings for a queer politics to organize things differently.

While Ahmed proposes disorientation as a "queer" moment that might occasion "vitality as well as giddiness," her work is also concerned with the perilous antithesis of this "might":

> Moments of disorientation are vital. They are bodily experiences that throw the world up, or throw the body from its ground. Disorientation as a bodily feeling can be unsettling, and it can shatter one's sense of confidence in the ground or one's belief that the ground on which we reside can support the actions that make a life feel livable. Such a feeling of shattering, or of being shattered, might persist and become a crisis. Or the feeling itself might pass as the ground returns or as we return to the ground. The body might be reoriented if the hand that reaches out finds something to steady an action. Or the hand might reach out and find nothing, and might grasp instead the indeterminacy of air. The body in losing its support might then be lost, undone, thrown.[35]

Ahmed's chiasmatic prose and repeated "mights" trace narratives of spatial encounter that, while compelling, invite speculation as to whether she *might* be talking about something else. She usually is, and that is the point. Her critics and admirers alike note that it is difficult to extract her conclusions without sliding into flattened terrains of tautology and metaphor, forms that her prose occasionally indulges as a starting point for her phenomenological account of queerness.

Still, I find an immense permission in Ahmed's articulation of desire as something far more plural in its movements than the vast architecture of psychoanalytic, philosophical, and literary accounts of desire would have us believe. By "plural" I do not mean polymorphous or diverse in its objects, but in its *narratives*. What Ahmed's work reveals is how desires (and some desires more than others) may be directed but also divergent, distractible, and open to the manifold adjustments that desiring bodies must make in their encounters with the world. Her spatialization of desire both nods to and radically disrupts a long tradition of spatial metaphors that chart a path and direction for desire's movements, from the popular-mythic (Cupid's arrow) to the psychoanalytic (Havelock Ellis's concept of "inversion"), attending instead to the forms of dwelling that different desires and bodies occasion.

In many cases, her disruption simply consists of adding one last "might" to the narratives of desire available. Her reading of Radcliffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, for example, moves one more beat beyond the toll of repression to ask what lesbianism "might" bring into view:

> Although the novel seems to point to the burden of being inverted, perverted or simply led astray, it also shows how the "negated" life stills gets us somewhere, through the very turn towards others who are also seen as outside the contours of a good life.
>
> You might search for others who share your points of deviation, or you might simply arrive in spaces (clubs, bars, houses, streets, rooms) where welcome shadows fall and linger, indicating that others too have arrived… It is the very social and existential experience of loneliness that compels the lesbian body to extend into other kinds of space, where there are others who return one's desire.[36]

Within the bounds of Brooks' Freudian masterplot, it would be impossible for Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* to show, as Ahmed contends it does, "how the 'negated' life stills gets us somewhere… (clubs, bars, houses, streets, rooms)" since that "somewhere" could only be the negation of the desires it sets in motion. That is, Brooks's model of a novel that is oriented towards its end cannot be oriented toward anything else, unless it be a means to that end. If we read narrative desire only as a desire for the end, how then do we acknowledge the value of texts that are, to paraphrase Lauren Berlant, "inarticulate" in relation to their own desire? How do we read disorientation in the novel as anything other than a means to the end of orientation, or an act of staggering from the tangles of the impasse onto the open paths of agency?

The texts in my archive propose desires that are inarticulate in some degree, either because they are unarticulated by the protagonists that "have" them or because the worlds they inhabit fail to offer the routes, objects, or sites of attachment that might give their desires direction.[37] Each of my chapters centers around a different form of momentary orientation, understood as an instance of directionality that does not cohere into a stable map.

Chapter 1 begins with *cruising*, the process of seeking sexual partners in a public space. Samuel Delany's defense of cruising in *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* is indispensable for thinking how desire in general, and queer sexual desire in particular, alternately activates and relies upon the urban geographies that act as its field of play. Writing in the final years of the Times Square redevelopment project, Delany draws upon the work of Jane Jacobs to suggest that the area's porn theaters offer a utopian form of "contact" that, unlike the more capitalist sociality of "networking," forges connections across the boundaries of race, class, and profession.[38] His numerous anecdotes of sexual contact in these theaters act as supplements to the soon-to-be demolished landmarks, events that memorialize in writing what will soon be absent from urban space. And yet, I argue, these moments of contact do not want to be mapped: their transitory status is crucial to Delany's argument for their political force. Anticipating moments of vanishing space in my other primary texts, this chapter locates a productive tension between Delany's lament for the vanishing contact site and his celebration of the vanishing "contact," or person.

I develop the implications of this claim by considering Delany's "periplum" of Times Square alongside Ulrich Beck's conception of the "risk society." I argue that Delany's anecdotes of cruising negotiate between the two societies that Beck says we are poised between, one in which anecdotal knowledge was sufficient to calculate risk, and one where the rise of "risk experts" displaces its explanatory force. They also place his own argument at risk to forces it cannot accommodate. The anecdote thus marks Delany's negotiation between nostalgia—rooted in a longing for continuance—and the celebratory brevity of a moment of "contact" that anticipates its own end. As they circulate around the vanishing sites of the old Times Square, Delany's anecdotes of queer sex mobilize the

narrative brevity that Foucault once associated with social interdictions against homosexuality in service of fleeting orientations: moments of directedness that allow us to glimpse the utopian impulses that may persist, if only in flashes, after the loss of the spaces Delany describes.[39]

I then move from Delany's fleeting orientations to consider what transpires in their absence. In other words, I ask what it means to "get lost," particularly in a world where technological advances make finding and being found a relatively easy prospect. As mapping and surveillance technologies continue to saturate the spatial, communicative, and economic procedures of daily life, the traditional travelers' confession ("I'm lost") is more likely to be uttered by a person who cannot "follow" the thread of information they are given, or by the technological neophyte who despairs of navigating a digital terrain, than by the proud male driver of popular myth. Yet just as the anxious condition of lostness saturates the experience of daily life, the desire to "get lost" in space begins to seem like an object of nostalgia whose political purchase (as trumpeted in the situationist practice of derivé and Walter Benjamin's concept of flânerie) is attenuated by its increasing distance from conditions of life in what Manuel Castells has termed the "network society."[40] What benefits—beyond the pleasure of nostalgia—might motivate the desire to get lost in the increasingly mappable space of contemporary life? And how does narrative respond to a world where "getting lost" is at once an object of desire and a structural impossibility?

Chapter 2 considers these questions by examining the several dimensions of lostness at work in Thomas Pynchon's 9/11 novel *Bleeding Edge* (2013). For Pynchon, the attacks of 9/11 are less a historical crisis point than an event that indexes a crisis already underway, as the rise of the surveillance state and the strategic erasure of countercultural sites (including those that Delany documents) drive emergent counterpublics to seek to "lose" themselves in the non-space of the online network. I argue that Pynchon's novel animates a tension between "loss" and "getting lost" that seeks to expand upon and trouble the myriad affective, political, and spatial connotations those terms have come to designate. I track how the novel absorbs the "loss" of the towers into a longer catalogue of material disappearances that blur the symbols and objects of national mourning with the unmourned sites of queer, countercultural, and otherwise preterite gathering that the city has erased. I then consider how the novel depicts the desire to lose oneself, informatically but also ontologically, in the digital spaces of an online utopia called DeepArcher.

I propose that the novel's narrations of "movement" in a graphics-based space stage virtual (in the Deleuzian sense of "potential") modes of resistance that are co-opted by power but nevertheless instructive, as they register the emergence of a utopian impulse alongside its simultaneous, historical failure. Critics are often content to see the novel's portrayal of co-opted resistance as a continuation of Pynchon's longer historical project, which documents the failures of American countercultures alongside their persistent utopian impulses. I elaborate these claims by suggesting that the particular failure Pynchon envisions in *Bleeding Edge* is brought about by a naïve spatial imaginary that resembles and therefore unsettles the spatial positions (surface and depth, reader and text, mapped and unmapped) that his previous work has relied upon. I therefore argue that Pynchon's articulations of orientation in digital space signal a turn away from the postmodern project of cognitive mapping toward a less agential relation to the social.

My third and fourth chapters explore two texts that resist the "desire for the end" that Brooks and Kermode identify with narrative desire. *Chapter 3* zooms in on the figure and action of "turning" in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*, a novel that invents a European city afflicted by an unspecified crisis. I propose that the act of turning around (which Ryder performs incessantly)

introduces a spatial and temporal recursivity into the novel, one that deliberately works against the expectation that Ryder's actions will lead to the expected "turning point" in the crises he encounters. On the level of plot, Ryder's turns towards people or objects behind him produce digressions that quite literally delay the completion of a task or the unfolding of a narrative trajectory. Yet these discrete acts of turning are also placed in a discursive contest with the often-mentioned "turning point" of crisis that the narrative envisions. By attending to the spatial orientations (behind, ahead, close, or distant) that animate this process of the turn, reading for orientation reveals how spatial dynamics might participate in upending the anxious and alluring "desire for the end" that captivates the novel's characters.

It also allows us to propose a new slant to Ishiguro's representation of crisis. Critics tend to read this novel's dizzying play with time and space as a reflection on the "harriedness" of life in a post-Fordist, globalized Europe. Compassion fatigue, the time crunch, and the blurring of boundaries between personal and professional life are frequently offered as paradigms to account for Ryder's obscure and conflicting desires.[41] While such readings capture the structure of feeling at work in the novel, their tendency to identify Ryder as the source or owner of the desires and discomforts that animate this text reduces its spatial oddities to a form of psychological mimesis, and consequently misses the larger, formal disruptions that this space effectuates. By shifting our attention from Ryder as a desiring subject and attending instead to the forms of directedness that circulate and lose their way in Ishiguro's text, we can see both how the narrative of crisis might be troubled and how crisis might be reconceived as trouble.

Chapter 4 carries this line of argument into the more speculative terrain of Renee Gladman's Ravicka novels (2010-2017), a series of four cross-genre texts that investigate a fictional city in crisis. Taking its cue from the narrator of Gladman's second book, my chapter considers how Gladman transforms the "circumstantial" and thus inadmissible evidence of crisis into a narrative method that privileges the accidental, wayward, and arbitrary orientations that texture subjects' encounters with social and urban space. I likewise contend that the figure of circularity embedded within this notion of "circumstance" names a spatial as well as narrative procedure, one that circles back to particulars, persons, and seemingly insignificant details to expose and refuse structures that situate crisis within the causal frame of beginnings and ends.

Gladman's texts announce themselves as "novels." Yet her writing, which builds upon the experimental sensibilities of New Narrative writing and Language poetry, pushes the limits of the narrative genre by insisting on the *line*, rather than the paragraph, chapter, or scene, as the compositional unit that takes primacy for the narrative text. My chapter considers how a tension between linearity (at the micro-level) and the larger circularity that structures the texts and the series as a whole performs a calculated disruption of narrative. Put differently, Gladman's work dwells in particulars but refuses to move beyond them. Deviation becomes inseparable from movement, and going astray is not a failure but a method of tracing new and lines of connection that work against teleological narratives of consummation. Her texts, I argue, allow us to consider circumlocution as a form that might challenge the instrumentalized discourse of state power, which, as Naomi Klein has shown, leverages the rhetoric and event of crisis to effect material erasures in social and economic life.

Impossible Maps touches throughout on themes of crisis, which is registered in moments of spatial disorientation that alternately dramatize and exacerbate the disorientation of desire. The assumption that crisis provokes disorientation, or that disorientation registers on a spatial level the

felt upheavals of crisis, is easy to make. My archive certainly speaks to the resonance between crisis and the distortions of the impossible map. Yet reading for orientation also makes visible the turns, re-routings, and momentary directions that subvert the temptation to resolve crises by coalescing them into visions of "solid ground."

My project tarries on real historical crises. Delany's autobiographical essay eulogizes cruising in porn theaters at time of overlap between two crises: the ongoing AIDs epidemic and the Times Square redevelopment project, which will consign these theaters to the scrap heap in the name of public morality and urban renewal. Pynchon sets the attacks of September 11th in the middle of his narrative, yet he stages the destruction of the World Trade Center not as a point of a crisis but as an event that will give shape to the ongoing consolidations of neoliberalism. Perhaps more provocatively, Renee Gladman's *Event Factory* (2010) and Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* (1995) treat "crisis" as a social refrain—of gentrification, of neoliberalism—whose anxieties are never resolved by any semblance of a narrative climax.

Indeed, the centrality of crisis in my archive suggests a compatibility, if not a causal relation, between the impossible map and the instabilities and adjustments that constant crisis provokes. The crises in these texts may be real or imagined. What they share is a propensity to be ongoing, and in these states of ongoing crisis it is doubtful that disorientation will give way to its opposite, or that the impossible map will resolve into the surety that, as Ahmed has it, "the ground on which we reside can support the actions that make a life feel livable."[41]

Ultimately, however, my readings are less interested in treating the impossible map as a totality that *means* crisis (on par with the cognitive map) than in tracking the smaller movements, turns, and adjustments that index subjects' negotiations with their changeable worlds. As I have indicated, these texts seem rather happy to linger in and even deepen the disorientation that accompanies their crises. Rather than move toward (and move us toward) resolution in the form of some return to stability, they allow us to think how momentary orientations might—in their brief conjurings of "to" and "from," or "beside" and "among," reveal contours of the micro-narratives that make crisis itself, along with its unstable ground, a livable terrain.

NOTES

[1] Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1995), 5.
[2] Ishiguro, 9.
[3] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Routledge, 2013), 265.
[4] Franz Kafka, *The Castle*, trans. Anthea Bell (OUP Oxford, 2009), 17–18.
[5] Renee Gladman, *Event Factory* (Dorothy a publishing project, 2010), 51.
[6] Thomas Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge: A Novel* (Penguin, 2013), 76, 357.
[7] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Duke University Press, 1991), 53.
[8] Jameson, 38.
[9] According to Berlant, "the affective structure of an optimistic attachment involves a sustaining inclination to return to the scene of fantasy that enables you to expect that this time, nearness to this thing will help you or a world to become different in just the right way. But, again, optimism is cruel when the object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility actually makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which a person or a people risks striving; and, doubly, it is cruel insofar as the very pleasures of being inside a relation have become sustaining regardless of the content of the relation, such that a person or a world finds itself bound to a situation of profound threat that is, at the same time, profoundly confirming." Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Duke University Press, 2011), 2.
[10] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke University Press, 2010), ix, xvii.
[11] Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 28.
[12] Ngai, 29–30.
[13] Rachel Greenwald Smith, *Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1.
[14] Smith, 2.
[15] Jameson, qtd. in Smith, 77.
[16] Smith, 78.
[17] Jameson describes the cognitive map as "something like a spatial analogue of Althusser's' great formulation of ideology itself, as "the Imaginary representation of the subject's relationship to his or her Real conditions of existence." Fredric Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (University of Illinois Press, 1988), 353.
[18] Smith, *Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism*, 79.
[19] Consider how the westward movement of the line in Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* indexes the twinned forces of manifest destiny and enlightenment reason, or the elevator's vertical ascent in Colson Whitehead's *The Intuitionist* sets racial uplift and capitalist advancement in contest over the same stretch of track. We might note, too, how Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* extends a more temporal desire—the desire for the end that Frank Kermode identifies as a feature of apocalyptic thinking—by the length of one last, posthumous highway.
[20] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2003), 9, 8.
[21] Lauren Berlant, "Love," in *Critical Terms for the Study of Gender*, ed. Catharine R. Stimpson and Gilbert Herdt (University of Chicago Press, 2014), 253.

[22] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006), 1.
[23] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Duke University Press, 2002), 16.
[24] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction with a New Epilogue* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 17.
[25] Kermode, 7.
[26] Kermode, 7.
[27] Fredric Jameson, "The End of Temporality," *Critical Inquiry* 29, no. 4 (2003): 695, 697–98, https://doi.org/10.1086/377726.
[28] Ursula K. Heise, *Chronoschisms: Time, Narrative, and Postmodernism* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.
[29] de Certeau describes place (lieu) as "the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence." Space, on the other hand, "exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities. On this view, in relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualization, transformed into a term dependent upon many different conventions, situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts." Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press, 1984), 117.
[30] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 8.
[31] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Harvard University Press, 1992), 52.
[32] Dorothy J. Hale, *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900-2000* (John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 276.
[33] Smith, *Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism*, 2.
[34] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 158.
[35] Ahmed, 157.
[36] Ahmed, 105.
[37] Delany's *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* may be an exception here, though I would argue that his essay gains its force from the ways in which it anticipates the loss of the sites it describes.
[38] Samuel R. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (NYU Press, 1999), 147–49.
[39] Michel Foucault, "Sexual Choice, Sexual Act," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, vol. 1, The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984 (New Press, 1997), 159–50.
[40] Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 2nd ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).
[41] See Bruce Robbins, "Very Busy Just Now: Globalization and Harriedness in Ishiguro's 'The Unconsoled,'" *Comparative Literature* 53, no. 4 (2001): 426–41; and Katherine Stanton, *Cosmopolitan Fictions: Ethics, Politics, and Global Change in the Works of Kazuo Ishiguro, Michael Ondaatje, Jamaica Kincaid, and J. M. Coetzee* (Routledge, 2013), 17–23.
[41] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 157.

CHAPTER 1

CRUISING IN CRISIS:

SAMUEL DELANY'S *TIMES SQUARE RED, TIMES SQUARE BLUE*

Among the queer, anarchic, urban nomads of Bellona, the fictional city where Samuel Delany's *Dhalgren* (1974) is set, there is a character named Mrs. Richards who is afraid to leave her apartment. *Dhalgren* is classed as a work of science fiction, but there is nothing particularly otherworldly in Mrs. Richard's account of her fears:

> "But do you know how terrible it is to live inside here—" she gestured at the green walls—"with everything slipping away? And you can hear everything that goes on in the other rooms, in the other apartments? I wake up at night, and walk by the window, and I can see lights sometimes, moving in the smoke. And when the smoke isn't so heavy, it's even worse, because then the lights look like horrible things, crawling around . . . This has got to stop, you know! Management must be having all sorts of difficulty while we're going through this crisis. I understand that. I make allowances. But it's not as though a bomb had fallen, or anything. If a bomb had fallen, we'd be dead. This is something perfectly natural. And we have to make do, don't we, until the situation is rectified?... The guards will be back. They will get rid of all these terrible people who run around vandalizing in the halls. We have to be patient, and be strong. Of course I'm afraid, I'm afraid if I sit still more than five minutes I'll start to scream. But you can't give in to it, any more than you can give in to them."[1]

There is little here to distinguish Mrs. Richards from the stereotypical white, middle-class homemaker whose fear of the urban metropolis would send her rushing to join the caravans to the suburbs that were, in the decade this novel was written, the common lament of urban developers. She is, in short, a caricature of the white flight generation. And in case we missed it, the novel has thrown a healthy dose of "white fright" (Jane Daily's shorthand for the fears of black sexuality that undergird the history of white supremacy) into her family saga.[2]

What sets her apart from this caricature, however, is that Mrs. Richards is determined to stay. What has ruined the city, she reasons, is not "a bomb" but something "perfectly natural," and it is only natural that the group of individuals she calls "management" should step in and make things right. "Management" will return and eject the squatters on the floor below, whose audible fights disturb "the peace of mind" she needs to make a home. "Management" will restore the electricity they have lived without for months. "Management" will not, we assume, resolve the inexplicable problems that afflict the city outside, which include an expanding sun, two moons, smoke that "indicates fire, but conceals its source," and a state of mostly cordial but occasionally violent anarchy. But in her fantasy, they will enforce the now permeable boundary between her home and what lies outside it.[3]

Sometimes a certain relish creeps into passages of literature—it might be a word or a tic of speech—and through it we recognize that an author is truly horrified by the character they have created. I believe that this is one of those times, that Samuel Delany is horrified by Mrs. Richards. Her repetitive invocation of the word "management" recalls the discomfort provoked every time Uriah Heep, the fawning and duplicitous secretary in Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, says that he is "humble." It reveals an obsession with a broken structure that is broken anew each time the word is repeated, and it tips us over the edge of a chasm of violence, self-deception, and psychic pain whose depths we would rather not plumb. It is obvious to everyone that "management" has long since fled the chaos of Bellona. They are not coming back to fix the broken windows or to seal the gaping elevator shaft, and they will not mind (despite Mrs. Richards' protestations to the contrary) if she siphons electricity from a working socket in the hallway. Yet Mrs. Richards is unable to function without a placeholder for those abstract forces of authority and order— "management," "the guards," or the nebulous "they"—that might be appealed to in times of chaos. Her entire psychic life is bounded by the middle-class values that have also imprisoned it. The values that task her with producing a tranquil home and a network of carefully selected friends to decorate it cannot admit anything that would undermine that enterprise. In order to have a home, she cannot leave it. The result is that neither we nor Mrs. Richards can separate her fear of the city's real and imagined risks from her unwillingness to admit the city into her map of the real.

Dhalgren's narrator, Kid, offers an analysis of Mrs. Richards that's both short and to the point. He reflects that "trying to stay sane under that sort of madness drives us nuts."[4] Yet the novel does not stop at such an easy dismissal. Kid's assessment returns in modified form when he compares the terror provoked by Bellona's giant sun to his previous, Cold War terror of "the bomb." As the sun triples in size, he reflects that "when what terrifies is neither noisy, nor moves quickly, and lasts hours, then we become very different."[5]

Dhalgren's temporality of crisis reminds us that there is a difference between "different" and "nuts." The "sort of madness" *Dhalgren* explores is not loud or sudden; it is prolonged state of crisis that above all taxes people's capacity to assess and rationalize risk. Under these conditions, the collective process of becoming "different" takes differ routes, as the response to perpetual crisis traverses the spectrum between a pathological magnification of risk (Mrs. Richards) and a wholesale rejection of its power (Kid).

What is troubling about Mrs. Richard's madness—if it is madness—is the reason that lurks beneath it. The "madness" that terrifies Mrs. Richards is not the bomb but "these terrible people who run around vandalizing in the halls," people whose very presence undermines the selectivity of her beloved Labry Apartments and the image of the good life it projects. And what is terrifying to

Delany in the character of Mrs. Richards, I would hazard, is not her madness but her determination to weaponize "what terrifies" her in order to maintain, under the banner of safety, the capitalist values of competition, individualism, and class-bound social networks that define her sense of home. "'I want a home," she says "that looks like my home, feels like my home, is a place where my family can be safe, where my friends—psychologists, engineers, ordinary people . . . poets—can feel comfortable. Do you see?'"[6]

Delany's hunch is that the marriage of fear and security that Mrs. Richards represents carries a destructive potential that extends beyond the domestic space where it may or may not originate. If the city of Bellona—with its queers, its orgies, its roving gangs, and above all its erotic celebration of George, a black man who purportedly raped a white girl named June—seems calculated to terrify the Richardses of the world, it also proposes a mythology in which terror rather than chaos strikes the first blow to the social order. As George tells it, June wanted him, and still wants him. She will eventually succeed in her attempts to find him, and when she does, "the sky gonna go dark and the lightning gonna go roll over the night... just like last time."[7] But this dramatized vision of apocalypse, he explains, will be brought on only by the strength of its own filmic (and distinctly "Birth of a Nation"-like) imaginary: "When we get together again, we just gonna be doing our thing. You all is the ones who gonna be so frightened the city gonna start to fall down around your head."[8] It is Mrs. Richards' fears, in other words, rather than Goerge's violence, that will bring the sky down.

Delany is of course not alone in his diagnosis of the racial and sexual panics that unite in the psychology of "white fright."[9] What is interesting about his fictional and non-fictional forays into this pathology is how he repeatedly returns to the affective and material geographies that have inscribed that panic in the urban landscape, and yet continually offers that landscape as a place where they might be shaken loose. In *Dhalgren*, this means constructing a city where disorientation—produced in part by the city's literal capacity for movement and agency—is at once a terrifying prospect and a site of intense potentiality. Kid's off-hand assessment of Bellona's crisis offers a succinct summary of the many oddities that leave us unmoored in the geographic, temporal, and affective space of the novel. "The whole city," he reflects, "shifts, turns, rearranges itself. All the time. And rearranges us…"[10] This is a frightening prospect. Yet the novel also proposes these rearrangements as an antidote to the romance of safety that subtends Mrs. Richards' refusal to be "rearranged" by the city around her.

Bellona is a city of apparitions and displacements that flicker restlessly among the allegorical and generic conventions that propose to stabilize them. Delany doesn't just want to redraw the map; he wants to undo it. The novel's speculative bid to grant agency to the city is coupled with a rearrangement of those institutions where agency is usually exerted and constrained. The affects that normally attach to particular spaces—the home, the church, the "dens" of gangs—are hollowed out to make room for others. The home, traditionally a site of stability and comfort, is the stultifying domain of Mrs. Richards; the church counterintuitively distributes naked pin-ups of George, a local celebrity and sexual icon who, when a second moon appears in the sky, is granted the honor of having it named after him. And the gang members, known as "scorpions," forge alternative structures of relation that provide a welcome and permissive contrast to the Richards' petrified model of family. Yet Mrs. Richards' fear of moving—that it might produce "a space, a gap" where some "filth" would get in—is realized in perverse form when her son falls down the empty elevator shaft beside the working one. In death, his body becomes the "filth" that Kid must step in to retrieve it.[11] In short, the novel stops short of effecting a comfortable dismissal of Mrs. Richards' nightmare

vision of the social. It wants to hold open the possibility that getting disoriented in any urban landscape is truly a risky endeavor.

Such rearrangements obviate the utopian projections that might resolve Bellona's decidedly un-homelike landscape into a comfortable object of longing. They also decline to establish a spatial, ideological, or "cognitive" map that might, as in Jameson's formulation, allow us to "begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion."[12] Like many of the novels addressed in the following chapters, *Dhalgren* works instead to magnify and linger in the "spatial and social confusion" it provokes. However, the novel's apparent delight in disorientation is not indicative of a mere contentment to languish in a postmodern moment where, as Jameson laments, our position in the "world space of multinational capital" becomes increasingly difficult to represent.[13] If the distinction is not too hairsplitting to be admitted, *Dhalgren*'s strangeness is not about the incapacity to *represent* anything. It is about how we enter into the inevitably partial representations we have already created, and about how we calculate the risks and rewards of such entry. And risk, as the novel makes plain, does not admit a separation between the representation and its original. It deals in apparitions and partial logics, in affect and anecdote.

Anecdote is also one of the ways we tell of the city. Thus when Mrs. Richards confesses to Kid that she can't even let herself "assess how dangerous the whole thing really is," his only appeal to rationality is to offer the statistically inadequate sample size of himself: "Of course it's dangerous. But I go out. I live outside in it; I walk around in it. Nothing happens to me."[14] In response she alludes to the gash on his head, evidence of a recent fight with some scorpions. "Besides," she adds, "you are a man. You are a young man. I am a middle-aged woman."

Times Square Red, Times Square Blue

This is the discourse of risk that troubles Samuel Delany's *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*. Delany's twin essays posit desire as a force that might reorient us within the contours of public and private life and the pleasures that each is thought to afford. They also invite us to think about how spatial configurations at once construct the bodies that move within them and reify, by means of habit, the relations that transpire there. We might think that Delany's description of cruising in Times Square's porn theaters could help to account for the ethos of radical openness that persists in the social and sexual landscape of Bellona's decay. Yet in a reversal of the usual hermeneutic gesture, I propose that the textures of Bellona's crisis help us to understand what is at stake in the discourse of safety and risk that subtends Delany's defense of cruising and the euphemistically "seedy" neighborhood that enabled it. I likewise propose that the above exchange between Kid and Mrs. Richards indexes the shifting and often inajudicable calculations of risk that, as Delany's essays intuit, circulate in the drive to arrange the city in ways that reinscribe racial and class-based divisions.

Times Square Red, Times Square Blue is at once a forward-looking treatise on urban sociality and a monument to the end of the era that corresponds—depending on which lens we use—with the triumph of neoliberalism, the turn to what Ulrich Beck has called the "risk society," or the period of urban renewal that José Esteban Muñoz jokingly refers to as "late Disneyfication."[15] Its twin essays recount how the panic surrounding the AIDS crisis, the fear of crime, and the specter of street harassment were cynically leveraged to weed out the porn theaters that had made Times Square a resource for gay cruisers and replace them with a corporate haven for tourists. In the first

essay, "Times Square Blue" (1996), Delany weaves his own anecdotes of cruising in the area's porn theaters from the mid-seventies until their closure into a street-level tour of the neighborhood as it stands at the time of his writing, complete with photographs and scraps of interviews. The second essay, "…Three, Two, One, Contact: Times Square Red" (1998), combines anecdote and essay to make a case for cruising as a model of the "interclass contact" that Delany, following the work of urban theorist Jane Jacobs, sees as an integral part of urban life in a democratic society. Delany insists that under our current mode of capitalism "life is at its most rewarding, productive, and pleasant when large numbers of people understand, appreciate, and seek out interclass contact and communication conducted in a mode of good will."[16] He also contends that cruising—the practice of seeking sexual encounters in public space—stages an ideal form of such "contact."

Delany's thesis essentially inserts "sexual activity" into Jacob's claims for the benefits of merely social "contact," which in her analysis decidedly excludes the sexual. In a passage that might serve as warning to *Dhalgren*'s Mrs. Richards, Jacobs writes:

> Nobody can keep open house in a great city. Nobody wants to. If interesting, useful and significant contacts among the people of cities are confined to acquaintanceships suitable for private life; the city becomes stultified. Cities are full of people with whom… a certain degree of contact is useful or enjoyable; but you do not want them in your hair. And they do not want you in theirs either.[17]

Delany's intervention is to suggest that you might literally, even sensually, "want them in your hair," but only briefly. This addition makes a difference, as it pushes desire beyond the ethos of the private home that, as Jacobs recognizes, offers a poor foundation for public life.

On a thematic level, Delany's text indexes a moment where the questions that animate my project—questions about orientation, desire, and the "impossible maps" that hold us in periods of crisis—intersect in the battle over New York's iconic Times Square. On a formal level, it offers a tour that cannot, or will not, congeal into a stable map of the neighborhood that it recalls or the practice of cruising it envisions. These essays enter the tangles and stoppages of public space in a call to reject what Rem Koolhaas decries as the "serenity of the Generic City," which is achieved by evacuating the public realm to make room for the "smooth space" of economic and informatic networks.[18] Cruising, for Delany, is a mode of relation that reorients us among the places and pleasures of urban public life. It is an instance of contact without connection that exemplifies how sexual desire might be freed from class-based constructions of social belonging and the spaces that traffic on their legibility. What allows cruising to escape such strictures is not only its promiscuousness and brevity—though these features certainly help—but also the fact that it transpires in public spaces that circumvent the home, as well as the ethos of family, security, and class-bound individualism the home upholds.

Yet cruising also relies upon sites that circumvent the forms of "safety" that the home exemplifies. Thus in order to defend cruising, Delany must also confront the hypocrisy and the allure that comes with extending notions of security derived from the domestic into the domain of public space. Delany contends that the redevelopment of Times Square is not about making the neighborhood "safer for women" or controlling the spread of HIV/AIDS.[19] Nor is it about preventing drug use and prostitution, since these practices will simply move to less frequented and thus more dangerous areas of the city. Rather, it is about the image of safety that the newly

Disneyfied Times Square will promote in the service of tourism and corporate investment, one that comes at the price of pleasures that, throughout his essays, ricochet between sexual pleasure and the weaker yet no less important category of the "pleasant." We hear echoes of Mrs. Richards in Delany's account of this notion of safety:

> Over the last decade and a half… a notion of safety has arisen, a notion that runs from safe sex…to safe neighborhoods, safe cities, and committed (i.e., safe) relationships, a notion that currently functions much the way the notion of "security" and "conformity" did in the fifties. As, in the name of "safety," society dismantles the various institutions that promote interclass communication, attempts to critique the way such institutions functioned in the past to promote their happier sides are often seen as, at best, nostalgia for an outmoded past and, at worst, a pernicious glorification of everything dangerous: unsafe sex, neighborhoods filled with undesirables (read "unsafe characters"), promiscuity, an attack on the family and the stable social structure, and dangerous, noncommitted, "unsafe" relationships—that is, psychologically "dangerous" relations, though the danger is rarely specified in any way other than to suggest its failure to conform to the ideal bourgeois Marriage.[20]

When it comes to the charge that the Times Square he extolls was "unsafe," Delany finds himself in a rhetorical bind that is not too different from Kid's reply to Mrs. Richards about the dangers of Bellona. On the one hand, Delany offers his own anecdotal experience as counterevidence; he essentially says, "I walk around in it. Nothing happens to me." On the other hand, he wants to displace the valuation of "safety" that is synonymous with the expected, the familiar, and the comfortably home-like. This means that he also wants to say something like, "yes, some things happened to me, but the reward was worth the (widely overestimated) risk."

While his critique of safety holds these counterposed gestures in tension, both are also constrained by the scientized discourse of risk that casts doubt on the anecdote itself as an evidentiary mode. We can read Delany's figuration of cruising as a practice that negotiates a moment of historical transition coincident with what Ulrich Beck, in 1986, identified as the turn toward the "risk society." Delany's anecdotes of cruising, I suggest, mediate between the two societies that Beck says we are poised between: one where risk was taken to be personal, knowable, and often subject to fate, and one where the global proliferation of risk makes individuals into "small, private alternative experts in the risks of modernization."[21] Delany's attitude toward risk—including the risk of openness to the other—entails calculations that deploy such expertise while paradoxically reinvigorating obsolete structures of knowledge and relation: the anecdote and the chance encounter that, in his now-famous formulation, he calls "contact."

What follows will consider how Delany's anecdotes of cruising negotiate the social and epistemological landscapes of risk. The first part of this consideration will hinge upon the anecdote itself, which I consider as a foreshortened narrative that captures the brevity and multiplicity of the "contacts" cruising makes. I suggest that the anecdote, as a narrative form that works in conjunction with the form of the tour, seeks to reorient us within the affective and geographic landscape of Delany's Times Square. In this context, the anecdote becomes a spatial procedure that opens onto risk. It cites the location where contact transpired while refusing to delimit the boundaries—whether affective or geographic—that might help us to locate ourselves in the scene it describes.

My second section expands to consider the social forces that put the anecdote at risk. By tracing connections between Beck's description of the risk society and the early response to the HIV/AIDS crisis, I argue that Delany's anecdotes of cruising trouble the boundary that distinguishes the era of the risk society from the era that precedes it. This boundary is marked by society's relationship to anecdotal knowledge. On one side is the era when anecdotal knowledge sufficed to calculate risk; on the other is the risk society, when the rising complexity of risk demoted anecdotal experience to "merely anecdotal, uncontrolled non-knowledge."[22]

In Delany's challenge to the conflation of urban and domestic "safety" that eased Times Square's redevelopment, the anecdote slides between narrative form and epistemological category in ways that animate the tension between these old and new approaches to risk. The anecdote is itself a risky form. It is brief. It leaves little space for explanation. It is, I propose, the narrative form most congenial to cruising, as it replaces the *grand recit* of the love story with a series of isolated encounters that may, in the final analysis, lead nowhere. Yet even as it names the situated knowledge that "contact" often provides, the anecdote puts Delany's own discourse at risk to a multiplicity of forces it cannot fully accommodate. To reiterate, Delany's primary thesis is that cruising models the "interclass contact and communication conducted in a mode of good will" that is necessary to healthy democratic societies, and that the redevelopment of Times Square proceeds in part from a fear of the interclass contact it enables. But his anecdotes about moments of "contact" are often attended by uncertainty, risk, or a disorientation that opens up scenes where race, class, or gender are not in fact smoothly traversed by the "good will" that may or may not subtend them. And while he insists that the interclass contacts he documents depend upon the urban spaces that enable them, his anecdotes render those spaces *undependable*: the reader is never quite sure what degree of warmth, eros, or abjection they might afford. Put differently, Delany's guide to the old Times Square deliberately leaves open the question of what we might find there.

Mapping the Anecdote

Times Square Red, Times Square Blue has become foundational for theorists who aim to think through the political and ethical dimensions of cruising, which has come to occupy a central place in queer studies. Cruising has been taken up as a spatial, historical, and relational practice, as a queer way of relating to cities, to persons, to alterity, and to the nature of relation itself. It has become a metaphor for desire's mobility and an example of how such desire might play out in material space. Perhaps most importantly, it has also offered us a way to think how the "right" to privacy, and with it the right to do what you want "behind closed doors," corresponds with a vitiation of public privileges. For some scholars (Diane Chisholm and Mark Turner), cruising reinvents the nineteenth-century "man of the crowd" as a queer figure, one whose libidinal investments counters the cool distance of flânerie with a dense sociality premised on erotic desire.[23] For others, the urban spaces that cruising typically negotiates are secondary to the temporality—the brevity—that describes its acts and relations. Brevity allows Tim Dean to find in cruising an ethics of relation that embraces alterity without absorbing it, as it "turns strangers into lovers so briefly and perfunctorily that it rarely compromises their status as strangers."[24] Similarly, Leo Bersani holds that the danger of cruising is not that "it reduces relations to promiscuous sex, but rather that the promiscuity may stop," thus foreclosing cruising's capacity to model an anti-relational "new relationality."[25] And against the anti-relational thrust of Bersani's argument, Michael Warner poses cruising as a way of

engaging with, and thereby constituting, a counter-public sphere. "Contrary to myth," he contends, "what one relishes in loving strangers is not mere anonymity, nor meaningless release. It is the pleasure of belonging to a sexual world, in which one's sexuality finds an answering resonance not just in one other, but in a world of others."[26]

Delany's articulation of cruising in *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* could lend support each of these accounts, as indeed it has. Yet one of the features of Delany's text that is often obscured in its citational afterlife is the extent to which cruising becomes a way for Delany to navigate the contradictory rhetoric of risk that enabled the "Baron Haussmann–like event" of Times Square's transformation.[27] Delany's cruiser does invite a comparison with Walter Benjamin's flâneur, but I submit that this comparison is justified less by the way desire informs his navigations than by his tendency to hold open a dialectical image that sights a moment of urban transformation it cannot resolve.[28] Broadly speaking, the poles of the flâneur's dialectic may still be found in the home and the city-as-landscape that together produced the phantasmagoria of Benjamin's nineteenth-century Paris. But in Delany's cruiser, this dialectic takes shape around the particular valences of safety and risk that the home and the city are thought respectively to afford.

My consideration of the anecdote as a spatial procedure is prompted in part by Delany's own framing of his project. In his introduction, Delany offers his two essays as versions of orientation that resist the fixity and certainty of mapping. The figure he invokes instead is the "periplum" as described by Ezra Pound, which depicts a terrain "not as you would find it if you had a geography book and a map, but as… a coasting sailor would find it."[29] For Delany, the periplum designates "those early texts, from before the advent of universal latitude and longitude, that allowed the navigation of the Mediterranean from at least the Trojan War through classical and medieval times." "Periploi," he continues, "were detailed descriptions of the coastlines of the mainland and the various islands, which, when coupled with a bit of common sense about directions and travel times, allowed early navigators to ascertain where, after a storm, they might have ended up, once a coast came into view."[30]

The double uncertainty evoked by the image of a storm-tossed traveler who, assuming a coast *has* come into view, must determine where they "might" have ended up is a condition that Delany wants at once to describe and to impart. The periplum is apposite not only for the rich description it affords, but also for the way it demands a certain amount of labor on the part of the reader, a labor that couples the work of reading with the work of getting oriented. The reader becomes the figurative sailor whose cruising of the sea is a venture, a risk, and whose iconic sexuality queers the masculine venture that Pound celebrates, while the shore becomes a collection of unmapped sites that may offer the traveler rest, erotic possibility, or a new set of dangers.

When we consider that the sailor was, as George Chauncey has documented, an emblem of Times Square's erotic scene from before Delany's time, we begin to glimpse the temporal expanse that Delany wants to keep in view. He is nodding toward Times Square's historically fluid and changeable geography in spite of—or perhaps because of—the loss he feels in the altered geography of the present.[31] His periplum is akin to one of those medieval maps described by Michel de Certeau, whose roots in narrativity were erased when the advent of modern scientific discourse converted the map into a purely graphic array.[32] It is an admixture of map and itinerary that offers, in de Certeau's words, "a memorandum prescribing actions," "an outline marked out by footprints with regular gaps between them and by pictures of the successive events that took place in the course of the journey… not a 'geographical map' but 'history book.'"[33]

Delany's map of Times Square refuses to stay still. He concedes that he himself was somewhat "storm-tossed" when he landed in Time Square in the seventies, a journeyer seeking, as he puts it, "something no less necessary to his appetitive life than good food and fresh water."[34] Yet the Times Square he describes is not a safe harbor, and the tour he gives us is often hard to follow. Memory keeps interrupting the specter of boarded up facades that index, in the first photograph he includes, the physical impenetrability of sites that are newly inaccessible at the time of his writing. The Times Square he reconstructs from the vantage point of 1996 is a jumble, whose points of interest—the porn theaters that once served as active gay cruising grounds—change names and change hands in a movement that description does little to still. The Cameo became the New Adonis when the old Adonis, Delany tells us, "was hounded out of its home on Fifty-first Street by a lawyer for World Wide Plaza, then newly under construction." "The Cameo/New Adonis" together become the Playpen peep show, whose marquis—which flashes "in pink, blue, pink neon: 'Live!' 'Live!' 'Live!'—calls out with a desperate insistence from the wash of development that threatens it. Yet the most striking interruptions of this tour are found in the collection of anecdotes that Delany has provided (belatedly, he tells us) in answer to the question of an early reviewer of his essay: "But what... went on in those movie theaters, before they were closed? Let me see some of that."[35]

These anecdotes are striking for the very ordinariness of the acts they describe. The scenes of cruising bear little resemblance to the moments of "pornographic communal rapture" that José Esteban Muñoz finds in Delany's autobiography *The Motion of Light in Water,* where the massed bodies at the St. Mark's Baths allow him to glimpse "a population—not of individual homosexuals… not of hundreds, not of thousands, but rather of millions of gay men," and to realize "that history had, actively and already, created for us whole galleries of institutions, good and bad, to accommodate our sex."[36] In place of this transhistorical community, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* gives us a collection of theaters where men of diverse sexual orientations and preferences come together, at varying times and with varying frequency, to satisfy desires that are differently accommodated by the site itself. In place of sublime communal rapture, we are offered small-scale interactions and triangulations of desire in which the straight porn on screen often plays a mediating role. In one queerly tender moment, a satisfying encounter with a gay teenager is summarized in the simplified language of exchange: (everything I did to him… he did to me)."[37] In another, Delany describes offering his hand to a compulsive, formerly institutionalized masturbator who mercifully falls asleep, waking only intermittently to mumble "something about tits."[38] And the anecdote that opens Delany's essay is not a scene of cruising but a catcall, a moment of (albeit mild) sexual harassment that indirectly plays into the argument that a newly developed Time Square would be, at the very least, "safer for women."

This opening scene of sexual address serves to place us at the intersection of desire and public space that both essays go on to explore:

> Against the subway kiosk around the corner on Forty-second Street and Eighth Avenue, Ben still sets up his shoeshine stand, his bottles of polish and cans of stain, his brushes and cloths. Ben's come-on is much what it was when I first noticed him in the late seventies. For every third or fourth woman in the passing bustle, with or without a boyfriend, it's "Hey, there, beautiful!" or "Mmmm! Hi, sweetheart!" There's never an obscenity or mention of a bodily part… But the hailing is clear and the inflection is drenched enough in both sensuality and sexuality to startle practically anyone, especially the white women with even a bit of naïveté

> left—or the men with them, who are really Ben's mark, though anyone in leather shoes will do. Who does—who could—this black guy think he's talking to like that? For when, surprised, woman or boyfriend turns, the head lifts, or the eyes look up, Ben—so faintly, and within the beat—shifts his tone from pander to preacher: "You are a truly fine woman…" or "Sir, you have a beautiful woman there. You're a lucky man. Respect her and treat her well!" Now people smile—men and women. (Maybe one in five—the women in groups or the single ones—doesn't smile.) But it's harmless, even charming, isn't it? In his shorts and his sunglasses for Indian summer, he's just this old black shoeshine man—who makes enough shining shoes so that pretty much annually he and his wife can fly over to spend the Christmas holidays with her family in Germany. "If the women smile, see, then the men gotta get their shoes shined, to show that they're good sports and that they go along with it; and to put me back in my place just a little. It's a game we play. That's all. I got friends from all over the world that I made out here. People come back here every year, just to take their picture with me!"[39]

Delany's textual tour begins on a corner that is at once a physical intersection (42nd and 8th Ave.) and a figurative one where the categories of race, class, and gender collude in the power dynamics that structure Ben's "virtuoso performance."[40] We are asked to read in Ben's hail echoes of Althusser's famous scene of interpellation, in which the public cry of the police man ("Hey, you there!") triggers the subject's recognition of themself *as* a subject through the medium of ideology.[41]

Of course, the players involved in this scene have already been subject to that call, as have we, and Ben's performance leaves us somewhat dizzy as it cycles through various moments of subjection. The woman becomes the locus for an exchange between men. If the woman is white, the exchange gives way to a racial negotiation in which the black man's performance of masculinity sets the stage for his retreat into commerce. The proffered shoeshine then becomes a way to "put him in his place" by transforming him into the familiar "old black shoeshine man." And this, too, is a ruse, since the shoeshine is also Ben's means of putting himself in a *different* place, in Germany for the Christmas Holidays. By the time we follow Delany around the corner, we feel something like the child who has been blindfolded, spun around several times, and told to hit a paper mâché unicorn, except that here the unicorn is called "interclass contact, conducted in a manner of good will." What does Delany even mean by "good will"? Does he mean good intentions, which notoriously pave the road to hell? Does he mean an honest transaction that leaves both parties satisfied? Is he talking about a Whitmanian, brotherly love?

The text declines to dispel this dizziness. Delany only postulates that the woman hailed has experienced "a moment on the city's cultural Tilt-a-Whirl," to say nothing of the whirl that Ben is already in. Delany does, however, briefly pose a question that he performatively fails to answer: what bothers him about this encounter, he admits, is the elusiveness of the boundary between harassment and performance. "Ben didn't put it there. But does his witty and always slightly disorienting performance help erase it? Or does that performance inscribe it more deeply? Honestly, I can't tell. Perhaps it does some of both. Let's go around the corner."[42] Delany couches his ambivalence about Ben's address in the tour-like movement of the text, which turns away with a forced casualness from this scene of exchange.

Yet the redirection that ends this inquiry is not meant to close it. A kind of affective excess returns to haunt Times Square's social geography at the close of Delany's essay. Until this point, he

has held his own mourning for the neighborhood at bay, but when he departs the square his sense of loss gives way to a sense of *being lost.* At this moment, he hears again the echo of Ben's call:

> I said good-bye and went to wait for my bus—a black gay man, in my midfifties, who's utilized the sexual outlets of this neighborhood for more than thirty years. What kind of leaps am I going to have to make now between the acceptable and the unacceptable, between the legal and the illegal, to continue having a satisfactory sex life? As my bus came, behind me Ben called out to the woman in a passing couple: "Mmmm! Hey, there, sweetheart…!"[43]

Convention dictates that framing devices like these are stabilizing; they situate the reader at a vantage point from which they might confidently view the text that has been packaged for their consumption. Ben's call does not perform this stabilizing function, however. On the contrary, Delany's recognition of kinship with Ben suggests that he feels the loss of the theaters as a form of disorientation, a future of boundaries and leaps that his text is unable to chart.

This callback to Ben's call also calls us back to the question of women, whose absence from the porn theaters corresponds to a dearth of female actors in the other scenes of interclass contact Delany depicts. Delany tries but fails to dispel the assertion that the "charm, sociality, and warmth" of the theaters depend, as he himself speculates, "on the absence of 'the woman'—or at least depend on flattening 'the woman' till she is only an image on a screen, whether of light or memory, reduced to 'pure' 'sexuality,' till, a magical essence, a mystical energy, she pervades, grounds, even fuels the entire process, from which she is corporally, intellectually, emotionally, and politically absent." When he tests this theory by bringing a female friend (Ana) into the theaters, the results are inconclusive at best. The doorman reminds him that they will be expelled if he finds out she's taking money ("this ain't no whorehouse"), and although Ana seems pleasantly surprised by the ease with which sexual rejections are accepted (that "so many people say 'no'… and that everybody pretty much goes along with it") she concludes that she would not go again. In her words, "I was scared to death!"[44]

Delany seems unable to comprehend her reasons, yet Ben's closing hail could aid us in our own speculations. This re-entry into ideology returns Delany to his own body and the identities that structure it, leading him to name himself in his parting question as "a black gay man" in his "midfifties." It thus reminds us, as Ben's opening hail did, of the ideologies that convert bodies into subjects, and it raises the possibility that the brevity of contact in the theaters helps to elevate bodies—bodies that are refigured as sites of pleasure—over the consequentially weakened subject positions they occupy. It makes bodies *comfortable*. This is not to say, contra Althusser, that there *is* a space "outside" of ideology. Nor does it to aim to overlook the power structures that are inevitably present in sexual encounters, however brief, as well as in institutions like the movie theater. It simply indicates that where one body is comfortable, another may not be.

Sara Ahmed writes that institutions are one of the "orientation devices" that work to keep things in place. She describes this "placement" as the "comfort" that comes from being orientated, a comfort we only notice "as an affect when we lose it—when we become uncomfortable." "To be comfortable," she writes, "is to be so at ease with one's environment that it is hard to distinguish where one's body ends and the world begins."[45] It is this ease, this forgetful merging with one's environs, that Delany clearly misses when he names himself as "a black gay man" in his "midfifties." The loss of the theaters returns him to this distinction between body and world, and it suggests that

cruising, unlike the cruisy tenor of Ben's call, did not have to perform such leaps around the structures of social power.

This explains, obversely, why Ana might fear a space that is organized not around women but around "the woman" as a mystical, disembodied ideal—an ideological subject position. By entering the theater, she is entering a site that is so saturated with the ideology of the woman that her body is not a site of pleasure but merely an example that bears the weight of "the woman."

It is often difficult to separate Delany's anecdotes of Times Square's cruising sites from the rhetorical thrust of the essays, which aim to assert the importance of the porn theaters to gay men, to defend cruising's mode of sociality, and to ensure that he doesn't obscure those aspects of Times Square that were not—to use his favored adjective—entirely "pleasant." Delany wants to distance himself from the charge, leveled by Marshall Berman and anticipated from other quarters, that his nostalgia for "the pre-AIDS golden age of hustling" is on a par with the nostalgia for the various "golden ages" of Broadway that predated it.[46] For Delany, this means admitting into Times Square those scenes that caused it to be deemed "unsafe" or unsavory, scenes that contributed to the view that Time Square was, as one concerned citizen described it, a place with "safety hazards that have nothing to do with OSHA [Occupational Safety and Hazards Act]."[47] It also leads him to include the scenes of sexual harassment that Women Against Pornography (WAP) charged the theaters with enabling."

As rhetorical moves, we might say that anecdotes like the one about Ben and about Ana do what anecdotes often do. They are fragments of the real that resist a totalizing historical narrative. They deviate from the line of argument and open onto other spaces that thought might wish to inhabit. They are scraps of documentary "evidence" that lay claim to a certain authenticity, and they puncture the glow of nostalgia with material scenes and people that resist it. Delany's accounts of the "mad masturbator" who has rubbed himself calloused, or the affable hustler "Joey who needs a bath," found frozen to death in a doorway, disturb Times Square's porn theaters, setting them apart from the idealized home to which nostalgia (from the Greek *nostos* "return home") longs to return. Yet these anecdotes also pose disruptions that puncture what Delany calls, in an unwieldy moment of exasperation, the "smoke-screen behind which developers of Times Square and of every other underpopulated urban center in the country have been able to pursue their machinations in spite of public good and private desire."[48] They aim to puncture this smokescreen—which might be called safety—with scenes of *public desire.*

Delany names this smoke-screen "the small-town fear of urban violence" that informs campaigns to promote urban tourism.[49] Yet I would argue that the smoke-screen his anecdotes invite us to dispel and see through is broader than this designation would suggest. It is the illusion that sees safety, and its more explicitly political cousin—*security*—as an unalloyed good. It is one that aligns "public safety" with the *comfort* that, per Ahmed, is notoriously extended to one "public" (white, heterosexual, and monied) by being withheld from another.[50] *Public desire* disrupts the age-old contest between "public good and private desire." It is the unthinkable scene between these two terms, and the sites where it occurs, like the theaters, aim to combat the demarcation of acceptable "publics" and admissible desires. Indeed, Delany's essays recall an era when this unthinkability shifted to a more codified illegality, as the discovery of HIV/AIDS removed public sex from the domain of "public decency" and placed it in the incontestable domain of public safety. Delany faults this transition with returning gay liberation to a "pre-stonewall" era of invisibility:[51]

> Till 1985 public sex was largely a matter of public decency—that is to say, it was a question of who was or who wasn't offended by what went on in public venues. Since '85, for the first time, under a sham concern for AIDS, the acts themselves have been made illegal, even if done with condoms in a venue where everyone present approves. In October '95, after issuing endless contradictory statements about AIDS, the city gave all the theaters in the area a year—till this month, October '96—to be out, so that the renovations could get under way.[52]

Delany is referring to New York City's 1995 Zoning Text Amendment, which stipulated, among other things, that adult businesses would only be allowed in certain non-residential areas and that they could not be within five hundred feet from other adult businesses, schools, or houses of worship.[53] With this amendment, public sex became a risk to the "general public," a term that came to code the nation's ideal (heterosexual, white, and middle-class) citizenry.

Cruising the Risk Society

While there are many ways to historicize the period that Delany recounts, Beck's description of the risk society seems particularly apposite to the structures of feeling that circulated around the acts and spaces Delany describes. Contra Berman, the era of Times Square Delany defends is not "pre-AIDS." His recollections of the theaters span the period from the late seventies to the mid-nineties, a time that saw the discovery of AIDS-related symptoms among gay men, and a flurry of scientific studies and public media campaigns devoted to the rising epidemic, many of which made "male homosexuals" and their gathering places synonymous with risk.[54] As Delany describes it in his 1990 essay "Street Talk/ Straight Talk," the official ("straight") discourse surrounding HIV/AIDS in those years was "a demonstrably murderous discourse… a discourse of 'high risk' and 'low risk' behavior" that replaced the clarity of "street talk" with the sanitized obscurity of fear.[55]

This was the discourse in which the "straight talk" of scientific studies was polluted by the "street talk" that at once informed and disseminated those findings. This was the discourse that allowed reports of HIV infection among military members or married men to be offered uncritically as evidence of heterosexual transmission.[56] And this was also the discourse that allowed individuals' (anecdotal) speculations about how they acquired HIV to fuel the perception that oral sex was a common vector of transmission. Delany writes that what emerged from this jumble of discursive modes was not the "scientific method," but rather "what happens to such a 'method' in a field ripe with…prior political agendas that flagrantly, at all levels, abnegate that method."[57] He summarizes its deadly logic as follows: "If 'Don't get fucked up the ass without a condom' is safe, perhaps 'Don't do anything without a condom' is safer. But because the latter is far harder to follow, it militates instead for laxness; and to the extent that the two are perceived as somehow the same, the laxness finally infects the former."[58]

Against this discourse, the anecdote offers a form of knowledge that might check the extremes of laxness and unbridled fear. In "The Rhetoric of Sex, The Discourse of Desire" (1990), Delany cites AIDS as "the material fact that has made it desperately important for people, when writing about sex, to write about what they have done and experienced and seen themselves," since the trading of firsthand accounts works to situate and demystify practices that the "risk experts"—or their representatives in the media and public discourse—tend to obscure.[59] Yet for Delany, the

rhetoric around AIDS also prompts a critique of the broader discourse of risk it emerges from. One way to state the problem with this messaging is to say that it takes aim, not at a virus, but at *risk itself*. It constructs risk-avoidance as a moral imperative that desire will inevitably fail to uphold. In doing so, it feeds the belief system (which Delany considers to be the foundation of homophobia) that sees "the untrammeled pursuit of pleasure [as] the opposite of social responsibility."[60] Importantly, risk avoidance becomes here an *individual* moral imperative. It becomes a matter of "decisions" and "lifestyles" that divide the safe from the unsafe in a way that resembles the moral division of the "clean" from the "unclean." As Ronald Reagan asked rhetorically in 1987, "when it comes to preventing AIDS, don't medicine and morality teach the same lessons?"[61]

Beck published *Risk Society* less than a year after the disaster at Chernobyl shook the public's faith in the private industries and governmental agencies tasked with mitigating risk. Nuclear disaster, environmental collapse, and exposure-related illness thus loom large in his conceptualization of risk, which is admittedly closer to Don DeLillo's "airborne toxic event" than to the particularly urban and epidemiological "risks" that Delany addresses. Still, Beck's description of the risk society helps to articulate the fault lines between anecdotal and "expert" knowledge that Delany seeks to engage, and it offers insight into the ways in which risk becomes at once a political category and a force that the individual is tasked with containing.

Beck describes the risk society as one in which an increase in technological and economic progress corresponds with the production of increasingly globalized risks, whose mitigation exceeds the managerial capacity of science, business, and government, and is therefore addressed by an inadequate marriage of the three. While he concedes that risk is not a modern invention, he maintains that a category that was once dominated by known dangers and perceptible threats has shifted to encompass a calculus of risks that are impersonal, imperceptible, and increasingly hard to quantify. A person might be affected by a risk without knowing it. Or they might receive only the retroactive knowledge of exposure: the knowledge that one has been touched by risk and may, someday down the line, be affected. This is the knowledge bestowed on Jack Gladney in DeLillo's *White Noise*, when he receives what may be the tag-line of the risk society: "Your genetics, your personals, your medicals…. It comes back pulsing stars. This doesn't mean anything is going to happen to you as such, at least not today or tomorrow. It just means you are the sum total of your data. No man escapes that."[62]

Consequently, Beck contends that "risk positions," which designate one's proximity or susceptibility to risk, begin to compete with the class formations that formerly organized social life.[63] Risk is something we are "affected by," not something we "possess." It therefore elides the forms of affiliation that class-based societies typically produce. In Beck's analogy, "the 'class' of the 'affected' does not confront a 'class' that is not affected. It confronts at most a 'class' of not-yet affected people."[64]

In a broad sense, Beck is describing, as Kid says of Bellona, what happens "when what terrifies is neither noisy, nor moves quickly, and lasts hours."[65] Beck is also drawing a practical distinction that relates to one of the central contradictions of the risk society, namely, that it makes individuals accountable for the knowledge required to assure their safety, at the same time that such knowledge becomes increasingly hard to come by:

> They lose an essential part of their cognitive sovereignty. The harmful, threatening, inimical lies in wait everywhere, but whether it is inimical or friendly is beyond one's own power of

> judgment, is reserved for the assumptions, methods and controversies of external knowledge producers. In risk positions, accordingly, features of daily life can change overnight, so to speak, into Trojan horses, which disgorge dangers and with them risk experts, arguing with each other even as they announce what one must fear and what not.[66]

Individuals who lack the necessary resources are therefore made, or made to *feel*, "incompetent in matters of their own affliction."

This is precisely what happened in the early years of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, when the disconnect between scientific knowledge, public rhetoric, and personal experience silenced those suffering from AIDS and made gay men—regardless of their serostatus—shoulder the burden of care and prevention. In the 1987 issue of *October* dedicated to AIDS and AIDS activism, Jan Zita Grover describes how the popular euphemism of the "general population" (the largely heterosexual, non-drug using population among whom HIV was slow to spread) cordoned off the "specific" populations whose deaths were considered to be unmournable and, for that reason, unworthy of large-scale political action. Those groups, she explains, were designated by "the epidemiological category of *risk group.*"[67] It is easy to see the double stigmatization this division performs. Not only does it cordon off those at risk from the public denoted by the "general population," it implicitly poses the "risk group" *as* a risk to what Beck would call the "class of the not-yet-affected." The most immediate material effect of this language, Grover writes, was to justify the Regan administration's failure to fund research and prevention efforts that might benefit those whose lives it had already condemned. Grover cites a famous example of this condemnation in the form of a comment that Gary Bauer, Ronald Reagan's assistant, made on "Face the Nation" when asked why the President Reagan had not even mentioned AIDS publicly before late in 1985. Bauer justified the silence by noting that AIDS "hadn't spread into the general population yet."[68]

There is, however, another possible outcome to the loss of "cognitive sovereignty" Beck attributes to the risk society. Individuals with enough information or enough need—those who have been abandoned or silenced by the "risk experts"—can become "small, private alternative experts" in risk who must lobby on their own behalf.[69] Douglas Crimp articulates the widely-held sentiment of the era when he writes that, "as anyone involved in the struggle against AIDS knows from horrendous experience, we cannot afford to leave anything up to the 'experts.' We must become our own experts."[70] Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner echo this view in "Sex in Public," where they add that the experiential knowledge gleaned from sexual promiscuity, including the cruising culture that Delany defends, became "a lifesaving public resource" during the epidemic. "Unbidden by experts, gay people invented safer sex."[71]

The early years of the HIV/AIDS epidemic offer a rare example of how the "risk group" might come to forge communities from out of the very "risk positions" that are, in Beck's analysis, an obstacle to older forms of affiliation. If risk groups are at once socially legible and socially ostracized, risk itself may offer a cynical foundation for community. This is why Simon Watney, in the preface to the second edition of his groundbreaking book *Policing Desire* (1987), takes issue with the strain of triumphalism that promotes "the fanciful notion of the 'gay community' that we are constantly told has responded so well to the epidemic."[72] Watney notes that this community "did not pre-exist the epidemic in any meaningful sense." Instead, it was born from "the ruthless individualism of much contemporary conservative culture, which lacks any vision of community beyond the impoverished ideals of 'family' and 'nation.'"[73] In Watney's view, the emergence of the

"gay community" from crisis speaks less to the coherence of that community and more to the abandonment that we might, with Beck in mind, see as the retroactive power of risk positions to forge alliances that neoliberal society otherwise works to obliterate.

The rhetoric of risk that prevailed in the early years of the HIV/AIDS pandemic helps us to contextualize Delany's choice to frame the benefits of cruising in terms of "contact" rather than "community." It also helps us to see what is at stake in Delany's departure from Jane Jacobs' tendency to think about "contact" in explicitly non-sexual terms. Delany's "contact" is a form of cross-pollination that willfully includes the sexual connotations of that term. It is a moment of proximity to the other that carries risk into the social sphere. Yet it also proposes to reimagine the social beyond those structures of affiliation that take the family as their model. It recognizes that "community" may involve practices of exclusion that outweigh the benefits of belonging, especially when belonging shrinks the vectors of knowledge to which individuals have access.

Delany's itinerary thus strays from the one laid out by the tour buses catering to the "small-town tourist" whose movements he takes to task:

> The small-town way to enjoy a big city is to arrive there with your family, your friends, your school group, your church group, or—if you are really brave— your tour group, with whom you associate (these are all preselected network groups) and have fun, as you sample the food and culture and see the monuments and architecture. But the one thing you do not do is go out in the street alone and meet people. The fear of such an activity in New York City is, for most out-of-towners, one with the fear of bodily contagion from AIDS coupled with the equally bodily fear of hurt and loss of property.[74]

These last fears, he implies, are united in the fear of "contact." The contrast between this "tour" and the one Delany offers brings us back to the double bind we began with. On the one hand, Delany wants to expose the fraudulent rhetoric that claimed the new Times Square would be, for example "safer for women" while discounting the women (sex workers) that the renovations would displace. On the other hand, he wants to displace the valuation of "safety" that is synonymous with the expected, the familiar, and the comfortable.

We might recognize this valuation in the stereotypical "small-town" ("gen pop") tourist that Delany invokes, the person for whom the specter of poverty, homelessness, or "vice" broadly construed is illogically magnified on the scale of threats to personal safety. We might recognize the racism that often subtends it in the figure of the "Karen," that self-appointed guardian of the white "familiar," whose policing of black people includes, but is not limited to, calling the police and whose arguments for that prerogative resemble *Dhalgren*'s Mrs. Richards'. And although his argument predates the term's popularity, I would hazard that the form of safety Delany interrogates also includes the "safe spaces" that queer and marginalized communities now widely defend, especially in university settings. This does not mean that he objects to the existence of such spaces, but it does lead him to insist on the need for spaces that, by the rubric of safety that "safe space" implies, are likely to be unsafe. The form of public life he advocates is precisely about leaving the networks of like-minded individuals that increasingly determine social exchange. It does not require discomfort, but it does require a willingness to risk discomfort as a possible outcome of venturing beyond one's habitual sphere or community.

To state the case in general terms, we might say that "community" forges connections to make a home for itself in the social; acts of cruising, and by extension contact, wander beyond the familiar or simply habitual associations that make us feel "at home." They privilege the *moment* of touch over the longer narratives of connection and community. To emphasize the tenuousness of cruising, Delany makes a careful distinction between "contact" and the more capitalistic, class-bound practice of "networking." Though he insists that these practices do not form a strict or opposed dichotomy, he is quick to list their many differences. Whereas networking occurs indoors, is often dependent on institutions, and holds to and re-inscribes class boundaries, contact is ideally interclass and unplanned: an "outdoor sport" that is dependent on urban public space.[75] Networking (as in Delany's favorite example of the writer's conference) promises more than it delivers, whereas contact delivers in excess of its promise. "Contact is the conversation that starts in the line at the grocery counter with the person behind you." It is also, Delany tells us, "the intercourse—physical and conversational— that blooms in and as 'casual sex' in public rest rooms, sex movies, public parks, singles bars, and sex clubs."[76]

Cruising mediates between these forms of social and sexual contact by rendering them, if not the same, nevertheless equivalent in the discourse of safety and risk. By reminding us that intercourse is both "physical and conversational," Delany smuggles a hint of risk into the "safe" act of conversation, just as he smuggles a hint of safety into the "public rest rooms, sex movies, public parks, singles bars, and sex clubs" that serve as cruising's locales. Both modes of contact are forms of exchange. In each of the examples above, contact relies on proximity; it implies an act of reaching out, perhaps even of touching or being touched. (Even in situations of geographic distance, to be "in contact" is also to be "in touch"). Of course, being open to touch also implies a certain vulnerability, one that is compounded in an epidemiological context in which risk and sex have been rendered morally, if not physically, indistinguishable.

Such risk is not mitigated by the brevity of touch that "contact" implies. On the contrary, the brevity of contact replaces the narrative of seduction, consummation, and the bounded relationship with an unpredictable excess that is inseparable from the fear it provokes. As Bersani points out, this rapidity of contact enabled commentators to conflate the fear of promiscuous gay sex with the fear of HIV/AIDS transmission. Bersani opens "Is the Rectum a Grave?" with a memorable quote from Professor Opendra Narayan, who likens the sexual practices of gay men to the activities of the famously short-lived and appetitively catholic mosquito:

> These people have sex twenty to thirty times a night.... A man comes along and goes from anus to anus and in a single night will act as a mosquito transferring infected cells on his penis. When this is practiced for a year, with a man having three thousand sexual intercourses, one can readily understand this massive epidemic that is currently upon us.[77]

It is hard to decide which is more troubling to Narayan: the fact that gay men might have as much "contact" as the mosquito, or the fact that these men live longer than male mosquitos (who, unlike their female counterparts, do not actually transmit disease).[78]

Delany's anecdotes embrace the promiscuity of Narayan's nightmare vision in a bid to resuscitate, by means of cruising's excess, the networks that atrophied with public sociality's retreat into the private home. While his theaters fall short of the *polis* that founds the city's public and political life, they stage moments of contact that mingle social and sexual exchange in ways that

reconfigure the publics who gather there. Touch is accompanied by conversation. Sexual exchange opens new routes for knowledge and association, and both are attended by moments of safety and risk that alternately fix and destabilize the affective space of the tour.

One moment of contact is particularly notable in this regard. Delany introduces us to Jonathan in a series of anecdotes spanning several years, beginning with their first meeting:

> My first memory of Jonathan is somewhat blurred. But it was in the Capri. I recall a young guy, sitting down front on the right, masturbating and watching the movie. I remember it was fairly late at night, and when I sat next to him, there was a conversation.
>
> "What's your name?"
>
> "Jonathan."
>
> "How old are you, John?"
>
> "It's Jonathan. I'm twenty."
>
> "You look like a kid."
>
> "Yeah, I know. Everybody tells me that. I just look young. But I'm twenty.
>
> ….And when we got down to sex, everything I did to him, five minutes later he did to me—unusual enough to note in the general exchanges in the theater.[79]

This anecdote is wholly unremarkable save for the perfect reciprocity that characterizes their sex. Names and ages are barely exchanged. Delany gets Jonathan's name wrong and Jonathan, as it turns out, misrepresents his age: In their last encounter, which Delany dates as occurring in "92 or 93," Jonathan reveals that he was fifteen when he first started frequenting the theaters with a fake ID, which is also when he first met Delany.[80] This revelation is hardly softened by the fact that Jonathan calls Delany "professor," a nickname he acquired in the theaters before it became his professional title.

What emerges from this conversation is series of second-hand anecdotes that attest, albeit in terms that resonate suspiciously well with Delany's own defense of the theaters, to a messy but ultimately "beneficial" imbrication of sex and knowledge. It is the closest Delany's anecdotes come to being exemplary or evidential, and were it not for the lingering risk posed by Jonathan's underage status it could almost be a safely liberal account of "interclass contact." Still, Delany shows his hand as a novelist when he reproduces Jonathan's history, beginning with the moment he entered the theaters and found himself, like Ana, "scared to death."

> The first few times I came in here, I was scared to death. I didn't know what the fuck was going on. So I just did everything I saw anybody else do. I'd come in here and see somebody with his dick out, beatin' off. I'd take my dick out and beat off. Somebody would come along and suck on my dick. I'd turn around and suck on his. And I tell you, it was fuckin' wonderful! Everybody was so nice. I mean, I was just a kid. The guys in here could have chewed me up and spit me out back then. But they didn't. I remember I met one guy in here one evening who had an extra ticket to a Broadway show because somebody he was supposed to go with had canceled out, so he took me instead! My first Broadway play—I was maybe seventeen. Just like that, an hour after he met me. Then, a week later, he got us some tickets to a concert up at Lincoln Center and he took me to that, too. The show was fun, but the concert was fuckin' amazing! I still go to concerts, every chance I get. And you told me all

> about applying up at Manhattan Community College—how I didn't have to be scared of all the classes, because there'd be advisors there to help me with my schedule. I didn't know any of that shit!....I mean, I learned half the stuff I know in this place. People told me here how not to get AIDS—and I sure don't got it. I get tested just about every year. You do too, professor—you told me that."[81]

Jonathan's address to Delany as "professor" does double work in the anecdote's final turn to the question of AIDS, and not all of it is reassuring. While their sexual exchange is delivered in the language of perfect mutuality ("everything I did to him… he did to me"), their conversation is mediated by a stark inequality of power that becomes troubling in the context of Delany's actual profession. Jonathan recognizes, and Delany unabashedly *recognizes him recognizing*, the elder Delany as a valuable source of knowledge. Sexual exchange is mingled with the narrative of experience ministering to youth, and that narrative is in turn deployed to reinforce the argument that the theaters were conducive to safer sex.

Yet without dismissing the ethical questions raised by this dynamic, we can acknowledge that this passage makes an important point about the political efficacy of "risky" contact as an epistemological exchange. The knowledge Jonathan receives is situated in "this place" and strengthened by frequent encounter. He learns about safer sex anecdotally, as it were. We can almost imagine Delany practicing a form of narrative-based medicine, which relies upon personal anecdotes or stories ("I get tested every month") rather than the prescriptive commands that many populations are likely to dismiss. When we couple this narrative of coming into knowledge with the fact of Jonathan's initial terror, we begin to see Delany performing a balancing act between fear and desire that names both as sites of possibility.

Delany's tendency to play upon the conservative and liberal valences of safety and risk makes "contact" a site of rich contradiction in his essays. At times, he all but invites us to overlook the "riskier" aspects of his argument and reclines into the liberal rhetoric that "interclass contact" naturally invokes. As Tim Dean has noted, his description of cruising is comfortably Whitmanesque in its appeal to the progressive values of diversity and egalitarianism, which he is quick to find in Times Square's porn theaters. [82]He describes their population as racially heterogeneous—"white, black, Hispanic, Asian, Indian, Native American, and a variety of Pacific Islanders"—and includes a sampling of professions reflective of the class strata of the city at large: "playwrights, carpenters, opera singers, telephone repair men, stockbrokers, guys on welfare, guys with trust funds, guys on crutches, on walkers, in wheelchairs, teachers, warehouse workers, [and] male nurses."[83] The list goes on.

Indeed, his defense of cruising often embraces the liberal ethos that Bersani forcefully condemned in his own writing on gay sex in the era of HIV/AIDS:

> The argument for diversity has the strategic advantage of making gays seem like passionate defenders of one of the primary values of mainstream liberal culture, but to make that argument is, it seems to me, to be disingenuous about the relation between homosexual behavior and the revulsion it inspires. The revulsion, it turns out, is all a big mistake: what we're really up to is pluralism and diversity, and getting buggered is just one moment in the practice of those laudable humanistic virtues.[84]

Two things arguably differentiate Delany's celebration of "interclass contact" from this disingenuous appeal to pluralism. The first, as I suggested earlier, is his tendency to blur the line between sexual and social contact so that both are sites of risk. The second is that in his analysis, the fear of interclass contact exceeds any "revulsion" that homosexuality might inspire.

According to Delany, the fear of AIDS is leveraged to promote the fear, not only of homosexuals, but of interclass contact itself. We can watch this exportation of fear unfold in a 1987 *New York Times* article entitled "Fact, Theory and Myth on the Spread of AIDs," whose author dismisses the myth that HIV is transmitted through non-sexual encounters in language that oddly reaffirms the safety of remaining inside one's social class and social network. "Many studies have shown that people do not become infected with the AIDS virus as a result of routine, nonintimate contacts *in the home or workplace*" (my emphasis.)[85] "Routine" contacts in the streets of New York, we might conclude, are a somewhat riskier business. The discourse Delany holds accountable for the closure of the porn theaters "sees interclass contact as the source of pretty much everything dangerous, unsafe, or undesirable in the life of the country right now—from AIDS and 'perversion' in all its forms, to the failures of education and neighborhood decay, to homelessness and urban violence."[86]

We might protest that Delany is performing a rhetorical sleight of hand here, as elsewhere he reverses the causal relationship between these fears and asserts that that "AIDS functions, on an international level, as a discursive tool to keep visitors to the city away from all public facilities and places where, yes, one might, if so inclined, engage in or be subject to any sort of interclass contact."[87] Still, his appeal to democratic values does not obscure the fact that he is making a risky argument. He is essentially defending a neighborhood that has been labeled "unsafe" in the popular imagination by appealing to a practice—cruising—that has likewise been stamped with the "risk" of HIV transmission. And while he is careful to note that the sexual encounters in the theaters stopped short of the penetrative acts that carried this risk, he is acutely aware of the discourse of "safety" that will condemn neighborhood and practice alike.

Delany's anecdotes place us squarely within this discourse's field of contradictions. They trace a "safe" itinerary that takes risk as its staging ground. They are cautionary tales in which the manner of their telling is one of the features we must approach with caution. They always leave behind an excess that cannot be accounted for, one that gestures towards *jouissance*. Such excess is in the nature of the anecdote, and Delany is unusually keen to invite it. That is, his anecdotes do not offer the exemplary summation that, according to David Simpson, temporarily closes "the otherwise infinite possible series of interpretations" that conversation might open.[88] They are more akin to the anecdotes that Joel Fineman describes in terms of excess rather than limitation. Delany's anecdotes of Times Square introduce what Fineman calls "an opening" or "hole" in the teleological narrative that surrounds them, thus giving way (in Fineman's erotic punning) to "the formal play of anecdotal hole and whole."[89] There is always an excess that that Delany's anecdotes cannot account for. Sometimes that excess is women, whose physical absence from the porn theaters might smooth their easy sociality of gay male contact more than Delany would like to admit. Sometimes that excess is blackness, which Delany sometimes elides with the politics of class.[90] Sometimes it is the excess of *jouissance*. For Fineman, the historical anecdote works to open possibilities that are, if not infinite, beyond the scope of the narrative that includes them. Fineman writes that the anecdote "lets history happen" by introducing "an opening into the teleological, and therefore timeless, narration of

beginning, middle, and end."[91] We might say that Delany's anecdotes stand in the place of this teleological narrative. His conception of cruising is anecdotal: it is all openings.

One anecdote in particular illustrates how Delany's micro-narratives puncture the discourse of risk and safety, in ways that unsettle its claims to knowledge. It recounts a robbery Delany witnessed at the Cameo, and it is offered to support the claim that the theaters were, by and large, safe places to be. There are several "holes" here, but the final hole, as we shall see, is the specter of AIDS:

> In the Cameo once, I saw the following operation pulled by two black guys in their late twenties, early thirties. The victim was an older white man, maybe sixty, in a suit and tie.
>
> As the gentleman came down the aisle, sight dim from the daylight outside, one of the assailants rose abruptly from his chair, turned, bumped into him roughly, and immediately started an argument: "Hey, man, why'd you bump into me? Watch where you're goin', huh? What were you, born in a barn? Don't you got no manners? You're a fuckin' rude asshole, you know that? What—you just bump into everybody, don't you? You don't give a fuck!" By now he was pushing the man in the chest (who was apologizing, trying to explain that, really, it was unintentional, he simply couldn't see…), backing him up the aisle.
>
> Waiting at the back of the theater, now the accomplice hurried down and, just behind the older man, dropped to one knee with his fists on the floor, facing to the side.[92]

What follows is easy enough to imagine. So too is the purpose of the absurdly extended harangue that Delany includes, word for unnecessary word, to signal a distraction technique for a type of robbery that will likely be familiar to many readers: "The first man gave the older a big shove, so that he stumbled over the kneeling man, to fall back, flailing, in the aisle. Then both were on him, the kneeling man taking his pants pockets, the other quickly going inside his jacket, yanking out whatever was there."[93]

While Delany does not comment on the older man's failure to read the narrative scene unfolding around him, his anecdote acts as a kind of filtering device, winking at the reader who is "in the know," as if to confirm their separateness from the man who mumbles apologies when he should be looking behind him. This is the street-smart reader, the reader whose experience might protect them from crimes like the one described. Yet Delany's anecdote also gestures towards another reader: the reader whose knowledge is limited, whether by chance or inclination, to the statistical language of crime that opens this anecdote. This reader finds themself in the language of the police report, the language of age, race, and gender that classes the perpetrators and the victims of crime. Its inclusion here seems calculated to bring into contact the two discourses—anecdotal and official—that together inform and misinform the dialogue around crime and safety.

The effect of the first gesture straddles the veteran New Yorker's faith in "street smarts" (which Delany shares) and the risk society's tendency to tout individual knowledge as the final and necessary defense against risk. The effect of the second, which is clarified as the anecdote continues, raises questions about how the positions of "victim" and "perpetrator" are distributed and reinforced:

> Eventually the story was that one of these older victims was the wrong lawyer, public prosecutor, or upper-administration city civil servant. The theater hired security guards soon after. The police, so the queens reported, got some special urging to catch this pair and make

> them an example—and did. But it confirmed for me what I'd already intuited: porn theaters were not a place to enter wearing good clothes or looking as if you had something. But that was the closest thing to real violence I ever saw there—over thousands of visits. And though there was still the odd argument in the balcony, the odd attempt to pickpocket someone down front, by the first years of the eighties these and the razorings [of pockets] stopped. (Was it because AIDS scared away all but the most committed, on all fronts?) And the movies just seemed generally safer.[94]

Delany dismisses the danger of the porn theaters in two moves. The first offers practical advice (don't go to the theaters "wearing good clothes or looking as if you had something") and the second insists on the statistical rarity of occurrences like these. The last observation, however, raises the possibility that the fear he is addressing—of mugging—is secondary to the fear of AIDS that scared away "perpetrators" and "victims" alike. In response to this last category of risk, Delany unapologetically suggests that the fear of AIDS made the movies "safer."

Delany's anecdotes of Times Square thus perform a dual gesture of risk and assurance that asks us, to borrow Donna Haraway's formulation, "stay with the trouble" of contact. Haraway's conception of "trouble" offers a potent intervention into Beck's formulation of risk, because Haraway acknowledges the precarity of the present without reaching for the mythic "security" that might figure its antithesis. Decades into the environmental crises that first prompted Beck's inauguration of the "risk society," Haraway asks us to confront a world in which "risk" is here to stay:

> Our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places. In urgent times, many of us are tempted to address trouble in terms of making an imagined future safe, of stopping something from happening that looms in the future, of clearing away the present and the past in order to make futures for coming generations. Staying with the trouble does not require such a relationship to times called the future. In fact, staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings.[95]

"Trouble" is something we might experience, but it is also something we might *make*, in order to clear space for new forms of living in a risky present. In its tendency to blur the lines between having and making, between moving away and moving towards, "staying with the trouble" rejects the moralistic dualisms that creep into the discourse of risk and safety, chaos and calm.

Delany's account of Times Square shares something of this ethos. He figures cruising as a go-between, a mode of contact that invests in the present, and contents itself with what (or who) is present on the scene where it transpires. It does not imagine futures for the relationships that may or not arise from it. It is premised on brevity, pleasure, and an openness to the other that acknowledges the "myriad unfinished configurations" of urban and social life, and it is content to leave them unfinished. It calls on us to embrace the messiness of contact against the streamlined and networked cities it sees coming into being. Delany writes:

> I never thought of the sex movie houses—the theaters that showed straight porn and encouraged gay sex in the audience—as dangerous, at least for the regular repeat attendees. Come back six times in five weeks, and you recognized a third of the faces you saw, and they recognized you.[96]

Delany invites us to come in and "come back" to the theaters that are closed at the time of his writing. Whatever echoes of nostalgia we hear in this invitation are obviated by the present-tense insistence of this gesture. The colloquial, present tense "come back" replaces the past conditional ("if you came back… you would recognize") with an oblique imperative: (you should) "come back."

In the reading that opened this chapter, I suggested that disorientation—of the kind found in *Dhalgren* and initiated by Delany's departure from Times Square—is at once a terrifying prospect and a site of intense potentiality. We can sight this potential when, in "Times Square Red," Delany anticipates the objection that will be raised to his conflation of social and sexual "contact:"

> A conservative commentator might ask, "Well, why are these beneficial nonsexual (i.e., safe) encounters threatened by the severe restriction of sexual (i.e., unsafe) encounters, especially if, as you say, the sexual ones are in the minority?"
>
> My answer: Desire is just as inseparable from the public contact situation as we have already seen in the fundamental structure of the networking situation. Desire and knowledge (body and mind) are not a fundamental opposition; rather, they are intricately imbricated and mutually constitutive aspects of political and social life. Situations of desire (as Freud noted in *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood* [1910]) are the first objects and impellers of intellectual inquiry.[97]

Delany here falls back upon the Freudian conception of desire as a drive that triggers curiosity, motivates pursuit, and leads us (if we are lucky) to truth. It might be tempting, then, to say that the tour he has led us on is one in which the object or impulse of desire is strong enough to overcome whatever barriers might keep us from the sites he depicts.

Yet it seems worthwhile to read Delany somewhat against his own grain here, and to propose that an equally powerful impeller of inquiry is found in the scene of loss that closes his essay, the one whose backdrop is the dizziness provoked by Ben's hail. I do not mean to discount the very real losses that accompany this scene. Nor do I wish to claim that struggle (in this case, the struggle to regain one's bearings in social, sexual, and geographic space) is somehow a beneficial experience. Yet with a view to scenes of loss and being lost that the following chapters take up, I want to propose that the forward-looking thrust of Delaney's argument, as well as the utopian impulse that grounds it, takes shape around the subjunctive question that closes "Times Square Blue": "What kind of leaps am I going to have to make now between the acceptable and the unacceptable, between the legal and the illegal, to continue having a satisfactory sex life?" This question crystallizes the suspicion that what Delany has shown us are scenes of pleasure, and that his textual periplum has left that pleasure behind at the absent sites where it occurred.

To be clear: to leave pleasure behind is not the same thing as abandoning it. In one of his later interviews, Foucault offers a correction to the Freudian narrative of desire that may offer a better summation of what Delany's departure achieves:

> It is very interesting to note…that for centuries people generally, as well as doctors, psychiatrists, and even liberation movements, have always spoken about desire, and never about pleasure. "We have to liberate our desire," they say. *No!* We have to create new pleasure. And then maybe desire will follow.[98]

Delany's periplum of Times Square leaves pleasure behind as an invitation for desire to follow. That it also charts the contraction of places where new pleasures might be found and founded only intensifies the urgency of its provocation, as it intuits the contradiction whereby desire, which follows pleasure, also seeks it out.

NOTES

[1] Samuel R. Delany, *Dhalgren*, 1st Vintage Books ed edition (New York: Vintage, 2001), 225.
[2] Jane Dailey, *White Fright: The Sexual Panic at the Heart of America's Racist History* (Basic Books, 2020).
[3] Delany, *Dhalgren*, 75.
[4] Delany, 136.
[5] Delany, 441.
[6] Delany, 226.
[7] Delany, 212.
[8] Delany, 212.
[9] Dailey, *White Fright*.
[10] Delany, *Dhalgren*, 36.
[11] Delany, 252.
[12] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Duke University Press, 1991), 53.
[13] Jameson, 53.
[14] Delany, *Dhalgren*, 225.
[15] See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press, 2007); Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (SAGE, 1992); José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (NYU Press, 2009), 53.
[16] Samuel R. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (NYU Press, 1999), 121.
[17] Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2016), 55–56.
[18] Rem Koolhaas, *The Generic City*, Second Edition (New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, Inc., 1995), 1251.
[19] Samuel R. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (NYU Press, 1999), 153.
[20] Delany, 121–22.
[21] Beck, *Risk Society*, 61.
[22] Beck, 5.
[23] Dianne Chisholm, *Queer Constellations: Subcultural Space In The Wake Of The City* (U of Minnesota Press, n.d.); Mark W. Turner, *Backward Glances: Cruising the Queer Streets of New York and London* (Reaktion Books, 2003).
[24] Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (University of Chicago Press, 2009), 180.
[25] Leo Bersani, "Sociability and Cruising," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, no. 3:1 (2002): 24.
[26] Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Harvard University Press, 2000), 179.
[27] Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, 1999, 144.
[28] Walter Benjamin locates the practice of flânerie as a transitional point in the movement towards a stage of capitalism where the exaltation of transparency (of the home, the city, and the work week) is exemplified by the architectural values of Le Corbusier. The flaneur is the "scout in the marketplace" who desires not (yet) its wares but its spectacle: the crowd. He is a dweller in the marketplace, at home and yet not at home, as the city becomes a landscape that opens onto dwelling. "Or, more

precisely, the city splits into its dialectical poles. It becomes a landscape that opens up to him and a parlor that encloses him." Walter Benjamin, "The Return of the Flaneur," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2: Part 2: 1931–1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press: An Imprint of Harvard University Press, 2005), 263. For a fuller account of this figure, see Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (HMH, 1968), 155–200.

[29] Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (New Directions Publishing, 1960), 43–44.

[30] Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, 1999, xxvi.

[31] George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (Basic Books, 2008), 66.

[32] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press, 1984), 121.

[34] Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, 1999, xxvi.

[35] Delany, xxiii.

[36] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (NYU Press, 2009), 44; Samuel R. Delany, *The Motion of Light in Water: Sex and Science Fiction Writing in the East Village* (Open Road Media, 2014), 179.

[37] Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, 1999, 81.

[38] Delany, 70.

[39] Delany, 3–4.

[40] Delany, 5.

[41] Louis Althusser, "On Ideology," in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (Verso Books, 2014), 190–92.

[42] Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, 1999, 5.

[43] Delany, 108.

[44] Delany, 26, 30.

[45] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006), 134.

[46] Marshall Berman, "Signs of the Times: The Lure of 42nd Street," *Dissent* 44, no. 4 (September 1997): 78.

[47] Qtd. in Lynne B. Sagalyn, *Times Square Roulette: Remaking the City Icon* (MIT Press, 2003), 20.

[48] Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, 1999, 153.

[49] Delany, 153.

[50] Christine Miller offers an interesting account of how the New York State Urban Development Corporation (UDC) sought to establish an ideal public for Times Square. Miller argues that in pitching the project as in the interest of the "public good," "the UDC made an implicit distinction between the current public of Times Square and an idealized general public that exists elsewhere" (140). As evidence of this process, Miller compares two versions of a photography project by Neil Selkirk that was used to adorn construction fences in 1998. As Selkirk describes it, the project began when "Tibor [Kalman] proposed that the fences be covered with poster-sized portraits of the denizens of Times Square, whomever they proved to be as a way of giving the sidewalks back to the people who used them." He produced 1000 photographs of bypassers, each adorned with a button

that listed their name, where they were from, and their reason for being in Times Square on that day. Miller compares the photographs that were displayed (though she only has records of six) to the originals that appeared in Selkirk's published collection in 2000, and she notes some interesting discrepancies. "In the collection, Lisa says she is in Times Square, 'looking for chicks with dicks.' Lisa's poster that was hung in Times Square says that she is 'being nice'...In the collection, Duane says he is in Times Square 'looking for sex'. But his poster says he is, 'looking for love'" (144-5). Kristine Miller, "Condemning the Public: Design and New York's New 42nd Street," *GeoJournal* 58, no. 2–3 (October 1, 2002): 139–48.

[51] Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, 1999, 92.

[52] Delany, 91.

[53] Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner cite this ammendment as one scene in the long project to establish a "national heterosexuality" that links intimacy to the institutions of personal life, thus positing the personal as "a home base of pre-political humanity from which citizens are thought to come into political discourse.""Sex in Public," in *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*, by Michael Warner and Lauren Berlant (Harvard University Press, 2000), 193.

[54] For more on this history, see Cindy Patton, *Inventing AIDS*, 1st edition (New York: Routledge, 1990); Dangerous Bedfellows Eds, *Policing Public Sex: Queer Politics and the Future of AIDS Activism* (South End Press, 1996); Richard Berkowitz and Michael Callen, *How to Have Sex in an Epidemic: One Approach* (News From The Front Publications, 1983); Linda Singer, *Erotic Welfare: Sexual Theory and Politics in the Age of Epidemic* (Psychology Press, 1993).

[55] Samuel R. Delany, "Street Talk / Straight Talk," in *Shorter Views: Queer Thoughts & the Politics of the Paraliterary* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan, 2000), 53–54.

[56] Samuel R. Delany, "Street Talk / Straight Talk," in *Shorter Views: Queer Thoughts & the Politics of the Paraliterary* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan, 2000), 44. Delany points to instances where individuals' speculations as to how they got AIDS generated headlines announcing "confirmed" heterosexual transmission via oral sex. Cindy Patton shares his suspicions as to the reliability of personal accounts. She points out that military personnel, for example, "may be discharged if their homosexuality becomes known. Thus, military men who have aids may be extremely reluctant to admit to homosexual behavior or intravenous drug use." Cindy Patton, *Sex and Germs: The Politics of AIDS* (Black Rose Books Ltd., 1985), 73.

[57] Samuel R. Delany, "The Rhetoric of Sex / The Discourse of Desire," in *Shorter Views: Queer Thoughts & the Politics of the Paraliterary* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan, 2000), 54.

[58] Delany, "Street Talk / Straight Talk," 54.

[59] Delany, "The Rhetoric of Sex / The Discourse of Desire," 34.

[60] Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, 1999, 206.

[61] George E. Curry, "Reagan Says AIDS Solution Rests With Morals," *Chicago Tribune*, April 2, 1987, https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1987-04-02-8701250240-story.html.

[62] Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (Penguin, 1999), 136.

[63] Beck, *Risk Society*.

[64] Beck, 40.

[65] Delany, *Dhalgren*, 441.

[66] Beck, *Risk Society*, 53–54.

[67] Jan Zita Grover, "AIDS: Keywords," *October* 43 (1987): 27, https://doi.org/10.2307/3397563.

[68] Jan Zita Grover, "AIDS: Keywords," *October* 43 (1987): 24. That the term "general population" was catching at the time is borne out in responses to a *Los Angeles Times* article suggesting that fears of heterosexual transmission may have been exaggerated, in part (according to the cynical assessment of several federal physicians) in order to secure more federal funding for research and prevention. One man objects to this claim on the grounds that "the community that ignores the AIDS crisis now will wake up in seven or eight years as did the gay community and find the devastation that only now is beginning to surface among the population in general." Another respondent echoes this view. "If the general public is led to believe that it's safe to 'go into the water' so to speak, then it won't be long before there is a mass panic along with more and more unnecessary new cases." Robert Scheer, "Growing Consensus: AIDS Threat to All-How Serious?," *Los Angeles Times*, August 14, 1987, https://www-proquest-com.libproxy.berkeley.edu/historical-newspapers/growing-consensus/docview/816143870/se-2?accountid=14496.; Phil Shaarsmith et al., "'AIDS Threat: How Serious?,'" *Los Angeles Times (1923-1995)*, August 26, 1987, 816129654, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times.
[69] Beck, *Risk Society*, 61.
[70] Douglas Crimp, "Introduction," *October* 43, no. Winter (1987): 6, https://doi.org/10.2307/3397562.
[71] "Sex in Public," 201.
[72] Simon Watney, *Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS and the Media* (A&C Black, 1997), xii.
[73] Simon Watney, "The Spectacle of AIDS," *October* 43 (1987): xii, https://doi.org/10.2307/3397565.
[74] Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, 1999, 156.
[75] Delany, 129.
[76] Delany, 123.
[77] Qtd. in Leo Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave?: And Other Essays* (University of Chicago Press, 2009), 3.
[78] I am indebted to Professor Namwali Serpell for this point.
[79] Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, 1999, 80–81.
[80] Delany, 81.
[81] Delany, 82–83.
[82] Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy*, 188.
[83] Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, 1999, 15.
[84] Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?," in *Is the Rectum a Grave?: And Other Essays* (University of Chicago Press, 2009), 26.
[85] Lawrence K. Altman, "Fact, Theory and Myth on the Spread of AIDS," *New York Times*, accessed July 7, 2018, https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/national/science/aids/021587sci-aids.html.
[86] Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, 1999, 164.
[87] Delany, 156.
[88] David Simpson, "Anecdotes and Conversations: The Method of Postmodernity," in *The Academic Postmodern and the Rule of Literature: A Report on Half-Knowledge* (University of Chicago Press, 1995), 53.
[89] Joel Fineman, "The History of the Anecdote: Fiction and Fiction," in *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veeser (Routledge, 1989), 61.

[90] In his 1990 introduction to *Silent Interviews*, Delany states that "anything 'positive' in the system associated with 'race' can be translated into terms of class—as class conflicts alone can explain the obfuscation, lies, and unspeakable cruelties that are the oppressive system itself." This statement does not deny the specificity of race as a social construct, and yet it does seem to align Delany with the view that reducing class-based divisions and inequalities (as, for example, through increased interclass contact) will work to combat the effects of racism. Oddly, Delany's work offers countless instances that contradict this argument, one of which (George's prediction of Bellona's fall) is cited in this chapter. Samuel R. Delany, *Silent Interviews: On Language, Race, Sex, Science Fiction, and Some Comics—A Collection of Written Interviews* (Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 8. For more on the status of race in Delany's work, seeRoss Posnock, "Cosmopolitan Collage: Samuel Delany and Adrienne Kennedy," in *Color and Culture: Black Writers and the Making of the Modern Intellectual* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 260–96; Jeffrey A. Tucker, *A Sense of Wonder: Samuel R. Delany, Race, Identity, and Difference* (Wesleyan University Press, 2004).
[91] Fineman, "The History of the Anecdote," 61.
[92] Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, 1999, 34.
[93] Delany, 35.
[94] Delany, 35.
[95] Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Duke University Press, 2016), 1.
[96] Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, 1999, 32.
[97] Delany, 168.
[98] Michel Foucault, "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurly, vol. 1 (New Press, 1997), 166.

CHAPTER 2

LOSS AND LOST IN THOMAS PYNCHON'S *BLEEDING EDGE*[1]

> Networks end postmodernism. They counter pastiche with the zoom and the overview; they animate and 'locate 'wherever' architecture; they resolve multiculturalism through neighborhood predictors that bypass yet reinforce categories such as race, gender, sexuality; they replace postmodern relativism with data analytics.
>
> -Wendy Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same*

My previous chapter sought to partake in Samuel Delany's refusal of nostalgia, both for the old Times Square he documents and for the modes of queer sociality it allowed him to articulate. In order to honor that refusal, it was necessary to resist the historicizing impulse that would name *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* as marking the end of an era for the provisional modes of contact it describes. The following chapter will begin by momentarily giving way to that impulse. Thomas Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge* (2013), an homage to New York City in the age of 9/11 and the first dot com crash, appears to pick up precisely where Delany's text leaves off. It places us in a New York City that has recently completed the project of transforming Times Square into a sterilized and "Disneyfied" tourist attraction, and it indulges in frequent bouts of nostalgia for its own (and our) recent past. In Pynchon's New York, Delany's opposition between "contact" and "networking" has been firmly resolved in favor of the latter, and the novel's extended exploration of the still-nascent online network merely reaffirms the suspicion that some crisis has reconfigured the material space of the city. In one of many laments for the material absences felt in this "new" New York, we are told that Maxine Tarnow, the novel's detective-protagonist, avoids Times Square because its possibilities for chance contact have been rendered obsolete by the encroaching networks of tourism and capital:

> The sleazy old Deuce she remembers from her less responsible youth is so no more, Giuliani and his developer friends and the forces of suburban righteousness have swept the place Disneyfied and sterile—the melancholy bars, the cholesterol and fat dispensaries and porno theaters have been torn down or renovated, the unkempt and unhoused and unspoken-for have been pushed out, no more dope dealers, no more pimps or three-card monte artists, not even kids playing hooky at the old pinball arcades—all gone.[2]

Bleeding Edge marks Pynchon's first return to New York City since his debut novel *V.* (1963), and his apparent nostalgia for his city's romanticized, grittier past is not particularly surprising. What is surprising, however, is the way the novel's nostalgia for the queer, unsanctioned, and un-gentrified spaces that Delany described bleeds into a more explicit nostalgia for the tropes of Pynchon's earlier work. The mourning we hear in this passage is not merely the anticipatory mourning one would expect in a novel that builds towards the attacks of 9/11. It is a more particular mourning that reaches, with unabashed nostalgia, for the material spaces where resistance was once sought and arguably effected in Pynchon's novels: the gritty bathroom stalls, the underpasses, and the many underground gathering points where society's wayward and forgotten once sought chance encounters, left messages scrawled on bathroom stalls, or reveled in pleasures that power did not condone. These places are "all gone." In the novel's own media-saturated language, the passage above encounters their absence as a shocking erasure of the links between past and present in the city's visible geography. With each repeated iteration of what is "no more," the text seeks apophatically to draw Pynchon's preterite figures back into the present of Maxine's New York, only to find that it no longer has anywhere *to put them*.

This problem of where to put them afflicts the novel as well. *Bleeding Edge* casts 2001 as a time when the rise of the surveillance state and the strategic erasure of countercultural sites has driven emergent counterpublics into the non-space of the online network, and it invents, because it *must* invent—an online game-world called DeepArcher to house them. DeepArcher ("like 'departure,' only you pronounce it DeepArcher") is one of many utopian spaces that have organized political longing in Pynchon's novels.[3] It is figured alternately as an underground network, a dystopian city, and a wild-west of the Deep Web: an explicitly spatialized zone that remains autonomous only to the extent that it is as yet undiscovered. Like the hollow earth in *Against the Day*, or the dream of America in *Mason & Dixon*, it is a place that is imagined to be "safe" until it is mapped. And like each of these spaces, it is eventually colonized. When the attacks of 9/11 indirectly damage its encryption code, the space that had hoped to be "history- free" finds itself, with all the loudness of allegory, caught up in what Pynchon has called the "Bad History" of the nation.[4] The program is infiltrated, a "backdoor" is opened, and the space is quickly filled with virtual chain-stores, popup ads, and other abominations of the "surface web," including private and state-sanctioned surveillance. We might say that DeepArcher falls prey to the cartographic violence that, as *Mason & Dixon* has it, "slowly triangulates its Way into the Continent, changing all from subjunctive to declarative, reducing Possibilities to Simplicities that serve the ends of Governments."[5]

Pynchon's utopias have always been virtual in the Deleuzian sense of "potential."[6] That DeepArcher is also "virtual" in the colloquial sense—both digital and immaterial—thus makes little difference to the possibilities it holds open for the novel. Yet it does make a difference, I argue, to the way the novel encounters the forms of hope and resistance available in its historical present. DeepArcher offers an experiential corollary for the internet that, when translated to the medium of narrative, effectively spatializes the novel's encounter with networked engagements. It is a kind of anti-network within the network: one that carves out space for the unmapped, un-surveilled encounters that might, it posits, still unfold at the margins of state power. And like most technologies it evolves to supply a social demand. Yet that demand markedly departs from the network's affordance of social connectivity and the gamic affordance of mastery. What DeepArcher

offers, or what its creators propose to offer, is a "journey" with no destination, an experiment in getting "constructively lost."[7]

This chapter proposes to take seriously the affordances of the digital world that alternately supplements, mirrors, and bleeds into the material conditions that *Bleeding Edge* historicizes. More particularly, it asks after the spatial and affective currents that mingle in the novel's depiction of *loss* and *getting lost* in the digital age. What does it mean to get "lost" in a game-world, a world within a world that is marked, in the era Pynchon records, by a host of the material losses: the human losses of 9/11, the spaces lost to the rise of the generic city, and the increasingly immaterial dimensions of life in the epicenter of what David Harvey has called the "financialization of everything."?[8] What politics does such an enterprise announce, and to what conditions can it be said to respond?

The novel is constructed in such a way that our answer to the last question is likely to overdetermine how we encounter DeepArcher's politics. As we shall see, getting lost in DeepArcher might be the escapist dream of getting "lost" to power: of exiting the networks of surveillance and dataveillance that locate subjects in a latticework of social, political, and economic markers. It might be a utopian exercise in imaging the world otherwise, in forsaking the "here" in order to think an elsewhere. It might be the ultimate escape of death, a bid to align oneself with the "lost" victims of 9/11 whose avatars wander DeepArcher like the traumatic return of the repressed. Finally, it might be impossible. The novel's bid to get lost—whether by vanishing or by losing one's way—is housed within a medium whose affordances run contrary to that enterprise. As Maxine's father obligingly reminds us, the internet evolved from a Cold War defense strategy into the perfect medium for the neoliberal era. It has become "this magical convenience that creeps now like a smell through the smallest details of our lives, the shopping, the housework, the homework, the taxes, absorbing our energy, eating up our precious time."[9] "Call it freedom," he says, "it's based on control. Everybody connected together, impossible anybody should get lost, ever again."[10]

Bleeding Edge is one of Pynchon's detective novels. It begins in the spring of 2001, when Maxine Tarnow, a "semi-divorced" mother of two and lone operator of the "Tail 'em and Nail 'em" fraud investigating business, receives a tip from documentarian Reg Despard about some financial irregularities at a tech security firm called hashslingrz. The business is headed by the youthful yet sinister Gabriel Ice, a man with, as hacker Eric Outfield puts it, "a purpose on earth written in code none of us can read," and Maxine is tasked with reading it. Despard has stumbled into a secret weapons lab in a mislabeled bathroom at hashslingrz. He also suspects (and Maxine confirms) that Ice is funneling money to the middle east through a variety of shell companies. Intimations of 9/11 reach their peak when hashslingrz employees are filmed setting up an apparent missile attack on the roof of a Manhattan building, aptly named the Deseret. In the pre-and post-9/11 conspiracy plot that ensues, Maxine is drawn into a vibrant underworld of tech startup wizards, online gamers, hackers, and government assassins. They all eventually converge in the virtual game-world of DeepArcher, one of whose co-creators happens to be the husband of Maxine's friend Vyrna. "Just lately," Vyrna confesses, "everybody's been after the source code—the feds, game companies, fuckin Microsoft? all have offers on the table? It's the security design—like nothing any of these people've ever seen, and it's makin them all crazy."[11]

It seems that DeepArcher's creators, Lucas and Justin, "had it in mind to create a virtual sanctuary to escape to from the many varieties of real-world discomfort. A grand-scale motel for the afflicted, a destination reachable by virtual midnight express from anyplace with a keyboard."[12] They have therefore buried DeepArcher "way down" in the "Deep Web" (the part inaccessible to search

engines), where it is heavily encrypted and programmed to erase all traces—in the form of metadata—of its users' actions and movements. Justin explains this mechanism by comparing it to anonymous remailers. "What remailers do is pass data packets on from one node to the next with only enough information to tell each link in the chain where the next one is, no more. DeepArcher goes a step further and forgets where it's been, immediately, forever."[13] In other words, DeepArcher's encryption technology effectively mechanizes what Fredric Jameson calls "postmodern schizophrenia," which occurs when the breakdown of the linguistic links between past, present, and future results in "a series of pure and unrelated presents in time."[14] It is a journey that leaves no trace, a punning departure with no return. This makes it a good place for Maxine to meet with her more paranoid clientele. It also makes it a coveted prize among the "the managed security people," who want, as Vyrna explains, to get "somewhere without leaving a trail….It isn't about the destination or even the trip, really, not for these jokers."[15] Chief among these jokers is Gabriel Ice, who wants to purchase DeepArcher to conceal his company's less legitimate activities. These include unauthorized surveillance (of Maxine, among others), complicity in the murder of wayward employee Lester Traipse, laundering money to Dubai, and suspected involvement in 9/11 (which may have been an inside job). We eventually learn that Ice is funneling money to counterinsurgents through numerous CIA fronts, and the novel's threads of conspiracy conclude in an indeterminate series of dead ends. All we know is that Ice is just one node on a distributed network of global capital, and like the links embedded in DeepArcher, the links between 9/11, hashslingrz, the CIA, and Montauk project "vanish and relocate" as soon as they're clicked on.[16]

Richard Gray has argued that the majority of 9/11 novels fail to think beyond the historical rupture they posit. While they uniformly depict the trauma of the attacks as a "yawning and possibly unbridgeable gap between before and after," they fail to develop the formal and imaginative procedures that would allow us to think the "after." Instead, he writes, they "domesticate" the crisis by retreating into the familiar terrain of the realist novel.[17] Ultimately, Gray contends, these novels fail to make good on the mantra that "everything changed" on 9/11. "Recognition that the old mindset has been destroyed, or at least seriously challenged, is widespread in recent literature. We are still, perhaps, waiting for a fictional measure of the new world view."[18]

Bleeding Edge does not quite adopt the mantra that "everything changed" on 9/11. While the attacks furnish the novel with its crisis point, that crisis seems merely to tip the hand of the neoliberal consolidations that Pynchon has been tracking since the Reaganite revolution of the 1980s. Yet it does come closer to glimpsing, if only by virtue of its hindsight, the "new world view" that Gray finds lacking in the 9/11 novels of Don DeLillo, John Updike, Ken Kalfus, and Jay Mclnerney. This world view is inseparable from the online network through which it is glimpsed. On the one hand, DeepArcher's infiltration on 9/11 allegorizes and renders visceral the post-9/11 expansion of domestic surveillance that began with the hasty passage of the Patriot Act (in October of 2001) and continued through the Obama administration. *Bleeding Edge* was released three months after Edward Snowden exposed the NSA's secret PRISM program to the American public, and for anyone who followed the news, it is impossible not to draw connections between the "back door" through which DeepArcher is infiltrated and the alleged "back doors" that Google, Facebook and other corporations opened to the NSA after 2008.[19] On the other hand, DeepArcher's susceptibility to erasures and updates dramatizes the "shock-and-awe" tactics of American economic and military imperialism that Naomi Klein described as "the shock doctrine." The game-world's encryption is designed to erase not only the history of its users' actions, but the history of the graphic

worlds they edit and replace. When its borders are breached on 9/11, the program that prides itself on generating endless blank slates in its wake thus becomes an easy testing ground for the technique of neoliberal expansion that, as Klein has shown, harnesses "a great rupture—a flood, a war, a terrorist attack—" in order to generate the "vast, clean canvases" that are susceptible to experiments in radical privatization.[20]

DeepArcher thus allows the novel to imagine these twin pressures of its moment—which this chapter will refer to as surveillance and erasure—as having produced a Faustian bargain. In exchange for security, it has sold its memory. When Maxine returns to DeepArcher after 9/11 she encounters a work remade in the image of global capital, complete with "yuppified duty-free shops, some for offshore brands she doesn't recognize even the font they're written in. Advertising everywhere. On walls, on the clothing and skins of crowd extras, as pop-ups out of the Invisible and into your face."[21] The pop-up, which emerges "out of the Invisible," is revelatory. And it is tempting to say that this scene of DeepArcher's cooptation is, like 9/11 in the words of the Maxine's therapist Shawn, "not when 'everything changed'" but "when everything was revealed."[22] It is tempting to say that a technology that began with the idealistic refrain of "information has to be free" has suffered the cooptation of freedom in service of capital, one that parallels neoliberalism's repackaging of imperialism under the banner of "free markets."[23]

Still, Pynchon is not known for delivering the untarnished clarity of revelation. He prefers to offer correctives like Shawn's as possibilities that the reader is forced to toggle between, only to leave us with the sense that the "truth" cannot be reached by the either/or logic his novels propose. Thus,while the broader arc of the novel leads us towards the second item in the binaries of freedom and control, memory and erasure, and privacy and publicity, its willingness to entertain both options as capacities of the online network wages a double war on technological progress and narrative resolution. We may note that even Maxine's father's diagnosis ("call it freedom, it's based on control") fails to dismiss either "freedom" or "control" as a possible affordance of the medium.[24] What we "call it" and what it is "based on" do not determine what it can do. And what it can do, or what it might yet be able to do, is get us "lost."

In order to make thinkable the novel's play on "lost" and "loss," this chapter will consider the text's portrayal of online engagements that hover between the actions of *reading* and *navigating*. While online navigation has clear relations to spatiality, reading may seem like a strange place to encounter feelings of loss and lost-ness. It does not lend itself easily to the tension between surveillance and erasure that, as I have argued, conditions the novel's changeable worlds. On the contrary, reading carries connotations of stillness, interiority, and a stable text that can be returned to in the privacy of the domestic sphere. Yet reading, which is a recurring trope in Pynchon's work, is stretched to its limits in the digital spaces of *Bleeding Edge*. The novel conjures up digital texts that are prone to alterations and deletions. Its readers may be watched or "read" through the transparent window of the screen. Moreover, reading in the gamic context of DeepArcher comes to encompass actions that extend beyond the strictly textual or epistemological connotations of the term. When confronted with an object, space, or passage of text, the gamer asks not only (or not primarily) what it means but what it *affords*. These questions might pertain to the gamic affordances of action, selection, or movement. Thus in Maxine's actions in the game-world, we can intuit the following questions: "If I click on that object, will I move towards it? If I click on that man, will dialogue appear? If I click on that door, will it open, or will it link me to a new space or scene?"

Such acts of navigation render the network a navigable space replete with choice, action, and agency. They offer the pleasures of acclimation to a system of rules, yet they also animate the negative affects that emerge when those rules suddenly change. At such times, the freedom of movement may give way to the coercive relocations brought on by a gamic video sequence, which transports the viewer (or their avatar) from one game "space" to another. The pleasures of selection may be thwarted by the apparition of a blank screen. A game of exploration, which appears to offer little more than an open-ended journey, may suddenly segue into a first-person shooter whose player lacks the usual affordance of a weapon.

These dizzying shifts between agency and its opposite are among of the novel's many disorientations, but they are not confined to the digital world of DeepArcher. Instead, they foreground the questions of orientation—and the agency it presumably affords— that trouble the acts of reading, navigating, and erasure that blur together in the material and informatic registers of Pynchon's text. This blurring obtains as well to the line between the digital and the material worlds of the novel, generating a level of ontological uncertainty that hinges on questions of affordance. Erasing your digital "trail" or "history," for example, becomes an act of getting lost in a world where the "route is erased behind you." The city dump might contain "hidden links" to a world without refuse. Acts of online reading and navigation lose all distinction, such that a failure to "follow" the information presented leaves the reader spatially "lost." The resulting confusion between informatic and spatial disorientation, I argue, raises compelling questions about the utopian impulse that drives the novel's advocates of lost-ness. Are confusion, disorientation, and the loss of agency we ascribe to these conditions an unwelcome side-effect of getting "lost" in the digital age, or might these eventualities serve a positive role in the novel's politics? And if we embrace the latter possibility, how might this expanded definition of lost-ness allow us to rethink the famous indeterminacy of Pynchon's novels?

Navigating the Screen

Pynchon's work has long played upon the line between affordance and resemblance, multiplying the mechanisms of culture through a process of doubling that reassigns objects to their uses. If the city from above resembles the printed circuit of a transistor radio, perhaps it can communicate. If the computer screen contains a window, someone might be looking in. What makes these metaphors compelling is not their paranoid quest to find connections between societal forces and their technological expressions; it is their capacity to register in the uses of objects those moments when things might have turned out otherwise, moments when, as Sean Austin Grattan has argued, "something other than the neoliberal present could have come to pass."[25] Brian McHale has described Pynchon's novels as engaging in "mediated historiography—the writing of an era's history through the medium of its popular genres."[26] Yet it is equally accurate to say that Pynchon writes an era's history through its objects, medias, and technologies, whether those technologies are material (the bomb) or epistemological (the map). And in cases where they are not material, Pynchon renders them so. He picks up an object and turns it over, tries out its moving parts, and asks what else it can do. The cartographic line in *Mason & Dixon* becomes, in the dissenting opinion of Captain Zhang, a transubstantiated "sword-slash, a long, perfect scar" that leaves a material mark of colonialism's "hateful Assault" on the landscape.[27] In *V.* (1963) the humble technology of the yo-yo offers a metonymic link between Benny Profane, the itinerant "human yo-yo," and the defense contractor

Yoyodyne, whose name tracks a genealogy that leads from toy gyroscopes to gyrocompasses to missile guidance systems.[28] In each case, what these objects afford becomes a question of emphasis.

DeepArcher is adamantly neither object nor material, but it has its affordances nonetheless. It also has its moods. The novel posits 2001—which marked the transition from dial-up to broadband connections—as the tipping point for a shift in society's "network imaginary," Patrick Jagoda's term for the material and metaphorical infrastructures that inform our understanding of the networked contemporary world.[29] DeepArcher therefore occupies the bleeding edge between the techno-utopian sensibilities of the nineties and the cautious cynicism of the early oughts. Its reigning saint appears to be Grateful Dead member and early WELL (Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link) pioneer John Perry Barlow, whose "Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace" (1996) declares the network's freedom from borders, governments, and materiality itself. Speaking from the disembodied terrain of a Gibsonian cyberspace, Barlow writes: "Your legal concepts of property, expression, identity, movement, and context do not apply to us. They are all based on matter, and there is no matter here."[30]

There are signs, however, that this dream of escape is marred by the same "Bad History" that Pynchon tracked in *Mason & Dixon*, where the utopian impulses directed at America evaporate with the westward sweep (or scar) of the line.[31] The novel is troubled by the ease with which early defenders of the "electronic frontier" trope on a particularly expansionist vision of American freedoms. Elsewhere, Barlow writes that "Cyberspace has a lot in common with the 19th Century West. It is vast, unmapped, culturally and legally ambiguous, verbally terse… hard to get around in, and up for grabs."[32] Yet the historical present of *Bleeding Edge* has already witnessed the frenzied grabbing of the 90's dot com boom, and the novel is steeped in fears of what will come next. "Promoman," the handle of a Deep Web advertising entrepreneur that Maxine only meets in avatar form, mixes Barlow's expansionist faith with a glimpse of the inevitable "grab" to come: "Once they get down here, everything'll be suburbanized faster than you can say 'late capitalism.' … Link by link, they'll bring it all under control, safe and respectable. Churches on every corner. Licenses in all the saloons."[33] March Kelleher, leftist activist and reluctant mother-in-law to Gabriel Ice, echoes in more familiar terms the fear that the techno-utopians have embarked on a doomed enterprise. "Their idealism… Maxie, I haven't seen anything like it since the 60s. These kids are out to change the world. 'information has to be free'– they really mean it. At the same time, here's all these greedy fuckin dotcommers make real-estate developers look like Bambi and thumper."

More important, however, is that Barlow's Gibsonian celebration of an immaterial "cyberspace" has entered an era where "matter" has begun to feel like an endangered resource. The digital may be particularly susceptible to the blank-slate tactics that Klein's "shock doctrine" seeks to name, yet everything is made to feel a little digital in *Bleeding Edge*. The novel jokes that "meatspace"—shorthand for the material world in Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984)— is becoming "soy-extenderspace."[34] New York City at night feels like "one of those first-person-shooter towns that you can drive around in seemingly forever, but never away from."[35] By the end of the novel, Maxine has the uncomfortable sense that "DeepArcher is about to overflow out into the perilous gulf between screen and face."[36] The novel pulls us into a world that is not virtual so much as *informatic*, a term that N. Katherine Hayles (following Donna Haraway) takes to encompass "the technologies of information as well as the biological, social, linguistic, and cultural changes that initiate, accompany, and complicate their development."[37] Its material world is shot through by digital forms of organization, connectivity, and flickering presence. "Windows" and "backdoors" take on new

meaning, and Pynchon's characters are free to become the avatars that (by some accounts) they always have been. Even life is reduced to a combination of the informatic and the animate. In the novel's somewhat abbreviated treatment of 9/11, the destruction of the twin towers feels more like a digital erasure than the conflagration that DeLillo, in *Falling Man*, renders as a "thunderhead of smoke and ash."[38] Maxine and her estranged husband Horst feel the aftermath of the attacks as a loss whose object vacillates uneasily between the material world and its informatic counterpart, between the lost life and the lost "numbers on the Rolodex."

> They gaze at each other for a while, down here on the barroom floor of history, feeling sucker-punched, no clear way to get up and on with a day which is suddenly full of holes—family, friends, friends of friends, phone numbers on the Rolodex, just not there anymore . . . the bleak feeling, some mornings, that the country itself may not be there anymore, but being silently replaced screen by screen with something else, some surprise package, by those who've kept their wits about them and their clicking thumbs ready.[39]

Donna Haraway writes that "blasphemy protects one from the moral majority within, while still insisting on the need for community."[40] If there is something blasphemous about Pynchon's treatment of 9/11, its blasphemy consists in rendering the losses from that crisis as a series of informatic "holes" that will be replaced, or perhaps filled in, by an equally immaterial "surprise package." Yet in DeepArcher, this blasphemy is leveraged to posit a community of the lost, and the reader is called (and in a sense compelled) to join it. There is something almost gamic in the way *Bleeding Edge* confronts us with the range of affects that respond to material, digital, and informatic forms of loss and getting lost, affects that, whether we imagine the latter as unpleasantly disorienting or pleasantly liberatory, fail to cohere into the consciousness of an emotion. Maxine, who has a professional investment in the trails people leave behind, responds uneasily when Justin first describes DeepArcher's security measures. "It's really just another maze," he assures her, "only invisible. You're dousing for transparent links, each measuring one pixel by one, each link vanishing and relocating as soon as it's clicked on… an invisible self-recording pathway, no chance of retracing it."[41] This leads Maxine to ask, "But if the route in is erased behind you, how do you get back out?"[42] And if Maxine succumbs to a spatial metaphor here, the novel in fact goes one step further, as it unites this erased "route" with the more material erasures transforming New York City. March Kelleher, who Maxine first met while protesting evictions, sums up the effect of New York City's development when she proclaims, "the only way to live here is not to get attached."[43]

The novel does not hide the contradiction that leads it to invest hope and fear in the same action. Rather, it exploits the network's capacity to generate both hope and fear, the desire to get figuratively "lost" to power and the fear that this impulse might somehow compound the losses—of matter or of memory—that threaten its amnesiac present. Maxine, who evinces a reflexive fear of such erasure, can thus be seen embracing DeepArcher's dream of informatic escape in a place that is the very definition of material excess: the city dump. When a pre-9/11 side plot finds her hiding from the DEA in the pre-renovation Island of Meadows (formerly a landfill off Staten Island), Maxine first encounters the dump as something akin to Benjamin's scrap heap of history, whose mounting "wreckage" in this case consists of "everything the city has rejected so it can keep on pretending to be itself," including "every Fairway bag full of potato peels, coffee grounds, uneaten Chinese food, used tissues and tampons and paper napkins and disposable diapers, fruit gone bad,

yogurt past its sell-by date that Maxine has ever thrown away."[44] She then indulges in a scene of "reading" that recalls the hermeneutic impulse that Oedipa Maas, reluctant executrix of *The Crying of Lot 49*, directs towards the circuit chip of San Narciso's streets, except that now it is spiked with the informatic vision DeepArcher allows. This act of reading transforms the wreckage into a series of embedded "links"—not to the past—but to a place where history and its "wreckage" are a structural impossibility:

> This little island reminds her of something, and it takes her a minute to see what. As if you could reach into the looming and prophetic landfill, that perfect negative of the city in its seething foul incoherence, and find a set of invisible links to click on and be crossfaded at last to unexpected refuge, a piece of the ancient estuary exempt from what happened, what has gone on happening, to the rest of it.[45]

This scene recalls the type of paranoid reading that leads Oedipa to encounter the material world as a readable text whose visible manifestation conceals a "transcendent meaning."[46] Yet Maxine's act of reading here does not seek to reveal those "orders behind the visible" that have come to characterize Pynchonian paranoia.[47] What it looks for is not revelation but the possibility of movement—of departure—that the "invisible links" might bring about. It is as if the links could "crossfade," not only the image on screen, but the now informatic reader who encounters them. Reading, then, is at once obscured and cut short by the acts of searching and "clicking" and by the movement (or departure) the click might produce. And yet, Maxine reflects, this image of DeepArcher as a place of "refuge" is also illusory. "Like the Island of Meadows, DeepArcher also has developers after it," and those who shelter there will "soon be rudely surprised by the whispering descent of corporate Web crawlers itching to index and corrupt another patch of sanctuary for their own far-from-selfless ends."[48]

This analogy between history and its material "trail" is one of many points on which the novel seems determined to get lost in its own logic. That New York City must banish its history is not among its better qualities, as evidenced by the encounter with Times Square that opened this chapter. Yet in DeepArcher this same capacity gives rise to a place of "refuge" from history and power at once. It is as if the absence of material history, or the absence (in Benjamin's terms) of its "wreckage," could somehow halt the "progress" that makes the wreckage.

Provisionally, then, we might say that getting "lost" is the point where the utopian impulse that fuels DeepArcher pulls away from the dire predictions of Maxine's father. It is also the point where the passive experience of "loss" collides with its active corollary: where the mourning whose mantra is "never forget" meets a willful retreat into an immaterial and unmappable domain. Put differently, it is at once the aim of the novel and the source of its confusion. It is at once "lost" and "loss," and the novel refuses to situate us within the affective or ontological conditions that adhere to these terms. The reader of *Bleeding Edge*, as Tony Tanner remarks of *Gravity's Rainbow*, "does not move comfortably from some ideal 'emptiness' of meaning to a satisfying fullness, but instead becomes involved in a process in which any perception can precipitate a new confusion."[49]

Still, I would hazard that there is something different about the confusion *Bleeding Edge* provokes. In a world dominated by informatics, as the world of this novel is, we might say that confusion is also a form of getting lost. It is an inability to "follow" the information one is given. According to Tanner, the "confusion" of *Gravity's Rainbow* is part of what the novel aims to

represent. "It is the way we live now."[50] *Bleeding Edge* prompts us to consider that "the way we live *now*" might no longer be represented by this movement from perception to confusion. It asks the reader to get lost in a network that has become synonymous with the search and the inevitable "find. And it intimates that, in an era where subjects are continuously interpolated as informed, agential navigators of their informatic worlds, getting lost might become an object of nostalgia, an act of resistance, or an exercise in utopian hope. As DeepArcher suggests, it might become "productive."

One of the more compelling questions raised by the novel's call to get lost unfolds at this intersection between confusion and disorientation. By mingling the spatial and informatic valences of getting "lost," the novel both evokes and complicates the politics of cognitive mapping that critics, most notably Brian McHale, have leveraged to account for the combination of informatic excess and ontological indeterminacy that characterizes Pynchon's novels. For McHale, what Tanner calls the "confusion" of *Gravity's Rainbow* represents "yet another 'degraded attempt' at cognitive mapping of the postmodern world, in Jameson's terms."[51] McHale applies a similar rubric to the confusion of genres we find in *Against the Day*:

> Pynchon's wager is that, multiplied and juxtaposed, an era's genres might compensate for each other's distortions and, taken all together, might jointly yield a complete and faithful—if also complex and elusive—representation of the historical whole. The map of the era's genre system can also serve as a cognitive mapping of the era itself (in Jameson's sense)—or so Pynchon hopes.[52]

Admittedly, *Bleeding Edge* approaches 9/11 with the arsenal of technological histories, national anxieties, pop culture references, and prophetic indulgences that Pynchon's novels are known for, resulting in a text that seems to say (as McHale says *Against the Day* says) "you are here."[53] Yet at what point does a text cease to become "an impoverished attempt" at cognitive mapping and become, more properly, a *mess*, a deliberate exercise in confusion that seeks not to orient subjects but to allow them to lose themselves?

This might be another way of posing the question that Wendy Chun, in the epigraph to this chapter, implicitly answers about the effects of networks on postmodern tropes. Chun proposes that networks "end postmodernism" by coopting and intensifying the textures of pastiche, connectivity, surface, and excess that characterize postmodern aesthetics.[54] Yet what is most damning in Chun's analysis is the network's ability to replicate the activity of "cognitive mapping" that Jameson famously offered as an antidote to the spatial and social disorientations brought on by late capitalism. According to Jameson, cognitive mapping responds to the alienation produced by the unmappable totality of global capital, whose scope eludes personal experience such that "if individual experience is authentic, then it cannot be true; and…if a scientific or cognitive model of the same content is true, then it escapes individual experience."[55] Under these conditions, Jameson argues, subjects cannot situate themselves in relation to global systems and thus cannot exert agency within those systems. He therefore tasks aesthetics with the problem of representing what cannot yet be represented: the "great global multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects."[56]

Chun's argument is not that the internet "represents," in a mimetic sense, what Jameson calls "the great global multinational and decentered communicational network." Rather, she suggests that its affordances of linkage, transparency, and connectivity mimic in its users the feelings of

orientation and agency that Jameson's cognitive map seeks to produce. In her analysis, the analogical appeal of Jameson's map is reflected (albeit at several political removes) in Bruno Latour's "network" and Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's "rhizome," as each of these spatial figures proposes to empower subjects by rendering visible the unseen lines of connection that mediate their daily lives.[57] Yet Chun, who is writing in 2017, contends that we are "now" in a different situation:

> We are forever mapping, forever performing—and so, we are told, forever empowered—and yet no more able to imagine, let alone decisively intervene in, the world around us. Precarity, however liberating, is the dominant network condition, and mapping follows and amplifies networks. Maps may allow users to zoom out from the close-up to the overview—to see patterns and to move between scales rather than be mired in postmodern pastiche—but they seem to be always zooming and never changing, in part because users are… simply zooming around a pastiche.[58]

"Zooming around a pastiche" is an apt description of DeepArcher's gameplay. It is a place of walls and windows, "receding trackscapes" of potential and measureless, black voids. In its confusion of images, scenes of heartland nostalgia give way to cities of polished chrome, and '90s era train cars open onto places where "impossibly fractal towers" grow upward to find what is left of the light. Yet the game decidedly withholds any possibility of a mappable terrain. What it offers instead is an impossible map, a world that plays upon the pretense of its spatiality in order to expose the very fallacy of that pretense. If Chun is correct in positing precarity as the "dominant condition" that mapping seeks to allay, the game Pynchon plays with DeepArcher is one that asks us to map precarity: to forge "links" between entities that vanish, relocate, and frustrate cognition by consigning its efforts to those trails of "link-rot" the program leaves in its wake. Moreover, the novel insists that this is a game whose player is destined to lose. It is a game that will produce, not agency, but a realization of its limits: a game where the best possible outcome is getting lost.

Accordingly, when Maxine first "submits" to the "lucid dream" of DeepArcher in Lucas and Justin's office, she encounters a world that is steeped in the contradictions of departure and delay, surface and depth, freedom and control. Her "journey" begins in earnest in the program's "lounge," where a helpful guide introduces her to the affordances of the game:

> "Go ahead, explore around, use the cursor, click anywhere you like."
>
> If it's a travel connection that Maxine's supposed to be making, she keeps missing it. "Departure" keeps being indefinitely postponed. She gathers that you're supposed to get on what looks like a shuttle vehicle of some kind. At first she doesn't even know it's ready to leave till it's gone. Later she can't even find her way to the right platform. From the sumptuously provisioned bar upstairs, there's a striking view of rolling stock antiquated and postmodern at the same time vastly coming and going, far down the line over the curve of the world. "It's all right," dialogue boxes assure her, "it's part of the experience, part of getting constructively lost."
>
> Before long, Maxine finds herself wandering around clicking on everything, faces, litter on the floor, labels on bottles behind the bar, after a while interested not so much in where she might get to than the texture of the search itself.[59]

It is worth noting that "clicking" here at once encompasses and fails to differentiate between the acts of looking, moving, and reading. "Clicking" might produce a close-up of an object, change the point of view, or open a bubble of explanatory text. It might help Maxine to "find her way" to the platform by moving her avatar or by linking her, with the filmic flourish of a cut, to another graphic space. The point is that we cannot tell the difference, and there is little indication that Maxine can, either. "Clicking" produces a narrative we can follow without following, a narrative where getting "constructively lost" applies at once to causality, agency, and orientation in the graphical space it manipulates. We are therefore torn between the sense that Maxine is undertaking a journey and the sense that she is *being taken* on one, and the latter impression is confirmed when she finally clicks on the "right" link and is passively "crossfaded" through a confusion of images that register the divergent aesthetics of DeepArcher's designers:

> Maxine locates at last a master directory of train schedules, and when she clicks on "Midnight Cannonball"—bingo. On she is crossfaded, up and down stairways, through dark pedestrian tunnels, emerging into soaring meta-Victorian glass- and iron-modulated light, through turnstiles whose guardians morph as she approaches from looming humorless robots into curvaceous smiling hula girls with orchid leis, up to a train whose kindly engineer leans beaming from the cab and calls out, "Take your time, young lady, we're holdin her for you . . ."[60]

Of course, the train will not be "held" by the program that presents it to her view. In the post 9/11 DeepArcher it will be converted into a "Jetsons-era spaceport with all wacky angles, jagged towers in the distance, lenticular enclosures up on stilts, saucer traffic coming and going up in the neon sky."[61] Yet even here, it will whisk Maxine away in a mechanized departure whose rapidity belies the nostalgic tenor of the engineer's injunction to "take your time."

> The instant she steps on board…the train accelerates insanely, zero to warp speed in a tenth of a second, and they're off to DeepArcher. The detail of the 3-D countryside barreling past the windows on both sides is surely on a much finer scale than it has to be, no loss of resolution no matter how closely she tries to focus in.[62]

One of the peculiar features of these gamic narrations is their tendency to evade all mention of the screen or the body that views it. Mark Hansen points out that virtual reality relies exclusively on the sense of sight, so that to speak of movement and space in the virtual is really to speak of a change at the level of image.[63] DeepArcher's more properly digital interface takes on this quality of the virtual as the narrative dispenses with any reference to screen and monitor; in these moments, we might say that the text mimics Maxine's tendency to *forget* about the screen. Still, the passage above does deliver a rare allusion to Maxine's bodily immobility, albeit one that keeps us locked within the frame of the digital world. Instead of the train's movement, or Maxine's movement within it, what we *see* is the moving 3-D landscape that barrels past a presumably still window. It is as if she and the train have been stilled while the world goes "barreling past." She is no longer the agential explorer, the one who manipulates the game and gets lost in the texture of a "search" whose stages she can follow. The only action she can take is to zoom in on the landscape for signs of its artificiality, for the "loss of resolution" that fails to appear.

Something strange happens, though, during this reversal of the mobile in the stationary. While the "resolution" of the landscape acknowledges the artificiality of the digital medium, it paradoxically heightens our sense that the train, and the window that Maxine gazes through, are somehow real. By orienting us towards the window of the train rather than the "window" of the screen that displays it, it draws us further in, as it were, to the frame of the graphic world.

Elaine Scarry offers a compelling account of the visual trick this verbal passage employs. She argues that texts produce the illusion of solidity by describing the passage of one (ideally transparent) image over another solid form, so that the projected image announces the materiality of what it has touched. Scarry takes her example from the opening of Proust's *Swann's Way*, where the narrator describes the play of magic lantern images across his bedroom wall. "By instructing us to move the one across the surface of the other," she writes, "the transparency of one somehow works to verify the density of the other."[64] In other words, Proust's wall is rendered solid in contrast to the image projected upon it, and its solidity makes it available to a broader array of imagined sensory encounters.

The above passage's reversal of window and landscape produces an equal but opposite illusion. As the landscape barrels past the train, the transparent window takes on solidity in the reader's imagination. It becomes an "actual" window, a solid analogue of the computer screen it both alludes to and replaces, and the scope of Maxine's gaze is expanded—or perhaps deepened—accordingly. As Maxine encounters this landscape she is (and we are) no longer looking "at" the larger window of the monitor, but rather *through* and beyond the represented window of the train. Her bodily orientation shifts in accordance with the mobile frame: she is no longer *outside* of the screen but somehow *within* it. Yet there is a danger in this re-orientation, one that becomes startlingly apparent when Maxine decides to explore the "back" of the train. At this point she encounters an image of the screen but not the screen itself, doubling the vertiginous experience of stumbling upon the end of the script.

> She mouses her way to the back of the car, expecting grand vistas of trackscape receding, only to find, instead, emptiness, absence of color, the entropic dwindling into Netscape gray of the other brighter world. As if any idea here of escaping to refuge would have to include no way back.[65]

This "gray" absence signifies the ultimate prohibition. It is both a wall that prevents future movement and a codeless void without content, as unnavigable as it is unreadable. The void confirms Maxine's fear that there is "no way back" from such a space, yet its existence also indicates that there is no "back" (of the train) to go to. There is no depth, only surface. Maxine is delivered, against her will, into the stifling confines of a blank page, and this blankness shifts from the "not yet" of futurity to the "no more" of death. Accordingly, Maxine's next round of "clicking" is followed by an involuntary movement that makes no claim on gamic or narrative continuity:

> The screen begins to shimmer and she is abruptly, you could say roughly, taken into a region of permanent dusk, outer-urban somehow, no longer aboard the train, no more jolly engineer or bodacious waitstaff, underpopulated streets increasingly unlit, as if public lamps are being allowed to burn out one by one and the realm of night to be restored by attrition….She's lost. There is no map. It isn't like being lost in any of the romantic tourist destinations back in

meatspace. Serendipities here are unlikely to be in the cards, only a feeling she recognizes from dreams, a sense of something not necessarily pleasant just about to happen.[66]

Here the experience of "getting constructively lost" gives way to a deterministic placelessness, an existence where no chance contact may intervene in the subject's trajectory. Serendipities are not simply "unlikely," they are a structural impossibility. And while "public lamps" would allow for the possibility of surveillance—lateral or otherwise—their absence does not prevent Justin from cutting Maxine's visit short, declaring that there's "no telling who's monitoring."[67] The scene has come full circle, and the "monitor" (screen) returns in Justin's punning reference to the surveillant gaze.

This, then, is the novel's utopian space, its hope for refuge from surveillance and the depredations of capital. Maxine's journey through this space may lead us to conclude that the affordances through which this hope is tried are more important than the links, whether narrative or informatic, that might allow us to map her trajectory. And the hope is "tried," in both senses of the word: it is *tried out* even as the journey is rendered *trying* by the obstacles the medium places in its user's way. As Maxine cycles through a loosely chronological array of network imaginaries and their gamic and social counterparts, we are asked to navigate a world that extends the hope of getting "lost" only to leap, with a rapidity peculiar to the online medium, from the aimlessness of "clicking" to the frenzy of "clicking," from the freedom of the search to the forced instantaneity of connection.

Returning to Chun's description of the map that is always a pastiche—the map that seems "always to be zooming and never changing"—we might say that DeepArcher proposes a map that changes with every click or keystroke: a map whose capacity to be *always* changing undermines the orienting capacity of the links and routes it asks us to trace out. Put differently, Maxine's journey conjures an instance of what Chun calls "zooming around a pastiche" while exposing the agency we attach to the act of "zooming." The searcher here encounters a world whose agencies exceed her own, one that transports her into spaces where the rules and affordances of the game seem to shift along with its dominant mood. Moreover, I would contend that where affordances or opportunities for action are at stake, the gallery of pastiche is secondary to the affordances of the game that carries us through it. As the permissive welcome of the MUD era ("go ahead, click anywhere you like") gives way to the high-stakes stealth of what might be a scene from *Metal Gear Solid*, the question becomes not what this world represents, but what it affords. The question Maxine presumably ends with is not "where am I," but "where is the exit."

Chun's argument about the relevance of cognitive mapping in the era of the network is echoed by Rachel Greenwald Smith, who proposes that Jameson's emphasis on *agency* as a function of cognitive mapping must be rethought in the neoliberal era. Neoliberalism, she reminds us, builds upon the liberal tradition that values agency as a good in and of itself.[68] It posits agential, entrepreneurial subjects who are armed with the information they need to act on their own behalf, and yet, she argues, "the choices we are encouraged to make exist within a restricted set of options, all of which fundamentally run in accord with the foundations of the neoliberal state."[69] While Smith does not address the internet directly, its affordances are implicit in her description of neoliberalism's interpolation of entrepreneurial subjects:

> There are disorienting aspects of neoliberalism, to be sure, but neoliberal subjects are also constantly provided with forms of location, transparency, and information, and are expected

> to use the agency these experiences offer in order to make smart entrepreneurial decisions. Neoliberalism therefore entails the cultivation of subjects who can locate themselves effectively within certain situations, who can take stock of the rules and operating functions of a given system, and who can productively claim agency in relation to that system.[70]

Under these conditions, she concludes, there is a "tension between the need for forms of mapping to penetrate the obscurities of global capitalism and the possibility that some forms of mapping merely reproduce feelings that reinforce neoliberal norms and expectations."[71] Texts that extend feelings of agency to their readers, she writes, may do little more than replicate the assurances that neoliberal subjects have come to expect: that information will be available, that systems will be intelligible, and that the reader or consumer will be given access to their workings.

Keeping in mind the play on "monitor" that concludes Maxine's voyage through the game-world, I would add that such texts may also reproduce the satisfying "transparency" that neoliberal governance increasingly touts in lieu of other political values. Returning to the novel's investment in online surveillance debates, it is telling that the public response to PRISM was muted in comparison to the outcry that followed reports of Russian Facebook advertising during the 2016 presidential election. Also telling is the fact that the latter outcry produced the more significant update.[72] In 2017, Facebook announced that it had disabled anonymous advertising on its platform. Rob Goldman's official announcement of the change solidified the link between transparency and accountability while conveniently eliding the language of rights, representation, and the stickier questions of policy that Facebook has sought to avoid. "Transparency," he wrote, "helps everyone, especially political watchdog groups and reporters, keep advertisers accountable for who they say they are and what they say to different groups."[73] While this may be the case, Goldman's affirmation of transparency as a public good downplays and arguably seeks to justify the more harmful forms of transparency—surveillance and dataveillance—that users are subjected to as a condition of their engagement.

The videogame, even one imagined by a work of fiction, offers a rich medium in which to explore the tensions around mapping, transparency, and the forms of agency these acts may alternately mimic and produce. Scholars in the growing field of gaming studies often cite neoliberalism's interpolation of agential subjects to propose a resonance between video games—which are typically marked by action, competition, and the navigation of informatic systems—and the structures of life in neoliberal society. In *Protocol* (2006), Andrew Galloway argues that video games "flaunt" rather than hide informatic control such that "to play the game means to play the code of the game" and "to win means to know the system."[74] Furthermore, he argues that the more emancipating games appear by virtue of the choice and action they afford, "the more they are in fact hiding the fundamental social transformation into informatics that has affected the globe during recent decades."[75]

A more measured assessment is provided by Patrick Jagoda in *Experimental Gaming* (2020). While he likewise proposes that "the competition, repetition, and quantified objectives" of games "correspond with some of the most pernicious aspects of advanced capitalism," Jagoda departs from Galloway's semiotic analysis of protocol to recenter the experiential and experimental aspect of game play. In his view, "games do not merely represent or simulate reality, but also serve as an experimental form that has the potential to alter the conditions of the historical present."[76] They can "realize (in the sense of make real) designed worlds that influence the social world—or, more

accurately, a world that is perpetually changing in ways that undermine the grammatical work performed by the definite article 'the.'"[77]

The invitation that DeepArcher extends to its user, and, I argue, to the reader, acts as a call to experience the precarity that Jagoda implicitly aligns with the conditions of neoliberalism. It is a call to get lost in a terrain where the impossibility of mapping is at once trying and a source of hope, and it asks us to realize the constraints that threaten to consign agency to the same fate as "freedom" in the neoliberal canon of double-edged swords. Moreover, it launches this call by returning us to the era when "freedom" became the battle cry for a frenzy of geopolitical aggression and legal exceptionalism, such that we are prompted to examine the potential uses—and missuses—of our expanded agency in a mappable, networked world. And in this regard, it warns us that the distinction between resemblance and affordance—in Maxine's father's words, what we "call it" and what it can do—can be hard to read. In a scene that resonates with Andrew Galloway's adequation of protocol and control, Eric admits that the Deep Web, that unindexed and unsearchable graveyard of "sites lost to linkrot, to bankruptcy, to who-gives-a-shit-anymore," is not the unmapped and unregulated domain it appears to be.

> The Deep Web is supposed to be mostly obsolete sites and broken links, an endless junkyard. Like in The Mummy (1999), adventurers will come here someday to dig up relics of remote and exotic dynasties. "But it only looks that way," according to Eric—"behind it is a whole invisible maze of constraints, engineered in, lets you go some places, keeps you out of others. This hidden code of behavior you have to learn and obey. A dump, with structure."[78]

If reading in the network enhances the reader's feeling of agency by expanding and making visceral a sense of informatic connectivity, reading Pynchon's network mitigates those feelings by making us aware of the digital's enhanced capacities of control, surveillance, and erasure. Eric's reference to the "behind" figures the screen a surface that conceals its uses. This rendering notably departs from James Gibson's conception of affordance, a term he coined to designate what an object offers, provides, or furnishes to the animal, in particular the possibilities of action it appears to invite.[79] In formulating this theory, Gibson makes what he admits to be a "radical" hypothesis, namely, that "the composition and layout of surfaces constitute what they afford," so that "to perceive them is to perceive what they afford." The radical nature of this hypothesis, he explains, consists in the implication "that the 'values' and 'meanings' of things in the environment can be directly perceived."[80] What Eric suggests, however, is that the "values and meanings" *behind* the screen's surface are at once learnable and "invisible," which would imply that they can only be learned by being obeyed. The "dump, with structure" at once recalls Maxine's vision in the Island of Meadows and banishes its mechanism of escape. It proposes that the desires of the reader are to some extent anticipated and delimited by the affordances of the digital text.

One question, then, is how the novel's scenes of reading this "dump with structure" interrogate the now habitual actions of the reader who has learned to "obey"— but also, we must add, to enjoy and to exploit—the structures that organize networked engagements. In order to answer this question, it is necessary first to linger on the "surface" of the screen that mediates acts of reading and navigating in the network. The novel's rendering of the screen resonates startlingly well with the arguments of Anne Friedberg, who proposes that the computer screen "adds new depth to

the perpendicular surface" from which it takes its name.[81] "The computer screen," she writes, "is both a 'page' and a 'window,' at once opaque and transparent. It commands a new posture for the practice of writing and reading—one that requires looking into the page as if it were the frame of a window."[82] *Bleeding Edge* plays upon this distinction between the opaque "screen" and the transparent "window," as it asks what each affords to the reader and to the surveillant gaze. For example, we may recall how Maxine's shock at encountering a screen of "Netscape gray" abruptly ends the exploratory zeal that sent her "zooming in" on the landscape of DeepArcher.[83] As a counterpoint to the agency afforded by the window's transparency, we may also recall that Justin's termination of her session—on the grounds that someone might be "monitoring"—recast the monitor as a window open to the surveillant gaze.

This unwelcome link between transparency and surveillance gains precedence over the agential or readerly window as the novel progresses. Indeed, I would argue that the increasing transparence of textual communications, rather than the attacks of 9/11, constitute the crisis and attendant disorientations that afflict the novel's world. Pynchon, who is known for his astute interrogations of reading, proposes that the figurative transparency of the digital screen reorients the network reader within a reconfigured terrain of surface and depth, privacy and surveillance. In the novel's spatial imaginary, the screen becomes a surface that conceals some perspectival depth, much like a two-way mirror conceals an invisible someone on the other side. And depth, which for Pynchon has long signaled a hermeneutic access to the workings of a text, a system, or a city, becomes an increasingly ambivalent figure. It is both meaning and illusion, concealment and lure. In DeepArcher, it is the illusion of "forced perspective" that aligns the act of searching, or journeying, with the process of going "deeper."[84] It is the "depth" that promises privacy and concealment, yet this too may be illusory. Even Justin acknowledges that "if somebody wants in, they'll get in. Deep Web or whatever."[85] In short, whatever agency is afforded to the reader who can access the "deeper" levels of a text or code is mitigated by the surveillant practices that may anticipate, track, or curtail the user's actions in the network. When coupled with the mechanized erasures that seek to defend against surveillance, the internet, "Deep Web or whatever," becomes a very disorienting place.

These twin threats of the digital are made manifest in Maxine's several encounters with the informatic doubles of government agent Nicholas Windust. Windust is that quintessential Pynchonian type that Maxine, after an unwelcome erotic dream about him, aptly describes as the "federal penis."[86] He is a slightly more salvageable version of a Captain Blicero, an emblem of government power who descends from above the confines of law and morality on a mission that happens to involve the targets of Maxine's investigation. Erasures—of information, states, and lives—appear to be his specialty. From his dossier, "downloaded from some Deep Web directory for spooks called Facemask," Maxine learns that Windust is "something worse" than FBI.[87] "If there is a brother- or God forbid sisterhood of neoliberal terrorists, Windust has been in there from the jump, a field operative whose first recorded job… was in Santiago, Chile, on 11 September 1973, spotting for the planes that bombed the presidential palace and killed Salvador Allende."[88] Windust, whose name connotes windows, erasure, and the promise of a "clean slate," is thereby aligned with the "little 9/11" coup that David Harvey names as the first "experiment with neoliberal state formation."[89] We later learn that he is also tasked with erasing what some see as "evidence" that 9/11 was a crisis engineered to promote a few more. He has apparently been ordered to sweep away, or consign to dust, all evidence of hashslingrz's rooftop stinger operation—the one that looked suspiciously like a "a dry run" of "somebody planning to shoot down an airplane."[90] He fails. When

March Kelleher posts the video on her "Weblog" along with a sampling of other 9/11 conspiracy theories, Windust becomes a marked man.

The risks of Maxine's credulity in digital space are made abundantly clear when she meets Windust, now in hiding, while loitering in a post-9/11 version of DeepArcher. Her sense of the serendipity of this encounter is quickly checked by the suspicion that dataveillance and predictive algorithms have set her up, namely "that somebody, some all-knowing cyber-yenta her online history has always belonged to, would be logging her every click, every cursor movement…. Knowing what she wants before she does."[91] Yet her wariness soon vanishes among the graphics, which now portray a post-apocalyptic desert landscape punctuated by burning oil rigs and shattered towers.[92] Or rather, her wariness is directed at the *wrong risks*. The last time she saw Windust, they nearly got shot by snipers at the Chinatown bus stop, and as they careen through the digital desert, Maxine worries that the game's snipers will get them this time. Windust is unconcerned. He tells her to meet him at "the place"—an abandoned factory they once used for a tryst—and she arrives to find him murdered and partially eaten by dogs, presumably hours before their conversation took place. The landline rings, and a voice on the answering machine tells her, "we know you're there."[93]

If this is a type of phishing scheme, Maxine has taken the bait in more than one sense. While visibly alone with Windust's avatar she allows herself to be lulled into a false sense of privacy, one that is abruptly shattered when she returns to "meatspace." The reader is likewise disoriented by this turn of events. Aside from a slightly adjusted verbal lexicon, the novel's depiction of online and offline action is remarkably similar: what "takes place" in the network is presumed to occupy its own place within the novel's plot. Maxine is talking to Windust, therefore he must be alive. And to all effects they do appear to be talking, since during their online encounter there is no reference to typing. When she quarrels with Windust he objects: "'I didn't come looking for you. You clicked on me.' 'Did I.' Long silence, as if he's having an argument with himself and they finally settle it."[94] "Silence" indicates a pause in conversation, just as it would in any dialogue, and "clicking" is synonymous with desire or approach. As readers we are treated to an exaggerated version of the illusion Maxine falls prey to: an illusion that works by erasing the screen and, in so doing, blurring the line between network affordances and their real-world equivalents.

Put differently, the trick Maxine succumbs to is not the trick of anonymity that obsessed network users in the nineties, when the prospect that people on the internet might not be who they claimed to be was a cause of widespread anxiety.[95] While the text certainly plays upon this fear, it is more concerned with the illusion of orientation that allows Maxine to feel herself at once *alone in the desert* and *alone with Windust*, as if the positions and capacities of her avatar were also her own. This illusion is likewise extended to the reader, who may be forgiven for feeling tricked by this fraudulent depiction of a meeting. There is a seemingly impossible degree of detail in the novel's digital world. Facial expressions, T-shirts, and distant advertisements are all easily (and implausibly) readable, a fact which renders the constraints of an eight-by-twelve monitor both forgettable and insignificant. In this instance, Windust's avatar "gazes at her, steady, unremorseful."[96] It is no wonder, then, that Maxine mistakes perspectival depth for its epistemological counterpart. She once again forgets about the screen, and her forgetting allows it to become a window.

This play on windows reappears, albeit in altered form, when Maxine attempts to reread her copy of Windust's dossier after his murder. When she returns to this digital text, Maxine finds that the history of Windust's exploits has been subjected to updates that are "strangely nonnegative when not outright eulogy material."[97] The dossier has been living on her hard drive, but "each time she

consults it now, there's been new material added. As if—a breeze given her generations-old firewalls—somebody has been hacking in whenever they feel like it."[98] As the firewall opens to the "breeze," the wall becomes an open window. And the window, which Maxine has a professional history of spying through, donates some of its transparency to the screen of the monitor that displays it. Moreover, this open window is now coupled with that other risk of network engagement: the erasure and alteration of the text. The risk of "no way back" is reconstrued as the prospect of a text that cannot be returned to.

Reading the Window

Together, these reconceptions of textual depth mark an update to the usual scheme of Pynchonian paranoia. Paranoia for Pynchon is not primarily the fear of being watched but, as Leo Bersani has argued, the fear that *what* is watched, read, and interpreted is itself a textual product that emerges from unknown and omnipotent authors. His protagonists are typically detectives, cartographers, interpreters of signs, and if power intervenes in their interpretations it does so by manipulating those signs rather than by surveilling their actions. They are paranoid readers who look beyond the visible surface as if, in the words of Sharon Best and Stephen Marcus, it is simply "a layer that conceals, as clothing does skin, or encloses, as a building's facade does its interior."[99]

Consider the moment when Oedipa Maas attempts to read a city at night:

> It was now like walking among matrices of a great digital computer, the zeroes and ones twinned above, hanging like balanced mobiles right and left, ahead, thick, maybe endless. Behind the hieroglyphic streets there would either be a transcendent meaning, or only the earth. . . . Ones and zeroes. So did the couples arrange themselves. . . . Another mode of meaning behind the obvious, or none.[100]

Here and elsewhere, Oedipa approaches the visual world as a set of "hieroglyphic" phenomena, a potential text to be interpreted. The resulting partnership between watching and reading becomes hard to untangle. In reference to Pynchon's definition of paranoia as the "reflex of seeking other orders behind the visible," Leo Bersani suggests that "the 'orders behind the visible' are not necessarily… orders different from the visible; rather, they are the visible repeated as structure. Paranoid thinking hesitates between the suspicion that the truth is wholly obscured by the visible, and the equally disturbing sense that the truth may be a sinister, invisible design in the visible."[101] Oedipa's method of surveillance, then, is as much an act of "watching over" as of *looking through* or *reading into*. She is figured as a surveyor gazing down from a great height, a detective walking the noir streets, the one who watches and interprets what she sees. She seems unconcerned with the prospect that she herself may be the object of surveillance; rather, her fear is that she may be a bad reader, projecting clues where there are none, or a duped reader, seeking the real in a text that has been designed to lead her astray.

Bleeding Edge alters this structure of paranoia by proposing that the reader of the digital text, whether linguistic or graphic, is forced to encounter herself as yet another text subject to the gaze of others—a compendium of online actions that may be read, analyzed, and leveraged against her. This reorientation of the reader weakens the promise that textuality, and by extension language, might provide the "transcendent meaning" Oedipa once sought. Returning to Bersani's analysis, we

might say that DeepArcher represents an excess of the visible to the extent that it is experienced wholly as image. At the same time, its reliance on code and network protocol may be said to literalize the sense of an "invisible design in the visible." Yet the suspicion that there may be some underlying truth obscured by the network's visual manifestations is shown to be just as illusory as DeepArcher's instantiation of graphic depth. In Maxine's final journey into DeepArcher we learn that its greatest advocates go there not in search of the truth, but in search of an "abyss," "a horizon between coded and codeless," "the edge of the unnavigable, the region of no information."[102] What is sought in this space is not an epistemological truth but the absence of the text, code, or signs that might reveal it. It is an invisibility that adheres to both reader and text. "The region of no information" offers not truth but its absence, an illegible space whose promise is to confer such illegibility on those who reach it. By means of this figure of getting lost, the promise of reading is surpassed by the promise of freedom from being read.

Pynchon is certainly not the first to consider how the vexed transparency of the screen reconfigures online engagements. William Gibson, who coined the term "cyberspace" in 1982, has described Google as a "two-way membrane….that makes the world accessible to everyone, and everyone accessible to the world."[103]Wendy Chun goes so far as to ask what the internet might look like if we accepted the fact that its privacy is illusory, that the personal computer is an oxymoron, and that networks are essentially "promiscuous" and "leaky" modes of communication.[104] Yet Pynchon's ongoing interest in acts of reading—and, by extension, in the production and apprehension of readable "texts"— complicates his unease in the face of this "two-way membrane." What happens, the novel asks, when the "window" of the screen conceals a second, surveillant gaze? What happens when the act of reading generates a "history" of online engagement that renders the reader perceivable as text, a history that some readers might prefer to erase?

Chun proposes a compelling answer to this question, one that may help us to see what difference the digital makes in Pynchon's latest rendition of the detective novel. She recalls us to D.A. Miller's suggestion, in *The Novel and the Police*, that the Victorian novel-reader is interpolated as "the police" who may identify and judge the crimes the novel portrays. Miller concedes that this argument requires "moving the question of policing out of the streets" and into "the private and domestic sphere on which the very identity of the liberal subject depends," but that is also the whole point.[105] The reading subject, he argues, is at once concealed and constituted by the privileged domain of domestic privacy. As Chun points out, Miller's reader is one who sees but "is never seen in turn, invisible both to himself (he is reading a novel) and to others (he is reading it in private)."[106] Yet Chun contends that this ontological divide between reader and text breaks down in the case of online networks. The window that holds the text no longer implies a unidirectional gaze, and readers, she argues, become "characters in a drama putatively called Big Data."[107]

It is important to note that Chun's invocation of "seeing" is metaphorical here. The type of surveillance she invokes is not the Orwellian eye that watches the reader through the "window" of the screen, nor is it the more literal "eye" of the built-in camera on the personal computer. Rather, it encompasses the diverse forms of corporate, governmental, and "lateral" (or peer-on-peer) surveillance that have arguably decoupled surveillance from its etymological roots in "watching." In the network, surveillance (from the French *sur*- "over" and *veiller* "to watch") becomes closer to *reading*, as here it is not our movements that are surveilled but the traces of those movements.[108] Our search histories, IP addresses, location histories, and patterns of engagement may be collected and used by advertisers, web designers, or (in some cases) intelligence agencies. Evidence of our reading

may remain on social media in the form of "likes" or re-tweets. Our browsing history may generate freakishly targeted ads at the bottom of the screen, and so on. The result is that reading in the network generates a trace and a trail: a record of what we have seen, felt, and done.

This is the trail that DeepArcher is intent on erasing. Yet while Chun articulates the network's capacity for transparency and memory, other scholars, notably N. Katherine Hayles, worry about its amnesia. In *How We Became Posthuman*, Hayles identifies an "epistemic shift" in contemporary informatics, one in which ideas of pattern and randomness take precedence over the dialectic of presence and absence that has informed previous theories of language and signification. Hayles argues that Lacan's conception of "floating signifiers," which sought to deny the notion of language as "code" in which a stable correspondence exists between signified and signifier, takes for granted the materiality of textual inscriptions. In word processing software and HTML, she argues, "language *is* a code." "The relation between machine and compiler languages is specified by a coding arrangement, as is the relation of the compiler language to the programming commands that the user manipulates."[109] Moreover, Hayles proposes that information technologies have given rise to "flickering signifiers" that are characterized by their tendency to undergo "unexpected metamorphoses, attenuations, and dispersions."[110] Her figure for these dispersions is the "refreshed image" of the screen:

> When a text presents itself as a constantly refreshed image rather than as a durable inscription, transformations can occur that would be unthinkable if matter or energy, rather than informational patterns, formed the primary basis for the systemic exchanges. This textual fluidity, which users learn in their bodies as they interact with the system, implies that signifiers flicker rather than float.[111]

Earlier, I proposed that DeepArcher offers an experiential corollary for the internet by embedding its affordances in the texture of a spatialized world. Hayles's analysis allows us to think how this experience becomes pedagogical, as the game asks its users to "learn in their bodies" what it means to be lost in a world where "the route in is erased behind you."[112]

Maxine, who emblematizes the late-adopter mindset of generation X, is slow to acknowledge the difference between the flickering text and the flickering world. Well-schooled in the tactics of physical and financial tailing, binocular stakeouts, and evasive driving, she is slow to realize that something else may be looking back at her through the window of the screen. She approaches DeepArcher with the credulity of a neophyte, accepting its pretensions to spatiality with a combination of metaphorical and metaphysical logic. When Lucas and Justin first introduce her to the concept of an avatar, she recalls that "in the Hindu religion avatar means incarnation. So I keep wondering – when you pass from this side of the screen over into virtual reality, is that like dying and being reincarnated…?"[113] She finds it easier, at least initially, to imagine forsaking her body than to learn in her body the rules of the digital world. This stance is in keeping with the novel's frequent references to the disembodied domain of Gibson's "cyberspace," yet Justin's response aims to deflate this spatial imaginary. "It's code," he tells her, "just keep the thought, couple of geeks up all night on cold pizza and warm Jolt wrote this, not exactly in VRML but something hyper mutated out of it, 's all it is."[114] VRML, or Virtual Reality Markup Language, is the text-based file format used to represent 3D graphics. Justin is essentially asserting that this visual world is composed of text—albeit text that has been translated from a "world" (or .wrl) file into an interactive "world" of vector

graphics. Yet these very graphics make it difficult for Maxine to accept his explanation. Instead of trying, like Oedipa, to convert the world into readable text, she succumbs to the allure of a text that has already been converted into a world.

Whether for Maxine's edification or the reader's, the novel therefore supplements its encounters with the digital "text" by endowing the screen's analogue counterparts with the affordances of transparency and loss. To clarify how the novel encounters the digital as distinct from the material text, we might compare Pynchon's figurations of reading in two spaces, or on two surfaces: the bathroom stall and the computer screen. This comparison is not as fanciful as it might seem. Among Pynchon's many nostalgic self-references in *Bleeding Edge*, the novel's vast catalogue of bathrooms points to an intentional yet vexed analogy between stall and screen. Both the bathroom and DeepArcher are proposed as heterotopias of the private-in-public: they are publicly accessible spaces that nevertheless extend the promise of privacy to their users. The graffitied bathroom stall—which functions as a message board in *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*—also offers a productive figure for Pynchon's earlier, analog networks, insofar as it anticipates an online platform's ability to disseminate anonymous content from a wide array of social groups. Consider the bathroom graffiti that first acquaints Oedipa with the ubiquitous WASTE symbol: "Interested in sophisticated fun? You, hubby, girl friends. The more the merrier. Get in touch with Kirby, through WASTE only, Box 7391, L. A."[115] As Gregory Flaxman points out, the in-group selectivity of the declarative "WASTE only" renders the message taboo: since Oedipa does not yet know about WASTE, she cannot "get in touch," and her desire to do so increases accordingly.[116] At the same time, the wording of the invitation collapses the line between the desire to break the communicative taboo—to "get in touch"—and the desire to break the sexual taboo—to *touch* whoever may be inviting the reader to this bacchanalian orgy.

These erotic messages from the margins spark the curiosity that drives Pynchon's detective-protagonists forward, even as they gesture toward alternative economies of knowledge and intimacy. In *Bleeding Edge*, however, this circle of intimacy shrinks in proportion to the expansion of the online network. Maxine's contacts center around a small world of web entrepreneurs, hackers, and their powerful foes, and yet the novel seems to long for the random, entropic contact-sphere that characterizes its author's previous works. Fortunately, Maxine displays almost parodically Oedipa-like faith in the bathroom's ability to provide her with the "signs" and "hieroglyphics" that the network cannot supply. We are told that she has an extra-sensory bladder that sends her to the right restroom at just the right time:

> When she's out of range of information she needs, she can go whole days without any particular interest in pissing, but when phone numbers, koans, or stock tips from which she's likely to profit are close by, the gotta-go alarm has reliably steered her to enough significant restroom walls that she's learned to pay attention.[117]

In contrast to the vulnerability inherent in "reading" the network, the novel's bathroom scenes attempt to return us to Miller's private act of novel-reading in the era of print. Freed from the tether of their IP addresses, readers encounter the stall as a space that may give rise to the durable yet untraceable inscriptions that facilitate "networking" at the margins of state power.

Maxine encounters one such stall when her hunt for the reclusive hacker Eric Outfield steers her toward the restroom of a former techie hangout called "Wall of Silence." There she ends up in

the stall adjacent to Cassidy, a young woman who, as chance would have it, designed the stunning splash-screen for DeepArcher.

> They sit there side by side, mutually invisible, the partition between inscribed in marker pen, eye pencil, lipstick later rubbed at and smeared by way of commentary, gusting across the wall in failing red shadows, phone numbers with antiquated prefixes, cars for sale, announcements of love lost, found, or wished for, racial grievances, unreadable remarks in Cyrillic, Arabic, Chinese, a web of symbols, a travel brochure for night voyages Maxine has not yet thought about making.[118]

Despite its now-uncanny resemblance to an online message board, this is in many ways a standard Pynchonian bathroom. It is a palimpsest of urban thought, a document that shows evidence of textual editing in the lipstick "smeared by way of commentary." Each marking on this wall retains traces of its past and its author's presence in that past. Makeup, here employed as a writing tool, foregrounds the physical origins of these markings, some of which have been inscribed in a medium that has touched its authors' bodies. The phone numbers' "antiquated prefixes" announce their datedness if not their date, for these traces do not sacrifice privacy for the sake of information. Presence here is detached from any record of identity, and the fact that Maxine and Cassidy are "mutually invisible" behind the wall's partition allows their conversation to be structured by the relative privacy of this public space.

Though this wall suggests an old-school, analog attempt at "networking," its form and function in fact lay the groundwork for a freer and more intimate type of network than that provided by an online platform. The heterogeneous wall combines the contents of a comments section, an advertisement, a personal blog, and a matchmaking site, but there is no filter placed upon the text it contains, and no predictive algorithms to tailor its messages to the reader. These inscriptions, to borrow novelist Garth Greenwell's characterization of the bathroom as cruising-site, come to function as "pre-internet personals."[119] The multilingual "web of symbols" further reminds us – albeit with a tinge of exoticism – that we are far from the linguistically mediated "web" of the Internet. These texts propose "voyages Maxine has not yet thought about making": they are a multilingual answer to a question she has not yet entered into any search engine.

Compare this scene of reading to a later one that takes place in a restroom at the headquarters of a tech security company named Tworkeffx. If the surprisingly communicative "Wall of Silence" betrayed traces of an analogue message board, the Tworkeffx bathroom figures Web 2.0 at its worst:

> Eric motions her through a door and down a corridor to a toilet that proves to be unisex and privacy-free. Instead of rows of urinals, there are continuous sheets of water descending stainless-steel walls, against which gentlemen, and ladies so inclined, are invited to piss, while for the less adventurous there are stalls of see-through acrylic which in more prosperous days at Tworkeffx also allowed slacker patrols to glance in and see who's avoiding work, custom-decorated inside by high-ticket downtown graffiti artists, with dicks going into mouths a popular motif, as well as sentiments like DIE MICROSOFT WEENIES and LARA CROFT HAS POLYGON ISSUES.[120]

In this scene, the mechanisms of privacy collide with the apparatus of surveillance to produce a transparent rendition of "privacy-free" space, where the transparent stalls eliminate the private subject while simultaneously insisting on that subject's presence within a demarcated, single-occupancy zone. In other words, these stalls draw attention to the absence of privacy by mimicking the architecture of its possibility; they offer vestigial borders, or "windows," that seem to ask the subject—and the reader—to peer through them. Windows allow for both lateral (or peer-on-peer) surveillance—here literalized by the row-formation of the stalls—and the managerial surveillance of a hierarchical workplace, which the simulacrum of anarchic graffiti does little to dispel. The once opaque wall becomes a window, a transparent surface that displays a text while simultaneously putting the one who reads it on display. The reader of these stalls may be "watched" in the act of reading, and any addition they make to the custom graffiti can traced back to their hand.

The privacy-free stalls at Tworkeffx epitomize the corporate impulse to surveil. Yet we cannot forget its urinals, whose "continuous sheets of water descending stainless-steel walls" are offered as a second choice to the presumably more "adventurous" bathroom-goer. This wall of water is another figure for the screen, and its unmarkable, continuously "refreshed" surface offers a fairly accurate summation of DeepArcher's security tactics. Yet while the stalls provided the simulacrum of bathroom commentary, the urinals display a defensive absence of textual production that troubles DeepArcher's privacy tactics, as it aligns their response to surveillance with a politically deadening silencing. In a punning nod to Manuel Castells' description of the network as "space of flows," this wall of water brings an unsettling silence to the once textually "vocal" Pynchonian bathroom.[121] It recalls the moment when Oedipa, in her hunt for the Trystero, encounters entirely blank walls in the restroom at the Tank theater: "She could not say why, exactly, but felt threatened by this absence of even the marginal try at communication latrines are known for."[122] The Tworkeffx urinals update this unease. Where blankness once signified an absence, it now becomes—in the case of a cascading sheet of water—the only conceivable possibility. The water does not simply erase any marks that may be drawn, it is itself an un-markable surface.

These are the architectures of surveillance and erasure that Pynchon keeps us poised between. Their juxtaposition is such that the call to get lost becomes an increasingly tempting alternative to the exhaustion of circling around—or yo-yoing between—a binary that never resolves into legible text. At the end of the novel, this binary is realized in two scenes of "exit" by road trip: one westward for the "bleeding edge" of technological promise, the other northward for a more material act of revenge. Eric and Reg are glimpsed on video driving westward with a fleet of mobile server farms, for purposes they obliquely describe as "experimental."[123] Misha and Grisha, KGB defectors and members of the Chechnyan resistance, are headed to the Adirondacks to blow up Ice's server farm. From them we learn that Ice had Lester Traipse murdered for diverting hashslingrz funds to the Chechnyan resistance, which makes their desire for vengeance "personal."[124] Their revenge is for meatspace. Eric, on the other hand, seeks to extend the network in a potent act of westward escape.

Between these two exits we are offered two possible futures, one that proposes to destroy the network's nodes of power and one that seeks, presumably, to expand resistance to alternative nodes. DeepArcher, I propose, offers an uncertain third. Pynchon may ultimately agree with Maxine's father's contention that internet, "conceived in sin," "never stopped carrying in its heart a bitter-cold death wish for the planet."[125] He may likewise share March Kelleher's 60's era skepticism of the techno-utopian enterprise, a skepticism that March defends by appealing to Susan Sontag's notion of a "deep sympathy modified by contempt."[126] For evidence of his contempt, we might point to the

resemblance between DeepArcher's security tactics and the urinal wall, whose affordances (to be peed upon) are well known. Yet the novel's faith in getting lost does not vanish with the breeching of DeepArcher's borders. On the contrary, the desire to get lost persists with an amplified version of its own Sontagian formula, which is one of hope modified by desperation. In the program's post-9/11, open-source iteration, Maxine meets a woman who is on "a mission to the edge of the known universe," a woman whose own contempt is for the DeepArcher tourists who, with their "surface Web" mentalities, "drive you deeper" into the "unlighted," "beyond anyplace they'd be comfortable." Her scorn for what might be called technological yuppiedom echoes Lucas's contempt for the surface web, now made intolerable by "all that yakking, all the goods for sale, the spammers and spielers and idle fingers, all in the same desperate scramble they like to call an economy."[127] In his new economy, the compulsion to get "lost" from only intensifies, and it carries at its core a desire for flight that is opposed, not to the internet itself, but the cartographic violence it facilitates under the aegis of transparency. By "going deeper," the woman tells Maxine, "you approach the border country, the edge of the unnavigable, the region of no information." Or, as the avatar/ghost of Lester Traipse tells Maxine when she offers to bring "back up" to the surface, "lost down here is the whole point."[128]

Pynchon's engagements with the history of American countercultures, the cooptation of 60's radicalism, and what Stefan Mattessich calls the "lines of flight" that organize political longing have been well documented.[129] What emerges from this reading is that the loss and recovery of orientation—understood not as ideology but as a more discrete form of positioning—animates and informs the political force of Pynchon's latest work. If the novel mourns our contracted spaces for resistance, it also illustrates that Pynchon's "edge" of possibility is not a frontier zone, not a new world to be occupied, but desire for those unmapped potentialities that cannot be reached by the available routes. To the extent that this "edge" is impossible, moving towards it may feel like getting lost. Yet such lost-ness is not a rejection of politics but an attempt to think beyond paths of action it anticipates and lays before us: the "hidden" or manifest structures that subjects learn and obey.

Implicit in my argument, and something that remains to be thought, is how this sighting of possibility in crisis both resembles and pulls away from the opportunism that leads neoliberal thinkers, most famously Milton Friedman, to celebrate crisis as a chance to remodel the world in accordance with free market policies.[130] Klein nods to Friedman's *Capitalism and Freedom* when she writes that believers in the shock doctrine look to crisis, whether natural or manmade, to generate the "vast, clean canvases they crave." "It is in these malleable moments," she writes, "when we are psychologically unmoored and physically uprooted, that these artists of the real plunge in their hands and begin their work of remaking the world.''[131] Albeit in retrospect, Pynchon encounters the shocked aftermath of 9/11 as a similar opportunity. Is one of those points that mark, as Tyrone Slothrop once mused, the "fork in the road America never took, the singular point she jumped the wrong way from."[132] Yet the novel's crisis is not a blank slate. On the contrary, it is a clutter of cultural objects, national memories, emergent technologies, and the hopes and anxieties that cluster around them. It is a mess we are asked to navigate rather than map, knowing full well that we will not find what Slothrop calls the "single set of coordinates from which to proceed," or the "invisible links" that will crossfade us somewhere safe from history's wreckage.[133] The novel, and the departure it proposes, does not seek to remake the world. It aims instead to render it virtual—potential—so that some glimpse of the possible might, as we turn our heads, be allowed to shimmer at its edges.

NOTES

[1] An earlier version of this chapter is included in the collection *Narrating Surveillance*. This version has been significantly altered to reflect my changing perception of Pynchon's text. See Mary Griffin Wilson, "From Stall to Screen: Reading Surveillance in Thomas Pynchon's Bleeding Edge.," in *Narrating Surveillance*, ed. Betiel Wasihun and Christopher Bode, Literatur, Kultur, Theorie, Band 28 (Baden-Baden: Ergon Verlag, 2019), 225–44.
[2] Thomas Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge: A Novel* (Penguin, 2013), 51.
[3] Pynchon, 36.
[4] Pynchon, 373; Thomas Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon* (Macmillan, 2004), 615.
[5] Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 345.
[6] See Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Barbara Habberjam and Hugh Tomlinson (Zone Books, 1988).
[7] Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, 76.
[8] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 33.
[9] Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, 420.
[10] Pynchon, 420.
[11] Pynchon, 36.
[12] Pynchon, 74.
[13] Pynchon, 78.
[14] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Duke University Press, 1991), 27.
[15] Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, 37.
[16] Pynchon, 79.
[17] Richard Gray, "Open Doors, Closed Minds: American Prose Writing at a Time of Crisis," *American Literary History* 21, no. 1 (2009): 134.
[18] Gray, 132.
[19] Glenn Greenwald, *No Place to Hide: Edward Snowden, the NSA, and the U.S. Surveillance State* (Macmillan, 2014); Barton Gellman and Laura Poitras, "U.S., British Intelligence Mining Data from Nine U.S. Internet Companies in Broad Secret Program - The Washington Post," The Washington Post, June 7, 2013, https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/us-intelligence-mining-data-from-nine-us-internet-companies-in-broad-secret-program/2013/06/06/3a0c0da8-cebf-11e2-8845-d970ccb04497_story.html?nid&utm_term=.43f888b8da66.
[20] Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Henry Holt and Company, 2010), 25.
[21] Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, 354.
[22] Pynchon, 340.
[23] See Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*; Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Beacon Press, 2012). Harvey's account of neoliberalism begins by tracing the process through which the liberal ideal of "freedom," often touted by the Bush administration in its case for the war in Iraq, neatly cloaked the ambition to expand free market capitalism at home and abroad.
[24] Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, 420.

[25] Sean Austin Grattan, *Hope Isn't Stupid: Utopian Affects in Contemporary American Literature* (University of Iowa Press, 2017), 71.
[26] Brian McHale, "Genre as History: Pynchon's Genre-Poaching," in *Pynchon's Against the Day: A Corrupted Pilgrim's Guide*, ed. Jeffrey Severs and Christopher Leise (Lexington Books, 2011), 25.
[27] Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 542.
[28] Thomas Pynchon, *V.* (Harper Collins, 1999), 1. Mark Greif also points to this resonance in his account of Pynchon's technological genealogies. Grief, however, dismisses Pynchon's interest in technological affordances, arguing instead that the persistence of technologies as mere material, devoid of their initial uses and values, indexes the larger waning of value that Pynchon seeks to explore. SeeMark Greif, "Thomas Pynchon and Technology," in *The Age of the Crisis of Man: Thought and Fiction in America, 1933–1973* (Princeton University Press, 2015), 229–30.
[29] Patrick Jagoda, *Network Aesthetics* (University of Chicago Press, 2016), 3.
[30] John Perry Barlow, "A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace," Electronic Frontier Foundation, January 20, 2016, https://www.eff.org/cyberspace-independence.
[31] Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 615.
[32] John Perry Barlow, "Crime and Puzzlement," Electronic Frontier Foundation, June 8, 1990, https://w2.eff.org/Misc/Publications/John_Perry_Barlow/HTML/crime_and_puzzlement_1.html.
[33] Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, 241.
[34] Pynchon, 429.
[35] Pynchon, 412.
[36] Pynchon, 429.
[37] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 29.
[38] Don DeLillo, *Falling Man* (Simon and Schuster, 2007), 246.
[39] Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, 339.
[40] Donna J. Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto," in *Manifestly Haraway* (U of Minnesota Press, 2016), 5.
[41] Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, 79.
[42] Pynchon, 79.
[43] Pynchon, 116.
[44] Pynchon, 166.
[45] Pynchon, 167.
[46] Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (HarperCollins, 1986), 181.
[47] Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (Penguin, 1995), 188.
[48] Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, 429.
[49] Tony Tanner, *Thomas Pynchon* (Routledge, 2019), 75.
[50] Tanner, 75.
[51] Brian McHale, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodernism* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 73.
[52] McHale, "Genre as History: Pynchon's Genre-Poaching," 25.
[53] McHale, 26.
[54] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media* (MIT Press, 2016), 40.

[55] Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 410.
[56] Jameson, 43.
[57] Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same*, 43.
[58] Chun, 44.
[59] Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, 75–76.
[60] Pynchon, 76.
[61] Pynchon, 354.
[62] Pynchon, 77.
[63] Mark B. N. Hansen, *New Philosophy for New Media* (MIT Press, 2004), 161–62.
[64] Elaine Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book* (Princeton University Press, 2001), 12.
[65] Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, 77.
[66] Pynchon, 77.
[67] Pynchon, 77.
[68] Rachel Greenwald Smith, *Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 80.
[69] Smith, 84.
[70] Smith, 77.
[71] Smith, 79.
[72] In a statement posted to Facebook the day following Snowden's revelations, Mark Zuckerberg denied any knowledge of PRISM and dismissed Snowden's accusations as "preposterous." He added, "We strongly encourage all governments to be much more transparent about all programs aimed at keeping the public safe. It's the only way to protect everyone's civil liberties and create the safe and free society we all want over the long term." See Mark Zuckerberg, June 7, 2013, https://www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/10100828955847631.
[73] Rob Goldman, "Update on Our Advertising Transparency and Authenticity Efforts | Facebook Newsroom," October 27, 2017, https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2017/10/update-on-our-advertising-transparency-and-authenticity-efforts/.
[74] Alexander R. Galloway, *Protocol: How Control Exists After Decentralization* (MIT Press, 2004), 90–91.
[75] Galloway, 106.
[76] Patrick Jagoda, *Experimental Games: Critique, Play, and Design in the Age of Gamification* (University of Chicago Press, 2020), xi.
[77] Jagoda, 8.
[78] Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, 226.
[79] James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception: Classic Edition* (Psychology Press, 2014), 128.
[80] Gibson, 128.
[81] Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2009), 19.
[82] Friedberg, 19.
[83] Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, 77.
[84] Pynchon, 75.
[85] Pynchon, 77.

[86] Pynchon, 106.
[87] Pynchon, 108.
[88] Pynchon, 108.
[89] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 7.
[90] Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, 268.
[91] Pynchon, 406.
[92] The graphical palate of this iteration of DeepArcher appears to be modeled after the multi-player PlayStation game Journey (2012), which sought to replace its genre's emphasis on violence and mastery with the feeling of "social interactivity" (Chen). Jagoda's description of the network's tendency to produce "a feeling of connectedness" is taken from a player's description of the experience this game provoked. See Patrick Jagoda, *Network Aesthetics* (University of Chicago Press, 2016), 2; Jenova Chen, "Designing Journey," GDC Vault, 2013, http://www.gdcvault.com/play/1017700/Designing.
[93] Thomas Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge: A Novel* (Penguin, 2013), 411. For an account of the NSA's history of spying on online games, see Justin Elliott, "World of Spycraft: NSA and CIA Spied in Online Games," *ProPublica*, December 9, 2013, https://www.propublica.org/article/world-of-spycraft-intelligence-agencies-spied-in-online-games.
[94] Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, 407.
[95] Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same*, ix–xi.
[96] Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, 407.
[97] Pynchon, 426.
[98] Pynchon, 426.
[99] Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108, no. 1 (2009): 9, https://doi.org/10.1525/rep.2009.108.1.1.
[100] Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*, 181–82.
[101] Leo Bersani, "Pynchon, Paranoia, and Literature," *Representations*, no. 25 (1989): 105, https://doi.org/10.2307/2928469.
[102] Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, 357, 358.
[103] William Gibson, "Google's Earth," *The New York Times*, August 31, 2010, sec. Opinion, https://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/01/opinion/01gibson.html.
[104] Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same*, 25, 115.
[105] D. A. Miller, *The Novel and The Police* (University of California Press, 1988), viii, ix.
[106] Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same*, 94.
[107] Chun, 94.
[108] Scholars of surveillance, including David Lyon, Lisa Gitelman, and Virginia Jackson, register this difference with the neologism "dataveillance." In 1994, David Lyon cautiously suggested that information technologies do not represent a difference in kind, but simply "make more efficient, more widespread, and simultaneously less visible many processes that already occur," yet he has more recently acknowledged that "liquid, large-scale dataveillance" is "different" (presumably in kind "from what went before." David Lyon, *The Electronic Eye: The Rise of Surveillance Society* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 40; David Lyon, "Big Dataveillance: Emerging Challenges," *Queens University*, May 3, 2016, 7, http://www.sscqueens.org/resources/key-issues-in-

big-data-surveillance; Gitelman, Lisa and Jackson, Virginia, "Introduction," in *"Raw Data" Is an Oxymoron*, ed. Gitelman, Lisa (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2013), 1–14.
[109] Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 30.
[110] Hayles, 30.
[111] Hayles, 30.
[112] Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, 79.
[113] Pynchon, 70.
[114] Pynchon, 70.
[115] Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*, 52.
[116] Gregory Flaxman, "Oedipa Crisis: Paranoia and Prohibition in The Crying of Lot 49," *Pynchon Notes*, no. 40–41 (1997): 48.
[117] Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, 84.
[118] Pynchon, 85.
[119] Garth Greenwell, "How I Fell In Love With The Beautiful Art Of Cruising," Buzzfeed, April 4, 2016, https://www.buzzfeed.com/garthgreenwell/how-i-fell-in-love-with-the-beautiful-art-of-cruising?utm_term=.tha2vYD4O2#.qc7YLlG5jY.
[120] Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, 303.
[121] Castells describes the emergence of two distinct types of space in network societies, which may combine and overlap to varying degrees. The "space of places" is "a locale whose form, function, and meaning are self-contained within the boundaries of physical contiguity" (553). The "space of flows," by contrast, has no need of contiguity; it is a "new form of spatiality" that arises with digital communication and is defined as "the material support of simultaneous social practices communicated at a distance" (xxxii). Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 2nd ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).
[122] Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*, 70.
[123] Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, 437.
[124] Pynchon, 460.
[125] Pynchon, 420.
[126] Pynchon, 116.
[127] Pynchon, 357.
[128] Pynchon, 428.
[129] Stefan Mattessich, *Lines of Flight: Discursive Time and Countercultural Desire in the Work of Thomas Pynchon* (Duke University Press, 2002).
[130] In his 1986 preface to *Capitalism and Freedom*, Friedman asserts that "only a crisis-actual or perceived-produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable." Milton Friedman and Rose D. Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom: Fortieth Anniversary Edition* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), xiv.
[131] Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Henry Holt and Company, 2010), 21.
[132] Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (Penguin, 1995), 556.
[133] Pynchon, 556; Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, 167.

CHAPTER 3

TURNING POINTS, TURNING BODIES:

KAZUO ISHIGURO'S *THE UNCONSOLED*

In his 2000 review of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, James Wood laments that "the big contemporary novel" treats character as secondary to the art of crafting correspondences between persons, spaces, and social or political histories. In the genre he describes as "hysterical realism," Wood complains that characters are flattened beneath the more pressing needs of their crafted worlds. These characters, he tells us, are "lively" but "without life," animated by an excess of motion in order to conceal the fact that they are "inhuman."[1] By way of example, Wood offers his own caricature of this "hysterical turn":

> If, say, a character is introduced in London, call him Toby Awknotuby…then we will be swiftly told that he has a twin in Delhi (called Boyt, which is an anagram of Toby, of course), who, like Toby, has the same very curious genital deformation, and that their mother belongs to a religious cult based, oddly enough, in the Orkney Islands, and that their father (who was born at the exact second that the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima) has been a Hell's Angel for the last thirteen years….And all this, over many pages, before poor Toby Awknotuby has done a thing, or thought a thought![2]

Though we may not share Wood's confidence in the absurdity of these fictions, his parody hits its mark. The writers he names (which in addition to Smith include Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, Salman Rushdie, and David Foster Wallace) certainly push Dickensian happenstance to its limit, and at times the vibrancy of their networks outshines their not-so-inevitable narrative arcs. For Wood, however, the real problem with all this movement is that it is textual rather than characterological. Indeed, what Wood describes as "movement," "velocity," or "liveliness" seems to occur when the world of the text is bent out of shape until is edges, preposterously, meet. Such narratives are driven by correspondence rather than character, by textual rather than "human" desire. Wood, however, insists that stories should be "generated by human beings, and it might be said that these recent novels are full of inhuman stories, whereby that phrase is precisely an oxymoron, an impossibility, a wanting it both ways."[3]

Wood makes a valuable observation here, but his uncritical reliance on the fraught category of the human—as a locally situated, agential liberal subject—obscures the more interesting formal shift he identifies. This is a shift away from character and towards what the crafters of fiction might broadly call setting, except that "setting" has now been granted an agency—an energy—of its own.

I propose that we might reframe the problem Wood articulates as a problem of desire. Desire, which Peter Brooks once called the "engine" of fiction, seems to migrate in these novels from the human character to the world they inhabit, a world that seems to have its own plans for their trajectories.[4] To be clear, this is not Wood's argument, but I would hazard that what he dramatizes under the sign of the "inhuman" is the hysterical novel's departure from the schema of desire, conflict, and resolution that has long governed the arc of the realist novel. These novels' newly enlivened settings seem, in Wood's view, to press too firmly on the "round" character that E. M. Forster described as having "the incalculability of life about it," so that the pressures of life outside the human threaten to flatten the life within.[5] We may note that in Wood's condemnation of the hysterical novel, the absence of vitality corresponds with a privileging of setting over scene, a choice that locates agency in the world of the novel rather than its characters' actions or desires:

> The mere existence of a giant cheese or a cloned mouse or several different earthquakes in a novel is seen as meaningful or wonderful, evidence of great imaginative powers. And this is because *too often these features are mistaken for scenes, as if they constituted the movement or the toil or the pressure of the novel*, rather than taken for what they are—props of the imagination, meaning's toys. The existence of vitality is mistaken for the drama of vitality. (My emphasis.)[6]

Apparently, the novel must "toil" with and alongside its characters, not around them. But why *not* around them? There is no arguing with Wood's caution against taking "the mere existence of a giant cheese" as a sign of a successful novel, yet the suggestion that human movement is the only proper toil of the novel threatens to petrify literary realism at the dawn of the workshop era. How, then, might we imagine the "inhuman" turn as something that calls for adaptation rather than lament? How might we locate desire in the movements, correspondences, and barriers the novel constructs?[7]

This chapter considers how the vitality of setting alternately generates and reroutes desire in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* (1995), a novel that Wood famously described as having invented "its own category of badness."[8] Ishiguro's work does not quite correspond to Wood's description of hysterical realism. Still, the spoken and unspoken terms of Wood's argument—the warping of realist tropes, the question of the human, and the sprawl of cosmopolitan or global fictions—are explored directly or indirectly in each of Ishiguro's novels and have become recurrent themes in critical discussions of his work. For example, there is considerable debate over whether Ishiguro should be read as a realist writer or a writer who, as Louis Menand claims, "writes like someone impersonating a realist."[9] His notoriously stiff characters have been described as "repressed," "animatronic," or "simulators of humanness, figures engineered to pass as 'real.'"[10] And although his first-person narrators "toil" ceaselessly, their motivations are often as opaque to themselves as they are to the reader. It makes little difference that the above descriptions refer to *Never Let Me Go,* a novel about human cloning, just as it matters little whether we attribute the stiff formality of Ishiguro's narrators to the fact that the speaker is a butler (*Remains of the Day*), a porter (*The Unconsoled*) or an artist whose words are being "translated" into English (*Artist of the Floating World*).[11] There is an absence

at the heart of Ishiguro's novels: not of the human, exactly, but of human desire as legible, actionable, and appropriate to the sphere of action allotted to it. [12]

In considering how spatial figurations direct, deter, and even generate desire in *The Unconsoled*, my argument joins a growing body of scholarship that takes seriously the "flat," "inhuman," or "generic" aspects of Ishiguro's work. Much of this discourse revolves around the troubled category of the clone in *Never Let Me Go*, which according to Anne Whitehead raises "the ethical question of whether we can, or should, rely on such absolute categories of difference as 'human' and 'nonhuman.'"[13] Yet such questions are increasingly being sounded in relation to Ishiguro's broader stylistics. In a 2021 issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* that was convened in response to Ishiguro's 2017 receipt of the Nobel Prize in Literature, Jane Hu reveals a resonance between the figure of the clone and that of the ethnic stereotype, which throughout Ishiguro's work tropes upon the typical, the generic, and the reproducible to perform what Rey Chow calls an "over-iterative mimesis" in the realm of character.[14] Je Eun Lee, writing on the problem of identity formation in *Never Let Me Go,* considers the novel as a post-colonial bildungsroman that sheds the romance of agency and temporal development that the genre is premised on. Instead, Lee argues, the novel forges identity from specters of loss, geographic drift, and "stagnant oscillations between places."[15] I submit that *Never Let Me Go* is not exceptional in this regard. Indeed, we might see the critical fascination surrounding that novel as symptomatic of its capacity to make explicit the themes of limited agency, instrumentalization, and what Kelly Rich calls "infrastructuralism" that are evident in Ishiguro's previous works.[16]

Taken together, these analyses index what I take to be a productive shift away from the fascinating unreliability of Ishiguro's first-person narrators. The tendency to read desire as a hermeneutic key is particularly evident in approaches to Ishiguro's work, which is known for offering repressed, unreliable protagonists who are at once intensely driven and impossibly opaque. Yet the shortcomings of this approach extend beyond those of the much-maligned hermeneutics of suspicion, as they promote the fiction of a coherent, desiring self by seeking its model in even the most incoherent of fictional protagonists. In doing so, they risk imbuing desire with the political force of action while disregarding the wayward, contradictory, or excessive qualities that split desire from its stated aim.

More troubling, especially in relation to the enlivened setting of *The Unconsoled,* is that such readings tend to collapse the stark peculiarities of Ishiguro's worlds into the psychological oddities of the protagonist who views them. These worlds, I argue, are more productively described by the "liveliness" Jane Bennett takes to designate the "thing-power" of objects. For Bennett, as for Ishiguro, "the locus of agency is always a human-nonhuman working group." [17]

Ishiguro's protagonists take their shape from the objects and worlds that surround them. His texts deploy strange correspondences that frustrate our credulous acceptance of the people and places they depict. These correspondences tend to be domestic, local, and intensely personal. They are not—or not often—the geopolitical correspondences that link Wood's "Toby Awknotuby" to Delhi and the bombing of Hiroshima. Instead, they are moments of doubling that render foreign or unknown spaces uncannily homelike, thereby foregrounding the characters' prop-like emergence among them. In *Klara and the Sun* (2021), the robot Klara enters a neighbor's barn to find the "Red Shelves" from the store where she spent her first, sentient days.[18] In *When We Were Orphans*, Stephen returns to Shanghai to discover an exact replica, in the house of a stranger, of "what used to be the entrance hall of [his family's] old Shanghai house."[19] And Ryder, in *The Unconsoled*, arrives

in an unnamed European city to find himself, against all probability, stumbling upon replicas of his childhood room, his parent's old parlor, and the wreck of his father's car. These unlikely objects and impossible spaces insert themselves into the "human" story with surprising force. They may gesture towards a character's psychological attachments, but their force subsists in the way they attach to, and vibrate along with, the characters who cling to them.

What follows thus rejects Wood's insistence on the "human" story and its comprehensible desires. Instead, it seeks to expand upon Lauren Berlant's suggestion that "the waning of genre" offers new possibilities for fictions of desire that frame "different kinds of potential openings within and beyond the impasse of adjustment that constant crisis creates."[20] What do we do with a novel that is, to paraphrase Lauren Berlant, "incoherent" in relation to its own desire? If the human character is not a legible source for the desires that drive it, how might the novel's objects, spaces, and trajectories help us to read the flood of dissatisfaction and longing the novel unleashes?

Constant Crisis

Berlant's invocation of "constant crisis" aptly describes the dominant mood and narrative structure of *The Unconsoled*. The novel was written after Ishiguro, having won the Booker Prize for *Remains of the Day*, began "to crave the brilliant messiness that certain writers can achieve through… not sticking to their map."[21] In a 1989 interview with Graham Swift, he intimates his growing rebellion against the critical praise he received for writing "dignified," "subtle," and in some cases, "Japanese" novels.[22] "Life is messy," he points out. "I sometimes wonder, should books be so neat, well-formed? Is it praise to say that a book is beautifully structured? Is it a criticism to say that bits of the book don't hang together?"[23]

Unsurprisingly, the novel is neither neat nor well-formed. Many of its scenes do not only *not* "hang together," they willfully contradict themselves, creating a narrative where all we can depend upon is the impasse, the turn, and the wholesale reversal. Every scene is interrupted by another, and the novel's circuitous routes are facilitated by its deliberate dismissal of spatial and temporal conventions. An elevator ride lasts for six pages. A truck stop outside the city turns out to be connected, by a tunnel in what looks like a broom closet, to a cafe in the city center. And the event which the entire novel builds towards, and for which all else is preparation, never actually occurs. Like the city it describes, the narrative is one of determent, distraction, and disorientation, all delivered with the almost excessively orientating signaling words ("suddenly," "of course") that saturate Ishiguro's prose. Recalling *The Unconsoled* in his later review of *Never let Me Go*, James Wood essentially sums up the opinion of the novel's detractors: "It was bold of Ishiguro to abjure facility and to exchange it for difficulty. Kafka spoke of the effect of his work as 'seasickness on dry land.' But Ishiguro's novel produced, in many readers, seasickness at sea."[24]

The Unconsoled is narrated by Ryder, a renowned English concert pianist who arrives in an unnamed European city in the grips of a mysterious "crisis." He is slated to give a highly anticipated concert and speech, a speech that is expected to mark a "turning point" for the city, and he shares the public's exaggerated sense of the event's importance. The problem is that Ryder seems to have forgotten key details of his own narrative. For example, he doesn't initially recognize Sophie and Boris—the "woman" and "boy" he meets at a cafe—as his partner and (potentially) son. We gradually learn that he's lived with them in this city before, but he can't remember the way to their apartment, and he seems to have forgotten the substance of the violent quarrels he and Sophie had

there. He has also forgotten his schedule or "itinerary" for this trip, which leads to countless missed appointments and a pervasive sense of running late. For it turns out that this itinerary, which Ryder won't admit to having lost, is packed with professional obligations that would be impossible to meet even were it not for the social obligations that continue to accrue. An old school friend hopes that a visit from him will save her social life. Gustav, the hotel porter, wants him to add a line to his speech about hotel porters, who he feels are under-appreciated. The hotel manager, Hoffman, wants him to look at his wife's scrapbooks, which detail key moments in Ryder's career. Ryder spends most of the novel torn between his obligations to his family and his duty to an abstract "public" or audience, and his tendency to privilege the later turns out to be a bad gamble. His performance and speech—the ostensible purpose of his visit and the projected end point of the narrative—never actually take place, and the added cruelty is that no one seems to care. Sophie finally leaves him, he boards a bus to the airport, and the reader (and Ryder) are left with little consolation for the long anxiety dream they have endured.

In short, the novel overflows with the "improbable possibilities" that Aristotle warned against, and it throws in some improbable *impossibilities* for good measure.[25] Yet Ryder's improbable amnesia, whose selectivity places it within the latter category, grants an odd agency to the city that surrounds him. His absent memories force the narrative to rearrange itself in order to proceed, and the figure of that rearrangement is the turn. Ryder is always turning to discover something behind him—literally and figuratively— that he hadn't noticed before. Here, for example, is the moment he meets Miss Stratmann, the possessor of the critical itinerary he will never admit to having lost: "Turning, I saw with a start that we were not alone in the elevator."[26] And here is his first encounter with Sophie and Boris, who turn out to be his wife and son: "Turning, I saw a woman sitting with a young boy waving to me from a nearby table. The pair clearly matched the porter's description and I could not understand how I had failed to notice them earlier."[27]

These turns hesitate between revelation and rearrangement; between revealing and rewriting what is the case. In the first example, it is hard to believe that Ryder would not notice the presence of a third person in an elevator, and thus his "start" signals the start of a new fictional scene. In the second, Ryder's failure to notice the "woman and boy" situates Sophie and Boris in the missing or occluded background of the text and foreshadows their subsequent emergence as his family. While the first turn reveals something missed in the spatial background, the second turn begins to recover something from the "background" of the fabular past.

The turn, in other words, pivots on the novel's invocations of physical space in order to disrupt the telos of plot and scene. What Ryder turns to see *turns out* to be the case, and the intrusion of what is behind him triggers a new obligation, aim, or desire. Such turns disorient Ryder and reader alike. They allow the past to intrude on the present, the private on the public, the distant on the close at hand. They disrupt the coherent, bounded self with the pressures of other selves, transforming the arc of individual desire into a community of crossed purposes. What, exactly, does Ryder want from this community? Or, what does he want *for* it?

It is difficult to say. Ryder's response to the many demands made upon him casts him as the anti-Bartleby; where Bartleby says "I would prefer not to," Ryder says "I will try." Indeed, the only form of denial available to him is one that replaces the object of a request with a more pressing objective of his own. At such moments, he replaces "I will try" with the insistence that he "must" attend to something else. When work beckons, he must attend to his family. When family beckons, he must work. In the tension between "I will" and "I must," this disorienting text is paradoxically

oriented in excess towards its own, ever-lengthening checklist of obligations, each of which will presumably be dispatched in the four days before Ryder's performance.

To give Wood his due, the result is unsettling. Instead of desire as a productive force,we are given a plot of obligations that creep up on the protagonist—quite literally—from behind. As the novel moves towards its promised culmination in Ryder's performance, we begin to feel that we, like Ryder, are being pushed towards a precipice that is neither definitive nor desired; it is at best a false goal that distracts from the more positive yearnings the text alludes to. The two poles that animate Peter Brook's description of the novel— the "engine" of desire and the "desire for the end"—are distorted by this novel's obligatory progression.[28] In their place is the "unendurable" reversal described in Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*, where the narrator encounters the future as a void rather than a lure. "Before me," he writes, "is continually an empty space, and I am propelled by a consequence that lies behind me. This life is turned around and dreadful, not to be endured."[29]

Anton Chekov's well-worn declaration— "Tell me what you want and I'll tell you who you are"—is often adapted to readings of novels that foreground desire as a hermeneutic problem to be untangled. Ishiguro's novels delight in producing this problem. They return repeatedly to his favorite theme of failed intimacy, which seems to occur when a grandiose or unrealizable desire is adhered to at the expense of its more quotidian, "human" counterparts. In *When We Were Orphans*, Christopher's stated wish to "solve the problems" in Shanghai leads him to abandon his adopted daughter and would-be lover; Ryder sacrifices family for career in *The Unconsoled*, and Stevens, the butler in *The Remains of the Day,* greets the news of his father's immanent death by remarking, "I'm very busy right now."[30] Indeed, we might say that these novels are *about* the ruptures that occur when the desire for intimacy—or the desire for what is near at hand—is drawn into conflict with desires that pull us farther afield. Read in this light, the structure of these character's repression could be generalized as a species of Freudian sublimation. Each of these characters, we might say, fixates on an unattainable object to protect themselves from the commonplace failures that accompany more modest desires.[31] The job of the reader would then be to probe these failures for evidence of the desires they point to or conceal; to find in the failure the evidence of the sublimated aim.

Yet when it comes to their ostensible "need" for love or social belonging, Ishiguro's opaque narrators are rendered oddly transparent by the interjections of their fellow characters. In *When We Were Orphans,* Christopher flatly denies his friend Osborne's contention that he was "an odd bird at school," asserting instead that he "blended perfectly into English school life."[32] Similarly, in one of many unlikely encounters in *The Unconsoled*, Ryder encounters an old school friend who relates one of the favorite anecdotes of their former social circle. It turns out that Ryder's old friends still recall the moment when he declined to go drinking because, he reportedly said, "'I'm much too busy….I've missed two days' practice on account of these horrid exams!'" As Parkhurst tells it: "Then they all make the retching noise together, and do their piano-playing in the air, and that's when they start...Well, I won't tell you some of the other things they get up to, they're quite appalling."[33]

This mode of unreliable narration can have a self-canceling effect. On the one hand, it takes the air out of the "gotcha" moment of symptomatic reading by countering the alluring aporia of the symptom with a deflating revelation of the obvious. On the other, it leaves the reader with the feeling that the symptom, and perhaps desire itself, may not be the hermeneutic key they had been hoping to find. Although it is clear that both Ryder and Christopher have problems with personal intimacy, it paradoxically requires an excess of suspicion to conclude that the simplest answer is the correct one: that Christopher and Ryder only work because they cannot play. To do so would be to

dismiss these characters' public commitments and conclude that their stated desires are merely a smokescreen for their "true" or "human" desire for intimacy. We then arrive at a text that is one of our own creation: a text where the mechanistic aspects of the human compete with the richer, more properly *humane* life of desire.

I therefore propose to subjugate the question of *what* Ishiguro's characters desire to the question of *how* they desire: to the form their desire takes. I contend that the desire at work in *The Unconsoled* is fundamentally a narrative desire, of the kind that Peter Brooks once called "the desire for the end."[34] It is a desire that seeks resolution in the end as the culmination of a single trajectory or purpose, so that all other desires are either forsaken or sublimated into this single aim. The trick of the novel, however, is that while the characters each fall prey to this structure of desire, the city resists it with a stubbornness that borders on absurdity. There is something almost "stuplime" (to borrow a term of Sianne Ngai's) in the way the novel continually throws obstacles in its protagonist's path at the least opportune moments, obstacles that are no less maddening for being predictable.[35] A medieval wall in the middle of a street blocks him from reaching the concert hall where he is scheduled to perform; a "private" practice room turns out to be a cubicle with an un-closable door; a five-minute drive takes an hour, and so forth. These obstacles divert and delay Ryder on his course. In the process, however, the novel's space takes on an agency of its own. Figures of orientation begin to feel like desire. Objects offer consolation, frustration, or purpose. And Ryder's course, with its improbable turns and impossible leaps, becomes the "movement," the "toil" and the "pressure" we must contend with.

Turning Points

In *Reading for the Plot*, Peter Brooks postulates that most novels open with scenes of a nascent desire that will be actualized by the novel's end. "Desire is always there at the start of a narrative, often in a state of initial arousal, often having reached a state of intensity such that movement must be created, action undertaken, change begun."[36] After offering *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, and Jean Genette's *Notre-Damme Dame des Fleurs* by way of example, Brooks reiterates this point in more placid terms: "One could no doubt analyze the opening paragraph of most novels and emerge in each case with the image of a desire taking on shape, beginning to seek its objects, beginning to develop a textual energetics."[37] The wording of this assertion is vague enough to encompass most novels, yet in its quest for applicability it elides the explicitly masculine model of desire that Brooks will go on to elaborate. In Brook's reading of the nineteenth century novel, desire—which is typically that of the male protagonist—is the "motor" that drives the text through the stages of arousal, build-up, and release, which turns out to be meaning. "If the motor of narrative is desire, totalizing, building ever-larger units of meaning," he writes, "the ultimate determinants of meaning lie at the end, and narrative desire is ultimately, inexorably, desire for the end."[38] What happens, however, when the "motor" of desire is located outside, behind, or ahead of the "human" character? How then do we see desire "beginning to seek its objects"?

If we direct this question to the opening of *The Unconsoled*, we find ourselves thrown into the maddeningly cyclical "energetics" that will come to dominate much of Ishiguro's novel. The desire we find in this opening is primarily a desire for *desire*; it is a desire to discover some "state of intensity such that movement must be created, action undertaken, change begun." This desire is not (as in Brook's examples) the protagonist's, but rather our own, and it will sit in uneasy relationship

with the protagonist's desire—or lack thereof—for the remainder of the novel. It will also be alternately frustrated and enabled by the highly artificial spaces the novel constructs. These spaces constrict and expand around Ryder, promising, refusing, and then producing meaning as through a limited aperture that vanishes as soon as it is glimpsed. In the opening of *The Unconsoled,* then, we see desire beginning to seek its objects, but we are also made acutely aware of the spaces that conceal these objects.

The Unconsoled opens in the middle of an arrival, a particular form of *in-medias-res* that carves a middle from a natural beginning. Ryder has just arrived at the hotel that will form the epicenter of the novel's events, and the scene is marked by a tension between absence and expectation. The hotel lobby is empty. There is no one there to greet him, and the thwarted expectation of welcome is replaced by the expectation that someone, or something, will appear from *behind* the visible backdrop:

> The taxi driver seemed embarrassed to find there was no one - not even a clerk behind the reception desk - waiting to welcome me. He wandered across the deserted lobby, perhaps hoping to discover a staff member concealed behind one of the plants or armchairs….
>
> The lobby was reasonably spacious, allowing several coffee tables to be spread around it with no sense of crowding. But the ceiling was low and had a definite sag, creating a slightly claustrophobic mood, and despite the sunshine outside the light was gloomy. Only near the reception desk was there a bright streak of sun on the wall, illuminating an area of dark wood panelling and a rack of magazines in German, French and English. I could see also a small silver bell on the reception desk and was about to go over to shake it when a door opened somewhere behind me and a young man in uniform appeared.[39]

In this opening passage we can already glimpse two of the spatial moves that will come to structure our disorientation in this novel. The first and most obvious is the lurking presence of the "behind,*"* which will soon expand beyond its above denotation (of a relative position) and become a narrative gesture toward the concealed, the forgotten, or the fabular "past." The second is the uncanny rearrangement of space this "behind" effectuates. The bizarre suggestion that there may be "a staff member concealed behind one of the plants or armchairs" trains us to expect concealment while simultaneously conditioning us to perceive space in a way that might account for such concealment. The *behind* of the plant activates a state of anticipation that Husserl attaches to the "merely co-presented" sides of an object, those that are unseen yet assumed to exist.[40] Yet the expectation that a staff member may be lurking there transforms this phenomenological anticipation into a vaudevillian one. It simulates a flattening of space that recalls the perspectival constraints of the stage set, where a potted plant may believably conceal a human body, and this theatrical illusion continues to gain force as the passage proceeds. The lobby is large but "claustrophobic." The magazines—which suggest an unspecified European setting—are set under a spotlight. We begin to get our bearings in this theatrical space, and the illusion of spectatorship is so complete that when a door opens "somewhere behind" Ryder we are surprised to recall what we momentarily forgot: that there *is* a space behind Ryder where action might conceivably occur. The door shocks us back into space-as-lived rather than space-as-perceived.

This scene produces a particular kind of disorientation. While Wood's "seasickness at sea" implies a setting made dreamlike by imprecision, what we enter here is a solid, precise, and immovable world of sharp objects and stark lighting, a world where disorientation emerges not through a lack of specificity but through an undermining of the specificity we are given. The spotlight on the magazines is neutralized by the dimness of the surrounding space, the clues suggesting a European setting are rendered useless by their lack of national specificity, and the breadth of Ryder's perception is called into question by the surprising intrusion of the behind. Yet it is also worth noting that the stage—the architecture of performance the novel moves towards—is made present in the perspectival limitations of the novel's opening. Although Ryder never *takes the stage* to give his performance, the stage has a way of arranging itself around him.

We might then say that Brooks's assertion—that the novel opens upon a scene of desire "taking on shape"—holds true for the opening of *The Unconsoled,* but with a difference.[41] Desire here does not take shape by seeking its objects; rather, it is conferred upon Ryder by the objects that take shape around him. The stage is a shadow presence conjured by the form of Ryder's vision, and the performance it evokes will only emerge concretely as his aim (or the novel's) when more information appears from *behind* the scope of that vision.

The passage that follows instructs us to anticipate this emergence from behind as a particular force of narrative propulsion. What emerges from behind Ryder in this instance—the "young man in uniform"—offers us the first glimpse of the expectations surrounding Ryder's visit and sets up further expectations for the novel's trajectory. From the ensuing dialogue we perceive what will later be confirmed: that Ryder is late and has therefore failed to meet some prior expectation; that Ryder is inexplicably ignorant about the details of his visit; and that Ryder, like the other characters in the novel, tends to conceal his ignorance beneath polite yet empty platitudes. The hotel clerk takes his place behind the desk, and as he speaks we realize that what Ryder knows, like what he sees, is far from comprehensive:

> 'Mr Ryder, I'm so sorry I didn't recognize you. Mr Hoffman, the manager, he was very much wanting to welcome you personally. But just now, unfortunately, he's had to go to an important meeting.'
>
> 'That's perfectly all right. I'll look forward to meeting him later on.'
>
> The desk clerk hurried on through the registration forms, all the while muttering about how annoyed the manager would be to have missed my arrival. He twice mentioned how the preparations for 'Thursday night' were putting the latter under unusual pressure, keeping him away from the hotel far more than was usual. I simply nodded, unable to summon the energy to enquire into the precise nature of 'Thursday night.'
>
> 'Oh, and Mr Brodsky's been doing splendidly today,' the desk clerk said, brightening. …
>
> He indicated the rear of the lobby. Only then did I become aware that a piano was being played somewhere in the building, just audible above the muffled noise of the traffic outside….
>
> 'Brodsky, you say.' I thought about the name, but it meant nothing to me. Then I caught the desk clerk watching me with a puzzled look and said quickly: 'Yes, yes. I'll look forward to meeting Mr Brodsky in good time.'[42]

Ishiguro's "studied husbanding of affect" here joins forces with a careful husbanding of expectation, as Ryder's turn toward the clerk behind him raises expectations for further turns ahead.[43] "Thursday night," we later learn, is the night of Ryder's performance and speech, and he will soon intuit that it is expected to be "something more than a simple recital."[44] His performance will follow an orchestral production by Mr. Brodsky, a disgraced local conductor who is poised to make his comeback on the same night, and whose recital is "suddenly," inexplicably, made audible by the gesture to the "rear of the lobby." Mr. Hoffman is organizing the evening's events, and his son Stephen will open the night with a piano recital of his own. Yet the mention of these figures, like the mention of Thursday night, sparks no recollection in Ryder. A punning doubleness emerges between Ryder as *writer* and as *rider*; though he narrates the story we are reading, he takes on its desires in the manner of a passenger being driven through his own life. He seems to lag behind the desires and expectations that the text constructs, and in response to the clerk he expresses only a dull expectation delivered in the twice-removed futurity of professional cliche. Of Hoffman, he says, "I'll look forward to meeting him later on." Later, he deploys a variation on this phrase to conceal his ignorance of Mr. Brodsky: "I'll look forward to meeting Mr Brodsky in good time."[45]

Thus at the start of this novel of expectations, expectation itself is oddly deferred. Ryder's delayed invocation of the present continuous tense ("I'll look forward to meeting him later on") shrouds the anticipated event of meeting in the stock-language of professional formality, suggesting that some new turn of events will be required before Ryder's anticipation can be actualized. These deferrals become all the more pressing when we learn that Thursday night is hoped to mark a "turning point" in a long list of personal and social trajectories. The porter Gustav employs the phrase when he asks Ryder to mention hotel porters in his Thursday night speech, which he hopes will interrupt the declining prestige of his profession: "One word from you tonight, sir, that could alter the course of everything. It could be an historic turning point for our profession."[46] The other porters proleptically echo this view, figuring the turn as an object of future celebration. "Tonight will be a night we'll remember forever. A turning point for every porter in the town."[47] Even greater levels of abstraction appear in the civic expectations for Ryder's speech, which will either save the city from its "crisis" or affirm its irreversible downfall. Some theatergoers articulate the hope and despair the town is torn between: "It's too late. We've lost it," says one. "Why don't we resign ourselves to being just another cold, lonely city? Other cities have. At least we'll be moving with the tide."[48] Another man retorts with the opposite opinion: "We're at a turning point, an important turning point. Mr Ryder has come here to tell us that."[49]

The dream of the turning point becomes the novel's contrapuntal refrain, a yearning that echoes through the city's medieval alleyways, hotel lobbies, and recession-era housing complexes until it becomes little more than noise. The city is in crisis, people are lonely, families are falling apart, and Ryder has come here to solve their many problems. Yet we, like Ryder, are never quite sure what this crisis *is*. It might be a crisis of civic unity, which in this city is affected by a shared love of music. It might be a crisis of intimacy at the level of the family, but to solve it Ryder must keep abandoning his own. Yet to the extent that this city is nowhere and anywhere—a generic "Europe" reduced to its barest outlines—it is hard to ascertain what the "turn" proposes to transform. The city's complaints comprise everything from uninspired interpretations of contemporary music to stale tea cakes, and that is hardly a false range. Lukacs's "transcendental homelessness" gives way to melodramatic flights of nostalgia for pasts that were as taxing as the present.[50] Globalization hovers in the background, and technology makes itself felt in the peculiar habits of Gustav, the hotel porter

who holds onto Ryder's bags for the duration of an elevator ride in a Stephens-like quest for professional dignity. The end result, however, is a diffused melancholy that seems in search of an outlet. *The Unconsoled* is a novel that conditions us to believe, like the disconsolate Mrs. Hoffman, that transformation will only take "one moment, provided it's the correct one. Like a cord suddenly snapping and a thick curtain dropping to the floor to reveal a whole new world, a world full of sunlight and warmth."[51] Yet it never tells us whether this fallen "curtain" opens on the bedroom window or the public stage: the private viewpoint or the public show. It longs for an end that will transform, but it distorts the desired end by proposing a cliché of transformation in a setting that hovers precipitously between the public and the private spheres.

The novel's intimations of allegory do little to ground us. Its oneiric setting has drawn comparisons to Franz Kafka's *The Castle*, yet as Amit Chaudhuri points out, *The Unconsoled* lacks the historical grounding that might make its allegorical contours legible as such.[52] Ryder's amnesia, for example, does not signal the problem with historical memory we encounter in *The Buried Giant*, where a mysterious mist erases a nation's memory of their past atrocities. The novel is set in what Ishiguro concedes is a "generic" European city, yet it misses the more explicit historical and geopolitical engagements we find in *Remains of the Day* and *When We Were Orphans*.[53] Moreover, the city's collective obsession with music seems to be little more than a pretense for Ryder's improbable celebrity. The link between aesthetics and the human, which is central to *Never Let Me Go*, becomes in this novel an exercise in the absurd. Townspeople maintain a breathless silence as Ryder contradicts their former "leader," the disgraced conductor Christoff, about the emotional nature of pigmented triads.[54] When it seems that Brodsky, now their favorite to replace him, might be plunged back into alcoholism by the death of his beloved dog, the town convenes an emergency meeting. One man declares that they have to get Brodsky "back on course" to avert the "crisis" that awaits them. "Because if we don't, if we don't pull together and get this right tonight, I tell you this, there's nothing left for us except misery! Yes, deep, lonely misery!"[55]

Indeed, the city's obsession with music may be little more than a pun on the process of instrumentalization. Everything is a means to an end in this novel, but the means and the end are hopelessly out of tune. As Thursday night becomes the locus and deferral of the novel's multiple desires, the longed-for moment of public transformation is accompanied by a multitude of private ends. Mr. Hoffman works tirelessly to combat Brodsky's alcoholism in the hope that the success of Brodsky's Thursday night comeback will somehow save his own marriage. Stephen sees the performance as a chance to secure his parents' love, which diminished when he ceased to be a child prodigy and became a merely average young pianist. And Brodsky, whose alcoholism contributed to his separation from the influential Ms. Collins, hopes that this night will lead to a renewal of their relationship. The "desire for the end" that the novel repeatedly directs towards Thursday night is thereby transformed into a collective desire: a desire for a vast concatenation of personal and public ends that proposes to erase the very distinction between the two.

When we consider that the final "turning point" the novel longs for is also, in narrative terms, a crisis, we begin to see the full extent of the novel's disorientation of desire. Crisis, as Frank Kermode reminds us, is "a point in time filled with significance, charged with a meaning derived from its relation to the end."[56] It provides a collective end to lend definition to *chronos*—or "waiting time"—and relieve the indeterminacy of life "in the middest."[57] Crisis is also another kind of turn. In the context of illness, crisis indicates the "turning-point" that decides between recovery or death, and its figurative use preserves this notion of the "point" or "turn." Yet the crisis that confers meaning to

time by figuring its end has in this novel been scattered, diluted, and displaced. For while the anticipated final "turn" promises the consoling stasis of civic and familial unity, the novel amplifies the turn's capacity to disorient by setting up a maze of figurative or narrative "turning points" that have led the city and its occupants to their current crisis. Mr. Hoffman, for example, recalls the moment his wife learned that he was not (as she had mistakenly assumed) a composer or even a musician: "I see it as a sort of turning point in my life. I don't exaggerate, sir. In many ways, I see it now, my present life started from that moment."[58]

Such musings raise the stakes of the turn by investing it with the capacity to define the present and, by extension, the future. More importantly, they call into question the very desirability of being orientated in relation to the turns one has taken to get where one is. While the novel's physical turns provoke the anxiety that attaches to being lost, the narrative turn thus provokes an even greater anxiety: the anxiety of being locked in place. A wrong turn—here reduced to a single "point"—can be devastating, and those who locate themselves in its wake are left to pursue the impossible promise of the turning point that will console, repair, or bring about a rosy future.

What we are dealing with here is not merely a multiplicity of distinct desires that might, in another novel, give rise to Henry James's parodic happy ending that unfolds in "a distribution at the last of prizes, pensions, husbands, wives, babies, millions, appended paragraphs, and cheerful remarks."[59] Instead, the novel's direction of its multiple desires towards a single "point" mirrors their consolidation in Ryder to create a fiction of linkage between what is otherwise disparate: a fiction that the "end" in view, like the desire for that end, might be singular rather than plural. For as the novel progresses, we begin to sense that Ryder is less a coherent subject than a composite of selves whose contradictory desires (for parental approval, professional success, and romantic love) are dealt out among the trio of Boris, Stephen, and Brodsky, who collectively offer the flashpoints of Ryder's absent history. As Ishiguro describes it, the novel is "a biography of a person, but instead of using memory and flashback, you have him wandering about in this dream world where he bumps into earlier, or later, versions of himself." But, he adds, "They're not literally so...they do exist in their own right, in this city, to some extent."[60]

This explosion of the protagonist refutes the model of individuality that, as Nancy Armstrong has shown, emerged as the realist novel worked to invalidate former notions of the subject "as idiosyncratic, less than fully human, fantastic, or dangerous."[61] Depending on how we parse Ishiguro's technique, Ryder is either over-full or impossibly attenuated. For his "earlier" and "later" versions want very different things. While some aim for professional triumph as a means to secure love, others sacrifice love to secure professional triumph, and Ryder vacillates between both options in reversals that stretch the permitted boundaries of unreliable narration. To Boris, he justifies his work ethic by crafting a narrative of his importance that builds upon its own recursively: "I have to keep going on these trips, because…you can never tell when it's going to come along. I mean the very special one, the very important trip, the one that's very very important, not just for me but for everyone, everyone in the whole world."[62] Yet at a public event, he angrily berates the crowd for being "too obsessed" with the "little internal disorders" of their community to show "even the minimum level of good manners" to his family, implying that their crisis results from a privileging of communal relations over more local acts of individual care.[63]

Ultimately, Ishiguro is riding a fine narratological line by dispersing his protagonist into the bodies of "other characters" who also "exist." To the extent that Ryder's doubles exist as characters "in their own right," they exist *as* characters: external to Ryder and present in the world he

encounters. This means that Ryder's turns toward his doubles do not merely reveal, as a flashback might, what may have occurred in his own timeline; they also locate Ryder's ostensible desires in the city that surrounds him. His encounters with his doubled selves tend to redirect him in ways that dissipate his own agency. We might say Ryder *embodies* each of their desires in turn. Yet in the process of embodying this extensive "human" wish list, his own body seems to flatten out. He loses the consistency of a human character and becomes a container for the collective desire the novel aims to think.

Gary Adelman struggles to account for this characterological oddity in psychological terms. He suggests that *The Unconsoled* presents "a double level of consciousness" comprised of "the subjective, or solipsistic dream narrator" and "the narrator's core personality as portrayed, that is, cast and performed, by the other characters."[64] While this reading resonates with Ishiguro's stated intentions, it also reveals the lengths we will go in search of the "human" agent of fiction. Adelman is at pains to insist on the depth of Ryder's character—its "core" or essence—even as he acknowledges how thinly it is spread among a cast of desiring subjects. After all, what *is* Ryder's "core personality'? Where is it located? As Natalie Reitano points out, there is no indication that Ryder has resolved the conflicting desires his doubles embody. Instead, she writes, Ryder's mirroring in these characters (to which she adds Hoffman and Gustav) "constitute[s] a fractured *Kunstlerroman* in which *Bildung*, in any of its senses, is thwarted at every narrative turn."[65]

I would add that what is thwarted in this novel is not only *Bildung* and the character development that typically accompanies it, but the related developments and frustrations that accrue in the movement of desire towards its object. By stretching its protagonist's desires across a fragmented temporality of childhood, youth, and old age, the novel resists our attempts to figure desire as a plot, or even as something that has a plot. The true temporality of desire in this novel is not progress; it is a recursive process of turning back, forward, and away.

The result is a dizzying interrogation of life defined by what Berlant has called the "crisis ordinary," a life where crisis is no longer the exception but the rule.[66] Ishiguro's various deployments of the turn formalize the crisis ordinary by setting the need for continual readjustments to changing conditions in tension with the consolations once offered by the exceptional or pivotal crisis of the end. Put differently, the end the novel longs for is a structural impossibility that persists in the dream of form, and this fact is repeatedly underscored by attempts to adjust to minor crises through the proffering of expectations (ends) that are thwarted by the novel's improbable turns. For if the novel desires consolation as a turning point, it figures consolation as the point that is turned around: a point as difficult to find as the lost objects and opportunities that fill its pages.

Where, then, should we look for relief in this onslaught of crisis and (imperfect) adjustment? Where is consolation to be found in this novel, and what injury or wrong does it propose to address?

Consolation

To answer this question in the negative, we might say that consolation is *not* to be found where the characters seek it. Let us consider what might transpire if the novel's characters were to get what they profess to desire. Hoffman would secure his place in a marriage whose contingent affections are a burden to him, Gustav would win honor for the profession that literally kills him towards the novel's end, Steven would be confirmed in his belief that only professional success can

elicit his parents' love, and Ryder, his work complete, could return to the familial structures that failed him as a child.

Lauren Berlant's description of cruel optimism—which conditions life in the crisis ordinary—thus becomes productive for tracing the belated, restless, and wavering desires that weave through Ishiguro's novel. Berlant's "optimism" is not quite desire, but it dovetails with desire in ways that linger on the affective rupture between ends and means. Optimism, she writes, is "the force that moves you out of yourself and into the world in order to bring closer the satisfying something that you cannot generate on your own but sense in the wake of a person, a way of life, an object, project, concept, or scene."[67] It therefore registers those moments of desire that may precede the formation of an *object* of desire, which Berlant also renders as multiple; the object of desire, she says, is nothing more than the "cluster of promises" that attach to it.[68] And while optimism is not "inherently cruel," it becomes cruel when "the object/scene of desire is itself an obstacle to fulfilling the very wants that bring people to it."[69]

I take cruel optimism to be cruel insofar as it retains the structure of a telos while concealing at its core a fundamental stagnancy, not of effort, but of the vital capacity to turn aside: to imagine the other routes that might lead to a satisfactory end. The cruelly repetitive temporality of *The Unconsoled* resonates with Berlant's description of the optimism that hinges on repetition, raising expectations that 'this time," things will be different. [70] It often feels as though the characters are *taking turns* acting out the same attempts at repair and achieving the same disastrous results. Yet if *The Unconsoled* realizes this cruelty in the dream of a turning point that names precisely what it cannot and will not be, it also offers glimpses of consolation that ask us to turn aside—albeit briefly—to encounter objects that ignite a sense of possibility divorced from the telos of the end.

Here is one such glimpse. After arriving late to a gala where he and his family are the guests of honor, Ryder becomes "distracted" by something out of the "corner" of his eye. "Turning," he sees "the remains of the old family car" that his father had driven for years, and he treats us to a long recollection of the "endless imaginary scenarios" he enacted there as a child before the car's shabbiness became a source of shame to him.[71] He is abruptly torn from this reverie by Sophie, who reminds us that our distractible narrator is also a body in the world:

> 'What's got into you? You seem to have fallen in love with that thing.'
> Only then did I realise I was holding the car in a virtual embrace; I had been resting my cheek on its roof while my hands made smooth circular motions over its scabbed surface.[72]

Ryder is embarrassed. He laughs, calls the car a "disgusting heap," and gives it a kick for good measure. But when Sophie and Boris "turn away" from him, apparently satisfied, he is filled with remorse.[73] He inspects the car for damage, crawls inside, lapses into more painful recollections of his parents' unhappy marriage, and eventually falls asleep, seeming to forget the winding and harried car ride that caused him to arrive late, as usual, to this important event.

There is something touching about this scene, but it isn't Ryder's "love." It is the whole circular drama of "turning" towards and away that the object incites, a drama whose circularity is mirrored in the "smooth" motion of Ryder's hands over the car's "scabbed surface." Ultimately, *The Unconsoled* is a novel about the human need for consolation. Yet in the course of over five-hundred pages of turns, misdirections, and spectacular failures, this car is the only thing that gets consoled.

There is more to be said about this displacement, onto an object, of the novel's greatest human wish. First, however, it is worth pointing out that there is nothing particularly transformative about this moment. It passes us by in the whirlwind of Ryder's more pressing civic duties that collectively reduce it to a mere distraction. It is a turn but not a turning point. It comes out of nowhere and it goes nowhere, much like the wrecked car that has been seemingly transported from England to this field in the European continent.

Consolation thus offers yet another framework for thinking the final "turning point" the novel longs for and moves toward. It also marks the novel's second formal inquiry into the plot of constant crisis. For even without the false promise of the end, the desire for consolation poses a specific challenge to the plot of desire. Consolation, we may note, occurs in lieu of satisfaction. (Here we might think of the consolation prize: the minor award bequeathed to the un-victorious.) The desire to be consoled therefore presumes that satisfaction is out of reach, or that the chance for satisfaction has already passed by. While Brook's "desire for the end" seeks satisfaction in that end, a novel that desires consolation may therefore hold satisfaction to one side. Such desire reorients the subject toward the "end" of satisfaction and adjusts the usual temporality and agency of desire. While satisfaction is "achieved," consolation is more often "given" or "found" in what remains. The desire for consolation is a minor desire, a belated desire. It might even be the desire the novel asks us to inhabit.

Still, it could be argued that the desire for consolation also seeks to be satisfied, if only through its own belated logic. It is oriented toward the satisfaction of being able to turn around, examine something lost, and tell oneself that the loss has been met with its own compensatory reward. While the desire for satisfaction looks ahead, the desire for consolation hopes it will be able, when satisfaction fails, to look behind or alongside the lost object of desire.

The novel suggests that only the admission of failure can bring about a readiness to be consoled. Ishiguro expands upon this theme in *When We Were Orphans*. There, Sarah enjoins the Ryder-like Steven to give up on his own unwieldy aims (to save his parents and "solve the problems in China") and run away with her before it's "too late." "I've wasted all these years looking for something," she tells him, "a sort of trophy I'd get only if I really, really did enough to deserve it. But I don't want it anymore, I want something else now, something warm and sheltering, something I can turn to, regardless of what I do."[74] Notably, Sarah's abdication of the "trophy" does not abdicate desire. She still "wants" something, but she has moved that something off to the side; she has removed it from the teleology of means and ends and placed it somewhere she can "turn to, regardless."

This state of abdication is never quite reached by the primary characters in *The Unconsoled*. Yet within the novel's network of conflicting desires, Miss Collins betrays a rare fidelity to the logic of consolation I describe, one that helps us to articulate what is at stake in the novel's juxtaposition of civic duty and personal intimacy. One of the principle losses the townspeople seek to recover is that of Brodsky, whose rehabilitation to sobriety and social standing becomes the shared project of Hoffman, several citizen committees, and at times even Ryder himself. These efforts notably reverse Brodsky's own logic of instrumentality; while the townspeople see his reunion with Miss Collins as the means to the end of Brodsky's professional success, he views his musical comeback as the means to regain the love of Miss Collins. Ryder, who is swept up in every major and minor scheme in the city, urges Miss Collins to accept Brodsky's proposals. Her response is decisive. It echoes the novel's favorite refrain of belatedness, but it also offers a rare commitment to a consolation achieved. "I'm

much too old to be standing at any crossroad," she tells Ryder. "And it's really much too late for Leo to be talking like this.'"[75]

Ishiguro loves to bury significance in cliche, and the "crossroad" Miss Collins refuses is more than an empty placeholder for decision. She seems to say that it is "too late," not for the renewal of love, but for the turn and readjustment of hope it would require. Yet she justifies this position by taking yet another turn, backward, to the civic duties that have consoled her for her loss:

> Of course, I've not been able to achieve anything on your sort of scale, Mr Ryder. But that doesn't mean I can't enjoy a certain sense of satisfaction when I look back and see what I've been able to do. Yes, by and large, I feel quite satisfied with the life I've made for myself since Leo, and I'm quite content to let it stand at that…. But if I agree to return to him, well, that'll be a different matter. He will decide after a little time to destroy everything he's built, just as he did before. And where would that leave everyone? Where would that leave this city? In fact, Mr Ryder, I rather think I have a public duty not to accept these proposals of his.[76]

Miss Collins's response epitomizes the belated and minor pleasures that consolation may afford. Her "certain sense of satisfaction" seems to approach satisfaction without quite reaching it, yet even this attenuated satisfaction is preferable to reinserting herself in the expectant narrative of transformation that the city is swept up in. Significantly, Miss Collins has turned from the dream of the private family to find consolation in public duty, and she displays a resolution—rare among the novel's characters—to remain there.

The novel, as I have intimated, does not remain there. Private and public consolation are both put at risk when Thursday night turns out to be a disaster of slapstick proportions. A local poet is heckled, Stephen's parents miss his stunning performance and declare it a failure, and Brodsky, whose wooden leg was mistakenly amputated in a previous scene, conducts a frenzied, brilliant, and generally inaccessible rendition of "Mullery's Verticality" while seemingly inebriated and using an ironing board as a crutch, after which he concludes the evening by falling off the stage. These events are promptly followed by a dizzying series of missed consolations that reimagine the turn as an act of rejection. When Mr. Hoffman confesses the night a failure and begs his wife to leave him, she turns toward her distraught husband only to turn away:

> Mrs Hoffman had by now turned and was watching her husband carefully. She did not seem at all astonished by the outburst, and a look of tenderness, almost of longing, had come into her eyes. She took a hesitant step, then another, towards Hoffman's bent-over form. Then slowly she reached out a hand as though to touch gently the top of his head. The hand hovered over Hoffman for a second without making contact and then she withdrew it. The next moment, she had turned on her heel and disappeared down the corridor.[77]

This scene mirrors another between Brodsky and Miss Collins, where the extension and retraction of the woman's hand occurs so quickly that it stages the absence of consolation rather than its possibility. In that scene, which comes just a few pages before the one above, the retreat of Miss Collins's hand is coupled with her bodily retreat behind the stage curtain. Miss Collins offers her hand to the fallen Brodsky, but he seeks a fuller performance of reconciliation: "No, no," he says,

"let's embrace properly…. When they open the curtain. Let them see we were together at the end."[78] Yet when he goes on to beg consolation for the pain of his "wound," the appeal backfires. "Suddenly Miss Collins withdrew the hand she had started to extend and rose to her feet. She stared down coldly at Brodsky, then walked back briskly towards the curtain."[79]

The curtain, which Mrs. Hoffman hoped would open on "a whole new world," here becomes the architecture of retreat: a closing rather than an opening. Miss Collins has realized what Brodsky admitted to Ryder in an earlier scene: that the wound, which gives rise to the desire for consolation and drives Brodsky to seek it everywhere, is also a desire that will never be satisfied: "Me, the music, we're neither of us anything more to you than mistresses you seek consolation from. You'll always go back to your one real love. To that wound!"[80] The spheres of love and work, or the person and the music, may both be instrumentalized, and what Miss Collins rails against is instrumentalization itself.

The Personal City

Thus far I have attempted to sketch the novel's stakes through the figures of directionality that allow its desires to convene around moments of orientation: around the turning points that direct desire and the turns that turn it aside. In doing so, I have sought to circumvent the problem of character that may, in this novel, be described as a problem of individuality. Ryder is not unique. His desires are and are not his own, and although his community of doubles is a fractured community—a community in crisis—he fails to achieve the status of the "individual" protagonist that takes shape, according to Armstrong, through a "collision course" with the limits of the social.[81] We might say that the novel's social world is *too much* his own. Ryder is, in this sense, the "unproblematic individual" that Georg Lukács takes as an unfit subject for the realist novel; he is one whose "aims are given to him with immediate obviousness," and who proceeds through the "world constructed by these given aims" with hinderances that ultimately pose no threat to his interior life, for they are already there.[82] If the turn and the turning point stage intersections between the disparate, individual longings that circulate around the figure of crisis, they also animate conflicts that are not *human* so much as *personal*, insofar as the personal becomes for Ishiguro a figure of limitation that must be bent, broken, and wrenched into possibility.

In a recollected argument that resonates throughout the text, Ryder disparages the "limited" nature of the personal demands that Sophie makes on him. When she asks him why he can't stay home, be a father to Boris, and leave people to "sort out their own problems," he tells her: "I'm needed out here!' Such a small world! You live in such a small world!'"[83] The irony, of course, is that Ryder's world is small enough to ensure that when his civic duties bring him "out here" to a "foreign" city he will find that he has lived there before, married the hotel porter's daughter, and started a family whose dynamics are identical to those he grew up with. He will find that the ceiling of his hotel room—which serves as home base for his public commitments on this trip—is "unmistakably the same ceiling [he] had so often stared up at" from the "narrow creaking bed" he slept in as a child at his aunt's house in Wales.[84] He will also find that the "public" problems he endeavors to solve are rooted in private wounds that he himself has carried. And the greater irony is that he will not be able to solve them. The novel proceeds through a tragic reversal of Adam Smith's theory of sympathy; its rule is that the more familiar the wound, the more completely Ryder's sympathy will fail.[85]

Ishiguro has addressed the problem of sympathy more than once. Armstrong points out that Smiths' model of sympathy is rendered inadequate in *Never Let Me Go*, as Kathy's euphemistic invocation of "doners" and "carers" severs the reader's sympathetic identification with the "you" she addresses.[86] *The Unconsoled* arguably performs a more complete evacuation of sympathy, one that is accomplished not by deflecting sympathetic identification but rather by carrying it to extremes. To the extent that Ryder *is* Boris, Brodsky, and Stephen, he feels (or has felt) as they do. When placed in other bodies, however, and when *set upon different trajectories*, the feelings he knows as intimately as his own are relegated to the category reserved for the frustrations of matter. They get in his way. They delay and deter him, and in doing so they are placed in league with those other painful diversions (walls, circular streets, and uninhabitable spaces) that frustrate the novels' progress and exhaust the reader who attempts to follow it.

This slippage between human and matter produces contradictory effects. At times it allows the turn toward objects, such as Ryder's embrace of the "scabbed" car, to offer scenes of consolation whose emotional import moves between human and object and back again with an intensity that causes us to forget who is embracing whom. At other times, however, it reduces the swell of emotion to an anxious noise. If consolation is our goal, Ryder's extensions of sympathy are, in a sense, as painful to witness as his retractions of it. For while the retractions seem arbitrary in their coldness, the extensions lead him to deviate further from the reparative or consolatory tasks he has already promised to perform. For example, when Ryder "turns" to encounter Stephen and his various demands while trying, in lieu of some other obligation, to get Boris safely home, we feel annoyed at Stephen on Boris's behalf. Our frustration is akin to the one provoked when Ryder stumbles upon a wall that blocks his way as he rushes to the concert hall, rendering that cultural institution a point as evasive as Kafka's castle.

Such frustration is stoked by the absurd pretense that these diversions are commonplace. When Ryder, standing before the aforementioned wall, asks a passerby how to circumvent the wall to get to the concert hall, her reply wrings hilarity from a studied flatness: "The concert hall, sir? Well, it's quite a long way if you're thinking of going on foot. Of course, we're very near it just now' - she glanced up at the roof - 'but in practical terms, that doesn't mean very much because of the wall."[87] Here Ryder indulges in a rare angry outburst that gives vent to the frustrations that the reader has been feeling all along. Indeed, his outburst crystalizes so perfectly the anxiety the novel has been cultivating that it feels at once studied, belated, and preposterously flat:

> 'This is quite ridiculous! …You're obviously quite unable to appreciate that a person might be very busy, working on a tight schedule, and simply can't afford to dawdle about the town for hours. In fact, if I may say so, this wall is quite typical of this town. Utterly preposterous obstacles everywhere. And what do you do? Do you all get annoyed? Do you demand it's pulled down immediately so that people can go about their business? No, you put up with it for the best part of a century. You make postcards of it and believe it's charming. I may well use this wall as a symbol, I've a good mind to, in my speech tonight!'[88]

We need not unpack Ryder's loudly symbolic tirade on infrastructure for its bearing on the novel's fraught temporality. What is interesting here is that Ryder collapses, under the category of the "obstacle," the wall and the presumably human diversions that have impeded his course.

This presumed equivalence between the turns provoked by persons, objects, and spaces throws into relief the "affective economies" (Sara Ahmed's term) that come to circulate around a protagonist who is, as I have argued, a permeable container for selfhood. For Ahmed, affective economies register the ways in which affect moves between subjects and objects without giving precedence to either. "Emotion," she writes, "does not positively inhabit *anybody* or *anything*, meaning that 'the subject' is simply one nodal point in the economy, rather than its origin and destination."[89] Affective economies are therefore "social and material, as well as psychic": productive of surfaces that belie the distinction between "in here" and "out there."[90]

Ahmed's notion of affective economies helps us to see how the novel's turns toward objects might be accompanied by consolation, anger, frustration, or relief. More importantly, it allows us to refute the proposition that the novel's tendency to collapse its human and material frustrations registers a moral failure on the part of its protagonist. For as Jane Bennett has pointed out, "the Kantian imperative to treat humanity always as an end-in-itself and never merely as a means does not have a stellar record of success in preventing human suffering or promoting human well-being."[91] Humans and objects, as Miss Collins recognizes but fails to accept, may both be instrumentalized in the search for consolation. They may likewise be bad instruments: clusters of promises that lead to the forms of cruel optimism. Yet the fact of instrumentalization is not the tragedy, here. The tragedy is that the novel's characters turn away, at the pivotal moment, from the call to be a means to someone's end. Put simply, they refuse to console.

Boris, whose childhood apparently mirrors Ryder's own, is particularly subject to the whiplash of failed consolation. The child's needs emerge as something of a non-sequitur in the larger drama of civic crisis, allowing us to glimpse the very ordinary crises that creep into and ultimately expose what is at stake in the novel's exaggerated, farcical depiction of the crisis ordinary. For Boris's crisis is, at least at first, painfully ordinary. Early in the novel we learn that he lost his favorite toy, a plastic footballer he calls "Number Nine," when he and Sophie moved to their new apartment. Ryder, who was introduced to Boris as a stranger only moments before, suddenly "recalls" "that 'Number Nine' was not in fact a real footballer, but one of Boris's miniature players from his table-football game."[92] His recollections betray a level of detail that suggests they are also his own:

> The footballers, moulded in alabaster and each one weighted at the base, could be made with flicks of the finger to dribble, pass and shoot a tiny plastic ball. The game was intended for two people each controlling a team, but Boris only ever played on his own, spending hours lying on his front orchestrating matches full of dramatic reversals and nail-biting comebacks. Boris despised the manufacturers' assumption that he would enjoy pretending the teams were 'real' ones, such as Ajax Amsterdam or AC Milan, and had given the teams his own names. The individual players, however - though Boris had come to know each one's strengths and weaknesses intimately - he had never named, preferring to call them simply by their shirt numbers. [93]

Perhaps this is one of those objects that Wood would call "meaning's toys." At once generic and profoundly intimate, it is not unlike the characters that populate the novel. It is plastic and *personal*, animate and instrumentalized. Ryder describes the "dramatic reversals" whereby Number Nine, a talented yet "moody" player, would wow the spectators by emerging from his stupor to score countless goals in the final minutes of the game. He even recalls the words of the announcer, the

"roar" of the crowd, and Number Nine's graceful bearing as he "turned to receive the adulation of his grateful teammates."[94] Number Nine in Boris's hands is a predictable instrument. He/it is designed to create a crisis scenario and, at the very last moment, turn it around.

This description loudly corresponds to Ryder's own recollections of childhood play in an earlier scene, which emerge when a Proustian brush with his hotel carpet causes him to "realize" that his hotel room is identical to his childhood bedroom. The torn carpet brings him back to the plastic soldiers he once commanded there, and the day when an unusually "furious row" downstairs compelled a reconfiguration of his field of battle:[95]

> Near the centre of that green mat had been a torn patch that had always been a source of much irritation to me. But that afternoon, as the voices raged on downstairs, it had occurred to me for the first time that this tear could be used as a sort of bush terrain for my soldiers to cross. This discovery - that the blemish that had always threatened to undermine my imaginary world could in fact be incorporated into it - had been one of some excitement for me, and that 'bush' was to become a key factor in many of the battles I subsequently orchestrated.[96]

Instrumentalization, in Ryder's timeline, moves from the carpet to the plastic figure who surmounts the "blemish" he cannot smooth.

Boris's frequent, whispered invocations of "Number Nine" suggest a determination to keep alive (or "lively") the lost object that was central to the orchestration of his own "imaginary world." Still, he mourns the loss of this object alongside its loss of liveliness. For when Ryder asks Boris, in a delicate extension of the child's fantasy, whether Number Nine is still "on good form," the child's attribution of liveliness to this character suddenly breaks off. "'We left the box behind," Boris tells him. Number Nine "came off his base" and was put aside in a "special box." "I was going to fix him once Mother got the right kind of glue…. But we left him behind.'"[97]

The character Boris has crafted becomes an instrument divorced from its purpose, one whose liveliness is diminished in the "special box" that might as well be a coffin. Severed from its plastic base, it can no longer "be made with flicks of the finger" to perform those "nail-biting comebacks" that mark the turning points in Boris's fantasy. In the midst of this civic crisis, then, we are diverted by a wholly personal tragedy that revolves around the loss of a fantasy object, or rather by the becoming-object of what had been fantasy. If melancholy, for Giorgio Agamben, is "the imaginative capacity to make an unobtainable object appear as if lost," Boris's loss is also a loss of the object (the instrument) that carried the weight of the unobtainable.[98] It is a doubled melancholy. Boris, in losing this animate figure, has lost the capacity to set in motion the turns and reversals that console him.

Ryder initially evades the work of consolation by proposing a repair. He promises to take Boris back to the old apartment to retrieve Number Nine: "Perhaps even tomorrow if I find a spare moment. Then as you say, you've got the glue. He'll be back to his best in no time. So don't worry. We'll do that very soon."[99] His promise of "very soon" adds a painful impatience to the many pages of surprise engagements and unexpected detours that inevitably intervene. When they finally find themselves on a bus to the old apartment, a friendly fellow passenger joins in Ryder's promise of repair. His reassures the boy that the errand will be a success. His reassurance is delivered in one of the novel's signature moments of prolonged prolepsis, whose extreme duration makes it worth quoting at length:

> I feel sure it'll turn out well. Of course, when you first knock on the door, the new people might not know who you are and be a little suspicious. But then once you've explained they're bound to welcome you in. If it's the wife who's answered the door, she'll say: 'Oh, at last! We've been wondering when you'd be coming round." Yes, I'm sure she will. And she'll turn and shout to her husband: "It's the little boy who used to live here!" …And then she's bound to say: "Oh yes, we kept that box in a special place. We could see it was something important." And even as she's saying this, she'll give her husband a little signal. Perhaps not even a signal, husbands and wives become almost telepathic when they've lived happily together for as many years as this couple have done. Of course, that's not to say they don't quarrel. Oh no, they may even have quarrelled quite often, perhaps even gone through patches over the years when they seriously fell out. But you'll see when you meet them, a couple like this, you'll see these things sort themselves out in the end and that they're essentially very happy together.[100]

Hope is here delivered in the form of a story, a narrative complete with its own array of characters, conflicts, and crises overcome, and Ryder dozes off "contentedly" as the story echoes back to him his own dreams of marital bliss.

The scene they encounter, however, exposes how far Ryder's own life has diverged from this narrative. They find the old apartment, which Ryder has lived in but apparently forgotten, in a concrete housing development whose "seamless circular effect" evokes the domestic comfort of a modern sports stadium.[101] The walkway they follow past the building's many, identical doors is also circular, and they make several loops before Boris admits that they passed the apartment twice. When they finally arrive at the (vacant) apartment, the neighbor who greets them offers a scathing account of the previous tenants' violent domestic quarrels. He narrates to Ryder what we can only believe is Ryder's own history, and he offers what might be Ryder's self-defense: "If he'd actually got violent, well, that would have been something else, but there was never any evidence of that…. Okay, he went away a lot, but from what we understood he had to, that was all part of his work. It wasn't a reason, that's what I'm saying, it wasn't a reason for her to behave in the way she did.'"[102]

It is hard to avoid the spatial metaphor whereby this circular path traces out, in the architecture of the city, the characterological doubling that keeps Boris, Ryder, and Brodsky (not to mention the ill-fated "Number Nine") in an endless feedback loop of loss. For the "old apartment" that gives us the story of Ryder's abusive relationship is also—or so we are led to believe—the scene of his own unhappy childhood. In one of the text's uncanny doublings, Ryder looks through the window of this vacant apartment to find that it "resembled exactly the back part of the parlour in the house" that he and his parents lived in "for several months in Manchester."

> The house, a narrow city terrace, had been damp and badly in need of redecorating, but we had put up with it since we were staying only until my father's work enabled us to move away to something much better. To me, a nine-year-old, the house quickly came to represent not only an exciting change, but the hope that a fresh, happier chapter was unfolding for us all.[103]

Ryder's hope, like Boris's, keeps moving out of reach. As it happens, Boris and Sophie are also seeking a "fresh, happier chapter" in the guise of a new apartment. They never get there, just as Boris never recovers Number Nine. But Ryder gives him a consolation prize: a book on home-repair that will allow him to redecorate their current home and "fix everything" that is broken. The book signals the boy's graduation from the fantasies of childhood to the adult world of work, which in this novel is always *repair work*.

Indeed, the book itself requires repair. It cracks and falls apart when Boris opens it, but the boy clings to it like a treasure, desperate to solicit Ryder's recognition of his gratitude. Ryder refuses to give him that recognition, which is all that is needed to make the consolation prize complete. He suspects, or so we must intuit, that Sophie interprets his growing coldness to Boris as a sign that he is still angry about an affair she had, and he concludes that an act of kindness to Boris would be taken as a sign of his forgiveness. The book, along with Boris, has become Sophie's instrument, and Ryder's first impulse is to destroy it. By the end of the novel this impulse gives way to melodrama. Ryder attempts to wrest the book from the boy's hands, calling it a "*useless* present": "'What did your mother tell you about it? She told you it was a marvellous present, I suppose. Well, it wasn't….No thought, no affection, nothing went into it. An afterthought, it's got it written over every page. But you think it's something marvellous I gave you!'"[104]

In reference to moments like these, Louis Menand has proposed that Ishiguro's "single insight into the human condition is that people need love but continually spoil their chances of getting it."[105] I propose that these turns of events trace, not the human condition, but a view of the social that accumulates specificity in the objects, places, and geographies that surround the wayward "human" called Ryder. Ryder has forsaken the broken domestic sphere of his youth—which collapsed under the pressures of globalization and economic itinerancy—for the vague cosmopolitanism of public duty. Boris, uninterested in the civic and national pride that his footballers denote, is initiated into the rites of masculine domesticity by the repair manual. And Brodsky, forsaking both models of belonging, has succumbed to a hermetic lifestyle with his consolatory dog. This is a circle with no escape, one whose catalogue of lost and broken objects leads to an exhaustion that is more stuplime than revelatory.

Yet this is not the only end of the story. For the scene above, which concludes with Boris's loss of the book, is punctuated by Ryder's evasive "turn" from the boy to another object: "a large sheet marked 'Lost Property'" that Ryder, "for some reason," finds "diverting." [106]

> There was a long list of entries in every kind of handwriting, a column each for the date, the article lost and the owner's name.… The entries near the top appeared to have been written in earnest - a lost pen, a lost chess piece, a lost wallet. Then, from about halfway down, the entries grew facetious. Someone was claiming to have lost 'three million US dollars.' Another entry was that of 'Genghis Khan' who had lost 'the Asian Continent.'[107]

Ngai describes the aesthetic category of the stuplime as "a series of fatigues or minor exhaustions" rather than the "single, major blow to the imagination" that characterizes the Kantian sublime.[108] That Ryder turns to this list of lost objects while actively causing Boris's loss of the manual and his own loss of Boris would certainly qualify this scene as one of the novel's "minor exhaustions." Yet Ngai also tells us that there is a "comical and even farcical element" to the stuplime.[109] This element is exemplified by the stuplimity of slapstick comedy, which "stages the

confrontation of small subjects with the big systems that circumscribe them."[110] In the midst of these objects "one is made to fall down…only so as to get up again, counteracting the seriousness of one-time failure with an accumulation of comic fatigues."[111]

The Unconsoled performs this accumulation. It also performs it *as* an accumulation, as the objects that emerge from behind and around the amorphous protagonist give tentative shape to desires and affects that are and are not his own. But the drama of the novel, its "toil" and "pressure," does not lie with its primary subject. No matter how fully we trace the contours of "Ryder" from the objects he confronts, the drama is in the confrontations themselves. It is in the intensities that leap between his human doubles and their corresponding worlds, catching both in a crisis whose turning point is just another turn.

NOTES

[1] James Wood, "Human, All Too Inhuman," *The New Republic*, July 23, 2000, https://newrepublic.com/article/61361/human-inhuman.
[2] Wood.
[3] Wood.
[4] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Harvard University Press, 1992), 47.
[5] E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (Rosetta Books, 2010), 67.
[6] Wood, "Human, All Too Inhuman."
[7] Rachel Greenwald Smith cites Wood's analysis as an example of what she calls the "affective hypothesis," or "the belief that literature is at its most meaningful when it represents and transmits the emotional specificity of lived experience." This chapter takes a different approach to the question of the human. Whereas Smith interrogates the logic whereby human emotion becomes the privileged site for the transmission of meaning, I propose that *The Unconsoled* offers a test case for thinking about how we approach disruptions of meaning that occur at the level of desire. Rachel Greenwald Smith, *Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1-12.
[8] James Wood, "The Unconsoled," *The New Republic*, no. 223.16 (October 16, 2000).
[9] Louis Menand, "Something About Kathy," The New Yorker, March 21, 2005, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/03/28/something-about-kathy.
[10] Menand, "Something About Kathy"; Cynthia F. Wong, *Kazuo Ishiguro* (Oxford University Press, 2018); Shameem Black, "Ishiguro's Inhuman Aesthetics," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 55, no. 4 (2009), 786.
[11] In an interview with Gregory Mason, Ishiguro offers the following explanation for what Mason calls the "Japanese texture" of the language in *Artist of the Floating World:* "The thing about Ono in An Artist of the Floating World is that he's supposed to be narrating in Japanese; it's just that the reader is getting it in English. In a way the language has to be almost like a pseudotranslation, which means that I can't be too fluent and I can't use too many Western colloquialisms. It has to be almost like subtitles. "Gregory Mason and Kazuo Ishiguro, "An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro," *Contemporary Literature* 30, no. 3 (1989): 345.
[12] Here I am in agreement with Lisa Fluet, who proposes that the human clones in *Never Let Me Go* are "a literal realization of what, figuratively, [Ishiguro's] protagonists have always been." Lisa Fluet, "Introduction: Antisocial Goods," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 40, no. 3 (2007): 208.
[13] Anne Whitehead, "Writing with Care: Kazuo Ishiguro's 'Never Let Me Go,'" *Contemporary Literature* 52, no. 1 (2011): 65.
[14] Jane Hu, "Typical Japanese: Kazuo Ishiguro and the Asian Anglophone Historical Novel," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 67, no. 1 (2021): 124.
[15] Ji Eun Lee, "Norfolk and the Sense of Loss: The Bildungsroman and Colonial Subjectivity in Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 61, no. 3 (September 1, 2019): 271.
[16] Kelly Rich, "'Look in the Gutter': Infrastructural Interiority in Never Let Me Go," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 61, no. 4 (2015): 633.

[17] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke University Press, 2010), xvi–xvii.
[18] Kazuo Ishiguro, *Klara and the Sun* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2021), 171.
[19] Kazuo Ishiguro, *When We Were Orphans* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2001), 219.
[20] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Duke University Press, 2011), 7.
[21] Graham Swift and Kazuo Ishiguro, "Kazuo Ishiguro by Graham Swift," October 1, 1989, 23, https://bombmagazine.org/articles/kazuo-ishiguro/.
[22] For evidence of the attribution of Japanese-ness to Ishiguro's work, see Swift, Davis, and Iyer. In a 1989 interview with Graham Swift, we can watch as Ishiguro attempts to turn the anticipated imposition of "Japaneseness" on its head, while Swift, somewhat spectacularly, misses the cue. When Swift raises the issue of Stevens' fixation on professional dignity, Ishiguro replies: "This has got something to do with the fact that I come from a Japanese background. There are certain things that are very exotic to me about Englishness." Swift, who fails to conceptualize Englishness as the exotic, promptly offers his own reading: "Dignity is enormously important to this character. There is a resemblance with Japan—that feeling of dignity, service, life as a kind of performance. There is a strong echo of An *Artist of the Floating World*" (23). Given these remarks, it has been suggested that *The Unconsoled*'s un-marked setting stems from Ishiguro's desire to foreclose any glimmer of national or cultural allegory. For a largely sympathetic reading of this attempt, see Sim; for a critique of the novel's evasion of race and nationality, see Ma. For an incisive and overdue reading of Ishiguro's play with the genre of the racial and national stereotype, see Hu. Swift and Ishiguro, "Kazuo Ishiguro by Graham Swift"; Davis, Rocio G, "Imaginary Homelands Revisited in the Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro," *Miscelanea*, no. 15 (1994): 139–54; Pico Iyer, "Waiting Upon History," *Partisan Review*, no. 58.3 (1991): 585–89; Wai-chew Sim, "Kazuo Ishiguro," *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 25, no. 1/2, March 2005; Jane Hu, "Typical Japanese: Kazuo Ishiguro and the Asian Anglophone Historical Novel," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 67, no. 1 (2021).
[23] Swift and Ishiguro, "Kazuo Ishiguro by Graham Swift," 23.
[24] Wood, "The Unconsoled."
[25] Aristotle, *Poetics*, ed. Malcolm Heath (Penguin, 1996), 41.
[26] Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1995), 9.
[27] Ishiguro, 32.
[28] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 47, 52.
[29] Soren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life* (Penguin UK, 2004), 24.
[30] Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1989), 153.
[31] This is essentially the conclusion reached by a number of Ishiguro's critics. Bruce Robbins concurs with James Wood's suggestion that *The Unconsoled* reveals professionalism to be "one of the stories we tell ourselves to keep other stories away.'" Barry Lewis reads the town as a "projection of Ryder's unconscious," and A. Harris Fairbanks, who accounts for the novel's ontological uncertainties by noting the text's resemblance to the dreamworld, notes that "characters and events of the narrative are molded to fit [Ryder's] need to work out his own psychological problems rooted in his childhood relationship with his parents." Bruce Robbins, "Very Busy Just Now: Globalization and Harriedness in Ishiguro's 'The Unconsoled,'" *Comparative Literature* 53, no. 4 (2001): 424; Barry Lewis, *Kazuo Ishiguro* (Manchester University Press, 2000), 124; A. Harris Fairbanks, "Ontology and Narrative Technique in Kazuo Ishiguro's The Unconsoled," *Studies in the Novel* 45, no. 4 (2013): 605.
[32] Ishiguro, *When We Were Orphans*, 7.

[33] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, 304–5.
[34] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 52.
[35] Ngai describes the stuplime as an "encounter with the finite but iterable" that "seems no less daunting than the effort by the imagination to comprehend the infinitely extended object—but unlike Kant's mathematic sublime, the effort is also tedious and exhausting." Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 272.
[36] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 38.
[37] Brooks, 38.
[38] Brooks, 52.
[39] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, 1.
[40] Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. F. Kersten, vol. 1 (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1983), 94.
[41] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 38.
[42] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, 4.
[43] James Wood, "The Human Difference," *The New Republic*, May 15, 2005, https://newrepublic.com/article/68200/the-human-difference.
[44] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, 15.
[45] Ishiguro, 4.
[46] Ishiguro, 296.
[47] Ishiguro, 394.
[48] Ishiguro, 107.
[49] Ishiguro, 107.
[50] Georg Lukacs, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (MIT Press, 1974).
[51] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, 418.
[52] Amit Chaudhuri, "Unlike Kafka," *London Review of Books*, June 8, 1995.
[53] Sam Jordison, "Kazuo Ishiguro Webchat – as It Happened," *The Guardian*, January 20, 2015, sec. Books, http://www.theguardian.com/books/live/2015/jan/16/kazuo-ishiguro-webchat-the-buried-giant-the-unconsoled.
[54] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, 197.
[55] Ishiguro, 128.
[56] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction with a New Epilogue* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 47.
[57] Kermode, 44–47, 17.
[58] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, 347.
[59] Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," in *The Art of Criticism: Henry James on the Theory and the Practice of Fiction* (University of Chicago Press, 1986), 68.
[60] Maya Jaggi, "Interview: Kazuo Ishiguro Talks to Maya Jaggi," *Wasafiri* 11, no. 22 (September 1, 1995): 114.
[61] Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think: The Limits of British Individualism from 1719-1900* (Columbia University Press, 2005), 3.
[62] *The Unconsoled*, 217.
[63] Ishiguro, 217.

[64] Gary Adelman, "Doubles on the Rocks: Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 42, no. 2 (January 1, 2001): 168–69.
[65] Natalie Reitano, "The Good Wound: Memory and Community in *The Unconsoled*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 49, no. 4 (2007): 372.
[66] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 10.
[67] Berlant, 1.
[68] Berlant, 23.
[69] Berlant, 1, 229.
[70] Berlant, 2.
[71] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, 261.
[72] Ishiguro, 262.
[73] Ishiguro, 262.
[74] Ishiguro, *When We Were Orphans*, 227–28.
[75] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, 275.
[76] Ishiguro, 276.
[77] Ishiguro, 508.
[78] Ishiguro, 498.
[79] Ishiguro, 498.
[80] Ishiguro, 498.
[81] Armstrong, *How Novels Think*, 6.
[82] Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, 78.
[83] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, 35.
[84] Ishiguro, 16.
[85] Smith understands sympathy as an imaginative act of identification, an act of "changing places in fancy with the sufferer." Adam Smith, *Adam Smith: The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 11.
[86] Nancy Armstrong, "The Affective Turn in Contemporary Fiction," *Contemporary Literature* 55, no. 3 (2014): 454–55.
[87] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, 388.
[88] Ishiguro, 388.
[89] Sara Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 46.
[90] Ahmed, 6.
[91] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke University Press, 2010), 12.
[92] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, 41.
[93] Ishiguro, 41.
[94] Ishiguro, 42.
[95] Ishiguro, 16.
[96] Ishiguro, 16.
[97] Ishiguro, 42.
[98] Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture* (U of Minnesota Press, 1993), 40.
[99] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, 43.
[100] Wood, "The Unconsoled," 209.

[101] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, 210.
[102] Ishiguro, 215.
[103] Ishiguro, 214.
[104] Ishiguro, 471.
[105] Louis Menand, "Anxious in Dreamland," *The New York Times*, October 15, 1995, sec. Books, https://www.nytimes.com/1995/10/15/books/anxious-in-dreamland.html.
[106] Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, 471.
[107] Ishiguro, 471.
[108] Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 273.
[109] Ngai, 272.
[110] Ngai, 105.
[111] Adelman, Gary. "Doubles on the Rocks: Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 42, no. 2 (January 1, 2001): 166–79.

CHAPTER 4

POINTS AND LINES:

RENEE GLADMAN'S ARCHITECTURES OF CRISIS

The narrator of Renee Gladman's *Event Factory* (2010) has difficulties with communication. As a self-described "linguist traveler" recently arrived in the fictional city-state of Ravicka, she struggles to achieve even a semblance of fluency in the language she has come here to study. And no wonder, for in the Ravickian language each utterance is accompanied by an elaborate choreography of gestures that range from the mundane (a wag of the head) to the physically taxing (knee bends), and the wrong movement will cause the utterance to diverge wildly from its intended meaning. Thus the narrator opines, "if only traveling were about showing off your language skills, if only it did not also demand a certain commitment of body communication, or outright singing or dancing—I think I would be absolutely global by now. In Ravicka, I was barely urban."[1]

With this admission of the geographic mobility afforded by language, Gladman's novel at once acknowledges and exaggerates the extent to which language and movement coexist at the level of the gesture. The "barely urban" narrator might be taken for the barely *urbane*: the traveler whose linguistic abilities are stymied by a corresponding awkwardness, a hesitancy not of speech but of the body.

Yet the novel goes further than this in its attempt to weld linguistic and bodily movement, so far, in fact, that the appellation "linguist traveler" threatens to become redundant. In Ravicka, we are told, "speaking is a trip." The sentence is a line between two points, and as the narrator explains, "you cannot skip ahead, or you'll be saying something entirely different." To illustrate language's capacity to travel she recounts making an accidental "trip" of her own: "I wanted to say, 'when you are a visitor to a place, especially one such as Ravicka, it is difficult to remain stationary. The landmarks call out.' But I could not get my body to say 'landmark' versus the 'shipyard' it kept performing."[2]

You cannot "skip ahead" in Ravicka, but skipping ahead is precisely what this passage performs. While searching for "landmarks" our narrator arrives—bodily, it would seem—at the "shipyard," and despite the pleasant specificity of this revision, the shipyard is not where she wanted to go.

Gladman's work reveals such detours as a possibility embedded in the logic of all narrative. Hers is a space where deviation becomes inseparable from movement, where going astray is not a failure but a method of tracing new and unanticipated lines of connection that work against linear narratives of finality and consummation. In the process her writing transforms the traveler's communicative dilemma into an act of "skipping ahead" that has narrative as well as spatial consequences. It proposes a queering of narrative that reconfigures the epistemological values we attribute to directness and asks us to think anew the pleasures of its others (I will not say "opposites"): the pleasures of tarrying, circling, or even going astray. .

In order to understand what is at stake in these pleasures, we must first understand that Ravicka, the setting of Gladman's series of four cross-genre texts, is in the midst of an undefined "crisis" in which the activities of skipping, circling, and losing one's way are not altogether voluntary. Ravicka's crisis is also a queer one. Buildings move and vanish, rubble appears inexplicably in front of structures that are still intact, and smoke emanates from fires whose actual existence cannot be agreed upon. The community is subject to a similar instability. Some people vanish without a trace; others have a strange problem where they "depart" yet can never "arrive," and by this we are meant to understand that they are caught in the perpetual middle of interminable journeys. All we can know for sure is that the city is in a crisis at once material, phenomenological, and ongoing, yet no one is able to agree on its cause or visible effects. The narrator of the second book, *The Ravickians*, tells us that official accounts of the crisis are unreliable: "Ciut Centrali is not in ruins, though the paper ran an article today that said it was."[3] Yet she also agrees with the general consensus that something is wrong: "For Ravicka to be so still means that it is dying. What other explanation could there be?"[4]

Plenty, as it turns out. Each of the four novels in this series seeks to document Ravicka's crisis from a different viewpoint, and their common object makes the first-person narrators appear like so many cardinal directions encircling a central hub. The outsider's account in *Event Factory* gives way, in *The Ravickians* (2011), to an insider's account from the perspective of "the great Ravickian novelist" Luswage Amini, who documents the discrepancies between official accounts of the city and its actual condition. *Ana Patova Crosses a Bridge* (2013) offers another such account—this time in verse—from Amini's former lover, the poet Ana Patova, and *Houses of Ravicka* (2017) provides an official account from the perspective of the city comptroller who is tasked with taking geoscogs (measurements that document a structure's movement over time) of Ravicka's mobile buildings. At this point, we learn that some of the buildings are invisible.

Yet very little "happens" in the course of these narratives. Instead, each narrative muses on the circumstances of the crisis with a melancholy circularity that keeps us in its grips. As Ana Patova tells it:

> The crisis came out of its originary
> moment making numerous, slow
> overlapping circles around the city
> until every building and every
> inhabitant was floundering in its
> enclosure. The crisis wore a T-shirt
> to the market and handed out flyers
> about climate change and asbestos;

the crisis put bugs in your bed, it added
periods to your sentences, so that you
spoke plain and without invention.[5]

My account of Ravicka's peculiarities reveals a densely metaphorical crisis that is at once the subject of writing and the condition of its possibility. For Gladman, writing and place are co-constitutive features of an artistic praxis that recirculates feelings of moving, pausing, and dwelling in urban space. Her multimodal work—which slides between the forms and sensibilities of poetry, narrative, and visual art—shares the tangential, circular, and provisional structures of the city she invokes, so that reading the Ravicka novels feels like circling the same building over and over only to find that its contours have changed after each orbit. What is surprising is that the cumulative effect of these changes is less a feeling of Brechtian estrangement than a perplexing intensification of intimacy. It is almost as if the act of circling—whether a building, an object, or a city—has left a visible or geographic mark that wraps that object in the folds of our attention. Or it is as if our attention has made a map of its own movements and placed that object in its momentary center: "momentary," because the "center" of attention moves as often as Ravicka's buildings, and the circle has a tendency to expand and contract as our position shifts. Indeed, when reading these texts it is hard to separate the quality of orientation (toward and among, inside and outside) from the question of what it is we are oriented toward, among, or within. What is Ravicka? What is this place we are flying over, walking through, and failing to arrive in?

One answer is that the novels propose a restless allegory of urban decay, gentrification, environmental crisis, and the atomization of communities most affected by these crises. Another is that the crisis is all in the telling. There are indications that Ravicka's crisis has been brought about by language, and that only language can ameliorate its effects. Unfortunately, the ability to *account for* the crisis is one of the things the crisis has affected, and this, Amini decides, is the real problem: "What is truly declining in Ravicka is the ability to get valuable information to those who most need it. There is no corps to centralize this intelligence. What I have to say is not pending, otherwise I could send it to the Pending Bureau, nor is it viral (because our clinics are intact); it is circumstantial and there is no place for that."[6]

I want to argue that Gladman's Ravicka novels carve a space for the circumstantial within the narrative of crisis, and that an attention to the "circumstantial" orientations these texts inhabit can help us to access the political and formal work they perform. In each of its grammatical forms, "circumstantial" bears within it connotations of circumference, circuity, and circumlocution like so many nested dolls. The Oxford English Dictionary defines circumstantial as "of, relating to, or dependent on circumstances," a definition which leads us, somewhat circuitously, back to circumstance: "that which surrounds materially, morally, or logically." What surrounds seems all-encompassing, yet we are also told that "circumstantial evidence" holds little sway in a court of law, and that the circumstantial in narrative refers to that which is "adventitious, accidental, incidental or unimportant." It seems the circumstantial is at once all-encompassing and, for that very reason, marginal: confined to the margins of power and of discourse.

Gladman's intervention allows us to think how the accidental and incidental might reconfigure our conception of crisis as it is lived and narrated. Her work proposes circumlocution as a form that might challenge the instrumentalized and occasionally fraudulent discourse of state power, which would deny or manufacture crisis, fashion its aftermath into a blank slate for capital to

build upon, or pin the crisis to an outside cause. Yet because the body becomes the site where crisis is registered, these texts also prompt us to ask whether "crisis" is not just another word for the smaller interruptions, losses, and disorientations that structure daily life. I propose that we cannot decide between these possibilities, and that the nature of the crisis depicted evades the logic of "either/or" and arrives at "both/and." Ravicka's crisis is both disaster and disruption, loss and loneliness. It is both an event and a circumstance, and this collapsing of event into circumstance is what energizes the narrative praxis we encounter. Gladman's work constructs a method wherein the accumulation of circumstance gives us a *feeling* for crisis through the sheer force of the circumlocutions the text performs.

My interest in circumlocution is not merely etymological. I am taking a cue from the passage above, where Amini laments that "there is no corps to centralize this intelligence." The play on "corps" (core) and circumference hides in the plain sight of spatial thinking. Without a core, what the narrator has to say must keep circling, keep moving around the center (corps) of power. Like Ravicka's citizens, her narration cannot "arrive," because there is no place where it can rest. Yet the narrator keeps saying it. She keeps circling back to buildings and persons, sketching a perimeter around a crisis we cannot explain but are nevertheless asked to confront. Such circularity articulates the combination of restlessness and exhaustion that plagues the protagonist of *Event Factory*, who finds herself "circling the same block of streets" and feeling that "one of the walls needed to turn away, become a courtyard, become a Plaza."[7] It gives way, in the subsequent two novels, to a melancholy circumlocution that lingers with the crisis while refusing any linear progress towards a decisive or transformative event. Here is Ana Patova, the fictitious author of the third book:

> I had to walk backward
> along the streets (deserted), but not
> literally with my back moving forward,
> rather, walking as if north were south
> and north were east and entering a
> rotary was to be spun around a wheel
> (deserted) and disorganized as a being
> of the world, yet to have exits along the
> way that led out to time, but each exit
> (deserted) opening to a different quality
> of time and those times being in
> correspondence with a set of streets
> that were reassigned (deserted)[8]

At times the act of circling and the process of circumlocution become part of the same movement.

Yet crisis also has narrative consequences, and we are made to feel that the possibility of narration is also at risk in this centrifugal temporality. In the preface to *Ana Patova Crosses a Bridge,* the narrator insists that her book cannot narrate a sequence of events; it can only index what is present in the continually rearranged space of Ravicka: "The book wishes to end a crisis by the sheer fact of existing. But, rather than a History, the book becomes an index. It shuffles our bewilderment. It does not tell our story. It cannot do that."[9] To "shuffle" is to rearrange. It is also to walk slowly or haltingly, perhaps from exhaustion, perhaps from uncertainty about the ground underfoot.

Gladman has said that she resists applying the term "metafictional" to her work, yet it is hard not to read Ana Patova's description of the "index" as reflection of her own, non-linear process of narration.[10] "Shuffling" is how Gladman's texts tend to move. It is how they accumulate evidence of a crisis in the small and not-so-small failures, disappearances, and disorientations that crisis provokes. It is also how they register the small feelings of connection, proximity, and potentiality that make crisis livable. More importantly, though, such "shuffling" indicates a reluctance—which Patova frames as an impossibility—to produce a "history" of crisis that might terminate in the present, thus establishing an end that would make way for a future beyond it. While the index signals a determination to remain with the quotidian details that might, however you shuffle them, add up to a picture of the crisis and its effects, it also names what happens when the desire for an ending will not or cannot be gratified.

Between the figures of circularity and shuffling, then, a refusal of the end that situates the lived, circumstantial experience of crisis sits in tension with the narrative resolution that crisis demands. Such tension is a central concern in studies of post-apocalyptic literature, where the "end" of apocalypse, as James Berger has pointed out, is paradoxically softened by the novel's tendency to hold space for futurity through the provisional resolution that the novel form enables.[11] For Berger, this evasion of the *apocalyptic* end is not an evasion of the "end" of the novel but rather the condition that makes such ending possible. Leif Sorensen takes this argument one step further, proposing that post-apocalyptic narratives "rewrite apocalyptic time as the occasion for the production of new stories" whose endings tend to take two forms: a reversal that brings either a return to normalcy or a realization of a "new normal" that humanity must adapt to.[12]

That Ravicka's crisis is not explicitly post-apocalyptic does not undermine the relevance of this tension around endings. Yet this model alone cannot account for the way her texts delight in those wayward and deviant refusals of linearity (a delight Fred Moten describes as "contemplative waywardness") that are often—sometimes in the very next breath—painted as a condition of the crisis that afflicts Ravicka.[13] Nor can it account for the ways in which sociality, eros, and the architectures that enable them become at once a casualty of the crisis and the means of finding repair within it. These texts call out to each other, sometimes literally. Luswage Amini, the narrator of *The Ravickians,* directs her writing and her love to Ana Patova, the narrator of the subsequent book. In *Event Factory* the protagonist's utterance of Amini's name occasions a moment of intimacy between her and an unknown woman, who offers her "a particular handshake that is reserved for occasions when [Ravickians] … have exhausted all creative possibilities of conveying intimacy, short of nakedness."[14] Even the ornery comptroller of *Houses of Ravicka*, whose chronic frustration recalls that of Beckett's Molloy, finds momentary solace in the thought of naming his day "Finding Amini" (though he subsequently abandons this task in favor of "staying on top of his [professional] game").[15] In short, the "crisis" that strikes a blow to intimacy and erotic desire only serves to highlight how both are constitutive of the city as Gladman imagines it.

In order to consider how these features of queer and artistic sociality participate in Gladman's refusal of narrative closure, this chapter will situate her work in relation to the two literary "movements" whose sensibilities it arguably unifies: Language poetry and New Narrative writing. As I shall demonstrate, Gladman's writing locates the circumstantial at the intersection between the incidental currents of daily life that motivated these two traditions. Her "circumstantial" seeks a middle ground between, on the one hand, New Narrative's autobiographical rendering of relationality, gossip, and what Robert Glück termed "ecstatic sexuality" as the means of writing

(queer) community and, on the other, Language poetry's tendency to elevate the quotidian while effacing the authorial "I," an effacement which (as Natalia Cecire has argued) limited the possibilities of engagement with questions of racial or sexual identity.[16] Gladman, who is sometimes counted among the later generation of New Narrative writers, finds that middle ground in the body. In the vanishing ground of Ravicka, the body—Husserl's "zero point of orientation"—is the only stable point we are given, and its capacity to become disoriented indexes how crisis might direct and redirect the body by animating those moments where it too is shuffled and rearranged.[17] Orientation thus becomes another "circumstance" we must attend to in these texts. Though the formulation is somewhat clumsy, we might say that orientation enters the gap left by Gladman's refusal of "character" as the vehicle for fiction and offers, in lieu of character, a sense of what she calls "the person in the world," a body that is rendered particular in it the movements and desires that give it direction.

The New Narrative

When Peter Brooks wrote, in 1984, that narrative desire is essentially "desire for the end," numerous writers were already working in explicit opposition to the totalizing "consummation" of sense-making he described.[18] Notable among these were the writers associated with the two literary "schools" named above, both of which emerged in productive opposition in the Bay Area literary scene during the 1980's. In her introduction to *Biting the Error: Writers Explore New Narrative*, Gail Scott identifies the loosely defined school of New Narrative writing as a field that is at once established and in the process of emergence, an ongoing experiment that reaches, like the sentence itself, towards the discovery of "what must be said."[19] This is an apt characterization of a literary movement that is only now finding its way into critical anthologies after three decades of relative obscurity.[20]

New Narrative arose in the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1980's as a response to the perceived hegemony of Language poetry, whose own distrust of the consummate "end" was often accompanied by a broader distrust of narrative itself.[21] Its early practitioners (who included Robert Glück, Bruce Boone, Kevin Killian, Dodie Bellamy, and Gail Scott) were predominantly queer writers working outside the academy, writers for whom Language poetry's denial of authorial voice and subjectivity seemed to place a premature limitation on their own sense of political urgency. As Robert Glück puts it in his 2016 essay "Long Note on New Narrative," "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."[22] However, he continues, "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—an image so unjust that it amounted to a tyranny that I could not turn my back on." Glück goes on to assert that for queer writers whose very identity was a contested site—and whose bodies were often a site of physical violence—"political agency involved at least a provisionally stable identity."[23]

New Narrative writers answered this need with a peculiar blend of fiction and autobiography, insisting that identity is always in part a fiction (and thus only "*provisionally* stable").[24] Yet many also turned their attention to the formal and ethical elements of plotting, not just at the level of the story, but at the level of the line, the word, or what Scott calls "the sentence as

sensor."[25] For many New Narrative writers, *plotting* is akin to *plodding*: an explicitly embodied and often meandering movement through the paths of language. These writers tend to enjoy the swerve, the turn, the reach and recoil of bodily motion. I use the word "reach" here advisedly, for what is interesting about New Narrative's understanding of textual progress, and what sets it apart from other experimental prose traditions, is its tendency to collapse notions of writing and embodiment without granting the body a fixed position in relation to its textual productions. Many New Narrative writers often name the body and desire as central to their aesthetic practice. Yet for each writer, as for each body, "the body" means and moves differently. For those who engage most explicitly with issues of identity, it is body rather than world that represents the primary site of flux and uncertainty. For others, body and language are complimentary extensions of subjectivity that act in tandem to articulate the subject's desires. While these are not mutually exclusive positions, they underscore how New Narrative writers tend to figure embodiment as the primary site of challenge to the poststructuralist denial of the authorial subject.

This figuration of embodiment brings with it a certain distrust of those narrative structures that propose a path for the body to follow, or an end for it to reach. In her essay "Echoes Enough of Echoes of Enough of Me: In Favour of 'Not Going Anywhere,'" Nathalie Stephens collapses bodily and textual movement into the notion of "reach," which is "not only extension or thrust (th*u*rst) or desire for other (recoil), it is a physical motioning in language that seeks to move (forbidden) outside of the many constraints imposed on it."[26] She envisions this reach as one that proceeds "away from the body" and returns as echo:

> Body is the (contested) place where language originates, if one views, as I do, language as desire, desire as un- or many-gendered. Body is also the place of exile, and language, as it is (mis)used, makes repeated (failed) attempts at return. Looked at that way, I suppose, it operates a sort of *aliyah*, and language's reach in this context might be read as messianic (I am waiting (for it) to come)."[27]

Stephens's description of textual and bodily "reach" mingles the Hegelian conception of desire as self-consciousness with overtones of a Blochian hope.

This hope energizes José Esteban Muñoz, for whom queerness is also a reach: a "structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present."[28] For Muñoz, this anticipatory aspect of queerness—its tendency to be "not yet here"—is integral to the utopian potentiality that he offers as a corrective to the "romance of singularity and negativity" that drives Lee Edelman's *No Future*.[29] Muñoz's work thus helps us to think the odd combination of messianic hope and infinitely delayed (erotic) consummation that is evident in Stephens's parting, double parenthetical: "(I am waiting (for it) to come)." The delayed consummation of orgasm (I am waiting *to come*) becomes the figure for a messianic deferral that constitutes queer hope, and what it defers is the ending.[30]

Situating Gladman's work in relation to New Narrative writing helps us to uncover the links between queerness, lineation, and the temporality of crisis that the Ravicka novels encounter. As is the case for Stephens, questions of embodiment and an orientation that partakes in the sexual are central concerns in Gladman's work. So too is the tension between point and line: the exploratory flight and the pivotal "event" of arrival. Gladman is sometimes counted among the later generation

of New Narrative writers, and her work shares New Narrative's interest in depicting urban life and queer sexuality in ways that challenge generic norms.

That said, her writing also tends to obscure those aspects of identity that New Narrative writers sought to reclaim in their departure from Language aesthetics. Sexual orientation is acted on but rarely named in the Ravicka novels, and racial identity is present only in oblique hints that become more oblique in the decontextualized terrain of Ravicka's fictional world. Such obliquity is especially notable when we consider that Gladman, who is one of the few black writers associated with new narrative writing, has tracked a related set of questions—of the body in space, of the body writing—through two decades of work in multiple genres. Her first book, *Juice* (2000) begins, "About the body I know very little, though I am steadily trying to improve myself," and this quest for "improvement" extends from her prose work to her more recent foray into visual art.[31] In the introduction to *Prose Architectures* (2017), a collection of drawings that occasionally explode into fragments of almost legible script, Gladman writes: "Drawing extended my being in time… It produced a sense that thinking could and did happen outside of language: I saw it as a line extending from the body, through the hand, as if something were being poured or pulled out of oneself."[32]

Even allowing that the dictates of New Criticism are a smudge in the rearview mirror, this feature of Gladman's work makes it difficult to ascertain what bearing identity—and racial identity in particular—might have on the narrative interventions her work performs. As Evie Shockley points out, "one of the challenges her work presents is determining whether, when, and how her racial subjectivity informs art that does not often invoke "blackness" in the ways our society has encouraged us to expect."[33] Yet as Shockley goes on to demonstrate, the untenable politics of colorblindness may conspire in the tendency to miss those "elusive feelings and thoughts" that lack, like the "circumstantial" writ large, a proper place to put them.[34]

Admittedly, Gladman's reference to the unmarked "body" is left open to interpretation in ways that the practitioner of Hélene Cixous's *écriture féminine*, for example, is not. But the body tends to move, and its movements accumulate the "tendencies" that for Eve Sedgwick mark the accumulated pressures of the social.[35] The body and the line appear again in Gladman's 2008 prose work *To After That (Toaf),* which opens with the following description of her process:

> This book would concern my favorite subject – the problem of the person in space and time – and would flow from the farthest left margin to the furthest right, the way novels did in bookstores. But its story – the exact parameters of it – I did not deem necessary to know right then, as this was my first novel, and would be a ghost book.[36]

It is hard not to notice how one little article strips "the body" and "the person" of all particularity, as if it were merely a position from which to move, think, and write. As Gladman concedes in an interview: "I am never very good at addressing 'the body' directly. I'm not sure I always mean the literal body when I use that word."[37]

Still, the above passage positions this body in contest with the dominant modes that would render it the ghostly author of a "ghost book." We might note, for example, that "the problem of the person in space and time" asks for a form whose "parameters" are only jokingly present in the material constraint of the page, which is in turn expanded and unconstrained in Gladman's description. "The farthest left margin to the furthest right" insists that the line, and the body which produces and inhabits it, is stretched to the limits of its spatial possibility. When we consider this

form-shattering "flow" in light of Gladman's insistence on *the novel* as her chosen genre, her description of writing begins to accumulate subversive notes that locate "the body" as a source of that subversion. We must not be fooled by Gladman's assumption of novice status here. Her intention to make her book look "the way novels did in bookstores" only underscores the radical reformation of the novel she proposes. Her novel insists on a form that fits the contours, desires, and body of "the person" who writes it, a form that, without "parameters," might move without the comfort of an end.

Desire and the End

The questions raised thus far—of desire, of narrative, and the "end" it envisions—are central to Brooks's *Reading for the Plot*. Brooks begins his study by echoing and expanding upon Roland Barthes's assertion that the desire of narrative is "the desire for the end," and that the end—as Walter Benjamin once argued of death—is what makes narrative and narrative meaning possible.[38] He thus concludes that "the very possibility of meaning plotted through sequence and through time depends on the anticipated structuring force of the ending: the interminable would be meaningless, and the lack of ending would jeopardize the beginning."[39]

Brooks's argument about the "the desire for the end" is also an argument about desire, and in the chapter entitled "Freud's Masterplot" he turns to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to articulate how each stage of a narrative—including its dilatory, repetitive, and merely circumstantial moments—gets caught up in a movement toward the consummate "end." Repetition thus becomes the "binding...of textual energies that allows them to be mastered," and binding becomes that which "creates delay, a postponement in the discharge of energy, a turning back from immediate pleasure, to ensure that the ultimate pleasurable discharge will be more complete."[40] In short, the dilatory, deviant, and circumstantial aspects of narrative are useful only insofar as they enhance the final "gratification of discharge."[41]

It goes without saying that Gladman's conception of writing as an embodied entanglement in the contours of the present marks a clear departure from the plot conventions of realist fiction. Whereas Ishiguro stages resistances to teleological ends that run against the grain of his own text, Gladman's writing forsakes that grain for a complex texture of resistance in which the genre of poetry—with its proclivity for parataxis and linguistic play—figures as an important part. It is hardly surprising, then, that her work does not seek to approximate the "narrative of desire" that Brooks proposed, and that whatever "ends" her narratives envision will be at once multiple and resistant to any pleasing sense of finality. Why, then, do I dwell on Brook's "end" at all? One reason is to consider the role that embodiment—and queer, black, or female embodiment in particular—might play in redirecting the "desire for the end" towards more provisional modes of incompletion. The second is to highlight how the ontological purchase of crisis shifts when we encounter it in narratives that resist the desire for the end and, with it, the promise of the pivotal turning point that will bring us from crisis to its relieving (or devastating) aftermath.

Brooks's argument has since been countered by feminists and scholars who have objected to the explicitly male model of desire that underlies Brooks ejaculatory narrative arc. Susan Winnet, for example, counters what she calls "the Masterplot's reliance on male morphology and male experience" by imagining what a female narrative of desire might look like. Noting that Brooks relies heavily on a linear, phallic model of "tumescence and detumescence" to articulate the "significant

discharge" of the end, Winnet points out that female arousal may begin and conclude at any point in the sex act, that orgasm may be a repeated occurrence rather than an end, and that the "tumescence and detumescence" that marks pregnancy and childbirth may model not an end but another beginning.[42]

While useful for offering a counter-argument to Brooks' model, Winnett's account of female desire arguably falls victim to the gender essentialism that plagues its target of critique. Indeed, the retort to Brook's end-driven model is better articulated by New Narrative's embrace of a "dilatory" praxis that embraces deviation as one of pleasure's forms. According to Nathalie Stephens, there is an "argument to be made in favour of text that does not 'arrive,'" and that argument is inseparable from the queer refusal of endings she envisions. It might even be a queer argument. In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Judith/Jack Halberstam employs the spatial metaphor of "losing one's way" to locate a productive potential for queerness in what is generally designated as a failure. In a passage that resonates with Gladman's description, in *TOAF*, of not knowing the parameters of her novel "in advance," Halberstam suggests that there is a queer potential in not knowing where one is headed. Knowing one's way via the preparation and training common to all disciplines, Halberstam writes, "is a way of refusing a kind of Benjaminian relation to knowing, [which is] a stroll down uncharted streets in the 'wrong' direction."[43] *Not* knowing one's way, by implication, embraces that Benjaminian stroll.

Stephens's defense of "the text that does not 'arrive'" at an ending or orgasmic consummation helps us to think how one of the stranger effects of Ravicka's crisis, namely, the problem of "arrival" that I alluded to earlier, comes to codify Gladman's elision of finality and consummation in the disorienting spatial contours of the city. Given that most if not all of the Ravicka texts are peripatetic narratives, the fact of arrival might be understood as a softer instantiation of the ending, even when it is not (and it often is) a play on the consummate "arrival" of *jouissance*.

In *Ana Patova Crosses a Bridge,* we are told that a man named Hausen has "a mechanical problem, which people / began to attribute to the city: Hausen, they said, walked for hours without arrival."[44] The narrator explains: "He seemed to get on a bus. But only moments after one thought one had seen him go, he would be standing there."[45] Later this malady afflicts the protagonist herself, who remarks, "I couldn't arrive, so I stayed in my home…"; "I couldn't arrive any place and / so was a kind of ghost in myself. I touched / my body all the time."[46] Ana Patova's articulation of her failure connotes a failed *jouissance* that couples the termination of a journey with the "arrival" of orgasm.

This coupling is also present in *Event Factory*, where the problem with arrival first appears as a dilemma particular to the tourist-protagonist. Finding herself disoriented by the moving geography of a city where, as she tells us, "the ground moved as I moved," she turns first to her map and then to her recurrent desire for "company" in order to envision an arrival that hovers between the spatial and the erotic.[47] "I was beginning to worry about arrival. Would it ever come? And kept pulling the map out for encouragement, as if embedded in it was motivation itself.… I needed someone again; it seemed I always would. I needed another to tell me, 'You'll find it,' before I could go on."[48]

There is a striking resonance between this passage and Nathalie Stephens's description of the text that does not arrive. The protagonist's worry that arrival will never "come" proposes a similar play between the messianic arrival and the "arrival" of orgasm that animates a tension between waiting and wanting, failure and hope. Yet amidst this tension, we may also note that the nebulous "it" of the protagonist's destination is sublimated to the line of movement or "motivation" that will

bring her to it, so that the trajectory of her going takes precedence over the end point it moves towards or awaits. This attention to trajectory makes room for the circumstances of crisis—of living with crisis—even as it minimizes that crisis' status as an "event" that gives way to others. As Amini notes in *The Ravickians*: "I did not arrive anywhere.… Nothing has happened for weeks, though I struggle to prove this. People will never believe you are 'without events.' And that is why decay is slow, and why it is not devastation."[49]

It may be useful here to regain some footing, uncertain as it may be, in the loosely allegorical dimensions of Gladman's prose. We might point out that some crises—such as urban decay and environmental decline—can be relatively "uneventful" insofar as their effects are registered slowly over time, and that to survive a crisis may also mean to live slowly. Decay is not an event, like devastation. It is a process, and part of that process may entail acts of turning aside or away to hold the confirmation of finality in abeyance. We may not want to "arrive." Or, our living may call for forms of attention that elevate the present over the arrival we envision. "How can we think in times of urgencies," asks Donna Haraway, "without the self-indulgent and self-fulfilling myths of apocalypse, when every fiber of our being is interlaced, even complicit, in the webs of processes that must somehow be engaged and repatterned?"[50] When the processual nature of arrival emerges in the *The Ravickians*, the failure to arrive is figured as something like a lived experience of Zeno's paradox:

> The nearest person is down the block, leaning against a closed newspaper stall.… I wonder how long, if I venture, will it take to reach him. What if—though I am moving—I never arrive? Impossible. But if the distance between us is unalterable, if this particular man is made to always be that many feet away from me, then it is true that we might never touch. I do not want to touch him.[51]

In this instance, the question of whether it is possible to "arrive" is left dangling, as the drift of the narrative pulls away from the bodily act of "conveyance" (walking) that Amini has undertaken. At first she reports some success, telling us that she is "moving and relieved to say that the space between us is diminishing." This sounds promising, though if we truly are in Zeno's paradox then the distance might diminish indefinitely without giving way to arrival.

But a new desire arrives to pull her off her course: "As I near him," she continues, "I find the open door of Han's bookshop equally compelling. It would be smart to decide which way to go before I arrive there, as I have never enjoyed forks in the road."[52] The narrative then succumbs to its own fork in the road as Amini launches into a recollection, via flashback, of the last time she visited the bookstore and found that Hans had sold all her books to a "collector" (all of the "A's," in fact). Amini remarks, "His surrendering of his books was the exact kind of extinction-event that should have convinced me that once was is no longer. I let that event lapse from my mind completely, unable to bear it."[53]

Perhaps this is what the narrator of *Event Factory* means when she cautions us that "in Ravicka, speaking is a trip." The crisis of arrival circles back to the crisis of loss through the medium of one unlikely circumstance.

When Amini flashes back to the bookstore it is as if, instead of the consummation of arrival or end, we have wandered into an erasure whose absurd premise (that a collector bought all the "A's") complicates the attempt to register this loss as "evidence" of the crisis we nonetheless feel. In

Brooks's terms, it is a case where "the lack of ending" threatens to "jeopardize the beginning," where "A" has literally been erased in the progress through "B" and "C."[54] Yet this occlusion of endings is also a condition of crisis that the narrative wants us to think. The "extinction-event" is at once circumstantial (dismissible) and unbearable; it is evidence that presents itself without submitting to the comfort of linear or causal narrative. Moreover, its appearance in the narrative marks a divergence from the endpoint (the man) that we set out to reach. Amini does not return to her trajectory after this brief analepsis. Her path through the city trails off, and when the section concludes we have lost her in the topography of the city. The next section begins with an acknowledgement of the erasure that has occurred: "Does it matter where I stop or do all scenarios render this nothing clamoring about you?"[55]

This failure to arrive animates the queer deviations that unfold in the circumstantial or (to quote Brooks quoting Barthes) "dilatory space" the novel occupies.[56] Brooks tends to conflate the "dilatory space" of narrative with the Aristotelian middle, "the space of retard, postponement, error, and partial revelation... where the problems posed to and by initiatory desire are worked out and worked through."[57] Yet Barthes, who also lingers on the dilatory's role in delaying the gratification of meaning, is less keen to locate this "dilatory space" within a naturalized structure of narrative sequence. In *S/Z,* Barthes skirts the phases of narrative by locating the dilatory within the structure of language, in particular the "hermeneutic code" that operates in tension with the subject/predicate structure of the sentence:

> Whereas the sentences quicken the story's "unfolding" and cannot help but move the story along, the hermeneutic code performs an opposite action: it must set up delays (obstacles, stoppages, deviations) in the flow of the discourse; its structure is essentially reactive, since it opposes the ineluctable advance of language with an organized set of stoppages: between question and answer there is a whole dilatory area whose emblem might be named "reticence," the rhetorical figure which interrupts the sentence, suspends it, turns it aside.[58]

Gladman's own conception of narrative comes closer to Barthes's in its identification of language as the source of the dilatory. In an interview with Flore Chevaillier, she writes:

> To speak...is to enter into a system of conveyance; and regardless of whether one is rendering events or a state of mind, this system entrenches one in time. So, to narrate is, in a sense, to agree to time and order. But, to narrate is also to put oneself in a position to question time and order and then to allow time and order to bewilder one's narration.[59]

This notion of "conveyance" proposes a link between linguistic utterance and mechanisms of movement, whether bodily or mechanical, and in Ravicka both are bewildered and bewildering.

That the people of Ravicka "cannot arrive" therefore suggests a condition of crisis that points beyond the particular oddities of the city and towards a crisis in which spatial, erotic, and narrative trajectories become part of the same ontological entanglement. Such narrative drift is pure deviation. It paints a crisis that unfolds without the relief of completion. What the text figures as stagnancy, deviation, or failure thus becomes an opportunity to encounter crisis not in the event of a turning point but in the minor circumstances that register the unstable ground beneath us. As Amini puts it elsewhere in *The Ravickians*, "even now, it is only the smallest things that indicate we are not

moving forward. But it is when you move among your subject—in this case, the buildings—that you see the underlying weakness."[60] "Not moving forward," which appears at first to be a sign of Ravicka's stagnancy, gives way to the potentiality of "moving *among*." Moving among is an orientation that hovers between something imposed and something chosen, or something imposed and then chosen, because it is worth lingering in.

Orientation in Crisis

I would like to linger on this distinction between moving "among" and "moving forward," as it opens up the question of how a particular orientation—and embodied orientation in particular—intercedes in and shapes the narrative and affective dimensions of the crisis these novels portray. On the one hand, we might say that moving among denies the myth of progress its ability to capitalize on crisis as a moment of transformation, an ability traditionally deployed to enable the forward motion of "moving on." Moving among thus becomes an attentive way to go, an act of lingering and waiting that resuscitates and makes thinkable conditions of stagnancy, paralysis or decay we might wish to "move on" from. As Amini notes, "'You don't have to go'… bears weight politically…. Go means leave, vacate, but it also means journey, attend."[61] At the same time, moving "among" rather than "forward" situates the body within the contexts and objects that give it shape; it returns the body—along with its gestures of movement and attention—to a reactivated topos of a crisis that can act on that body in turn. For there are also obstacles to moving among. While moving forward emphasizes the object that is desired or approached, the object that gives "forward" its direction, moving among emphasizes the quality of approach and retreat that registers how the body registers the world.

In his afterword to Gladman's *Prose Architectures*, Fred Moten uses the term "bearing" to articulate the quality of Gladman's work that I have been describing as orientation, and it strikes me that "bearing" does more to articulate how the body retains traces of the obstacles it confronts. Moten writes:

> Bearing drives motion and also is a sense of its direction. But it is also a way of standing, a mode of comportment, subtle and imperceptible irruptions out of being stalled, out of having been stilled or stolen, out of stealing oneself away in frenzied, and spirited moments of auto-dispossessive possession, out of steeling oneself against the effects of such transport when it is illegitimately, externally imposed.[62]

Moten suggests that there is something in this "bearing" that has a bearing on blackness, even it does not name race as part of its positioning. We might glimpse this bearing in the epigraph to *Ana Patova Crosses a Bridge.* In a nod to another practitioner of narrative verse, that text begins with a quotation from Anne Carson: "It is when you are asking about something that you realize you yourself have survived it, and so you must carry it, or fashion it into a thing that carries itself." Gladman then poses a question to her epigraph, thus destabilizing the whole authoritative business of epigraphs. "But," she asks, "if you have not survived the thing you are thinking, because it won't end, what are you writing?"

It is worth considering the valences of race that emerge in this brief dialogue. From a certain vantage point, Gladman's question—or the challenge she poses to a white writer's articulation of

having "survived" the thing she was thinking— begins to trace a circle around the "thing," and the thing begins to look like survival. There is an air of triumphalist self-sufficiency in Carson's description of fashioning the thought "survived" into "a thing that carries itself," one that implicitly aligns artistic production with an emancipatory unburdening. It almost harkens back to romantic conceptualizations of art-making as akin to giving birth, except that here the infant appears Hellenic, fully grown, and ready to make its way in the world with little effort on the part of its creator.

Against this figure of completion, Gladman's question suggests a more Sisyphean project. She has not survived her thought because it "won't end," and while this statement approaches the tautological it does not sit easily there. It converts survival, like crisis, into an ongoing process. In this it recalls the writing of Audre Lorde, for whom survival is always an ongoing effort, always "survival as a living pursuit."[63] It also recalls Lorde's famous articulation of what it means to be black in America—and queer and black in particular: "For to survive in the mouth of this dragon we call america, we have had to learn this first and most vital lesson—that we were never meant to survive."[64]

From this vantage point, Gladman's question ("what are you writing?") might be productively interpreted as a question about how to write a city, a community, or a person engaged in the living pursuit of survival. One answer her work proposes is that writing becomes a processual engagement with all three. The act of survival is also "the problem of the person in space and time," and it unfolds in a ceaseless movement that ricochets between persons and the moving grounds they occupy. To quote Moten again, "There's complication of direction, and of destination.… It keeps you from getting there, or let's you go past there so that by the time you arrive there ain't there no more. Not that there's no there there, but that there moves."[65] The result is an impossible map of crisis in which affect—understood as the capacity to affect and be affected—takes precedence over both transformative change and the transformative "achievement" of survival.

Of course, such impossibility also poses a problem for representation. The fictional author of *Ana Patova* puts the problem this way:

> ...I wanted
> the maps to represent the city and to do
> this they needed to be in motion the way
> all structures in Ravicka were, but this is
> not what you asked of maps, so perhaps
> I was calling the "conveyance" by the
> wrong name. Maps couldn't move and
> space couldn't move, yet, within both,
> the object world was alive and in a fidget.[66]

When read in conjunction with Gladman's assertion that "to speak...is to enter into a system of conveyance," the "map" or "conveyance" described here begins to acquire valences of a more linguistic mode of representation.[67] It also seems to fidget there, though, because the city's crisis demands a narrative that is oriented *among* rather than *towards* what it wishes to convey. It asks, in other words, for something that can accommodate both direction and indirection, for a reorientation of narrative that embraces its bewilderment.

I have suggested that Gladman's work represents a radical departure from the narrative desire that Peter Brooks describes as the desire for the end, and that queerness and blackness have something to do with the deviations and failures of consummation these texts perform. I would like to extend the orientation of these texts beyond the language of deviation and direction, however, and to argue Gladman's work allows us to articulate a *positive* desire that consists in something more than deviations from the "straight path" of causal narrative. A productive starting point for this model of desire may be found in the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, who reject the Oedipal construction of desire favored by Freud and Lacan, and taken up by Brooks and his interlocutors. For Deleuze and Guattari, desire is not a "lack" but a productive and potentially emancipatory intensity that organizes, positions, and repositions the subject within the realm of the social. Desire does not originate in the subject but is instead a multiplicity of "flows" that exist outside the subject, enabling them to tap into "a collective assemblage of enunciation, a machinic assemblage of desire, one inside the other and both plugged into an immense outside that is a multiplicity in any case."[68]

In *Reconfiguring Lesbian Desire*, Elizabeth Grosz proposes that Deleuze and Guattari's tendency to frame desire without recourse to the language of lack and phallic signification makes their work a generative site for reimagining female desire and lesbian desire in particular.[69] Grosz argues that the Freudian and Lacanian understanding of desire as a lack that can never be filled implicitly codes that lack as feminine. "Moreover," she writes, "it is precisely such a model, where desire lacks, yearns, seeks, but is never capable of finding itself and its equilibrium, that enables the two sexes to be understood as (biological, sexual, social and psychical) complements of each other—each is presumed to complete, to fill up, the lack of the other."[70]

In turning to the question of lesbian desire, Grosz therefore proposes that we "understand desire not in terms of what is missing or absent, nor in terms of a depth, latency, or interiority, but in terms of surfaces and intensities," an understanding for which Deleuze and Guattari, as well as the Spinozist tradition they inherit, provide a generative model.[71] Yet she also declines to identify lesbianism as a fixed identity whose desire tends in a particular direction. Instead, Grosz takes up Deleuze's description of "becoming" in order to eschew the fixed identity of "being" for a more dynamic process. Following Deleuze's conception of becoming as a reach toward "something momentary, provisional, something inherently unstable and changing," Grosz speculates on what the process of "becoming lesbian" might look like:[72]

> Becoming-lesbian…is thus no longer or not simply a question of being-lesbian…the question is not am I—or are you—a lesbian, but rather, what kinds of lesbian connections, what kinds of lesbian-machine, we invest our time, energy, and bodies in…and to what effects? What it is that together, in parts and bits, and interconnections, we can make that is new, exploratory, opens up further spaces, induces further intensities, speeds up, enervates, and proliferates production (production of the body, production of the world)?[73]

For Grosz, "becoming" proves generative for considering how bodies enter into queer desire in fits and stages, as it accommodates models of queerness that span the spectrum between those who were "born that way" and those who arrive there partially or by degrees. In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze describes "becoming" as a simultaneity that eludes the present moment. "Insofar as it eludes the present," he writes, "becoming does not tolerate the separation or the distinction of before and

after, or of past and future. It pertains to the essence of becoming to move and to pull in both directions at once."[74]

Grosz's description of a lesbian "becoming" analogously side-steps the present of "being" (with its connotations of fixed identity) in favor of the "lesbian connections" and "spaces" whose temporality slides between the past and the future, insofar as those connections and spaces may both energize and result from the intensities that circle around them. In this respect, her description resonates with those thinkers (Lauren Berlant, Michael Warner, Sara Ahmed, and Samuel Delany, to name a few) who foreground queer sexuality's stake in the production and transformation of social and geographic space.[75] Delany, for example, offers a compelling testament to the fragility of "being" in *Times Square Red* when he describes the importance of the institutions ("clubs, bars of several persuasions, baths, tea-room sex, [and] gay porn movie theaters") that have been produced by and productive of gay life: "The freedom to 'be' 'gay' without the freedom to choose to partake of these institutions is just as meaningless as the freedom to 'be' 'Jewish' when, say, any given Jewish ritual, text, or cultural practice is outlawed."[76] Without the possibilities of continuous becoming, he seems to say, all notion of "being" is rendered vacuous.

In conjunction with the implications of Grosz's "becoming lesbian" for time and space, Deleuze and Guattari's thinking also opens alternatives to the model of narrative desire glimpsed, as Brooks rightly intuits, in the trajectories of the realist novel. Deleuze and Guattari's rewriting of desire as flows and intensities that the subject may tap into detaches the energies of desire from the "object" of that desire, compensatory or otherwise, thereby freeing the subject from the Oedipal journey whose trajectory moves from lack towards (impossible) fulfillment. At the same time, their elaboration of "becoming" offers a temporality that denies the very possibility of an "end," thereby opening the text to a proliferation of middles and stages that circle each other insofar as they "pull in both directions at once."

Several of Gladman's essays speak to the influence that Deleuze and Guattari, as well as Brian Massumi, have had on her conception of narrative.[77] In her own contribution to *Biting the Error: Writers Explore New Narrative*, Gladman names the philosophy of events and the notion of becoming as central to her departure from realist fiction and, implicitly, from her choice to sidestep the autobiographical "I" of New Narrative writing:

> I want to focus on the development of a philosophy of experience in the realm of events (things happening or failing to happen). And, thus, to think of narrative. But not the strict narrative of fiction, for fiction is too burdened by a system of expectations (e.g., entrenched characters, well-developed storylines, conflicts and resolutions) to allow for the wandering and sometimes stuttering 'I' that I associate with discovery. This 'I,' not necessarily autobiographical, is a manifestation of the act of thinking in language, of the difficulties that arise, the fractures that form. This 'I' undermines a tendency of conventional fiction to present a realism that is as faithful as it is complete and confident, a realism that has little use for the materials of its own construction. The 'realm of events' or narratives that I think of as I write this are not static; they are full of becoming, full of questions of becoming.[78]

Gladman does not make explicit how race or queerness might inform her entry into this "realm of events." She does, however, cite another of Grosz's essays in *Space, Time, and Perversion* as the source of a quote from Massumi, by means of which she offers this description of her practice: "'The

task of philosophy,' to quote Brian Massumi, 'is to reattach statements to their conditions of emergence.' I would say the task of prose is to explore the habitability of those conditions."[79]

Gladman's departure from the aesthetic and structural sensibilities of realist fiction is thus grounded in a project that decenters *being* in favor of *becoming*. And the apparent elision of identity in the Ravicka novels must be understood not as a desire to be "free" of its burdens of representation, but rather as an effort to think how persons and bodies unfold in processual encounters with the world and with language. In this respect, we might hazard that her repeated references to "the body" (unmarked) suggest a sympathy with Massumi's critique of poststructuralism, namely, that the body "as movement and sensation," which disappears from "the subject" of structuralism, is not helped by poststructuralism's attempt to bring it "down to earth" by way of "positioning."[80] Massumi observes that "positionality begins by subtracting movement from the picture" in order to place the body in an ideological grid, catching the body "in a cultural freeze-frame" that elides the possibility of movement, change, and becoming.[81] Gladman seems to suggest that "character," insofar as it is "entrenched," lives and moves within this grid.

I want to suggest that the features of instability and geographic flux that characterize Ravicka's crisis foreground this process of becoming as a process of *becoming oriented*. That orientation is never fully achieved, and that crisis does not give way to stability, only enhances the rich potentialities of becoming oriented within and among Ravicka's moving buildings and circuitous routes. If orientation is a process (Ahmed goes so far as to call it "work"), then the subject who is becoming oriented must always be located in this becoming, and part of Gladman's task is to keep them there.[82] This opens up yet another way to read the passage cited earlier, where the narrator of *Ana Patova* decides that a "map" is the wrong word for the "conveyance" she needs to represent her moving city.[83] While before I described this passage as an acknowledgement of the difficulty of representing crisis, it is worth considering how the refusal of a "map" in favor of a "conveyance" indexes the text's determination to keep "becoming" on the move.[84] In this case, the impossible map embraces disorientation, a condition of crisis, as a condition of possibility.

Ahmed makes a similar argument about the particular "crisis" of disorientation. In *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed takes "sexual orientation" as an invitation to consider how sexuality (as well as race, gender, and nationality) is "lived as oriented." She traces this idea back to phenomenological discussions of spatial orientation, in particular Husserl's assertion that the body becomes oriented by directing its consciousness to the objects around it, so that consciousness is always consciousness *of* something. Ahmed's project extends this point to think how sexuality is experienced as a spatialized form of orientation, one that places the body in different affective relations to the world it inhabits. "If orientation is a matter of how we reside in space," she writes, "then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence; of how we inhabit spaces as well as 'who' or 'what' we inhabit spaces with."[85]

One of Ahmed's aims is to demonstrate that, as Frantz Fanon has shown, "disorientation is unevenly distributed: some bodies more than others have their involvement in the world called into crisis."[86] For example, bodies that do not follow the line of straightness must deviate and are thus "made socially present as a deviant." [87] Race may occasion more jarring disorientations, since "bodies that do not follow the line of whiteness," she writes, "might be 'stopped' in their tracks, which does not simply stop one from getting somewhere, but changes one's relation to what is 'here.'"[88] This condition, Ahmed concludes, is why it is "possible to talk about the white world, the straight world, as a world that takes the shape of the motility of certain skins."[89]

Still, Ahmed firmly asserts that moments of disorientation are "vital" even when they "persist and become a crisis."[90] She concludes with the provocative claim that disorientation, for all its unsettling effects, might provide the impetus to shape the world differently:

> Queer politics might *involve* disorientation, without legislating disorientation as a politics. … The point is not whether we experience disorientation (for we will, and we do), but how such experiences can impact on the orientation of bodies and spaces, which is after all about how the things are "directed" and how they are shaped by the lines they follow. The point is what we do with such moments of disorientation, as well as what such moments can do—whether they can offer us the hope of new directions, and whether new directions are reason enough for hope.[91]

I would contend that Ahmed's argument for "disorientation" depends upon the process of "becoming" that unfolds in the gap between orientation and its opposite. She acknowledges, for example, that "the forms of politics that proceed from disorientation can be conservative, depending on the 'aims' of their gestures, depending on how they seek to (re)ground themselves." "And, for sure," she writes, "bodies that experience being out of place might need to be orientated, to find a place where they feel comfortable and safe in the world," which might give rise to a politics that either partakes in or eschews the radical.[92]

This would suggest that disorientation is politically efficacious only insofar as it throws the disoriented subject into a process of "becoming oriented" that holds space for something new, even (and especially when) that process eludes completion. Ahmed's belief in the political potential of disorientation and thrownness sheds light on the question of *why*, when faced with a crisis, Gladman's texts are so keen to tarry there and multiply its circumstances. Gladman's work allows us to think through the ways in which disorientation can be at once a pleasure, a crisis, and a site of potential. To consider how this affective nexus unfolds, I would like to conclude by lingering on some of the "orientation devices" that come to locate us, albeit momentarily, in the disorienting space of Ravicka.

The Table and the Bridge

An "orientation device" is Ahmed's term for any "technology of convention" (such as a table or a bedroom) that taps into "the presumption that life should be organized in certain ways, in this space or that, for doing this or for doing that, where you find this or you find that."[93] This allusion to "doing" bears traces of James Gibson's theory of affordances, which holds that certain objects announce to the viewer what might be done with them.[94] Yet for Ahmed, the orientation device does not only *allow* (afford) certain actions. It might also compel them, a fact which is exemplified by her naming of "the fantasy of a *natural* orientation" (i.e. heterosexuality) as an "an orientation device that organizes worlds around the form of the heterosexual couple."[95] Gladman's deployment of these architectures demonstrates an awareness of the forms of movement and stasis they propose, as well as a will to disrupt those forms in order to bring something else into view.

In one of their forays into the city, the linguist-traveler and her lover (another foreigner named "Dar") set out to find the mediaeval city of "old Ravicka." After much circling they come upon a bridge, but they can't read the sign that tells them how to cross it. The sign says "*Digla Les*

Lemsnshes," and "*Digla*," the protagonist tells us, means "'read" and 'see' at once… *Digla* implied that to successfully cross the bridge (or not cross the bridge, depending on the meaning of the remaining words) we had to grasp the content of the message and integrate that content into an act or gesture made toward the bridge."[96] But when they ask some Ravickian men to translate, the situation devolves into a hilarious spectacle of reading, seeing, and mistranslation. The men point to the protagonist and her lover, asking "*vaninas*?" She explains: "that meant 'dykes' to them but 'posterior' to us. 'Sometimes,' I answered and jabbed my finger toward the sign."[97]

It is not clear in what language "*vaninas*" means "posterior." It might be the idiom that famously disrupts translation, but as readers we can perform a translation of our own. As far as the sign goes, the protagonist can see but can't read. As far as the women go, the men believe they have seen and read at once, and they produce what might be a homophobic slur in some un-locatable dialect. But the protagonist's rejoinder—"sometimes"—refuses to locate her sexual orientation in any of the available registers. It refuses to narrate. "Sometimes" could be any time, past or future, just like "posterior" could indicate what follows or what is behind. As she says this word she points away from her body and towards the sign, deflecting the readerly activity of the men away from her body onto the task (text) at hand. They finally learn that the sign reads "eat before you leave," but "'eat before you leave' might as well mean… 'forget where you have been,' because it was impossible to hold this crossing in your mind."[98]

If crossing here invokes the impossible act of translation (to translate, as Walter Benjamin reminds us, also means to carry across), the reader is also made to feel this impossibility.[99] The trajectory from "*vaninas*" to "dykes" is complicated by the queer insertion of "posterior," leading us to doubt the points of departure and arrival—linguistic or otherwise—that this translation proposes to connect. The lines we are asked to follow here—the line of translation and the line of the bridge—refuse to deposit us on the solid ground of a position. At the same time, there is a queer pleasure to be found in the disorientation this passage incites. Part of this pleasure derives from the absurdist comedy of bodies and words and pointing that inserts a multiplied transitivity into the very act of signification. Yet pleasure also arises from the fact that the bridge, an architecture of connection, is transformed into a space we must linger in, a space where we might even lose our bearings as we cycle through the slippages that attend the act of crossing.

The bridge—like so many architectures in this city— becomes invested with queer potentialities that radiate out from the fog of crisis and propose to branch off into other trajectories of becoming. It calls on us to think beyond the trajectory of crossing and its attendant connotations of beginnings and ends, and to linger in a present that is not static but "in a fidget."

Is this crossing a point of crisis? It may be, but like many of the points or "events" this text proposes it leaves us in a fidget of lines. Crossing is an event where very little "happens," an event that foregrounds the line rather than the point that it leads to.

In *The Ravickians* the bridge returns to its status as an architecture of connection, even coming to signify the relationship between Luswage Amini and Ana Patova, the "poet of architecture." (Amini tells us, "Ana Patova and I referred to our friendship as 'The Bridge.' We would say, 'Were it not for The Bridge,' and so on.")[100] But although the bridge becomes their metonym of choice, they seem reluctant to "cross" it. Amini tells us:

> [Ana's] entrance into my life came at a crossing, that of the great bridge connecting cit Mohaly to cit Sahaly. I no longer remember from which direction each of us was walking; it

> is equally possible to have been either—one was always moving back and forth between these enclaves.… I was writing my first novel at the time and would have wanted to occupy both places simultaneously. So, it is more likely that I was not actually crossing the bridge, but standing directly at its center.[101]

By standing in the center of the bridge the narrator prolongs—perhaps indefinitely—the act of crossing over. Her position again blurs the distinction between line and point, movement and stasis, as the trajectory of the bridge is transformed into a central "point" between the two cities.

It is at this point that Amini meets Ana, and the prolongation of the act of crossing comes to figure the absent trajectory that is at once the impossibility and the energizing force of their relationship.

> Meeting a person on a bridge and standing there with her, not progressing to either end, but staying put or at most drifting conscientiously over to the side, imprints upon you the sense that you are hovering with the person. I harbor little expectation that Ana Patova and I will ever finish our conversations.[102]

In the context of a relationship or conversation, this failure to "arrive" at completion might be a good thing. While their meeting in the center of the bridge delays the act of crossing, it also provides an elongated space of encounter, a "conversation" they can be "held" in. To "converse" comes from the Latin *converāre*, "to move to and fro, pass one's life, dwell, keep company with." These characters are in company with each another, perhaps circling each other, even if their relationship lacks the traditional "points" that would mark its progress.

It is worth recalling here that Eve Sedgwick claims a similar intransitivity for queerness itself; "queer," she writes, "is a continuing moment, movement, motive." She reminds us that "The word 'queer' itself means *across*—it comes from the Indo-European root *-twerkw*, which also yields the … Latin *torquere* (to twist), English *athwart*."[103] Athwart can mean to move aside, or to cross from one side to another; it can also mean to deviate from the proper course, to be at cross purposes, perverse. To be continuously athwart the bridge, then, might be a queer position. Yet I would hesitate to call this an ethics of queer relation, one that simply exalts a queer transitivity against the social ossification of "straight time."[104] I want to claim it instead as something more descriptive, as an account of how bodies might orient themselves within and among those crises of transformation or loss that Gladman's texts make palpable.

Later in *The Ravickians*, the narrator begins to wish for a different kind of architecture: for a table instead of a bridge. Yet something of the orientation of bridges is carried over into this new architecture. She reflects:

> Thirty years ago, Ana Patova and I thought we could pass our lives on this bridge, held in this conversation. Then, it seemed that the grip that fixed us there was beginning to loosen and something had to change. Perhaps, to put a table and drinks between us. But in which place? There were reasons for choosing either: cit Sahaly because it was gorgeous and ancient and from it we could watch the spectacle at the other end of the bridge, or cit Mohaly because it was the spectacle.[105]

The table emerges here as a speculative point of domestic convergence that may never be reached, since they cannot decide on which side of the bridge to "put" it. But the bridge may itself be a kind of table, or the table a kind of bridge. Both structures organize a form of spanning and gathering. Both incur the prepositional activities of being at, on, or across (though possibly not around), and both mark out a structure that can link bodies in space or in conversation. As Ahmed writes, "stories of queer kinship will be full of tables."[106] Yet if the table invokes an image of settled domesticity, its merging with the bridge is pleasantly *unsettling*. It reveals a line where we thought there was a point, a potential for movement in what seems like stasis.

A more dramatic unsettling occurs in *Event Factory*. During the protagonist's first foray into what she alternately calls "downtown" and "the cityscape," she enters an office building, follows a convoluted set of directions to a particular room, and upon arrival is immediately, inexplicably drawn into the arms of an unknown woman: "I walked until we were face-to-face with about a foot between us. She unfolded her arms and embraced me. Moving salaciously. We danced without comment."[107] The scene closes, and the narrative commences as the protagonist wakes up "facedown" on a desk that is poised above uncertain ground. She tells us: "Getting off the desk proved a challenge: you could not trust the floor. I tested it by removing my shoes and throwing one of them down. I listened carefully for the sound of impact: would it thump, splash, or send up emptiness?"[108] As the narrator calls the very distance and materiality of the floor into question, ostensible relations of proximity (such as that of a desk-top to a floor) can no longer be taken for granted.

The desk may be a bridge. It may or may not be on the floor, and the floor may or may not be solid. In place of the implicit, unaccountable degree of trust that brought her "face-to-face" with the unknown woman (and presumably led her to sleep with this woman and end up "facedown" on the desk) the narrator now evinces an equally unaccountable *lack* of trust in her material surroundings. The other shoe has dropped—she is again disoriented—and beyond the oblique punning of this reversal, the shoe becomes a surrogate for her resuming the process of becoming oriented. Where before she walked directly towards the women, certain that there was only "a foot" between them, she must now send down a tentative shoe to find the ground beneath her feet.

So, where are we? We are not quite on a table and not exactly on a bridge, but we are in a world where crisis has made each of these architectures a metonym that reaches towards precarity or possibility, depending on the moment. We are also in a state of affective suspension. We are unsure whether we would prefer the thump, the splash, or the emptiness: the confirmation of solid ground or the splash that would make us justified in doubting its presence. Perhaps this uncertainty is also a sign of crisis, insofar as crisis brings a desire for confirmation that both does and does not want to be satisfied. We may feel ourselves in crisis, but we may want the feeling to be greater than the fact. On the other hand, we may register crisis affectively and long for a narrative that would settle that affect into the more manageable (because less volatile) domain of emotion. Whatever the case, the text leaves us unsettled.

There is a further distinction to be made here, though, which is that we are no longer sure what these architectures might *afford*. Gladman's unsettling of the table and the bridge is not quite surrealism, because there is nothing noticeably askew about the table or the bridge. Nor is it enstrangement (*ostranenie*) in Viktor Shklovsky's sense, because enstrangement functions by disrupting the axis of recognition, and there is nothing in the prose that would bring us to recognize "bridge" and "table" as anything other than themselves.[109] What is thrown into doubt is the forms of

living or moving these architectures might support: their potential to afford or enable certain types of gathering, connection, or stasis. If bridges and tables are an orientation device, Ravicka's bridges and tables are—or leave us—slightly disoriented. This does not mean that they cannot do what they were made for, but it inserts some vertigo into our encounters with them, some sense that the movement we begin may not be completed.

Gladman repeatedly inserts such moments of productive intransitivity in what might otherwise read as the impasse of crisis. What is produced in such moments is impermanent, yet the glimpse of it serves to shuffle and rearrange what is present in a way that transforms instability into a chance to organize things differently. Of course, this this capacity for change is accompanied by its own unique perils. In the case of Ravicka, it is possible to imagine the city that is vanishing and being replaced as an allegorical San Francisco or New York, a site where certain subjects are spaces more likely to "vanish" than others. Ravicka's residents are not racially marked, but there are some indications that most of the people there are black.[110] The narrators of the first three novels are queer women, and the novels move among those communities of artists and writers who often constitute the first, disposable wave of urban gentrification. In one of these texts' more pointedly allegorical moments, the narrator of *The Ravickians* meditates on the new architectures her friends have come to inhabit:

> The old bungalows lining my street fascinate me now as much as they did decades ago when they first appeared. They were promoted as "innovations against slum living," though none of us could find any slums at the time. We were collectives, living in four- or five-story apartment buildings, and this felt fine. These clusters allowed us to share our opinions with the government: we could shout as a group and not be terribly afraid of being tracked down as individuals. But something began to trouble us about these buildings in which we were living. It was as if the propaganda actually altered their condition: suddenly the walls were crumbling, there were too many rodents, too much noise at night. We "dropped like flies" as my American friend, Edward, would say. One after the other coveting these strange, isolated huts.[111]

Urban officialdom here becomes aligned with the hidden economic motives and propensity for propaganda that Delany articulates in *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* and allegorizes in *Dhalgren,* a novel with which Gladman is in clear conversation.[112] As the more fantastical descriptions of vanishing buildings and a city steeped in yellow fog give way to a stable allegory of gentrification, redlining, and the racist rhetoric of urban blight, the narrative reveals the familiar tale of a collective resistance that has caved in to the pressure of "rodents" and the lure of a suburban American dream.

In *TOAF*, Gladman alludes to her time in San Francisco as an experience of displacement and replacement whose culmination was the transformation of a city into an "area." Her description of gentrification ("favorite streets overcome: apartment buildings, having stood 100 years, demolished in a day to erect lofts") is a familiar one, as is the narrative that follows it.[113] Gladman describes finishing her novel in Oakland, whose own transformation is now well underway:

> The majority of the second draft was written in a flat city connected to my former one by a bridge, such that it was, in effect, the same city. That is, I continued to work in the former

> city, commuting by train from my new home, and I continued to socialize there. No, it wasn't so much that these two places were the same city as it was that they had become an "area."[114]

It is tempting to read this account of urban gentrification as the source text for Ravicka's "crisis." People and buildings seem to vanish, and some vanish more quickly than others. Bridges enable connection while announcing the separation that makes them necessary, and part of what is announced is the increasing atomization of queer, black, and working-class communities. No one is quite sure where the center of the "area" is, or rather everyone has a different center depending on their orientation towards the social.

Calamities offers a glimpse of the forms of relation this new space might give rise to. Gladman describes the event of gathering with friends and former lovers (all lesbians) around a table. The table again becomes a meeting point, and yet its status as the "center" of the event is soon obscured beneath the proliferating lines of relation that connect the figures around it:

> I began the day trying to explain to Danielle what it was like to be a lesbian in the 90s and why there were so many ex-girlfriends around who were often in committed relationships with other ex-girlfriends of yours as well as one or two others in the room… And how one of these people might suddenly grill peaches with mint, causing us all to gather around the table.… I wanted Danielle to want to be at this table, though she didn't know any of these people previously and had grown up with better boundaries in another part of the country. She missed this decade where we just couldn't burn our bridges, where we built bridges on top of ruined bridges, and lived in an elaborate architecture of trying and failing to try then at the last minute trying, escorting some broken love into what looked like a better love, until that love broke and that old love became an even older love who moved on, perhaps to someone you roomed with or someone a person you roomed with once loved.[115]

The table and its domestic formality is not the point of this gathering; what brings the gathering about is the network of relations that precede and run through it.

From a sociological perspective, this passage speaks to the forms of gathering that lesbian, queer, and non-binary people have engaged in for decades, gatherings that depend on social networks and tend, for various socio-economic reasons, to center around domestic or noncommercial spaces. Even in cities like San Francisco, where Gladman spent most of the "90s," bars catering to gay men continue to vastly outnumber those catering to queer women and trans people. Yet in the absence of recognizable gathering points, lines of connection and interconnection tend to proliferate. No wonder, then, that people in such groupings cannot burn their bridges. For those who lack or eschew a network of semi-permanent gathering points, bridges may become the only habitable forms of social architecture.

Gladman offers the dinner table as an aspect of this architecture, but it soon becomes apparent that it is only one prop among many. The preparation of food occurs "suddenly," bringing the table into view, and yet neither the table nor the food can act as points around which one might reproduce the "elaborate architecture of trying and failing" she describes. The passage continues:

> Danielle didn't eat the ribs but did eat and eat the peaches and went on for days thinking about them, wanting to re-create them later for a different gathering of people that comprised no ex-girlfriends and no friends of ex-girlfriends, so was not as warm as the previous gathering and the guests were not as old. They didn't remember the 90s in the way I did and didn't have fourteen bridges built over one piece of water and didn't have water.[116]

Perhaps the table is becoming a bridge, another architecture of connection that must be crossed or rested on when the ground becomes uncrossable. The people who lack such bridges may not need them if they also lack the obstacle of "water," and yet because of this absence of obstacles, the "point" of this gathering lacks the lines of connectivity that give it value.

In the opening of this chapter, I suggested that what the Ravicka novels call "crisis" might be another word for the disorientations that unsettle the body, or that render certain bodies askew in relation to the movements and connections that unfold in daily life. I have also suggested that these disorientations may be linked to the more mundane—because more familiar—erasures and dislocations that unsettle urban communities and fracture the centers of queer and black life. The above passages offer ample evidence for this reading. It is easy to imagine Ravicka, a city beset by a yellow "fog" and partitioned into districts connected by bridges, as an allegorical San Francisco in the grips of 90's era gentrification, and to imagine its vanishing buildings and people as allegorizing the losses that transformation effected. I maintain that that *might* be the case, but I also maintain that Gladman's narrative engagement with crisis, which also engages a crisis of narrative, requires that we hold open the space of this "might." This city is more than the sum of its allegories, and by attaching a "real world" equivalent to its imagined forms we propose a translation for what the text insists is untranslatable, a translation that would only still the movement of its multiply transitive and perpetually fugitive lines. We would, in effect, detach the crisis from its circumstances.

Yet the crisis is *in* the circumstances. In a passage I quoted in the introduction to this project, Sara Ahmed crafts a tentative narrative of disorientation, crisis, and reorientation that hinges on this speculative "might":

> Moments of disorientation are vital. They are bodily experiences that throw the world up, or throw the body from its ground. Disorientation as a bodily feeling can be unsettling, and it can shatter one's sense of confidence in the ground or one's belief that the ground on which we reside can support the actions that make a life feel livable. Such a feeling of shattering, or of being shattered, might persist and become a crisis. Or the feeling itself might pass as the ground returns or as we return to the ground. The body might be reoriented if the hand that reaches out finds something to steady an action. Or the hand might reach out and find nothing, and might grasp instead the indeterminacy of air. The body in losing its support might then be lost, undone, thrown.[117]

Ahmed concludes with a gesture towards Heideggerian *dasein* (being), which is constituted in part by the subject's "thrownness" into the world. In being "thrown," she seems to say, the "undone" and unsupported body is nevertheless caught up in the vitality of becoming, even as thrownness—which for Heidegger means that we find ourselves *somewhere*—comes to name the moment of losing oneself in relation to that "somewhere," the moment of being disoriented. Part of

this vitality adheres in her deployment of "might." "Might" leaves open a multiplicity of circumstances that might cause or intervene in the crisis, and in doing so it names how the body registers crisis as an openness to such contingency. Gladman's Ravicka novels conform to the genre of speculative fiction only insofar as they track the unfolding of this "might." The impossible map they propose leaves other possibilities open, and always just out of reach.

NOTES

[1] Renee Gladman, *Event Factory* (Dorothy a publishing project, 2010), 42.
[2] Ibid, 29.
[3] Renee Gladman, *The Ravickians* (Dorothy, a publishing project, 2011), 29.
[4] Ibid, 48.
[5] Renee Gladman, *Ana Patova Crosses a Bridge* (Dorothy, a Publishing Project, 2013), 18.
[6] Renee Gladman, *The Ravickians*, 48.
[7] Renee Gladman, *Event Factory*, 53.
[8] Gladman, *Ana Patova Crosses a Bridge*, 100.
[9] Gladman, 11.
[10] Flore Chevaillier, "Renee Gladman," in *Divergent Trajectories*, Interviews with Innovative Fiction Writers (Ohio State University Press, 2017), 76.
[11] See James Berger, *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse* (U of Minnesota Press, 1999); Daniel Grausam, *On Endings: American Postmodern Fiction and the Cold War* (University of Virginia Press, 2011). Grausam echoes Berger's assertion that "the apocalyptic event, in order to be properly apocalyptic, must in its destructive moment clarify and illuminate the true nature of what has been brought to an end." For Grausam, this means that "end is never the end, because if it were, the apocalyptic event couldn't have brought clarity and illumination" (12).
[12] Leif Sorensen, "Against the Post-Apocalyptic: Narrative Closure in Colson Whitehead's Zone One," *Contemporary Literature* 55, no. 3 (2014): 562, https://doi.org/10.1353/cli.2014.0029.
[13] Renee Gladman, *Prose Architectures* (Wave Books, 2017).
[14] Gladman, *Event Factory*, 110–11.
[15] Renee Gladman, *Houses of Ravicka* (Dorothy, a publishing project, 2017), 33.
[16] Robert Glück, *Jack the Modernist* (High Risk Books/Serpent's Tail, 1995), 5; Natalia Cecire, "Experimentalism by Contact," *Diacritics* 43, no. 1 (2015): 6–35.
[17] Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. F. Kersten, vol. 1 (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1983), 61.
[18] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Harvard University Press, 1992), 52.
[19] Gail Scott, "Introduction," in *Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative*, ed. Mary Burger, Robert Glück, Camille Roy, and Gail Scott (Coach House Books, 2000), 10.
[20] *Biting The Error* (2000) was the first anthology of New Narrative writing. Several more critical and creative anthologies emmerged on the heels of the New Narrative conference ("Comunal Presence: New Narrative Writing Today") held at the University of California, Berkeley in 2017. See Dodie Bellamy and Kevin Killian, eds., *Writers Who Love Too Much: New Narrative Writing 1977-1997* (Nightboat Books, 2017). Halpern and Robin Tremblay-McGaw, eds., *From Our Hearts to Yours: New Narrative as Contemporary Practice* (Contemporary Practice, 2017); Daniel Benjamin and Eric Sneathen, eds., *The Bigness of Things New Narrative and Visual Culture* (Oakland, CA: Wolfman Books, 2017).
[21] For a concise account of the field that became known as Language poetry and its relationship to New Narrative writing, see Lyn Hejinian and Barrett Watten, "Introduction," in *A Guide to Poetics*

Journal: Writing in the Expanded Field, 1982–1998, ed. Lyn Hejinian and Barrett Watten (Wesleyan University Press, 2013), 1–33.
[22] Robert Glück, "Long Note on New Narrative," in *Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative*, ed. Mary Burger, Robert Glück, Camille Roy, and Gail Scott (Coach House Books, 2000), 26.
[23] Ibid, 30.
[24] Ibid, 30.
[25] Scott, "Introduction," 10.
[26] Nathalie Stephens, "Echoes Enough of Echoes of Enough of Me: In Favour of 'Not Going Anywhere'," in *Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative*, ed. Mary Burger, Robert Glück, Camille Roy, and Gail Scott (Coach House Books, 2000), 67.
[27] Ibid, 67.
[28] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (NYU Press, 2009), 2.
[29] Muñoz, 11.
[30] Stephens's engagement with queer utopianism is by no means representative of New Narrative approaches to queerness, desire, and narrativity, some of which embrace the anti-relational thrust of Leo Bersani's work. For a different articulation of narrative desire, see Kevin Killian, "Poison," in *Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative*, ed. Robert Glück et al. (Coach House Books, 2004), 92–103.
[31] Renee Gladman, *Juice* (Kelsey St. Press, 2000), 8.
[32] Gladman, *Prose Architectures*, vii.
[33] Evie Shockley, "On Seeing and Reading the 'Nothing': Poetry and Blackness Visualized," *New Literary History* 50, no. 4 (2019): 503.
[34] Evie Shockley, "On Seeing and Reading the 'Nothing': Poetry and Blackness Visualized," *New Literary History* 50, no. 4 (2019): 524.
[35] See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Duke University Press, 1993).
[36] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Duke University Press, 1993).
[37] Flore Chevaillier, "Renee Gladman," in *Divergent Trajectories*, Interviews with Innovative Fiction Writers (Ohio State University Press, 2017), 75.
[38] See Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (Schocken Books, 1968), 83–110.
[39] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Harvard University Press, 1992), 93.
[40] Brooks, 101, 101–2.
[41] Brooks, 102.
[42] Susan Winnett, "Coming Unstrung: Women, Men, Narrative, and Principles of Pleasure," *PMLA* 105, no. 3 (May 1990): 508, 509.
[43] Judith Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Duke University Press, 2011), 6.
[44] Gladman, *Ana Patova Crosses a Bridge*, 24.
[45] Gladman, 24.
[46] Gladman, 42.
[47] Gladman, *Event Factory*, 41.
[48] Gladman, 80-81
[49] Gladman, *The Ravickians*, 44–45.

[50] Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Duke University Press, 2016), 35.
[51] Gladman, *The Ravickians*, 57.
[52] Gladman, 58.
[53] Gladman, 61.
[54] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 93.
[55] Gladman, *The Ravickians*, 62.
[56] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 92.
[57] Brooks, 92.
[58] Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (Macmillan, 1974), 75.
[59] Chevaillier, "Renee Gladman," 73.
[60] Gladman, *The Ravickians*, 54.
[61] Gladman, 70.
[62] Fred Moten, "Afterword," in *Prose Architectures* (Wave Books, 2017), 109.
[63] Audre Lorde, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," in *I Am Your Sister: Collected and Unpublished Writings of Audre Lorde*, ed. Rudolph P. Byrd, Johnnetta Betsch Cole, and Beverly Guy-Sheftall (Oxford University Press, 2009), 75.
[64] Audre Lorde, "Turning the Beat Around," in *I Am Your Sister: Collected and Unpublished Writings of Audre Lorde*, ed. Rudolph P. Byrd, Johnnetta Betsch Cole, and Beverly Guy-Sheftall (Oxford University Press, 2009), 41.
[65] Gladman, *Prose Architectures*, 112.
[66] Gladman, *Ana Patova Crosses a Bridge*, 50–51.
[67] Chevaillier, "Renee Gladman," 73.
[68] Gilles Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (U of Minnesota Press, 1987), 23.
[69] Elizabeth Grosz, "Refiguring Lesbian Desire," in *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (Routledge, 2018), 180.
[70] Grosz, 177.
[71] Grosz, 179.
[72] Grosz, 184.
[73] Grosz, 184.
[74] Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense* (Columbia University Press, 1990), 1.
[75] See Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public," *Questions de Communication* No 33, no. 1 (August 7, 2018): 111–33; Samuel R. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (NYU Press, 1999); Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006). For studies that consider queer spatial production beyond the confines of the urban, see Karen Tongson, *Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries* (NYU Press, 2011), and Scott Herring, *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* (NYU Press, 2010).
[76] Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, 215.
[77] In *Calamities*, Gladman references Deleuze's *The Fold* as well as Brian Massumi and Erin Manning's *Thought in the Act*, from which she takes the notion of the "commotional field" as a model for writing. *Ana Patova Crosses a Bridge* also alludes to Deleuze's conception of the rhizomatic text. See Gladman, *Calamities*, 53-4, 121-3; and *Ana Patova Crosses a Bridge*, 74.

[78] Renee Gladman, "The Person in the World," in *Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative*, ed. Robert Glück et al. (Coach House Books, 2004), 46.
[79] Renee Gladman, "The Person in the World," in *Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative*, ed. Robert Glück et al. (Coach House Books, 2004), 47. In the footnote to this citation, Gladman writes: "I found this quote in the notes of an astounding book that I recommend to all readers of this essay: Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space by Elizabeth Grosz, published by MIT Press in 2001."
[80] Gilles Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (U of Minnesota Press, 1987).
[81] Massumi, 3.
[82] Interestingly, Ahmed deploys this term in relation to the work required to "reorient" oneself as a lesbian. She writes: "while lesbians might have different temporal relations to "becoming lesbians," even lesbians who feel they were "always that way," still have to "become lesbians," which means gathering such tendencies into specific social and sexual forms. Such gathering requires "habit change"… It requires a reorientation of one's body such that other objects, those that are not reachable on the vertical and horizontal lines of street culture, can be reached. The work of reorientation needs to be made visible as a form of work." Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006), 100.
[83] Gladman, *Ana Patova Crosses a Bridge*, 50–51.
[84] Gladman, 50–51.
[85] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 100.
[86] Ahmed, 159.
[87] Ahmed, 13.
[88] Ahmed, 160.
[89] Ahmed, 160.
[90] Ahmed, 157.
[91] Ahmed, 158.
[92] Ahmed, 158.
[93] See Ahmed, 168, 4, 85.
[94] James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Psychology Press, 1986).
[95] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 85.
[96] Gladman, *Event Factory*, 46.
[97] Gladman, 49.
[98] Gladman, 50.
[99] Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 1: 1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Belknap Press, 1996), 253-263.
[100] Gladman, *The Ravickians*, 16.
[101] Gladman, 14.
[102] Gladman, 33.
[103] Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, xii.
[104] Muñoz takes "straight time" to refer to the "dominant and overarching temporal and spatial organization of the world" that queerness disrupts. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (NYU Press, 2009), 154.

[105] Gladman, *The Ravickians*, 64.
[106] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (NYU Press, 2009), 154. For Muñoz, queerness refers to "a dominant and overarching temporal and spatial organization of the world" that queerness disrupts.
[107] Gladman, *Event Factory*, 20.
[108] Gladman, 21–22.
[109] Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Device," in *Theory of Prose*, trans. Benjamin Sher (Dalkey Archive Press, 1991), 1–14.
[110] These are oblique but nonetheless present. Of one woman she meets, the narrator of *Event Factory* remarks: "her skin was paler than the typical Ravickian, more of a burnt orange" (44). Elsewhere she describes sitting in a room full of five people, "all various shades of brick" (26). In one of her essays in *Calamities*, Gladman offers an aside that appears to allude to the obscure ethnicity of the Ravickians. "I can't get anyone to understand how black people are another kind of Eastern European, especially not Eastern Europeans.…How eventful it would be for the Eastern Europeans to begin calling themselves black, or even black Asian. How undermining of all that is the case where I to proclaim in my bios, 'Renee Gladman is an Eastern-European African American,'" I would hazard that what is undermined in this scenario is not race or nationality but rather the logic of the hyphens that qualify, via distance, the relation those designations are supposed to name. Gladman, *Calamities*, 19.
[111] Ibid, 37.
[112] Gladman concludes the acknowledgements page of *Event Factory* with a special thanks to Samuel R. Delany, "for *Dhalgren*."
[113] Gladman, *To After That (Toaf)*, 20.
[114] Gladman, 34 – 35.
[115] Gladman, *Calamities*, 83–84.
[116] Gladman, 84.
[117] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 157.

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