

ART/WORK: WHITE-COLLAR CREATIVITY, 1960-1970

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## ABSTRACT

Ben Rogerson: Art/Work: White-Collar Creativity, 1960-1970  
(Under the direction of Gregory Flaxman)

My dissertation examines mid-twentieth century American art that poses artistic autonomy against the drudgery of white-collar work. Employed in increasing numbers in the cultural industries after World War II, artists feared that they were becoming conformist breadwinners rather than independent bohemians. Translating these concerns into crises of form, the artworks that I study present themselves as if they were produced under the conditions of managerial capitalism – film editing that follows corporate logics of efficiency, for instance, or novels that reduce dialogue to bureaucratic formulae. To resolve such crises, these artworks imagine new forms of creativity liberated from the workaday world. I argue, however, that these artists come to realize that their valorization of artistic independence is not opposed to the economic values reshaping midcentury American labor but is, in fact, derived from them; their celebrations of flexibility and self-direction, in other words, make them prototypes for modern “no collar” workers who are freed from the traditional nine-to-five office grind at the peril of becoming disposable workers.

Over the course of four chapters, I cover artists working in four different media who recognize the costs of the new work arrangements: Billy Wilder celebrates Hollywood independent production in *The Apartment*, only to lament workers’ disempowerment in his later films; Richard Yates’s novels reassess the ethic of artistic suffering once entrepreneurial, “literary” publishing imprints appropriate the rhetoric of risk; John Berryman’s poetry volume

*The Dream Songs* comes to understand foundation fellowships as inducements to self-exploitation; Lee Friedlander embraces photography commissions at the expense of career stability. Ultimately, I contend that these artists—ostensibly free agents—anticipate the precarious laborers who inhabit a neoliberal world of contingent work arrangements, institutional distrust, and vast economic inequality.



To my parents, Andrew and Elizabeth Rogerson.

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## INTRODUCTION: THE ARTISTIC CRITIQUE

This dissertation investigates 1960s American film, poetry, fiction, and photography that define artistic autonomy in opposition to the routines of bureaucratic white-collar work. After World War II, midcentury artists increasingly found “white-collar” employment in workplaces such as universities, Hollywood studios, publishing houses, public relations firms, and mass-circulation magazines. Paid to perform mental labor that they derided as routine, midcentury artists often depicted the stable careers, hierarchical management, and staid institutional culture of the corporate workplace as stultifying, if not as antithetical, to art. However, emphasizing the “work” in these midcentury artworks demonstrates that they are not only exercises in asserting artistic autonomy, but that they also develop hypotheses about working autonomy as well. Indeed, the image of the artist as an ideal worker has become ubiquitous; the same characteristics that conferred integrity on the artist—say, resistance to routines and commitments to creativity—have become standard operating procedure for today’s worker in the advertising agencies, internet startups, and graphic design firms that typify the contemporary “no-collar” creative industries.<sup>1</sup> Thus, this project ultimately argues that these artistic critiques of midcentury white-collar work produce a genealogy of the post-Fordist work arrangements that underscore contemporary notions of creative and professional work. But in an increasingly market-oriented society, the “new romance” with creative work obscures new antagonisms that are perhaps more intense, if not more insidious, than those associated with the white-collar routines and vertical corporations at midcentury (Fraser, “Feminism” 109). By deriding the midcentury workplace, midcentury artists advanced the seemingly humane values of the contemporary workplace—

values such as flexibility, creativity, and self-direction—that have been used to legitimate precarious and contingent work arrangements, to collapse social welfare, and to usher in radical uncertainty about the future. Yet this dissertation argues that these same artists, and these same artworks, provide a flashpoint at which to re-imagine forms of creativity that recognize the importance of robust institutions, as well as respond to calls for economic justice.

This project engages these complex issues by examining artworks that exaggerate white-collar work into the basis for what the contemporary social geographer David Harvey calls a “total way of life” (“Fordism” 135).<sup>2</sup> As we will see, the idea of a total way of life abstracts from the complex and concrete institutions, habits, and norms that sustained Fordism, a mode of capital accumulation and social regulation regnant in the United States between 1945 and 1973. In the total way of life, bureaucratic organizations—if not a single monolithic Organization—threaten to subjugate social existence in its entirety. The rich social relations of family, work, and community recede to low ebb. In the total way of life, it does not quite make sense to say that institutional distrust is rampant since the Organization effectively extinguishes institutions altogether. In this telling, the organization does not serve a citizenry by providing a “socially ordered grounding for human life” or rules that express “moral obligations” (Heclo 38). Rather, rules exist only as empty rites that perpetuate the power of the organization; citizens serve the instrumental and technical ends of the Organization, satisfying its cold zeal for efficiency, standardization, and control. Indeed, the point is precisely that the Organization does not limit its calculations to the workplace. Rather, it extends its rationality beyond the walls of the office and the façade of the skyscraper to underwrite the very elements that we generally regard as exempt from the routines of white-collar work. “Everyday life,” so the story goes, “is taken over by the capitalist machine” (Chiapello 71). In so doing, life is reduced to common Fordist denominators

that can often be encapsulated in a single, damning image: the white-collar corporate drone repeating a monotonous task in a vast open-plan office. No matter where he goes and no matter what he appears to be doing, the drone always remains “inside” the office, always “on-the-clock” and, at the behest of the organization, always performing a degrading, routine task that renders him less man than machine.

These artworks caution us, as the literary critic Sean McCann puts it, that “the nefarious Organization is everywhere” (303). And so too were depictions of the Organization, most prominently in midcentury fiction, film, and sociology. As we will see, even poetry and photography, fields with little ostensible relationship to this narrative (or to narrative as such) exhibit signs of its stresses. The tone and the politics of these depictions run the gamut, stretching from the darkly or sentimentally comic to the tragic, from traditional conservatism to consensus liberalism to psycho-political radicalism.<sup>3</sup> A small sample of novels that prominently feature the Organization includes Janoth Publications in Kenneth Fearing’s *The Big Clock* (1946), the Group in Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22* (1961), the Combine in Ken Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1962), and Yoyodyne in Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966). In film, prominent examples include Consolidated Life in Billy Wilder’s *The Apartment* (1960), the Organization in John Boorman’s *Point Blank* (1967), and the Electronic Labyrinth in George Lucas’s *THX-1138* (1971). Sociologists were not to be outdone. By the mid-1960s, decrying the total way of life had become an academic cottage industry sparked by the surprise success of David Riesman’s best-selling *The Lonely Crowd* (1950). Other influential jeremiads such as C. Wright Mill’s *White Collar* (1951) and *The Power Elite* (1956), William Whyte’s *The Organization Man* (1956), and Herbert Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), among countless forgotten others, presumed the hegemony of the Organization when they assessed what

Riesman called “the changing American character.”<sup>4</sup> In many of these books, that character was dystopian. Within the cogs of the Organization, so many white-collar white males were precipitously pitched to lose their masculine individuality and, as a result, to be conscripted into the homogenous armies of other-directed persons, little men, organization men, and one-dimensional men.<sup>5</sup> The specter of the Organization and its white-collar drones even haunt less hyperbolic depictions of the midcentury life, particularly through symptomatic fears of conformity, corporations, and the rat race.

### **Routine Criticisms**

In sum, these cautionary tales about the total way of life warn of its eminent realization and, more often than not, model strategies for forestalling or extinguishing it. More to the point, these examples suggest that the critique had become no less ubiquitous than the Organization it would target. Put simply, complaints about sclerotic organizational routine had become routine. But the habitual nature of this complaint was not its only telling feature. Oblivious to the ways in which they typified a mass society, mass-circulation magazines like *Life*, *Look*, and *Collier's* fretted about “Gary Grays” and “The Group” without any noticeable irony (Leonard 25, 29). When *Reader's Digest*, a magazine with a circulation of 12 million copies, had the audacity to reprint an article entitled “The Dangers of Being Too Well-Adjusted,” it prompted the sociologist Daniel Bell to note a “curious fact” about conformity and, by implication, the critique of the total way of life: despite widespread alarm, “no one in the United States defends conformity. Everyone is against it, and probably everyone always was” (35). As a result, the primary “problem” associated with these ubiquitous critiques is identifying just “who is accusing whom.”



This project addresses Bell's problem by re-describing narratives or depictions of the total way of life according to two interrelated approaches. First, the project situates the total way of life within the dynamic horizons of American capitalism and its critiques. This approach follows the recent work of French sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello by trying to understand how critique shapes the "spirit of capitalism," or the "*ideology that justifies engagement in capitalism*" (*New Spirit* 8, emphasis theirs). Continuing in this vein, I argue that depictions of the total way of life attempt to delegitimize the spirit of midcentury Fordism, the period designating the "long postwar boom" in the United States between the years 1945 and 1973 (Harvey, "Fordism" 129). David Harvey has provided a seminal summary of Fordism as "series of compromises and repositionings" between the state, corporate capital, and organized labor (132):

The state had to take on new (Keynesian) roles and build new institutional powers; corporate capital had to trim its sails in certain respects in order to move more smoothly in the track of secure profitability; and organized labour had to take on new roles and functions with respect to performance in labour markets and in production processes. The tense but nevertheless firm balance of power that prevailed between organized labour, large corporate capital, and the nation state, and which formed the power basis for the postwar boom, was not arrived at by accident. It was the outcome of years of struggle. (132-33)

It is no surprise that images of "malevolent organizations" develop against this backdrop of vertical corporations and government bureaucracies, mass production and mass consumption (Melley 6). Harvey's summary is important because it also stresses that the most salient features of Fordism were "not arrived at by accident" but were instead "the outcome of years of struggle" ("Fordism" 133). Indeed, Fordism signifies an imperfect and piecemeal response to what Boltanski and Chiapello call the "social criticism," or social critique.<sup>6</sup> Most closely associated with labor movements in the 1930s, the social critique makes broad demands for economic redistribution—that is, for "rising standards of living, increased social mobility, and 'a better

life', underpinned by great equality of opportunity" (du Gay and Morgan, "Understanding" 16). While failing to invest workers with decision-making power on the job, midcentury Fordism did more adequately address the social critique's pressing concerns with "inequalities, misery, [and] exploitation."

Crucially, the social critique's wide-ranging demands for "security" formed the second spirit of capitalism and shaped the breadwinner, the "ideal-typical citizen" of Fordism (Fraser, "Feminism" 101). He is the white-collar middle-class man who matures, Barbara Ehrenreich has argued, by working to support a family (1-51). In self-congratulatory tales of the American Century, this breadwinning Ward Cleaver lives the good life by striking a harmonious balance between the demands of work and leisure, middle management and suburban family. On the clock, this security characterizes a labor force with expectations of full employment and hierarchical promotion from the cradle to the grave. Off the clock, security also characterizes the breadwinner's "family wage," which allowed him and his family to "[participate] in a mass consumption society"—a new world of suburban houses stockpiled with cars, televisions, and refrigerators (du Gay and Morgan, "Understanding" 16). The same economic growth, the same mass industrial production and mass commodity consumption, that makes possible this breadwinner also reorganizes the more traditional relationships that obtained between autonomous masculine selfhood, work, and leisure. The bourgeois entrepreneur who epitomized the "first spirit" of capitalism was dead; the vertical corporation instead exalted the technocratic manager, the dreamer of plans, as its "heroic" worker (Boltanski and Chiapello, *New Spirit* 18). But even this manager could not stave off images of the lifeless bureaucrat. For the professional-managerial class, the writing was on the wall for the quality of white-collar work: the formation of large hierarchical firms, with imperatives towards bureaucracy, centralization, control, and

discipline, accelerated the erosion of professional prerogatives. But what of it? With basic “quantitative” needs satisfied, so the story goes, through technological advancements and egalitarian redistribution, social critics insisted that work mattered less, and that there would be less of it. In the coming “post-capitalist,” “post-scarcity,” “post-industrial,” or “abundant” society, sociologists anticipated that the elements of an autonomous self would be “increasingly formed for leisure and during leisure” (Riesman 248-49).<sup>7</sup>

In other words, Fordism signifies “an attempt to silence [the social critique] by satisfying it” (Boltanski and Chiapello, *New Spirit* 199). However, depictions of the total way of life suggest that Fordism also incubates a second critique whose challenge it was less equipped to silence. Indeed, the total way of life is recognizable as a species of what Boltanski and Chiapello call the “artistic criticism,” or artistic critique.<sup>8</sup> Unsurprisingly, this critique partly originates in the romantic, anti-bourgeois positions of the Parisian “bohemian lifestyle (Chiapello 38). In a recent essay, Chiapello summarizes the familiar concerns that compel the artistic critique, especially as it pertains to midcentury Fordism:

The whole life of a human being finds itself shaped by capitalist processes: not only his working life but even his consumption patterns and education. Everyday life is taken over by the capitalist machine. Life has lost all authenticity, depth, and unexpectedness. The useful and the functional reign supreme. This is recognizable as a criticism of mass society, the consumer society (Baudrillard, 1970), the self-perpetuating growth of the technical (Ellul, 1964), societies of control and discipline (Deleuze, 1990; Foucault, 1975), submission to the logic of the tool (Illich, 1973), learned needs, and indoctrination (Marcuse, 1964). (71)

In this telling, the artistic critique’s “main concern is the transformation of lifestyles in a capitalist society” (Chiapello 71). Such lifestyles need not be politically revolutionary. Take, for example, the Beat and the playboy, two examples from the United States in the 1950s. These lifestyles articulate the artistic critique in order to reject (Beat) or perfect (playboy) the comfortable bourgeois consumption of the white-collar worker. For Chiapello, these types of

examples demonstrate a basic limitation of the artistic critique—it shows “very little concern for ... the workers’ lot.” Her summary also clarifies important differences between the artistic and social critiques. Whereas the social critique challenges capitalism as an economic system that exploits workers as a class, the artistic critique challenges it as a system that alienates the individual from his essential nature. Which is to say, the artistic critique lets us understand why the white-collar drone serves as such a pivotal image, focalizing internecine conflicts between prevailing “spirits” and upstart critiques of capitalism. Whether it is shown as harrowing or comically pathetic, the white-collar drone rebukes the breadwinner’s security as a complacent disguise for inauthentic pleasures and sclerotic routine. Rather than spurious security provided by the organization, the artistic critique claims that we need “an ideal of liberation and/or of individual autonomy, singularity, and authenticity” (Boltanski and Chiapello, “New Spirit” 176)—that is, we need the freedom of artists.

As the relationship between the social critique and Fordism suggests, critiques of capitalism can become “contingently constitutive of its spirit (du Gay and Morgan, “Understanding” 20). “The cunning of history” can transform yesterday’s critique into tomorrow’s new spirit of capitalism.<sup>9</sup> Boltanski, Chiapello, and other critics are suspicious – and rightly so – of the artistic critique due to the success with which it has been incorporated into the “third spirit” of capitalism. According to these critics, the artistic critique does not articulate the problems of work until the late 1960s and early 1970s, when it challenged the hierarchical and authoritarian elements of Fordist work, its divisions of labor, separation of conception and execution, and strict working schedules. Motivated by the artistic critique, workers demanded autonomy, creativity, and flexibility in the workplace. Employers acquiesced to workers’ demands, so the story goes, by turning workers’ demands into the bywords of the contemporary

no-collar workplace. In high-end creative workplaces, the white-collar drone is gone, and so are the rigidities of the vertical corporation.<sup>10</sup> The new ideal worker is one for whom “nonconformity was its earnest emblem”—that is, the new ideal worker is an artist (A. Ross, *No Collar* 10).

However, these workers’ demands also complemented emerging post-Fordist methods of organization and neoliberal political and economic rationalities. This project uses the term “post-Fordism” to describe the move away from mass production to “just-in-time production,” from the vertical corporation to networks of small and medium-sized enterprises” (du Gay and Morgan, “Understanding” 16). Post-Fordism also designates the development of work arrangements that accommodate the divergent movements towards, on one hand, work that is creative rather than repetitive and, on the other hand, work that is more insecure than stable. Whereas post-Fordism describes the reorganizing of the production process, neoliberalism describes the restructuring of society at large. David Harvey defines neoliberalism as “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (*Brief History* 2). Neoliberal economic and political rationality succeeded the breakdown of midcentury Fordism in the early 1970s when “the Keynesian compromise collapsed as a viable way to manage capital accumulation consistent with social democratic policies” (Harvey, “Neoliberalism” 30). But what Harvey argues was “a crisis in capitalism,” neoliberal policies re-described “as a crisis in failed systems of governance.”<sup>11</sup> In the simplest ideological terms, the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism and neoliberalism seems to satisfy a desire in our institutional imagination, delivering us from an inauthentic life dominated by the Organization into an authentic life

liberated by a decentralized Market. Here post-Fordism and neoliberalism dissemble about their own institutional bases and instead share an ostensible antipathy towards centralized and hierarchical management, if not towards institutions as such. Of course, it is clear that post-Fordism and neoliberalism do not satisfy the artistic critique by offering a more authentic life, but by recasting claims of authenticity as a matter of entrepreneurialism. As we will see, both the post-Fordist workplace and the neoliberal market develop entrepreneur-subjects who are disinclined to recognize the claims of the social critique—that is, claims for addressing issues of exploitation and insecurity.

This project regards the post-Fordist workplace and its work arrangements as a sort of neoliberal laboratory, developing exemplary “artists,” or entrepreneur-subjects, who model best practices for adapting to a market-dominated neoliberal society. In the workplace, the artist supplies the comic mask for the processes by which “the gift of autonomy” justifies the new forms of exploitation endured by workers (A. Ross, “New Geography” 34). According to one employee whom Andrew Ross interviews, contemporary creative work ““was work you just couldn’t help doing” (*No Collar* 10). In part, this exploitation reflects the changing face of work that “[seeks] to enlist [workers’] creativity and their relational and affective capacities” (Weeks, *Problem* 70). In other words, the artistic critique of repetitive and routine Fordist work has lost its target, at least as it pertains to high-end workers: capitalism has not engendered a world in which life collapses into the Organization, or in which diverse forms of activity reduce to a single form of abstract labor. Rather, the barrier between work and life, between work and the self, dissolves because the concept of work consistent with the creative worker often “requires not too little but too much of the self” (Weeks, “Life” 242). Work is not “just the labor of the hand, but the labors of the head and the heart” (Weeks, *Problem* 69). Creative work exceeds the

guiding metaphors of the Fordist factory, industrial or paper – for instance, metaphors about time on- or off-the-clock, spaces inside or outside the office, and fixed capital such as machines (Weeks, *Problem* 70). Indeed, work does not designate a “precise and circumscribed part of [...] life [but] a more and more comprehensive action” (Morini 44). Because creativity migrates towards the center of post-Fordist production, notions of productive activity creep into the spaces outside the office and into the time that was formerly off-the-clock—that is, into the very areas that Fordism preserved as non-work.

Neoliberalism celebrates the flexible artist in order to justify the precarious worker. If high-end creative workers are subject to new forms of exploitation, low-wage workers are also increasingly subject to contingent, temporary, and insecure work arrangements. Entrepreneurialism provides part of the justification. In this so-called market society, the artist legitimates the neoliberal subject “homo oeconomicus,” whose (economic) freedom consists in his wholesale and constant responsibility for his own well-being.<sup>12</sup> For this entrepreneur, competing in the market justifies both the expansion of work and its increasing precariousness. Indeed, the temporariness, contingency, and/or insecurity of work do not reflect political and structural problems, but the natural and fundamental reality of “market tendencies” to which the artist-entrepreneur must always be responsive. Paolo Virno describes this disposition as “the art of being in the world,” of negotiating its constant risks and opportunities for the development of one’s human capital. These same “precarious” work arrangements, and the consequences that they entail, point to the failure of capitalism’s third spirit to justify neoliberalism as “fitting, fair, and legitimate” (Chiapello 62).

### **Art/Works**

This dissertation takes the unusual step of emphasizing a minor – if not marginalized – mode of the artistic critique, comprised of artworks that closely link artistic and working autonomy as early as the mid-1950s: Billy Wilder’s film *The Apartment* (1960), Richard Yates’s novel *Revolutionary Road* (1961), John Berryman’s poetry volume *77 Dream Songs* (1964), and Lee Friedlander’s photobook *Self Portrait* (1970). While Chiapello singles out “lifestyle” as a motive underscoring the artistic critique, this project instead focuses on “vocation,” a category that work, not consumerism, constructs and motivates. This mode suggests ways in which the artistic critique can sidestep the consumerist limitations that Chiapello, as well as other critics, ascribe to it. This mode also shows the contribution that midcentury artists made towards celebrating post-Fordist forms of work, work-time, workspace, work ethics, and work assignments. Moreover, I argue that these artworks change the resolution, so to speak, of the artistic critique. These artworks still critique the second spirit of capitalism, de-legitimizing its justifications and constraints. But this project also discusses these artworks as polemics that indict the second spirit as it manifests in narrower and more specific sets of institutional and working conditions. As we will see, regarding these critiques as industry- or field-based polemics does not contravene the first approach. Rather, it allows this project to outline the new spirit of capitalism in a manner responsive to the dynamic institutional changes that were reshaping “white-collar” employment in midcentury film, fiction, poetry, and photography. Crucially, this second approach also enriches the first approach by attending to the pragmatic decisions and workaday concerns of midcentury artists. Besides connecting midcentury artworks to the history of capitalism and its critiques, I argue that this minor mode offers possibilities for revising the artistic critique—of making it capable of articulating an artistic-inflected notion of exploitation that can address the critical impasses introduced by post-Fordist work and neoliberal



market rationality. In other words, this mode could provide opportunities to use the artistic critique as the basis for, rather than the bane of, a revived social critique.

This project justifies this polemical approach to the minor artistic critique by recognizing a historical fact: many of the artists who depicted total ways of life did not merely represent white-collar work with the indifference of outside observers, but understood firsthand the anxieties, resentments, and depredations that it raised.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, midcentury artists increasingly found employment in diverse workplaces like universities, Hollywood studios, publishing houses, public relations firms, and mass-circulation magazines. While artists and, more generally, intellectuals saw their work “definitively reconfigured as something that took place within institutions” after World War II, Andrew Hoberek has argued that a presumption nevertheless existed about “the essential incompatibility of institutions and creative thought” (21). In these institutions-cum-organizations, any lingering fantasies about the bohemian artist, whose unconventionality distinguished him “from the philistinism of a small-business owner like George Babbitt,” became increasingly untenable. While the more conventional breadwinner struggled to maintain a sense of masculine identity in the bureaucratic office, these artists more clearly grappled with the analogous sense in which the requirements of white-collar employment undercut the creative demands of their vocations. The routines of the “organization man,” to use William Whyte’s famous phrase, threatened to blunt the creativity of the artist (*Organization* 3). Or, as the poet Delmore Schwartz put it in 1958, the unpredictable artist is a “peculiar being” who risked becoming a “useful and acceptable member of society” when, in this case, he was employed by the university (“Present State” 37). As a result, it is no surprise that these polemics argue that the prevailing conditions are antithetical to creativity—the conditions are, in fact, responsible for producing bureaucratise, not art.

This project focuses on polemics in four midcentury fields—film, poetry, fiction, and photography—that deride the “second spirit” of capitalism as a constraint on creativity. The would-be artists follow a basic pattern by abstracting an image of the white-collar drone from the concrete circumstances in his field—in this project, from the experiences of a filmmaker who endures executive interference in the Old Hollywood studio system, a writer anxious about publishing a first novel for the paperback mass market, a poet who resents his teaching obligations in the university, and a photographer who dismisses the editorial constraints of photojournalism and street photography alike. The working conditions that threaten the artist’s creative autonomy would not only turn him into a drone, but also imply a crisis for the art form itself—namely, its degradation into a mass-produced commodity. In turn, these artworks would satisfy their polemical ends by conditioning us to accept without hesitation the ways of life that counter the inhuman image of the white-collar drone in the office. In other words, we are conditioned to accept the diverse notions of selfhood, activity, space, and time that, so the story goes, would liberate us as human beings, if not as creative artists, from the shackles of the drone’s subjugation to the organization. Unsurprisingly, these texts suggest that creative autonomy exists only inasmuch as the artist repudiates or escapes white-collar work arrangements and organizational constraints.

Of course, such reflexive anti-institutionality is precisely the point. After all, both post-Fordist and neoliberal ideologies share a “deeply antibureaucratic” narrative in which institutions ossify into the Organization, and thereby pervert human nature into its inauthentic, mechanical doppelganger (McCann 300). In turn, the Market undoes the Organization: it eradicates the oppressive constraints foisted on us by institutions in order to enable the flourishing of human nature or, more to the point, the flourishing of human capital and economic self-interest. Here

my project makes its most significant contribution. Like the neoliberal spirit that it prefigures, the “minor” artistic critique makes it easy, and even encourages us, to overlook the complex and ongoing inscription of art in institutional conditions and work arrangements. Indeed, the relationship between artists and workers seems entirely negative, at least on first glance. Liberated from what were the prevailing work arrangements, the artists encourage us to view new organizations of work as activities without an institutional basis – that is, as the self-directed and self-interested activities of so many artists, “free agents,” and entrepreneurs (Pink 3). This seemingly free activity advances what much literature, literary criticism, and critical theory will eventually celebrate—namely, “the therapeutic value of ineffable mystery” (McCann and Szalay 451). But accepting romantic figurations of the artist, or even the entrepreneur, risks perpetuating what McCann and Szalay describe as “the comforting folklore of the late capitalist economy” (460). By exposing the institutional and working conditions that underscore these artworks, we can detail the ongoing history of a particular creative industry, and also provide points of departure for reflecting on the impasses of post-Fordist work and neoliberal political economy. We can confront culture as a form of labor or, put more concretely, confront the ways in which “people actually make a living out of culture” (A. Ross, “New Geography” 32).

In the first chapter, Billy Wilder’s film *The Apartment* (1960) provides the most pointed example of the polemic when it clearly targets Paramount Studios, where the director and writer worked from the 1940s to the mid-1950s. The film depicts the fear that the Organization will expand its control, imprisoning life within the four walls of the workplace. *The Apartment* also continues Hollywood’s rich, ongoing history of self-reflexive filmmaking by re-describing the Old Hollywood studio as an expanding bureaucratic corporation that aims to squash humanity altogether. In this case, the polemic occurs post-mortem, after broader industry-wide pressures

had already dismantled the work arrangements associated with the studio system. The protagonist escapes outside the walls of the “consolidated life” by quitting his job and becoming a “*mensch* ... a human being” (Wilder and Diamond 101). But when Wilder’s film undercuts this *fait accompli* through a familiar renewal of caring humanism, it also points to life in a workplace without walls. For Wilder, this redefinition of workspace celebrates the circumstances responsible for developing both a more entrepreneurial film worker and a more flexible film industry. In an industry irrevocably changed by the Supreme Court’s 1948 *Paramount* decision, Wilder’s *mensch* echoes the decentralized management practices that revitalized the studio United Artists in the early 1950s, making it the world’s largest film distributor. But new forms of creative autonomy, the film suggests, justify the industry-wide shift towards the contingent work arrangements so closely associated with independent production and the “package,” the new basic unit for organizing labor on a film production.

While it lacks the sharp polemical clarity of Wilder’s film, Richard Yates’s first novel *Revolutionary Road* (1961) nevertheless provides a complex meditation on what the writer viewed as a grim choice between commercial success and literary integrity. The novel narrates the boring workdays of Frank Wheeler, a corporate copywriter and faux-bohemian, in order to deride a work ethic that is based on either earning a breadwinning salary or developing extra-work lifestyles. By doing so, Yates also undercuts the prevailing Fordist and nascent post-Fordist work ethics. At the same time, he also redefines “serious” fiction over and against the dilemma posed by the mass-market paperback publishing industry. April Wheeler, the desperate housewife in the novel, dies of a self-administered abortion rather than submit to the “deadly dull” middle-class life and, by implication, the exhausted clichéd hackwork signified by the middlebrow novel (Yates, *Revolutionary* 20). Her death reconstitutes the writer as a figure whose

laborious commitment to revision overcomes the middlebrow dilemma between success and integrity in the mass-market paperback industry. A serious writer, the novel suggests, insulates himself against this dilemma since his craft is always about risk—the risk of self-mutilation—and never the material rewards of a wage or the intangible rewards of self-development. But after an onslaught of mergers and media conglomeration in the 1960s pushes the publishing industry towards more bureaucracy, companies establish “literary” publishing imprints as a strategy for re-harnessing the lost values of craft. At these “semi-independent fiefdoms,” editorial impresarios such as Seymour Lawrence, Yates’s longtime publisher, re-signify the craft ethic of self-mutilation when they begin to appropriate the writer’s language of risk (McDowell, “Publishers” D11). In his later fiction, Yates finally grapples with new dynamics of sacrificial labor in the contemporary workplace.

Despite the claims of critics such as Joseph Epstein, Dana Gioia, and Donald Hall, there is no poetry industry that compares to Hollywood, and corporate publishers invest considerably less attention in poetry than in fiction. Indeed, there seem to be few industrial or institutional impediments to writing poetry, and even fewer poets who make a living from their vocation. Following the expansion of higher education after World War II, many poets found employment as teachers in universities—some teaching in creative writing programs such as the Iowa Writer’s Workshop but most as instructors in more traditional disciplines. In *77 Dream Songs* (1964), the poet John Berryman inflates his grievances with teaching in the university into a wide-ranging indictment of a repressive “organization” society. “Huffy Henry,” the incorrigible personality at the center of Berryman’s *Dream Songs*, desires to escape “wicked & away” (“Dream Song 1” 1, 6). Fortunately for Berryman, the same university that imposes teaching onto the poet facilitates his attempts to escape the organization and to turn poetry into a paying

vocation, even if indirectly and only in the short-term. Between 1945 and 1970, prominent fellowships from public and private foundations such as Guggenheim and Rockefeller advanced widespread efforts to support artists and establish a broad American audience for the arts. For Berryman, fellowships detached would-be artists from the 9-to-5 grind. Indeed, the teacher becomes a full-fledged artist because the fellowship ratifies Henry's dream to escape at the level of federal and philanthropic policy. In so doing, Berryman's poetry confronts the new impasse at the center of contemporary work: on the one hand, his poems give cautious praise to emerging notions of post-Fordist work-time, which mimic the vocational whole time necessary, so he claims, for the creation of art; on the other, he confronts the sense in which work-time that is neither on- nor off-the-clock invites intense forms of self-exploitation.

In a final chapter on midcentury photography, the critique of the total way of life persists even in the absence of prominent signifiers such as corporate offices or white-collar workers. Lee Friedlander's first photobook *Self Portrait* (1970), a collection of photographs taken between 1965 to 1969, operates under the assumption that the slow disappearance of glossy magazines such as *Collier's*, *Life*, *Look*, and *The Saturday Evening Post*—of picture-magazine photojournalism—enables photography to resume its unfolding history as a modernist art that is preoccupied with “the photographic” as such. Indeed, *Self Portrait* suggests that the editorial-driven “double standard” hampered the artistic autonomy of workaday photojournalists and freelancers (Szarkowski, “Photography and the Mass Media” 31). For Friedlander, the effects of the double standard are pernicious, putting into question even the seeming self-evident autonomy of a photographic “self-assignment.” His photobook thus signifies a self-reflexive instance of occupational portraiture that investigates the contours of an “open-ended” photographic project (Westerbeck). In the photobook, the amateurish insistence on including traces of Friedlander's

body in each photograph redefines the photographer as an artist. Since 1970, Friedlander's status as a photographer and artist has only grown, and the development of his career over the last four decades provides a fitting conclusion for this project. Besides confirming his creative autonomy, *Self Portrait* sets the stage for his subsequent embrace of commissions as a method of organizing his work and his relationship with quasi-employers. Indeed, Friedlander's commissioned work suggests that the artist has become a de facto consultant. When he accepts a commission to photograph in offices in 1985, the true subject matter isn't the office workers in front of the camera. Rather, it is Friedlander, the worker behind the camera, who models the ideal photographer as a mobile professional whose expertise resides in his ways of seeing.

The conclusion briefly situates the artistic critique within the longer history of capitalism. After reviewing this project's findings about the relationship between art, post-Fordist work, and neoliberal ideology, the conclusion reflects on what this relationship says about the need for institutions and "institutional thinking" (Heclo 162).

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>A. Ross, *No Collar* 10. Ross defines this no-collar disposition as an “anti-authoritarian work mentality” invested in “open communication and self-direction” (*No Collar* 9). Its name reflects a “self-conscious rejection ... [of the] status-conscious work uniforms and attitudes” that precede it (10). Ross does not use the term to describe “a specific set of occupations”; even if the mentality is most closely associated with high-end creative industries, Ross notes that its characteristics have seeped into the dispositions of low-end service and manufacturing workers (261).

<sup>2</sup>In his 1991 book *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Harvey uses the phrase to describe the tendencies of midcentury “Fordism,” a crucial concept for this project.

<sup>3</sup>The chapter on the poetry of John Berryman will discuss in greater detail the consensus liberal and psycho-political inflections of this critique. Depictions of the total way of life with conservative undertones are beyond the purview of this project. For an overview of traditional conservative approaches to the “mass society,” see Nash 36-56.

The Organization and the drone are also the objects of satire in genres other than fiction, poetry, film, or photography. Prominent examples include Bob Newhart’s subdued performance in the comedy album *The Button-Down Mind of Bob Newhart* and the *Mad Magazine* parody “The Man in the Soot-Gray Flannel.” Perhaps the deadpan 1961 publication *The Executive Coloring Book* represents a satiric apex. The book encourages readers to color the captioned black-and-white drawings: “THIS IS MY TRAIN. It takes me to my office every day. You meet lots of interesting people on the train. Color them all gray.”

<sup>4</sup>The phrase is the subtitle to Riesman’s book.

<sup>5</sup>For the typology of “other-directed,” as well as “inner-directed,” persons, see Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, 1-36. For the “Little Man,” see Mills ix-xx. For the organization man, see Whyte, *Organization Man*. For the one-dimensional man, see Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*.

<sup>6</sup>For a discussion of racial, gendered, and class-based exclusions at work in midcentury Fordism, see Michael Harrington’s classic *The Other America* (1962). For a more recent overview, see Fraser, “Feminism” 100-107.

<sup>7</sup>For an assessment of the left-liberal “postcapitalist vision,” see Brick.

<sup>8</sup>In addition to the artistic and social critiques, there are two other less prominent but nonetheless distinct critiques of capitalism – the conservative and ecological critiques. See Chiapello.

<sup>9</sup>Fraser, “Feminism” 99. Fraser uses this phrase to describe the affinity between many of the tenets of second-wave socialist feminism and contemporary neoliberalism.

<sup>10</sup>To that end, management gurus continue to crow about the necessity of post-Fordist “liberation management” (Tom Peters) for incentivizing the “creative class” (Richard Florida) into



becoming “change masters” (Rosabeth Moss) responsible for developing “the brand called you” (Peters).

<sup>11</sup>“Neoliberalism,” 16. This tactical re-description serves class and business interests, justifying “[attacks on] all forms of social solidarity ... that hindered competitive flexibility (including the power of many professionals and their associations), dismantling or rolling back the commitment of the welfare state, [and] the privatization of public enterprises” (*Brief History* 23).

<sup>12</sup>W. Brown 40. This entrepreneurial subject conducts himself “according to a calculus of utility, benefit, or satisfaction against a micro-economic grid of scarcity, supply and demand, and more value-neutrality.” From the minimum-wage worker to the C.E.O., everyone is “an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself” (Foucault 226). This entrepreneurial subject also speaks to the neoliberal scrambling of the traditional categories of worker and capitalist. The worker re-describes himself as a capitalist, as “a bearer of a capacity, of a human capital” (Balibar 53); in turn, the capitalist becomes a “worker ... an ‘entrepreneur.’”

<sup>13</sup>As Thomas Frank has noted, this approach requires that we understand postwar business as more than “the unchanging and soulless machine imagined by countercultural leaders: it was as dynamic a force in its own way as the revolutionary youth movements of the period, undertaking dramatic transformation of both the way it operated and the way it imagined itself” (6). “Mad Ave” advertisers, as contemporary television has taught us, bristled at the routines of Fordism with a rhetoric that would anticipate the counterculture.

## CHAPTER 1: WILDER'S "MENSCH": UNITED ARTISTS AND THE CRITIQUE OF FORDISM

There could be no starker critique of the midcentury white-collar workplace than *The Apartment* (1960). In Billy Wilder's iconic film, "Consolidated Life" names more than the powerful Manhattan-based insurance company that employs the protagonist C. C. Baxter (Jack Lemmon): the phrase also describes the *modus operandi* of Fordism. The corporation literally consolidates life, extending its rationality beyond the walls of the office in order to underwrite the very elements that we generally regard as exempt from work—the subjects, activities, and spaces of our familial and communal lives. More to the point, *The Apartment* implies this consolidation by depicting work and leisure as increasingly indistinct, for both are integral parts of a Fordist "mode of accumulation" that depends, Nancy Fraser has argued, "on mass industrial production, mass commodity consumption, and the vertically integrated corporation."<sup>1</sup> While Consolidated Life executives spend their after-hours as carefree playboys, their leisure never accedes to authenticity because it is manufactured and canalized by its reliance on commodity consumption. In *The Apartment*, Fordism even threatens to automate and standardize virtually every aspect of individual existence, right down to the capacity to care for others. What was life—spontaneous, creative, and unpredictable—becomes prefabricated, deadened, and calculable. Thus, Wilder's film initiates its critique with an indelible image that depicts the common Fordist denominators to which the consolidated life would reduce all leisure, if not all love: the white-collar corporate drone repeating a monotonous task in the open-plan office.

But this summary neglects how cautionary tales about the consolidated life had become no less standardized and ubiquitous than their target. By 1960, influential sociological jeremiads such as David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), C. Wright Mill's *White Collar* (1951), and William Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956) had saturated public discourse with anxieties about corporations, conformity, and the rat race.<sup>2</sup> Even mass circulation magazines like *Life*, *Look*, and *Reader's Digest* fretted about "Gary Grays" and "The Group" without any noticeable irony (Leonard 25, 29). Excluding its ample efforts in other genres, Hollywood had directly examined the Fordist corporation through the "classical corporate executive film," a short-lived postwar genre that includes films like *Executive Suite* (1954), *Woman's World* (1954), *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1956), and *Patterns* (1956).<sup>3</sup> Given these various examples, the sociologist Daniel Bell noted a "curious fact" in *The End of Ideology* (1960): despite widespread alarm, "no one in the United States defends conformity. Everyone is against it, and probably everyone always was" (35). In short, critiques of Fordism had spawned their own mass-production industry. The film critics Pauline Kael and Dwight Macdonald panned *The Apartment* upon release for that very reason. The film, Kael wrote, articulated a "machine-tooled commercialized social consciousness" perfectly suited, no doubt, for the consolidated life (41). Baxter, his love interest Fran Kubelik (Shirley MacLaine), and the other characters abused by Consolidated Life are less "little people" than "little dolls," ciphers that Wilder deploys to serve predictable, sentimental ends. Such sentimentality culminates in the film's pat, humanistic solution to the specter of the corporate drone in the open-plan office: Baxter's eventual decision to refuse "the old payola," quit his job at Consolidated Life, and restart his life as a caring "mensch – a human being."<sup>4</sup>

However, Kael and Macdonald fail to address what Bell identified as the primary “problem” associated with ubiquitous critiques of Fordism: “to know who is accusing whom” (35). If *The Apartment* shows that Hollywood is, in Macdonald’s words, “out of touch with reality,” it is because the film so closely follows the contours of the film industry in the aftermath of the Supreme Court’s 1948 *Paramount* decision.<sup>5</sup> By forcing the major studios to divest ownership of theater chains, the *Paramount* decision put an effective end to the “factory-like” Old Hollywood studio system (Lev 24). In that system, the major studios typically kept creative and technical personnel under long-term contract in order to mass-produce films. In the fifties and sixties, the industry began to reorganize on the basis of independent production, or “the specialized production of a few films by many independents” (Staiger 331). This “different, more entrepreneurial model of filmmaking” (Lev 32) also gradually reorganized labor according to the “package-unit” system (24), a “flexible, free-lance system where the personnel and other elements of a production are assembled for each individual film.” Crucially, neither the major nor minor studios disappeared during the era of independent production; instead, the studios gravitated toward powerful roles as the financiers and distributors of the films manufactured by independent production companies.

In *The Apartment*, these complex shifts in the film industry provide the terms of Bell’s “problem.” After writing, directing, and producing *Sabrina* in 1954, Billy Wilder ended a contentious thirteen-year, ten-film relationship with Paramount. Following a series of one-picture deals that included *The Seven Year Itch* (1955), the 1959 smash hit *Some Like It Hot* inaugurated Wilder’s long-term partnership with both the Mirisch Company, an independent production company, and the distributor United Artists (UA), a minor studio closely associated with post-*Paramount* independent production.<sup>6</sup> I argue that *The Apartment*, Wilder’s second film in this

new partnership, levels a polemic that accuses Paramount, as well as the other “big five” Old Hollywood studios, of resembling Consolidated Life, an inhuman, bureaucratic workplace that is “one of the top five companies in the country” (*Apt* 3). Baxter’s transformation into a caring mensch doubles as an image of a more entrepreneurial film worker who must respond to the new exigencies of the film industry. In that sense, I argue that *The Apartment* does not resolve the problems of Fordism so much as it provides a point of departure for considering the new antagonisms that structure post-Fordist creative work.

Even if it is targeting a moribund studio system, *The Apartment* confronts midcentury Fordism with an unwavering and uncommon clarity. The film’s opening scene establishes the narratological and cinematic terms by which we understand that Baxter’s plight in the open-plan office threatens every human being with proletarianization and threatens life itself with consolidation “inside” the spatial hegemony of the Fordist corporation. This diagrammatic critique implies that every human face disguises the inhuman stare of the office clock, every activity its decomposition into a form of abstract labor, every space its derivation from the office—and no space more so than the titular one. The opening scene initiates this critique by establishing the film’s preoccupation with interrogating space across three distinct but interrelated registers—*diegetic*, *cinematic*, and *critical*. This spatial logic makes the embrace of the mensch, as well as the relations to work implied by such a subject, inevitable and necessary.

*The Apartment* opens with an aerial shot of the New York City skyline. The camera captures the grid-like organization of streets and cross-streets before this shot dissolves to a street-level shot which pans up the exterior of the Consolidated Life skyscraper. In turn, this exterior shot dissolves to an extreme long shot of clerical workers in an immense open-plan office before cutting to a medium shot of Baxter at his desk. No sooner than this shot establishes

his degrading work routines, Baxter looks up from his desk. Crucially, an eyeline match connects this gaze to the succeeding shot of an office clock. Given the film's critique, the clock evinces obvious themes about corporate control over the pace of work and the length of the workday. Likewise, the sequence of the shots implies the subordination of individual agency to the Fordist criteria of efficiency and rationalization: a human face finally appears but immediately looks away, deferring to the inhuman face of a clock. With this simple gesture, the film asserts its difference from classical corporate executive films.<sup>7</sup> No amount of promotional grooming will allow Baxter to supplant the clock. For that matter, no amount of squinting allows one to mistake Jack Lemmon for William Holden, Gregory Peck, or Van Heflin, the barrel-chested screen idols who star in such films and who play characters capable of realizing their professional and personal aspirations under the auspices of the corporation.<sup>8</sup>

Yet the shot of the clock is not just a punchline for a genre parody. *The Apartment* uses the clock to establish the hegemony of the Fordist corporation as a matter of both diegetic and cinematic space. As I have already suggested, *The Apartment* levels its critique of Fordism by depicting apartments and executive offices such that these spaces ultimately resemble the open-plan office, the film's basic unit of Fordist space. The film reinforces the resemblance between seemingly different diegetic spaces by strictly regulating the composition of cinematic off- and onscreen space, or the space represented as outside or inside the frame. The eyeline match between Baxter and the clock establishes the film's basic logic of off- and onscreen space. While its exact location in the office remains unknown, his gaze implies that the clock organizes all space—not only the workspace onscreen, but even the work and non-work spaces offscreen. Indeed, this subjugation of onscreen to offscreen space introduces a third spatial register: the “spatialized” critical concepts “inside” and “outside.” There is no escaping “outside” the

hegemony of the corporation, even if a worker leaves the office for what we might characterize as non-work or leisure spaces. Rather, the worker is always “inside.” Even when it is offscreen, the clock dominates the space and, by implication, subjects and activities, onscreen.

To that end, the opening scene demonstrates the consolidated life by unfolding as if the Fordist corporation were responsible for its construction. In a voiceover, Baxter specifies the precise starting date of the narrative (“November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1959”) and population of New York City (“8,042,783”) (*Apt* 3). But this voiceover belongs more to Consolidated Life than to Baxter, who admits that he only “know[s] facts like this because [he] work[s] for an insurance company.” These “facts” cue a sequence of dissolves and cuts that drastically reduce the amount of space shown onscreen until the camera finally locates Baxter at exact coordinates. During the voiceover, the scene cuts from the shot of the skyline (“New York City”) to a single skyscraper (“one of the five top companies in the country”), a single office floor (“the nineteenth floor – Ordinary Policy Department – Premium Accounting Division – Section W”) and, finally, a single desk (“desk number 861”).

Finding increasingly precise locations onscreen depends on the control that Consolidated Life exerts over offscreen space. The scene conveys such control by exploiting the spatial assumptions of Hollywood continuity editing. According to David Bordwell, the continuity system acts as a seemingly “neutral vehicle” that subordinates offscreen space to narrative consistency (57). Without any “cues to the contrary,” we assume that offscreen space—“the always-present pockets of non-established space” in a given scene—remains utterly consistent with the space we see onscreen (58). In the case of *The Apartment*, the combination of the voiceover and the editing imply that the entire world resembles the open-plan office. While the analytical editing zeroes in on Baxter, the voiceover extends corporate hegemony by evoking the

unseen spaces of the other nations (“Pakistan”), American cities (“Natchez, Mississippi” and “Gallup, New Mexico”), insurance companies, and office floors (*Apt 3*). Working at his desk, Baxter occupies only a single set of coordinates within a vast system administered by Consolidated Life. If not Baxter, the camera could have located any of the over 30,000 Consolidated Life employees or 8 million New Yorkers that remain offscreen; it could have located anyone anywhere because the corporation has replaced authentic, irreducible *places* with abstract and standardized space—with office space that could be *anyplace*.

The voiceover concludes when it introduces the “little problem” that drives the narrative (*Apt 4*). At the end of the workday, Baxter cannot leave the office because his apartment is already occupied. In order to climb the corporate ladder, this low-level accountant has been currying favor with four mid-level executives—some married, some single—by letting them use his apartment for sexual affairs. When it dissolves to Baxter’s midtown apartment, the scene only confirms what the clock has already implied: non-work spaces remain consistent with the offscreen office. Amorous executives conduct affairs with a business-like precision. Romantic love is inefficient, “wasted” time (83); sex is subject to time-management (“run on schedule like a Greyhound bus”) and even speed-up tactics (“rush rush rush”) (11, 6). For his part, Baxter does not stop working when he finally gains access to his apartment, but continues to serve executives: scheduling future trysts, cleaning up messes, and restocking liquor and food. When these guests finally leave, Baxter’s leisure-time and space prove utterly indistinguishable from work-time and workspace. Rather than a clock, a television set manipulates Baxter onscreen, the sounds of its programming prompting him to blink, nod, and smile in response to offscreen cues. The motions of work translate into urgent, automated leisure activities.



It is Baxter's work at home, so to speak, that eventually attracts the attention of J. D. Sheldrake (Fred MacMurray), the director of personnel at Consolidated Life, who approves Baxter's promotion in exchange for a key to his apartment. With this promotion, Baxter realizes several careerist aspirations: a new title, a bigger salary, and a supervisory office on the perimeter of the nineteenth floor. Of course, what Baxter has yet to calculate is the untenable cost exacted in exchange for those rewards. He has unknowingly cuckolded himself by enabling Sheldrake, who is both a husband and father, to resume a secret affair with Fran, an elevator girl at Consolidated Life whom Baxter loves. But for now Baxter thinks himself transformed from a lonely corporate drone to an executive and a playboy. Of course, the parody of this transformation is a foregone conclusion. After all, the success and scope of the film's critique depends on erasing the differences between what at first appears to be a diversity of subjects, activities, and even spaces in order to expose their common Fordist denominators. As a result, the executive and the playboy do not signify subjective transformations—subjects capable of distinguishing Baxter within, or of enabling him to altogether transcend, the hegemony of the corporation—so much as doomed efforts to repress the ubiquitous image of the corporate drone.

These particular subjects also clarify the principle subtending the repression: what Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., writing in 1958, called “the crisis of American masculinity” (292). Based on an assumption about “the passing of the autonomous male self,” this diffuse crisis registers in a variety of midcentury discourses and sometimes, but not always, in tandem with critiques of Fordism (Cuordileone 14). Complementary and conflicting inflections of this crisis include Billy Graham's Christian evangelism, Mickey Spillane's pulp novels, *Playboy* magazine, and John F. Kennedy's New Frontier liberalism.<sup>9</sup> Culprits range from sinfulness to dames, suburban housewives to communists. For its part, *The Apartment* depicts this crisis as a symptom diverting

attention from the more fundamental problem of the consolidated life. For that reason, the film does not resolve its narrative by transforming Baxter into a cocksure executive or an oversexed, sartorial playboy, much less Mike Hammer or a Cold War anti-communist. Rather, Baxter ultimately becomes a *mensch*, a Yiddish word for a person (typically male) with integrity. In *The Apartment*, this Yiddishism accommodates a quasi-androgynous subject unafraid to care or even to be mistaken for a “nurse” or a “Miss” (*Apt* 131, 112).

In *The Apartment*, Baxter’s executive aspirations compensate for the bureaucratic reorganizing of work that male white-collar workers primarily experience as forms of diminution, if not outright emasculation. As a result, our first glimpse of Baxter initiates his tongue-in-cheek struggle to do the impossible: to recuperate a sense of masculine autonomy within the walls, so to speak, of the consolidated life. Besides the reorganization of the Fordist workplace, the opening scene also depicts the nadir of white-collar masculinity. In the open-plan office, the masculinist signs of artisanal, professional, or entrepreneurial identity and activity are conspicuously absent, replaced by the impersonal ones of bureaucracy. At desk #861, the corporate drone is more a number than a name. Even the name “C. C. Baxter” erases the very identity that it should afford; the initials are a joke, an abbreviation for carbon copy, for a *selflessness* that midcentury sociologists like David Riesman and Talcott Parsons regarded as essentially feminine (Ehrenreich 34).

When Baxter receives a new title and workspace, the film modifies its opening depiction of cinematic space to accommodate the appearance of a masculine subject who commands spaces both off- and onscreen. The promotion scene starts with Baxter at desk #861 on the nineteenth floor. We should recall that the opening scene establishes off- and onscreen spatial consistency with a series of rapid analytical cuts organized around an image of a clock. But this

scene tethers our sense of space to the executive himself with a tracking shot that lasts for more than twenty seconds. When Baxter begins to move his belongings to his new office, the camera keeps him centered onscreen in a *plan américain* as he walks through the open-plan office. By doing so, this scene appears to resume the classical corporate executive narrative that the film so conspicuously abandoned in its opening scene. If we ignore the intervening plot about Baxter's quid pro quo with the other executives, the scene shows "loyal, resourceful, cooperative C. C. Baxter," an exemplary junior executive climbing the corporate ladder at a benevolent American corporation (*Apt* 41). According to the detailed script by Wilder and I. A. L. Diamond, Baxter regards his new perimeter office, which is really no more than a "small cubicle" with one window, as "the Taj Mahal" (61). Rather than space dominated by an offscreen clock, this office appears as an onscreen *place*—it is *his* office, its window provides *his* view—from which "C. C. BAXTER, SECOND ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT" commands the offscreen spaces of the corporation and the city (60). To that end, music from the opening scene replays in order to punctuate three triumphal moments: Baxter's gaze out of his office windows and onto an unseen city; his smile when he places his hands across the expanse of his desk; and his straightened posture when he surveys the unseen open-plan office.

It is only appropriate that the film shatters this fantasy with a voice from offscreen. The scene cuts to show Baxter arguing in his office about access to his apartment with the "charter members" of his "little club" (*Apt* 42). Despite his previous yeses, Baxter now says no to the initial quartet of mid-level executives by insisting that his apartment is "private property," not a "public playground" (63). Of course, this defiance is a ruse. Now only Sheldrake enjoys access to the apartment. Indeed, the scene makes this point with off- and onscreen space. While the clock seems to be gone, Baxter clearly serves as an onscreen proxy for Sheldrake—that is, for a

more powerful offscreen executive. The clothesline arrangement of the mid-level executives keeps Sheldrake offscreen until their argument with Baxter reaches a fever pitch. When one executive steps forward to threaten Baxter, Sheldrake's face and torso appear in the window of the office door, now visible onscreen. Following Sheldrake's entrance, the less senior executives turn into deferential yes men, their angry expressions into "sickly smiles" (64). By reasserting the hierarchy of corporate power, Sheldrake's entrance severely qualifies Baxter's autonomy. After all, Baxter has only gained his position by constant acts of self-abrogation before a changing cast of corporate superiors. His defiant "no" to the mid-level executives presumes an ongoing "yes" to Sheldrake.

Yet this diagram of Fordist corporate power remains incomplete insofar as it still fetishizes the role of flesh-and-blood people. The scene implies a perpetual offscreen game of executive one-upmanship: if Sheldrake looms offscreen, so too could Sheldrake's immediate superior, his immediate superior's superior, ad infinitum. The possibility even exists that some moral, upstanding executive could emerge from offscreen to redeem Consolidated Life. Indeed, classical corporate executive films such as *Executive Suite* and *Woman's World* organized their narratives around the search for just such an executive. Such films often motivate their succession narratives by beginning with the death of a "great man," a powerful executive within the corporation. In other words, these films narrate efforts to name the flesh-and-blood executive with whom the chain of command—and, crucially, the act of offscreen deference—stops. For example, *Executive Suite* resolves its succession narrative when Don Walling, "a man of outstanding qualities," assumes the presidency of the company.

These films also intertwine dead executives and their successors through the complex articulation of diegetic and cinematic spaces. Without ever appearing, the dead great men in

*Executive Suite* and *Woman's World* nevertheless legitimize corporate succession by haunting onscreen space. The films show onscreen the vacant office or boardroom chairs that belonged to these men in order to establish a metonymic link between the (offscreen) dead executive and his (onscreen) successor.<sup>10</sup> Late in *The Apartment*, a brief scene manipulates off- and onscreen space, thereby rearticulating elements of the succession narrative into a critique of Fordist bureaucracy. In his perimeter office, Baxter rehearses a speech by addressing an empty chair as "Mr. Sheldrake" (*Apt* 148). The differences between this scene and a typical succession narrative are telling. Unlike a protagonist in a classical corporate executive film, Baxter wants Sheldrake's girl, not his job. In other words, even marriage in the consolidated life requires the approval of a senior executive. Of course, the dull-witted and insensitive Sheldrake cannot provide such sanction. Although he is offscreen, Sheldrake is neither a great man nor a dead executive. Like the other executives, Sheldrake is only an empty suit, his proper name an empty shibboleth capable of perpetuating but not stopping the game of executive one-upmanship. By addressing the empty chair as "Mr. Sheldrake," Baxter does not evoke a specific flesh-and-blood executive. The address instead evokes the Fordist corporation itself, identifying it as an bureaucratic chain of command that exists independently of and in control over both Consolidated Life executives and low-level employees. In this scene, any "suit" could enter from offscreen, sit in the empty chair, and assume the position of a "Mr. Sheldrake." For that matter, any name could fill the slot marked "Director" or "Asst. Director," as Baxter later learns firsthand when he watches a sign painter insert his name in the company directory. Like office chairs, executives are inanimate objects that serve as the onscreen proxies of a corporation too vast and powerful to be framed onscreen otherwise. Thus, corporate succession at Consolidated Life involves no human lineage;

a “Walling” does not succeed a “Bullard” so much as the lifeless corporation reproduces itself at the expense of everything inside it.

While an executive position cannot resolve the crisis of masculinity, *The Apartment* makes it clear that the promotion is less a matter of work than of leisure. Indeed, Baxter’s executive promotion coincides with the erasure of office work – clerical, executive, or otherwise – from the film. This erasure is never more conspicuous than in the office party scene that immediately follows the promotion. On Christmas Eve, a “swinging party” is underway on the nineteenth floor (*Apt* 67). “Nobody is working”: mid-level executives have turned into bartenders and dancers. Furthermore, the open-plan office has transformed into an immense bachelor pad, and perimeter offices, desks, and water coolers into bars, dance floors, and kegs, respectively. Yet even now, the Fordist imperatives of mass production and mass consumption spur the bacchanal. The liquor, the script notes, “is flowing out as fast as it flows in—everybody is in line with a paper cup waiting for a refill” (68). Furthermore, the gray steel filing cabinets, IBM machines, and office walls surround the entire celebration. No matter what happens, this bacchanal is literally inside the corporation.

In the party scene, white-collar careerism is motivated by a desire to participate in different forms of consumerism. In fact, Baxter’s executive promotion doubles as a promotion to the position of playboy. With the hopes of rekindling his own aborted courtship, Baxter invites Fran to his office in order to impress her with his new wardrobe. The screenplay includes elaborate sartorial details. Gone are the less expensive “Brooks Brother type suit” and the “weatherbeaten Ivy League raincoat” (*Apt* 4, 5). Baxter now models “a new suit, dark flannel, and ... a white shirt with a pinned round collar, and a foulard tie” and a “new, black chesterfield” coat (68, 76). In his office, he will unveil the piece de resistance—an expensive bowler hat. Although *Playboy*

magazine only appears briefly onscreen in the final version of the film, the screenplay uses fantasies of playboy consumerism—in particular, the bowler hat—to motivate Baxter’s climb up the corporate ladder. Since its inception in 1953, *Playboy* has promoted a sophisticated bachelor life of “Picasso, Nietzsche, jazz, sex” (“Editorial” 3). This playboy “life” of sexual and consumerist desire claims to provide a leisure-time antidote for an act of emasculation and repression that does not occur at work but at home and at the hands of the wife and family.

But *The Apartment* suggests that the playboy’s primary failing is his work arrangement with the corporation. Indeed, it is an ironic failing: on the one hand, Baxter’s close attention to his clothing implies that he measures his manhood by the things his executive salary affords him; on the other, the crisis of masculinity—the very crisis that necessitates his careerism and consumerism—originates at the office. The script first develops these ironies in a scrapped scene that undermines the playboy’s sartorial “glow” (*Apt* 68). In this early scene, Baxter does the seemingly unthinkable: while perusing the latest issue of *Playboy*, he skips the centerfold because he is “avidly interested” in an article about executive fashion. For the would-be playboy, fantasies of sexual desire require the proper accessories. Baxter returns to the centerfold only after viewing “photographs of male models wearing various styles of bowlers” (16). By implication, the playboy life exchanges the prison of family for another variation of the commodity-driven consolidated life.

The office party scene appeals to the film’s overarching spatial logic in order to subsume the playboy within the consolidated life. When Baxter finally dons a bowler, the scene with Fran cuts to a medium close-up in which the would-be playboy now dominates the frame. Emboldened, Baxter proposes a “stroll down Fifth Avenue” (*Apt* 73). More specifically, what Baxter proposes is not a stroll between himself and Fran but between “the three of us”—“you

and me and the bowler.” These offhand phrases distinguish between Baxter as an empirical person, what the film identifies as a “human being,” and his metonymic relationship to commodities, executive titles, and proper names (101). In this scene, the “human being” does not command on- and offscreen space so much as the bowler does. No less than an executive, the playboy is an onscreen proxy. The medium close-up confirms that *Baxter* is the extraneous term when he points to the bowler and identifies it as “the junior executive model” (Fig. 5) (72). His “big unveiling”—that love triangle between playboy, playmate, and bowler—anticipates a bigger one: in this scene, Baxter finally realizes that he is already in a love triangle with Fran and Sheldrake (74). Moreover, Sheldrake has been taking her to his apartment. When a phone call interrupts the scene, a deflated Baxter answers and then asks Fran to leave the office. Alone onscreen, Baxter nevertheless utters meek, servile responses to Sheldrake, who remains offscreen and unheard. Indeed, it is as if the triumphant walk to the new office never occurred. The playboy’s glamorous leisure has deteriorated into the familiar image of the Fordist worker dominated within the open-plan office.

The office party exaggerates the sense in which even executives must re-imagine the workplace as a site of pleasurable consumption. Given the diagrammatic quality of this critique, we expect the film to come full circle: because the office becomes a pad, the apartment should become an office. In other words, the film seems poised to efface work from the office only to re-impose it on the apartment—that is, on the would-be pad. To that end, the apartment certainly ceases to be a pad. Upon discovering the Fran-Sheldrake affair, a devastated Baxter picks up a married woman and takes her to his apartment. But the seduction stops when he stumbles on Fran, who has overdosed on sleeping pills in his apartment after learning that she is just one of Sheldrake’s casual office affairs. For Baxter, her suicide attempt completely punctures the



playboy fantasy of carefree leisure, of “the life” with “no headaches, no complications” (*Apt* 66). Over the next two days, his life becomes nothing but a series of headaches and complications as he covers for Sheldrake and worries about additional suicide attempts.

But the transformation is not entirely symmetrical because the apartment does not transform into an office as such. Rather, the film uses the suicide attempt to refocus on what it regards as the authentic, non-alienated, and outside—that is, on the constituents of what Kael would regard as its simplified social conscience. Following the suicide attempt, Baxter’s activities in the apartment depart from what the film has heretofore depicted as white-collar work—as work divided between the repetitive tasks of the clerk and the managerial tasks of the executive. Baxter instead becomes a caregiver. The nature of this new activity is captured in a simple exchange:

BAXTER: Please, Miss Kubelik, you got to promise me you won't do anything foolish.

FRAN: Who'd care?

BUD: I would. (*Apt* 125)

After saving Fran’s life, Baxter maintains a vigil next to her bed and, over the course of the next two days, entertains, nurses, and comforts her. Certainly, the narrative implies that the authenticity of Baxter’s care is a foregone conclusion: we know that he loves Fran. But these apartment scenes postpone this surefire conclusion by continuing to assess Baxter’s care according to a critique of the consolidated life. In these scenes, the difference between the authentic and the inauthentic depends on whether Baxter cares for Fran or for Sheldrake *via* Fran. Initially, the latter appears to be the case. Like the office drone, Baxter provides inauthentic care that, while not work as such, resembles the “deadened” routines characteristic of Fordist work-time. Once informed of the suicide attempt over the phone, the callous Sheldrake delegates

caregiving to Baxter, who accepts this new assignment with yet another “yes, sir” (106). By implication, Baxter regards Fran as less a human being than an onscreen proxy for an offscreen executive, caring for her only to keep Sheldrake’s “name out of it.” In exchange, Sheldrake eventually gives Baxter a second promotion. It is the familiar quid pro quo, but with a slight twist. By following the directives of his superior, the yes man packages what should be his authentic feelings and emotions—not just his “sweat” but his very “soul”—into the labor power that he sells to the corporation (Whyte 440).

Of course, the film’s point is precisely that the corporation has not fully consolidated life. The possibility of authentic care—of care that emanates from a “source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality”—survives (Hochschild 7). The film ultimately associates such authentic care with the *mensh*, a subject who purports to exist *outside* the corporation, and to be capable of acting in a manner irreducible to the drudgery of the Fordist worker (*Apt* 101). If the corporation would dehumanize work, leisure, and even care, the *mensh* signifies the film’s eminently “human” solution to the problem of Fordism. *The Apartment* anticipates this solution by explicitly contrasting authentic care from its inauthentic Fordist counterpart. In one of the film’s most enduring scenes, Baxter prepares a romantic Italian dinner for a convalescing Fran. A camera positioned inside the kitchen frames Baxter in the kitchen doorway as he cooks spaghetti. While this framing and the activity seem simple enough, the film treats Baxter’s movements with an unprecedented degree of sympathy. In previous scenes outside the apartment, he has struggled to control his own spastic movements or even to remain in the frame. In previous shots in the kitchen, Baxter is a maid cleaning up executives’ messes, an office drone heating up a TV dinner, or a failed playboy urgently brewing coffee to resuscitate Fran. But the cooking scene rearticulates his nervousness as virtuosity—indeed, the script describes his

motions as combining the “technique of Brillat-Savarin and Pancho Gonzales” (141). While “humming operatically,” he coordinates implements such as stovetop, saucepan, and even a tennis racquet with a grace that belies the mechanical productivity of the clerical worker or the managerial oversight of the executive.

Furthermore, the cooking scene purports to create a form of “togetherness” distinct from the inauthentic alternatives associated with either the playboy or the suburban family (*Apt* 117). Baxter’s cooking is the authentic activity of an unalienated self: “How about a little spaghetti with meat sauce? Made it myself” (145). Rather than “dressing for dinner,” Baxter advises Fran to “just come as you are” (141). Baxter rejects the sartorial excesses of the office and instead goes casual, rolling up his shirtsleeves and leaving his collar unbuttoned. Without becoming a pad, the apartment has undergone a transformation no less spectacular than that of the office. With its furniture rearranged, the apartment is no longer a lonely space or a bachelor pad, an hourly motel or a hospital, but a romantic space to share “a wonderful thing – dinner for two” (142).

Although interference by Consolidated Life executives ends this dinner before it begins, Baxter nevertheless returns to the office determined to reconcile corporate careerism and true love. Would that it were so easy, as circumstances threaten to push Baxter further inside the hegemony of Consolidated Life. After accepting a promotion to assistant director of personnel, Baxter is surprised to learn that Sheldrake, his own marriage now over, plans to marry Fran once he “enjoy[s] being a bachelor for a while” (*Apt* 152). Here several critics start to applaud the film’s final scenes for transcending the Fordist corporation. For Christopher Budd, for example, “the promise of ... humanity” spurs Baxter “to leave the vulgarity of the corporate world” (10). In Baxter’s new office on the twenty-seventh floor, Sheldrake eventually demands access to the

apartment in order to rekindle his relationship with Fran for a second time. But instead of giving Sheldrake an apartment key, Baxter returns his key to the executive washroom.<sup>11</sup> He quits his job by declaring that he has “decided to become a mensch,” confirming what we already know: Baxter really cares for Fran (*Apt* 159). Tellingly, the film adjusts its depiction of onscreen space. After he quits, the camera follows Baxter as he exits the office suite. When the music from the opening and promotion scenes resumes, it now authenticates a subject who has divorced spatial intelligibility from the corporation. The climb up the corporate ladder ends when he dispenses with his bowler and boards a down elevator, signaling what Wilder once characterized as Baxter’s emancipation from the consolidated life (Gehman 32).

The film completes its critical taxonomy of cinematic space by asserting an “outside” to the consolidated life. Since deference to off-screen space characterizes the inauthentic activities of alienated corporate drones, the film’s final shot reserves onscreen space for the authenticity of a mensch. Fran and Baxter have reunited in his apartment on New Year’s Eve. Both have effectively quit their jobs and, for that matter, quit Sheldrake. Baxter is leaving New York City. The final shot shows the two sitting on his sofa with a wall directly behind them. This shot is novel for several interrelated reasons. The perpendicular angle to the sofa avoids shooting the deep space of the apartment. Moreover, the *mise-en-scène* excises offscreen space—with Baxter’s MoMA posters and other belongings packed, the bare apartment walls no longer evoke the city. Most importantly, the static shot holds until a reciprocal gaze develops between Baxter and Fran—a gaze that generates a self-sufficient onscreen space that does not defer offscreen to hypothetical executives or clocks. According to film’s spatial logic, this two-shot finally confirms the presence of authentic *human beings*. This gaze would reassure us that “Baxter” is not a name stenciled on an office door or lettered in a company directory, or even a metonym

associated with some consumerist lifestyle. For that matter, Fran is not a “playmate” or, better yet, a dead plaything (*Apt* 123).

But such humanistic bromides should not distract from the complexity of the shot. Whereas the opening scene locates Baxter at precise coordinates, utter dislocation now looms for a mensch without a job or an apartment. With its bare walls and cardboard boxes, the apartment has never been less homely. In this moment that Gerd Gemünden describes as “*least anchored living*,” *The Apartment* distinguishes itself from corporate executive films and midcentury romantic comedies that typically conclude by privileging a specific diegetic space as a site of autonomy (129). These are the outside “places” – suburban homes or even executive offices that counter rationalized, clock-dominated Fordist space.<sup>12</sup> But this final shot carefully avoids placiality or fixity. In *The Apartment*, places such as executive offices, playboy pads, and suburban homes only disguise the persistence of alienated spaces “inside” the consolidated life. Thus, the film produces a purely cinematic solution in order to solve the problem of “inside” and “outside” spaces, of anyplace and place. Rather than thematically guaranteeing the authenticity of some place whenever it is off- or onscreen, the film formally authenticates the onscreen space of the mensch. When they each walk out on Sheldrake, Baxter and Fran provide the film’s first examples of this resolution. In other words, the film authenticates the mensch’s every movement and activity. Wherever he goes, Baxter cares and thus forges authentic space onscreen.

However, I have already suggested that the significance of this critique extends beyond its seriocomic treatment in the film. A 1960 promotional profile in – of all magazines – *Playboy* depicts the film’s director and co-writer as no less a mensch than his protagonist. Like Baxter with his meat sauce, Wilder makes his films himself:

The film was *Some Like It Hot*, conceived by Billy Wilder, written by Billy Wilder, produced by Billy Wilder, directed by Billy Wilder, promoted by Billy Wilder, and

forgotten by Billy Wilder as soon as it was finished, for by then Billy Wilder was thinking about a new film with Lemmon to be called *The Apartment*, which appears in fair shape to break the box-office record of *Hot*, the biggest-grossing comedy of all time. (Gehman 21)

The interview clarifies just who is accusing whom. Rather than an insurance corporation, the interview pits Wilder against the ghost of a studio system that is remembered as a bureaucratic impediment to creativity and care. Conversely, Wilder is an artist with integrity, “one of those rare human beings” who would rather lose “a job than compromise or say yes” (22, 23).

No stranger to self-reflexive filmmaking, Wilder effectively bookends his career as a writer-director with films that confront the changing structure of and systems of production within the industry.<sup>13</sup> For critics and audiences alike, *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) was the more notable film. By depicting the grotesque relationship that develops between a screenwriter and a silent-era star, the film casts a critical eye on the antagonisms between studios and their creative personnel, past and present. This Paramount film also explicitly anticipates the anti-executive positions undertaken in *The Apartment*. In addition to stylish, spacious offices, the most powerful executives depicted in both films share the surname “Sheldrake.” *Sunset Boulevard* also asserts a disjunction between corporate management and authentic creativity or care. According to Wilder’s earlier film, creative and artistic films are made in spite of executives and, moreover, in spite of a studio system that reproduces the worst consequences of the Fordist corporation: a mass-produced product and an alienated worker. In an early scene in *Sunset Boulevard*, the unemployed and desperate screenwriter Joe Gillis (William Holden) tries to find work by sacrificing creativity to the business of filmmaking. Indeed, it is Paramount that transforms Gillis into a yes man who tells another Sheldrake (Fred Clark)—another inauthentic anti-mensch—what he wants to hear. Gillis’s pitch only fails because an intelligent studio staffer—not a Paramount executive—pans his script as pabulum, but not before she acknowledges that Gillis has

“talent” (Wilder and Brackett 16). By implication, *Sunset Boulevard* attributes his “flat and banal” script to a studio system that fails to reward creativity with success. While Gillis tried to create something authentic “last year,” “this year [he’s] trying to earn a living.”

Fortunately for the talented Gillises in Hollywood, independent production promised to remove the dull-witted Sheldrakes from the initial conception and production of a film. Independent production was, if industry observers were to be believed, “a source of new freedom, new talent, and new ideas” (MacCann 14). Until his career began to decline in the mid-1960s, Wilder certainly agreed, as he made clear in a statement about his relationship with the three Mirisch brothers, the “packagers” who negotiated the financing and distribution of his films with United Artists (UA) and who managed the logistics of production and marketing: “All the Mirisch Company asks me is the name of the picture, a vague outline of the story and who’s going to be in it. The rest is up to me. You can’t get any more freedom than that” (qtd. in Balio, *UA* 168). For privileged “above-the-line” film personnel such as Wilder, independent production appears to subordinate the business of filmmaking to the imperatives of creativity. For that reason, many filmmakers regarded this type of film production as emancipation from the so-called mechanical productivity and hierarchical control of a studio system in which directing, as the producer-director Otto Preminger put it, became no different than working as “a foreman in a sausage factory” (99-100). Put another way, independent production turned the tables by transforming the Mirisch brothers, and even UA executives, into “yes men” in the service of the director-mensch.

Of course, this entrepreneurial-cum-creative image of independent production also served the bottom lines of UA and the Mirisch Company, who worked together to promote an image of a “maverick” studio and production company committed to facilitating freedom for filmmakers

(Balio, *UA* 73). For UA, the rise of independent production in a post-*Paramount* industry actually signified the relocation of studio power from film production and exhibition to distribution, the “most flexible and profitable branch of the motion picture business, especially in an era of rapidly changing audiences, tastes, and technologies” (Monaco 26). This focus on distribution was not unfamiliar to UA. Indeed, the studio was founded in 1919 to provide that single exclusive function to independent producers—initially, to distribute the films produced by its founders Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, and D. W. Griffith (Balio, “New Producers” 167). In 1951, the new studio managerial team of Arthur Krim and Robert Benjamin greatly expanded this commitment to distributing independently produced films with a simple plan: UA offered “independent producers complete production financing, creative control over their work, and a share of the profits” (168).

But the new relationship between independent production and studio distribution generates its own antagonisms. Even at UA, “independence” was a slippery concept since “many producers [were] still only as free as their production-distribution deal [let] them be” (MacCann 17). By structuring its business model around non-negotiable distribution fees, UA became the world’s largest film distributor in the mid-sixties, earning profits even if the producers “took it on the chin” (Balio, “New Producers” 170). In addition to creative bait-and-switches and financial risks, independent production also introduced filmmaking personnel to potentially disadvantageous work arrangements. Since studios without theater chains no longer needed to mass-produce films, production was reorganized around “a film, not a firm” (Staiger 330). As a result, the long-term contracts of both staff and stars now represented unnecessary fixed costs. An independent production company would instead approach UA with a “package,” the new basic unit of organizing labor in post-*Paramount* Hollywood. A package consists of the crucial



elements—director, stars, story—necessary to pitch and to secure financing for a single film (330-331). For above-the-line personnel, this short-term “package-unit” system promises flexibility and creative freedoms but at a potential cost—not only the new financial risks involved in studio distribution agreements, but also the increasing discontinuousness of film work itself.

In other words, independent production reconsolidates the power of the studios even as it appears to satisfy a critique of Fordism and, by implication, the studio system. Indeed, independent production nullifies the salience of that critique. Since it always focused on distribution, UA had “never owned a studio nor had it ever held any actors under contract” (Balio, “New Producers” 167). These business practices earned UA the nickname “the studio without walls” (Balio, *UA* 161). The implications for *The Apartment* are clear: the same spatial logic that levels a devastating critique of the consolidated life also promotes UA’s flexible business strategies. After all, a studio without walls realizes the critical spatial metaphors prevalent throughout *The Apartment*; UA is a corporation without an *inside* and for which all creativity happens *outside*. Likewise, a company press release trumpets the Mirisches’ packaging services for enabling a filmmaker “to do the thing he most wants to do”: namely, to “concentrate completely on the films, on what appears *on the screen*” (qtd. in Balio, *UA* 161, emphasis added). Rather than the vision of any particular director, the business practices of UA and its closest collaborators guarantee the authenticity of cinematic space.

Given this sympathy between corporate strategies and the filmmaking of a director-mensch, *The Apartment* does not resolve Fordist contradictions so much as it provides a point of departure for considering the new antagonisms that structure post-Fordist creative work.<sup>14</sup> First, *The Apartment* ultimately gestures to the inadequacy of the categories of Fordist work. Rather

than consolidating life, creative work gestures to the ways in which productive, capitalist activity matches the complexity of life itself. “Authenticity” does not preclude care from being work; instead, care is valuable precisely because it strikes us as authentic or outside. In that sense, the film’s final two-shot confronts us with an image of a post-Fordist worker whose work “requires not too little but too much of the self” (Weeks, “Life” 242). Baxter is both a mensch and a careworker – as a result, no appeal to offscreen space, to the criteria of inauthenticity or alienation, can dissociate the two.

The two-shot also evokes the package-unit system. Here this system signifies the type of work arrangement that Andrew Ross has described as a “zone of contestation among competing versions of flexibility” (*Nice Work* 50). In the final shot, the prospects of lasting romantic love between Baxter and Fran are “practically unimaginable” (Sikov 439). They share no kiss. Fran deflects Baxter’s declaration of love with an appeal to the open-endedness of negotiation: “Shut up and deal” (*Apt* 166). Despite their shared gaze, Baxter and Fran are both “on [their] own” (165); they are both entrepreneurs, constrained by a system of production to form a package no less caring for its temporariness. Indeed, the final shot only tentatively arrests Baxter and Fran in one moment of a continuous movement, of flexibility gained at a heavy price: homelessness, joblessness, precariousness. We are left to wonder whether the shot confronts us with the creative and caring mensch so much as another Yiddishism: the unlucky—and unemployed—schlimazel. After all, in love and in independent production, there are no sure things, no permanent relationships, and no secure careers.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>“From Discipline” 161. My discussion of Fordism is indebted to the scholarship of David Harvey and Nancy Fraser, which uses the term “Fordism” as, in part, a periodizing one in order to identify salient characteristics of the “long postwar boom” in the United States between the years 1945 and 1973 (Harvey, “Fordism” 129). Following World War II, first-world institutions such as the welfare state were developed through “a series of compromises and repositionings” between the state, corporate capital, and organized labor (132). But more than the imperatives of mass consumption and mass production, the critique of a “total way of life”—of a consolidated life—hyperbolizes Fordism into a system that has succeeded in “rationalizing all major aspects of social life, including many never before subject to deliberate organization” (Harvey, “Fordism” 135, Fraser, “From Discipline” 163).

<sup>2</sup>For a recent assessment of these and other midcentury sociological texts, see McClay.

<sup>3</sup>Boozer 18. For further discussion of this genre, see Boozer 18-49. For a compelling examination of the relationship between *Executive Suite* and corporate reorganization at MGM, see Christensen 186-209.

<sup>4</sup>This quotation is from Wilder and I. A. L. Diamond’s screenplay *The Apartment* (101). Additional quotations from the screenplay will be cited parenthetically as “*Apt.*”

<sup>5</sup>“Trouble” 118. On the developments in the film industry that motivate the transition from the studio system to independent production, see Schatz, Lev, and Monaco. On the role that United Artists and the Mirisch Company played in pioneering independent production, see the second volume of Balio’s *United Artists*, his indispensable history of the studio.

<sup>6</sup>Starting with *Some Like It Hot* in 1959, the Mirisch Company and United Artists (UA) produced, financed, and distributed the eight films that Wilder directed and co-wrote until the release of *The Front Page* (Universal) in 1974. During those fifteen years, the apparent exception is *Kiss Me Stupid* (1964) a film distributed by Lopert Pictures. But UA moved the distribution of *Kiss Me Stupid* to Lopert, a subsidiary company, after the film drew negative attention for its farcical depiction of marriage.

<sup>7</sup>The opening sequence in *The Apartment* parodies the conventions of classical corporate executive films. In such films, the executive-protagonist mediate between corporate power and the “street-level” experiences of everyday Americans that are dramatized in the distance between aerial shots of skylines and street-level shots of skyscrapers. For example, *Woman’s World* opens with a pattern of shots familiar from *The Apartment*: it cuts from an aerial shot of New York City to several closer aerial shots of skyscrapers and, eventually, to a street-level shot of a skyscraper. Likewise, the film begins with a voiceover in which Ernest Gifford, the head of an eponymous corporation, surveys “a city of eight million men and women.” Whereas *The Apartment* attributes such powerful knowledge and aerial perspectives to a hegemonic corporation, the sequence of shots in *Women’s World* tempers those fears. After the aerial shots, Gifford does not initially appear in the boardroom but in a shot on the street outside his company’s skyscraper.

After showing Gifford enter the lobby and board an elevator, the camera returns to a position outside the skyscraper; this shot pans up the skyscraper's exterior in order to mimic the movement of the elevator. In other words, the shot effectively humanizes Gifford's rise from the street to a position of corporate power. After another cut, we rejoin Gifford as he exits the elevator on the top floor.

<sup>8</sup>Holden and Peck star in the films *Executive Suite* and *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, respectively. Van Heflin stars in both *Woman's World* and *Patterns*. For a protagonist similar to Baxter, see Tony Randall in *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?*

<sup>9</sup>For more on masculinity's relationship to Billy Graham and Christian evangelism, see Gilbert. The bibliography on masculinity, consumerism, and *Playboy* is extensive. For a seminal discussion, see Ehrenreich 42-51. For more recent studies, see Fraterrigo and Osgerby. On masculinity and New Frontier liberalism, see Cuordileone.

<sup>10</sup>In *Woman's World*, chief sales manager Philip Briggs stays offscreen because he dies before the narrative begins. In the opening scene, the film motivates the search for his successor by cutting twice to shots of his empty office chair. In *Executive Suite*, the "one-man corporation" Avery Bullard does not appear onscreen as such; rather, the film begins by assuming his perspective in an extended subjective shot that climaxes with his death. In the film's climactic boardroom scene, Don Walling stands behind Bullard's baronial chair and before stained-glass windows to deliver the speech that wrests control of the corporation from Loren Shaw, the cold-hearted and calculating "efficiency" expert.

<sup>11</sup>Keys have symbolic import elsewhere in popular depictions of both executives and playboys. In the farcical film *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?*, for example, a key to "the executive powder room" is the prominent prize for a promotion. When Baxter returns the washroom key (and keeps his apartment key), he also undercuts the fantasy articulated in immensely popular *Playboy* articles like "Playboy's Penthouse Apartment" (1956), which guide the reader through a "penthouse apartment for the urban bachelor – a man who enjoys good living, a sophisticated connoisseur of the lively arts, of food and drink and congenial companions of both sexes" (54). The design of the article reinforces the importance of the key—its silhouette, complete with the *Playboy* rabbit depicted in negative space, serves as the background to the text.

<sup>12</sup>For example, *Executive Suite* concludes by assuring the viewer that the titular space resists "the tensions of the lower floors" to instead reassert order and morality within the corporation. *Woman's World* and even *Patterns*, the strangest entry in the corporate executive genre, reach similar conclusions about the office. *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* participates in the same placiality but privileges the suburban home over the office. Perhaps the romantic comedy *Please Don't Eat the Daisies* (1960) most clearly articulates the importance of place when its protagonist-housewife insists that a house transcends the security of bricks and mortar: "It's more than [a house and kids]. It's putting down roots in a community. ... From now on the Mackays are really going to belong somewhere."

<sup>13</sup>If *Sunset Boulevard* is Wilder's first film about Hollywood, *Fedora* (1978) is his last. While *The Apartment* celebrates independent production, *Fedora* damns it for producing the conditions of Wilder's obsolescence. By 1974, Wilder's longstanding relationship with United Artists has deteriorated after a decade of box-office disappointments. For *Fedora*, he and longtime co-writer I. A. L. Diamond accepted a humiliating "step deal" with Universal only to see the project put into "turnaround" (Sikov 552). A scramble for financing ends with German backers but the film struggles to find distribution in the United States. When United Artists eventually picks up *Fedora* for American release, Wilder describes the distributor's efforts as "perfunctory and insulting [...], spending about \$625 on an advertising campaign" (Sikov 561). The film is another box-office failure.

In *Fedora*, Barry Detweiler (William Holden), a washed-up producer with a script, searches for the eponymous forgotten film starlet of the studio and the early independent production eras. Fedora refuses to accept the role, but tries to console Detweiler. Finding another actress should be easy since he already has a scenario. But Detweiler responds that he's "got nothing." "It's a whole different biz now": "The kids with beards have taken over" – presumably, the Spielbergs, Coppolas, Altmans, and Lucases – and "they don't need scripts. Just give them a handheld camera with zooms lens."

<sup>14</sup>*The Apartment* is certainly not the only United Artists film that criticizes industry competitors or work arrangements in the studio system. In the iconic opening scene of Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936), the depredations of working on a factory-floor assembly line double as a satire of studio production and, more specifically, the introduction of sound technology. Under the management of Krim and Benjamin, UA also distributes Robert Aldrich's *The Big Knife* (1955), an adaptation of a Clifford Odets's play that does little to hide its disdain for the powerful executives, and long-term contracts, of the studio era.

## CHAPTER 2: WRITING AS SACRIFICIAL LABOR: LITERARY IMPRINTS AND THE FICTION OF RICHARD YATES

By the 1970s, the career of the fiction writer Richard Yates had foundered. While his first novel *Revolutionary Road* (1961) sold moderately well and was a finalist for the National Book Award, subsequent books such as the short-story collection *Eleven Kinds of Loneliness* (1962) and the novel *A Special Providence* (1969) had scant sales and, in the case of the latter, poor reviews. For that matter, his career as a novelist was never successful enough to spare him from working a wide variety of salaried and freelance jobs.<sup>1</sup> This disappointment surfaced in a drunken 1972 interview in which Yates provided his most sustained reflection on his career:

A popular writer, a writer who gains a broad and sustained contemporary audience, I guess, like any other writer wants to know he's good, and the bestseller lists and talk shows and his annual income all repay whatever faith it was that sat him down in front of his typewriter in the first place. But if he's a serious writer that's got to come second. . . . Much more common, and I think the case is mine, [is when] the good work is its own reward and you share it with as many readers as you can and it stays alive, and has some hard-won clarity and richness, some distillation of human investment, that continues to claim some kind of permanent interest no matter what angles fashion may dispose new readers towards. . . . My first book made a big, popular splash and that kind of success was intoxicating, and I was in the racket, in the race, but the down that followed it was miserable, and the real success has been a quieter, more solid kind of thing. I know the book's good. It's there. It wins new readers. That level is there to be reached, and I don't need a cheering crowd to tell me that it's worth it. It would be nice to be the fashion, to be recognized for what I'm trying to do – in the sense that Mailer is, for instance – life would be easier in a lot of ways – but the price of doing something difficult and honest, something true, as April Wheeler learned, is doing it alone. (qtd. in Bailey 414)

According to Yates's biographer Blake Bailey, this "besotted" response to a question about "neglect" never made it into the journal *Ploughshares* (411, 414). Nevertheless, Bailey insists that Yates "surely believed every word of it" (414).

Yates's original response attempts to answer a simple question: why does a writer *write*? While every writer "wants to know he's good," Yates nevertheless divides writers into two basic types. For "popular" writers, he insists, writing is a means to remuneration and prestige - the "bestseller lists and talk shows and [...] annual income [that] all repay whatever faith it was that sat him down in front of his typewriter in the first place." Yates amplifies this point in the printed interview when he suggests that even a writer as esteemed as Philip Roth is guilty of success until proven otherwise.<sup>2</sup> He even allows that *Revolutionary Road* poised him to become just that type of writer: "My first book made a big, popular splash and that kind of success was intoxicating." But such success is dangerous because it puts the writer "in the racket, in the race." In any case, Yates is a "serious writer" who instead enjoys "real success," a "quieter, more solid kind of thing" that does not respond to the caterwauling of publishers or readers. This real success wavers between pleasure and pain. On the one hand, success is an intrinsic property of the writing itself: "good work is its own reward." But serious writing tempers this pleasure with pain by extracting a "price" from the writer. To prove his point, Yates quotes directly from *Revolutionary Road*, thereby implying that the novel provides an exemplary image of just such a writer. He identifies the difficulties of serious writing with April Wheeler, a protagonist in the novel for whom the "price" of "doing something difficult and honest" was dying of a self-administered abortion.

By 1972, the year of the interview, writing commercially unsuccessful novels was second nature to Yates. Excepting *Revolutionary Road*, his hardcover, mass-market, and quality paperback sales were, as his longtime publisher Seymour Lawrence put it, "not impressive" and even his first novel was not a bestseller.<sup>3</sup> In other words, a writer's tension between literary integrity and commercial success had been resolved for Yates in favor of the former—that is, in

favor of April Wheeler. But this lack of commercial success was not always a foregone conclusion. According to Bailey, *Revolutionary Road* was “a potentially hot property” while in prepublication at Atlantic-Little, Brown (219). Besides hardcover sales, publishing executives saw in the novel the promise of lucrative subsidiary rights. Atlantic-Little, Brown increased Yates’s advance in exchange for a percentage of potential television, film, and radio rights (Lawrence, *Yates* 57). Prior to the hardcover release of the novel, *Esquire* bought the rights to publish an excerpt (Lawrence, *Yates* 57), the mass-market paperback rights were sold (Bailey 220), and the film studio Columbia Pictures and the mogul Sam Goldwyn, Jr. were already talking about screen adaptations (Bailey 219). Those film talks fizzled and disappeared for nearly fifty years.<sup>4</sup>

We’re thus confronted with an interesting counterfactual scenario: given his typology of writers, how would Yates have assessed his own writing if *Revolutionary Road* had realized its potential commercial success? In the five years that it took him to write the novel, Yates certainly grappled with the pitfalls of would-be success. In 1955, a reader at Atlantic-Little, Brown rejected an early draft as “one of the many imitators of *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*,” Sloan Wilson’s immensely successful middlebrow novel about a breadwinner who tries to balance work and family (Lawrence, *Yates* 56). In that same *Ploughshares* interview, Yates agrees with the rejection, admitting that “the first draft of *Revolutionary Road* was very thin, very sentimental” (68). On its face, Yates’s agreement concedes that his “somewhat hackneyed” early draft about the Wheelers—a young family that grows disaffected with “Conformity” in the office and the suburbs—was indistinguishable from the dozens, if not hundreds, of other midcentury suburban-corporate novels by writers such as Wilson, John Marquand, John Cheever, Cameron Hawley, Howard Swiggett, George De Mare, and Theodore



White (Lawrence qtd. in Bailey 178).<sup>5</sup> But this comparison between Yates's drafts and Wilson's novel implies more than a thematic similarity. For a real serious writer, imitating Wilson's novel also includes the accusation that one has tried to achieve commercial middlebrow success. *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* was a bestseller in hardcover and mass-market paperback formats, and was also adapted into a hit 1956 movie starring Gregory Peck. Its title and its titular silhouette served as shorthand for sociologists and commentators who were trying to capture the zeitgeist of white-collar, middle-class America.<sup>6</sup> In other words, a writer imitating *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* has not tried to write a novel. He had instead made a single-minded attempt to found an industry with concerns in hardcover books, quality- and mass-market paperbacks, serializations, sequels, and Hollywood films.

For *Revolutionary Road*, a novel that excoriates white-collar work and suburban conformity, this charge of imitation is damning. Like other serious writers, Yates stigmatizes middlebrow writing by assuming that it succeeds only because it can be easily consumed—not read—as a commodity in the mass market of readers. The artistic pretensions of fiction like *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* or Marquand's *Point of No Return*, so the story goes, disguise the fact that these novels are “bad imitations of genuine art” (A. Ross, *No Respect* 31). But it's hard to fathom that Yates wanted his first novel to fail commercially. Starting in the late 1940s, he supported his wife and young family as a hack writer—initially as a staffer and, later, as a freelancer—for the business machines company Remington Rand. As a result, Yates's allusion to April Wheeler in the 1972 interview suggests that his first novel was already preoccupied with reconciling seemingly incompatible desires for commercial success and literary seriousness. I argue that *Revolutionary Road* effects this reconciliation by narrating a strategy that is one-part polemic, one-part apologia. The polemic reinforces the stigma towards middlebrowism by

sketching the familiar outlines of the Fordist anthropology of work. In this case, a “real” writer reprimands middlebrowism by depicting it as a mystification of a scene familiar from the industrial assembly line or the open-plan office: the middlebrow writer is a drone-worker, his act of writing is a mechanical and repetitive task, and his novel a commodity.

In turn, the apologia purports to transcend the middlebrow dilemma. But such excoriations of middlebrow fiction, or related topics like “Conformity,” were already a convention of middlebrow fiction itself. For a middlebrow writer, the strenuous objection that one is serious—that, for example, one despises the “deadly dull” suburbs—is not sufficient since such objections are *de rigueur*.<sup>7</sup> *Revolutionary Road* proposes to transcend the middlebrow dilemma by narrating its own failure as a protective measure against the prospect of its commercial success. When April Wheeler dies trying to abort her child, the novel transforms this natal failure, so to speak, into a sign of its artistic integrity. A full account of these polemical and apologetic strategies also considers the “extraordinary transformation” in progress in the midcentury publishing industry (Whiteside 184). In the 1950s, this so-called “gentlemen’s business”—a business whose *raison d’être*, it claimed, was the publication of “serious” or “literary” fiction—declines as trade publishers slowly reorganize to take better advantage of profitable subsidiary rights to paperback reprinting, magazine serializing, book clubs, and Hollywood films (Tebbel, *Between the Covers* 82). For would-be serious writers, middlebrow fiction—especially when it circulates as mass-market paperbacks, an exceptionally profitable format—is an alarming symptom of a publishing industry that is abandoning its craft-like origins to become “a business like any other, selling books as others sell soap” (Murphy 43).

As I have already suggested, the novel’s polemic against the middlebrow writer, or the commercial writer with pretensions to seriousness, succeeds by uncovering the appearance of

literature as a disguise for what *Revolutionary Road* calls “production control” (122). *Revolutionary Road* most clearly initiates this polemic by narrating the dull imagination of the white-collar hack. Becoming such a hack, the novel suggests, is the final step in an altogether familiar breadwinner narrative. In *Revolutionary Road*, the breadwinner narrative does not signify mature consent, or even good fortune, so much as passive participation in an adulthood that the protagonist Frank Wheeler endures as “a succession of things he hadn’t really wanted”—but instead must—“do” (51). But things weren’t always so bleak. After serving uneventfully in France during World War II and attending Columbia University on the GI Bill, Frank successfully cultivates the image of an intellectual and bohemian – of an “intense, nicotine-stained Jean-Paul Sartre sort of man” (23-4). The final puzzle piece falls into place when his affectations win him the heart of April, a “first-rate girl” for whom Frank is ““the most interesting person [she’s] ever met”” (23, 25). But when April gets pregnant, the breadwinner narrative starts in earnest; the couple marries, eventually abandoning the bohemian life in the Village. If anything, the breadwinning life follows in the desperate footsteps of middlebrowism: it’s about “proving, proving” (51). The next step is “a hopelessly dull job to prove he could be as responsible as any other family man,” then a “mature” but “overpriced, genteel apartment,” a second child “to prove that the first one hadn’t been a mistake” and, finally, “a house in the country” (51). Fed up with such “proving,” April will eventually suggest that the family expatriate to France in order to regain the promise of the bohemian life.

How does a “Jean-Paul Sartre sort of man” survive the transition to white-collar breadwinning? *Revolutionary Road* develops its polemic by translating middlebrow success and middlebrow seriousness into the competing laborist and humanist ethics of white-collar work.<sup>8</sup> The novel’s depiction of these two ethics center on Frank and, in particular, two sequential

workdays at the Home Office of Knox Business Machines: on the first day, Frank seduces a co-worker; on the second, he composes a memo and a brochure. For now, we can simply summarize these ethics in terms of the ideal worker that each presumes: for the laborist ethic, the ideal is the white-collar breadwinner who works to support a family; for the humanist ethic, a *no-collar* artist who realizes self-development in the office by applying his “authentic” experiences to work. In *Revolutionary Road*, the polemic succeeds inasmuch as it “uncovers” or “exposes” the fundamental identity between the two ethics. Put simply, the self-development of the white-collar worker-cum-artist—which doubles as an image of the successful middlebrow writer with pretensions to seriousness—ultimately disguises the dull imagination of the white-collar hack.

The breadwinner narrative, or Frank’s decision to give up the bohemian life for a white-collar job, sketches the assumptions that underpin the laborist ethic. In *Revolutionary Road*, the relationship that the laborist ethic assumes between pay and work is familiar: “in exchange for so many dollars,” Frank gives Knox his “body and [his] nice college-boy smile for so many hours a day” (75). Of course, this is a cynical version of the ethic, a careful triangulation of work, salary, and imagination.<sup>9</sup> Yes, Frank works, but only “to get enough dough coming in to keep [his family] solvent for the next year or so” (75). For Frank, a paycheck is purely instrumental, whereas the conventional laborist ethic understands the wage or a salary to imply not only “adequate recompense” but also “respect” (Weeks, *Problem* 59). Such cynicism would also preserve the autonomy of his imagination, especially since the laborist ethic presumes that a strict barrier separates the subject and activities of work- and leisure-time. Thus, Frank can “retain [his] own identity” at Knox (*RR* 75). In this respect, this cynical laborist ethic also protects or sequesters the so-called imaginative *man*, or even the would-be artist, from the dull *worker*. Because it cannot “be considered ‘interesting’ in its own right,” the work does not

“touch” the workers. In turn, it is precisely because Frank *is* “interesting”—or so he thinks—that Knox cannot expect him “to care about whatever boring thing it is [that he’s] supposed to be doing.” He can instead “sort of turn off [his] mind every morning at nine and leave it off all day” because his work does not require thought. And after work? Beyond the hours of 9-to-5, Knox and Frank “leave each other strictly alone,” or so says Frank. Before the Wheelers move to suburban Connecticut, the bohemian reappears “every afternoon at five” (76-77) when Frank returns to a Manhattan apartment and to “a girl as totally unlike the wife of a Knox man as the apartment was unlike a Knox man’s home” (77). At such moments, “the Knox Building could have been a thousand miles away,” and the difference between work and leisure seems absolute.

In 1948, this scenario is a stopgap measure. Working for Knox buys Frank enough time to “figure things out” (RR 75). Which is to say, this scenario claims that a salary and nonwork autonomy, the rewards of the laborist ethic, eventually enable the worker to transcend the conditions of that same ethic.<sup>10</sup> Of course, Frank is now arriving at the same office seven years later as a “middle-aged” thirty-year old (68). Here *Revolutionary Road* rejects the laborist ethic by exaggerating its crucial claims about imaginative autonomy to the point of parody. What the laborist ethic instead fosters, the novel ultimately implies, is the dull imagination: asked “what he did for a living,” Frank responds that “he had the dullest job you could possibly imagine” (78). It’s an almost nonsensical phrase. Rather than pushing our imagination towards sublimity, the superlative asks us to contract its horizons. The novel’s next sentence amplifies the point: Frank “walked into the Knox Building like an automaton” (78). Circumstances can cause a writer, we see, to automate his imagination as well.

On this Monday in 1955, the office serves as the staging ground for the parodic transformation of a white-collar drone into an imaginative man. Of course, what Frank is trying

to figure out is the best way to seduce Maureen Grube, an office secretary. The novel exaggerates the iconoclastic and spontaneous quality of his imagination into a form of artistry. For example, he decides to seduce Maureen on a whim (“Why not?”) in full defiance of the office’s “unspoken rule” (*RR* 85, 86). These efforts mistake the dullest fantasy that a breadwinner can possibly imagine—a fantasy that follows the clichéd contours of the seven-year itch—for a virtuosic escape from deadly, dull life (*RR* 20).<sup>11</sup>

But how to abscond with her? For Frank, going through “the motions of working” has become “the best way to think” (85). While he pretends to mull over rectifying a promotional crisis, “the beginnings of a bright idea” emerge (88). Frank is “suddenly” on the move towards Maureen’s desk with “his heart in his mouth.” More paper shuffling serves as foreplay before he eventually whisks Maureen to lunch and, eventually, her apartment. In other words, this parody succeeds by touting the desirability of mindless work: such work is necessary for—if not indistinguishable from—the triumph of the imagination. The sacrosanct separation between work and leisure collapses because the act of shuffling papers now paradoxically signals imaginative autonomy.<sup>12</sup>

Fresh off this initial seduction, Frank arrives home to a surprise party for his thirtieth birthday. The party starts with a (dull) dream come true: his wife April apologizes for questioning his manhood during a recent fight. But the apology prefaces April’s “elaborate new program for going to Europe ‘for good’ in the fall” (*RR* 108). Now it is April who “had it all figured out.” The expatriation, she insists, will allow Frank to find himself: “‘You’ll be reading and studying and taking long walks and thinking. You’ll have *time*, for the first time in your life you’ll have time to find out what it is you want to do, and when you find it you’ll have the time and the freedom to start doing it” (109). Frank needn’t emulate modernist heroes like

Hemingway; April assures him that it doesn't matter if he isn't "an artist, say, or a writer" since it is his "very *essence* that's being stifled" in suburban-corporate America (115). Of course, April's plan "instantly frightened" Frank, who isn't about essences so much as images, especially his own reflection in mirrors and picture windows (108). But when he asked her to identify that essence, April delivers a deft coup de grâce that flatters the image with which Frank seduced Maureen: "Don't you know? You're the most valuable and wonderful thing in the world. You're a man" (115). When the couple has sex, Frank had never "triumphed more completely over time and space." Despite his fears, Frank agrees to April's plans to expatriate.

On Tuesday, Frank's commute to the office intimates that the effects of the seduction and expatriation continue to reverberate, scrambling the laborist relationship between work and imaginative leisure. Indeed, the Jean-Paul Sartre sort of man is revived. Tuesday begins "a time of [...] joyous derangement, of [...] exultant carelessness" (*RR* 119). The drone has been replaced by the artist, the routine automation of Monday by the exceptionality of Tuesday, the "only day that would always stand clear and sharp in [Frank's] memory." On Tuesday, Frank "allow[s] himself to be late for work" (120); at Grand Central station, Frank's coffee is "delicious," his paper napkin "excellently white and dry," and his waitress "so courteous and so clearly pleased with the rhythm of her own efficiency." Indeed, this workday—if we can even call it that—promises that every task will be "easy" because every task is performed in a "euphoria of half-refreshed exhaustion" (120).

Monday's exercise in the dull imagination anticipates similar exercises on Tuesday that now target the humanist work ethic. The novel unmasks the humanist ethic's ideal artist-worker, we shall see, as the laborist drone in disguise. Loitering in Grand Central, for example, Frank watches the "endless desperate swarms of [other men], hurrying through the station and the

streets” to the “giant silent insectarium[s]” (RR 119). Ironically, this cliché derides the cynical exploitation of the laborist ethic. After they “swallow [the workers] up and contain them,” these midtown office buildings host a “passionate little dumb show” (120). Gone is yesterday’s workplace, one that allows workers to go through the motions and thereby preserve the autonomy of their nonwork imaginations. Rather, this workplace now imprisons “hundreds of tiny pink men in white shirts” in a desultory, non-stop work process: they are “forever shifting papers and frowning into telephones.” In *Revolutionary Road*, it is a foregone conclusion that this critique includes the means of its own dismantling. One must “stand in one tower”—in an adjacent midtown office building—in order to “inspect [*another*] great silent insectarium.” But the point is not that Frank is a hypocrite. What matters is that Frank’s putative exceptionality, his masculine-cum-artistic pretensions, does not dislodge the centrality of work *as such*. While other novels and cultural texts share its derision of the breadwinning, laborist ethic, Yates’s novel distinguishes itself by distrusting the humanist ethic.

But “first things first”: Frank must “deal like a man with Maureen Grube” by putting an end—albeit a temporary one—to their relationship (RR 120). Once again, the novel is exaggerating the virtuosity with which Frank completes this task. Like writing middlebrow fiction, ending the relationship with Maureen is *easy*: “if he’d spent days planning and rehearsing it, filling page after page of scratch paper with revised and crossed-out sentences, he could never have come up with a more dignified, more satisfactory speech” (122-23). Composed “on the spur of the moment,” his breakup speech is an effort without waste that—damnably—requires no act of writing and no revision (120). His triumphs seem limited only by his imagination, and Frank wonders if “there anything in the world he couldn’t do?” (122).



What he does next seemed unthinkable on Monday, when the worker's imagination defied the prerogatives of the company. After all, the seduction amounts to an elaborate example of work avoidance. Yet Tuesday sees the workplace reconfigured as an opportune site for self-development, creativity, and autonomy. The same skills that made the seduction successful enable a new type of business writing. Emboldened by his speech to Maureen, Frank tackles "the whole disorderly problem of the branch manager in Toledo and the production control brochure" (RR 122). The brochure is a "Real Goody," or the sort of arduous work assignment that employees like Frank scrupulously avoid (86). According to the manager's memo, the brochure, which is slated for distribution at an upcoming conference, "*is so inferior that it does not fulfill its purpose in any way, shape, or manner*" (88). On Tuesday, Frank responds by dictating a memo to the branch manager, promising a brochure that answers the specific failings of its predecessor, the awkwardly-titled "*Pinpoint Your Production with the Knox '500.'*" That brochure was a "thick, coated-stock, four-color brochure" whose "densely printed pages" "defied simple logic" and baffled its "readership" (87). In its place, Frank promises *Speaking of Production Control*, a document with "no slick format, no fancy artwork or advertising jargon to tell its story" (123). While *Pinpoint* was garish, the new brochure will deliver a "brief, straightforward sales message," "crisply printed in large, easy-to-read type, in black and white." Indeed, it is a brochure designed "'to give the NAPE delegate nothing more or less than what he wants': namely, 'the facts.'"

Just like Frank, *Speaking* is exceptional because it delivers writing with "all the immediacy of plain talk" (RR 123). The phrase "plain talk" alludes to the "'plain talk' movement" in business and bureaucratic communication of the 1940s and 1950s. Taking the writings of the "readability" advocates such as Rudolf Flesch and Jacques Barzun as its point of

departure, the movement exemplified the “great new preoccupation” in business with correcting the “communication breakdown” (Whyte, *Anybody* vii). Incomprehensible memoranda containing “bureaucratese” or “gobbledygook” obscured the agency of the writers (50). In this argument, such writing inadvertently undercuts the corporate criteria that they are meant to uphold—criteria that *Revolutionary Road* identifies as “SPEED, ACCURACY, CONTROL” (78). For that reason, the Knox corporate brass praise the plain-talking *Speaking of Production Control* as “a crackerjack” because it rebukes the “opaque” writing that makes the Toledo memo and *Pinpoint* virtually unreadable (174, 87). A sales executive suggests that the brochure succeeds because it elides the distinction between writing and talking, between print and voice; it excises its origins in corporate committees, teamwork, and assembly lines. Or, as the executive puts it: ““To me it wasn’t like a piece of reading matter at all. It was like a man talking”” (195).

But the executive is only partially correct. The brochure and the memo—and even the act of composing them—are so crackerjack because each one initiates its own act of seduction. Frank’s memo in response to the Toledo branch manager start in customarily banal fashion—a formulaic header and opening sentence—before stalling “without any idea of how the matter was going to be taken in hand, if at all” (RR 122). But soon “the branch manager [...] was turning out to be as easy to handle as Maureen Grube,” and the Dictaphone becomes a subtly sexual object once Frank began “fingering the mouthpiece.” That sexual charge immediately generates ideas, as well as pleasure; “soon he was intoning one smooth sentence after another, pausing only to smile in satisfaction.” It is as if Frank never left the restaurant, a place where he seduced Maureen with “sentences that poured from him,” “paragraphs [that] composed themselves and took wing,” and “appropriate anecdotes [that] sprang to his service and fell back to make way for the stately passage of epigrams” (96).

More importantly, the laborist ethic has suffered a crippling blow. Frank is not giving Knox his “smile” in exchange for “so many dollars” but because he finds the work satisfying, if not pleasurable (*RR* 75). Simply put, Frank doesn’t compose the brochure as a means to laborist compensations; rather, he views it as *better* work. Here the novel shifts its question in order to ask what happens when that Jean-Paul Sartre sort of man applies those creative or imaginative skills *on the job*? How does one—or should one—level a critique of what seems to be *better* work? These new questions also mark a shift from depicting the laborist to the humanist work ethic. According to Marxist humanists such as Erich Fromm, the humanist ethic “affirms a vision of unalienated labor,” substituting the laborist concern for “the quantity of work’s compensation” with one focused on the ensuring the “qualities of its experience” (Weeks, *Problem* 105). In other words, the separation of work and leisure, so fundamental to the laborist ethic, dissolves, but not because work is mechanical; the dull imagination has not absorbed life. Rather, the anthropology of work itself has undergone a transformation, introducing new forms of productive activity that do not presume repetitive tasks performed by dull or automatic drones. Embraced by 1960s theories of human-resources management, the so-called unalienated humanist work instead requires that workers now “bring their ‘authentic’ selves from outside work into work.”<sup>13</sup> Indeed, work now exists as an opportunity for developing and expressing the self, its affects, and its experiences. If a “disillusioned young family man” imagined and carried out a seduction so as to escape the laborist ethic, that same activity now resurfaces as the basis of a new form of work (*RR* 97). Indeed, it is precisely Frank’s ostensible dissatisfaction with the routines of white-collar work and family that provide the basis for a commercial breakthrough: seductive plain talk.

*Revolutionary Road* shows more immediate polemical concerns by using the memo to describe a business landscape that shares stark similarities with the midcentury publishing industry and, especially, the paperback mass market. This market developed as paperback publishing houses piggybacked on the distribution and retail systems already established for magazines. Using an excerpt from Frank's memo, the novel indicts the deleterious effects of the paperback market and the relationships it supposes between writers, publishers, and readers:

[...] the NAPE delegates would be given dozens of competitive brochures, most of which were certain to end up in the wastebaskets of the convention floor. The problem, then, was to develop something different for Knox – something that would catch the delegate's eye, that he would want to put in his pocket and take back to his hotel room. (122-23)

Frank's memo justifies the forthcoming brochure by noting its responsiveness to "competitive" considerations. More to the point, literary quality counts less in the paperback mass market than sexual seduction. Not only does Frank seduce Maureen and the branch manager, but now a brochure must "catch the delegate's eye" in order to ensure that he will "take [it] back to his hotel room." Shoved into a delegate's "pocket," the brochure evokes both the compact size of the paperback and even the name of the prominent paperback line Pocket Books. Of course, the paperback distribution system had obvious advantages. Writing in 1957, Freeman Lewis, an executive vice-president at Pocket Books, lauds the system for "mak[ing] it possible to sell books so cheaply and in so many places"—namely, now-familiar locations like drugstores, newsstands, and airports (318).

But Lewis acknowledged that this distribution system faced an acute "space problem" that risked turning the novel into a "bastard product" pitched halfway between literature and merchandise. With only so much rack space to accommodate the nonstop churn of new product, "persistent complaints" arose about paperback covers (317). Like Frank's proposed brochure, the

cover of a successful paperback seduces the reader from the crowded retailer racks.<sup>14</sup> And the paperbacks that don't sell? Most of those NAPE conference brochures—those paperbacks—“were certain to end up in the wastebaskets of the convention floor” (123). Mass-market paperbacks received the same treatment as commodities such as magazines. Indeed, the dynamics of the mass-market distribution system makes it cheaper for retailers to destroy unsold paperbacks, returning only the covers to publishers.

*Speaking of Production Control*, the brochure that Frank promises the branch manager, addresses a topic that directly contravenes any associations we might have with imaginative risk (RR 123). Looking ahead, the success of this brochure eventually generates executive demand for “a whole series of the crazy things”: “*Speaking of Inventory Control, Speaking of Sales Analysis, Speaking of Cost Accounting, Speaking of Payroll*” (174). Here the novel focuses its polemic on the publishing industry's development of what the critic Albert Van Nostrand called “clustered books” (59). In *The Denatured Novel* (1960), Van Nostrand explores this clustering phenomenon by discussing business fiction, ultimately concluding that “the fiction of business has got thoroughly mixed up with the business of fiction” (177). Take, for example, John Marquand's *Point of No Return*, a 1949 novel about the tumult of corporate promotion and succession. Its success in hardcover, book-club, and paperback formats initiated a cluster or series of books. Since it was “a sure thing,” *Point of No Return* created a problem for competing publishers. The legendary publisher Alfred Knopf states the problem succinctly: with a Marquand novel, a reader “know[s] just exactly what you are going to get” (qtd. in Van Nostrand 159). So publishers, Knopf continues, must wonder whether readers would risk “pay[ing] the same price for a book of the same length by someone you never read and have never heard of, which may utterly disappoint you after fifty pages.” In an era in which publishers considered it a

formidable risk to second-guess the temporary appetites of customers-cum-readers, the postwar mass-market publishing industry compromised with an “expedient remedy”: namely, “mannerism,” or publishing a “new novel [that] sound[s] like one of John Marquand’s” (Van Nostrand 159).<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, *Speaking*’s predecessor, the disastrous brochure *Pinpoint*, fits Van Nostrand’s jeremiad about the inexorable decline of literary quality in a clustered series. According to Van Nostrand, manneristic novels are “packaged, advertised, some of them even written to exploit and exaggerate the characteristics of the original book, but always contrived to attenuate it” (177). The later entries that appear on the market are “mannered imitations” that “caricature one another” because they have even forgotten the initial point of departure – the “original” *Point of No Return* (159). In a novel like DeMare’s *The Empire and Martin Brill*, Van Nostrand argues, “thematic characteristics” have become “ornamental” because the “dialectic” that motivates the novel “exists not in [itself] but in earlier books” (191). With its “densely printed pages” cribbed helter-skelter from various promotional materials, *Pinpoint* is similarly a stillborn entry in a promotional brochure series (RR 87). Although “tens of thousands of copies” have been distributed, the brochure lacks any autonomy as a discrete literary artifact. To revive the moribund series, Frank and Maureen return to the “central file” in order to “trace the thing back to original sources” (89). In this case, it is not clear that revival is possible. The source material is filed as “SP – 1109,” a coldhearted classification that recalls the alphanumeric codes placed on the covers of mass-market paperbacks to streamline ordering for retailers.

While publishers hope these clustered novels satisfy consumer appetites, *Revolutionary Road* would show the insidious consequences that “competitive” consideration wreck on writers, if not on the activity of writing itself. By narrating Frank’s composition of a new brochure, the

novel accuses risk-averse publishers of imposing Fordist anthropologies of work onto fiction writing itself. The brochure *Speaking of Production Control*, the replacement for *Pinpoint*, initiates a series that reflects on the production of clustered novels:

It would “give the NAPE delegate nothing more or less than what he wants, colon: the facts.”

After putting a new belt in the Dictaphone machine, he leaned back again and said “Copy for Veritype. Heading: Speaking of Production Control, dot, dot, dot. Paragraph. Production control is, comma, after all, comma, nothing more or less than the job of putting the right materials in the right place at the right time, comma, according to a varying schedule. Period, paragraph. This is simple arithmetic, period. Given all the variables, comma, a man can do it with a pencil and paper, period. But the Knox ‘500’ Electronic Computer can do it – dash – literally – dash – thousands of time faster, period. That’s why. . . .” (123)

Significantly, this passage does more than excerpt the brochure. It directly quotes Frank’s dictation, thereby retaining the markup language—phrases like “Heading,” the elliptical “dot, dot, dot,” or “Period, paragraph”—that indicates necessary formatting and punctuation to the secretaries who will transcribe it. But first, we should focus on what the brochure says about clustered novels. For example, whatever narrative one writes will be derived from a single formula: “the job of putting the right materials in the right place at the right time.” Granted, these narratives aren’t exactly identical. The “varying schedule” that guides production control allows for spurious forms of novelty—perhaps the idiosyncratic mannerisms of so many copycat novels. But the brochure is careful not to overstate the importance of the writer. Under the auspices of production control, writing becomes an activity no less calculable than “simple arithmetic.” Unsurprisingly, this formulaic conception of narrative makes the writer obsolete. It is a point that the passage is at pains to convey: why let “a man do it with pencil and paper” when “the Knox ‘500’ Electronic Computer can do it – dash – literally – dash – thousands of times faster, period.”

For writers, seductive plain talk has not precipitated artistic development so much as it has introduced professional obsolescence.

No doubt the completed brochure is eminently readable—short sentences, and single sentences that comprise entire paragraphs. Because it reads “like a man talking” (*RR* 195), the brochure heightens the “human interest” factors so crucial to the formulas for “plain talk” readability (Flesch, *Readable* 179). But while Frank and Knox executives delight in the brochure, the inclusion of markup language complicates this vaunted immediacy in order to question the new mission of publishers. Whereas the gentlemen’s industry of yesteryear, focused on “fiction, particularly the classics” in order to provide an “acculturating, formative service,” mass-market publishers now abandon the “boring classics” if such books “threaten not only their market share but the very quality in the purchaser that is essential for books’ survival: the ability and desire to read” (Murphy 48). For a mass-market publisher, the mission is the simple provision of *information* to *consumers*. Instead of edifying or instructing, reading should be another easy and effortless form of consumption that approximates listening to “plain talk.”

For its part, *Revolutionary Road* would expose this sort of reading as a disguised form of laborious drudgery. Hence the markup language: it undercuts the “product benefits” that a brochure-cum-novel delivers (*RR* 78). The case against “ACCURACY” is clear-cut since the brochure provides anything but “colon: the facts.” Indeed, the redundancy that results from combining the punctuation mark with the word “colon” calls attention—in this case, unwanted—“to the fact that these expressions are being used” to generate the “illusion” of communication (Whyte, *Is Anybody Listening?* 59). Finally, markup language (“– dash – literally – dash –”) interrupts the brochure at the precise moment that it promises speeds that are “thousands of times faster” than those that a writer could achieve (*RR* 78). In the end, the markup language turns



*Speaking* into a brochure that is no less “opaque” than the bureaucratese in either the Toledo memo or *Pinpoint*. Rather than correcting bureaucratese, plain talk substitutes, as William H. Whyte once put it, its own “reverse gobbledygook” (*Is Anybody Listening?* 59).

Thus, *Revolutionary Road* turns an apparent fruit of the midcentury good life into a degrading extension of the white-collar corporate workplace. Even our fiction, the novel implies, reads like so much office memoranda. Later in the novel, the forces responsible for middlebrow fiction—production control and the dull imagination—collide in a dialogue that Frank imagines about work. This dialogue still targets the middlebrow writer who appeals to literary integrity or artistic self-development to parry the cruder tokens of success in publishing. Whereas the brochure hides a formula for writing dull middlebrow fiction in glib business writing, this sentimental dialogue amounts to an exercise in production control. The dialogue is part of a scene that begins with Frank telling his wife April about the sales executive Bart Pollock’s “‘big idea’” for a series of brochures (*RR* 174). But the laborious preparations for dinner—setting the table, wrangling the children, serving the food—distract what should be an attentive wife.

Of course, Frank is disappointed. He wants flattery and fawning attention. During the train ride home, he even “imagined” himself and April as a perfect couple in a middlebrow novel:

The trouble, he guessed, was that all the way home this evening he had imagined her saying: “And it probably *is* the best sales promotion piece they’ve ever seen – what’s so funny about that?”

And himself saying: “No, but you’re missing the point – a thing like this just proves what a bunch of idiots they are.”

And her: “I don’t think it proves anything of the sort. Why do you always undervalue yourself? I think it proves you’re the kind of person who can excel at anything when you want to, or when you have to.”

And him: “Well, I don’t know; maybe. It’s just that I don’t *want* to excel at crap like that.”

And her: “Of course you don’t, and that’s why we’re leaving. But in the meantime, is there anything so terrible about accepting their recognition? Maybe you don’t want it or need it, but that doesn’t make it contemptible, does it? I mean I think you ought to feel good about it, Frank. Really.”

But she hadn’t said anything even faintly like that; she hadn’t even looked as if thoughts like that could enter her head. She was sitting here cutting and chewing in perfect composure, with her mind already far away on other things. (RR 175-76)

Excluding any consideration of production control, the dialogue clearly parses the familiar middlebrow dilemma. By turning the husband and wife into mouthpieces for different versions of the work ethic, this imaginary, if not monologic, dialogue attempts to reconcile reservations about white-collar success with more palatable notions of integrity or artistic self-development. For the purposes of the dialogue, Frank re-adopts the cynical version of the laborist ethic depicted on the Monday workday; *Speaking* is a “dumb little piece of work,” less a matter of creativity and initiative than an extended exercise in shuffling papers to keep the paychecks coming. After all, who would “‘*want* to excel at crap like that’”? Of course, Frank *would*, even if this imaginary dialogue tasks April with defending the brochure as an expression of a humanist work ethic. To that end, her defense focuses on Frank’s integrity, not the brochure’s successfulness. Although it “‘probably *is* the best sales promotion piece they’ve ever seen,’” this achievement is secondary to the message the brochure sends about the writer. April makes the point obliquely: “‘Why do you always undervalue yourself?’” In other words, the imaginary dialogue refocuses our attention on what April, earlier in the novel, identified as Frank’s “essence” (115). But there is a crucial difference; this dialogue also overturns her previous denunciation of corporate Manhattan and suburban Connecticut. Who Frank is *isn’t* “‘denied and denied and denied’”—as April previously declared—by working for Knox. Rather, Frank “ought

to feel good about” his work. Indeed, the imaginary dialogue squashes the need to expatriate to Paris since corporate copywriting now entails ““recognition”” for the sort of ““bright young man”” that we might associate with creative, if not specifically literary, achievements (176, 174).

Such droll wish fulfillment exemplifies the dull imagination. Yates has even described such dialogue as middlebrow—indeed, as the sort of conversation that might appear in “some Sloan Wilson novel” in which characters “talk very earnestly,” appearing to say “exactly what they meant” (“Interview” 68). But this earnest dialogue advertises that fact. If the dialogue wasn’t already stilted enough, Yates amplifies the back-and-forth artificiality of the Wheelers’ patter by preceding each *actor’s* lines with what are effectively stage directions: “And himself saying,” “And her,” “And him,” “And her.” These stage directions—what Yates’s interviewer calls “all the he saids, and she saids”—continue an indictment of theatricality with which the novel opens (68).<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Frank and April Wheelers have always spoken less to one another than performed for an implicit audience—their voices and actions carrying a theatrical “resonance” (RR 114). In the imaginary dialogue, these stage directions indicate that the actors are hitting their cues. In other words, Frank’s dialogue would have the Wheelers follow the formula for production control: they are in the right place at the right time.

In conjunction with the brochure *Speaking*, the dialogue also explains the novel’s overarching strategy for asserting literary seriousness. It is a strategy that is widespread throughout Yates’s fiction, and its goal can be summarized as follows: he writes in the hopes that the relentless exposure of middlebrow conventions—of the guidelines of production control—indemnifies his own writing from accusations that it exhibits those same conventions. Following this strategy, the self-reflexive inclusion of stage directions—much like the previous inclusion of markup language—parries the dull imagination in the last instance. Put simply, the strategy isn’t

itself dull precisely because it foregrounds the very operations of the dull imagination.<sup>17</sup> In this way, Yates's writing regards the dull imagination as a tool, but never the horizon, of its aesthetic. As *Revolutionary Road* attests, it is a risky strategy. After all, even someone as mediocre as Frank is always congratulating himself for exposing middlebrow pieties as, for example, when he upends the "myth of Free Enterprise" for Maureen (*RR* 96).

The imaginary dialogue also implies that the Wheelers' plans for expatriation—their plans to become "new and better people"—have already begun to unravel (*RR* 126). But the plans to expatriate are not explicitly jeopardized until April tells Frank that she is pregnant. In turn, Frank reverses his prior dismissals of the breadwinner role. Rather than more "proving, proving," another child (even an unwanted one) takes "the pressure [...] off" (207). But April wants to terminate the pregnancy and, with it, the resumption of corporate-suburban normalcy. In the months that follow, Frank wages a sales "campaign" that doubles as an extended exercise in production control (217). Everything is "skillfully arranged in a variety of settings" (216)—dinners in New York restaurants, nighttime car rides—to "sell" (217) to April the idea that "a man condemned to a life at Knox could still be interesting" (219). Through cajoling and cowing, through guilt and textbook Freudianism, Frank thinks he has won when the deadline passes for a safe abortion. He prepares to resume the deadly, dull life with chipper optimism straight out of *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*: "everything, in the final analysis, was going to be alright" (274).<sup>18</sup> But such placidity is short-lived. The couple fights, and the marriage appears ready to dissolve.

Yet Frank wakes up the next morning to an "incredible" scene: a breakfast and a conversation that surpasses the imaginary dialogue (*RR* 296). There is a "carefully set" table "with two places for breakfast" and a kitchen "filled with sunlight and with the aromas of coffee

and bacon.” For her part, April appears as the dutiful, pregnant housewife, “at the stove, wearing a fresh maternity dress.” She delivers her lines perfectly: “‘Good morning,’ she said” before inquiring about an important business meeting scheduled for the same day. Of course, we understand that this picture-perfect scene isn’t the culmination, but the exhausted nadir, of the good life. Frank tries to deflect the topic “with the deprecating, side-of-the-mouth smile he had used for years in telling her about Knox, and said: ‘Big deal’” (297). But April provides the exact response that Frank desires: “‘Well,’ she said, ‘I imagine it *is* a pretty big deal; for them, anyway. What exactly do you think you’ll be doing? Until they start sending you out on the trips, I mean. You never have told me much about it.’” Expatriation to Europe has become business “trips” on the behalf of Knox. The breakfast ends and, after a goodbye kiss, Frank leaves for work.

After Frank leaves, April performs two basic tasks: she reviews and rewrites a letter to him and prepares the instruments for an abortion. I argue that her writing, preparations, and eventual death elaborate a new craft-inflected work ethic that re-conceives risk as it relates to so-called serious writers. With this ethic, the novel shifts from a polemic against the middlebrow writer to an apology for the serious writer’s engagement with the same publishing industry. Indeed, the novel preemptively apologizes for the possibility that *Revolutionary Road* may succeed on “popular” grounds—that is, through hardcover sales or, more likely, the sale of mass-market paperback and other subsidiary rights. So whereas the humanist ethic celebrates work as a pleasurable activity for self-development, the letter writing follows a craft-inflected ethic that redefines self-development as self-mutilation. To that end, the respective compositional approaches of Frank and April Wheeler could not be any more different. On the two sequential workdays, Frank dictated a memo and a brochure, and even seduced an office secretary—all “on

the spur of the moment” (RR 122). A glib hack like Frank made writing look so easy because he avoided the “planning and rehearsing [...], filling page after page of scratch paper with revised and crossed-out sentences.” For April, however, writing is an act of self-mutilation marked by pain (“her gums were sore from too many cigarettes during the night”) and exhaustion (she was “aching with tiredness”) (303). Her cluttered desk in the Wheelers’ suburban home intimates the workspace of a writer with a severe case of block: she spent “hours and hours [...] trying to think it through,” but could not complete a letter to Frank (302). Of course, it is a solitary task with no assistance from a Univac, a Dictaphone, or an invisible army of secretaries and technicians. She doesn’t even have a typewriter—just an “opened bottle of ink”—and so many imperfect drafts.

And what happens to all this “scratch paper” (RR 122)? April’s “abortive” drafts appear to suffer the same fate as any uncompetitive brochure or, by implication, any unsellable middlebrow paperback (303): “in a wastebasket, lumped and crumpled, lay all the failures of the letter she had tried to write” (302). These drafts are as unreadable as *Pinpoint*; April “could only marvel at how cramped and black and angry the handwriting looked, like row on row of precisely swatted mosquitos [*sic*].” The novel excerpts the single legible draft:

. . . your cowardly self-delusions about ‘love’ when you know as well as I do that there’s never been anything between us but contempt and distrust and a terrible sickly dependence on each other’s weakness – that’s why. That’s why I couldn’t stop laughing today when you said that about the Inability to Love, and that’s why I can’t stand to let you touch me, and that’s why I’ll never again believe in anything you think, let alone in anything you say . . . (302-03, italics and ellipses in original)

However, April discards the letter “because she knew it wasn’t worth reading” (303). Like *Speaking*, the excerpt conveys the conventions or, worse yet, the formulas of middlebrow fiction through its earnest expressions of emotion (“*contempt and distrust and a terribly sickly dependence on each other’s weakness*”) and overdramatic ultimatums (“*that’s why I’ll never again believe in anything you think, let alone in anything you say*”). The unnecessarily

capitalized invocation of topics like “*the Inability to Love*” recalls what Dwight Macdonald called the spurious Midcult “penchant” for engaging “real Problems” like “the Agony of Modern Man” (“Masscult and Midcult” 42).

But if the excerpted letter “read[s] like soap opera,” it also reads like a first draft of *Revolutionary Road*, which Yates described as “very thin, very sentimental” (“Interview” 68). It is his commitment to revision, Yates insists, that ultimately separates his writing from middlebrow fiction: “I have to go over and over a scene before I get deep enough into it to bring it off. I think I’d be a slick, superficial writer if I didn’t revise all the time.” Excerpting an “abortive” draft enables *Revolutionary Road* to narrate its own practices of revision and, by implication, guarantee the novel’s literary integrity in the event of either success or failure in the marketplace.<sup>19</sup> Revision does so by redefining the writer’s relationship to writing, publishers, and readers. For instance, April decides that her letter isn’t plagued by sentimentality so much as it is “weak with hate” precisely because it concerns itself with its readership—that is, with Frank (303). But Frank “was – well, he was *Frank*.” In other words, writing for readers—in this case, writing that blames Frank—cannot achieve seriousness. As a result, April’s final draft recasts a serious commitment to revision as an act of self-responsibility. Excepting its concluding signature, the novel reproduces the entire letter:

*Dear Frank,*  
*Whatever happens please don’t*  
*blame yourself.*<sup>20</sup>

It is a letter of resignation, and its memo-like concision a parting shot at both bureaucratese and overblown middlebrow mannerism. With the letter, April quits the drudgery of life as a middlebrow domestic whose career began “in a sentimentally lonely time long ago” (304). Her careful choice of nine words, the end result of so much revision, of so much failure, would

convey a writing style commensurate with her new self-responsibility. Overcoming “old, insidious habit,” April refrains from concluding the letter with the “the words *I love you*” to instead write “the signature plain: *April*” (310).

It is a cagey conclusion. By making the struggle to revise a prerequisite to an assertion of self-responsibility, the novel implies that publishers, middlebrow writers, and readers fundamentally misunderstand what constitutes success for a serious writer. While deserving none of the blame for failure, Frank also deserve none of the credit for success. Since the painful processes of revision guarantee its seriousness, a literary novel makes no appeal to extrinsic notions of success. Or, as Yates once put it: “I don’t need a cheering crowd to tell me that [a novel is] worth it” (qtd. in Bailey 414). In *Revolutionary Road*, wastebaskets makes Yates’s point—the convention-floor “wastebaskets” to which Frank alludes in his memo, and the “wastebasket” full of April’s drafts (123, 302). A letter does not end up in April’s “wastebasket” because it fails to satisfy a branch manager or a customer, a publishing company or a reader. Rather, a letter goes into the wastebasket and, eventually, the incinerator because it fails to satisfy the writer. In other words, April’s drafting, revising, and eventual completing of the letter reconstitute the “man,” so to speak, “with pencil and paper” that production control claimed to render obsolete.

Within the novel, April’s abortion serves as the surprising sign of a form of labor that is unalienated but also decidedly “sacrificial.”<sup>21</sup> The writer assumes a level of risk that dwarfs those of callous publishers, dimwitted readers, and middlebrow hacks. After completing the letter, April begins the methodical preparations for an abortion that the novel never narrates. Now she “needed no more advice and no more instruction” (*RR* 311). There will now be no outside influences, no new entries in an exhausted series. The scene ends—and April never reappears in



the novel—with the words that Yates paraphrases in his self-censored answer about “real success”: “if you wanted to do something absolutely honest, something true, it always turned out to be a thing that had to be done alone.” That April dies—that the abortion, in a sense, fails—is inconsequential. Its success or failure is secondary to the painful and risky, rather than pleasurable, processes of revision that precede it. If her death implies that self-mutilation and failure counter the dead ends of humanist ethic, it also rebukes the laborist work ethic. Clearly, the revisions and abortion return a sort of “dignity” to work, but only because wage remuneration has been rendered epiphenomal (but welcome, no doubt) to the activity at hand.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the industry may be “contaminated” by corporate boards and bureaucratic committees, and readers by television, but the serious writer (*RR* 20)? No: because you “remember who you were”—you have suffered.

### **Media Empires, Minor and Major**

*Revolutionary Road* initiates Yates’s career-long preoccupation with writing fiction about the work ethics that motivate writers. His later fiction constantly revises his apologia to keep pace with a publishing industry that undergoes mergers and conglomeration from the 1960s onward. In what follows, I argue that this fiction contends with a publishing industry that begins to underwrite an ethic of craftsmanship by establishing “literary” publishing imprints—what one journalist called “semi-independent fiefdoms”—within the overarching tendency towards media conglomeration (McDowell, “Publishers” D11). Run by risk-taking editors like Seymour Lawrence, publishing imprints offer writers another tentative compromise between literary integrity, financial stability and, possibly, commercial success. Under such circumstances, Yates’s later fiction confronts the growing inadequacy of an apologia grounded in the metaphors of craft and sacrifice.

If Lawrence establishes a literary empire, short stories in Yates's 1962 collection *Eleven Kinds of Loneliness* elaborate the ongoing antagonism between literary writers and businessmen over the nature of risk-taking, payment, and the work of writing. For example, the final story "Builders" depicts the tension between writers and the entrepreneurial "idea men" who package and commission stories or novels. Like several other stories in the collection, "Builders" narrates the apprenticeship of a writer—in this case, the aptly-named Robert Prentice, a newspaperman and would-be novelist.<sup>23</sup> The story opens with a morbid wink to literary self-mutilation: "Writers who write about writers can easily bring on the worst kind of literary miscarriage."<sup>24</sup> The story also narrates a familiar back-and-forth between remuneration and imagination. After answering a magazine ad offering an "unusual free-lance opportunity" to a "talented writer" with "imagination," Prentice starts ghostwriting melodramatic *Reader's Digest* submissions for and about Bernie Silver, a well-meaning New York cabbie hack.<sup>25</sup> Silver envisions the stories as the first step—the foundation, to use the craftsmanship metaphor—in a new entertainment empire. Serialization in the *Reader's Digest*, he hopes, will eventually lead to "a Simon and Schuster contract and a three-million dollar production starring Wade Manley" (C 156).

While he may have the capital, it is clear that this employer does not understand the work of writing literature. Silver believes that writing should follow a hokey metaphor that amounts to a low-rent version of production control:

"Writing a story is ... like building a house. . . . I mean a house has got to have a roof, but you're going to be in trouble if you build your roof first, right? Before you build your roof you got to build your walls. Before you build your walls you got to lay your foundation – and I mean all the way down the line. Before you lay your foundation you got to bulldoze and dig yourself the right kind of hole in the ground." (C 148-49)

For five dollars a story, Prentice "builds" ridiculous vignettes in which Silver saves marriages, prevents juvenile delinquency, and gives the elderly a reason to live—and all from the behind the

wheel of his taxicab. While Prentice's stories convince Silver that he has finally nabbed a "first-rate professional," *Reader's Digest* does not come calling, and Prentice understands that *he* is exploiting Silver's naïveté (154). The arrangement finally dissolves when Silver commissions a propaganda pamphlet that plumps for a local political candidate. After writing a mean-spirited satire of the candidate and Silver, Prentice struggles with his employer over payment. But the story insists that it's still not about the money. Even by demanding payment for an intentionally unusable story, Prentice isn't stealing from Silver. In fact, quite the opposite: it is Silver, Prentice argues, who is the "little parasitic leech of a *cab* driver [who] comes in here and bleeds me *white*" (168, emphasis in original). Yates reinforces the point he made in *Revolutionary Road*. For the would-be literary writer, even one so untalented as Prentice, payment is of secondary concern. In Yates's masochistic fashion, Prentice objects to the arrangement because it is uncreative.<sup>26</sup> If Silver bleeds Prentice white, the parasitic employer lessens the chance that the writer can follow an ethic of self-mutilation, and thereby create. In other words, the parasitic employer forecloses the possibility of what the story celebrates as "faulty craftsmanship."<sup>27</sup>

Following *Revolutionary Road* and *Eleven Kinds of Loneliness*, Yates's fiction continues to champion writing as a form of sacrificial labor. Such labor, as we have seen, proposes to indemnify the solitary writer from the exigencies of the publishing industry. But how does this self-mutilating ethic, or this commitment to faulty craftsmanship, respond to further changes in the publishing industry? According to the book historian John Tebbel, "it can be argued that no other American business has changed so completely so quickly" (*Between the Covers* 469). I have already suggested changes in publishers' missions. With the growing clout of the mass market, hardcover publishers started peddling subsidiary rights to paperback publishers, rather than books to readers. But the year 1960 also initiated what is commonly called the Age of

Acquisitions, or a shift from “what was once, for the most part, a diverse group of independently owned concerns into subordinate divisions of corporate conglomerates” (Whiteside 184). The fate of the venerable publisher Random House is a case in point. Founded by Bennett Cerf and Donald Klopfer in 1927, this so-called gentlemanly publishing house became a publicly-owned corporation in 1959. The next year Random House triggered a wave of consolidation by purchasing Alfred A. Knopf. In turn, RCA purchased Random House in 1965, adding it to media holdings that included NBC Radio and Television.<sup>28</sup> After RCA sold it in 1980, and before the German conglomerate Bertelsmann AG bought it in 1998, Random House merged with countless smaller publishers such as Crown, Fawcett, and Ballantine.

Alarmed by these changes, cultural critics claimed that conglomeration endangered serious literary writing. In *The Blockbuster Complex* (1981), Thomas Whiteside argues that the trade-book business risks losing its autonomy to become “nothing more than the component of the conglomerate communications-entertainment complex which happens to deal primarily with publishing books” (22). Writing in 1974, Richard Kostanlanetz agrees, arguing that lucrative subsidiary rights have “produced a shift in the center of editorial reasoning”:

If a new novel is not destined to become a movie, then it probably is not worth mass-paperbacking; if a manuscript of fiction is not likely to be mass-paperbacked since no quality paperbacker reprints new fiction, then the novel will probably not be hardbacked either. Suitability to the mass media determines not only whether a novel will be offered to a large audience, but whether it will be published at all. The true czars of American fiction reside not in New York but in Hollywood – not in the libraries but in the screening rooms. (189-90)

In the “literary-industrial complex,” a serious book is only raw material to be repackaged as a paperback and, especially, a film. As a result, designations like “writer,” “director,” or even “producer” do not signify distinct categories of expertise or craft. And some publishers wouldn’t have it any other way. According to Michael Korda, editor-in-chief at Simon & Schuster in 1972,

inflexible categories such as “writer” and “director” detract from the “opportunity” available to “creators,” whose lack of disciplinary exclusiveness presumes the subsidiary process: any novel is always already in the subsidiary pipeline, ready to be transformed into a TV show or a film (4).

In 1975, Yates’s third novel *Disturbing the Peace* was published, fourteen years after *Revolutionary Road*. Nevertheless, Yates went so far as to suggest that this novel is “almost like publishing a first novel all over again” (“Interview” 74). Like *Revolutionary Road*, *Disturbing the Peace* confronts the writer’s place in the publishing industry—this time, in the era of conglomeration. While Yates had a short experience as a Hollywood screenwriter, he certainly understood that blockbusters in fiction and film were the prominent symptom of media conglomeration.<sup>29</sup> Not that anyone would ever mistake *Disturbing the Peace* for a “big book,” for the sort of book that is “destined to become a movie” (Kostelanetz 186, 189). But the novel does elaborate what we might call an anti-blockbuster strategy. Since the conglomerate era views books, film, and television as interchangeable elements in “a total media package,” *Disturbing the Peace* narrates its own development as a “property” in order to assert the precise opposite point: namely, its autonomy as a crafted novel, faulty or otherwise (Whiteside 39). Or, as the novel’s protagonist puts it, “movies aren’t books”; “movies are movies.”<sup>30</sup>

More immediately, *Disturbing the Peace* narrates the gradual alcoholic breakdown of John Wilder, a family man and advertising space salesman for a middlebrow science magazine. After his release from a mental hospital, Wilder eventually abandons his family and heads to Hollywood to become a latter-day Bernie Silver:

“[...] I wanted to make movies. *Good* movies. Oh, I knew I couldn’t be a director – that’d take more talent than anybody with an IQ of a hundred and nine could claim – but a producer: the man who gets the idea, raises the money, hires the talent, puts the whole thing together. That’s what I wanted.” (DP 97-98)

Notably, Wilder complicates Yates's early derision of idea men. Unlike Silver, Wilder is committed to artistic integrity. He arrives in Hollywood in search of financing for *Bellevue*, a writer's script adaption of Wilder's prior institutionalization. A low-budget art house version of *Bellevue* has already been filmed, but it languishes in post-production, never to be finished. Unsurprisingly, Wilder's script meets with resistance from Hollywood producers who are, if Whiteside and Kostelanetz are to be believed, de facto publishers. If *Bellevue* is an "'art piece'" (213), a "gentleman producer" named Carl Muchin insists, it must also be "'a selling proposition'" (212). Since audiences—what *Revolutionary Road* identified as readers—aren't "'buying'" a "'miraculous recovery'" as the end to *Bellevue*, the film's protagonist must instead suffer "'a real breakdown'" (214).

In other words, the script must be changed. A new screenwriter pitches a clichéd story about an "unhappy advertising man, gray flannel suit and all that" that succinctly summarizes what has happened and what is yet to happen in the novel (*DP* 221). Here the novel creates a complex relationship between Wilder's mental health, the integrity of the original script, and Yates's autonomy as a writer. For Wilder, these changes aren't painstaking yet salutary revisions so much as grievous wounds. Once a production company is formed and the script is altered to "wipe ... out" the protagonist, Wilder begins to disintegrate.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, his life now follows the pitch. Like Prentice, Wilder is bled dry, permanently institutionalized, "turned grey ... his face ... gone slack and his eyes bland" (276-77).<sup>32</sup> And Yates? The fact that his *novel*—that is, Wilder's life—fleshes out the clichéd pitch is nevertheless an assertion of his autonomy as a writer. Indeed, *Disturbing the Peace*—like *Revolutionary Road* with middlebrow fiction—delights in exposing the painful constraints of conglomeration. Yates's novel lets us wonder if the author of *Disturbing the Peace* has "seen" the commercial remake of *Bellevue*.<sup>33</sup> By doing

so, Yates defines autonomy in drawing attention to the limp distinction between a novel ready-made for the silver screen and a novelization of a film—that is, between the book-to-movie and the movie-to-book processes.

### **Sacrifice and Parasitism in the Literary Imprint**

Publishing his books with the imprint Seymour Lawrence Books seems to provide Yates with an ideal vantage from which to criticize the publishing industry's perpetual war against what should be its literary mandate. Although *Disturbing the Peace* was Yates's first novel published by Delacorte / Seymour Lawrence Books, the careers of Yates and Seymour "Sam" Lawrence were already closely linked. While an assistant editor at the publisher Atlantic-Little, Brown, Lawrence secured reconsideration and the eventual acceptance of Yates's short story "Jody Rolled the Bones."<sup>34</sup> After encouraging Yates to write a novel, Lawrence secured the publication rights to *Revolutionary Road* and *Eleven Kinds of Loneliness* for Atlantic-Little, Brown. Out of loyalty, Yates agreed to follow Lawrence when he left Atlantic-Little, Brown in the early 1960s for the publisher Alfred A. Knopf. But when Lawrence resigned his vice presidency at Knopf in 1965 to found his own publishing imprint at Dell-Delacorte, Yates stayed put.

While Yates would spend the greater part of the 1960s eking out a living as he tried to finish his second novel, Lawrence's career flourished.<sup>35</sup> In 1965, he established the Seymour Lawrence Books imprint as part of a joint deal with Delacorte Press, the hardcover subsidiary of the paperback giant Dell.<sup>36</sup> In an industry undergoing conglomeration, and increasingly bureaucratic and bottom-line driven, personal publishing imprints, so the story went, signified a countervailing force—preserves or enclaves for the "craft-like" methods such as close editor-writer relations. Which is to say, early imprints were, in the words of the editor Henry Robbins,

an anachronistic ““wave of the past.””<sup>37</sup> Newspaper and other accounts of the rise of imprints suggest that editors also dreamed of exchanging the “standardization” of the “immense conglomerates” for “freedom” (Kleinfield 25). In this telling, a “maverick” Lawrence walked out on Knopf because his “heart [was] not with the corporation.”<sup>38</sup> He ““[couldn’t] work with committees”” (qtd. in McDowell, “Publishing” C23) and wouldn’t suffer the “publishing bureaucracy” (R. Lyons A22). Whereas conglomeration presumed publishers closely attuned to the marketplace, imprints allowed, as Lawrence puts it, an editor to ““establish [his] autonomy and exert [his] own taste”” (qtd. in McDowell, “Publishing” C23). Of course, an imprint editor still “sort of works” for a main publishing company (Kleinfield 25). Imprint editors such as Lawrence acquired and edited manuscripts before eventually turning over the package to a larger firm for manufacture and distribution.<sup>39</sup>

On seeing the success of Seymour Lawrence Books, Yates regretted his initial failure to follow the editor: “Within two years his ‘venture’ had burgeoned into the multi-million-dollar Delacorte empire – one best-seller after another” (qtd. in Bailey 374). Fortunately, Lawrence was still interested in Yates.<sup>40</sup> But the contract for *Disturbing the Peace*, Yates’s first Seymour Lawrence book, initiated an “eccentric method of payment” (Bailey 423): namely, a “long-term arrangement” in which Yates “would receive an advance on signing followed by a series of consecutive monthly payments.”<sup>41</sup> According to Lawrence, this arrangement provided Yates with “a kind of salary [...] that sustained him” (*Yates* 59).<sup>42</sup> The arrangement continued for the remainder of the Yates’s career, providing “steady long-term income for an unpredictable man.”<sup>43</sup>

Receiving Lawrence’s “largesse” must have been a strange feeling for Yates, a writer whose characters dream of escaping salaried, hackwriting jobs that degrade their imaginations.<sup>44</sup>



After all, the long-term monthly payments effectively confronted him with an unexpected tension: he was a salaried employee of Seymour Lawrence Books, a literary imprint dedicated to serious writing. In other words, an uncanny reversal had occurred. While Yates's monthly payments were a sure thing, Lawrence was the one taking risks as an imprint editor. John Tebbel writes that imprints exemplify a conglomerate strategy aimed at "sharing ... risk" (*History* 731). Imprint editors like Lawrence "were, in effect, gambling," betting on "their ability to choose manuscripts that would sell in sufficient quantity to pay their way, against the formidable odds facing any regular trade publisher – and without that publisher's backlist, diversification, and other resources to sustain them and make up for their mistakes." According to Tebbel, Lawrence was "supplying books to be published, *as an author* might, and the Dell organization took care of everything else in return for participating in the profits."<sup>45</sup> In the realm of literary imprints, of "creative business," risk-taking and creativity had become proximate concepts.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, sometimes imprint editors did not even receive salaries. Creativity, it would seem, inhered in both the act of writing and a method of compensation; or, as one imprint editor put it: "There was always something obscene about the fact that I was insulated from the grim realities with a salary when the authors were always gambling. Now I'm gambling right along with them."<sup>47</sup>

I contend that these notions of a salaried yet serious writer and a risk-taking editor eventually complicate Yates's persistent depictions of writers who self-mutilate or sacrifice and the moneyed men—executives, producers, and even editors—who "leech" on their creativity (*C* 168). Whereas *Revolutionary Road* focuses on writers' sacrifices, Yates's 1984 novel *Young Hearts Crying* depicts the lovers and publishers who sacrifice for artists. Which is to say, the novel imagines sacrificial *capital*, not sacrificial labor, suffering editors and not starving artists. As a result, *Young Hearts Crying* reevaluates the relationship between self-mutilation and artistic

integrity in order to grapple with questions of insecurity, dependency, and precariousness. With the character Michael Davenport, the novel probes the growing inapplicability of Yates's midcentury stances by explicitly evoking *Revolutionary Road* and "Builders." Like Frank Wheeler in *Revolutionary Road*, this would-be poet has been tempted with "an extraordinary opportunity for time and freedom," for "a full and productive life"—but only if he will accept money from his wife's trust fund.<sup>48</sup> Davenport declines, and grows violently angry whenever his wife repeats the offer, but not because it scares him. Rather, the offer offends his sense of self-responsibility: "he had always assumed he would make something of himself on his own" (*YHC* 11). Of course, April Wheeler, and even Yates himself, voiced a similar refrain. The novel then channels Prentice's denunciation of Silver's parasitism in "Builders." The money would exact an "unthinkable price": "Living off her fortune might bleed away his ambition, and might even rob him of the very energy he needed to work at all." After refusing his wife Lucy's money, and as their marriage crumbles, Davenport does what any self-respecting fifties man would do. He embraces the "mundane necessity" of hack writing for a trade magazine (*YHC* 39). But Davenport would maintain his "essential integrity" (229) by convincing *Chain Store Age* to employ him on a "freelance basis" (52)—as a "contributing writer," rather than an employee" (52). The freedom that Davenport accrues from casting off "the security of a salary and all the 'fringe benefits'" has the benefit of reducing costs for the magazine. Indeed, Davenport now believes himself in a "world of opportunity" (82). He is a flexible worker, gleefully describing a schedule split between magazine assignments and personal writing. He's always his own boss, even if the magazine pays him for part of his time. Of course, the novel makes clear that Davenport's pretensions to creative and working autonomy are masquerades in a life of struggle, economic insecurity, and dependency.

Indeed, Davenport's artistic career produces only a single memorable poem—the poem that concludes his first book. While insisting on an imaginative capacity for “big risks” that mirrors his penchant for freelancing, his career nevertheless produces only one “plateau performance” after another (*YHC* 398). But the novel also suggests that Davenport's potential for creative risk-taking is no longer the apposite issue. In a scene set in the early 1970s, Davenport has lunch with his long-time publisher Arnold Kaplan, a character whose biography resembles that of Seymour Lawrence.<sup>49</sup> For the publisher, considerations of Davenport's creative risk-taking, his sacrifices or his self-mutilation, do not matter because publishing his poetry is not a risky proposition, even if it did realize his grandiose literary claims. Simply put, Kaplan isn't gambling. Although every one of Davenport's poetry books had “lost money,” Kaplan muses that “it wasn't exactly the profit motive that impelled you to publish a poet” (328). What impels Kaplan is a familiar logic of self-mutilation and sacrifice:

... if anything, it was your knowledge that some other commercial house might be ready to pick him up and absorb his losses if you let him go. Well, it was a funny line of business; everybody knew that. (328)

If anything, Kaplan will not risk *not* subsidizing Davenport's books because it is these “losses”—advances, if not a kind of salary, gifted to the poet—that indemnify publishers in this “funny line of business” against the charge of insufficient literariness. Indeed, it is the publisher, not the writer, who is singled out to suffer the “price”:

[Kaplan] made more money than he could ever have imagined as a boy; but the price of it was that he had to spend too many hours like this – getting half smashed on his expense account and pretending to listen to a boring, rapidly aging striver like Davenport. (328)

Without knowing it, Davenport is the recipient of Kaplan's largesse. Sacrificial labor has been replaced by sacrificial capital.

Whereas Yates's earlier fiction fused self-sacrifice and creativity into singular acts of self-responsibility, *Young Hearts Crying* stalls on the question of the writer's dependency on sacrificial capital. While Kaplan suffers Davenport, *Young Hearts Crying* is a novel replete with aspiring abstract painters, illustrators, and writers, some of whom aren't too proud to accept or too dim to recognize largesse. Like the character Michael Davenport, the creative writing instructor Carl Traynor finds inspiration in Yates's biography. For example, Traynor's first book "was a big, rich, 'tough' novel," but he's struggling to write the second one (*YHC* 194). More importantly, Traynor's work history picks up where Davenport's leaves off. Traynor had already freelanced, an activity that did not facilitate creativity but exhaustion: doing "grubby little writing for hire; picking up a hundred bucks here and fifty bucks there; years and years of it ... and all of it for no other purpose than to buy time. Just to buy time. It's been very—tiring" (168). At the conclusion of a brief affair, Lucy Davenport cuts Traynor a check to help him pay his debts. But Traynor balks at payment "'For services rendered'" (200). However, this outrage is only for appearances. Here *Young Hearts Crying* takes tentative steps towards reshuffling the work ethics that Yates found so distasteful at midcentury, forming what we might call a cynical *humanist* ethic. So he can write more novels, Traynor will cash the check: after all, there is "no virtue" in poverty; and if compensation was always epiphenomenal to writing, there can be "no corruption" in "unearned income" (186).

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>For much of the 1950s, Yates wrote promotional materials on both a salaried and freelance basis for business machines companies such as Remington Rand. After his career as a writer launched, he also taught creative writing at the Iowa Writer's Workshop, The New School, and Wichita State. While Robert F. Kennedy served as the United States Attorney General, Yates worked on staff as a speechwriter. He also tried his hand as a Hollywood screenwriter. Although the picture was never made, he adapted William Styron's novel *Lie Down in Darkness* for John Frankenheimer in 1962. His sole screen credit as a screenwriter is for the 1969 war film *The Bridge at Remagen*.

<sup>2</sup>See Yates, "Interview" 77: "I thought Philip Roth was vastly overrated for years until I read *Portnoy's Complaint*; then I forgave him everything, including his millions of dollars."

<sup>3</sup>Lawrence, *Yates* 60. *Richard Yates: An American Writer* is a series of tributes that Lawrence self-published following Yates's death in 1993.

<sup>4</sup>John Frankenheimer tried and failed to secure financing for an adaptation of the novel in the early 1960s (Bailey 257). Yates desperately wanted Jack Lemmon to star as Frank Wheeler. In 2008, Paramount Vantage released the film *Revolutionary Road*, directed by Sam Mendes and starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet.

<sup>5</sup>Following the verdict offered by other editors at Atlantic-Little, Brown, Seymour Lawrence described the drafts as hackneyed in a 1956 letter to Yates's longtime agent Monica McCall.

<sup>6</sup>For a compelling account of the conception, writing, and promotion of *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, see Brier 74-101.

<sup>7</sup>Yates, *Revolutionary Road* 20. Additional quotations from the novel will be cited parenthetically as *RR*. It could be said that Yates blurs Dwight Macdonald's famous distinction between "Masscult" and "Midcult." For Macdonald, "Masscult" is the result of mass production: "the production line grinds out a uniform product whose humble aim is not even entertainment, for this too implies life and hence effort, but merely distraction" ("Masscult and Midcult" 5). Such books "seem to have been manufactured rather than composed" (6). But Midcult is worse. With its pretensions to literary seriousness, it does not primarily signify "a raising of the level of Masscult [but] ... a corruption of High Culture" (36).

<sup>8</sup>For a discussion of these work ethics, see Weeks, *Problem* 37-77.

<sup>9</sup>In its ideal iteration, the laborist ethic celebrates a "lifetime of 'dignified' work" (Weeks, *Problem* 68). Although most closely associated with the industrial working class of the early twentieth century, the laborist ethic was pliant enough to accommodate the white-collar workforce as its numbers grew throughout the twentieth century.

<sup>10</sup>The more common version of this argument does not focus on the escape from work as an absolute goal. Rather, it views the ethic as a means for participating in a society of mass consumerism. For an overview of these issues, see Cohen.

<sup>11</sup>For example, see Billy Wilder's 1955 comedy film *The Seven-Year Itch*.

<sup>12</sup>*Revolutionary Road* also undercuts the breadwinner by implying that the laborist ethic encourages masculine fantasies in order to make dull work palatable. After his tryst with Maureen, the dull imagination is on display when Frank catches a train home, riding it "the way [...] a man [should] ride": "erect and out in the open" (RR 102). Later in the novel, it is the very predictability of the affair that becomes the source of its pleasure: a hotel rendezvous under an "anonymous" name "so perfectly fulfilled the standard daydream of the married man" (250). Indeed, the novel ultimately makes the heavy-handed point that Frank has not seduced a woman so much as *he* has been seduced by white-collar drudgery itself. The "awful" last name "Grube" evokes Grub Street, the famous London locale where hack writers congregated. The name also resonates with Yates's career-long emphasis on writers who endure white-collar work arrangements—or, as his later novel *Young Hearts Crying* puts it, "years of grubbing along in white-collar work until one 'start[s] believing in Management' (101). The final liaison between Frank and Maureen underscores such a reading when Maureen's embrace edges towards deadline: sitting in Frank's lap, her "weight" pulls "his coat and shirt [...] painfully tight across his back and chest" (RR 271). His "collar" is "choking" him. He touches her "upper thigh [...]" as if it were the edge of a conference table." Finally, her mere kiss belies the promise of social mobility that the laborist ethic promises by making him feel like "a drowning man in his upward struggle."

<sup>13</sup>See Weeks, *Problem* 107. For more on human-resources management theories such as "theory X" and "theory Y," see McGregor. It should also be noted *Revolutionary Road* insists that Frank has *no* authentic self—at least not in the typical sense. Rather than celebrating or affirming authentic subjectivity, *Revolutionary Road* insists on mediocrity. April later puts it best: Frank "was – well, he was *Frank*" (303).

<sup>14</sup>Lewis argues that many paperback covers are "too sensational, or in shockingly bad taste, or ... actually misrepresent the contents" of the novel (317). For a discussion of paperbacks and paperback covers, see Davis.

<sup>15</sup>Van Nostrand lists the following novels as derivations of Marquand's novel: Cameron Hawley's *Executive Suite* (1952) and *Cash McCall* (1954), Howard Swiggett's *The Power and the Prize* (1954), Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955), and George DeMare's *The Empire and Martin Brill* (1956).

<sup>16</sup>The novel begins by narrating the disastrous opening night of a community theater production of the play *The Petrified Forest*.

<sup>17</sup>Sean McCann identifies a similar preoccupation with self-conscious writing as part of the “postmodern aesthetics of vocation,” in which writers such as Philip Roth and Don DeLillo “achieve a kind of professional autonomy not by repudiating the constraints that have made [them] but by making those constraints themselves the object of literary reflection” (301). Likewise, McCann argues that such postmodern writing includes “metafictional gambit[s],” a “deeply antibureaucratic spirit and [an] appeal to chance as an escape from imprisoning routine” (300). For McCann the university is the epicenter of these “aesthetic principles,” and its consequences resonate through the New Left, the rise of expert professionalism, and the development of poststructural theory, cultural studies, and contemporary literary criticism. At the very least, Yates spoils many of these associations. Seven years Roth’s and ten years DeLillo’s senior, he never attended college and his writing is more likely to speak to the New Deal than the New Left. His fiction also has less to do with postmodernism than realism or naturalism.

<sup>18</sup>Compare the climatic line in Wilson’s novel in which the protagonist Tom Rath earnestly quotes the Robert Browning’s poem “Pippa’s Passing”: ““God’s in his heaven,” he said, ““all’s right with the world”” (274).

<sup>19</sup>Yates uses a similar strategy in two sequential chapters in his 1984 novel *Young Hearts Crying*. The first chapter realistically narrates a series of events; the subsequent chapter, set in a creative writing workshop, discusses the effectiveness of the fictionalization.

<sup>20</sup>The italics, indentations and line breaks are taken from the original.

<sup>21</sup>See Andrew Ross, *No Collar* 142. Ross uses the term “sacrificial labor” to define the artist’s longstanding “training” or “predispos[ition] to accept nonmonetary rewards—the gratification of producing art—as partial compensation for their work, thereby discounting the cash price of their labor.” Of course, Yates does not emphasize gratification so much as pain, if not death.

<sup>22</sup>While outside the purview of this essay, *Revolutionary Road* addresses the feminist politics of housework in addition to the laborist and humanist ethics. Given its housewife protagonist, it is no surprise that the novel engages what Kathi Weeks has described as the two “dominant feminist remedies for the gender divisions and hierarchies of waged and unwaged work” (*Problem* 12). Associated with first- and second-wave feminism, the first strategy re-imposes the primacy of the laborist ethic because it would “secure women’s equal access to waged work.” This strategy, it might be said, generalizes the breadwinner across gender divisions. The second strategy resembles the humanist ethic by “revalu[ing] unwaged forms of household-based labor” as “socially necessary” (13). With its turn to individual sacrificial labor, *Revolutionary Road* appears to reject these strategies for relying on the wage and social recognition, respectively.

<sup>23</sup>Once again, the difference between this *Bildungsroman* and Sean McCann’s argument about the postmodern aesthetics of vocation is apposite. Yates follows an older, pre-World War II model. Rather than at the university, writers train as newspapermen, following the hard-scrabble example of writers such as Ernest Hemingway.

<sup>24</sup>See Yates, *Collected* 141. Additional quotations from the collection will be cited parenthetically as *C*. According to Yates's biographer Blake Bailey, the first draft of "Builders" also exhibited the same "soap opera" problems that earned *Revolutionary Road* its initial rejection. Rust Hills, an editor at *Esquire*, rejected an early draft of "Builders" as a "'formula story'" (Bailey 256).

<sup>25</sup>*C* 143. Yates did not invent the genre of taxicab confessional. "Builders" references James Maresca's lowbrow 1948 collection *My Flag is Down: the Unique Diary of a New York Taxi Driver*, first published in hardback by Dutton and later in paper by Bantam.

<sup>26</sup>Once again, McCann's argument is apposite. Here Yates's insistence on creativity recalls the examples of Roth and DeLillo, even if it does not rely on what Stephen Schryer has characterized as "fantasies of the new class" (1-28).

<sup>27</sup>*C* 173. Of course, the ethic of faulty craftsmanship counters Bernie's metaphor of building. The story's final paragraph:

I'm not even sure if there *are* any windows in this particular house. Maybe the light is just going to have to come in as best it can, through whatever chinks and cracks have been left in the builder's faulty craftsmanship, and if that's the case you can be sure that nobody feels worse about it than I do. God knows, Bernie; God knows there certainly ought to be a window around here somewhere, for all of us. (173)

In the *Ploughshares* interview, Yates elaborates on the basic points of faulty craftsmanship: "Easy affirmations are silly and cheap, of course; but when a tough, honest writer can look squarely at all the horrors of the world, face all the facts, and still come up with a hard-won, joyous celebration of life at the end, in spite of everything, that can be wonderful" (69).

<sup>28</sup>Whiteside 192. Here Random House's purchase by RCA parallels the example of Simon & Schuster, a publishing house founded in 1924. By 1975, the house was owned by Gulf + Western Industries Corporation, a former car parts manufacturer, that had also bought Paramount Studios in 1966 (Whiteside 65).

<sup>29</sup>In the early sixties, he was hired to adapt William Styron's *Lie Down in Darkness* into a screenplay for a John Frankenheimer-helmed film that eventually lost its financing. He tried his hand at one additional screenplay called *The Bridge at Remagen*, which became a 1969 B-movie war picture.

<sup>30</sup>See Yates, *Disturbing the Peace* 119. Additional quotations from the novel will be cited parenthetically as *DP*.

<sup>31</sup>See *DP* 214. In the *Ploughshares* interview, Yates draws a direct connection between "a young woman dying of a self-inflicted abortion" and "a man going crazy," musing that the former "was



a good fictional metaphor for the fifties,” and the latter “might just turn out to be a good metaphor for the seventies” (73).

<sup>32</sup>Although it complicates matters, it is worth noting that Frank Wheeler becomes a “walking, talking, smiling, lifeless man” following April’s death in *Revolutionary Road* (330).

<sup>33</sup>Indeed, *Disturbing the Peace* foregrounds the sense in which conglomeration renders the author “ancillary” (Whiteside 72). Writers do not survive by writing novels but by working on some other writer’s artistic property. For example, Jerry Porter, the original *Bellevue* screenwriter, has a “professional breakthrough” by adapting for the screen a ““downbeat”” first novel that recalls *Revolutionary Road* (DP 175). The author of that novel, Chester Pratt, is a ““terrifically talented”” writer with ““Integrity”” who is nevertheless in debt to his publisher following its publication (185, 175). Pratt stabilizes his life by rewriting Porter’s *Bellevue* screenplay for the new team of producers.

<sup>34</sup>Published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1952, Yates’s first published short story eventually won the magazine’s annual “First” prize (Bailey 133).

<sup>35</sup>In 1969, Knopf published *A Special Providence*, a critical and commercial failure that left Yates in debt to the publisher for more than ten thousand dollars (Bailey 401).

<sup>36</sup>See McDowell, “Publishers” D11 and “Publishing” C23. Helen and Kurt Wolff are typically credited with establishing the first major personal publishing imprint in 1961 at Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. In the early and mid-1960s, other well-known editors established literary imprints at large publishers: Henry Robbins at E. P. Dutton, Eleanor Friede at Delacorte, Richard Seaver at Viking and Thomas Congdon at Dutton.

<sup>37</sup>Qtd. in Buckley BR3. While granting limited forms of autonomy to an editor, William Shinker, the publisher of the Harper Collins trade division in the early 1990s, notes that imprints also lower costs for corporate publishers by “reliev[ing] them of the administrative responsibility of running divisions” (qtd. in McDowell, “Book Imprints” D6).

<sup>38</sup>See Lawrence, *Lawrence* 70. The writer Jayne Anne Phillips describes Lawrence as such in her contribution to a commemoration of the first twenty-five years of his imprint. In addition to booksellers and editors, other contributing writers include Thomas Berger, J. P. Donleavy, Tillie Olsen, Kurt Vonnegut, Dan Wakefield, and Yates.

<sup>39</sup>Nichols BR32. At Dell-Delacorte, Lawrence served as a sort of “scout” tasked with finding “promising authors – literary ones – ahead of the competition” (Shields 218). The first Delacorte / Seymour Lawrence book was an unexpurgated version of J. P. Donleavy’s *The Ginger Man* (1965). Lawrence is perhaps best known for resuscitating the flailing career of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. with the 1969 publication of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, a book that also turned his imprint into “a literary publishing powerhouse” (Shields 358). Lawrence provided Vonnegut’s “talent” with

“opportunity” (Shields 218), a point that *Slaughterhouse-Five* makes when it narrates its own contracting:

And somewhere in there a nice man named Seymour Lawrence gave me a three-book contract, and I said, “O.K., the first of the three will be my famous book about Dresden.”

The friends of Seymour Lawrence call him “Sam.” And I say to Sam now: “Sam—here’s the book.” (Vonnegut 18-9)

Seymour Lawrence Books would also popularize the works of the authors Richard Brautigan, Thomas McGuane, Barry Hannah, Jayne Anne Phillips, Tim O’Brien, Tillie Olsen, and Dan Wakefield.

<sup>40</sup>Always on the brink of destitution, Yates regarded the initial contractual negotiations with guarded optimism: “I might still bring out a Delacorte ‘Seymour Lawrence Book’ and have money coming in by the bushel-basketful” (qtd. in Bailey 416). Of course, such riches would never materialize.

<sup>41</sup>See Lawrence, *Yates* 59. Even more eccentric, perhaps, was that Lawrence is describing this payment arrangement as part of his eulogy for Yates.

<sup>42</sup>From a production standpoint, Yates thrived under this arrangement with Lawrence. After *Disturbing the Peace*, he published novels in rapid succession, including the masterpiece *The Easter Parade* (1976), *The Good School* (1978), a new short-story collection *Liars in Love* (1981), *Young Hearts Crying* (1984), and *Cold Spring Harbor* (1986). He was at work on *Uncertain Times* when he died in 1992.

<sup>43</sup>Bailey 423. In 1989, Yates signed a final two-book contract with Houghton Mifflin, the new house behind Lawrence’s imprint. The contract stipulated “an advance on signing and thirty-three equal monthly payments” (Lawrence, *Yates* 59). Yates died in 1992. Even though Yates appreciated Lawrence’s “laissez-faire approach,” the editor nevertheless had certain expectations for the writers whom he benefitted: namely, “that they do their work and show a seemly gratitude” (Bailey 423). For his part, Yates wavered between such gratitude and resentment. His daughter Monica Yates called the Lawrence-Yates association a “‘love-hate relationship big-time’”; “‘Dad would’ve *hated* that eulogy [since Lawrence] went on and on about the money’” (qtd. in Bailey 424). As Bailey puts it, the eulogy was a catalog of “unacknowledged favors” (424).

<sup>44</sup>For example, Robert Prentice initially works for the United Press in “Builders.” “Wrestlers with Sharks,” another short story in *Eleven Kinds of Loneliness*, is set at the broadsheet *The Labor Leader*. In “Regards at Home,” a short story in *Liars in Love* (1981), the protagonist writes copy for Remington Rand, Yates’s employer during the 1950s and the basis for Knox Business Machines. In the devastating novel *The Easter Parade* (1976), the protagonist Emily

Grimes writes for the *Food Field Observer*. Michael Davenport writes for *Chain Store Age* in *Young Hearts Crying* (1984).

<sup>45</sup>Tebbel, *History* 731, emphasis mine. As part of his joint-deal with Dell-Delacorte, Lawrence received royalties on the sales of Delacorte hardcover books and shared in the softcover profits.

<sup>46</sup>See McDowell, “Publishers” D11. The quote is from Harold Miller, chief executive at Houghton Mifflin in the late 1980s.

<sup>47</sup>See Kleinfeld 25. The quotation is from Thomas Congdon, the head of an imprint in the late 1970s at E. P. Dutton. Congdon made his name, as well as his fortune, with Peter Benchley’s *Jaws*.

<sup>48</sup>Yates, *Young Hearts Crying* 11. Additional quotations from the novel will be cited parenthetically as *YHC*.

<sup>49</sup>While an editor at a “more modest New York publishing house,” Kaplan enthusiastically accepted Davenport’s first book of poetry and is now a successful “senior-vice president at the office”—whether it’s the same publisher, or a bigger player like Knopf, is unclear (*YHC* 328).

### CHAPTER 3: GOING “WICKED & AWAY”: WRITING DREAM SONGS IN THE AGE OF FELLOWSHIPS

In June 1955, just six months before he began drafting poems that would eventually comprise *77 Dream Songs* (1964), John Berryman wrote his own “epitaph”:

He was a poet. To earn a living – instead of scrounging as he should have done – he lectured on subjects he knew nothing about to students incapable of learning anything. He was obliged to live in the capitals of the greatest empire the world has ever seen, at the supreme moment of its prosperity; could afford to write very little; and died.<sup>1</sup>

Despite its hyperbole, the epitaph sketches the devil’s bargain that tempted countless midcentury poets for whom, as Berryman’s close friend and fellow poet Delmore Schwartz puts it, “there is little hope or none of being able to earn a living directly by the writing of poetry” (“Vocation” 14). While Berryman “was a poet,” the epitaph does not memorialize artistic achievements. Berryman instead parses blame for artistic failure, chastising himself for his willingness “to earn a living” by lecturing at universities “on subjects he knew nothing about.” Whereas the modernists earned a living by “scrounging” in either middle-class professionalism or bohemia, the postwar university paid poets to perform mental labor that they regarded as routine. In an era anxious about the consequences of social and institutional conformity, such poets subsequently grappled with the sense in which the demands of their white-collar employment threatened the creative powers of their vocation.<sup>2</sup> In the university, the routines of the “organization man,” the sociologist William Whyte’s famous description of the midcentury white-collar worker, threatened to blunt the creativity of the poet (3); a “peculiar and strange being,” Schwartz writes, risks becoming a “useful and acceptable member of society” (“Present State” 37). No doubt

Berryman feared that he would become just such an organization man. Since 1939, he had taught in English and other humanities departments at more than ten colleges and universities, including a brief stint at the Iowa Writer's Workshop; in the fall of 1955 until his death in 1974, he taught in an interdisciplinary studies program and the English department at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis.<sup>3</sup>

But the epitaph is also a jeremiad in miniature, cautioning us that the same circumstances that force poets to teach also imperil American culture. Berryman magnifies American political and economic power in order to wield postwar abundance as an accusation rather than a cause for celebration. The United States is not only a prosperous nation, but a nation at the “supreme moment of its prosperity,” not only a great empire, but “the greatest empire the world has ever seen.” Living in a nation that could afford so much, the authentic American poet “could afford to write very little; and died.” What the poet cannot afford to do implies precisely what the nation can afford to pay him to do. Citing the number of federal, state, and private subsidy programs started and continued after the end of World War II, Marvin Lazerson has described the years 1945 to 1970 as a “golden age of fellowships” that enabled the research efforts of the “best and brightest” scholars in the sciences, social sciences, and humanities (30). Prominent fellowships and other subsidies from private foundations such as Guggenheim and Rockefeller contributed to widespread efforts to both support the arts and encourage a broader nationwide audience of intellectuals and educated readers. Indeed, Berryman and other poets who earned a living in the university regarded fellowships in the arts as a powerful but short-term solution to a perennial crisis of vocation. One reason was financial – even if only indirectly, occasionally, and for a limited duration, a fellowship grant turned poetry into a paying vocation. Another reason was both creative and sociological – fellowships countered the “radical change” signified by the

growing employment of poets in the bureaucratic university (D. Schwartz, “Present State” 36).<sup>4</sup> Fellowships disrupted the co-incidence of poet and teacher by detaching would-be artists from the 9-to-5 workday: the demands of undergraduates and administrators, monotonous courses and books, office hours and class time.<sup>5</sup> In its place, fellowships allowed a poet to write poetry under ideal vocational conditions – under conditions hospitable to writing, as Berryman put it, with one’s “whole mind and [...] one’s whole time” (“State” 858-859).

In what follows, I argue that poems in Berryman’s *77 Dream Songs*, perhaps his best-known volume, elaborate a polemic against the university that envisions the writing of poetry as an act of vocational resistance to the anthropology of white-collar work – that is, to the prevailing notions of what constitutes work, workers, and even work-time. Berryman tempers this caustic polemic by embedding it in a broader reflection on the artist’s role in fulfilling the “national purpose,” which *77 Dream Songs* limns through its scrupulous efforts to prescribe the terms of its own reception. Berryman, the book insists, is an American artist and *77 Dream Songs* an American work of art capable of addressing, and thereby assembling, an American community. But for a poet who teaches to earn a living, what is missing is the national support necessary to transform him into a full-fledged artist. In *77 Dream Songs*, this complex articulation of issues culminates in “Dream Song 14,” a poem whose vision of boredom closely resembles notions of creative research associated with fellowship grants. However, I contend that Berryman could not anticipate the ways in which a Guggenheim fellowship would reshape the writing of *His Toy, His Dream, His Rest* (1968), the second and final volume of the Dream Songs project. In these poems, the fellowship does not usher in vocational whole time, as Berryman hopes. Instead, the fellowship redefines work, nullifying salient Fordist distinctions about time on and off the clock in favor of a form of work-time that is productive precisely

because it seems so unconstrained. As a result, I argue that Berryman's poetry provides a point of departure for investigating the terrain of post-Fordist creative work where the dream of work as artistic self-fulfillment collides with the nightmare of self-exploitation.

Only on rare occasions does Berryman's poetry directly criticize or deride teaching in the university.<sup>6</sup> Instead, *77 Dream Songs* typically indicts the breadwinner, the white-collar, middle-class masculine ideal who matures, Barbara Ehrenreich has argued, by marrying and supporting a family (1-51). For example, "Dream Song 67" broadens the polemic against teaching into a conflict between poetry as a non-remunerative vocation and the obligations of breadwinning. To that end, the poetic speaker trumpets his vocational duties:

I am obliged to perform in complete darkness  
operations of great delicacy  
on my self. (13-15)

But the same speaker does not "operate often" (1). The speaker's unnamed interlocutor articulates the "reason": "They for these operations thanks you, what? / not pays you" (9-10). The lack of payment for writing poetry might not cripple a more bohemian poet, a point that the speaker makes in characteristically ambiguous fashion: "I have a living to fail— // because of my wife & son—to keep from earning" (6-7). The obligations of poet and breadwinner are at odds. The midcentury good life, the harmonious balance that Ward Cleaver strikes between the demands of work and family, precludes the poetic vocation. After all, the poet who only writes poetry for a living cannot but fail to support a family. Put the other way, the poet who teaches to support his family fails his vocation precisely because he cannot "operate often."

However, the longstanding categorization of *77 Dream Songs* as Freudian-inflected "confessional poetry" stands to marginalize this tension between vocation and breadwinning. Coined in a 1959 review by M. L. Rosenthal, this dominant critical category advances the basic

assumption that Berryman's poetry, as well as poetry by Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, and Anne Sexton, appears to be less about work than about childhood or, more to the point, about "the ideology of the [nuclear] family."<sup>7</sup> The experiences often dramatized in confessional poetry – Diane Middlebrook cites "divorce, sexual infidelity, childhood neglect, and the mental disorders" as typical fare – necessarily "follow from deep emotional wounds received early in life" (636).<sup>8</sup> For his part, Berryman was also no stranger to Freudian thought, the "implicit psychology" of confessional poetry, in either his personal life or his scholarship (Breslin xv). He underwent extensive psychoanalysis and subjected his own dreams to rigorous self-analysis, at one point cataloging more than one hundred (Mariani 290-93); his critical biography of Stephen Crane imposes a Freudian framework onto the writer's life and work, and he claimed elsewhere to have discovered Crane's "Primary Scene" (Mariani 219). Finally, Berryman's childhood was the stuff of Oedipal dreams, and quite clearly the motivation for many of trials and tribulations suffered by Henry, the poetic protagonist of *The Dream Songs*.<sup>9</sup> Taken from "Dream Song 365," the phrase "bad times" aptly summarizes a poetic project that seems to chronicle the consequences of a traumatic childhood – to give just a few examples, Henry's drunkenness, hospitalizations, lusting, sorrow, and all-around ruin (5).

*77 Dream Songs* seems eager to earn its confessional categorization in "Dream Song 1," the poem that inaugurates Berryman's project, as well as his mature career as a poet, as the after-effects of a Freudian "birth-trauma" (Haffenden, *Commentary* 81). But inasmuch as it marginalizes labor in favor of libido, the psychoanalytic tenor of the poem – and of *77 Dream Songs* more generally – is misleading. I argue that Song 1 re-describes Freudian preoccupations with childhood and family as one part of an overarching conflict between breadwinner and poet. Indeed, Berryman's deviations from middlebrow Freudian orthodoxies motivate the poem's



critique of the breadwinner. Rather than simply rehearsing the clichés of midcentury Freudianism, Song 1 shares a widespread “style of thought” with post-Freudian radical and anti-conformist liberal intellectuals such as Herbert Marcuse and William Whyte, respectively (Breslin xiv). So armed, the poem confronts the “professional disaster” that Berryman endured in 1958 at the University of Minnesota when a faculty faction finally succeeded in dissolving the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, winning what Berryman described in a 1971 letter about the poem as a ““long interdepartmental war”” (Haffenden, *Life* 269, qtd. in Haffenden, *Commentary* 81). With his program gone and his tenure in jeopardy, Berryman found himself reassigned to the English department, where “double chores & insolent nagging” awaited him (qtd. in Mariani 377). He did not accept these changes with equanimity.<sup>10</sup> After all, the politics of work inevitably impacts the practice of his vocation. Since teaching courses and writing poetry draw on the same “energy,” any disaster that makes breadwinning more burdensome also spells disaster for Berryman’s writing (“State” 858).

In Song 1, Berryman inflates a poet’s grievances with the university, as well as the breadwinner ideal, into an indictment of a repressive society. No less than Marcuse’s “one-dimensional” or Whyte’s organization societies, Berryman projects a total way of life that is “everywhere and in all forms” because it subjugates libido and labor to the same factory rationality (Marcuse, *One-Dimensional* 11). Indeed, the poem acts as a cryptogram that ultimately focalizes the incompatible possibilities vying for expression in Henry’s life: on the one hand, the conformist pressures to mature or adjust into a breadwinning family man and university teacher; on the other, the vocational, if not narcissistic, dreams of the artist who transcends such workaday responsibilities. The poem depicts those conformist pressures

inasmuch as Berryman's professional disaster appears to initiate a straightforward Freudian exercise in surface and depth:

Huffy Henry hid the day,  
unappeasable Henry sulked.  
I can see his point,—a trying to put things over.  
It was the thought that they thought  
they could *do* it made Henry wicked & away.  
But he should have come out and talked.

All the world like a woolen lover  
once did seem on Henry's side.  
Then came a departure.  
Thereafter nothing fell out as it might or ought.  
I don't see how Henry, pried  
open for all the world to see, survived.

What he has now to say is a long  
wonder the world can bear & be.  
Once in a sycamore I was glad  
all at the top, and I sang.  
Hard on the land wears the strong sea  
and empty grows every bed. (1-18)

Correspondences between the first and second stanzas demonstrate a psychoanalytic cliché: the traumatic loss may be – as a preface to the poems puts it – “irreversible,” but it is eminently repeatable<sup>(vi)</sup>. The first stanza poeticizes the manifest symptoms of Henry, a teacher who wishes to go “wicked & away” after losing his departmental home. The second stanza more closely skirts the original childhood trauma. Henry's flight repeats the traumatic “departure” – what Berryman later identified as the suicide of Henry's father (Haffenden, *Commentary* 81). In a Freudian narrative, this departure irrevocably transforms the original narcissistic child who had “all the world” on his side into the “Huffy,” or childish, adult who “sulked” instead of adjusting to the demands of midcentury workplace. Put through its Freudian paces, Henry's failure is libidinal as much, if not more, than it is professional. Here the poem's compatibility with the Freudian hermeneutic produces the sense that Henry's failings as a breadwinner do not indicate

an antagonistic politics of work, but unresolved childhood trauma. Unmanned by his unnamed opponents, Henry cannot muster the “thought” to “do it” – the typography teases Oedipal possibilities – because he has lost “the world” that covered him like a child’s “woolen” blanket. Put another way, Henry is a bad worker, but only because he misses his mother.

This practice of defusing the politics of work was not uncommon in a postwar milieu saturated with middlebrow Freudianism, a milieu in which the protests of ardent communist laborites could be cured by talking through their “symbolic castration” at the hands of maternal figures (Lindner 69). But Berryman did not regard the Freudian hermeneutic as matter of rote application. Indeed, Song 1 counterpoises the Freudian hermeneutic, as well as the conformist pressures it produces, with a poetics of narcissistic self-display. As we will see, this poetics tethers the vocational obligations of the poet to the elaboration of Henry’s “personality” (Berryman, “Art” 29). For now, the presence of this poetics makes a more immediate suggestion: namely, that Song 1 so conspicuously depoliticizes work in order to recast the Freudian hermeneutic as an instrument of repression in the service of one-dimensional or organization societies. In more concrete terms, “Huffy Henry” does not desire to go “wicked & away” because he is a childish adult trapped by the after-effects of repression. Rather, Henry wants to escape because he is a reluctant breadwinner, and the nine-to-five a second, and ongoing, primal scene for a poet.

The opening line of Song 1 serves as a point of entry into this counter-poetics: “Huffy Henry hid the day.” The empty space of the caesura complicates the identity of “the day” by disrupting the trochaic sing-song of the alliterative opening feet. For the Freudian, the ambiguity anticipates the correspondences between the first and second stanzas; thus, “the day” is always already two days – a manifest workday for a childish adult and, on some deeper level, the

traumatic primal scene. The first line levels an accusation of childishness precisely because the hermeneutic is tasked with ensuring the production of breadwinners: Henry hides from the workday in order to hide from that portentous day. But here Berryman's own training in "very close reading[s]" of poetry, as well as his awareness that "a word may be used richly in a variety of meanings," justifies a second approach: what if the verb "hid" is transitive rather than intransitive?<sup>11</sup> What if Henry himself somehow "hid the day" itself? In this reading, Henry does not hide from the breadwinner's "day," but expands to hide that day by exploring his own subjectivity. This narcissistic Henry is not an immature neurotic but instead appears as a subjective principle capable of occluding two primal scenes – the childhood trauma in the home and the workday at the office. These self-operations, to paraphrase Song 67, right the original "departure" by returning to him the attention of "all the world." By doing so, the poem suggests what Marcuse terms the "striking paradox" of narcissism (*Eros* 169). Rather than "egotistic withdrawal," narcissism signifies the emergence of a new and "comprehensive existential order" – in this case, a post-scarcity and non-repressive world in which Henry's "language is *song*, and his work is *play*" (169, 169, 171, emphasis his).

More simply, Henry hides the breadwinner's "day" by talking, or even huffing, about his self. In response to the workplace disaster, the first stanza of the poem establishes self-disclosure as his new obligation: rather than have "sulked" in silence, "he should have come out and talked." Here the poem subtly advances the poet, no less than Henry, as a subjective ideal who resists the sociologists' bogeymen – that is, who resists the organization men, one-dimensional men, little men, and other-directed persons that signify so many efforts to describe the breadwinner as the mass-produced subject of a total way of life.<sup>12</sup> Henry's simple obligation relies on a felicitous analogy between prominent psychoanalytic and poetic conceits: namely, the

talking cure and the lyric voice of a speaker overheard.<sup>13</sup> What Henry obscures with his volubility, the poet obscures with his writing. Thus, the final stanza gestures to the poetic project to come as proof that Henry – as well as Berryman – has accepted this challenge: “What he has now to say is a long / wonder the world can bear & be.”

While Song 1 treats poetry writing as an act of resistance to the repressive forces of “the day,” Berryman recognized that writing just one more poem – much less sustaining “a long / wonder” – is an immensely difficult task for any poet who earns a living in the university. As I have already suggested, *77 Dream Songs* grapples with this crisis of vocation by embedding it within midcentury reflections on the “national purpose,” a widespread exceptionalist narrative with important consequences for both the typical breadwinner and the reluctant poet-teacher. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, reflections on this purpose often organize liberal responses to the prospect of a new American “age of ever-increasing wealth and leisure” (Schlesinger, “New Mood” 119). But abundance, as liberal intellectuals such as David Riesman and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. suggested, was invariably interrogative – “abundance for what?” (Riesman, *Abundance* 300).<sup>14</sup> The need to articulate a purpose recognized that economic abundance could exact its own costs from average Americans: the “spiritual malaise” associated with excessive materialism, complacency, apathy, selfishness, etc (Schlesinger, “Challenge” 9). In his 1962 essay “The Arts in America,” John F. Kennedy answers Riesman’s question when he claims that the creation of art satisfies the national purpose by assuring “quality” leisure-time for breadwinners. By extending debates about economic abundance and the national purpose to questions of quality leisure-time, Kennedy’s essay is symptomatic of efforts to solicit consent from white-collar breadwinners for the economic and political rationales that reorganize more

traditional relationships between autonomous selfhood, work-time, and leisure-time. In turn, the collaboration of *American* artists, audiences of white-collar breadwinners, and artworks – the elements crucial to Kennedy’s narration of the national purpose – resurface in Berryman’s poetry as the grounds on which he stakes his most effective protests against the impositions of breadwinning. The same conditions that make quality leisure-time and art appreciation suitable for white-collar breadwinners, Berryman argues, indelibly harm the artist.

Originally published in *Look* magazine, Kennedy’s essay describes “a nationwide movement towards excellence” that culminates in the creation and appreciation of American art (5). This “movement” relies on crucial assumptions about not only the national purpose, but also its relationship to changing notions about the breadwinner’s work- and leisure-time. Kennedy embraces the idea that the United States was fast becoming a post-scarcity society in which the same factors that enriched the nation irrevocably changed the nature of work. With basic “quantitative” needs met by advances in mass production, work mattered less.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the breadwinner could submit to the impersonal bureaucratic office even as its push towards centralization eroded the prerogatives of professionalism. After all, he would not be in that office for very long. Dabbling in science fiction, magazines like *Life* forecast an incredible “shrinking work week” – from four days a week, to six months a year and, finally to retirement by the age of forty (“Begin Here” 4). Given such expectations, Riesman claimed in the influential *The Lonely Crowd* that the elements of an autonomous self, of the ideal “American character,” were now to be “increasingly formed for leisure and during leisure” (32, 248-49). The breadwinner now works for the weekend.

Of course, there’s the crux: with all this free time, how does one guarantee the “quality” of the breadwinner’s leisure-time? How does one ensure that leisure-time supports the

characteristics that have been excised from the office? Kennedy begins his answer by marveling at the “American scene” – its “seashores,” “great parks,” “sports,” and “new shopping centers” (5). After noting their “diversity and vitality,” he insists that these leisure-time activities express “something more than merely the avidity with which goods of all kinds are being acquired in our exuberant society.” This claim responds to lingering anxieties that American leisure-time is just another “billion-dollar business” that packages or commodifies experience. In order to more fully allay these worries, Kennedy shifts attention from the culture industries to the irreducible “essentiality of artistic achievement.” Crucially, such an achievement does not simply presume the isolated genius of the artist. Rather, the arts “incarnate the creativity of a free society,” or what Kennedy characterizes as an implicit collaboration between artists and white-collar breadwinners responsible for guaranteeing the quality of the latter’s leisure-, as well as work-, time (6). In this collaboration, breadwinners transform into patrons of the arts, and every artistic achievement a testament to national achievement – that is, to what Kennedy calls the “quality of a nation’s civilization” (4). After all, the breadwinner’s “expertness and skill” – Kennedy emphasizes professionalism, not bureaucracy – make possible the economic abundance so hospitable to the flourishing of artistic creativity and eager audiences for art (5). Thus, Kennedy’s exceptionalist narrative re-conceives white-collar work-time as the necessary prerequisite to (but a parodic endpoint of) the national purpose. Once off the clock, a breadwinner “weary from work” becomes a “lover of the arts” who reads a novel or poem or views a painting with the expectation that the “disturbing experience of art” leads to a life “more fully lived” (8, 8, 5, 5). Art ensures quality leisure-time because it encourages autonomous selfhood. By appreciating art, a worker exercises powers of judgment excised from the office.

Berryman's poetry also narrates the national purpose by parsing the American scene in terms of artists, artworks, and audiences. Following David Haven Blake, I argue that *77 Dream Songs* uses "the advertising and hype of modern consumer culture" to establish its nationalist and creative bona fides (719). The uneasy premise – poetry as advertising – does not render it incompatible with the national purpose. Advertising, as Blake argues, had become "the principal sign and expression of civic life" (724). As a result, several poems in *77 Dream Songs* resemble advertisements tasked with promoting the book as a national artwork capable of addressing an American audience. For example, "Dream Song 15" exemplifies this basic preoccupation with hype when it depicts a gallery art show at which "Henry's pelt was put on sundry walls" (1). Audience response suggests that this pelt exhibits both the authenticity of an artwork and the excitement of a Coca-Cola: "This is *it!*" (6, emphasis his). "Dream Song 69" is even less circumspect about the similarities between poetry and promotion when it compares the speaker's lust for a woman to a campaign to "launch a national product" (3). Finally, "Dream Song 75" launches a national product in its opening line: "Henry put forth a book" (1). The concluding lines of the same poem describe an American artwork that advances the national purpose:

Something remarkable about this  
 unshedding bulky bole-proud blue-green moist  
  
 thing made by savage & thoughtful  
 surviving Henry  
 began to strike the passers from despair  
 so that sore on their shoulders old men hoisted  
 six-foot sons and polished women called  
 small girls to dream awhile toward the flashing & bursting  
 tree! (11-18)

Following Walt Whitman's example, Henry's book, a "flashing & bursting tree," confronts its readers with an experience of "despair" so "remarkable" that it assembles a community of shared American experience. Indeed, this artwork makes Kennedy's dream come true. The book



addresses a “great audience” comprised of “individual of all trades and professions, of all ages, in all parts of the country” (8).

However, this collaboration is asymmetrical in *77 Dream Songs*. While Song 75 flaunts the authenticity of Berryman’s poetry, and the receptiveness of an American community to the experience of such art, Henry is only “surviving.” For that matter, poet-teachers such as Berryman could not solely concentrate on poetry. But this is not to say that Berryman rejects Kennedy’s clear-cut distinction between white-collar workers and artists. Berryman instead embraces the distinction as a condition for realizing the national purpose. When it depicts the American scene, in other words, *77 Dream Songs* uses the national purpose to underscore how an era of economic abundance has failed to remedy the poet’s ongoing crisis of vocation. This failure is never more evident than in “Dream Song 14.” It is one of Berryman’s most anthologized poems, and opens with one of his best-known lines:

Life, friends, is boring. We must not say so.  
After all, the sky flashes, the great sea yearns,  
we ourselves flash and yearn,  
and moreover my mother told me as a boy  
(repeatedly) ‘Ever to confess you’re bored  
means you have no

Inner Resources.’ I conclude now I have no  
inner resources, because I am heavy bored.  
Peoples bore me,  
literature bores me, especially great literature,  
Henry bores me, with his plights & gripes  
as bad as achilles,

who loves people and valiant art, which bores me.  
And the tranquil hills, & gin, look like a drag  
and somehow a dog  
has taken itself & its tail considerably away  
into mountains or sea or sky, leaving  
behind: me, wag. (1-18)

The poem reflects on the vocational crisis by depicting the struggle to write poetry under the fraught conditions of quality leisure-time. What renders quality leisure-time wholly unsuitable for writing poetry, Song 14 suggests, is its relationship to repetitive white-collar work. To that end, I argue that Song 14 raises the specter of the organization man who – even when he seems to be at his leisure – is always performing monotonous work on the clock. In the poem, so many conspicuously repetitive lines double as so many monotonous activities in order to suggest that university employment would condemn poet-teachers to writing organization, or “academic,” poetry.<sup>16</sup> No longer able to live as artists, poets degenerate into white-collar workers. Still, Berryman’s epitaph insists that he is a poet. Thus, the poem subtly showcases the creative fitness of an American poet, and the triumph of authentic poetry, in spite of the obstacles that an organization society poses. In turn, this demonstration of creativity by a poet-teacher also doubles as an accusation: the nation imperils the creation of future art when it fails its obligation to support, if not subsidize, artists.

To level its polemic against teaching, Song 14 constructs an impasse between the poet’s unique experience of boredom and the breadwinner’s quality leisure-time. Indeed, the poem chronicles a series of accusations and counter-accusations that show the complex role that boredom plays as both the bane and blessing of American leisure-time. Whereas it confronts the typical breadwinner with the uncomfortable, if not dangerous, experience of idleness, boredom signifies to the poet the possibility of whole time – of unharried time that is hospitable to creative opportunities and consistent with the writing conditions that fellowships offer. After creativity stalls in the romantic clichés of the second and third lines, for example, Song 14 interrogates boredom according to the expectations that guide quality leisure-time. In lines 4-8, the speaker recalls a formative childhood in which his mother admonishes him for confessing his boredom.

According to her, the poem's opening line is incorrect. Life isn't boring; rather, boredom is a character flaw of boring people:

and moreover my mother told me as a boy  
(repeatedly) 'Ever to confess you're bored  
means you have no

Inner Resources.' I conclude now I have no  
inner resources, because I am heavy bored. (4-8)

By rehearsing familiar charges about a poet's fitness as a breadwinner, the mother implies that the bored speaker is *idle*. If she is correct, his boredom marks "the utter absence of leisure" because it suggests a speaker who forgoes "the claims [...] that belong to his nature" (Pieper 342). In this telling, the bored speaker misuses his leisure-time by failing to secure the qualities like autonomy and individuality that it has been tasked with recovering. To underscore the absence of these qualities in the speaker, the poem binds the phrase "Inner Resources" to the first-person pronoun. Both the phrase and the pronoun only appear in the seventh and eighth lines – the phrase twice, the pronoun thrice – and the reason is clear: to have "no / Inner Resources" is to have no "I."

As these lines already demonstrate, the poem's depiction of boredom relies on the heavy use of repetition. In over two-thirds of Song 14, a line either repeats some portion of a preceding line or itself becomes fodder for such repetition. In interviews and articles, Berryman associates repetition with breadwinning inasmuch as he describes repetition as a primary characteristic of teaching. In other words, Berryman associates repetition with work-time, not leisure-time, and often pointedly contrasts it with the experience of writing poetry. In a 1948 contribution to *Partisan Review*, for example, Berryman follows his mention of vocational whole time with a denunciation of the university as "the perfect place not to write": "the substantial repetition of *experience* involved in teaching [...] constitutes, for a fiction writer at any rate, the most

unsatisfactory life conceivable short of imprisonment.”<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the “repetition of courses and books numbs” (“State” 858), a point that Song 14 makes more than once in a set of lines about “literature” and “great literature”:

Peoples bore me,  
literature bores me, especially great literature,  
Henry bores me, with his plights & gripes  
as bad as achilles,

who loves people and valiant art, which bores me. (9-13)

In these lines, “Henry” does not simply bore; his “loves” – “people and valiant art” – echo the very “Peoples” and “great literature” that already bore the speaker. The poem also repeats different conjugations of the verb “to bore”; in nine lines, the words “bore” and “bores” appear once and thrice, and the adjective “bored” twice. Song 14 translates Berryman’s resentments toward teaching into conspicuous repetition in order to accomplish two ends: first, it outmaneuvers the mother’s moralistic accusations about boredom as idleness; second, it clarifies the claim that quality leisure-time is inimical to writing authentic poetry. Exaggerating repetition enables the poem to redefine idleness as less a moral failing than a disciplinary breakdown familiar from the factory – industrial or paper, it makes no difference – and synonymous with the unproductive misuse of work-time. In other words, the poem uses repetition to level a counter-accusation about the breadwinner’s quality leisure-time: because it proffers monotonous activity as the productive antidote to boredom, quality leisure-time actually extends, rather than escapes, work-time. In turn, Berryman’s polemic against working in the university succeeds inasmuch as the poem implies that a productive antidote for breadwinners risks having the opposite effect on poets. Written under conditions of quality leisure-time, organization poetry isn’t poetry – it is *work*.

While Berryman's speaker will triumph over these conditions, the repetition so far warns that the narcissistic dream of Song 1 is set to expire, to be permanently replaced by the perpetual nightmare of white-collar work. Whereas the opening Song asserts an analogy between psychoanalysis and poetry, talking and writing, Song 14 suggests that breadwinning confronts the poet with a much less felicitous one: the act of composing the poem, of the speaker speaking it, now resembles an hour spent working on the clock. Indeed, Berryman writes portions of Song 14 as if the lines in a Dream Song had become the quantitative units – the “minutes” – in an “abstract” and “empty” work-hour imported from the Fordist assembly line and open-plan office.<sup>18</sup> This time is the precise opposite of whole time: just as Fordist work-time dominates the white-collar worker by requiring him to repeat so many monotonous actions every hour, the invariant eighteen-line form of a Dream Song now demands that a poet repeat himself in order to fill the lines. The repetitions that we have already catalogued – in particular, the conjugations of the verb “to bore” and the paratactic listing of what bores the speaker – suggest that very labor. Indeed, the white-collar worker, his monotonous work, and his empty work-time – the very images that quality leisure-time tries to exorcise – reappear in starkest form in the same lines in which the mother urges the poet to develop an individual “I” with “Inner Resources.” Now it is evident that the mother operates in tandem with this poetic work-hour to both produce and discipline the first-person speaker. The first-person pronoun is chided into existence by a mother whose very scolding is monotonous; the poem not only quotes her words – that is, the speaker repeats them – but even describes the admonition as one she issued “(repeatingly).” Once the coveted prerequisite for the autonomous life of an “I,” “Inner Resources” are now not so much “inner” as installed, an aftereffect of maternal and temporal compulsions. Indeed, the reason this

“I” is not bored is because it mistakes its desire to write as self-expression rather than the internalization of an abstract form of compulsion.

Rather than the poet-teacher who becomes a “useful and acceptable member of society,” Song 14 depicts a speaker whose experience of boredom indicates Delmore Schwartz’s “peculiar being” (“Present State” 37). Of course, this authentic poet does not experience boredom as idleness. The poem only evokes “Inner Resources” so the speaker can renounce them in favor of being “heavy bored.” The typography of the poem flashes indifference to any potential consequences: “‘Inner Resources’” become diminutive, if not emasculated, “inner resources.” In the succeeding lines about “literature” and “great literature,” shifting the pronominal emphasis from the subject “I” to the direct object “me” starts to more clearly elaborate a properly poetic notion of boredom. There boredom does not infantilize the “me,” as the prior presence of an Oedipal mother might suggest. Instead, the mother is dead wrong: boredom privileges the poet.<sup>19</sup> To the bored “me,” supposedly “great literature” proves no more interesting than middlebrow “literature.” Similarly, the otherwise exceptional “Henry” no more interests “me” than do indistinct “Peoples.” While positioning the speaker, so to speak, on the outside looking in, boredom swallows literature and great literature, Peoples and Henry into one great quality-less mass: they are all the same, all equivalent, all boring.

By subtly revaluating boredom, Song 14 both advertises Berryman’s creative fitness of the poet and stresses his lack of sustained whole time as evidence for the failure of the national purpose. While circumstances may force him to make ends meet as a teacher, Berryman implies that he is actually an artist who deserves a paying vocation. This revaluation of boredom, and the creative fitness it portends, depends on demonstrating Berryman’s ability to transcend – not to consolidate – the “tyranny” of empty work-time that the poem so closely associates with the

manufacture of organization poetry (Postone 214). In other words, the preceding lines test the poet's mettle by tasking him with a challenge familiar from our discussion of the New Frontier national purpose: namely, overcoming empty time, or repetitive work-time and its threat to quality leisure-time. As we have already seen, Song 14 conceives this challenge at the level of the line. Putting aside the conventional eighteen-line limit of a Dream Song, the parataxis and repetition in the poem could continue without end. The lines could rattle off items ad infinitum, effectively repeating the opening assertion again and again: "Life, friends, is boring." In the concluding lines, Song 14 surmounts this problem by revaluing boredom as a glimpse of whole time for a beleaguered poet-teacher:

And the tranquil hills, & gin, look like a drag  
and somehow a dog  
has taken itself & its tail considerably away  
into mountains or sea or sky, leaving  
behind: me, wag. (14-18)

Because it interrupts the preceding pattern of repetition, the phrase "somehow a dog" signifies a creative breakthrough with implications for the national purpose. A conspicuous end rhyme reinforces the point: what was a repetitive "drag" has become the happy "wag" of a dog's "tail." The same "tail" that goes "considerably away" doubles as a homonymic "tale" – a book of poetry such as *77 Dream Songs* – that fulfills the poet's obligation to provide Americans with the experience of an artwork.

Moreover, this breakthrough does not only result in a notion of boredom that comports with what Berryman characterizes as whole time, but also with the conditions that fellowships promise. Such a "chance distraction," as William Whyte describes breakthroughs in *The Organization Man*, confirms that boredom is illegible in the Fordist terms to which it has heretofore been subjected – idleness, passivity, monotony, repetition (209). After all, the bored

speaker is not idle so much as he engages in “free research,” Whyte’s ideal account of the fellowship as the opportunity for a poet or scientist to “welcome the unexpected [...] when it comes” (233). Since “discovery has an accidental quality,” the scientist cannot be “too busy” with repetitive tasks that will “[inhibit him] from seizing the *idle* question” (208, 209, 209, emphasis mine). However, the conclusion of Song 14 is yet another ambiguous moment in *77 Dream Songs*, a moment aimed at the ongoing tension between the artist and white-collar worker: poeticizing “free research” doubles as an accusatory reminder of the conditions under which the poet-teacher must write. The poet, it would seem, is still only surviving. While his artwork persists, he is left “behind,” abandoned to the university.

Following the successful publication and favorable reception of *77 Dream Songs* in 1964, the Guggenheim Foundation awarded to Berryman the prize for which he had been waiting: a fellowship (Haffenden, *Life* 336). In September 1966, he travelled to Dublin with plans to finish editing and arranging poems for *His Toy, His Dream, His Rest* (340-48). The four “Books” that comprise this second volume conclude the project begun in *77 Dream Songs*. Keenly sensitive to the effect of how he lives on what he writes, Berryman’s poetry acknowledges the impact of a fellowship. In the first Song that Berryman writes in Dublin, the fellowship appears to augur its own creative breakthrough:

Golden his mail came at his journey’s end,  
Henry was back in action. His old friend liked  
his ancient sonnets,  
and institutions had come up to scratch  
awarding Henry much: now he was on his own,  
no lectures, no seminars,

only the actual: I perfect my metres  
until no mosquito can get through ... (1-8)



Besides “awarding Henry much,” the “institutions” require him to teach “no lectures, no seminars.” Instead, he is finally “on his own.” “Dream Song 297” also assures us that he is still the same incorrigible Henry Pussy-cat, even if “institutions” as esteemed as the Guggenheim Foundation have “come up to scratch” – to fund – him. In any event, Henry now gives his whole mind and his whole time to poetry. He focuses on “only the actual,” taking the time to “perfect [his] metres” by crafting a net through which no bureaucratic “mosquito” can fly.

Simply put, Song 297 does what Song 14 could not: it sings a full-throated celebration of whole time. After all, the fellowship appears to satisfy the accusations leveled against the university in *77 Dream Songs* since it liberates researchers, scientist and writer alike, from the Organization. The teacher becomes a full-fledged artist because the fellowship ratifies Henry’s dream of going “wicked & away” as a matter of federal, state, and philanthropic policy. In *His Toy* and, in particular, its final “Book,” the fellowship defuses the critical salience of Berryman’s polemic against white-collar work. While its offer of whole time annihilates the uneasy distinction between time off- and on-the-clock, between leisure- and work-time, the fellowship also introduces subtler forms of domination. Indeed, the same poet who resists routines in the bureaucratic university advances the cultural and social arrangements crucial to contemporary “no-collar” workplaces where “more work has become comparable to artists’ work” (Brouillette, “Creative Labor” 142).

While advertising its creative exceptionality à la *77 Dream Songs*, *His Toy* also obsesses over the project’s ever-deferred completion. In the simplest sense, it is a preoccupation suggested by the size of the second volume. Despite initial plans to include only 84 poems, *His Toy* eventually balloons to 308 poems (Haffenden, *Life* 337). “Book VII,” the final book, balloons from 11 to 107 poems (*Commentary* 60). The outsized nature of *His Toy* speaks to the manner in

which writing Songs had “become a customary and conventional outlet” for Berryman as early as 1964. Nor did this habit cease when he arrived in Dublin, where he wrote at least one hundred more Songs, which comprise the bulk of Book VII (Haffenden, “Introduction” x). In a more complicated sense, Berryman’s desire to write what he called ““THE LAST DREAM SONG”” had become nearly impossible because the fellowship, and its promise of whole time, now delimit the scope of Book VII – a book in which no fewer than twenty-four poems meditate on the fellowship, writing Songs, or completing the project.<sup>20</sup> Despite the fellowship, speakers in Book VII do not often luxuriate in boredom, in the free and vital possibilities of time, but appear to suffer from overwork, from “toils without surcease” (“DS 318” 8). The effort to “put pen to paper” – to compose a Song, let alone complete the project – has become a “life sentence” (“DS 261” 1, 7).<sup>21</sup> But when the poet cannot “end a labour” in “Dream Song 379,” it is not because monotonous work strangles creativity (5). Rather, the problem is the open-endedness of the fellowship itself: with every passing second, “Strange & new outlines / blur the old project” (9-10).

How does one end a poetic project that styles itself as free research into “Life” itself? If Berryman cannot stop writing Songs, it is not for lack of trying, even if Book VII suggests speakers less inclined to finish the project than to escape it through the familiar means: “bad times” (“DS 365” 5). Song 365 conjures a Henry that is not “exhausted” by any conventional workday, but by “Grimy dreams” – that is, by writing itself (9, 10). The poem’s solution would make Henry Ford spin in his grave: “Open the main! / Pour, if necessary, drinks down him” (11-12). What remains unclear is whether Henry heeds this imperative – drink! – in order to escape work, or to perform it. Regardless, it is clear that the Fordist distinction between work-time and bad times, between work and unproductive activity, no longer obtains. Moreover, the breakdown

of that distinction does not happen for the reasons imagined in *77 Dream Songs*. There the difference between white-collar work and creativity relies on vitalist conventions: death happens on the clock, and creative activities such as writing occur beyond its control. But unlike his modernist predecessors, Berryman has become “abrupt, an industry” in life, not death (“DS 38” 13).<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, Berryman’s poetry captures the disorienting sense in which work arrangements in contemporary creative fields now accommodate workers as “Seedy” as Henry, as well as activities as immaterial and intangible as writing *Dream Songs* (“DS 77” 1). Here the “masterless” Berryman figures less as an artist than as an antecedent to contemporary creative workers who are driven by “an attitudinal mindset that [blends] bohemianism and entrepreneurialism” (“DS 280” 13, Gill and Pratt 14). In turn, Berryman’s writing is less a matter of romantic inspiration than a form of flexible and informal productive “activity” that is valuable precisely because it so closely contours “Life.” More to the point, even management consultants and autonomist Marxists generally agree that cutting-edge creative workplaces such as advertising agencies, internet startups, and graphic design firms depend on the “artists’ vaunted resistance to routine work” (Brouillette, “Creative Labor” 146). When economic activity centers on such resistance, the barrier between work- and leisure-time dissolves once again, but not because monotonous activities threaten leisure-time. As I have already suggested, white-collar work is characterized as antithetical to the vitality of a creative human being – it is monotonous and mechanical, or even dead. But now the barrier between work- and leisure-time dissolves because the concept of work consistent with the creative worker “requires not too little but too much of the self” (Weeks 242). When Berryman admitted to feeling “remote & lost without [his] poem,” he anticipates the passionate attachment between work and identity that distinguishes the

contemporary creative worker (Haffenden, *Life* 344). For this worker, work is quasi-vocational – it does not designate a “precise and circumscribed part of [...] life [but] a more and more comprehensive action” (Morini 44). Or, as Berryman puts it, poetry is “just something you *do*”: the poet and writing merge in “a funny kind of jazz” (“Interview” 6, emphasis his). The later Dream Songs make it clear that no matter how much he drinks, drugs, or lusts, bad times do not free Henry from his work because Henry’s personality, and the poet who accompanies it, is the work.

Thus, Song 14 does not resolve the problems of Fordist work-time so much as it provides a point of departure for reassessing the new antagonisms that structure work-time in contemporary creative industries. Because it unfetters the speaker from the clock, this post-Fordist work-time is “less restrictive, less corporeal” (Read 29). In that sense, boredom offers the creative worker the flexibility to develop his personality in concert with activity that provides “genuinely humane” gratifications (A. Ross, “New Geography” 33). But *His Toy* also demonstrates that this “gift of autonomy” exacts hidden costs (34). The fellowship replaces empty work-time with a form of work-time so alive or intense that only death can give Berryman rest. In the absence of a clock, whole time turns into a “game without time-outs and no finish” (Virno 16). In this formulation, a poetic “somehow” does not signify a plenitudinous chance encounter or creative breakthrough; instead, each passing moment threatens the worker with a torrent of “infinite negative and privative chances, infinite threatening ‘opportunities’” (Virno 16). For the contemporary creative worker, the problem isn’t that life is boring. Rather, “We must not say” that life, friends, isn’t boring enough.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Berryman's biographer John Haffenden describes the block quotation as an "epitaph" in his introduction to *Henry's Fate and Other Poems* (xiv). In his indispensable *John Berryman: A Critical Commentary*, Haffenden designates "Dream Song 20," written in December 1955, as the first Song ever drafted (157).

<sup>2</sup>For more on white-collar employment and artists, see Hoberek, 1-32. For more on the relationship between work and vocation, see Muirhead 95-113.

<sup>3</sup>For a brief chronology of Berryman's teaching jobs, see Thornbury lxii-lxvii.

<sup>4</sup>See D. Schwartz, "Present State," 36. In the 1940s, Berryman won small-scale fellowships more often for his scholarship than for his poetry. After numerous rejections, Berryman received his first Guggenheim fellowship in 1952 to pursue creative writing and a Shakespeare study (Haffenden, *Life* 227-28).

Like Berryman, Delmore Schwartz centers discussion about the state of poetry on the poet-teacher. His 1951 essay "The Vocation of the Poet" exhibits sympathy for poets for whom teaching proves a second vocation – a "temptation," and "not a job," that nevertheless still "may injure or weaken [him] as a poet" (15). Schwartz evokes the university to show that the vocation of teaching benefits from a robust system of support while poets enjoy scant "real economic support for the writing of poetry" (14). In turn, his 1958 essay "The Present State of Poetry" acknowledges that fellowships turn poetry into a paying vocation by allowing a poet to "devote [himself] entirely to the writing of poetry" (39).

<sup>5</sup>For a discussion of the institutional politics of fellowships in the sciences and social sciences, see Whyte 205-241.

<sup>6</sup>This essay makes widespread reference to poems in *77 Dream Songs* (1964) and *His Toy, His Dream, His Rest* (1968), which were both collected as *The Dream Songs* in 1969. The 385 poems are sequentially numbered across the two volumes – *His Toy* begins with "Dream Song 78." The two volumes are also organized into 7 "books" – the first three books comprise *77 Dream Songs*, and the last four *His Toy*.

Any effort to read *77 Dream Songs* for intimations of this tension between poet and professor must contend with a seemingly glaring absence of poems about teaching. Only approximately 15 poems in *The Dream Songs* directly mention university teaching. At least six of those Songs mention the university but deflect questions of teaching; in poems such as "Dream Song 170" and "Dream Song 373," the speaker strictly assumes the mantle of poet, engaging with professors only because the poem broaches issues of literary criticism. Of the remaining poems, teaching is less a driving preoccupation than a casual aside, even if offhand lines about teaching do suggest that the university and its practices are incompatible with writing poetry. For example, "Dream Song 211" implies that the speaker could not write poetry but instead "led with his tongue & taught & taught & taught" in order to "to mollify one creditor / or another" (4, 5-6). Reflecting on the administering of an exam, "Dream Song 240" derides the

university as an exemplary institution of a bureaucratic society, noting that not only the desks, but the students “are hinged too, / for storing” (3-4).

<sup>7</sup>See Middlebrook 648. Middlebrook limits the title “confessional poetry” to the work of Lowell, Sexton, Plath, and W. D. Snodgrass in the years 1959-1966 (636). But she acknowledges that other critics apply the title to poets such as Berryman, Jarrell, and Theodore Roethke. I cite Middlebrook’s discussion because she succinctly characterizes the assumptions that underscore other critical accounts of Berryman’s poetry. For applications of confessional paradigms to Berryman, see Travisano 52-57 and Mariani 3-13.

<sup>8</sup>For more on the complex role of Freudianism plays as the “implicit psychology” of confessional poetry, see Breslin xi-xvii.

<sup>9</sup>Like Henry’s father, Berryman’s “shot his heart out in a Florida dawn” when he was a boy and his mother, with her “almost unbearable smother,” was a domineering woman on whom he doted (“DS 384” 8, “DS 166” 12).

<sup>10</sup>For more on Berryman’s reaction, see Haffenden, *Life* 269-273; Mariani 330-34.

<sup>11</sup>See R. Ross 2, 5. Berryman co-authored *The Art of Reading* in 1960 with Ralph Ross and Allen Tate. In a series of short essays based on excerpts from writers and poets, Berryman guides students on reading methods that extend beyond “mere literacy” (2).

<sup>12</sup>For the one-dimensional man, see Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*. For the organization man, see Whyte. For the “Little Man,” see Mills ix-xx; for the typology of “other-directed,” as well as “inner-directed,” persons, see Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, 1-36.

<sup>13</sup>For the provocative suggestion that the form of Berryman’s Songs resembles “the therapeutic fifty minutes,” see Vendler 36.

<sup>14</sup>For important and illustrative discussions of the national purpose, see Schlesinger, *The Politics of Hope* 105-20; Riesman, *Abundance for What?* 19-51. For a collection that reflects a wider political spectrum, see Jessup. For a more recent overview of the national purpose vis-à-vis the Cold War, see Jeffries; see White 275-296.

<sup>15</sup>See Schlesinger, “Challenge” 9. His account of the “future of liberalism” (8) delimits a transition in the self-conception of American liberalism from a “quantitative” New Deal liberalism attentive to matters of “want and privation” to a “qualitative” New Frontier liberalism focused on “bettering ... lives and opportunities” (9).

<sup>16</sup>In a contribution to *Partisan Review*, Berryman answers a question about pejorative “academic” literature by describing it as “spineless [...] professorial imitations of serious writing” (“State” 858).

<sup>17</sup>“State” 859, emphasis his. In an interview twenty years later, Berryman expresses similar sentiments about the teaching “routine,” and the “labor” of courses, as compared to the “fresh experience” of writing (“Conversation” 341).

<sup>18</sup>Postone 202. For more on the “abstract time” of Fordism, see 186-225.

<sup>19</sup>For more on Berryman’s close attention to pronouns in his poetry, see “One Answer,” p. 327.

<sup>20</sup>Berryman thought he had written “THE LAST DREAM SONG” – what eventually became “Dream Song 161” – in June 1965 (Haffenden, *Life* 337). He continued to write Songs for inclusion in *His Toy* at least through February 1968 (*Commentary* 164). Other Songs written after the publication of *His Toy* would eventually be collected in *Henry’s Fate*, a posthumous volume edited by Haffenden.

<sup>21</sup>While it is part of Book VI, not VII, “Dream Song 261” was written in August 1966, and designated as a “Gugg,” or Guggenheim, poem (Haffenden, *Commentary* 161-2).

<sup>22</sup>“Dream Song 38” eulogizes Robert Frost. His death transformed him into an “industry” because it coincided with the appearance of the “Professional-Friends-of-Robert-Frost,” the associate professors that subjugate poetry to the pedantry of literary criticism (14).

## CHAPTER 4: LEE FRIEDLANDER AND PHOTOGRAPHY'S BELATED RETURN TO THE OFFICE

The vicissitudes of mass-market magazine photography are certainly part of the “sad poem” that the Swiss photographer Robert Frank depicts in *The Americans* (1959), the seminal photobook of the 1950s.<sup>1</sup> A telling 1955 photograph shows a magazine newsstand outside the Metropolitan Life Insurance Building in New York City. The success of *Metropolitan Life Insurance Building – New York* depends on the resonance that it creates between the rows of magazines—dozens of titles that are basically the same rectangular shape and the same size—and the windowed façade of the modernist skyscraper. The resulting composition implicates magazine and photographer alike in prevailing anxieties about midcentury Fordism. Indeed, the photograph is a polemic: what appear to be so many different magazines are instead recast as so many iterations of a single corporate logic. The whimsical claims to distinctness shouted in glossy, colorful magazine covers, and in titles like *Whisp*, *Safari*, and *Life*, give way to the cold-hearted criteria that guide magazine distribution. Furthermore, juxtaposing the office and the newsstand, the sites at which magazine photography is produced and distributed, does little to flatter the aesthetic or working autonomy of the magazine photographer. In the shadow of a monolithic insurance corporation, the practice of magazine photography is not an expression of creativity but a desultory form of repetitive white-collar work. Magazine photographers become white-collar drones whose task is filling the pages of magazines with interchangeable images.<sup>2</sup>

In practical terms, Frank's photograph is as close as midcentury art-photography ever gets to confronting the office.<sup>3</sup> *Metropolitan Life Insurance Building – New York* identifies what



is effectively an absence, the significance of which becomes more striking given the prominence, if not ubiquity, of office depictions in other media such as film and fiction. But midcentury art photography provides no equivalent to *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*—which is to say, the medium had no definitive visual statement about, no great apology for or exposé of, the workaday white-collar breadwinner. This absent corollary persisted in photography until the 1980s, when the white-collar office—despite work, workers, spaces, and affects that are “all too familiar” to many Americans—emerged as “startlingly new” photographic subject-matter in Chauncey Hare’s *This Was Corporate America* (1984) (Salvesen 22). In “brutal” photographs from the late 1970s and early 1980s such as *Electronics Industry*, 1980-81, Hare showed white-collar workers employed in government bureaucracies and technology and energy corporations.<sup>4</sup> Crucially, Hare never considered himself a photographer, much less an artist making what the conceptual photographer Jeff Wall calls “Pictures” (36). He was instead an activist, photographing offices because art photographers could not bear to:

Many artists and curators were once among the ranks of demoralized workers and made a run for it when they could. And they’ve never looked back – afraid to acknowledge a responsibility to or see an opportunity in beginning a needed dialogue. (qtd. in Salvesen 22)

In any case, art photographers such as Wall and political activists such as Hare were in agreement: the former had abandoned “the social field,” the workaday world, to “professional photojournalism proper” or even to “a new version of proletarian photography (Wall 36).

Hare’s explanation for why midcentury art photography neglects the office is helpful in several ways. First, it implies two versions of the photographer that serve as important bookends to the changes in photographic practice from roughly 1955 to 1970. On the one hand, there are staff and freelance photographers. These photographers constitute the “ranks of demoralized workers” who toiled for mass-market picture magazines like *Life*, *Look*, and *Holiday*, the sort of

magazines displayed on the newsstand and planned in the office skyscraper in Frank's photograph. On the other, there are those same photographers turned "artists." According to John Szarkowski, the director of photography at the New York Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) from 1962 to 1991, these artists are members of the "post-*Life* breed of photographers" ("Photography" 31). These photographers reached maturity when institutions such as museums, art galleries, and universities embraced photography as a modern art form.

Of course, shifting from put-upon workaday professional to artist—from commercial or magazine to art photography—required transformations to the arrangements under which photographers work. For some fortunate photographers in the post-*Life* generation, the shift towards art photography allowed them to stop accepting what Szarkowski derided as a "double standard for their own work":

their livelihoods are made according to the standards set by the magazines and agencies; their serious work is done on weekends and between assignments, in the hopes of producing an exhibition, or a small book, or perhaps only a personal file that someone, someday, will look at openly and slowly and with pleasure, without wondering how the picture might be made more 'effective' by tighter cropping and the addition of a good caption. ("Photography" 31)

During the heyday of the picture magazines, the double standard was the prevailing solution to the impasse between commerce and art. The photographer accepted some assignments in order to make a living; but at the end of an informal nine-to-five, "on weekends and between assignments," the photographer's attention turned to his "personal" or "serious" work (31). For Hare, casting off the double standard would no doubt constitute a salutary goal. But what he construed as a problem of work, Szarkowski construed as an affront to art. For Szarkowski, who championed a renewed photographic aestheticism, photographers are artists, not workers. In his telling, the double standard was disastrous for "today's best photographers"; they might need commercial work to make a living, but remained "fundamentally bored with the mass media, and

[did] not view it as a creative opportunity.”<sup>5</sup> While sharing Hare’s suspicions of commercial photography, Szarkowski insisted that photographers should refuse to “look back” onto the office. Documentary reform should not concern photographers because the picture-magazine era was an aberration that interrupted the “unfolding of photography’s main [modernist] tradition” (Phillips 61).<sup>6</sup> As a result, photographers should refuse to turn the double standard, and the degraded state of photography that it presumed, into subject matter.

Hare’s and Szarkowski’s respective arguments show that the double standard serves as the flashpoint for a series of polemics and counter-polemics regarding the state of midcentury American photography. This chapter will eventually introduce two other representative, if not influential, formulations of the double standard: first, the double standard as it relates to the hierarchy of photographic practice elaborated by Wilson Hicks, an influential picture editor at *Life* magazine; second, its relationship to the *Bildungsroman* of Joel Meyerowitz, a prominent member of the post-*Life* generation of street photographers. As we will see, these complex polemics about the double standard substantially impact reflections on the nature of photography, as well as considerations of the status of the photographer and its relationship to work. Ultimately, these episodes in a long-simmering debate culminate in a discussion of Lee Friedlander’s first solo photobook *Self Portrait* (1970). I contend that the career of this seminal photographer provides a unique opportunity to interrogate shifting notions of photographic practice. Besides critiquing conventional efforts to resolve the “white-collar” tensions of the double standard, I argue that *Self Portrait* re-imagines the work arrangements—in particular, notions of what constitutes a project and a career—that underscore the practices of the photographer as an artist. In other words, what *Self Portrait* produces is not only an image of the photographer as an artist, but as a new type of worker as well. For that reason, Hare is correct to

argue that many post-*Life* photographers “never looked back” to depict, much less critique, the working conditions of commercial and magazine photographers. But if the most successful post-*Life* photographers followed Szarkowski’s judgment and neglected what Hare saw as their “responsibility,” it was because some of these photographers were already looking forward. To support this argument, the chapter concludes by considering the implications of this new photographer-worker as Friedlander begins to accept commissions to photograph workers in factories and, especially, white-collar offices in the 1980s and 1990s.

Until he was, in his own words, “discovered by the art world” in the early 1970s, Friedlander’s career shuffled back and forth between freelance photographic assignments and personal work (“Q & A: Lee Friedlander” 54). Szarkowski was primarily responsible for this discovery. In 1967, he curated “New Documents,” an influential MoMA exhibition which launched the art-photography careers of Friedlander, Garry Winogrand and, especially, Diane Arbus. Friedlander had otherwise started his career in New York City in the mid-1950s, when “almost any photographer with a modicum of technical competence, a little bit of hustle, and an ability to deliver the standard product on time could earn a living as a freelance” (Galassi 17). And Friedlander hustled, his freelance career a varied one consisting of “hundreds and hundreds of jobs,” from photographing jazz album covers for Atlantic Records to photographs and feature assignments for magazines like *Sports Illustrated*, *Holiday*, *Status*, and *Seventeen* and even Time-Life Books (18-19). For his part, Friedlander has expressed agnosticism about the effects of the double standard on his own career—in his own words, the arrangement never seriously precluded his ability, or that of his colleagues, to “[do] our own work for our pleasure” (“Q&A with Lee Friedlander” 54-55).<sup>7</sup> Peter Galassi argues that freelance photographers such as Friedlander “were content to do a job, get paid, and pursue their ‘personal work’ on the side”

(17). Friedlander's personal photography typically appeared portfolio-style in small magazines.<sup>8</sup> In addition to the income from MoMA exhibitions and freelance assignments, prestigious fellowships such as the Guggenheim allowed Friedlander to focus on "photographic studies of the changing American scene" (N. Lyons 20).

Published on Friedlander's Haywire Press imprint, the first edition of *Self Portrait* contains forty-three photographs (including its cover) and a preface written by the photographer.<sup>9</sup> Its title is no accident; *Self Portrait* challenges prevailing photographic practice through its thematic preoccupation with identity, and its generic preoccupations with self-portraiture. To those ends, *Self Portrait* seems to ask its readers a pair of simple questions: "who is Lee Friedlander"? and "what is portraiture?" The justification for the first question is straightforward enough: the photographer—some trace of his "physical" body, its shadow, and/or its reflection—appears in every photograph in *Self Portrait*. In particular, this mediation of Friedlander's body lends itself to the widespread critical conclusion that *Self Portrait* undercuts the pretensions of a stable identity. However, I argue that *Self Portrait* does not use these traces of Friedlander's body in order to mount an impression of the "inner" Friedlander—far from it. *Self Portrait* is instead concerned with interrogating the activity of a photographer as such. After all, the double standard presumes a veritable crisis in the identity of photographers: are they artists? amateurs? professionals? "white-collar" hacks? In *Self Portrait*, Friedlander answers that a photographer is a modernist who is committed to photography as its own autonomous and specific medium with no necessary dependence on, say, the illustrative requirements of journalism or even particular subject matter such as "the street." By presenting self-portraiture as an *occupational* genre, *Self Portrait* ultimately undercuts prevailing notions of photographic practice in order to redefine

photographic autonomy through a commitment to what I call the “open-ended” modernist project.

### **The Double Standard**

Photographer and critic Martha Rosler argues that Friedlander “has omitted any active claim to control over reading,” thereby allowing his photography to be “read anywhere from photo-funnies to metaphysical dismay” (127). But elsewhere it is a matter of conventional critical wisdom that several, if not most, of the photographs in *Self Portrait* ironize the very presentation of identity that self-portraiture usually presumes. The Friedlander that appears in *Self Portrait* is “protean”: “by turns prankster, magician, cheeky kid, hipster, tired and befuddled Everyman” (Gohlke 185). None of its photographs reveal the “inner Friedlander”—we struggle to infer any of the qualities or characteristics of “the man” himself (Angier 19). More to the point, *Self Portrait* has no concern to “[produce] a definitive self-likeness, but multiple versions reflecting many personalities and possibilities” (Garner 185). Andy Grundberg has argued that this thematic preoccupation is an intervention into the history of midcentury art. *Self Portrait* is an “anti-narcissistic tract” that is “almost compulsively concerned with debunking” a very specific identity: namely, “the myth of the artist-as-hero” (81). Thus, a polemical undercurrent begins to appear in *Self Portrait*: by thematically insisting on the instability of identity, the photobook implies the generic problem of portraiture; in turn, this problem undercuts prevailing norms of “white-collar” photographic professionalism. Take, for instance, *Industrial Northern United States* (1968), a photograph of Friedlander’s reflection in the storefront window of what seems to be an employment agency.

*Self Portrait* interrogates the double standard by combining themes of masculinity, work, and photography. With canny precision, Friedlander has positioned his own face to appear in the

space between the words “AMERICAN” and “TEMPORARIES” and between the phrases “AMERICAN TEMPORARIES” and “MALE DIVISION.” Like Frank’s photograph that juxtaposes the newsstand and skyscraper, Friedlander’s photograph also operates as a veiled critique leveled by a photographer who would like to surmount the requirements of magazine “reportage.” In this case, juxtaposing the photographer and the stenciled phrases turns the latter into impromptu captions; the stenciled phrases evoke the double standard and, as Szarkowski argues, the photographer’s tiresome struggles with the magazine editor.

The photograph also engages the more complex polemic suggested by the discussion of Szarkowski. The photographer is not undergoing an identity crisis as such; rather, the photographer has been stripped, as Szarkowski would have it, of the robust and coherent sense of professionalism that once characterized his calling. During the “golden age” of the picture magazines, or roughly the years 1920 to 1950, professional photographers such as photojournalists enjoyed “privileged status” as the “possessors of special and arcanum skills” (Szarkowski, “Photography” 28). Because they “did not understand what photography could do [and] better yet, they did not think they did,” editors necessarily granted autonomy to the photographer—a far cry, it is implied, from the shooting scripts and editorial dicta of post-1950s *Life*. But Friedlander’s photograph presumes the end of those “halcyon days.”<sup>10</sup> In this telling, photography is not a medium in which professional photographers can explore a modernist aesthetic for an enormous mass-market audience. Rather, the picture magazines, and the “mass media” more generally, have imposed on photographers a degrading form of “white-collar” professionalism that turns them into “just one of many dependent contributors to,” in this case, “the large publishers.” Since the early 1950s, those same editors—whom Szarkowski starts to ominously identify as “the men in the offices”—think they understand photography: to the

editors, photography is a “universal language” because they have subordinated it to criteria such as “economy, graphic force, and simplicity of meaning” (30). Indeed, the editors have expropriated the self-sufficiency of photographs by turning them into “threads in a tapestry which had been conceived by a higher intelligence, and woven by a committee” (29). Where it was once its own end, meaningful in itself, a photograph now only signifies one raw material consumed in order to produce an editor’s magazine feature or photoessay.

In *Industrial Northern United States*, Friedlander makes the tongue-in-cheek suggestion that the photographer’s identity has reached a nadir. Like Chaplin’s Little Tramp, Friedlander regards this nadir as a comic opportunity, not a tragic loss. With Friedlander’s characteristic deadpan wit, other photographs in *Self Portrait* explore the possibility that this zero point is a new beginning for the construction of new identities. As I have already stated, every photograph in *Self Portrait* includes some trace of Friedlander’s body—more often than not, his shadow or reflection. Thus, a photograph such as *Grant’s Tomb, New York City* (1965) explores the question of identity and portraiture when it substitutes a cannonball for Friedlander’s head. Other photographs in *Self Portrait* often riff on this motif by juxtaposing traces of Friedlander with other inanimate objects—cigarette machines, bushes, palettes of sod and, especially, objects on display in storefront windows such as trophies, chairs, and Pepsi bottles.<sup>11</sup> But those photographs do more than problematize identity and portraiture. For Friedlander, these juxtapositions also construct new ways of seeing, as well as new photographic practices capable of supporting a modernist photographic program.

By characterizing those same shadows and reflections as self-consciously “amateur” tactics that undercut prevailing notions of photographic professionalism, we can understand the relationship between thematic and generic preoccupations in *Self Portrait* and the more



fundamental issue of photographic practice. Most discussions of *Self Portrait*, and Friedlander's photography more generally, have accepted this basic characterization. For example, the critic Rod Slemmons allows that the presence of reflections and shadows are generally regarded as "a careless beginner's mistake in amateur photography" (112). Peter Galassi describes Friedlander's photography, especially during the 1960s, as a "deliberate catalogue of photographic errors" (42).<sup>12</sup> Crucially, these characterizations rely on the conventions about photographic practice promoted by influential figures in midcentury photography such as Wilson Hicks. The picture editor at *Life* magazine from 1937 to 1951, Hicks codified photographic practice in *Words and Pictures*, his 1952 reflection on a career dedicated to developing the pictorial logic of the photo-essay. He presents a hierarchy that orders photographic practice from its amateur beginnings to its professional heights—that is, to the photojournalist who has access to events that are newsworthy *and* artistic. By promoting photographic practice as it exists at mass-market picture magazines, Hicks promotes the very views about photography that earned Szarkowski's rebuke. From Hicks's eagle-eyed position atop a skyscraper in the Luce empire, photography is about storytelling for a mass audience; it is about communicating a clear idea through clear subject-matter. Indeed, proximity or access to certain types of subject matter enables a photographer to move up the hierarchy. Tellingly, each gradation of subject matter elicits a "stronger response" from viewers (103). With enough improvement in the photographer's subject matter, the viewers of a given photograph aren't so much family or friends, or even just customers but, more specifically, magazine readers.

It is also clear that *Words and Pictures* and *Self Portrait* are at odds with one another. Whereas the former argues for a stable hierarchy of photographic practice, the latter presumes that the hierarchy is crumbling. In fact, Hicks's book precedes what Szarkowski describes as a

“sudden decline and failure of the picture magazines,” the last outposts of midcentury photographic professionalism: it started with the death of *Collier’s* in 1957 and ended with the deaths of *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Look*, and *Life* in 1969, 1971, and 1972, respectively (*Mirrors and Windows* 13, 26). After this decline, the reorganization of photographic practice, as *Self Portrait* suggests, was an open question. For Hicks, the subject matter in *Self Portrait* bespeaks a rank photographic amateur, who starts by giving himself assignments that focus on the vernacular—that is, on things that are “close at hand” like “babies and pets” (103). While invariably exercises in cliché, amateur self-assignments can exhibit gradations in subject matter. The lowest level gives way to assignments that focus on scenic pictures of “all-out beauty”—“a farm in winter,” “skyscrapers” or, notably, “reflections.” The photographer’s shadow, it must be said, is beneath consideration altogether. That level is followed by a “variation of the scenic,” examples of which are familiar to anyone who flips through the pages of *Self Portrait*: “the eye-level view of the odd city doorway or store window display.” The next step in subject matter—“people”—provides the amateur photographer with a crucial opportunity to professionalize. For different reasons that we will discuss later, *Self Portrait* also views this transitional step between amateur and professional photographic practice as a crucial one.

Besides ranking types of photographic subject matter, Hicks’s hierarchy also includes a prominent maturational dimension that exchanges Szarkowski’s polemical language about an exploitative double standard for the discourse of masculine breadwinning. Indeed, Hicks’s hierarchy narrates a photographer’s *Bildungsroman*, or the developmental steps from a childish-cum-amateur to an adult-cum-professional photographer. This *Bildungsroman* attempts to yoke the photojournalist, or what for Hicks constitutes the acme of photographic professionalism, to the same prevailing norms about masculine breadwinning that Friedlander satirizes in the

“American Temporaries” photograph. The maturational dimension to photography is clearest when we ascend the hierarchy. Take, for example, Hicks’s discussion of street photography, which emerges as another non-professional step for amateur photographers whose interests have shifted from the scenic to people. But the practice comes with its own temptations for unpopular and, in Hicks’s mind, unnecessary political expression. Street crowds can too readily accommodate an “adolescent change” in a photographer who is just a few short steps beyond the level of rank amateur (103). Writing from a perspective seasoned by photojournalism, Hicks warns that this “younger photographer” risks becoming preoccupied with the subject matter of the street “just so long as it is ‘socially significant’ and shows a disagreeable aspect of life.”<sup>13</sup>

Hicks’s efforts to pathologize the sort of photography that Hare revives in the 1970s are beyond the purview of this essay. What interests us more are the ways that Hicks’s claims about artistic self-expression decry certain types of photographic practice and, by the same token, secure the legitimacy of editorial photojournalism as a form of journalism *and* art. For Hicks, reformist and amateur photographers exhibit many of the same maturational limitations. Amateur self-assignments—the same sort of assignments that street and reformist photographers undertake—cannot express artistic intent. Like the amateur, the street-reformist photographer still trades in clichés even though his subject matter drastically departs from babies and pets. If the reformist or street photographer is undergoing an adolescent change, the amateur photographer—who is located a step *below* on the hierarchy, or a maturational step *in the past*—is an altogether immature *child*. For Hicks, annexing artistic self-expression is perhaps the final step in his efforts to buttress photojournalism and editor-driven photographic practices from its critics. Since the amateur is a child, the amateur self-assignment is a contradiction in terms. Its preoccupation with photographic clichés implies a photographic assignment incapable of

expressing a photographic vision. Which is to say, the amateur self-assignment implies a photographer who has no or, at least, has not yet developed a self.

It is an effective tactic. Conflating amateurism, immaturity, and cliché establishes the groundwork on which Hicks will eventually claim a natural and inevitable relationship between photojournalistic-qua-professional photographic practice, access to particular photographic subject matter, and artistic self-expression. Yet how does the photographer realize what W. Eugene Smith called his “‘final desire’... to have his photographs live on past their important but short life span in a publication” (qtd. in Hicks 100-101)? The simplest answer is Edward Steichen, the director of photography at the Museum of Modern Art from 1947 to 1962, and Szarkowski’s immediate predecessor. Like Hicks, Steichen basically viewed photography as a mass medium and a universal language—he curated *The Family of Man*, a 1955 MoMA exhibit, to resemble a picture-magazine layout.<sup>14</sup> The runaway success of *The Family of Man* as both an exhibit and a photobook confirmed Hicks’s claim about the relationship between picture-magazine photography and art: after having “cooled somewhat as living history,” a photograph from a picture magazine could then exhibit its “warmth as art” on museum walls (99).

For Hicks, an exhibit like *The Family of Man* also confirms that the so-called double standard renders professional photojournalistic practice compatible with artistic self-expression. As we have seen, Szarkowski’s double standard presumes a difference in kind between commercial and art photography, between paid and personal work. However, Hicks presumes to dismiss claims about perniciousness on the basis that, as the *Life* photographer Gjon Mili once put it, photojournalism is pitched “halfway between art and journalism” (qtd. in Hicks 101). The picture magazines put photographers in a unique and enviable position to avoid the types of self-assignments that the desire for literary posterity forces a *Life* writer to accept.<sup>15</sup> Yes, Hicks

admits, a *Life* photographer could make some attempt to “work at journalism days and art nights, digging up his own subjects” (99). Here his emphasis on subject matter as a reliable measure for photographic professionalism comes in handy: “But where, other than in journalism, can a photographer be exposed with greater frequency to richer possibilities for his artistry”? The self-assignment is vestigial for a photojournalist who “tries,” and, as we have seen, succeeds, in finding “art in his job.” Thus, photojournalism defuses the antagonisms of the double standard because its editorial assignments are *editorial-cum-self* assignments that satisfy the photographer in his dual roles as photojournalist and artist. The consequences of Hicks’s professional-artist amalgamation reverberate further down the hierarchy. Even at “lower” levels, the double standard now presumes that the photographer has undertaken the path to professionalism. Whatever else he does with his camera when not on assignment, the double standard means that the photographer makes a living *as a professional photographer*.

As I already suggested, Hicks’s ideas about photojournalism should allow us to understand the portraiture’s importance as a genre capable of transitioning the photographer from amateur to professional practices. Obviously, portraiture is a genre of some importance in a book that appears to consist of forty-three amateurish self-portraits. But *Self Portrait* involves portraiture in one other obvious way: studio portraits appear as elements in eight photographs, often implicated in complex juxtapositions and superimpositions made by reflections and shadows on storefront windows.<sup>16</sup> After working through babies, skyscrapers, and doorways, Hicks’s amateur photographer gives himself a final assignment: “people themselves, with whom he has known for some time [that] he would have sooner or later to cope” (103). Crucially, the subject matter of this self-assignment, the highest that amateur photographic practice offers, provides the photographer with a low-level opportunity to professionalize. A photographer who

is so inclined can capitalize on his limited interests, turning them into “a well-paying business” and himself into a “salon portraitist” who trades in kitsch such as “arty portraits,” “arty nudes,” “arty pastorals, sea pieces and nocturnes” (104). As our discussion of photographic *maturation* suggested, such professionalization also sets the photographer on a course of *self*-development.<sup>17</sup>

By juxtaposing Friedlander’s shadows and reflections with examples of professional portraiture, *Self Portrait* exaggerates the consequences generated by the decline of the picture magazines. In *Madison, Wisconsin* (1966), Friedlander has photographed the shadow of his own face cast onto a studio portrait of a young African-American woman in a storefront window display. The photograph also includes his headless reflection, as well as limited views of the street behind him and the store’s interior. More to the point, the photograph upends Hicks’s photographic hierarchy and its celebration of the double standard. After all, Hicks would certainly penalize the picture for committing the cardinal sins of amateurism: the storefront window, the shadow, the reflection. In other words, the photograph is an exercise in affronts to professional photographic practice. But it is also clear that the photograph exaggerates the identity crisis presumed by the waning of those same standards. Even for a white male photographer whose reflection lacks a head, the photograph asserts a startling identification in the 1960s: if we allow her features to recede into the dark tones of Friedlander’s shadow, the eyes of the African-American woman in the portrait now peer out as *Friedlander’s* eyes.<sup>18</sup>

More specifically, *Madison, Wisconsin* demonstrates how *Self Portrait* re-organizes the relationship between art photography and amateur and professional practice. First, the photograph assigns priority to Friedlander’s shadowy self-portrait—following Wall, the shadow is the precondition for interest in the professional portrait as an element in a “Picture.” In other words, the inclusion of Friedlander’s shadow, reflection, or likeness acts as a visual signature.

After all, you can't have a photograph in *Self Portrait* without such elements. Moreover, the commercial portrait no longer emblemizes professional practice so much as it becomes just one image—or even one readymade—available for appropriation in the visual “social landscape” (N. Lyons 5-7). Indeed, the primacy of Friedlander's shadow denies Hick's cozy relationship between art and professional photojournalism. Instead, *Self Portrait* instructs photographers that the path to art doesn't require access to what Hicks called “richer possibilities” (99). In *Madison, Wisconsin*, it is the commercial portrait, not a photograph from a *Life* photoessay, which “cools” down to become art. Indeed, *Self Portrait* advances a position that is diametrically opposed to Hicks's: the self's shadow and reflection—literally, a *self*-assignment, and a seemingly amateurish one at that—makes photographic art possible.

In *Self Portrait*, photographs such as *Madison, Wisconsin* suggest the primacy of the self-assignment as a means of artistic self-expression. After all, the appearance in every photograph of Friedlander's reflection, shadow, or body—of *himself*, so to speak—literalizes the self-assignment. But *Self Portrait* maintains that the self-assignment is a fraught endeavor for midcentury photographers. Whereas *Madison, Wisconsin* exploits assumptions about professional photographic practice, I argue that other photographs engage the conventions of street photography in order to assert more restrictive standards for legitimate self-assignments. Indeed, we can see street photography and photojournalism as the two modes of the double standard: photojournalism is a way to make a living (and, as some claimants asserted, to eventually make art); street photography is a way to make art when one wasn't making a living. But if Szarkowski and Frank were correct, the double standard minimizes the difference between professional and personal work. Over the weekend, even as he snaps shots of the street—in other words, even as he pursues some self-assignment—the photographer must always be wary that his

professional work may have infiltrated his personal work. In other words, he must be worried that his photographs do not express an artistic vision, but only show that he has successfully internalized the “white-collar” eyes of the editorial men in the offices.

### **The Self-Assignment**

Thus, the photographer’s challenge is to ensure the authenticity, so to speak, of what appears to be a self-assignment. We can best understand the significance of these claims about Friedlander’s photographs by turning to Joel Meyerowitz, another member of the post-*Life* generation of photographers whose writing and photography suggest the evolving relationship between art photography, commercial photography, and the office.<sup>19</sup> It is a relationship inscribed in the rhetoric of masculinity. For Hicks, photographic professionalism was synonymous with normative breadwinning. But Meyerowitz and Colin Westerbeck, a writer and Meyerowitz’s frequent collaborator, describe a masculinity fit for the streets in *Bystander* (1994), their idiosyncratic history of post-1970s street photography. In an interview with Westerbeck, Meyerowitz provides a heavy-handed metaphor in which the street becomes an ocean “wave” that threatens to overpower the photographer (2). Unlike the photojournalist, who cultivates transparent detachment, the street photographer is “in the crowd, in all that chance and change.” The resulting photographs are “tough” and “uncompromising”—none of that illustrative hokum—“something that came from your gut, out of instinct, raw, of the moment, something that couldn’t be described in any other way. So it was TOUGH. Tough to like, tough to see, tough to make, tough to understand” (2-3).<sup>20</sup> Buried underneath such exaggerated toughness is a simpler insistence on the photographer’s autonomy. If you had to be there to get the shot, then the shot can’t possibly belong to an editor back in the office.



Like Frank's and Szarkowski's descriptions of photographic practice, Meyerowitz's "tough" street photography owes much to an implicit polemic in which the photographic professionalism associated with the double standard resembles a form of office work. Although he wasn't a photojournalist, Meyerowitz *was* one of those men in the offices. Colin Westerbeck's essay "From Viewfinder to View Camera" opens with a daydream that Meyerowitz has cited repeatedly as the genesis of his photography career:

When Joel Meyerowitz, was an art director in the early 1960s, he would look out his office window at the shoppers and tourists and businessmen thronging Fifth Ave. in the afternoon, and he would have this fantasy that one day he would just not come back from lunch. He would stay out on the street where it was lively and light-filled, instead of having to return to his drawing board and the endless rows of fluorescent tubes.

... The initial desire to be out on the street rather than in an office had been urgent, yet vague. It was little more than a yearning Meyerowitz had, an undertow that he felt in the street and had to struggle to escape after lunch each day in order to go back inside.

Although Meyerowitz was an art director for a "small advertising agency," this description nevertheless evokes the open-plan office and, with it, the standardization and rationalization mandated by the Fordist corporation. "Endless rows of fluorescent tubes" structure the space of his office, a touch straight out of the Frank photograph or Hollywood films. In any case, it befits the narrative of a would-be photographer that the quality of light distinguishes the office and the street. Contrasted with the vibrancy of a "lively and light-filled" street, we do not doubt that work in the office is stifling, monotonous, and repetitive. The office's work arrangements establish the grounds against which Meyerowitz defines a salutary photographic practice. A chance encounter launches his career as a photographer—just the sort of spontaneous detail that a photographer, responsive to the flux of the street, would appreciate. In the early 1960s, Meyerowitz is sent by his agency to oversee a commercial shoot by none other than Robert Frank. The assignment itself was unremarkable. Nevertheless, watching Frank photograph was a singular, "magical experience," even for an art director who "had no idea who he was"

(Westerbeck). “That afternoon,” Meyerowitz insists, “was when [he] decided, as it were, not to return to the office after lunch.”<sup>21</sup>

After quitting his office job, Meyerowitz spent his first year photographing in the streets. Yet even if he no longer works in an office, Meyerowitz’s *Bildungsroman* assiduously avoids treating street photography as the complementary “personal work” to photographic professionalism—in this case, to *absentee* photographic professionalism. To that end, his street photography entails both a commitment to “tough” physicality and, moreover, to photographing in a “completely open-ended way” (Westerbeck n.p.). Meyerowitz, Westerbeck writes, practiced “open-ended” photography by trying “to take it all in, to be ready to respond to whatever chanced to appear in his viewfinder, no matter how far out on the edges of the frame it might be.” There were no editorial shooting scripts, no demands for illustration, and no predetermined theses.

Perhaps no photograph better shows Meyerowitz’s commitment to open-ended photography than *New York City* (1968), in which the responsiveness of the open-ended photographer rebukes commercial photographic practice. Indeed, the photograph depicts the sorry state of affairs that occurs when a photographer accepts a predetermined, editorial assignment or even a self-assignment in which “he picked a particular subject and approached it the way a photographer working on a feature spread did” (Westerbeck n.p.). Weighed down with equipment, an assistant, and a clear-cut assignment, the commercial photographer seems doomed to produce, as Meyerowitz describes it, “another dull catalogue picture” (Joel Meyerowitz n.p.).<sup>22</sup> It is as if a commercial photographer is “wearing blinders” (Meyerowitz qtd. in Westerbeck). His eyes are not his own, but belong to the editor, the client, or even the commercial assignment. The commercial assignment canalizes his attention, focusing it on a pair of nearly identical

blonde women modeling pea coats, not the “infinite possibilities” that the medium of photography offers (Westerbeck). Indeed, the photograph cautions us about the incompatibility of art and the double standard. A photographer committed to open-ended photography cannot be handicapped by the requirements of a commercial assignment. In turn, “personal work” is *no* compromise. When a man “suddenly [...] flies off the bridge,” only the unencumbered Meyerowitz has the agility to respond or, put the other way, the instincts to let the camera act: “the camera rises to my eye and flickers once” (*Joel Meyerowitz n.p.*).

However, *Self Portrait* undercuts some of Meyerowitz’s claims about “tough” street photography in order to hypothesize its own version of open-ended photography. For example, Friedlander’s *New York City* (1965) could be described in the same way that Meyerowitz describes his Central Park photograph—the photographer had become a spontaneous and athletic vector through which the camera flickered. Friedlander’s photograph relies on a similar snap response to unexpected arrangement of the women, the terrain of the sidewalk and, of course, his own shadow. The resulting composition arranges these elements so that the crack in the sidewalk resonates like a fault line, reinforcing the relationship between his shadow and the four pairs of legs that remain oblivious to his lurking presence. But if Meyerowitz claims that the photographer out on the street is a tough hero-artist, certain photographs in *Self Portrait* propose that the same photographer is instead a “sleazy” sexual voyeur (Rosler 130). *New York City* (1966) also amplifies or distorts Meyerowitz’s comparatively puritan athleticism into sexual aggressiveness or predation. Once again, Friedlander is following women—the shadow of his head superimposed onto the collar of a woman’s fur coat. Although it likely means that he isn’t following her too closely, the oversized shadow nonetheless makes matters appear worse. And there are no indications that she suspects anything.

But exaggerating voyeurism into sexual predation advances Friedlander's occupational polemic. *Self Portrait* is attempting to exorcise the rhetoric of masculine embodiment or physicality that underpins street photography and, moreover, the self-assignment. By doing so, Friedlander demonstrates his commitment to photography as such—to what we can more clearly define as “formalist-modernist” photography. In *Self Portrait*, this commitment and its consequences become clearer when another photograph entitled *New York City* (1965) subordinates sexual desire to the primacy of the photographic image. This photograph combines elements—commercial portraiture, street voyeurism, Friedlander's shadow—familiar from our discussion so far. Examples of commercial portraiture cluster near the upper-right-hand corner of the frame. Once again, signage effectively captions the photograph. Whereas the stencil “AMERICAN TEMPORARIES” confirmed a crisis of identity, the sign below the portraits acts as a faux-illustration of the photographer's voyeuristic luridness: “GIRLS WANTED / NO EXPERIENCE NEC.” Friedlander's elongated shadow literalizes that sexual yearning as it stretches from the bottom right-hand-side of the frame. To further complicate matters, the photograph includes two “real” women as they enter the frame. These women do not exist as full-fledged figures but as the sort of suggestive metonyms that Hicks associated with street photography: two pairs of legs, left legs forward, in knee-length dresses that the frame cuts off at the waist. Taken together, the women in the street and in the portraits combine to form a complete but composite image of women: the real women from the waist down, and the portraits from the chest up.

Other photographs in *Self Portrait* combine commercial portraiture and “real” women to achieve a similar sense of completion. In the ribald photograph *Minnesota* (1966), a storefront window shows the interaction between Friedlander's shadow-reflection and a close-up commercial portrait of a blonde woman. The legs and chest of a real woman—without, of course,

a head—abruptly enter the photograph on the right side. What these photographs suggest isn't simply an act of completion, but of prioritization: the primacy of the "photographic" over and against the "real." Commercial portraits initiate and shape the sexual desire that flesh-and-blood women are left to complete. Since it presumes the primacy of the photographic, *Self Portrait* recasts women as photographs-to-be and commercial portraits of women as *already-photographed* photographs-to-be. Because it presumes the primacy of the photographic, this reading would also satisfy the sense in which Friedlander's character in *Self Portrait*, as Rosler puts it, "never forget[s] the meaning of a photo" (130).<sup>23</sup> More specifically, such a reading flatters the modernist presumption that Friedlander's photography is an "art endeavor [that] explores the specific boundaries and capabilities of the medium" (117). Thus, Friedlander's photography comes with its own alibi for the moments when he too closely follows women on the street. Following the woman in the fur coat isn't about sexual predation or voyeurism—indeed, it really isn't "about" anything. First and foremost, the photograph is an exemplary example of the descriptive powers of photography as a medium as expressed in the play of light and dark tones or the subtle gradations of texture on the photographic surface.

But *Self Portrait* does not only interrogate the identity of the photographer through the distorting lenses of shadowy exaggeration and startling juxtaposition, through the pretensions of street photography and commercial portraiture. Photographs such as *Philadelphia, Pennsylvania* (1965) make an about-face, turning away from the hyper-physicality of a street-photographer-cum-sexual-predator. In that photograph, Friedlander instead stares directly into the camera. In *Self Portrait*, this photograph provide perhaps the most comprehensive, or the most descriptive, likeness of Friedlander.<sup>24</sup> Because it was taken with a shutter-release cable, the photograph can show Friedlander's body in the frame's middle ground and without the mediation of reflections

or shadows. While other photographs in *Self Portrait* present distorted or even grotesque arms-length close-ups, *Philadelphia, Pennsylvania* thematizes its comprehensiveness as the fact of composed, objective exposure. Weary, and wearing only his underwear, the photographer bares himself before the descriptive capacity of the camera. The results are not entirely edifying. He's no Meyerowitz—the photograph does not convey heroism or toughness. Friedlander is instead pale, paunchy, disheveled, unkempt.

This act of self-exposure instead appears to entreat viewers to recognize Friedlander's bare humanity, as well as the suggestion that portraiture can be personal. But the photograph *Provincetown, Cape Cod, Massachusetts* (1968), which was also taken in a hotel or boarding room, complicates this seemingly straightforward humanism. Here exposure is flagrantly photographic—it is a matter of light-level tests, not confessions. Indeed, the suggestion ramifies what I have already stated: in *Self Portrait*, portraiture is an occupational, not a personal, introspective, or self-revelatory genre. Nevertheless, I would not go so far as to argue that the depiction of Friedlander-qua-photographer in *Philadelphia, Pennsylvania* resembles one of Hare's "demoralized" magazine or professional photographers, even if the photograph was taken—like all the photographs in *Self Portrait*—during the last years of Friedlander's freelance career. Rather, I contend that the photograph *humbles* the photographer as part of an effort to redefine the practice of art photography. By doing so, *Philadelphia, Pennsylvania* demonstrates a final strategy with which *Self Portrait* foregrounds the "photographic"—what is Friedlander's commitments to modernist photography—through excising the *self* from the self-assignment and from the photographic project more generally. The resulting photobook is an effort to demonstrate what we might call the unfolding, open-ended and implicitly modernist history of the medium.

This claim suggests that the more straightforward depiction of Friedlander's body in the *Philadelphia* photograph is no less "photographic" than the depiction of his shadow cast on the woman in the fur coat. Because it casts similar light and dark tones across the surface of Friedlander's body, the hotel room lamp also foregrounds the specific characteristics of photography as a modernist medium. By doing so, *Self Portrait* once again thwarts efforts to understand the "inner" Friedlander or to consider it as a standard version of portraiture. However, it is tempting to say that *Self Portrait* is working at cross-purposes. While suggesting a practical definition of photography as that which occurs "in the mind and in the camera," *Self Portrait* seems to incessantly jeopardize "the photographic" through the ubiquitous inclusion of Friedlander's body, shadow, and/or reflection (Rosler 130). After all, such shadows, reflections, and bodies—even a bared or exposed body rendered with such stone-faced humility—remain exemplary indexical traces of a flesh-and-blood photographer in the real world. Indeed, notions such as Szarkowski's modernist "description" or Hicks's photojournalistic "reportage" already gesture to indexicality, a concept "central to [...] the medium specificity of the photograph" (Michaels 432). Walter Benn Michaels describes indexicality as the reminder that a photograph "is made by the world" (436); put the other way, indexicality reminds us of "the irrelevance of the photographer's intentionality" (447).

Indeed, indexicality is precisely why using a camera to make a "Picture," as Jeff Wall would phrase it, is so difficult. In response to the problem of indexicality, Friedlander's photoconceptual contemporaries often modeled non-autonomy in order to elaborate a different version of artistic autonomy. By the 1960s, "autonomous art," Wall argues, "had reached a state where it appeared that it could only validly be made by means of the strictest imitation of the non-autonomous" (35). In conceptual photography, prominent examples of such "pseudo-

heteronomy” abound in works such as Dan Graham’s *Homes for America* (1966-1967), Vito Acconci’s *Following Piece* (1969), Douglas Huebler’s *Duration Piece #5* (1969) and, especially, Ed Ruscha’s photobooks *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1962), *Various Small Fires* (1964), and *Thirtyfour Parking Lots* (1967). These examples foreground the problem of indexicality; the descriptive capacity of photography persists even when “there is nothing of significance to depict” (38). For example, Ruscha’s famous photobooks contain pictures of exactly what their titles suggest: gas stations, small fires, and parking lots. By foregrounding photographic indexicality or description, these artists relocate their autonomy or intentionality in “the validity of the model or hypothesis of non-autonomy” that their conceptual photography produces.<sup>25</sup> Granted, these are examples of *conceptual* artists—a term that Friedlander, ever the photographer’s photographer, would certainly reject. His aversion to “ideas,” the sine qua non of conceptualism, is well documented: “if an idea bit me in the ass I still wouldn’t be able to recognize what it was” (Friedlander, Interview). But in his own oblique fashion, Friedlander has remarked on the challenge of indexicality: “I only wanted Uncle Vern standing by his new car (a Hudson) on a clear day. I got him and the car. I also got a bit of Aunt Mary’s laundry, and Beau Jack, the dog, peeing on a fence, and a row of potted tuberous begonias on the porch and 78 trees and a million pebbles in the driveway and more. It’s a generous medium, photography” (“Excess” 104).

Rather than embracing conceptualism’s postmodern questions regarding art and non-art, Friedlander’s focus on generosity engages photography’s specificity as an autonomous modernist medium. Indeed, *Self Portrait* has tried to undermine the relationship between indexical traces of Friedlander and their referent, the flesh-and-blood Friedlander. As we have seen, the depiction of these traces has invited speculation that Friedlander suffers from an identity crisis or, worse, that



he is a sexual predator. More importantly, these depictions have enabled Friedlander to interrogate different versions of the photographer and, by implication, of photographic practice. In which case, the *Philadelphia* photograph provides thematic closure to the question of the photographer's body. It is a complex statement. On the one hand, the photographer's body registers as just another indexical trace. Such a humbled, self-effacing body could *not* be a site of artistic intentionality. On the other hand, this thematizing of Friedlander's body is exactly how *Self Portrait* hypothesizes the pseudo-heteronomy, or the "non-autonomous" autonomy, of the photographer: namely, the photobook insists that its photographs describe only the unfolding of modernist photography itself. In other words, *Self Portrait* would depict the autonomy of the medium, not the artist. In turn, it is precisely by using indexicality to deflect his intentionality that Friedlander turns his ubiquitous body into a representation of that same deflection. Put another way, even as it thematizes the primacy of a "photographic" aesthetic over the referential power of such traces, *Self Portrait* turns natural objects into intentional objects or representations (Michaels 447). Friedlander's ubiquitous body becomes a representation, but a representation of what? Following Michaels's considerations of Hiroshi Sugimoto's photographs of fossils, this body does not become "exactly a representation of the referent." Rather, *Self Portrait* re-describes traces of Friedlander as the representation of the making of the photograph. Indeed, it is for this reason that *Self Portrait* defines its titular genre as an *occupational* one: what the book portrays is the *activity* of a modernist photographer.

But saying that Friedlander's body represents the making of a photograph does not sufficiently describe the polemic in *Self Portrait*. Turning to his preface to *Self Portrait*, Friedlander provides some provocative suggestions about the representational ends of his body.

Written in 1970, the preface is significant simply because it is one of the rare instances in which the photographer discusses his own work at length.

These self portraits span a period of six years and were not done as a specific preoccupation, but rather, they happened as a peripheral extension of my work. They began as straight portraits but soon I was finding myself at times in the landscape of my photography. I might call myself an intruder. At any rate, they came about slowly and not with plan but more as another discovery each time. I would see myself as a character or an element that would shift presence as my work would change in direction. At first, my presence in my photos was fascinating and disturbing. But as time passed and I was more a part of other ideas in my photos, I was able to add a giggle to those feelings.

I suspect it is for one's self interest that one looks at one's surroundings and one's self. This search is personally born and is indeed my reason and motive for making photographs. The camera is not merely a reflecting pool and the photographs are not exactly the mirror, mirror on the wall that speaks with a twisted tongue. Witness is born and puzzles come together at the photographic moment which is very simple and complete. The mind-finger presses the release on the silly machine and it stops time and holds what its jaws can encompass and what the light will stain. That moment when the landscape speaks to the observer. (n.p.)

The opening sentence distinguishes Friedlander from photojournalists and commercial and street photographers by implying that his working methods amount to a differential temporal and existential approach to photography. His self-portraits were a lackadaisical, if not unintentional, undertaking that “span a period of six years,” from 1964 to 1969. Compared to the daring feats and last-minute antics of street photographers and photojournalists, the preface strikes a particularly understated note.<sup>26</sup> No predetermined thesis guides *Self Portrait*. The self-portraits “were not done as a specific preoccupation” but were a matter of happenstance: “they came about slowly and not with plan.” Indeed, the portraits “happened as a peripheral extension of [his] work”; this curious phrasing holds open the possibility that *Self Portrait* is distinct from his usual personal work, or what he has elsewhere consistently described as a preoccupation with “the American social landscape and its conditions” (qtd. in Lockwood 13).

Indeed, Friedlander's point about photographic practice is subtler than a straightforward insistence on personal work. As Szarkowski might put it, Friedlander has “[chosen] not to lead

photography but to follow it, down those paths suggested by the medium's own eccentric and original genius" (qtd. in Phillips 60). The preface makes canny use of the rhetoric of "self-interest" and "discovery" in order to wed Friedlander's photographic practice to modernist preoccupations. Self-interest, or his "reason and motive for making photographs," is only visible in the activity of photographing. The outlines of a project are always secondary, a point that Friedlander has insisted on for decades: "I don't have any plan. I take a picture when something looks interesting or I feel I need to play with my camera – one or the other, I don't usually know which comes first" ("Untitled" 5). Resolutely anti-conceptual, Friedlander insists that "anything that looks like an idea is probably just something that has accumulated, like dust" (Interview).<sup>27</sup> In turn, the preface does not apply the language of discovery—that is, revelatory language consistent with a genre like self-portraiture—to Friedlander himself but to photography, if not to the project, itself. Photographs "happened," one photographic "discovery" after "another" was made, and picture "puzzles [came] together." Friedlander makes a subtle distinction: he didn't find *himself* in *Self Portrait*; instead, he kept "finding [him]self at times in the landscape of [his] *photography*" (emphasis added). While initially disturbed by his appearance in the photographs, this "intruder" comes to express the self-interested spirit of discovery that underpins *Self Portrait*. His own "character," he is happy to say, "would shift presence as my work would change in direction."

Thus, *Self Portrait* coalesced as a project only when Friedlander's self-interest in these oblique self-portraits finally became, so to speak, self-aware. Paraphrasing Michaels, re-describing a referent such as Friedlander as the representation of the medium is only the first step. Borrowing Meyerowitz's phrase, we can conclude by saying that *Self Portrait* reorganizes photographic practice, making it constitutive of a particular type of open-ended project.

Friedlander's traces become representations of an unfolding photographic project about photography itself.

### **Art Photography Returns to the Office**

As we have seen, *Self Portrait* conceives its own “open-ended” project as a modernist art-photographic rejoinder to a white-collar “double standard” that mars both professional and personal midcentury photography. On first glance, Friedlander's photographic series “Changing Technology” (1986) finally supplies art photography with an explicit and belated critique of white-collar office work. Before I complicate this characterization, we can assert some provisional facts regarding the conception, form, exhibition, and publication of “Changing Technology.” Commissioned in 1985 by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the photographic series primarily depicts office workers in technology companies on Boston's Route 128, a loop that provided the Northeast's answer to Silicon Valley.<sup>28</sup> The photographs themselves follow a rather basic setup: each of the more than seventy photographs spread across different versions of series is a medium close-up of a single office worker as s/he looks at a computer monitor. In every case, the display on the computer screen is unseen. Finally, “Changing Technology” was originally displayed as part of *Three on Technology*, a 1988 exhibit with the photographers Robert Cumming and Jan Groover. Afterwards, versions of the series with different photographs, sequencing, and layout designs have been published in book form, most notably in the exhibit catalog and *At Work* (2002), a collection of Friedlander's workplace photography. Despite their differences, both published versions present photographs in a manner that differs drastically from the style of presentation in *Self Portrait*.<sup>29</sup> Whereas *Self Portrait* only presents one photograph per spread, photographs in “Changing Technology” appear in spreads that sometimes include one, two, four, or even eighteen photographs.

Meyerowitz's and Hare's approaches to the office provide three basic options for interrogating "Changing Technology." Does the photographic series follow Hare's prescription? Which is to say, has Friedlander finally looked back to document the abuses of the office? Such an option would cast Friedlander in the unfamiliar position of a documentary or even reformist photographer. The second option rephrases and re-inflects the first: has Friedlander double-crossed Meyerowitz by going "back to the office through another door" (Westerbeck n.p.)? In this option, Friedlander is not Hare's reformer, but a "blind" commercial photographer who would resemble the workers that he photographs. Of course, the notion that Friedlander is a hack, or even a socially-minded reformist, seems unlikely. Is there a third option? A way for the photographer to return to the office while retaining the protection, so to speak, afforded by "art"?

To answer this last question, let us start by trying to ventriloquize Hare. As we can see, the basic setup of a given photograph in "Changing Technology" does allow for a certain amount of variation. Camera angles change: some shots are straight-on, even if most are taken from an angle that creates a slight right- or left-side profile. The geography of workspace differs from photograph to photograph. In some cases, ceiling lights suggest an open-plan office, while other photographs show personal items, and even the occasional window. Nevertheless, the layout of the series undercuts the viewer's responsiveness to variation by compounding the sense of monotony and drudgery that we have come to expect from depictions of the white-collar Fordist office. Likewise, the tight framing and the basic frontal shots of office workers "deny us information about the actual work" that takes place in these workplaces (Trachtenberg 16). When they appear, co-workers float in the background as part of their own individual worlds, as would-be sitters in their own single shots. As a result, the single shots create an unexpected symmetry: like the office workers, a given viewer has no holistic sense of the operations of these

workplaces. We even struggle to identify shared workplaces—that is, to identify *co*-workers across the dozens of photographs. For this well-worn critique of the office, the only clarity is the clarity of repetition and monotony.

Not surprisingly, the critical reception of “Changing Technology” is hostile to positions that we might attribute to Hare. In their respective essays about “Changing Technology,” Alan Trachtenberg and Rod Slemmons disregard the notion that the photographs level a belated critique of the Fordist workplace. Slemmons insists that Friedlander’s workplace photography includes “no answers and no promise of reform” (116). Yes, Slemmons admits, the photographs dabble with “clichés about dehumanization.” But such dehumanization is just that—a cliché—that necessarily precedes the depiction of humanist transcendence. In this telling, “Changing Technology” upends critiques of the office and, moreover, the notion that such an environment, or that any environment, could imprison the human spirit. Both Trachtenberg and Slemmons base these humanist claims about “Changing Technology” on a modernist conception of photography. Which is to say, the series celebrates the human individuality that only photography can make visible through the exploration of its own medium specificity. Trachtenberg puts it best: photography “retriev[es] from the nondescript, impersonal settings of the mechanized offices the core of *human* mystery” (16, emphasis in original). Of course, this argument has simply traded one set of clichés for another, pushing Friedlander’s series towards a redemptive end that arrays the artist against an alienating social existence. By denying “the routine and the normative,” the artist, so this story goes, “seeks to recover what is human” (Roberts 115).

The next step is another familiar one: providing Friedlander with an alibi for his subject matter—or at least for certain subject matter. Put simply, Trachtenberg and Slemmons efface

work from the office altogether, turning what is ostensibly workspace into a staging area for human individualism. Rather than office photography, the photographs are part of a modernist “discourse on photographic cognition” (Trachtenberg 17). As a result, the significance of terms like “‘white-collar,’ ‘office-work,’ [and] even ‘technology’ recede.” Even the basic elements of the set-up—a worker and a computer screen—do not support a case for Hare’s critique of work. In fact, the computer screen isn’t even work equipment but a “general cause” responsible for generating what we are enjoined to identify as the series’ true photographic subject matter: the “extraordinary gamut of affect” displayed on the face of each so-called office worker (Trachtenberg 16). Thus, “Changing Technology” isn’t about workers “in a common trance” but the “vital individuality” of human beings (Slemmons 116), not about “exploitation but interpretation” (Trachtenberg 17). For that reason, the pictures do not confront us with information about the office so much as with “the ultimate unknowability of exactly what the camera tempts us most to desire: the inner truth of other human beings” (Trachtenberg 17).

But if work does not occur in front of those computer screens, what is work and where does it happen? Trachtenberg and Slemmons share two basic answers that effectively demonstrate the extent to which the tense struggle connecting midcentury photographic practice and the discourses of white-collar work continues to exert considerable stress on efforts to establish photography as an autonomous modernist art form. With respect to “Changing Technology,” Trachtenberg and Slemmons make the tropes about white-collar work—its repetition, monotony, inauthenticity, and so on—applicable only to *viewers* of the photographs, rather than to the *office work* itself. Here the appeal to humanism, filtered as it is through the vision of the artist-photographer, becomes the crucial step in the argument for modernist photography. Because of its inviolable “unknowability,” the affective “content” of each

photograph militates *against* the repetitious forms, or the set-up, the design and, especially, the type of work associated with such offices (Trachtenberg 17). For these critics, “Changing Technology” is actually a *test*: can the viewer see the “disturbing” difference between the repeated set-up and the singularity of affect on display in a given photograph (Slemmons 116)? For Trachtenberg and Slemmons, repetition and monotony now suggest problematic ways of seeing the photographs: “we find ourselves informed by the seemingly dull repetition of the photographs rather than by what we think we know about the dull repetition of the computer jobs” (Slemmons 116). The viewer who fails to see the difference between the photographs, it is implied, has submitted to a repetitive act of seeing. Which is to say, allowing the repetitive set-up and layout to dominate our way of seeing the series is to *not* allow ourselves to really see the series at all. But for those of us who look with attentiveness, the photographs deny us “the [clichéd] order our eyes seek.” The photographs deny us a repetitive mode of seeing that would reduce that gamut of affect—no doubt consistent with what Meyerowitz identified as the “infinite possibilities” available to the photographic medium—to monocular vision (Westerbeck n.p.).

Returning to the question of work in “Changing Technology,” we have so far established that the viewers work—in the sense that they perform something akin to a repetitive act of visual labor—only inasmuch as they fail to recognize that the workers do *not* work. *Those white-collar workers aren’t drones; they’re human beings!* However, modernist photographic criticism does maintain that these photographs exhibit a salutary form of work. Like *Self Portrait*, “Changing Technology” is another example of occupational self-portraiture. Before Trachtenberg chides us to forget about office work, he compels us to imagine Friedlander with his camera: “we can place Friedlander almost exactly in the spaces he represents, can detect the contortions of his



own body, leaning, bending, reaching, shooting off his flash” (16). With the aid of his camera, Friedlander is “making a work-place of his own out of the work-places he pictures.” No doubt Friedlander is a special case. His work is not the white-collar work that modernist photographic criticism labors so exhaustively to efface. Instead, he dissolves the office into an ad hoc artist’s studio when he becomes an “athlete,” a comparison Friedlander has himself made in several interviews.<sup>30</sup> This athletic photographic “shooting” speaks to the wholeness or authenticity of Friedlander’s photographic practice as a form of craftsmanship that is consistent with what he elsewhere calls “the honor and pleasure of work.”<sup>31</sup> In turn, the camera is not work equipment like a computer. Rather, it is “an alternative technology to the computer, a machine which preserves a realm of freedom, of human difference and uniqueness at the site of mechanical necessity” (Trachtenberg 17). Much like *Self Portrait* before it, *At Work*, the title of Friedlander’s decades-spanning collection of work photography, now gains new significance: his photographs show a photographer *at work* making photographs that depict people who—depending on the zealousness of one’s modernist commitments—may or may not also be *at work*.

Now we need to put aside critical bromides about human individuality and photography as a form of craftsmanship. Understood as occupational portraiture, “Changing Technology” provides a point of departure for considering the new antagonisms that structure contemporary creative work. I argue that Trachtenberg’s imputation of the artist-photographer to “Changing Technology” doubles as the image of the ideal flexible and professional worker in contemporary “no collar” creative or informational workplaces (A. Ross, “No Collar” 10). Indeed, “Changing Technology” remarks on the redefining of the categories and definitions of work, professionalism, and career in the contemporary creative workplace. The workplace

hypothesized by Friedlander's photographic practice is not one in which art liberates stuffy office workers from work altogether; precisely because of its commitments to creativity and activity, art is instead the means with which contemporary capitalism reorganizes cutting-edge work in ways that appear antithetical to the stale categories of white-collar Fordism.

To make the case for Friedlander—or, more generally, the post-*Life* modernist photographer—as an ideal contemporary creative worker, we first need to understand trends in photographic practice in the years between *Self Portrait* and “Changing Technology.” While effectively signaling the end of his “active” freelance career and commemorating the launch of a more forthrightly artistic one, the 1970 publication of *Self Portrait* did not end Friedlander's assignment work. He continued “working on assignment, albeit of a different and more rewarding sort”: namely, the commission (Galassi 54). Of course, “Changing Technology” is just such a project, and one of several commissions that Friedlander has accepted since 1970 from institutions such as the Corcoran Gallery of Art, the Akron Art Museum, the supercomputer manufacturer Cray, the George C. Gund Foundation, the finance corporation Dreyfus, and the Canadian Centre for Architecture.<sup>32</sup> For art-photography gatekeepers such as the Museum of Modern Art, the artistic legitimacy of work produced on commission seems to remain an open question, even if it isn't the right question. In his essay that introduces *Friedlander*, the massive catalog for the 2009 MoMA exhibition, Peter Galassi is keen to burnish Friedlander's credentials as a canonical art photographer. In part, he does so by assuring us that the commission blends characteristics of commercial assignments and personal work *without* resurrecting the double standard. Like the commercial assignments that preceded them, commissions “have helped [Friedlander] to pay the bills” (54). But remuneration, at least in Friedlander's case, does not come at the cost of artistic autonomy. Part of Galassi's argument relies on appeals to authority:

whatever the provenance of his most recent projects, *Self Portrait* is self-evidently artistic. The photobook has sacralized Friedlander's subsequent oeuvre since it was a work of complete autonomy from start to finish, from artistic-entrepreneurial conception to execution.<sup>33</sup>

For his part, Friedlander legitimates the commission by revisiting the terms established in the preface to *Self Portrait*. Like an open-ended project, a commission is the precipitate of Friedlander's interests, as expressed in his photographic activity. "I like commissions generally," Friedlander says in his typically wry style, but "I have also turned down commissions that did not interest me" ("Interview with Lee Friedlander" 107). But his career has nevertheless been a series of charmed moments. For example, the offer of a commission to photograph Olmstead parks "came at the same time that [he] had become personally interested in landscapes." Indeed, the remunerative aspects of the arrangement are always secondary to self-interest—so secondary, in fact, that Friedlander even asks us to "drop the word commission" altogether. Unlike the freelance commercial assignments of yesteryear, commissions simply provide him with "something bigger and more interesting to chew on" (Galassi 54-55).

Perhaps Friedlander enjoins us to forget about the commission as a work arrangement precisely because it scrambles the hierarchical relations of power that we associate with Fordist work. The commission empowers artists by destabilizing the more familiar "white-collar" employer-employee relationship. For a post-*Life* generation of photographers, the commission removes the predetermined editorial strictures or calcified conventions of the streets.<sup>34</sup> For example, a project commissioned by the George C. Gund Foundation succeeded because the trustees were "so willing to be surprised" (Schwartz 168). To "get Lee's best work," the art directors at *Harper's Bazaar* "left [him] to his own devices, and they granted him complete freedom" (Fraenkel n.p.). Indeed, the *Harper's Bazaar* commission on automobiles succeeded in

2011 as art for the precise reasons that it failed as a commercial feature in 1964: "... to get Lee's best work he had to be left to his own devices, and they granted him complete freedom." Indeed, the commission replaces the more familiar manager-worker relationship with one that prioritizes the project itself as the conjuncture at which an artist (his skills and interests) and a commissioner (access to resources and money) contract as free agents. Because it is amenable to artistic autonomy, a commissioned project seems capable of reconciling art and commerce in ways that twentieth-century modernism considered difficult, if not impossible. Excepting, perhaps, the practicalities of a deadline, the commissioner often does not discipline, direct, or encourage the artist to perform certain actions.<sup>35</sup> Friedlander simply receives access to "the raw materials" and license to re-assemble and re-present them in whatever fashion he sees fit: "let me see what I can make with it" ("Interview with Lee Friedlander" 107). Indeed, the desired result, as another commissioner put it, is a project that is "clearly pure 'Friedlander'" (Cray n.p.).

Given this discussion, we can understand the commission as a work arrangement that concretizes emerging reformulations of work and life in the contemporary creative workplace. In contemporary capitalism, work has been increasingly reformulated as an unceasing form of "activity" driven by interests. Activity is not the same as work, at least insofar as the latter word connotes the Taylorist disciplining of motions and the Fordist organization of assembly lines in the factory or office. Contemporary creative work instead presumes a concept of work, of activity, that responds to the complexity of life itself. According to Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, this reformulation of work as activity surmounts the prevailing Fordist "oppositions between work and no-work, steady and unsteady, paid and unpaid" ("New Spirit" 169). Likewise, the strictures of professional magazine or commercial photography, perhaps the closest analog to the assembly line that the medium provides, did not squash the vitality and

vibrancy of photographic modernism. As the commission suggests, activity has instead dissolved the “white-collar” double standard for some privileged photographers—that is, it has dissolved the qualitative barrier that was once presumed to separate commercial and personal photographic practice. This is also a way of saying that the specter raised by the critique of Fordism has come to naught: capitalism has not engendered a world in which monotonous, repetitive work absorbs or flattens life, reducing it to so many simple integers. Whereas “life” often represented the very possibility of resistance for such critiques, contemporary capitalist work has repositioned it as a different type of opportunity. Activity—or what Friedlander calls interests—now “aims to generate *projects*” (*New Spirit* 110, emphasis in original); and life is subsequently “conceived as a series of projects” (“New Spirit” 169).<sup>36</sup>

Thus, “Changing Technology” does not simply present the familiar one-two punch: the artist’s critique of the Fordist office and the humanist transcendence of that same office through art. As we have seen, *Self Portrait* hypothesized its version of “non-autonomous” autonomy through its portrayal of the activity of the photographer. The book transforms the photographer’s ubiquitous trace into a representation of an open-ended project. But this hypothesis also amounts to a definition of photographic professionalism, albeit one that departs from Wilson Hicks’s vision of photojournalist as the consummate white-collar breadwinner. “Changing Technology” translates its photographer—in this case, the modernist photographer—into an image of a contemporary worker. There is a potential symmetry between the actions of the photographer and the office workers: just as the workers stare fixedly at screens, Friedlander fixes his camera on them. But crucial distinctions remain between these ways of seeing. For one, Friedlander is the only person who is mobile—a point that he underscores by only photographing workers who are stuck behind desks. This asymmetry enables the series to imagine its ideal worker: it is not,

of course, the immobile desk jockeys marooned at work in some Fordist-era holdover on Route 128, but the photographer who moves freely from one workplace to another or, more to the point, from one project to another. Its ideal worker is the expert professional.<sup>37</sup>

Here Friedlander's commission becomes legible as part of a broader shift from "organizational" to "boundaryless" careers, from "cradle-to-grave" hierarchical advancement in a single organization to expert professionals who work on a "project-by-project basis" (Arthur and Rousseau 5). Indeed, short-term projects can be antithetical to the Fordist organizational model since they almost invariably encourage worker movement "across the boundaries of separate employers" (6). No less than the ideal contemporary worker, Friedlander's wide-ranging career confirms the image of a mobile and interested, or the open and flexible, modernist photographer. Since *Self Portrait*, Friedlander's life, his interests and activities, has generated more than two dozen photobooks with disparate focuses on flowers, monuments, flowers and trees, parks, Rust Belt factories, jazz musicians, portraits, supercomputer manufacturing, nudes, his wife Maria Friedlander, the desert, plant stems, the artist R. B. Kitaj, telemarketers, people working, architecture, photographs taken from inside of cars, photographs of cars, and even more self-portraits.<sup>38</sup> These various projects encourage Friedlander, like the contemporary worker, to make "entrepreneurial or professional, rather than bureaucratic" identifications (Fletcher and Bailyn 256). The expert professional has replaced the company man. In other words, a given worker is encouraged to identify with the interests, activities and lifestyles that underscore, say, being a graphic designer or a computer programmer *as such*, not with designing or programming for a particular employer. After all, we would never construe Friedlander's loyalties or commitments—what an artist might more often describe as his interests or even his passions—as ultimately oriented towards a particular commissioner. Here the modernist photographic

historiography pays its dividends since Friedlander's commitments are *professional* commitments to *photography* itself, and not to the specific ends of a Dreyfus, Cray, or M.I.T.

Thus, "Changing Technology" models the best practices through which the workers it depicts might adapt to the demands of mobile expert professionalism in a post-Fordist workscape. Like Friedlander's body in *Self Portrait*, "Changing Technology" does not present these workers' faces as traces of a referent; instead, it endeavors to represent the kernel of potential activities and projects, each "different, new and innovative in nature" (Boltanski and Chiapello, "New Spirit" 184). Indeed, these faces represent so much human capital—a given worker-entrepreneur's stock of usable affects, competencies, knowledges, and aspirations. In turn, Friedlander—with his contortions, leanings, and bendings—completes the picture by modeling the freedom that can be gained when one accepts the conditions of human capital. By doing so, "Changing Technology" has the unexpected effect of stitching one more thread of what Friedlander calls "continuity" through contemporary careers that are otherwise discontinuous (qtd. in Slemmons 115). After all, the project makes clear that portraiture is by definition occupational since our faces now represent our stewardship over our most potent, and portable, skills.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>See Sante 205. In the 1959 introduction to first American edition of *The Americans*, the Beat writer Jack Kerouac uses the phrase “sad poem” to describe Frank’s photography.

<sup>2</sup>Although he accepted freelance assignments from magazines such as *Fortune* and *Vogue*, Frank nevertheless expressed derisive views towards commercial photography in general. In “Letter from New York,” published in 1969 in the influential photography magazine *Creative Camera*, Frank shares a conversation that he had with the *Life* staff photographer Gjon Mili about the work of the seminal British photographer Bill Brandt. After Mili casually dismisses Brandt’s nudes (“I don’t buy that stuff”), Frank has an acerbic response:

Of course Mili and *Life* and 500 other editors wouldn’t buy it either. A lot of photographers wouldn’t even think of doing that stuff because the chances that no one would buy it are real and on top of that you have to be an artist to do that kind of stuff. This makes me think of the human spine. Bill Brandt’s spine must be really straight. Some of our best photographers had their spines seriously bent under the weight of *Life* or *Condé Nast* or *Holiday* or some commission without whom they’d be “poor.” (“Letter” 35)

Working for the picture magazines distorts a photographer’s very eye, disqualifying him from authentic membership—at least as an artist—in the profession. Indeed, the eyes of photographers like Mili are hopelessly oriented to the needs of “*Life* and 500 other editors.” In the same letter, Frank claims that he stopped photographing when the practitioners in the medium exchanged artistic integrity for “respectability and success” (36).

In a 1975 symposium on photography at Wellesley College, Frank describes the initial attraction of photographing for *Life*, and the “tremendous contempt” that he developed for the magazine since it refused to buy any of his pictures (“Robert Frank” 55). Eventually, the development of his artistic “intuition” made it impossible for him to “make any concession”—that is, to “make a *Life* story. That was another thing I hated. Those goddamned stories with a beginning and an end.”

In the same 1975 symposium, Frank continues to employ the metaphors of Fordism in order to rail against what he calls “the system” (“Robert Frank” 59). He acknowledges the apparent hypocrisy of speaking at universities that he compares to “really protected compounds or factories” and that he holds responsible for promoting an “aesthetics of tombstone photography” But his authenticity and integrity combine to form the “asset” that inoculates him from hypocrisy: “I sort of know who I am. I know what I can do — what I can do well” (62).

<sup>3</sup>Midcentury picture magazines, and even more highbrow fare like *Esquire* or *Harper’s Bazaar*, were less likely to focus on the workplace than to turn their attention outward, so to speak, onto the possibilities of midcentury leisure. The Promethean drama of the blue-collar workplace, of man and machine, was more likely to receive photographic attention—prominent examples include W. Eugene Smith’s photographs of steelworkers in his Pittsburgh project, Andreas Feininger’s pictures in *Life* of steelworkers, and Frank’s photographs of assembly-line workers in *The Americans*.



Which is not to say that there is no office photography between, say, 1945 and 1965. But office photography is almost entirely limited to the occasional feature in mass-market magazines. When depicting the white-collar workplace, photo-essays in mass-market magazines like *Fortune*, *Life*, and *Look* only articulated the weakest of corporate liberal critiques—which is to say, these essays offer no critique. For example, the 1953 feature “The Company of Smiling Employees” shows just that—smiling employees in a corporation on the brink, it would seem, of perfecting “human relations” (84). Other prominent *Life* photoessays and photographs about offices or office work include: Leonard McCombe’s “The Private Life of Gwyned Filling” (1948), a chronicle of a day in the life of a “career girl” (103); Walter Sanders’s “The Many Lives of Office Buildings” (1957), a feature on the workers and workplaces within a Madison Avenue office building; and Walter Lane’s 1946 photograph “The Pattern of Lighted Office Windows in the RFC Building,” in which the windowed exterior of the building shows that “bureaucracy carries on” (32).

The business magazine *Fortune* featured the work of prominent photographers such as Margaret Bourke-White, Walker Evans, and Dan Weiner. Weiner often photographed board and business association meetings for the magazine, reveling in the opportunity to turn seeming banality into “a tense drama, acted out,” for example, “around a mahogany table” (qtd. in Ewing 189). Best known for his seminal photobook *American Photographs*, Evans served for twenty years as an editor at *Fortune*. Unsurprisingly, the business magazine, itself part of the Luce empire, featured little in the way of a critique of the office. But it did include a regular portfolio with dramatically lit photographs of an up-and-coming businessman—*Fortune*’s equivalent, it would seem, to the monthly *Playboy* centerfold. However, Evans did include challenging photography in the magazine. For example, his 1946 feature “Labor Anonymous” is an eleven-photograph, two-page spread that shows the “American worker” in profile walking “on a Saturday afternoon in downtown Detroit” (153). In 1968, Evans would document an entire office—more specifically, a bank company—for a book on its sesquicentennial.

Members of the international photographic collective Magnum Photos strike a slightly more confrontational stance – take, for example, Leonard Freed’s 1966 series of photographs of a ribald New York City office party.

<sup>4</sup>Hare’s involvement in photography was short-lived. After publishing photobooks in the 1970s and 1980s, he stopped taking photographs in 1985 in order to focus on being “an engineer, a family therapist and, above all, a protester” (“Chauncey Hare”). Hare would put down the camera to refocus his life as a therapist, and published a handbook on “work abuse” with the poet Judith Wyatt in 1997.

Since Hare’s photobooks in the 1980s, American and international photographers have taken up the charge of documenting the office in photobooks and online series. A non-exhaustive list includes Steve Ahlgren’s recent series “Inside the Office” and “Outside the Office,” Anna Fox’s *Work Stations: Office Life in London* (1988), Jacqueline Hassink’s *The Table of Power* (2000) and *The Table of Power 2* (2012), Eric Percher’s series “Office” and “Work,” John Pilson’s *Interregna* (2007), Phillip Toledano’s *Bankrupt* (2004), and Lars Tunbjörk’s *The Office* (2001).

<sup>5</sup>Originally published in *Creative Camera* in 1967, “Photography and the Mass Media” is notable because it stakes a much more contentious position about photography than Szarkowski’s more evenhanded (and better-known) writing for MoMA catalogs such as *The Photographer’s Eye* and *Looking at Photographs*.

<sup>6</sup>In “Photography and the Mass Media,” Szarkowski follows Frank’s example. In order to legitimate photography as a modernist art form, Szarkowski impugns magazine photography by associating it with widespread anxieties about the effects of managerial bureaucracy, teamwork, and white-collar employment.

<sup>7</sup>Despite Szarkowski’s pronouncement about the mass media, Arbus continued to work for magazines such as *Esquire* and *Harper’s Bazaar*. According to Thomas Southall, she “appears to have defied the double standard and continued to hope that she could earn a living from magazines by doing some of her best, most serious work” (166).

<sup>8</sup>Friedlander’s work appeared in prominent exhibitions at institutions such as the George Eastman House and the Museum of Modern Art. His photographs appeared in almost essayistic form in highbrow but well-distributed magazines like *Harper’s Bazaar* and smaller photography magazines like *Art in America*, *Contemporary Photographer*, and *Camera*.

<sup>9</sup>In any case, it was not a firebrand’s commitment to modernist values that punctuated Friedlander’s turn to full-time art, but dumb luck. Or, as he puts it, a “boom came along,” after which “it became possible to be a photographer without doing other things if you didn’t want to” (“Q&A: Lee Friedlander” 55). Part of that boom was a financial “windfall” he received for his collaboration with the artist Jim Dine on *Photographs and Etchings: Work from the Same House*, a portfolio and companion book (1969) (Galassi 40). According to Galassi, Friedlander “had been trying and failing to get a book of his work published” for a few years (41). But flush with cash, Friedlander could create *Self Portrait*, a different kind of book: “I had this piece of money, which I thought was a lark. And I thought to myself, ‘What would be the craziest thing I could do with that crazy money that just came from the sky?’ . . . Then I thought, ‘Well, if I’m going to make a book, I should make a book that nobody in their right mind would ever touch’” (qtd. in Galassi 41).

<sup>10</sup>In a book that otherwise identifies photographs by city, state, and year, the title *Industrial Northern United States* reinforces the post-*Life* photographer’s crisis of identity.

<sup>11</sup>In the second edition of *Self Portrait*, see plates 2, 6, 8, 9, 21, 22, 23, 25, and 33 for examples. *In the Picture*, a recent and more expansive collection of Friedlander’s peculiar self-portraits, includes several examples of similar juxtapositions taken between the years 1965-1969 that were not included in *Self Portrait*. See plates 46, 88, 92, 93, and 97.

<sup>12</sup>For more on Friedlander and photographic amateurism, see Edwards.

<sup>13</sup>Hicks make it clear that his criticisms have less to do with street photography as such than with the potentially radical political commitments of reformist photography—that is, commitments to fighting “injustice” and to satisfying a “craving for reform” (103). The examples that Hicks cites—“littered and filthy streets, broken-down tenements and flophouses” and “thin and unhappy babies in the arms of a tenant farmer’s wife down South”—seem to be clear-cut allusions to the pre-World War II photographic subject matter of the Photo League and the Farm Security Administration, respectively. Fortunately, the ongoing development of professional “balance” eventually neutralizes the “crusading impulse,” transforming the interests of a reformist photographer into nothing more than “a symptom of his transition to adulthood” (104).

<sup>14</sup>For more on Steichen and *The Family of Man*, see Phillips 48-49.

<sup>15</sup>Mili’s formulation suggests that the photographer does not struggle with the editor, but suffers the jealousy of the writer. Although he collaborates with the photographer, the writer must always confront the obsolescence of his writing, the harsh fact that “in the routine of newspaper or magazine work he is not likely to produce anything of more than transient merit” (Hicks 99). At *Life*, the *writer* is the one who must endure the double standard, endeavoring to “[write] The Great American Novel ‘on the side.’”

<sup>16</sup>In *Buffalo, New York* (1968), Friedlander flattens geometric space in the viewfinder, positioning his reflection in a storefront window display so it appears within the borders of two overlapping picture frames (*Self Portrait*, plate 5). *Colorado* (1967) makes a self-portrait using the window of a community center. Friedlander excludes his upper torso and face from the reflection by standing so that they are blocked by the blank backside of a poster taped to the inside of the window. He completes the headless reflection with a portrait of John F. Kennedy that is facing the street through the window (plate 12).

In *Chicago, Illinois* (1966), Friedlander simply extends the camera away from his body. Friedlander is outside of a peep show, standing in front of a display case advertisement that consists of several portraits of nude or near-nude women (plate 14). Like *Chicago, Illinois*, the photograph *Albany, New York* (1967) is less strictly an example of portraiture than a photograph that shows advertising using portraiture (plate 29). The photograph is an extremely acute high-angle shot of a low-height display case that shows three notebooks; the notebook covers each show a clean-cut man in partial profile. *Aloha, Washington* (1967) shows three framed portraits atop a dresser in what appears to be a private home (plate 38). Friedlander’s reflection in a mirror, and his expressionless face, is juxtaposed with the happy portraits. This chapter will discuss *New York City* (1965) and *Minnesota* (1966) in greater detail below.

Once again, *In the Picture* confirms Friedlander’s preoccupation with portraiture in his photographs. For examples that are contemporary to *Self Portrait*, see plates 22, 23, 43, 48, 54, 56, 61, 76, 77, 82, 104, and 112.

<sup>17</sup>Granted, Hicks probably didn’t have in mind the racy, if not quasi-pornographic, portraiture that Friedlander includes in photographs such as *Chicago, Illinois* (1966).

<sup>18</sup>For that matter, the juxtaposition is not without its own opportunism. We are reminded of comparable efforts such as “The White Negro,” Norman Mailer’s racialized foray into white hipster voyeurism, or the poet John Berryman’s incorporation of black dialect and minstrelsy in *The Dream Songs*.

<sup>19</sup>This chapter discusses the formative role that the discourse of street photography played in developing Meyerowitz’s aesthetic. However, he is best known for his contributions to color photography and for his use of a large-format camera. While he began photographing in the early 1960s, Meyerowitz did not produce a photobook until *Cape Light* in 1979. He is also known for a photobook about the St. Louis Arch and more recent photographs of the cleanup of the World Trade Centers following the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks.

<sup>20</sup>For a discussion of the photographer’s heroic “vision” and its ability to mediate “the raw social facts,” see Rosler 207-244.

<sup>21</sup>While Westerbeck receives credit for writing the essay, it consolidates anecdotes that Meyerowitz has shared repeatedly in interviews. For example, see Cole, par. 11-13. There Meyerowitz makes the story sound even more dramatic—after watching Frank photograph, he “returned to the office, walked up to his boss and quit his job.” “And he said, ‘What do you mean you’re quitting?’ Meyerowitz recalls, ‘I said, ‘I saw this guy take photographs. I want to be a photographer. I want to go out in the street and take photographs of life.’”

<sup>22</sup>In the unpaginated volume *Joel Meyerowitz*, the photographer also supplies short descriptions or reflections on each photograph.

<sup>23</sup>Rosler also makes the same point by comparing Friedlander’s approach to photography to Walker Evans’s: “what for Evans occurs in the world occurs for Friedlander in the mind and in the camera” (130).

<sup>24</sup>Perhaps the other claimant is *New City, New York* (1967) (plate 36). This frontal photograph includes a dedication to “Maria D.,” Friedlander’s wife.

<sup>25</sup>In the case of Huebler, for example, “what is creative in these works are the written assignments, or programs” (Wall 38).

<sup>26</sup>For example, the *Fortune* and *Life* magazine photographer Margaret Bourke-White gives an account of the richer possibilities, as Wilson Hicks might put it, available to photojournalists:

I caught the last plane to Louisville, then hitchhiked my way from the mud-swamped airport to the town. To accomplish the last stretch of this journey, I thumbed rides in rowboats and once on a large raft. These makeshift craft were bringing food packages and bottles of cleaning drinking water to marooned families and seeking out survivors. Working from the rowboats gave me good opportunities to record acts of mercy as they occurred. (Bourke-White 149)

In this telling, the access to newsworthy events typical of a *Life* photographic assignment turns into a series of near-misses, near-escapes, and near-disasters. That is to say, those richer possibilities turn into an invitation to glamorous adventure for what Henry Luce had called the “crack photographer” (qtd. in Tagg 108). The last-minute strictures of an editorial or commercial assignment imbue Bourke-White’s work with urgency and shape its very form. Indeed, we can imagine Meyerowitz providing some variation of Bourke-White’s sentiments, but perhaps leavened with a tougher street argot.

<sup>27</sup>Friedlander’s fuller statement from the interview, initially published in the August-September 2002 issue of *Camera Arts* magazine, expounds on this sentiment: “It looks like I have ideas because I do books that are all on the same subject. That is just because the pictures have piled up on that subject. Finally I realize that I am really interested in it. The pictures make me realize that I am interested in something ... As I say, I hardly ever think about doing work. I think about going somewhere that might interest me.”

<sup>28</sup>For an influential account of the rivalry between East and West coast technology companies, and its broader relationship to changing styles of corporate organization and management, see Saxenian.

<sup>29</sup>“Changing Technology” presents a challenge for scholarship. Besides the original exhibition, it has been reproduced in two different versions with different epigrams, designs, and photographs. The 1986 MIT exhibition consisted of 42 black-and-white photographs. The exhibition catalog *Three on Technology* includes 35 of Friedlander’s photographs. There “Changing Technology” includes more than just photographs of office workers, but also workers in emergency services and medicine. Friedlander’s preface to the version of the series in *At Work* stresses technology companies: “The pictures were made in the environs of route 128, a loop road around Boston, which at the time was considered a northeastern Silicon Valley” (n.p.). The version of the series in *At Work* includes 52 photographs, more than either the original exhibition or exhibition catalog. The two versions reproduced in *Three* and *At Work* only share twenty-one photographs. That is to say, *Three* includes 14 photographs that are not reproduced in *At Work*; in turn, *At Work* includes a whopping 31 pictures not included in *Three*. Yet the essays often emphasize many of the same photographs. In either version, any given photograph that appears on a page in isolation or as part of a two-picture spread appears in both versions.

Not surprisingly, the sequencing of the photographs and design of the series differ between the two versions reproduced in books. In *Three on Technology*, the layout of the photographs seems to gain momentum as the essay unfolds. In order, the subsequent spreads consist of two, two, four, eight, and eighteen photographs. *At Work* tweaks this basic layout. Likewise, its opening spread pairs text—in this case, a preface by Friedlander—with a single photograph. After opening with single- and two-photograph spreads, the pace accelerates only to slow down in spreads of four, twenty-four, twelve, and three photographs. The twenty-four and twelve-photograph spreads are organized by gender: the former includes only pictures of women, the latter of men.

In sum, these differences are perhaps another way of saying that “Changing Technology” does not value content—a particular worker in a particular photograph—so much as it values its form.

<sup>30</sup>For example, see Friedlander “Q&A: Lee Friedlander,” 54 and “Interview with Lee Friedlander” 110.

<sup>31</sup>Friedlander wrote the phrase as the epigraph to *At Work*.

<sup>32</sup>Friedlander had done a few commissions prior to *Self Portrait*. In 1962, for example, *Harper's Bazaar* commissioned him to photograph the new-model automobiles. But magazine editors were worried that his sensibilities would scare away advertisers. In 2011, the unpublished and forgotten photographs were finally published as *Lee Friedlander: the New Cars 1964*. A non-exhaustive list of his post-1970 commissions includes the following publications: *The Nation's Capital in Photographs, 1976* (Corcoran), *Lee Friedlander's Factory Valleys* (Akron Art Museum), *Cray at Chippewa Falls* (Cray), “People Working” (George C. Gund Foundation), “Dreyfus” (Dreyfus), and *Viewing Olmstead* (Canadian Centre for Architecture). Many of the projects were commissioned in the interests of museum exhibitions. There are exceptions: the Cray photobook is a company photobook; the photoessay “People Working” accompanied a foundation annual report; the “Dreyfus” photographs decorated a corporate office.

<sup>33</sup>Indeed, the specter of editorial-driven magazine era still haunts photography. In practically every sense of the word, Friedlander “made” *Self Portrait*: “conceived, edited, designed, financed, published, warehoused, and sold and distributed [it] wholesale and retail” (Galassi 14). Even if commercial publishers have since assumed some of those chores, Friedlander “in every sense that matters [...] has remained the author of his books” (14).

<sup>34</sup>Galassi also writes that the Corcoran commission “carried minimal restrictions and generous consequences, including an exhibition and a modest catalogue”: “a picture made in Tennessee, say, was out of bounds, but just about anything Friedlander wanted to photograph in Washington would be welcomed” (55). For the *Factory Valleys* photographs, John Coplans, the director of the Akron Art Museum, “gave the photographer no explicit instructions other than to photograph in the areas indicated.”

<sup>35</sup>For oblique references to the effects of deadlines, see “Interview with Lee Friedlander” 107.

<sup>36</sup>For more on the redefinition of careers as “boundaryless,” see Arthur and Rousseau.

<sup>37</sup>For more on the development of expert professionalism, as well as the social trustee professionalism that preceded it, see Brint.

<sup>38</sup>This description of Friedlander’s subject matter includes the following non-exhaustive list of books: *Photographs of Flowers* (1975), *The American Monument* (1976), *Flowers and Trees* (1981), *Factories and Valleys* (1982), *Jazz & Blues* (1983), *Lee Friedlander: Portraits* (1985),

*Cray at Chippewa Falls* (1987), *Nudes* (1991), *Maria* (1992), *The Desert Seen* (1996), *Kitaj* (2002), *At Work* (2002), *Stems* (2003), *Sticks & Stones: Architectural America* (2004), *America by Car* (2010), *The New Cars 1964* (2011), and *In the Picture: Self-Portraits 1958-2011* (2011).

## CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A CONSTRUCTIVE CRITIQUE

In *The Passion and the Interests*, Albert Hirschman focuses on the titular keywords in order to examine “political arguments for capitalism before its triumph.”<sup>1</sup> Writing in the late 1970s, an era of capitalist triumphalism in the United States, Hirschman captures an irony that underpins the artistic critique:

In one of the most attractive and influential of these critiques, the stress is on the repressive and alienating feature of capitalism, on the way it inhibits the development of the “full human personality.” From the vantage point of the present essay, this accusation seems a bit unfair, for capitalism was precisely expected and supposed to repress certain human drives and proclivities and to fashion a less multifaceted, less unpredictable, and more “one-dimensional” human personality. This position, which seems so strange today, arose from extreme anguish over the clear and present dangers of a certain historical period, from concern over the destructive forces unleashed by the human passions with the only exception, so it seemed at the time, of “innocuous” avarice. In sum, capitalism was supposed to accomplish exactly what was soon to be denounced as its worst feature. (132)

In other words, such critiques have performed their own act of repression by marginalizing the reasons why non- or pre-capitalist support existed for capitalism. Here we can return to Hirschman’s keywords. Compared to the destructive and unpredictable “passions” of militaristic rulers, *homo oeconomicus* was a godsend, a figure that pursued innocuous economic “interest,” or material advantage, with a predictable “constancy” that approached virtuousness (56). Speaking more broadly, economic activity and growth were viewed as stabilizing forces against political instability. For eighteenth-century republicans, the economy was instrumental to the *political* process because the generation of wealth empowered the citizenry to place checks on the arbitrary actions of rulers, as well as to initiate forms of constitutional self-governance. Montesquieu’s famous “*doux commerce*” thesis about the “soften[ing]” effects of commerce is



a case in point (qtd. in Hirschman 60). His contemporary and fellow republican Sir James Steuart likewise viewed the economy as a countervailing check on the power of rulers, repurposing the familiar metaphor of God as a watchmaker to that effect: a “modern prince” who “establishes the plan of oeconomy” will eventually find his authority diluted when the economy “will at length come to resemble the delicacy of the watch ... which is immediately destroyed, if put to any other use, or touched with any but the gentlest hand” (qtd. in Hirschman 85). Which is to say, these republicans argued that economic activity promoted freedom as non-domination, the republican ideal in which “to be free ... is to be free from arbitrary power” (Laborde and Maynor 5). In sum, economic activity was viewed as part of the solution to “the desperate search for a way of *avoiding society’s ruin*” (Hirschman 130, emphasis in original).

This project has endeavored to show that the artistic critique has facilitated a specific sort of “ruin.” My project is what Christopher Nealon calls “a hermeneutics of situation” (25) or what Nicholas Brown has called “positive historicism” (par. 28-29). Most closely associated with Fredric Jameson, this methodology “proposes texts for our attention because they seem useful for historicizing the present” (Nealon 25). I have profiled artists whose own works—one-part critique and one-part polemic—show the ways that the emergence of the post-Fordist workplace served as a sort of laboratory, developing exemplary artist-entrepreneurs adaptable to the exigencies of contemporary neoliberalism. Insofar as it focuses on liberating the authentic “passions,” the artistic critique has promoted a general, and ruinous, spirit of anti-institutionalism. Such anti-institutionalism has become, as the literary critic Mark McGurl puts it, a “virtual institution,” and one that joins people of diverse political persuasions (341). Indeed, the political scientist Hugh Heclo has argued that our “fundamental distrust of institutions is the one mark we have in common as inhabitants of these times” (11). This ruinous spirit has

legitimized the partially successful efforts to dismantle the Fordist-era welfare state as a repressive and inauthentic emblem of the Organization, while simultaneously privileging the Market as natural, and thereby exempt. Thus, my efforts to historicize the present imply the need for forms of what Heclo calls “institutional thinking” (162) or what Mark McGurl calls “reflexive institutionality” (337). For Heclo, such thinking urges us to view institutions as “*enabling* constraints that make it possible for us to live out and further develop our humanity” (43). Heclo’s evocation of “our humanity,” it should be noted, does not imply the [passionate] artist-worker—the “brand of you,” as the management guru Tom Peters puts it—so instrumental to contemporary neoliberalism. Rather, Heclo shares with Hirschman the sense in which the artistic critique suffers from historical shortsightedness. When it regards the individual as the basis for emancipation, the critique severely abbreviates the scope of what has historically constituted the ““full human personality”” (Hirschman 132). As a result, Heclo’s new ethic of obligation, office, and profession instead supposes that “interest” includes “the totality of human aspirations,” a more expansive and reflective notion that countered whatever concessions republicans made to the narrower interests of the economic sphere (Hirschman 32). For literary studies, reflexive institutionality pushes for us to abandon critique and its penchant for, as Bruno Latour puts it, “add[ing] fresh ruins to fields of ruins” (225). Rather, we need to develop reading practices that operate in the interests of “construction and maintenance”—that is, in the interests of “safeguard[ing] a stable institutional home” (McGurl 341, 337).

In order to sketch the prospect of “postcritical” institutional thinking, we need to better understand how an abbreviated “full human personality” reconfigures the passions and the interests in a manner that is productive for contemporary neoliberalism (Felski, “After Suspicion” 34).<sup>2</sup> In the form of the creative worker, an exemplary neoliberal subject, our

spontaneous, personal “passions” and economic “interest” fuse in order to form what Michel Foucault called “the entrepreneur of the self” (226). No doubt the “passions” have shifted in meaning, and no longer connote the political capriciousness and militaristic aggressiveness of rulers. More than just a craft-inflected ethos, our contemporary sense of “passion” registers shifts in what constitutes productive activity. The passions now capture the sense in which we must be *passionate* about our work, investing it with egotism and valuing it for its creative unpredictability. In turn, contemporary political economy enfolds that same artist-worker within the narrow calculus of the entrepreneur. We must also be the ruthless purveyors of our own saleable expertise—that is, we must doggedly direct our passions towards economic ends. For creative workers, passion now indexes the political sphere only inasmuch as the workplace has pretension to the utopian; as Andrew Ross puts it, high-end workplaces convey the notion that “some kind of improved, if not ideal, society could be pursued *within* a company” and in lieu of “aspirations to social change outside of the workplace” (*No Collar* 17).<sup>3</sup>

The consequences are, of course, disastrous. According to David Harvey, we are encouraged to interpret “individual success or failure ... in terms of entrepreneurial virtues or failings (such as not investing significantly enough in one’s human capital through education) rather than ... any systemic properties (such as the class exclusions usually attributed to capitalism)” (*Brief History* 65-6). Win or lose, succeed or fail, we must necessarily be ruthlessly passionate because we’re all radically self-responsible. On the one hand, this analysis tells us what we already know about insecure and precarious workers. On the other, it effectively re-describes the entrepreneur of the self as less an autonomous amalgam of personal passions and economic interests than a “weak subject” (Brouillette, “Academic”). In the ersatz naturalness of the marketplace, such subjects take refuge *from* any substantive form of autonomy by insisting

“on the impossibility and even the undesirability of attaining any authority, unconvinced that autonomy from the market is even a worthwhile goal.”

Moreover, Brouillette’s “weak subject” also suggests a way to rehabilitate the artistic critique, thereby allowing it to contribute to a new form of institutional thinking in the contemporary neoliberal era. To do so, we must be skeptical about the fervent derision of the artistic critique—derision fueled, in no small part, by the fact that neoliberalism “has exploited the differential between the social critique and the artistic critique” (Boltanski and Chiapello, *New Spirit* 503). This derision spurs calls to revise the social critique—calls that this project regards as salutary, but insufficient in and of themselves. After all, institutional thinking asks us to reflect on our “daily transactions” as “constant microendorsements of institutional values” (Heclo 38). The presumption, in other words, is that the effort to de-legitimize the upward redistribution of wealth would also need to reflect on the sense in which the market dissimulates its institutional status; the market masquerades as a technical, if not natural, apparatus that is unaccountable to such endorsements—that is, to politics or culture.

In that sense, Brouillette’s “weak subject” suggests an implicit logic of rulers and ruled, dominated and dominating, that disarticulates what conventional accounts of the artistic critique fuse—namely, the desire for “individual liberation,” on the one hand, and resistance to “oppression,” on the other. The opening scene in *The Apartment* is a case in point. The scene pointedly undercuts claims of *doux commerce*, and of Steuart’s metaphor, when we see C. C. Baxter dominated by the presence of a looming offscreen clock and, by implication, the seemingly unassailable imperatives of midcentury Fordist efficiency.<sup>4</sup> Economic activity—so much narrow self- or, in this case, Organizational self-interest—can replace political passion as the grounds for new forms of domination. In other words, the social critique can overlook the

fact that domination is not only the precondition for, but can even persist in the absence of, exploitation. By narrowly focusing on Fordist-era politics of redistribution, this “politics of class outcomes,” as Kathi Weeks has described it, overlooks what the artistic critique can identify—namely, the consequences of work, or economic activity more generally, on conceptions of non-economic and civic lives (*Problem 23*).

Of course, recognizing domination in the Organization, the repressive force “beneath” or “behind” the epiphenomena of the total way of life, is the easy part. Indeed, this project has shown that the careers of the same artists who resisted the prevailing “white-collar” working conditions in their respective careers have become subject to the “cunning of history” (Fraser, “Feminism” 99). What were considered hard-won “zone[s] of autonomy”—artistic, working, or otherwise—have receded or relapsed into explicit heteronomy (N. Brown). Indeed, the Market presents new challenges since it is not an institution that represses so much as it intensifies. In the figure of the artist-entrepreneur, the Market is neither inside nor outside so much as “beside” or “adjacent” to our activities. But while it does not *interfere* or *discipline* in the same sense as the Organization, it nevertheless *dominates* by constructing incentives that allow it to “rule without penetrating interiority” (Harkins and Elliott 10). But there are some recent suggestions that the artistic critique has re-adapted to this more complex terrain by focusing less on the individual liberation of the artist than on the special status of the work of art. If it perseveres, the artistic critique does so in the artwork that “remind[s] us,” as Jennifer Ashton puts it, “that it cannot be altered by our responses to it or by its effects on us—by any of our fleeting desires. It can only be altered by a change to its form” (228). Without strictly rehashing modernist or postmodernist aesthetic strategies, this “post-postmodern” art revives formalism as a counter-response to the challenge of market domination, of heteronomy. By steadfastly insisting on its

autonomy, the artwork thus issues a dual challenge. On the one hand, it is a reminder, to return to Brouillette's phrase, that its viewers or readers are weak subjects. On the other, the autonomous artwork that foregrounds our weak subjectivity reminds us that autonomy is "not about continuing to valorize the self as a site of all meaning and value" ("Academic"). The autonomous artwork instead "reveal[s] the limitations of the neoliberal market as an arbiter of what is valuable to know and do." By doing so, the artwork points to the difficult task of constructing institutions that are both instrumental and non-capitalist in an era where the neoliberal Market appears to make such a task impossible.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>The quotation is the book's subtitle.

<sup>2</sup>Felski's recent work on "critique" implies that my project is working at ironic cross-purposes. While this conclusion proposes to focus on the importance of institutions, the project is rife with *distrust*. And distrust, as Heclo has suggested, is corrosive to institutions. Most obviously, my project distrusts the artistic critique, arguing that the artists responsible for it unwittingly elaborate the preconditions of post-Fordist and neoliberal ideologies. Felski basically agrees, arguing that critique allows critics to efface or dissolve concrete notions of institutionality ("Critique"). For all its more recent appeals to the analytic and poststructural, to the deconstructive and the genealogical, critique dissembles about its relationship to what Paul Ricoeur famously called "the hermeneutics of suspicion" (qtd. in Felski, "Critique"). Ricoeur's phrase "capture[s] a common spirit that pervades the writings of Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche," writers who "share a commitment to unmasking 'the lies and illusions of consciousness'; they are the architects of a distinctively modern style of interpretation that circumvents obvious or self-evident meanings in order to draw out less visible and less flattering truths" (Felski, "Critique"). Felski charges that critics are reluctant to embrace Ricoeur's phrase for two reasons. As a method, hermeneutics lacks "the intellectual edginess and high-wattage excitement ... of poststructuralism"; in turn, the affective commitment to suspicion implies an unwanted "personalization of scholarly work" that threatens to "[reduce critics' arguments] to their putative state of mind."

According to Felski, it would seem that critique as such has undergone that same cunning of history as the artistic critique. Like those midcentury denunciations of conformity, academic critique has become an industry in its own right. For the artists in this project, the artistic critique culminated in a quasi-romantic form of creative liberation. Likewise, literary critics experience "critical self-consciousness" and "self-reflexive thinking" as the liberation of thought itself from its institutional trappings ("Critique"). The next step is a familiar one. While voicing "intransigent opposition to the status quo" and "a sense of its own marginality, iconoclasm, and outsiderdom," critique is "attracting disciples, forging alliances, inspiring mimicry, and ensuring its own survival." Critique "permeates disciplines and institutional structures, spawns conferences, essays, courses, and book proposals, and triggers countless imitations, translations, reflections, revisions, and rebuttals (including the present essay)." In this instance, critique isn't merely "probing capitalism," as Paul du Gay and Glenn Morgan put it, but mimicking its processes ("Understanding" 20). Indeed, critique would seem to model a form of non- or intra-institutional expert professionalism that would allow critics to criticize and champion "otherness or alterity ... without being pinned down to the ordinariness of a real-world referent" (Felski, "Critique"). In other words, critics are reluctant to concede their own professional and institutional embeddedness. Just as Friedlander works for modernist photography, critique employs critics.

<sup>3</sup>For a recent newspaper account of the workplace as utopia, see Stewart. According to a Google spokesman, the company's east coast Manhattan headquarters proposes would "push the

boundaries of the workplace” in order ““to create the happiest, most productive workplace in the world.””

<sup>4</sup>Indeed, the image of the oppressive clock has precedents in the writings of less optimistic civic republicans. The eighteenth-century Scottish historian Adam Ferguson reverses Steuart’s metaphor:

When we suppose government to have bestowed a degree of tranquility, which we sometimes hope to reap from it, as the best of its fruits, and public affairs to proceed, in the several departments of legislation and execution, with the least possible interruption to commerce and lucrative arts; such a state ... is more akin to despotism than we are apt to imagine. ...

... liberty is never in greater danger than it is when we measure national felicity by the blessings which a prince may bestow, or by the mere tranquility which may attend on equitable administration. (qtd. in Hirschman 121).

Ferguson focuses on the deleterious effects of economic growth in order to show “the other side of ... Steuart’s metaphor of the economy as a delicate watch” (Hirschman 122). It is economic, not political, domination. In Steuart’s example, economic activity would secure the stability of society by ensuring the freedom of citizens from the arbitrary “passions” of rulers. But when Ferguson employs the same metaphor, it shows that one must also be wary that the so-called innocence of economic interests could aspire to form an incontestable, and therefore arbitrary, form of power. In the absence of public discussion and political deliberation, economic efficiency can have pretensions to domination no less troubling than those of the passionate prince.



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