A poetics of aesthetic forms

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A Poetics of Aesthetic Forms

by

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Abstract

I contend there is a rationalist reader-function that limits many approaches to the political in contemporary formally innovative poetry. The exemplary model of what I mean by a rationalist reader-function is a critical essay by Yvor Winters on modernist experimental poetics. Versions of that model appear in as politically divergent critics as Fredric Jameson and Steven Knapp.

Identification is the predominant relation that the rationalist reader-function establishes with the political in the formally innovative text. It is not the sole speculative relation available to a reader. I explore in outline a speculative alternative to it, in the form of a social-formalist poetics, and provide readings of texts by Bruce Andrews and by Harryette Mullen.

The speculative is the "internal" limit of my approach, which I consider next to Slavoj Zizek's interpretation of Hegelian "speculative identity," and Deleuze and Guattari's performative theory of the "order-word."
Preface

My thesis is that formal innovation in poetry speculates on social change.

I begin with Kenneth Burke's notion of the "symbolic act" in light of Fredric Jameson's critique, arguing that while, as Jameson demonstrates, Burke reproduces bourgeois individualism, Jameson also reproduces a version of the same in the form of what I call an existential subject template. Post-individualist versions of collective agency were hotly contested in the early decades of this century when Burke was writing about literary form and social change. I consider, in Chapter 2, one of the poetic nexi of debate on "group consciousness," particularly as it concerns the American poet and critic, Yvor Winters. In criticism of his contemporaries, Winters develops the equivalent in poetics of an existential-subject template, which turns out to be best characterized as rationalist. In Chapter 3, I examine the use of the critical term "disjunctive" as it is currently applied to formally innovative texts, arguing that it refers less to the texts themselves and more to the critic as a professionalized reader who functions as another version of the existential subject template.

In Chapters 4 and 5 I anticipate certain of the contemporary institutional arguments against the contemporary relevance of my thesis - some that have already been made, some that might be made in future. I examine how,
in recent Canadian and American literary history, claims for the formally innovative have entered the academy in a way that has resulted in an institutional bias against the formally innovative as the potential bearer of values of social change. The politics of representation for social change have compounded the issue. What this has structured in discourse is I believe a false opposition between "social change" and "formal innovation."

In Chapter 6 I argue that direct statement and the identity persona are at least two limits that have constituted how the political - i.e., the public, the social - is represented in poetry, as a result, in part, of the "templates" outlined in Chapters 1 through 3. The "rational design" at the heart of Winters's template has upheld the aforementioned two limits of representational politics in poetry. I consider the premises and some criticisms of these two limits that have historically determined the manner in which poetry and politics have combined, using the examples primarily of Yvor Winters and Allen Ginsberg. These limits have been completely transformed in the poetics of "social formalism," which I explore in a speculative manner in Chapter 7. Social-formalist poetics alters and extends how the formally innovative has historically entered the academy and how politics has traditionally combined with poetry. I describe a concept of "blocked" agency as being one of this poetics' founding (insofar as my thesis is concerned) premises, by contextualizing "agency" within the history of
liberalism and the rise of the bourgeois subject, and by speculating on this poetics as an effort to critique that history. I consider the implications of a poetics based on an aestheticized resistance to transparently accessible agency. It is in interpreting the "resistance" of the formally innovative to transparent agency where a predominant explanation lies as to why a social-formalist poetic is viewed by some as apolitical and nonaligned to social change. Two examples follow, in Chapters 8 and 9, of what a social-formalist poetics looks like. I consider two particular cases - the poetry of Bruce Andrews and of Harryette Mullen - and both the problems and the advantages of interpreting what circumventing the "rational design" amounts to in practice.
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CHAPTER ONE:

"I Seem To Be A Verb": identification and the existential subject

In a 1978 essay, "The Symbolic Inference; or, Kenneth Burke and Ideological Analysis," Fredric Jameson retells a familiar story about a recurring problem literature poses for criticism. Jameson describes very basically how the challenge of literary interpretation - in fact, its defining act - is to articulate the object before one's attention - a poem, for example - as a subject of critical discussion. The challenge of criticism is to relate text (poem) to context ("social ground"). Needless to say, difficulties exist in establishing a relationship between these terms. The text seems to make self-declaredly intrinsic, while the context self-declaredly extrinsic, claims to value. I say that Jameson's story is a familiar one because the conceptual dichotomy between "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" is well-established in English studies by the time Rene Wellek and Austin Warren use it to organize their introduction to the field of literary criticism - Theory of Literature - in 1942. There, most readers will not be surprised to find that the "intrinsic" refers to the qualities of sound, rhythm and sense in a literary treatment of language. The "extrinsic," in contrast, defaults to all that the "intrinsic" leaves out.

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1 I borrow this line from Buckminster Fuller, the title of one of his books.
but that might ultimately bear on a critic's understanding of the latter.

Jameson, who does not want his thinking about literature to be ruled by this dichotomy, emphasizes how context can be as plural in derivation, and as complex in the relations that it establishes for its object, as the object itself - that in fact, for every sound shading sense, there are complicating social factors. Context is as much within the interpreter's reach to define as it is within the text's. The text itself, in other words, critically addresses context(s) as well. Conversely, context indirectly - although just as critically - "addresses" text.

Historically, Jameson tells us, the break between text and context occurs with the emergence of industrializing nation-states - with the autonomization of the aesthetic realm as a mode of consumption, from the economic realm as a mode of production, at the turn of eighteenth-century Europe. So that for Jameson, our very consciousness of the intrinsic properties of literariness is made possible due to a prior historical structuration of the literary object as capable of such relatively autonomous scrutiny. The preconditions of a textual "inside" are logically supposed to exist in a partially textual "outside." For Jameson, the presumed relationship of mutual exclusion that holds between "inside" and "outside" is an effect of the ideology of the
aesthetic.\textsuperscript{2} The perhaps overfamiliar part of the story Jameson tells is that Marx, Freud and Nietzsche each attempt to define a causal relationship between these halves by prioritizing the outside/extrinsic over the inside/intrinsic. Crudely, the "outside" is figured as that which the "inside" necessarily mystifies (Marx), represses (Freud) or suppresses (Nietzsche) in order to constitute itself as the priority of attention. "Outside" is constituted by economic base (by Marx), unconscious (Freud), will to power (Nietzsche); "inside," by a superstructure of ideas/laws (Marx), desire and ratiocinative cogito of the individual (Freud), truth/virtue (Nietzsche). The positive "face-value" of the texts of the instrinsic - the thoughts, desires and quality of witness that a text may overtly express - is subjected in each case to an interpretive process that discloses constituting negations.

It is in order to locate Kenneth Burke in this story of furthering negative critique that Jameson turns an evaluative eye on Burke's critical writings - in particular, on Burke's concept of literary and nonliterary verbal communication as "symbolic acts." Burke's "symbolic act" is an effort to bring the halves - of text and context, word and world - back together again. In numerous books, Burke attempts to systematize a critical vocabulary that will

\textsuperscript{2} The phrase, "ideology of the aesthetic," is in fact the title of a fairly recent book by Terry Eagleton, which traces just this narrative of the historical development of the aesthetic in relation to philosophical and socioeconomic themes.
allow the artistic text to - following his metaphor - not only act, but walk and talk on a social ground. This ground is only partly historical. As the 1931 "Lexicon Rhetoricae" (Counter-statement 123-183) shows, Burke attempts to systematize discussion of literary form by defining its "essential" aspects, which he then speculates are to be transhistorically found in any literary work in some combination and relational hierarchy of importance, in the same way as symbolizing is considered by Burke to be a part of the immanent structure of human thinking itself. Burke explains:

The Symbol might be called a word invented by the artist to specify a particular grouping or pattern or emphasizing of experiences - and the work of art in which the Symbol figures might be called a definition of this word. (Counter 153) "Experiences" (the extrinsic) are linked to "the work of art" (the intrinsic) via the symbol, whose form is oriented towards "the creation of an appetite in the mind of the auditor" (Counter 31). Similarly, Burke conceptualizes "act" and "action" within a system that he calls "dramatism," a system intended to provide a critic with the means of grasping the vexing question of literary, and social, change:

In a rounded statement about motives, you must have some work that names the act (names what took place, in thought and deed), and another that
names the *scene* (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred); also, you must indicate what person or kind of person (*agent*) performed the act, what means or instruments he used (*agency*), and the *purpose*.... Any complete statement about motives will offer some kind of answer to these five questions. What was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose). (*A Grammar of Motives* xv)

And so, it is from a foundational premise that "there are no forms of art which are not forms of experience outside of art (Counter 143) that Burke conceives the "symbolic act" - as apparently bridging, in other words, the intrinsic and extrinsic divide. A poem cannot ever merely exist for its own formal sake without demonstrating, in Burke's terms, social "attitude," or in ours, effects. The concept of "symbolic act" enables Burke to posit poetic language as capable of offering to the reader a utopian social situation where there is no longer a historical separation of text from context. This, I believe, is effectively the same ultimate textual horizon of the social that Jameson desires when, in the epigraph to *The Political Unconscious*, he implores critics with the Leninesque slogan to "always historicize!" Finally, this utopic gesture is recognizable in, if not the defining mark of, formally innovative poetry by Bruce Andrews and Harryette Mullen, which I examine here.
In *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, Kenneth Burke deploys other adjectives - in addition to "symbolic" - in order to help explain his concept of the "verbal act." They are presented as loosely synonymous so that he can differentiate his use of "symbol" from the highly contrastive use made of it by the turn-of-century Symbolist aesthetic tendency in poetry and criticism. The symbolic act is "statistical" and "representative." Representativity "moves us [and our interpretation of the verbal act] into the matter of synecdoche, the figure of speech wherein the part is used for the whole, the whole for the part" (*Philosophy* 26). Burke says how

the more I examine both the structure of poetry and the structure of human relations outside of poetry, the more I become convinced that this is the "basic" [read: immanent - with emphasis on the definite article] figure of speech, and that it occurs in many modes besides that of the formal trope. I feel it to be no mere accident of language that we use the same word for sensory, artistic, and political representation.

(*Philosophy* 25-26)

Although Burke is asserting a homology - between res and verba, text and context - at the level of the representational, his assertion is not identical in kind to the homologies we might be familiar with as a constitutive gesture of "avant-garde" poetic practices at the level of
the *presentational* in language. Gertrude Stein's poetics of the "continuous present" re-presents, does not represent, the object, or person. The following lines are from "If I Told Him. A Completed Portrait of Picasso":

Presently.
As presently.
As as presently.
He he he he and he and he and he and he and he and and as and as he and as he and he. He is and as he is, and as he is and he is, he is and as he and he and as he is and he and he and he and he and he. (Stein 231)

Presentationality enters Burke's system as the rhetorical effect that form has on the reader. Representing Picasso, and by formal extension, re-presenting the patriarchal, aristocratic encodings of the Western art of portraiture, are endeavors to be laughed off ("He he he"). Tensions between the representational - as the "social ground" of analogues of the artistic, sensory and political - and the presentational - as the generative mode of formally innovative poetics (in this case, Stein's Cubist portraits) - are at the heart of my thesis.

For Jameson, the centrality of representation in Burke's system of dramatism is the *locus classicus* of the "ideology of representation and, with it, of the optical illusion of the subject, of that vanishing point from which spectacles - whether of culture, of everyday life, or of
history itself - fall into place as metaphysically coherent meanings and organic form" ("Symbolic" 522). Jameson values Burke's intention - to describe the literary act on a social ground - but determines that as an interpretive strategy the "symbolic act" does not reach far enough across the social ground that the literary act "rewrites" and is rewritten by. Jameson describes these internal limits on Burke's text ideologically, as "strategies of containment" that have themselves external correlative on an extended social ground. One containment strategy operative in Burke's text concerns "the category of identity and of the self, which is itself ideological, and which can hardly be properly evaluated if we remain locked into the very ideological system . . . which generates such concepts in the first place ("Symbolic" 521). Jameson reads Burke's theory as internally contained or shaped and therefore delimited - unbenownst to its own reflexive theorizing - by the category of identity and a concept of self. Jameson discloses the social ground of this containment strategy as follows:

In the American myths of the self and of its identity crises and ultimate reintegration [there is] some final trace and survival of that old ideology of bourgeois individualism whose basic features - juridical equality, autonomy, freedom to sell your own labor power - had crucial functions to fulfill in the establishment and
organization of the market system. ("Symbolic"
520)

From Burke's legacy, Jameson preserves the concept of "act," substituting "ideology" for "symbol," "subject" for "individual," in order to account for the workings of representation in discourse and of the bourgeois individualism that historically accompanies the concept of representation in the West.\(^3\) In order to achieve these substitutions, Jameson proposes narrative as the basic ideological unit of both fictional and nonfictional texts. Jameson grounds his concept of narrative in a phenomenological understanding of how ideology is imbricated within it. The transhistorical function once performed in Burke by the symbol is now performed in Jameson by narrative.\(^4\)

There is, however, in my reading of Jameson, a "strategy of containment" shaping his own aesthetics\(^5\)

\(^3\) For a useful overview of the historical rise out of feudal courts of the political concept of representation, and of the various forms it has taken in Western theories of governance (with analogies to the rise of "representation" in art and poetry) see Hanna Pitkin.

\(^4\) Jameson is heavily indebted to Althusser's concept of ideology. If, as Althusser argues, "ideology represents the imaginary relationships of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser 162), then narrative is the privileged mode of specific ideological representations. Narrative in general is transhistorical in the same way that ideology in general is transhistorical for Althusser - not in the sense of transcending history, but of being omnipresent within it (Althusser 161).

\(^5\) I do not endorse the irony of reversing this phrase upon Jameson, however. When Jameson uses the phrase in The Political Unconscious, "strategy of containment" still
manifesto for narrative acts in "Postmodernism; or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." As with Burke, Jameson's own "strategy of containment" becomes evident I think if one considers not fiction - however transgenerically mixed - but formally innovative poetries, including the "presentational poetics" of Stein. This containment strategy in Jameson's theorization of the postmodern as a historical period results from his privileging narrative as the basic social unit, as this forecloses critical examination of texts that would question this very premise and all that such a premise might entail. Secondly, the containment strategy operative in Jameson's version of Marxist hermeneutics results from the privileging of phenomenological description as the means of dealing with the ineluctable bind of the ideological. I call this dual strategy of containment the "existential subject" of Jameson's text. The existential subject is a normative, reading template by which Jameson "verifies" his interpretations of postmodern cultural works. There exists for Jamesonian theory such an ontological state as - the referent of - "existential experience," which is invoked in

critically articulates, I believe, its former political usage. The phrase was used after 1951 to refer to the "Truman Doctrine" of 1947, which for many inaugurated the Cold War - and the U.S. foreign policy of involvement in the domestic affairs of other countries, for the purpose of "containing" Soviet expansion. Applying such a concept to the way that literary texts are "managed" by a political unconscious remains a powerful statement.

6 By this I mean the Althusserian assertion that the ideological cannot ever be transcended by a subject or act. See "Ideological State Apparatuses."
his essay when interpreting postmodern cultural production. This ontology exists as a referent independent of any specific existentialist philosophical text, but at the same time is, paradoxically, not an ahistorical metaphysical condition. Jameson has characterized existentialism proper as one of the "model-building and language-oriented philosophies" that has taken part in this century's uncrowning of the referent ("Symbolic and Imaginary" 387). He salvages from this what he calls the "existential analytic. . . . not necessarily in itself ideological," that "lays out a whole [sociological] anatomy of lived time, action, choice, emotion, and the like" (Political Unconscious 259). He strategically deploys the "existential analytic," or template of an "existential subject" as a subjectivity in the field of contemporary cultural artifacts, in order to assess these artifacts, and to conclude, finally, that they are radically incompatible with his template - the defining feature, for Jameson, of postmodernist art. Specifically, Jameson describes how the "objects of representation" in E.L. Doctorow's novel, Ragtime, are "incommensurable . . . incomparable substances" - the Coalhouse character is intertextual, the Houdini character historical" (Postmodernism 22-23). Much in the same way, there is an object of representation in Jameson's text - the "existential subject" - which functions, though in a static and rudimentary way, as a fictional character in the critical essay. The "substance" of the existential
subject is incommensurable with that of the essay’s objects of representation of the postmodern. Nevertheless, postmodern cultural objects such as Doctorow’s novel and Bob Perelman’s poetry are inserted into Jameson’s argument through the 'point of view' of the figure of the existential subject. The existential subject provides in effect a reader for the reader of Jameson’s text; that is, the reader inserts and reproduces her/himself as the existential subject - the guide through the theoretical landscape of postmodern objects.

By means of this allegorical reader, Jameson demonstrates how he brings together two important arguments. The first is an argument for the value of Lacan to Marxist literary interpretation: "at a time when the primacy of language and the Symbolic Order is widely understood," there is an "underestimation of the Imaginary and the problem of the insertion of the subject" ("Imaginary and Symbolic" 383) into the Symbolic. The Imaginary’s role is to provide

that indispensible mapping fantasy or narrative by which the individual subject invents a 'lived' relationship with collective systems which otherwise by definition exclude him [sic] insofar as he or she is born into a pre-existent social form and its pre-existent language. ("Imaginary and Symbolic" 394)

It is this Imaginary function that the existential subject foregrounds for the reader.
The second argument is the Marxist concern to historicize the bodily sensorium and its perceptual capacities. The bodily sensorium has centrifugally fragmented under and to the extent that the division of labour has centripetally coalesced - the forces of capital. There is fragmentation replicating the division of labour within the psyche as the "by-product" of social fragmentation. The psyche is atomized into noninstrumental (the senses) and instrumental functions (rationality) (Political Unconscious 228-229). Marx's concern to historicize the body is reflected in the inadequacy of the existential subject - a modernist sensorium - to inhabit a postmodernist space. The existential subject reflects the inadequacy of a phenomenological Imaginary when it attempts to inhabit the postmodern.

The existential subject provides a paradoxically decentred yet balanced norm to guide the Marxist hermeneutic and its cultural evaluations. Decentredness, although ultimately only a potential at the present time ("only the re-invention of the collective and the associative can concretely achieve the 'decentering' of the individual subject" ["Imaginary and Symbolic" 380]), comes from the fact that the subject's consciousness is subverted and delimited by the Lacanian social developmental model of the psyche. The existential subject serves to balance the Imaginary and the Symbolic registers in Jameson's interpretation of postmodernism. The balance that the existential subject
achieves for Jameson's hermeneutic is important because Marxism is premised on the narrative of history as the "'ground' of truth" ("Imaginary and Symbolic" 388), taking precedence over other possible narratives. My phrase, "narrative of history," signals toward a concession by Jameson to narrative over history. At least, this is the way that Wlad Godzich sees it. The importance attributed to narrative is a theoretical compromise that Marxism makes with poststructuralism. For Godzich,

[t]here is a stinging irony here: once upon a time it was claimed, under Marxism auspices, that 'men made history', that human beings were the subject of history. Now, with the equation of history and narrative, that claim becomes the derisory one that 'men make stories', that human beings are the subjects of stories. ("After" 100)

Historical narrative requires the figure of a socially constituted material body, however fragmented. The theoretical balancing Jameson performs on the question of the subject is in order to "admit the descriptive value of the post-structuralist critique of the 'subject' [a critique that bids good riddance to bourgeois individualism] without necessarily endorsing the schizophrenic ideal it has tended to project" (Political Unconscious 125). 7

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7 Jameson is, I believe, thinking of the "schizophrenic ideal" endorsed in theory and practice by French psychoanalyst Felix Guattari. Guattari, in collaboration with French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, theorize schizophrenia as a methodological response to capitalism in
Postmodern space renders "our older systems of perception . . . archaic and aimless . . . without offering another in their place" (Postmodernism 14). It is for lack of alternatives that "[t]he [postmodern] waning of affect . . . is perhaps best initially approached by way of the human figure" (Postmodernism 11) - the existential subject. The existential subject proposes to be the best available historical model of a liveable bodily sensorium under capitalism. Thus it imaginatively launches the reader into postmodern space, which is hostile to inhabitation. The existential subject must necessarily fall short of this ideal model, while remaining under constant threat of "mutation." The failure of the existential subject to inhabit the postmodern stands as a symbol of our collective incapacity to represent multinational capitalism.

The "foundational" aspect of Jameson's critique of Burke's social criticism is that it allows for no theorization of an unconscious. Jameson discloses, as another level of motivation in Burke's theory, a "political unconscious" in the "strategies of containment" that make Burke's text what it is. Burke's criticism fails to acknowledge these motivations, and for this reason cannot adequately critique the ideology of the self and its historical function of bourgeois individualism in a market economy. "The Burkean symbolic act is thus always serenely

Anti-Oedipus and A Thousand Plateaus. In Chapter 6, I use one chapter from the latter book.
transparent to itself, in lucid blindness to the dark underside of language, to the ruses of history or of desire" ("Symbolic" 522). However, the existential subject template in Jameson's theory is constructed out of conceptual elements that appear to be identical with the historical trajectory Jameson attributes to Burke's category of identity and concept of self. Effectively, the existential subject is constructed out of Burke's category of identity and concept of self, and supplemented - in a way that affects all the aspects of the construct - with an unconscious.

Burke is on the whole known more as a critic than as a poet. Generically, these two roles - poet and critic - fulfill different interpretive expectations and functions. But if narrative is a basic social unit, as Jameson suggests, then texts are rhetorically constructed by narrative regardless of whether they are written by critics or poets. This intergeneric potential for text is conditional, in Jameson's conception, on a specific understanding of what narrative is and how it is used.

Jameson's understanding of narrative is much like the social function of the ideological in general. Narrative consists of interpretive space-time frames which constitute the function of communicative understanding at this historical moment, that as subjects we - in Burke's active phrase (a sign of the absence of the unconscious) - "identify" with, or - in Althusser's passive phrase (a sign of the critical
presence of Lacan's rewriting of the Freudian unconscious in terms of language) - are "interpellated" by Freudian identification,\textsuperscript{8} conceived of as Althusserian interpellation, becomes, in the existential subject template, a normative reading practice. Readerly identification, or interpellation, can be purposefully blocked in formally innovative poetry, in order to achieve forms of political consciousness grounded in language conceived of as a utopian democratic space where no aspect belongs a priori to a privileged constitutency of users. Writing belongs to those who are literate (whose primary fact is not access to education, but to the legal right to literacy); poetry, to a minority of the literate. Formally speaking, there is no privileged aspect of language that is exempt from, in Deanna Ferguson's coinage, "democratique."\textsuperscript{9} For example, perhaps the most socially contested element of language in poetry is the first-person pronoun. The first-person pronoun, in some formally innovative poetry that questions Jameson's premises (narrative as a basic social unit; phenomenological identification with narrative) is no longer privileged as a point of identification, or entry, into a narrative function that transcends its moment of enunciation. This is a form of critique that exists more

\textsuperscript{8} The concept of identification arguably derives from Freud, who likely projects it from Aristotle's concept of mimesis (in the Poetics). For Freud, see Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego, esp. pp. 37-43.

\textsuperscript{9} Title of chapbook by Vancouver poet, Deanna Ferguson.
fundamentally in language than the (historically, representative and universal) first-person who "speaks for us all." Readerly identification can be arrested in poetry by critically addressing the level of the sentence as the ideological unit of socialization - the normative grammatical unit through which narrative is established as a primary function of communication for Jameson.

Part of the agonism of this linguistic space issues from the consciousness raised in formally innovative poetry that the condition of being always already interpellated can be recognized. Such poetry is itself a negative hermeneutic (i.e. not poetry, but criticism) insofar as the writing denies access to "the ruses of history or of desire" to establish interpellative processes in the reader. In effect, reading becomes a political ground of the poem: a critique of these various conceptions of language as action - symbolic, statistical, and representative action. The existential subject as normative reader - based on the ideology of bourgeois individualism, that is, in Jameson's terms, on the "category of identity and of the self" - forms the social ground of, and itself figures the ground of

10 For a compelling reading of the emergence of concepts of identification and representation in 18th century Europe - notably in German aesthetics - as supplying a theoretical resolution to "the antimonies of bourgeois politics," see David Lloyd. I especially find of value Lloyd's concept of a "Subject without properties." It is the universal Subject who "becomes representative in consequence of being able to take anyone's place, of occupying any place, of a pure exchangeability" - the "disinterested judge formed for and by the public sphere" ("Race Under Representation" 70).
agency in, formally innovative poetry. I think of this poetry as being part of a continuous modernist project of dismantling the subject/ego of bourgeois individualism. The larger social project (of revolution) remains (muted). But what is at stake in Jameson's theory is a view of formally innovative poetry as other than merely formalistic, as other than an epiphenomenon or ornamentation of historical processes beyond its grasp.
CHAPTER TWO:

Individual versus collective subjects

If a critique of liberal individualism is at the heart of formally innovative poetics, then it raises the issue of whether a postindividualist consciousness is possible.11

A second example from the 1930s (the first was Burke) shows how resistant the American poet and critic Yvor Winters was to admit a social value for what was then called "group consciousness," and which Hans Magnus Enzensburger was to call, about sixty years later, "the consciousness industry." The debate over the social lineaments of consciousness was particularly charged in the 1930s, since both Marxists and incipient/active Fascists had vested interests in legitimating the concept. The concept emerges, for example, in letters between Louis Zukofsky and Ezra Pound in the late 1920s in the context of Pound's skepticism toward Zukofsky's self-claimed grounding of his verse in Marxist social values. Despite their differences, they both recognized the value and existence of "group consciousness." Pound had as early as 1918 publicly endorsed, in a review, Jules Romains's formulation of "Unanimism," a concept which he refers Zukofsky to in a letter of 1928 (Pound/Zukofsky 7), after reading Zukofsky's poem, "In Memory of V. I. Ulianov" (i.e. Lenin), that Zukofsky had sent him. In this

11 To reiterate Fredric Jameson's assertion quoted in Chapter 1: "only the reinvention of the collective and the associative can concretely achieve the 'decentering' of the individual subject" ("Imaginary and Symbolic" 380).
poem, the third-person plural is invoked as a people's *hegira*, then contrasted with the singularity of a star, and then made identical to the star (thus, the collective made identical to the one) as they succumb to an "orbit-trembling" cyclicity of historical change:

We . . .
... throngs everlasting, rising forever,
Rush as of river courses,
Change within change of forces
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Share now your fate
Whose process is continual.
(32-35, 45-46; Complete 21-22)

It appears that in Winters's case, however, collective action was suspect, as was any correlative articulation of it in poetry. The traditional (i.e. patriarchal) epic device of invocation to a female muse as the source of inspiration for writing poetry can, from a rhetorical perspective, be considered as the acknowledgement of a foundational arbitrariness between what "I" want to say and what "I" actually say, as well as between the *intentions* of the poet and the *intentions* extrapolated by a reader from the work itself. It is the Muse who will write the poem for the poet. It is this arbitrariness that Winters disavows, a disavowal that constitutes an affirmation of "the morality of poetry."

In the title of Winters's poem, "A Post-Card to the Social Muse Who Was Invoked More Formally by Various Marxians and
Others in the Pages of The New Republic During the Winter of 1932-3" (*Collected* 143) the muse-function in epic is metonymically identified with the invocation of the social, i.e. "mass consciousness": muse consciousness is mass consciousness. Instead of the poet seeking counsel from the muse, it is Winters in this poem who counsels the muse, "since you choose / To call yourself a Muse" (ll. 1-2):

Change or repose is wrought

By steady arm and thought:

The fine indignant sprawl

Confuses all. (ll. 9-12; *Collected* 143)

It is the individual's "steady arm and thought" that effects change, change that is, moreover, of equal value to "repose": not the "fine indignant sprawl" of public address to "the masses," with the cutting suggestion, in the adjectives (fine, indignant) that such a stance is possible only through a withdrawal from - not an immersion within - the world. "The masses" was the figural counterpart to the socialist and fascist forces then competing for public attention,. The Congress of American Writers was formed in 1935 under its figure:

From 1930 on, more and more American writers - like their fellow-craftsmen in other countries - began to take sides in the world struggle between barbarism (deliberately cultivated by a handful of property owners) and the living interests of the mass of mankind. Within the last five years, those
whose function is to describe and interpret human life - in novel, story, poem, essay, play - have been increasingly sure that their interests and the interests of the propertyless and oppressed, are inseparable. (Hart 9)

Cary Nelson confirms the aesthetic diversity of the socially committed poetry of the 1930s, a fact that has been overlooked by critics until recently:

During its heyday [i.e. the 1930s], 'proletarian literature' came for some to include all the socially conscious poetry written from the vantage point of the left, whatever its intended audience, subject matter, style, or implied political commitments. (Repression 164).

The juxtaposition of Louis Zukofsky with Yvor Winters is all the more extraordinary given that Zukofsky never published in "proletarian" magazines - such as The Masses - yet wrote poetry whose form was inherently "socially committed." 12

Politicized poetry is virtually absent from Winters' Collected of 1978. But there is a gap, which I interpret as political, in Winters's poetic. As I have suggested, Winters did not approve of collective address to a "social muse" for the poet, nor, it can be assumed, would he approve of the

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12 Zukofsky personally broke with Communism, and with formulating formal equivalencies in poetry to Marxist concepts such as the commodity fetish, in 1940. This break is manifest in his poetry, and occurs at the end of the first part of the ninth section of his life-long poem, "A." I will speak of Zukofsky a little more in Chapter 7.
types of allegory which might issue from such address, as in the case of Zukofsky's poem. But Winters has written at least one politicized poem that I know of.\footnote{I am grateful to Terry Comito's book on Winters, where he alludes to the existence of this poem.} It is curiously absent from the Collected (yet whose last section is entitled "Uncollected Poems"). This is a symptomatic elision, and as I will argue a direct consequence of Winters' understanding of form. "A White Spiritual" was published in The Nation in 1957. I attribute the editorial elision to the fact that a poem, when it addresses contemporary political issues in a formally traditional mode, becomes "occasional," and therefore unworthy of reprinting - especially when there is a model to which the poem aspires: the model of 'total comprehension' provided by the supposedly contextually-autonomous, self-relational poem that has come to be stereotypically associated with New Criticism. A poem is occasional when the editor thinks that it requires historical annotation in order for it to be understood. In an occasional poem, history "in the making" provides the occasion, but the occasion is only of antiquarian interest. Address in "A White Spiritual" is indirect and formally contained by various devices which do not exclude historical connotation. The line that in my reading most requires annotation is the fourth in the second stanza:

\begin{quote}
Take it easy for a spell;
We can all go back to bed;
\end{quote}
Let the niggers die in hell:
This is what the statesman said,
This is what the students read.

As Sartre has convincingly argued for the passé composé in *What Is Literature?*, the past tense, that is being used here, assures that the address remains contained for the reader and uncontaminated by the present tense inhabited by the reader, and that history remains therefore antiquarian rather than immediate. The unnamed statesman being referred to, and the issues that his name invokes, remained five years later volatile operatively in the American "mass consciousness," as is evident from this sentence appearing on the next-to-last page of the first book, *From the Back of the Bus*, by "comedian, social satirist, Negro, pioneer" - as the back jacket blurb of 1962 describes him - Dick Gregory: "I was planning to write much more, but prudence dictates we end it here. Governor Faubus may ask for equal space" (123). The *School Segregation Cases* ruling of May 17, 1954, by the Supreme Court, outlawed the "separate but equal" policy in public education. Southern State Governors reluctant to implement what effectively was a ruling on the constitution, after signing on to the (Democratic-lead) Dixiecrat Manifesto of 1956, thought they had found a leader for their revolt in Governor Faubus of Arkansas, who called out the National Guard to prevent high school integration in Little Rock; however, during the week that Winters's poem appeared in *The Nation*, President Truman responded to Faubus's
constitutional challenge by sending federal troops to Central High in order to ensure the safe passage of black students into the school.

In an occasional poem, history in the making provides the occasion. There is a parallel - in the way that the occasional poem addresses history as external to its own formal process - to the function of epic poetry in the dialectical relationship that Hegel establishes historically, in his Aesthetics, between epic and lyric poetry:

What leads to epic poetry is the need to listen to something which is unfolded as an independent and self-complete totality, objective over against the subject; whereas in lyric what is satisfied is the opposite need, namely that for self-expression and for the apprehension of the mind in its own self-expression. (1113)

While they are opposed genres in Hegel's system - based on a fundamental oppositional dynamism between subject and object - there are also instances of reciprocal inter-relation between them: the lyric, for example, "may adopt in subject-matter and form an event which is epic in matter and external appearance [i.e. utilizes narrative on public - 'objective' - themes]" (1116). As an example of the epicalised lyric, Hegel refers to the subgenre of the occasional poem.
Winters establishes what I believe has become a paradigmatic relationship between a specific understanding of form (in relation to content, historical and otherwise) and a specific understanding of agency/agent (in relation to poetry). At the level of form, Winters is affiliated with and by critics who are and who advocate political conservativisms. At the level of agency, however, particularly the professional agency of scholar and critic, this is not the case. Students of Winters include Richard Ohmann and Gerald Graff. Winters was a participating member of the N.A.A.C.P. So that, although Winters, as Terry Comito argues in In Defense of Winters, was opposed to "that all but universal [i.e., in the USA] strain of literary modernism [...] that insists on the 'autotelic' nature of art, hermetically sealed off from one's practical, moral, and social existence" (xi), thereby allowing Comito to align Winters with the critique of such autotelism, and of the institution of literature that was founded upon it in this century (e.g., the critique by Frank Lentricchia in After the New Criticism). Nevertheless, agency is confirmed to operate on the level of the individual alone, not on the level of "mass consciousness."
CHAPTER THREE:
Disjunction, nonsense, and the (rational) discursive base

Winters' 1927 review for Poetry of Hart Crane's first book, White Buildings, published the previous year, describes Crane as a "contemporary master" who is "among the five or six greatest poets writing in English" (Uncollected 47, 49). Furthermore, he defends the difficulty, the "oblique or psychological presentation" (Uncollected 49) of some of Crane's verse from fellow critic and poet, Allen Tate, who writes the introduction to Crane's book. Invoking I. A. Richards' argument for the "strategic value of obscurity," Winters considers how Crane's "use of words is so subtly dense with meaning and overtone . . . [that] . . . logical obscurity is likely to force the attention upon separate words and lines, and so facilitate at the outset an appreciation of the details as details, which may, in turn, lead on to a grasp of the whole" (Uncollected 49). He cites the poem "Sunday Morning Apples" as "a very good example of the more difficult poems":

A boy runs with a dog before the sun, straddling
Spontaneities that form their independent orbits,
Their own perennials of light
In the valley where you live
(called Brandywine). (49)

By the time Winters' first book of criticism comes out in 1937, he reverses his opinion on Crane's poetry (yet the book's index cites Crane's name more often than anyone
except W.C. Williams, by one citation). In *Primitivism and Decadence: A Study of American Experimental Poetry*, Winters finds occasion to quote the same lines from Crane's "Sunday Morning Apples," providing this commentary:

The second line, taken in conjunction with the first, conveys the action of the boy, but it does so indirectly and by suggestion. What it says, if we consider rational content alone, is really indecipherable. (*Primitive* 29)

Deciphering constitutes, of course, the critical act as conceived by New Criticism. These comments on Hart Crane appear in the second chapter, "The Experimental School in American Poetry: An Analytic Survey of Its Structural Methods, Exclusive of Meter." In these lines, Hart Crane provides for Winters an example of "grammatical coherence in excess of, or in the absence of, rational coherence" (26; his itals.), which is a subtype of one kind of "pseudo-reference," where the poet "retain[s] the syntactic forms and much of the vocabulary of rational coherence, thus aiming to exploit the feeling of rational coherence in its absence or at least in excess of its presence" (*Primitive* 26). Verse that is pseudo-referential demonstrates a disparity between "feeling" and "paraphrasable content."¹⁴ In Crane's poem, a coherence of feeling is achieved at the expense of rational coherence. The subjective mysticism that

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¹⁴ I use quotes this first mention in order to emphasize that they operate in Winters's critical lexicon as conceptual - technical - terms.
the second line suggests can, however, be read strictly in terms of dynamic form as follows. What produces a defamiliarizing perceptual reading-effect in "Sunday Morning Apples" is the juxtaposition of an Imagist-based first line ("A boy runs with a dog before the sun") with a second line that only simulates Imagist procedures by suggesting something metaphysical ("spontaneities") is an empirical entity that "orbits." The representational dissolution of an event is suggested by Crane who makes "spontaneities" into a substantive noun.

Winters, in criticism of his contemporaries - those whom he designates members of "the experimental school in American thought" - opposes "the fallacy of expressive, or imitative, form: the procedure in which the form succumbs to the raw material of the poem" (Primitive 41). There is not one but rather a catalogue of procedures that Winters draws up to defend his classicist sense of form. Winters' negative poetics dialectically contains in linguistic kernel a fundamental principle that less than three decades later is expanded by "imitative form"'s greatest proponents: "the experimental school" designated by Donald Allen as "The New American Poetry." In a footnote, where Winters considers how "[t]his law of literary aesthetics [the law "regulating" procedures of imitative form] has never . . . been stated explicitly" (Primitive 64). He speculates that this law might be formulable as follows:
Form is expressive invariably of the state of mind of the author; a state of formlessness is legitimate subject matter for literature, and in fact all subject matter, as such, is relatively formless; but the author must endeavor to give form, or meaning, to the formless - in so far as he endeavors that his own state of mind may imitate or approximate the condition of the matter, he is surrendering to the matter instead of mastering it. Form, in so far as it endeavors to imitate the formless, destroys itself. (Primitive 64)

Form "surrendering to the matter instead of mastering it" is - in a well used poetics formula written by Robert Creeley to Charles Olson in 1950 (Creeley, Complete 58, 60) - nothing more than an extension of content. This poetic formula has been made antemetabolic\textsuperscript{15} - relativized, even neutralized - by Charles Bernstein (in both cases, less than three decades after Olson's pronouncement) who argue that content is nothing more than an extension of form to the same extent that form is nothing more than an extension of content.\textsuperscript{16} Before escaping from the binary of this antemetabole, I wish to reconfigure it on a larger scale as

\textsuperscript{15} I thank Larry Kennar for introducing me to this term.

\textsuperscript{16} In Autobiography (1990), Creeley retells and reinterprets the occasion: "When young, I'd written Olson with almost pious exclamation: 'Form is never more than an extension of content'. Now I might say equally, 'Content is never more than an extension of form'. It depends, as they say in New England" (94-95).
a binary concerning subjectivity in poetry. For Winters, the poetry of the experimental tradition he calls "American obscurantism" is characteristically tainted by "amateur mysticism" (Primitivism 53), which he historically traces along two routes. One route - a "history of ideas" approach, as Donald Davie says - travels from his Surrealist-influenced present through Emerson's transcendentalism to Pope's liberal-individualist Essay on Man. The second route - a poetic technique - contributing to subjective "mysticism" in verse Winters traces through the use of "nonsense" procedures by some of his contemporary poets who are writing from the flux of "a state of mind," back to Ben Jonson's usage of "nonsense" procedures as a means to characterize dramatis personae - the Alchemist, for example, in the play by that name. There is no other kind of obscurantism for Winters but that which issues from subjective excess. The antedote to mysticism is to be found in Winters' rationalist template for a poetics, in which "pseudo-reference" is but one categorical flaw leading to private obscurity.

A directly opposed value judgment on obscurity - as a technique of public address in poetry - can be found in Bernstein's Artifice of Absorption (1987). The premise of Bernstein's essay-in-verse is that language can never be private, that it is in its "innermost mystery" a concatenation of signifiers - a social product. The reader is not necessarily either solitary or collective, but both, in what seems very much like a paradise of textuality, or as
Charles Bernstein has put it: "I want no paradise only to be
/ drenched in the downpour of words, fecund / with
tropicality" (Rough Trades 11).

What Winters and Bernstein's essays on their contemporaries have in common, despite their opposing value judgments, is their method - one of cataloguing formal procedures. Bernstein's catalogue is organized around the positively valued concept of artifice, in contrast to Winters's that is organized around a negatively valued catalogue of procedures whose positively valued model is virtually absent from the essay (symptomatic, in a way, of his self-appointed seat of judgment).

Winters' catalogue of literary procedures can stand on its own, separable from his value judgment on them. Winters' catalogue contains, I believe, valuable and prescient analyses of techniques that - together with the writing of some of Winters' contemporaries, notably Williams and Crane17 - have become essential to the formation of Language Writing poetics. Stripped of value, the rational itself, as the identity of discursive prose, has been decentred in the poetic text, and revalued.

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17 Winters cites with familiarity from Williams' Spring & All, a text that, as Silliman points out, was lost from the bibliographic horizon of the Williams that influenced the New American poets, until its republication by a small press, Frontier Press, in 1971, and hence recovery by Silliman (New Sentence 23-24) and fellow Language Writers who were then also, in the 1960s, reading Zukofsky - who writes auspiciously of Spring & All: "In a work most indigenously of these States, and beginning perhaps a century of writing" ("A"-17, 378).
I believe Winters, as critic, not as poet, retains a significant but unacknowledged influence on current institutional reading practices of poetry, particularly in relation to criticism based on an implicit consensus on what sense-making is. The result is that "the morality of poetry" - Winters' ultimate concern in *Primitive and Decadence* - becomes not only a question of how an ethical individual ought to behave, but how the social ought to traverse the space of the subject. A normative, institutionally reproduced reader is born.

If the political is the "ultimate horizon," as I, following Jameson, think it is, then nonrepresentational texts (e.g. Hart Crane's) must also be evaluated by politicized readings, the corollary being that politics, in the way that it formally enters poetry, is not limited to the genre of the political poem. Formally innovative work has too often been interpreted as transcending the historical conditions of its possibility rather than as supplying speculative commentary on and within it. To be a historically aware critic and to be a historically aware poet is to practice a like-minded politics of interpretation. Modernist experimental poetry is read, for example by Winters, as a solitary, private language of "excess," based on a concept of the individual as ontologically separated from socially constitutive forces, as opposed to the values of the (e.g. Lukacsian) realist aesthetic, which are sociopolitical, where individual character is determined by social relations.
in a representational language. It seems to be that the only way to read contemporary poetry within the academy, if it is to be read there at all, is politically, and in relation to its stance towards issues of social change - which embrace more than pedagogical concerns.

Here I want to self-reflexively historicize my thesis topic as a function of my own position as reader: a student of poetry in the academy. Speculative and historical approaches will (hopefully) limit and check each other.

Let me begin reflexively then, as a reader of contemporary poetry in the academy, and consider what history there may be to the term "disjunctive," that with increasing frequency describes a line of twentieth-century poetry and poetics. "Difficulty" is its modernist parallel (which can be interestingly compared with Winters' "mysticism").

A parallel interruption of "plain reader" identification was a common objection to modernist works. An example can be found in Laura Riding's and Robert Graves' A Survey of Modernist Poetry:

[T]he chief feeling [of who they call the "plain reader"] against the poem ["Captain Carpenter" by John Crowe Ransom] would be that Captain Carpenter is not an easily defined or felt subject, neither a particular historical figure nor yet a complete allegory. He confounds the emotions of the reader instead of simplifying them and provides no answer to the one question which the reader will ask
himself: "Who, or what, particularly, is Captain Carpenter?" (108)

In other words, most problematic for the "plain reader" is identification of the agency in the poem. Riding and Graves rather high-mindedly assert that "if it [poetry] is difficult it means that he [the "plain reader"] must think in unaccustomed ways, and thinking to the plain reader, beyond the range necessary for the practical purposes of living, is unsettling and dangerous; he is afraid of his own mind" (108; my itals.).

Peter Quartermain appears to be the first critic to reuse "disjunctive" for literary-historical purposes.\(^\text{18}\) The "disjunctive" appears to have altogether replaced "writerly,"\(^\text{19}\) yet is not as popular as "nonsense," as descriptors for texts that exceed given, implicit, interpretive parameters. In *Disjunctive Poetics: From Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky to Susan Howe*, Quartermain uses the term in order to conceive the diachronic axis of formally innovative change as a nonlinear, yet historical, trajectory. He does this as one who intends to emphasize how social (especially linguistic) histories saturate formally innovative poetry in specifically discontinuous ways. In invoking the social history contained in a disjunctive poetics, Quartermain

\(^\text{18}\) Antecedents include William Sylvester.

\(^\text{19}\) "The writerly" was theoretically conceived by Roland Barthes at the height of French semiotics, and depended for its effect on the value of production - "the productive text" - in and of itself. The trajectory of the productive text was configured as the horizon of literature itself.
avoids constituting, in the same act, a tradition of the
disjunctive (with the attendant idealization of a version of
social history). But the broader question lies for me in how
terms - for instance, "disjunctive" - come to unreflexively
patrol the limits of critical discourse (its rationality),
reproducing, besides new understanding - for instance, of
literary and social diachrony as not tied to tradition and
to a simplistic linear narrative of formal reversals -
something less spectacular and more speculative: a normative
reader reproduceable in and for the academy. In this debased
normative usage, "disjunctive" metonymically refers to any
poetic text a reader perceives as operating beyond his or
her literary repertoire. To say a text is disjunctive then,
is to say it is not as the reader commonly knows and reads a
text to be and work. In other words, "disjunctive" refers to
that which the text is not, not to how or what it is. If the
disjunctive text were specifiable (or, better yet, general-
izable) in some way, on the basis of what the reader knows,
then the text would not be disjunctive. So that to
characterize a text as disjunctive is to reaffirm a reader's
norm of value the text does not necessarily support, and a
position for the reader-critic that assumes a common
knowledge of literary convention, a knowledge the text does
not necessarily uncritically share.

Already, in writing about the disjunctive text, there
is an implicit relationship acknowledged with the text. The
relationship is one that places the text beyond appropri-
ation by critical method and convention. It is a relationship of admission that the text can only be addressed inadequately through common knowledge about literary convention. Perhaps the only way to alter this paradoxical condition of subordination to the disjunctive text and yet of domination over it is to forego the rules of discursive prose which constitute most critical method, and welcome disjunctivity into critical method proper. Common knowledge of literary convention is usually not referred to as the place of "the conjunctive." The latter term does not suggest itself, to me, as the antinomy of the disjunctive. Perhaps, instead, this place from which the discursive critic addresses the disjunctive text is best understood as constituting the rational in poetry. The rational limits of poetic form have perhaps been most cogently articulated by Yvor Winters, whose "analytic survey" that I mentioned previously - of the poetic procedures of his contemporaries - provides working definitions of just what the borders are of the rational in poetry, beyond which lie the works of most of his contemporary "experimental" poets, and of, as I suggest, "experimental" poets today. It is as if contemporary "experimental" poets have taken Winters's catalogue not

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20 By the rational in poetry, I refer to Winters: The poet . . . as a result of the very nature of his medium, must make a rational statement about an experience, and as rationality is a part of the medium, the ultimate value of the poem will depend in a fair measure on the soundness of th rationality: it is possible, of course, to reason badly, just as it is possible to reason well. (Qtd. in Graff, Poetic Statement 162-3)
symptomatically, as listing what is wrong with contemporary poetic methods (as Winters would wish), but as extending and complicating those definitions (e.g. "pseudo-reference"), reinterpreting them as bearers of positive social values, and in the process, historically reinterpreting the self-imposed limits of the rational.

When disjunctivity is understood as referring to the limits of the rational in poetry - which are ultimately limits of conceiving the/a logic of/for the social - then a historical outline of the place from which the text is judged disjunctive can be more readily perceived. For poetry is disjunctive only from the critical point of view that issues out of a specific historical method of exercising discursive prose on poetry.

The "disjunctive," in this normative sense, camouflages the reader's own rational base in discursive prose. One reason why difficulty is experienced is because, in some works, identification by the reader with the text is politicized as an interpellative process, and thereby reflexively addressed as such in the work as part of an effort to articulate the social formalism of everyday life. In summary, what I am saying is that there is an inherent rationality within discursive prose that resists the possible radical lack of rationality within formally innovative poetries. Discursive prose has a logic that is the equivalent to Hegel's "speculative propositions" (e.g.: "The real is the rational") and will in some ways be served
by explicitly reverting to Hegel and this concept, as I suggest in Chapter 7. I am also saying that there is a model of inherent rationality in the poetics of Yvor Winters, and it is one that structurally haunts poetry as a student in the academy.

It is the New Critics' collective symbolic role as the explicators of the contemporary and the "difficult," or "unreadable," in poetry, that is of concern to me here as well. I do not agree that the "unreadable" always necessarily "withdraws from the political and social space in which textuality is realized .... into the idealism or fetishism of the text,"21 as Patrick McGee remarks of James Joyce's writings, or withdraws into subjective mysticism (Winters). I would start rather with the fact that "difficulty," together with "genius," are social constructions that made possible conditions of textuality and subjectivity respectively in the early twentieth century.

Winters' catalogue is in many explicit ways critically responding to the premises and formulations of another catalogue published in the 1930s, Kenneth Burke's "Lexicon Rhetoricae" and correlative essays in Counter-statement. There is, between Burke and Winters, a fundamental difference in their definitions of form. For Burke, form is not exclusively literary; for Winters it is, although they both

21 McGee is quoted in Bob Perelman's The Trouble with Genius, fnnte 1, p. 229.
admit the reader as the important counterpart to the text. Form for Burke is not so much rational (as it is for Winters) as persuasive, rhetorical, and "resides in the fulfilment of an audience’s expectations" (Counter 204). There is an "extrinsic" function for form: reader affect. Privileging the "intrinsic" character of form results in a muted reader-affect function for form and in the dominance of subject matter. There is a perceptual basis to Burke’s dialectical understanding of form, and of the need to reverse "categorical expectancies" (Counter 127) by means of perceptual reversal (the Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky would call this defamiliarization).

Winters distinguishes - from Burke - between "subject matter" and "rhetoric" as aspects of the literary text. Winters describes their relationship as a sort of direct inverse equation: too great attention paid by the writer to subject matter inversely results in less paid to the rhetorical axis of address between writer and reader. It is the vice-versa situation that concerns Winters: when most attention by the writer is paid to the rhetorical axis between reader and writer, subject matter virtually disappears. That is, subject matter itself becomes a mere sequence of rhetorical manoeuvres through which the writer attends to the axis of writer-reader address, and nothing more. Subject matter provides narrative continuity and context, so that when "rhetoric" prevails over "subject matter," the subject matter of the text can for all intents
and purposes be replaced by the reader, "with perfect impunity" (*Counter* 37), with whatever subject matter the reader desires. This potential for "fragmentation" and arbitrariness due to the lack of an internally coherent and unfolding subject matter, or of a continuous context of narration, is in fact activated as a positive method by the contemporary writers Mullen and Andrews.

A symptom, then, of how this inherent limit to discursive prose remains unacknowledged is the current interest by some critics in considering "disjunctive" poetry as "nonsense." However nuanced nonsense might become as a critical term, there seems nevertheless to be an implicit, unacknowledged judgment on the poetry as non rational (i.e., impossible to understand), even when it is embraced wholeheartedly. In other words, "nonsense" as a critical term is rooted as a linear extension from "sense" conceived of rationally; as such, the border defining these two terms, and privileging, in a social hierarchy of structural power relationships, the one over the other, goes unacknowledged and therefore unchanged: poetry will not have social affect unless it is reasoned to have sense by the critic.  

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22 Examples of recent criticism that employ nonsense as a critical term in this problematic way, deploying at the same time a literary history of "nonsense poets," include Leonard Depieveen, Brian McHale, and Marnie Parsons. It should also be noted that Yvor Winters used the term critically as well ("The Anatomy of Nonsense" in *In Defense of Reason*). Cf. Ron Silliman, who has critiqued this bad-faith use of "nonsense" from the perspective of close reading in "Migratory Meaning" (*New Sentence* 109-126), and Charles Bernstein's poem, "A Defence of Poetry."
CHAPTER FOUR:
Foredoomed is foredone?

Recently, in Literary Interest: The Limits of Anti-Formalism, Steven Knapp has argued - although I think at the risk of the obvious seeming extraordinary - that value and evaluation "cannot be reliably grounded in [the] logical analysis" (139) of a text considered as bearing "literary interest." He goes on to say that, equally, "no empirical survey of people's multifarious responses to literary artifacts could hope to confirm" (139) the truthful evaluation and value of a text. An empirical survey of a different group of people at another time might indicate entirely different values for the identical text. That a specific text is considered to have literary interest because of the social value it conveys would be a speculative, never empirical, claim.

The role - roll - of texts through social changes, specifically in their reception, is a foundational, vexing problem of historical materialist analyses as they were initiated for literature and art by Marx.\(^23\) There is a paradoxical overdetermination in the textual condition. On

\(^{23}\) In the Introduction to the seven notebooks which comprise the Grundrisse (written 1857-8, first published 1939-41), Marx writes, in a section on the relationship between material production and artistic development: [T]he difficulty lies not in understanding that the Greek arts and epic are bound up with certain forms of social development. The difficulty is that they still afford us artistic pleasure and that in a certain respect they count as a norm and as an unattainable model. (Marx 246)
one hand, only through cumulative "social evaluations" does literary interest materialize as a social fact in the first place. Social material that is textual in kind depends, for achieving any sort of identity as such, on a further temporal materialization (beyond the event of its production) through perceptual encodings in a reception. On the other hand the identity of a text exceeds the horizon of reception history and is ultimately an inexhaustible interpretive enigma. This is true both when the text in question has virtually no reception history (the event of a specific utterance - "I sleep alone," for example - whose pragmatics of reception is complex for the very reason that it is ideologically saturated and functional, in the way that Bakhtin/Medvedev describes all language-use, yet at the same time momentary, nonrepeatable) as when the text has a long-established history of literary reception and indeed of reproduction through cultures, making it "classic" ("I sleep alone," a line from the poetry of Sappho).

Perhaps, then - given Knapp's sobering reminder - the claim as I want to raise it - namely, that formally

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24 I am referring specifically to how the reception of the work constitutes "social evaluation." M.M. Bakhtin/P.M. Medvedev, from whom I have taken the concept of "social evaluation," use the concept in a more comprehensive and fundamental way than I do, referring to a primary sociohistorical condition of any language use, including poetic: "When the poet selects words, their combination, and their compositional arrangement, he selects, combines, and arranges the evaluations lodged in them as well.... These existed before the poet took them, reevaluated them, renewed them, and gave them new nuances" (The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship 123).
innovative poetry is the bearer of social change - is an evaluation necessarily prone to exaggerate social relevance for its favoured symbolic acts due to the internal logic and self-affirming desire of the claim, of the act of claiming, itself. Social relevance does not exist in the literary text except as the speculative claim being made for it, and to the extent of its institutional (and otherwise) legitimation. It can almost be taken for granted today that an evaluative claim for formal innovation - however exaggerated and "unlegitimated," and whether uttered by poet, reader or critic - cannot blithely or even willfully exempt itself from consequences which might issue once the value of Knapp's tactical stance towards value and evaluation is acknowledged - without losing some of that social value the claim itself is attempting to shore up for formal innovation.

Such a relativistic stance towards value and evaluation is available to Knapp due, in part, to a critical perspective on literary history achieved by intellectual and artistic communities in Canada and the United States since the 1950s. It is impossible to get around the historical fact that the last "push," into the academy, for the value of formally innovative poetry, to be known as "the modernist canon" (highly selective and conservative as their representation of it was) remains for many the movement to
rue as New Criticism.25 Fredric Jameson's passing remark (Postmodern 182), concerning the flight of progressive intellectuals from the English Department, implicitly indicts New Critical dogmas which then prevailed in the discipline.26 But contemporary Anglo-American literary criticism has achieved a compelling momentum as a result of various reassessments of the New Critical legacy (or, more appropriately, enterprise). For Frank Lentricchia, this reassessment began in criticism, in 1957, with Northrop Frye's proto-structuralist Anatomy of Criticism,27 and its argument for a relational positioning of the individual literary work as a member of the class, Literature. The autonomy of the individual work propounded by New Critical doctrine came thereby under question. From another angle - providing ironic commentary on the New Critical "intentional fallacy" (Wimsatt) - the everyday pedagogical reproduction of the institution of literature was disclosed as a product of a New-Critical professionalizing agency, with Richard

25 From the point of view - an increasingly wider and richer one - of the range of poetries produced in the early decades of this century, the New Critics were so highly selective as to be false prophets of the new; indeed, they gave "reactionary" a respectable name.

26 The context in which he makes this remark is in an essay on Walter Benn Michaels (Postmodernism 182). Incidentally, Steven Knapp is best known for the collaborative essay that he wrote with Michaels, "Against Theory."

27 Frye's book is not the first criticism levelled at the group formation called "the New Critics." Frye's book does, however, play a significant role, for Lentricchia (After) and others, in the reassessment of New Critical objectives for poetry and for criticism.
Ohmann's *English in America*, in 1976. The theory and praxis of New Criticism was explored as an ideology in John Fekete's Marxist *The Critical Twilight* (1977). It is not too great a leap of imagination, even in this shorthand, I think, to anticipate how the debates from the 1980s on, over the formational horizon of the canon are themselves related to the loosening hold of New Criticism, first, on defining what the textual object with literary value is, and second, on constituting and explicating that value. Most recently and interestingly, works by Alan Golding (*From Outlaw to Classic*, 1995) and Jed Rasula (*The American Poetry Wax Museum*, 1996) have rediscovered the subject position of the poet in the historical formation of New Criticism. This subject position complicates the critiques of the professionalizing agency said to promulgate New Critical doctrine in the academy. "Poet" is a differentiation of position from "critic" that significantly alters how the history of New Criticism is interpreted. I shall return to this point later on.

The rhetorical address of any contemporary argument for the value of formally innovative poetry must be substantially refigured in light of the historical perspective these reassessments of New Criticism afford, much as this same historical perspective, in its broadest terms, has altered the discourse of value itself. Evidently one lesson gleaned from New Criticism is that values and evaluations do not inhere disinterestedly and immanently in
the close reading's textual object, but continue to inhere in a fully interested manner in the close reading itself, and in its institutional production and reproduction. That is: however "close" a close reading may be, it is as good as a miss. The reader is never close enough to achieve identity with an absolute textual value. The criticism of New Criticism has opened to question formalist analysis itself: whether it can offer adequate means to argue the social value and for the social evaluation of a text. If an argument for formal innovation as social change unfolds at the level of formal analysis, as it might be expected to, then it may be criticized as New Criticism has been, and in the manner I have outlined. That is, it can be argued that the only value of social change which is really being addressed in formal analysis is the value provided by the analysis itself and by the authenticating agency of the particular critic. It is as if: to address the social at the level of form is to fail to address form at the level of the social! The "insight" that formal analysis may provide, is "blind," to use Paul de Man's metaphor, to its own social context. Any argument that value adheres, specifically to formal innovation as a bearer of social change, is therefore defeatable. Any such argument does not have the empirical numbers to prove its point. The arguer cannot assume, furthermore, there is transhistorical, or -cultural, "objectivity" in the evaluative process shared by critic and
reader. This is why Knapp describes in the Introduction to *Literary Interest* how he "expected to write a book that would, for better or worse, lend theoretical confirmation to the mounting historical and institutional case against formalism" (2).

However, once the writing begins, Knapp surprises himself; in the end, he offers a rather astonishing formalism as the conclusive outcome of his book's argument. As the subtitle of Knapp's book, "The Limits of Anti-Formalism," suggests - as do I - there is a "limit" to anti-formalism. It is precisely, for my purposes, a limit that is necessarily established by the text's own materiality regardless of genre - whether the discursive prose of criticism, or poetry. In addition, I do not want to conclude from the critiques of New Criticism that close reading itself, being a formalist practice, can only attempt to articulate absolute value in a "logical analysis," as Knapp would say, of the literary object, and therefore

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28 But were the New Critics interested in arguing a social relevance for formal innovation? Their values were for the autonomous poetic object, and although these values configured the poem in such a way as to apparently remove it from the social text in flux, nevertheless it could be argued that this removal was itself based on a social act of communicating the value of the poetic to a reader. This was the impetus behind the classic tool of New Criticism, *Understanding Poetry*. If the New Critics failed abysmally, it can be conjectured that it was for pedagogical reasons, including an over-zealous rationalization of the poem.

29 I will examine Knapp's formalism more closely in Chapter 7.
should not be performed as a literary-critical method of
discursive prose.

As far as poetry is concerned, there are a number of
conclusions about it that I want to avoid. For now let me
just say the following. All that is textual is material.
Language, oral or written, is textual. Language is,
therefore, material. All that is material is not,
necessarily, textual (or linguistic). It is in determining
an intersectional relationship between concepts of
materiality and textuality that a speculative claim of
literary interest for social value is fixed. A homology
between materiality as the world, res, and textuality as the
word, verba, is the source of the claim for the social in
poetry that I examine here. The more absolute is the
homology, the more its claim has to be that the poetry is
operating beyond the usual logic of the social: in other
words, the logic of representation. That is where the
tensions of its politics lie.

Before inquiring any further into Knapp's "limit," at
this point I think a brief questioning of my language would
be useful. So much of the debate over the relationship
between formally innovative poetry and values of social
change seems inevitably caught in endless Wittgensteinian
word-games, regardless of the scale in which the
relationship is addressed - the close reading of one text,
or the historical assessment of a poetic movement. There is
truth value to two contradictory statements that can be made
concerning this debate. On one hand, it is common sense that, being composed of words, a formally innovative poem cannot physically effect social change. On the other hand, it is equally commonsensical to rhetorically ask, if a formally innovative poem is not socially constituted, then what is it constituted with, and by?

As far as examining my own language goes, I am interested in how to read and write about contemporary formally innovative poetry as social change. But do I mean, then, in the way I have just stated my interest, that formally innovative poetry is, or is like, social change - or is this distinction not important? How do I mean "social change" to carry value? If I am referring to politics and to the political in the way I mean "social change," then why am I doing so implicitly? How, for whom, in contrast to what, do I mean "formally innovative"?

For now, I frame these questions of language as two issues. First is the issue of intentionality and of its representation; the issue, in other words, of agency - mine, the poet's, the text's. Second is the issue of identification with the intention or agency. These traditional issues shall pervade my thesis.

In addition to the ongoing post-New Critical critique of close reading's institutional complicity, by critics who are themselves invested as professors in the institution of literature, there is - to shift the scale of address on the relationship between formal innovation and social change -
the purported fate of the social criticism implied in literary and artistic practices within communities of poets and artists, whose agency has historically been outlawed, while their works, to borrow Alan Golding's title figure, have undergone, to varying degrees of success, trials of canonization. According to Peter Bürger, the two claims made by avant-garde European movements earlier in this century—namely: to foundationally critique the institutions of art and literature themselves, rather than only the previous artistic style that was last successfully reproduced within those institutions; and secondly, to propose an alternative everyday praxis through art, in lieu of the dominant economy's pervasive demands to rationalize everyday life—are no longer possible to make, for historical reasons. As he remarks:

During the time of the historical avant-garde movements, the attempt to do away with the distance between art and life still had all the pathos of historical progressiveness on its side. But in the meantime, the culture industry has brought about the false elimination of the distance between art and life, and this also allows one to recognize the contradictoriness of the avant-gardiste undertaking. (50)

The poetic and artistic anti-institutional force these avant-garde communities and individuals once yielded as social critique in the earlier decades of this century has
apparently dwindled, together with the structural
oppositions - e.g. institutional/anti-institutional - that
such collective agency required to have social force.
Oppositions between the avant-garde and institutional
byt,\textsuperscript{30} between the forces "making it new" and those
opposed (however so construed), between the difficult,
bizarre or nonsensical and the obvious, pleasing or
profound, seem only to create a rhetorically redundant fury
now. Literary critic Gerald Graff notes how with the rise of
consumer culture, the adversarial culture of the avant-garde
no longer has any useful work to do. This is not
because there are no longer any entrenched
ideologies to challenge but because the
revisionary formulas do not challenge them - they
are the entrenched ideologies, or at least they
play into them. (Literature 2-3)
The consumption of adversariality as a commodity of the new,
means, for German poet Hans Enzensberger writing in 1968,
that
even the most extreme contraventions no longer
meet with serious resistance.... This means the
end of an equivocation which has ruled progressive
literature for fifty years: the parallelism or

\textsuperscript{30} "Opposed to ... [the] ... creative urge toward a
transformed future is the stabilizing force of an immutable
present, overlaid, as this present is, by a stagnating
slime, which stifles life in its tight, hard mold. The
Russian name for this element is byt." Roman Jakobson, "On a
Generation that Squandered Its Poets," in Verbal Art, Verbal
Sign, Verbal Time, p. 114.
even equation of formal and social innovation (91; my itals.)

For Graff, Enzensburger and Bürger, the demise of these structural oppositions - which founded the discursive matrix of the early avant-gardes of this century - coincides with the emergence of mass media monopolies and of public relations as dominant forces transforming the public sphere into a virtually privatized sphere of corporations dispensing "public goodwill."31 This consolidation is roughly the historical moment where periodization begins for the postmodern,32 according to Fredric Jameson and David Harvey.33 It is also more specifically the moment of

31 See, in this regard, Herbert Schiller's Culture, Inc., as well as Jurgen Habermas's The Transformation of the Public Sphere.

32 Complicating any effort at periodization are the examples of the commodification of avant-garde techniques at the height of avant-garde movements in this century. Bürger is including this as part of his reference to the contradictoriness of the avant-garde (see p. 15). It is especially evident in, for example, Italian Futurism. Fortunato Depero promoted futurist literary techniques of word distribution over the page as a new means of advertising for the perfume industry. See Depero's manifesto, Futurism and Advertising.

33 Jameson usually summarizes this moment's inception with reference to the rise of modes of cultural reproduction (film, video, television, etc.). In these summaries, Jameson is fond of citing the Marxist-inflected analysis of the culture of the spectacle that is provided by the itinerant scholar and founder of the Situationist group, Guy Debord, in the 1967 book, Society of the Spectacle. For example, see Jameson's essay by the same name as the book, Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capital. David Harvey, on the other hand, posits the cultural moment of the postmodern as occurring in an exemplary fashion, in Britain at least, in a 1974 novel by Jonathan Raban. See Harvey's The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change.
articulation, in writings by David Antin and Frank Davey,\textsuperscript{34} of a utopic version of the postmodern as alternative and antidote to the absolutist values of modernism.

Knapp's differentiation between literary "interest" and "interpretation" can be viewed as a response, I think, both to the perceived cooptation of the avant-garde and to the re-evaluation (still underway) of the role of value (e.g. for the formally innovative) in the social reproduction of the institutional values of literature. "Literary interest" Knapp defines, in as purposefully "neutral" a language as possible - and at the risk, this time, of the extraordinary seeming ordinary - as "an interest in representations that construct new compositions of thought and value out of pre-existing relations between objects and the responses associated with them" (97). An accurate "interpretation" performed by a professional critic is not the legitimating prerequisite to a reader affirming "interest" in a text. So that, for Knapp, the "right conclusion to draw about the ethical and political benefits of literary interest in general and as such seems to be ... that there may not be any" (98). There seems to be a consensus on this point.

\textsuperscript{34} See, for example, Antin's important 1972 essay, "Modernism and Postmodernism: Approaching the Present in American Poetry," which appeared in the first issue of a journal, \textit{Boundary 2}, that would devote itself to elaborating such a liberatory view of the postmodern. For Frank Davey, see especially the introduction to his important 1974 Canadian literary survey of writing since 1960, \textit{From There to Here}. 
amongst literary critics intent on practicing a broad-based materialist sociocriticism. It is, for instance, a premise of poet-critic turned cultural critic Frank Davey's recent essay collection, *Canadian Literary Power*. Davey's own trajectory provides a textbook example of a formally innovative poet who initially defines himself within a community-based poetics (*Tish* magazine of Vancouver), and then graduates as it were, to become critic of contemporary culture at large, with books on former Progressive Conservative Prime Minister, Kim Campbell, and mass murderer's wife, Karla Homolka. "Literary texts," Davey states as one of the premises of his book, "are inseparable from general textuality.... [T]he designation ['literary'] points to no intrinsic quality [of a specific kind of text] but instead to a social process" (4). The literary text is understood sociologically. A text achieves literary value once the "literary interest" expressed in it by individual writers and readers achieves a critical mass of measurable "cultural capital," as Pierre Bourdieu would say. As a social process, the text's interest is produced (and reproduced) in contexts of reception. And processes of textual transmission, circulation and distribution do not

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35 In Bourdieu's "general science of the economy of practices," cultural capital takes three forms. It is, first, embodied in "long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body," second, objectified in cultural goods including books, and third, institutionalized for reproduction. See "The Forms of Capital."
pick up texts without supporting institutional networks of organized, interested labour.

Davey makes "the poetic" co-terminous with "social process" by invoking "poetry" in as inclusive a manner as possible. "Poetry" is defined sociologically as whatever enough people say poetry is, poetry is. From this point of view, "the poetic" does not necessarily require Poetry - a teachable tradition, in other words, based on established literary conventions and themes. Linguistic devices associated with the poetic already exist in the languages of society, employed to various ends - in for example advertising, newspaper headlines, political slogans, etc. Next to these popular usages, formally innovative poetry - however much it may incorporate these already-aestheticized codes of language usage - is only one "kind" of poetry, and is not, for the most part, the focus of Davey's criticism. Poetry's all-inclusive definition discloses for study a range of hitherto overlooked texts to literary critics.

36 This in itself is a sign, I think, of decreasing cultural capital for the formally innovative. More importantly than such market-oriented rumours of which texts have the cultural capital "stocks," however, is the broader question of how the formally innovative then gets separated from values of progressive social change.

Davey's Ph.D. dissertation was on Charles Olson. Since then he has focused less on formally innovative poets and more on the conditions of critical and social reception of Canadian poets regardless of formal technique.

37 For a good example, see Maria Damon's essay, "Tell Them About Us," and also her chapter on Bob Kaufman in On the Dark Side of the Street.
It would appear that both within the institution of literature and without - as the social manifestation of an avant-garde - arguments for how the formally innovative is itself a harbinger of social change seem foreclosed. The "social" in formally innovative poetry is transformed into the "sociological" for critical discourse. During this transfer, as I hope to show, the formally innovative is equated with values that a sociological approach to poetry explicitly opposes.
CHAPTER FIVE:
Speculative

It seems to me that the contemporary distribution of literary power (Davey’s term), or capital (Bourdieu’s), within the sociocultural field is such that the foreclosure scenario I have described in Chapter 4 operates by significant "truth effects" within it. These truth effects are made possible due, I think, to an implicit analogy that is being made between the concept of representation as it is used in art and literature, and as it is used in politics. In this chapter I speculate that a power/capital distribution implied by the arguments outlined in Chapter 4 might be expected to receive formally innovative poetry in at least two ways. The first way is simply to fetishize "the formally innovative" as a conceptual label, to fetishize poetry purely as "the new," in other words, as aesthetic change, the poetry is separated from any critical understanding which might provide a contextual horizon of broader social change.

A second way that the formally innovative might be received, within a power/capital distribution of this sort, is not at all. Glossed but not read, the formally innovative will appear within the politics of representation as the art of a special interest group, whose subject position is, structurally, the historically dominant one - although admittedly existing at its vanguard margins. "Glossed but not read" - and for partly good reason, I think, if "the
formally innovative" equated with "the new" allows a critic to focus on aesthetic questions at the expense of social questions concerning not only the institutional reproduction of aesthetic values, but the reproduction of social values in society at large. The assumption behind the poetry's dismissal in the second scenario, then, is that the poetry bears no literary interest for the context of the contemporary politics of literary power and social change. The contextual example provided by - and of - Frank Davey is useful in this regard.

In the preface to Canadian Literary Power, Davey sketches "a major ideological shift" that he says occurs in Canadian culture and society roughly between 1973 and 1975. He contrasts the social context of literary practitioners after this ideological shift with the context which informs his own generation's coming-to-literary-power in, as the icon of Canadian cultural nationalism, Pierre Berton, says, the "cool, crazy, committed world of the sixties."38 This shift, asserts Davey, is

based on conflictual rather than utopian models of society.... [and proclaims] not social revolution, but endless political struggle in which both individuals and special 'interests' - women, blacks, gays, lesbians, Asians, small business people, doctors, truckers - would have to

38 Title of a collection of television interviews, published in 1966 by McLelland and Stewart, from The Pierre Berton Show, broadcast on CBC.
separately seek 'rights' that the general polity would be at best diffident about obtaining for them. A new discourse of 'rights' and 'equality' was ... constructed ... in which the 1960s understanding of equality as a kind of 'oneness' ... was replaced by equality as a condition of being 'separate but equal'. (18)

Davey dedicates his book to this new context of reception, which he characterizes as a "polylogue of strong, locally produced institutions, discourses, and practices" ("Preface," n.p.) that have emerged as a result of this major ideological shift. Formally innovative poetry, in this context, is a community organized as such around its "'separate but equal'" practice, and enters the politics of representation, to the extent that it does so, as a special interest with its own networks and scenes, potentially in order to vie for representative governance within that class.

39 There is a steady rhetorical attempt at achieving a neutrality of tone in Davey's book that curiously does not appear in his diction and turns-of-phrase when isolated in a quotation such as the one I provide. "'Separate but equal'," even if it is in quotes, is not a neutral descriptive phrasing, standing as a recognizable English translation of the Afrikaans word, apartheid. The apparent neutrality of the term "special 'interests'" also seems oddly jarring, given its usage in politics to denote, often in a disparaging way, the politically organized efforts at articulating group over individual rights.

40 Davey affirms these diverse communities, with their own specific scales of address, as aspects of a "national ... literary community." It is a neutrality of argument this time, I think, by which Davey evades discussion of exactly what he is proposing, which is a sort of decentred nationalism.
of symbolic capital that is regulatable as the canon. That such poetry is community-based is in fact one of its strengths. What I am suggesting, however, is that when politics is construed only within such a frame, the poetry itself is ignored to become, instead, the alibi ("cultural phenomenon") for a sociological method of analysis.41

The "ideological shift" can be thought of as part of the struggle to further the democratic franchise - inside the cultural sphere and on its economic base - to those whose roles in that sphere have been marginal for systemic reasons not of their own choosing. At work is a double articulation. These are values for social change in the cultural domain that articulate, as well, values for the machinery of traditional democracy and the basic concept that we have come to associate with it: representation.42

The effect of this is a perception that what "political radicality" there may be in the nonrepresentational is either dated, or dissimulating. Even the term, "nonrepresentational," is derogatory (although frequently used to describe vanguard work in language) when considered literally as designating that which is not, in the political sense, representational. It can be readily argued that such tension, or fundamental incongruity which is disclosed here,

41 "Flaubert" is the exemplary abili for Bourdieu's theory of the "cultural field," for example. See "Flaubert's Point of View" (The Field of Cultural Production 192-211).

42 As Hanna Pitkin shows, the concept of representation was not always associated with democracy. See her Representation.
between the radically political and the radically aesthetic holds to be the case throughout this century. In the 1930s, class was the most forcefully productive (and conflicted) axis of representational politics in art; since at least the 1960s, gender; since at least the 1980s, race. Throughout this schematic history there is an increasing involvement of the academy in the production of democratising values. Critical reappraisals of the relations between politically committed and formally innovative poets have gone hand-in-hand with overhauling the literary canon. There has been a growing interest amongst literary critics to analyse their own complicity in reproducing a tension which discloses itself once the canon is enlarged to accommodate politically committed poetry that until now has been excluded.

In the older oppositional dynamics of the avant-garde (out of which the New Critics consolidated their institutional power, while radically revising and narrowing the scope of what "avant-garde" referred to), formally innovative poetries claim to speak for more than "constituency" self-interest, and as more than the aesthetic fly-paper of literary interest. But according to my hypothetical scenario, formally innovative poetry today is perceived as, at best, pursuing an outdated utopic dream of total social critique, while being mapped, and its reception

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43 The New Critics, as both critics and poets, published with commercial presses. Academic publication was very rare, whereas now it is the norm. Jed Rasula develops this point in The American Wax Museum.
contained, as a special interest. It is, specifically, the special interest of the European-trained or oriented, white, heterosexual male petty bourgeois: the dominant subject (admittedly vanguardist).

I am seemingly put in the awkward position, in other words, of speculating beyond the limits of interpretation (to invoke Knapp's distinction referred to earlier) on how formally innovative poetry is socially engaged, despite at least two prevailing frames of reception set out to entrap my efforts in advance: as either formally innovative and socially redundant, or, formally innovative, socially redundant and also an ideological screen of a dominant subject position.

Poet and critic Peter Middleton has recently indicated, in "Who am I to speak? The politics of subjectivity in recent British poetry," that the critical mapping of British poetic schools on to race, gender and class representations is far from one-to-one. Nor does such a correspondence hold true for American or Canadian poetic communities. Insofar as various poetic communities are classifiable in academic shorthand as being of "the formally innovative school," there is an equal variety of ascriptive markers bearing various ontological "weights" within current representational politics amongst poetry communities of which the poets I look at here are members. A point I bring up later is that one mark of the formally innovative - though by no means a constant or dominant mark - is not
necessarily to limit textuality to interpreting a priori ontological ascriptions by means of the first person pronoun (for example) — and therein lies the dilemma of its politics.

But it is when formally innovative poetics is considered, however misconstruedly, as constituting the cultural stake of a representative dominant subject (white, male, etc.) that the most simple (and, therefore, most damaging) yet most complicated scenario emerges. The formally innovative poetries I am interested in have contested the typification of "representative subject" (Emerson's "representative man"), and as a fundamental premise of their relationship to textuality (viz. critique of transparent agency). In terms of the scenario, it becomes "simple" when the motivation attributed to formal innovation is speculative desire to exceed the representational parameters and status of special interest, a motivation

44 There is ample evidence, however, the further back in the literary history of this century one goes, that the majority of vanguard poets occupy the margins of the dominant subject. I would speculate that the margin of a dominant subject was received as the social margins of society itself due to the enormous literary interest that their works held, and also due, as Peter Burger has argued, to the relative homogeneity of the receptive field — the bourgeois class. The magazines, anthologies and symposia compiled and edited by Jerome Rothenberg since the 1960s, however, in addition to his notion of ethnopoetics, can from this point of view be regarded as a series of efforts to bridge this gap between the vanguard of the dominant subject position, and the social margins of Western culture. See, for example, his anthology *Technicians of the Sacred*, or his magazine, co-edited with Dennis Tedlock, *Alcheringa: Ethnopoetics, "A First Magazine of the World's Tribal Poetries."
explainable - more exactly, psychoanalysable, since the concept involved here is subjectivity - as an effort to retain a vestigial dominant function as the repository of (once universal) values. If this were the case, then a critique of the formally innovative could segue with the longstanding critique of the speculative as incorrigible idealism. A reading of how this might work could be had by examining a famous letter John Keats wrote to his brothers (dated December 1817):\textsuperscript{45}

> The excellence of every Art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate.... [Otherwise,] we have unpleasantness without any momentous depth of speculation excited, \textit{in which to bury ... repulsiveness}. (Letters 42; my itals.)

It is here that the scenario also becomes complicated, for it marks, very explicitly in the terms set out in Keats's letter (the tension between high and low, spirit and death, etc., revealed in Keats's phrase: "unpleasantness without any momentous depth of speculation excited"), the conceptual opposition between the speculative (i.e. subjective - or Imaginary in a Lacanian reading) and the material, or real (i.e. objective, which is aligned with Symbolic and Real for Lacan).\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{45} This letter is quoted by Knapp in his book. Although he does not explicitly focus on this issue, it is implicit, I believe, in his argument.

\textsuperscript{46} Equally arguable, however, is that Keats feels repulsiveness towards his own subject position, and this leads him to privilege the speculative - not as escape, but
the politics of formally innovative poetry - as outlined in the two criticisms which result from the limited options available to such poetry on entering the reading environment provided by the academy - overlaps and parallels, philosophically, the debate over speculative - Hegelian versus materialist - Marxian - approaches to the real. For materiality is not exclusively representational. Likewise, the speculative is not necessarily "formalist" - a false consciousness that prevents grasping and representing the subject's material conditions. In fact, I hope to show that the speculative is itself a value inherent to formally innovative poetry, one that, moreover, puts into question the traditional conceptual division between idealism (i.e. speculation) and materialism by engaging in a self-reflexive dialectic of speculation on its own text-as-material production. The speculative marks a limitation, but also a vital necessity of my thesis. The specific value I attribute to formally innovative poetry is speculative, and the manner in which I attribute such value is speculative. Speculation is a limitation, because it suggests an investment in the philosophical and literary tradition preceding the historical-materialist interpretations of the literary initiated by Marx when he reversed Hegel's categories. As Enzensburger concludes his 1962 essay, "Poetry and Politics":

remedy.
If we want to gain a deeper insight into what binds poetry to politics and what divorces the two from each other, we cannot hope for proof, nor can we proceed without risk; in other words, we are dependent on speculations. (81)

If there is any literary value arguable for a formally innovative poetics, it will exist at the level of the specific in an intensive language, not at the level of the general in a neutral language ("neutral" precisely in order to discursively accommodate differences of value) to which Knapp as well as Davey and other cultural studies-oriented critics aspire. The specific that I am interested in, insofar as it is exemplary, is one "[h]oping that poetry / is the politics that stays politics." 47 The concept of the exemplary is useful for the reason that, as Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben explains, it escapes the antimony of the universal [the general, in my vocabulary] and the particular [specific].... [The example] is one singularity among others, which, however, stands for each of them and serves for all. On one hand, every example is treated in effect as a real particular case; but on the other, it remains understood that it cannot serve in its particularity. Neither particular nor universal, the example is a

47 From Steve McCaffery's poem, "Teachable Texts" (The Cheat of Words 102).
singular object that presents itself as such, that shows its singularity. (10)

The lines of poetry I have quoted above represent the sort of poetic value I am interested in as an example of the formally innovative. That which "stays political" stays contestable, is subject - as well as subjects itself - to the processes of change while outcomes remain unknown, the intersubjective and the relational where terms can claim only contingent definition. I read McCaffery's lines as variants of the often-cited opening lines to Charles Olson's poem, "The Kingfishers": "What does not change / is the will to change." Change remains an inherent value of the formally innovative poem and accounts for its ambiguity. I would like to examine how the change in some formally innovative poetry "stays" political by signalling social, not simply aesthetic, change - by assessing, articulating, commenting, accepting, critiquing, resisting social change. My literary interest lies in the direction of how to read formally innovative poetry that is difficult to read because it is politicized as a "politics that stays politics."

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48 Charles Olson, from "The Kingfishers" (Collected 86).
CHAPTER SIX:
Two limits of representational politics in poetry

A poetics that is at once formalist and open to the social - a social-formalist poetics - would suggest to me, and I do here, that there are formal limits defining the conditions of possibility for representational politics in poetry. These conditions equally hold for classicist or romanticist poetic forms. The extent to which a representational politics is ever activated by a poetic form is a matter of the scale of address and of the scale of the social in the poem. I will use the example of Yvor Winters as classicist poet and as a counterpart to Allen Ginsberg as romanticist poet.

The first of at least two limits determining representational politics in poetry concerns how agency is situated in the poetic. Representational politics is achieved by conflating poetry with the agency of the poet. A second limit defining the conditions of possibility for representational politics in poetry is direct statement. I treat direct statement as a literary device, and also, in philosophical and legal senses, as an elementary unit of language.

In Chapter 4, I noted how the professionalizing agency as well as sociological profile of "the critic" is elided by the practice known as New Criticism. In addition, the simulation of "life" in the "art" of the mass media renders further heroic efforts on the part of claims for the agency
of the poet to bridge art and life — in line with the role of a vanguard like Surrealism — redundant. Both of these failures of critical and poetic agency are constructively addressed by numerous New American poets, notably Allen Ginsberg. The agency of Ginsberg is unencumbered by official institutional affiliations. His is, furthermore, a fully mediatized, yet subversive agency. Finally, Ginsberg introduces a practical level of discussion to politics — the need for intelligent, imaginative interventions on local issues.49

"Yvor Winters" may strike the reader, familiar with his name, as an anachronous invocation for a thesis concerned with formal poetic innovation as — or, even, and — social change. Winters's views on contemporaneous formally innovative poets of the early decades of this century were favourable at first, but they became notoriously critical after the mid 1920s.50 These "later" views were in fact formative for Winters as critic, shaping the poetics of formal traditionalism he is known for today. Winters's mature poetics does not condone poetic innovation, nor an argument for its extension into, let alone as, politics.

49 See, for example, Ginsberg's counsel to a class of undergraduate students at Kent State, which he visited just after the student shootings there by state police (Ginsberg Live 195-212).

50 Winters's break with his earlier views on poetics is apparent in his poetry as well. There is a shift from free verse to inherited forms such as the quatrain.
Such a view might be expected from a poet who came to espouse a classicist sense of unchanging form. Politics means change understood as historical. Insofar as poetry has anything to do with politics, a reasonable assumption is it must embody change, and demonstrate temporal, relational contingency somehow — and in a total way, which ultimately means formally. In other words, if Winters is classicist, he is, born in 1900, a reluctant modernist. Indeed, Winters calls himself, in a complimentary way, "reactionary." Compared to poetry I might imagine fitting totally (i.e. formally) within the world as political, Winters's sense of form is — if classicist, in the way I have described — reactionary. But he, from what we know of him, is not reactionary in the way that word is understood today, and neither is his conservative poetry.51

Winters states poetry has deteriorated since the eighteenth century. In Subjective Agency Charles Altieri provides an historical frame appropriate for considering Winters's sense of form. Enlightenment thinking — structuring ours still — can't understand concepts of expressivity, process and subjective agency, according to Altieri. These are at least one imaginable set of concepts poetry needs in order to become indistinguishable from and

51 Winters calls Eliot an illusory reactionary. See his essay on Eliot in The Anatomy of Nonsense. It is a mark of how far apart his poetry is from his politics that when he uses the term, "reactionary," to describe his poetic views, he is not, to my knowledge, thinking of himself as politically reactionary as we understand the term now.
to actively address its political moment. If such concepts haven't, historically, found much of a footing in discursive prose, as Altieri (following Deleuze) argues they haven't, then can they exist at all in poetry? This is a fundamental question. Winters would answer, I think, they cannot. Put another way: What is the status of that which is beyond the concept? Winters's answer would be: "There is no beyond conceivable beyond the concept." For this reason and in this way, Winters's sense of form is classicist, especially contrasted with Romanticist forms, which embody form in/as process. It is virtually tautological to say the classicist sense of form cuts across historical periods. When Louis Dudek remarks how Byron "was the last poet (except in Canada, some up to 1860) / who defended the rational design,"52 he overlooks Yvor Winters.53

From a Modern Language Association articles search, I find two examples of how Winters is being critically received today. The first example: Richard Moore's (terrible) "Classicism in Poetry: Shakespeare, Aristotle, and Yvor Winters" (1991). The essay title alone indicates the ease with which Winters has been critically assimilated within the terms of a debate of mutually exclusive opposition that once urgently compelled decisive allegiance from a poet - to tend toward either a Romanticist or a classicist

53 Dudek also overlooks himself.
sense of form. The second example is a 1993 interview of Donald Hall, entitled "Rocks and Whirlpools: Archibald MacLeish and Yvor Winters." The name alone, Donald Hall, as editor of *New Poets of England and America*, signals a positively valued formally conservative affiliation. In contrast to Hall's and Moore's classicism, the Romanticist tendency in poetics appears to have championed progressivist social change. Abundant evidence of this can be found in *The Poetics of the New American Poetry*, edited by Donald Allen and Warren Tallman, published in 1973. This anthology is the companion volume, admittedly thirteen years late, to Donald Allen's groundbreaking 1960 anthology of formally innovative poetry, *The New American Poetry*, to which the aforementioned Hall anthology (second edition published 1962) was in direct reaction.

One reason frequently given to account for the perception that a Romanticist poetics affirms progressivist social change, and that conversely a Classicist sense of form does not, is - in Robert Pack's midst-of-the-fray cynical assessment of 1962 - the substitution of "the personality of the poet" for the poem. To Pack, the poet affirms social change, despite exactly what, or how, the poem affirms. Pack is alluding to the media attention received by the Beat poets, particularly Allen Ginsberg by *Time*. He is also implying that by any classicist measure what Ginsberg writes is not poetry, that poetry is not the source of his media attention despite Ginsberg's politics of
social change. Situating poetry as a social object within a mass cultural field, which Time can so easily do (however frivolously) indirectly exposes an ideological rift between Ginsberg and Pack in their understanding of what the social function of poetry and poet are. The ideological rift concerns the social status and the scale of address of the poem. Pack's comment regarding the substitution of the personality of the poet for the poem expresses betrayal. Classicism is meant to uphold values located, by definition, in the status quo that is presumably reproduced by the mass media. Mass media attention to the Beats betrays classicism.

Pack is rhetorically saying that to articulate a social function for poetry inevitably requires substituting poet for poem. Pack advises to examine the poem instead of the poet. It is instructive to do so. Both romanticist and classicist poetries tend to address the social by conflating agent and agency. That is, both Beat and academic poets retain, for the most part, identical views on how agency is manifested in the poem. It is not only the media, as Pack complains, substituting "the personality of the poet" for the poem. The academic poet would do the same, if s/he were inclined to value agency. The difference between Beat and academic poets lies, not in how they conceive of agency inflecting poetry, but in how they value the inflections. For Beats such as Ginsberg, it is an understatement to say that personalized agency is positively valued. For academic poets such as Pack, agency is not formally valued at all,
since the poem by definition exists for Pack asocially in
the ideal impersonal space of the reader's mind. But the
example of Winters proves Pack's opposition to agency to be
wrongheaded.

Winters's break with the formal innovation of his
contemporaries coincides with his entry into the Ph.D.
programme at Stanford in 1928, where he remains as professor
for the rest of his life. It is often forgotten that many of
the New Critics, like Winters, were first and foremost
poets. They subordinated the agency of their practice as
poets to the requirements of their academic careers.
Collectively they succeeded to such a degree that for Frank
Lentricchia, a significant critic of New Criticism, there is
no need to address or find a place for the role of poet in
discussing issues of, as the title of his book indicates,
_Criticism and Social Change_. Lentricchia focuses
exclusively on the social role of the academic critic.
However, Winters's poetics was sufficiently idiosyncratic to

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54 Just as Ginsberg's personality is mediated by the
media at the level of the formal properties of the poem,
there is a personality mediated by the academy through the
formal properties of the poem envisaged by followers of the
new critics such as Pack that is so abstracted from "the
social" as to rhetorically appear a-social (which for Brecht
is worse than being anti-social). This can be noticed in the
language of the following arcane commentary by Pack:
The school of criticism that sees the work of art as
the sum of the social or psychological forces acting
upon the artist (failing to regard the artist as a
creator, the inventor of his own life, and, in part,
his own age) has inevitably led to the regarding of the
artist and his work as social phenomena, as cultural
fact.... In other words, the poet and his work are
merely of social interest. (Pack 178)
have not been anthologized in either the 1957 or the 1962 editions of *New Poets of England and America*, nor to have appeared in *Understanding Poetry*. Winters is, in other words, only partially assimilable as a Classicist in the oppositional debate with the Romanticists. Although Winters is toted as a major New Critical theorist, his poetics departs from the New Critical doctrine concerning "intentional fallacy." Form, for Winters, "is nothing more nor less than the act of evaluating and shaping (that is, controlling) a given experience" (*Primitivism* 5). Form "is not something outside the poet, something 'aesthetic', and superimposed upon his moral content; it is essentially a part, in fact it may be the decisive part, of the moral content" (6). The "morality of poetry" Winters argues for is achieved through an approximation of poet and poem: "One feels, whether rightly or wrongly, a correlation between the control evinced within a poem and the control within the poet behind it" (6). This approximation fails when the poet fails to make an adequate statement about her/his experience, experience being, for Winters, an inherently moral subject matter.56

55 For example, Jed Rasula considers Winters, together with Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom, as comprising "arguably the theoretical core of New Criticism" (*American 72*).

56 Winters cites the example of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester who "displays a mastery of an extremely narrow range of experience ... [such that] ... his moral brutality falls almost wholly in those regions ... with which his poetry fails to deal or with which it deals badly" (*Primitive 9*).
But for Winters, the status of the social and the scale of address in the poem is circumscribed by the privileging of individual, private experience. "Individual experience" in Ginsberg's "Wichita Vortex Sutra" (to which I return momentarily) is heavily mediated by the media itself. Formally, the persona in the poem anticipates media attention to Ginsberg as poet.57

Prior to examining Ginsberg's poem, I want to briefly consider the limits of representational politics in poetry in historical terms.

Marjorie Perloff argues that in American twentieth-century formally innovative poetics there is a shift away from the authenticating image, or the "direct treatment of the thing" (one of Pound's directives for Imagism in 1912) towards the affirmation, instead, of "direct statement." This shift away from the image by 1962 (in late William Carlos Williams and George Oppen) Perloff argues is in critical response to the risen dominance of the commodified image of the mass media - to "the actual production and dissemination of images in our culture" (57).

There is a historical tension between "image" and "direct statement." For Perloff, "the assumption that an image-free lyric would necessarily be the lyric of 'direct statement' has haunted our poetry from the late eighteenth century to the present" (57). This tension is that of a

57 To analyse this point further, it might be useful to begin with Yuri Lotman's essay, "The Audience in the Text."
split between showing and telling functions of language. In Imagism, the poem shows the object, lets the object 'speak for itself'. A "direct statement," on the other hand, need not embody the object, but instead can tell you about it, or in fact substitute the rhetorical aspect of its telling for the object itself. In the terms of showing and telling, then, the tension that Perloff picks up on (as she notes the absence of the image as occurring in some poetries at a time when the presence of the image in society is pervasive) has deeper historical roots. Showing and telling constructs, for Foucault, "the oldest oppositions of our alphabetical civilization: to show and to name; to shape and to say; to reproduce and to articulate; to imitate and to signify; to look and to read" (This 21).

Herbert Schneidau, in his study of Ezra Pound, provides evidence that - to use the terms I've suggested here - for Pound the manner in which the relation between showing and telling sorted itself out in poetics was not initially clear to him. Prior to co-writing, in 1912 with Hilda Doolittle and Richard Aldington, the three principles of Imagism, Pound vascillated between affirming and denying the importance of the concept of "rhetoric" for Imagism, and for the place of the image in what he later describe positively as the "prose tradition" in verse. In the end Pound rejected "rhetoric" as constituting the "rhetorical din" of

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58 "The Prose Tradition in Verse" was published in Poetry, edited by Harriet Monroe, in 1914.
nineteenth century poetry, in order to assert value for "direct treatment of the thing." Pound achieved, of course, another mode of rhetoric, founded on values for "stripping words of associations to get a precise meaning" (Schneidau 16), so that the "prose tradition" existed along the same prescriptive axis of poetics as Flaubert's search for the mot juste.

Schneidau interestingly points out that the reason for Pound's vacillation over the status of rhetoric for his Imagist manifesto was that the image per se was not the sole nor perhaps even central feature of the thoughts on poetics that Pound was entertaining in the years prior to the publication of the Imagist manifesto. Notions of "common speech" and of "presentation" (as, for example, in the desire to present the American vernacular in poetry) were equally important to Pound.

In other words, the troubled relationship between showing and telling functions of language, and at Pound's vacillation on what their exact ratio should be for poetry, is as follows. The fundamental problem Imagism was struggling with turned on the relationship of poetry to metacommunity. An unresolved understanding of the relationship of poetry to the function of metacommunity in language resulted in equivocation over whether it was rhetoric or direct statement that was the best route to

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59 This is one of the three Imagist principles. See Pound's "A Retrospect."
asserting legitimacy for poetry - to asserting, in other words, literariness. The ambiguity of terms is apparent in Ford Madox Hueffer's contradictory assertions: "Never state: present.... Never comment: state" (qtd. in Schneidau 54). Such confusion is, I suggest, the reason why image, presentation and common speech were all potentially viable affirmations of intrinsic value for the poetic. It can be argued that every presentation, even of an image, states. The distinction lies in the kind of statement made.

Robin Blaser emphasizes how the "prose tradition" comprised for Pound an "insistence . . . that form follows function" and "tests the function of words in society" (Blaser 23). Pound says that is a "practice of speech common to good prose and good verse alike" (qtd. in Blaser 23).

For Winters, a poem is primarily a statement, albeit an unparaphrasable one, about experience.

Both of these limits construct a representational politics for the poem, and to an extent define the genre of the political poem. They are limits as much struggled against, as constituting the political in the poem. This can be seen in "Wichita Vortex Sutra," by Allen Ginsberg. Literary critic and poet Don Byrd has recently emphasized how the conditions of possibility of the radical poetries of the 1970s are the outcome of a profound social trauma. The 70s is the decade when certain formally innovative poets began to publish, who became known a decade later as associated with Language Writing. Byrd underscores the
extent of the social displacement between New American poetries, which became known as such in the 1960s, and Language Writing. Written in early 1966, "Wichita Vortex Sutra" can be productively read as anticipating some of the concerns, at the level of language, that were later to surface in the writing of the 1970s. It is a time-based poem written as part of a travel-log of the poet's journey through American midwest towns (including Wichita, Kansas) during the beginnings of American military involvement in Vietnam. Language is a theme of the poem. The poem includes, on the one hand, the false language of Pentagon reports of the war, of politicians, of newspapers and television, of advertising. There is, on the other hand, the hope for a truthful language of the body, of desires and hopes; the poet is "almost in tears to know / how to speak the right language" (Collected 404).

The prophetic bard-persona of the poem describes for the reader a traumatic breach between two experiences: immersion in the body's sensorium of direct experience, and, ultimate coercion by that which is beyond direct experience: the abstractions of an indirect reality. On the one hand: the idyllic landscapes of rural prairie towns, such as Wichita or Watertown, the poet directly perceives. On the other hand: the nation-state of which the poet is citizen, whose government conscripts the youth of the country for war.

Passing through Watertown. . .
mid-Sunday afternoon's silence
[in town
under frost-grey sky
that covers the horizon -
That the rest of the earth is unseen,
an outer universe invisible,
Unknown except thru
language
airprint
magic
[images

(Collected 404)

A simultaneously concrete and abstract experience is possible because of language itself and mass media technology ("airprint," "magic images"). Ginsberg's rhetorical strategy in the poem fits the description that Frank Davey gives of the politics of the 1960s as characterizable by the assertion of transcendent social value for unity. One of Ginsberg's messages is that the people of North Vietnam are no different from the people in Kansas: "secret / heart the same / in Waterville as Saigon one human form" (404).

Ginsberg fancifully describes a language-battle between good and evil magicians. On the one side, there is the rhetoric of the Pentagon: "communism is a 9 letter word / used by inferior magicians.... working with the wrong
equations" (401). On the other side, carrying the theme of the poem - that language is distorted yet one of the sole means of knowing more than sense data will allow us to know - issues from a refrain, "language language," as prophecy. In part, Ginsberg's "right language" is mantric. It can become mantric even on the radio as a pop song -- the lyrics, for instance, of Bob Dylan (409). By virtue of the sheer utopic fact of a self-declaration, which functions to valorize the agency of the bard-as-prophet:

I lift my voice aloud,

make Mantra of American language now,

I here declare the end of the War! (407)

However, the utterance "I here declare the end of the War!" fails as a performative speech act because there is no authority bringing it to pass. Ginsberg is a poet, after all, not the President. In this utterance, the limit of direct statement is reached, and is superposed upon the limit of agency (conflated with the poet as agent). Here the social function of language is conceived as ritualistic as a mantra. By staying true to this function, political change will come about.

These two limits, which can be engaged as Ginsberg has shown, come together as a rather bald critique of the political use-value of poetic representation by John Dolan:

Poetry has evolved as an art form in which literal truth of narrative has been basic; and the literal truth that poets, in desperation [due to the rise
of positivist science], have turned to has been
the safe, private, uncontradictable truth of the
mental event, often juxtaposed for pathos with a
public occasion ... [and] ... the paradigmatic
occasion for English-language poetry has always
been war. (174-175)

This is a legal limit and understanding of political
engagement. Defamatory libel, as it's called in the Canadian
Criminal Code, would be one instance of its form as a legal
limit. 60

What is remarkable about Ginsberg's poem is the extent
to which the persona in it is constituted by political
events in the public sphere. As Michael Davidson has pointed
out, in The San Francisco Renaissance, "the Beat generation
was largely the projection of the media, albeit aided by its
participants" (61). The media projection was not altogether
favourable. The Beats were equally villified by the left
(The Nation) as by the centre-right (Life). Davidson draws a
link from the scapegoatism of the McCarthy lists to the
caricature of the bohemian Beat lifestyle sometimes invoked
on sitcoms and in newspaper cartoons in the 1960s. On the
other hand, "[t]he return of, and to, the body in poetry
arises out of a more profound need to rejoin the larger body
of the world" (81). "During the 1960s he [Ginsberg] became a

60 See, for example, The Globe & Mail editorial, "Can
words be a crime?" concerning the legality of a protester's
poster directed toward a Crown decision concerning charges
of manslaughter brought against Kingston Penitentiary guards
in the case of Robert Gentles.
sort of populist chronicler, providing, as he titled one book, 'planet news' of contemporary history: the Chicago convention, the Human Be-In, various antiwar marches, May Day in Prague" (85). Davidson notes, however, how Ginsberg "has suffered the same difficulty as all romantic poets - that of participating so much in the world that he often lacks a vantage from which to speak" (85). This lack-of-vantage results, in part, from the two limits constituting representational politics in poetry. The lack-of-vantage reveals itself when the poet attempts to exceed these limits on the terms of representational politics, as Ginsberg attempts to do in his declaration for the end of the Vietnam war.

The criticism of not only the means of inducing reader-identification (in this case, the persona of a prophetic bard), but of the representational system itself (of agency, will, etc), with its underpinnings in liberalism and its historical inception in forms of democracy, constitute the new ground of politics on which poets rest - such as Bruce Andrews and Harryette Mullen, both of whom are associated with Language Writing communities.
CHAPTER SEVEN:

Social-formalist agency

Knapp describes, in the introduction to Literary Interest, how at the outset he "expected to write a book that would, for better or worse, lend theoretical confirmation to the mounting historical and institutional case against formalism" (2). As I said in Chapter 4, he surprises himself once he begins the writing. One of his conclusions is that "literary interest offers an unusually precise and concentrated analogue of what it is like to be an agent in general" (139). To hold such a position requires a formalistic account of the agency that is available to readers of literary texts.

The key words in Knapp's conclusion (above) are: "in general." In order to consider how the historical, irreplaceable conditions of a reader's own specificity as agent are imaginable in the terms of agency "in general," Knapp invokes the concept of "concrete universality." He turns to W.K. Wimsatt, the literary critic who gave the concept its name in the 1947 essay, "The Concrete Universal" (The Verbal Icon 69-84). With the paradoxical term "concrete universality," Wimsatt claims to transhistorically identify that which, since Aristotle, has either eluded or else remained implicit in a wide range of pronouncements concerning what makes poetry poetic. Specifically, "[i]n one terminology or another this idea of a concrete universal is found in most metaphysical aesthetic of the eighteenth and"
nineteenth centuries" in Europe (Verbal 72). That is, poeticity has been variously defined by either emphasizing the concrete over the universal,61 the reverse of that,62 or some combination of the two.63 In the case of Aristotle, Wimsatt claims that the concrete universal is implicit. The passage Wimsatt may have in mind is the one in the Poetics where Aristotle distinguishes, by means of the "singular" - i.e. concrete - and the "universal," poetry from history. History "describes the thing that has been," poetry "a kind of thing that might be":

Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singulars. By a universal statement I mean one as to what such or such a kind of man [sic] will probably or necessarily say or do - which is the aim of poetry.... (Poetics 9 1451b1; Complete 2323)

For Wimsatt, "concrete universality" refers to how nonpoetic details transform into poetic parts of a whole. The "whole" in question may be a poem, where concrete universality is achieved by the use of metaphor, or a character, where

61 Wimsatt cites William Blake: "To Generalize is to be an Idiot. To Particularize is the Alone Distinction of Merit" (Verbal 73).


63 Wimsatt quotes Coleridge's praise of Shakespeare's art as the "union and interpenetration of the universal and the particular" (Verbal 72).
concrete universality is achieved by the depth of charactorial self-consciousness - "roundness," as E.M. Forster would say. As poem or character, the concrete universal demonstrates the autotelic nature of the poetic object.64

Knapp qualifies his citation to the New Critical context of Wimsatt and thereby his commitment to formalism. Knapp re-emphasizes how useless it would be to argue inherent value for literary interest as "the" means to assist the self in understanding its social role as agent. There are so many kinds of "selves," and their interests are unpredictable.65 Yet despite this qualification, Knapp associates the concrete universal with "the fundamental structure of the liberal concept of agency" (Literary Interest 156 n. 25). Aristotle's definition of the

64 Cf. Charles Altieri, who makes the concrete universal central to his distinction between two poetic tendencies, issuing from Romanticist principles, he calls symbolist and immanentist. Symbolist poetics, issuing from Coleridge and including modernists such as Eliot and Pound, emphasizes the concretized universal. Immanentist poetics, issuing from early Wordsworth and including postmoderns as various as Olson, Creeley and O'Hara, emphasizes the universalized concretion. See Enlarging the Temple, esp. pp. 41-43, 54-55.

65 It is an understatement to emphasize how these qualifications of Knapp's with regards to Wimsatt's views are important. Wimsatt's aim, in arguing for the "concrete universal" as an apt description of the motive of poetry, is to unite in an "objective criticism" two critical motives that are often separate: analyses of "technique" ("how poetry works") and of "worth" (i.e., value and evaluation) (Verbal 82). Wimsatt is interested not just in how a poem works and what a poem is. Wimsatt wants to argue how a poem should work and what a poem should be - in other words, a role for the critic in defining the poetic object.
"universal" - "what such or such a kind of man will probably or necessarily say or do" (see above) - can be heard when, for Knapp, selfhood, conceived as an agent in a certain broad tradition of 'liberal'\textsuperscript{66} thought ... is caught up in an irreducible oscillation between typicality and particularity: between ... the [typical] forms of action that an agent must understand in order to make sense of herself as the possible performer of certain actions, and ... the [particular] concrete history without which the agent could not distinguish herself.... (Literary Interest 139) 

In effect, formalism is built into our conception of ourselves as agents.... The self ... is a formalist, and never more so than when it attempts to escape its formalism by binding itself still more strictly to what particularizes it. Hence the persistence, and the persistent irony, of anti-formalism. (Literary Interest 138; my itals.) 

"Concrete universality" is a metaphor for the action of an "irreducible oscillation" between the particular and the typical, an oscillation activated by a reader who engages a text of literary interest.

\textsuperscript{66} Knapp explains that by "liberal" he refers to "the broad range of ethical and political theories and values associated, since the late seventeenth century, with Anglo-American and European modes of representative government" (Literary Interest 155 n. 5).
It would appear that Knapp is arguing from the juridico-philosophical supposition of individual agency, where agency is considered to be fully contained within and enacted by a rational consciousness that expresses subjectivity. The necessity of beginning anywhere other than with the supposition that the individual is the predominant locus of agency is virtually the sole general agreement that Paul Smith has with the poststructuralist theorists he critiques on the question of the "subject," in Discerning the Subject. "The individual" is, for Smith's purposes, "simply the illusion of whole and coherent personal organization ... the misleading description of the imaginary ground on which different subject-positions are colligated" (xxxv). In contrast to Knapp, Smith argues for agency as a collective (hence activist) rather than individual event, citing, as exemplary instance, feminist practices. He makes an important conceptual distinction between the "subject" and agency, in order to avoid their conflation and rearticulation as "the individual." While the "subject" is variously theorized as subjected to or determined by, and the individual as determining social forces, Smith reserves the concept of agency for resistance to social forces:

To mark the idea of a form of subjectivity where, by virtue of the contradictions and disturbances in and among subject-positions, the possibility (indeed, the actuality) of resistance to ideological pressure is allowed for (even though
that resistance too must be produced in an ideological context). (xxxv)

In a wide-ranging essay (ostensibly a review of Thomas Pavel's *The Poetics of Plot*), Wlad Godzich considers "the problem of agency" in its historical trajectory, particularly since the Enlightenment. He notes with almost perverse equanimity how its recent transformation as the "philosopheme" of self in relation to language "has been subject to harrowing critique in Continental thought, but in its Anglo-American version continues to enjoy considerable status" ("Where The Action Is" 112). At the same time as there is recent critical interest in refining terminology - differentiating the "harrowing" critiques of the "subject" and "individual" from the critiques of "agency" - it is worth observing Godzich's conclusion that, insofar as "agency" may be offered as a clearer conceptualization of what a critic concerned with social change is after, the conditions of its historical formation as a concept is yet to be written. Godzich offers a brief history of the concept of agency in the West, beginning with Heraclitus and Aristotle, through the Scholastics, and from Enlightenment thinkers to his moment of writing in the 1980s. The latter part of his survey provides the following synopsis:

The Enlightenment encounters the problem of agency because the secularization that it carries out consists in bracketing away the divine instance and letting loose all that which had previously
been an attribute of God. Although some of these attributes could function autonomously, others, and most notably agency, proved far more problematic. Diverse philosophical and, given the implications of this problem, political solutions were proposed, ranging from the consensus of free consciousnesses in Kant to the slave-master dialectic in Hegel, the class struggle in Marx, and the will to power in Nietzsche - to cite but the better known. The inability to identify a viable social agent of change haunts the thought of Adorno, and the search for a capable agent in the light of the apparent reluctance of the Western proletariats to fulfill that role has marshaled the forces of thinkers on the left while the right has referred either to the mysterious, because apparently unknowable, laws of the market or to the even more mystical Invisible Hand. ("Where The Action Is" 119-120)

Agency is the conceptual problematic of social change itself. A theory of the subject need not necessarily engage in the problematic of social change to the same extent as would a theory of agency. What explanatory model of

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67 Paul Smith makes this point with critical reference to the ways in which psychoanalytic theory has been used: "[P]sychoanalytic theory and its insights are more often than not merely inserted into an overarching and ahistorical conception of the social which can provide little hope for radical change" (Discerning 79).
agency and the "subject" is adequate to account for change? How macro and how micro within the "social" is its explanatory reach?

In the same essay, Godzich examines how "the problem of agency" became, as plot, action, character, the major object of study of narratology at the height of critical interest in that field (between the mid 1960s and mid 80s). The fundamental aporia in narratology, Godzich states, remains the problem of agency itself - of how to understand agency as social force. It is no wonder that Knapp's "irreducible oscillation" between concretion and universality in the activation of literary interest for a reader-agent is premised on narrative-based text - although he does not argue from any particular point of view in narrative theory. In addition to a liberal-individualist

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68 The aporia Godzich speaks of can be observed as systemic to the exposition of narratological principles and methods; for example, in Mieke Bal’s Introduction to the Theory of Narrative. Problems of change are "solved" as if they were technical in nature, needing to be overcome in order to fulfill the conditions of rationality (self-consistency, etc.) of an analytic system. The teleological aspect of change is asserted as a narratological organizing principle, and in the asocial guise of a problem of logic. There is in effect a controlled or selective mimesis at work that when admitted is oriented toward the exposition of intrinsic functions of narrative textuality. Homologies are asserted as internal rules of narrative textuality, furthering rational exposition - the structural homology, for example, between sentence grammar and story. Principles enabling the construction of a rational system of narrative analysis are asserted as being mere didactic conveniences in the face of criticism.

69 His principle literary examples are Paradise Lost, Keats's Isabella; or, the Pot of Basil (poem based on a tale by Boccaccio), and Chinua Achebe's novel, Things Fall Apart.
concept of agency, and to the primacy of narrative, the third premise of Knapp's account is reader identification or interpellation.

Knapp's Anglo-American-inflected argument for formalism, on the basis of agency, is the precondition to and indeed the reason why a more explicitly ideological rendering of the issue of formalism is required. This is because the premises of Knapp's formalism are themselves already ideological commitments. Even Knapp's position must acknowledge that textuality interposes between self/reader/writer and a self-understanding of agency. I want to consider, beginning at the level of the "individual," the implications of this textual interposition for a poetics. I will go into more detail as to what agency consists of when it is consciously mediated by text.

The major tensions over the notion of agency have their roots, I believe, in the question of narrative. What happens when the reader is no longer confronted with a text premised on a fundamental identification value? That is, what happens to such a premise when agency is problematized by a literary text to the point where identification with the text - which is required in order to develop the analogy from one's own experience to the experience of agency in general - is part of that which is being problematized? Such a text might be expected to implicitly raise questions concerning how narrative is linguistically and rhetorically formed. Text based on narrative is, traditionally, based on reader-
identification with agencies represented in the narrative: the Aristotelian principle of mimesis. Formally innovative poetries question - politicize - narrativistic and reader-identification processes inherent to the logic of analogy constituting the self within the liberal-individualist tradition. There is a kind of formal innovation that brings into question the applicability of Knapp's analogue (to agency) for the value of literary interest. Yet, while questioning the premise of narrativity (unargued in Knapp's book), this same poetry is answering to a similar conclusion as Knapp's: that there is an inescapable formalism to textual agency.

Before giving examples in poetry to contest Knapp's premises, I want to further elaborate on this last point concerning an inevitable textual formalism that the reader confronts. The reader confronts this when the text occurs on the printed page. There is a visual dimension to the text that occurs as an event on the page prior to signification. There is a corresponding phonic dimension to the text that can also occur as an event prior to signification.

For a moment, I return to the problems raised in Keats's letter - the historical opposition between idealism and materialism, and the question of the dominant subject who is able to speculate because free from material bonds or needs. Smith is particularly sensitive to the fact that, on the one hand, the concept of the "subject" in its relation to power suggests, etymologically, as Raymond Williams has
described (Keywords 308-312), subjection. On the other hand, the concept of the "subject" that is widely in use derives from German classical philosophy, a nexus that invokes, as in the case of Hegel's early work, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), the absolute knowing self or sovereign subject. For Smith, this "ironic contrast," as Williams calls it, has "become unfunny by the 1980s" (Discerning 164).

I would like to consider the event-status of words on the page (described above) - while bearing in mind Knapp's assertion that "the self is a formalist" - in relation to what Slavoj Zizek calls, in his essay "'Not Only as Substance, but Also as Subject'" (hereafter Sublime) the act of "formal conversion" (Sublime 220). Zizek's term, "formal conversion," is adapted from a section in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* which begins by discussing the "simple moral action of conscience" (Phenomenology 386). Action occurs from conscience when it has dialectically superceded the contradiction of moral consciousness that otherwise inhibits or deceives consciousness of the appropriate action. The contradiction of moral consciousness is "that there is a moral consciousness, and that there is none, or that the validation of duty lies beyond consciousness, and conversely, takes place in it" (Phenomenology 383). It is "between pure duty qua pure purpose, and reality qua Nature and sense opposed to pure purpose" (385). Knapp's formula, "self as formalist," based on the "concrete universal," is effectively a mini
Hegelianism, particularly when related to this moment in the *Phenomenology* where conscience acts by what Zizek calls "formal conversion." In speculating on "a case of moral action," Hegel describes "simple and unmediated" conversion as follows:

Action *qua* actualization is ... the simple conversion of a reality that merely *is* into a reality that results from *action*, the conversion of the bare mode of *objective* knowing (i.e. knowing an object) into one of knowing *reality* as something produced by consciousness.

(*Phenomenology* 385)

In a Lacanian reading of Hegel, Zizek describes this as an existential act where "by means of a forced choice, the subject assumes, repeats as his own act, what happened anyway" (*Sublime* 219). In the case of a death, for example, "the subject confers the form of a free act on an 'irrational', contingent natural process" by organizing a funerary ritual. Zizek interprets Hegel as follows:

Before we intervene in reality by means of a *particular* act, we must accomplish the *purely formal* act of converting reality as something which is objectively given into reality as 'effectivity', as something produced, 'posited' by the subject.

(*Sublime* 217)

Formal conversion, as Zizek readily admits, is distinctly not Marx's understanding of how consciousness is
produced by social reality, which considers natural events - and Nature - as always-already imbued with relations established by the material needs of human labour (use-value). Form is required before there can be consciousness of form:

In Marx, the (collective) subject first transforms the given objectivity by means of the effective-material process of production; he [sic] first gives it 'human form', and thereupon, reflecting the results of his activity, he formally perceives himself as the 'author of its world', while in Hegel the order is reversed - before the subject 'actually' intervenes in the world, he must formally grasp himself as responsible for it.

(Sublime 218)

In relation to poetry, its reader, and the concept of agency, however, this fundamental difference with Marx is not, I believe, as important as that "formal conversion" occurs as an originary act by an agent. What matters is whether the conversion is of a preconstituted sign, i.e. of a reality that is already semiotically constituted, as Marx would argue, or of a reality that is beyond the sign (beyond it in such a way that, perhaps, the subject repeats by recalling a precoded ritual response to that beyond-the-sign Real, as in the case of death). Reality that is beyond the sign need not necessarily fall within the domain of the "natural" (death, etc.), since a signifier without a
specific signified is also a form of real that is "beyond the sign," in for example the graphemic and phonemic aspects of page-borne textuality described earlier. Either way, conversion occurs simultaneously as event and as act, is structured for the reader that way, and carries within it implicit agency, whether it is a real - in the Lacanian sense - or "hyperreal" - in Baudrillard's sense - event.

I want to focus more specifically on the event-status of one process: in Zizek's phrase, again using Hegelian language, the "positing of the subject's presuppositions." In order for a subject to act, the subject must first formally posit an interpretive framework, or set of intersubjective relations, for the action. There is, however, a fundamental discrepancy - the basis of psychoanalysis - between what the action "says" it is doing, and what the framework "says" the action is doing. This discrepancy corresponds to two kinds of subject identification for Lacan.

In *Four Fundamental Concepts in Psychoanalysis*, Lacan distinguishes between constituted - i.e., imaginary - and constitutive - i.e., symbolic - identifications. Imaginary identifications are supported by prior symbolic identifications that have a greater claim over our actions than do imaginary identifications. Identification can be made with the act if the act implicates a narrative scenario for itself.
It is in this context of a possible movement of some sort between act and its posited frame of suppositions, or imaginary and symbolic identifications, that I would like to situate both formally innovative poetry and my understanding of Pierre Bourdieu's remark that social revolution actually requires, as its prior condition, or as we can say now, presupposition, symbolic revolution:

Struggles over words ... will consist in trying to carry out what musicians call inversions of the chord, in trying to overturn the ordinary hierarchy of meanings in order to constitute as a fundamental meaning, as the root note of the semantic chord, a meaning that had hitherto been secondary, or, rather, implied, thus putting into action a symbolic revolution which may be at the root of political revolutions. (In Other Words 96)

As a further example of my point, it is also in this context that I understand Kristeva's comment that the French Revolution "was literally made, and not only heralded, by the discourses and writings of its leaders" (282). And as William Carlos Williams succinctly confirmed, in "A Poem for Norman MacLeod" (1935), in speaking of the American Revolution in a moment of democratic optimism:

The revolution is accomplished
noble has been changed to no bull (114)
The "positing of presuppositions" results in a formal responsibility for that which is "given" to the subject to work on. Zizek leads us through a distinction between the "finite" subject (of Kant and Fichte) and the "absolute" subject (of Hegel). The "finite" subject is "the subject of practical activity," who "actively intervenes in the world." This subject is always "bound to some transcendent presupposition ... upon which he performs activity, even if this presupposition is reduced to the mere 'instigation'... of our practical activity" (Sublime 220). The "absolute" subject, in contrast, is not "bound to, limited, conditioned by some given presuppositions; he himself posits these very presuppositions" through the responsibility that issues from formal conversion of the given reality as his own work. But for Zizek this is an "empty gesture," since the "positing of presuppositions" does not require a further active intervention by the subject in the world - rather, only the formal recognition of "what is happening anyway" as being the subject's responsibility. This "empty gesture" is for Lacan, Zizek says, the signifier. This formal responsibility is for the interpretive frame, or constitutive identification, which "regulates" the subject's acts.

What is important in the Lacanian reading of Hegel that Zizek achieves is that the "empty gesture" by which language enters the world is, although superfluous, paradoxically also necessary for constituting that particular "world" in its totality - presuppositions and all. This is the agency
of the signifier that allows for puns on the order of Williams's.

Zizek's conclusion introduces the interpellative process of ideology:

The 'empty gesture' [i.e. formal conversion] by means of which the brute, senseless reality is assumed, accepted as our own work ... [is] ... the most elementary ideological operation, the symbolization of the Real, its transformation into a meaningful totality, its inscription into the big Other.... [T]he purely formal conversion which constitutes this gesture is simply the conversion of the pre-symbolic Real into the symbolized reality - into the Real caught in the web of the signifier's network. (Sublime 230; my itals.)

Poetry would be a purely formal conversion were it not repeating, and through the repetition drawing critical attention to the various ways and means by which the Real and hyperreal are symbolically constituted through the agency of the signifier, for the reader.

Privileging the event-status of "formal conversion" in poetry makes for what I shall call a poetics of "social formalism." It may occur through politicizing reader-identification itself by self-reflexive attention to its interpellative processes. A poetics of social formalism

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70 I borrow this term from poet and critic Barrett Watten. I discuss the context in which Watten uses the term at the end of this chapter.
attempts to address processes of symbolic identification, which are structural: i.e., formal.

I would like to relate social formalism to Deleuze and Guattari's treatment of Louis Hjelmslev's reorientation of the traditional form-content opposition. This I want to do because for my purposes it is not important which comes first, form or the real, as I've said, but rather that they each have a contingent priority in a pragmatics of the ideologically saturated utterance. Deleuze and Guattari rethink the utterance.

Taking Deleuze at his word,\footnote{Interview, Liberation, October 23, 1980, p. 17 (Qtd in Thousand 518, n. 23).} I shall consider A Thousand Plateaus as an "open system," delving into one of its chapters without fear of miscalculating on the importance of the others for what I find of interest in this particular one. In their fourth chapter, "November 20, 1923: Postulates of Linguistics," Deleuze and Guattari attempt to redress and realign fundamental values which have governed our understanding of the relationships between language and world, and of linguistics as science. Of these I shall focus on one key term, mot d'ordre, whose variety of meanings Deleuze and Guattari have, as the translator Brian Massumi indicates, used in their analysis. Mot d'ordre means, literally, "'word of order', in the double sense of a word or phrase constituting a command and a word or phrase creative of order," and also, "in standard French, 'slogan', \ldots"
[or] (military) 'password'' (523). Massumi translates the term as "order-word."

The order-word, for Deleuze and Guattari, is a key theoretical unit that has been left out of linguistic analysis stemming from Saussure. Deleuze and Guattari describe its intense affect as fear and flight - as, for instance, the lion's roar, the example that the authors borrow from Elias Cannetti's analysis of commands in *Crowds and Power* (Thousand 525). Order-words can be anything from explicit commands to implicit presuppositions of certain utterances - from the familiar to the uncanny. The order-word is a structure of language: "I is an order-word" (84); "[t]he elementary unit of language - the statement - is the order-word" (76). Furthermore:

The whole classical rationalist theory - of common sense, of universally shared good sense based on information and communication - is a way to cover up or hide, and to justify in advance ... order-words. (Thousand 90)

It is how this can be related to "the most elementary ideological operation" (Zizek, cited above) - i.e. formal conversion, its process - that is of interest to me. The concept of order-word provides me with a means to discuss agency in relation to literary interest.

Deleuze and Guattari are intent on disobeying and reversing order-word's effects because of what Bakhtin would call their complicit agency in the verbal-ideological centre.
of centripetal social forces. Deleuze and Guattari describe "common sense, a faculty for the centralization of information ... [as] an abominable faculty consisting in emitting, receiving, and transmitting order-words" (76).

There is a second, complementary concept I need to describe. If the order-word invokes fear and flight, what Ernesto Laclau has called the "empty signifier" can invoke hope and courage. It is as an "empty signifier" that I understand, for instance, the word "social." "Social" was a buzzword of the 1980s, its usage involving the opposite of the individual. In the decade that ushered in nuclear Cold War rhetoric unparalleled since the Bay of Pigs, and a wave of conservative social policy in Canada and the USA from which we are now still experiencing the effects, there seemed to be an intellectual fervour for this word, "social." It encapsulated all that was missing in the "public" of the so-called public sphere being bought out by anti-social private interests and sold back as shopping malls and cable t.v. to a growing a-social and apathetic anti-constituency. The "social" was a revolutionary, oppositional symbol, invoking the possible in the face of the impossible and unthinkable. Its usage seemed to hold within it the possibility of developing an expansive and all-new revolutionary rhetoric. At the same time, its usage was vague, "empty" - the very thing that permitted its circulation. This was understandable - although perhaps not

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72 See "Discourse in the Novel."
utterly rational - on grounds of the socially contingent condition of language itself. Frank Lentricchia, in Criticism and Social Change (on the continued relevance of Kenneth Burke) deploys "social" as the antimony of Frye's concept of literature as an autonomous domain: "As a form of action in the world the literary is fully enmeshed in the social - it is not an imaginative space apart" (25). And with the contested but nevertheless arguably dominant role that deconstruction came to play in the academy, for which the concept of "text" was central, it appeared to some that adding the adjective "social" would symbolically invoke the desired praxis of revolution, as in the critical journal, Social Text.

Insofar as I am focussing on a poetics that historically traces back to Romanticism,73 "change" is considered a vital concept to composition itself, its vital ideology. To conceive of poetic form as tracking thought in its actual present moment of unfolding - "unceasing present of enunciation" (Benveniste) - means attaching to "change" the highest possible transcendental value, indistinguishable from thinking, being, acting. Change as a value is one with understanding that exceeds the rational. Most recently, it could be argued that the term is the critical "blindness" of Ron Silliman's insightful critique of the effect of the use of the concept "postmodernism" on contemporary art

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73 See, for example, the second volume of Donald Wesling's yet-to-be-completed trilogy: The New Poetries: Poetic Form since Coleridge and Wordsworth.
practices. Change is implicitly judged valuable when
adjectivally abutted as "social change."

In the next chapter I consider examples of social-
formalist poetries in relation to the issues raised in this
chapter, not the least being the concept of formal
conversion, and the three premises underlying Knapp's
account of literary interest.

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74 See "Struggle for the Sign: Sign of a Struggle."
CHAPTER EIGHT:

"Let the Balkanizers eat Velveeta"75: Bruce Andrews' "Social Romanticism"

In "Social Formalism: Zukofsky, Andrews, & Habitus in Contemporary Poetry" (1987), poet and critic Barrett Watten speculates on the adequacy of "social formalism" as a term to describe the poetry of two twentieth-century poets, Louis Zukofsky and - Watten's contemporary - Bruce Andrews. Each poet has had a formative influence on an aesthetic tendency - "objectivism," in Zukofsky's, and "language-centred writing"76 in Andrews' case. Zukofsky's and Andrews' poetics have not been critically compared before.

For Watten, the terms "social" and "change" (i.e., the terms of my argument) will formally enter the poetic work, articulating a social-formalist poetics, by means of one essential dimension of the work: development in time.

75 Bruce Andrews, I Don't Have Any Paper So Shut Up (or, Social Romanticism), p. 168.

76 "Language Writing" has come to designate, within the academy and outside of it, a poetics by contemporary American and Canadian poets based on "language-centredness" - instead of "breath-" or "body-centredness," as is the case with "New American" writing (see Donald Allen). I use the term "language-centred" instead of "Language Writing" in order to suggest the relationship to New American writing, however fraught it may be on formal and political grounds. See Jackson Mac Low for a very good analysis of the empirical problems that any critic will encounter in attempting to formally specify the "intrinsic" aspects of "language-centred" writing. Mac Low provides, in fact, a good argument for sociologically specifying the writing instead. Alternately, Mac Low provides an argument for specifying the work as I do - constituted in a formal relationship to a historically antecedent body of work. The character of "objectivist" poetics is not directly relevant to my thesis.
Ascertaining the temporality of the work will distinguish the social formalist from the merely social formalist text. A merely social formalism would be the equivalent of undermining word order, leaving intact the order-words themselves. "Merely social formalism" dominates, according to Watten, as the initial American canonizing interpretation of the poetic tendency to which Andrews is affiliated (as is Watten, for that matter). It is this interpretation of language-centred writing that Watten wants to redress.

By focusing on whether or not the term "social formalist" might usefully describe the poetics of Zukofsky and Andrews, Watten is drawing attention to the institutional role that group naming plays in the critical reception of formally innovative poetry. At stake is the extent to which the context of formally innovative poetry will be compromised in its critical reception - in order to be read at all. Watten's essay directly addresses the bleak scenario that currently awaits - or so I hypothesize (Chapter 4) - formally innovative poetry on its entry into the academy. Andrews, throughout his career, and Zukofsky, for half of his career, espoused a political praxis for formal innovation. For Andrews' poetry - and, by group extension, for language-centred writing - to be read as merely a social formalism would only provide one more

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77 I will consistently use the expressions "social formalism" and "merely social formalism" throughout this chapter in order to differentiate the two opposing evaluations.
argument against connecting formal innovation to social change and relevance: one more argument against reading their work.

The ornamental sense of "merely social formalism" that Watten is leery of, partly derives, I think, from the following logic: if the reader perceives the author to be absent both as a figure in, and as the intentionality of, the writing, then the reader concludes that agency is either completely absent from the writing, or else completely present within Language itself. The blueprints for this doxa are found in "What Is an Author?" by Michel Foucault, and "The Death of the Subject" and "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?" by Roland Barthes. Watten is not concerned with establishing an answer to the question of agency in language. The question of whether or not language "writes itself," the related question of the extent to which poetry can actively resist and even redress social issues within an ideologically preconstituted linguistic condition - these are vital problems, to which each poetics tendency - objectivist and language-centred - develops a set of conflicted responses, altering the questions themselves in relation to specific historical needs. Rather, Watten is concerned with noticing the important change in reading-context that language-centred poetry undergoes in its shift

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78 For a good comparison of these historical contexts - the 1930s and the 1980s - and of the relationship of these poetic tendencies to significant changes in Marxist aesthetic theory, see Andrew Ross.
from community to academy. From perceiving poetry as a social enactment within a self-marginalized artistic community, where critical theory is subordinated to poetic practice, the reading-context shifts to one of perceiving the poetry as a cultural example for use within a set of institutionalized discursive and social relations, where critical theory is reproduced as the dominant mode of a pedagogically-oriented communication. Given this shift in reading-context, it is significantly different for a critic to begin with a premise that poetry delivers agency over to Language, than it is for a poet. For a critic, such a view of agency as Language may result in only methodological mystification, preventing access to the actual complex historical world-situation that the poetry is immersed in and is exposed and responds to. Or such a view may result in outright dismissal of the poetry by the critic, on theoretical grounds that the concept, for example, of "Language" the poet employs is outdated.

Watten anticipates both of these criticisms. To the charge that a poetry, "like" Bruce Andrews', delivers agency over to Language, Watten proposes the concept of development in time as the indicator of a language of human agency in the work. To the charge that the poetry is based on outdated theory, Watten explains to readers of the North Dakota Quarterly (where his essay is published) that "there appears a split between defunct theory and engaged practice" ("Social" 369) in Andrews, and emphasizes how the practice
exceeds the parameters of the theory. It is the "defunct theory" of Andrews' practice that might lead a critic to suppose a merely social formalist poetics. "Identification of poetry with its linguistic base" is how Watten characterizes Andrews' (defunct) theory -

has become known in the last twenty years as "formalism" where tautology, narcissism, and semantic slippage reign. . . . [where] meaning or content empties out. . . . [and] all contexts evaporate in the index of the already known. . . . It is certainly the business of every concerned critic to be against this kind of formalism - against which should be proposed the humanly real. ("Social" 370)

It is via the concept of "agency" that a criticism can be made of the social claims for formal innovation, since agency is a strong social claim. As I have said, Watten proposes a principle: that agency for social change is articulated in form insofar as the dimension of time perceptibly enters the work. He raises this principle in relation to Pierre Bourdieu's formulation for agency, "habitus," with the help of which Watten examines the quality of time in Andrews' work.

I have chosen to approach Andrews' work through Watten's essay, not only because Watten addresses a concrete reading-context of academic reception (something that I don't do in Chapter 4), but also because he does so by means
of Bourdieu's sociological theory of literature and art. Bourdieu permits me to revisit some of the issues in Chapter 1, and to invert a premise for the questions raised there. The premise in Chapter 1 is that text and context are historically split. Here, after considering Watten's Bourdieuesque reading of Andrews, the premise is that text and context are split by the critic's interpretive method. This permits a different set of questions to be raised. At what points does one delimit "text," and from there introduce the "context"? Where does the "critical consciousness" of the text end, and a reading of its symptomal unconscious begin? How does one decide where to draw the lines?

The impetus behind Bourdieu's use of the term "habitus" is "to get out from under the philosophy of consciousness without doing away with the agent" ("Genesis" 14): the exact dilemma that Watten brings into his essay as (1) a formal question in the work (its temporal development) and as (2) a question of the academic reception of two tendencies in formally innovative poetry, the objectivist and the language-centred - whether their concept of agency is author- or Language-based. What is "new" is not the principle of temporal development in the work - which, as Romanticism is the forebear of process-oriented or open-form poetics, has been around for that long, indeed providing the
basis for many deconstructive readings — but the assertion of this principle's validity for a text — Bruce Andrews' — that resolutely resists autobiographical, even biographical, agency. The dimension of time, taken as a lifetime writing one long poem, dominates Zukofsky's 800-page, 24-sectioned work, "A" that as a total work is broken by formal discontinuities between their sections which become a part of the work's continuous thematic developments. The dimension of time struggles to be perceived in any way in Bruce Andrews' works, however, according to Watten. The test-case for Watten is Andrews' longish work, I Don't Have Any Paper So Shut Up (or, Social Romanticism) (1991). Although written within a decade —

It might be said that what leads critics from structuralism to poststructuralist is a recognition of the dimension of time in the text — the diachronic axis of change, over the synchronic axis of structural relations. The "undecidability" of a term within the apparently "closed" structure of a text, whose detection enables Derrideans to "unravel" the structure, is due to the way that the term's significance is multiplied, rather than consolidated, through its reiteration in the dimension of time in the text. Nevertheless, Watten's treatment of time in the poetic text is worth distinguishing. Taking his cue from Andre Breton and the writings of other Surrealists who emphasizes the interconnectedness of life and art, Watten considers the method of the text to begin only after the text has been written, in the agency it gains for itself, with the author's help, amongst communities of readers. See "The Politics of Poetry: Surrealism and L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" (Watten, Total 31-64).

Written in the early 1980s, portions of it published in various smallpress magazines throughout the decade, Shut Up was only published in a complete edition in 1991. This is symptomatic of Andrews's treatment of time in general, I think. It strikes me as a deliberate strategy on the author's part: to show indifference to biological time. His writings are often not published in the biographical order
the 1980s - it is long enough, and multiple-sectioned, to allow for an assessment of how time infuses it. As Watten notes, Bourdieu sees as constitutive of the habitus not any set of social rules and regulations but "the semi-learned grammars of practice - sayings, proverbs, gnomic poems, spontaneous 'theories' [what George Lakoff labels "folks theories"] that always accompany even the most 'automatic' practices." ("Social" 374-375)

The term "semi-learned grammars," with its implicit Wittgensteinian metaphor of the language-game, is a good description, I think, of Andrews' writing method in Shut Up, which consists of recording, onto index cards, words and phrases that Andrews overhears and mis-hears from diverse sources - or that occur to him - during the course of everyday life (in Manhatten, which will become relevant shortly). These words and phrases are then assembled and shaped into prose poems. "Whose habitus is this?" is the question. For Watten, the habitus of Shut Up is "locked into a commoditized, institutionalized and finally displaced world" where "practices are alienated," "communication is circular," and "development is blocked" ("Social" 372, 373).

81 Watten's interjection.
Watten encounters a "holding pattern" at the core of Shut up; the "regulated improvisation" of its habitus mimics reified social relations of commodity exchange.

Despite these criticisms that point towards a blocked temporal agency in the work, Watten's essay ultimately equivocates on whether Shut Up is a merely social formalism - thereby confirming "every concerned critic"'s worst fears - or, instead, a properly social formalism that Watten is attempting to envisage. In addition to the biographical and institutional reasons for supposing that Watten's equivocation is a strategic choice, there is also a speculative reason that is, I believe, constitutive of the problem itself of how to determine the social agency of a formally innovative text.

To recall Zizek from my last chapter - in drawing attention to the fact that the agency of the signifier is superfluous, Zizek raises the notorious "end of history" motif of Hegel's dialectic. In superceding every historicizable object (e.g. the State) as a thought-moment in dialectical motion, culminating in the pure knowledge of the "absolute" subject, Hegel implies that everything -

82 If Watten were to dismiss Andrews' writing as merely social formalism, then he would be contradicting the main thrust of his essay, which is to contest just these terms of language-centred writing's initial academic reception.

That is the primary institutional reason for Watten's equivocation. The biographical reason is that Watten, as the editor of This Press (books and magazine), in Berkeley, California, has supported Andrews' work since the 1970s. Watten's writings on the whole demonstrate great respect for Andrews' project.
History - has already happened. For the subject, as Zizek details, everything becomes "my own responsibility" through formal conversion of the Real into the Symbolic; but at the same time - since for all the intents and purposes of "formal conversion," everything has already happened - I am not effecting any change, I am not actually doing anything, and indeed for Hegel's "absolute" subject of the Phenomenology, I cannot do anything about anything, because the dialectic determines it so. Similarly to Zizek, Watten critiques Andrews's text for presuming an always-already known world defeated by commodity logic.

At the same time, however (Zizek continues), the superfluous agency of the signifier is paradoxically constitutive of necessary acts. The speculative reason for Watten's evaluative equivocation on Andrews is an equivocation before the text's fundamental negativity. Negativity is difficult to evaluate. Watten evaluates the negativity in Shut Up at the level of its totalizing (homogenizing) social effects (the reified commodity language of global capitalism).

Insofar as Barrett Watten's argument addresses the literary critic, the message is (to reiterate): The poetic text does not just "write itself." For if that were the case, intentions expressed by the text would not necessarily be motivated towards the social, let alone contextually motivated (for change and critique) within the social. The text "writing itself" might not even be said to have
intentions, and consist of, instead, arbitrarily organized
signifying chains - "pulling the chain" of any conscientious
coherency-seeking reader.

Where, then, are the intentions of the text to be
"located," if not within the agency of an author-construct
somehow? I shall not be persuaded by a rhetorical question,
and, instead, will take up the question by searching for
other "locations." The answer Knapp provides to this
question presupposes a certain kind of text. Knapp's
presuppositions are not fulfilled by Andrews' Shut Up.

For Bourdieu, to try and answer this same question of
location involves formulating no less than an adequate
sociology of culture. In "Principles for a Sociology of
Cultural Works," the third and concluding essay on Flaubert
in The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and
Literature, Bourdieu determines that historically there have
been two ways of theorizing intrinsic value for a literary
text. Knapp's argument for "concrete universality" would be
an example from the universalizing "tradition of neo-Kantian
symbolic forms" (Field 177): the first way. Narratology
would be an example from the second - structuralism. To deal
with the creation of an aporia of agency that structuralist
methods have been widely criticized for, Bourdieu proposes
to adapt structuralism with a series of new concepts,

83 As I argued in Chapter 4, the logic of "irreducible
oscillation" between particularity and typicality that
engages the reader of the literary text presupposes at the
least a recognizably narrative-based text and an
interpellated reader.
"habitus" and "field" among them. These new concepts not only theorize intrinsic value for a literary text, according to Bourdieu, but they also link the intrinsic to the extrinsic, so that "the problem of change" is "at once resolved" (Field 182):

The impetus for change in cultural works - language, art, literature, science, etc. - resides in the struggles that take place in the corresponding fields of production. These struggles, whose goal is the preservation or transformation of the established power relationships in the field of production, obviously have as their effect the preservation or transformation of the structure of the field of works, which are the tools and the stakes in these struggles. (Field 183)

Nevertheless, it is difficult to know from this quotation exactly how a reading of the intrinsic plays itself out as an influence within Bourdieu's theoretical construction of society. Poems read as "the tools and the stakes," judging from this language of economic instrumentality, still seem to be read by criteria extrinsic to the poem. The key to how the intrinsic is mediated by the extrinsic in Bourdieu's mode of analysis is the concept of "position-taking." The critic adduces a "position-taking" from the text and then correlates it intertextually to the relational "spaces" (structures) of relevant "creative works" as well as to
"positions [of the agents] in the field of production" (Field 182). The key, then, is to determine position-takings in the text. The mediating role of "position-taking" is due to its ambiguous intrinsic/extrinsic status, a mix of act and word, agent and structure. The value of the concept "position-taking" would only be enhanced, I think, with the addition of concepts from a radically context-bound linguistics. This links to Deleuze and Guattari, whom I will get to in a moment.

For Watten, the regulating principle of the habitus in Andrews' Shut Up is the commodity logic of exchange. This logic can never be overthrown since, in a Catch 22, it is the regulating principle of every formal choice - every intention - made/enacted by the text. This logic determines the constitutive atemporality, as well as the equivocation on the status of social agency, in Shut Up.

Watten situates, with Bourdieu's help, both the work and the author in a geosocial literary field comprised of New York School poets, John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara. In Ashbery's poetry, and in the way that the editor (Donald Allen) of O'Hara's Early Writing constructs a non-developmental trajectory for O'Hara the poet, Watten finds two other sorts of atemporality. The atemporal assumption of O'Hara's editor is that O'Hara's "education was already completed at the beginning," before he began writing, "as if from that point onward all O'Hara had to do was negotiate his value with the . . . world" ("Social" 380, my itals.).
The atemporal presupposition in Ashbery's poetry is of an aesthetic unity existing prior to, and as the assumption behind the writing of the poem. "[T]he [Ashbery] poem is an inevitably entropic movement away from [investigating] the implications" (380, my itals.) for poetry of positing a prior achieved unity in the aesthetic realm. Watten situates the implications of these two atemporalities within the fields of education and poetics, and discloses a context that overlaps with the atemporality of Andrews's work. All three Harvard graduates, from whence may derive, Watten implies, the ideological presupposition of a "unity of social good and achieved art that precedes the actual poem" ("Social" 381). Finally, what Andrews gets from Zukofsky is "the 'objectivist' interest in the social scientist viewing his data as a map of culture, 'spread out before him, a field'" ("Social" 381). The irony is that the biography of Andrews, expunged from his text, returns at this point: Andrews is a university professor of political science. It is the presumed objectivity of this subject position that Bourdieu famously critiqued, that he identifies as the dilemma resolved by applying his concepts of habitus and field to himself, as social scientist, as well.

The atemporality that Watten says leads to the "by-and-large evenness and similarity" of "results" in Shut Up - tending to a merely social formalism - is theoretically equivalent to detecting the text's "blindness," or "unconscious," or "gap." This is because the atemporal
dimension of the text lacks agency. Mere formalism is artifactual, not generative. Temporal agency is recuperated for the work by means of the Bourdieu-esque reconstruction of the ideological presuppositions of the institutional and community productions of the agent as agent. The conditions of possibility for the production of Shut Up require the inversion and negation of the temporal agency of the dominant aesthetic ideology reproduced by Harvard: all that Harvard stands for. But there is an ineradicable aesthetic remainder, or trace, of the negated dominant order, reproduced by the text as no less than its regulating principle - in Shut Up, a constitutive atemporality - which results in compromising any ulterior message of transformational politics the text may wish to project for a reader. In other words, the claims for the text's status as a revolutionary project are merely (speculative) author-claims that the text itself (in the hands of a competent critical reader) problematizes. We have come full circle back to the author. The task of materialist criticisms such as Bourdieu's is to re-situate the claims of the author and of the text within their historical moment of emergence, to gain perspective on those claims by considering them as the intentions of an agent. It is an agent who is no longer

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84 Critical references or allusions to "Harvard" can be found in the text: "Money talks as a decent but conservative group of people, led by Catholics" (170); "Harvard Arafat, it's time to get on some elephants now" (151).
considered in social isolation, nor considered by means of the "genius" trope, as Bourdieu is at pains to point out.

Thus, a formally innovative poetry is made transparent through critical unravelling and re-insertion into a politics of representation. This is achieved by delimiting "text" from "context" along a temporal axis.

But a critique of that same politics of representation may have been the premise of the poetic, as is the case with Andrews'. The politics of representation that underlies Andrews's critique is liberal individualist. What is being affirmed via Watten's reinsertion of Andrews's text within a sociology of culture is, I think, the inadequacy of a totalizing critique - such as Andrews's - of this politics. The symbolic revolution, whose necessity Bourdieu concedes, seems to not be easily found "live" in, for example, Andrews's text.

Watten's approach is premised on the inadequacy of the homology - a "defunct theory" - between poetry and its linguistic base. The homology is inadequate because it assumes the objectivist paradigm critiqued by Bourdieu. As a subjectively invested agent in a contemporary literary field he objectifies, Watten's critique of the value of the totalizing gesture in Andrews's work must be understood, I think, as a bid to influence (and also acknowledge) historical shifts in what Bourdieu calls the "space of possibles" - "a kind of system of common reference" that "transcends individual agents" (Field 176) - for the poetry
that Watten, Andrews, and the other addressees of Watten's essay are variously committed to.

Watten's interpretation reconvenes authorial intention within a complex sociological paradigm. But "atemporality" is only one possible delimitation of the text, only one interpretation of the internal distance opened in Andrews' formally innovative text between, on one hand, authorial intentions and, on the other, the intentions a reader may impute to the text. To reformulate this in line with a questioning that assumes that the textual/contextual divide is contingent on critical viewpoint: can what Watten calls the "atemporality" of Andrews' text be itself considered a part of the intentionality of the text, rather than the whole of an unintentional "blindspot"? A critic might still reconvene a literary field for the text (even comprising Ashbery, O'Hara) and a social ground for the author (including biographical information). But in such reconvening, the text itself would receive a greater proportion of (critical, social) agency - in that ambiguous

85 These contexts of address include: specific critics who are dubbed orthodox and conservative; the initial critical reception, assessed as a whole, of the object that circulates within the network of literary institutions under the rubric of "language writing"; and, self-reflexively, to the formative context of Watten's own writing/thinking (i.e. Zukofksy, whom Watten has called the greatest poet in the world). In other words, Watten's essay is a very successful application, to a living culture that he is a member of, of Bourdieu's sociological principles, reinserting the "disenchantment," that Bourdieu fears some may think results from his objectifying method, back into the production of values by agents who are participating in the field.
zone between act and word that Bourdieu calls "position-taking."

Like Bourdieu, Deleuze and Guattari critique the objectivist paradigm of linguistics, except they do so in order to retain the paradigm itself. They provide, I think, concepts that expand "position-takings" so as to not preemptively short-circuit the internal distancing that a formally innovative text opens between authorial and textual intentions. Publishing A Thousand Plateaus in 1980, the authors emphasize how "relatively few linguists have analyzed the necessarily social character of enunciation" (Thousand 78). Pragmatics has been designated the "trash heap" of linguistics. Linguists since Saussure have attempted to ascertain the invariant rules (phonological, grammatical, semantic) of language conceived as a relational system, which each unique verbal utterance obeys in order to be constituted as a communicative act. However, V.V. Voloshinov and M.H. Bakhtin were the sole critics of this position in the early decades of this century, whom Deleuze and Guattari cite as important influences on their re-thinking of pragmatics.87

86 They write: "As long as linguistics confines itself to constants, whether syntactical, morphological, or phonological, it ties the statement to a signifier and enunciation to a subject . . . consigns circumstances to the exterior, [and] closes language in on itself. (Thousand 82)

87 See Voloshinov's 1929 Marxism and the Philosophy of Language, which critiques both subjectivist and objectivist paradigms of linguistics as inadequate to the ideological
As part of their contribution to a new pragmatics of enunciation, one that would answer to the very same question Bourdieu poses for the sociology of culture - the question of how to bridge the agent/structure divide - they introduce the concepts of "order-word" and "collective assemblage" (amongst others).

French linguist Emile Benveniste writes of J. L. Austin's distinction between performative and constative utterances - arguing that this distinction was implicit in his own work in linguistics. While Austin argues that the distinction cannot finally hold due to substantive exceptions, Benveniste claims to resolve the exceptional cases, and argues that the distinction remains useful. For Benveniste, there are three conditions enabling a performative: the utterance must be (1) an authorized act, (2) nonrepeatable and unique, and (3) self-referential (i.e., the authorized act is identical to the utterance of that authorized act).

Deleuze and Guattari extend the distinction even further - towards pragmatics. Reading the concept of the "order-word" into Benveniste's theorization of the performative, Deleuze and Guattari extend it by attributing it to a structure - "collective assemblage" - rather than to a speaking subject, so that "the statement is individuated... enunciation subjectified, only to the extent that an complexity of an actual verbal utterance. For Bakhtin, see his references to the significance of indirect discourse for dialogism in Problems in Dostoyevsky's Poetics, pp. 181-185.
impersonal collective assemblage requires it and determines it to be so" (Thousand 80). Befitting a concept that is at once act and statement, the order-word is "coextensive" with language itself.

My purpose in raising Deleuze and Guattari here is to think more about where Andrews' text "ends" intrinsically and where a context for it might extrinsically "begin." Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "order-word" embraces rather than resolves paradoxes - it is at once statement and act, intrinsic and extrinsic. I think that Shut Up's "atemporality" remains, from the perspective of the order-word, intended. The intention of the perceived atemporality in Andrews' text is, from the perspective afforded by the order-word, to create the effect of redundancy. If Andrews' text addresses the order-word, then, for the order-word, "information is only the minimal condition for the transmission of order-words," and "redundancy of the order-word is . . . primary" (Thousand 79).

We call order-words, not a particular category of explicit statements (for example, in the imperative), but the relation of every word or every statement to implicit presuppositions, in other words, to speech acts that are, and can only be, accomplished in the statement. . . . The only possible definition of language is the set of all order-words, implicit presuppositions, or speech
acts current in a language at a given moment.

(Thousand 79)

Between statement and act there is a relation of redundancy, not of identity, nor even of incomplete identity as in representation (act represented by statement, statement the representative of the act; or vice versa). We have the "intermingling" of word and act constituting the order-word; acts are presupposed by and yet only accomplished within statements; the extrinsic is found within the intrinsic, and vice versa.

The order-word occurs at a historically datable moment. Its effect is instantaneous: the "incorporeal transformation" of bodies (understood in the broadest sense). The "incorporeal transformation" attributed by an order-word to a body transforms the body from one state into another, and is distinct from the specific actions performed and passions experienced by or within the body. Deleuze and Guattari give the example of an airplane hijacking:

[T]he threat of a hijacker brandishing a revolver is obviously an action. . . . But the transformation of the passengers into hostages, and of the plane-body into a prison-body [hijackers as prison guards], is an instantaneous incorporeal transformation, a "mass media act" in the sense . . . of "speech acts." (Thousand 81)

If Shut Up is conceived of as dealing with the order-word, and if there is no "standard" temporal dimension in the
text, then what Watten refers to as its atemporality may alternatively be instantaneity. Shut Up might consist of one order-word multiplied by redundancy and variably expressed by incorporeal transformations. The 300-page Shut Up, divided into 100 sections of almost identical length, might then be an analysis of that historical instantaneity in a "nonstandard" molecular time - or in the spatialized time of the photograph of subatomic particle traces.

The intentions - "position-takings" or implicit presuppositions - of the text are located in the "semi-learned grammars," a habitus of word and phrase. There the order-word is transmitted by (another paradox) indirect discourse. We must reconstruct its constitutive speech acts - a pragmatics. The same reappraisal of linguistics by the variable performative, such that "[p]ragmatics ceases to be a 'trash heap'" (Thousand 77-78), would apply to Andrews' writing that Watten has elsewhere characterized as a machine comprising a "conveyor belt of semiotic rubble" (Total 160).

The explicit aggression of Andrews's text (the terrorist hijacking example, above, is appropriate) is due to the fact that it focuses on the constitutive function of the order-word in the speech act.

"Social romanticism" suggests, to me, that the text is a counterpart to "social realism," specifically "socialist realism," the official aesthetic promulgated and enforced by the former Soviet Union state. "Social romanticism," then, would be the imagined aesthetic counterpart prevailing in
the "free world" of capitalism; an aesthetic coercion based, paradoxically, on romanticist principles. On what grounds are the aesthetics comparable? On the grounds of repressing human freedom for social change. The aesthetic ideology in the United States as exemplary representative of "the free world" operates hegemonomically; that is, by consent and affirmation (outlined, for instance, in Foucault's later theorizations of power's capillary action within the social system).

The thought of the United States as a "negative totality" on the order of a totalitarian state is virtually unheard of. When articulated as such, it is within the ideology of autonomous individualism, a historical narrative rooted in libertarianism, that peaks in post-World War II radical pacifism, and crumbles in the form of the present-day militias. Chomsky conceives of the United States a "negative totality" when he examines domestic media complicity with covert military foreign policy objectives since the rise of the military-industrial complex after World War II. Andrews conceives of the United States as a negative totality by examining social relations at the level of utterances "individuated" and "subjectified" within a collective assemblage of order-words. For instance, the utterance "I don't have any paper so shut up" is a response to an implicit question whose pragmatics it forces the

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88 For an overview of Foucault's "power" project, see his essay, "The Subject and Power."
reader to imagine. Who would ask for paper? If the reader is asking the implicit question of the writer, then the writer is in an offensive way preventing reader-identification. If the writer is asking the question of the reader, then the reader is projected into a social space that denies agency to the writer. The title is fragmented and recycled in the text in complicating, confounding ways: "Shut up, America!" (199); "I don't have any paper so stick some paper in your mouth" (200).

"Social romanticism" suggests that the text of Shut Up is the American equivalent of "state art." It is the equivalent of what American writers would roundly condemn: enrolling art in ideological production; lack of freedom of art. Andrews takes up a form that is widely disparaged, and ironically inverts its valuation, using it to critique the concept of "freedom" available in the "free world" - thereby redeeming the form and, as well, the communist hopes of the past (to slightly alter a phrase of Adorno's and Horkheimer's). If socialist realism is transparently utopic, its message is nevertheless clear, its syntax transparent, and its characters type-cast. Social romanticism is in every sense the obverse of socialist realism. Its textuality is opaque and, whenever "clear," blatantly dystopic. The freedoms available in a Western democracy are "getting us nowhere" - is the message: "Liberalism equals the gulag" (Shut Up 215). Critiques of the United States as a negative totality, such as the phrase just quoted, are a part of the
decentring production of capital itself, and receive no privileged position over other sentences in the text.

But then, if Shut Up is "equivalent" to social realist narratives, then the choice for authenticating truth-value that Watten proposes (the time dimension) is wrong: Shut Up's corresponding modernist project is not the "high art" of Zukofsky's "A"-9 ("the prototype of a poetics concerned with the reification of language" ["Social" 377]). Shut Up obeys (and disobeys) a different genre altogether: the state novel. Shut Up is, in its own words, an "inspirational semi-satiric deus ex machina" (158). For "inspirational," read romanticist. "Deus ex machina" because there are no laws of development - of meaning, imagery, plot, etc. - above that of the arbitrary rule established "inspirationally" through the act of writing: arbitrary rulings become the structuring device of the entire text: "I never let anyone change a word that I have written" ( ). Shut Up is a "semi-satire" on the order-word, achieved by rendering the force behind the received laws of form as explicit as possible and in all their arbitrary character. Metaphors remain unformed or become deformed, sentences which begin as direct statements end incoherently. The arbitrary rule is a forceful and aggressive intervention upon recognizable subject matters, social relations and reader identifications.

It is also possible to examine the assumptions behind the dismissal of a text for being merely a social formalism, which Watten anticipates and to which his essay is partly
addressed. There is a set of social wars going on in the guise of a genre war. Because if in fact the genre to which Shut Up in an indirect way belongs to is the "state novel," it is, then, on the order of popular genres (western, mystery, detective, etc.). A merely social formalism has provided in fact the materials of the cultural studies approach to English literature. This would include analyses, such as Janice Radways' of the Harlequin romance, as well as efforts to recover subordinated or forgotten genres, like the diary, autobiography, political poem, etc. To disparage merely social formalism as not good enough, as not socially committed, is to curiously deny that commitment to virtually any "lowbrow" genre. This is an elitist judgement carried to texts such as Shut Up because it does not follow representational politics.

Shut Up resists change at every point, in every way. The "incorporeal transformation" of Shut Up is from a state where change is imminent, to a state where change is denied, obstructed. This occurs on many levels and within many registers of discourse. In fact, "change" is its transcendental order-word, the very word whose positive value has remained for the most part unquestioned throughout the various positions outlined in this thesis. In Shut Up, all change is false, leads nowhere, benefits capital accumulation and further deepens the exploitation of the human. If there is any time dimension in the text, it is the time of the deus ex machina.
Poet and critic Bob Perelman is concerned to socially evaluate the negativity that pervasively informs Andrews' text. Although the violence is directed toward every identity and subject position, including those we might attribute to the author, Perelman wonders if the work only destroys, or if it anticipates new readings that would then link the work to "social change." Like Watten, Perelman is trying to negotiate a place of social critique for the negativity of the text. While Watten approaches Shut Up at the level of its form and method, Perelman simply reads the lines, letting them stand much like prosecutorial evidence before a jury (of readers). The problem with this juridical approach is that the process - of deciding on whether the critical persuasion. By appealing to the reader as a juror, Perelman weighs the evidence of the lines against the very paradigm that the text denies. For every line whose intention may be questionable (whether it sufficiently critiques the position of power from which the statement is made), another can be found suggesting otherwise. This quantifying of qualitative response seems a limiting approach to the text - one that gets caught up in the very polemics that the text encourages. For instance, Perelman focuses on the highly obnoxious line, "Where's a battered woman - I want to beat her up?" (Shut Up 193):

How much credence are we supposed to put in that question mark? The rhetoric is indecisive. It's would be like Baudelaire's "Let's Beat Up the
Poor"), but neither is it "Can we possibly understand the twisted feelings of someone who wants to beat up a battered woman?" It's hard to imagine Andrews is condoning abusive men, but what, besides triggering a conflicted response, does such a sentence do? ("Building" 128-129)

The answer lies, I think, in how aspects of the sentence - women, violence, conflicted response - reappear in other contexts of the book. For instance, the phrase on page 166, "questions are just a speech defect from accommodating men," throws a deconstructive reading over the sentence on page 193 that Perelman focuses on. This linking reveals the weakness of Perelman's position, which is another attempt at reconstructing authorial intention for the text. Perelman's strategy tends to unify the pronouns in the work, especially the first-person pronouns. "Where's a battered woman" and "I want to beat her up?" are read as utterances by the same person, a violent male. It is the very soundness of such linkages that are undermined, however, in Andrews's method of aggressive arbitrary rule on how phrases are joined. The fact that linkages across many pages can be made paradoxically supports this view. The question mark in the second phrase, "I want to beat her up?", need not be read as only qualifying its statement (raising the issue of credence). If baring the arbitrary and forceful aspect of linkages between phrases is one of the text's organizing principles, then the statement "questions are just a speech
defect from accommodating men" suggests that the two phrases composing the sentence Perelman focuses on might be read as separate - as two speech acts by two persons, the second person female, and the sentence as a whole behind an evaluation of intentions of the dominant subject position and its effect in the pragmatics of intersubjective communication on those such a position subjugates.

Perelman, and Wattan, are both careful when they quote sentences to quote as much of its immediate context as possible, pointing out that the context itself plays into the indeterminacy - conflicted response - of the text. The sentence that I am juxtaposing to the one that Perelman focuses on is actually a phrase within what might be taken as a line, since, while right-justified and syntactically built like prose, there are other segments of text within the prose-like block that are broken like lines:

least break this bunk; there are two dead grooves - eat what flees from you, let my son collect rubbish or sell used cars but please don't let him be the First Amendment, I saw demagogues forced to be pinballs, labor leaders ritually castrated: questions are just a speech defect from accommodating men. (166)

Aspects of the phrase, "there are two dead grooves," are given meaning later in the book as: "Synapses hate grooves, they hate them = social relations are overrated. My mind...is not here today; when did the liberals run out of
your money?" and as: "guard dog patrols mental gaps, feeble pooch no longer an activist" (194). To give one more example of repetition, the text's negativity is to an extent pulled in to the generation of arbitrary rules designed to shock. The first appearance in Shut Up of a phrase whose elements will be picked up later and related to negativity is: "Baby on the plate could still be a turkey come to life" (12). Then, on page 234, there is a tabloid-style question, "Are Intangible Negative Energies Blocking Your Life?," which reappears as "turkeys you carve effectively shield you from harmful negativity" on page 290, and so on.

The text anticipates and encourages cursory readings from any point within the book, as this only heightens the aggressive fetishizing of social conflict. The 100 sections are indexed alphabetically by the first letter in each title. The "Table of Content" is a parody of contents pages, and of organicist understandings of "content": "Law + freedom = content" (187).

To return to the question of development in time raised by Watten. The signifying chains are arbitrary, but arbitrariness is intrinsically argued through development in the form of the work as its content. This enacts a totalizing argument for the violence of the arbitrary. Phrases are severed as is from "original" contexts which readers can determine because those contexts can be "reconstructed" through the sort of suturing I have done here with two sentences. This is a part of the work itself.
In other words, there is a formal development in the work, but it does not mimic the "standard" development-in-time construct that Watten and Perelman implicitly appeal to for their viewpoint on the text. "Standard" time duration establishes what in Chapter 1 I called the existential subject template. This duration Andrews sardonically invokes in the line: "real time people are happy in real time" (Shut Up 42).

Ernesto Laclau's notion in "New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time" — that intrinsic to any social antagonism is a constitutive outside, and that antagonism is intrinsic to any identity — provides a way to think of the negativity informing Andrews's text. The antagonism, or totalizing negativity, of Andrews's text is constituted by an outside positivity, the presupposition of a "unity of social good and achieved art" that Watten discloses as its atemporality at the formal level in the work. Because it is a paradox that the formal gesture is at once superfluous and necessary — as Zizek has argued — there is no point in forcing a decision on which predominates. If the text is both, then the antagonism that is inherent to the text might look in a different light.

For Deleuze and Guattari, the order-word is experienced both as a kind of death and as a warning to flee (death). Flight itself must be made to "act and create" — as "vectors of flight" — in continuous variation so that death itself becomes, instead of an absolute, a variation. This is
equivalent to a sociolinguistic process that they refer to as the "becoming-minor" of the major language. It is one that releases the passwords in the order-words lodged in the major language. The order-word cannot be eluded, but its death-sentence affect can be; and so the task is one of discovering "how to develop its [the order-word's] power of escape, how to prevent escape from veering into the imaginary . . . how to maintain or draw out the revolutionary potentiality of the order-word" (Thousand 110). "Death" would correspond to the destructive effect that a number of lines have for Perelman (and no doubt will have on virtually all readers, since as many identifications that a reader may have with the text as possible are "killed"). The order-word as death sentence "legislates by constants" (Thousand 107): "referential formalism would be stalinist" (Shut Up 202). A warning to flee could be taken by the reader as a cue to dismiss the book, but that would not be to "act and create": death cannot ultimately be escaped. It goes without saying that neither of these aspects of the order-word are reassuring. If it is Andrews's intention to "bring forth the order-word of the order-word" (110), then a fatefull negativity cannot be ignored.

The concern with Andrews' Shut Up, which I think both Watten and Perelman indicate, is what might be called a closure, or a negating circularity, between these two aspects of order-words - fear and flight/creation/action. For every variation that asserts itself by becoming-minor -
by the tentative formation of an identity - there seems to be a countervailing, negating constant. There is a continuous variation set up in rhizomatic fashion across virtually every noun in the text (altering meanings substantially in some cases, as I demonstrated with the problematic line pinpointed by Perelman). The effect is that nowhere in the text can a centring identity be affirmed: there is no legislator. But this is, paradoxically, the very definition of a major language: it affirms no one in particular, Nobody. It is, then, the becoming-minor of the identity constituted by a major language: the becoming-minor of Nobody.

Cohesion
I rest rat nose wheel emergency drugs cremate the media, opponents of change stand center stage. (163)

But *Shut Up* is also the becoming-minor of the avant-garde order-word for social change. The closure, or negating circularity of *Shut Up*, the perception of atemporality, is because of a genre decision to write the Western counterpart to the social realist novel. Its application to the form of content in the West is such that the incorporeal transformations of social change are prohibited, or overturned.

I hit the beach at Anzio with my pink ankle warmers; work for social change & earn a living,
too; remove 400 hairs/hr on face (not lip) 1500/hr on legs and bodies.... (106)

An avant-garde role itself for the text is denied in society at large, as I have argued it is denied on the text's entry into the institution of literature by means of the academy. The avant-garde text is becoming-minor: circulation is small, publishing is smallpress, etc. On the other hand, the avant-garde object has always been constructed with noncanonical forms of content and expression - and in contrast to what the doxa defines as poetry or art. Likewise here, then, the social realist novel - state novel - is "redeemed." - But on whose terms? The terms themselves have changed. "So, it's / what, art, just formalist social theory?" (Shut Up 308). Gillian Rose:

Divine comedy represents an absolute beyond which annihilates individual consciousness, in contrast to the epic which presents a present in which individuals live. Divine comedy represents a humanity which has absolute certainty only in its negation, whose acts are immediately destroyed. The spectator of a divine comedy can only burst into tears. (74-75)
CHAPTER NINE:
"Feeding from a dented cant": Harryette Mullen's *S*PeRN**xx*T

Emile Benveniste describes, in three influential essays collected in *Problems in General Linguistics*, how the self-referential nature of the first-person pronoun is due to the fact that the *I* does not refer to a concept or an individual. He contrasts the first person pronoun to the noun. The noun refers "to a fixed and 'objective' notion, capable of remaining potential or of being actualized." *Hat*, for example, can refer to all hats, or to one specific hat. The *I*, on the other hand, "refers to the act of individual discourse in which it is pronounced, and by this designates its speaker" (*Problems* 226). The *I*'s self-referentiality is purely linguistic. When the subject produces itself in an utterance by means of the first person pronoun, the subject is present in that enunciated utterance alone.

Each *I* has its own reference and corresponds each time to a unique being who is set up as such. . . .

If I perceive two successive instances of discourse containing *I*, uttered in the same voice, nothing guarantees to me that one of them is not a reported discourse, a quotation in which *I* could be imputed to another. (*Problems* 218)

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89 "Relationships of Person in the Verb" (1946) (*General* 195-204); "The Nature of Pronouns" (1956) (*General* 217-222); "Subjectivity in Language" (1958) (*General* 231-238).
There are other linguistic elements that, used in combination with the first person pronoun, "guarantee" for the reader that two successive utterances refer to the same subject. The process of enunciation in the utterance is one that establishes being in language. Reader-identification usually is said to occur at junctures where - and when - the text is drawing attention to itself as ontologically constituted. The reading experience of these junctures is of a self-referentiality where the term "self" in "self-referential" literally implies being. Befitting ontology as "the first philosophy," Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben describes, in *The Coming Community*, what might be called ur reader-identification with/in language. He draws attention to how we read being into/as language primarily through anaphoric and deictic grammatical functions. The guarantee for the reader that a sequence of utterances utilizing the first person pronoun refers to the same subject is made by anaphora and deixis. "The pronoun," Agamben says, "through *deixis*, presupposes relationless being.... [i.e.] the immediate being-there of a non-linguistic element, which language cannot say but only show." "Through anaphora," the pronoun "makes that being [invoked by deixis] 'the subject' of discourse" (95). There is a process of "reciprocal implication" between anaphoric and deixic functions, constituting ur reader-identification with the pronoun. For Agamben, the point is to focus on the paradoxical becoming of "the being-in-language-of-the-non-linguistic, the thing
itself." The only "fixed and 'objective' notion" that the I refers to is itself as a purely linguistic "thing."

In Bruce Andrews's *Shut Up*, the first-person pronoun dominates. It can be conjectured that the first-person pronoun dominates in order to partly deflect, away from the reader, the violence of his assertions. They are deflected back into the social, the social relations that the reader herself projects her reading into. At the same time, very little anaphora and deixis can be found supporting the creation of a stable subject in the text. Rather, to recall Benveniste, "[e]ach I has its own reference and corresponds each time to a unique being who is set up as such" (Problems 218).

Andrews's technique is to draw reflexive attention to the process of enunciation in the utterance, and to specific illocutionary acts presupposed in each utterance: "That's right, I want permission to kill the unborn in my womb" (*Shut Up* 228). The forthright tone and the decisive diction situate the speaker on the abortion debate. The I will reappear in different contexts at many other points in *Shut Up*, but in each case as "someone else." Andrews's technique, which takes full advantage of the formal properties of the personal pronoun as described by Benveniste, draws a reader's attention to the process of enunciation in the constitution of an utterance as a social process. In each instance, the utterance's outcome is contestable, the reader forced onto a ground of social debate. The ontological
status of textuality, the metaphysics of presence in language, the reader's identification with a fully humanized subject, an objectification that discloses a singular persona - these are beside the point.

What may strike a reader of Harryette Mullen's *S*PeRM**K*T, especially after reading Andrews's *I Don't Have Any Paper So Shut Up* (or, *Social Romanticism*), is the literal absence of the first-person pronoun. The second-person pronoun is present in Mullen's text. According to Benveniste's argument, this logically implies a first-person pronoun. There is a "correlation of personality" (General 200) between the I and the You. The I must already be set up as a kind of implicit utterance within the person who addresses another person by the second-person pronoun. The implicit utterance in the statement, "You are about to leave Calgary," is the I uttering the statement: "It is I who says that you are about to leave Calgary." One convention of lyric poetry is the You that refers to an implicit I - when the poet addresses herself. Benveniste does not, however, detail how exactly the implicit I is constituted in the You. Is it identical to the explicit I of an utterance? A probable reason why Benveniste does not elaborate on the implicit I is because the pragmatics of the specific utterance determines its nature. It is these determinations that Harryette Mullen draws from in the implicit I/absent I of *S*PeRM**K*T.
My first response to Harryette Mullen's poetry is to situate it, within Erica Hunt's schema of oppositional poetics, as a speculative project. Hunt's essay, "Notes for an Oppositional Poetics," emphasizes the constitution of the subject by order-words, on the scale of everyday life in a late-capitalist mode of production:

Dominant modes of discourse, the language of ordinary life or of rationality, of moral management, of the science of the state, the hectoring threats of the press and media, use convention and label to bind and organize us.

The convenience of these labels serves social control . . . . they are wedded to our common sense, they are formulaic without being intrusive, entirely natural . . . .

These languages contain us, and we are simultaneously bearers of the codes of containment. Whatever damage or distortion the codes inflict on our subjectively elastic conception of ourselves, socially we act in an echo chamber of the features ascribed to us, Black woman, daughter, mother, writer, worker and so on . . . .

The codes and mediations that sustain the status quo abbreviate the human in order to fit us into structures of production. (199-200)
Hunt takes this conception of the social order and thinks it through in terms of poetics. She differentiates between oppositional and conventional poetics, noting how oppositional poetics are often attached to social movements for change and are committed to exploring the social effects of innovation in literary form. A conventional poetics might consist of those linguistic and visual devices which have been coopted by the advertising industry to promote and sell its products. Oppositional poetics have, for Hunt, historically offered two kinds of projects, the speculative and the liberatory:

[Speculative] projects . . . engage language as social artifact, as art material, as powerfully transformative . . . as distinct from [liberatory] projects that have as their explicit goal the use of language as a vehicle for the consciousness and liberation of oppressed communities. (203)

I would say that these historical projects are distinguishable in terms of the extent to which each conceives of the power-differentiated hierarchies of society as being homologous with language itself - the extent to which, in other words, each politicizes the sign as an end in itself. The liberatory project tends to affirm the liberation of the black subject as already having occurred, or begun, in the acts of writing by black authors. Such a project might affirm the existence of a positive black
identity operating politically as, in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's phrase, "strategic essentialism."

For a speculative poetics, the concept of subjectivity itself forms part of the social critique, at the formal level of language - the process of enunciation in the utterance. Such a poetics might be interested in how subjectivities are differentially constituted within a poeticized sign system as colour-coded beings. This would include a critical reading of how newly liberated subjectivities might be coopted by the capitalist logic - liberated for cooption. Centripetal forces of the social order refer then not only to mass media representations but also to identity and to the terms that a particular identity is deemed to be either positive or negative. The speculative project provides a critical vision of how alternative subjectivities to the officially reproduced (white) subjectivity remain historically eclipsed from social inscription.

My second response to S*PeRMK**t is to recognize how this alternative between speculation and liberation is complicated, as the text implicates both oppositional projects.

For Hunt, oppositional poetics, whether liberatory or speculative, are to varying degrees dependent on external definition, such that "the perceived hostility of the dominant group shapes the bonds of opposition" (204). If oppositionality is shaped by contact points of hostility,
then it must also be externally shaped by the granting of concessions. For Hunt, both projects are vulnerable to cooptation, which consists of practices of reinscription by dominant discourse on conceptual advances made by oppositional groups into the terms, values and structures of dominant ideology. . . . Opposition is alternately demonized or accommodated through partial concessions without a meaningful alteration of dominant culture's own terms. (201, 202)

If oppositional poetics are constrained to the existing codes, codes which are organized centripetally to reproduce the cultural dominant, then it becomes important, for the poetic text as social critique, to in some way address this centre in order to anticipate and preclude cooptation by the centre. Mullen's *S*PeRM**K*T critically addresses the centre's mass media language and the terms of its construction of subjectivity. For Hunt, however, a speculative poetics that addresses the centre is vulnerable to the charge of ignoring the value of an address to a specific community of readers on whose behalf it is oppositional - that is, to a set of political issues beyond the politics of poetry. A text that critically addresses the centre is itself prone to becoming centred on that critique of the centre, even though the centre is no longer recognizable as itself (thus the text resists cooptation) or as the margin (where a community lies). This can lead to a
criticism that denies the value of a liberatory poetics, as
Hunt points out: "When such projects produce claims of
exclusive centrality, they are bound to be disturbing to
allies who have experienced social subordination" (204; my
italics). A critique of the centre - adamant concerning its
own value as demonstrating the only viable means of
addressing the totality of oppressions as the effects of
multinational capitalism on everyday life - can be
experienced as another form of social subordination. In
other words, there is in the speculative project an ideal
reader, just as there is in a liberatory poetics. Likewise,
a liberatory poetics that adamantly attributes positive
values to clarity of expression, and negative values - of
power, or of elitism - to any other form of expression, runs
the risk of reinscribing the dominant need for a major
language.

Hunt is suggesting that there is, however, a productive
dialogue that can occur between liberatory and speculative
projects, and more importantly that each should acknowledge
its dependence on the other's strengths. The value of this
blending is that it can address sociopolitical
transformation at the structural level, rather than the
purely phenomenological level of subjectivity. In "The
Theoretical Subject(s) of This Bridge Called My Back and
Anglo-American Feminism," 90 Norma Alarcon refers to what

90 This essay provides a critical retrospective on the
anthology This Bridge Called My Back (1983), one of the
first compilations of writings by women of colour to
Julia Kristeva calls the "logic of identification." Alarcon outlines a female subjectivity which, substituted for a male subjectivity within the same structurally oppressive constitution of the subject of knowledge, effects only token change - a change in personnel. Alarcon writes:

To be oppressed means to be disenabled not only from grasping an 'identity', but also from reclaiming it. In this culture, to grasp or reclaim an identity means always already to have become a subject of consciousness. The theory of the subject of consciousness as a unitary and synthesizing agent of knowledge is always already a posture of domination. (364)

The task of subverting that historically inherited (by the few but powerful, gendered male, racially white subjects) "posture of domination" is the allied objective of both poetics projects. The possibilities of dialogue itself might be found issuing from this matrix which Alarcon has articulated: with and against subjectivity as a "unitary and synthesizing agent of knowledge," and with its alternatives, those utterly disenabled social realities and those which have been reclaimed from oppression.

Mullen's poetry is premised on the textually elided black subject. Premised, in other words, on the pervasive condition of social relations as selectively refracting directly address the absence of discussions of race in feminist writings.
those subjectivities it wishes to make "visible," social relations ideologically most explicit in what she terms the media cyborg.\footnote{Mullen's concept of the racialized media cyborg is described in her essay, "Miscegenated Texts & Media Cyborgs: Technologies of Body and Soul." Mullen's racialized media cyborg falls soberingly short of Donna Haraway's vision of the cyborg, in "The Cyborg Manifesto," for socialist feminism. The racialized media cyborg is, for Mullen, a mass advertising instrument of the multinational corporation, and constructs the hybrid social ideal of a "miscegenated text" as the packaging for its products and as cover for the logic of capital. This hybridity, Mullen argues, is selectively constituted in order to exclude the lived social reality of Afro-Americans.} A reading of one of Mullen's poems suggests the following description of what the analogous situation in poetry is when the textual elision of the black subject by a pervasive ideology of the media cyborg forms part of the poem's address. In this scenario, black subjectivity is admitted into the text only as the sounds of words (corresponding to the "black soul" of the media cyborg). This segues with the negative connotations sound as an absolute value has in official verse culture, of being transrational or beyond "sense." Whereas white subjectivity is invoked literally as the "thoroughly materialized" image of words themselves, of writing itself, the typefaced body of letters (the "white body" of, ironically, black ink), thereby seguing with connotations of cultural literacy, tradition and knowledge. These latter values for the image of the word are directly opposed to those inherent to sound. This analogy to poetry would have its historical basis in American race relations history, beginning with the white
writer/black voice collaborative literary production of American slave narratives.92

In *S*PeRM**K**T there is, beginning with the first of its thirty-two untitled serial prose poems, a stress, in the verbs, on the formal constructedness accompanying the very fact of text prior to reading what that text might say (which as one must read it to understand even this, demonstrates thereby the reader's paradoxical complicity with what might now be called a social formalism). Here is the first poem:

Lines assemble gutter and margin. Outside and in, they straighten a place. Organize a stand. Shelve space. Square footage. Align your list or listlessness. Pushing oddly evening aisle catches the trail of an eye. Displays the cherished share. Individually wrapped singles, frozen divorced compartments, six-pack windows express themselves

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92 In "Miscegenated Texts & Media Cyborgs: Technologies of Body and Soul," Mullen traces American racial history itself in terms of a "miscegenated text": from the collaborative black narrator/white amanuensis team of the slave narrative, through the religious abolitionist literature crafting a soul for the previously objectified, "unreadable" black body. This soul was "visibly represented and described in terms familiar to the literate white audience" (36) so that the person could be recognized as human by European standards. Mullen traces this racial history to this century of media technologies where, for example in early Hollywood film, blacks portray "the repressed and emotional soul of a white social-cultural-political-economic body" (42), to the present, "in which the black soul may be a more lucrative commodity than black bodies ever were" (43) for the reproduction of a consumer market whose surplus value is the historical legacy of slavery. These ruling discourses remain racialized as a white supremacy.
while women wait in family ways, all bulging bas-
kets, squirming young. More on line incites the
eyes. Bold names familiar type faces. Her hand
scanning throwaway lines.

Lines, prior to being read as poetry, belong to a different pro-
tocol of production - the typesetter's. But as the poem, in this
linear reading, laterally shifts its social space from producer
(the typesetter) to consumer (in the supermarket), "lines"
metonymically come to represent information in general and in
contrast to knowledge, rendering the fate of interpretation under
these new consumerist conditions as "a more or less subjective
(privatised) and hence dispensible activity," to quote from
Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary
Cultural Studies by Rey Chow. Chow cites Edward Said:

What happens to information and knowledge, ... when IBM
and AT&T - two of the world's largest corporations -
claim that what they do is put "knowledge" to work "for
the people"? What is the role of humanistic knowledge
and information if they are not to be unknowing (many
ironies there) partners in commodity production and
marketing, so much so that what humanists do may in the
end turn out to be a quasi-religious concealment of
this peculiarly unhumanistic process? (131-132)

To rephrase part of Said's question: What is the role of poetry
and its interpretation if poet and critic are not to be unknowing
partners in commodity production and marketing? I think laying
bare the latter's "peculiarly unhumanist process" informs
Mullen's poetics in a fundamental way. If there is a persistent question behind her poems, I would hear it right here, in the context of "the world's corporations" and their impact on or compact with our everyday life. For example, How are the productive relations, i.e. the 'necessities', which are basic to life, being reproduced against us? Mullen's poetic, and the critical question I hear from it, has consequences for how to conceive of subjectivity, and of the necessities and conditions of its reproduction. Mullen's poetry is situated at the multidirectional intersection of the reproductive issues of the everyday (e.g. food, sex, living standard, health), where, echoing the concerns of Donna Haraway in "The Cyborg Manifesto,"

[t]he dominance of the information model results in life itself being regarded as simply another form of information storage and retrieval . . . . [and thus where] information has long since been transformed into both commodity and capital. (1990, 39)

In Mullen's poem, the sentence "Align your list or listlessness" marks the first instance of punning homophony with a previous word in the poem, splitting sound from image: "align," "a line." The poetic sentence spreads its address across the social to embrace three contexts: 1) a line as a line in the supermarket, 2) of prose poetry, and 3) the notion of prescribed social alignment. Align a potential list of things to do/produce, so that it becomes a list of things to buy/consume, and if listless, that is, no money to spend, then at least align that listlessness - 'do not loiter', get off the dole. Mullen's text
raises variations on my earlier question: Where are these prescriptions for social alignment 'coming from', and how are they made? In Althusserian language, Mullen's poetry shapes answers based on a poetics of ideology-critique of the social formation at the level of the reproduction of the metonymic chain of productive relations (that is, the chain of production, consumption and surplus value).

Mullen's poetry defamiliarizes any self-evident, given, social necessity for the reproduction of social prescriptives as internalized rules in the subject. To this end she theorizes subjectivity as social construction. The sentence, "Pushing oddly evening aisle catches the tail of an eye," pursues the sound/-image split into the context of racialized subjectivity. I read "aisle" homophonically as "I'll" and, on that same level, the object phrase of the sentence ("catches the tail of an eye") as commentary upon it (with the pun on "I"). Thus black subjectivity and will is suppressed to this homophonic level as merely a glimpse or a "tail of an I," for nowhere in S*PeRM**K*T is the first-person pronoun used, except for here and in this oblique way. All of the language has implications for the positioning of the reader/writer; there is no privileged grammatical point of entry into (black) subjectivity that is untainted by the socially, ideologically saturated medium, language itself, of potential agency. In S*PeRM**K*T there is a "we," "they," "you," "his," "our," but no unmediated "I." Since the written "I" would identify the immediacy of a liberated black subject, and, since there is no written "I," there is no such immediacy available in
the language. Black subjectivity will be expressed to the reader by subterfuge within the language, "in mediacy." The immediacy available for political purchase is related, according to my reading, in the next line: "Displays the cherished share." Possessive individualism's reified objective correlative, its "cherished share" is, in this instance, the packaged foods of supermarkets - "individually wrapped singles, frozen divorced compartments, six-pack windows." These all have more reality of expression than the female consumers, because the produce - as a concrete realization of the history of capitalism which has suppressed economic recognition of the value of domestic labour and emphasized the packaging and handling of the produce over the produce itself - favours the white male gender.

Thus subjectivity is dealt with as an effect of objects, of language, of writing. These social prescriptions are for the most part represented in Mullen's prose poems as phrases culled from the mass media, mostly television advertising. She writes: "I use . . . folk-based forms, allusively, along with their mutant offspring: clichés, political slogans, advertising jingles, tabloid headlines, and other linguistic ready-mades from the mass culture dumpster."93 TV is where the corporate world inserts itself most assiduously, and insidiously, into everyday life. The scale of the specific in Mullen's poems includes sex videos, house cleaning, germs and bugs, bread and milk, pets, and disposable packaging. So in part the consequences for thinking subjectivity, in Mullen's poetry, have to do with how mass media representa-

93 Personal correspondence, February 17, 1995.
tions construct blackness and elide race as a conflictual social issue. Mullen never repeats these representations in her poems without inflecting them ironically, demonstrating just how race is elided, and where. She is therefore anticipating and critiquing the character of the "demand," as she puts it in her essay, of the centre upon any differentiation (such as the one she is making) from within status quo language to be seamlessly coopted into its reproduction. Her poems are not 'passing' for white (thereby suppressing the oppressed lived social relations of black subjectivity), nor are they passing for black (thereby suppressing the social reality of the appropriative social machinery of dominant white culture) so much as demonstrating how passing mechanisms work at the primary levels of identification for a subject in everyday language, whose public face is constituted by the power plays of the mass media.

My reading is intended to show how and why reader-identification processes are obstructed in Mullen's writing, and the extent to which instead of individuated lyric (focusing on first-person pronoun) Mullen's language gives a social totality where, to quote from a collaboratively written statement of poetics that bears on Mullen's assumptions, a "more inclusive address in the poem . . . an openness to the world . . . [takes place] . . . at a point where language occurs as a 'not-I' that, by definition, is beyond the poet" (Watten 269).
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