WHITENESS, OTHERNESS, AND THE INDIVIDUALISM PARADOX FROM HUCK TO PUNK

By
DANIEL S. TRABER

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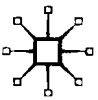

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Dedicated to my parents, Daniel and Lillian,
for their many years of love, support, and patience,
but especially to my wife, Julia, who has been willing
to match their benevolence in a quarter of the time.

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Contents

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Introduction

Like many previous investigations of American culture this one is about individualism. It is an old subject but still worth exploring, for one of the nation's ruling myths continues to be that the self-contained individual is unconstrained by society, culture, and history. This is evident in the emphasis placed on autonomy by those seminal voices of American studies that manufactured the canon by defining "true" American literature as promoting the individual and democracy, with the caveat that freedom and selfhood are possible only outside of and away from the demands of a society external to the self.[1] In 1954 R.W.B. Lewis famously articulated a key element of this mythos he calls "strategic distance": "The individual in America has usually taken his start outside society . . . and if he does get inside, it makes a difference whether he is walking into a trap or discovering the setting in which to realize his own freedom" (101). Such a stance ossified the relationship between individualism and American literature, but that could only be accomplished by ignoring, in effect silencing, any qualities of the texts that contradicted the belief. This book joins that past work, intent on reexamining and demystifying the search for autonomy through a personally chosen physical and psychic displacement; it hopes to further complicate not only faith in a naturalized self untouched by structural forces but overly optimistic assumptions about the politics of voluntary marginality.

The primary criterion for my choice of texts is that they have been treated, sometimes even reified, as nonconformist at some point in time. With this type of project it is impossible not to leave out someone's favorite rebel hero. There are plenty of other texts, groups, and cultural phenomena that can be viewed through the lens of self-marginalization (for example, today's "wiggers") and some are far more removed from the center. My choices have all been promoted at one time as emblematizing an American spirit of dissent and their current "mainstream" status is precisely what intrigues me.[2] The "rules" determining what is outlaw or

radical—like the varied categories of otherness—are thoroughly contextual, changing with time, place, and group. Each of these texts has its contemporary target, a dominant idea/value/system that is critiqued, so one should consider how that chosen "enemy" may consider the work a threat to some aspect of an *episteme* maintaining the center's power. In short, these texts were all branded with a mark of subversion before they were canonized; each was created with the intention of angering someone invested in the "old ways" before critics made them incorporated iconoclasts.

That my choices may all be deemed examples of "white" rebellion is also crucial. The prevalent method of critical whiteness studies is to critique "white" identity for its constructed quality and the privileges it is unfairly awarded, with the guiding assumption being that whites work to protect whiteness. This is my stance as well, but I approach it by a different route: straight white males (the group poised to benefit most from the status quo) who choose otherness to divorce themselves from a dominant "white" culture. The beliefs and values typically connected to whiteness extend beyond race; therefore, I examine this resistant self-fashioning through varied minorities all defined by their exclusion from the center. Race is always in the background, since each protagonist tries to elude a form of dominant whiteness, but it expands and transmogrifies into atypical shapes. The following characters, authors, and people rely on the border to insulate themselves from incorporation, all hope the marginality label will create an identity in opposition to the approved social categories. But this is not the old saw about interracial bonding, and not just because otherness will take less of an exclusively race-based model (see Introduction, n.1).

The recurring question is the degree to which subjectivity can be chosen even when the boundaries regulating the self are considered transmutable. Upon closer inspection the subversive quality of these border crossings proves ambiguous—simultaneously a success and failure. There are problems with self-marginalization when the purpose is to build a sense of individuality, so I theorize an attendant paradox to show that any simple correlation of marginality with agency is flawed since the center's values are replicated. These cultural traitors prove complicit with the power formation as this new self is underpinned by an orthodox logic of individualism. The figures I study try to break with a systemic discourse but build their freedom on the

enemy's codes. The paths these characters take in the name of self-interested privatization and the choices that desire sanctions will vary, but all the protagonists pledge allegiance to the fundamental principles of individualism and they all rely on reifying their Others into valorized stereotypes. The lines of race, class, and culture are not erased, and the hegemonic values of the dominant culture endure precisely because they are needed to define the new identity and to be recognized as a threatening Other. My end goal, then, is to imagine modes of freedom that facilitate agency without blindly duplicating repressive values.

The chapters are organized chronologically according to three broad periods of American history and cultural production—realism, modernism, and postmodernism—to get a snapshot trace of this discourse's articulation from the 1880s to the 1980s. This historical starting point is significant to my project for three reasons. First, the postbellum years are when individualism takes a shape that is still recognizable today. Although Alexis de Tocqueville coined the word well before the Civil War, it is during the Gilded Age, as Mark Twain helped name it, when self-interest grows into a reigning principal. Thus, the doctrine of placing the self before all others is further naturalized and entrenched as a national ideology to define what America, and Americans, stand for. In every text we find a rebellion that mirrors the system it claims to despise. Individuality is conflated with individualism, so the pursuit of uniqueness and freedom starts to look like satisfying one's own desires at any costs and is justified by the same philosophy of self-aggrandizement that considers anything less to be an act of submission.

This specific discourse of the self is closely connected to the second reason. The economic transformations in the years after 1865 chart capitalism's exponential growth into a naturalized system affecting every level of society. The changes wrought by the development of industrialism into late capitalism play a vital role in understanding the rationale behind appropriating Otherness in the name of individuality. The evolution from market economy to multinationalism opens an historical panorama of self-marginalization that follows the trail of the white male American hoping to avoid the trap of "civilization." Accompanying industrialization is the expanded influence of the urban on American culture as older social patterns based on agrarian

values are replaced by a faster mechanized pace; contact with immigrant cultures; and an increase in commercialization and mass consumption that all contribute to the way protagonists respond to urbanization by conceptualizing their freedom in relation to nature—be it Twain's St. Petersburg, fin de siècle New York, Jazz Age Paris, or postmodern L.A. Self-marginalization promises a way to regain autonomy when individuality appears less attainable as a member of the faceless, alienated masses. As time passes, we find a growing sense of resignation about the loss of nature as it becomes less of an escape option. Some regret being disconnected from the natural world, others, like punks who reject the suburbs, will turn their sights back on the city to find a sense of difference.[3]

Finally, with emancipation and Reconstruction's legal mandates to establish equality by integrating blacks into American society, the Other's presence and new self-definition as a free self incites a heightened mobilization of legal, political, and cultural practices to distinguish white people from "inferior" nonwhites. In conjunction with the physical and cultural diaspora of African Americans away from the South (albeit not in large numbers until 1914's Great Migration) there is a dramatic increase in southern European immigration. Both groups are portrayed as a threat to the "way of life" of those benefiting from the hegemony of whiteness that contributes to a milieu based on us-against-them cultural warfare. In an atmosphere where those classified as nonwhite were equal in word only (more rarely even that), association with an Other made it possible for "white" subjects to invent an identity that could forcefully break with the sanctioned conventions of normalcy imposed by the mainstream. All the horrors inflicted on these tokens of extreme Otherness—mass lynching, child labor, unhealthy tenements—mark them as abhorrent outsiders of the center, an inscription that makes them a source for separating from the mainstream.

I begin with Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. I still read Huck as fleeing society by associating with an African American, but in a less acknowledged guise: the criminal. Huck hopes such a pariah status will seal his fate with those who keep trying to foist civilized respectability upon him. Yet Twain makes the ideological influence too strong for the boy to ever escape; not only is Huck a racist to the end, his privatized desire for freedom is merely a fulfillment of the reigning ethos.

The issue is next discussed in terms of an author. Stephen Crane's fictional ethnography of slum life in *Maggie* is not to be taken as an "honest" portrayal of lives brutalized by industrialization. Instead, I read the novel as Crane's attempt to establish a personal and authorial rebellious subjectivity with his subject matter: the white ethnic poor. His representation of the white Other is a means to fulfill his desire for difference. Moreover, we find a parallel contradiction in Crane's positing a standard of "proper" whiteness that parrots those who condemn the not-quite-white ethnics as "savages."

Such paradoxes continue into the twentieth century where the protagonists try dissociating themselves from parent cultures tainted by an affiliation with the mores of a dominant whiteness. That move can be critiqued in the four texts I examine but there is a significant twist in that two promote ambivalence as a politics in refusing an either/or paradigm for identity construction. The proposed geographical and psychic diasporas from affluence informing both the quasi-Beat hipster in Cormac McCarthy's *Suttree* (which includes an analytical leap backward to James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pioneers*) and L.A. punk culture remain invested in a notion of the true and authentic self. As one of the exceptions, the protagonist of Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* is a modernist expatriate exploring hybridity, the mixing of identities, to avoid claiming allegiance to any one totalizing narrative. He makes distinctions between certain forms of whiteness and Otherness as he attempts to construct a new self, choosing the Spanish peasant as a viable Other to balance out his expatriate side and give his life a meaning he has approved for himself. Chapter 6 functions as a culmination of these issues by interpreting Alex Cox's *Repo Man* as a meditation on subversive identity in the early Reagan years. Cox turns to an aesthetic Other—the cult film—to establish the outsider credentials he wants but does not wholly believe can exist in the postmodern world.

The book closes with an alternate theory of identity drawn from Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of the "emptied self." This model breaks with the ideal of uniqueness that emphasizes cultural dissimilarities but only raises borderlines higher by containing people within restrictive binaries. Rather, one should recognize the already mixed quality of being so that any standards for locating the self become too slippery to hold. There is no concept like difference for we are all always already different. And when we accept this idea as common sense, as

the new hegemony, there is no longer a need for border guards to protect or assign identity by classifying someone a subject or an Other.

* * *

In 1987 Fredric Jameson declared, for all who may not have heard the news, that "myths of the lonely rebel or nonconformist are patently antiquated" ("On *Habits*" 561). That depends on whom you ask, for the "death of the subject" has really only influenced academics who had a chance to read (and contribute to the writing of) the obituary. That the freedom and rights of the individual—free to think and choose whatever he or she wants, to become whomever she or he wants, unconstrained by society, culture, or history—are sacrosanct is central to figuring the individualist as a nonconformist. Sacvan Bercovitch defines individuality as a "belief in the absolute integrity, spiritual primacy, and inviolable sanctity of the self," ideally leading to respect for the individuality of other selves (*Rites* 314). Individualism and individuality are typically distinguished by characterizing the former as a philosophical narrative revering the self above community, while the latter is concerned with issues of autonomy and rights but is compatible with community.[4] It is hardly generalizing to claim that much American literature and popular culture advocates these philosophies. Nina Baym reminds us that early American writers "assumed that the truest Americans would also be the most individualistic, the persons least like their neighbors" ("Creating" 220). Likewise, self-marginalization as a strategy for individuality is repeated throughout America's social and cultural history. Although individuality defines what these protagonists are pursuing, their rationale for it draws on beliefs influenced by individualism.

The cast list of individualists, misfits, and loners—all threatening, antiauthoritarian, and unconventional—in American culture is a long one, but it is crucial to note how white, how male, and how straight the archetype has been. There is no shortage of nonwhites, women, or homosexuals in the roster of American rebels poised against the status quo, but the necessities of identity politics often force people from those groups into taking on the role of representing their category. White straight males have not had to carry that burden, they are granted more license—in politics, art, and life in general—to focus on the self without a concern for the community. White males have had

the freedom to pick up and leave at will when the impulse strikes, fortifying the narrative that without individualism there is no "America."

It is fitting that the writer who introduced the term to a large audience would also critique it. Alexis de Tocqueville describes individualism as "a mature and calm feeling, which disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellow-creatures . . . [and] willingly leaves society at large to itself" (506). He predicts the despotism that arises from atomization as people withdraw inward and allow the government a freer reign over society—destroying any chance for full individuality. But there have always been critics of individualism, and their voices arose again in the 1960s and 1970s to criticize how its excesses—reframing "rugged" as "rampant"—benefit the powerful at the expense of public interests (Tichi 222, Glazer 298). Individuality was also problematized in critical theory by deconstructing the individual/self (a biological creature with a transcendent, unified, and natural core identity) into a subject (a biological product of society and history).[5] In reading subjectivity as something continually being represented and inscribed in discourse we must then view people as *subjects in process* who can learn to negotiate the specific historical, social, and cultural forces shaping their options. Identity then becomes a site of struggle.

Michel Foucault aims to disprove there is an essential self existing outside the boundaries of power. Individuality "categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him" ("Subject and Power" 212). Foucault shifts the focus from ideology to discourses so as to broaden the field of social influences, resulting in an indispensable concept for examining the appropriation of Otherness: relations of power. These are "the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are always local and unstable. . . . [Power] is not an institution, and not a structure . . . it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (*History* 93). Control is maintained at all levels by dispersing power through even the most insignificant social relationship. The world is composed of systems of power, with both subject-to-subject and subject-to-institution relations caught in a complex network influenced by a culture's dominant economic, political, and social

structures. From this perspective, the subject is *produced* by power, always involved in a relation of power even though it is also always unstable. These power relations become more complicated when one attempts individuation through self-marginalization. In *The History of Sexuality* Foucault construes the self as an act of self–domination as it relies on available discursive formations. When a subject attributes distinctions of what/who one is it only serves to subjugate the self further through the requirements of a social role. The very desire for liberation feeds self-domination by incorporating distinctions already chosen for us; so every time an identity is donned we open ourselves to being subjected.

Foucault's later work comes to argue that the very breadth of power's dispersal means there are unlimited sites in which we can resist, although never from outside a system of relations. His micropolitics promotes a multiplicity of difference to frustrate totalization and exclusionary discourses. This belief in a constant struggle between subjects and power refutes the determinist viewpoint while avoiding a naive model of autonomy with a pure, unified self deep within us waiting to be unchained. One must strive for formlessness by stripping the self of sure distinctions and definitions. In *The Care of the Self* he returns to the ancients' idea of ethics (the humanist's method) to propose that a subject can only attend to controlling her/his own needs and passions, and through such control will become a better citizen who can affect society in a localized fashion. Steven Best and Douglas Kellner explain the implications of this shift: "individuals also have the power to define their identity . . . [so] freedom is achieved to the extent that one can overcome socially imposed limitations and attain self-mastery and a stylized existence" (64–65). This postmodern ideal of protean identity is a solution with agency, but the choices are still mostly taken from what the culture or a particular social group supply to the subject. Ironically, Foucault's method of resistance starts to resemble the self-interest of liberal individualism: the self ignores the macropowers of domination by receding into an aesthetics of personal identity to enhance private freedom.[6] There is no organized large-scale attempt to change the institutions of power, only localized battles to negotiate their social effects to the satisfaction—the pleasure—of the individual. With that in mind, appropriating a marginalized identity becomes a more dubious method for achieving autonomy. A person moving outside the center carries an undeniable system of power—unwittingly reinforcing the control of the hegemonic discourses—and perpetuates the dominant

culture within the margin where those assigned Otherness try to maintain their own unstable sanctuary.

In anticipation of the critique of self-marginalization to follow, I want to present Pierre Bourdieu's theory of "habitus" to further problematize autonomy, more specifically the reliance on Otherness as the vehicle to achieve it. His interest in the way social space influences group practices and beliefs spurs him to emphasize how an environment enables a system of seemingly unconscious dispositions that contribute to shaping a subjects' particular actions and reactions, attitudes and perceptions of the world. Habitus describes the accepted rules of a social space, those often minute details of appearance and behavior that mark one as belonging. Each habitus has a history of choices open to the subject, so there is room for change, differentiation, and improvisation; however, a person's options are still ultimately rooted in an established system of possible behaviors and tastes. A habitus operates as a privatized social space. It can offer a limited means of escape from the dominant culture through modes of behavior that counter the center's values (*Language* 71). Such choices serve as a means of respite from the official world; it empowers subordinated subjects with a sense of self and a personalized freedom through membership in a specific group.

This idea informs the dream of using the margin as a space where one can live a life contrary to "white" bourgeois norms. The protagonists choose marginal groups and spaces that offer an identity *contra* the mainstream. Their search for agency buys into a system of classification but uses it for a transgressive purpose. Bourdieu notes how identity is given shape by determining which group one belongs to in comparison to the groups in which one is definitely *not* a member. Certain qualities designate a particular subjectivity: dress, food, and drink, how one spends leisure time, public behavior, even the minute bodily movements constituting one's "hexis." *Distinction* shows how the specific qualities and practices of a group work as codes for establishing hierarchies and authenticity, each "provides the small number of distinctive features which . . . allow the most fundamental social differences to be expressed" (226). So the political potential of a marginal habitus is tied to the distinctions that can be adopted and turned against the dominant. The problem is the purported ease with which a person from outside assumes they can join through mimicry. The

differences that mark a group are assigned specific meanings and maintained with rules of behavior within the group itself. This should not be taken as supporting a notion of authenticity, the fact is that a habitus is already partly manufactured by the center. Border crossers do not pollute any supposed sanctity of the margin since a system of distinction already pervades it, otherwise it could not exist in a knowable state. The habitus and its members are "the product of the whole history of its relations" with other groups (*Language* 81); any effort to create difference is woven through by the society so the margins prove problematic as sources for a selfhood free of external control (*Outline* 86). As with Foucault, power creates one's options and its influence is ubiquitous although not omnipotent.

The "agents" responsible for these texts understand the intricacies of subjectivity and identity's tenuous opaqueness. A degree of self-reflexivity informs this playing with signifying systems; however, self-marginalization, as both a method of representation within society and resistance against it, can easily become an iridescent mirage of freedom. First, the limits of an Othered identity underpinning this individuality foreclose a "full" autonomy because the individual's identity is caught within the subordinated group's—the individualist has escaped a community to join another community with its own systematized rules of being. Second, subjectivity must be filtered through the dominant culture for the new identity to even make sense as different; hence, it cannot be labeled a retreat to a "true" self. Finally, the heroes of these texts still work from a bourgeois notion of the individual and "his" rights by seeing themselves as entitled to disengage from society by using the Other. And it is this choice that taints their transgression with complicity. To embrace the hegemonic faith in individualism is to act in accord with power; to choose a self-marginalizing atomization is one more adaptation of a myth that has long-served the power structure in sustaining its hold on America and its "subversive" individuals.

* * *

All this theorizing of the subject also deals with its required opposite, the "Other"—for neither subject/center nor Other/margin can exist without the contrasting element. The Other and Otherness designate difference

from a norm, the "non-" that threatens a fixed history, truth, reason, what have you.[7] If the center is to maintain power, the Other must be framed as negative and exiled to the periphery of knowledge—suppressed, silenced, and excluded, placed outside the realm of acceptable political and social imaginations. The Other is marked as something "out there"—illegitimate, irrational, uncivilized—to be repelled if the gaps in the privileged narratives are to be concealed. Audre Lorde lists the usual suspects comprising America's "mythical norm": "white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, christian [*sic*], and financially secure" (282). We should recognize, then, the abstract *potential* for transgression that comes from associating oneself with emblems of the disempowered, for even entertaining the ability to think against the center is a choice with contestatory energy. All the protagonists appropriate signs of Otherness in the hope of finding a sense of self, a life separate from (allowing individual autonomy) and contrary to (endowing a distinctive identity) the "norm." That they actually replicate some of those norms will be a lesson in how self-critical a border crosser should be.

A site of Otherness is not always the bottom rung of the hierarchy, but it is always defined as being located outside a condoned normative system, and some subject positions will be closer or farther to that center. We need to discern the specific periphery of a specific center since the restrictions normal/ abnormal, typical/atypical, right/wrong are enforced within the margin too. Even among rigid master narratives one can find the means for resistance, and it is within those flexible sites that the potential exists for authority to be challenged, weakened, or destroyed. The transgression of self-marginalization may not affect the balance of power but it does reveal how reality is manufactured and the limits arbitrarily installed. Border studies' creed and vocation is based on a faith in the agency of multiple identities—to include the Other in one's subjectivity can push back the lines of restriction, taking control of the self through "new affiliations that subvert old ways of being" (Saldívar-Hull 214).[8] Border theory analyzes marginal zones as spaces of infinite possibility, subjects can develop new identities and new ways of knowing through endless combinations of disparate elements. In essence, a subject who moves in both the margin and center, never fully integrating oneself into the discourses of either space, can resist total assimilation or cooptation. Ironically, this premise partly mimics the old discourse of American exceptionalism: If one moves to

the edge of society (physically, intellectually, politically) a "new world" can be discovered. Moreover, in revealing the theory's underlying logic of individualism we uncover the delicate strands of domination that may be reinstated in the move from center to margin.

The anchoring problematic of my project is brought to light by bell hooks's advocacy of self-chosen liminality and invitation to join her in the margin as a liberator. Existing on the border of the center, hooks says, is a site for inspiring "a counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives" ("Choosing" 149). If she is correct that "[u]nderstanding marginality as [a] position and place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonized people," then the question arises how we should read the self-marginalization of white males for whom maintaining a connection to the past and "home" (so crucial to hooks) is the discourse they flee (147, 148). hooks helps us think through this dilemma because her plan hinges on the mandate that one not define the margin and otherness according to the terms disseminated by the dominant culture, otherwise the old binary obstructs the liberatory potential of crossing. Such a prerequisite repeatedly undermines the rebellion in the texts I analyze.[9]

* * *

What is the center these supposed emblems of rebellion want to escape from? To better grasp how the Other is deployed in those texts, we should consider the group consistently named as the dominant culture's self-anointed arbiters of Culture and Truth: white people. As David Johnson and Scott Michaelsen cogently remark, this is the group border theorists feel free to stereotype and exclude from their utopian visions by demonizing into a homogenous "they" (13). If whites are the Other one sees when looking from the border, what it means to be "white" and how "whiteness" works need to be delineated to shape our understanding of self-marginalization.

If there is one group that has been most successful at concocting Others it is "white people." The historical desire to categorize races—to shield one's own group from a particular "them"—casts its shadow on to the Naturalization Act of 1790 that restricted American citizenship to "free white persons" (Foner 39). Whiteness may have been as

obvious as one's skin to some, but that politicians felt a law was required to keep it so exposes the anxiety over racial stability (see Haney López). The constructed quality of race and subjectivity is the shared premise in critical whiteness studies' mission to map the vectors of racial and cultural identities, while also critiquing the consequences of making whiteness the unquestioned norm.[10] We will find lingering traces of binary thinking in the assumptions underneath the protagonists' actions, but I want to hold off reducing such contradictions to a monolithic narrative of racism. Richard Dyer is correct in noting that "the right not to conform, to be different and get away with it, is the right of the most privileged groups in society" who "depend upon an implicit norm of whiteness" to rebel against (*White* 12). Nevertheless, the texts in this study all move toward fulfilling David Roediger's belief that "consciousness of whiteness" can lead to a politics for "exposing, demystifying and demeaning [its] particular ideology" (*Towards* 3, 12). If the "very claiming of a place in the US legally involved . . . a claiming of whiteness," then whites' self-marginalization is a political challenge to the ruling definition of legitimatized Americanness (*Towards* 189).

Dyer's "implicit norm" is a contentious issue, one demanding what I mean by white(ness) be given some shape. Whiteness is not a neutral category of identity one simply checks off on a census; it is the name given to a naturalized way of thinking about and representing a certain phenotype, the special place it deserves, and the specific desires and endeavors it promotes. I prefer "culture traitor" to "race traitor" as it casts a larger net and can portray whiteness in broader strokes than an exclusive focus on race permits. One must recognize that "white people" designates a group much larger than the image of affluent Republicans living in exclusive suburbs; its own sites of diversity vary "across lines of class, gender, and sexuality and . . . according to the politics of place and region" to frustrate a monolithic racial identity assuming the category accords the same advantages to all "whites" (Newitz and Wray, "Introduction" 4). The idea of the model minority promoted by the center to discipline and incorporate nonwhites finds a reciprocal figure in the "model majority." The ideology of whiteness can also harm those of European descent if one goes against the grain of the official portrait delineating whiteness as a specific race and culture. Norms can be enforced by branding subjects with the appellation of a "bad" white person to exclude them from the privileges accorded

those who uphold the center's standards of behavior and belief. Elizabeth Ellsworth elaborates on this point and the folly of assuming all whites live free from inequality: "[The benefits of] white skin can be . . . overridden or eclipsed by the oppression and discriminations associated with queerness, Jewishness, femaleness, poverty, homelessness" (226). It is important, then, to also consider forms of nonracial otherness if we are to mark out the multiple ways whiteness can be confronted.[11]

The language in Henry Giroux's dissection of race as "a set of attitudes, values, lived experiences, and affective identifications" places racial identity firmly within the arena of culture (294). The consolidated power of a culture of whiteness is concretized through bodies, and the way people attempt to disrupt that order is crucial to the chapters to come. The proposal that there is a "white culture" is anathema to some whiteness studies scholars.[12] However, if we are to map whiteness so as to discern what self-marginalizing subjects are denouncing, we must acknowledge that a white culture exists for some people who believe it has discernible characteristics—ways of appearing, acting, and believing that are granted the aura of biological and cultural truth. That these can easily be proven stereotypes based on constructs and designed against forms of otherness does not undercut how such naturalized assumptions result in concrete responses.

Critical whiteness studies' politics of "unmaking" whiteness suggests that white culture *does* exist, it is not "empty." So-called white people often remark that they have no culture, but the simple fact is they live it so closely that it slips by as an unnoticed normalcy, as "the way things are done." Some label it a false consciousness, but it is real enough because so many people consider themselves to be performing the identity and make sense of the world through it. This strengthens the case for the existence of a living "white" culture, but always seeing it, like any racialized identity, as a construct built on stereotypes in all its essentialist, monolithic, and repressive infamy. And this system is larger and deeper than having white writers and painters or culinary dishes uniquely "white" as opposed to an ethnic rainbow striped with disparate shades of paleness. The point is that subjects come to name and know a culture through contrasting options. As per Bourdieu's habitus, every stereotype of whiteness needs a stereotype of nonwhiteness to give it shape and vice versa. What is proffered as a specific racial

culture does not define everyone phenotypically so labeled because it can never encompass them; thus, we can apprehend all the moments when people break with "their" culture. A racial culture can only make rules and try to coerce or shame people into obeying, making them walk a certain path for so long they do not notice they are moving. Whiteness studies points out how the race's invisibility sustains it as the hegemonic norm, but invisibility is not nonexistence. It is the invisibility of white *ideology*, not culture, that buttresses it as an unseen, unquestionable common sense. I use white(ness) as referring specifically to a hegemonic *dominant* identity, one diffused throughout the social formation, thereby noting the constricted options accorded the values, standards, and expectations associated with "being white."[13] The protagonists I examine have a sense of what whiteness is, what it looks like, and they also think they have a sense of how to negotiate, even subvert, the long-reaching control of its reified standards.

* * *

To "quit" being white and move into the marginal space of Otherness is a transgressive act, but it can also undermine its subversive purpose. All the fictional and real subjects of this study expose this paradox because their attitudes toward the Other influence how they approach their rebellion. The blind spots can be traced to their indoctrination in the ideology of whiteness. Even while professing to leave behind racist or essentialist beliefs, they carry into the supposedly liberatory space a more subtle doctrine of that mentality. The very motivating premise of this strategy—to enhance the autonomy of the individual self—sustains the hegemonic values of the "white" center they establish as their negative. The sense of difference sought in appropriating Otherness becomes its own barrier to an autonomous identity and existence.

A fundamental issue is the perception of identity's malleability. The protagonists see themselves as being able to recreate their sense of self, but they close down that option for those who are their sources. It is clear in several texts that the search for an identity emblematic of an anti-"civilization" narrative simply relies on defining these varied Others through stereotypes buttressing the mythical norm. They deploy rather than dissemble any coherent identity based upon a

subject/Other division; instead of decentering the hegemony they disseminate it. The acts of self-othering in these texts reify subordinated subjects into portraits of difference. The marginal subject is prevented from speaking, prevented from representing the complexities of his or her own identity. Forcing the Other into an identity to fulfill a personal lack—in this case, a subversive identity—is an imperializing gesture in which the Other's identity is the object exploited for self-aggrandizement.[14] The hierarchy is not subverted, merely negotiated in a fashion that works to the border crosser's own advantage.

So where does one draw the line in passing judgment on this practice? How do we distinguish between the racism meant to hurt and that which is an unintended by-product of being trained by the center? Are these equivalent? If you consult some of the foundational scholars in whiteness studies you will think so. Much of this work expresses deep concern (when not righteous indignation) about the concealed racist assumptions of whites who use the Other as a source of freedom. But there are other viewpoints. In *Love and Theft* Eric Lott uses nineteenth-century minstrelsy to contemplate the effects of a simultaneously racist and celebratory cultural practice. Lott helps us to recognize the deep complexity of cultural appropriation, for even as performers affirm their sense of whiteness with stereotypes about "black" life, they integrate aspects of African-American culture into "American" culture as "small but significant crimes against settled ideas of racial demarcation" (4). In one sense the figures I analyze can be framed as minstrels for they are putting on "masks" of Otherness, but they propose their actions will break with the hegemonic ideals. They do achieve this on one level, of course, since they name whiteness and characterize it negatively, but the marginality they appropriate is itself apocryphal.

This model of rebellion objectifies the Other through a romanticization steeped in negative stereotypes given a positive spin.[15] This reinforces the power of whiteness and the marginality of the Other. George Lipsitz argues that this fetishization "maintain[s] the illusion that individual whites can appropriate aspects of African-American experience for their own benefit without having to acknowledge the factors that give African Americans and European Americans widely divergent opportunities and life chances" (*Possessive* 120). If you substitute "Other" for "African American" the field widens and becomes

more intriguing, but what gets repeated is stereotypes being recirculated in the name of a good cause. The people living in that space are locked into a naturalized subject position delineated by the standards of the center. These "white" subjects leave home hoping for a solution to their problems but must contain the meaning of their act within definitions that will make that space, and its inhabitants, fit their needs.

Any evaluation of this tactic comes down to the issue of power, who has it and how they choose to use it. In this cultural practice power is on the side of the seeker. The matrix of potentiality a subject moves within is marked by where he stands in relation to the varied sites of power shaping the material limits placed on what he can say, do, or become. The freedom white males have to entertain this option marks them as different from those they want to emulate. These subjects misrecognize how their freedom to break with the dominant depends on their association with it, that the very idea of freedom they take into the margin is a legacy granted by the center. That contradiction leads back to the key problem of self-marginalization pervading each text to follow: complicity through individualism.

The quest for individuality is grounded in, run through, and justified by employing a logic of individualism; indeed, the act makes little sense without it. Some texts give readers the signals of a critique, but others do not recognize how it negates a break with "civilization." The same type of individuality informs the meaning of autonomy in these texts: a free market mentality in acquiring a kind of "personal property" or "wealth" by enhancing their identity as free beings. Their appropriation of Otherness comes to resemble, to use C.B. Macpherson's term, a principle of possessive individualism: "property in the person."[16] The self is the property the protagonists seek to protect and augment, with the objectified Other simply as a means to that end. These texts show that without critically questioning how we understand the individual we take those discourses of the center with us wherever we go. Theories of self-fashioning and border-crossing walk a perilous line between abandoning and mimicking repressive norms.[17] And this enervates, when it does not evacuate, the transgressions of self-marginalization.

Stuart Hall views identity as a "process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' . . . so much as what we might become . . . not the so-called return to roots but a coming-to-terms-with our 'routes' "

("Introduction" 4). But what if those routes are closed off to people caught in a detour right back to where they started? Any treatment of these border subjectivities equating white subjects and the Others they mimic as having comparable opportunities for subject (re)formation is problematic at best, naive at worst, since the latter has notably less control over their life-options. That incongruity cuts deep; ultimately, the center's power is intact and no broad alliances are built that ensure respect for the individuality of all. We should consider these particular cultural crossings as a vision of potentiality; however, we might learn from them so as to avoid the mistakes that hinder not only their transformation but the freedom of that all-important self.

CHAPTER 1

"THEY'RE AFTER US!": CRIMINALITY AND HEGEMONY IN *HUCKLEBERRY FINN*

I DOUBT WHETHER ANYONE WOULD DISPUTE THE CLAIM THAT Huckleberry Finn is one of the most famous figures in the literary gallery of American individualists. But Mark Twain has a darker purpose: to demonstrate the false promise of individuality. To argue that the ideology of the center influences Huck's marginal life, and that Huck himself carries it into this zone, complements previous critical work questioning the novel as a model for a freer life in the refuge of nature.[1] This explains why Twain does not offer a positive example of freedom in the final chapters, an early indication of the cynicism that fuels his later years. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) is filled with Hank Morgan's reflections on the hegemonic influence of culture: "Training—training is everything; training is all there is *to* a person. . . . We have no thoughts of our own, no opinions of our own: they are transmitted to us, trained into us" (162). The centered, essential subject is critiqued here, but that issue had already been broached four years earlier. Twain is fully conscious of representing a hegemonic social structure in the text; therefore, Huck, as the narrator and "author" Twain invents, is equally aware. Hence, the final dangled promise of freedom and its retraction is the grand prank Huck plays in the novel, only this time the reader is the victim.[2]

I begin by theorizing the kind of marginality Huck pursues to prevent his reincorporation: he assumes the identity of a criminal, presenting

himself as a threat to St. Petersburg's naturalized definition of order in refusing to obey the established laws and mores. I then analyze the restrictions that complicate reading Huck as a figure of autonomy; then elaborate on Twain/Huck as author(s) articulating a counter-hegemonic proposal that there is still a possibility for agency, but that that viewpoint breaks with the popular conception of individualism.

* * *

American literary realism is traditionally attributed with promoting the efficacy of the individual to free him- or herself from social control. Henry Nash Smith attributed to *Huckleberry Finn* (1884–85) a message of "fidelity to the uncoerced self," helping to institutionalize the novel's association with a nonconformity that transcends the constraints of history and culture through physical separation (123). Jonathan Arac believes Twain tries "to keep pure a reader's sense of Huck's individual autonomy" (*Idol* 61), and that the novel was canonized precisely because it helps critics to maintain that myth (see "Nationalism"). There is ample evidence on the surface of the text to support this reading, and Twain's own hatred of arbitrary social conventions accounts for a protagonist who claims to prefer the margins. Huck is already a marginal figure due to his poverty and social pedigree when the novel begins, but his outsider status is slowly being dismantled by the Christian benevolence of Widow Douglas who cleanses Huck so as to socially incorporate him. The negative view of society and its institutions is *exactly* how Huck comes to perceive going to school, wearing "town" clothes, and praying to God. He understands that he will have to alter his identity, his natural self, according to the dominant culture's rules if he is to partake in its rewards.

After his father forces him to leave the widow, Huck contemplates life away from St. Petersburg's social structure and includes a curious detail: "Two months or more run along, and my clothes got to be all rags and dirt, and I didn't see how I'd ever got to like it so well at the widow's . . . I didn't want to go back no more" (30). This closing point complicates Huck's supposed desire for escape by indicating his adaptability to the ways of civilization. Contrary to any notion of an inherent, transcendent identity repressed by society, Huck is quite capable of transformation as he begins to move comfortably in the town,

becoming adept at living within the center by adjusting to its prescribed boundaries:

> At first I hated the school, but by and by I got so I could stand it. . . . I was getting sort of used to the widow's ways, too, and they warn't so raspy on me. . . . I liked the old ways best, but I was getting so I liked the new ones, too, a little bit. (18)

Life in the widow's house and at school "pull" on him, but he can be trained to act "properly." When Pap returns to town he notices the change in Huck, he ridicules the boy for thinking he could be different from what he "is": "Who told you you might meddle with such hifalut'n foolishness, hey?—who told you you could?" (24). Pap's attitude is itself a result of hegemony, for in criticizing Huck he echoes the elitist rhetoric that assigns people to concretized roles.

Huck's tendency to acquiesce to a given social environment is repeated during the Grangerford episode. He states that their home "was a cool, comfortable place. Nothing couldn't be better" (141). He expresses confusion about how to act within this space, but the life of a "gentleman"—which includes a personal slave Huck refers to as "my Jack"—in a house with "style" becomes less foreign to Huck as he assimilates (136). Even when this section ends with his return to the river, Huck frames the raft as a different kind of home: "there warn't no home like a raft, after all. . . . You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft" (155). Although the raft is an alternative to the place he has left, he relies on the concepts of family and home—both described as "comfortable"—to make sense of his thoughts and feelings about this floating social space.

All this indicates Huck is willing and able to integrate himself into society's patterns, ostensibly realizing the American dream of social mobility by breaking the bounds of culture and history. Forrest G. Robinson accounts for Huck's protean social identity: "we recognize that the awareness of culture as an aggregation of constraints on individual autonomy diminishes as the process of acculturation advances" (115). But social respectability brings with it a sense of confinement, so Huck runs to the simpler pleasures of the "natural" life on Jackson's Island where he joins Jim, the vehicle for Huck to realize his antisocial ambition. Jim's race and criminal status as a fugitive slave mark him as

the clearest symbol of marginality in Huck's social totality. An alliance with Jim will disrupt the codes and augment Huck's otherness to free himself from the grasp of St. Petersburg.[3] Arac claims that "Twain excludes the category of law" (*Idol* 61), but this ignores the specific bond forming between the duo as they travel down the river: they are now outlaws—Jim as a runaway and Huck his accomplice.

A working definition of crime is easy: "the offender is clearly where he should not be, doing something he should not be doing" (Gottfredson and Hirschi 25). As applied to Huck's situation, he should not be in the company of a fugitive slave and most certainly should not be involved with his escape. This is one of the most despicable crimes a white person can commit in the slaveholding states—forms of punishment included fines, imprisonment, being sued for damages, or even hanged. That the deputies at the Phelps farm nearly lynch Jim for escaping reminds us that Huck's collusion is indeed serious business. Huck figures he can attain self-marginality if he engages in criminal deviancy; this union will effectively cut off his connection to society because it makes him a more repulsive pariah than his poverty and dysfunctional family ever could. He openly calls himself "low-down" and gradually comes to consider himself as being "brung up wicked" not only to free himself from the customs and laws but to rationalize that choice (269).

Stanley Cohen's definition of deviancy emphasizes its transgressive element: a "behavior that somehow departs from what a group expects to be done or what it considers the desirable way of doing things" (35). Crime is an otherness that crosses the very borders holding a society together. Law constructs a community and nation's self-understanding by instituting a definition of order and authority. By knowing what is allowed/disallowed we can judge ourselves and Others, thereby establishing a system of meaning used to make sense of the world and our own place within it. The criminal threatens this instituted order and knowledge because he acts as though the laws do not apply to him—he articulates his freedom in not playing by the same rules. James Kastely critiques this as "radically antisocial, for it recognizes no inherent limits to one's actions; rather, its ultimate tenet is that the world is a place for individual exploitation" (421). Perhaps, but the criminal can also constitute a freer space where the individual/deviant acts according to personal need and is disconnected from the dominant mores and values of a community.

The criminal's contestatory response is heightened when read as "white" in *Huckleberry Finn*. This is more attributable to Twain/Huck as author than Huck-the-character since the latter never completely breaks free from St. Petersburg's ideologies. Whiteness is critiqued by denying the discourse of civilization. The racism inherent in whites labeling themselves as "civilized" in comparison to the savage Others maintains power by protecting white interests and privileges through law. In Huck's context the discourses of property and freedom—and property as signifying freedom—give whiteness its defining shape. As an institutionally condoned social belief the slavery laws maintain the relations of power benefiting white privilege. To break those laws, to deny their validity, disputes the social and legal structures supporting the ideology of whiteness. Noel Ignatiev has a point—despite its essentialism—when he reads Huck's decision to rescue Jim from the Phelps farm through a white/nonwhite binary. He calls it an act of racial treason to "violate the rules of whiteness" in choosing not to do "the 'white' thing and rat on his friend" (Stowe 75). Twain undermines the "white" conception of civilization by constructing Huck as a deviant who breaks unjust laws, presenting him as more civilized and moral than those who blindly adhere to the rules, allowing him to present a higher, more humane level of thought and behavior through Jim.

Autonomy through deviancy is inherently paradoxical since a person can judge himself a criminal only by using the center's own standards. Even as Huck deploys his criminal identity he remains a conflicted character hovering in the liminal zone betwixt and between social convention and rebellion; and his vacillation is what makes the moral sea change in Chapter 31 all the more poignant. But the will to disobey fundamentally separates the outlaw from "normal" people. Twain had already established the criminal as a liberatory subject position in *Tom Sawyer* (1876). Huck is "the juvenile pariah of the village . . . [who] was cordially hated and dreaded by all the mothers of the town, because he was idle, and lawless, and vulgar and bad—and because all the other children admired him so, and delighted in his forbidden society, and wished they dared to be like him" (47–48). Tom eventually turns to a "life of crime" with Joe and Huck when they abscond to Jackson's Island to become pirates—until it rains and they tire of sleeping on the ground (97). The performance of a criminal identity is treated as an exciting game in *Tom Sawyer*, but *Huckleberry*

Finn raises the stakes to saving one's very sense of self—crime is now a path to independence.

By placing Huck at two points of crime studies' theoretical trajectory we can see his othering as a strategy rather than an imposed condition. The language of modern criminology is incongruous with the criminological approaches of Twain's own day or the novel's setting (although the issue of rehabilitation, as concerns Pap, is one approach to deviancy Twain finds ludicrous).[4] Yet, we will find that Twain's characterization of Huck parallels certain theories of deviancy and these help us further comprehend the motivations informing the protagonist's actions.

Criminology dates its disciplinary birth to the eighteenth century with a "classical tradition" embodied by Thomas Hobbes and Jeremy Bentham who root crime in human nature. Deviancy is different from crime in modern criminology, but in the classical model they are the same: "[A]ll human conduct can be understood as the self-interested pursuit of pleasure or the avoidance of pain. By definition, therefore, crimes too are merely acts designed to satisfy some combination of these basic tendencies" (Gottfredson and Hirschi 5). Now, how one defines pleasure and pain is specific to the person or group. Pleasure can be the financial gain of theft, or it could be a sense of power from committing a violent crime. A key factor in gauging whether an act will result in pleasure or pain for the individual, and of what kind and degree, is the concept of sanctions, defined as the varied difficulties and/or punishments one is likely to encounter in committing a particular act.

This approach is applicable to Huck's criminal acts since they are done to acquire the "self-interested pursuit" of autonomy, a desire he shares with Jim as they run away to freedom. Huck indicates that Jim's interests are now his own the moment he announces, "They're after us!" (75). This is a crucial move. When Huck discovers Jim on the island he is initially shocked to learn Jim has escaped from Miss Watson, until he sees that the stigma of deviance will benefit him: "People would call me a low down Abolitionist and despise me for keeping mum—but that don't make no difference. I ain't agoing to tell, and I ain't agoing back there anyways" (52–53). The crisis of conscience—exposing how a fight with morality is a fight with social conditioning—is a recurrent issue for Huck. Each time he takes the

religious, moral, and political sanctions into consideration and chooses to spurn them. Michel Foucault's theory of discipline indicates that Huck has already resisted Miss Watson's method of "micro-penality," in which "the slightest departures from correct behaviour [are] subject to punishment" (*Discipline* 178). Once Huck joins Jim he raises the stakes of his rebellion by challenging the very linchpin of southern society's moral infrastructure. His decision connects him with "the practice of men on the fringes of society, isolated from a population that was hostile to them," for the particular crime Huck chooses to commit, the one he will forever be branded with if caught, situates him in society's periphery (*Discipline* 274).

But the kind of criminal Huck wants to be needs clarification. The murderers on the wrecked *Walter Scott* are an incompatible model; instead, the king and duke serve to entwine him in the criminal world. Although initially amused by them and impressed with the amount of money they pull in, Huck never states approval of their actions. Bruce Michelson turns to the Wilks sisters episode to charge Huck with collusion for "blow[ing] the whistle on the Duke and the King only after days of complicity" (125). Huck does this, but key moments reprieve the boy from guilt by association when he expresses a sense of shame (210, 225) and dislike for the crooks (258). Huck is trapped between the duo's retaliation if he does not obey and the retaliation of the community (a group Twain depicts as lacking fairness and good will) for being involved with the con-men. Ultimately, the world Huck enters through the king and duke is unfulfilling and he rejects their version of the criminal life. Huck never acts in the name of a self-interest that abuses without conscience, without a resultant sense of guilt or compassion, even for those that harm him. This defines the king and duke, but not Huck. Myra Jehlen's claim that "the association with an escaping slave is turning Huck into a reformer, a true white gentleman in a false genteel society" is closer to the case but inaccurate (102). The alliance with Jim rewards Huck with his only criminal desire: to be socially marginal, an other (102).

Following criminology's classical period are three successive modern approaches: biological, psychological, and sociological.[5] The sociological paradigm of labeling theory is our key to understanding Huck's criminal persona. In the 1950s and 1960s Howard Becker and Edwin Lemert were interested in how crime is treated by communities, with

the way social responses affect a criminal's behavior and sense of self. Becker proposes that deviance is simply the product of a society's rules: "*[S]ocial groups create deviance by making rules whose infractions constitute deviance*, and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders. . . . The deviant is one whom the label has successfully been applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label" (9). Labeling draws social lines of degree; for example, an inside trader is not as bad as a drug dealer. This explains how Colonel Sherburn and the Grangerfords/Shepherdsons redefine killing through their social status—theirs are not the acts of murderers, it is how gentlemen conduct themselves. Likewise, Jim's opinion of the king and duke differentiates his criminal behavior from theirs: he is after freedom and self-ownership, but they are "rapscallions" (199). Twain's recollection about the moral stance on theft during his youth explains the larger impact of Huck helping a runaway slave:

> In those old slave-holding days the whole community was agreed as to one thing—the awful sacredness of slave property. To help steal a horse or a cow was a low crime, but to help a hunted slave, or feed him or shelter him, or hide him, or comfort him, in his troubles, his terrors, his despair, or hesitate to promptly betray him to the slave-catcher when opportunity offered was a much baser crime, & carried with it a stain, a moral smirch which nothing could wipe away. . . . It seemed natural enough to me then. (Qtd. in Arac, *Idol* 38)

Thus, we witness Huck consciously go against the laws and customs of his society in a manner that reverses the disciplinary classification of criminality/ deviance to make the negative into a positive. The definition of a "criminal or deviant depends upon what certain powerful groups decide is threatening, disgusting, and so on, and upon the ability of those groups to persuade legislators" (McCaghy 81). Twain uses Huck's outlaw identity to stage resistance against the dominant values of white society.

A deviant's self-understanding requires an "audience" to judge and react, such as the courts or a more nontangible jury: "The labeling could take place just as effectively if the audience is a representation in the actor's mind—he or she witness, labels, and may even punish himself or herself without reference to what others actually do" (McCaghy 86). This is most often the case with Huck. His conscience speaks the judgment of the center because it has been molded by it—he *knows*

when he is being a "bad boy." This is the source of his moral vacillation when it comes time to make decisions, which calls into question the level of autonomy Huck reaches but is also a clue as to why he appropriates the criminal identity. Labeling is a major factor in subjectivity and reveals a potential for subversion. By defining the behavior of subjects as deviant—a field spanning theft to homosexuality—the community attempts to enforce the dominant values and norms by containing the "criminal" in a particular public identity: Huck the charity case becomes Huck the abolitionist. But the accused can himself choose the deviant moniker to construct his public identity, "employ[ing] his deviant behavior or a role based upon it as a means of defense, attack, or adjustment to the overt and covert problems created by the consequent societal reaction to him" to the point that one's "life and identity are organized around the facts of deviance" (Lemert 76).

Huck hopes to imbue himself with the criminal stigma attached to violating the law on helping runaway slaves. He depends on his partnership with Jim being labeled negatively, and once Jim ceases to be a criminal Huck decides he must go West to maintain his individuality. When Huck situates himself as an immoral criminal, by declaring he will "go to hell" for rescuing Jim, Twain yokes morality to Huck's clearest expression of criminal otherness to display the potential agency of labeling. Prior to that moment there is no wholesale denunciation of the dominant racial, legal, and religious narratives. Twain uses Huck's conflicted response to Jim to show hegemony at work and how difficult its grasp is to break. Once he settles on being a criminal we can read him as moving one step closer toward psychic freedom. Upon meeting Tom Sawyer at the Phelps farm, Huck proudly displays his outlaw persona: "*I* know what you'll say. You'll say it's dirty low-down business; but what if it is?—*I*'m low-down; and I'm agoing to steal him" (284). This new space of autonomy does not last long, for the identity Huck has invested in is thrown into disarray once Tom offers to help. That Tom Sawyer, Huck's living symbol of the "quality" folk, would agree to be a "nigger stealer" disrupts the system of order Huck has relied upon to define himself. Since the truth that Tom is actually agreeing to help free a free man is withheld, Huck's criminal subjectivity is thoroughly upended and he begins to (re)adopt a submissive adherence to the center's ways.

The aura of the outlaw puts distance between Huck and the limitations of a life in St. Petersburg, even if only due to the necessity of

permanently remaining outside society to avoid being punished. The very reason Huck must rationalize his kindness toward Jim as the act of a culturally inherited wickedness, the reason he is able to frame himself as a criminal, is because his mind and values are never freed from the mentality of St. Petersburg. This allows Twain to pursue his larger objective of decentering the myth of the autonomous subject. He makes sure it is impossible for Huck to reach full autonomy and agency as the closing "evasion" chapters withdraw the promise of Huck's liberal acknowledgment of Jim's humanity—portraying the power of hegemony—and call into question the very logic of individuality.

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The theory of hegemony, as reconfigured by Antonio Gramsci, posits that a group's control is legitimized through social and cultural apparatuses to build consensus, rather than applying directly coercive methods.[6] Hegemony is a process of normalization, one subtly imbuing a particular ideology through all levels of society until the dominant group's discourses inform what is "common sense" for the whole society. Exploitative relationships are maintained by harnessing the power of culture so the oppressed will perpetuate their own domination and be incorporated into the ascendant power structure. The subordinate class's subjugation is obvious to themselves, but by accepting the ruling bloc as natural and unchangeable they consent to the perpetuation of repressive divisions. This concept calls out the targets of Twain's social critique in *Huckleberry Finn*.

All the varieties of ideological control—channeled through the institutional discourses of religion, "intellectuals" and education, and government—appear in the novel to be read as a commentary on practices contemporary with the late nineteenth century. During Twain's era the racial hegemony

> was publicly endorsed by every major institution in the nation as the churches found biblical justifications for it, the courts repeatedly ruled that African Americans were not entitled to the protection of the Constitution, and businesses refused to employ blacks in any but the most menial capacities. (Jones 175)

Twain soundly denounces such apparatuses of power to situate the novel as an oppositional text. Ostensibly, the story is a *Bildungsroman*,

a "boy's tale" in which Huck will experience mental and moral growth. But Twain does not allow that growth to be fulfilled so he can raise the problem of ridding ourselves of civilization's *internalized* ideologies. He designs Huck and Jim's relationship to examine the difficult problems—public and private, social and personal—one confronts when the dominant ideology is transgressed. Twain denies the reader any naive succor that hegemony can be transcended by "leaving" society, although he skillfully masks this stance through Huck's antisocial discourse.

Prior to Huck's moral transformation in Chapter 31, he maintains a racial hierarchy on the raft—that exalted symbol of freedom and refuge—by deeming himself superior to Jim due to his race. Consider the arguments about royalty, culture, and language when Huck presents himself as being smarter than Jim, best exemplified by his comment on Jim's analytical ability: "I see it warn't no use wasting words—you can't learn a nigger to argue" (98). Huck occupies the discursive space of the racist, and although both make fallacious arguments, Twain cripples the racism by giving Jim a stronger syllogism (see Mailloux). The specific context of Huck's socialization in a slave state continually influences his opinions. He is caught in the tension between his changing feelings for Jim, as a black, and what he has been taught to think of blacks, with the result that he reinforces society's rules on race.

Huck's time on the raft is surely spent weakening hegemony's hold as he slowly reinscribes himself as a subject apart from society, one capable of making decisions without relying on the public fictions ordering reality. But it is still necessary to discern how Huck's consciousness and conscience remain firmly in the center. His decision to free Jim transgresses the dominant ideology, yet *not* by "committ[ing] his all to what he believes is the morally, spiritually, and ethically right action" (Chadwick-Joshua 117). The implications of the choice are antiracist, but Huck is responding to Jim as a loyal friend, not a crusader. He assents to the beliefs of the racist center by labeling himself an outlaw to its moral and social order, regardless of our reading Huck as really being a good person. The ironic reference to Sunday School's ability to set Huck on the right path if he had only "gone to it" opens a space for Twain to critique the hypocrisy of social institutions (269). Both Robinson and Michael Hoffman advocate this point. As Hoffman explains it, "[Huck] decides. . . to opt for the life of the 'criminal,' at least in the eyes of his society—whose values *he does not*

reject" (39). It is this conflicted act of "conscience" that leads him to reproduce society's hierarchical structures.

Huck easily (re)submits to the power of social pressure when outside figures enter the space of the raft (the duke and king) or he reenters civilization (the Shepherdson/Grangerford episode) and slides back into supporting the dominant ideology. Sometimes he appropriates such discourses as a deceptive ruse to either get what he needs or to maneuver through society with less difficulty, but there are enough racist statements made outside the boundaries of society to problematize his liminality. Huck's persona shifts between being rebellious and racist, and the inner-psychological moments, in which he battles his conscience, are the most revealing of Huck's deep-set adherence to the social codes. Ultimately, the individual is incapable of transcending society because it accompanies a person into all social spaces, into every relationship. The internalization of ideology is the means by which hegemony controls subjects. To stress this, Twain ends the novel—in that troublesome evasion section—with Huck yielding to the discourses of racism and individualism characterized in Tom Sawyer.

Twain's promise of freedom through Huck's revelation is repealed as he succumbs to Tom's self-interest. The modicum of comforting liberalism Twain has been giving the reader through the protagonist is quietly frustrated. Huck allows himself to be ruled by Tom, submitting to the more socially prominent boy's level of patrician "respectability" (echoing the Colonel Sherburn episode when the lynch mob bows to the authority of a "gentleman"). As Tom prepares ever more elaborate plans for rescuing Jim, Huck obsequiously follows along. He questions Tom's ideas, but participates in them nevertheless.[7] Huck's prior characterization as an autonomous subject is shown to be a larger farce due to his complicity in the rescue farce. Steven Mailloux shows how the faith the reader has been led to instill in Huck is exposed as an authorial manipulation—it fulfills the audience's belief in the transcendent individual only to tear it down. Jim is forced back into assuming the mask of the deferential and docile slave, and Huck capitulates by allowing Tom, the representative of the dominant culture, free rein.

I disagree with Lee Clark Mitchell's assertion that "[t]oo much should not be read into the role that Huck accepts with belated relief" when he dons the identity of Tom (103). On the contrary, *everything* should be read into this moment because it exposes the power of

hegemony. When Huck states, "Now I was feeling pretty comfortable all down one side, and pretty uncomfortable all up the other," the audience is meant to note the split in Huck's social being beyond his literal anxiety about Tom arriving and accidentally blowing his cover (282). To claim, "Being Tom Sawyer was easy and comfortable," reveals how it is both easy and comfortable to take on the mask of social convention Huck is familiar with, influenced by and in awe of: "[I]t was like being born again, I was so glad to find out who I was" (282).

Tom and Huck's relationship is based on the acquiescence of a poor white to the values and rhetoric of a figure who emblematizes the social codes:

> That was the thing that was too many for me. Here was a boy that was respectable, and well brung up; and had a character to lose; and folks at home that had characters; and he was bright and not leather-headed; and knowing and not ignorant; and not mean, but kind; and yet here he was, without any more pride, or rightness, or feeling, than to stoop to this business, and make himself a shame, and his family a shame, before everybody. I *couldn't* understand it, no way at all. (292–93)

Tom's bourgeois position endows him with "character" and "style" to place him higher in the social hierarchy Huck has absorbed, ensuring Tom is interpreted by Huck as "knowing" and "kind." When all this is combined with his accumulated cultural capital—since he has read more romantic novels and knows how an escape is done according to the "regulations"—Tom demands, and gets, compliance from Huck. On occasion, he grants this compliance grudgingly, but grant it Huck does to the very end. He suppresses his own nascent beliefs about Jim's humanity to (re)adopt the discourse that treats Jim as an Other because Huck believes Tom is smarter than himself. Besides, Huck "don't wish to go back on no regulations" (301).

It is the selfish and racist cruelty in these scenes that make them important. For Huck, these attitudes and actions are justified by the "regulations" requiring such behavior. The inability to recognize their treatment of Jim as inhumane becomes all the more poignant by recalling an earlier comment Huck makes when he sees the tarred and feathered duke and king: "Human beings *can* be awful cruel to one another" (290). Apparently cruelty can only be inflicted on whites, even those who have mistreated and deceived Huck. Twain repeats this kind of sly condemnation

of Huck to problematize the likelihood of social transcendence. After Jim refuses to leave the wounded Tom on the raft, Huck says to himself, "I knowed he was white inside," and believes it to be a compliment (341). In the closing pages, Huck endorses the racial and class hegemonies when he learns of how Jim was already freed and that Tom's treatment of the freeman was all merely for "the *adventure* of it" (357). Huck's response is not anger about Tom's selfish, cruel manipulation of Jim and himself. Rather, he expresses relief that the social structure remains intact because he now understands "how [Tom] *could* help a body set a nigger free, with his bringing-up" (358).

The traditional reading of the evasion chapters is correct: it is a commentary on how an individual *within* society is subordinated and controlled. However, Twain is no more convinced of the potential for autonomy *outside* society as Huck's closing nod to the freedom of the West suggests. On a formal level, Twain's appropriation of the romantic style in the evasion suddenly reduces the narrative to a farce as Tom's schemes prolong the unnecessary rescue. This process of cleaning up the ending's narrative chaos derides the romance as a genre—the final pages inform us that Jim is free, Tom will live, Huck's money is safe, and Pap is dead—with the most romantic idea saved for the very end: Huck can escape from society and avoid being civilized. That call to freedom and the potential of the individual becomes an ironic gesture when grouped with these other plot lines that have been too easily packed away to end the story.[8] Huck is the one who is enslaved, continuing to conceive of himself as an agent unrestrained by the society that gave him his very identity, and the naive belief that he can break those chains is mocked in the closing sentences.

Twain knows what will happen to the West soon after the novel's setting (well before Frederick Jackson Turner's famous obituary in 1893). As he wrote the novel, Twain was well aware of the population explosion that had occurred with an increased financial interest in the region's natural resources and real estate. There was still unclaimed land (owned by the government and banks) in the 1840s, but new settlers were moving in to build new towns, to form new societies with the old hegemonic codes of the places they had left behind. To imagine the western territory will prove any different for Huck is self-delusion. Twain ridicules and dismantles the belief in individualism—puncturing the myths of freedom and self-reliance—so this ending is to be read as stinging satire. Twain's historical field of vision spurs him to withdraw the

escape-to-the-wilderness dream as an option for the young Huck, thereby enervating the myth for his own time. The possibility for a subject— even one who makes it to the territory "ahead of the rest"—to sustain a self-reliant freedom was soon to be sacrificed to the growing logic of private accumulation underpinning the Gilded Age's ethic of greed (362).

The possibility of westward escape is also undercut by the dilemma of Huck's narratorial role—what Henry Wonham calls Twain's "transfer of narrative responsibility" (9). To ignore that an older Huck is the narrator neglects to account for the authorial license afforded this character.[9] Despite the present tense used in the final paragraph, insinuating that the text was written after the events in the 1840s (forty years prior to publication), Huck has already referred to Twain's authorship of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* in the novel's first paragraph, a book "made by Mr. Mark Twain" (1). Huck does not mention the book was published in 1876, but indirectly states it precedes his own narrative; thus, situating himself as writing at some point after that year. As Arac asserts in "Nationalism," this precludes any temporal correlation between the text and the narrator's life when Huck gives his closing summation about Tom's well-being. It is especially curious that Twain places these subtle clues in the first and last paragraphs of the novel—a story that begins with clarity ends in deceit. So Huck-the-narrator changes even if Huck-the-protagonist has not—the former becomes a sophisticated writer who is responsible for keeping the latter a naive boy, and is equally responsible for the textual representation of hegemony. In the end, "lighting out" is just another promise that cannot be kept, a cunning prank on the audience to criticize a belief system Americans are socialized to accept as natural.[10] Far from extolling individualism in *Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain critiques both its negative potential and the very impossibility of achieving it. The former is represented by the narcissistic, Othering attitude of Tom and Huck in their objectification of Jim in the evasion section—after all, "Jim's a nigger and wouldn't understand the reasons for it" (300). The latter is accomplished by Twain's portrayal of the control society has over individuals.

* * *

For some this is far too depressing a vision to be attributed to Twain as their favorite humorist. There is, however, an important component

of hegemony theory that preserves agency. Although defining hegemony as a system of consent, Gramsci does not utterly forego the possibility of resistance. Society comprises multiple, varied sites for struggle and compromise in an ongoing "war of position" that prevents one group from ever having complete control, and from this battle a counterhegemony can arise. Raymond Williams comments on this always circulating energy:

> while by definition [a hegemony] is always dominant, it is never either total or exclusive. At any time, forms of alternative or directly oppositional politics and culture exist as significant elements in the society. . . . The reality of cultural process must then always include the efforts and contributions of those who are in one way or another outside or at the edge of the terms of the specific hegemony. (113)

Those who confront the ruling bloc may not succeed, but there is always the capacity to do so—there is always the possibility of social change, even upheaval. The subordinated can contest and transform society and culture by negotiating the lines of power. It is the impossibility of totally mapping individuals, never being fully able to anticipate or encapsulate their mental and political movement, that gives subjects their agency. People have the power to inhibit the influence of universalized ideologies and to articulate counterhegemonic beliefs through subtle, more localized methods. Authority can be dethroned by disseminating an alternative hegemony, a different consciousness addressing the needs and problems of the subordinated group(s)—all dependent, of course, on a benevolent hegemony replacing the oppressive one.

Twain/Huck's narrative in *Huckleberry Finn* is a negotiation that intertwines resistance and acquiescence. This allows the author(s) to intervene in discursive formations under the guise of humor; consequently, a form of freedom takes shape through authorial agency. For example, in the evasion section all Tom's romantic foolishness functions to make the ending appear superficially innocuous. The narrative devolves into a simple-minded rollick of the bourgeoisie, until the "game" becomes deadly serious with Tom shot and Jim being insulted and threatened by the deputies. Since you have to present an idea to dismantle it, both romanticism and racism are abused in these chapters by being made ridiculous.

A superb, and often cited, example is the scene when Aunt Sally and Huck discuss steamboat explosions.[11] When she asks "anybody

hurt?" Huck says: "No'm. Killed a nigger." Some have used this comment to impute Huck (and Twain) with a socially-conditioned racism, for falling victim to the ideology of white supremacy. The key to understanding this exchange is that Huck does not make his statement unwittingly. At this point, he has decided to rescue Jim and without this act of ironic, assimilationist deception he will be unable to carry out that plan. He understands what he is saying and uses it to negotiate the effects of hegemony in a slaveholding culture, as evidenced in Aunt Sally's response: "Well, it's lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt" (279). Blacks are not categorized as people in this woman's perception and Huck is playing off that belief to free Jim. Huck avoids suspicion by giving the response she expects from a fellow white southerner—a strategy learned from Judith Loftus's advice on how to act like a girl (74–75). One can turn to numerous other moments of disguise and lying where Huck opens a space between incorporation and subversion to move through society without interference. This does not contradict my basic argument, for Huck's heroic project crumbles once Tom arrives and he succumbs to the discourse of the white patrician class's favorite son. Even on a formal level Twain's sudden turn to a romantic plotline is a literary version of hegemony. The romanticism seeps into a novel that has previously worked according to an antiromantic style—as a foil to Huck's style, used to be abused, it represents the power of hegemony. The ending, then, appears as a more powerful and unified part of the text as a whole.

Before the ending arrives there is already the issue of the narrator's language. The novel's vernacular style is often extolled for critiquing ossified literary conventions and the New England intelligentsia. It is a technique inflected with a class-conscious response to writers who, in Ernest Hemingway's famous observation, "did not use the words that people always have used in speech" (*Green Hills* 21). This assessment may be overstated, but Huck's voice is a severe break with the narratorial style of "proper" literature as a poor rural boy is allowed to "speak for himself" (and by using the "lower" form of humor).[12] This becomes transgressive when placed against the larger institutional forces—political, social, cultural, juridical, and economic—which benefit from such constrictive rules. As Pierre Bourdieu's theories of "symbolic power" and "cultural capital" argue, the linguistic hegemony that mandates what is an acceptable language legitimates social inequalities by restricting *how*

one must speak to participate in the reward system, as well as decreeing *who* gets to speak (see "Symbolic Power"). On a literary level Huck's written vernacular voice is a counterhegemonic presence, a challenge to accepted "truths" about art that extends to other hegemonic apparatus.

Huck's reactions to society proffer the text's counterhegemony to the audience on another level. The young protagonist's innocent questioning of society is suppressed by the adult figures but exposes them as either hypocrites or the blind followers of custom. Recalling that Huck is actually an *adult* writer, the reader should be wary about brushing off any observations or underhanded social critiques made by Huck-the-protagonist as the untrained musings of an innocent child author. Huck-the-narrator resists the dominant ideology even when his protagonist self succumbs to it. Without acknowledging Huck's role as the narrator of a story set in the past, the more positive nuances of *Huckleberry Finn*'s politics remain elusive.

Like his narrator, Twain is aware of what he is doing at these moments. The conclusion, similar to the Aunt Sally scene, has been interpreted by some as sufficient evidence of Twain's racism, but that reading misses the truly radical spirit of the text. It has been argued that Jim is stereotyped into the role of a minstrel figure used for comic relief by his portrayal as a superstitious, ignorant, and servile burlesque figure. Based primarily on Jim's willing submission to Huck and Tom, Twain is accused of diminishing Jim's own humanity to emphasize Huck's, but this is insupportable when one adds Twain's treatment of hegemony to the mix.[13] To attack the ideology of white supremacy he establishes Jim as the most humane character in the novel, as expressed through his loyalty and constant concern for Huck's welfare—not as a deferential slave, but a loving friend.

The charge of collaborating with white supremacy in the final chapters is proven even more fallacious once we combine hegemony theory with the context of the novel's publication.[14] As the North pulled back from dealing with the issue of race, the South was able to regain control of the discourses used to discuss and represent blacks. After slavery ended, blacks were still being depicted as inferior to whites and there was to be no racial mixing (even if platonic) for fear it would poison the purity of the white race. Racist whites easily convinced themselves that blacks were on par with animals and deserving of no more respect or kindness. As Rhett Jones explains, this part of white society had to deny

blacks their humanity because they would be incapable of rationalizing their actions if characterized as equal human beings. Amid the public rhetoric of condoned racism, Twain introduced a character who epitomized compassion in the form of a fugitive slave. The question arises whether making Jim the symbol of humanity exhibits racism: can Twain only conceive of a black man as being primitive enough to escape civilization's poison? Can he only see Jim and Huck through that binary? This criticism falters when one recalls how Jim is not above subterfuge in withholding Pap's death from Huck so his passport to freedom will not leave him. This is the same reason he plays along with Tom's escape plan and partly explains his staying with the wounded boy. Jim understands that Tom represents bourgeois white America even if he has "helped" him to escape. In short, Jim is not just in the stock role of a noble savage; placing Jim at the moral center of the novel is more productively read as upsetting the ideologies of both race and individualism.

Jim's characterization establishes the most concrete example of counterhegemonic negotiation in the novel. Huck and Jim's relationship on the raft is an alternative community allowing Twain to rupture the social order by showing potentiality through a transgressive social formation. It is in those rare moments with Jim that Huck expresses happiness and comfort, of feeling "free and easy," without the sense of alienation that repeatedly creeps in to overwhelm him. Twain gives the reader glimpses of a system without reified assumptions of race, but foregoes a too easy sense of optimism by exposing the impossibility of such a model "realistically" existing in America as it is currently structured. He broaches the issue that any new value system is caught within, and must contend with, existing social processes as symbolized by Huck's ingrained ideas about race. Jim pushes Huck (and the audience) beyond his socialized consciousness, making him understand that one's *actions* determine how a person should be judged:

> [S]omehow I couldn't seem to strike no places to harden me against [Jim], but only the other kind. I'd see him standing my watch on top of his'n, stead of calling me, so I could go on sleeping. . . and would always call me honey, and pet me, and do everything he could think of for me, and how good he always was. . . (270)

Huck begins by considering what Jim has done for *him*, but will progress to returning the kindness of another human being. When read in its historical context, *Huckleberry Finn* represents a radical vision.

Twain openly antagonizes the dominant discourse and every reader who uses it to speak, who uses it to define himsel or herself. And his tone becomes more hostile in the final chapters once Tom's presence dominates the narrative and opens a space for Twain to critique the impossibility of sovereignty as well as its possible negative effects.

One can point to other moments to support the idea of subversive negotiation, but what I am trying to prove, finally, is that Huck articulates his freedom from Tom's influence—and from society at large—through the act of writing. This also applies, of course, to Mark Twain who is attempting to loosen the grip American society has on himself.[15] Self-empowerment is accomplished in a method similar to Gramscian negotiation that allows subjects a degree of mastery over their identities and minds. Twain and Huck are endowed with a limited autonomy through the act of writing (particularly by using irony and satire) because it gives them the space they need to violate constrictive social codes while existing within the shadow of power.

Too many assessments of Twain's politics in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* neglect this complex mixture of negation and affirmation. The ability to transcend systemic boundaries with anything resembling full sovereignty is given little credence by the author(s). The journey has been a long process of withdrawal and return, with Huck unable to completely free his identity and sense of morality. Huck, like most Americans, still lives within the discursive formations of the ruling bloc: his racial discourse in the novel does not change, nor is his place in the text's social hierarchy is affected; therefore, the dominant ideology remains intact and in control at the end. But Huck's stratagems as an author/narrator help to resist a total capitulation. The aesthetic/literary transgression the novel uses recognizes that sites of counterhegemonic potential exist, a method of contestatory agency is open to all—be it the subject position one (re)constructs, deploying irony during encounters with authority, breaking unjust laws, or briefly creating an alternate social system.[16] Twain reminds readers through Huck-the-narrator that social control is always present but never total. A localized negotiation may not overthrow all forms of power, but it can affect one's own internal domination.

CHAPTER 2

STEPHEN CRANE AND *MAGGIE*'S WHITE OTHER

CONTRARY TO THE TRADITIONAL CRITERIA THAT DEFINES AMERICAN literary realism, we have seen that Mark Twain is deeply skeptical about the idea of a transcendental individual. If *Huckleberry Finn* must be categorized then Twain's pessimistic portrayal of society and its subjects is better grouped with the deterministic social theory and politics of the literary movement said to follow realism. Naturalism staked its claim for originality in heightening its predecessors' depictions of "real" life.[1] If William Dean Howells wanted more honest-to-life characters and settings and antiromantic endings, then they promised to go further than he dared. In offering a grittier portrayal of the world—the tenet of "unflinching honesty" so many relish attaching to these authors—the naturalists aimed to shock their readers, and this effect was to be enhanced by denying Americans their beloved ideology of autonomy and free will.

In the 1980s, scholars such as Walter Benn Michaels, June Howard, and Amy Kaplan aimed to expose how the realist/naturalists were embedded in the knowledge systems of their time. The authors were charged with being utterly produced by and given license to speak by the culture rather than "honestly" observing it from the outside. They, therefore, replicate the assumptions of bourgeois capitalist ideology, of being complicit with the power structures they ostensibly oppose since they reinforce the social hierarchies and class divisions; for example, by characterizing the poor as brutes (Howard) or using such portrayals to impose a sense of order on the chaos of the new society (Kaplan). In

short, these writers were not the subversive social critics an earlier generation of scholars had promised.[2]

The theory that artists are intertwined with their historical and social contexts—in ways they may be unaware—will serve as my foundation for considering Stephen Crane's first novel, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets (A Story of New York)* (1893, 1896). I am specifically interested in Crane's use of white ethnics, those people descendent from varied European cultures who emigrated to the United States throughout the nineteenth century and populate his representation of Bowery life. Historical scholarship in whiteness studies details how ethnic groups like the Irish and Italians were not "white enough" upon arriving in America—remaining unincorporated in the racial fold and denied the privileges attending the label of "white"—until it became a necessary political strategy to protect the power of "true Anglo-Saxons" against the rising number of emancipated blacks and "dangerous" immigrant groups.[3] There was a widely articulated conviction that "not-quite-white" ethnics lacked the self-control necessary for fulfilling the appropriate role of a citizen. We even find references to "white savages" from the period, so Crane's rationale for turning to those figures denied full access to the benefits of whiteness goes beyond the act of an astute journalist documenting a specific time and place, nor is their value for him simply that they prove naturalist theories.

There are two contradictions attending Crane's motivations in taking white ethnics for his subject matter: individualism—an idea critiqued in naturalism—and "proper whiteness" that keeps him deep within the ruling moral order. The first arises from Crane's desire for a transgressive identity, a sort of street credibility, as someone hostile to the conventional mores. *Maggie* announces that Crane is the kind of person who is familiar with these kind of people. Although they were both dead when the novel was published, his choice of topic and proposing that he applies a nonjudgmental treatment of a fallen woman break with his parents' strict Protestant morality. Like a disrespectful child, Crane intends to denigrate all the parent culture symbolizes in order to construct his own identity, to mark off his own space in the world. However, his attitude about the white Other does not fall that far from the branch. The Bowery characters function as a critique of immigrant cultural practices and personalities according to a standard of behavior "white" people, the true Americans, should exhibit.

Hence, we see Crane side with convention in the same moment he attempts to present himself as being free of it.

* * *

Larzer Ziff makes a common critical gesture in claiming Crane was "shaped by an inner consciousness that told him that whatever was accepted was suspect" (186). Indeed, the pursuit of individuality is the common thread interlacing Stephen Crane's brief life, with a clear pattern of conscious disengagement from mandated convention. Well before he started spending his evenings amongst Manhattan's lower forms he was the wild-boy minister's son. Committing the typical teen transgressions of smoking and drinking carried more weight since his parents were vehement temperance supporters; his father Jonathan Townley Crane's 1869 book *Popular Amusements* attacks the vice of reading novels, his son's future profession (Brown 29); and he freely engaged in gambling, smoking, drinking, and taking opium while at college (before dropping out), slumming in the Bowery and as a New York bohemian. All this amounts to a clear pattern of conscious disengagement from mandated convention. Rebellion would also seem to be the impulse behind Crane's writing style as a naturalist who does not play by the genre's rules (that he actually has a style is a favorite scholarly point).[4] Keith Gandal is the most recent critic to argue that Crane structured his life and work according to an ethos of nonconformity. He enumerates the principles Crane purportedly lived by:

> [O]ne must battle egotistical desires for praise that threaten to make one conform. One must fend off condemnations with anger; one must also forgo the pleasure of acclaim. One must exert hostility against any external force that would assault one's personal or true feelings and against any internal impulse that would make one vulnerable to outside opinion. In response to a world in which a tyrannical environment is frequently imagined to shape lives regardless, *this rebel morality is a new ethics of independence, individuality, and authenticity*. (129, emphasis added)

Gandal echoes the romanticized theory of the autonomous self established well before Stephen Crane began his writing career, and he is convinced, for the most part, that *Maggie* is proof he fulfills the demands of that doctrine.

That Crane thought himself transgressive requires little evidence. It is not so obvious, however, whether his novel really achieves the glory of subversive freedom Gandal bestows upon it. First, what is the philosophy Crane thinks he is challenging? What are the characteristics of the identity he is so deeply invested in showing the reading public he has cleansed himself of? Crane's Protestant heritage constitutes a set of beliefs and practices from which, depending on your perspective, the United States is still either benefiting or suffering. Richard Brookhiser's 1991 *The Way of the WASP*, a celebratory meditation on Anglo-Americans, approaches it as the former. He lists six tenets of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) code that have steered the nation since its colonial days: conscience, industry, success, civic- mindedness, use, and antisensuality (29). To flesh out the enemy Crane targets I focus on the three most applicable to interpreting the white ethnic in *Maggie*: conscience, industry, and antisensuality. All three are fundamental to anti-immigrant feeling in the nineteenth century, all three inform the attitude that makes *Maggie* a text of nativist complicity.

Conscience is the inner monitor that controls behavior. It is based upon the rules of public or institutional authority, but conscience enables Foucault's panoptican to be carried within the subject as a constantly self-regulating sense of correctness. One does not follow whims or instincts, those engines driving the human machine in naturalism; rather, one is always striving to rein them in. Conformity is the result, but its root is internal so the individual is the sole guilty party in any moral offense. If a person is strong enough to resist temptation there will be no problems.

Industry is what will keep your mind off those temptations. To be engaged always in work of some sort, accomplishing some goal, not only keeps you out of trouble but may be rewarded with success (the fourth WASP tenet). Those who stop working are simply undeserving of pity or empathy. Eric Foner summarizes the theory (around since 1590s England) of the "undeserving poor" informing many middle-class and reformist views of the people who inhabit *Maggie* (the concept returns in Chapter 5 with L.A. punk). These folks were "essentially responsible for their own dire conditions . . . [Their] [f]ailure to advance in society bespoke moral incapacity, a lack of 'character' . . . the absence of self-reliance, perseverance, and courage in the face of

adversity" (121). To waste time is to waste your life, to sit and contemplate your miserable condition only ensures remaining in that condition. The ideology of pulling up one's own bootstraps denies blaming anyone or anything other than yourself if you do not succeed—neither bad luck nor a systemic power structure count as excuses.

Antisensuality is what can be avoided if one is being industrious. Keeping the senses clean and clear reduces interference with conscience and industry. In its most extreme form this amounts to nothing being done for its pleasure value alone—it has to be good for you. According to WASP ideology, food keeps you alive and sports keep you healthy, but hanging out on a street corner, going to saloons or vulgar theater shows, and having one night stands accomplish nothing useful.

Barry Shain's work on American individualism emphasizes early Protestantism's communal foundation, with virtue defined as "the total denial and suppression of the self in subservience to God and the public good . . . [and the] standards of the community" (40). This gives us a broader view of the moral heritage Crane targets with the publication of *Maggie*—one larger than the shadow of his parent's values. Those who benefited most from Protestant culture's hierarchical position feared that its dominance was waning in the 1890s (Gandal 7, 10). Whether WASPs actually adhered to the code themselves is irrelevant, as the source and force of the nation's dominant culture they believed their way to be the true and right one. This is the ideological lens through which slum dwellers are comprehended, defined, and made knowable as victims of their own failed character. Thus, Crane has a ready vehicle for separating himself from this group identity by writing a "shocking" book and donning a "bohemian" artistic persona, both of which reek of pleasure and heartily doing nothing the mainstream would consider productive. In Protestantism *self* is the antithesis of conscience (because it discards the inner monitor), *creativity* the opposite of antisensuality (as self-expression, feeling one's emotions, and pursuing pleasure). Both are central not only to Crane's characters in *Maggie* but to his own moral and aesthetic missions, and taking the slum for his subject matter will be the means to that end.

To demonstrate this extraliterary explanation for the white ethnic in *Maggie*, let us recall the story of the novel's troubled publication and the inscription Crane wrote in the initial vanity edition copies he sent

to literary figures, reformers, and ministers. When pursuing serialization in the mainstream *Century* magazine, Crane's manuscript was rejected for its harsh subject matter and profanity, to which Crane is said to have replied, "You mean the story's too honest?" (Beer 83). This anecdote exposes how aware Crane is concerning the effect he wants the book to have on a middle-class audience trained in sentimentalism and stories that end with clear resolutions and moral certainties. The inscription he wrote into the self-published edition likewise reveals this, but also suggests Crane's willingness to deploy the discourse of nonconformity in constructing his public authorial identity:

> It is inevitable that you be greatly shocked by this book but continue, please with all possible courage to the end. For it tries to show that environment is a tremendous thing in the world and frequently shapes lives regardless. If one proves that theory, one makes room in Heaven for all sorts of souls (notably an occasional street girl) who are not confidently expected to be there by many excellent people. It is probable that the reader of this small thing may consider The Author to be a bad man, but obviously, this is a matter of small consequence to The Author. (*Correspondence* 53)

Michael Davitt Bell reads this as Crane taunting and daring his readers, all those self-judged "excellent people," to confront his presentation of the urban underbelly (135). He is practically barking tickets to a freak show the passersby cannot resist, and further enticing them by proposing that a prostitute may get into heaven, thereby dangling a seamy counterphilosophy to Christianity's moral tenets that cleanly divide society into the worthy and unworthy.[5] Hamland Garland's 1893 review of *Maggie* imbues it with just such a spirit, attributing Crane with a "desire to utter in truthful phrase a certain rebellious cry. It is the voice of the slums" (qtd. in Dooley 8).

I do not think the rationale is quite so progressive. The fact that Crane initially published the novel under the pseudonym of "Johnston Smith" suggests the level of self-consciousness he had about his writing career, the sense of hesitation he felt about the public's possible reaction, not to mention his practical business acumen as concerns ruining his writing career before it starts. Crane is worried about his artistic future; therefore, it is not wholly a matter of his showing the bourgeoisie the "truth," nor that a more honest choice of literary topics was made, nor how sincere Crane is in the endeavor. What should be noted is the logic informing his choice of

subject and the claim that it is more interesting because more "true," more gritty, thus more scandalous to the parlor room matrons and young women who composed the majority reading public (see Budd 37–38). My interest lies in how the "facts" are chosen and deployed by Crane in creating himself as a particular kind of author. He refuses to be taken for a romantic sentimentalist (at least not on the surface), nor is he dull enough to believe in higher moral values or the judgments they lead to in an author like Howells. The question is what those white ethnics and their neighborhood do for Crane as a writer—not what he does for them in his writing—so he can be rewarded the laurels of the rebel author whose public and professional identity is founded upon being "regarded as something of an iconoclast, a maverick in his own era" (Petry 426).

Well before Crane began working on the sketches that became *Maggie*, the lives and cultural practices of immigrant subjects were branded as that unknown element for most Protestants that only heightened their deep anxiety over the current and future state of the nation. In conjunction with the labor union violence of the time (Boyer 125), the city was viewed as alien territory by most of the middle class. Since New York was the epitome of American city life it became a model by which to gauge and judge solutions to the "crisis" other towns were facing, or feared they might soon face. According to Alan Trachtenberg,

> spatial barriers appeared threatening and intolerable [to middle-class whites far removed from the slums], and in the rhetoric of reformers the idea of *mystery* itself was the veil that hid the sight of the lower orders and their quarters from the "public," the readers of newspapers and the payers of taxes for whom the slums were par excellence an "elsewhere" shrouded in awe and fear. (140)

Such fear informed the accusation that immigrants and their descendents lacked the self-control of correctly Americanized white people. Matthew Frye Jacobson documents the assessment of the new arrivals' "*un*fitness for self- government" that was "rendered racially in a series of subcategorical white groupings—Celt, Slav, Hebrew, Iberic, Mediterranean, and so on—white Others of a supreme Anglo-Saxondom" (*Whiteness* 42). In the late-nineteenth-century nativist mind, one of "the most pressing problems faced by the republic were the ever-expanding 'race-colonies' of unmetabolized, un-Americanized Europeans now in every major city" (*Whiteness* 56). In other words, these geographically, economically, and culturally marginal folk did not

act "white," so they were portrayed as a threat to the "American" way of life.

Newspapers continually fed middle-class fascination with the urban white Others by running stories about the exotic "other half" in the uncharted depths of New York's urban jungle, or as Harry P. Mawson conceives them in an 1892 article, "white savages" living in "Darkest New York" (*Maggie* 105).[6] Protestant reformers contributed to this narrativization of the slum and its inhabitants by locating the source of the problem not with capitalism but with the victims themselves. The Lower East Side—with its saloons, dance halls, prostitutes, and gambling dens—stood for deviant behavior and failed character, so the execrable conditions the urban poor lived under were caused by their own turpitude; and the charitable calling taken up by pamphlet writers was to cure this social disease in order to save these people from themselves. By 1893, Robert Dowling informs us, "the Bowery was already the infamous Bowery . . . conspicuous but now for alcoholism, poverty, homelessness, and crime. The streets were filled with hoboes and rival gangs. The number of prostitutes drew sailors by the thousands" along with the horde of slumming tourists, some on guided tours, who wanted to witness these taboo delights of the underclass with their own eyes (4). They were all driven by the same hunger for breaking the routine of middle-class respectability, even if for only one night and from a safe distance, that fueled Crane's pre-*Maggie* expeditions into the city.[7]

In addition to awakening Crane's initial interest in the Bowery as a zone of immorality, the assumptions underlying his characterization of the urban poor—how they sound, what they do and why they do it—are bound up with the reformers' discourse. Their ideas are integral to the novel because they inform how the white ethnic is represented in Crane's early city sketches—written before he ever ventured to the Lower East Side (Benfey 56, 61)—and account for his decision to write about the middle class's perceived urban Other in the first place. The narrator's condescending tone in *Maggie* mirrors that of the pamphleteers; in fact, Howells thought the novel fulfilled his conviction "that the middle-class discovery of the urban poor was a natural extension of bourgeois decency and clear-sightedness" (Levenson 157). As I elaborate shortly, Crane does not diverge greatly from the moralizing "progressive" impulse of this mentality. His primary goal in writing about the slum is to construct his own identity, a practice

reformers are surely invested in as well, but Crane has a very different kind of subjectivity in mind.

Crane plays off the tabloid desires of his imagined reader: Come see everything that disgusts you, he promises; come right in, folks, and be offended by the *bad* writer and his *bad* characters. Whether or not he actually believes his determinist statements in the inscription and novel, the fact that he calls attention to them in such an outright fashion signals Crane is trying to establish the credentials that will marginalize him from the Victorian novel of manners and the strict morality of sentimentalist fiction. In short, Crane attempts to stake out his individuality, his sense of self, through his subject matter. We are taken into the bowels of the Lower East Side and have the accumulated ethnographic details of urban white ethnic cultures put on display—the mangled words and dialects, the clothes, the activities and spaces of work, and leisure with all their smells, sounds, and colors—to convince us that Crane knows how to maneuver New York's dangerous underworld. Unlike *you*.[8]

The contradictions are twofold and interconnected. First, naturalism's call for deemphasizing individual agency—a demystification of free will and the centered subject—is part of Crane's project. In critiquing that bourgeois shibboleth he will disturb the hallowed ground of the middle class's comfortable convictions. Nonetheless, he proves himself susceptible to bourgeois thinking in his move to individualize himself as a unique subject choosing against the parent culture, although naturalists (theoretically) pit natural and social forces against human agency or transcendental subjectivity. The issue is hardly whether Crane is "really" a naturalist because *Maggie* is littered with victims of evolution, those who lost the survival-of-the-fittest war. All signs in the novel point to Crane's advocating at least a rudimentary belief in determinism, except where his own life is concerned. In his role as author he grants himself individuality and autonomy: he has the authority to claim access to the "real" (as Kaplan argues about authors other than Crane [13]), he is the one capable of an artistic expression perched above the fray of social combat where he looks down on the poverty and brutality of the Bowery with a discerning narrative eye. June Howard's thesis that naturalism's narrators are observers with agency while their characters lack any speaks to this issue (albeit Donald Gibson made the same point seventeen years before her [27]), but it becomes more convoluted in Crane's case.

The implications of Crane's artistic act double the problem of individualism. The fictionalized treatment of white ethnics becomes analogous to the logic of capitalism, the very system naturalists want their readers to hold responsible for the Bowery's deplorable conditions. Crane exploits not only slum nightlife but its denizens; the narrative function of the white ethnic in *Maggie*, the literary *work* they do, can be viewed as an artistic colonization of these subjects through a representation of their environment and behavior. Crane assesses their labor value for the product he wants to market to the reading public: his persona as a guide through the seedy world of the white Other. In using them for his personal desire we find the negative transformation individuality can take into individualism. Kaplan argues that naturalism relies on a process of spectatorship to commodify the Other as an object to be presented and looked at (7); in a similar fashion being poor and marginal becomes the labor of the white ethnic Crane exploits to make his profit in the marketplace of identity. His symbolic payoff is tendered as individuality—partly as a private sense of self (understood as autonomy) and partly as a public artistic identity (advertised as rebellious). And when the private self is enhanced through the efforts of a labor pool that does not share in the profits we have the model of modern capitalism naturalists posit as the key source for an environment like the Bowery where cheap labor lives a cheap, degraded life.

* * *

What does all this have to do with Crane's representation of white racial identity? We find a paradox in his approach to "proper" or legitimate whiteness. It grows out of the individualism paradigm because Crane aims to disquiet the dominant values of bourgeois whiteness by writing about a culture framed as threatening. But Crane's attitude toward the not-quite-whites supports the traditional ideology of whiteness in the end because he neither likes his characters nor approves of (nor even shows indifference toward) the way they are represented as living. The idea is never explicitly voiced in the novel, but the anxious discourse about white ethnic groups and the parameters of whiteness is found in the deployment of his slum characters.

It is significant that there are almost no nonwhite characters in Maggie despite its self-labeling as a "story of New York"—an urban novel about America's ground zero of cosmopolitan multicultural

contact. A "Chinaman" is included in one of Crane's neighborhood snapshot passages (49)—intimating the Bowery's transnational flavor as well as its marginal essence due to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 that denied them citizenship—but the only African-American presence is filtered through the burnt-corked stereotypes of a minstrel performance when a woman sings a "negro melody" that "necessitated some grotesque waddlings supposed to be an imitation of a plantation darkey" (57). Eric Lott has theorized minstrelsy as a simultaneous hatred of and interest in blacks; however, I read this passage as a negative response to such performances—not because the depictions are racist so much as they are beneath a white person—and it makes the question of this ghostly trace of the African American all the more curious.[9]

Toni Morrison's theory of blacks' absent presence in American literature—that the history of blacks in America haunts and shapes literary texts even when they are not included as characters—helps to clarify the purpose of the white ethnic in *Maggie*.[10] The improper whiteness of these figures is a substitute for nonwhite voices and images, the more common point of contrast. Annalee Newitz and Matthew Wray use the term "white trash" to define whites historically excluded from the financial and cultural privileges too easily ascribed to white people as a whole. Their term is different but the theory is applicable to Crane's white ethnics:

> [W]hite trash must be understood as both an external and an internal threat to whiteness. It is externalized by class difference but made the same through racial identification. White trash lies simultaneously inside and outside whiteness, becoming the difference within, the white Other that inhabits the core of whiteness. . . . [White trash] is a way of naming actually existing white people who occupy the economic and social margins of American life, and it is a set of myths and stereotypes that justify their continued marginalization. ("What" 169–70, 172)

If the nonwhite also symbolizes the non-American, as Morrison proposes, then Crane's ethnics perform a transference of the marginalized role nonwhites hold in Euroamerican literature. Most of these groups were not considered officially "white" at the time so they are synonymous with nonwhite Others for Crane's audience—the ethnic takes on the narrative duty of black people in *Maggie*. Crane's own constructed

sense of otherness depends on the fear that people with immigrant backgrounds are different from "typical" Americans if his rebellion from dominant whiteness is to be successful. It provides the shock effect necessary to acquire the sense of uniqueness from mainstream society and other writers. Unfortunately, a nativist suspicion of white ethnics also informs Crane's unflattering characterization of the slum characters, not as a dialogic voice to enlarge the novel's social panorama, but as the very moral position for which it seeks the reader's assent. Crane becomes complicit with the mainstream, thereby voiding any rebel status he may hope to attain.

His short story "An Experiment in Misery" (1894) reveals Stephen Crane is aware of how these categories are deployed by "whites." The young protagonist, a slumming writer, is trying to blend in with homeless beggars who are outside the dominant white identity, yet he still uses "white" as a positive term denoting proper behavior and higher values. Toward the conclusion, the protagonist offers to lend his new acquaintance, the "assassin," money for breakfast, whereupon the assassin promises, "[A]n' if yeh do that fer me, b'gawd, I'd say yeh was th' whitest lad I ever see." The men then jokingly insist that each is a "respecter'ble gentlm'n" until "they concluded with mutual assurances that they were the souls of intelligence and virtue" (192). The assassin has a sense of where the boundaries lie in his own race. Although he is kept out of the center he keeps its power alive by placing faith in an idea of what it means to be a proper white person, as well as its inherent superiority as a race and economic class. The passage closes with them joking about what they are not, a game with extra significance for the costumed protagonist, and calls attention to how those classified under dominant whiteness are represented. When the assassin blames "niggers" for taking lower pay and running the "white man out" of the South, we see the hegemony of proper whiteness at work (192). The subordinated subject attacks those below him, but he makes no gesture of hatred toward those above—their hegemonic position of privilege is safe because its naturalization is consented to by those it harms. There is no moralizing authorial/narratorial commentator to intervene and clarify this for the reader, so it is unclear how self-conscious Crane is in this text.

While the same could be said of *Maggie*'s narrator, one should not overlook how the other narrative devices work to establish a standard of proper whiteness. It is an all too common refrain in Crane scholarship

that he breaks with the primary convention of the slum narrative by not "preaching" about morality or character, nor does he make clarion calls for progressivist social action. But Crane does preach against something he finds distasteful; namely, the improper whiteness of slum ethnics, only he does it through his content and the authorial choices he makes to present that material (i.e., form). Gandal says Crane offers middle-class readers an alternative morality without external authorial judgment. This assessment overlooks how slum culture is subtly presented to the bourgeoisie and how judgment is passed on it in a manner that would corroborate their opinions, not challenge them. Michael Davitt Bell calls it "mockery (137), while Donald Gibson argues, "What has seemed to some critics to be 'objectivity' or 'ironic detachment' is not that at all, but loathing and disgust for the depraved characters of whom [Crane] writes" (29). Nearly every detail Gandal sees as part of an amoral ethnography to critique middle-class Protestant standards can be read alternatively as a critique rooted in transparent values. Whether a matter of behavior, appearance, or taste, Crane is not above criticizing his characters for failing to recognize how debased their cultural practices and pleasures are—for not grasping that there is a better way to live—and this stance is directly influenced by an embedded belief in proper whiteness. Crane may have found the slum and white ethnics more exciting than his father's social circle, but so did dad and his colleagues, and for the exact same reasons as the son's. The difference is that one decided it might actually be interesting to spend time amongst the savages and partake in their ways.

Character, setting, and the narratorial tone used to present them (and nothing in *Maggie* signals to me that a reader should separate author from narrator) are only three devices Crane uses to influence opinions on the slum. There are few overt statements so one must seriously contend with how Crane deploys his moral judgments about not-quite-whiteness through all that irony (not always paired with ironic detachment) and negative animal imagery (going well beyond the need of emphasizing humanity's animalism). There is also the oft noted difference between the character's slang gutter speech and the narrator/author's standard English and literary style (Howard 105). Eric Solomon accuses Crane of using "dialect to an excess to characterize his slum dwellers and to indicate the paucity of their linguistic, intellectual, and emotional resources" (33–34).[11] And there are recurring

attacks on mass culture that resemble an attempt to dictate what constitutes "Culture" by restraining and retraining the tastes of both the impoverished ethnic and the sentimental middle-class readers—showing through negative examples what proper white people should appreciate. The leisure of urban ethnic whites—the beer halls, music halls and theaters staging their simplistic melodramas—is critiqued and ridiculed, but more importantly the people who pay for these amusements are depicted with herd imagery as cattle. They are the unthinking, uncultured mob who hatefully glare at businessmen, who strut their gaudy finery and evaluate themselves according to how well they can fight. And Maggie is the character most severely criticized for swooning under the blinding glare of all these shallow desires.

The sum result is an unrelentingly negative attitude toward the white ethnic characters. That they do not see themselves as immoral may break with a slum narrative convention, but it is evidence of Crane's own pretensions at shock effect and making the form more literary than granting his approval to their amorality. Certainly he follows the naturalist dictum that people survive their environment by adapting to it, as Maggie's demise shows, but the point is still that their environment is at fault for their choices because to be ignorant, hypocritical, excited by violence, or allowing saccharine mass culture to seduce you into romantic illusions is always *bad* in this novel. That Jimmie must become "hardened" to survive the Bowery habitus is the reformer's problem of the novel. In the end, this is the assimilation discourse of Protestant reformers—if you cannot keep them out, then require them to act like you—only delivered in a more stylized manner.

David Halliburton rightly accuses Crane of creating types rather than fully developed characters (47).[12] The novel begins with a portrayal of white ethnic slum brutality and ends with white ethnic slum hypocrisy. The first five chapters alone are a primer in the way Crane tries to shape the reader's response to the slum habitus. It begins with a juvenile rock fight to set the novel's naturalistic tone by showing the animalistic territoriality of humans, and more specifically the brutish behavior of the Bowery's indigenous tribes. "Barbaric trebles," "Blasphemous chatter," a "whirling mob," "triumphant savagery," a "hoarse, tremendous howl"—these are the words used to describe the young products of this environment (37). Each phrase is coded with the nativist language of a threatening Other, an unruly, uncivilized subculture that does not act in

accordance with "American" values. The arrival of the teenaged Pete plays on that middle-class fear even further. Here is what these urchins will soon grow into:

> Down the avenue came *boastfully sauntering* a lad of sixteen years, although the *chronic sneer* of an ideal manhood already sat upon his lips. His hat was tipped with an *air of challenge* over his eye. Between his teeth, a cigar stump was tilted at the *angle of defiance*. He walked with a certain swing of the shoulders which *appalled the timid*. (37, emphasis added)

Crane uses Pete's candidly arrogant and uncivil style of movement and dress (Bourdieu's hexis) to symbolize visually his difference from Protestantism. Jimmie's father is the final stage of this (de)evolutionary chart. He "plods" toward the kids smoking a pipe (an unhealthy, sensual behavior) and then unsympathetically kicks and curses at his wounded son to send him home.

We are next taken into their neighborhood for a quick tourist's view of Bowery family life. Crane's sketch mixes dark figurative language with the same lexicon of savage whiteness and urban jungles used by the journalists:

> Eventually they entered into a *dark region* where . . . a dozen *gruesome* doorways gave up loads of babies to the street and the gutter. . . . In all *unhandy* places there were buckets, brooms, rags and bottles. In the street infants played or fought with other infants or sat *stupidly* in the way of vehicles. Formidable women, with *uncombed* hair and *disordered* dress, gossiped while *leaning* on railings, or *screamed* in frantic quarrels. *Withered* persons, in curious postures of *submission* to something, sat smoking pipes in obscure corners. . . . The building quivered and creaked from the weight of humanity *stamping* about in its bowels. (39, emphasis added)

Dirty, chaotic, sloppy, ignorant, unkempt, loud and thudding, demoralized—this is the milieu in which Jimmie and Maggie are to be raised, to be formed. Jimmie will adopt Pete's sneer to become "a young man of leather," who "never conceived a respect for the world, because he had begun with no idols that it has smashed" (46). Despite her parents being violent drunks, having to do the housework and survive the world outside her apartment, Maggie will be the pretty girl who "blossomed in a mud puddle" (49). That Crane finds pretty girls a "rare . . . production of a tenement district" is one of the more obvious

cracks in his objectivity. The cracks spread larger and cut deeper when he writes about Bowery cultural practices, framing them as a catalyst for Maggie's inevitable death.[13]

The unifying issue in Crane's treatment of the slum's varied cultural practices is that of taste. The white ethnics' pleasures are easily placed in a binary structure with the dominant culture: good/bad, deep/shallow, enlightening/dulling, and educational/spectacle. Bourdieu's *Distinction* aimed to prove what few wanted to accept: Taste is neither natural nor innate, it is a process of inculcation related to one's life options. In doing so he argues what everyone already knew: Taste constructs social identity.

> [Taste] unites and separates. Being the product of the conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence, it unites all those who are the product of similar conditions while distinguishing them from all others. And it distinguishes in an essential way, since taste is the basis of all that one has—people and things—and all that one is for others, whereby one classifies oneself and is classified by others. . . . Objectively and subjectively, aesthetic stances adopted in matters like cosmetics, clothing or home decoration are opportunities to experience or assert one's position in social space, as a rank to be upheld or a distance to be kept. . . . As for the working classes, perhaps their sole function in the system of aesthetic positions is to serve as a foil, a negative reference point[.] (56, 57)

Although Bourdieu is too deterministic concerning the agency of subordinate taste cultures (that they have limited control over their choices), his theory that we deploy taste comparatively to give the world meaning is impossible to deny. Late-nineteenth-century American WASP reformists are disturbed by the immigrants willfully maintaining their cultural differences. The refusal of full assimilation leads to the white Other's tastes and practices being labeled immoral and menacing, a threat to the status quo.

Crane's narratorial tone regarding slum culture parallels this maneuver. To be fair, he does not present everyone as completely incognizant; Jimmie, for example, understands how the city's field of signification is structured. On the one hand, Crane creates Jimmie as a corner menace to have a model of the dangerous classes, something to be feared and contained. On the other hand, Crane strikes me as fully grasping what the Chicago School on deviance and, even later, Bourdieu theorize

about how a subordinate habitus willingly defines itself against the dominant. Here is one facet of Jimmie's street attitude:

> He maintained a belligerent attitude toward all well-dressed men. To him fine raiment was allied to weakness, and all good coats covered faint hearts. . . . Above all things he despised obvious Christians and ciphers with the chrysanthemums of aristocracy in their button-holes. He considered himself above both of these classes. He was afraid of neither the devil nor the leader of society. (47)

Jimmie is allowed to consciously deromanticize those above him socially. In feminizing them he creates a sense of self-valorization, making physical power a substitute for his utter lack of political or financial agency. This portrait makes Jimmie's "type" more frightening to middle-class readers since he is not impressed with the "respectable" people, not accepting the hegemony that makes "well-dressed men" symbols of proper behavior and appearance. Crane takes it even further when Maggie's beau, Pete, tells a story of hitting a man who calls him an "insolen' ruffin' . . . doom' teh everlastin' pe'dition" (53). The language signals that the accuser is a gentleman, one of Jimmie's chrysanthemum in the button-hole types. But Protestant anxiety is stoked by showing how little respect proper whiteness and its ideals get from these street thugs, and how the boundaries of power are weakened by people who neither respect nor comply with the hierarchy. (Jimmie's attitude later weakens when he judges Maggie with middle-class morality, "publicly damn[ing] his sister that he might appear on a higher social plane" [77]).

Crane claims not to moralize over Maggie or the Bowery toughs but he is consistently negative about the sources informing their consciousness. He buttresses Protestant thought by ensuring they have neither self-control over their behavior nor a community influence that keeps them on the right side of the moral boundaries. The inability to rein instincts and desires plays a part in every character's problems. Moreover, Maggie is the only "animal" in the Bowery to remain innocent, or stupid, enough to read her environment and its laws incorrectly. That she is the only one Crane makes dense enough to believe that the spectacle's facade applies to real life (also a censure of melodrama's bourgeois audience) could be read as a clumsy fault of the novel or simply misogyny, but I will just rationalize Maggie as a foil character who allows Crane his necessary openings for making

social commentary.[14] Maggie is our eyes and ears, we will follow her into this "bad" culture to be taught about proper "white" tastes.

Unlike Jimmie's reversal of the taste hegemony Maggie is easily caught in its web. Let us begin with her reintroduction after having grown into that flower in a mud puddle when she meets Pete, the man who will be her figurative and literal corruptor. Pete is a Bowery dandy and Maggie's "dim thoughts" perceive him as manly, heroic, and sophisticated in his dress and manners (52). Pete's large, colorful presence makes her see more clearly what a dreary life she lives:

> Turning, Maggie contemplated the dark, dust-stained walls, and the scant and crude furniture of her home. A clock, in a splintered and battered oblong box of varnished wood, she suddenly regarded as an abomination. She noted that it ticked raspingly. The almost varnished flowers in the carpet-pattern, she conceived to be newly hideous. Some faint attempts she had made with blue ribbon, to freshen the appearance of a dingy curtain, she now saw to be piteous. . . . She reflected upon the collar and cuff factory. It began to appear to her mind as a dreary place of endless grinding. Pete's elegant occupation brought him, no doubt, into contact with people who had money and manners. (53)

Maggie is thrust into a newly defined self-awareness based on nothing more than becoming conscious of style. She is surrounded by inadequate things that she now reads as reflecting the inadequacy of her life. The details overwhelm her, shock her, depress her to the point that the clock is humanized with a rasping tick as though on its death bed. Certainly, it is strange that Maggie would just this second, at her age, come to judge the style in her life as third class, or grasp that her factory job is not going to feed her soul, but she does and it happens by having a "better" style dangled in front of her to incite her desire to be the kind of person it signifies.

The audience is meant to respond on two levels: disgust and pity. Disgust is easy since Maggie lives in a filthy hovel with broken furniture. But lacking the basic ability to decorate a room becomes almost tragic—as if her meager attempts at mimicking bourgeois taste should incite sadness. Pity is more complicated because it is an emotion of power. Pity is not empathy, one person is placed above the other and granted the ability to look down on a situation with the knowledge that it is "piteous," and is then able to bestow condolences. In Maggie's case, it relies on the reader already knowing her life is horrid, feeling

sorry for her, and then showing pity a second time because she is so unfamiliar with the standards of good taste that it took her this long to realize she deserves to be pitied. Maggie does now understand and she will use Pete to take her into that dazzling world of "money and manners." But what a shame she does not know better than to choose Pete and his friends for a model of aesthetic judgment.

Being mesmerized by Bowery leisure and popular culture will cause Maggie to become a fallen woman. Crane uses these pleasures to deliver moral lessons about their vacuity but also to make a larger comment on one of the sources of the white ethnic problem. When Pete takes Maggie to her first music hall she is awestruck by the place. The energy and excitement impress her, so much so that she becomes one of the "happy cows" (55) unable to break from the herd to distinguish between true and false. The hall is a place for laborers "with calloused hands and attired in garments that showed the wear of an endless trudge for a living," but Maggie does not see Pete in this light. The facade of clothing and attitude fool her into thinking he is a "cultured gentleman" with a "knowledge of high-class customs" (56), like the "sprinkling of kid-gloved men who smoked cigars *purchased elsewhere*" (55, emphasis added). Crane places falsity and wantonness on display throughout the evening: spendthrift workers buying overpriced beer; rowdy behavior like pounding glasses on tables and yelling; dance styles with a sexual tinge "that can never be seen at concerts given under church auspices"; singers in gaudy, overdone dresses; and an audience whose emotions are easily moved.

The tackiness of the whole scene is exactly why Crane is interested in it. If it ceases to be branded uncouth and tawdry by his audience then it ceases to be exciting or marginal compared to his natal background. The novel has many similar examples but the conclusion is always the same: white ethnics have bad taste and they like it that way. Their pleasures offer them a form of false consciousness, anesthetizing the pain of their lives and pacifying them for not taking any action to change it, or being angry over having such limited opportunities to do so. The theatrical melodramas satisfy their sense of humanity with the simplistic plotlines where good always champions over evil. These productions do not break the conventions, they allow people to feel complete if they respond with the proper emotions. Crane's own cynical sneer is addressed to both the lower and upper classes. He exposes

a similarity between the two because he ultimately dislikes both. Neither side is pure in its tastes put one does ultimately win out over the other.

Crane may, however, offer an alternative approach to culture. Maggie and Pete's weekend excursions take them to different parts of the city outside the Bowery. They visit both a dime museum freak show and the Museum of Arts—and Maggie is enthralled by both. Pete, as always, shows indifference (at the art museum he spends his time making tough faces at guards, "the watch-dogs of the treasures") while Maggie's response to the art is "Dis is outa sight" (61). Perhaps she says this because she thinks enthusiasm is expected of her when confronted with "high culture." Being untrained in art appreciation she would act the way she assumes is appropriate. But what if Crane is actually making her sincere? Could this be his way of suggesting one should be open to all culture? Might this be a version of cultural hybridity in action, much like Crane was in his own life? In engaging the artistic pretensions of a bohemianism that partakes in slum culture, in writing a "literary" novel based on nonliterary subjects, he mixes two disparate sources to locate himself in the world. If we suppose Maggie is following the same line then she might be read as a more interesting character than before.

Ultimately, this path is closed to us by Crane, made an impossible interpretation, because the art museum scene is followed by Maggie's night at the theatre and all the self-deluding fantasies it awakens in her. She is finally drawn as choosing one form of culture, but it may be due more to getting herself stuck in it. The romantic illusions will lead her to have sex with Pete, which will lead to her mother kicking her out (a scene so ripe with hypocrisy it is almost surely intended to make bourgeois readers despise white ethnics), which leads to her turning to prostitution to survive, which leads to her death. The lesson has been handed down and I think it is equally applicable to how we should interpret Crane's authorial position. His own hybridity seems to have taught him little. He too chooses one culture over another, but it is more troubling if only because he has more options than someone like Maggie.

Regardless of his infusing the novel with examples of determinism and environmental influence, Crane's reliance on the "white savage" stereotype and disparagement of their popular culture reflects the

dominant culture's ideology—the one his original inscription claims to question. But Crane can go only so far in his break with bourgeois whiteness. In the end, *Maggie* does not abide by naturalism's ethos of getting below the superficial to the tougher facts of life because his own hard-to-swallow truths slide by without notice.

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CHAPTER 3

ONE OF NONE: QUASI-HYBRIDITY IN *THE SUN ALSO RISES*

> And that is Hemingway, he looks like a modern and he smells of the museums.
> —Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*

> I'm sorry. I've got a nasty tongue. I never mean it when I say nasty things.
> —Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises*

MARK TWAIN'S INFLUENCE ON ERNEST HEMINGWAY IS CLEAR FROM THE latter's well-known celebration of *Huckleberry Finn*: "All American writing comes from that. There was nothing before. There has been nothing as good since" (*Green Hills* 22). The impression Twain had on Hemingway's style is seen in his own truncated sentences and "realistic" speech. Likewise, one can easily find characteristics of naturalism in Hemingway's work: its anti-Victorian spirit, its dedication to a reportorial style, a deterministic fascination with life and death that claims to strip away the veneer of sentimentality. Even with these similarities in mind, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) may first seem a peculiar choice for studying the appropriation of Otherness because so many characters with that status are denied full membership in Jake Barnes's cliques, be it Parisian expatriates or Spanish bullfighting aficionados. But the issue is more complicated than a simple "us and them" logic as Hemingway posits a transformative model to theorize the individual's relationship to identity groups. The novel's epigraphs speak to his response to the idea of

membership at the outset: the "Lost Generation" is just another historical blip that will mean little after it "passeth away" to make room for the next generation, the newest identity label.

At the root of Jake's story is his attempt to strike a balance between pre- and postwar narratives so as to negotiate a world without transcendent truths. He is neither a member of the prewar *episteme* nor an adherent to the common values of the Lost Generation. In questioning the legitimacy of both perspectives Jake is able to maneuver between them. His beliefs and practices are formed by selectively borrowing from both discourses, a blending he anticipates will endow him with agency. Stephen Cooper is correct that *The Sun Also Rises* is not a directly political novel, but this should not obscure how Jake uses hybridity to create a politicized subject position (26). A hybrid is built upon fragments and disparate parts, manifesting itself as a decentered identity. By withdrawing from rigid lines of social identity the hybrid is not easily contained within any single category. This move has transgressive potential, for it gives subjects a degree of latitude against restrictive identities. Such an act of decentering is the agency Hemingway posits, with Jake's personal aesthetics of existence (to use a late-Foucauldian phrase) opening a path to greater mobility across the lines of culture by manipulating subjectivities.[1]

So far I have located the source for transgressive social practice in the Other, and this is equally applicable to Jake's scheme for dissociating himself from both his subculture and the mainstream. The rift between staid morality and modern alienation leads to Spain's significance in the novel, with the Basque peasant marked as a source for mixed identity. The Spanish Other exhibits a sense of tradition and communitarian sensibility without resorting to either the constrictive morality of the American middle class or the hollow individualistic practices of the expatriate. Jake is after a personal center to structure his life and Spanish culture is framed as a preferable standard. The system of moral order Jake associates with working-class Spaniards is posited as an effective space to confront existence, to find a way to just "live in it" (148). The path this takes continually shifts in the novel. In a sense Jake's otherness is doubled since it shuttles between the two sides, taking from either one and relying on *contra*-contexts to judge the utility of the appropriation. I intend to show where Otherness lies and how Jake either discards or uses it, for the kind of Other Jake is willing to associate himself with

gives the novel its shape. The Basque peasants—situated sufficiently outside and within the center—are privileged over the marginality represented by Robert Cohn's Jewishness or the *bal musette* homosexuals. In making this choice it is not wholly misguided to accuse Hemingway as author, and Jake as narrator/character, of anti-Semitism and homophobia. Nor are they innocent of objectifying these people into "types" to construct a private sense of self. By examining how whiteness relates to these characters, however, we move to a more nuanced understanding of Hemingway's convoluted tactic—that in disparaging certain kinds of marginality he attacks a form of centeredness. We find that Jake's dismissal of certain Othered identities exposes something other than a bigotry born of Hemingway's social training, for the evaluation of Otherness according to a rejected whiteness is a critical politics existing simultaneously with prejudice.

The portrait of Jake in Book I serves as a foundation for judging his later actions. It is the vehicle for introducing Jake introducing himself to the reader in his Parisian life as he espouses, albeit critically, the general pleasure-seeking values of the hard-boiled expatriates. In considering how self-marginalization is portrayed in these chapters the sure topic would be their bacchanalian lifestyle. They have physically and spiritually alienated themselves from their homelands, yet it is their material practices that are given priority in articulating a division with the past. This premise dates back to Allen Tate's 1926 review in which he labels the characters "bounders" (94). The common denominator in analyses of Hemingway's expatriate characters is that they are a modernist renunciation of Western society's reified values. Jake's social circle is construed as enacting their negation through drinking and sex to distance themselves from the responsibilities of the "real" world in an age of circumspect belief systems.

That Hemingway critiques the expatriate response to the modern age's upheavals has become a critical postulate.[2] So, self-marginalization is conceived as a solution to his longing for a narrative that will give him a sense of fixity against an illogical universe. Jake wants a reason to live that will not succumb to false rationalizations, and he applies this ideal to all the discourses he encounters. He balances his connection to the new generation by incorporating aspects of the parent culture that give him a sense of certainty, sometimes with a nostalgic yearning for the old ways. Things were simpler when he did not know

politicians lie and values are tools of control; when people were judged according to their actions it was easier to decide what kind of life one would lead. But Jake is too cynical now to accept such black and white distinctions without question, so he lives in the grayer shades of a skepticism that enables him to integrate the past into his present. Jake has doubts about his ancestors' narratives, but he leaves himself open to the possibilities of both belief systems by integrating and disposing particular elements as he sees fit.

Jake's association with the expatriates can be misleading as to how different from them he truly is.[3] Hemingway inserts prevalent examples to denote Jake's disillusionment with their cultural practices, showing he is neither completely interested in nor successful at keeping the new code of conduct. Many of his friends in Paris—such as Brett, Mike, and Robert—are living the kind of carefree, carousing lives that wealth provides. Jake represents himself differently by splicing tradition and modernity. The public Jake is reconciled to a godless universe in which the answers are no longer found in the prewar society's beliefs. Life is to be reduced to the most basic pleasures and experiences if one is to survive the malaise of postwar life. But at night, when alone, his "hard-boiled" surface cracks (34). His mind is plagued with thoughts about his wound and the loss of solid social structures that gave a focus to life. As a witness to both his public and private lives, the reader sees the identity conflict arising from the confrontation of these two spheres.

The scenes of Parisian nightlife in Chapters 3 and 4 present Jake in the cliché persona of the Lost Generation.[4] He picks up a prostitute, goes to a nightclub to dance, and drinks too much—all perfectly in line with the public face of expatriate amorality. Yet we also find curious counterbalancing moments in these pages. The first is Jake's commentary on the powers, both good and bad, of Pernod (15). Jake is not a person who drinks only for the sake of drinking, neither is he a follower controlled by the whims of his friends. He takes the anesthetizing effects of the alcohol seriously, he knows how the Pernod can either help or hurt him. Such epicureanism is not exhibited by the other expatriates. For them liquor is what gets you drunk, and being drunk is more fun than sobriety. Jake maneuvers between two cultural practices—the competing discourses about alcohol (immoral versus fun)—to perform the same act with a different interpretation of it.

Later, Jake fails to sustain the code of silence, revealing he is at odds with his peers. The episode begins with Jake and Georgette's taxi ride. She tries to do what is expected of her by placing a hand near Jake's crotch but he stops her. Their brief dialogue typifies the code of keeping emotional pain inside, and her subtle use of the word "sick" to name the modernist malaise is a safe way of speaking (16). Jake soon breaks this discursive strategy at the *bal musette* when introduced to Robert Prentiss. Jake is "a little drunk. Not drunk in any positive sense but just enough to be careless," and lashes out at Prentiss's cool arrogance (21). Once Jake's outburst is acknowledged, after he has carelessly shown emotion, he turns his anger at the slip onto the people in the bar by openly stating that this "whole show makes me sick" (21). He is not "getting damned romantic," as Brett says, nor is he simply "bored" as he states (23). Overdrinking holds transgressive *symbolic* capital against the old ethic of moderation, but Jake views most of the expatriates' rebellion as vacuous. Still, he remains at the club until Brett suggests they leave and go to a different one. This too is an act of hybridity: she wants to get more drunk, Jake follows because of his emotional attachment to Brett. Under the guise of revelry he pursues a different course than the expatriates—being in love with another human being—to balance two competing desires.

Jake's attitude toward working is where we find the clearest point of his breaking rank.[5] He thinks it is "pleasant to be going to work" and enjoys doing a good job when he is in the office (36). This ethic separates him from those who have money or have it sent from home. Jake's respect for those who work for a living—harking to the old Puritan work ethic—signals why he will later be attracted to the Spanish peasants for whom "Money still had a definite value in hours worked and bushels of grain sold" (152). This attitude toward money contributes to exposing his hybrid identity. After leaving Brett for the night, Jake returns to his apartment where he does a small but telling act: he balances his checkbook. He informs the reader about his balance, but this detail is not given to document how much money Jake's life provides him. The scene shows that his private life has order to it, rather than being left entirely to chance and spontaneity. In public he dons the mask of indifference, pretending to be careless, but to label this hypocritical is reductive. Jake keeps himself aware of his actions to maintain an equilibrium that explores the options and interprets them in a way enabling

him to exist until a suitable answer can be found. This is in keeping with the modernist ethos of avoiding self-delusion or blind acceptance. By balancing the positives (breaking with atrophied norms) and the negatives (the banality of the counterresponses to those norms) Jake strives to avoid the constraints of commitment.

A serious attitude toward life's necessities is best concealed from his friends to maintain a life of reduced tension. This is articulated when Robert Cohn, a man with too much free time, interrupts Jake at work. They go to a bar and Robert morosely asks, "Don't you ever get the feeling that all your life is going by and you're not taking advantage of it?" To which Jake says, "What the hell, Robert. . . . What the hell" (11). Jake's cool, detached response brushes the thought away as inconsequential. He wears the public mask of aloofness to protect himself until he can be alone. That is when the counterculture's narrative gives no comfort; it is when Jake can permit himself to cry, releasing the deluge of self-pity and sadness that must be hidden from others once the morning comes and the cycle of self-repression begins again (34).

The scene that best displays Jake's inner schism is Brett's visit to his apartment with Count Mippipopolous, whom she has previously lauded as "one of us" (32). Brett remains an emblem of the age with her childish behavior. She flicks ashes on Jake's rug and then makes a big show of asking for an ashtray (only after Jake catches her in the act). She wants to drink the champagne to get drunk and rudely hurries the count to open it. She does not think it improper to send the count out to get the wine so she and Jake can be alone, to which he responds she "*can't* just like that" (54, emphasis added). This latter action highlights Jake's divided allegiance, the etiquette points to his yearning for a system of order. The reader may infer that Jake is someone who clings to older rules of propriety, but his choice goes beyond a general mode of polite conduct. What should it matter—especially in an absurd world opposed to obsolete mores—if Brett sends the count away for a little while? It means nothing to Brett, but there is something in Jake's conscience that feels guilt.

Once the count returns, Jake's entire demeanor changes. He deals with Brett in one fashion and the count in another, namely, with respect. When Brett asks for a drink Jake says, "You get it while I go in and dress. You know where it is" (54). It is not the rudest of responses but it is *informal*, unlike the tone of a person performing the role of host. The

count is told, "Do sit down, count. . . . Let me take that stick" (57). Jake's manners and language change in the count's presence. He no longer operates in his cynical mode;. he expresses respect for the count without knowing him as he takes on the persona of a wise father figure for Jake (a relationship repeated in Book II with Montoya). Later, while dancing with Brett at a club, Jake looks at the count sitting alone and wants to join him (partly out of manners, partly to be with someone who has answers to his questions). Brett keeps them dancing and Jake makes no strong effort to resist, symbolizing Jake's inner discord between reason and passion competing for his loyalty from both his friends and himself. Hence, Brett's accolade of membership in the clique is not applicable to the count (despite his wounds received in a quest for commerce not valor), nor to Jake. In fact, "Jake never utters or otherwise ratifies Brett's totality of 'us' or 'one of us,' thereby implicitly denying its potency and position as a legitimate entity" (Baldwin, "Class" 22).

Jake's story of the expatriates in Book I is dominated by a sense of divisiveness, a dissatisfaction with his limited options. No member of his social group is represented as balancing the ethic of immediate gratification with a drive toward self-understanding. Jake too partakes in the fun but sets himself apart by denying its power to assuage the pain. This knowledge marks Jake as a more self-conscious person than his friends, it also marks him as a figure of hybridity. The longing for an infusion of stable values into the modern sensibility finds its fullest expression in Book II. By shifting the setting to Spain the reader is taken into a country where tradition and the freeing peace of nature are more accessible. Robert Stephens reads this through a rhetoric of escape: Jake "escapes *to* another situation to find more tolerable experience" (52). Stephens singles out the aficionados as the model of society Jake yearns while ignoring the bus ride scene with the Basque peasants in Chapter 11, thus missing the lesson Hemingway has Jake learn from this marginal group. Before turning to how this Other underpins the novel's politics, it is first necessary to interrogate the types of Otherness Jake turns away from in Paris.

* * *

Michael Harper argues that Hemingway has a "preoccupation with characters who exist on the fringes of society . . . [and] it is among the outcast and the despised . . . that an alternative has the best chance of

flourishing" (19). By clarifying the relationship Hemingway has with varied marginal identities and the center we find that this idea is true and untrue. Jake must be seen as a character in transition to find the identity politics underpinning his beliefs and practices. Stephens's assessment of why certain characters are barred from Jake's circle calls attention to how whites, Christians, and heterosexual men and women are all accused of breaking the code:

> Robert Cohn, Mrs. Braddocks, Robert Prentiss, the artist Zizi, the *bal musette* homosexuals, and the Paris and Pamplona tourists who are unhaunted by *nada*, have no real cause for rebellion against their societies, and are messy and undisciplined as they imitate without comprehension the actions of the insiders. (53)

To discover the criterion Jake uses for deciding which marginality is worth appropriating I consider two groups chosen to portray the Lost Generation's negative side: the Jew Robert Cohn and the *bal musette* homosexuals. The anti-Semitism voiced in the novel has always been problematic for readers, and the recent interest in Jake's homophobia requires that we attend to how these Others are approached by Hemingway.

Hemingway's sense of an identity politics is difficult to pin down conclusively in *The Sun Also Rises*. His ability to make social commentary and facilitate characterization through derogatory racial and ethnic terms—which proves he recognizes racism—is found in the story collection *In Our Time* (1925) published prior to the novel. This occurs in the Chapter 8 vignette with the word "wops." This piece depicts nativism resulting in the death of two foreigners by a policeman named Boyle, who fires without warning. His partner is worried about the possible repercussions of the act, but the murderer apprehends the racial climate: "They're wops, ain't they? Who the hell is going to make any trouble?" (79) It is with the heaviest of critical irony that an Irish-American cop claims he "can tell wops a mile off" since the victims are actually Hungarians. Hemingway places in conflict the two largest immigrant groups eventually subsumed under the racial category of whiteness.[6] He critiques the kind of assimilation a "Boyle" makes once he adopts a hatred toward the Other—anyone different from himself—in accord with mainstream "white" America's racial policy.

A more equivocal application of racial slurs occurs in "The Battler," where the African-American character, Bugs, is referenced through a careful shuttling between the terms "negro" and "nigger." Having Nick "know" Bugs is black by his voice and walk before he can clearly see the man seems essentialist, but the significance is established through Bugs's submissive demeanor around Ad Francis and Nick. "The negro" is the term most frequently used to refer to Bugs, but it is those "nigger legs" and the deferential "Mister" when addressing the white men that tell us more about Bugs's condition as a black man and Hemingway's possible racial politics (57). While "negro" lacks the racist tone of "nigger" it remains problematic since Hemingway continually identifies Bugs by his race, effectively reducing him to it, even after naming him. So race may be exactly what Hemingway is emphasizing: Bugs's blackness is a foil to the white Ad's psychotic, violent behavior. Although this raises the question of a black character filling the stereotypical role of dutiful benevolence, the degree of ambiguity in Hemingway's management of Otherness compels the reader to avoid a too easy condemnation or apology for how it appears in such figures.[7]

A conclusive judgment on Hemingway's opinion of Jews proves equally difficult in *The Sun Also Rises*.[8] Criticism of Robert Cohn's portrait as a Jewish character followed close on the heels of the novel's publication. In a December 1926 letter to Maxwell Perkins, in which Hemingway belittles the critical reaction to his immoral and "unattractive" characters, he is prompted to defend his portrayal of Cohn: "And why not make a Jew a bounder in literature as well as in life? Do jews [*sic*] always have to be so splendid in writing?" (*Letters* 240). Despite his appeal to common sense and a logic of realism, such a rationale has failed to convince many readers there is no ulterior motive behind a Jew being selected to play the author's primary whipping boy. And rightly so, for our ability to make sense of the novel's purpose depends on answering the question of this character's function and how Otherness as a whole is articulated by Hemingway.[9] There is always the historical argument that Hemingway was shaped by his time, as when Michael Reynolds insists that "to fault Hemingway for his prejudice is to read the novel anachronistically. . . . The novel's anti-Semitism tells us little about its author but a good deal about America in 1926" ("Recovering" 54).

This form of evasion strikes me as too easy, as though Hemingway were incapable of changing his opinions, especially when we recall that Jake mentions how Robert became "race-conscious" at Princeton (4). That term leads me to infer that Hemingway (and Jake in his role as author) knows what it means to treat someone differently because of race or ethnicity and that some will consider anti-Semitic utterances immoral. So Jake *chooses* to express racist opinions about Robert based on his Jewishness that cannot solely be traced to Hemingway's socialization.[10]

Surely Hemingway controls Jake's representation of Robert Cohn, but what of the authorial/narratorial control Jake is granted by Hemingway?[11] To dismiss the centrality of Jake Barnes as the narrator renders an incomplete sense of the novel's purpose. Jake is as guilty as anyone of making prejudiced comments (about noses, stubbornness, and money), but the overtly malicious anti-Semitism is put in the mouths of those Jake is growing tired of and trying to cast aside. Mike's cruelty toward Cohn, continually targeting his Jewishness, is not meant to win the approbation of readers. Indeed, the other members of the group are shocked by the level of hatred Mike spews forth. It is even explicitly condemned by Bill Gorton who candidly expresses bigotry toward Jews and blacks: "I don't like Cohn . . . but nobody has any business to talk like Mike" (145). A character like Bill proves especially useful for grasping how Hemingway complicates matters since he often plays the role of comic relief. Bill's frequent use of irony, added on top of Jake's own, causes some of his racist comments to fall into a gray area. A prime example is when he speaks of an African-American boxer cheated in Vienna. Bill begins his story by saying there is "[i]njustice everywhere" but then uses the term "nigger" throughout (even tossing in a touch of "black" dialect with "musta") (71). It is hard to tell if this is to be read as a racist blind spot or an example of facetious dark humor, for although there are moments when Bill clearly speaks the language of racism, his instances of anti-conservative irony work to confuse the politics one can attach to him. Hemingway/Jake purposefully disrupts the reader's ability to make meaning, to have closure, by muddying the system into which one can place Bill.

The same uncertainty can be applied to one of Jake's superficially unequivocal responses to the Other. At the club Zelli's, after dinner with Brett and Count Mippipopolous, Jake refers to a jazz musician as

a "nigger drummer" who is "all teeth and lips" (62). The reader is given a one-dimensional Louis Armstrong-esque figure without any details or commentary to signal authorial irony, or that the drummer's behavior—including his spoken "Hahre you?" and "Thaats good"—is interpreted as the mask an African American must don to appease the whites who pay his salary (the same rationale behind Armstrong deploying a one-dimensional stage persona of teeth and lips and statements akin to "Thaats good"). This representation of a black Other is not an irrefutable example of racism on Hemingway/Jake's part. Recall the preceding chapter when Jake calls attention to his authorial position by confessing to misrepresenting Cohn: "Somehow I feel I have not shown Robert Cohn clearly" and "I probably have not brought [his cheerfulness] out" (45). Here he admits both the impossibility of objective writing and that his statements should not be taken as the truth. No matter how stripped down the language or submerged the iceberg, authorial bias will enter the representation of characters and events. As with the treatment of Bugs in "The Battler," it is conceivable that Hemingway subtly undermines the very racism he has his characters display.

Hemingway ensures that any analysis of Jake is slippery because his feelings about Cohn are utterly contradictory. Jake says he likes Cohn but will later claim to dislike him; he feels sorry for Cohn and deliberately withholds sympathy; Cohn is feminized as highly emotional and still gets to physically conquer the novel's two code heroes by knocking Jake out and pummeling Pedro Romero into a bloody mess. Moreover, as a Catholic, a detail Jake often mentions, he and Cohn are both members of religious groups suffering prejudice against immigrants. To overlook the equivalent prejudice expressed toward Catholics and Jews will miss the subtle manner in which Hemingway complicates a reader's possible reactions to both characters.[12] Karen Brodkin tells of how nineteenth-century "anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism overlapped and fused with racial stigmatization of southern and eastern Europeans" (55). Add the Ku Klux Klan's broadly condoned nativist voice in the 1920s against these religious Others (recall Bill's dark joke about joining the Klan because Catholics have filled the dining car [88]) and we have Hemingway deploying an ambivalence that forces one to find an explanation for why Cohn is anathema to Jake other than a culturally embedded anti-Semitism.[13]

Some reasons for Cohn being depicted negatively are obvious: he has sex with Brett, does not follow the code, and as Jake's double is an ever-present reminder of Jake's own proclivity for sentimentalism. Jake has the same impossible romantic feelings for Brett, but he learns how to deal with them and continue existing without experiencing a full-fledged breakdown like Robert. As a hybrid of old and new narratives, Jake has achieved the kind of identity Cohn never will. Of all these offenses, the most useful one to focus on is still his inability to live according to the code, but it must be linked to another significant element in Cohn's characterization: his social background.

Hemingway grew up in a middle-class home and was familiar with the life of Oak Park's upper middle class, but neither rank is ever ascribed to Jake's social background. On the other hand, Robert is the son, the product, of one of New York's wealthiest and oldest Jewish families. It is significant that in a text so concerned with details and using words sparingly that Hemingway gives the reader three clues to emphasize Cohn's privileged upbringing. First, while eating lunch together, Robert angrily stands up, his face having turned "*white*" (emphasis added), and demands that Jake "take back" a disparaging remark, to which Jake responds, "Oh, cut out the prep-school stuff" (39). Second, in the midst of narrating Cohn's bawling apology after the fight in Pamplona, Jake mentions, for the second time, that Cohn is wearing "a white polo shirt [a button-down oxford], the kind he'd worn at Princeton" (194). Third, Cohn gives a social climber's reason for being impressed by Brett: her "breeding" and title (38). These instances mark him as a well-born and well-financed person with no intention of breaking with that lifestyle. He is the antithesis of the marginality found in the Basque peasants, and it is why Cohn cannot be a positive source of otherness for Jake. His consciousness and values are shaped by the lessons of prestigious schools and romantic novels. This injects a class perspective into Jake's identity quest that is repeated throughout the narrative. It is plausible, then, that the combination of social origin and code breaking supersedes "race" in Jake's opinion of Robert Cohn.

Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy of otherness posits that marginality can break the binds of society, allowing one to become more "authentic" by denying a society's normative values. In *Anti-Semite and Jew*, he theorizes Jewish Otherness as a subversive threat to white Western

society's self-conception as superior. Non-Jews should emulate the Jewish Other by placing themselves outside the center and Jews should resist assimilating into bourgeois society or "passing" for a non-Semite. In judging Jake's reaction to Cohn, Sartre's theory allows us to go deeper than just labeling it a callous anti-Semitism. Robert accepts legitimized, hierarchical notions of racial superiority and discards the subversive potential of his own Otherness. Like Sartre's "inauthentic Jew," Cohn has spent his life trying to shape himself according to the mainstream's standards; thus, he is no model of transgressive marginality.[14] Ron Berman comments on this situation: "Cohn is a rootless Jew . . . who imitates exhausted Protestantism," who "tries to become what Hemingway refused to become" (43, 45). Berman focuses on the non-Semites' rebuff of Cohn's integration, which is applicable to the characters who speak of Brett needing to stay with her own "kind" (102, 143, 203). Jake, however, expresses no concern about the matter; what really seems to bother him is that Cohn yearns for the identity of the non-Other.

Cohn is a vehicle for commenting on the assumed superiority of whiteness in its dominant mode. The signifiers of the American upper class attributed to him—boarding school, Princeton, polo shirts—construct a virulent form of privileged white identity. The details Jake presents insinuate that Cohn's wealthy family—which, as one of the oldest, arrived before the massive waves of immigration—has trained him to desire such an assimilation. Jake compares Cohn's reaction to Brett as being akin to the Hebrews' upon entering the "promised land," and this biblical allusion can be extended as a comment on an Americanized promised land represented by wealth and higher social status (22). Robert occupies a privileged place at the center of marginalized people but wants access to that more central culture of affluent whiteness, even while he plays at being a bohemian. What is revealed is not the source for Jake's occasional expressions of anti-Semitism but a repudiation of Cohn's maneuvering to affiliate himself with an elitist whiteness through the likes of Brett and Mike (the holders of "true" Anglo-Saxon "blood"). This is the identity Cohn envies; therefore, Jake dissociates himself from him the same way he eventually dismisses Brett and Mike.

The negative treatment of Otherness is more obvious with homosexuality, but it too has larger ramifications as a comment on the code

and, further, on race. At the Parisian *bal musette* a group of young gay men arrive with Brett at which point Jake commences scornfully referring to the group as "them" or "they." Arnold and Cathy Davidson theorize Jake's thoughts as an act of Othering: "Jake may be ill-equipped to deal with Brett's sexuality, but not from lack of desire. Lacking such desire, the gay men . . . are thus defined as Other—not men, not Jake" (90). Jake's dislike for this group stems from their having the ability to act as "men" sexually but choosing to conduct themselves otherwise when Jake lacks the option. Several critics have called attention to Jake being in the role of a feminized male due to his war wound; he is a sexual Other struggling to establish his masculinity in conventional terms. This anxiety conflicts with the world of inverted gender roles presented in Paris: boys who like boys, girls who dress like boys, boys who weep like girls and plead with their lovers, boys who perform sex like girls because they lack a functioning penis. Debra Moddelmog dismisses critics who focus on androgyny in *The Sun Also Rises* as unwilling to see homosexual desire in the novel and for maintaining gender stereotypes (31–32, 154). I counter that the complexity and confusion of androgyny is precisely what Hemingway is deploying. Homosexuality reverses heterosexist conventions but loses its transgressive aura by remaining an either/or choice—one is either gay or straight and must obey the rules of behavior. Androgyny maneuvers through an in-between state that never quite fits the expectations of a conventional gender identity because the two exist together—a notion that contributes to the novel's extended theme of an antifoundational ambiguity.

I agree with Peter Messent (102) and David Blackmore (65) that Hemingway views these changes more as a threat than encouraging signs of a new world open to the variability of being. He may like Brett's short haircut, but he prefers maintaining the old values where males are assumed to be "men." He uses signs associated with queerness to separate these men from a heterosexual like himself, and the encoded smile he shares with the policeman connotes his attempt to salvage a sense of stability. That Jake essentializes homosexuals to configure another counter-example to his social philosophy is obvious, and the fishing trip episode with Bill works hard to posit an idealized homosocial relationship as a counterbalance to homosexuality: men being friends with men, no strings attached.[15] It is peculiar, however,

that Jake once again admits to breaking with postwar values in not condoning queerness. The statement, "I know they are supposed to be amusing, and you should be tolerant," carries the same implication of mentioning Cohn became race-conscious at college: his reaction is self-evaluated as unjust. Jake *knows* he is being homophobic, and in acknowledging his own failure to live up to a "modern" standard (one based on a "sympathetic" stereotype of homosexuals as amusing) denies his opinion the power of truth. Nevertheless, Jake wants "to swing on one, any one, anything to shatter that superior, simpering composure" (20). Surely, not blending their marginal subjectivity into his identity is based on a prejudice about proper masculinity, but, as with Cohn's Jewishness, it is offered to the reader with something extra: an aversion to those who act "superior."

This double Othering further expresses Jake's conception of the code in the novel. He represents the men as effeminate snobs to clearly distinguish himself from them when Jake overhears one speak of dancing with the prostitute Georgette for a laugh (20). Eventually they all take part in the joke by dancing with her, objectifying her for their amusement, which infuriates Jake. He may use Georgette to keep up the guise of masculinity (Davidson 91), but does not deliberately humiliate her (except with the reader when he jokes about her "wonderful smile" [18]). As a *poule*, Georgette is also marginal, an Other, but she knows the code and Jake respects her for that. Certainly Jake does not want to be gay, but the personality ascribed to this group delineates the kind of people he wants to separate himself from. It is a matter of how one treats people that differentiates them, for even when Jake dislikes someone, and the novel is littered with people he dislikes, he rarely ridicules them publicly. Here, though, Hemingway/Jake's politics of ambiguity infect the moment. The smile that passes between Jake and the policeman is a nonverbal example of his ability to ridicule. Thus, Jake's behavior parallels the homosexuals': he uses an Other to make himself feel superior *morally* in the public constituted by the reader, Lett and company use an Other to make themselves feel superior *socially* in the public realm of the club.

What strikes me as truly curious is the way Jake connects the homosexuals' pompous behavior to a form of racial centeredness. His description of the men calls attention to a very particular detail: their "white hands" and "white faces" (20). The Davidsons offer an

explication: "The suggestion is that the faces are pale, like the powdered faces of women; that the hands are white in contradistinction to the tanned hands of real men—the dark, leathery hands of a Basque shepherd" (90). This is compelling, but to insist that Jake's singling out of "whiteness does not mark race" misses how he forces the reader to "see" the whiteness of the homosexuals. None of Jake's friends has worker's hands and Brett is hardly a woman of the "powdered face" type. What is the reason for racially naming these characters when the assumption of whiteness is adequate for the others?

The homosexuals represent not only the kind of Other Jake repudiates, they are the kind of white people from whom he wishes to distance himself. To name the homosexuals' race installs a hierarchy of whiteness composed of varying shades associated with different values. The homosexuals' whiteness represents that of privileged nonworkers who exploit those different from themselves (here on a class level) for enjoyment. In a sense they are not Other *enough* in that they maintain the condescending attitude of slumming tourists. They enter the environment of the *bal musette* as foreigners exploiting the exotic, and this accusation is applicable to all the expatriates at the club that is usually a gathering place for the working class (19). The expatriates take over the club for one night, imposing a different meaning on the social space that cuts it off from the local culture. One might find here a level of transgression in disobeying custom, but I believe Hemingway views it differently. Their refusal to acclimate, to integrate a difference with the identities they have arrived in Paris with, conflates the expatriates and tourists. It is symptomatic of a colonialist mentality that perpetuates a disparaging view of marginality by establishing one group's sense of superiority over those posited as Other.

The difference between Jake and the expatriates who behave this way further infuses a sense of class consciousness into his system of judging people. Elitism can then be read onto Jake's friends without the narrator having to state it directly—they rise above neither their class nor, by extension, their race. The *bal musette* scene quietly prepares the reader for judging the actions and attitudes of Jake's friends in Pamplona. They are all associated with this whiteness as they exhibit the elements of "bad form" attributed to the American and British tourists in the way they disrespect and abuse the culture for their own pleasure. This colonialist type of whiteness gets the better of Jake and that, I contend, is Hemingway's point. He is commenting on the expatriates' incomplete separation from past narratives by showing

how easily one falls back into the old practices. To remedy this one must find a way to combine the old and the new in a precarious balance.

The great paradox in his critique of elitism and white racial identity is that Hemingway accomplishes it by targeting figures from marginalized groups. Any transgressive intent attached to either author or narrator is compromised by an underlying system of exclusion. Yet this method is quite befitting a novel with so many accumulated layers of irony and misdirection, and makes the text more than a forum for anti-Semitism and brutish machismo. That is the challenge Hemingway lays before his audience, so any interpretation will miss the mark if, like Earl Rovit's, it portrays Hemingway as a mouthpiece for a "casual racist, anti-immigrant, anti-Semitic, antiurban, sex chauvinism . . . [that thinks] [t]hese 'new' alien Americans—immigrant, working-class, or bourgeoisie—were patently 'not one of us' " (187).

I have shown that Hemingway does not include Jake in that supposed "us," and his response to the Other is hardly "casual" (nor is Cohn's ethnicity a facile anti-immigrant sentiment since his background is unlike the " 'new' alien Americans"). Rovit limits Hemingway to the paradigm of an "individualism [that] characteristically asserts selfhood by excluding . . . rather than by absorbing creatively from others to strengthen that self" (184). Jake is in the process of (re)inventing the self, and exclusion is an inherent facet of that act—be they outsider or mainstream sources, choices are made about what enters the mix. Cohn and the homosexuals adopt practices of the center opposed to the sense of self Jake wants to inhabit. In Spain Jake uses the margins "creatively" when he tries to emulate the Basques' blend of outsiderness and traditionalism. But Jake himself is ultimately a failure in that space, which connects back to the treatment of marginalized subjectivities in Book I, in that his relation to the Basques becomes an extension of his convoluted reaction to Cohn and the homosexuals. Hemingway is an author who deploys a politics of ambiguity, a strategic uncertainty, to confront the world. And it is by denying readers the traditional comfort of a clearly demarcated "good guy" or a transcendent morality that he attempts to make that theory subtly clear.

* * *

The trip to Spain introduces readers to the antithesis of life in France. In the scenes leading up to the fiesta Jake switches to the Spanish mode in

order to cleanse himself of Paris, showing that the differences between the two are not irresolvable and Jake's hybrid identity permits him to move in either one. While telling of the old man in Pamplona who renews his bullfighting subscription Jake intrudes with an interesting aside: "He was the archivist, and all the archives of the town were in his office. *That has nothing to do with the story*. Anyway . . . when I went out I left him sitting among the archives that covered all the walls" (96, emphasis added). The joke is that the archives detail is actually fundamental to the story Jake is telling. Here is a person who respects the past instead of building over it. Spain is the alternative to the modern "progress" of destroyed woods, fished out rivers, and invading tourists replacing native culture with their own.[16] Delbert Wylder summarizes the Spain/France binary: "Spain, then, is at the center of tradition and represents the old truths, the old concepts, the old ways. France is the new way, the materialistic direction, the country of twentieth-century change" (49).

Consequently, it is the Basque peasants who fulfill Hemingway's vision of useful marginality. Long known for their independent, antinationalist attitude in Spain, Basques are commonly portrayed as an unsophisticated and coarse folk. Edward F. Stanton treats them more diplomatically, as people in a modern world whose "basic, simple, and natural" life lacks the artificiality of Paris (62). This is Jake's affirmative Other because it willingly rejects identities forced upon it by an external power (although Basques enforce their own singular idea of "authentic" subjectivity; see Del Valle and Heiberg). We also see Jake using the Basques for their racial difference. He and Bill are the Others in this space, but the Basques are a racial Other to Jake's American experience. They are not outright raced as nonwhite but the "brown" (107) skin "tanned the color of saddle-leather" (104) does mark them as being not-quite-white to the extent that they differ from Northern and Western Europeans, which is the "race" nativist Americans claimed for their "purer" heritage. Brett even remarks on how "brown" Jake and Bill look once the group reunites in Pamplona (134); furthermore, it offers an interesting counterpoint to those times Jake describes Robert's face turning "white" (39, 51).

The contextual significance of skin color lies in the U.S. Senate having recently passed the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act (a.k.a., the National Origins Act) restricting immigration to Northwestern Europeans while denying further entry to Eastern and Southern Europeans so as to

prevent the "mongrelization" of America.[17] Paul Kivel notes that southern Europeans, including Spaniards, were placed in the "darker" race category by nativists (17); and John Higham recounts how "native-born and northern European laborers [in the United States] called themselves 'white men' to distinguish themselves from the southern Europeans whom they worked beside" (173). Such reactionary discourses reveal that, in addition to class, Jake associates with a "race" located outside America's hegemony. The Spanish peasants would hardly be included in the kind of whiteness (nor ascribed the values associated with it) residing back home in Oak Park (21).

There is a scene that I think perfectly enunciates the path Jake's identity formation takes. In Chapter 11, Jake and Bill take a bus to Burguete on which the peasant passengers share their wine, offering it to the men without their asking. These Americans, outsiders, are schooled in how to behave and reciprocate the kindness with their own wine (104). The communal passing of the wine and buying of rounds (106) show the reader a different way of life. Jake welcomes the break with solemn American morality and individualistic self-interest. This is not Brett's unrestrained drinking to get drunk nor is it the solitary drinking style of Harvey Stone (43). Capellán emphasizes that during the bus scene "the drinking has a purpose and a meaning. It has to be done according to the proper rules" (53). Sharing the wine fits this interpretation although it may first seem they are only learning how to use a wine-skin. Additionally, the (masculine) camaraderie witnessed on the bus carries over to the fishing trip and helps Jake to heal his Parisian wounds.

In positing his appropriate Other as a "primitive" we are given a kind of savagery discourse. Jake romanticizes the Basques' as preindustrial subjects, containing the peasants in a role eliding their own sense of self or how they interpret their cultural practices. Hemingway is guilty of having the Other occupy a traditional teaching role; however, he is sure to criticize a colonialist mentality. This becomes clearer once the action shifts to the fiesta. Here we find similar communal lessons being taught, but with a different group and producing different results.[18] The reversal of Otherness in the bus scene reappears in Pamplona where Jake's group is the outsider. On the first day of the festival a group of dancers carry a banner declaring, "Hurray for the Foreigners!" Cohn asks, "Where are the foreigners?" and has to be

reminded by Bill that it is themselves (154). The expatriates are the Other in Pamplona—and none of them lives up to the expectations of this particular center—but Spain still functions as the opposite of Jake's experience, a difference he wishes to integrate into his identity.

Pamplona's carnival spirit signals a dramatic break with ritual—a moment ripe for border crossing. Mikhail Bakhtin's carnivalesque theorizes an officially designated moment when the conventions and hierarchies used to structure people's lives are suspended. Carnival is a break from official rules, a relaxation of ideological social structures that demystifies their power to give subjects a chance to experience their own liberatory potential. Even though there is no direct political action against the power apparatus, a new political knowledge is revealed to participants that can affect everyday life. On the first day of the fiesta, Jake reflects on the sociopolitical revelation divulged to him: "Everything became quite *unreal* finally and it *seemed* as though nothing could have any consequences. It *seemed* out of place to think of consequences during the fiesta" (154, emphasis added). Jake is presenting more than an uncritical acceptance of organized debauchery that will end after seven days. Reality is thrown into question as things begin to show the ability to "seem" different from what one has been taught to assume. Jake is giving voice to a political imagination with the potential to continue after the party ends.

Vital to this transgressive act is that it is the one moment when people of all stratified levels gather as equals. During carnival "representatives from different social and political strata [are] thrust together in the same physical and social space in such a way that normal hierarchies and class distinctions are rendered ineffective, or at least unstable" (Booker 34). This is the facet of fiesta that most influences Jake's hybridity. Large numbers of peasants enter the city, becoming "assimilated" and intermingling to the point "you did not notice them." The distinctions used to separate them into different classes begin to vanish. "There they were drinking, getting ready for the fiesta. They had come in so recently from the plains and the hills that it was necessary that they make their shifting in values gradually" (152). What Jake reports here is a transformation taken slowly and methodically; rather than a rash and total erasure of the old sense of self, they carefully don the carnival subjectivity. Jake shows that he recognizes this and is able to interpret it. He is witness to the possibilities one has over identity that avoid constrictive either/or formulas.

The moment also speaks to how Jake tries to avoid a wholesale belief in any one discourse. When he and his friends meet with a band of *riau-riau* dancers, the Spaniards pull them into a wine-shop where they commence to singing and drinking with the "foreigners." Social, economic, and national classes are mixing, and each version of the Other—be it peasants from the hills or visitors participating in a foreign culture—is integrating with each subject's sphere of experience and knowledge. Here we find the same laid-back, collective attitude toward drinking found on the bus, and that earlier scene shows how one's everyday life can absorb the values of the carnival by using them after it officially ends. Both scenes present an alternate society from which Jake can find life lessons to reverse the alienation and selfishness of postwar industrial society.

For Jake is still learning. At the wine shop a stranger treats Jake to a drink but will not let him buy a round. The sense of obligatory compensation Jake uses in his human relations is further destabilized when he enters the back room. Brett and Bill sit atop barrels while men sing with their "arms on everybody's shoulders." Mike is "sitting at a table with several men in their shirt-sleeves" as they all eat tuna from a single bowl. Jake's initial reaction is to be embarrassed by his friend's behavior. When he is asked to join them, he supports Brett's own reprimand of Mike's actions by saying, "I don't want to eat up your meal." Jake's relation to the Other creates a barrier between his background and theirs because it is a respect rooted in pity for the lowly. But the men Jake wishes to show respect for are not insulted by Mike. One of them hands him a fork and replies, "Eat. What do you think it's here for?" (161). These men share what they have with complete strangers in a portrait of the communal framed as an unquestioned common sense. Hemingway shows there are multiple options open to subjects for structuring a society and just as many modes of reality for thinking about human relationships. Jake finally assents to the social model of carnival when he passes his wine skin around and they all take a drink.

Of course, not all naturalized assumptions are disrupted during the San Fermin festival. The shopkeepers perpetuate the economic basis of human interaction by raising their prices. Spain's conservative, patriarchal culture holds sway when Brett is barred from entering a church without a hat and the *riau-riau* dancers use her as their "image to dance around" (155). The ambiguity of transgression during the fiesta parallels

Jake's own pursuit of a life based on mixing rules and freedom. The problem is that his conception of the proper rules, the traditions he searches for, is intertwined with a more static male subjectivity. He maintains this through the remainder of the novel but is more critical of the return of "whiteness" we find in his friends' occasional, and often casual, mistreatment of the Spanish Other. Jake exposes the difficulties of an unquestioned respect for the Other when it forces the marginalized into an idealized subjectivity. Unlike Paris, where there are few locals in the narrative, in Spain the natives dominate the scene with the focus on tourists being deemphasized except when Jake turns his eye to the persistent colonialist mentality of his friends. Despite their free-wheeling attitude toward alcohol and sex, Jake and his friends maintain several "old" ways of thinking. In Messent's words, "[T]he text foregrounds the (irreconcilable) disparities between the expatriate, tourist world and that of traditional Spanish life" (143, 144). For example, a drunken Bill buys shoe-shines for Mike because he finds it entertaining to throw money at the subaltern for a kind of song and dance (173); Brett decides to follow her physical desire by "corrupting" Romero instead of adhering to the local authority of the aficionados (with Jake indirectly sanctioning the act by bringing them together); and Mike's drunken outburst to insult Romero, "bulls have no balls," disparages this culture's dominant pastime and self-identity in one shot (175). Ironically, the last two are also counterhegemonic moments, quite befitting the carnivalesque spirit because they cut through the reified respect for bullfighting culture. Jake himself is guilty of succumbing to such mystification, and even his "expertise" becomes suspect when his advice to Brett at the bullfight is corrected by a "native," reducing him to just another misinformed tourist (213).

Some critics read Jake's betrayal of the aficionados' principles in like terms, but this ignores what Hemingway has been saying about identity, which is best presented through Montoya's refusal even to look at Jake when he leaves. The collision of Jake's hybridity with Montoya's monolithic *afición*, unwilling to accommodate partial dedication, shows how stringent society can be with subjectivity, and that the festival's lesson is lost on those holding their belief systems too tightly. Jake obviously falls short of a purist *afición* but that is not what he endeavored to do, for purity is illusionary. The "purity of line" is possible in a bullring but not transferable to one's everyday life, as even

Romero's falling for Brett shows and Jake himself long ago warned us in Book I with his inability to represent Cohn "clearly" (45).

Jake's hybridity comes from suturing two disparate halves together; unfortunately, his search for an alternative to whiteness (as an economic, social, and moral dominant) never breaks with one of the center's most basic assumptions—individualism. This sweeping connection of nonwhiteness with the communal is essentialist, but it offers a level of insight into how Jake has not disentangled himself from naturalized conventions of the self. The very interest in constructing a personal identity is rooted in an anticollective attitude. Jake enacts his own colonialist appropriation in his turn to the Spanish peasant. The romanticized image he uses to counter contemporary society relies on the containment of identity and "speaking for" the Other. It also works from the very premise that his private identity is of such primary importance that he has an unquestioned right to do this. Jake falters not only in maintaining the code of *afición* but the whole communal ethic he wished to synthesize into his sense of self.

However, Hemingway never promises the reader Jake will get beyond this paradox. Is he really a failure when something as fluid as hybridity is the end goal? The Davidsons and Baldwin read Hemingway using a waiter to demystify the bullfight after Girones's death: "All for fun. Just for fun. What do you think of that?" (201). I think we are meant to view Jake as learning from that interchange and integrating the method into his consciousness; although it does not emerge until his closing statement of demystification to Brett: "Isn't it pretty to think so?" The brief San Sebastian episode prior to that moment exhibits the change in Jake after Pamplona.[19] He is alone, drinking in moderation and finding solace in the sea. The peace he experiences here makes his behavior all the more noticeable to the reader once he is with Brett again. Jake knows Brett's newfound morality is as ephemeral as the sense of balance he had in San Sebastian before her telegram arrived.

From the moment Jake answers her call the final scenes depict him moving ever closer to a heightened sense of self-awareness. The last page denies Brett her romanticism and self-deception, the very problems Jake has battled throughout the novel. Saying "Isn't it pretty to think so" adheres to the code by being ironic and not making a scene while also confessing a truth he believes. That closing image of Jake's

"individuality" mixes the old and new, forging a subject position enabling him to live through one more day, ever closer to constructing the narrative that will help him live through the next day. It is an extension of the evaluative system by which Jake decides who he will be, what fragments he will fuse to assemble a temporary wholeness to get him through this particular situation.

Jake's conduct in the closing scenes could problematize his hybridity if we consider the extent to which Hemingway's protagonist is more traditional than subversive, but that was always the point. He is an imperfect example of open-mindedness because his opinions and choices are as hybridized as his character. Hemingway means for, "Isn't it pretty to think so," to be directed at Jake as much as Brett. *The Sun Also Rises* is a novel of process, a working through these ironies that never reaches a sure conclusion. Indeed, the predominance of irony is the way Hemingway advocates a double vision that refuses monolithic paradigms. And it is that continuing equivocation, so troubling for some critics, that is to be taken as the novel's "message," presenting the difficulty of negotiating between believing too strongly or not at all—in absolutely anything and everything.

CHAPTER 4

BACK TO THE FUTURE: *SUTTREE* (AND *THE PIONEERS*)

JAKE BARNES'S INTEGRATION OF CENTER AND MARGIN GROWS OUT OF ambiguity and ambivalence—a willful liminality that wants to splice two worlds. This is not the impetus behind the self-marginalization of Cormac McCarthy's protagonist in *Suttree* (1979) that takes on a fuller shape than what Hemingway puts on display. Ostensibly, Cornelius Suttree is a person who does not need to worry about life—but he does. As a well-educated, white male in his twenties "lucky" enough to come from a southern upper-class family, Suttree has what would be considered a secure future in the early 1950s. Yet he leaves behind his advantaged life to pursue an existentialist examination of the self. Prompted by a desire to attain autonomy from the constrictive social, political, and economic structures of the dominant culture, Suttree has moved into a dilapidated houseboat on the Tennessee River. For two years he has lived in McAnally Flats, a black ghetto on the margin of Knoxville, where he associates with the outcast members of an urban subclass, both white and black, in a piecemeal existence of drunkenness, debauchery, and minimal employment. Here he is able to maintain a quotidian survival as he pursues "[h]is subtle obsession with uniqueness" (113).

The national prosperity following World War II attenuated public interest in the more mainstream progressive social movements of the 1930s driven by the Great Depression, and the majority of white Americans happily entrenched themselves within a conformist,

bureaucratic social structure. The romanticized primacy of the self is still a strongly cherished element in America's national vision of life and identity, but its ideal form is now defined in relation to anticommunism and an economic individualism rooted in the freedom to succeed, no matter who is harmed. The values and myths of the Gilded Age have been naturalized and intensified, manufacturing a society in which people are dependent on economic success for their sense of identity. Materialism is not viewed as an impediment to individuality—locking subjects into a system of desire and commodity fetishization that induces them to commodify themselves as labor—for the logic of self-autonomy justifies one's right to the acquisition of wealth by defining the richest people as having the most freedom. But underneath the surface of postwar society some were questioning these definitions and means of selfhood.

Eventually, I connect the text to James Fenimore Cooper's first Leatherstocking novel, yet it is worth noting how Suttree is a philosophical cousin of the Beat Generation, not just because the novel is set in the 1950s (the period McCarthy first began working on it). The association is an indirect one that proves useful in understanding the politics of Suttree's choice to live in McAnally Flats. The Beats promoted themselves as agents of a burgeoning counterculture's rebellion against the postwar economic transformations, they lusted for a marginalized status that could deliver a critique of the bourgeois status quo and the social structures maintaining it. One of the oft quoted articulations of that desire comes from Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957):

> At lilac evening I walked with every muscle aching amongst the lights of 27th and Welton in the Denver colored section, wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world has offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night. . . . I wished I were a Denver Mexican, or even a poor overworked Jap, anything but what I was so drearily, a "white man" disillusioned. (180)

Certainly this informs Norman Mailer's theory of the "white Negro" (also published in 1957) as a subversive threat to the dominant culture that allows people to create a new sense of identity by emulating what he takes to be the cultural signs and worldview of a subordinated group:

> The cameos of security for the average white: mother and the home, job and the family, are not even a mockery to millions of Negroes; they are

> impossible. The Negro has the simplest of alternatives: live a life of constant humility or ever-threatening danger. . . . The hipster had absorbed the existentialist synapses of the Negro, and for practical purposes could be called a white Negro. (586, 587)

It is partly by appropriating the so-called black cultural practices, styles, and attitudes that the Beats attempted to deny the authority of that white majority they condemn as safely insulated by conservatism and consumerism.

The key problem with this strategy, as expressed in the Mailer and Kerouac passages, is that it works from a festishization of racial Otherness that maintains whiteness as the civilized norm. Dick Hebdige argues that the "beat lived an imaginary relation to the Negro-as-noble-savage, to that heroic Black poised . . . between servitude and freedom. . . . [T]he beat, studiously ragged in jeans and sandals, expressed a magical relation to a poverty which constituted in his imagination a divine essence, a state of grace, a sanctuary" (48–49). The seminal Beat literature relies on a subversion typically enacted within white intellectual groups lacking any close interaction with African Americans. Blacks are (re)posited as the dark Other: more natural, more sensual, more savage.[1] They influenced some people to consider a different way of living, but all too often the Beats—like Kerouac and his aestheticized fascination with the Other's lifestyle—were only capable of giving lyrical lip-service (occasionally powerful and beautiful) to cultural and racial treason. These rebels did not condone the system, but neither did they truly try to assimilate themselves, or their characters, into any predominantly black culture, despite, for example, Kerouac having one date a black woman in *The Subterraneans* (1958), or by praising superficial attributes associated with marginal black life such as listening to bebop (a jazz genre itself outside mainstream black culture), living in urban poverty and using drugs. In contrast, McCarthy has his protagonist Cornelius Suttree take both interest and action further in a search for individuality, which makes his text a more nuanced treatment of the "white Negro" as a transgressive strategy.

Most critics discussing Suttree's flight to the margin frame his association with the subgroups of Knoxville in terms of individualistic rebellion, but they do not study its deeper cultural and political implications, nor do they even question its possible success.[2] This work

concentrates on Suttree's psychological, philosophical, and mystical levels—placing him in the role of a romantic individualist on a vision quest—but it is necessary to bring him back to earth and balance our reading of this character by examining exactly why Suttree moves to McAnally and how he uses that social space. McCarthy's narrative of one man's psychological journey to a form of selfhood meditates on the problems attending an invention of identity by such means, thus ultimately questioning the sociopolitical ramifications of individualism.

The novel exposes certain barriers to autonomy through self-marginalization in postwar America, making it relevant to contemporary discussions about the center/margin binary. McCarthy started writing *Suttree* in the 1950s and worked on it for the next twenty years; nevertheless, it is a novel that speaks perfectly to the era of its publication in 1979—on the cusp of the Reagan years it is an almost prophetic response to the 1980s' nostalgic discourse of "rugged individualism" used to rationalize economic disparity. The ascendancy of the individual over society was entrenched in policies that favored moneyed interests over the needs of the underclasses. Resistance to this repackaged ideology was weakened and forced into atomized acts of rebellion; in other words, transgression of the dominant power had to occur through an increased focus on the self as the sole site of potential change, generally along the parameter of moral issues. Such a strategy of atomization is deployed by Cornelius Suttree, and it reveals again how self-marginalization is caught in a double-bind as an act of simultaneous transgression and conformity.

Suttree's problems revolve around wanting a sense of self that is of his own design. The dominant master narratives used to explain the world no longer offer him any solace, so he is searching for something else. The novel's preface presents a dark world on the verge of collapse:

> Here at the creek mouth the fields run on to the river, the mud deltaed and baring out of its rich alluvial harbored bones and dread waste, a wrack of cratewood and condoms and fruitrinds. A world beyond all fantasy, malevolent and tactile and dissociate, the blown lightbulbs like shorn polyps semitranslucent and skullcolored bobbing blindly down and spectral eyes of oil and now and again the beached and stinking forms of foetal humans bloated like young birds mooneyed and bluish or stale gray. (4)

Rather than bringing salvation, the river that passes by Knoxville is a dismal vision of life that forecasts the drowning future of a society

weighing itself down with a desire for trivial material possessions and the false ideals of the past.

The river also flows into a different place, there is something else living on the Tennessee River:

> We are come to a world within the world. In these alien reaches, these maugre sinks and interstitial wastes that the righteous see from carriage and car another life dreams. Illshapen or black or deranged, fugitive of all order, strangers in everyland. . . . Here from the bridge the world below seems a gift of simplicity. . . . Ruder forms survive. (5)

As a zone situated on the margin of the city, the narrator implies that the social space of McAnally Flats, this "world within the world," is a haven from the decay and dross of high modernity.[3] This environment functions as a substitute to the dominant culture's model, and it is by repositioning himself in this social space that Suttree hopes to find a response to the complexities of the modern world: "a gift of simplicity." He has come to the conclusion that a rudimentary existence on the river, without an excess of material accouterments or civic obligations, will answer his questions about life's meaning. It will force him to strip himself of everything he has been taught and relearn what is truly important and necessary—to discover "things known raw, unshaped by the constructions of a mind obsessed with form" (427).

Thomas D. Young describes this desire for simplicity as an "attempt . . . to penetrate into ever more primitive realms of being" (73). In a sense, then, Suttree is trying to connect with what he takes to be his past, with that individualistic American spirit that escapes to the margin to live a freer and moral life. Similarly, Suttree wants to resist the malevolent self-interest he finds in society. By choosing to live without the social pretensions one must use in "civilized" society, Suttree becomes a traditional example of the American individualist who lives as he sees fit. Yet, attaining self-autonomy in postwar America cannot be accomplished by moving away from the visible seat of cultural control into the supposedly freer anonymity of the wilderness.

The wilderness still holds a mystical quality of marginal freedom, but the setting of the periphery has changed in *Suttree*. Living on a river polluted with the detritus of society is the only refuge open to Suttree—at least it is the only one he is willing to attempt. Nature is reduced to a weekend tourist attraction, a place people visit on holiday

at an expensive resort; it is no longer capable of giving the peace and protection from urban life Suttree has read about. Rather, it has become an inhospitable environment for someone raised in the city, even pushing Suttree into a delirious, hallucinatory state when he attempts to survive in the Smoky Mountains for a few weeks. What begins as an attempt to get away from the city eventually takes Suttree away from himself in a negatively portrayed madness.[4] The options for existing outside the dominant culture—living "raw"—are now restricted to a life among those of a different socialization experience that is shorn of most modern conveniences and the prevailing social conventions.

In order to pursue the dream (myth) of individualism Suttree will neglect all social responsibilities he is expected to have toward his privileged life. He sees this as living on his own terms and for himself, as giving himself the freedom to define his identity outside the conservative standards of his father's world. Suttree's father criticizes him for his chosen path in a letter:

> [T]he world is run by those willing to take the responsibility for the running of it. If it is life that you feel you are missing I can tell you where to find it. In the law courts, in business, in government. There is nothing occurring in the streets. Nothing but a dumbshow composed of the helpless and the impotent. (13–14)

Suttree knows that his father is all too correct in this summation of who controls (and constructs) society, but it is the father's credulous approval of this system that prompts Suttree to reevaluate his upbringing. The ruling class's pompous ability to champion their institutions without acknowledging the source of public helplessness and impotence as being keenly on the shoulders of those very systems of law, business, and politics disgusts Suttree and induces him to flee to the margin. He wants to disengage himself from all that his father privileges, and this clearly suggests an implicit social and political impetus for living among the rejected and deviant that goes beyond Suttree's private reasons for being on the river. His two groups of friends, separated by race, are used to balance out the more metaphysical and psychological mental wanderings that Suttree is prone to take. He immerses himself within a segment of Knoxville's black culture to discover an alternative way of life, while also running with a circle of white petty criminals who are more interested in drinking and senseless

brawling than submitting to the systems of work, family, and responsible civic duty. These relationships remind him of the "real world" and how "real people" have to live in it without the burden of an overintellectualizing immobility.

His professed disavowal of a "mind obsessed with form" signals Suttree's antifoundationalist stance. He dissociates himself from the modern, industrialized, bourgeois society—lauding itself as "civilization"—because it represents nothing more than a structure of comfortable lies used to maintain control over others. Suttree will not accept what has been handed to him as being the one true "reality"; he makes himself into a symbol of dissent by renouncing the discourse of one truth, one way to live. The class identification Suttree finds in the margin is important to his new identity. His father is an aristocratic snob who married a woman beneath his class, and Suttree believes his father despises him because he takes after the mother's side: "I was expected to turn out badly. My Grandfather used to say Blood will tell. It was his favorite saying" (19). Suttree chooses the lower end of the social hierarchy for his sense of self, claiming a kinship through his mother's blood, as though it were his fate to be a member of America's subordinated social groups. At one point, he dreams of an inquisition where a judge sums up the kind of people Suttree has aligned himself with for the past two years:

> Mr Suttree it is our understanding that at curfew rightly decreed by law and in that hour wherein night draws to its proper close and the new day commences and contrary to conduct befitting a person of your station you betook yourself to various low places within the shire of McAnally and there did squander several ensuing years in the company of thieves, derelicts, miscreants, pariahs, poltroons, spalpeens, curmudgeons, clotpolls, murderers, gamblers, bawds, whores, trulls, brigands, topers, tosspots, sots and archsots, lobcocks, smellsmocks, runagates, rakes, and other assorted and felonious debauchees. (457)

This extensive catalogue of subterranean beings comprises the community Suttree has joined. These people—both black and white—are defined by what they do or, rather, what they do not do. They are below the "sanctioned" lower class of society because they will not maintain even that modicum of civilized existence through "straight" work.

This way of life appeals to Suttree because it is an antithetical value system denying the strength of the dominant power formations (be they

political, social, economic, or cultural). The discourse of the Protestant work ethic is robbed of its validity by his preferring mornings in a bar to an office or warehouse job. The naturalized values of America—duty, industry, sobriety, and patriotism—are shown to be vacuous fictions used to maintain the status quo. Virtue is open to interpretation and each person is capable of inventing his/her own moral sphere. Vereen Bell portrays Suttree as having realized that the "Logos is no longer in the tabernacle but in the streets, in hearts, in the community of the living and dying who thrive close to the raw edge of being, where they are in turn ignored . . . by those who absolutize their vested interests in a vision of order and sanctity" ("Death" 109). These hustlers, criminals, and slackers create their own social system living and moving beneath the super- and infrastructures of society. Their objectives are contrary to the desires of the aspiring middle class, and they have mastered a life within the system that subtly exploits the exploiters. Bell casts the subgroups' actions as a carnivalesque response: "The carnival spirit approaches ideology, though it is never serious enough to be called that" ("Death" 105). This description is better suited to Suttree's white friends. For a less decadent response, McCarthy has Suttree turn to his nonwhite acquaintances, those whom even the white rabble are apt to scorn.

Suttree's white friends manifest an outlaw quality in relation to bourgeois society, but he befriends nonwhites who are even lower in the social hierarchy to find what he believes can be learned from them. He aligns class and race to increase his potential marginalization. It is the nonwhites who hold a secret about living in the world, be it a mode for surviving in nature or in a subordinate social position. Suttree believes these people have found successful strategies for maintaining a sense of self-worth and autonomy under subjugation. There are two characters who fulfill these needs for Suttree: Michael and Ab Jones.

During one summer, Suttree meets an American Indian also living on the river. Michael, like Suttree, earns his living as a fisherman, but he is more proficient at the job. For Suttree, Michael represents both a social and political touchstone for a life in the margin. He displays the ability to live in nature according to his own abilities without a total dependence on the products and systems of civilization—disregarding, of course, his reliance on the market economy to sell his fish. Suttree has a houseboat, but Michael lives in a red clay-floored cave where he

has fashioned a shelter from the surrounding natural materials and other people's junk. This is the ultimate in living raw; this is the level of simplicity Suttree believes he should achieve. Young attributes Suttree's reason for pursuing this relationship to "Michael [being] a true avatar of the path Suttree is seeking to follow. As an Indian, he is by definition socially disenfranchised, the target of the white man's taunts and a likely candidate for his jails" (78). This sociopolitical facet of Michael's identity (i.e., his race) is important because it exemplifies the conditions of *full* marginalization upon which Suttree can only speculate. Both men have been harassed by the police and thrown into jail for the way they look, but a shower and some new clothes will affect Suttree's life-chances in a way closed off to Michael due to his race: "They call me Tonto or Wahoo or Chief. But my name is Michael" (25). The native American subject must cope with the racism his skin color will incite and Suttree admires (and fetishizes) Michael for being able to exist within this situation.

Similarly, African Americans represent a group systematically denied inclusion in society. The racism that silences their voices and attempts to contain them in a negative sense of self ennobles them in Suttree's mind because they represent a legitimate rage against both micro- and macrosystems of oppression. Being excluded from the opportunities endowed by "self- evident" truths about the human race has forced blacks to build their own social structures in McAnally Flats. They must live in the larger culture, but they can find a degree of freedom from it in their own habitus.

In Suttree's purview there is one other person who truly symbolizes the strength one can, and must, acquire to survive the margin. Ab Jones is his guiding figure of resistance against subjugation with his forty-year war against the Knoxville police force, a fight he admits he himself cannot stop. Frank W. Shelton points out how this violence is different from the pointless frays Suttree's white friends use to amuse themselves. In contrast, Ab's fighting is a lashing out at the repressions of white society. As a visible symbol of the power that has reneged his right to be treated humanely—"They dont like no nigger walkin around like a man" (203)—he attacks the police in bloody fights that he already knows he will always lose. It is a desperate attempt for a sense of agency that is complicated by Ab's ambivalent belief in the ultimate futility of insubordination: "[I]t dont signify a goddamn

thing. . . . I wouldnt fight em at all if I could keep from it" (204). Underneath Ab's cool exterior there must be a reason for him to sustain this doomed struggle. Ab is fatalistic but displays a kernel of optimism in his persistent acts of transgression that amounts to a belief in personal agency, in the very ability to act. A little later in the novel, Ab says, "You caint do nothin with them crackers. They needs they wigs tightened ever little bit" (226).

What seems a headstrong death-wish is eventually seen by Suttree as an honorable refusal to surrender. Suttree plays the role of a passive observer during most of the novel, remaining comfortably restrained from taking any action by his nihilistic attitude, but Ab's spirit influences Suttree to commit his one outright subversive act. After Ab dies from a police beating, Suttree steals a police squad car and drives it into the river. It is a minor deed in relation to the larger, more deeply pervasive offenses of the police against those without money, power, or the proper skin color, but it is a political act nevertheless, one with ramifications since an individual's actions can be taken to speak for the whole. Thus Suttree momentarily breaks through the comfort of his solipsistic cynicism and comes a step closer to accepting his integral connection to society.

But this is only part of the lesson McCarthy means for Suttree to learn from Michael and Ab. The subtle distinction between being "away from" and being "outside" of the center is an important one in the novel. Individualism is itself a fiction, but self-marginalization to attain individuality proves equally futile for someone like Suttree. First, there exists an intrinsic desire for community in his pursuit of marginality. Radical individuality is annulled when a subgroup is the source because their position *contra* the center forces him back into a group identity. Suttree's success in this role is then determined by the level of assimilation the group is willing to grant him, as well as how much he himself is willing to embrace. His background—white, upper class, well-educated, and Catholic—is in constant conflict with the experiences of those already living in Suttree's *chosen* habitus. Vital to these issues, and running throughout them, is the idea that one is never capable of escaping relations of power. Suttree is intertwined within these relations and dependent upon them as his cultural markers follow him into McAnally Flats to expose how any success at self-marginalization is actually manufactured by the dominant culture.

Suttree's affiliation with these economic and racial groups signals his desire for a sense of community. In fact, this longing informed Suttree's quest from the beginning. It is inherent in Suttree's decision to live in McAnally, and it is also the reason his efforts at a transcendent individuality are set to fail the moment he decides to move there. By taking up a place among the disenfranchised, Suttree has selected a path that contradicts the one he was born into and expected to uphold. Rather than being reclusive, like several other characters, he chooses to associate with specific groups shaped by cultural, economic, and political factors that cannot be ignored. Suttree sets himself against the dominant culture and that changes the dynamics of what initially begins as a private act into a social one. Cornelius Suttree is not seeking isolation from the community; on the contrary, at this stage he desires an alternate style of community set against the self-interested individualism with no concern for the welfare of others.

Throughout the novel, McCarthy gives cues that Suttree is not wholly interested in isolation—that retreating into the privatized self is an ambivalent motive. Suttree constantly interacts with the pariahs of Knoxville, momentarily allowing his surface desire for cynical atomization to be replaced with a sincere empathy for their hopeless conditions. He is concerned about the people who have difficulty taking care of themselves or need assistance making it through life—those like Ab, Gene Harrogate, and Daddy Watson. The ragpicker living in a hovel under the bridge is another such person. Suttree visits him on occasion to bring food and to ask the old man if he needs any help, which is always rejected. Suttree recognizes that this man is what he came to the river to become, but to see and hear the ragpicker is to be confronted with a wasted, lonely, and bitter vision of his own future. Suttree's philosophy has changed when he finds the ragpicker's dead body, and he mournfully tells the corpse, "You have no right to represent people this way. . . . A man is all men. You have no right to your wretchedness" (422). This reaction to the death is more than sorrow for a particular person, it is a sadness felt for all humanity as he realizes the individual cannot be disentangled from the community. By the end Suttree comes to grasp that "all souls are one and all souls lonely" (459). It is through the inner commonality of pain and sorrow that the human race is connected. At one point, he sits alone in a room "sharing his pain with those who lay in their blood by the highwayside

or in the floors of glass strewn taverns or manacled in jail. He said that even the damned in hell have the community of their suffering" (464). This epiphany satisfies a desire for community by acknowledging the affective interconnectedness of the human race, but it is eventually offset by Suttree's decision to leave Knoxville at the end of the novel. Even with his revelation about community fresh in his mind, he is intent on finding a place where his sovereignty can be nourished—still sure there is a possibility for individuality in America.

McCarthy ensures that this desire will remain unfulfilled, and for reasons he never has Suttree consider in all his self-reflexive inquiries. The problem is partially the result of Suttree's perceived inauthenticity within the McAnally habitus. There is individuality in his difference from this social context, but it is thoroughly tainted with the workings of the dominant culture's power. Suttree goes to the periphery to escape the mainstream's control, but he carries that system with him because his background is so different from the subgroup's. One scene in particular makes this distance clear by giving voice to the point of view of the McAnally residents who recognize the enduring racial structure sustaining Knoxville's status quo. When Jabbo and Bungalow offer Suttree a drink and he rejects it, the mood turns ugly: "I thought you said old Suttree didnt care to drink after a black man. . . . This aint Gay Street, motherfucker. . . . Come on, Mr Suttree, please suh, take a little drink with us poor old niggers" (165–66). The brief confrontation shows how easily Suttree's act of marginalization can be interpreted as nothing more than a tourist's excursion into the exotic slums. For the denizens of McAnally, this *is* their way of life, the only one they are allowed to have. For Suttree, however, a life within a subgroup can only be a superficial immersion. He will live in the area of the marginals, he will drink and fight with marginals, he will dress like the marginals, he will even have empathy for the marginals, but this surface mimicry is the extent of his marginalization. That he will give up his inheritance of easy living to "discover himself" is a bourgeois appropriation of marginality to satiate personal self-interest. It is a desire focused on the self that ignores the material conditions of the Other and is antithetical to what Suttree claims to seek.[5]

The character of Gene Harrogate, a petty criminal from a poor white family, highlights Suttree's lack of transformation. Like Suttree, Harrogate came to the river by choice, but for a different reason. Suttree

wants to get away from society, but Gene is excited by the prospect of city living. So much so, in fact, that he will take shelter in a sewer viaduct: "It'd be really slick if it wasnt took wouldnt it? I mean, being uptown like it is and all" (116). Although Suttree muses about the ghastly state of the world, Gene is thrilled by its possibilities. Gene's life on the river—the viaduct, furniture made from what others consider debris, his scrounged meals—is far severer ("raw") than Suttree's. Part of this enthusiasm is derived from Harrogate's obstinate ignorance and optimism—Gene is contented with his luck while Suttree is repulsed. Bell compares the two characters' outlooks: "Suttree himself is an educated and reflective character, the antithesis of freewheeling Harrogate, and he is paralyzingly aware of everything that Harrogate's industry and simplicity shield him from" ("Ambiguous" 40).

The distinction is not so clear, however. Bell is correct in noting the intellectual innocence of Harrogate compared to Suttree, but Gene's attitudes are formed from the dire economic and social/familial conditions he comes from. In his worldview the independence of the river is more than enough reason to live as he does. As he tells the doctor giving out the reward for dead rabid bats, "Maybe a dollar and a quarter aint nothin to you but it is to me" (219). This remark could just as easily be said to Suttree. The philosopher knows that a desire for money is ethically debilitating, but the idiot knows that hunger can be far worse than a breech in one's personal moral code. Once again, McCarthy uses Suttree's erudite contemplation to show his distance from the people he is supposedly striving to join. He is consumed with self-reflexive analysis about his chosen asceticism, but those born into it are more concerned with the pedestrian problem of trying to live it. The concerns he occupies himself with are considered of a higher order by Bell, but they are also influenced by his privileged social station. Suttree's acquaintances function to put into question his philosophical and psychological investments; what Young calls the "exteriority" of the lives in McAnally counters Suttree's self-focus (82). By aspiring to a privatized withdrawal as an existential subject with agency he keeps himself tied to the fantasy of an authentic self. And there is something mighty "white" about a depoliticized, quasi-Sartrean obsession with the self mired in adolescent navel-gazing that does not progress to a broader conception of humanity and subjectivity. It is this individualistic approach that limits Suttree's rebellion and makes him remain "white" in accordance to the defining

values of the dominant culture. (If this seems a thoroughly essentialist statement it is because whiteness is a thoroughly essentialist concept.)

McCarthy has this chasm of difference haunt all Suttree's relationships in McAnally. It is depicted as impassable and an occasional source of embarrassment for the novel's presumed hero. His reticence during his social interactions in the margin is comparable to Hemingway's code in *The Sun Also Rises* to live quietly with your own pain. Suttree's silence can also be explained by his perception that he is not a complete member of these groups; therefore, he cannot speak with a true sense of authority. As John B. Thompson (in discussing Pierre Bourdieu's theory of language use) would explain the situation, Suttree cannot "concur . . . with the demands of the [subgroup] market" (Bourdieu, *Language* 22). This idea of a "market" is synonymous with habitus. Suttree injects the dominant culture's system of status and distinction more deeply into the subgroup's social space, to the point that McAnally becomes an ever more ineffectual vehicle to psychic and social individuality. Suttree is a friend and confidant to these rough hewn men and women, but he can never be a true peer since he never had to take on an adolescent's paper route for money. He will always be one of the dominant culture's "[f]uckin educated pisswillies. He goes to college but he cant roll a newspaper" (47).

Upon further reflection, William Spencer's claim that "Suttree is quite likable" may prove difficult to support (87). Choosing this life on the river appears to be born of respect for a different culture, but it becomes a cultural appropriation based on personal self-interest—an ethic well suited to the family from whom he is trying to separate himself. Suttree can always go back home, the blacks of McAnally *are* home. His relationship with Michael is a revealing example of these two levels of appropriation. On the one hand, Suttree is exploring all channels of experience to learn about himself, and Michael's skills make him a source of knowledge about living in the "wilderness." On the other, Michael's race attracts Suttree's desire to generate distinction against the dominant culture. He will learn how to live like the marginalized by studying those forced outside the boundaries of society. It is as though Suttree has found his own personal Chingachgook from whom he can learn the "ways" of the red man for survival. If this is the case, then Suttree is comparable to his father, as guilty of essentialist assumptions

about Michael's identity as the racist discourses used to keep Michael outside the center.

* * *

Suttree's relationship with Michael calls attention to the way McCarthy comments on the long cultural tradition of whites using a racial Other to create their autonomy, and he extends it further back than solely the Beats. In a compact form, Suttree and Michael mirror the problematic in what I consider to be the American ur-text of self-marginality, James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pioneers* (1823). While an extended treatment of that text may seem an awkward shift, I think it will help to clarify and give a larger scope to McCarthy's possible intentions nearly 150 years later. Natty Bumppo is neither the main protagonist nor sole focus of the novel, but he was lauded by reviewers as a symbol of independence. Cooper's "presentation of a socially marginal hero as the essential American" fit with the national narrative, impacting readers who could only experience the myth vicariously (Wallace 172). This is the first of the Leatherstocking tales, but throughout the series Cooper continues to depict Natty as a person who more and more adamantly isolates himself from all people and systems that impinge upon his freedom.[6]

Set in upstate New York in 1793, Natty's assumed marginal subjectivity in *The Pioneers* is indeed an attempt to insulate himself from the encroaching postrevolutionary society, but through a relationship with the aging Amerindian Chingachgook, not simply by moving further away. His act of voluntary dispossession, choosing what the character Richard Jones calls "the savage ways" over civilization's customs, will move Natty down the hierarchy to appropriate the rebellious status of a figure subordinated by the mainstream represented by Judge Marmaduke Temple and Jones (217). But he never finds that freedom, for he is a pawn of larger social forces allowing him to remain in the woods until it is more advantageous to their interests to dispose of him.

The traditional reading of Natty's independence is largely accurate. It is the interference from social and family ties—a sense of civic responsibility—Natty is trying to escape. His presence in America has long preceded that of the American Revolution and the frontier towns

that followed. He is from the colonial settlements but has maintained a pioneer's life in the woods because its particular "laws" are perceived as being more conducive to sovereignty. Even when he was an employee of the British army Natty claimed nature as his home. The freedom of the open land and the mobile, unattached life of a scout kept him from spending too much time in the military forts—a form of the country's earliest organized societies. At seventy, Natty claims to have lived on Lake Ostego for over forty years. The hut by the lake has been his home well before Templeton was founded and Natty's way of life in the wilderness (learned from American Indians) became jeopardized by Judge Temple's wealth and laws (291). Natty recognizes how the community outside the woods has begun to intrude on his life—the autonomy and privacy nature allows him—with the arrival of the entrepreneurs and their land titles. The presence of the "civilized" American bourgeoisie in Natty's "home" makes a life in nature even more precious and worth protecting if only because it becomes more precarious. His hostility toward the white community—the reigning political and economic order—is well established in the novel. The crux of the dispute between Natty and the settlers is his battle with Temple over who owns nature, and his belief in a self unburdened by a sense of responsibility to the society is the ethical basis for Natty's decisions.

Independence becomes a matter of identity construction as Natty tries to find a space more conducive to the way of life he wants. The intrusion of the settlers forces him to deal with the "new fashions" of the unnatural world: law, class, a market economy, and so on (301). He shuns this community because those in a "civilized" society must live with too many responsibilities and sites of control (legal, social, financial, religious, familial). He frankly states his disdain for society's structured system in the conclusion when he turns down the newly married Effinghams' patronage: "I know you mean all for the best, but our ways doesn't agree. . . . The meanest of God's creaters be made for some use, and I'm form'd for the wilderness; if ye love me, let me go where my soul craves to be ag'in" (454). Rejecting civilized life is what defines Natty *for* Natty. His sense of self is based on a logic of individuation that informs his opinions on all legal, political, racial, and environmental issues in the text. To sustain his prior sense of an autonomous self, he must seek out an identity that is different from

that found in Templeton. If civil law serves the ruling class's act of reformulating the meaning of the world, then a life in the woods using Chingachgook's "native ways" can offer Natty asylum—at least until the law spreads its influence beyond the borders of the town (421).

Natty satisfies his need for individuality by placing himself outside civilization, but his *identity* as an outsider is intensified through his intentional relationship with a marginalized subject. Chingachgook is initially a problematic model of autonomy: he has been forced to give up his land, his culture has disappeared with the death of his tribe, and his only hope for the future, as he perceives it, is to die soon. Representing the whites' lack of concern for Indian subjectivity, and his own lack of control over the self within the town's boundaries, is central to Cooper's purpose because it allows his fictional white society to go so far as to rename Chingachgook.[7] Through baptism he is stripped of his own identity and reinscribed according to white Christian definitions as John Mohegan or Indian John. He is made into a "read" subject, a person with no identity outside the dominant order's interpretation of him (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 161), an Othered being innocuous to white subjectivity and customs who is assimilated just enough to keep the settlers sure of who they are by being a living symbol of who they are not. This renaming occurred because Chingachgook chose to be converted by Moravian missionaries to stifle his sadness after losing his tribe and son—now it is a cultural negotiation he treats insincerely. When he speaks with Natty "he was heard uniformly to call himself Chingachgook" and in his last moments during the forest fire he refuses Reverend Grant's call to partake in the Christian rites of death (85). By the novel's conclusion Chingachgook openly renounces any place in white society and maintains allegiance to Delaware culture. It is this strong-willed repudiation of white culture that makes Chingachgook such an attractive, albeit romanticized, figure for emulation.

What Jane Tompkins views as broaching "the social problems" of racial mixture in *The Last of the Mohicans* is the very source of rebellion in *The Pioneers* when it takes the guise of cultural mixture (103). So, why exactly does Natty turn to the Amerindian to support his individualism? Is there something innate about that culture that promises freedom; that guarantees it? If Natty is free to adopt the mark of otherness, while it is forced upon Chingachgook, why not appropriate elements of a different marginalized group? There are

blacks present in Templeton—such as Brom, a freeman, and Jones's slave Aggy—but Natty considers neither of them a friend. Racism is surely part of the answer, Cooper even has Jones observe that the Indians perpetuate the racial hierarchy by looking down on the blacks (204). A more substantive reason for Natty's choice is Chingachgook's aura of independence inscribed by his status away from the center—akin to Jake's mixed response to the Other in *The Sun Also Rises*. Both the "black" and the "red" have been subordinated by the "white," but it is the Amerindian who carries the aura of a positive alterity—and it is to him that Natty turns for guidance.

Chingachgook, and consequently Natty, struggles to be outside history's processes of "progress." The slave Aggy clearly lacks any potential to be free, but Brom, as a free black, has become part of the social structure by selling shots at a turkey shoot with the call to "gib a nigger fair play" (194). Brom simultaneously acts with deference to the whites and invokes the nation's rhetoric of freedom by demanding "fair play"—with economic freedom, the right to pursue profit, as an extension of personal autonomy. Brom's ability to participate in the white dominated society, limited as it is, represents what Eric Foner calls, in a discussion of postrevolution free blacks, "a standing challenge to the logic of slavery" (37). The black characters are caught within the same racist Euroamerican power relation as the Amerindian, but how one chooses to live in it—the public identity a person displays—seems to mark the difference for Natty. He ignores the limitations imposed on nonwhites and it is indicative of an ideology that categorizes people as being either free or enslaved. Chingachgook is equally trapped, equally defined by the racism of Templeton, but Natty interprets him as having a degree of autonomy because he views Chingachgook as being outside the dominant culture's realm of control.

One could argue that the Delaware chief is forced into maintaining a transgressive identity because Natty *needs* Chingachgook to represent the capability of localized resistance. He practically goads Chingachgook into anger at the town pub: "Why do you sing of your battles . . . when the worst enemy of all is near you" (165). Natty rouses Chingachgook from his paean, prompting him to glare at Temple "with an expression of wild resentment" before drunkenly attempting to attack him with his tomahawk (166). Granted, Chingachgook is not utterly acquiescent without Natty's prodding.

There are scenes when he criticizes the hypocrisies of the Euroamericans, as he does with impassioned vitriol after Elizabeth comments on how Chingachgook has assimilated into the ranks of the properly civilized by learning "to fear God and to live at peace": "Has John lived in peace! . . . He has seen his English and American Fathers burying their tomahawks in each other's brains, for this very land. Did they fear God, and live in peace!" (401). Chingachgook's ultimate freedom comes from his Otherness in the Templeton social formation, and Natty wants a degree of it for himself. He holds no material power within the society, but he also feels no responsibility *to* the society. Chingachgook's self is based on what he does *not* have; his very dispossession is empowering because he has nothing but his life to lose, a loss he is already resigned to accept. As a member of the displaced, subordinate, but ostensibly *independent* "savages" situated outside history, Chingachgook becomes a perfect model to Natty for crafting his self-exile.

By becoming separate and distinct within white culture Natty can free himself from the destructive, dominating legacy into which he was born. He hopes this marginal status will insulate him from external control and society's invading progress. Living in the woods transforms into more than a way of life for Natty, for it is now his means of public refusal. His resistance is defined—for both himself and the citizenry of Templeton—by his chosen life outside the borders of white culture. He declares himself the town's antagonist several times by dismissing the ways of his race. He even critiques the ideological apparatus of education by being proud of his illiteracy, claiming to have "never read a book in [his] life," for "how should a man who has lived in towns and schools know any thing about the wonders of the woods!" (293). Natty appropriates Chingachgook's distrust of whites, showing how marginality can affect one's politics through the experience of seeing like an Other. By calling attention to his own whiteness as he criticizes the actions of the race, Natty focuses on his simultaneous similarity (race) and difference (opinion) from whites, both of which he uses to mark his own identity. To say "though I'm white myself" disproves the white center's ideological assumption that one's race should constrain the limits of an individual.[8]

Nevertheless, Cooper ultimately depicts the white ideology of purity surviving in Templeton and Natty walking away, but it is not without

a denunciation of the social formation. Natty's statements and behavior work as an act of localized resistance and Jones's comment that "I count half-breeds . . . as bad as heretics" is exactly the kind of response Natty hopes to receive from the town (112). This is no small distinction Cooper has Jones make. The 1790 Congress decreed that American citizenship would be extended only to "white persons." This is the earliest official reliance on the category of whiteness in American politics, setting whites apart as a recognizable racial group to protect their social privileges. For Jones—the emblem of power's concealed machinations behind the judge's authority—to use the discourse of the half-breed against Natty is a political move to make him a nonentity, a double absence with no recognized race who is invisible in the social field of Templeton except as an aberrant threat to its narratives of justice.

Alexander Saxton's discussion of the Jacksonian discourse rationalizing U.S. Indian policy clarifies the political impact of Natty's subject position. By investing in a binary distinction between civilization and savagery the white power structure was able to "justif[y] whatever the white republic might find necessary or convenient to do to Indians; and those who questioned that justification ceased by definition to be good. They became renegades, vestiges of aristocratic privilege, or the spawn of artificially created monopolies, alien to the real America" (190–91). The judge deploys this ideology to defend the law as preventing whites from becoming savages (383), and Jones (who represents the nation's economic and political transformations) clarifies the role Natty chooses by his remark that the woodsman has "set an example of rebellion to the laws, and has become a kind of outlaw" (355). The outlaw label is vital to comprehending Natty.[9] By reinscribing himself with an identity in opposition to his natal culture he attacks a ruling ideology firmly rooted in white privilege that oppresses the individuated subject.

In the role of marginal subject, Natty may appear to be a positive model of transgressive individualism, a symbol of the autonomous subject who resists the common path and takes personal control of his fate—still the bedrock of many Americans' fantasy about the potential of their country and themselves. Further inquiry reveals that Natty's image as the heroic individualist is insupportable. Natty and Chingachgook retain their defiant attitude, but it is often more like an apolitical resignation until death can free them from the future

starting to roll over them. Can a self untouched by external manipulation be realized? Does Cooper even give the reader hope about Natty's future as he heads west?

In laying claim to the ways of the native American, Natty enters an historical conflict between two types of community: one in accord with the dominant culture, the other contesting it. He forms his subjectivity by comparing his identity as a marginal individualist to that of the conformist settlers in Templeton. Natty knows what kind of reaction his life(style) in the woods will incite in the town elders. He expresses his opinions candidly because he *wants* to be heard. Cooper makes it more difficult to ascribe individuality to Natty by endowing him with this sense of political consciousness. Bumppo voices ideas supporting the rights of the individual, but these proclamations are delivered as a person joined with the subordinated Amerindian. Natty's whole sense of self depends on being a tacit part of Chingachgook's historical and cultural experiences as a subordinated subject, so he is not simply fleeing social connections.

This affiliation is taken for granted by the townspeople. Natty's connection to Chingachgook raises few eyebrows in Templeton because "the habits of the 'Leather-stocking,' were so nearly assimilated to those of the savages" (85). Here, crossing the borders of race and culture is empowering as a reinvention of self freed from one's original background. Natty's liminality enables him to adopt aspects of the Indian way of life while using white society when necessary. Hybridity can, therefore, strengthen one's identity by having authority over self-representation: one takes what is needed from either system as a means of existence free from any cultural subservience to either. But Natty can win this mobility only by using bourgeois, Euroamerican definitions. His sense of self adheres to the categories and values of the dominant culture because the logic of individuation is the structure supporting his actions. By relying on Templeton's opinion to *produce* that identity he is subordinated by the very definitions he uses because they are drawn from the system he wants to escape.

Moreover, although Natty tries to incorporate many of Chingachgook's cultural practices to resist the dominant culture, he still holds a connection to his own race, "always [thinking] of himself, as of a civilized being, compared with even the Delawares" (453).

Natty's appropriation turns malevolent as he assumes a colonizing mentality willing to exploit the Amerindian to benefit himself. Natty is said to show "the utmost deference, on all occasions" to Chingachgook, but this deference to the Other masks ulterior motives all the more alarming since Natty himself is oblivious to them. The novel's closing mention of maintaining the category of "civilized being" highlights how Natty thinks that he is above the Amerindian—regardless of how close the hierarchical rungs are. He may live like an "Indian," but he knows he is a white man and uses that distinction to help locate himself in the world. Such statements reinforce a subtle racist discourse about the superiority of whites, a disquieting aspect of Natty's belief system. They expose how linked to the dominant culture his consciousness remains by perpetuating a racist relation of power in the woods.

The surest example of this blind spot occurs at Chingachgook's grave. After Oliver reads the epitaph, "his faults were those of an Indian, and his virtues those of a man," Natty says, "You never said truer word, Mr. Oliver" (452). This is a difficult matter since Natty has explicitly acknowledged the negative effects of the white presence in America. The earlier quotations about the laws and land use show a man distrustful of Euroamerican culture and dreaming of a new territory without whites.[9] Even Natty, the person Chingachgook has known most of his life and trusted more than anyone else, will refer to him by his Christian name of "John" (291). Such an attitude opens a troubling insight into Natty's perception of race and the benefits he is free to take to enhance his individuality. We can read these moments as revealing how the bourgeois order plants another subtle seed by so naturalizing individualism that its negative colonizing potential is overlooked. Natty cannot see through the ideology of individualism to imagine the more sinister social abuses a narrow focus on the self condones.

Ultimately, Natty is abetting the dominant culture, not subverting it. Adhering to the logic of individualism alleviates Natty of experiencing any outright guilt by justifying his actions. The quest for atomization deludes him into believing that he is most powerful, hardly powerless, in his privatized wilderness outside of society. Templeton continues to grow and the transactions that will affect Natty are initiated *outside* the woods. It is conflicting individualisms that separate

Natty and the judge, to the point that "each of them representing a great but conflicting principle, cannot forever remain within the same social framework" (McWilliams 128). Natty believes in the right to privacy and keeping to himself, but Temple "purchase[s] pleasure at the price of misery to others," as the metaphor of the pigeon massacre shows, and his ultimate objective of primacy over property means that Natty must be expelled from the social space of Templeton (250). Natty, like "Indian John," is made innocuous by his self-exile, leaving Temple and Jones to become more powerful behind the discursive mask of establishing an ordered society and providing what is the best for the most. Using laws to control the competing desires for equality of opportunity, Temple and Jones have procured the certainty of America's future that spawns the 1823 of the narrator—ready for the first wave of industrialism.

That outcome should not have arrived so unexpectedly for Natty. Early in the novel, he sees a transformed, coopted Chingachgook—a prophetic vision of what he can become: "I remember . . . the 'Great Snake,' as he was called, for he was a chief of renown; but little did I ever expect to see him enlisted in the cause of Christianity, and civilized, like old John" (156). Chingachgook ignores Grant's supplications to perform the Christian ritual at his death, but the everyday countenance of Indian John should speak strongly to Natty's own potential future. This again touches upon Natty's possible awareness of his privileged skin color. Being white he may view himself as further removed from Chingachgook's problems in maintaining his sense of self, even when in the margin. Nevertheless, self-marginalization fails Natty and he must pack his subjectivity—the one no person could infringe upon—to head west where "there's the best of hunting, and a great range, without a white man on it, unless it may be one like myself" (453).

Natty pushes forward to a future he hopes will be just like the past. He eventually succumbs to his predicament in an emotional speech: "You've rankled the heart of an old man . . . and you've driven him to wish that the beasts of the forest, who never feast on the blood of their families, was his kindred and race. . . . I come to mourn, not to fight; and, if it is God's pleasure, work your will on me" (357). After losing his trial, he is led away "bowing his head with submission to a power that he was unable to oppose" (373). At last, Natty nears a partial

realization that all is lost, including the past, for people like himself. The clearings will continue and he will be pushed to the West, vanquished by the new economic forces invested in the future. By novel's end he is still unconvinced of history's ascendancy. His devotion to atomization prevents him from any agency except leaving for fresh territory, and his biased memory prevents him from seeing that it was people like himself—"the foremost in that band of Pioneers, who are opening the way for the march of the nation across the continent"—who helped set in motion the "progress" that has displaced him (456). Natty has ceased to be a creator of history, a woodsman exploring new territory; he is now its victim, an anachronism being edged out of the new style of American political, cultural, and social life.

Although the conclusion depicts Natty as a failure he should not be too easily discarded as a figure of rebellion. His sense of marginality reveals a potential for agency vital to any project of transgression. It is not a choice between total freedom and complete capitulation, rather reinventing the self in ways that do not reproduce the oppressive beliefs of the ruling power structures. Despite this caveat of the *possible* subversion self-marginalization could articulate noted, one cannot ignore that Natty's own act of resistance is an unsatisfactory response. He completely dissociates himself from neither the bourgeois nor the white supremacist ideologies of the center. Cooper has problematized this character's scheme for individualism by inventing a "rebel" who is complicit with his enemies. As Natty departs for new territory, a new space for his autonomy to survive, he never grasps that he is transporting these ideals into the West, nor that the new economic structure will follow him. Bumppo dies in *The Prairie* and his dying vision is of that "final" space of freedom being overtaken by a new generation of frontiersmen with the same selfish reasons for expansion. He does not understand that it is his faith in the sovereign individual that has allowed people like Temple and Jones—close on the heels of the pioneers—to promote their own autonomy with a discourse of economic individualism that maintains the status quo. And, as history shows all too well, white America will succeed in clearing the way for its own interests.

In Cooper's time society is no longer defined as an organic community united in common purpose but as a mass of individuated bodies. The new necessities of survival have forced people into

competition with each other. It is plausible, then, that Cooper is using Natty Bumppo as a vehicle for criticizing the dream of radical individualism, but for both generations. History has not stopped for the pioneer, erasing him as easily as Templeton strips the forest. The social forces instigating the new changes are uninterested in Natty except as part of the past—a minor obstacle to material self-interest—and the society is no longer compatible with his style of individualism. The narrator is well aware of these transformations from his place in 1823. It was old news, a *fait accompli*, that the pioneers will no longer be needed after the developers move into the territory. Cooper maintains ideological control by making sure his own brand of conscientious individualism—an autonomy limited by civic obligations—prevails at the end with the cautiously optimistic closing picture of the benevolent Effinghams. He implies that the couple will now rule over Templeton and its woods with an idea of bringing harmony to these two spheres. That this form of civilization would not come to fruition was an issue Cooper did not confront until 1838. That year he sadly returned to Templeton in *Home as Found* to display how the town has increased its wasty ways and become a center of "envy, rapacity, uncharitableness, and all the other evil passions of man" (152).

* * *

The Pioneers gives us a deeper sense of the cultural lineage Cormac McCarthy is both looking back upon and forecasting for the 1980s. He uses a similar structure for making a commentary on the present through the past; likewise, we ultimately find that Suttree is also not that far removed from his cultural upbringing. This is evidenced in his romantic relationship with Joyce, a wisecracking, hipster prostitute. Young thinks the couple facetiously "caricatur[es] the pleasant rituals of bourgeois courtship . . . while always secretly thumbing their noses at the respectable folk around them engaged in identical activities. Their romance is based upon an iconoclastic anti-romanticism" (88). I interpret their relationship quite differently: Suttree is (re)becoming a contented member of the bourgeoisie, proving himself just as willing to live a life of ease as the idle-rich. While Joyce goes to work (selling herself), Suttree spends his days staring out their apartment window. He accepts the expensive, gilded gifts she gives him and is satisfied to wait

for Joyce to bring the money home. Over time, Suttree exhibits traces of the responsible citizen by opening a bank account in her name and they eventually buy a used Jaguar sports car. As the savings account is depleted the relationship turns sour, ending as they return from a bar when Joyce begins destroying the car and ripping up money. Despite her argument that these things are only material goods, Suttree furiously walks away and returns to his home on the river. Perhaps he does not want to see things go to waste just because of an emotional tantrum, but it is equally likely that Suttree is still firmly tied to the consciousness of his father.

Suttree's dilemmas of commitment to the life he claims to desire point to the varied and diffuse relationships of power in the novel—some overt, others covert—that restrict self-marginalization's potential. The labels of Suttree's "respectable" upbringing make every relationship in McAnally a power relation with him representing the dominant. Despite his proclamations of renouncing his origins, he is still defined by his background and by the very idea that he *can* discard that culture. These local power relations are as simple as Suttree chastising Harrogate for his ignorance whenever he devises another eccentric scheme, or as complicated as the friendship he has with Michael.

His reactions to Harrogate's deranged projects are based on conventional ideas—scientific knowledge, the law, or common sense—of how things are supposed to work: two car hoods welded into a barge will not float, stealing the coins from pay phones is illegal, and a person cannot live in an old sewer viaduct. It is rare for Suttree to condemn Gene openly, but he does try to steer him toward certain ways of thinking, all to no avail—Harrogate's innocence prevails, and often with some degree of success. In the case of Harrogate, Suttree's belief in "reason" exposes how he never really gets beyond his "mind obsessed with form." Likewise, his relationship with Michael is based on hegemonic ideals to reveal his underlying adherence to bourgeois assumptions. The logic of individualism makes it acceptable to appropriate whatever will enhance one's own sense of self. Suttree's naturalized belief in an atomized self perpetuates a system of domination by exploiting surface differences.

Despite all Suttree's self-examination, he does not consider himself complicit with the Knoxville power structure. His subversion is

carried out in a privatized manner preventing any broader transformation of society. Suttree prefers the privately symbolic political act of separating himself from that social machine to establishing a solidarity that can change the system. A late-Foucauldian reading of this strategy would see Suttree responding appropriately to his situation. The relationships of power are so pervasive that the only attainable contestation is localized. Choosing to live on a river outside the city may be the only way to challenge power because it is the only "real" option open to Suttree. Bell comments on this limited resistance: "because of the abstractness of the forces that bear down on everyone from any side, abstract rebellion seems a worthwhile cause, whatever form it might take" ("Death" 82). If Suttree can change his own sense of subjectivity by disposing of the past labels meant to restrict and enforce his relation to the society, then he has reached a level of success, albeit minimal.

As it stands, Suttree's method of individuation is in accord with the bourgeois society he despises: if public domination is total and ubiquitous then it is only by focusing on the self that one can effect any change—changing the self becomes the sole responsibility anyone has to the public. Suttree's transgression keeps him an aimless puppet who remains attached to the constrictive strings of the macropowers. His belief in individualism as a means of transgression is false, so in pushing himself into a corner where power can regulate him he merely executes the actions he has been trained to perform, perpetuating a belief system he was trained to accept.

Such a critique can also be applied to Suttree's marginalized neighbors and drinking buddies. Their own atomization is a sign of submissiveness since avoiding collective action has limited their own chances for a more successful subversion. Subordinated subjects like Ab Jones are left with no agency but to strike out at expendable police officers. They hold second-class status by living on the river (as a ghetto), yet McAnally (as a marginal sanctuary) promises a degree of transcendence beyond power because they are left to a life among their own kind. However, by remaining within that margin Suttree and his friends confine themselves to a space where surveillance is effortless; their attempts at insulation from pain only make them more compliant with the power structure. The kind of autonomy Suttree and his friends desire is basically a concern for the self and it immobilizes them. We know that Suttree has empathy for his friends and comes to believe that all humans are

connected to each other through the act of suffering, but he does not attempt to heal that suffering. By the conclusion of *Suttree* the gap between marginalization and freedom remains—no matter how early in the day people start drinking, how many cops they hit, or how vehemently they hate their rich fathers. Bell's comment on this situation is lucid: "McAnally Flats is being torn down, as Suttree leaves, to make room for the new expressway and eventually, beyond the foreknowledge of the novel, ironically, a World's Fair, the advance of the Jaycee vision of human purpose" ("Death" 110).

McCarthy deromanticizes Suttree's politics with regard to the limits of agency against entrenched power. It is unfair to chastise a text for not giving the story one wants to read, but it is an incomplete reading that ignores what does *not* happen in that text alongside what does. In other words, an author is responsible for the particular representation of political and social reality in a text. Following Pierre Macherey on the textualization of ideology and Fredric Jameson's notion of the political unconscious, it is those gaps and silences in the novel—what is *not* attempted or accomplished by the protagonist—that I propose McCarthy considers equally deserving of a reader's attention.

In deciding to retreat from Knoxville, in choosing to walk away from an untenable situation, Suttree allows free rein to those who will benefit from his absence:

> He had divested himself of the little cloaked godlet and his other amulets . . . and he'd taken for talisman the simple human heart within him. Walking down the little street for the last time he felt everything fall away from him. Until there was nothing left of him to shed. It was all gone. No trail, no track. (468–69)

Suttree's presence in McAnally will be forgotten just as easily as he moved there. Contrary to Bell's veneration that "even an illusory choice, an illusory transcendence gets one through to the next place in one's life where something bizarre or exhilarating or moving—worth surviving for—obscurely waits," Suttree is a pawn oblivious to how he abets the center's interests ("Ambiguous" 40–41). As witnessed in *The Pioneers*, and like so many other protagonists in American culture preceding him, by running away Suttree leaves the power structure in place and ever more capable of increasing the reach of macropower into the microspaces of Knoxville.

McCarthy's authorial position at the end of *Suttree* is similar to Cooper's and Twain's. He looks to the past from a historical vantage point that knows how the world will evolve (or devolve, depending on how one interprets contemporary America). By 1979, the year of publication, America had transformed into a system of stronger multinational control of material resources and bodies. As the "me-decade" of the 1970s comes to a close, it will be replaced by the "only-me-decade" of the 1980s in which individualism is once again connected to the freedom for self-aggrandizement. The connection to humanity that Suttree uncovers at the end is a message of hope, but one caught in the ambivalence of the American commitment to the self before all others. At the edge of the Reagan years, *Suttree* is a warning about the dangers of individualism, as well as the fallacy of using a naive self-marginalization as the means to a subversive end. Confronted by their own economic and political problems, the reaction of some social critics in the 1970s and 1980s was to fall into a soothing cynicism that absolved them from social responsibility with the mantra: "Nothing ever changes." By this time, Kerouac's hipsters seeking spiritual transcendence have been replaced by the brutal materiality of punk rockers who repeat the gesture of manipulating identity to break with the dominant culture. And, ultimately, like Suttree's attempt at life on the river, punk's transgression can be read as a self-undermining gesture.

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CHAPTER 5

L.A. PUNK'S SUB-URBANISM

IN MOVING FROM MODERNISM TO POSTMODERNISM I AM POSITIONING Los Angeles punk subculture as an historical and philosophical bridge between the two eras. Applying the postmodern brand to punk identity is problematic but not entirely without merit since it crosses boundaries and questions metanarratives. The one narrative most punks leave securely in place is the primacy of the individual, investing in a discourse of alienation that cannot be characterized as free-floating posthumanism. So a more exact classification is Charles Jencks's definition of "late modernism": any philosophy or act that breaks with modernism by taking its basic tenets to an extreme level but is not fully postmodern.

Part of the allure of popular music is that it offers fans tools for identity construction. Music can open sites for people to negotiate their historical, social, and emotional relations to the world. The way fans define and understand themselves is intertwined with the varying codes and desires claimed by a taste culture associated with a specific genre (Grossberg "Another" 31). An example of finding social and cultural distinctions through music occurs in *Dissonant Identities*, Barry Shank's study of the Austin music scene. In explaining her impetus for joining the local punk subculture, a fan states, "[I]t really had something to do with just wanting to do something different . . . . I think that might be part of the attraction, too, is being in a minority. Being in a self-imposed minority" (122). Using self-marginalization to articulate a politics of dissent is central to the L.A. punk scene from roughly 1977 to 1984.[1] To resist master narratives they considered static and

repressive, to establish an independent sense of self freed from the mainstream, a small fringe group of youth pursued a life based upon the inner-city underclass denied access to the American dream, an identity I call the "sub-urban."

While noting the specific positive effects of this border crossing, I criticize punk's lofty subversive goals for reasons the participants themselves overlook. L.A. punks deploy the racial and class facets of the sub-urban identity to recreate themselves in the image of street-smart kids who are skeptical about the trappings of bourgeois America. They hope to tap into a more "authentic" lifestyle—equivalent to real, hard, tough, all those qualities associated with a life on city streets—than the one they think themselves being forced to replicate. But in using markers classified as subordinate, their self-exile is laden with the baggage of preconceived social categories that reaffirm negative stereotypes.

The term "sub-urban" is more than a pun on suburbia, denoting an existence beyond the quotidian difficulties of city life. The sub-urban is multiracial, but it does constitute a very specific class position, one that must daily confront extreme poverty, hunger, inadequate housing, and the threat of physical danger—and punks choose this way of life for their hard-edged bohemianism. I do not wish to trivialize the circumstances many of these kids faced, such as dysfunctional homes or the downward mobility many middle-class families suffered during this period. Still, we see that a good number of punks root their subjectivity in the same romanticization of the down-and-out Stephen Crane deployed almost a century earlier. Their dissent and social critique are weakened since privileging the individual, America's dominant social value, is L.A. punk's very lifeblood.[2] Their view of marginality as a way to experience "real life" is a belief in something transparent—choosing an identity they situate as more true for being less contaminated by middle-class illusion and conformity. So the choice starts to lose its thrust as a commentary on the parent culture's naturalized beliefs: that success is the result of hard work rather than the privilege accorded race and class (such privileges give them the option *not* to succeed); that material wealth is synonymous with freedom (these kids have the freedom to come and go); that their way of life exemplifies the highest level of progress (they reject it by going "down").

Although problematizing L.A. punk's rebellion, I do believe their self-marginalization has subversive promise. The punk movement's independent labels established an alternative to the corporate apparatus of the music industry, and it enabled a form of political community as witnessed by the numerous punk scenes throughout the world sharing their music and ideas. Still, the foundations of L.A. punk's politics are shaky and its liberatory spirit needs to be rethought. The punks' contestatory gestures result in transgression and demystification, but I am wary of claiming they address the paradox of their grand endeavor. This subculture claims to privilege dissonance, incoherence, and destabilization, all the while depending on the boundaries and regulatory fictions of the dominant culture to define itself, all the while forcing the subordinated into the role of being their alternative. This does not mean the subversive energy completely dissipates, but it is not an unproblematic dismantling of identity categories. Punks are finally uninterested in abolishing the restrictive lines of cultural and social demarcation; like those in the center, without a conception of the Other they cease to exist in any meaningful way.

In making this case I do not strive to give an account of the way "it really was" in the L.A. scene; instead, I aim to make sense of the way we are *told* it was. I interrogate the scene's narratives, discourses, and practices through published interviews, historical reportage and the music itself as a means for articulating shared ideas. What I have for evidence, then, is information culled from the punks' own cultural production (music and fanzines), documentary films, academic texts, and general historical accounts that attempt to theorize what L.A. punk "is" from its stated intentions and performed acts. In short, along with the music I have a collection of statements received second-hand—other people's enunciations about a particular moment in rock history—I piece together, analyze, and critique.

* * *

L.A. punks transgress the fixed order of class and racial hierarchies by crossing the boundaries of their inherited subjectivities. The animosity they direct toward "straights" is commonly traced to their socialization experience: "Having escaped suburbia, having been outcasts, [punks] now had their own group from which they could sneer and deliver

visual jolts to the unimaginative, dumb, suburban world" (Belsito and Davis 17). For many kids the subculture's sense of anger and unrest came out of southern California communities where post-1960s children were searching for something to pierce the boredom of their lives and express their sense of being outsiders. Punk advocates a reinscription through an identity different from the majority, finding self-empowerment in choosing a worldview you have authorized for yourself. In *Subculture* Dick Hebdige emphasizes that these subjects wish to annihilate their past: "the punks dislocated themselves from the parent culture and were positioned instead on the outside . . . [where they] played up their Otherness" (120). L.A. punks confront the image-conscious mentality of Los Angeles with a contrary image: celebrating ugliness over beauty, depression over joy, the sordid over the morally approved; in short, opting for the city's gritty underbelly over its glamorous face to open a space for social critique.

Greil Marcus emphasizes punk's attraction to the darker realms of urban life in a review of X's *Los Angeles*. The songs express "an insistence that those horrors [of the urban down-and-out] have made the people who live them and who sing about them better than those who don't: not just tougher and smarter but morally superior, if only because they've seen through the moralism other people only pretend to believe in anyway" (134). Segregating themselves from the status quo extended beyond fashion and music for the core L.A. fans. In early 1978 a run-down apartment complex named the Canterbury Arms became the living quarters for a handful of punks. In two recollections about the Canterbury we see how particular signifiers of race and class are deployed to establish the rebel credibility of inner-city subjectivity denoting genuine Otherness. Craig Lee lists a catalog of their new neighbors that relies on racial and class markers to indicate its stark difference from home: "black pimps and drug dealers, displaced Southeast Asians living ten to a room, Chicano families, bikers from a halfway house, in addition to various bag ladies and shopping cart men" (Belsito and Davis 22). Eleven years later, Trudie duplicates Lee's roster of marginality: "When we first moved there, the whole building was full of criminals, SSI people, hookers, bikers, and pimps" (Spurrier 122).

A space like the Canterbury is delegitimated in dominant American discourses and the popular media. For middle-class punks to self-banish themselves from "paradise" is a blatant transgression of the

American dream. Even as their parents fought battles over taxes, property values, and neighborhood boundaries to prevent an influx of inner-city people into their planned utopias, this subgroup of youth (the justification for their parents' politics) chose to live among the very people the folks back home wanted to protect them from.[3] It is a choice about a certain way of life: immersing oneself in urban decay and the asceticism of harsh poverty. This border crossing becomes, quite literally, an act of deterritorialization (Deleuze and Guattari's term for escaping repressive social structures) in that changing one's physical environment facilitates an ideological change in one's psychic space. The lifestyle works as an inverse of social mobility, in their own social formation punks earn status by becoming tougher and going "lower."

One L.A. punk divulges the code of austere living: "Did you live in a rat-hole and dye your hair pink and wreck every towel you owned and live hand-to-mouth on Olde English 800 and potato chips? Or did you live at home and do everything your mom told you and then sneak out?" (Spurrier 126). A similar example occurs in Penelope Spheeris's 1980 film documentary *The Decline of Western Civilization* (hereafter *Decline*), when Chuck Dukowski narrates becoming a punk as his "search" for an answer to the meaning of life: "I did this because I felt like to set myself aside and make myself different, maybe, maybe, it will just come to me." All the more suggestive is that he delivers this conversion narrative from a room brimming with signifiers of extreme poverty. The camera pans to follow Ron Reyes (the Puerto Rican singer for Black Flag, adding a nonwhite participant to the picture) give a tour of his apartment in a dilapidated church. We see the rest of the band and a few hangers-on (all white) lounging on decrepit furniture, drinking cheap beer, surrounded by walls covered with spray-painted band names and profane slogans. Reyes pays $16 a month to sleep in a closet since he owes money to all the utility companies. The scene establishes the "just getting by" life(style) of the sub-urban subject, with Reyes's attitude teetering between noting there is something troublesome here—showing how some people actually live—and exhibiting a resigned, dignified posture—this is how "we" live as compared to "you."

Another voice celebrating self-marginalization and hard "realness" comes from the eighties. From 1981 to 1986, Henry Rollins was the singer for Black Flag, the premier L.A. hardcore group. In *Get in the*

Van Rollins explains what attracted him to the band's lifestyle upon first meeting them:

> They had no fixed income and they lived like dogs, but they were living life with a lot more guts than I was by a long shot. I had a steady income and an apartment and money in the bank. . . . The way they were living went against all the things I had been taught to believe were right. (8)

Rollins soon describes his new life after joining the band and moving to L.A.:

> Now the next meal was not always a thing you could count on. Money was hard to come by. . . . Slowly I came to realize that this was it and there was no place I'd rather be. As much as it sucked for all of us to be living on the floor on top of each other, it still was better than the job I had left in DC. (11)

What is prominent in these recollections is a strong sense of freedom even when one's life options are limited. Rollins proudly defines himself as *choosing* to discard middle-class stability. By adopting a life contrary to his natal social environment, he articulates the discourse that a true sense of individuality and autonomy can be achieved through disengagement.

All this locates punk's self-marginalization physically and philosophically, but where do they stand historically in relation to their identity as an Other? The domestic and foreign battles of the late-1960s were a difficult time for Americans trying to make sense of their country's future, but the post-Vietnam years saw the United States transform into a demoralized nation deeply wracked by uncertainty. The historical record proves a daunting one indeed: a lost war; the scandal of Watergate; the feminist and racial identity movements reminding Americans their nation has not lived up to its egalitarian promise; soaring inflation and interest rates; energy shortages and oil embargoes causing a decrease in real wages; deindustrialization and downsizing; increased divorce rates and the fading nuclear family model of domesticity; Three Mile Island; and hostages in Iran. All these events led to a widespread feeling that America's day was past. This was instrumental in the upsurge of neoconservatism, culminating the decade by sweeping Ronald Reagan (whose recycled optimism countered Carter's "malaise") into office on a platform of laissez-faire economics, tax cuts for the rich, and rabid anticommunism.

Research on the economic problems of the middle class in this period reveals the hardship and collapsing expectations experienced by late baby boomers, unable to attain their parents' level of prosperity, as well as those of the lower class and lower middle class whose once secure manufacturing jobs were disappearing as inflation rose (see Kreml, Newman, and Strobel). Additionally, postwar subsidies like the Federal Home Loan program and G.I. Bill, which enlarged the white middle class, had ended and the tax burden was shifted from corporations to the lower and middle classes (Strobel xiii). California, home of the 1978 tax revolt, was a key player in these events. Mike Davis reports that Reagan's plan for helping the rich get richer was successful in L.A. where affluence tripled but "ensured an erosion of the quality of life for the middle classes in older suburbs as well as for the inner-city poor" (7).[4]

Since punk emerged from this social matrix it is tempting to trace the appropriation of a sub-urban identity to a story of decline and stagnation, framing it as an act of negation intended to minimize the pain of lost suburban dreams by claiming not to want them. Such an interpretation is inaccurate. The rationale of L.A. punk's common discourse is grounded in privatized issues: feelings of personal alienation or repelling conservative attempts to control individual consciousness. Rick Gershon makes this case in stating, "Although people were doing their homework and reading their *NME*s, clearly it wasn't representative of any sort of economic or political situation in L.A." (Hoskyns 293). While the waning middle class is a catalyst thrusting some punks into a broader understanding of class politics, to draw a straight cause and effect line between the two is misguided. We need to look at the evidence of the cultural practice rather than foisting a romanticized proletarian label on these subjects.

It is rare to find in L.A. punk anything like an outright lament for the loss of white privilege, while critiques of suburbia as illusory and shallow are ubiquitous.[5] There is little music from the period criticizing the vanishing middle class—no hostility expressed over parents not rising up to demand prosperity be guaranteed for their children. The subculture more often proclaims their mission to be rebelling against the bourgeoisie, not bemoaning their diminished opportunities to join it. What punks do repeatedly tell us is how much they hate the middle class and suburbia—the things low interest rates and gainful employment (along with shutting your mouth and following the

rules) are supposed to get you. Punks do not resolve their problems by believing hard work will be compensated with wealth and social status. They spurn the whole idea of desiring this lifestyle, let alone working for it. We also cannot ignore how punk is commonly framed by fans and performers alike as a response to the standard teen complaint of "nothing to do," not as a voice demanding the reinstatement of lost privileges. The extreme conditions of a sub-urban life are not forced onto them by their parents' financial problems, so in turning away from suburbia they challenge America's cherished shibboleths of prosperity, stability, and progress.

There are political motivations behind self-marginalization in punk, but its fundamental concern is a privatized differentiation from the status quo as a person free from external control. The most evident source for punk's definition of individualism is classical liberalism's defense of the sovereign individual: no person or institution has the right to determine what you can say, think, feel, or do as long as you do not inhibit another's freedom. In *Decline* Malissa tells the interviewer that punks are striving "to be accepted any way we want to." And Jennipher advises that "everyone shouldn't be afraid to be as different as they want to be." The earliest scene-makers became disenchanted when the punk scene shifted to the hardcore style. John Denny opines, "The whole individuality thing began to dissipate, and it just became more fascistic" (Spurrier 126). That is ultimately the passkey for grasping individualism in punk subculture: one is either independent and unique, or acquiescent and ordinary.[6] We have seen this is a prevalent thread running through American literature and culture. In 1977 there is no longer any unexplored frontier to which one can escape (as Californians know all too well) and the individualist is left searching for a new territory to provide refuge from the structures of late capitalism.

This spirit of resistance in L.A. punk befits the subculture's ethos of negation. Their antiestablishment attitude toward musicianship (three chords being enough), audience participation (demolishing the boundary between performer and audience), and cultural production (the do-it-yourself [DIY] ethic) marks punk as the antithesis of corporate-controlled rock and pop, and makes it an extension of the participants' general social politics.[7] Also, English punk expressed an interest in residual cultures through its quasi- affiliation with

Rastafarian music. Reggae's focus on the oppression of a marginalized group made it the only genuine "rebel rock" of the time for white London punks.[8] The urban locale of the West Indian immigrants also accounts for U.K. punk's affinity for city life. The city represents a space of possibility, both good and bad; it is exciting and dangerous and, unlike the suburbs, one needs more than superficial manners or money to survive the brutal truths found there. Since the nineteenth century, Iain Chambers notes, the English middle class has viewed the city as an alien place antithetical to a "British" way of life (23). In violation of this code, as well as the hippie's Romanticist reverence for nature as a place to escape the mechanistic world (although they too critique suburbia), punks come to valorize the urban experience to smash the false ideal of suburban contentment. So bands like the Sex Pistols and the Clash openly cited urban working-class backgrounds to validate their music as a political intervention.

Both Simon Frith ("Punk Bohemians") and Paul Fryer reveal this working- class narrative to be disingenuous. Fryer targets the working-class rhetoric that gives middle-class fans a rebellious stance through an alternative identity (13).[9] He charts the middle-class influence on British punk, showing that many of the people who conceptualized its ideas or championed the movement as the "new thing" had roots in art schools and universities. This revisionist perspective opens a view to Los Angeles's own middle-class rebellion. The early scene was initiated by artists exploring new avenues of self-expression. Geza X explains that the "people in the Weirdos and Screamers came from a very conscious art background," and this is backed up by Cliff Roman, one of the Weirdos: "I was going to Cal Arts, and performance art was the big thing then" (Spurrier 119). These are not suburban nihilists discovering a mouthpiece for their economic dread, neither is it a wholly organic popular revolt from below.

A neither/nor formula permeates any search to ascertain how middle- or working-class L.A. punks "really" were. In *Decline* Darby Crash of the Germs and his girlfriend Michelle are filmed in their apartment kitchen. This is a lower-class apartment but hardly a dilapidated slum or squatting house, and the signifiers of "normal" domesticity are replete as Darby cooks breakfast and Michelle washes dishes. What is amiss here is that the couple does not fit a preconception of what punks would look like at "home," or that they should even have a home life. For a less

ambiguous example of middle-class punks there is the trio of teenagers filmed practicing their stage-diving techniques at a private family pool in *Another State of Mind* (a 1983 documentary on the North American hardcore scene but primarily focusing on L.A.). Woody Hochswender's 1981 *Rolling Stone* story on hardcore includes a photograph of Keith Morris, the Circle Jerks' singer, posing with his mother in their living room. Morris exemplifies how those who do not physically move to the suburban space still depend upon it for their discursive practice as a punk. He lives with his mom—who calls her son and his bandmates "just middle-class kids" (31)—but many of his songs rely on dark, brutal urban imagery. Morris even equates the media's tabloid treatment of "punk-rock violence" to their interest in "the gang fights in East L.A. or three or four black people shooting each other to death or whatever" (31). Comparing his experience with the racial Other illustrates again the kind of image and transgressive energy punks tap into: we are not obedient, well-off white kids. Hochswender relays the obligatory nostalgic history lesson from Derf Scratch (from Fear) who connects hardcore's violence to the socioeconomic background of the new initiates:

> There're all these rich kids and they're spoiled and have all kinds of money from their parents. They got into the punk scene, and the only way they can prove to themselves and to their friends that they're punks is to beat somebody up. Because they can't really say, "Yeah, I'm punk, I don't have any morals, and fuck the middle class," because that's right where they came from. (30)

Derf's critique points to the cultural phenomena I analyze, but it acknowledges neither the already prevalent population of middle-class fans, nor that there were several bands started by such kids who were playing shows and recording before 1981.

We should be wary of drawing a too easy conclusion about class affiliation from these examples because a working-class kid can attend art school, and making a meal is not an inherently bourgeois act. The temptation to read them that way is there because they all go against a certain closed conception of "Punk" as it is publicly defined by punks themselves to shape expectations when the word is used. It turns out, though, that plenty of British and American fans were content to believe that the subculture represented an authentic working-class voice. As the U.K. variant of punk traveled to America, L.A. is one of the places where the Clash's call to have a "white riot" is taken up

enthusiastically; and it is by fitting themselves into the public discourses surrounding nonwhites that they attempt to enact their version of white insurgency.

The impulse behind this self-fashioning and its class politics is the disdain of whiteness as a privileged life(style). Legs McNeil's comment on the New York scene signals how L.A.'s white rebellion differs from what others proffer as punk's impetus: "[W]e were all white: there were no black people involved with this. In the sixties hippies always wanted to be black" (Savage 138). (This despite Patti Smith, the New York scene's reigning queen, claiming to be a "rock 'n' roll nigger" because she is "outside of society.") McNeil's statement certainly does not apply to L.A. punk because it was racially mixed from the start; however, to ignore that whites were the majority is also to ignore how they appropriate a sub-urban identity. In trying to deny the benefits of their race, these kids are negating the entire system upon which the United States was founded, came to power, and truly functions. Turning to the sub-urban applies their treason against the dominant white social class buttressing suburbia, but aiming at a particular portrait of whiteness—based on a conflation of racial and class categories—drifts toward essentializing both whites and nonwhites. A standard image of white bourgeois middle-class life is reified as the norm, such that it remains entrenched as the nation's dominant ideology. This is addressed in detail shortly, for now I want to establish how whiteness is configured by these subjects.

In *Another State of Mind* it is notable that during the later phase of the subculture the kids all pick out preppies, not hippies (the earlier middle-class youth group punk targets), as the opposite that helps them grasp their identity, in essence stating, "I could have been a preppy, but I choose to be a punk." In other words, preppiness is the alternate subjectivity open to them. Like punk, preppiness is itself a distinctive way of life—clothes, behavior, and worldview—but one immersed in the discourse of affluent whiteness. Now, one can find nonwhite preppies and those who do not subscribe to tenets of conservatism and elitism, but in punk's social landscape it is a style thoroughly associated with "acting" and "looking" like a wealthy white person. By associating whiteness with the lifestyle and values of the exclusionary suburb, punk comments on the (mis)representation of white racial and class subjectivities, namely, the invisibility of whiteness

and the privileges it is awarded. And with whiteness as the center, punk's border crossers side with those labeled as inferior Others.[10]

Black Flag's "White Minority" both labels whiteness as a specific race and resists the homogenizing pressures of that culture to be bourgeois, mundane, conventional, in a word: uncool. The song opens with the speaker's claim of seeking a new identity: "I'm gonna be a white minority / All the rest'll be the majority." In choosing disaffiliation he chooses to remake himself outside the accepted categories of race, class, and nationality. The song proposes that the only viable alternative for white kids uninterested in the American dream is to refuse the privilege of their skin color by emulating the lifestyle of marginalized subjects—safe from outside control to the extent that they can remain hidden from and ignored by the larger society like other "oppressed" social groups. Greil Marcus interprets "White Minority" as a song about hatred of the Other (185). His censure is based on misunderstanding the lyrics, what he reads as "breed inferiority" is actually "feel inferiority" (184). This is not an attack on the Other, it is a call to *become* Other, to "hide /Anywhere [you] can" so as to escape being incorporated by a center that legitimizes itself through "white pride." It all hinges on the distinction between, the separation of, "you" the proud American and "I" who reject that discourse.

It is unwise to generalize the subculture's class background—the working-class lives in suburbs too—yet suburbia repeatedly draws punk's contempt. Punk uses geographical location to determine identity, reading one's presence in suburbia as a telltale of the desire to climb the social ladder. Suburban punks are raised seeing what they are supposed to envy and achieve with their lives. A common theme of the music and fans' enunciations is viewing the bourgeois lifestyle as a perceived threat. Even those white punks not from the middle class are reacting to their race as the passport to such a life, rebelling against the very expectation that suburban comfort is what they want. The music reveals a strong discursive investment in characterizing "true" fans as not competing for the mainstream's dangled rewards.[11] The Descendents' "Suburban Home," the Adolescents' "Creatures," and Social Distortion's "Mommy's Little Monster" do not express an overt class politics so much as a fear of losing to the forces of conformity. They do, however, deal directly with the issue of one's relation to a generalized white suburban identity, offering a critical view of a culture

people are born into but find hollow and unfulfilling. Albeit not the primary theme for every band or song, one can apply the antisuburban discourse to L.A. punk since its general politics critique those who do *not* feel dispossessed. Thus, the appropriation of sub-urbanism becomes a political statement given that the middle class wants to move up rather than down and treats that mobility as an unspoken birthright.

This fascination with the post–"white flight" city reverses the postwar yearning to move away from crowded, expensive, and dangerous urban areas into the (segregated) suburbs where (white) people could own a single-family dwelling. The veneration of the urban as the fount of otherness was at the root of punk's origins in New York and London. Before these cities entered the media spotlight there was already a creative community of bands in Cleveland who had staked out the rotting inner city as their home. Pere Ubu's David Thomas speaks on the value attached to urban life: "We were into this Urban Pioneer thing, which was a bunch of kids born in the suburbs to middle-class families, moving back into the city[.] . . . It was run down, but we thought it was beautiful at the time of youth when you're prone to romanticism" (Savage 136–37). The urban is unmarked foreign territory (for those from suburbia) filled with exotic discoveries not normally encountered back home. Here is the new pioneer, a revised act of westering now that the closed off frontier's cost of living has risen.

Thomas's reflection on the aestheticization of urban life directs us to one of the reasons American punk was typically depicted as more artistic than political—which the U.K. bands reminded us were not disparate realms. Mary Harron, a writer at the time for New York's *Punk* magazine, has stated, "American Punk had no politics at [the early] stage" (Savage 241). It is berated as "inauthentic" because it lacks the more "serious" political realities considered necessary for making a truly oppositional music. Fryer claims, "Class warfare was irrelevant to American punk; art was central. Its leading proponents came out of a privileged and educated middle-class" (4). The critique holds some validity since England's problems were more visible than America's where *Star Wars*, disco, me-decade spiritualism, and Iran-bashing could distract the public from their problems in the late 1970s. Los Angeles in particular is censured as the final promised land of hyperreality—a Disneyfied, Hollywood movie-set where false

surface is treated as reality. But that surface masks the underclass's desperate poverty behind the stunning wealth of the entertainment industry. There existed a reified dichotomy between New York and Los Angeles as concerns a "true" urban experience. This split is reproduced at the beginning of punk as the urban miscreant aura surrounding the New York club CBGBs in the Bowery becomes the defining style and site for self-representation. Despite having to go to the same kind of "dangerous" parts of town to see punk bands in Los Angeles, the negative characterization of L.A. as too plastic, too clean, too full of sunshine and too intellectually vacuous was firmly in place outside the city limits. In 1981 Greil Marcus echoes the anti-L.A. rhetoric by panning the scene as "a U.K. punk spin-off that has . . . jumped that track [of having a politically based music]; perhaps because those who make L.A. punk are so often tracked to become those in power, to enjoy money and mobility without purpose" (184). Such an assessment calls attention to the predominant class background of the scene but obscures the political content of L.A. punk and ignores their actual sociocultural practice.

Like Keith Morris, Exene Cervenka of X comments on L.A.'s politics by framing it with a connection to racial marginality: "The scene was directly political; it was so political it didn't even know it was political. It was political like Rosa Parks, who didn't feel like getting up because her feet hurt, not because she was trying to start a civil rights movement" (Spurrier 126). Cervenka's rhetoric of an intuitive politics does not tell the whole story. The fanzine *Search & Destroy* often quoted the Dils' Tony Kinman in his repeated calls for L.A. bands to be more openly political, to use the music as a vehicle for social change:

> America is pacified by irresponsible media distortions and falsifications, such as: "American punks aren't political because there's nothing wrong here." . . . and "Punks here are just middle-class, well educated kids." (BUT that does not necessarily invalidate revolutionary integrity—you don't have to be poor, black or on welfare to know it stinks!). (105)

I find it significant that Kinman does not dispute the media representation of American punks as middle class. Here is a figure deeply involved in the movement who acknowledges the privileged economic background of its members and attempts to prod them into political

awareness. Nevertheless, one should not discount the underlying political impetus of this emerging culture. These malcontent descendants of the American dream engage a different experience by joining the ranks of the disenfranchised inner-city "underclass."

This is a debated term but it was common enough to suit our purposes.[12] Equivalent to the Protestant critique of the urban poor a century earlier, the concept of the underclass categorizes poverty, and the cultural lifestyle associated with it, by splitting the poor into two groups: deserving/undeserving. This division fuels the conservatives' calls to dismantle social programs they condemned for "creat[ing] a culture of dependency in a population which explicitly denies the norms and values of the society to which they notionally belong" (Morris 3). The undeserving poor are stigmatized as enemies of the state who neglect their civic duty and swindle decent citizens of their hard-earned money because they lack the moral fiber and self-motivation to help themselves. What is silenced by the pundits disseminating this scapegoat portrait are the structural inequalities at the root of poverty—racism and rapidly dwindling employment opportunities for those unable to leave the urban centers for jobs relocated to outlying suburbs.

Such a malicious portrayal of poverty opens a way for thinking about the roots of L.A. punk's political imagination. Conservatives represent the underclass as a counterculture "who stand—in terms of values, behavior or life style—outside 'the collectivity' " (Morris 79). Punks take this discourse of the underclass and turn it into a badge of honor. This attitude is found in Jeff Spurrier's 1994 interviews with people from the scene who lived in the sub-urban space:

> Geza X: I was on SSI—about $600 a month. That was like the artist's subsidy. Nobody worked, everybody was broke, but everybody just fed each other. It was like a tortilla-and-no-beans diet. (120)
>
> KK Bennett: [A group of punks] fed themselves by raiding an ice-cream truck that was parked in the alleyway. They stole about twenty gallons and ate it for weeks. . . . And there was a liquor store. . . that took our food stamps. (120, 122)

The survival techniques of extreme poverty—living by one's wits—are here made part of an alternate truth system, an ethic of living that counters the approved patterns. These memories are layered with the rhetoric

of community and improvisational negotiations of hardship. Punk's appropriation of Otherness exhibits a significant shift in the ideological investments of this group against the conservative vision of people adhering to the values of the proper American: self-reliance and self-sacrifice directed toward material success.

But punk's disjuncture between dominant and subordinate cultures gets complicated when race enters the picture. Ironically, these two narratives fit snugly into the prevalent negative image of the underclass. They accede to the racist assumptions of underclass discourse by glamorizing the "pathological" activities attributed to that group. Both Geza X and KK ennoble the kind of behavior conservatives brandish for their periodic inner city witch hunts. Punks act this way because they think it is how the sub-urban Other is supposed to behave. What is revealed is how L.A. punks rely on the center's discourses for a sense of marginality. This dilemma is a cultural negotiation—a rhetoric and practice built on the conflicting belief systems they are questioning—but that qualification must confront the issue of punks positing a stereotype as sincere rebellion.

There is a hazard of overlooking the way those whom punks try to emulate are themselves performing classed and raced (as well as gendered and sexed) identities. The discourse of sub-urbanism asserts the punks' belief that they are immersed in an "authentic" mode of existence. They deny the Other's own ability to perform by treating the underclass identity as "real" instead of a possible role. They ignore the boundaries determining how far certain people are allowed to go with any such performance. The lower status of most minorities prevents full participation in the nation's politics or benefiting from its patriotic promises. This accounts for why suburban punks were attracted to the idea of the sub-urban to spurn the complacent life of conservatism. Barry Shank's discussion of punk's subterranean nature repeats the gesture of Morris and Cervenka by emphasizing the connection to marginalized racial groups a punk lifestyle opens:

> This rock'n'roll truly challenged people. It was not safe to like it; you could get beat with a billy club; you could get arrested. The ability to derive pleasure from punk rock gave an instant aura of danger, independence, and power to any individual. . . . [Being a fan of punk] seemed to produce momentary experiences for middle-class [whites] akin to the everyday life of Blacks or Hispanics. (110)

This circles us back to Black Flag's song, seeing how punk flips the majority/minority binary. Minority status is the valorized element for this group. They recognize the structural racism in American society even while essentializing the nonwhite Other into a victim role—casting nonwhites as simultaneously threatened and threatening. What aims to be a critique of repression ends up an agent of it by utilizing a stereotype of inferior, violent, and immoral nonwhites.[13] Ultimately, punks are working from a particular condoned image by playing out the authorized subjectivities they associate with that habitus and expect to find there.[14]

* * *

The punks' chosen life of marginality depends on its relation to what the suburban bourgeoisie decides to include and exclude from the center. The cultural practice of punk subjectivity comes to take on the quality of a colonial appropriation of sub-urban life through a specific "look" and behavior. Punk's crossing of racial and class borders can be read as a commodification of the Other that aestheticizes identity for capital in a symbolic economy of signification. Some are bothered that punk's counterhegemonic power ultimately cannot escape cooptation in the material economic system, but the truth is they employ that same logic against those they posit as the newly privileged element by exploiting the sub-urban to make a product (their identities) marketed through the channels of their own bodies and culture. It is pointless to accuse punks of a "failed rebellion" because they cannot get outside the larger system, but treating punks as if they are completely aware of it fails because there is too much invested in this public image that wants to be taken seriously as a cultural intervention.

The most obvious way to problematize this appropriation is the option of (re)escape waiting for some back home. Although one should avoid generalizing their disparate economic statuses and life-options, we must also recall that this rebellion, as framed by middle-class punks, is a disavowal of the desires and social values *causing* the sense of economic anxiety their parents and mainstream peers feel. These kids left a parent culture that believed their lifestyle could survive if only the proper political steps were taken—hence the sweeping turn to conservatism—so there is a sense of hope for the future. And

those values, which attempt to maintain a middle-class life, that punks evade are still waiting for them. Besides, any transition from a suburban life seems that much easier because the next level looks that less grim. Even the Chicana Alice Bag, who left her east L.A. barrio to live in the Canterbury, has a better place to run as the scene's first phase is dying in late 1979. Disheartened by the changes in the subculture she "moved back home and had quit [the punk scene] and was getting ready to go back to school" (Spurrier 124). In contrast, for "true" suburbans this life is one with very real threats of hunger, disease, and death that are firmly rooted in a systematized inequality from which they cannot easily free themselves.

Admittedly, this border crossing increases the "credibility" attached to punks because they *are* living this life, but that status is just another essentialist version of true identity. Postmodern parody and decontextualized signifiers cannot account for this cultural practice because punks *want* context, otherwise they are mere "poseurs."[15] This pursuit of authenticity, no matter how sincere, is as insulting a gesture as playacting when compared to those who cannot escape. That they freely opt to live like oppressed groups formed by historical and social conditions they cannot claim may say something about the political dedication of some punks, but it also speaks to how people of their social status understand their relationship to the very idea of freedom. Mobility and access depend on where one is placed in the social totality; such sites are constituted in a way that can offer either emancipation or further repression—a large number of punks enjoy the former. The crushing realities of racial and/or economic subjugation are trivialized in their search for autonomy. They become mere adornments for differentiation capable of being discarded when no longer useful to the new subjectivity—just one more brand in the supermarket of identities. Punks attempt to be associated with a group that is ignored and swept away from public acknowledgment, but that oppressed status is complicated by being presented in a way that requires, that begs for, the shocked gaze of the conservative masses.

Punks ignore how ontological mobility is not open to all; thus, "white subjectivity [is equated] with a social entitlement to experiment with identity" (Wald 153). If we return to the Canterbury apartments, that physical and social space chosen for its extreme Otherness, seven months after a contingent of punks moved in, we find a growing tension

between the "real" sub-urbans and the new initiates. Craig Lee describes the changing state of the hotel and the negative response of the nonpunk residents to their neighbors:

> The halls smelled like shit, someone constantly pissed in the elevator . . . one girl was raped at gunpoint, cockroaches were everywhere, and another girl had an angry neighbor throw a pot of boiling soup on her face. Racial tensions were high. The basement rehearsal room had been padlocked, little fires were breaking out and punks started to flee. What had been envisioned as L.A.'s equivalent of the Chelsea Hotel [in New York] was no longer hospitable to kids playing Wire and Sham 69 full blast at four in the morning. (Belsito and Davis 31)

The punks treated the Canterbury the way they thought it deserved, showing no respect for a place where some are forced to live. This is more than the snotty teenager pose punks affected. The sub-urban subject is exoticized, forced into a preexisting stereotype that further stabilizes a monolithic view of marginality. The belief that this self-fashioning endows one with authenticity in contradistinction to the smiling mask of white middle-class life is based on the same uncritical acceptance of racial typing found in Norman Mailer's "The White Negro": "the Negro knows more about the ugliness and danger of life than the White" (602). Lee does not elaborate on the source of the Canterbury's "racial tensions," but one might assume they grew out of a feeling that the punks "don't fit in" and do not respect "us."

Denaturalizing both suburban and sub-urban identities is a possible and worthy objective, but then what? To acknowledge that suburban punks crossing racial and class lines have more options is not a return to a naive conception of authenticity. All identities are performances of approved categories, so punks try on a particular subjectivity to attain their goal of transgression. Yet something lingers, something intimating deep complicity, when kids coming from comfortable lives try to earn hipness by playing dress "down." With a remarkable kinship to Stephen Crane's method of manipulating the "undeserving poor" discourse, a similar colonizing impulse informs this border crossing, exploiting the condition of sub-urbans by mimicking a "way of life" others must negotiate in order to survive. This is turned into prestige by punks; acquiring rebellious symbolic capital is how the appropriation of Otherness "pays," and assuming the underclass is there for their emulation becomes the imperial gesture in

punk's escape tactic. Representing themselves as the same weakens the barriers of difference but only as a by-product of self-aggrandizement.

Punks totalize the Other in a fixed identity to empower themselves; thus, requiring conformity to the center's preconceptions and ignoring that these people may want to escape from the degradation of this life. By eliding the heterogeneous hopes existing in the sub-urban space they silence the marginal subject's own viewpoint on marginality and allow the center to continue speaking for the Other. By proposing that they have joined a different cultural formation because of a lifestyle choice punks further naturalize that subject position in a binary relationship to suburban life that is then also (re)naturalized. The necessary image of stereotyped racial and class differences are defined by the discourse of affluent whiteness, buttressing whiteness as the norm that gives a substantive meaning to their cultural practice. I wish to avoid duplicating the punks' theft of voice, but it is highly dubious that anyone located in the sub-urban would say this life is a just and good consequence of the unequal distribution of wealth. I disagree with Greil Marcus's overall assessment of L.A. punk's motivations, but he phrases the issue of their implications wonderfully: "The freedom of Los Angeles punk may be inspiring, it may convince many their world is still to be made, but it costs those who use it nothing. They won't be the ones to pay the piper" (186).

The incongruity between positive social intentions and negative ideological ramifications rarely penetrates the public discourse of the L.A. punks whose status allows them to be heard. The result is that living on welfare becomes more like a game than a necessity, daily navigating danger a source of excitement. Punk situated itself as an ironic, self-conscious reaction to the commodification ubiquitous in late capitalism—understanding that even as it berated corporate rock it could not sell its product without replicating its basic processes—but it appears neither willing nor capable of extending that critique to its own cultural practices at this level. Too many punks believe they can have an identity free of their past personal history by moving to this social space and declaring themselves a taste culture on the boundaries of mainstream consumption. Too often the music treats this transformation quite transparently. L.A. punks imitating the sub-urban are, in essence, duplicating the methods of the group they publicly vilify to realize their rebellion. They leave the parent culture to establish their

own "lifestyle enclave" through an identity based on certain patterns of belief, dress, and leisure activity, all of which are framed as part of a vanguardist movement occurring in underground venues for people of the same inclination (Bellah et al., 335). To escape the group mentality they build their own group. As a subculture of secret meanings and codes for dress, attitude, and bodily movement (dancing, walking, or posing), the identity is an exclusionary one, so in the end they are not unlike their suburban foes.

The transgressive potential of their strategy for resisting America's reigning ideologies is enervated due to that stringent faith in the primacy of the individual at the core of punk's conceptualization of revolt. Any economic and social injustices punk rails against are an effect of the logic of individualism. An ideology that rationalizes focusing on private concerns—be it financial or spiritual or aesthetic fulfillment—and advocates self-interest keeps punk locked within the very system it claims to be protesting. This critique is not utterly foreign to punk. Craig O'Hara complains, "Many Punk anarchists have been content to stay within their own circle and have rejected the possibility of widespread anarchy. This attitude is referred to as a conception of 'personal' anarchy. . . . This idea echoes the epitome of bourgeois culture" (69). The chance for a collective response to the systemic problems punks scream against becomes difficult as they grow more preoccupied with avoiding cooptation and descend further into a clique of obscure, self-ghettoizing knowledge and secret handshakes. It is in this light that punk's ability to work as a form of dissent needs to be reconfigured. The late capitalist alienation these subjects feel is caused by their investment in an autonomy that privileges insular individuation over a collectivity allowing the inclusion of nonpunks. They force themselves into a solipsistic cocoon wherein they cannot affect the conditions they claim make them unhappy, and this adds the finishing touches to their sense of alienation.[16] As a culture of quasi-postmodern subjects, punk may best be understood in terms of a Foucauldian micropolitics: the localized effect of crossing social boundaries contains the potential to spread. Or is punk too far in the margin to be heard by the kind of mass audience a more subdued music is allowed to reach?

Punks prove themselves adept at criticism; this includes themselves, but is more typically directed at those on the outside. I have shown the

borderline that too many could not cross in Los Angeles. For punks who join the sub-urban, and those just celebrating it as the Other of suburbia, their means of self-construction mirror the logic of individuality as practiced by the center. Their contrarian version of "reality" and the "good" succumbs to the illusion of a whole self, despite the opportunities for denaturalization. Although attempting to create free selves on their own terms, L.A. punks forego critiquing the sources for that subjectivity; thus, getting further entwined in the system they despise, to the point that the paradox becomes so accepted—like that unseen whiteness back in the center—it is rendered all the more invisible.

CHAPTER 6

Repo Man, Ambivalence, and the Generic Mediation

I'm goin' indie.
—Bud in *Repo Man*

That's bullshit. You're a white suburban punk, just like me.
—Otto in *Repo Man*

The two hemispheres are fundamentally at odds.
—J. Frank Parnell in *Repo Man*

THE SUBMERGED COMPLICITY IN L.A. PUNK IS THE THEMATIC STARTING point for Alex Cox's film *Repo Man*, but placing a 1984 film so close to a 1926 novel is not as capricious as it may first seem.[1] The modernist ambiguity of *The Sun Also Rises* is a grounding issue, such that the same paradoxes found in Hemingway and L.A. punk culture become the subject matter informing the film as Cox attempts to negotiate the problems of cooptation and equivocal politics. This is also a prominent issue for 1980s critical theory, with one of the recurrent debates about postmodernism being the political effect of theories deployed in or influenced by late capitalism. Building off Fredric Jameson's theory of the "waning of affect," Lawrence

Grossberg ponders the current state of affairs by analyzing a pervasive ambivalence in society. That people have beliefs but lack a deep sense of "affective" investment in them is a disturbing trend for him: "It is increasingly difficult to locate places where it is possible to care about something enough, to have enough faith that it matters, so that one can actually make a commitment to it and invest oneself in it" (" 'It's a Sin,' " 223). Defining the postmodern condition as one in which subjects can comfortably balance contradictory positions and desires proves useful for understanding *Repo Man*, a film consistently framed as an expression of postmodern life.

Some critics focus on the film's content to discuss its transgressive politics, some to decry it as a vacuous acquiescence to late capitalist values. There is at least general agreement that the film's style is worth reflection, if only because form is so integral to what Cox presents. It is not the depthlessness Jameson accuses postmodernism of celebrating; *Repo Man*'s style serves as a self-reflexive and utterly ambivalent statement on its own status as art—a quality of both modern and postmodern aesthetics.[2] The film expresses a sense of wavering indeterminacy through its simultaneous use and critique of realism (as mimesis) that further reveals how the film's meaning is rooted in its split loyalties between modernist and postmodernist narratives.[3] Cox appropriates realism—repeatedly establishing and withdrawing a reality effect—to present a picture of contemporary life while examining the film's own identity as a rebellious "cult" film. This double use of realism is highlighted through the dual function of the generic that mediates between modernism and postmodernism. The generic appears in two forms: the motif of generic consumer goods appearing in scenes and the bricolage style of mixing "nonartistic" Hollywood genres. This allows Cox to address his film's relation to the movie industry and to carve out a space of marginality, as well as constructing his identity as a maverick director.

John Powers notes how an early concentration on marginality helped earn Cox a "reputation as a filmmaker drawn to weird tones, oddball milieus, and characters who bear no resemblance to the toothsome teenagers and lovable yuppies of Hollywood cinema" (35). That helps to explain why Cox wants to associate *Repo Man* with the cult film: its aura of being an individualistic genre outside Hollywood's corporate structure. The cult film techniques give a stamp of originality

to a story focused on groups that symbolize nonconformity. Both facets are used to develop a mantle of difference, in a word: the artistic. The film tries to other itself from contemporary life and commercial Hollywood movies (the joke on bland generic products), but it complicates this by also moving to other itself from sanctioned "high art" (the avant-garde use of mass culture genres). Cox expresses ambivalence about his allegiance to modernism and postmodernism, extending it into a conflict between critical theory and lived reality. The concept of the generic can be read as a joke and/or a metacommentary on *Repo Man*'s own marginal identity in the cultural field. Cox's search for an outsider identity through form is mirrored in Otto Maddox, the central protagonist who moves between subordinated spaces to carve out an identity apart from the formulaic and static mainstream. Just as Otto uses subcultures to differentiate himself, the movie uses the subcultural quality of the cult film to mark out its own territory as different. So, a standard rebel-teen narrative dealing with a commercial genre in a less commercial fashion lets Cox make a statement on society as well as the process of art and the artist.

Repo Man is a collection of cross-purposes and lofty aspirations tinged with skepticism—ideals hoped for yet not wholly believed attainable. I am interested in how the film articulates its relationship to realism because it is not a text especially concerned with mimesis or progressive slice-of-life tales. The mise-en-scène creates a seedy authenticity, something hard and antithetical to commercial cinema's perceived sentimentality, but this is interrupted by the fantastic tale of aliens and government conspiracy—two Hollywood genres—propelling the plot, and in turn these genres are dealt with in a stylized, "quirky," less commercial fashion. Cox presents and undermines expectation upon expectation. Structuring the film as a combination of these two forms, he exposes the artifice of Hollywood conventions *and* high art to earn symbolic capital in what Pierre Bourdieu calls the field of cultural production. In short, *Repo Man*'s form (combining realism and the generic) reflects its content (political and theoretical ambivalence). Thus, Otto's cold statement of fact, "That's bullshit. You're a white suburban punk, just like me," is significant. Moreover, Otto's naming of whiteness here calls attention to how marginality is pursued—with Cox outright ridiculing the way whites rebel.

Signifiers of whiteness appear throughout the film; even the white of the generic product packaging connects it to a stereotype of whiteness as bland and boring, symbolizing what Otto seeks to escape. From that we can make an interpretive leap to seeing it as a possible attack on the whiteness as purity discourse (a stripping away of excess) used to bolster ideas of moral self-control in racist discourses where nonwhite is the negative term of unrestrained savagery. And the whiteness critique extends to Hollywood with the multiple generic references critiquing it as a corporate producer of bullshit (to use Otto's word)—an industry run by whites making its products for white target audiences (albeit debatable whether Cox offers much advancement for nonwhite actors). Cox's deriding of white-targeted films, and having his Reagan government "bad guys" costumed in the most rudimentary stereotypes of white people—light-haired and light-skinned (as opposed to Otto's tanned skin)—makes the idea that he is censuring the "whiteness" of an innocuous mass culture, as well as America's power structure, quite tenable. Whiteness is continually present in the background; nevertheless, I pull back from using it as the focal point to concentrate on the film's appropriation of an *aesthetic* Otherness.

* * *

One of the famous debates within film theory has been the role of realism. Is it film's ethical duty to mirror life? What ideology props up a claim of (re)presenting external reality? What happens when audiences take this to be the relation they have to a movie? The shift from montage to mise-en-scène can be traced to André Bazin, the key voice on filmic realism, but the issue also occupies Marxist interpretations of ideology in the 1970s. Graeme Turner sketches out the rationale of realism:

> Realist film creates a world which is as recognizable as possible; and audiences understand it by drawing analogies between the world of the film and their own world. . . . The technologies of film production are hidden, so that techniques which might draw attention to the means of construction are kept to a minimum. (156)

Because of its appeal to the natural, realism is critiqued for ignoring its association with the ideological structures that give a reality its shape.

The world on screen "does not question reality or its constituent conditions," otherwise the filmic representation would lose its sense of authenticity, as well as its audience (157).

Although dated, Bazin's theories still prove relevant for thinking about this style in *Repo Man*. He praises mise-en-scène as a means for establishing film as a superior medium moving ever closer to a fuller depiction of external reality that simulates the "solidity of the world" ("Theater and Cinema" 382). All the necessary clues for interpretation are found in both the obvious and subtle details of the shots: setting, props, lighting, costume, and the actors' movements. *Repo Man*'s appropriation of realist techniques—location shots, no back-projections (a notable choice considering all the driving in the movie), and an acting style that often tempers the exaggerated Hollywood mode—indicates an attempt to concoct a recognizable world. The deployment of a reality effect is found in minor places (as it should be), such as the film's ambient soundtrack: when Lite breaks into a car the alarm keeps up its annoying ring until he drives off; when Otto picks up Leila the Cadillac's squeaky suspension is heard throughout the scene; and when he drops her off at the UFO office a large truck that enters the shot momentarily drowns out Otto's voice.

These few examples hint that Cox is reflecting on realism in cinema, but that he is theorizing a conflict between narratives of reality and their ideological underpinnings is best exemplified in the early supermarket scene. The opening crane shot shows the rows of products, their different colors are common enough for us to understand where we are as the camera descends to Otto pricing cans of generic-brand peaches. The scene is lit in a dull light to simulate the rows of fluorescent bulbs, with frontal lighting reducing the presence of shadows to a natural look (in the context of a supermarket) with a hazy dullness. The sound of muzak and the store's intercom crackling announcements throughout the scene increase the degree of realism. Even the acting balances over-stylized affect (the boss's gasp, the security guard's heavy accent and macho gun twirling) with Otto's underplayed movements and voice. The scene reflects the dual impulses of Bazin's conception of realism. His demands about setting, décor, and acting style are met with a supermarket image and interaction between characters that "ring true": the boss is a condescending jerk and the minimum-wage teenager disrespects authority. Otto's actions may not

be highly "realistic," but there is nothing here to seriously disrupt the spectator's view of the world.

Cox is not concerned with giving a believable representation of the everyday, however. This scene's opening wide depth of field crane shot shows the different products in the background. At this point it is a collection of realistic details until the camera stops on two stock boys working by the generic products aisle, a fact that is further accentuated by their light blue smocks and light blue and white striped shirts—the same colors of a generic package. Otto's surly reaction to Kevin singing a 7-Up jingle and cussing out his boss position him as our rebel hero stuck in a mindless job under mindless authority (while the cross-earring he wears is a signal of the contradictions to come). This seems a straightforward example of the mise-en-scène reflecting plot and character, with one's initial reaction being to read it as a critique of the bland consumerism and condescending structures of power in everyday life. But there are additional levels of meaning at work here as a conjoined commentary on realism as a genre, Hollywood as a system, and *Repo Man*'s own status as a filmic Other.

One of the film's major themes is the relationship between brand names and the generic. The lore behind the generic items is that the producers could not get any product placement contracts. This explains the comic presence of "food" and "drink" labels in scenes, as well as characters being named after beers (Bud, Miller, Lite, Oly[mpia]), but it does not account for how the generic motif focuses our attention on the movie's complicated maneuvering between the commercial demands of Hollywood, high art institutionalization, and cult film originality. In the supermarket Del Monte signs juxtaposed to generic labels are our first clue of this relationship between the commercial and anticommercial, but it is the subtly placed refrigerator with a large Coca-Cola logo that signals how we should read form and content in *Repo Man*.

Coke, that transglobal god of brand names, is placed by the generic aisle. These contrasting signs are opposed as commodities because they make different promises. The brand name is a "legitimate" product while the generic is degraded. The brand name can be theorized in relation to both high art and mass culture. Consumers associate certain qualities with a brand name because it is a familiar signature, one that imparts trust and the fulfillment of expectations pertaining to accepted values and tastes. The same applies to mass culture performers

and companies—those products designed to appeal to a much larger audience to make a larger profit. In film this would encompass "A-list" actors, directors, and, to a degree, the studio or production company. The brand name carries varying degrees of respect and popularity with the consuming public, but they also must deal with consumer preconceptions. To turn against brand names, in either high art or mass culture, is to contest the consumer system supporting these cultural fields.

Repo Man explores the contextual nature of consumption during the alley slamdancing scene following Otto's expulsion from the supermarket. The mise-en-scène includes a brick wall with a spray-painted band name (Circle Jerks) and recognizable punk rock symbols (the circled A for anarchy and the four black bars of the Black Flag logo). These symbols add a touch of authenticity (realism) to the scene, yet what I find intriguing concerns the issue of brand names. Circle Jerks stands as a brand in the context of punk (their music plays in the scene and they appear in the movie), a well-known brand approved by the consumers within this specific niche market. The symbols for anarchy and Black Flag, the slogan/tag-line of "No Future," and a t-shirt bearing the image of the punk poster-boy Sid Vicious are all official trademarks of punk—amounting to a commodification of its supposed authenticity in order to promote itself. Instead of being immersed in the hard "realism" of the streets, punk becomes just another collection of products used to sell a public image. Even Otto's last name, Maddox, strikes me as sounding like a brand name product—a joke signaling punk's anger has been coopted into another commodity (in conjunction with the commodification of humans represented by the repo men's beer names). All these details lead to Cox's grand gesture: conceding that *Repo Man*'s own subjectivity ricochets between the poles of rebellion and commercialism (note the "R[epo] & M[an] Burgers" sign in the car wash scene).

The generic is a constant presence in *Repo Man* and must be conceptualized as a multiple term. On the one hand, as the brand name's opposite, the generic is a stripping away of the pretentious and superfluous. It is promoted as the real, the product itself, getting what you pay for. If framed in artistic terms, the generic is antiart because it is antiartifice. This version of the generic wipes away the characteristics "approved" products use: bright colors, graphics or the corporate

signature of a brand name logo. (Granted, the generic items are marked by a blue stripe but it still differs from mainstream corporatism.) On the other hand, the generic can also be framed as lacking originality—it is what it is, without attempting to be "better." In the artistic field the generic is defined as formulaic and nonexperimental; a product made for maximum recognition so as to satisfy an audience's expectations—a perfect choice for a profit-driven mass culture. Hollywood also exists in a dual relation to the generic: (1) it rejects the generic *style* by relying on brand names (the bright colors and logos of superstar actors and directors) to sell its goods, while (2) it embraces the generic *mode* since their products are typically formulaic, safe, and conformist.

Cox's generic motif calls attention to this split and negotiates it. In *Repo Man* we find the macho clichés of detective and western movies; the car chase scene from an action flick; the spy genre's sense of shadowy, global machinations; the clumsiness of slapstick comedies; the surly (and psychotic) stock types of teen rebellion found in juvenile delinquency B-movies; and the eerie ambiance of an unseen alien common to 1950s science fiction. A fine example of their mixture occurs in the liquor store shootout scene. Cox employs a collage of genres in an attempt to manipulate them rather than be manipulated by them. The style of the sequence exemplifies an attempt to dismantle both realism and generic formulism even as it borrows their techniques. Similar to the supermarket, the mise-en-scène is tightly controlled: there is the same dull lighting and piped-in muzak, and a noirish quality is created by the store's seedy appearance. Confusion sets in because throughout the scene we are invited to laugh at what happens when genres are spliced together. We are *supposed* to be amused by Duke, the punk gang-leader, who is a study in generic layering. He speaks like a caricature of James Cagney ("I kill everybody! HA, HA!"), is shot in a five-way western shootout occurring in a noir setting, and sputters the closing repentant lines of a juvenile delinquent film before he dies: "The lights are growing dim. I know a life of crime led me to this sorry fate, and yet I blame society. Society made me what I am." Even before his death, as he and Debbi are waiting to rob the store (the same one they rob throughout the movie), Duke begins a whimpering paean to marriage and having a family, but instantly switches back into "character" once Debbi sticks a popper

under his nose—it all boils down to which generic, mandated role you will perform: suburbanite or thug?

This is a perfect illustration of Cox's split motivations. The excessive parody deploys cliché in the name of originality, reflecting *Repo Man*'s own liminal status between independence and commercialism as a "cult" film distributed by Universal. Cox strives for autonomy through a border identity by criticizing the artifice of Hollywood. In the shootout scene the formulaic side of the generic partly suspends any realism to expose the movie as unnatural, thereby making realism into just another genre. By refusing to allow the audience a comfortable suspension of disbelief—instead forcing an *activation* of disbelief—the audience has to take note of style in *Repo Man*. The film situates itself between Bazin and ideological treatments of realism like Colin MacCabe's belief that "film does not reveal the real in a moment of transparency, but rather that film is constituted by a set of discourses which . . . produce a certain reality" (82). A denaturalization of reality through form (e.g., when sound and image do not correspond) is necessary to disrupt the relationship between movie and viewer (in the role of the camera's eye) and make spectators aware of the film's constructed reality. In essence, Cox uses genre *against* genre in order to simultaneously critique mainstream Hollywood films and confront the elitism of high art by incorporating such a wide variety of mass culture genres. This balancing act moves us toward seeing the film as breaking with convention (the artistic gesture) yet maintaining a questionable marginality in relation to the expectations of both commercial and noncommercial culture.

This is a filmic (re)presentation of Grossberg's theory of ambivalence, and Cox's treatment of violence during the shootout scene clarifies the point. After Debbi shoots the cashier, he falls back into the shelves of generic liquor in a stylized manner (i.e., unrealistic and unnatural). The action is sped up by slowing the frame speed in homage to Martin Scorsese's bloody climax in *Taxi Driver*, but it is a double-edged allusion. The appropriation of this technique is a postmodern pillaging of the film archive that makes for a cartoonish spectacle of gore. This is made all the more obvious, and humorous, as the wounded Bud's flailing arm smashes bottles of ketchup (*generic* ketchup) to splatter "fake blood" as a further comment on the falsity of death in movies. All of this has to be over the top to avoid being

derivative, as well as to ensure that the parody gets discerned as artistic and not solely a game to amuse the audience. Using the generic to divulge realism's ideological function as a falsely naturalized representation is part of Cox's purpose, yet there remains the sense he still wants to give something realistic, something hard.

This is why Otto reinjects a final discourse of "truth" into the scene during his interaction with the dying Duke. He kneels over the body but does not replicate Duke's exaggerated acting style as he goes through his death throes. Otto stands in for the real, he is the one who breaks with convention in his reaction to Duke's statement, "Society made me what I am," by coldly replying: "That's bullshit. You're a white suburban punk, just like me." Positioned in front of generic products, Otto and Duke symbolize the double meaning of the term: being a convention (Duke) and being stripped of artifice (Otto). Otto spoils Duke's reading of his death that adheres to the conventions of a commercial Hollywood film, in which the teen is repentant and the moral is handed down. He states his opinion without tears or the other sentimentalities such a scene usually demands; in other words, Otto chooses to proceed through the world without "bullshit." The movie has been building up to this explanatory point, but it must be viewed through the logic underlying *Repo Man*'s style as an adversarial cult film.

The doubleness of the generic can be traced to the avant-garde's use of mass culture to attack bourgeois "institutionalized" art. Peter Bürger's study of the avant-garde distinguishes it from modernism, insisting that experimentation is not the sole criterion of avant-garde art. It is with the movements after World War I that "art enters the stage of self-criticism" to examine the purpose of art itself (22). The intention was to reintegrate art into life praxis—without realism's claim to represent life as it is lived—thereby enabling art to influence the way you look at your life. Shock is the preeminent method for accomplishing this self-scrutiny. In withholding a clearly articulated or discernible meaning, the artist prompts the viewer to find a similar lack of meaning in his own life and then, hopefully, feels provoked to change that life. So, one of the questions to be answered eventually is whether Cox refuses meaning or yearns for it? Or is he just ambivalent about the whole matter?

Andreas Huyssen describes the avant-garde project of the 1920s as a "radical break with the referential mimetic aesthetic and its notion of

the autonomous and organic work of art" that is "a reified reproduction of a false reality" (9, 25). Bürger's analysis of montage in early cubist collages points to "the insertion of reality fragments into the painting, i.e., the insertion of material that has been left unchanged by the artist" as an example of the avant-garde's attitude toward realism (77). This distinction points to how *Repo Man* uses the *appearance* of a reality authorized by familiarity (a recognizable resemblance) to tap into avant-garde theory. Reality is inserted into places but balanced with the scenes and dialogue of stylized "weirdness"—the anticipated shock effect will come from the juxtaposition of styles to reveal all films as unnatural; that is to say, showing the artist's hand in the making.

Repo Man plays off the discourse of mass culture as degraded culture by using its genres. The film can maintain its artistic status by mixing genres in a self-critical style that absolves it from being either typical Hollywood mass culture or bourgeois art. Huyssen depicts postmodernism—the avant-garde of the 1970s and 1980s—as mixing modernism's aesthetics with mass culture (which he theorizes as modernism's Other) to make the former work in new ways with the paradoxical goal of making Art (218). *Repo Man*'s complicated, layered structure deploys the elements of both commercial Hollywood movies and cult films—the latter a sort of "ungenre" (as Kevin's 7-Up is the "uncola") set against Hollywood's "brand name" actors, linear narrative structure, and hackneyed aesthetics—to prevent easy categorization. The cult film's heritage is avant-gardist in that it celebrates the "culturally disreputable" genres of low-budget B-movies (Hoberman and Rosenbaum 3). Often the crasser qualities of some cult films are given artistic status: the it-is-so-bad-it-is-good model of film criticism.[4] Whether you label them midnight, underground, or independent, these films stand for artistic autonomy and individuality.

The cult film and art film are not equivalent, although the aura of the artistic surrounds both since they strive for independence and claim to be uninterested in commercial success. Jonathan Rosenbaum claims that a midnight movie tends to be a success when it "has to do with transgressing particular taboos" (Hoberman and Rosenbaum 301), and J. Hoberman argues that every midnight movie has a social conscience because it works as a grassroots "alternative to 'straight' movies, television, and theater" (73). A marginal subjectivity is attributed to this form, not the least because many New York showings from the 1950s into the 1970s took place in seedy theaters on the Lower East

Side (a spatial signifier of marginal activity): "Underground movies—the very term was redolent of danger, secrecy, subversion, resistance, liberation; not to mention perversity, alienation, even madness" (Hoberman and Rosenbaum 39). By linking cult films with a Foucauldian definition of transgression—where boundaries are exposed but not crossed—J.P. Telotte links the cult film to the avant-garde as integrating art and life, and the possibility that one can affect the Other (16). Finally, Bruce Kawin comments on the freedom cult films have since unhindered by the drive for profit: "it has license to be subversive, to be avant-garde, and above all to be tasteless" (22).

Cox appropriates this discourse of rebellious Otherness for credibility as a filmmaker appropriately distanced from the Hollywood system. A movie that uses "real" actors, is produced by an ex–pop star (Michael Nesmith of The Monkees), and distributed by a major studio (Universal) is very close to collusion with the mainstream for a "punk" film, as several critics label it.[5] A. Keith Goshorn thinks so, and he sets out to "reconcile" these factors by analyzing the movie's subversive spirit (39–40). This is unnecessary, for Nesmith's involvement mirrors Cox's attempt to mine marginality for authenticity. His past connection to a manufactured rock group has given him the identity of a superficial corporate puppet; therefore, he seeks to transform that appraisal of his creative worth by being involved with a noncommercial "artistic" product: a marginal, "Othered" film. I suggest this also may have been the initial rationale for Universal's involvement with the project because the individual artist and/or company must constantly negotiate its public identity in the cultural field. Hollywood makes few apologies about its purpose as a business, but it also understands that there is more than one kind of capital. As often happens with those involved with mass culture, the desire for respect eventually arises after making all the money you need. By agreeing to distribute "Art," Universal, like everyone connected to *Repo Man*, can earn symbolic profit through prestige.

In *The Field of Cultural Production* Pierre Bourdieu lays out the disguised commercial function of anticommercialism in art. Art's producers and distributors disavow the profit motive but also ignore the actual financial system underlying art. "Disinterestedness" is the signature of high art, and the honor accorded to a respected name is the symbolic capital accumulated by those who profess a higher degree of

economic purity. In other words, prestige is the scarce resource in the cultural field that groups and individuals struggle to control: "To 'make one's name' means making one's *mark*, achieving recognition (in both senses) of one's *difference* from other producers, especially the most consecrated of them; at the same time, it means *creating a new position* beyond the positions presently occupied, *ahead* of them, in the *avant-garde*" (106). Difference is the product being sold; it is the incentive for making "Art" and the means of separating it from mass culture. Bourdieu divides the cultural field into "restricted production" (high art) and "large-scale production" (mass culture)—*Repo Man*'s plan for winning status is to partake in both. The film draws from the commercial and formulaic, restricting the artist's vision; on the other hand, autonomy comes from expressing that vision in a way that breaks with the formulas, giving the appearance of not being motivated by profit. Thus, the film acquires the moniker of uniqueness by obeying the cultural field's logic of difference.

In fact, it is the longing for difference that governs the way Cox inserts *Repo Man* into the cultural field's economy. The film adheres to the rules of high art in trying to attain prestige by being anti-Hollywood. The film uses an avant-garde method to make a name for itself and a value for its product by reasserting a stance against commercialness or "interestedness." Bourdieu shows how the discourse of difference, by defining the current standards as passé, helps an artist gain power in the cultural field. Likewise, *Repo Man* uses difference to earn symbolic capital. The movie did not make money until it went to video, and profit is surely not the sole impetus behind it since Cox could have decided to do a hundred things differently to make it more marketable. The blending of high art and mass culture enables the film, and Cox, to earn the distinction of an artistic avant-gardism poised against *both* corporate Hollywood and the purported anticorporate world of "artistic" minded films.

* * *

How does all this get translated into a split loyalty toward modernism and postmodernism, and how does that enable a political reading of the film? In "The Existence of Italy" Fredric Jameson articulates a symptomatic model of art: "the social context . . . is to be grasped as

the *situation*—the problem, the dilemma, the contradiction, the 'question'—to which the work of art comes as an imaginary solution, resolution, or 'answer' " (164). To account for this he posits a triad of aesthetic periods (realism/modernism/postmodernism) and matches them with corresponding transformations in the mode of production. At the expense of a more detailed economic analysis of the film industry and society in general, I prefer to focus on some of the aesthetic and ideological categories thrown into conflict in *Repo Man*. Realism opens a path for understanding how to read the structure within which Cox balances modernism and postmodernism to give the film a marginal "identity."

As we have seen, realism is a component of the film's design as its formal techniques are employed to critique the style itself. We have also located a residual interest in establishing something like "truth." The same ambivalence shown toward realism, the generic and the film's own split artistic status is also manifested in the "message" of *Repo Man*, and this ambiguity hinges on a conflict between modernism and postmodernism. Although there is an antimodernist discourse at work—one interested in breaking free from reified aesthetic and social rules—postmodernism too receives a negative response. *Repo Man* exhibits an oscillating attitude toward the late capitalist world. It revels in the new aesthetic techniques but uses them to criticize the new world. Postmodern theory is not adverse to negative social critique; however, the film's connection to it is tenuous as its purpose is founded on a neo-Marxist view of the socioeconomic landscape.[6]

As displayed in the shootout scene, several of Cox's techniques have a straightforward correspondence with postmodern theory. The film is founded on an aesthetic of incoherence, attempting to disrupt the narrative patterns to which the average audience is accustomed. It does not operate according to a wholly logical sense of order as the narrative proceeds according to a doctrine of chance and coincidence with characters "accidentally" bumping into each other. The early part of the story jumps between scenes and plot lines without always tightly linking the action toward what can be perceived as a clear narrative purpose. The temporal disjunction is best apprehended after Otto decides to take the repo job. As he drives with Bud, the scene is composed of quick cuts between day and night settings to represent a disruption of time while Bud's monologue flows uninterrupted. Time has

been flattened into an indistinguishable blur such that, as Bud states, "Night, day, it doesn't mean shit." *Repo Man* does not use anything too radical; indeed, it maintains a chronological plot progression, revealing once again Cox's split sympathies. Still, the break with a conventional linearity exemplifies the failure of narrative to offer a unified sense of meaning while accentuating social fragmentation and incoherence.

The social critique is extended by Cox as America's common myths and national symbols are envisioned in a manner that reevaluates their meaning through humor. The value of such symbols to the national psyche is emptied of value to ridicule and question them. For example, during the opening credits the lore of Route 66 is played upon as a computerized map follows the path of the Malibu from Los Alamos, New Mexico to an unidentified spot on the road to Los Angeles. We get a threefold juxtaposition of America's love affair with the automobile, the myth of California as the promised land (alluding to the Joad's voyage in *The Grapes of Wrath* down the same highway to reach the same failed utopia), and the site of the atomic bomb tests (a critique of the nuclear world) that exemplifies the mixed concerns structuring the film. Each of these levels of meaning is embedded in discourses of technology (the car and nuclear energy as symbols) and progressivism (a critique of the utopia myth and bombs as scientific "progress") and it is this sort of narrative, rooted in modernist morality, that prevents the film from being a totally postmodern text.

On the other hand, blurring the evaluative distinctions between high art and mass culture is a postmodern (using Huyssen's definition) aspect of *Repo Man*. Cox questions naturalized aesthetic values by celebrating marginalized social practices in several scenes incorporating subcultural elements to keep the focus off institutionalized culture: the examples range from slamdancing punks to African-American scooter-boy mods (originally a white British subculture that drew its style from certain black sources, see Hebdige 53–54) and the Chicano Rodriguez brothers. The repo men themselves comprise an outlaw culture: hard-living, hard-drinking, speed freaks whose profession is stealing cars. (Otto even reads a cheesy biker magazine titled *Outlaws of Democracy* in one office scene.) There is also a fascination with the more "kitsch" facets of America: the nearly cultish need of white males to protect John Wayne as an image of masculinity, the tabloid mentality fascinated with

conspiracies and "weirdness," and, of course, the ubiquitous presence of evergreen car air-freshners providing artificial protection from the world's stench.

The treatment of urban space becomes an extension of this antiaesthetic. Choosing to set the story in Los Angeles (a city Andy Warhol loved for its plasticity and critics such as Jameson, Baudrillard, and Soja treat as the epicenter of postmodernity) highlights the film's transgressive spirit. In contrast to the "fun in the sun" lifestyle associated with L.A., Cox puts the camera on multiracial poverty to showcase a different side of the city. Jon Lewis and Pauline Kael both perceive how the city's familiar landmarks are absent, which breaks with traditional media representations focusing on the good life of Beverly Hills or Malibu (the connection between the car model and corporate marketing schemes should not be overlooked). The dirty sidewalks of East L.A. and the decay of industrial zones are the antithesis of those places. (It bears noting how often the L.A. skyline is shot from a far distance; thus using space to further convey the theme of marginality.) This unorthodox use of Los Angeles demystifies the illusory rewards promised by Reagan's trickle-down economics—a quasi-Marxist critique that, in Lewis's words, "depicts the city as just one large bad neighborhood" (91). Moreover, several of the locations could be in any American city, which extends the generic product symbolism that the world is bland, dreary, and anonymous. Urban areas were once heralded as cultural centers with everything to offer, now they are all deteriorating in the same way. It also signals another paradox in Cox's relationship to postmodernism: aesthetically he enjoys deriding convention through cynical humor (freed from the burden of modern proletarian righteousness), but in the "real" world he is appalled that such inequity goes unnoticed in the mainstream media.

The film's sense of humor helps to make its postmodern status hazy, specifically it is the difference between parody and pastiche that hinders any quick application of the label. Jameson concedes that parody and pastiche are similar but marks a distinction between the two, with the latter as the postmodern variant.[7] He theorizes that both mimic Other styles but differ because parody is a satiric method founded on "the feeling that there is a linguistic norm" ("Postmodernism and Consumer Society" 16). Pastiche is postmodern because it operates

"without parody's ulterior motive . . . without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something normal compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic" (16). Jameson's distinction forces us to confront whether *Repo Man*'s references to past styles are meant to be funny. Even if one catalogues only the moments of absurdity and outrageousness, all those throwaway jokes and allusions, these are strong cues to watch the film with a sense of humor.[8] To better understand Cox's parody, we can compare it to the conclusion of Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* that is a more appropriate example of pastiche. That film's final standoff scene relies on the same sources as Cox, the difference is that Tarantino does not call attention to the intertexuality, it is simply present as a method nodding toward the act of appropriation in which all films engage. Tarantino gives no clue to view the scene with either easy humor or strict morality. Even as Cox razes aesthetic conventions he leaves certain sociopolitical ones intact. Like Tarantino, Cox is maneuvering to portray himself as a stylist (read: artist) by imitating the styles of other directors and genres. It is his penchant for ridiculing them, however, that highlights his moralizing perspective. Cox's parody performs a double duty: it uses humor to critique the artifice of its target in the name of affirming itself an alternative.

A representation of postmodern reality is further developed through Cox's comic portrayal of early 1980s Los Angeles. Again, the subject of the postmodern world is delivered through humor precisely because Cox does not find it funny. The film's vision of America is of a power structure that limits individual freedom through government plots, illusory master narratives, and a mass consumerism pushing generic, anonymous products to distract an already dulled population. The mass media is implicated as another agent of social control as Otto's parents, in the costume of middle-aged hippies, sit transfixed and hypnotized by the blue glow of a televangelist railing against "the twin evils of Godless communism abroad and liberal humanism at home." Kevin, Otto's friend and foil, is another symbol of this mindless, zombie society kept diverted from its own repression through spectacles and consumerism as he sings the 7-Up jingle while stacking cans of generic peaches. Such scenes are influenced by both Marxist and poststructuralist theories of hegemony that divulge the secret lines of power controlling society and bodies. Religion, government, technology, and 1960s' youth culture

have all failed to keep their humanist promise of progress, now they help preserve the submissive mass of alienated individuals capitalism requires.

By taking control of the rules (the generic), manipulating instead of being manipulated, one finds a method for creating agency. Otto's characterization as a figure of ambivalent transgression is a vehicle for Cox's mixed response to postmodernism. Otto introduces the audience to the social milieu—his palindrome name symbolizes the boring repetition of his life—with a critical perspective. Lewis reads his transgression in the traditional terms of American individualism: "That Otto rejects [the] acquiescence [of mainstream society] helps to define his separation and heroism" (91). I disagree. Cox is contemplating the postmodern death of the subject to propose there has never been a centered, autonomous individual. The postmodern theorization of subjects as products of society and history leaves little space to rebel as people cannot totally free themselves from their social constraints.

From Otto's first scene rebellion seems to be his modus operandi.[9] As a self-described "white suburban punk," Otto physically enters the marginalized spaces of the inner city; he *chooses* to be there over the even more static social environment of his home in Edge City. Goshorn and Terry Andrews emphasize how punk affects Cox's style in "distill[ing] the anger and alienation of punk into the comic nihilism of the film's tone" (Andrews 410). Hoberman and Rosenbaum claim, "Punk had the same contempt for the music industry that the underground had for Hollywood" (278). Cox taps into this contempt, and the relaxed aesthetic standards of a DIY ethos, to invent the film's identity/status, but having Otto leave the subculture represents Cox's own turn to a more polished style.[10] Once again, the film's content expresses its formal endeavor to achieve marginality. The subcultural, a cultural outlaw persona, is appropriated to set *Repo Man* apart from the major studios. Just as Otto mines ex-centric groups for a subjectivity outside the center, the film uses the consciously marginal genre of the cult film to endow itself with authenticity. Breaking with form (or abusing it) is one of the markers of both cult films and punk, and it is also one of the factors that separates Art from the formulaic standards of uncritical genre films. Postmodernism disables the notion of an intrinsically high or low culture, but Cox still wants to believe in the power of the artist to break free of norms through uniqueness and originality. His

use of a reflexive stylistics delineates a space to position his work outside commercial, "brand name" cinema, raising it above the mass culture interested in making money or politically being, as he has put it, "some jumped-up, tin-pot, wanking piece of fascism like *Top Gun*" (Powers 35).

At this point a version of realism reenters. Both the repo men and punk characters exhibit generic aspects, but the former are what the punks pretend to be: full blown psychotics who live "intense" lives and get paid for it. This life of guns and "real live car chases" differs from the mock, ironic violence of punk slamdancing or walking with a swagger, and Otto's first brush with true intensity leaves him shaken when he is shot at while hot-wiring a car. (This scene is intriguing because Lite fires blanks [fake bullets] but "real" bullets are fired at Otto who is caught in the middle of a disjuncture between artifice and reality.) This is not a means for Cox to question how authentic Otto is about liking "tense situations" since he undermines that issue from the beginning. Otto shows little reservation about leaving punk for the repo job, but it does not place his authenticity under erasure since it never mattered in the first place. Contrary to critics who think Otto leaves the punk scene because of their "loose" morals or to find a larger meaning in the world, these are just costumes Otto chooses to wear because he does not like the ones back in Edge City.[11] It is more representative of a fluid identity that allows him the freedom to occupy different subject positions; just as the film itself does through parody. The continual disruption and mixture of form help Otto to avoid containment in one identity/genre. He adopts the repo man's uniform in a piecemeal fashion—moving from his punk regalia to a white t-shirt, then from a suitcoat (in generic light blue) over the t-shirt to wearing a tie. In the shootout scene Otto is wearing the generic blue sport coat to symbolize his cooptation is now complete. This is all the more emphasized in the prior scene when the repo wives tell Otto how rebellious their husbands used to be (one used to have a mohawk), which is then further stressed when Otto offers to make Debbi a repo wife. But Otto finally resists total recuperation into the mainstream by being dressed in one of the Rodriguez brothers' cholo-style shirts at the end.

Otto's transformation into a repo man has been read as a gradual inculcation sapping his subversive energy. Christopher Sharrett labels it a "shift from sub-culture to the arrogant, depoliticized petit-bourgeoisie"

(98). He fails to notice this is exactly the kind of punk rocker Otto admits to being. The film continually problematizes Otto's new source of identity. The "always intense" repo man's life as a deputized car thief is filled with amphetamine abuse and "going it alone," but there is another side to the supposed free-wheeling anarchy of this occupation/lifestyle: they are outlaws who steal in the name of financial institutions. Despite initially taking the job because his father has donated all the family's money to Reverend Larry, Otto adjusts without serious difficulty and begins to express a sort of pride in repossessing cars from "dildos who don't pay their bills." The repo man is a rebel who supports the power structure by protecting the interests of capitalism. They are a group who negotiate the system by not playing by its rules even if they do work in its name. This contradictory stance is best represented in one of Bud's conservative rants:

> *Bud*: Credit is a sacred trust. It's what our free society is founded on. You think they give a damn about their bills in Russia?
> *Otto*: They don't pay bills in Russia, it's all free.
> *Bud*: All free? Free my ass! What are ya, a fuckin' commie?
> *Otto*: No, I ain't no commie.
> *Bud*: Well, you better not be. I don't want no commies in my car. . . . And no Christians either!

What begins as praise for the credit system ends on an ironic liberal note. This duality parallels the film's own identity—it is fitting that a movie working both inside and outside the Hollywood system has its main characters doing the same with the American economic system. As Cox demystifies the quest for individuality in late capitalism, by representing rebellion co-opted at every turn, he is also reflecting on his own status as a filmmaker.

He (like Otto) does this under the aegis of an "individual" style—a localized agency that resists wholesale capitulation to the death of the subject. This is why Otto, formed by suburbia's failed vision of contentment and his own lowered expectations, is given a jaded cynicism that protects him from being a dupe. Whether it is the mass media's goadings to consume or the masculinist, macho discourse of the repo agents, Otto remains noncommittal. He allows people their discursive space but never completely accepts their discourses. Cox endows him with a degree of agency in a world where there are few chances to

express autonomy. Otto transgresses the dominant culture, but to impose too strong an expectation on him is unfair to the character Cox creates. Otto's acts of rebellion are more concerned with marking out a space he can negotiate with his own rules. He is a symbol of cautious hybridity capable of moving between the discursive lines of modernism and postmodernism precisely because he places little faith in either one, so he can shrug his shoulders and laugh at either one.

Otto balances himself in a liminal space between ideologies to deny a wholehearted conviction in the narratives of government, middle-class prosperity, religion, romance, machismo and 1980s capitalism. This occurs when Bud and Otto drive down a street littered with garbage and homeless people, which sends Bud on another rampage:

> *Bud*: Fucking trash! Makes you wonder how much they owe. If there was just some way to find out how much the motherfuckers owe and makin' 'em pay.
> *Otto*: Jesus Christ, Bud, they're winos. They don't have any money. You think they'd be bums if they did?

If Otto walks through his life without a clear politics, he knows when to walk away from one. He enters the radioactive Malibu in the penultimate scene with more a sense of curiosity than belief, guided by a hermeneutics of discovery instead of certainty. It is significant that Bud is allowed in the car once it is radioactive, but he can only drive it—Cox will not have it fly for him like Miller, the repo-lot's eccentric shaman figure. Miller is not interested in controlling the car, neither its potential use-value (like Bud's capitalism) nor its meaning (like the figures of social control). Otto, for his part, is not concerned with understanding it; he enters the car with a sense of wide-eyed indifference focused more on his desire for "intense" experiences to break through the anesthesia of everydayness—just a device that might prove he is a living being.

Contrary to Jameson's critique of intensity as too present-minded, too ahistorical, *Repo Man* acknowledges its debt to the past by having a style based on the hyperabundance and confluence of styles. This is also the power Cox gives to the character of Otto: an ability to see through discursive formations so he can use them, not be used by them (as Cox has done with genres). Linda Hutcheon has labeled this in-between state a "complicitous critique," where the postmodern text criticizes the socioeconomic effects of postmodernity "while never

pretending to be able to operate outside of them" (*Politics* 13, 25). Otto has to negotiate the discursive formations surrounding him because he knows he cannot escape them, he can only be wary and choose carefully.[12] Nevertheless, while the car may be a symbol of Otto's last attempt at escape from the system it also functions as a negative symbol in that such escape is only possible in a radioactive Malibu that takes to the air. In other words, it is only a fantasy.

Cox's postmodern aesthetic and critical paradigm—with its suspicion of naturalized truth, value, reason, and linearity—is juxtaposed with its own critical reading of how such a philosophy translates into "real" life. That his critique relies on humor to deliver the message signals an inability to divorce itself from the modernist discourses being dismantled; otherwise, as Cox is aware, the audience would have trouble getting the joke.[13] Lawrence Grossberg's opinion on postmodern social action sums up the film's sociopolitical stance: "the response of the Left to this crisis [of reduced radical investment] cannot be to define new goals or new moralities but . . . to enter the contradictory terrain of everyday life on which this postmodern formation is only one vector, to rearticulate it, to reconnect it, to the real concerns, needs, and struggles of people" ("Postmodernity and Affect" 165). The overriding concern in *Repo Man* is to reveal the devaluation of humanity and autonomy in late capitalism. Otto represents a gray area that blends two philosophies for a resistant subject position, which parallels the definition of art Cox posits throughout the film. As to whether *Repo Man* is postmodern or modern (realism is hardly a possibility), the reply must be that of most postmodern of answers: it is not a case of either/or, but rather both/and.

CHAPTER 7

WHITHER AGENCY?

> But the subject should not be entirely abandoned. It should be reconsidered, not to restore the theme of an originating subject, but to seize its functions, its intervention in discourse, and its system of dependencies.
>
> —Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?"

THROUGHOUT THIS WORK ONE MAY HAVE SENSED MY OWN LIMINAL ambivalence toward the individualist, a negotiation with a lingering sense of hope about the nonconformist's chances for success. The individual as a purely autonomous being is a fiction that furthers the interests of the dominant power structures, but when does this argument go too far, how does it shut down viable paths for resistance? In short, what of human agency? My intention has not been to police ontological boundaries, nor to condemn the one that does not adhere to arbitrary rules of authenticity. Nor, especially, is it to overly criticize subjects who do not rise to the impossible injunction to choose living in either "pure 'autonomy' or total encapsulation" (Hall, "Notes" 447). I hoped to emphasize the potentiality all these texts display, and how that should guide our thinking about the relationship between individuality and marginality.

In acknowledging the contingency of our identities we apprehend our ability to take control of them and envision how self-fashioning can aid personal sovereignty.[1] But in doing so it is important to be critical not only of our professed enemies but those we claim as allies. Frank Lentricchia remarks that "[I]t is the task of the oppositional critic to re-read culture so as to amplify and strategically position the

marginalized voices of the ruled, exploited, oppressed, and excluded" (15). True, but the critic's job should also include pointing out where oppositional voices do not quite meet the mark, when they become mired in playing the same game with slightly altered rules. This will serve us better than celebrating the smallest act of hybridity or privatized transgression as a triumph for humankind (no doubt some may think me guilty of this as well). Such a tactic only pulls the veil down tighter to hide from us the brutal truth of power. Deconstructing solely those acts and voices connected to the more obvious targets, or raising up those texts with even the faintest whiff of radical politics participates in our further subjugation by making the lines appear more distinct than they really are.[2] To forego taking a critical stance across the board, to silence those who do with a facile label of cynicism, is to shut down crucial avenues of political thinking. If cultural studies and the new(er) literary studies are truly interested, in George Lipsitz's words, with "engaging dominant ideology at the specific sites where it may be articulated and disarticulated" we must apply that standard to discursive formations along the political spectrum—left and right, white and nonwhite, rich and poor, what have you ("Listening" 621). Such a policy helps to ensure that "subversive" narratives and practices maintain the skepticism that prompted the decision to transgress.

I have revealed a long cultural pattern of contradictory white self-marginalization to next begin imagining strategies of transgression that could lead to stronger alliances. These connections start on the field of identity politics, but the aim should be preventing the self-ghettoization that occurs when groups narrowly focus on their personal coordinate of being a process of self-critique as this accomplishes little but short-term victories. We need contestatory border crossings, but they must avoid using representations founded on essentialist characteristics—both those imposed externally and taken on willingly—for these limit political praxis. Eventually we have to extend our politics beyond the self if we are to find a solution that can return to the individual subject and obtain what it needs for a peaceful, full life—however we agree to define it—in a way that allows others to do the same.

Individuals exist, agency exists, but both are located on shaky fault lines. The complicity I have highlighted is the result of an unquestioning

approach to an identity based upon, constructed by, and thoroughly infused with the system it wants to escape from. These figures are caught in those structures due, on one hand, to the logic of individualism, but also since they run to a space defined by ideologies of the center. As Althusser and others show us, how subjects perceive and define themselves—from their values to emotional responses—are thoroughly constructed, so one must question, challenge, and then rethink again how individuality can take a different form. To understand the complexity of self-inscription is to grasp how we can build more self-reflexive spaces to facilitate agency. All the texts exhibit *potentiality* in calling out the dominant as a reflection and extension of the logic of whiteness. Even with voluntary marginalization read as a self-defeating act, the protagonists are denying the absolute authority of white bourgeois culture. The fact that they even entertain the choice is an initial step toward liberation. They are then more capable of creating physical and philosophical alternative spaces for resistance through both material and symbolic means.

Margins are *possible* and can be sources of critical and political power; however, they are incomplete and finally ineffectual. Although people have to become alienated from the system before they choose to change it, alienation alone is inadequate. The possibility for transgression is clearly present in the attempt, but just leaving to become marginal is not enough. One enters a vicious circle: saying there are no possibilities for real resistance, then retreating to a privatized peripheral existence—to don identities in an unending game of cat-and-mouse with the master narratives—benefits the system of closed categories. It is a matter of finding the spaces that are not completely filled in by power in order to establish bases of existence that allow us to connect with others.

This brings to the table different ways of thinking about what the other side could look like, what alternate social formations could take to fight totalization. We start to see that, perhaps, the best thing we can hope for is multiplicity, for more and more difference to weaken hierarchies and demystify the discourses—all of them. When we see the core as a construct then all the marginalized voices can cease to be "marginal," becoming simply different and equal. This theory bothers those who charge "relativism" in order to protect their authority to dictate the sole correct system for a "truly concerned" humanist to hold.[3] What is overlooked in the contest to define a proper response, thus defining the proper human being, is how the moment we decide there is nothing

transcendental about our beliefs our individual subjectivities transform into merely one of many voices. There are no longer any enforced margins nor centers, and we can recognize that identities, like narratives, are localized and functional, personal and provisional, and this may have a chance to prevent the violence of having a naturalized sense of self worshipped as the one and only Truth.

One path this politics can take is extreme, not to mention nigh impossible, but it might, in theory at least, prove more effective in reducing the negative social ramifications of essentialism. I turn here to the idea of the emptied self, of casting off devotion to the idea of a unified identity. Scott Michaelsen argues that there can never be a "non-noxious" identity because "identity itself is that which produces, grounds, and guarantees dominance" ("What's 'White' " 78). Moreover, the prescriptions commonly concocted to find "benign" subjectivities exclude "the majoritarian, dominant forms of such identities" from the imagined plurality (79). Jean-Luc Nancy's theory of the "inoperative community" is a model meant to counteract this tendency. Community is reconfigured as being "formed by an articulation of 'particularities,' and not founded in any autonomous essence that would subsist by itself and that would reabsorb or assume singular beings into itself" (75). Unity is based on a multiplicity of "singularities" in Nancy's vision, and that reconceptualized sense of unity rejects defining difference as an opposite because we are all composed of differences—we are all others. The result is that subjects break with a notion of community as a shared identity built on exclusionary "origins," recognizing instead how we are alike only in our differences.

The inoperative community uses difference to weaken the rise of a "communion of singularities in a totality superior to them and immanent to their common being," to create a community defined by its "resistance to the communion of everyone or to the exclusive passion of one or several: to all the forms and all the violences of subjectivity" (Nancy 28, 35). David Johnson and Michaelsen pick up Nancy's lead in their critique of border theory (and identity politics in general) for still investing in the unique self.[4] They contend that subjects should slip into an undifferentiated "we" persona for

> which differences mean nothing, add up without sum . . . It is no longer a question of inclusion or exclusion, no longer a question of taking it personally,

> no longer a question of affiliation (brotherhood) or identity. Differences make no difference . . . [when we are] a community, a plurality, that produces no culture to which "we" belong, no identity "we" can call our own. (4, 21)

This "unidentified 'we' " is born out of the always already blurred lines that make up the so-called distinctive identities (21). Destroying in order to create, the emptied self opens up the multiple possibilities for subjectivity (the meaning of that term itself becomes hazy) that will dislodge any faith in concreteness.

It is a matter of taking on a new assumption, a different ground from which we think about identity to have a society where everyone is constantly (re)inventing the self—infinite performativity embracing the mulattoness of all cultures and individuals; indeed, actively pursuing it to replace purity (pure being, pure identity) with the mantle of mongrel. Subjectivity can be opened wide to accept all sources and influences, more willing to ingest the diversity they are already immersed within until the only sure identity is a fragmented one. "Whiteness" as a monolithic entity disappears, but so do *all* essentialist definitions until each individual is more like a culture unto him- or herself.[5] Conceivably, all is a matter of personal taste, a preference rather than an unimpeachable choice based on the good and true.

The problem for any political imagination is figuring out how to become a reality. The inoperative community theory will strike some as the old liberal pluralism in which everything is said to be equal by eliding difference in a universalistic paradigm, all the while ignoring the historical structures of oppression. It is not. Markers of Otherness are not wiped away by a fantasy of universal humanity, instead a universal dis-humanity enables an ever-expanding universe of identities more difficult to pin down or contain within narratives assuming likemindedness. It becomes harder, then, to make reference to *any* mythical norm that can benefit from perpetuating a universalist investment in positive similarities against negative differences. Foucault calls this space of condoned disorder a heterotopia: "fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry . . . [as] things are 'laid,' 'placed,' 'arranged' in sites so very different from one another that it is impossible to find a place of residence for them, to define a *common locus* beneath them all" (*Order* xvii–iii). There is still the mark of an individualistic evasion in this idea's claim that one should change the self in the hope that it will have larger

social reverberations, but if the system will not change subjects then the only hope is in subjects opting to change the system. Besides, the individual is always the starting point for any version of a collectivity.

Since all this remains at the level of possibility, it is fair to ask what a theory of the emptied self does for us now when the center's influence shows few signs of weakening. What cultural text can encompass this multifaceted and faceless "we"? How will it work? I confess my answer is a cop out: That must remain the topic of a different project. I am uncertain what this world would look like—who could since it requires letting go of clear demarcations? I am not even convinced there can ever be a space without a "they." Before taking on texts trying to utterly rethink the lines of otherness, I thought it necessary to return to some long deployed by those wanting to define individuality in an American context as a centered self. *Repo Man* brings us closer to a different approach, but the emptied self is not the identity these protagonists are pursuing. What we did find were authors who, akin to their characters, do not fully live up to the expectations imposed upon them. They give us treatments of self-marginalization that are neither entirely liberatory nor oppressive, but this ambiguity is not always accidental. The disjunction broaches the issue of how individuality and marginality can deal with power; that is to say, where we might succeed but also why we might falter. In emphasizing the potentiality all these texts display we are reminded that the dominant culture can be negotiated. Yet one must continually question how any level of agency is authorized, as well as the effect that grand illusion of the autonomous self will have on those located outside that personal center.

Notes

Introduction

1. Likewise, borders and self-marginalization have long informed the imagined shape of American subjectivity and the art that tries to represent it. Giles Gunn and Leslie Fielder offer two well-known approaches to the topic. Gunn's goal is to elucidate the ethical dimensions of otherness and how it can "make us a little more human" by pushing the self "to transcend its own perimeters" (207). Since the contact in the texts I examine occurs in the name of self-interested individuality, I find his overarching claim of expanded humanity tenuous. Fiedler's thesis is that the major American texts used to uphold the individualism discourse are meditations on "the mutual love of *a white man and a colored*" (with all its implications of latent homosexuality) ("Raft" 146). The racial Other holds out a masculine freedom for the white character, while the authorial impetus is one of guilt—the desire to be loved by those the nation has offended. By labeling the characters' motivations as self-interest, not remorse, I see the authors exploring the possibilities and fallacies of self-marginalization, so the "mood" of appropriation is quite different from Fiedler's warmer aura.
2. The clearest absences in my choice of Othered categories are sexuality and gender. I do not examine males who choose homosexuality or femininity for a transgressive persona. Feminism (along with the civil rights movement) helped lay the groundwork for critiquing the center's invisibility, but the misogyny tying women to the domestic sphere makes the feminine a rare choice for self-marginalization. Furthermore, using the feminine for an oppositional subject position depends on the rationale and assumptions underlying the choice: is a male appropriating accepted markers of femaleness or femininity to challenge the patriarchy by confusing gender binaries, or does he believe he is embracing his "true self." Either may provoke the same response from the dominant culture, but the motive determines whether norms are being attacked or perpetuated.
3. The rise of the urban spawns a related anxiety over the state of white gender because the discourse of the independent "self-made man" that defined masculinity for earlier generations no longer seemed applicable in the domesticated city. The dominant version of whiteness is itself often feminized by ascribing a Dionysian freedom to nonwhites that can help white males break the restraints civilization places upon their "natural" manly desires, sexual and otherwise.

As the city spreads ever further across the landscape, and deeper into people's lives, the possibility of finding a wilderness against which to define and prove one's manhood also vanishes. I make reference to the anxiety of masculinity where useful, but the topic has been covered by others; see Baym ("Melodramas"), Fiedler, Kolodny, and Joyce Warren. Little, if any, outright questioning of the patriarchy occurs in the texts, even if individual male characters are criticized—another layer of collusion that keeps them attached to the center.

4. For intellectual histories of individualism consider Bercovitch, Dallmayr, Mansfield, and Taylor. See Bellah et al., Glazer, and Lukes to get a sense of how broadly conceived individualism can be. Patell offers an overview and critical analysis of contemporary debates concerning the idea. Briefly, individualism, at the root of liberalism, defines freedom as the unquestioned right to self-interest and self-aggrandizement in competition with others. Barry Shain reveals that individualism was not always the reigning assumption in American sociopolitical philosophy. A spirit of communalism held sway while individualistic tendencies were censured as a sin against self-control and self-sacrifice (86, 115). He accuses nineteenth-century thinkers influenced by Romanticism, such as Emerson, of making individualism the new hegemony. This is also when the word begins to enter the social vocabulary by way of Alexis de Tocqueville—although 1839, a year before him, is the earliest known usage in American writing (Patell 36).
5. Poststructuralism denounces the possibility of an autonomous subject but Marxists gave them their cue. Marx could claim a conviction in the existence of individuals as he condemned individualism (*Grundrisse* 83–84). Horkheimer and Adorno propose that capitalism survives by selling products that promise uniqueness, and consumers are so mired in private desires they become incapable of collective action.
6. A contradiction in some postmodernist theories is that the deconstruction of the individual reconstructs a subject that still wants to be separate and free of the internal effects of external power (as aesthetic selves, schizos, and nomads). Another irony is their call for pluralism, increasing the number of recognized voices and perspectives, even as they situate themselves against believing in individuality. See George Yúdice's inquiry into the likely political (in)effects of postmodern marginality, and his genealogy of marginality in notes 2 and 3 is relevant to border theory. Winfried Fluck interprets self-fashioning as substituting fantasies of radical subjectivities in lieu of real political praxis, a philosophy concerned foremost with the self that can be reincorporated to support the center's power (61).
7. I follow the Lacanian model of distinguishing between the other—as a marginalized person with control over her subjectivity (simply a difference amongst others)—and the Other who lacks that autonomy (is represented and spoken *for*).
8. Chicano studies exploration of *mestizaje* is where many locate the field's "origins," refer to Calderón and Jóse Saldívar's *Criticism in the Borderlands*. The common element in border studies is liberating being and thought from either/or paradigms through physical and psychic dislocations. Edward Soja adopts this as a foundational tenet in his call to join diverse resistant communities in the

margins. He argues that physical space inherently influences mental space, which influences one's politics. Soja claims to have an effective strategy for resisting binarisms "by interjecting an-Other set of choices" built from materials found in the margins (*Thirdspace* 5). Victor Turner's earlier theories of liminality posit a place "betwixt and between" two modes of being, namely, the enforced order of culture and the disorder one experiences outside its laws and worldview (*Dramas* 14). Yet Turner disdains those marginals who reject reincorporation. Border theorists treat that refusal, and its concomitant mobility, as the point from which radical subjectivities can find the necessary agency to resist hegemony. What is more interesting and politically useful to them are the experiences of liminars who choose that space to make their own cognitive maps. Such sites of resistance present the chance to build an alliance politics working to affect shared issues of domination. For a critique of border studies' broad assumptions see Johnson and Michaelsen's "Border Secrets."

9. A partial source on appropriating otherness is found in Judith Butler's theory of performativity. She advocates manipulating the identities available to us to denaturalize categories of sex, gender, class, and race; this can enable people to assume subjectivities that transgress the lines of identity. Crossing into marginal territory for an oppositional identity is exactly what the protagonists and writers I discuss thrive on—negotiating permissible boundaries to construct a sense of self. I would deemphasize her strategy of parody, however, since it necessitates finding instances where people occupy roles identified with the center. The protagonists do not "play" with the *idea* of the Other. They work from the premise that a truer self exists somewhere in the world—it can be found and lived—so it cannot be read as the adoption of a parodic persona.
10. Ruth Frankenberg summarizes the field's shared tenets: "whiteness refers to a set of locations that are historically, socially, and culturally produced and, moreover, are intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination. Naming 'whiteness' displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of its dominance" (*White Women* 6). Some sources for guideposts to whiteness studies include Hill's *Whiteness*; Delgado and Stefancic's *Critical White Studies*; and Fishkin's "Interrogating 'Whiteness,' Complicating 'Blackness.' " Literary studies turns to Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* for its indictment of an unnamed whiteness in canonical American literature (the assumption that characters, and readers, are white unless noted otherwise) that asks, "What parts do the invention and development of whiteness play in the construction of what is loosely described as 'American'?" (9). For a critique of whiteness studies' assumptions see the articles by Walter Benn Michaels and Robyn Wiegman.
11. Of course, if whiteness is the concept then its sum total of social or cultural attributes cannot be disconnected from how race influences the social apparatuses that make subjectivities available. Ian Haney López brings it back to the living bodies those institutions inculcate: "Race exists alongside a multitude of social identities[.] . . . We live race through class, religion, nationality, gender, sexual identity, and so on" (xiii). On a related issue, "nonwhite" is a dubious word because whiteness remains the ideal against which everything is

compared to be understood, to make sense. I still use the term since whiteness is repeatedly named and marked as the normative center in these texts.

12. There are varied approaches to this issue. Frankenberg warns against eliding the problem of structural racism by homogenizing whiteness into an undifferentiated group of like tastes and beliefs (*Displacing* 19). Fishkin makes the hybridity argument in "Interrogating 'Whiteness' " that white and black cultures are so intertwined it is impossible to call either one pure. Finally, there is the opinion that it is always false to think there is such a thing as white culture since it is based on absence and emptiness—defined according to what it is "not" (Dyer *White* 78).
13. Valerie Babb uses the phrase "ideology of whiteness." Both her and my positions have roots in Althusser's formulation of ideology as "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (162). Ideology (and interpellation) creates agents in an apparently meaningful world by having people accept, and live, the common values and knowledge(s) that give the world a particular condoned shape, thus ideology attains materiality through bodies that believe in and conduct their lives according to what comes to be called a culture. Unfortunately, the analysis of "white" ways continually teeters under the weight of an unnamed essentialism, a common blind-spot in whiteness studies, that does not distinguish between whiteness in its dominant mode and the variability of white identity—whiteness remains singular, and white people perform it without subtle deviations; thus, it becomes just another stereotype, another racial slur relying on transparent classifications. Not everyone with light skin matches this standard, nor wants to, even as they reap the benefits of white privilege.
14. Refer to Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak" and "Subaltern Talk." Spivak argues that subalternity is not comparable to marginality (defined simply as difference in relation to a dominant culture). Subalterns lack access to "lines of mobility," they are shut out from sites of power and refused incorporation. The marginal, on the other hand, can enter the mainstream at certain nodes.
15. Norman Mailer's 1957 essay "The White Negro" is held by many as an exemplar of this problem for taking "devalorized attributes (primitivism, violence, insanity) [and] simply revaloriz[ing] [them] as emblems of alienation from dominant cultural norms" (Gubar 178).
16. John Locke is commonly named as the *locus classicus* for this theory (Macpherson says Hobbes). Humans enter an unspoken social contract to protect their property and are free subjects as long as they do not break the laws. But those who lack property now become free beings through property in the person. We all "own" ourselves and can freely enter contracts to "sell" our abilities (i.e., our labor). In *Capital* Marx demystifies the notion of "freely entered" labor contracts, while poststructuralists and new historicists have highlighted the gap between the theory and its practice throughout history.
17. Gupta and Ferguson respond to the same issue: "discussions of identity . . . all too easily fall into the model of possession and ownership embodied in discourses of the sovereign subject . . . [such that] the individual subject is taken as a pregiven entity" ("Culture, Power, Place" 12).

CHAPTER 1 "THEY'RE AFTER US!": CRIMINALITY AND HEGEMONY IN *HUCKLEBERRY FINN*

1. On Twain's critique of individualism, see Blues; Jehlen; James Johnson; and Shulman. Robinson's study of "bad faith" is especially useful. One of the few other pieces to deal with this issue in a fully developed manner is Michael J. Hoffman. Our examinations are similar in critical method, textual evidence, and thematic concern; however, we differ on the notion of agency integral to hegemony theory and the nuances of subversive power I accord Huck as the narrator.
2. This point is indebted to David Kaufmann's reading of the conclusion as a satirical confrontation with the audience. Twain exposes the readers' own "sham" morality by deceiving them into believing Huck will grow into a free and moral individual. But I differ from Kaufmann on Huck-the-narrator, seeing Twain as sharing credit with Huck for the satiric deception at the end.
3. I will only touch upon the issue of self-marginalization through a racial association. Huck does not assume any outright performative characteristics of a black male to increase his distance from society, but there are two views of this relationship worth noting. Rhett Jones reads the partnership between Huck and Jim in positive terms: the boy changes his ideas and becomes compassionate as he learns firsthand about black culture. He concedes that Huck's racism is intact by the conclusion, but it begins to transform into a mutual respect as Jim becomes a father figure, teacher, and friend. James Johnson, on the other hand, sees the relationship as one with Huck maintaining dominance (95). My resolution of these two sides lies in seeing Twain as restraining Huck's fuller social evolution to suggest the *potential* of appropriating characteristics of Otherness. By experiencing different cultural forms one progresses beyond the master narratives to view them as arbitrary public fictions. See Shelley Fisher Fishkin's study of the influence black culture had on Twain's work in both *Was Huck Black?* and *Lighting Out*; see also Jonathan Arac's critique of it in *Idol*.
4. Presentism, or interpreting the past through contemporary concepts, fears that one will lose the sense of an author's historically rooted intentions, but this underestimates how a person can think beyond the limits of *epistemes*—to be intellectually "ahead of" their time. See Steven Mailloux's "Rhetorical Hermeneutics" for a discussion of the public reactions to juvenile delinquency in the 1880s.
5. Biological theories are based on a eugenic approach, claiming that criminals are predisposed to deviance due to physiology, body type, and heredity. Psychological theories supplanted this by attributing crime to varied mental, emotional, and personality disorders; in other words, abnormalities. This method would emphasize Huck's history as the abused child of an alcoholic father. Victor Doyno (Writing 55–56) and Rosemarie L. Coste have grafted the modern checklist for children-of-alcoholics onto the novel; it fits but remains insufficient to explain Huck's choice. In fact, he comes across more well-adjusted than he probably should. In the sociological camp, Albert Cohen's work on gang/subculture delinquency sees it as a self-constructed culture by lower-class juveniles due to their failure to meet middle-class standards. This theory does not

get us very far in interpreting Huck's motives because his problem is not "status frustration" (denied the rewards of a bourgeois life)—being forced out of society is exactly what he wants. The "cultural transmission" school built on Cohen's model by treating deviancy as a learned behavior dependent on sustained contact with the norms, beliefs, and values of a criminal influence (Flowers 130). This environmental response opens a view to Huck's actions, yet also proves unsatisfactory. Huck's peer group in St. Petersburg is a dead end, the children are mischievous trouble-makers but hardly antisocial deviants. Huck's father is a more likely source (being "brung up wicked") and Huck often refers to Pap's lessons on rationalizing minor criminal behavior (80).

6. In the 1899 essay "My First Lie and How I Got out of It," Twain inveighs against the "lie of silent assertion," which, like hegemony, works as an unspoken common sense that "nothing is going on which fair and intelligent men are aware of and are engaged by their duty to try and stop" (441). Twain turns to the example of slavery to disclose the "universal stillness that reigned, from pulpit and press all the way down to the bottom of society" in justifying the institution (440).
7. Scott Carpenter is correct in his assessment of such a questioning, but he attaches a subversive purpose to Huck that he believes is still in effect by the conclusion. Although the early Huck rejects Tom's gang, Carpenter does not see the later Huck as mimicking Tom's ideological positions on race and the primacy of the individual.
8. Victor Doyno's afterword to the Oxford edition addresses this issue through the context of the violence surrounding the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. He describes the novel as an "ironic retrospective foreshadowing on Twain's part" that the West is thoroughly shaped by Eastern settlers, so viewing the territory as a space of freedom is a naive fantasy.
9. Joseph Sawicki emphasizes Huck's mastery of literary techniques that obscure "the existence of the shadow figure of Huck the narrator standing behind the protagonist and retelling events" (695). John Earl Bassett also observes that "[c]ritics often reduce the distance between Twain and Huck . . . to simplify the satiric inversions of the opening chapters" (92–93). Barry Marks's study of the text's "double tiered" structure uses the terms "narrative present" and "narrative past" to distinguish between Huck as protagonist and narrator. I prefer Sawicki's terms: "Huck the protagonist" and "Huck the narrator."
10. See Robinson's discussion of this issue and how it speaks to the reader's own self-deception if one thinks Huck is on his way "to the liberation and flourishing of his 'real' self" (206). Hoffman also hits on the objective of this subterfuge: "It is important that the reader be deceived, so that what happens to Huck later on will shock him into seeing that the problems posed in the book are unresolvable either in fiction or in life" (31–32).
11. Chadwick-Joshua, Kaplan (in Graff), Mailloux, and David L. Smith all analyze this scene.
12. Twain's ridicule of Walter Scott and parody of *Hamlet* (see Jehlen) are attempts to demystify cherished texts. Leo Marx is the principal source on the vernacular in the novel, while Arac critiques "the 'vernacular' as a notion depend[ent] on

a system of social stratification and hierarchy" (*Idol* 161). As for Huck's voice being his own, obviously Twain is responsible for its textualization, regardless of his ironic preface guaranteeing authenticity. Concerning the influence of African-American culture on that voice, refer to chapter 1, n.3.

13. Useful sources on the racism debate are Arac's *Idol*; Chadwick-Joshua's analysis of Jim's characterization and morality; and essays in Graff and Phelan and *Satire or Evasion?* (Leonard et al., eds.), especially David L. Smith.
14. Jones, Mailloux, MacLeod, Schmitz, and David L. Smith all contextualize the novel in relation to the post-Reconstruction era. .Fishkin also provides her thoughts on this topic (*Was Huck Black?* 70–76; *Lighting Out* 100–08, 116–21). This work counters those who condemn the novel's treatment of slavery as lacking depth, such as Donald Pease who claims Twain seeks an "end to ideology" by using "slavery as a pretext for practical jokes and burlesque" to "believe himself forever free from divisive contexts" (11). It is surprising that a critic so insistent on the benefits of context in literary analysis would so blatantly elide it.
15. Once again, Fishkin is a useful source for grasping the level of Twain's transgressive melding of white and black cultures, see chapter 1, n.3. This exemplifies the power of an author to move beyond social and creative boundaries to posit an alternate vision. Twain's hybrid style is counterhegemonic in that it disturbs the unquestioned "whiteness" of American literature.
16. Kenneth Lynn discusses how southwest humor, which Twain is associated with, and the oral tradition of yarnspinning used stories to express subversive ideas in a more palatable manner; also see Henry Wonham.

CHAPTER 2 STEPHEN CRANE AND *MAGGIE*'S WHITE OTHER

1. The terms realism and naturalism are typically conflated in recent criticism, as well as being placed under suspicion by those who call for rethinking literary history; see Bell and Glazener (6). Nevertheless, I think we find enough repeated generic and philosophical patterns to claim realism and naturalism are distinctive. In short, Crane and Dreiser are quite different, and quite deliberately so, from Howells and James; see Pizer for the standard lines of demarcation. Also refer to chapter 6 for Bourdieu's theory of how "newness" is deployed in the field of cultural production.
2. For historical overviews and comparisons of the criticism see Kaplan on naturalism and Colvert on postmodern treatments of Crane.
3. Allen, Ignatiev, Jacobson, and Roediger (*Wages*) each study the experience of not-quite-white ethnics who were brought into the white fold to increase the political power of "pure" Anglos.
4. Bell, Conder, Gandal, Mariani, Pizer, and Ziff all comment on Crane's style.
5. The voyeurism argument common to naturalism studies is applicable to the position Crane offers his readers as they watch the Bowery characters and peer into their lives (see Conder and Golemba). Mariani argues that Crane makes poverty and violence "into spectacles to be enjoyed by an audience of which the

reader and the narrator are also part," calling it the " 'pure' gaze of the bourgeois spectator" (81, 87). I think this is only partly accurate as he also exposes it as plain brutishness, as un-"white." The spectacle element is still there because this is frightening (and exciting) to the middle-class readers; however, Crane has taken away the romanticized cushion of heroism that his slum characters use to frame their actions. Gandal points out Crane's complicity as a "consumer" but is more forgiving than Mariani in claiming that he "is also attacking himself" for the pleasure he took in watching slum spectacles (84).

6. See Dowling and Mariani for extended summaries of slum fiction. Mariani's Marxist critique of the genre argues it masks real social problems with fairy-tale endings of protagonists who rise out of the slums. But his alternative is equally fanciful: the authors should have given endings with happy resolutions, showing the poor realizing their own agency and affecting positive political change.
7. Gandal describes the Bowery as a substitute frontier for exploration since the West is now closed to masculine adventurers wishing to escape the dullness, moralism, and perceived feminizing domestication of civilization: "The slum is both a danger zone that provides opportunities for adventures and heroism . . . and a separate culture . . . whose unrefined or more 'primitive' virtues offer a tonic for a tired middle-class society" (21). Also see Benfey, Kaplan, and Howard for similar assessments of how the city is typically characterized during this period.
8. See Gandal (49–57) for a reading that uses such details to frame *Maggie* as an ethnographic treatment of the slum.
9. By 1900 approximately 61,000 blacks lived in New York (Goldfield and Brownell 222–23). The home for black cultural life before Harlem was an area south of Times Square called the Tenderloin. Christine Stansell attributes whites' limited interest in the area partly to racism but also points to how its offerings were more "bourgeois." In short, it lacked the Lower East Side's faddish rebel cache of "tawdry grandeur" (25–26). (Stansell mentions Crane's arrest during an 1896 vice raid in the Tenderloin.) Thus, one explanation for the lack of a black presence is that Crane is focused on the Bowery and there simply were not many African Americans there. But this is complicated by *How the Other Half Lives*, Jacob Riis's 1890 photo-documentary of Lower East Side slum life. Riis has pictures of black-and-tan saloons where the races mingled, and since Crane was influenced by Riis's work, and was supposedly dedicated to experiencing every nook and cranny of the Bowery, it is odd to not have just one black character walk down the street or stand on a corner like his strategically placed "Chinaman."
10. In a similar vein, Kenneth Warren 's *Black and White Strangers* uses James and Howells to examine realism/naturalism's often oblique response to racial problems in the post-Reconstruction era by writing novels that avoid making race a "substantive" issue (10, 12).
11. See Alan Slotkin for a detailed linguistic analysis of dialect and slang in the novel.
12. Conder and Golemba are other sources on how Crane deploys stereotypes.

13. For all Crane's self-positioning as an antisentimentalist his plot is not that different from the earlier melodrama of moralistic women's novels. Maggie makes the incorrect choice by falling in love with Pete and entering his shallow world of spectacle. This results in being kicked out of her mother's home and having to become a prostitute, hence to her being killed while on the job. It is a gritty assessment of life on the street, but is also an old-fashioned conduct novel. Solomon calls this parody, but I am unconvinced.
14. Mariani critiques Crane for being a fatalist, not a determinist, who avoids historical cause and effect explanations for social conditions and denies his characters agency. One problem is that Mariani works from the assumption that Maggie's death is a suicide rather than a murder, so she dies simply "because the author decides she has to" (26). First, as a fictional character it is incredible to assume Crane would not have his plot follow a plan. Mariani might say I have missed his point to which I would counter he has missed Crane's. My analysis of Jimmie's transformation is evidence enough that Crane's take on environmental influence recognizes cause and effect—not everything "just happens" in this world.

CHAPTER 3 ONE OF NONE: QUASI-HYBRIDITY IN *THE SUN ALSO RISES*

1. Homi Bhabha offers a rationale for people to develop "in-between" subjectivities outside the old parameters: "hybridity . . . [is] where the construction of a political object that is new, *neither the one nor the other*, properly alienates our political expectations, and changes, as it must, the very forms of our recognition of the moment of politics" (25). To attribute the theme of hybridity to *The Sun Also Rises* is not an aberrant approach. Gerry Brenner claims Brett and Romero "yok[e] the ethical principles of hedonism and traditionalism," but rejects Jake as a hybrid because he "neither chooses between [these principles] nor synthesizes them in himself" (101). Peter Messent is more positive, giving Jake a decentered identity that can "mov[e] between a series of overlapping and often contradictory subject positions" (56).
2. In 1952 Carlos Baker ascribes a moral purpose to the novel: "Hemingway chose to declare himself out of the alleged 'lostness' of a generation whose vagaries he chronicled" as an "ennui and emotional exhaustion which is everywhere implicitly condemned" (77, 93). Earl Rovit repeats this gesture (*Ernest Hemingway* 128, 140), but Jake is just as often assigned the accolade of prototypical expatriate found in Philip Young's 1952 thesis of the code hero as a Fisher King figure.
3. Malcolm Cowley (3) and David Minter (143) both point out the novel's cultural impact in America as people began to drink heroically and mimic a Lost Generation pose of jaded stoicism. The irony is that the novel is dealing with the demise of the first wave expatriates' way of life due to this sort of pleasure-seeking latecomer.
4. David Zehr uses the public/private theme to discuss Hemingway's critique of the expatriates, Jake's marginal relationship to them, and the stereotypes

attached to that life (156). He deals with the Paris chapters at length, but ignores certain scenes and details that contribute to the idea of Jake's hybridity.

5. The novel included a more explicit statement about the work ethic and Jake's opinion of the expatriate lifestyle up to the proofs stage: "I always felt about the Quarter I could sort of take it or leave it alone. . . . Those who work have the greatest contempt for those who don't. The loafers are leading their own lives and it is bad form to mention work" (qtd. in Svoboda 135). For a Marxist-influenced counteranalysis of work in the novel refer to Baldwin's *Reading*.
6. It warrants repeating that Irish and Italians were classified as nonwhites upon arriving in America; see chapter 2, n.3. E.R. Hagemann offers some background for this vignette that, if true, shows Hemingway consciously inserted the racial/ethnic conflict.
7. Reynolds narrates how Hemingway submitted "The Battler" as a substitute story at the request of Liveright before they would publish *In Our Time*. Hemingway used "nigger" but the publisher changed it to "negro" (*Paris Years* 279). For another view of Hemingway's use of African-American characters see Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark*.
8. Anti-Semitic slurs are used casually in his personal letters, yet they also reveal close friendships with Jews, specifically Harold Loeb (the source for Cohn) and Gertrude Stein. It is unwise to fall into the *roman à clef* trap by misunderstanding how Hemingway manipulates the "facts" (see Svoboda and Reynolds); still, it matters that Hemingway expresses feelings of affinity for Loeb in his letters. In his apology to Loeb, written after their infamous argument in Pamplona, Hemingway is quite self-critical: "I'm thoroly ashamed of the way I acted and the stinking, unjust uncalled for things I said" (*Letters* 166). Even this limited evidence intimates Hemingway is more guilty of being angry with a particular Jew and permitting himself to take the low road of racist stereotyping to "fight" Loeb in his writing rather than venting an internalized anti-Semitism.
9. Linda Wagner-Martin argues that the stereotyping follows Hemingway's pattern of splitting off from a mentor, in this case Gertrude Stein. This explanation carries weight when one notes how Jake feminizes Cohn by accusing him of being "moulded by the two women who had trained him," suggesting the author feared being considered the product of Stein's influence (45). The theory becomes more valid when Harold Loeb claims in *The Way It Was* to have helped get *In Our Time* published by Liveright (238–39). Also consider Josephine Knopf's positioning Cohn in Jewish literary tradition as the stock type "shlemiel," a bumbling trickster who is a device for social criticism (67). She argues that Cohn's infractions of the code are a missed opportunity for Hemingway "to make meaningful social commentary" without the racist implications (68).
10. I apply the scare quotes to racist because placing Jews within a racial category is not the consensus today. Janet Helms thinks ethnicity speaks more to a group identity based on shared cultural behavior, values, and beliefs. Karen Brodkin continues to refer to Jews as a race, complicating this with the term "ethnoracial." American political discourse of the late nineteenth century was

invested in whiteness but the word "did not carry the same meaning that it does in the late twentieth century . . . compris[ing] many sharply distinguishable races. The categories 'Celt,' 'Slav,' 'Hebrew,' and 'Anglo-Saxon' represented an order of difference deeper than any current notions of 'ethnicity' " (Jacobson, *Special Sorrows* 185). It is during the early twentieth century that scientific narratives about race have a more widespread influence on racial thinking, see Sander Gilman on theories about the superiority of Anglo-Saxon blood.

11. As in *Huckleberry Finn*, the first person structure of *The Sun Also Rises*, with the addition of the plot's autobiographical roots, presents the usual problems about where to draw the line between author and narrator. Hemingway creates Jake as both narrator and author of the text, and while that does not relieve him of responsibility for any racist content it certainly complicates matters. Despite Hemingway's self-promotion as a writer who does not hide behind language, he is a cagey author who presents ideas in a way to forestall the reader from arriving at any one "true" interpretation. I use "Hemingway/Jake" or note the "dual" authorship in other ways when I think it is important to consider both the real author and the invented one as responsible for designing the story with a specific intention.
12. The decision to make Jake a Catholic becomes all the more meaningful when we recall that Hemingway had not converted at this time. Although framing himself as a believer, Jake's failure to perform devoutly the rituals of Catholicism (a system of order the modern world lacks) is an extension of the path hybridity takes in the novel.
13. See Walter Benn Michaels's *Our America* on nativism and modernist American literature. The few parts examining *The Sun Also Rises* (26–29, 72–74) are concerned with the treatment of Cohn as a Jew, and I aim to refute Michaels's opinion that Hemingway is an outright racist using Cohn to articulate a parochial, xenophobic response to immigrants.
14. As concerns the prudence of applying Sartre's theory to the novel see chapter 1, n.4. Gilman's work on cultural representations of the Jewish body documents how many wished to be accepted as phenotypically and culturally white in the twenties (179, 238).
15. For varied treatments of homosexuality in the novel see Blackmore; Clifford; the Davidsons; Elliott; Messent; and Moddelmog.
16. A sense of idealized memory influences Hemingway's opinion of the Basque country despite warning his friend William Horne against nostalgia in 1923 (*Letters* 85). His correspondence prior to the novel continually uses the "good old days" for a yardstick to praise Spain's unspoiled land and fishing that remind him of his summers in Michigan.
17. See David J. Goldberg's *Discontented America* and Jacobson's *Whiteness of a Different Color* for extended examinations of this law.
18. My analysis foregoes the ritual aspects of the bullfight. Two useful sources are Allen Josephs on Jake's spiritual quest through the *toreo* and Angel Capellán's study of Spanish culture in the novel. For negative views see Bigsby, Baldwin, and the Davidsons.

19. C.W.E. Bigsby, Harper, and Baldwin read Jake as a political quietist disengaged from a critique that can lead to action. I do not completely disagree, for the "separate peace" Jake runs to in San Sebastian can be taken as a privatized answer to his problems (Bigsby 207). Another way to approach this is through Jameson's theory of the political unconscious, in which literature becomes an ideological act by offering imaginary solutions to social contradictions. In this light, I consider *The Sun Also Rises* to be consciously political because it refuses to reconcile or cover up any of its contradictions. Little if anything is resolved by the end, so Hemingway resists offering tidy answers that would force sense on the social world.

CHAPTER 4 BACK TO THE FUTURE: *SUTTREE* (AND *THE PIONEERS*)

1. For similar reactions to and extended discussion of Mailer's "white Negro" see Gubar (176–89), Wald's "One of the Boys?" (159), Roediger's "Guineas" (662), and Sollors (26–27). Steve Wilson makes a nod toward critiquing Kerouac's romanticization of economic and racial Others in *On the Road* and *The Subterraneans*; nevertheless, his reading remains at the level of explicating a thematic pattern rather than unpacking the ideological assumptions informing it.
2. There are only a few essays focused solely on *Suttree*, but all of them mention the act of self-imposed marginality. Bell calls attention to Suttree's "chosen isolation and poverty" ("Ambiguous" 38) and how for him "alone among his derelict friends this choice is a real one" ("Death" 73). Shelton depicts Suttree as "alienated by his own choice, not by irresistible social or economic forces as are most of the other residents of McAnally Flats" (73). Finally, Young labels the act a "self-exile" (73).
3. Bell attributes McCarthy with an antimodernist sentiment. He believes that one purpose of the novel is to "restore to American literature a grounding in the humanistic value that the extremes of modernism continue to threaten to dissipate and obscure. For McCarthy a belief in the reality of other people is the first principle of responsible existence" ("Death" 114). I would counter this by pointing out Suttree's desire for "uniqueness" and individuality make him thoroughly consistent with the modernist project, and his eventual rejection of community prevents this humanist message from being represented in the text.
4. William Spencer uses this part of the novel to interpret Suttree as being on a mystic quest.
5. McCarthy subtly lets the novel speak to the context of its publication. New-age spirituality's focus on the self can be linked to the popularity of self-help movements in the 1970s. The problem was not the structure of society but, rather, the level of control a person could have over those conditions as they affect the individual. It should also be noted that this idea of self-discovery is nothing new in American culture and literature, finding expression to some degree in every "cultural revolution" since the Puritans.
6. Much of the work discussing race in Cooper tries to encompass the Leatherstocking series as a whole or centers on *The Last of the Mohicans* to draw

out generalizing claims for the other four novels. Too many analyses strive to accomplish too much, locating common elements and then charting their transformation in a manner conflating differences and forgoing a more nuanced treatment of the individual text. Other critiques take up David Noble's 1964 argument that Cooper aims to "destroy the myth" of the American Adam in having Natty "facilitate the reconciliation of Judge Temple and Major Effingham . . . [and thus] American and English culture" (426). Similarly, Brook Thomas accuses Natty of serving Major Effingham and endorsing the hegemony of property rights, while Leslie Fiedler (*Love* 195–96) and Susan Scheckel each claim that Cooper is trying to justify—to his own moral and financial benefit—the historical record on Indian abuses and land ownership. I am more inclined to take Effingham as another sign of Natty's nostalgia for the old days since the Major is a symbol of decay: his fine clothes are now "threadbare and patched" (436); he looks "decrepit," "vacant," and "feeble" (437); his mind is frozen in the past and he feels a "childish pleasure" about a carriage ride (442); and Oliver celebrates the Major's past glories in a manner akin to Natty's treatment of Chingachgook and himself. Such details sway me to read Cooper as saying the union between Effingham and Temple is a false hope.

7. Adams takes a different tack by accusing Cooper of indifference about Native Americans being denied the same legal identity as whites: "Like the concept of the 'noble savage,' the realization of Indian identity through law had no meaning for Cooper, or his America" (21).
8. This contradicts Tompkins dismissal of Bumppo in *The Last of the Mohicans*, in which she leaves her reader to assume that an overgeneralized explication is applicable to the entire series. "Only by clinging to the notion that he has remained true to his 'gifts' as a white man and a Christian, can Natty preserve that sense of cultural belonging without which he would have become another Magua—*for a villain in Cooper's calculations is someone who is not true to his kind*" (118–19, emphasis added). Natty hardly lacks a supremacist mentality in *The Pioneers*, but this reading ignores how Cooper has him antagonize his natal culture in the first Leatherstocking novel.
9. Saxton's analysis of the novel is problematic: Natty is subservient to the "white gentry" and this is "typified by his relation to Judge Temple and family in *The Pioneers*" (n.13, 202). Natty does acquiesce to the judge, but to argue that he does it without coercion is not the impression Cooper gives the reader. If by "family" Saxton is referring to Bumppo protecting Major Effingham, the meaning of that act remains uncertain. As concerns the outlaw persona, I find it curious that Mark Twain held such rancor for Cooper's work when *Huckleberry Finn* shows the matter of style is the only point at which they really break: both novels are set a generation in the past (as Arac notes, "Nationalism" 29), obviously we have the theme of racial bonding, and there is the similar critical celebration of an author being an advocate of personal sovereignty; taken further, the protagonists' identities are forged out of being classified criminals and both authors have darker purposes in that they critique the agency of individuals—be they inside *or* outside society—and condemn the freedom associated with the American West as a false promise. Obviously, several of these are also applicable to *Suttree*.

CHAPTER 5 L.A. PUNK'S SUB-URBANISM

1. My bookends encompass the point at which punk becomes a recognized scene in L.A. to its transformation into hardcore and final wane into cliché. There is typically a line drawn between punk and hardcore that places the latter in the 1980s, characterizing it as faster, more violent, and less artistic than the first phase (see Blush). Hardcore is all of these, but several of the "later" punks had been active in the early scene. Too often these periodizations are wrapped in the discourse of the hipster's dirge, delivered to remind everyone who the "creators" are once a scene sparks the imagination of people outside the guarded circle. Black Flag is a band associated with hardcore who existed near the beginning: "White Minority" was first recorded in January 1978, after the Germs' first single but before Dangerhouse released the *Yes L.A.* compilation. Stories about Hollywood art-rockers being pushed out by dumber, rougher "adolescents who'd had enough of living in a bland Republican paradise" rarely mention that hardcore bands had been blocked from the scene by the key clubs (Hoskyns 313). So, the hardcore aesthetic is an Other of the Other.
2. In *Resistance through Rituals* John Clarke et al. give the now standard theory of subcultures as a politically limited symbolic response to social contradictions (47).
3. See Mike Davis for a history of the development and political mobilization of L.A.'s suburbs, especially Chapter 3. Lipsitz gives a detailed history of the Federal Housing Administration's racist practices in making home loans that resulted in the overwhelming white demographics of postwar suburbs (see *Possessive*).
4. See Soja on the economic shifts in L.A. during the 1970s and1980s and how they construct physical sites affecting sociopolitical space.
5. This is not to claim that punk was quietist nor that L.A. punk lacks a class politics, but the majority of class critiques are expressed in general terms without direct reference to the period's economic problems—the poor are exploited, the (presumably white) rich are exploitative. The Dils sang about "Class War" and declared "I Hate the Rich"; later the Minutemen released "The Product," "Working Men Are Pissed," and "Themselves." One exception is the Circle Jerks' "When the Shit Hits the Fan" from 1983, a song that vacillates between criticizing both Reaganomics ("Social security has run out for you and me") and welfare recipients ("Let's all leech off the state"). Even if the song is a lament for the dying white middle class, to my knowledge it is an anomaly in the 1977–1984 L.A. punk catalogue.
6. References to freedom are overwhelming in their number and variety in punk rock. Sometimes the privileging of autonomy is stated overtly, in other instances the idea is more inherently bound up in the theme of a song as a critique of dominant values or knowledge. For, example, Suicidal Tendencies' "Two-Sided Politics" is a manifesto of individuality in which everything is divided along a line of me and that-which-limits-me: "I'm not anti-society, society's anti-me." In *Sound Effects* Simon Frith claims punk "was *about* the relationship of individualism and collectivism" (267). He does not discuss this point in detail, but it opens the question of how these two forms of social interaction operate in the punk ethos. The subculture strives for a reconciliation between the individual and the

group, between difference and a generic sameness, but the individual remains the privileged element with more value placed on the freedom of the self and its agency. As for political collectivity, there are many instances of punks acting as part of a group: the antinuclear movement, Rock against Racism concerts in England, and organized political events in the DC scene.

7. The details of punk as a style and approach to cultural production have been dealt with at length. See Hebdige; Henry; Laing; Savage; and Shank as sources attending to this topic in depth. For more general histories and commentaries on L.A. punk see Belsito and Davis; Hoskyns (291–330); James; Jon Lewis; and Spurrier.
8. See Hebdige and Lester Bangs on the connection between punk and reggae. See Lipsitz's " 'Ain't Nobody Here' " and "Against the Wind" on rock's origins in working-class culture and black and white cultural mixing during the postwar years. Grossberg's "Rock, Territorialization, and Power" (90–93) is a useful counterargument to Lipsitz.
9. Lipsitz presents a rock history similar to, if more positive than, Fryer's. He considers American hippies moving to inner-city neighborhoods to be "a real rebellion in dialogue with the traces of previous working-class cultures and urban life" ("Against" 129; also see his less optimistic treatment of the topic in "Who'll Stop the Rain?"). Punk was always self-conscious about the historical residue of popular culture they lived in and manipulated it for their own bricolage style, but there is a drive in punk to elide certain histories to make itself more original. That this spirit of marginality had been lost within the deeper corporatization of popular music during the 1970s imbues punk with its own energy, but it is only one link in the history of turning to stereotypes of racial Otherness. Self-creation as an Other has opened a political space for every generation to question the status quo; therefore, when situating punk in rock history we find that its proclaimed break with the mainstream is a conventional, though still significant, act of rebellion.
10. I want to be clear on the matter of racial and class diversity in L.A. punk subculture. The punk scene parallels L.A.'s multicultural population as whites, blacks (Black Flag's producer Spot), Latinos (Alice Bag, Ron Reyes, and Dez Cadena of Black Flag, the Zeros, the Plugz, and Suicidal Tendencies), Asian Americans (Dianne Chai, bass player for the Alleycats; and Kenny, a teenage fan interviewed in *Decline*), and others gather in the same social spaces. Nevertheless, it must be conceded that white people constitute the subculture's overwhelming majority. See Lipsitz's *Dangerous Crossroads* for an analysis of Chicano punk bands articulating a social critique rooted in their own experiences to a largely white "alienated suburban youth" audience (85). Also see Josh Kun's article on how many Eastside Chicano punks felt "invisible and unrecognized" by the Westside white punks, so in 1980 they opened their own club in the barrio that became a site for racial and cultural crossover.
11. For a take on existence not explicitly concerned with suburban life consider X's grim images of an urban landscape in "We're Desperate" and "Nausea" where life is a series of hardships and hassles. The elision of suburbia as the place one calls home also occurs in Fear's "I Love Livin' in the City" and the

Circle Jerks' "Behind the Door," both of which rely on images of a seedy, noirish sub-urban environment with dark and violent naturalistic imagery. Regardless of whether these bleak pictures are autobiographical or clichés of hard-living, they erect a boundary between two ways of life: one is risky, painful, and exciting, the other safe, unfeeling, and dull.

12. The word reached its vogue in the 1980s (Christopher Jencks 28; Morris 107–10); however, George Russell wrote a *Time* cover story on "The American Underclass" in 1977, the year, perhaps not so coincidentally, typically marked as punk's year zero as a global phenomenon. Also see Micaela di Leonardo (112–44) and Piven and Cloward on the underclass debate in the Reagan years. Michael Katz presents a history of welfare in America, including the rhetorical tropes used to discuss it.
13. That there are boundaries restricting the kind of marginality one is allowed to pursue is another level of contradiction in punk's rebellion. For a counterhistory of punk and racism see Roger Sabin. In terms of gender the subculture remained determinedly masculine despite the increased opportunities for women to express their own sociopolitical critiques. The very interest in a life typified as "tough" is indicative of punks accepting the stereotype of virility attached to certain nonwhite and lower-class identities, which then posits suburban males as white, feminized, and sensually reserved. See Lauraine Leblanc's *Pretty in Punk* for a fuller analysis of female participation in punk. As concerns sexuality, Spurrier quotes Nicole Panter: "The scene wasn't racist, but it was definitely homophobic" (124). This is displayed during the Fear show filmed for *Decline* when Lee Ving baits the audience by calling them "queers" and "homos." It is all a performance, but these are the words he chooses to provoke his audience's negative energy—and they respond by hurling homophobic slurs back with their spit. The lesbian folksinger Phranc tells Spurrier, "I think there were a lot of queers within the punk movement, but I don't remember anybody that was really out" (124). See D. Robert Dechaine on how this transforms in the 1990s with the rise of the "queercore" movement.
14. Punk's challenge to whiteness is further conflicted by the music itself as it seems to call attention to and play up its "race." Punk, like *all* music in the rock category, is a hybrid, but the connection to African-American culture is less obvious than the 1960s British Beat bands who cited R&B and blues as their influences. In emphasizing the treble over the bass and speeding up the tempo for an aggressive dancing style, punk was not out to woo the masses more enamored of disco which grew from the popular "black" dance music of the day (Hebdige 68). Disco promoted itself as easygoing and unthreatening entertainment—punk did not (Frith, *Sound Effects* 274–77; Stephen Miller 239). Both use a reified primitivist discourse long associated with black identity (and queerness in disco): celebrating the body as a release from daily worries or to express indignation. Some imagine punk as bleaching out rock's "blackness," but as a bricolage of rock history punk is thoroughly grounded in African-American culture (see chapter 5, n.8). Punk's own interests echo the naturalized attributes critics and musicians often cite to explain what rock learned from "black" musical traditions: "honest" expression, high energy,

and emotional passion, and using music to articulate dissent (see Grossberg's "Territorialization").

15. Judith Butler's work on performativity, as a way to "contaminate" discursive formations, might seem applicable to L.A. punk's use of the sub-urban space where they "act" or "perform" differently. Crossing into the margin is dangerous from the center's perspective because it challenges the stable narratives of the social order, revealing (sometimes accidentally) that *all* identities are a form of costume and performance. Applying her model of transgression through a parodic magnification of ordained identities is limited in this case (see Introduction, n.9), although parody and irony were often used in punk music and fashion. For the most part, punk would have to wait for riot grrrls in the 1990s to have anything resembling a truly parodic treatment of regulatory identities. By appropriating signifiers of femininity juxtaposed with misogynist words written on their bodies—backed up by highly political lyrics—they present an image that goes beyond the humor of parody to blatant social critique (see Gottlieb and Wald).
16. David James places the blame for punk's eventual depoliticization upon itself: "Having by definition no positive terms, and in the absence of any social movement that could supply them, punk was thus condemned not only to manifest itself purely as style, but condemned to manifest itself as a style that would always be in the process of pushing itself over into self-parody, to the point at which it would find itself able only to mimic its former gestures" (169).

CHAPTER 6 *REPO MAN*, AMBIVALENCE, AND THE GENERIC MEDIATION

1. For those unfamiliar with the film, one plot revolves around two alien corpses that have been smuggled off the Roswell, New Mexico military base (the reputed government hiding place for evidence of UFOs) in the trunk of a Chevy Malibu and the CIA's search for them. The second plot concerns Otto, the aimless young punk protagonist, who becomes a repo agent and associates with the tough-talking men who teach him the business. The two plot lines finally thread together when a $20,000 bounty is issued for the Malibu. The story ends with Otto joining Miller, the repo lot's crackpot sage, in a flight through downtown Los Angeles in the now radioactive car.
2. I assume that some will raise another issue of categorization: My classifying this an American film since the director is an English expatriate living in Los Angeles. If T.S. Eliot and Henry James can pull double shifts in the literature anthologies then the same can be applied to Alex Cox. Additionally, as I argue, Cox draws from Hollywood genres and the film's political work is firmly rooted in the context of Reagan's America.
3. Modernism is defined here less as an artistic style than through a postmodern conceptualization of Enlightenment rationality and liberalism. Cox's modernism has more in common with a 1930s social progressivism than the aesthetics of the 1920s, although a version of avant-garde practice (not synonymous with modernism) drives him artistically. As for postmodern film,

it has been fairly easy to receive this label. If a story is set in the future (preferably after an apocalypse); and/or there is an overwhelming presence of computers and robotics; and/or the narrative ignores smooth transitions or tight closure; and/or the characters' subjectivity is (even slightly) in question; and/or the dialogue and performances are eccentric; and/or the cinematography has the jerky, angled tilt of a music video with a frantic editing style, then critics have been quick to brand the film postmodern.

4. Hoberman and Rosenbaum's 1991 afterword cites *Repo Man* as an example of how the midnight aesthetic has been popularized. They have a problem with films that are too whimsical or "stylish" because it makes the message of dissent ineffective (282). This becomes an issue of sincerity or authenticity, which Rosenbaum essentializes by framing stylization as a negative quality for being too self-conscious (323).
5. Although a year away from brat-pack notoriety, Emilio Estevez was recognizable after appearing in television movies (one as a troubled-teen) and Francis Ford Coppola's major release *The Outsiders* (1983). Harry Dean Stanton was also a "known" actor but brought a degree of rebellious symbolic capital with him for his association with the 1960s counterculture.
6. Goshorn gives a more elaborate analysis of the early 1980s to situate the film as a critique of conservatism and the Reagan presidency. The protection of white privilege in Reagan's policies is obvious: large tax cuts for the rich, weakening the power of antidiscrimination laws, and attacking social welfare programs as the source of the nation's woes.
7. As an utter side note, I find it curious that Jameson's work on postmodernism is concurrent with the years the movie is being made and released; and I wonder if it is mere coincidence that we see the Bonaventura Hotel—Jameson's (and Mike Davis's) symbol of all that is wrong with postmodernism—in one of the few L.A. skyline shots.
8. A few such throwaways include allusions to William S. Burroughs's evil Dr. Benway being paged in a hospital; a new-age book called Dioretix (punning on L. Ron Hubbard's *Dianetics* and diuretic); and the acronym of the group trying to find the aliens, UFO, standing for the United Fruitcake Outlet. His attitude toward these last two is further proof that Cox still favors modernist narratives.
9. There is an attendant, perhaps extratextual, critique of postmodern whites to be found here: the issue of postmodernism itself being labeled a centrist, "white" reaction to the changing political status of nonwhite groups. Some critics question the reason for deconstructing subjectivity at the moment nonwhites, long lacking control over how they are publicly portrayed, were aggressively sanctifying racial identity as the nucleus of a political agenda to acquire parity. See bell hooks' "Postmodern Blackness," as well as Patricia Hill Collins and Jon Michael Spencer for various African-Americans' perspectives on this debate.
10. David James describes L.A. hardcore as a dualistic culture that practically matches *Repo Man*'s position: it was "the only white musical production that was both populist and avant-garde. . . . In social terms these polarizations

produce punk as the final modernist capitulation to decadence, irrationality, and despair or as a completely recalcitrant stance against the bland conformity of mass society and the naturalization of consumption within it" (167). This makes the connection between the film and the subculture seem that much tighter, but there is a caveat: by 1984 punk had lost its shock currency for adolescent rebels. There is a sense then in which Cox, despite his affinity for punk, characterizes it as just another coopted consumer good (shown by satirizing the "punk" radio station KROQ as "mellow" and having the Circle Jerks "sell out" as a campy lounge act). The buffoonery of the punk gang as drugged out, bumbling criminals indicates criticism of the subculture and better accounts for why Otto can walk away from it so easily.

11. The critics split on this topic, positing Otto as either aimless and powerless or a questing apprentice knight (with Bud as the mentor). Goshorn issues a useful critique of this idea, but he treats Otto as a human with real psychological motivations (relying on characterological factors to which the audience is not privy) rather than a narrative device.
12. Goshorn has his own take on Cox's controlling form to maneuver between the extremes of postmodern skepticism and a naive modernism.
13. That Cox expects his audience to understand the humor and irony used in the film further establishes a boundary of differentiation by being aimed at those who will *not* be shocked or angered. Hoberman and Rosenbaum call this the "one-upmanship" attitude of cult film audiences—if you get the joke you are one of us (324).

CHAPTER 7 WHITHER AGENCY?

1. Lawrence Grossberg summarizes this more nuanced approach to subjectivity: "Antihumanism does not deny individuality, subjectivity, experience, or agency; it simply historicizes and politicizes them, their construction, and their relationships. If there is no essential human nature, we are always struggling to produce its boundaries, to constitute an effective (hence real) human nature, but one which is different in different social formations" ("Circulation" 183). Also see Easthope (180–81).
2. For example, this very project is implicated in the same infraction as those I have examined. Ultimately, I am attempting to distinguish myself professionally and politically by writing about a traditional topic with methodologies that were once disparaged and excluded. I thereby tap into the same desire to present myself as an individual and nonconformist, and the gesture is carried out by using the Other.
3. See Michaelsen's insightful critique of this tendency in *Border Theory* and "What's 'White,' and Whither?" He labels it a sentimentalist tendency, referring to nineteenth-century American domestic fiction that marks out the territory of "right feeling" to exclude those "inferior" human beings who fail to meet the mark of a required emotional response to social problems.
4. Walter Benn Michaels's "Autobiography of an Ex-White Man" also discounts any belief in "real" identities. If I understand him correctly, Michaels, like

Michaelsen, argues for flushing the self free of all sure identity distinctions, especially the racial, to rethink what a subjectivity can look like, what it can mean.

5. Some argue that it is acceptable to identify with whiteness as long as it is understood to be a constructed and multiple subjectivity, not held as innately superior (indeed, not innately anything at all) nor used to shape public policy for the benefit of one group. As Henry Giroux proposes, white people can then "see how their whiteness functions as a racial identity while still being critical of those forms of whiteness structured in dominance and aligned with exploitative interests and oppressive social relations" (312).

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