

Partial Affinities: Fascism and the Politics of Representation in Interwar America

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Abstract

Partial Affinities: Fascism and the Politics of Representation in Interwar America
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Partial Affinities: Fascism and the Politics of Representation in Interwar America, is grounded in a comparatist sensibility, arguing that American culture can be fruitfully explored in its relation to socio-historical contexts extending beyond the borders of the United States. This is exemplified in the assertion, stemming from my research, that we cannot fully understand American culture without a careful investigation into our past engagements with the question of fascism.

Cultural changes between the wars, such as the Great Depression, technological modernity, mass consumerism, and urbanization, all generated points of reflection that served to amplify American self-scrutiny. Americans from across the political and social spectrum mirrored their uncertainties about this period of social turmoil in their contradictory descriptions of fascism. Between the wars, Americans asked about the future of democracy, the feasibility of mass culture, and the difficulties of a diverse polity as they were posed through the fears, hopes, and fantasies that circulated around the notion of fascism. This work explores a wide variety of figures across disciplinary boundaries, as literature, film, radio, and the visual arts intersect in the political/aesthetic representations of the American cultural imaginary.

The introduction addresses the scholarship on fascism in order to locate a feasible understanding of fascism for students of American culture. The first three chapters look at the development of social technologies such as mass spectacle (in the New York World's Fair), radio culture, and the changing notion of the human in the new industrial ecology of interwar America. The final three chapters focus on literary culture and everyday life in the period of fascism. In a discussion of authors ranging from John Dos Passos and Ernest Hemingway to Carson McCullers and William Faulkner, chapters four and five explore the pervasive concern with fascism in American interwar literature. The final chapter, on the Southern Agrarians and the New Critics, addresses their reaction to fascism as they developed a depoliticized method of literary investigation that still grounds much of our thinking about literature and culture today.

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The Lay of the Land: Fascism and American Studies

Americans have a longstanding fascination with the question of fascism.¹ We see this in its use as a constant theme for that hallmark of American self-presentation, Hollywood cinema, to the point that it has become its own genre cliché, as Quentin Tarantino has recently emphasized in his remake of the pulp classic *Inglorious Bastards*. Fascism most likely came to provide a fund of cultural images because World War Two was a defining moment for American consciousness that seemed to contrast democratic freedom against mindless fascist thuggery, providing an important grounding for American identity. The Hollywood treatment of fascism became as serial and formulaic as the Western, as it rehearsed over and over again the clean antagonism between American individualism and fascist mindless obedience. The exemplar of the cowboy's American values, John Wayne, alternately donned a ten gallon hat and an M1 steel helmet,² but instead of the cowboy as natural aristocrat and democratic leader struggling against the gangsterism of the black-hatted villain, the American soldier became the emblem of freedom and responsibility against the nameless, faceless Siegfried helmeted zombies.³

The American fascination with fascism began earlier than this, however, and my task in the following pages will be to investigate the prehistory to the post-War

¹ There is disagreement about the use of capital or lower case in the term "fascism." I will be using lower case throughout for ease and consistency, except where a citation uses a capital.

² Consider, for example, *The Flying Leathernecks* (1951) or *Operation Pacific* (1951).

³ I am thinking particularly of Gary Cooper's first film in the remake of the classic Western novel *The Virginian*. Cooper was accused of fascist tendencies in the 1930s when he started a vigilante group called the "Hollywood Hussars." See Carey McWilliams, "Hollywood Plays with Fascism" (1935).

Hollywood-style representation of fascism. The period between World War One and the Second World War was, I believe, extraordinary in American history for its level of self-exploration and uncertainty, all of which provide rich ground for investigating the complexities of American culture. Within that hectic inter-war period there were few topics more constantly and fervently debated than the emergence of fascism in Europe and its relation to the U.S. What I have found, time and again, is that the interwar period which saw the rise of fascism was also a period of intensive uncertainty about fascism in the United States. Far from being an easily deployed category of anti-democracy, the topic was scrutinized from every angle by many of the significant thinkers and cultural figures of the day. By this of course I partly mean that there were groups that emulated Italian fascists and Nazis in the U.S., and that fascism was a constant topic of debate both pro and contra at all levels of American culture; but, more importantly, I also want to signal the multiple cultural affinities that undergirded the American relationship to fascism before the War cleared up these ambiguities in the horrors of what Goebbels called *Der Totale Krieg*.

I will insist on this last element of my project because these affinities were probably the most troubling and intriguing dimension of fascism for Americans between the wars, responding as they did to many of the most pressing questions of the day: Was procedural democracy doomed to failure? How might this gigantic new mass culture be organized? Is the only aim of civilization its capacity for production? These and other questions were at the heart of sincere arguments and discussions about American culture, and each of these concerns was intimately related to the question of fascism in the interwar period.

Given the depth of U.S. involvement in the question of fascism, it is remarkable that the only scholarly work to extensively address the breadth of American involvement with fascism in the interwar period is John Diggins' *Mussolini and Fascism: The View from America* (1972).⁴ Diggins gives a thoroughgoing account of Mussolini's extraordinary popularity in the U.S., an interest he is at pains to demonstrate subsisted on all points of the political spectrum, both right and left. However, Diggins works around the problem of defining fascism by including all references to the term, regardless of their often contradictory uses. The dynamic and changeable quality that Diggins remarks in the use of the notion of fascism in the U.S. signals the difficulty that Americans had in categorizing it; but, rather than get mired in this problem, Diggins focuses on what Americans perceived as "fascist." The problem, as we shall see, is that fascism has been used in so many ways to describe so many aspects of culture that there is little that cannot be included under its rubric; conversely, coming up with a clear definition of fascism has proven equally tendentious.

After years of steady work on the problem of fascism, I sympathize with Diggins' method for finding a way to talk about an immensely important moment for American culture without getting lost in the many contradictory, yet often equally compelling theories of fascism. Nevertheless I am still convinced that in order to discuss fascism in relation to American culture it is necessary to find some way of describing it independently of the almost arbitrary use of the term that went on between the wars. Indeed, this has been a question from the very beginning of the debates about fascism, as American journalist Lillian Symes, writing for Harper's in 1939, attests in her

⁴ There have also been very important studies of a more specific nature by Robert Brinkmeyer, Philip Cannistraro and Pellegrino Nazzaro, as well as studies from the interwar period, perhaps most notably Gaetano Salvemini's, *Italian Fascist Activities in the United States* (1977).

consternation at “the anti-fascist hysteria which flings fascist labels to the right and left” (43). Symes’ concerns about fascist labeling indicate the difficulty of describing fascism without either over-generalizing, or narrowly cordoning it off as a specific historical movement. Yet for Symes this difficulty does not absolve one from thinking through the problem of fascism: “There are latent and active factors making for Fascism” in the United States, Symes concludes, “to which war, a prolonged crisis, and the general failure of political democracy to solve the problems of economic insecurity, could give force and cohesion” (36). The problem for students of American culture like Symes, therefore, is finding a way of talking about fascism in relation to the U.S. without falling into the twin difficulties of oversimplifying by labeling or getting lost in the welter of contradictory arguments. On the one hand there is the danger of arbitrarily narrowing the term, and on the other hand there is the risk of applying it randomly.

I will be drawing extensively on Diggins’ excellent research throughout this project, along with many new additions from my own investigations, but I will be aiming these facts at a specific set of problems. Like Symes, I want to emphasize the fact that fascism is such a constant preoccupation in the interwar period, both because it is a real threat and because it fascinatingly appealed to a wide range of Americans. In the debates that circulated between the wars in America, fascism forcefully insisted on introducing itself over and over again, while at the same time refusing to come to a clear definition. In light of this constant, uncertain presence of the problem of fascism, the guiding questions that have animated my own investigation are: How has fascism avoided a clear definition? And, given this first problem, why have we been so eager to delimit fascism? The first half of this Introduction is dedicated to answering these guiding questions,

considering them from the perspective of fascism studies. From this first part of my investigation, I will conclude that it has been both difficult and important to study fascism precisely because it does not organize easily into binary categories, functioning instead as an attractor of multiple, contradictory desires. The second half of the Introduction will seek to demonstrate that the interwar American fascination with fascism can be fruitfully explored according to this answer to my guiding questions.

The Challenge of Fascism: A Review of Fascism Studies

As Gilbert Allardyce and others have argued, the founding of contemporary fascism scholarship carries an uncertainty about the definition of fascism at its very core.⁵ The controversial historian and fascism scholar Renzo de Felice has also articulated the concerns we saw expressed in Lillian Symes' article: "The need to put an end to this indiscriminate and distorted use of the adjective 'Fascist' has become so practically and scientifically imperative that it has been proposed that its use be banned, at least temporarily, from our vocabulary. It is necessary to establish once and for all what is meant by Fascism." (9) Here De Felice gracefully combines my two questions into a single movement: the uncertain use of the term fascism demands a definition. Indeed, this double maneuver could be said to characterize what one means by fascism scholarship today. It should also be noted that De Felice concludes by radically delimiting the term geographically and historically to Europe between the wars, which does little to explain its fascination for Americans. However, even if we accept De Felice's strictures, this still

⁵ Allardyce has argued that there is no single way of understanding fascism. Similarly, Stanley Payne lists in his important *A History of Fascism* thirteen divergent modes of understanding fascism (see Griffin, *Fascism* 56, 177).

leaves residual and unanswered my original questions: why has it been so important in the first place to define fascism, and why does fascism present itself again and again as a question and yet resists clarification.

The best place to begin to answer these questions is in the wealth of important scholarly research on fascism in the post-War period. While Hollywood has had a propensity toward a straightforward vision of fascism, scholarship in the same epoch has been anything but monolithic. Recently, Roger Griffin has put forward one of the most influential definitions in fascism scholarship. I would like to start here because it will illustrate how quickly a clear definition of fascism tends to explode into multiple contradictory elements. Griffin has argued for a “fascist minimum” that would usefully describe the *Nature of Fascism* (1993).⁶ This comes to a “palingenetic form of populist ultranationalism,” a definition that emphasizes the fascist claims to cultural rejuvenation (palingenesis) and its connection to the nationalist fervor and popular ground-swell that brought fascism to power in many of the countries Griffin examines. I would like to explore Griffin’s wonderfully clear and persuasive description of the fascist minimum in order to draw out the difficulties I have signaled with my guiding questions.

I want to emphasize at the outset what to my mind is the most important element in Griffin’s definition: his argument takes into account significant recent research that has demonstrated the troubling affinities between populism and fascism.⁷ In this he avoids

⁶ Stanley Payne has accepted this description with some modifications, while Stephen D. Shenfield and others have presented their own versions of an essential core of fascism.

⁷ A great deal of research has gone into the question of the popularity of fascism. See for example Luisa Passerini (“Italian Working Class Culture”) and Forgacs (*Rethinking Italian Fascism*). One of the most important recent studies of populism, Ernesto Laclau’s *On Populist Reason* (2005) addresses the troubling affinities between populism and fascism. In contradistinction to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Laclau affirms the generative aspects of populism that Rancier refers to as “politics,” but this is not seen as contrary to fascism so much as problematically proximal.

another, longstanding and dominating line of argument that has defined fascism as a form of top-down totalitarianism. Renzo de Felice locates this argument primarily in Hannah Arendt's magisterial *Origins of Totalitarianism*, begun in 1945, before most of the important research into historical fascism had been accomplished (*Interpretations* 61).⁸ Her premises are based not on historical investigation, but rather emerge from her philosophical arguments, beholden as they are to Martin Heidegger's critique of modern industrial culture. In sum, Arendt contends that, under the regime of modernity, identity becomes disconnected from citizenship through capitalism and the atomizing effects of mass commercial culture. This in turn leads to a social and political identity crisis, because, in this modern society, there is no intersubjective interaction that can sustain true political community. This makes the citizen feel superfluous, and totalitarianism emerges from this disconnect as it takes advantage of these feelings by organizing atomized individuals into huge, impersonal collectivities. In other words, totalitarianism, including fascism, emerges because the alienating effects of modern industrialism make an authentic political culture impossible.⁹

Griffin's emphasis on the populist aspects of fascism is in tension with a totalitarian model. While populism suggests an active mode of political and social engagement, Arendt's interpretation depends on a notion of alienation that drives massive statist centralization. Rather than identifying fascism with the hierarchical bureaucratic machine of totalitarianism, Griffin's argument takes into account new historical evidence

⁸ John Pollard (*Fascist Experience*) asserts that the notion of "totalitarianism" was introduced by Mussolini in the 1920s, while A. James Gregor (*Giovanni Gentile*) argues that it was the Italian fascist philosopher Giovanni Gentile to who first developed the concept. In either case, it is important to note that the modern use originally developed out of the fascist regime's self representation.

⁹ For my summary I am drawing on John McGowan's excellent *Hannah Arendt, An Introduction* (16-18).

regarding the popular support for fascism and its complex connection to “grass roots” political movements. And yet the ground-swell of political activity in the interwar period does not preclude the equally true observation that fascist regimes were effective at gathering together a newly alienated population. The fascist response to the alienating effects of modernity were disturbingly successful at bringing the masses together, even as these mass political movements were agitating for truly revolutionary political change.¹⁰

I want to acknowledge the force of both arguments here. The populist origins of fascism should be recognized if we are to be responsible to this problem, and yet there is much that sustains Arendt’s argument as well. In a later development of this question, Michel Foucault’s examination of “biopower,” or the statist organization and management of human life, such as reproduction, health, mortality, etc. has provided a strong model for understanding the modern state apparatus that Arendt saw as a cornerstone of totalitarianism.¹¹ While Foucault’s explicit mention of fascism is rare in his corpus, his 1975-1976 College de France lectures “Society Must Be Defended” do provide a straightforward definition: fascism is an extreme form of biopower combined with atavistic modes of sovereign authority over life and death that belonged to the pre-biopower world of monarchical regimes. Although it must be said here that Foucault’s notion of biopower is generally organized around the micrological, the everyday, the subject-forming instances in which, he argues, power operates, nonetheless the image of sovereign authority provides a thoroughly top-down way of understanding fascism, and

¹⁰ See Forgacs, *Italian Culture* (1990).

¹¹ Some of the work that has followed this line includes George Williams’ immensely useful *Fascist Thought and Totalitarianism in Italy’s Secondary Schools* (1993), and Bialas and Rabinbach’s volume on *Nazi Germany and the Humanities* (2007) on the *Gleichschaltung* or coordination of German education.

thus, surprisingly, finds substantial points of connection with Arendt's concept of totalitarianism.

To the degree that scholars like Roger Griffin emphasize the popular element in fascism, we can counter-pose the centrality of fascism's modern bureaucratic state to offset these claims; conversely, to the degree that we emphasize fascism as a top-down organization of human life we misunderstand the mass appeal of fascism. The vitalist "palingenetic" aspect in Griffin's definition speaks much more to fascism's ability to draw enthusiastic support from a populace on the ground level, while a Foucauldian or Arendtian model provides techniques for understanding how this mass enthusiasm could be constructed and organized on a vast scale.

Emilio Gentile's description of fascism as a "secular religion" attempts to join the totalizing aspects of fascism together with its popular emotional appeal. Fascism as secular religion shares many traits with Griffin's notion of palingenesis: "Although fascism's symbolic world was full of numerous myths, in a certain sense they were merely corollaries of the dominant myth of the 'new state' as the expression of a 'new civilization'" ("Fascism" 244). However, in emphasizing this aspect, Gentile seems to leave aside the "grass roots" political dimensions of Griffin's description. For Gentile, the people are manipulated into a statist religious fervor through education, mass events, etc., while Griffin's notion of ultranationalist populism leaves a good deal of room for autonomous action. Thus Griffin contends that fascism "tends to generate a wide range of competing currents and factions even within the same political culture" because the statist grounding of the regime is always being contested at sub-official levels (*Nature* 40). Griffin clarifies that the role of the leader is important in this respect, because he forces

together these competing currents, but the fact remains that the chaotic initiation of fascism leaves its mark on the regime in its myths of populist cultural rebirth, or, as De Felice succinctly states, “for fascism the consensus and participation of the masses in the regime had to be active” (*Fascism* 75). This active participation, which has been so well documented in the historiography of fascism,¹² is downplayed by the stronger models of totalitarianism that have formed the theoretical bedrock for the popular cinematic representation of fascism. Finally, it must be signaled here that the tension between these two possibilities also recapitulates my guiding questions: if fascism functions as an ideologically consistent, totalizing institution that invites definition, what is the role of this vital populism that comes back to worry attempts at locating the nature of fascism?

In a brief survey of just a few of the more important analyses of fascism, we are in what Kant would have called a paradox: two or more apparently contradictory claims that must nevertheless both be true. Of course, many scholars of fascism have observed just this problem, which has led to another set of strategies I would like to delineate next. If Griffin’s work represents the project of seeking a coherent nature of fascism, a set of fundamental elements that do not contradict one another, another approach has tended toward what I will call the “anatomy” after Robert Paxton’s seminal *The Anatomy of Fascism* (2004). The anatomy sustains contradiction, establishing a formula for all the elements that tend to make for fascism, even when they are not entirely consistent with one another. Naomi Wolfe’s *Guardian* article “Fascist America, in Ten Easy Steps” (2007) follows this principle, as does Umberto Eco’s widely read *New York Review of Books* piece “Ur-Fascism” (1995), but more scholarly and historically grounded work has

¹² For examples, see Peter Fritzsche’s *Life and Death in the Third Reich* (2008), *Fascism, Aesthetics, Culture* (Golsan, 1992), Neil Gregor’s *How to Read Hitler* (2005).

been a great deal more successful in using the anatomy structure to navigate the apparently contradictory elements of fascism we have been tracing.¹³ Interestingly, the great majority of this kind of work has focused on fascist Italy rather than Nazi Germany, which by and large has tended toward interpretations of fascism as totalitarian.¹⁴

In one of the most notable examples of the anatomy, Mark Antliff has thoughtfully brought together Griffin's notion of palingenesis and Gentile's interpretation of fascism as a secular religion with two other interpretive approaches revolving around the influence of avant-gardist culture and George Sorel's revolutionary theory of myth.¹⁵ In my read, what is most significant about these two additions in Antliff's "Fascism, Modernism, and Modernity" (2002) is that they introduce another important aspect of fascism studies: the role of aesthetic presentation in organizing fascist power at both the popular and statist levels. In order to elaborate on the avant-gardist aesthetic strategies deployed by the Italian fascist regime, Antliff draws on Emily Braun's convincing argument that modernist techniques like montage and defamiliarization were integral to the fascist regime's ability to engage the active participation of the people (152). These are ground-breaking claims because much of the tendentious use of the epithet "fascism"

¹³ A similar example to Eco's more popular style is Michael Mann's *Fascists*, while Roger Eatwell's work is a strong demonstration of careful scholarship in this area. Other important work along this line includes, of course, Robert Paxton's *The Anatomy of Fascism*, in which he argues that "Fascist regimes functioned like an epoxy: an amalgam of two very different agents, fascist dynamism and conservative order [...]" (147), and George Mosse's *The Fascist Revolution*. Mark Antliff and Matthew Affron characterize Mosse's complex work as follows: "[...] for Mosse, Fascism in Italy embraced two aesthetics, one dynamic and fully accepting of technology, the other more traditional in its desire to anchor nationalism in the organicist and auratic aestheticism outlined by Benjamin" (1997). For both Paxton and Mosse, the anatomy method emerges out of a response to the multiple contradictory elements I have been tracing out in this review.

¹⁴ An important problem in fascism studies that I do not have the space to address here is the divergence between fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, a distinction which Geoff Eley and others have made convincing arguments for maintaining even in general theories of fascism. I am following Tim Mason's line of thought that the best way to engage the problem of fascism is to compare Germany and Italy because fascism was undeniably a continental phenomenon.

¹⁵ This summary is mainly drawn from Mark Antliff's "Fascism, Modernism, and Modernity" (2002).

depends on the underlying assumption that the radical anti-fascist left had an essentially different world-view and thus an entirely divergent aesthetic. Left avant-gardism was supposed to be able to sustain a modernist aesthetic of breakage and incoherence that totalitarian fascist regimes could not abide; however, like Griffin's inclusion of populist ultra-nationalism, Braun's research complicates the top-down model of fascism by engaging with its dynamic and revolutionary aspects.¹⁶

Equally important for Antliff is fascism's rejection of Enlightenment rationalism.¹⁷ Like Zeev Sternhell,¹⁸ Braun emphasizes Italian fascism's debt to Georges Sorel and his advocacy of the irrational, vitalistic imagery he refers to as myths. For Sorel myths are always a more primary force in drawing together the masses than rational consensus building (Affron and Antliff 141).¹⁹ This notion of myth has been centrally important for understanding how Italian fascism convincingly deployed concepts like *italianità* to create images of an organically cohesive society. Antliff's emphasis on the influence of Sorelian myth allows him to explore fascism's construction of images of wholeness and coherence that covered up the contradictions between the fascist regime and its more revolutionary aspects. In this he follows closely the work of Jeffrey

¹⁶ Andrew Hewitt's *Fascist Modernism* is perhaps the most important extension and exploration of this theme.

¹⁷ In *Avant-Garde Fascism: The Mobilization of Myth, Art, and Culture in France, 1909-1939* (2007), Antliff provides a thoroughgoing definition of this relationship between fascism and anti-Enlightenment: "Scholars now recognize the role of both fascism and modernist aesthetics in the emergence of anti-Enlightenment movements opposed to the democratic tradition that was the heritage of Enlightenment thought. Indeed the rise of fascism in Europe responded to a widespread search for spiritual values and "organic" institutions capable of counteracting what was considered the corrosive effects of rationalism (and capitalism) on the body politic" (19).

¹⁸ See *The Birth of Fascist Ideology* (1994).

¹⁹ For Sorel's use of myth, see his *Reflections on Violence* (originally published 1908) and *The Illusion of Progress* (1969, originally published 1908). Jack Roth's *The Cult of Violence: Sorel and the Sorelians* (1980) provides background on how Sorelian concepts were taken up in early twentieth-century Europe.

Schnapp, whose analysis of the fascist regime's use of theatricality in *Staging Fascism* (1996) provides excellent tools for investigating how Sorelian myths were deployed during the twenty-year period of Italian fascist rule, or *ventennio*. In brief, Schnapp argues that the fascist construction of spectacle served to cover up the regime's ideological inconsistencies through what he calls "aesthetic overproduction," that is, the generation of the theatrical appearance of a coherent regime leading a united people. Schnapp's influential work opened up a new area of fascism studies that investigated how the generation of spectacle served to mask the contradictions that have made fascism so difficult to locate.²⁰

Antliff argues convincingly for his choice to bring together facets of the work of Griffin, Gentile, Braun, and Schnapp, since each thinker brings to light important aspects of fascist culture. However, the anatomy method introduces two problems that we cannot ignore: first, these aspects may not encompass other important tendencies in fascism, and secondly the same elements may have other interpretations besides the ones deployed in the anatomy. Unlike Griffin's search for a universally applicable essence of fascism, the anatomy aims at a functional hybrid that takes bits and pieces from different interpretations. For instance, Gentile's notion of secular religion seems to work well with Schnapp's theory of state theatricality, but less well with Braun's emphasis on fascist avant-gardism. Secular religion and state theatricality share the sensibility of fascism's manipulation of the masses, while the welter of creativity invited by fascism's avant-gardism create a less coherent but ultimately more powerful appeal. Indeed, Schnapp's

²⁰ Some of this work includes Medina Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected: Architecture, Spectacle, and Tourism in Fascist Italy* (2004); *Donatello among the Blackshirts* (Lazzaro, 2005); *Fascist Visions: Art and Ideology in France and Italy* (Affron and Antliff 1997); Diane Yvonne Ghirardo, "Citta Fascista: Surveillance and Spectacle" (1996); Victoria De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent* (1981), Marla Stone, "Staging Fascism: The Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution" (1993).

case study notes that one instance of officially organized state theatricality, a mass-theater event called “18 BL,” is a failure because it is unable to mediate the tensions between its top-down and revolutionary intentions.

Regarding the first difficulty with anatomy, it is important to note that the recent prominence of work on the revolutionary aspects of Italian fascism has tended both to downplay the regime’s ability to dominate and organize avant-gardist elements and at the same time to promote an official conservative aesthetic.²¹ In contrast to the work we have looked at up to this point, important scholarship has focused on these more top-down aspects of fascism. Perhaps the most important counterexample is A. James Gregor’s influential work on Italian fascism, which emphasizes the coherence and functionality of fascist ideology in Italy. According to Gregor, fascism “featured a coherent, manifestly relevant political ideology committed to the redemption of a humiliated and retrograde people” (Griffin, *Fascism* 344). Far from expressing the confusing contradictions of fascism, this interpretation forcefully presents fascism as identifying a specific problem and developing a program for addressing it. Gregor extends this argument in his important study of Italian fascist intellectuals, which shows that the regime was grounded in a thoroughly-developed philosophical tradition rather than a chaos of ad hoc actions.²² In his careful work, Gregor signals the coherence of fascism’s ideology as an important area of investigation that is not addressed in the anatomy of fascism we have been exploring.

²¹ See for example Leonardo Benevolo, *History of Modern Architecture, vol 2: The Modern Movement* (1971), in which the author concludes, “In the end Fascism too, like the other totalitarian regimes, enforced a return to neo-Classicism and forcibly impeded the development of the modern movement, but the process was slow and passed through many shades of emphasis” (562).

²² As with Schnapp’s work, Gregor’s interpretation of fascism has developed into a family of readings. Probably the most outstanding example of this style of investigation is found in Aaron Gillett’s *Racial Theories in Fascist Italy* (2002), a study of racial policy in Italy as it was developed by racial theorists.

Besides these important counter-arguments for a more unified and coherent regime, many of the concepts Antliff elaborates in his interpretation of fascism (avant-gardism, aesthetics, myth, etc.) have been taken in divergent directions by equally influential thinkers. For example, Jean Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe see the fascist relationship to myth in a completely different light. Drawing on Nietzsche's classic *Birth of Tragedy* (1872), they describe myth as the Apollonian act of shaping the Dionysian chaos into an aesthetic whole.²³ According to this argument the German people are made into a folk by means of an all-encompassing belief that replaces the complex interactions of genuine political culture. As they state at the outset, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe see this fascist aspect of myth as corresponding to Arendt's definition of ideology, which in Arendt's words is "the totally self-fulfilling logic of an idea by which the movement of history is explained as one consistent process." Unlike Antliff's stress on the complex political and social processes brought into play by myth, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe see myth as the primary aspect of an ideologically coherent totalitarian regime, and locate the prehistory of myth not in Sorelian anarcho-syndicalism but rather in the traditions of German philosophy.²⁴

Equally divergent from Antliff's argument, yet also concerned with the problem of fascist aesthetics, Susan Sontag's important and original work has focused on the totalizing aspects of cultural representation under fascism. Her vitriolic criticism of Leni

²³ In yet another use of the concept of myth to describe fascism, the renowned scholar Ernst Cassirer, in one of the last projects before his death, argued that totalitarian regimes like Nazism are a technically orchestrated revival of mythical modes of thought and social organization (Skidelsky 223). In this argument Cassirer anticipates later theories of fascism as a form of "reactionary modernism."

²⁴ In another well known interpretation of myth and spectacle, Guy Debord in *Society of the Spectacle* argues that "Fascism is a state of siege in capitalist society. [...] Its decomposed ersatz of myth is revived in the spectacular context of the most modern means of conditioning and illusion. Thus it is one of the factors in the formation of the modern spectacle, and its role in the destruction of the old workers' movement makes it one of the fundamental forces of present day society (109).

Riefenstahl's book *Last of the Nuba* has at its core the premise that aesthetic presentation has the dangerous potential for harboring a totalizing ideology. For Sontag, this is demonstrated in Riefenstahl's photographs of the Nuba, which recapitulate the Nazi ideals that the filmmaker aestheticized in *Triumph of the Will* and *Olympia*. What worries Sontag most is the seductive appeal of this totalizing aesthetic vision; thus her rejection of Riefenstahl's work as Nazi propaganda goes hand in hand with her distancing from the more radical premises of her own earlier work on aestheticism.²⁵ Recent studies have further developed this problematic, especially the outstanding work of Kathleen James-Chakraborty on the use of avant-garde theater in Nazi Germany. In striking contrast to Braun and Schnapp, James-Chakraborty shows that avant-gardist techniques were strategically co-opted by a top-down structure instead of infusing contradictory elements into the regime's spectacular events.²⁶

I want to make it clear that my argument is specifically not attempting to line up Nazism with totalitarianism and Italian fascism with a more populist dissolution of rigid hierarchy. Just the opposite, I want to demonstrate that there are no absolute boundaries around which we can organize fascism studies without disregarding its contradictory elements. Further, while the majority of research on the cultural aspects of fascism has been on the Italian regime, the problems we are tracing out here extend, albeit differently in each case, to both Italy and Germany. One of the best ways of understanding the similarities that unite fascist Italy and Nazi Germany is the work that has been done on

²⁵ This is especially clear in Sontag's essay "On Style," in which she takes a different stance altogether with regard to the connection between aesthetics and fascism: "To call Leni Riefenstahl's *The Triumph of the Will* and *The Olympiad* masterpieces is not to gloss over Nazi propaganda with aesthetic lenience. The Nazi propaganda is there. But something is there, too, which we reject at our loss" (*Against Interpretation* 25).

²⁶ See also Katya Mandoki, "Terror and Aesthetics: Nazi strategies for mass organization" (1999), and Eugenia Paulicelli, *Fashion under Fascism* (2004).

the shared context of social organization and technological development that is often broadly referred to as “modernity.” Antliff’s work can be seen as an engagement with fascist modernism, since he gives prominence to modernist techniques of presentation and social organization. However, Antliff also argues that fascist modernism is in part a reaction to mass industrial culture that has been variously characterized as “romantic anti-capitalism” (Löwry and Sayre) and “reactionary modernism” (Jeffrey Herf).²⁷

Geoff Eley takes issue with Herf’s more binarizing claim that fascism emerges out of cultural groups that were reacting to modernity. For Eley, “fascism is a modernism,” meaning that it engaged in the ensemble of social and statist techniques that characterize the interwar period.²⁸ He persuasively argues that the context of statist modernism provides a commonly shared framework that joins otherwise divergent forms of fascism. Conversely, what is most decisive in his estimation is not a reaction to modernity, but the crisis of political and cultural legitimacy that ensued from the catastrophe of the First World War. While Eley’s work differs significantly from Antliff’s emphasis on the anti-rational aspects of fascism, his important line of reasoning has articulated just as many rich areas of study on the history and culture of fascism.²⁹

²⁷ Antliff especially emphasizes Italian fascism’s response to what he calls the “clock time of capitalism,” or the rationalization of time and space that characterized a certain form of modernity. Isaiah Berlin’s interpretation of fascism as an extreme form of romanticism is an important precursor to these arguments. See *The Roots of Romanticism* (147).

²⁸ These interpretations are mainly taken from Eley’s recent Birkbeck talk, which can be found at <http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2010/05/fascism-and-the-historians-past-present-and-future/>

²⁹ Neil Gregor provides an excellent summary of the foregoing argument: For Eley “fascist potential was rooted not so much in pre-industrial classes as in social groups which were precisely a product of Germany’s emergence as a mature industrial society, and that the causes of National Socialism are to be located more within a short-term crisis of capitalism itself, combined with a crisis of political legitimacy, from the First World War onwards” (71). Much of the best work in this area deals with these problems of cultural crisis in a shared context of modernity, and Eley’s work is most notably joined by Peter Fritzsche, Victoria de Grazia and Ruth Ben-Ghiat.

I have elaborated several different interpretations of the key terms in Antliff's anatomy at some length in order to demonstrate the difficulty of developing water-tight categories for these manifold elements. While Griffin's definition of fascism as "palingenetic populist ultranationalism" attempts to develop intertwined categories that form a mutually sustaining whole, the anatomy-method allows more flexibility, but at the cost of potentially endless debate on the nature of aesthetics, modernity, theatricality, etc. As we have seen, neither approach has entirely encompassed the problem of fascism. The difficulties posed by these various efforts to define fascism are not, however, merely part of an internal academic debate; rather, they reflect the multiple aspects of the regimes under question, and it was this same uncertainty that animated discussions of fascism in the period between the wars. It would be possible to extend the analysis of divergent interpretations of fascism indefinitely, and I do think there are equally significant dimensions to the material covered thus far that would further elaborate the multiple contradictory aspects of fascism we have been investigating.³⁰ Nonetheless, from my perspective as a student of American culture, what is most intriguing is the sense that these divergent and equally compelling interpretations still seem to be irresolvable, because they in fact mirror the debates about, and representations of, fascism in the

³⁰ For example, the element of crisis in the interpretation of fascism has provided a rich and varied line of inquiry. To mention just a few of the most striking examples of this area of work: Nicos Poulantzas' influential work contextualizes fascism in the twin crises of representation and consent. Eugene Weber follows this thesis closely in his work. In the classic *Some Sociological Aspects of the Fascist Movements* (1949), Talcott Parsons reads fascism as a cultural response to the cultural crisis of "anomie" (drawn from the sociology of Emile Durkheim) produced by modern "rationalization" (taken from Max Weber). In a different vein, Andrew Hewitt has argued that "what constituted the principle cultural nexus linking the culture of the avant-gardes and fascism was the search for a symbiosis between art and life, culture and politics, nationalism and modernity—a search enacted through the myth of Italianism" (59). Recently, Dylan Riley in *The Civic Foundations of Fascism* (2010) has emphasized the role of political crisis in the emergence of fascism. And yet another branch of work on fascist modernism circulates around Giorgio Agamben's interpretation of Carl Schmitt and the breakdown of procedural democracy that Schmitt refers to as a "state of exception." These arguments have found a striking response in Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau's investigations into democratic culture and crisis.

United States between the wars. Thus, covering this ground now will later help us to get a bearing on the American fascination with fascism in all of its contradictions.

We are now in a better position to address the second part of my guiding questions: why has it been so important to delineate fascism? I have given a great deal of space to developing various genealogical families of interpretive strategies, and yet it is clear that fascism has an anti-genealogical tendency in its multiple contradictory elements. Fascism is difficult to define because it assembles so many divergent elements, but what is equally significant is that encompassing its protean form has proven to be such a fascination. If we turn now to the rich history of critical thought on fascism that emerged between the wars, we will see that this question was so pressing because of its proximity to another uncertainty: why was fascism so successful despite its apparent incoherences? If my first question reflects the multiplicity of fascism, the second will address the success of what Umberto Eco calls fascism's "fuzzy totalitarianism."³¹

Precursors: The Interwar Engagement with the Question of Fascism

Two modes of interpreting fascism that we have not explored up to this point, the Marxist and the psychoanalytic approaches, are heavily freighted with concerns about the appeal of fascism. Significantly, both interpretive strategies are rooted in a tradition extending from the interwar period, before the work we have surveyed thus far had been accomplished. As with other methods we have looked at, there are widely divergent expressions of the psychological and Marxist approaches. In particular, Theodor Adorno

³¹ See Eco's June 22nd article for the *New York Review of Books*, "Ur-Fascism" (1995).

and other members of the Frankfurt School have integrated elements of both these theoretical approaches into their longstanding engagement with the question of fascism.

While the official Stalinist version of fascism has tended to insist on the direct parallels between finance capitalism and fascism and approve only a totalitarian view of historical fascism, other Marxist approaches have taken different avenues of exploration.³² The Marxist thinker most directly opposed to Stalin, Leon Trotsky, adapted Rosa Luxemburg's argument that fascism was an extension of the imperialist drive to expand capitalist markets, that is, it was an apparatus for waging war against the international proletariat.³³ Conversely, Antonio Gramsci's writings during his tragic confinement by the Italian fascist regime provide a markedly different interpretation of fascism. Provocatively arguing that "there does not exist any essence of Fascism as such," Gramsci refused to cordon off fascism from his general thinking on politics and society (139).³⁴ He therefore saw fascism as a dynamic response to the crisis of liberal capitalism that organized the bourgeoisie militarily in order to achieve the paradox of "revolution-restoration." Rather than read fascism as a mere reaction, Gramsci saw the

³² Undoubtedly the most canonical definition of fascism came with the Comintern's December 1933 decree that "Fascism is the open, terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinist and most imperialist elements of finance capital." However, it should be noted here that the Trotsky scholar Dave Renton has launched an important criticism of Roger Griffin, in which he challenges the a-historical (and thus de-politicizing) aspects of Griffin's project to discover a universal "fascist minimum." For this debate, see Griffin (2004).

³³ See for example Leon Trotsky, "What Hitler Wants" (1933).

³⁴ In this choice Gramsci stands in direct opposition to his most famous Italian contemporary, the liberal intellectual Benedetto Croce, who claimed that fascism was simply a "parenthesis" in the progress of democratic freedom.

advent of the Italian regime as part of a larger “war of position” on the part of bourgeois society in which it sought to maintain its cultural dominance or “hegemony.”³⁵

These three influential Marxist interpretations of fascism differ substantially, yet all three responses point to fascism’s aim to counter proletarian revolution as the main reason for its rise to power. Fascism, in other words, was successful because it was a tool of capital. For the Marxist tradition, then, we might generalize that it has been important to describe fascism as a force that blocks the freedom promised by social revolution. This answer emphasizes the conflict between two opposed world-views, capitalism and the proletariat, thereby delineating fascism as a monolithic force; and yet, as we have observed time and again in our review of fascism scholarship, what renders fascism so difficult to categorize is its ability to bring together seemingly opposed elements that disrupt the totalitarian model.

However, despite this tendency to see fascism in monolithic terms, Gramsci’s work (which was not widely read until after the Second World War) significantly complicates this orthodox line of interpretation with the concept of hegemony. As a category of mass social influence, hegemony introduces a methodology for investigating how fascism garnered the active participation of groups (like organized labor) even when, from a Marxist perspective, they benefited little. As we have seen, this question of mass influence has been central to debates over the accuracy of the totalitarian representation

³⁵ For my summary I am indebted to Ernesto Laclau’s work on Gramsci, as well as Leszek Kolakowski’s *Main Currents of Marxism* (2005) for the context of the Marxist debates on fascism. It should be noted that Gramsci’s own theories of social revolution are grounded in his encounter with the Italian regime and share important affinities with fascism. For example, he was avowedly influenced by George Sorel, and his notion of hegemony could be considered an adaptation of Sorel’s theory of myth (see *A Gramsci Reader* 239).

of fascism, a question to which the psychoanalytic approach has given a great deal of attention.

The psychoanalytic work on fascism between the wars has tended to produce a similarly totalized image, albeit through an entirely different methodology. Wilhelm Reich's *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1933) argues that primitive aspects of the psyche lag behind the rapid cultural and technological changes of modern society. According to Reich, fascism is the sadistically perverse backlash of these pent-up drives, appealing to all those who are normally forced to subdue their impulses. Erich Fromm's equally important *Escape from Freedom* (1941) attempts to redress some of Reich's generalizations by taking a more socio-historical view of the development of fascism. Nonetheless, he concludes that fascism is caused by the rise of the "authoritarian personality," a sado-masochistic reaction to modern alienation. In an important 1942 lecture, Herbert Marcuse also argued that fascism could be understood as the release of "primitive self-interest" in the "emancipation of sexual life" ("State and Individual" 229).³⁶ Like the Marxist approach, these thinkers seek to answer why fascism was so appealing. Their answer, in parallel to the Marxist conclusion, tends to construct binaries that totalize fascism, but, instead of a class analysis, this interpretive strategy imagines fascist regimes as totalized entities united by psychological perversion. By and large these models have been rejected because their argument is problematically based on a

³⁶ As David Forgacs has argued in "Equation in Films of the 1960s and 1970" (Bosworth and Dogliani 1999), the association of perversion with fascism has frequently found its way into post-War Italian cinema. Probably the best known example, Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salo, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (1975) develops direct parallels between Nazism and sadistic cruelty. Other films include Lina Wertmüller's *Seven Beauties* (1975), Luchino Visconti's *Gottterdammerung* (1969), Roberto Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* (1945).

rationalistic ideal of mental health.³⁷ Significantly, aspects of this line of reasoning are not foreign to orthodox Marxist interpretation: for example, in *The Destruction of Reason* (1954), Georg Lukacs associated fascism with the irrationality generated by the contradictions of modern capitalism.³⁸

These shared concerns of the Marxist and psychoanalytic approaches come together in much of the work of the Frankfurt School, especially the investigations of Theodor Adorno. In a signal essay, “Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda,” Adorno turns his attention directly to the problem of how fascism garnered the enthusiastic support of the masses.³⁹ Shadowing the arguments of Reich, Fromm and Marcuse, Adorno argues that “Fascism is not simply a recurrence of the archaic but its reproduction in and by civilization itself” (137). However, fascism’s motive to transform libidinal energy into an irrational bond is not simply provoked by a reaction to technological rationalization as Reich argues, but rather indicates an integrated strategy on the part of fascism to stall social revolution. Adorno expresses his proximity to the Marxist thesis here, stating that mass psychology “has become one element among others in a superimposed system the very totality of which is necessitated by the potential of

³⁷ It must also be emphasized that this model shares affinities with the emphasis on health at the official level of the Italian fascist and German Nazi regimes, both in organized sport and in medical practices. See for example, Gisela Bock, “Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany: Motherhood, Compulsory Sterilization and the State” (1984); Barbara Sorgoni, “‘Defending the race’: the Italian reinvention of the Hottentot Venus during Fascism” (2003).

³⁸ Further on in *Destruction*, Lukács argues that, since World War Two, the United States had taken Nazi Germany’s place as the predominant force of “reactionary imperialism” (766).

³⁹ Adorno is drawing on a rich history of mass psychology. Gustave LeBon’s *The Crowd* (originally published 1895) provided a starting point for a great deal of this work, including Freud’s work on mass psychology. Also important is Ortega y Gasset’s *The Revolt of the Masses* (originally published 1929), which addresses mass psychology as a phenomenon of modernity. Also of interest is Adorno’s radio interview with Elias Canetti in 1962, in which they discuss Canetti’s *Crowds and Power*; throughout Adorno is interested to bring his Freudian interpretation of crowd psychology to bear on Canetti’s mobile theory of “the pack.” For a summary of the work on crowds, see *Crowds* (Schnapp 2006).

mass resistance” (135). The psychological manipulation of fascism therefore emerges out of the need to forestall the utopian promise of social revolution.

Adorno explores another aspect of this thesis in his work with Max Horkheimer. Contextualized by the rise of what Adorno and Horkheimer refer to as fascist “barbarism,” their extraordinarily influential project on *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (written in 1944) seeks out the irrationality at the heart of bureaucratic, industrial and social organization, with fascism as the consummating expression of these contradictory aspects of capitalist social and psychological rationalization. Although Adorno and Horkheimer share Gramsci’s concerns about the ability of fascism to appeal to the masses, their analysis envisions fascism as an all-encompassing entity. This is especially important because, as we saw in our comparison of Roger Griffin and Hannah Arendt, the popular appeal of fascism is disruptive to claims of fascism as a top-down organizational force, since building active consensus would appear to introduce divergent elements into this supposedly totalizing regime.

In response to this problem, Adorno and Horkheimer explain fascism’s success in terms of what they call the “culture industry.” According to this argument, the commodification of culture produces a “ruthless unity” that stylistically smoothes over the contradictions normally found in social and political expression (123). This expression of cultural contradiction is tragically lost for Adorno and Horkheimer, because these disjunctions held out the promise of a better future in their inconsistency with the present. The submergence of these utopian hopes in a regime of sameness thus takes away the possibility of real social change. Instead, culture becomes the ubiquity of advertising, which inculcates to the point of total uniformity, absorbing and transforming

utopian promise into domination. This “psychotechnology,” which they mainly locate in American commodity culture, is parallel to the uncritical uniformity the Nazis have created.

Adorno and Horkheimer’s association between the American culture industry and fascism is provocative, insisting as it does on the links between American techniques for integrating avant-gardism and fascist techniques of domination. However, in their attempt to deal with fascism’s mass appeal, they construct an overwhelmingly totalized image of both the regime and the cultural apparatus by which fascism manipulated the masses. As with Adorno’s argument in “Freudian Theory,” the focus is on how fascism maintained control without constantly falling back on coercive violence; despite this, however, Adorno’s response resorts continuously to a top-down model of psychological manipulation and organizational control.

Adorno’s many engagements with his contemporaries over the question of fascism has left a rich history, for, although Adorno’s answer culminates in a totalized image of fascism, it also persistently addresses the problem of *how* fascism garnered mass support. This eroding question of mass appeal ultimately fragmented these monolithic theories of fascism into myriad possibilities, many of which became the precursors to the post-War interpretations of fascism we have already reviewed. For example, the playwright Berthold Brecht understood fascism in terms of theatrical manipulation,⁴⁰ while Siegfried Kracauer drew direct parallels between German popular cinema and the mass-coordination of spectacle, or “mass ornament,” that has since come to be regarded as one of the central strategies of mass organization in the scholarship of

⁴⁰ See Brecht’s “On the Theatricality of Fascism” (*Brecht on Art and Politics*, 2003), and his play *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (1941).

Jeffrey Schnapp, Andrew Hewitt and others.⁴¹ Like the cultural dimensions of Adorno's interpretations of fascism, these theories generate a cultural mode of thinking about fascism that undermines the image of a strictly totalitarian regime.

Among this group, undoubtedly the most important cultural theorist for understanding later developments in fascism studies is Walter Benjamin. The later emphasis on the representational strategies of fascism most likely originates in Benjamin's exploration of the "aestheticization of politics," a concept that has been frequently cited in fascism scholarship. By aestheticization, Benjamin means a specific kind of response to the shock of modern technological society. Whereas new media like cinema and photography have the force to generate revolutionary new modes of representing the world, fascist aestheticization insists on the production of clichés that actively co-opt and re-route the creative potential of new media into a false and repetitious coherence.⁴² This insistence on sameness denies historical change, even to the point of destroying the world to maintain this totalizing image, hence Benjamin's enigmatic critique of the aestheticist slogan "l'art pour l'art" at the conclusion of his *Work of Art* essay (1935-6). Thus Benjamin's answer to fascism's appeal is that it responds reactively to the new potential introduced by socio-technological changes. This characterization of fascism as reactionary parallels the psychoanalytic description we have already seen in Reich, Adorno, and others.

These extraordinarily different Weimar era thinkers are brought together in their shared observation that fascism was not exclusively a coercive top-down regime. This in

⁴¹ See *From Caligari to Hitler* (2004) and *The Mass Ornament: Weimer Essays* (2005).

⁴² A well-rehearsed example of this is the Hollywood-style "telefoni bianchi" produced under the Italian fascist regime. See for example, Massimo Mida, *Dai telefoni bianchi al neorealismo* (1980); Pino Bertelli, *La dittatura dello schermo: telefoni bianchi e camicie nere* (1984).

turn caused an explosion of unorthodox thinking that created the basis for the cultural turn in fascism scholarship. While the Marxist and psychoanalytic aspects of post-War descriptions have tended to see fascism in terms of binaries (proletarian vs. capitalist, revolutionary vs. reactive, rational vs. irrational, healthy vs. perverse), the effort to interpret fascism's surprising stability between the wars has led to the investigation of the cultural rather than ideological or psychological aspects of fascism.⁴³ In turn, we are inheritors of the interwar attempts to interpret fascism in the aftermath of its apparent popularity. My second question (Why has it been so important to define fascism?) emerged in the interwar period because fascism's success was not fully explained by Marxist and psychoanalytic approaches. Gramsci, Adorno, Benjamin, and so many other thinkers from this period developed new modes of understanding fascism in light of these regimes' ability to appeal to so many people in so many ways. The contradictory multiplicity that made fascism successful thus comes back to answer my two guiding

⁴³ Some of the most important post-War work on fascism takes its cue directly from this impasse in the psychoanalytic and Marxist methods. Frederic Jameson develops his notion of the political unconscious in relation to the question of fascism in *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (2008, originally published 1979). For Jameson, the "gap between style and narrative" expresses psychological-historical discontinuities as they are worked out in representational form; intriguingly, he sees Lewis' "fascism" as one of these jarring, incongruous expressions of his present, thereby suggesting that fascism presents for Lewis a utopian hope along the lines of what Adorno called the "*promesse de bonheur*." As I have argued, fascism's capture of this modernist aesthetic of disjunctive utopia presents one of the most dramatic problems for left politics in the interwar period.

Julia Kristeva's work on fascism in *Powers of Horror* (1982, originally published 1980) develops the concept of abjection from Melanie Klein to express pro-fascist Louis-Ferdinand Celine's subject-formation through his anti-Semitism. Using Lacanian language to continue her discussion of abjection, Kristeva reads Celine's language as a "symptom," that is, the rejection of otherness that both allows the subject to form a coherent self and comes back to haunt the subject as this proximal otherness. For Kristeva, the paradoxes of technological barbarism can also be understood in terms of this return of the other (4). In *Fascist Virilities* (1996), Barbara Spackman turns this mode of interpretation to an effective investigation of crowd psychology in fascist Italy. Likewise, Alice Kaplan's *Reproductions of Banality* has given an extraordinarily sensitive exploration of fascism as a "machine" that brings together opposites precisely because it rides this line of abjection/subject-formation.

Aside from these works there are many excellent engagements with the question of fascism that attempt to solve the same tensions. See for example, Karen Pinkus, *Bodily Regimes: Italian Advertising under Fascism* (1995); Herzog, *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe's Twentieth Century* (2009); Mabel Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self: The Political Culture of Interwar Italy* (Griffin 2004).

questions: it has been both difficult and important to study fascism precisely because it does not organize easily into binary categories.⁴⁴

Toward Micropolitics and Multiplicity: A Deleuzian Methodology for Fascism Studies

As we have seen over and over again, the binary opposition between the totalitarian interpretation and the more varied, culturally oriented strategies for interpreting fascism unsettle one another. In Alice Kaplan's useful phrase, fascism seems to be a "machine for binding doubles," yet fascism does more than bind together preconstructed, independent wholes. Indeed, the defining observation in the interwar period was that fascism is a generative force that functions at the micrological, everyday level as well as the macrological, regime level.

Peter Fritzsche illustrates this everyday aspect of fascism wonderfully in his recent *Life and Death in the Third Reich* (2008).⁴⁵ Discussing the Heil Hitler gesture, Fritzsche explores the various ways it was used and encountered by Germans between the wars. For some, it provided a form of neutral anonymity, an easy way to "pass," while for others it became a point of conversion or simple conformism that ended by reshaping the actor's consciousness, and, of course, for some it was a public expression of fanaticism. Fritzsche finds that there were many reasons and modes of making this marked gesture,

⁴⁴ I should make clear at this point that I do not think these are the only reasons for studying fascism. I have had to leave out Holocaust studies for reasons of space and concentration. Here it seems to me that the overriding concern is the possibility of repeating this kind of technologically orchestrated genocide. Indeed, I have not dealt with the Second World War, including the Holocaust, because it changes the stakes of my arguments so dramatically, since my guiding questions are predicated on the confusing uncertainty about fascism that reigned before the war.

⁴⁵ Fritzsche's study is especially interesting for its emphasis on everyday life under the Nazi regime. This mode of investigation, or *Alltagsgeschichte* puts forward the question that is central to my own work: "How do we distinguish between the interstices of private resistance/identity and outward regime support?"

some of them with unintended results for the Nazi regime, and yet the net effect was the integration of the public space under Nazi control: “the arc of the right hand raised at an angle in front of the body drastically expanded the physical claim of National Socialists to public space” (22). The simple everyday quality of the gesture opened its meaning up to multiple variations and shifts in significance that defy any straightforward organization of collusion or resistance. Nonetheless, the regime was successful at capturing an important aspect of public life *because* of the multiple, contradictory uses this gesture could be put to, not despite them.

The kind of problem posed by Fritzsche in this illustration has led me away from thinking of fascism in terms of the tensions between the regime and everyday life, and more towards looking for spaces and dynamics that would explain fascism’s complex integration into the lives of those who encountered it. Another example from Fritzsche will help to demonstrate this point. In 1933 Lore Walb, for her fourteenth birthday, received material for a brown Hitler jacket and a jar of Nivea cream. Fritzsche reads this as bringing together the home-spun values of thrift and simplicity with the allures of commodity culture. I agree that these must have been some of the desires circulating around these gifts, and there were undoubtedly others as well: the girl’s concern to develop outward signs of her sexuality, the pressures of conformity, the influence of Nivea’s recent ad campaign associating their cream with skin color and race, the ideals of natural beauty that pre-existed the Nazi regime, and many more perhaps more private and less delineated hopes, fears and wishes. The cumulative effect of these possibilities most likely resulted in Lore’s active participation on several levels with the regime. In this example, the capture of these nebulous desires has several valences, simultaneously

appealing to diverse aspects of Lore's needs, even when those may be in contradiction with one another.

This question of desire is especially interesting to me, because it seems to work at the capillary level, while also offering the potential for grouping people and concepts into fascicles. I should be clear that I am not talking about libido, but something much simpler: desires as what move and connect us. They are the myriad motives that coalesce and evanesce in partial or, occasionally, accomplished acts throughout the day. In Gilles Deleuze's untranslated interview with Michel Foucault he describes fascism according to this notion of desire: "les masses n'ont pas été trompées, elles ont désiré le fascisme à tel moment !" (9).⁴⁶ Lore's desires were multiple and inconsistent, and it was this multiplicity that drew her into the orbit of the Nazi regime. As I have been arguing, it has been important to study fascism precisely for the reason that it is not easily coordinated into binary categories, and yet this same fact has made its investigation so perplexing. Deleuze's claim that the masses desired fascism can function as a provocation toward working through this impasse.

This notion of desire has the advantage of being both smaller and larger than the subjects who have long been imagined as the building blocks of fascist power. It mirrors the extraordinary flexibility and adaptability of fascism in its capacity to draw together diverse classes and types of people into massive, universalizing agglomerations. In the section "1933: Micropolitics and Segmentarity" of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari explore this connection between desire and fascism:

The masses certainly do not passively submit to power; nor do they "want" to be repressed, in a kind of masochistic hysteria; nor are they tricked by an ideological lure. Desire is never separable from complex

⁴⁶ "The masses were not deceived; they desired fascism at that particular moment!" (my translation).

assemblages that necessarily tie into molecular levels from microformations already shaping postures, attitudes, perceptions, expectations, semiotic systems, etc. Desire is never an undifferentiated instinctual energy, but itself results from a highly developed, engineered setup rich in interactions: a whole supply segmentarity that processes molecular energies and potentially gives desire a fascist determination. (215)

In this passage, Deleuze and Guattari address some of the strategies for interpreting fascism we have already reviewed. If fascism is not merely a perversion, a deception, or the submission to coercion, if it is not, in other words, simply a top-down organization of the rabble, then we must face the problem of how fascism engaged the active participation of the people. The foregoing review of post-War scholarship amply demonstrates the validity of this claim, leaving us with the same question Deleuze posed: how is it that people came to desire fascism?

Addressing this problem involves understanding how desire functions. For Deleuze, perhaps the most important initial observation is that desire is not a vague energy, but rather describes the motive force of connection and interaction. Desire is “never separable from complex assemblages” because it enters a world full of pre-existing pathways, or what Deleuze and Guattari call “segmentarities.” In Fritzsche’s earlier example, the success of the Heil Hitler gesture depends on finding avenues through previous postures and expectations: the greeting, the wave of the hand, the semiotics that coalesce around the open palm, etc.⁴⁷ At the same time, desire is an index of the possibility of other connections that may be latent in more apparent segmentarities, as when the Heil Hitler gesture made it easy to mask dissent, or when the simple absenting of the gesture became a political expression. In Fritzsche’s example, we can

⁴⁷ In Jeffrey Schnapp’s remarkable study *Revolutionary Tides* (2005) he explores some these semiotics: “The fist opens up into a proliferation of signs: of peace, of victory, of recognition of the sacred bond between individual citizen and leader” (53).

call “segmentarities” any of the relationships built around the accumulation of partially static gestures, ideas, actions, etc., that compose everyday life. Desire is thus not so much a thing as a dynamic that describes the potential for the accretion and dissolution of the pre-existing segmentary elements that make up our social milieu.

Of course, this general description of desire does little to distinguish fascism from any dynamic involving segmentarities and “molecular energies,” so we will need to go further into the problem. Deleuze and Guattari develop their argument by describing the mode by which these micrological, everyday moments coalesce into what they refer to as “rigid segmentarity”:

The concept of the totalitarian State applies only at the macropolitical level, to a rigid segmentarity and a particular mode of totalitarian centralization. But fascism is inseparable from a proliferation of molecular focuses in interaction, which skip from point to point, *before* beginning to resonate together in the National Socialist State. Rural fascism and city or neighborhood fascism, youth fascism and war veteran’s fascism, fascism of the Left and fascism of the Right, fascism of the couple, family, school, and office: every fascism is defined by a micro-black hole that stands on its own and communicates with the others, before resonating in a great, generalized central black hole (*Thousand Plateaus* 214). [original emphasis]

This passage touches on observations that have grounded some of the best recent research into fascism: its appeal to different ages and cultural strata; its ability to draw on resources of the political left and right; its infusion into everyday life in the school, workplace, home, etc.⁴⁸ Deleuze and Guattari are arguing that these different social elements have their own segmentary logic, and therefore cannot be simply co-opted into a massively totalizing regime. Instead, they propose the concept of “resonance” to describe the ways in which these divergent desiring assemblages find echoes in (rather than

⁴⁸ In *The Culture of Consent: Mass organization of leisure in fascist Italy*, Victoria De Grazia gives a thoroughgoing account of Italian fascism’s involvement in everyday life.

directly causing or effecting) one another. Resonance can be considered an “overcoding machine” that converts difference into resemblance; this process can eventually generate “rigid segmentarities” that aggressively delimit difference, channeling desire toward a single point. This is what Deleuze and Guattari mean by the “black hole.” As they make clear, the “black hole” we associate with totalitarian state fascism is not born fully formed, but is part of an emergent process of the accumulation of segmentarities that capture multiple divergent desires before they resonate in a totalizing way across the entire field of social interactions.

In Fritzsche’s example of Lore’s fourteenth birthday, we see the fascistization of the private space as it resonates with the commercial appeals of Nivea and the paramilitary uniformity of the Nazi regime. The point for Deleuze and Guattari is that such an event had to be organized in accordance with the assemblages that coordinated the flow of desire in Lore’s fourteen-year old life. This is not to say that fascism can only be understood as beginning at home or the “private life,” but rather that the function of large-scale coordination must continually capture myriad micropolitical events like Lore’s birthday before it can function as a monolithic structure. We can see immediately that this cannot be a planned operation on the part of a conspiratorial group, although Hitler’s generals and Mussolini’s intellectuals were more than capable of coordinating large-scale points of resonance once these micro-events had coalesced into rigid social and conceptual groups.

Deleuze and Guattari situate this description of fascism in terms of a “plateau,” by which they designate the buildup of intensive interactions around cohesive segmentary

formations.⁴⁹ A plateau is similar to what we think of as an historical event, but one that is signaled by its emergence from dynamic interactions rather by a climactic moment. As such, a plateau is composed through what they call “disjunctive synthesis,” or bits and pieces that are not *per force* connected, but draw together in particular dynamic relations at particular moments. Thus, according to this historical argument, fascism and its mode of coordinating desire was most intensive in 1933, although this does not mean that it began or ended there.⁵⁰ This notion of the plateau usefully expresses an intensive moment without insisting on a teleological delimitation, since aspects of micrological, everyday fascism can eventuate wherever desires are coordinated according to this dynamic. Rather than searching out an essence or a strictly delimited geographical and historical category, therefore, we can begin to see the logic of fascism at play elsewhere. As I have noted in the foregoing review of fascism studies, what is most interesting about this proposition is that it also provides an excellent description of the dynamics typical of nations that have historically been characterized as fascist.

Partial Affinities: Interwar American Culture and the Question of Fascism

The description of fascism presented by Deleuze and Guattari is important to my investigation of interwar American culture because of the tools it provides for thinking of dynamics rather than entities. For Americans between the wars, fascism was not a stable

⁴⁹ Brian Massumi provides a useful description of “plateau” in his translator’s foreword to *A Thousand Plateaus*: “In Deleuze and Guattari, a plateau is reached when circumstances combine to bring an activity to a pitch of intensity that is not automatically dissipated in a climax. The heightening of energies is sustained long enough to leave a kind of afterimage of its dynamism that can be reactivated or injected into other activities creating a fabric of intensive states between which any number of connecting routes could exist” (xiv).

⁵⁰ Hitler’s coup is this year. This is also the year of the Italian fascist Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista, which opened late in 1932. The New Deal was also initiated this year.

unit; instead, it provided a dense point of interaction around different segmentarities (i.e. rigidified modes of thinking and acting) in American culture. The remainder of this introduction will attempt to sound the depth of this fascination and develop the investigative tools for the following chapters. I will be interested to map the emergence of organizations and debates that specifically deal with fascism, but, at the same time, these emergent elements will also have to be understood in the framework of the dynamic cultural assemblages that gathered in interwar America. This ensemble of ready-made segmentarities and the intensive accumulations of debate and action that cohered around them can be usefully understood as a “plateau” rather than as a string of isolated events within a generalized historical context. I should also stress that I do not mean to point to America’s fascination with fascism as an accusation, but rather as an extended observation on an intensive period of engagement with this dynamic logic that, I hope, will help us to explore key aspects of interwar American culture with open eyes.

America’s encounter with fascism between the wars bears the same complexities as the other interpretations we have reviewed thus far. As a plurivalent attractor for social hopes, fears, and fantasies in the United States, fascism drew in an almost unbelievable array of signs: it was alternately understood to be anti-labor and pro-big business, a genuinely popular movement, based on vigilantism and mob violence, dependent on war for its centralization, built on demagoguery and gangsterism, committed to creating an organic cohesive society, expressing a third way between capitalism and socialism, promoting efficiency and an end to class strife, a form of totalitarianism, identifiable with the principles of the New Deal, a pragmatic response to current problems, the rule of a new elite, promising revolution, or re-establishing conservative rule, growing out of the

radical left, organized by mass spectacle, a vitalist civic religion, a form of technological barbarism, the reaction of the lower-middle classes, an effect of the failure of political representation, emanating from an intellectual prehistory of anti-democratic thought, a species of irrational romanticism, and on and on.⁵¹ Each of these descriptions bespeaks a political and social assemblage of segmentarities, some with obvious points of affinity to others, although they do not add up to a complete representation of fascism. Indeed, I am arguing that fascism operated as a magnetic attractor that linked an indefinite range of desires as they emerged from the microformations of American life in the interwar period.

These various interpretations of fascism traverse a milieu of cultural tensions that operated through a multiplicity of thinkers, social configurations, events, etc. Because there are too many interpretations to trace out with scholarly diligence in a single arc of thought, my project chooses one of these cluster-formations, the search for what I will call “organic cohesive community,” in order to draw out the dense weave of relations that accumulate at this point. This question of social cohesion traces lines of affinity with many other formations in the above litany, but certainly not with all of them in all ways.

⁵¹ On fascism as anti-labor and pro-big business, see Evelyn Seeley (1936), Paul Anderson (1938), Anna Wallace (1935); on fascism as a genuinely popular movement, see Percy Winner (1936); on vigilantism and mob violence, see Archibald MacLeish (1940), Duncan Aikman (1925); on dependence on war, see C. Hartley Grattan (1939); on demagoguery and gangsterism, see James Wechsler (1939), V.F. Calverton (1935); on commitment to an organic cohesive society, see Ida Tarbell (1939); on fascism as a third way, see Coughlin cited in Dale Kramer (1940); on efficiency and an end to class strife, see E.C. Lindeman (1930); on totalitarianism, see John Flynn (1941), Walter Lippmann (1943); on proximity to the New Deal, see J.B. Matthews and R.E. Shallcross (1934), Raymond Gram Swing (1935); on fascism as a pragmatic response, see Kenneth Roberts (1922), Lothrop Stoddard (1927); on the rule of a new elite, see Lawrence Dennis (1936); on fascism as revolutionary, see Lincoln Steffens (1931); on fascism as re-establishing conservative rule, see William Y. Elliott (1938); on connections with the radical left, see George Sokolsky (1934); on fascism and mass spectacle, see Charles Beard (1939, 580); on fascism as civic religion, see Waldo Frank (1940), Percy Winner (1936); on technological barbarism, see Reinhold Niebuhr (1940); on fascism as the reaction of the lower-middle classes, see Reinhold Niebuhr (1937); on fascism as a response to the failure of representation, see Stebelton Nulle (1936), Lilian Symes (1939); as emanating from an intellectual prehistory of anti-democratic thought, see Lewis Mumford (1939, 1940), Hans Rosenhaupt (1937); as a species of irrational romanticism, see Robert Maynard Hutchins (1943).

For the reasons I have been at pains to outline up to this point, I do not think an all-encompassing image of fascism is either feasible or useful for the student of interwar American culture. Nevertheless, my project aims to demonstrate that fascism provided a focalizer for a remarkably broad array of concerns that characterized the United States between the wars.

Questions about the perceived dissolution of community took multiple forms in the United States between the wars, many of which clustered around mass industrial culture and the uncertain future of parliamentary democracy. These concerns gravitated toward the question of fascism with remarkable frequency. In an important article, “Our Guilt in Fascism” (1940), the influential cultural critic Waldo Frank calls fascism the “lethal ersatz of social integration,” describing it as the “disease” that feeds on the failure of modern machine culture to develop integrative spiritual values (603). Despite this adversarial language, however, Frank’s own project for uniting Americans into an organic cohesive community operates through modes of thought that coalesce with the supple segmentarities of fascism. Drawing on his earlier work, *The Rediscovery of America* (1929), Frank argues in the same article for the creation of cultural myths that would bring America back to its lost organic wholeness. As “an esthetic form of deep and organic knowledge,” these myths would overcome the crisis caused by technological rationalization that, in turn, was generating fascism (606). As we have already seen in the work of Mark Antliff and others, this concept of myth and the attendant hopes for a depoliticized organic community also resonate with the multiple appeals emanating from fascism.

We might say that Waldo Frank's thinking processes the question of social fragmentation through the same conceptual machinery that fascism also deploys. This is not to claim that Frank's thinking either was or was not "fascist," but rather that it is assembled from a discursive field of shared segmentarities. If we envision this field as a diagram, we might imagine that there is an intensive spike at the point of the perceived disintegration of community, drawing into it a wide network of related concerns: technological changes, aesthetic wholeness, myth, organicist ideals, and many others. These elastic segmentarities conjoin into large, dense assemblages that attract a broad array of unlikely events, people, and ideas.

We can put pressure on this model by comparing two dissimilar figures who are nevertheless situated within the horizon of this diagram. Waldo Frank's emphasis on aesthetic wholeness traces the conceptual dynamics we find in Ezra Pound's provocative *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* (1935), which sustains that Mussolini belongs to the genealogy of American theorists of democracy because of his capacity to unite the people. Pound characterizes Mussolini as a leader who, like Jefferson, is manysided ("*polumetis*"), a necessary trait for "remagnetizing" a diverse people into an organic whole (89).⁵² Pound refers to this quality of leadership as an aesthetic "will to order," or "*to kalon*," and complains of its absence in the current disorder of American culture (99).⁵³ Although Pound's analysis develops via an economic theory of "usury," thereby

⁵² In their masterful investigation into the concept of *polumetis*, or "cunning," Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant use the image of the net to describe its ability to capture diverse elements and draw them into a functional unity: "If the shifting net is the most perfect image for *mêtis*, the combination of the *circle* and the *bond* also appears in a whole series of actions and objects of an equally technical nature which are both the products and the instruments of the intelligence of cunning" (299, my emphasis). Pound is likely drawing on this image of a network of capture in his description of Mussolini.

⁵³ In Ancient Athenian Greek culture, the term *to kalon* literally meant the abstract concept of "the beautiful," although it also referred to a fitting social and political order.

joining with anti-Semitic discourses, I want to stress his propinquity to Frank's desire for organic cohesive community.⁵⁴ Despite the fact that Frank's spiritualist critique of modern technological society belongs to the altogether different cultural logic of refined New York intellectuals, he and Pound construct resonant concepts for understanding American culture in relation to fascism. We might say that in the topology of their thinking, they trace parallel routes through their desire for organic cohesive community. Again, this is not to say that they share one common element, a kind of passing likeness, but that their entirely divergent conceptualizations crystallize in a manner that reverberates, via the question of fascism, with their desire for organic cohesive community.

Significantly, Waldo Frank's account of fascism develops from his desire for a spiritual rebirth of American culture. Disturbed by the alienating effects of mass culture in the United States, Frank constructs a utopian image of cohesive community that absents the troubling dissention of social debate or the chaos of modern technologies: "Radio, telegraph, 'movie,' like the palavers of diplomacy and trade, are noises emitted by special social appetites or cells: they are no Word: whatever Word remains they render less accessible than ever" (1929, 15). This lost coherence of the "Word" results from the multiple contradictory desires generated by modern American machine culture:

The machine is action, particularized and dissociated into a body. It symbolizes the final break of a universe, wherein the personal will and every object had been theoretically fused within the Will of God, into a multiverse made up of independent wills and of insulate objects (39).

⁵⁴ Walter Benn Michaels, in *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, Pluralism* (1995), draws out the relationship between Waldo Frank's vision of an organic community and the emergence of exclusionist policies based on race in the same period. Michaels convincingly shows the subterranean affinities subsisting between utopian thinking like Frank's and the racial eugenicist and outspoken pro-fascist Lothrop Stoddard. See Lothrop Stoddard, "Realism: The True Challenge of Fascism" (1927).

In Frank's reaction to American materialism and standardized production, he describes a world of disparate "wills" or "appetites" that lack spiritual unity. These apprehensions about the emerging "multiverse" were not peculiar to Frank, as we will see, for they circulated through many of the fantasies, fears and utopian hopes in interwar America. At the same time, Frank's desire to "remagnetize" this "multiverse" into a unitary, depoliticized "Word" is consistent with his interpretation of fascism as a force for overcoding these multiple, cellular "wills" and "appetites."

Frank's image of a unified community was shared by his friend, the enormously influential architectural and design theorist Lewis Mumford, whose work presented one of the most profoundly affective utopian visions of American culture between the wars. Mumford's thinking was drawn into the horizon of the concerns we have been tracing in his *Story of Utopia* (1922), in which he searched for a "usable past" to establish a basis for his ideal organic cohesive community.⁵⁵ The aim of this work was to clear away outmoded utopian fantasies in order to discover the guiding elements for real utopia, that is, the truly unified society that would result from the beautifully planned community. Mumford shared with his friend Frank Lloyd Wright the sensibility that, by drawing people into harmonious and beautiful relationship with one another and their environment, the aesthetic presentation of unity would generate the desired coherence of

⁵⁵ This phrase, a commonplace in interwar American culture, originates in Van Wyck Brooks. His *America's Coming-of-Age* (1915) described the problem of American modernity in terms that profoundly shaped thinking between the wars. In sum, he argued that America straddled two traditions: a "Desiccated culture at one end and stark utility at the other have created a deadlock in the American mind, and all our life drifts chaotically between the two extremes" (14). Given this dangerous chaos, the work of the coming generation would be to find a third way between these extremes that would draw together a fully coherent American community. Waldo Frank, Lewis Mumford, and many others took up this call.

true community.⁵⁶ As with Pound's call for "*to kalon*," Mumford's image of the ideal community is based on an overarching "will to order."

In his maturity, Mumford would translate this drive toward utopia into what the scholar Casey Nelson Blake called "a common language for interpreting and uniting in aesthetic form the divided realms of modern experience" (*Beloved Community* 229). The primary instrument of this cultural renewal was to be effected through the planned community, and, like Frank, Mumford envisioned this ideal community in the absence of social strife. As Blake summarizes, "Mumford viewed liberal politics with suspicion [and] he endorsed William Morris's suggestion in *News from Nowhere* that the best use for Parliament in the socialist future would be as a dung heap." Mumford thus sought the "static portrait of a depoliticized planned community" that overcame strife through technical and social planning (285-6). Blake's excellent study makes explicit the relationship in Mumford's thinking between the "depoliticized" community and the aesthetically organized society that would accomplish this unity.

In his momentous *Technics and Civilization* (1934), Mumford argued that the failure to draw together and humanize this new machine culture would result in the take-over by massive bureaucratic and technical institutions he called the "megamachine." This image of the "megamachine" would appear again in Mumford's anti-fascist jeremiad *Men Must Act* (1939) as the pervasive "automatism and compulsion" of modern daily life in which "the human personality becomes dwarfed." Mumford holds that under this huge impersonal regime, fascist governments are able to "mobilize this sense of

⁵⁶ Wright, in his lectures on *Modern Architecture* (1930) argued that with the new architecture, "Order is coming out of Chaos. The word Organic now has a new meaning, a Spiritual one! Here is hope" (62). Later Wright would explicitly contrast this organicist vision to fascism, arguing that "the box is a fascist symbol. The architecture of democracy and freedom needed something basically better than the box. So I started to destroy the box as a building" (*Future of Architecture* 29).

defeat and direct it to their own ends: an attack on civilization itself” (25). This attack on civilization takes many contradictory forms, resulting in a false image of Mumford’s beloved ideal of a cohesive community:

Terrorism: repression: salutary violence: collective blackmail: mob assemblages: oratorical masturbation: monstrous parades – these are the main weapons whereby fascist dictatorships achieve power and remain in possession of it. [...] After a while, the unanimity, which was at first a bluff and a lie, becomes more or less a fact (21-22).

Mumford interlaces divergent aspects of fascism in his attempt to understand how it succeeds in cohering into a mass movement. In this catalogue, Mumford describes fascism as simultaneously violent and persuasive, theatrical and crudely overt, but nonetheless capable of creating “unanimity.” As with Waldo Frank’s accusation that fascism creates “ersatz community,” Mumford is uncomfortably close to his own project when he acknowledges that the organized presentation of unanimity can generate the “fact” of cohesive community.⁵⁷

Mumford, Pound and Frank follow different trajectories in their desires for organic cohesive community, yet each of their projects resonates with fascism’s capacity to turn the aesthetic simulacra of order and unity into the actual “fact.” What is remarkable is that, as divergent as these assemblages of ideas are, they crystallize into structures with strikingly resonant configurations. We could characterize this by saying that distinct cultural segmentarities are being pulled into the orbit of a powerfully dense concern with the force to attract heterogeneous elements into overcoded assemblages.

⁵⁷ So violent was Mumford’s reaction to fascism that some of his closest friends drew comparisons between his reaction and the fascist regimes he railed against. Malcolm Cowley called him the “Führer of anti-fascism” and his friend the historian Matthew Josephson called Mumford’s anti-fascist writings a “Mein Kampf” (Miller 400).

Through the question of fascism, these distinct, rigidified modes of thinking are united in a dynamic operation of attraction. Mumford's concern with what he calls "the machine" and Frank's elaborations of an ideal spiritual unity bring together entirely divergent segmentarities, and yet these widely different patterns of thought are brought into line by the overarching concern for organic community. Mumford and Frank both use the metaphor of the symphony to depict their image of the harmonious society: Frank wants to "symphonize" the social "chaos" (*Rediscovery of America* 205) while Mumford hopes to bring together humans and machines, or musicians and "instruments", in symphonic "harmony" (*Technics* 434). However, Mumford's use of symphony does not correspond with Frank's, because these seemingly isomorphic images of the harmonious community are constructed differently: the diverse elements that go into the image of the symphony are contained in a force-field of relations that changes whenever a segment joins or leaves. Waldo Frank's desires for the diapason of the "symphonic nation" are constructed through his complete rejection of industrial machine culture, or what he satirizes as the "monotone of industrial 'advance,'" by the "hierophants of the practical tradition." In his extreme characterization of modernity, Frank leaves open no possibility of a reconciliation with machine culture, which he sees as fragmenting and multiplying the "will" and "appetite" of the scattered community (*Story of Utopias* 221).

By contrast, in *Technics and Civilization* Mumford draws his image of the organic cohesive community through the "emergent order" of machine culture that Frank pointedly casts off (*Technics* 7). For Mumford, technics is more than an orientation toward machines: it expresses the "totality of our life-experiences" in the "social milieu"

as it is lived with and through our technical apparatuses (*Technics* 344).⁵⁸ This argument comes out of the conviction that machines are extensions of the human, which is itself an assemblage of technical structures, rather than a spiritual essence as Waldo Frank envisions. The epochs that define our history are thus not organized by spiritual unity, or even by class relations, but by the human-machine complex that Mumford calls the “will-to-order” (*Technics* 3). While the past epoch, or “paleotechnic” period, describes a time-span in which the machine was destructively externalized from the “social milieu,” Mumford hopes that the new epoch, or the “neotechnic” age, will bring a greater “synthesis” of human and machine that will “eliminate social distinctions” (*Technics* 355).⁵⁹ This will be achieved by means of the aestheticization of industrial mass production:

The machines, even when they are not works of art, underlie our art – that is, our organized perceptions and feelings – in the way that Nature underlies them, extending the basis upon which we operate and confirming our own impulse to order. The economic: the objective: the collective: and finally the integration of these principles in a new conception of the organic – these are the marks, already discernable, of our assimilation of the machine not merely as an instrument of practical action but as a valuable mode of life. (*Technics* 356)

Like Pound’s description of the ideal community as “*to kalon*,” Mumford seeks “a new conception of the organic” in the “passage of the machine into art” (330). Clearly, Mumford’s metaphor of the symphony differs radically from Waldo Frank’s, and yet these segmentarities are brought into line as they traverse the desire for organic cohesive

⁵⁸ Mumford redrafted *Technics*, completing the final draft when he was in Germany in 1933. Although he does not explicitly address the Nazi coup in his book, his concerns about the “megamachine” are clearly contextualized by the events he witnessed. See Donald Miller, *Lewis Mumford: A Life* (1989).

⁵⁹ Mumford is beholden to Patrick Geddes for his conception of the “neotechnic.” See Patrick Geddes, *Cities in Evolution* (originally published in 1915).

community; it is this concern for social unanimity that is continuously drawn into the resonant question of fascism.

According to Mumford, the potential for the “synthesis” of human and machine lies in the fact that machines and humans are not fundamentally different. Thus, the apparently external environment of modern industrial culture in fact emerges from what we might call the “micro-technics” of daily relations:

Technics and civilization as a whole are the result of human choices and aptitudes and strivings, deliberate as well as unconscious, often irrational when apparently they are most objective and scientific: but even when they are uncontrollable they are not external. Choice manifests itself in society in small increments and moment-to-moment decisions as well as in loud dramatic struggles; and he who does not see choice in the development of the machine merely betrays his incapacity to observe cumulative effects until they are bunched together so closely that they seem completely external and impersonal. (*Technics* 6)

These “choices” are not so much the directives of human determination as they are the accumulation of complex social interactions along a spectrum of intentionality. Machines materialize from these complex social dynamics as apparently objective facts distinct from the human and natural world, whereas in fact they emerge from our techniques for navigating daily life. This shared micro-technics of social emergence, in the end, is what promises aesthetic reintegration of the machine into the human social landscape, just as the aestheticization of nature generates a more humanized environment.⁶⁰

These micro-technics were especially evident in the communications technologies of radio, film, the ensemble of techniques gathered around mass spectacle, and mass media strategies of advertising. As powerful new modes of group sensory experiences,

⁶⁰ As Leo Marx has noted in *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (1964), the social integration of the machine is a longstanding question in American culture. It is important to note, however, that Mumford’s understanding of technics is not synonymous with technology, but encompasses the array of social techniques that make machine culture, as well as human culture, possible.

these media technics consisted of assemblages of listeners and technical apparatuses that affectively bound groups together.⁶¹ This can be seen in the case of one of the most important media figures of the interwar period, Orson Welles, whose engagement with radio and mass spectacle ambivalently drew on the cohering force of mass communications. As Michael Denning has shown, this ambivalence most often played out around the question of fascism.⁶² Welles defined fascism in multiple contradictory ways, as “power for its own sake,” as “the mob,” and perhaps most intriguingly as “showmanship”: “Showmanship is fundamental to the fascist strategy... and the chief fascist argument is the parade” (Naremore 193). However, as Denning argues, Welles himself also drew on these techniques, for example, in his use of lighting strategies from fascist rallies for his 1937 production of *Julius Caesar*.

Likewise, the showmanship of *The War of the Worlds* broadcast by Welles’ Mercury Theater on the Air seemed to demonstrate the force of radio to create mass phenomena, like what social psychologist Hadley Cantril calls “panic.” In his 1940 study of the panic caused by this broadcast, Cantril warned that the disoriented masses “become highly suggestible to some simple and sovereign formula provided by a demagogue.” And he continues, “The whole tactics of Hitler show the importance he places on providing directed relief to bewildered souls. If they are not already sufficiently bewildered, bewilderment can be manufactured by sufficient propaganda” (*Invasion* 203). In this reading, Hitler uses techniques of communication both to disorient and to take advantage of the disorientation that results from these new mass media. For Cantril,

⁶¹ Stephen Kern, in his extraordinary *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918* (1983), discusses some of these same changes with the development of these new technologies.

⁶² See Michael Denning, “The Politics of Magic: Orson Welles’ Allegories of Anti-Fascism,” in *Orson Welles’s Citizen Kane: A Casebook* (2004).

this is not a contradiction, because this “bewilderment” is not merely confusion caused *by* radio, but develops from a breakdown in social structures (like education and the distribution of wealth) that dynamically affect the way audiences *encounter* radio (*Invasion 205*).⁶³ These social-technical interactions are precisely what Mumford means by “technics.”

After the startling success of his *War of the Worlds* broadcast, Welles’ radio theater was renamed the Campbell Playhouse after their new official sponsor, but the first name, Mercury Theater on the Air, expresses wonderfully the intangible, quicksilver-like aspect of the paradoxical “theater on the air.” The new concept of “broadcasting” coined by the Radio Corporation of America president David Sarnoff described a dynamic very much like Pound’s concept of *polumetis*, able to throw a net over a broad area that functioned to capture discrete points of interest. Radio emitted a signal over a stretch of territory that remained inert unless the listener had the equipment and the technique to tune in. This went hand in hand with an entire set of specialized listening techniques that we still deploy when we listen to events on the radio today. The development of this radio technics and its ambivalent deployment by figures like Orson Welles characterize the promise and the threat of mass media in the interwar period.

As a broad set of strategies for drawing the masses together, fascism emanated the same uncertainties as new mass technics like radio: both fascism and these technics were encountered as modes of capturing and integrating multiple contradictory desires. The explosion of discrete wills in the “multiverse” (Frank), the threat of their capture and rigidification in the “megamachine” (Mumford), the permeating desire for “*to kalon*”

⁶³ See also his work on *The Psychology of Radio* (1941), in which he discusses this phenomenon in terms of “crowd-building” (9).

(Pound), and for the depoliticized coherence of the organic cohesive community, all provided a productive locus of intensive interaction between what Mumford called the “milieu” of technics and the question of fascism. Some of these points are well rehearsed, as when Pound made his infamous radio broadcasts between 1941 and 1943, or when the Italian “fascist of the first hour” General Italo Balbo flew over New York and Chicago with a fleet of twenty-four seaplanes in honor of the 1933 Chicago World’s Fair.⁶⁴ In studies of the cultural articulations of fascism, these events have tended to be seen as available for fascist manipulation. However, whereas descriptions of a monolithic “culture industry” have often corresponded to a totalitarian image of fascism, I am interested in events that express the force of technics to bind the multiple contradictory desires that filled quotidian life. While T.W. Adorno and other members of the Frankfurt School have often seen the expression of utopian promise in the contradictions of aesthetic presentation, it is important to recognize the desire for organic cohesive community as it operated via fascism’s capacity for holding disjunctive elements together. In contradistinction to the model of the culture industry, I want to use Deleuze’s question, “Why did the masses desire fascism?” to guide my exploration of the technics of mass media in interwar America.

These desires for organic cohesive community were transmuted into strategies of cohesion in American popular culture between the wars. Cole Porter’s hit song “You’re the Top” from the immensely popular 1934 musical *Anything Goes* exemplifies the

⁶⁴ Timothy Campbell, in his excellent exploratory work, *Wireless Wring in the Age of Marconi* (2006) provides an in depth study of Pound’s complex engagement with radio technologies. Pound’s broadcasts are part of Campbell’s larger argument about fascism and wireless technology, in which he intriguingly argues that “fascism models the dynamics of the wireless system by creating a feedback loop between sound manipulation and action” (136).

In honor of Balbo’s flight, the Futurist F.T. Marinetti declaimed a “Futurist encomium with compenetration of lyric+noise” via rooftop radio as General Balbo’s planes flew over Rome.

capture of multiple desires in a single event. The lyrics originally ran, “You’re the top! You’re the Great Houdini! You’re the top! You are Mussolini!” in a love ballad that funneled romantic clichés and popular music through the question of fascism.⁶⁵ Mussolini is one of the multiple appeals for identification with the song’s romantic theme, mixed in with discombobulated references to “a Shakespeare sonnet” and “Mickey Mouse,” “Garbo’s salary” and “the time of a Derby winner.” Together these references seem incoherent, yet each one draws on a different cluster of hopes, fears and fantasies that functions to hold a diverse audience together. As John Diggins has shown, Mussolini especially appealed to the American business community as a sign of order and efficiency.⁶⁶ In addition, as an image of fascism Mussolini was also a sign of organic cohesive community and the segmentarities that crystallized around this desire: the failure of democratic parliamentarianism, utopian planned community, the capture of new technologies, the celebration of agrarianism, and many others. In “You’re the Top” these references come together in a gesture that is devoid of political import, but full of appeal.

The sudden death in 1926 of Rudolph Valentino, easily one of the most popular film actors of the decade, occasioned a dispute when a self-identifying group of American fascists tried to provide his coffin with an “honor guard.” The importance of associating the fascist cause with this resolutely anti-fascist film star can be understood in terms of the appeal emanating from Valentino and the fascist bias toward this capacity to fascicle the hopes, fears and fantasies of the masses. The widely viewed 1931 Columbia

⁶⁵ After Italy’s participation in the Spanish Civil War, which was a major turning point in American sentiment toward the regime, Mussolini’s name was worked out of the lyrics and the song went on to have a second life.

⁶⁶ Diggins gives a thoroughgoing account of major figures in business that supported the Italian regime, including Johnson & Johnson, J.P. Morgan, William Randolph Hearst and his manager Frank Knox. In particular, Diggins cites Hearst as declaring, “Mussolini is a man I have always greatly admired, not only because of his astonishing ability, but because of his public service.” (*Mussolini* 48)

Studios film *Mussolini Speaks* expresses this multiplicity of appeals as they drew diverse viewers together. The narrator, the well-known newsreel commentator Lowell Thomas, describes Mussolini as both the modern “new man” and the classic self-made man who “turned himself into a leader,” and organized the masses with his “personal magnetism” (Ricci 133). The March on Rome is depicted as an orderly take-over of an ineffective parliament and is quickly recognized by the United States in Secretary of State Stimson’s visit. Mussolini’s Lateran Accord with the Catholic Church is hailed as an achievement that coordinates religion and the state. The film climaxes with the Duce’s address to the Neapolitan people on the tenth anniversary of the March on Rome. As Steven Ricci summarizes,

As Mussolini reminds the Neapolitan crowd that fascism is the force “building” a new Italy, a series of images display roads, bridges, railways, and hydroelectric plants under construction. When he invokes the regime as the engineer of social welfare, the film cuts away from the site of his speech, revealing images of new apartment buildings, schools, and hospitals. Mussolini mentions the importance of Italian agriculture, and the film couples the mechanized draining of the Pontine marshes with footage of the Duce himself manually harvesting wheat (139).

The images of a “remagnetized” people, the welfare state, mastery over machines, celebration of agriculture, and many other appeals emanate from this montage, each binding with particular hopes, fears and fantasies that bring the crowd together, just as Cole Porter’s song drew the audience together with its multiple references.

Along with the emergence of the technics of radio, mass spectacle, and film, the development of the new advertising industry exerted a powerful influence on the American fascination with organic cohesive community. When the leftist anti-fascist movement consolidated into the Popular Front, the John Reed circles of leftist writers and artists joined a wider-ranging group of intellectuals to form the First International

Writers' Conference in 1935. Kenneth Burke's speech at that event, "Revolutionary Symbolism in America," caused a stir when he suggested that writers take on techniques from advertising, using "myths" to create a cohesive image of "the people."⁶⁷ Using the image of "the people," Burke insists, will more effectively appeal to the middle classes and de-emphasize the political aspects of the proletarian movement. Burke contends that social cooperation is effected around "symbols" like the swastika or the hammer and sickle that cohere the "subtle complex of emotions and attitudes" of the masses (Lentricchia 267). This is even more effectively carried out by advertising and Hollywood, Burke argues, which create "a maximum desire for commodities." In political movements, as in advertising, this is accomplished by "association," through which diverse elements are bound together into a depoliticized image of "unity" that draws on complex desires (Lentricchia 271). As Frank Lentricchia has noted, what disturbed those who heard Burke's speech was his absolute commitment to rhetoric, regardless of the Marxian claims to history and realism that grounded much of the thinking on the left in this period. Lentricchia goes on to argue that this commitment to rhetoric, along with its force to draw in multiple contradictory desires, has constituted one of the most difficult challenges to the left, because it denies that any group has exclusive claims over radical culture apart from its ability wield a convincing rhetoric of revolutionary change. I would add that Burke's speech therefore signals both the threat of fascism as an entity that could accomplish this unity, and its proximity to the appeal of advertising culture.

⁶⁷ For a discussion of Burke's use of the image of "the people," see Warren Susman, "The People's Fair: Cultural Contradictions of a Consumer Society" (Harrison 1980). In *Criticism and Social Change* (1984), Frank Lentricchia gives a thoughtful account of this speech in the context of Burke's overarching theory of rhetoric. Michael Denning also discusses Burke's speech in his exhaustive account of leftist culture in *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (1996).

Burke recapitulates this interest in the efficacy of rhetoric in his essay on “The Rhetoric of Hitler’s ‘Battle’” (1939), in which he analyzes Hitler’s rhetorical appeals in *Mein Kampf*. Burke maintains that Hitler unifies the people by appealing to their “inborn dignity,” thereby drawing on “both religious and humanist patterns of thought” (“Rhetoric” 202). These “devices” multiply and intertwine as Burke continues his analysis, drawing in an ever-widening circle of appeals available to the fascist overcoding machine: the projection of fears onto a scapegoat, “symbolic rebirth,” and even the “commercial use” of rhetoric whereby non-economic desires are attached to economic ends (“Rhetoric” 202-4). At the same time, Burke also insists that “The efficiency of Hitlerism is the efficiency of the one voice, implemented throughout a total organization” (“Rhetoric” 213). Despite his contention that Hitler deploys multiple contradictory rhetorical devices, Burke nonetheless argues that this multiplicity of appeals coalesces into a singular expression, the “one voice” articulated through a “total organization.” While, “Hitler appeals by relying upon a bastardization of fundamentally religious patterns of thought,” and while the Nazi Fuhrer makes this rhetoric more effective by deploying the advertising technique of repetition, these multiple contradictory appeals are “remagnetized” (to use Pound’s phrase) into a unifying voice under fascism (“Rhetoric” 219). Hitler’s “rhetoric” thus expresses what Frank Lentricchia has called a distorted mirror image of the organic cohesive community that Burke proposed in his 1935 speech (Lentricchia 158).

The fascist appeal to the masses explored by Burke in his essay on Hitler expresses the generally felt ambivalence toward the force of advertising technics between the wars. Indeed, we can understand Burke’s term “rhetoric” as this combination of

multiple contradictory appeals and their gravitation toward a singular voice. Like the advertising technics Burke advocated in 1935, this mode of rhetoric engaged the multiple contradictory desires of the masses by developing tropes that expressed cohesive community. In his signal 1939 essay “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” Clement Greenberg famously described these aspects of advertising culture and mass appeal as “kitsch.” As Greenberg argues, the historical rise of mass culture finds its fulfillment in kitsch, because the capitalist mode of standardization required by the masses also necessitates the development of “ersatz culture” (149).

Like Waldo Frank, Greenberg is disturbed by this “ersatz” or “kitsch” quality of mass culture. Conversely, in his forceful rejection of this false and dehumanizing regime, he argues that a “fully matured cultural tradition” pre-existed the rise of mass industrial standardization.⁶⁸ Greenberg thus posits a “genuine culture” that predates the social contradictions of capitalism; avant-gardism is merely the after-image of this lost coherent society in which creation and life were not separated. In this interpretation, therefore, the new phenomenon that needs explaining is the ersatz culture of kitsch, rather than avant-gardism.

Greenberg identifies the “virulence” of kitsch as this rigidification of complex social creativity and relates it to forms of totalitarianism, including fascism: “If kitsch is the official tendency of culture in Germany, Italy and Russia, it is not because their respective governments are controlled by philistines, but because kitsch is the culture of the masses in these countries, as it is everywhere else” (154). As a more thoroughgoing

⁶⁸ Jochen Schulte-Sasse, in his careful and wide-ranging introduction to Peter Burger’s *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1984), argues that Greenberg traces a traditional line of thought about the avant-garde as an aesthetic mode of resistance to the deadening effects of bourgeois culture. In the context of the question of fascism and the desire for organic cohesive community, however, it is also clear that Greenberg saw the avant-garde as the continuation of “genuine” culture.

expression of mass culture, this form of totalitarianism “promotes on a much more grandiose style than in the democracies the illusion that the masses actually rule” (153). As the predominant fact of mass culture, kitsch expresses the social relations in all modern industrial nations, but its intensity is amplified under fascism. For Greenberg, then, the culture of kitsch always tends toward fascism as the predominant mode of capturing and coordinating the desires circulating through the masses. Doubtless Greenberg would understand the examples of mass technics we looked at earlier (such as Cole Porter’s “You’re the Top,” the *Mussolini Speaks* film, or Italo Balbo’s flight to the 1933 Chicago World’s Fair) as expressions of kitsch designed to create the “illusion that the masses actually rule.” However, in grounding his ideal of avant-gardism in the notion of “genuine culture,” Greenberg creates a binary that fascism also drew into its orbit. As we have seen with the work of Emily Braun, Mark Antliff and others, avant-gardism was a fundamental aspect of fascism’s overcoding of multiple contradictory desires.

This question of fascism’s capacity to draw on polymorphous desires has provided one of the recurrent themes in our investigation of the American fascination with fascism. The hopes, fears and fantasies that clustered around the cultural configurations of technics, rhetoric, and kitsch afford us with descriptors for fascism’s pervasive appeal between the wars, and help to express the dynamics of the desire for organic cohesive community in interwar America. These concepts can function as constructive tools for further investigations into the multiple appeals emanating from fascism as it absorbed the utopian drives that circulated through the figures and events we have been exploring. As Greenberg insists, one of the most fundamental elements of this question of fascism was the emergence of mass culture. The social scientist Hadley

Cantril signals this concern in the opening lines of *The Psychology of Social Movements* (1941), observing that, “Within the past 25 years we have seen millions of people swept into mass movements.” In his chapter on Nazism, he comes to the prescient conclusion that “The complete account of the appeal of the Nazi program could, then, only be given if we knew the complete life histories of all the followers” (233). Grounding Cantril’s investigation is the assumption that the creation of mass movements like fascism was predicated on the explosion of desires in a potentially infinite number of directions, making fascism both impossible to define and necessary to understand.

If this multiplication and fragmentation of desire was supposed to emerge from the conditions of modern industrial culture, fascism was just as often described as a new set of techniques for organizing these divergent desires into mass movements. Cantril described fascism as a “pragmatism and opportunism” that was “facilitated by the comparative disintegration of old norms and the disrespect for old mores” (256).⁶⁹ Thus, “to each group the Nazis promised what it desired” in a “pragmatic” response to the disintegration of culture, thereby generating the organic cohesive community that was so often hoped for in the interwar period (267).

According to the influential social scientist William Ogburn, the disintegrating effects of technological and cultural changes are due to what he calls “lag,” or the differential “speeds” at which new notions, habits of life, and mass technics circulate

⁶⁹ As Diggins has noted, American pragmatism was frequently associated with fascism between the wars, both as an accusation and as a positive attribute. For example, the eugenicist Lothrop Stoddard in “Realism: The True Challenge of Fascism” (1927) described fascism in these terms: “James tersely defined pragmatism as: ‘Does it work?’ Now that terse phrase is precisely the acid-test continually employed by Fascist leaders in considering their problems” (579). For further references, see Diggins (*Mussolini* 237 et passim) and his further investigations in *The Promise of Pragmatism: Modernism and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority* (1994).

through the social milieu.⁷⁰ If we recall our earlier model of the diagram of active forces collecting around the desire for organic cohesive community, we are now in a position to elaborate this model with Ogburn's notion of "speeds." As a field of intensive interactions, this diagram of relations is full of "lags" that operate at different speeds creating the possibility for some social configurations, events, etc., and, conversely, blocking off others. The term "lag" expresses these blockages and flows, as when the industrial workplace experiences a fluid speed-up through the Taylorist organization of time, or, conversely, or when groups of workers become recalcitrant in a backlash to this Taylorist speed-up.⁷¹ If we imagine these differential relations unfolding on a plane of contrastive configurations, we can see fascism as a function that "remagnetizes" these blockages and flows in a unitary direction that peaks around concerns like those for organic cohesive community. The cumulative series of intensive interests, or fascinations, that together characterize the question of fascism in interwar America is what I am calling a "plateau."

Ogburn's description of differential speeds encompasses the concerns with cultural change we have been tracking. Waldo Frank's image of a "multiverse" of scattered and multiplied desires, Pound's reference to the force of the "*polumetis*" leader, Mumford's exploration of the emergent socio-machinic relations of "technics," Burke's

⁷⁰ In *Living with Machines* (1933), Ogburn describes differential speeds in the following terms: "Civilization is en route – we do not know just where. But we do know that the different interconnected parts are traveling at unequal rates of speed. The result is that our civilization is out of joint. [...] We need to foresee their social effects. These are basic to any social planning worthy of the name" (14-5).

⁷¹ Diggins has identified these aspects of Taylorism directly with Italian fascism's success and its appeal to the American business community: "the American doctrines of 'Taylorism and 'Fordism' – technological rationality, optimality of output, and economic growthmanship – were the very doctrines Italian Fascists used to smooth over the old tensions of class confrontation and social division and to promote the hegemony of a unified, authoritarian, corporatist state" (*Mussolini* 168).

commitment to the shifting dynamics of rhetoric, the network of intensities captured by radio broadcasting, Greenberg's fear of the plurivalent appeals of kitsch, all accumulate around the desire for organic cohesive community. And, as we have seen again and again, these desires are organized through the question of fascism. The perceived social chaos resulting from these differential speeds incurred the reciprocal call for greater social order as the "Word," "*to kalon*," "neotechnics," or a return to the more genuine culture of the avant-garde, or again the adaptation of the cohesive force of advertising rhetoric. Similarly, Ogburn's conclusion from his observations on "lag" is that these disjunctive elements require greater "social planning."

The social planning response to the phenomenon of lag has been most often identified with the New Deal. As important recent scholarship has shown, this governmental response also had significant affinities with fascism.⁷² We can trace this line of argument in perhaps the most important theorist of the New Deal, Stuart Chase. In his groundbreaking article, "A New Deal for America," Chase presents a "third way" between "red or black dictatorship" (i.e. Communism or fascism) (225). In his book-length elaboration of this article a year later, Chase strikingly echoes fascist rhetoric, claiming that his proposed third way will avoid the extremes of Manchester capitalism and socialist collectivism.⁷³ Instead, "The third road has the advantage of a cultural lag, of maintaining many accustomed habit patterns, and I am inclined to believe that this is a more impressive psychological asset than even the dramatic simplicity of the red and

⁷² See Diane Ghirardo, *Building New Communities: New Deal America and Fascist Italy* (1989) and Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Three New Deals: Reflections on Roosevelt's America, Mussolini's Italy, and Hitler's Germany, 1933-1939* (2006).

⁷³ For a thoroughgoing account of fascism's rhetoric of the "third way," see Ruth Ben-Ghiat's excellent study, "Italian Fascism and the Aesthetics of the 'Third Way'" (1996).

black creeds” (*New Deal* 174). By integrating social traditions into the massive new machine culture, Chase hopes to sweep up the differential elements of “cultural lag” into a totalized vision of a coherent society. Promising both Taylorist efficiency and the celebration of agrarian traditions, New Deal philosophers like Stuart Chase sought to cohere cultural contradictions by bringing differential speeds into isomorphic relation.⁷⁴ In his earlier *Men and Machines* (1929), Chase’s desire for organic cohesive community again resonates with the statist dimensions of fascism when he unapologetically suggests that the best way to achieve this unanimity is through “practical dictatorship” (346).⁷⁵

In *The Good Society* (1937), the prominent political theorist Walter Lippmann takes issue with Stuart Chase’s program of totalized social cohesion, cautioning that

Throughout the world, in the name of progress, men who call themselves communists, socialists, fascists, nationalists, progressives, and even liberals, are unanimous in holding that government with its instruments of coercion must, by commanding the people how they shall live, direct the course of civilization and fix the shape of things to come. They believe in what Mr. Stewart Chase accurately describes as “the overhead planning and control of economic activity” (3).

Searching for an alternative to this “authoritarian collectivism,” Lippmann bases his counter-argument on the premise that “all collectivist systems must and do implicitly assume that a plurality of interests, which actually exists everywhere, is evil and must be overcome” (56). In a section entitled “The Cultural Lag,” he argues that these cultural

⁷⁴ The important New Deal economist Rexford Tugwell, in *The Industrial Discipline and the Governmental Arts* (1933), traces Stuart Chase’s arguments for overcoming cultural lag by proposing a system of social “discipline” that would give shape to “the fluid stuff of social life,” which “cannot be forecast,” because it “flows from an unguessed quantity of possible combinations.” Like Chase, Tugwell hopes to develop a “unilateral” goal for Americans that will “discipline” these multiple contradictory desires into a cohesive community (13).

⁷⁵ Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who has often been associated with fascism both between the wars and since, pledged to “assume unhesitatingly the leadership of this great army of our people, dedicated to a disciplined attack upon our common problems” and, should Congress fail to come to consensus, promised to take on the “broad executive power to wage a war against the emergency, as great as the power that would be given to me if we were in fact invaded by a foreign foe (Roosevelt 267-268). The rhetoric of militarization and discipline to deal with the crisis of democracy emerges from the same concerns that Stuart Chase expresses.

contradictions must be maintained if liberty is to be safeguarded. Deploying the Kantian argument also cited by Lewis Mumford that people are ends in themselves, Lippmann explicitly contrasts his position to both Stuart Chase and, ironically, Mumford in his defense of a spiritual and humanist basis for civil society: “Collectivist regimes are always profoundly irreligious. For religious experience entails the recognition of an inviolable essence in man” (382).

These humanist arguments underscore perhaps the most persistent element in Lippmann’s thinking: that each inviolable individual houses particularities that render universalizing generalizations impossible. In his important book *The Phantom Public* (1927), Lippmann attacks such “monistic theories of society” as irresponsible to more fundamentally democratic principles:⁷⁶

It is only when we are compelled to personify society that we are puzzled as to how many separate organic individuals can be united in one homogenous organic individual. This logical underbrush is cleared away if we think of society not as the name of a thing but as the name of all the adjustments between individuals and their things [...] (161)

Lippmann’s thoroughgoing rejection of top-down models of social organization is impressive for its scope and depth of commitment, and yet his turn to what we might characterize as humanist principles of the “organic individual” does not escape the gravitational pull of the question of fascism.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ John Dewey takes up this debate with Lippmann in *The Public and Its Problems*, published the same year (1929). Like Lippmann, Dewey worries that “the machine age has so enormously expanded, multiplied, intensified, and complicated the scope of the indirect consequences, have formed such immense and consolidated unions in action, on an impersonal rather than a community basis, that the resultant public cannot identify and distinguish itself” (126). Nonetheless, Dewey still holds out the prospect that a continuous experimentation in and by the body politic will allow the social community to continually “rediscover” itself.

⁷⁷ It should also be noted that Lippmann approaches Stuart Chase’s arguments in his 1934 Harvard lectures, *The Method of Freedom*, in which he meditates on the “menace of the insecure,” concluding that these lower classes must be integrated into a massive new welfare state in order to prevent social revolution and

Perhaps the most striking dimension of this humanist orientation is what Lippmann characterizes as the separation between “individuals and their things,” and, by implication, the separation between one individual and another. Whereas the figures we have looked at up to this point see social dynamics in a continuum rather than as interactions between separate entities, Lippmann describes a sense of separation between community and individual, between human soul and machine. Lippmann is by no means alone in his rejection of the massive social planning proposed by figures like Stuart Chase or Lewis Mumford. As the inventor and champion of “new humanism,” Irving Babbitt likewise describes the “substitution of standardization for standards.”⁷⁸ “The type of efficiency that our master commercialists pursue,” he laments, “requires that a multitude of men should be deprived of their specifically human attributes, and become mere cogs in some vast machine” (255). This standardization “undermines the moral responsibility of the individual,” leading to the need for “social justice,” which “means in practice class justice, class justice means class war and class war, if we are to go by all the experience of the past and present, means hell” (308). Instead of class war, Babbitt hopes for a more cohesive society built around universal standards that take the Golden Mean as a rule. This would require accepting cultural tradition as a source of authority for organizing society, rather than the industrially organized state. Thus Babbitt emphasizes discipline and education instead of industrial management and statist organization.⁷⁹ The chaos of

“to fortify the regime of liberty upon a foundation of private property” (103). If this fails, he warns, these lower classes will join with the plutocracy to become a fascist movement (96).

⁷⁸ While Lippmann’s thinking diverges substantially from New Humanism, it is also worth noting that he studied under Babbitt at Harvard.

⁷⁹ For a summary of Babbitt’s pedagogical theory of humanism, see Thomas R. Nevin, *Irving Babbitt* (1984).

modernity makes finding the Golden Mean that will balance the opposing extremes of “human nature” less and less likely, however, and Babbitt concludes his *Democracy and Leadership* (1924) lectures with the warning, “we may esteem ourselves fortunate if we get the American equivalent of a Mussolini; he may be needed to save us from the American equivalent of Lenin” (311-12).

Babbitt’s arguments would later find an echo in the President of the University of Chicago, Robert Maynard Hutchins, who puts forward an Aristotelian model of humanism based on the work of his friend and colleague, Mortimer J. Adler. Hutchins frequently spoke against “economic rationalization,” by which he meant “the overhead planning and control of economic activity” that Lippmann criticized in Stuart Chase. “We know now,” Hutchins argues, “that mechanical and technical progress is not identical with civilization. We must conclude, in fact, that our faith that technology will take the place of justice has been naïve” (40). Like Babbitt, this sense of justice comes from shared cultural values that grow out of deep social traditions. In contrast to Chase’s model of rationalization, Hutchins contends that “Civilization is not a standard of living. It is not a way of life. Civilization is the deliberate pursuit of a common ideal. Education is the deliberate attempt to form human character in terms of an ideal” (103).⁸⁰ Conversely, Chase’s commitment to centralized statist organization leads to “the doctrine that the state is all, that men are nothing but members of it, and that they achieve their ultimate fulfillment, not through freedom from the state, but through complete surrender to it.” And Hutchins concludes that this mode of social organization “is fascism” (88). Like Lippmann, Hutchins champions the rational capacity of the individual, and sees

⁸⁰ Charles and Mary Beard, in their magisterial *America in Midpassage* (1939), echo Hutchins’ argument here, as they maintain that American democracy is mainly distinguished from fascism by its “humanistic” aspects (949).

people as fundamentally separate from the state. Hutchins and Babbitt both value authority rooted in tradition, but they deploy these values differently in their assessment of fascism: for Babbitt fascism is a source of authority and stability that he identifies with humanism, while Hutchins sees fascist authority only in statist terms. Nonetheless, both Hutchins and Lippmann express the same hopes for a cohesive community guided by common ethical principles that Babbitt found in fascism. These hopes resonated throughout the debates on humanism in interwar America as they were funneled through the question of fascism.

The avowedly pro-fascist publisher of the *American Review*, Seward Collins, took Babbitt as his mentor (after Babbitt's death, it should be noted), dubbing his version of new humanism "new agrarianism." According to the influential leftist editor V.F. Calverton, Collins argues that new agrarianism was a movement based on "the international fascist appeal to the farmers to fight the industrialists and financiers in an attempt to replace the power of Wall Street by that of Main Street" (*Years of Protest* 264).⁸¹ While Collins was not a very noteworthy figure in these debates, what is perhaps more significant is that he was able to gather around him some of the most important thinkers of the interwar period, including the humanist Paul Elmer More (commonly recognized as carrying on Babbitt's project), the Southern Agrarians (especially Stark Young and Alan Tate), the English Distributists G.K. Chesterton and Hillaire Belloc, and the Neo-Thomists Christopher Dawson and Father D'Arcy (Diggins, *Mussolini* 211).

The Agrarians had an uneasy relationship with Collins, but their reaction to the changing social and technological landscape shared the values of agrarianism and

⁸¹ In his reference to "Main Street," Collins is misusing the phrase from Sinclair Lewis' popular 1920 novel of the same name, which critically depicts the foibles of small town life rather than touting the virtues of social traditions.

humanism that Collins championed. Like Babbitt's "new humanism," the "new agrarianism," also sought to establish universal values based on an organic notion of cultural traditions.⁸² Writing for the *New Republic* in 1931, the Southern Agrarian Stark Young set forth a series of "Notes on Fascism" that extolled the timeless unity of the soil-bound Italian community, contrasting it to Americans, who are "swept every little while by some fresh fad and rushing into some new scheme of life or social habit, are volatility itself." In this rush, "the strict family scheme is lost in a flutter of theories about love, individual rights, youth, divorce, freedom". Conversely, in Italy "The wind of time and change and systems plays over the surface like the waves in a field of wheat; Italians are affable, entertained with ideas, lighted with the passions of theory and theses; but their roots run deep into an ancient earth" (287). This ideal of the soil-bound community was strongly felt amongst the Southern Agrarians, grounding their reaction to radical shifts like the emergence of youth culture in supposedly timeless agrarian traditions.

It is important to recognize that the Agrarians Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren, and Stark Young were not lone conservative voices or fringe figures, but at the center of the cultural debates of the period. As Paul Conkin points out, Stark Young was "arguably the most prominent drama critic in America" when he wrote these articles on fascism (69). Young and the other Agrarians frequently associated with T.S. Eliot, Lewis Mumford, and other prominent figures in seminars on humanism and agrarian ideals.⁸³

⁸² In "Criticism and the academy," Wallace Martin argues that "The southern Agrarians inherited the conservative mantle of the humanists," and this can be seen in their engagement with the *American Review* (Litz 294).

⁸³ The interwar period saw several important seminars on humanism and the agrarian question. See for example, *Humanism and America: Essays on the Outlook of Modern Civilization* (1930); *The Critique of Humanism: A Symposium* (1930). One 1931 conference at the University of Virginia brought together the

Despite their importance in American culture, however, the Agrarians did not travel in the same circles as the leftist muckraker Ida Tarbell.⁸⁴ Nonetheless, Tarbell evinces the same nostalgia for timeless, soil-bound values in a series of articles for *McCall's* during her visit to Italy in 1926 (and republished in the late 1930s), in which she expresses admiration for the fascist social experiment. Praising the organic cohesiveness of the Italian people under fascism, she reflects,

It was hard to realize when I looked on them that six years earlier the same people had been as badly out of step as they were perfectly in step at the present moment, that instead of rhythmic labor, there was a clash of disorder and revolt. Men and women refused not only to work themselves, but to let other people work. Grain died in the fields, threshing machines were destroyed, factories were seized, shops were looted, railway trains ran as suited the crew. Sunday was a day, not of rest, amusement, prayer, but of war; fetes were dangerous, liable to be broken up by raids. Instead of the steady balance, orderly action, so conspicuous today, were the disorganization, anger, violence of a people unprotected in its normal life: a people become the prey of a dozen clashing political parties and not knowing where to look for a Moses to lead it out of their Egypt. (381)

In this passage, Tarbell metaphorizes Mussolini as the Moses who will lead the Italian people into an idyllic, depoliticized agrarian life, while the chaos of modern mass political culture is figured as slavery to Egypt. The contradictions of Tarbell's metaphor express the multiplicity of desires inhabiting her thinking on agrarianism and modern industrial culture as they are routed through the question of fascism.⁸⁵ Like the Southern

Southern Agrarians, Lewis Mumford, and Roosevelt as he made his bid to reach the Southern vote (Edward Spann 128).

⁸⁴ Tarbell is perhaps best known for exposing the Ludlow mine massacres, in which paramilitary forces employed by the mine strafed an encampment of striking miners, killing many of the strikers, as well as women and children. Tarbell's investigation of the incident connected the mine to the Rockefeller family. Her articles were widely read.

⁸⁵ A figure with similar cache on the left, Lincoln Steffens, in his 1931 *Autobiography*, writes, "Mussolini was challenging axioms, which brain-bound me, which spiked Europe to the past. As bold as Einstein, Mussolini, the willful man of action, saw by looking – at Russia, for example – that the people there in power were distracted by conflicting counsel and helpless. They wanted to follow, not to lead; to be governed, not to govern themselves" (816). For Steffens, Mussolini, created order out of the political chaos

Agrarian Stark Young, Tarbell imagines agrarian society as bringing the people “in step,” counteracting the alienating and dangerous effects of modernity.

Another important figure on the left, the author John Steinbeck expresses an agrarian idealism that sustains many of the humanist principles of Babbitt and the Southern Agrarians. Steinbeck insists on the inherent nobility of the people, and develops a nativist rhetoric that communicates a deep nostalgia for organic cohesive community. Much of Steinbeck’s affective prose can be read as a dirge for the loss of these traditional values with the rise of the new industrial-financial regime that Seward Collins generalized as “Wall Street.” Like the other humanist rejections of industrial mass culture we have been investigating, Steinbeck’s considerations of agrarianism are drawn into the question of fascism.

Steinbeck provides a strong example of this agrarianism in his best-selling novel *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), which recounts the adventures of the Joad family as they struggle to adequate their values of hard-work and decent simplicity with the inhuman practices of the fascistic fruit cartels. The only explicit reference to fascism comes from the casual mention of a newsreel of marching jackboots. The force of this reference redounds throughout the whole of the novel, however, as the migrant farmers coming to California face a kind of capitalist gangsterism that is increasingly associated with fascism in the popular imaginary during this period.⁸⁶ The latency of the analogy is

of capitalism and socialism by deploying a new, scientific species of relativistic politics. As for Tarbell, the emphasis for Steffens is on the end of conflict and the establishment of a cohesive society.

⁸⁶ Steinbeck’s novel *In Dubious Battle* (1936) portrayed a similarly fascistic aggression by capitalist cartels; this work was based on first-hand observations as a reporter in California during the fruit picking strikes of the 1930s (see *Years of Protest*, 1967). He also depicted fascism in terms of military control in *The Moon is Down* (1942), and as the murderous ideology of survival of the fittest in his “original screen story” for *Lifeboat* (1944). It should be noted that he turned down his Oscar for his contribution, because he felt that the depiction of the Nazi captain Willi was too one-sided.

powerful because it subtends the novel's entire argument for social justice while at the same time articulating a pervasive anxiety that individual freedoms were on the wane. For Steinbeck, tropes of fascism like these images of gangsterism become a mode of expressing concerns about the anti-democratic potential of "Wall Street" and its intimate connections to paramilitarism through financial cartels. In contrast, Steinbeck defended the traditional agrarian values that were part of the humanist rejection of these forms of aggressive capitalism. However, as we have seen in the writings of Stark Young, Ida Tarbell and others, fascism specifically drew on these images of agrarian simplicity and the soil-bound community in its appeal to other agrarian movements in the interwar period.

Whether the humanist and agrarian responses we have been looking at are identified with the political "right" or "left," they each trace lines through the question of fascism as it emanated multiple, contradictory appeals. Unlike the Americans who were concerned to describe the effects of what Ogburn called differential "speeds," humanist responses like Steinbeck's entailed a rejection of these cultural changes in favor of timeless values that sustained a separation between the human and the machine, the individual and the collective. Nonetheless, as we have seen, this Manichean vision was available to the fascist rhetoric as it remagnetized these desires for organic cohesive community. In *Culture as History* (1984), Warren Susman has convincingly shown that Steinbeck's depiction of the Joad family drew on a rhetoric of "the people" that pervaded American culture between the wars. We can see this in director John Ford's 1940 film adaptation of *The Grapes of Wrath*, which culminates in Ma Joad's speech: "We're the people that live. Can't nobody wipe us out. Can't nobody lick us. We'll go on forever."

We're the people.”⁸⁷ As we saw with Kenneth Burke's 1935 speech, this image of the people was a powerful mechanism of social cohesion, able to fascicle together the many segmentarities through which the desire for organic community circulated.

Conclusions: Closing the Circle

This wide ranging survey began with the difficulty of defining fascism and concluded from this that fascism held divergent forces in compositional relation. I then used this observation to address Deleuze's challenging assertion that the masses “desired” fascism. As a student of American culture, I noted that responding to this assertion offers an effective way of attending to a little-studied area of American interwar culture: the American fascination with fascism. Demonstrating this fascination and exploring its dimensions has consumed the rest of this investigation up to these concluding remarks. At the same time, this project seeks to assemble tools for exploring the intermeshings of desire and fascism in America. Rather than imposing “external” models of thought, I have looked for these tools in the logics that emerge from the overriding concern for organic cohesive community during this period, in notions like the “multiverse,” “technics,” “rhetoric,” “kitsch,” etc. At the other end of the spectrum from these exploratory responses to cultural changes, the “humanist” retrenchment turns to tradition and timeless values. Such values, however, include individualism and soil-bound nativism, drawing these figures into a field of concerns that were persistently captured by fascism.

⁸⁷ Jane Darwell, who played Ma Joad, won an Academy Award for her role (Harrison 18).

Each of the following chapters will be dealing with some of these interlacing segmentarities we have been tracing. The first chapter, on the 1939 New York World's Fair, will bring together technics and the rhetoric of "the people," and will seek to demonstrate the force of kitsch to capture the multiple contradictory desires of the masses. The second chapter will focus on two important seminars in 1930 dealing with the question of humanism, which brought together some of the most important thinkers of the day: Lewis Mumford, T.S. Eliot, Allen Tate, and others. These speakers grapple with the dehumanizing effects of social and industrial degradation that constitute the inverted image of the desire for organic cohesive community. The third chapter, on radio, will focus on the broadcast of the two matches between the African-American boxer, Joe Louis, and the darling of the Nazi regime, Max Schmeling, as a means of addressing the process of capturing a heterogeneous audience. The fourth chapter shifts focus to interwar American literature, looking at several authors' exploration of the question of fascism, with a special focus on John Dos Passos. In his aim to encompass the experience of 1930s America, Dos Passos' inventive style shuttles between the "multiverse" of disintegrating social relations and the force of aesthetic representation to cohere, or "remagnetize," the fragmented *socius*. The fifth chapter will look at the Southern Agrarians in an investigation of "new agrarianism" and its role in responding to statist collectivism. I conclude that the myths of soil-bound nativism that the Agrarians deploy to oppose these socio-technical developments would later become a fundamental aspect of their metamorphosis into the New Critics. The sixth and final chapter will deal with William Faulkner's *Snopes Trilogy* as it explores the emergence of commodity capitalism in the South. In conjunction with this new culture of advertising, I will argue that

Faulkner's extraordinarily multivalent prose expresses the differential speeds of a changing cultural milieu.

Whether oriented toward statist centralization or the individual, technological change or traditional agrarianism, the political "right" or "left," these cultural figures evince a fascination with fascism as it resonates with their concerns, drawing them into a mode of thinking that traces indicative lines through the topology of interwar American culture. As I have illustrated with the question of organic cohesive community, the multiple contradictory desires that circulate through the segmentarities that characterize the United States between the wars are "remagnetized" by the question of fascism, and thereby heliotropically brought into line with its technics of social organization.

To be sure, there are many other potential avenues of investigation into fascism in interwar America, many of which have their own clusters of events and interpretations. I should signal, for example, that I am engaging in a mode of cultural investigation that tends to omit the role of physical violence, although there is a great deal of material to be culled from this dimension of interwar American culture as well.⁸⁸ This aspect of fascism enters the horizon of concerns for organic cohesive community at certain points, as with Steinbeck's many references to fascistic gangsterism, but it peaks at a different point of intensity in the landscape of interwar American culture. In addition, there is a well-trod field of inquiry around anti-fascism and resistance that includes many important American writers.⁸⁹ I have traced my Ariadne's thread through the hopes, fears and

⁸⁸ On the role of the vigilante in American culture between the wars, we might look to American Legion, the portrayal of violence in Dashiell Hammet's *Red Harvest*, and Nathaniel West's *A Cool Million*.

⁸⁹ See for example George Seldes, *Sawdust Caesar* (1935), and Sinclair Lewis, *It Can't Happen Here* (1935), in which Lewis drew on his friend Seldes' work. Johnathan Dahlberg's *Those Who Perish* (1934) is also an important text of anti-fascism. Likewise, Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) and John Dos Passos' *Adventures of a Young Man* (1938) have often been read in this light.

fantasies that clustered around the concern for organic cohesive community because this question brings another world of considerations of fascism into the ambit of cultural investigation. As important as these other areas of study are, the inclusion of these would both add to and completely shift this concern for the organic cohesive community, which I am attempting to bring to the point of conceptual saturation. Regardless of this aim, it is also important to signal that the multiple contradictory appeals emanating from fascism tend to draw lines of association through unexpected and subterranean channels. Thus, there are many important figures within the scope of my project that I have had to leave out, including the theological-political considerations of Reinhold Niebuhr, the social-religious writings of T.S. Eliot, and Thomas Wolfe's unfinished manuscript *You Can't Go Home Again* (1942), and this list can be extended further still.⁹⁰

Rather than creating a summa, which must of necessity extend and defend a particular interpretation to as wide a territory as possible, I see my project as an invitation to other scholars to develop this investigation of the fascination with fascism in interwar American culture. Each extension will also signal a complete shift in the terrain covered

⁹⁰ Niebuhr argues that fascism dangerously appeals to the lower middle classes because it offers a greater degree of social cohesion than secular democratic culture. He describes fascism as "an organ of social cohesion" which uses principles of "primitive solidarity" that give "the barbaric tribe advantages over civilization," since in democratic nations "social complexity always threatens to dissolve the forces of social cohesion" (119). Niebuhr holds instead that a greater reliance on the absolute values of church doctrine would give democratic nations a way of creating greater social cohesiveness and thereby resisting fascism.

In "The Idea of a Christian Society" (originally published 1939), T.S. Eliot advocated that the best way to preserve a cohesive community was to safeguard religion and tradition against industrial modernity, as fascist Italy has done: "A compromise between the theory of the State and the tradition of society exists in Italy, a country which is still mainly agricultural and Catholic. [...] [T]he tendency of unlimited industrialism [on the other hand] is to create bodies of men and women – of all classes – detached from tradition, alienated from religion, and susceptible to mass suggestion: in other words, a mob" (Kermode 287).

In Thomas Wolfe's *You Can't Go Home Again*, the protagonist George Weber goes to the 1936 Berlin Olympics, where he meditates on "the organizing genius of the German people": "One sensed a stupendous concentration of effort, a tremendous drawing together and ordering in the vast collective power of the whole land. And the thing that made it seem ominous was that it so evidently went beyond what the games themselves demanded" (625). Wolfe's incomplete novel is ambivalently critical, at times filled with fascination for the "pageantry" of the Nazis.

and the peaks of intensity explored, but will nonetheless elaborate the plateau that also situates my research. Perhaps the most significant change in mentality this will require is a thoroughgoing inclusion of the question of fascism in our investigations of America between the wars. The question of fascism will thus provide a focal point for the development of new investigative tools, thereby forming one of the methodologies for further studies of interwar American culture.

Chapter 1. Fascist Exhibitionary Culture and the 1939 New York World's Fair

In his influential *Fascist Modernism* (1993), Andrew Hewitt summarizes the difficulty of defining fascism in his argument that it “disorients political analysis in the confusion of left and right, [and] refuses to point the way forward by conflating progress and reaction.” Thus, Hewitt concludes, “[f]ascism was and is a scandal, both historically and theoretically,” because it “introduces the forces of heterogeneity into the political” (68). As we saw in the introduction, the heterogeneity of fascism continues to pose a number of problems for both specialists and laypeople. For Hewitt, the primary “confusion” instigated by fascism is the conflation of the spheres of art and life. Fascism is troubling and scandalous, Hewitt contends, because it brings art and life together in what Walter Benjamin famously described as the aestheticization of the politics.

Focusing on the problem of cultural and political aestheticization outlined by Hewitt, many scholars of fascism have turned their attention to the role of mass spectacle and exhibition in the interwar period. Investigations into Italian exhibitions by Marla Stone, Jeffrey Schnapp, Claudia Lazzaro and others demonstrate fascism’s capacity to generate a depoliticized image of organic collectivity through an overlapping, heterogeneous network of spectacles and events. Most importantly, their work shows that between the wars fascism provided an effective set of techniques for drawing the masses into multivalent exhibitionary spaces. These complex spaces were successful, I would argue, because they mirrored the multiple, contradictory desires circulating through the

new mass culture of technological modernity. As Ruth Ben-Ghiat writes in *Fascist Modernities* (2001), “fascism expressed tensions within modernity between the push toward progress and the fear of degeneration, the demand for emancipation and the impulse to preserve order, the frisson of impermanence and the desire for stable identities” (8). In the exhibitionary culture that characterized fascist Italy, these “tensions” were turned into heterogeneous appeals that found micro-points of affinity with the diverse hopes, fears and fantasies welling up from the dangerous and fickle crowds.

Exhibition provided one of the primary loci for organizing the swarms of desire emanating from these crowds, because it created a free-floating yet charged atmosphere in which a participant could actively engage at any moment. From the re-enactment of Renaissance festivals in small towns to intricate nation-wide celebrations, fascist Italy explored the tactical parameters of the aestheticization of culture.⁹¹ Incorporating technologies like radio and film into a rich affective environment, fascism “allowed those who did not openly identify themselves as fascists to participate in the public initiatives of the regime” (Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities* 9). In superseding the musty museum culture of the nineteenth century, exhibition became a “site of volatile memory,” Jeffrey Schnapp argues, “an agitational instantiation of counter-memory, a museum in motion in which the life-sapping and grave-digging effects of historicism could be shaken off in the service of redemptive myths” (“Flash Memories” 224). As an important source of these redemptive myths, the irrational appeals of exhibitionary culture accreted into

⁹¹ For a discussion of these spectacles, see Victoria De Grazia’s foundational work, *The Culture of Consent: Mass organization of leisure in fascist Italy* (1981), as well as the more recent, and more specialized work of D. Medina Lasansky in *The Renaissance Perfected: Architecture, Spectacle, and Tourism in Fascist Italy* (2004).

assemblages that were both larger and smaller than the traditional boundaries of the rational citizen, generating new collectivities by gathering the traces of partially articulated impulses flowing through the masses.

These strategies were dramatically effective at creating the sense that participants in fascist culture comprised an organic, cohesive community in which political differences were superseded by a more genuine and immediate collectivity. Underpinning fascism's continuous series of exhibitions is what Schnapp calls "the principle of excess" which is "exemplified by the move from mere consent to participatory enthusiasm" ("Epic Demonstrations" 19).⁹² The heterogeneity of fascism identified by Hewitt is fully realized in this "participatory enthusiasm," whereby members of the crowd are brought into an ideal community in which diverse desires are realized without the tensions of political differences. If, as Marla Stone argues, "[f]ascist-sponsored exhibitions merged the core components of official culture – the arts, film, radio, tourism, entertainment, propaganda," they did so by realizing the intensive particularity of participants' desires as they circulated through these exhibitionary spaces (*The Patron State* 18). More than a set of Machiavellian strategies unleashed on an unsuspecting and passive populace, these excessive exhibitionary moments constituted the realization of the fascist state in the promise of total collective participation.

In this exhibitionary culture, past, present and future were folded into the fluctuating specificity of desires as they surfaced and re-submerged in the accumulating affects of the participatory crowd. The utopian space of the exhibition manufactured a sense of collapsed time, a now time of arrival that continued indefinitely, drawing

⁹² Schnapp goes on to add that this aestheticization "poses the greatest interpretative and methodological challenge to contemporary studies of fascism and especially of fascism's cultural-political dimensions." (19)

together past and present. Citing the most influential art critic in fascist Italy, Margherita Sarfatti, scholar Claudio Fogu argues that these exhibitionary spaces were “demonstrations” that united revelation and revolution in an ongoing experience of realized collectivity (“To Make History Present” 40). These “demonstrations,” illustrate what Fogu calls the “post-historic imaginary,” in which

Fascism conceived the subject as endowed of a historic imaginary that collapsed agency and representation along the lines of the actualist notion of history belonging to the present. This way, Fascism replaced both the diachronic direction of historical consciousness (past and present) and its image in historical representation (narrative) with the idea that only by making the past “present” one could properly make history. (“Fascismo-Stile and the Posthistorical Imaginary” 73)

In the “post-historical imaginary,” the participant actualizes history in her immediate experiences. This meant that the aesthetic display of organic cohesiveness in the exhibitionary space was also the concrete demonstration of the actual experience of fascist collectivity. As a set of exhibitionary strategies, fascism forcefully showed that the affect generated in aesthetic spectacles resulted in concrete socio-political effects. Far from masking an ideological ploy by a conspiratorial elite, exhibition under fascism can be understood as the co-emergence of the multiple, contradictory desires in mass culture with a new set of technologies and social techniques for realizing a palingenetic sense of community.

To recapitulate, the demonstration of depoliticized collectivity in fascist exhibitionary culture provided four important and integrated responses to the breakdown of traditional democratic forms of rational citizenship: (1) it produced a multiplicity of effects rather than insisting on cultural homogenization; (2) it created a free-floating yet charged atmosphere in which a participant could be actively engage at any moment; (3) it

incorporated technologies into a set of appeals both larger and smaller than the traditional citizen-subject; (4) it developed a sense of collapsed time, a now time in which the particularity of desire was not experienced as a contradiction. The effects of exhibitionary culture have been well documented by the scholars I mention above (and many more), but we have yet to encompass the rich multiplicity of these various “demonstrations.” Indeed, many of these “mostra” or exhibitions have yet to be examined by scholars of fascism. In order to illustrate my summary of fascist exhibitionary techniques, I will look at one of these unexplored exhibitions, the 1939 Mostra di Leonardo da Vinci.

The Mostra di Leonardo da Vinci.

Coordinated on the eve of international war, the Mostra di Leonardo da Vinci expresses the sophisticated harmonization of diverse hopes, fears and fantasies into an apparently classless community without any of the antagonisms that were driving the war preparation. Although the Mostra was a moderately-scaled presentation (attracting tens of thousands of visitors rather than the hundreds of thousands drawn to larger fascist events), it exhibited the most important and wide-ranging collection of Leonardo’s work assembled to date. More importantly, smaller, quotidian, and almost ubiquitous events like the Mostra provided a continuous environment for coordinating the heterogeneous population into a composite image of social cohesiveness. The Mostra is therefore an ideal starting place for exploring the techniques of fascist exhibitionary culture.

As a demonstrative rather than a discursive event, the Mostra appealed to the diverse viewpoints of the spectators. These appeals did not correspond to an either/or logic, but created an inclusive both/and sensibility that folded together the contradictions

so often noted by Andrew Hewitt, Ruth Ben-Ghiat and other scholars of fascism. The Mostra presented the promise of meshing technology and Renaissance history, the particular genius of Leonardo and the claims of Italian superiority, the multi-dimensionality of the participant's experience and the coordination of this experience for the fascist state. In other words, the Mostra illustrates Claudio Fogu's argument that fascism engaged in a "post-historical imaginary" that actualized the visitor's memory and emotions in an ongoing, affectively charged realization of collectivity.

The open floor-plan of Giovanni Muzio's Palace of Art in Milan, where the Mostra took place, allowed participants to wander freely through the collection of drawings, writings, photographic reproductions, full-scale models, and other media derived from Leonardo's work. This gave the impression both that the visitor must find her own way and that a communal experience evidenced itself through this process of diverse lateral movement in a shared field of cultural artifacts. The Mostra created a multiplicitous space that attracted different visitors in different ways. Rather than constraining the spectator into a linear movement, the agency of the visitor became maximally participatory in the coordination of Leonardo's heterogeneous materials according to the specificity of the visitor's interests or whims. There was something for everyone at the Mostra: science, art, history, staid technical engineering and wild flights of fancy, abstract reproductions and empirically testable three-dimensional models.

Despite this heterogeneity and complexity, the Mostra was fully a fascist event, replete with the official rhetorical gestures that we have tended to conflate with historical fascism. Many of the important fascist intellectual and cultural figures in Italy helped in the organization and presentation of the Mostra. Giovanni Gentile, Giuseppe Bottai, Ugo

Ojetti, Gustavo Giovannoni stand out from a very long list of several commissions put together for this exhibition. The official Mostra catalogue introduces the event with language typical of regime pronouncements, outlining the Duce's 1936 decree for the Mostra in order to celebrate "il maggior italiano del passato" (the great Italian of the past) as an index and inspiration for "gli inventori italiani" (modern Italian inventors) to push forward the Italian movement for "autarchia" (13).⁹³

Many of the typical tropes of fascism are also operative in the Mostra, functioning to fashion constellations of heterogeneous materials, technologies and visitors into an apparently interconnected dimension of a larger fascist worldview. The Mostra catalogue, for example, conflates Leonardo's "eroismo" (heroism), "sacrificio" (sacrifice) and his commitment to "servire" (to serve) with the fascist warrior ethos expressed in Mussolini's motto "credere, obbedire, combattere" (believe, obey, fight) (2). Throughout the catalogue, Leonardo is presented as a model of the typical Italian creativity and spirit. He is like the fascist, who marches into the future, "cosciente della sua forza e dei suoi destini" (conscious of his force and of his destiny) (14). This destiny is realized through force, by which the "ademantine" and organized fascist soldiers "conquer" the future. Thus, the militarized rhetoric of the Mostra catalogue coordinates Leonardo's oeuvre with the image of the aggressive, virile fascist soldier idealized by the regime.

⁹³ The "autarchia" movement grew out of League of Nations sanctions following Italy's conquest of Ethiopia. Mussolini's connection between resource independence and Leonardo's engineering devolved from Italy's claims to racial and cultural superiority over its new colonial holding. Coming after the official racial decrees of 1936, the Mostra combined the need for resource-independence with the racialized claims of native Italian genius. Extending Mussolini's logic, the new generation of 'inventori,' following Leonardo, could use their inventiveness to overcome the sanctions imposed from without. And, just as Leonardo's generation saw the conquest of Italy by foreign powers, so now was Italy threatened by the great national powers. Just as Leonardo turned his creative genius to the service of some of the great *condottieri* of the period (most notably Cesare Borgia and Ludovico il Moro), so now should the 'inventori italiani' support their Duce and, by extension, the independence and safety of Italy.

The exhibition offered the visitor a much more multivalent experience than the rhetoric of the catalogue would suggest, however. The official representation of Leonardo is complicated in the Mostra by contradictory, overlapping desiring assemblages that bring the visitor, Leonardo's work, and the exhibitionary presentation together. And yet these contradictions are not accidents or oversights on the part of the regime; rather, they form an integral, necessary part of the presentation that will attract different participants for different reasons. The descriptors that accumulate around Leonardo illustrate this multiplicity, as he is alternately described in the Mostra as a humanist, a technician, a Renaissance scholar, an architect and urban planner, a representative of "italianità" and the expression of the fascist actualist philosophy.⁹⁴ Any combination of these traits would have been available to the visitor, requiring the participant to actively create her experience at the Palace of Art through the different media used to illustrate Leonardo's multiplicity.

In its multiple, contradictory elements, the Mostra di Leonardo da Vinci demonstrates the array of particular appeals that made up daily life under fascism. Events such as the Mostra and other exhibitions, the promotion of internal tourism, celebratory parades, and fairs that commemorated regional history or traditions all had the quality of folding difference and particularity into a sense of organic community through the aestheticization of culture. The affective charge of these experiences was central to the regime's commitment to provoking the enthusiastic participation of its people, and this

⁹⁴ These two terms would have been common currency during the *ventennio*. "Italianità" was a typical by-word of the fascist regime, denoting the un-named, multiple traits that were supposed to make up the essential attributes of the Italian race. The fascist philosopher Giovanni Gentile described the central concept of fascism as "actualism," by which he meant the active process of self-creation. In his essay for the Mostra di Leonardo da Vinci, Gentile argues that Leonardo illustrates this principle. For an elaboration of Gentile's theory of actualism, see *The Origins and Doctrine of Fascism with Selections from Other Writings* (2002).

meant that almost no forms of social representation were unavailable to fascism. The Leonardo Mostra expressed the stylistic hybridity of fascism as it bound together a set of incongruous elements in new social configurations. Because of this loose, flexible framework, the Mostra's visitors could each have a private experience of satisfaction that appealed to her specific desires, and it was this atomistic desiring experience that the participants held in common and which brought them together as a depoliticized community.

The newspaper accounts of the Mostra communicate this same mixture of official rhetoric and diversity of experience. The largest paper in Italy, the *Corriere della Sera*, presents an account that differs importantly from the official rhetoric that we found in the Mostra catalogue, despite the newspaper's being a mouthpiece for the regime.⁹⁵ The unseasonably rainy weather ('quasi autunnale') reported in the *Corriere* did not affect the opening day celebration of the Mostra di Leonardo da Vinci at 3:30, 9 March, 1939 held in the six-year-old Palace of Art. Two of the most important figures in Italy, the Re Imperatore along with Maresciallo Badoglio, opened the ceremonies with speeches and a special reception. The elite group that heard Badoglio's speech included military generals, royalty, and heads of state. In the speech reported by the *Corriere*, Badoglio situated the Mostra in the context of Italy's expanding empire.⁹⁶ In the official rhetoric of

⁹⁵ Since the mid-1920s all newspapers in Italy came under Fascist influence or were shut down. The *Corriere della Sera* was bought out by pro-Fascists and had been a mouthpiece for official propaganda for years by the time of the Mostra. See David Forgacs, *Italian Culture in the Industrial Era 1880-1980* (1990).

⁹⁶ In speaking about the "universality of Italian genius" and the "union with the Albanian territory," Badoglio makes references to recent military conflicts on several Mediterranean islands. In "Il Duca di Bergamo e il Maresciallo Badoglio alla visita inaugurale della rassegna vinciana e di quella delle Invenzioni," *Il Corriere della Sera*, 9 March, 1939.

the reception, the Mostra was thus immediately put into the larger political and social context of the fascist regime's militaristic program.

Badoglio concluded his speech by praising the contemporary "inventori" "chi hanno alimentato la Mostra," "facendo corona ideale al genio del grandissimo predecessore" (the inventors who have nurtured the Mostra, crowning to perfection the genius of their illustrious predecessor).⁹⁷ Leonardo is the predecessor of this new generation of inventors, connected by the common culture of "italianità." Likewise, the official racism expressed in the newly passed laws in 1938 permeates the discourse of this period, and would have unmistakable resonances with Badoglio's comments on the racial heritage of Italian creativity.⁹⁸ Badoglio's official discourse on the Mostra argued that this inheritance was not complex, but simple and homogenous. Strangely, it is this official, top-down rhetoric that has often been confused with fascism, despite the fact that it was patently extraneous to the visitors' experience of the Mostra. Indeed, neither the catalogue, the racial laws, nor the speech by Maresciallo Badoglio expresses the complex experience of the Mostra, or of everyday life under the regime more generally.

While Badoglio's official rhetoric failed to encompass the diversity of desiring appeals in the Mostra, Leonardo's heterogeneous creative projects presented problems for the exhibition's organization, which attempted to render the Renaissance polymath

An even larger political-military event colored the Mostra's opening-night mood, as the German Foreign Minister Von Ribbentrop and Italian representatives signed the "Pact of Steel" in Milan to the same day, binding Italy's fate to Germany's just months before the outbreak of the Second World War.

⁹⁷ "Il Duca di Bergamo e il Marsciallo Badoglio all visita inaugurale della rassegna vinciana e di quella dele Invenzioni," *Il Corriere della Sera*, 9 March, 1939.

⁹⁸ Among other motives, the racial laws were meant to provide a rationale for Italy's increasing ties with its traditional enemy, Germany. As members of the same "Aryan race," the two nations naturally shared the interests and goals endemic to their 'stirpe' (racial stock). Aaron Gillette's *Racial Theories in Fascist Italy* (2002), provides excellent background for the racial policies in fascist Italy.

clearer and more accessible. Articles in the *Corriere* (perhaps unintentionally) expressed these complications in their descriptions of the Mostra. Guido Piovene's May 9th article for the Mostra is typical of both scholarly and popular literature produced on Leonardo in this period in its argument for a "Leonardo integrale": "I disegni hanno la chiarezza delle sue macchine, e insieme portano con sé un sentimento sotterraneo di vita [...]" (The drawings [or designs] have the clarity of his machines, and together carry with them a subterranean feeling of life [...]).⁹⁹ This argument posits a vitalistic metaphysic at the heart of Leonardo's work that makes it coherent and meaningful, even when we cannot decipher the "subterranean" forces uniting his technical and artistic designs. For Piovene, Leonardo's integrity comes from his "italianità," but the lines of connection between this vague national identity and his diverse, sometimes even incoherent oeuvre remain umbral.

In the same edition, opposite Piovene's article, journalist Metron also devotes an article to the Mostra, arguing that 'Leonardo è il precursore della tecnica moderna' (Leonardo is the precursor of modern technical design).¹⁰⁰ Metron defines "tecnica" as "la disciplina o l'insieme di discipline che insegnano a modificare la natura per scopi utili all'uomo" (the discipline or combination of disciplines that teach one how to change nature for the utilitarian purposes of man). Interestingly, Metron's instrumentalist argument comes uncomfortably close to the American cult of efficiency against which

⁹⁹ Guido Piovene, "Uomo che disegna," *Corriere della Sera*, 9 May 1939.

¹⁰⁰ Metron, "Ingegneria leonardiana," *Corriere della Sera*, 9 May 1939. The word "tecnica" is tactically ambiguous, and Metron uses it here to skip over the tensions between technical design, know-how, and technology, all of which can be signified by "tecnica."

many fascists railed in this period.¹⁰¹ As Metron is careful to point out, however, the difference between the typical efficiency-driven technology and Leonardo's work lies in his superior creativity. This maneuver reinstates the complexity of Leonardo's thought, which is so important for keeping his "tecnica" safely outside the domain of Taylorist-Fordist mass production. On the other hand if, as Metron writes, "la tecnica non ha bisogno dell'elemento creativo" (technology has no need of the creative element), it is not clear how Leonardo is the precursor of the modern technician. For both Metron and Piovene, the contradictions between technology and tradition, italianità and personal genius, official rhetoric and personal experience run throughout their accounts of the Mostra.

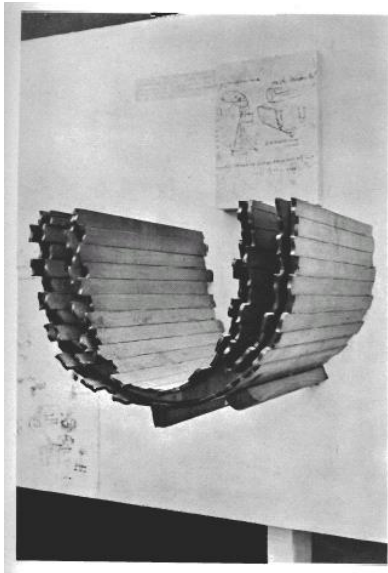


Figure 1: Boat Hull. The model juts out into space, illustrating the isolated photographic excerpt from Leonardo's *Notebooks*; rpt. in *Mostra di Leonardo da Vinci: Catalogo* (Milan: Palazzo dell'Arte, 1939).

Certainly, Metron's anti-technological argument would not have characterized the Mostra as a whole, since these exorcised elements of mass production creep back into aspects of the design and display of the exhibition. Emphasizing modern technology and the functionality of Leonardo's designs, the Mostra's team of engineers and other technicians built models of Leonardo's works specifically to attract visitors who would find aspects of technical design interesting. In the industrial center of Milan, these exhibitionary strategies would have been recognized as tracing lines of affinity

¹⁰¹ See, for example, a 1939 article series published in the *Corriere* called "La colpa é dell'America" (America is to Blame). In these articles the United States is accused of worshipping at the future-oriented alter of "l'Efficienza" (Efficiency).

between the industrialism of the northern Italy and Leonardo's machine drawings.

In preparation for the Mostra, a small army of technicians converted Leonardo's sketches into clear blueprints for working machines by photographing sections of the messy notebooks, further drawing the Renaissance polymath into the culture of mass production and reproducibility that pervades the exhibitionary space. The aim of a clear and utilizable Leonardo is in direct tension with the need to maintain the metaphysical sense of his subterranean complexity rather than seeing him as a precursor to industrial design. What is remarkable about the exhibitionary spaces of fascist culture is that they were able to bring these elements together so cohesively. The Mostra was organized in such a way that those who came for the sake of the original Renaissance drawings could appreciate the careful reproductions without infringing on those who were fascinated with the mechanical aspects of the work; while the committed fascist could revel in the corporativist or industrializing aspects of the technical drawings, the anti-fascist might be drawn to Leonardo's celebrated eccentricity.

To augment the Mostra's multiple affective appeals, the organizers covered many of the exhibition walls with these enlarged, blue-print like photographs of Leonardo's designs, and many (often human-scale) three-dimensional models of the designs were placed in the middle of the rooms, especially in the large central exhibition room on the second floor. The photos and models work in conjunction to reinforce the argument that Leonardo's work is characterized by clarity, accessibility, and practicality, even as they put pressure on Renaissance humanist aspects of Leonardo's image and his cult of genius. In the exhibitionary space, Leonardo stands in for the universal, authentic humanism of the Renaissance, while also pointing forward to the new, industrializing and technology-

oriented renaissance taking place in fascist culture. The rhetoric of presentation in the Mostra is one of both immediacy and realization, culminating a past that promises to extend into the future in blueprint-like reproducible photographs and three-dimensional, functional actualizations of these blueprints.

While Metron's *Corriere* article seems to gloss over these contradictions, Piovene takes the problem of the heterogeneity of the exhibition to the point of crisis. Attempting to provide his readers with a guided tour of the Leonardo Mostra, Piovene's careful narrative quickly breaks down under the multiple appeals of Leonardo's uneven interests and accomplishments. After a systematic introduction describing the first four rooms in which the visitor encounters Renaissance paintings, books from his library, and a portrait of the Renaissance polymath, Piovene begins relating his experience almost at random. He writes, in a tone bordering on frustration, "non è una mostra sistematica, nè si poteva fare; e di ciascuno, piuttosto che il panorama, vuol darsi qualche esempio e saggio" (this is not a systematic exhibition, nor could it be one; it is for whomever would rather experience scattered examples rather than a complete panorama). As he recounts his wanderings through these rooms, Piovene's descriptions increasingly reflect the apparent lack of integration in Leonardo's own work. Abandoning the coherence of the panorama, he suggests the conceptual models of "example" and "essay," both of which fracture the totalized image of Leonardo that the Mostra claims to present to the visitor.

Piovene's experience indicates the multiple, contradictory appeals emanating from the exhibitionary space. Rather than generating a totalizing conception of Leonardo, the Mostra engages with multiple and divergent interests; its coherence comes not from an enforced conception of Leonardo's work or its relation to fascism, I would argue, but

from the intensive experiences held together by the exhibitionary space of the Mostra. Tellingly, Piovene eventually abandons a general description of the Mostra altogether and focuses instead on his own interest in the paintings, describing these with a level of detail out of proportion with the exhibition as a whole.

The elective affinities expressed by visitors like Piovene mirror Leonardo's own shifting attention. A perfect model of the desiring subject, Leonardo was well-known for his extraordinary concentration that nonetheless often shifted before he had finished a project. Part of the reason for selecting sections of his notebooks to photograph and enlarge was that he frequently cluttered the pages with entirely divergent ideas, drawings, and writings. I would argue that visitors to the Mostra most likely found this multivalent and distracted aspect of his personality the most genuinely indexical dimension of his modern subjectivity and his modern designs. Despite the clear and focused pedagogical structure of the Mostra, Leonardo's wandering attention is reduplicated in Piovene's desultory prose. Moreover, the modernist, open interior of the Palace of Art facilitated this movement of desires and bodies, with its multiple staircases and rooms with several exits, as well as half-openings through which the viewer could catch partial glimpses of exhibition materials in other rooms.

Piovene's focus on his own interests in this open

exhibitionary space communicates a personal encounter with the Mostra, an encounter that could easily slip into other registers of meaning and emphasis, depending on the visitor and her mood.

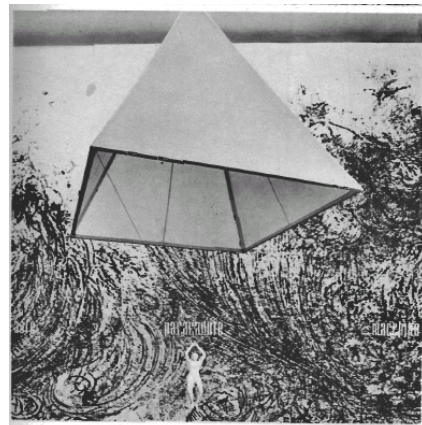


Figure 2: Parachuting Figure; rpt. in *Mostra di Leonardo da Vinci: Catalogo* (Milan: Palazzo dell'Arte, 1939).

Piovene's stochastic motion through the Palace of Art eventually leads to the central room of the second floor, the Salone d'onore, which was the focal point of the Mostra. Here, in the most important room of the exhibition, three-dimensional models of

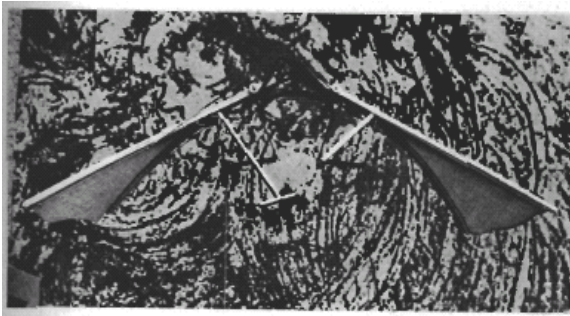


Figure 3: Flying Machine. The winged figure makes its way through the chaos of the Salone d'onore; rpt. in *Mostra di Leonardo da Vinci: Catalogo* (Milan: Palazzo dell'Arte, 1939).

Leonardo's flying machines are suspended in the air, framed against walls that featured a massively enlarged reproduction of his famous sketches of flooding water and tumultuous chaos. At a time when Mussolini was trying to build up fascist air-power, Leonardo's aeronautic designs

were considered the height of his conceptual achievement. The spectacle of the machines winging their way out of the chaos had an allegorical richness that the Mostra designers certainly intended and yet, at the same time, the sprawling background of the room threatens to overwhelm the models. In an intensification of Piovene's random walk through the Mostra, the interplay of chaos and organization in the Salone d'onore provides a rich environment for the engagement of the hopes, fears and fantasies of the tens of thousands of visitors who came to see the exhibition.

In a set of lectures delivered in the United States published in the same year of the Mostra, the well-known art critic Kenneth Clark argued that the 'universal flux' represented in Leonardo's flood drawings expressed a severe breakdown in Leonardo's thinking:

For if everything was continually in movement it could not be controlled by that mathematical system in which Leonardo had placed his faith [...] No wonder he became more and more disheartened by the mass of his

recorded observations, which, not only by their bulk, but by the nature of their evidence, had passed tragically out of his control. (16)

The loss of control represented for Clark by the flood drawings is specifically related to the overwhelming multiplicity of the world Leonardo tried to observe and catalogue. These drawings correspond to the moment at which systematic thinking recognizes its own failure, Clark argued, and as such they represent both the height of creative thought and its most dangerous moment of truth. Nevertheless, for the fascist exhibition organizers, this chaos clearly did not negate the function of the technical designs. The Mostra intriguingly combines what were then considered the images of Leonardo's highest conceptual and observational achievement, his flying machines, with an image of uncertainty and destruction that resists any systematic organization in the visitor's encounter with the Mostra. As an image of the multiple desiring appeals that flowed through the Mostra, the central room combined diverse, contradictory elements into a composite experience that drew the multiplicitous threads of the participants' desires into a shared, depoliticized space. Underlying these new constellations was the fascist promise of cultural rebirth sustained by the experience of realizing a collective past in the intensity of a shared present moment.

Complex events like the Mostra di Leonardo da Vinci were not simply the product of a conspiratorial cabal designed to manipulate the public; in order to fully understand the force and danger of fascism, we must face the demonstrable fact that the masses desired it, and that this desire was realized on the micrological, everyday level, in events like the Leonardo Mostra. The multiple, contradictory appeals emanating from fascism drew on the diverse desires that flowed through crowds of participants as they shifted along the folding surface of public and private, regime and individual, universal

and particular. As an exhibitionary culture, fascism can be characterized as a set of techniques for continuously creating spaces and events that harnessed as many of these desires as possible to create the living experience of social cohesion. In sum, fascism's commitment to galvanize the whole of the population engendered new constellations of affective appeals that filtered through social and personal boundaries and permeated public spaces; the Leonardo Mostra provides a typical example of these strategies.

Mass Culture in Interwar America

Coming the same year as the 1939 New York World's Fair, the Mostra di Leonardo da Vinci provides a point of comparison with the exhibitionary culture of the United States between the wars. Both exhibitions were situated in the uncertain atmosphere of a new mass culture that acted unpredictably. In the United States, the sudden expansion of voting rights to women and the enlargement of the middle class (to give two of the most salient examples) shifted political, economic and social balances uncertainly. Writers and social critics, both mainstream and marginal, noted the perplexing changes to traditional forms of citizenship and rationality effectuated by this new culture of the masses. In his notorious pro-fascist *Black Magic: An Account of Its Beneficial Use in Italy, of Its Perversion in Bavaria, and of Certain Tendencies Which Might Necessitate Its Study in America* (1924), journalist and bestselling author Kenneth Roberts links the breakdown of rational social organization with the rise of the consumerist multitudes:

Fashions in voting are as susceptible to change as any other sort of fashion. It has been unfashionable to vote for altogether too long a time;

and the erratic flock of organized minorities is turning America into a Nut's Paradise. (250)¹⁰²

Equating democratic participation with a key index of modernity, the commercial cycles of the fashion industry, Roberts gives up traditional forms of citizenship as a lost cause. For Roberts and other writers between the wars, the populace was increasingly seen as dangerously “erratic” in its social and political formations. Roberts’ solution is the “black magic” of fascism, which he equates with entrancing mass spectacle such as film (34).¹⁰³

Although they would not have agreed with Roberts’ overtly pro-fascist position, many of the most influential and thoughtful figures of the interwar period shared his concern that the masses were out of control. Between the wars, Americans expressed an unprecedented level of uncertainty about the new mass public, the complex effects of emergent technologies like film and radio, and the unpredictable social and political formations that were crystallizing in this volatile environment. While Robert’s polemics may have seemed odious, his distrust of the political, social and economic power of the new mass culture was widely shared. The turn to “black magic,” or the aestheticization effected by exhibitionary culture can only be understood against this background of the shadowy masses.

As I argued in the introduction, many Americans were concerned that, in Waldo Frank’s language, the new “multiverse” of disparate desires circulating through the

¹⁰² Roberts published this pro-fascist piece in *The Saturday Evening Post*, one of the most widely read periodicals in the nation.

¹⁰³ Describing fascism in overtly spectacular terms, Roberts writes, “for rapid action, drama, excitement, romance, comedy, and the final overthrow of Vice by Virtue, with a deep-dyed villain getting it in the neck every fifteen minutes, and the handsome hero pulling off a hair-raising stunt with equal frequency, the Fascisti movement had all the twelve-reel moving-picture thrillers in the world backed out of the projecting room” (34). In this fantasy, the aesthetics of the fascist spectacle convert violence and the overthrow of democratic government into a simple narrative with broad crowd appeal.

masses would cause the United States to disintegrate into “special appetites” without any organic unity. Frank’s fears about the multiverse had two separate but interrelated dimensions. On the one hand, he was concerned that the emergent mass culture lacked rational structures for coming to consensus and, on the other, he worried that the new technological environment was atomizing popular desires instead of bringing them together. Echoing Clement Greenberg’s polemic that “kitsch is the culture of the masses,” Waldo Frank, Lewis Mumford, and other important figures of the interwar period thought that “ersatz culture” would come to dominate unless they could find cultural myths for uniting “the people” into a depoliticized community. Situating this call for new social myths was the sense that mass culture was dangerously unpredictable, and that traditional forms of rational citizenry were no longer adequate.

The same concerns that animated Kenneth Robert’s diatribes against popular culture also influenced the thinking of mainstream figures on both sides of the political spectrum. The future United States President, Herbert Hoover, writes in his credo, *American Individualism* (1922),

The crowd only feels: it has no mind of its own which can plan. The crowd is credulous, it destroys, it consumes, it hates, and it dreams – but it never builds. [...] Popular desires are no criteria to the real need; they can be determined only by deliberative consideration, by education, by constructive leadership. (23-25)

Although Hoover is able to identify the crowds as a force of change, he has difficulty locating their swarming desires in the new social and technological ecology of interwar America. The masses thus seem like an inscrutable, and therefore unpredictable, cause. In response, Hoover proposes the traditional solutions of rational “leadership” and the

“education” of the citizenry in lieu of grappling with the complex socio-political effects of “popular desires.”

Hoover’s contrast between humanist values and desiring crowds was a frequent refrain in the interwar period. Rather than turn to Kenneth Robert’s “black magic,” which cynically acknowledged the shifting force of the crowd and sought other, more spectacular strategies for harnessing it, Hoover and others continuously returned to the democratic humanist principles of consensus and rationality. For example, the political philosopher Walter Lippmann argues in *A Preface to Morals* (1929) that the most significant problem in technological modernity is the waning of political and social consensus. “In the modern age,” Lippmann maintains,

there have gone into dissolution not only the current orthodoxy, but the social order and the ways of living which supported it. [...] In the modern world it is this very feeling of certainty itself which is dissolving. It is dissolving not merely for an educated minority but for everyone who comes within the orbit of modernity. (19)

The “orbit of modernity” dissolves traditional structures of rational citizenship, unleashing a barrage of incongruous appeals that divide the subject into myriad contradictory desires: “The modern man desires health, he desires money, he desires power, beauty, love, truth, but which he shall desire the most since he cannot pursue them all to their logical conclusions, he no longer has any means of deciding” (111). Arguing that “the real law in the modern state is the multitude of little decisions made daily by millions of men,” Lippmann is concerned that the “orbit of modernity” multiplies desiring possibilities to the point that these “little decisions” are unhinged from the process of rational decision making (274). As a solution, Lippmann proposes a return to what he calls the “foundations of humanism,” by which he means the “harmonious

adjustment between desires and the objects of desire,” but unlike Hoover, he never fully accepts that the crowds will act in their own self-interest (172). Stuck between the modern dissolution of the subject which he so carefully documented and the desperate need to locate new modes of social organization, Lippmann confirmed that, in the modern age, the risk of not controlling the desires of the masses is social chaos, but that the swarming desires of the multitudes are at the same time impossible to curb.¹⁰⁴

Lippmann repeated these arguments in a variety of forms throughout the interwar period, influencing a number of important thinkers and shaping many of the debates about what he called the “phantom public.” In Lippmann’s most famous exchange about the phantom public, he debated with the philosopher John Dewey about the changing shape of mass culture. Although they argue over particular aspects of the new mass culture, Dewey agrees that the “orbit of modernity” had shifted the social and political dynamics of interwar culture. For both writers, the new technological ecology is the most important factor in this shift. Lippmann holds that “as the machine technology makes social relations complex, it dissolves the habits of obedience and dependence; it disintegrates the centralization of power and of leadership” (*A Preface* 274). Likewise, in *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), Dewey argues,

the machine age has so enormously expanded, multiplied, intensified, and complicated the scope of the indirect consequences, has formed such immense and consolidated unions in action, on an impersonal rather than a community basis, that the resultant public cannot identify and distinguish itself. (126)

Technological modernity “intensifies” the effects of mass culture by creating “impersonal” social formations that replaced communities of like-minded individuals.

¹⁰⁴ As historian Loren Baritz summarizes, “Lippmann believed that the ‘20s, for the first time in human history, made authoritative belief impossible for large masses of people” (201).

The resultant loss of a coherent public was one of the most significant experiences of the interwar period.

The ambiguous nature of the newly technologized masses disturbed writers like Hoover, Lippmann, and Dewey, because it shifted political and social effects onto a subterranean, micro-dynamic plane of everyday desires. Rather than being able to group populations according to stable categories of behavior, the social theorists of the interwar period discovered a virtual world of minute desires driving large, shifting social and political formations. For example, the influential New Deal economist Rexford Tugwell, in *The Industrial Discipline and the Governmental Arts* (1933), demonstrates that the emergence of the technologized masses dramatically affects the governmental procedures of control and organization that characterize what Michel Foucault calls “biopower.” Unlike governmental forms in the nineteenth century, in interwar America the coalescence of social movements or the emergence of popular tendencies are hidden in a “multitude of convergent forces,” Tugwell points out:

Indeed we do not know that a group is a group until it comes alive and acts. If a social action happens, we judge that there existed a group to act. It is the only way we have of knowing, since circumstantial association frequently turns out to have been merely an agglomeration of individuals and not something which can be made to act. (16)

Because the co-emergent factors in social formations are too complex and subterranean, it is impossible to know what social and political changes the crowds might effect. Given this situation, Tugwell despairs of organizing the populace through the traditional humanist methods of “fixing in each individual mind a rationale of ends to be tried for” (32). Instead, the multiplicity of desires emerges into “social action” through indirect channels that do not have apparently rational ends. Consequently, Tugwell argues that the

most “promising area for new invention and for real leadership” in the United States is in extending “elements of group cohesion” (32).

The interwar period was largely characterized by this search for strategies that could generate “group cohesion.” As I will argue in the next section, exhibition presented one of the strongest responses to the problem of organizing the new masses. Offering the utopian promise of conflict-free community, exhibitions in the United States brought together technologies and people in an open space that produced a multiplicity of desiring appeals. Like the Italian fascist Mostra, these exhibitionary spaces created a charged atmosphere in which participants could be interpolated at any moment through a dynamic sense of involvement that collapsed time into a vivid realization of depoliticized collectivity. While nineteenth-century structures of biopower made claims on the whole of the person, demanding the regimentation and homogenization of daily life, the aestheticization of culture in the exhibitionary spaces that marked the new social landscape functioned on the micrological, everyday level by drawing desires into new social formations. These strategies promised a solution to the quandary of mass culture, demonstrating that the crowd could be brought together in a depoliticized collectivity.

The 1939 New York World’s Fair

The political and social tensions of the interwar period emerged simultaneously with a vast new exhibitionary culture in the United States. The micro-coordination of desire in events like the 1939 New York World’s Fair was part of a much larger aestheticization of everyday life in the United States between the wars that included other large events like the 1933 Chicago Exhibition, more quotidian experiences in the

increasingly popular spectacles of professional sports, and even the ubiquitous daily encounter with the emergent advertising industry.¹⁰⁵ The overlapping effects of this exhibitionary culture generated a set of strategies for drawing in the masses that coalesced in the extraordinary New York World's Fair.

Among the numerous exhibitionary events held in the United States between the wars, the New York World's Fair was by far the most impressive. Ostensibly a celebration of the 150th anniversary of President Washington's inauguration, and the first international New York fair since 1853, the Fair was the most popular single event in American history, drawing some 44 million people, more than one third of the total population of the United States. Although the Fair was spread over 1,216 acres of idealized public space, its main draws were relatively small interior spaces of private corporate exhibitions. Enveloping spectators in affectively charged micro-environments, these private spaces were an important new development in the emergent strategies of exhibitionary culture. Thus, while the well-governed commons boasted public fountains, allegorical statuary, and nighttime fireworks displays, the interiorized fantasy world of exhibits like General Motors' Futurama immersed the spectator in a theatricalized and highly stimulating dreamscape.

The Lagoon of Nations at the physical center of the New York Fair was the locus of the official national buildings. The Lagoon emphasized public space, deploying well-worn techniques for communicating the pedagogic models of civic virtue and rational citizenship that had characterized world's fairs since the nineteenth century. Nothing

¹⁰⁵ For a contemporary account of the effect of professional sports on interwar culture, see Ring Lardner's essay "Sport and Play" in *Civilization in the United States* (1922). Many other writers were concerned with the loss of play and the rise of spectator sports. Notably, Stuart Chase in his essay "Play" in *Whither Mankind* (1928). For an historical account of the rise of spectator sports, see *The International Politics of Sport in the Twentieth Century* (1999).

conveyed these humanist ideals more thoroughly than the statuary that ornamented these commons. While the statues presented allegorical images such as Labor and Knowledge in an instructive format typical of earlier fairs, stylistically they were indistinguishable from the monumental sculpture of official fascist and communist art. During their visit to the Fair, author Wyndham Lewis and his wife, Gladys, wrote an article describing “these muscular plaster symbols” as having “a sort of *Kraft durch Freude* look about them, as if they were taking part in a muscle-parade at some Nazi rally” (Lewis 286). The Lagoon thus presented a recognizably official style that had more in common with other nations (whatever their ideological differences) than with the strange new exhibitionary spaces in the corporate area.¹⁰⁶

Visitors to the Fair could enter from numerous points, each of which provided its own trajectories and sets of appeals. The freedom of movement in the fairgrounds manifested itself in the participants’ gravitation away from the Lagoon of Nations and toward the corporate area. Pavilions by General Motors, American Telephone and Telegraph, Ford and Westinghouse were vastly more popular than any of the national buildings, a fact that was visible in the flows of crowds toward the northern area where the corporate pavilions were located (Harrison 21). The play of desires in this open field functioned to de-center the governmental ethos of the Lagoon, drawing visitors based on their private fascinations rather than on their sense of nationalism. This magnetized corporate area drew visitors into an intensive world of hopes, fears and fantasies that seemed to make no ideological claims on their person. General Motors’ Futurama, for

¹⁰⁶ Joel Dinerstein makes a similar point, arguing that in the Fair the Russian pavilion used the same ideologically laden style as the public statuary: “The Russian worker was presented within the same conventions of monumental iconography as the fifty-foot tall statue of George Washington just down the Fair’s Constitution Mall” (285).

example, gave participants an aerial view of an immense utopian landscape of clean cities and pleasant farms. Instead of populating this space with people, however, Futurama was filled with dazzling new transportation technologies moving tranquilly along endless arterial highways. From this great height, participants were both removed from the sense of present socio-political upheaval and, at the same time, presented with a microcosm of shiny commodities that fascinated them with a world of multiple appeals. In synaesthetic spaces like Futurama, the participants experienced personalized desire in a three-dimensional environment that differed dramatically from the homogenized, humanist ideals of citizenship allegorized in the state-sponsored Lagoons.¹⁰⁷

This tension between the public commons and the private interior spaces came out of the series of exhibitions that preceded and contextualized the 1939 Fair. The rise of the fascist regimes and the Soviet Union, coupled with the apparent collapse of capitalism, forced the Fair organizers to re-conceptualize their previous role as heralds of continuous industrial progress and the strength of the nation-state model. When organizers began planning the 1939 Fair, they had two important examples to take into account. The most recent was the 1937 Paris World Exposition, which witnessed a fierce competition between the ideological systems of Nazism and Soviet Communism. From the perspective of the New York planners, the infamous face off between the competing Soviet and Nazi pavilions made the current political conflicts all too palpable.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ In his collection of speeches and campaign writings, *Looking Forward* (1933), Franklin D. Roosevelt set the tone for this future-oriented thinking. In fact, he was so impressed by Futurama that he invited its designers to the Whitehouse to discuss the possibility of realizing this utopia in the United States (Nye 218).

¹⁰⁸ In facing buildings, the Nazi and Soviet world-views made all-too concrete the ideological struggles taking place on the world stage. The Paris Expo was widely considered to have suffered because of these tensions, reducing the Fair's art and culture to emblems of a larger ideological fight. As a notable example,

Similarly, the Barcelona pavilion, which housed Picasso's *Guernica*, was too directly engaged in the politics of the Spanish Civil War (*Exit to Tomorrow* 50). Conversely, there was a clear sense in the 1939 New York World's Fair that the overt ideological struggles taking place on the diplomatic stage of the international expositions had to be replaced with a renovated, more cohesive image of community. Although the 1937 Paris World Expo provided important stylistic and organizational models for the New York Fair, the recognizably political tensions of the Paris Expo had to be reconfigured into a harmonious sense of wholeness.

The other major precedent, the 1933 Chicago Exposition, pointed to a different, yet parallel problem involving the conceptualization of history. The Chicago Expo took as its motto "A Century of Progress," claiming rather awkwardly in the midst of severe economic depression to look back over a century of steady industrial and social improvement. Organizers of the New York Fair thought, however, that this emphasis on historical progress had been discredited by the Great Depression, just as the First World War had discredited the narrative of humanist technical-mechanical progress in Europe. The "Century of Progress" had to be reconfigured as an image of the future in which present desires could be realized outside of contemporary conflicts. Instead of emerging out of a past of historical continuity, "The World of Tomorrow" (in the words of the New York Fair's motto), broke with this past, effacing it with a fantasy world that brought a utopian future into immediate, dramatic and experiential realization in the present.

In contrast to the Paris and Chicago expositions, the New York Fair's private and privatizing corporate exhibits took an aggressive stance toward the twin problems of

Leni Riefenstahl masterpiece of fascist propaganda, *The Triumph of the Will*, was first shown at the Nazi pavilion.

ideological public space and the dependence on instrumentalist notions of progress. If the New York Fair's commons used nineteenth-century methods that diffused social energies into a panoramic survey of democratic ideals, the interior world of the privately sponsored diorama circumvented questions of ideology by concentrating the consumer's desire to a powerful new degree. While the public space was built around the promise of civic duty and the Washingtonian ideal of leadership, the corporate buildings promoted the fantasy of pure private enterprise as a magical solution to the social and ideological conflicts spurred by the Great Depression. Both the governmental and the corporate spaces promoted a vision of social cohesiveness, but whereas the commons was organized around the tottering ideals of democratic citizenship, the interiorized microcosm of the private exhibitionary spaces presented an intensive, intimate world of appeals that completely reconfigured the notion of the coherent citizen-subject.

Although corporate exhibits presented participants with an ideal vision of collectivity, they constructed this fascinating world on top of a site laden with the historical evidence of social conflict. The New York World's Fair took place in Flushing Meadows, which was previously known as Corona Dumps, a vast rubbish heap of discarded commodities. Situated in the midst of extravagantly wealthy neighborhoods, Corona Dumps was a placeholder for the poverty generated by the wastefulness of commercial culture in interwar America. F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* describes the area as a "valley of ashes," and it is here, in this wasteland between pockets of decadent wealth, that Daisy hits and kills her husband's lover Myrtle. This accident which is no accident starts the chain of events that leads to Gatsby's murder at the novel's climax. As the meeting point between commodity consumption and the destruction of its

discarded debris, Corona Dumps is thus the nexus where the worlds of class and social conflict are at their densest in the novel. The Fair's land reclamation project spent \$26.7 million to convert this living sign of social dissonance into a spatial configuration of social cohesion in the form of the 1939 fairgrounds: Flushing Meadows (Wurts x).¹⁰⁹

As a former refuse heap, this site of historical contradiction had to be reconfigured into an image of idealized community that converted past history into a utopian future-present. On the one hand, covering over the dump meant burying the remains of the social conflicts generated by commodity culture that F. Scott Fitzgerald memorialized in his novel. Conversely, Flushing Meadows became a paradoxical site of future-memory in which exhibitionary spaces presented a perfected utopia devoid of labor or politics.

Conceptualizing a future without a past meant reconfiguring the Fair participants' relation to the notion of history. Like the literary utopias that inhabited the American cultural imagination since Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888), the 1939 Fair offered the spectacle of an archaeologized present, in which the liquidation of the visitors' historical context became an integral part of their hope for a perfected future. Like the people-less spaces in exhibits such as Futurama, this self-archaeologization created an emotionally intense, present encounter with the future in which visitors imagined the elimination of everything around them except the endless extension of their desiring relations with the commodities on display. Drawing on the model of utopia while at the same time depoliticizing it, the Fair's auto-archaeology involved the dual

¹⁰⁹ The mastermind of this project was Robert Moses, an extraordinarily powerful figure who situated his influence between the public and private sectors. In the interwar period, his parkway road system dramatically changed the landscape of the East Coast and established the pattern for America's turn to the automobile.

perspective of present and future, combining an absolute break with the past with the continuity of the visitor's present desires. This complex strategy functions to evacuate the past, drawing visitors into a history-less world of future-oriented commodities. Tellingly, the self-archeologization of the present for the sake of an ideal future required the negation of the site's accumulated refuse and the history of contradiction it contained.

The conversion of Corona Dumps to Flushing Meadows masks the evidence of social conflict, just as the fantasy world of three-dimensional spaces like Futurama replaces present discord and incongruity with the depoliticized image of an organic, cohesive community of the future. This requires eliminating every link with the historical present with the exception of the commodities that bridge the desiring participant's relationship to the future. In the world of Futurama, all that is left are the cars cruising along an endless set of highways, where communication and transportation technologies stand in for the intercourse of social community. Futurama thus canalizes the desires of its visitors by drawing participants into an intensive experience of the future in the now-time of the exhibition.

This landscape devoid of people and history was represented in many of the Fair's corporate exhibits. The Westinghouse Time Capsule, for example, created a powerful sense of self-archaeologization in its decontextualized presentation of future-oriented commodities. The capsule contained various objects and records that were supposed to be indicative of early 20th century American civilization. The selection of a Mickey Mouse cup and a fountain pen to go with a magnetic tape of speech by Albert Einstein and a copy of *Gone with the Wind*, as well as metal alloys and machine gears, had the effect of drawing together and condensing the history from which these objects had emerged. The

items are connected as objects in a serial collection rather than emerging from the tell-tale context that expressed the socio-political contradictions of these commodities. This self-archaeologization therefore imagines a series of objects outside of the contextual, non-homogenous social relations that produced them. Mickey Mouse, Einstein, industrial machinery and fiction about the Civil War form a new constellation of cultural meaning performed by the Westinghouse Time Capsule that reconfigures the social contradictions of America culture. Visitors to the Fair experienced the distancing effect of the Capsule in the same way that they encountered the aerial perspective of the dioramas: as an ideal future that cleared away social conflict to make room for the multivalent appeals of commodities in the present.

Like the Mostra di Leonardo da Vinci, the Capsule brings together heterogeneous elements in a demonstration of the collapsibility of the past and the future in the intensive experience of the present. Constructed of a special corrosion-resistant copper alloy called “cupalloy,” the capsule was destined to be opened some 5,000 years later, in 6939. As a figure of the future destruction of 1930s American culture, the capsule presented an image of non-continuity with the history from which it was supposed to surface, for it was paradoxically only valuable as a trace of the liquidation of that past culture.

The powerful draw of the Time Capsule, I would argue, came from the fact that the serial objects stowed away for an eternity were experienced immediately in a timeless present of desire. In other words, it was perfectly imaginable to a visitor of the 1939 Fair that the Mickey Mouse cup would have meaning in the distant future because it held meaning for her in the present moment. Each object in this serial collection contained a similar set of meanings that were drawn through the visitors’ desiring interactions with

these objects. What made this web of desires transportable into the future was its absencing of history through the decontextualizing seriality of the collection. The mechanical gears included in the capsule may have been involved in processing the Mickey Mouse cup, but the capsule strips these objects of that history, so that they come out of nowhere and appeal only to specific feelings in the viewers, like childhood memories of their favorite cup, or the fascination with advanced technology glimpsed in the new alloys.

The choice of 5,000 years placed the burgeoning American empire at an imaginary middle point of civilization, between the emergence of human history and the primitive structures of social governance on the one hand and, on the other, an equidistant future that would, to follow the metaphor, see itself as emerging out of the dim moment of social conflict in early 20th century American culture. The assumption was that the people of 6939 would have solved the problems of 1939, and yet the capsule also assumes that these future people would recognize the desiring relationship to the commodities stowed away in the cupalloy. The serial objects of the capsule re-enact this new logic of culture as commodity: the fountain pen, Einstein's speech, the machine parts each express a different axis of desires, but they are brought together in the unifying promise of a utopian future-present. The only continuity that inheres in the capsule's archeology of the present is the interface between the mass-produced object and the subject's desire as they are fantasized from the synoptic perspective of a conflict-free future.

We can see this logic at play in the Fleischman Brothers' promotional cartoon for the New York World's Fair, *All's Fair at the Fair* (1938), which stages a similarly

history-less continuity between commodity objects and desire. In the cartoon, a pair of country bumpkins find their way by horse and buggy to the fair. During their visit, however, they are thoroughly modernized in appearance and body as they are attended on by an infinite and docile workforce of robots and mechanical arms. Indeed, the only constant in their remarkable transformation is their insatiable desire for the cheap, infinite commodities that change the very quality of their existence. The piece ends with the pair zooming off in a roadster, their bodies transformed by speed into a metaphor of continuous yet meaningless change.¹¹⁰

As the Fleischman Brothers' promotional film intimates, the desire for commodities equally permeated rural and urban culture in the United States between the wars. Historian William Leuchtenburg writes, "[f]arm wives, who enviously eyed pictures in the Saturday Evening Post of city women with washing machines, refrigerators, and vacuum cleaners, performed their backbreaking chores like peasant women in a preindustrial age" (cited in Dickstein 26). The hope that these commodities would change American life was coupled with fears that the class and regional conflicts of the Great Depression would make the desiring masses dangerous. In the microcosm of the Fair, these socio-political conflicts are evacuated, replaced with a world in which multiple, contradictory desires do not generate social tensions.

Like the figures in the Fleischman Brothers' cartoon, Westinghouse (in the Time Capsule) and General Motors (in Futurama) imagined that the technological changes wrought in the interim between the present and the future would leave only the nebulous, partially coordinated desires of their increasingly fragmented, depoliticized consumers. As the double entendre of the cartoon's title suggests, the democratic leveling in this

¹¹⁰ To see *All's Fair at the Fair*, go to www.archive.org/details/AllsFairAtTheFair-1938.

ideal technological society (“all’s fair”) was integrally linked to the aesthetic presentation (“all’s fair”) of a world purified of the social tensions of class and region. Strangely, this “fair” world is devoid of people, as the cartoon characters explore eerily vacant fairgrounds. This exhibitionary space has been emptied of everything except the machines and commodities that attend the every desire of the two rural fairgoers. In this vision, mass technology is presented, not as progress, but as the means by which the conflicts emerging out of a complex history of “progress” are overcome.

In events like Futurama and the Time Capsule, and documents like *All’s Fair at the Fair*, the participants are hailed as a set of loosely configured desires. Rather than interpolating subjects in the Althusserian sense, these desiring appeals find micro-affinities with moments of partial preferences or passing inclinations in the fragmented consumer. The co-emergence of this set of strategies in both the United States and fascist Italy promised a world in which organic, cohesive community could be created without engaging in the conflictual process of democratic politics.

This exhibitionary culture functioned to coordinate the fragmentary desires of the masses through an advertising logic that developed contemporaneously with the new modes of exposition and the rise of fascism. As I noted earlier, figures as diverse as Waldo Frank, Herbert Hoover, and John Dewey expressed anxiety about the dangerously unpredictable force of the irrational crowds. In responding to these pervasive apprehensions, the New York Fair was not *sui generis*, but rather was embedded in a larger exhibitionary culture from which it borrowed its strategies. Probably the most important of these techniques for canalizing heterogeneous desires came from the burgeoning advertising industry. In their capture of the diverse hopes, fears and fantasies

that circulated through the masses, the corporate exhibitions in the Fair could be said to function like elaborated versions of the advertising that increasingly permeated everyday life.

The humorist and author Thorne Smith in his essay for the foundational collection of critical responses to technological modernity, *Civilization in the United States* (1922), argues that advertising is “but in its infancy.” Yet even in its early stages at the beginning of the 1920s, advertising

will appeal to our instincts of greed as quickly as to our instincts of home-building. It will make friends with the snob that is in us, as readily as it will avail itself of the companionship of our desire to be generous and well-liked. It will frighten and bulldoze us into all sorts of extravagant purchases with the same singleness of purpose that it will plead with our self-respect in urging us to live cleaner and better lives. It will use good nature or community spirit. It will run through the whole gamut of human emotions, selecting therefrom those best suited to its immediate ends.
(394)

Like so many of the humanist responses we have already noted, Smith hopes that “education” will suffice to bring this “precocious child” under control. Implicit in his discussion of advertising, however, is the sense that this barrage of multiple, contradictory appeals will not be tamed by rationality. If, on the one hand, traditional humanist notions of citizenship were clearly disrupted in the interwar period, social critics were equally doubtful that advertising’s appeal to the contradictory desires of the masses would uphold democratic humanist traditions.

In Thurman Arnold’s insightful document *The Folklore of Capitalism* (1937), the well-known Yale professor of law readily acknowledges the irrationality of the new mass culture, arguing that “[w]hen we attempt to analyze the actual operation of creeds in society, we discover the surprising fact that their content and their logic are the least

important things about them” (21). According to Arnold, this fact of contemporary society created a situation that he refers to as “political realism,” in which politics becomes increasingly inflected by advertising strategies:

Advertising men used slogans rather than descriptions of their products. Politicians soon found the advantages of such techniques over either appeals to pure reason or the grosser forms of vote buying. (41)

In contrast to Thorne Smith’s humanistic response, Arnold contends that, since rational citizenship is permanently on the wane, models based on the multiple, contradictory appeals of advertising ought to be considered as a possible alternative. Like the popular economists Stuart Chase and Ralph Borsodi, however, Arnold expresses significant discomfort about the new role of advertising and cultural spectacle.¹¹¹

As I noted in the introduction, Kenneth Burke’s advice to the 1935 International Writers’ Conference that they adopt advertising strategies was met with similar ambivalence. Arguing that the image of “the people” will more effectively appeal to the middle classes and de-emphasize the political aspects of the proletarian movement, Burke holds that abstracted symbols are the most effective way of organizing an irrational populace. Advertising and Hollywood provide the strongest examples of the strategies that generate the “maximum desire” and therefore should be harnessed for social movements. According to Burke, these movements ought to develop patterns of decontextualized “association” in order to create conflict-free images of “unity” (Lentricchia 271). The most important image of this organic, cohesive unity is “the people.”

¹¹¹ See Stuart Chase, *The Economy of Abundance* (1934) and Ralph Borsodi, *The Distribution Age* (1927).

As historian Warren Susman has pointed out, the interwar period was pervaded by this depoliticizing rhetoric of “the people” (“The People’s Fair” 18). The Work Projects Administration’s Art for the People and The People’s Theater projects, Carl Sandburg’s poem “The People, Yes,” and the populist films of Frank Capra and John Ford all drew on the language that Kenneth Burke linked to advertising strategies. Jane Darwell won an Academy Award for her portrayal of Ma Joad in Ford’s *The Grapes of Wrath*, whose lines “We’re the people that live. Can’t nobody wipe us out. Can’t nobody lick us. We’ll go on forever. We’re the people,” seemed to capture the sentiments and hopes of an epoch. This powerful cultural myth, with its depoliticized sense of vaguely shared concerns and common interests, was important for the Fair, because it was one of the principle factors uniting the disparate appeals of commodity culture. As with the Italian fascist notion of *italianità*, the notion of “the people” served to mythically unite the crowds in an irrational, de-politicized fantasy of total social cohesion that directly appealed to the involvement of each American.

Corporations at the New York Fair demonstrated the cohesiveness of this rhetoric of “the people” and the advertising culture from which it took its strategies. In Westinghouse’s 1939 upscale promotional production, *The Middleton Family at the New York World’s Fair*, an average family from the middle of the country (Indiana) visits a friend, Jim Treadway, working for Westinghouse at the New York Fair.¹¹² These representatives of “the people” are hard working, but concerned about the continuing unemployment and their children’s prospects. As the boy next door, Jim Treadway, has a longstanding flame for the Middleton daughter, the 18 year old Babs, but in this comedy there is an interloper with a suspiciously foreign sounding name, Nicholas Makeroff,

¹¹² To see this film in its entirety, see www.archive.org/details/middleton_family_worlds_fair_1939.

courting Babs with abstract art and harangues on the proletariat. The role of Westinghouse commodities, with Jim as their plain-spoken representative, is to provide a counterpart to Makeroff's emphasis on social discord. The discursive aspect of Jim's arguments with Nicholas are full of statistics (on Jim's part) and political ideology (on Makeroff's), but the strongest arguments come from the affective appeal of this all-American family and their down-home, Ma Joad virtues, like loyalty, sincerity, hard work, and a joy in life.

Westinghouse products like the new electric washing machine reach out to the desires that emerge from these natural values of "the people." After seeing an exhibition in which a fictitious housewife, Mrs. Drudge, frantically competes with the purring washing machine owned by Mrs. Modern, Grandma Middleton exclaims, "she'll look young when she's a hundred!" If electrical appliances reach out to Grandma by promising to preserve her feminine beauty, they appeal to other hopes, dreams and fantasies as well. Later, Grandma exclaims apropos of the modern kitchen, "It's a paradise. No one who hasn't cooked over a wood stove by the light of a kerosene lamp can really appreciate what it all means." Diverse appeals to modernization, health and hygiene, feminism, and a complex regionalism are folded together in the desire for the "paradise" of electrical appliances.

By saving drudgery through electrical commodities, so Jim's argument goes, more jobs are created and "the people" have more time to live out the inherent values modeled in the Middleton family and often verbalized by Grandma. While Jim's newly employed workers fade into statistical facts, Makeroff strangely persists in extolling drudgery, even though as an artist he is an unproductive member of the factory proletariat

he extols. In the end the values of “the people” win out over this rigid, parasitic ideologue, as Babs realizes that the family heirloom Makeroff has given her as a wedding ring is really a costume jewelry ring. Distinguishing the superficial from the genuine, the timeless from the faddish, the Middletons see the expression of their everyday traditions in the desiring appeal of Westinghouse commodities represented by Jim. In the film, these objects reach out on varying levels and in various ways, but always with the result of integrating themselves with the cohesive myth of “the people.” Incongruously, while the Time Capsule projects these values of “the people” into the infinite future, the Fair distributes Makeroff-like trinkets at record numbers to its Middleton visitors, who are encouraged to take mass produced goods for genuine experiences and emotional fulfillment (*Remembering the Future* 138).

Like the Time Capsule, which, as Jim Treadway says, “will still be here when the rest of this place is nothing but dust,” the values of “the people” are presented as timeless even as they are increasingly deracinated from the human social interactions of the past and replaced by conflict-free, smoothly functioning commodities. The most popular areas of the Fair did not accomplish this shift by rational argument to citizens or the invocation of national identity, but rather via overlapping, discrete appeals that parcel the crowd into desiring formations both larger and smaller than the traditional subject. Although Grandma Middleton’s encounters with the Westinghouse appliances on display are multiple and heterogeneous, the advertising logic of the Fair magnetizes these contradictory hopes, fears and fantasies, drawing them into an intensive present experience with mass-produced objects like the washing machine. As with the other exhibitionary spaces we have been examining, the Westinghouse displays generate

microcosms of desiring appeals that circumvent ideological tensions, promising a conflict-free community of “the people.”

Illustrating the powerful appeal of this non-ideological exhibitionary culture, General Motors’ Futurama proved more fascinating to “the people” than any other exhibit at the Fair. No other exhibitionary space came so close to communicating the captivating spectacle of a post-human world of technological production without human politics. In the course of the Fair, one in six Americans was drawn into this enveloping environment that claimed to be a “fair within a fair.” The salient feature of this vast diorama was its minute attention to detail. According to the official Fair *Guidebook*, the diorama had more than 500,000 individually designed houses, more than a million trees, and 50,000 scale-model automobiles (*Remembering the Future* 22). The realism that Futurama’s details imparted to this fantasy world had the force to intensively engage the particular interests of the participants.

The diorama’s realism created the sense that this utopian future was close at hand. To emphasize this feeling, on leaving the diorama participants stepped into a life-size model of the cityscape they had just witnessed from an aerial point of view. This “busy intersection in the city of the future” illustrates the intensification of experience in exhibitionary culture that Claudio Fogu refers to as “demonstration” (*Guidebook* 24). As a revelation of realized utopia, the full scale model at the conclusion of Futurama “demonstrated” the extension of this dreamlike future into the present moment.

Futurama’s concluding full-scale model seemed all the more realistic between the wars because of the serious attention that was given to city planning and urban design at that time. In a period that saw the shift of the majority of the population from rural to

urban milieus for the first time in the United States, design became an increasingly important mode of addressing the problems of democratic citizenship in the new mass culture. Futurama directly references these issues by borrowing design theories like the use of pilasters to separate traffic and living spaces from the architect Le Corbusier, and the concept of the greenbelt from the design theorist Lewis Mumford.¹¹³ In the interwar period, architectural and urban planning conveyed a powerful message that design could provide a more beautiful, just, and harmonious society, without resorting to conflictual politics.

In the United States the promise of design was most fully realized by the authoritative New York Parks Commissioner, Robert Moses, who organized the massive construction of Futurama-like arterial highways in the interwar period. Of all the fantasy worlds at the Fair, Futurama must have seemed startlingly close, as viewers felt the presence of General Motors' vision in the active realization of Robert Moses' new roadways. These influences went both ways, as Robert Moses' 1937 proposal for Flushing Meadows developed into a Futurama-like model in its plans to cover over Corona Dumps (*Remembering the Future* 52). For both General Motors and Robert Moses, the central issue in these design theories was the image of transportation as a solution to societal problems.

Drawing on myths of the American pioneers and the inclusive metaphor of "new horizons," the Futurama narrative developed the image of the road as a stand-in for freedom and progress. The continuous serial motion figured in the apparently endless roadways of Futurama was aesthetically presented as a way of overcoming the sense of

¹¹³ Like many Americans, Italian fascists were also drawn to this promise of better design, and Le Corbusier was even invited to Milan to give a slide show on his utopian "Voisin Plan" in 1927 (Mark Antliff, "La Cité Française" in Affron and Antliff, *Fascist Visions* 137).

deadlock that shrouded the Depression period. As we saw in the Fleischman Brothers' promotional cartoon, this image of serial movement through empty space was a common fantasy in the interwar period. Through this fantasy of serial homogenous time, Futurama presented a harmonious vision of society that brought together a series of contradictory elements: technology without labor, community without communism, and the realization of traditional American values in spaces emptied of human bodies. Like the incongruous promises of technology and tradition united under the multiple, contradictory appeals of fascism, the Fair's exhibitionary spaces constructed a vivid utopian vision of industrialism without its attendant social tensions. As the Futurama narrator intones, "True, each of us may have a different idea of what that future might be, but all the highways [...] lead us onward to better methods of doing things."

In the Fair's concept of the future, time becomes serial and homogenous as one epoch replaces another without transition and without refuse, producing a new harmony that effaces any contradictory history. The Fair therefore requires an active self-archeologization from its visitors as they are drawn into the palingenetic myth of a future that redeems the present. In this future-time, participants imagine space as perpetually empty, without the populations that leave detritus or generate political conflict. As the frontier mentality faded from the horizon of the American cultural imaginary, the fantasy of a new society was generated in the empty space of undesignated utopia.¹¹⁴ Like Hitler's *Lebensraum* and Mussolini's new cities, which were predicated on the fantasy of

¹¹⁴ One of the most important reference points of interwar American culture was Frederick Jackson Turner's 1893 essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" delivered at the Chicago Columbia Exhibition. The World's Fair frequently addresses Turner's argument that American life was on the verge of far-reaching changes signaled with the end of the frontier mentality that had dominated culture and politics in the nineteenth century.

depopulated spaces, Futurama envisioned spaces of apolitical social cohesion based on the absence of previously existing populations.¹¹⁵

The bird's-eye view of dioramas like Futurama communicated a conflict-free synoptic vision of cultural rebirth by evacuating the politics of social relations. Rather than the tensions that marked the landscape of interwar American culture, Futurama drew participants into a future-oriented gaze that reduced social differences while at the same time allowing visitors to explore their desiring responses to these conflict-free commodities. The General Motors 1940 promotional film *To New Horizons*, for example, does not, like the Westinghouse film, personify the timeless values of “the people” in a family like the Middletons; instead, the narrator explicates the connections between the myth of a cohesive American society and the desiring appeals of this future corporate world. Equally hostile to identifiably political ideologies, the General Motors film nonetheless, like almost all the corporate documents produced for the Fair, omits to mention the looming threat of fascism in its exposition of the future, even though a Gallup poll rated the oncoming war as the single greatest concern of the Fair's visitors by the release of the film in 1939 (Susman 22).

In its creative seating system, Futurama demonstrated this depoliticizing ethos by providing a collective experience for its participants that was nonetheless based on their particular hopes, fears and fantasies. After a wait of about two hours, participants seated themselves in comfortable individual chairs with separately synchronized microphones. Trolling along the darkened edges of the future paradise, viewers could participate in the

¹¹⁵ For further discussion Mussolini's new cities and the political uses of empty space, see Diane Ghirardo's compelling study, *Building New Communities: New Deal America and Fascist Italy* (1989). In *Life and Death in the Third Reich* (2008), Peter Fritzsche gives an account of the Nazi fantasy of empty space and the policy of *Lebensraum*.

diverse desiring appeals that reached out to them from the glowing diorama. Although their bodies were regulated and organized in a steady march through utopia, their fascinations could wander to any of the thousands of uniquely detailed objects that populated this inhuman world.

Many critics have mistaken the seriality of Futurama's seating system for the homogenizing simplification of the desires of the masses. In *Swinging the Machine* (2003), for example, Joel Dinerstein explores the importance of the new dance form of swing at the Fair, arguing that the African-Americans performing swing both took on aspects of the machine culture in their dance movements and transformed them in a social critique of the Fair. Dinerstein writes about the visitors to the General Motors pavilion,

the assembly-line products of Futurama were to be new forward-looking Americans, or more precisely, consumers. Citizens had a new civic responsibility: to become attuned to a mass-produced, machine-dictated world and forget whatever superstitious traditions and sentimental attachments they had. (292)

In contrast to this "rational scientific intellect," Dinerstein maintains, the Amusement Area (where the swing dance was demonstrated) housed the darker desires of the fair-going crowds. Conversely, I would argue that the translation from citizen to consumer required the kind of desiring appeals that Dinerstein segregates to the small, poorly attended Amusement Area. Drawing in 25 million visitors, Futurama provided a fantasy environment that found points of micro-affinity with each of its participants. Rather than manufacturing uniform consumers in an "assembly-line," exhibitionary spaces like Futurama demonstrated that the specificity of desire could generate a powerful sense of collectivity.

Robert Rosenblum illustrates this point in his childhood recollections of riding through Futurama: “I’ll never forget, an Amusement Park of the Future that featured a model of a roller coaster even more advanced than the Bobsled [ride at the Fair], made of—was I dreaming?—something like iridescent lucite” (*Remembering the Future* 13). The child Rosenblum’s fascination with lucite, one of the inventions on display at DuPont’s pavilion, unites the advertising rhetoric of “better living through chemistry” with the childish fantasy of wondrous new amusement park rides. Rosenblum’s fantasy of this future amusement park is more multivalent, overlayed with more desiring appeals than the actual Amusement Area at the Fair.¹¹⁶ Like Grandma Middleton’s encounter with the Westinghouse appliances, Rosenblum’s experience expresses the particularity of desire as it was captured in the heterogeneous appeals of Futurama. Besides an amusement park, the diorama also features a quiet monastery, dense forests, a metropolis, verdant rural homesteads, urban parks, all coherently integrated by a sprawling arterial roadway that is never overcrowded. There was something for everyone in this microcosm, but there were no signs of government or labor unions that made up such a significant part of 1930s American culture, because the future-present utopia, or “the great American way” in the words of the avuncular narrator, was organized as a mythical replacement for this kind of divisive political community. Thus, even as Futurama created a private, utopian community, it absented the governmental and ideological elements that suggested any lack of total social cohesion. As cultural historian Robert Nye summarizes, at the Fair, “corporations synthesized total environments” (144).

¹¹⁶ Similarly, in E.L. Doctrow’s fictional *World’s Fair* (1985), Futurama is a “science-fiction adventure rather than a sober-sided glimpse into the future” (cited in *Remembering the Future* 23).

Democricity and the End of the Fair

Like Futurama, the second most popular event at the Fair, Democricity, presented visitors with a diorama that drew them into a vivid experience of depoliticized collectivity. Neither governmental nor private, Democracity was a hybrid of official and private cultures. In the Mostra di Leonardo, we saw that these mixtures could generate multiple, contradictory appeals that brought both committed fascists and non-fascists into a shared experience. Likewise, Democricity appealed to both the governmental sensibility of officially sponsored large-scale projects, and the private desires circulating through the crowds who came to witness the Fair. To reach Democricity, visitors entered a large globe called the Perisphere, which housed a vast, detailed landscape of utopian urban and rural communities at its center.¹¹⁷ From their aerial vantage point, participants experienced a people-less microcosm of minutely detailed objects, organized according to contemporary theories of design such as Lewis Mumford's greenbelt system.¹¹⁸ As

¹¹⁷ Visitors could also mount the other structural emblem of the Fair, the Trylon, in order to get a panoramic view of the fairgrounds. Interestingly, visitors tended to prefer the private fantasy spaces like Futurama and Democricity in the Perisphere over the Eiffel tower style mastery over space provided by an elevated vantage point.

¹¹⁸ Mumford laid out his notion of the green-belt in a film made expressly for the Fair, entitled simply *The City*. Contrasting glum industrial zone tract housing with green and frolicsome Pleasantvilles, the film combined arguments for health and sanitation, ecology, educational formation, and democratic participation in this new vision of small residential communities surrounding large cities and separated from work zones by greenbelts. These design imperatives were a great success at the Fair, capturing the imagination of visitors to the two most popular events, Futurama and Democricity. Nonetheless, in the Fair Mumford's utopian space was converted into a private, theatricalized space in which the desire for a future cohesive society was tied to present commodities. Like the objects in the Time Capsule, design elements like Mumford's green-belt were decontextualized from their humanist motives and fragmentarily incorporated into a vision of the future in the same way that Einstein's speech or the fountain pen were. This atomization was key to the micrological aspect of the desiring appeals that flooded these exhibitions, permitting incongruous elements like Mumford's designs to sit side by side in an apparently coherent presentation. Just as the idealized public space of the Fair is folded into the interiorized representation of

visitors looked on, the walls on either side of the globe projected anonymous marching masses who strode up the sides, disappearing at their meeting point at the apex. To enhance this effect, the recorded sounds of tramping steps and the chanting of the marching masses resounded throughout the structure. While the diorama was, like Futurama, devoid of the masses for whom it was built, these crowds reappeared in Democricity as the technologically reproduced image of an organized and unidirectional force.

At the Fair, synesthetic experiences like Democricity created cultural myths of collectivity in an emotionally enveloping environment. Using the same logic as advertising and events such as Futurama, Democricity generated an immediate, participatory sense of community that answered Waldo Frank's and Lewis Mumford's hopes for the rebirth of culture through powerful new collective myths. As "an esthetic form of deep and organic knowledge," these myths, Frank argues, would reunite the "multiverse" created by technological modernity into an organic, cohesive community. Democricity's vivid presentation of utopia created a revelatory space that drew participants into this promise of cultural rebirth. In generating these myths, Democricity successfully mediated between official and commercial culture, urban and pastoral interests, technological reproduction and humanist organicism, uniting multiple, contradictory appeals into a cohesive experience.

In Democricity's mediation between contradictory cultural impulses in the fabrication of new collective myths, this popular event recapitulates the strategies of the largest and most important of the Italian fascist exhibitions, the 1932 Mostra della

public space in Futurama, the multiplicity and heterogeneity of Mumford's democratic project is captured and reduced to one of the multiple, contradictory appeals to participants' various hopes, fears and fantasies.

Rivoluzione Fascista (Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution). Attracting millions of participants, the Mostra brought together various media and technologies in a sublime, synaesthetic re-evocation of the fascist revolution. Like the New York Fair, this was to be a vitalizing event that rejuvenated participants' sense of cultural unity and future destiny. As Jeffrey Schnapp recounts, "[i]n his charge to the exhibition artists, Mussolini had asked that they forge a *living* monument: less a memorial of the permanent or static sort than a provisional and evanescent rallying point capable of mobilizing the Italian nation as a whole through its immediacy" ("Flash Memories" 232). Presenting visitors with an open format full of diverse appeals, the Mostra displayed massively enlarged photos, artifacts from the March on Rome, and recorded sounds of marching and chanting. Despite this complex, even excessive ensemble, the Mostra does not break down into chaotically disparate elements. As Schnapp argues,

the Mostra erupts with its violent multimedia cacophony, speaking one hundred tongues, slashing and piercing, mixing the disparate with the crude, death with life. This formal, cognitive, and taxonomical violence, intimately associated with Romantic notions of the sublime, produces astonishment and even a "strange pallor" on the viewer's face. But significantly, it does not foreclose the potential for a return to order. ("Epic Demonstrations" 23)

As fascist exhibitionary culture demonstrated throughout the interwar period, these powerful emotional experiences were vital for regrouping the unpredictable masses into a depoliticized collectivity. In Democricity, as in Futurama and the other corporate spaces of the New York Fair, these unifying myths superseded human social and political conflicts with utopian images of a depopulated space in a hybrid technological ecology.

Given the affinities between American and Italian exhibitionary culture between the wars, it is perhaps surprising that the Italian pavilion at the New York Fair met with

such moderate success. But, whereas the Mostra di Leonardo da Vinci and other fascist exhibitions had been able to absorb the visitor in a three-dimensional space with multiple and divergent points of fascination, the Italian Pavilion failed to create this encompassing environment. The building's facade referenced neo-classical monumental design with heavy porticos, a 200 foot waterfall, and a stately statue of Roma seated at the top. This homogenous official style lacked the enveloping fascination of the Leonardo Mostra. The centerpiece of the 1939 pavilion merely consisted of the plans for the upcoming Universal Exhibition of Rome 1942, giving fairgoers the sign of an event rather than its ecstatic actualization in the present. Rather than realizing an affective community by engaging the desires of its visitors, the exhibition merely pointed in a schematic way to another event. Unable to create a complex ecology of desiring appeals, the fascist pavilion became as uninteresting as the other state pavilions.¹¹⁹ At the same time that the Italian Pavilion employed the heavy nationalist generalizations and allegorical strategies characteristic of the aptly named Lagoon of Nations, the corporate exhibitions drew in and fascinated their participants by creating powerfully eidetic experiences in the same way that fascist exhibitions did between the wars.

In 1939, the Leonardo Mostra and exhibitionary events of the New York World's Fair engaged new strategies for creating community out of the masses. In this period of technologized mass culture, the appeal to a coherent, decision-making citizen-subject was increasingly overwhelmed by the swarming desires characteristic of the undisciplined crowd. Correspondently, the governmental institutions that had created the modern nation state through the school, the clinic, and the army were losing their ability to organize a

¹¹⁹ In fact, the main features of the Italian pavilion were a "bottega" where visitors could buy Italian merchandise, and an upscale restaurant modeled on Italian commercial ocean liners. This emphasis on commerce represented a striking shift in the aims of previous fascist exhibitions.

discursively recognizable subject. Often described with aqueous metaphors, the masses seemed to present unpredictable, fluidly morphing epiphenomena because biopolitical categories of demography proved incapable of measuring the complex, fluctuating micro-affinities that accreted into observable effects in the new mass culture. Fascism developed the first society-wide strategies for engaging these undisciplined masses in an intensive, three-dimensional environment that drew the crowds into a participatory collectivity. In developing these strategies for canalizing the heterogeneous desires of the crowd, American interwar exhibitionary culture thus participates in a logic that has been historically located in the political effects understood as fascism.

Chapter 2. Humanism, A Dubious Future

On assignment with the *New Yorker* in 1939, E.B. White, natively cynical and burdened with a head cold, moped onto the New York World's Fair grounds. The record of his visit, "The World of Tomorrow" (1939), depicts a troublingly dehumanized space of "passionless motion," even as White cannot forget about his own sick body (114). Surrounded by the "soft electric assurance of a better life," White goes in search of recognizably human elements in this mechanized image of a "rejuvenated America," finding only "a great deal of electrically transmitted joy, but very little spontaneous joy" (114). The smooth, frictionless space of the Fair is deadening: the vast Futurama is without children or animals, and everywhere recorded noises present "not the sounds themselves but the memory of sounds" (115). Although this mechanical utopia appeals to White's embodied desires in multiple ways, it is missing the organic aspects of social culture that he wants so desperately to find in the world of tomorrow. At the conclusion of his visit he wanders over to the Amazon Show in the amusement area, which bizarrely features a giant metal robot fondling naked women in its rubber arms. For White, the Fair's dehumanized peep show of industrial mass culture culminates in this reconfiguration of his masculine, bodily desire in the clumsy form of a robot in a hygienic community of Amazon women (117).

E.B. White's reflections demonstrate the common fears that some human essence would be lost in this new world of tomorrow. These fears were grounded in the concern

that the Fair's tactics for organizing discrete points of desire into social bodies extending beyond the human would disrupt traditional patterns of social community. As an intensive moment in this development, the Fair effectively bound the hopes, fears and fantasies of the new mass culture to a mechanized utopian vision. White's concern for his masculine desire, or the reworking of the biologically superabundant image of Amazonia into a sterile robot, seemed to prove fears that the re-routing of desire would result in the loss of a recognizably human environment. As White noted, the Fair did not demand rational reflection or require a centered conception of personal identity; instead, it produced a panoply of diversified appeals that both broke the subject down into particularized desires and assembled larger units than the individual subject in the construction and enactment of utopian visions. This "passionless motion" unsettled White and others who wanted their experiences grounded in recognizable forms of human tradition and rationality.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the Fair brought together a multitude of new technologies, social codes, techniques for mass spectacle, modes of social organization, desires, in short, a technics that was articulated through advertising rhetoric and what Clement Greenberg in the same year called "kitsch." This ensemble of technics reached a pitch of intensity in 1939 with the Fair, bringing manifold strategies of social integration together in a resonant climactic event. As such, the Fair represented a culminating point in the utopian vision of social integration that would finally bring the new chaotic mass culture into a depoliticized, homogenous society.

If the Fair expressed the saturation point of mass cultural technics between the wars, the perceived loss of coherent subjectivity in this emergent mass culture generated

concerns about this new species of mass subject. At one end of the spectrum of responses, the Fair sought a utopian integration of the human and the machinic; at the opposite end, the debates around humanism functioned as an attractor for the various desires to locate an essential human quiddity that could counterbalance fears of dramatic social change. The human became a key field of exploration between the wars, when the intensity of industrial standardization and centralized social planning raised concerns over the changing nature of the American *demos*.¹²⁰ We can see this in events like the 1933 “Humanist Manifesto,” which brings together many of the contradictory desires that accreted to the notion of humanism. Signed by numerous theologians and academics, and most conspicuously by John Dewey, the manifesto seeks to describe a new “religious humanism” that would replace the old metaphysical religions, which had been “disrupted by science and economic change.” As a secular religion, humanism would bring back a “brotherhood” of humanity in a vitalist “organic view of life.” At the same time, this humanism is a “synthesizing and dynamic force” that brings together communal traditions and the “social and mental hygiene” of modern scientific thought. The manifesto’s insistence on a universally common human element expresses a powerful desire for organic cohesive community, a desire that the manifesto demonstrates in a culminating, totalizing vision of a “free and universal society in which people voluntarily and intelligently cooperate for the common good.” Promising a depoliticized community

¹²⁰ See, for example, Walter Lippmann’s *The Phantom Public* (1927), John Dewey’s *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), and Ralph Borsodi’s *This Ugly Civilization* (1929). Lippmann flatly states, “We must abandon the notion that the people govern. Instead we must adopt the theory that, by their occasional mobilizations as a majority, people support or oppose the individuals who actually govern. We must say that the popular will does not direct continuously but that it intervenes occasionally” (51). Dewey shares this concern, arguing that, “the machine age has so enormously expanded, multiplied, intensified, and complicated the scope of the indirect consequences, have formed such immense and consolidated unions in action, on an impersonal rather than a community basis, that the resultant public cannot identify and distinguish itself” (126).

that would be secular and religious, traditional and scientific, a “brotherhood” without strife or essential differences, this configuration of humanism binds together many of the contradictory hopes, fears and fantasies that circulated through post-war American culture.

New Humanism and the Anti-democratic Ethos

The 1933 Humanist Manifesto traces lines of thought that came to a pitch of intensity earlier, with two important publications in 1930: *Humanism and America* (edited by Norman Foerster), and *Critique of Humanism* (edited by Hartley Grattan). These opposing projects were generated by debates and discussions within rival camps on the question of humanism. The “new humanists” and their opponents provide the two conceptual poles that will guide us through our investigation of the question of humanism in interwar America. The cenacle brought together by Foerster was committed to Irving Babbitt’s new humanism, often expressing religious, traditionalist, and classicist attitudes toward social changes. Conversely, Grattan’s heteroclite group came together around a common hostility toward the humanist retrenchment, but ultimately with similar concerns over social disintegration. As we shall see, together these warring camps included many of the most significant cultural and intellectual figures of the interwar period.

Like the 1939 New York World’s Fair, the question of humanism tended to cohere around the desire for organic cohesive community. As I have argued, the hopes, fears and fantasies that coalesced in the image of utopian community also opened up multiple points of affinity with the question of fascism. Several important advocates of new humanism, especially Paul Elmer More, contributed to Seward Collins’ openly pro-

fascist periodical, *The American Review*. While Collins saw himself as a disciple of Irving Babbitt, the founder of new humanism, he also connected the fascist populist appeal directly to the new humanist emphasis on discipline and order.¹²¹ In this way, Collins sought to bring the order and stability he found in new humanism into a populist political alignment that he called new agrarianism. In the final chapter, on the Southern Agrarians, we will come back to these interconnected affinities, but for now it is important to signal that Collins' self-identification with fascism was just one attempt among many to describe fascism. Rather than the scattered figures like Collins who specifically identified themselves with one of the many, incongruous notions of fascism, it is the multiple contradictory appeals emanating from fascism that makes it so significant for understanding American culture between the wars.

Assembling apparently incongruous cultural and conceptual elements, the new humanists argued for a religious sense of original sin that is, paradoxically, articulated through a classicist emphasis on order and tradition; on the other hand, Rousseau is made to stand for an image of romanticist anarchy that is also persistently connected to the mechanized, "modernist" state. Humanism functioned as a term of capture for these disjunctive segmentarities, drawing them into a crescendo of intensive relations around the hope for a reintegrated culture. As I will argue, at this pitch of intensity, the new humanists reticulate a radiating network of relations that join them to the question of fascism across multiple points of affinity.

¹²¹ Collins' notions of fascist populism were predicated on the same fears that, in the new industrial age, the *demos* was no longer capable of self-government. While he was hardly a systematic thinker, Collins was important in his capacity to bring together diverse thinkers who shared the sense that a new system of government would soon be necessary. See Michael Jay Tucker, *And Then They Loved Him: Seward Collins and the Chimera of an American Fascism* (2006).

In *Humanism and America* (1930), Norman Foerster explicitly takes up Babbitt's new humanism, juxtaposing this traditionalist, classicist doctrine to the "modernists" who want to "substitute intensity" for the staid commitment to an "ideal of completeness" (xiv). Foerster's collection brings together numerous thinkers who shared these criticisms of modern "intensity," and who likewise searched for a more complete society in the inverted image of modernity. The volume includes the most important representatives of new humanism of the day, like Paul Elmer More, Gorham Munson, and T.S. Eliot. All of the contributors emphasize the fundamental limitations of humanity and the consequent need for order and authority. As Foerster puts it, "certain parts of human nature, if not disciplined, will always thrive at the expense of other parts" (xiv). The disciplining of human nature is essential, Foerster argues, if humans are to "develop with mature reasonableness the diversities latent within themselves and thus to work towards a many-sided human type" (xiv). In this new humanist understanding, discipline is essential because of the contradictory desires that permeate the "many-sided," contradictory aspects of the individual.

Recalling Ezra Pound's representation of the "*polumetis*" leader who "remagnetizes" the masses, Foerster's description of new humanism promotes a rational, disciplined intellect that captures the multiple, contradictory aspects of the individual, bringing them into coherence. In the same volume, T.S. Eliot makes clear the political stakes of these claims: "I believe that at the present time the problem of the unification of the world and the problem of the unification of the individual, are in the end one and the same problem; and that the solution of one is the solution of the other" (112). The composition of the individual is thus essential to the construction of a harmonious

community; conversely, “modernism” indicates the absence of the disciplined individual on which social unity depends. For Eliot, our contradictory desires, or, in religious terms, our fallen nature, necessitates a personal discipline that can bring this unruly self into line with a hierarchically organized state.

Foerster indicates the conceptual roots for Eliot’s arguments at the end of *Humanism*, which recommends a few key titles in this new humanist tradition. Prominent in this small selection are Irving Babbitt’s *Democracy and Leadership*, T.E. Hulme’s *Speculations*, and Julien Benda’s *Belphegor*. These choices echo an earlier important essay by Eliot, “The Idea of a Literary Review” (1926), in which he pointed to Julien Benda, Irving Babbitt and T.E. Hulme (as well as Charles Maurras, Georges Sorel, and Jacques Maritain) as thinkers who shared his image of a coherent society. These foundational thinkers of new humanism shared a concern for the dissolution of traditional values with the onset of machine culture. Like Eliot and Foerster, they also shared a dislike for a species of undisciplined Romanticism they associated with Jean-Jacques Rousseau, but, at the same time, they just as often hoped for a return to the order and harmony of traditional culture. As it is expressed by the formative thinkers of new humanism, this desire for organic cohesive community resonates with the question of fascism.

It will be recalled that Babbitt’s *Democracy and Leadership* (1924) finds in Mussolini a source of the authority and stability that he identifies with new humanism. These arguments also echo those of his English contemporary T.E. Hulme, who develops a distinction between “romanticism” and “classicism” that strongly influenced the new humanists. In *Speculations*, Hulme explicitly aligns his thought with “Maurras, Lasserre

and all the group connected with *L'Action Française*” against Rousseau, who functions for Hulme as the representative of an unruly, anarchistic Romanticism (114). As is well known, Maurras’ group identified both with fascism and with the “classicism” that Hulme articulated as the acknowledgement that “Man is an extraordinarily fixed and limited animal whose nature is absolutely constant.”¹²² From this Hulme concludes, “It is only by tradition and organization that anything decent can be got out of [man]” (116). In this juxtaposition, Hulme contrasts the “sane classical dogma of original sin” with what he famously satirized as the “spilt religion” of Rousseauian romanticism (117).

For Hulme, Romanticism is still a religion because it claims to provide a foundation for human life, but it is “spilt” in its inability to cohere either the person or the community. Irving Babbitt follows Hulme’s arguments closely on this point, affirming that this lack of order disintegrates social structures as well as the individual’s sense of self:

The Rousseauist [...] breaks down traditional controls without setting up new ones. What emerges in the many men who have as a result lapsed to the naturalistic level is not the will to brotherhood, but the will to power; so that in this sense the Rousseauist is actually promoting what he is in theory seeking to prevent. (140)

In a phrasing that T.S. Eliot will go on to mimic, Babbitt links the unification of the individual to the development of organic cohesive community. In the Twentieth Century, Babbitt maintains, the name for this Rousseauian individualist is the “modernist,” who breaks with “both human and natural law” (145). This “modernist” sensibility thus

¹²² See for example, Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism: Action Francaise, Italian Fascism, National Socialism* (1965) and Eugene Weber, *Action Française: Royalism and Reaction in 20th Century France* (1962).

fragments the communal sense of “brotherhood” into atomized appetites that Babbitt calls the “will to power.”¹²³

This distrust of the multivalent, conflictual desires associated with Rousseauian romanticism directly translated for Babbitt into a distaste for the American demos: “If we analyze realistically the popular will,” Babbitt argues, “we find that it means the will of a multitude of men who are more and more emancipated from traditional standards and more and more given over to what I have termed the irresponsible quest of thrills” (267). For Babbitt, this is “a special problem of democracy” that relates directly to the explosion of multiple contradictory desires in the new intensities that characterize modernity (282). The essentially anti-democratic sentiment expressed by Babbitt in these passages redounds throughout new humanist considerations of emergent industrial mass culture.

In his preface to George Sorel’s *Reflections on Violence*, T.E. Hulme expresses Babbitt’s fears in even more direct terms, calling the “democratic ideology” “an essential element in the romantic movement” (177). In contrast, Sorel’s thought provides a vital method for cohering the masses:

This [i.e. Sorel’s] system springs from the exactly contrary conception of man; the conviction that man is by nature bad or limited, and can consequently only accomplish any thing of value by disciplines, ethical, heroic, or political. In other words, it believes in Original Sin. We may define Romantics, then, as all who do not believe in the Fall of Man. It is this opposition which in reality lies at the root of most of the other divisions in social and political thought. (177)

¹²³ The president of Chicago University, Robert Maynard Hutchins, expresses similar views, connecting Rousseauian arguments to both anarchy and a totalitarian model of fascism: “This notion of government and its role is based on a myth, on a misconception of the nature of man and the nature of the state. It is not surprising that a doctrine absurdly grounded and workable only in countries of vast and untapped resources should contain in itself the seeds of an opposing doctrine, the doctrine that the state is all, that men are nothing but members of it, and that they achieve their ultimate fulfillment, not through freedom from the state, but through complete surrender to it. This is fascism” (87-88).

In this important passage, Hulme brings together the hope for cohesive community with a profound distaste for the wrangling of parliamentary democracy that the new humanists associated with the intensive “will to power” generated by the unruly demos. As has often been noted, Sorel’s thinking was taken up directly by Italian fascism, especially his advocacy of the use of an intuitive “dramatic mythology” that could unite the masses in a brotherhood, thereby overcoming the alienating effects of mass industrial culture (*Reflections* 89).¹²⁴ Hulme saw in Sorel a strategist who shared his concerns over the disjunctive effects of modernity. Likewise, for the new humanists, the fear of the masses is woven together with the hope for organic cohesive community, which is expressed in specifically anti-democratic terms. The idealization of tradition and authority shared by Foerster, Babbitt, and T.S. Eliot is drawn into the orbit of the question of fascism via this anti-democratic sensibility, which extends lines of affinity to the precursors of new humanist thought in Hulme, Sorel, and the Action Française group.

Babbitt’s preface to the 1929 translation of Julien Benda’s *Belphegor* brings his new humanist argument directly in line with Benda’s aggressive anti-Semitic critique of the mass culture of kitsch. Benda imagines the mythical figure of Belphegor as the Jew “who is always greedy for sensation,” tempting innocents to exchange their souls for marvelous inventions that will likewise generate new intensive experiences (116). Whereas Benda’s style of obscene anti-Semitism has often been associated directly with fascism, it is important to stress how common this kind of hatred was, and that it generated affinities with fascism only as part of a larger assemblage that drew on humanist ideals and its fear of mass culture. As Benda is at pains to make clear, this

¹²⁴ See for example, Jack J Roth, *The Cult of Violence: Sorel and the Sorelians* (1980), and Zeev Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution* (1994).

humanist discourse is above all an elitist classicism that opposes the emergence of a mass culture of kitsch into the socio-political sphere: “We must realize that it is not simply that a class is changing its standards of value, but that because of political developments new arrivals, lacking culture, become members of that class” (117). Benda garnered the sustained interest of Irving Babbitt, T.S. Eliot, Norman Foerster and others who identified as new humanists because he spoke to their concerns about the changing socio-political milieu. Benda filters his concerns about the alienating effects of industrial standardization through his anti-Semitism; what must be emphasized is that the new humanists shared this logic even when they did not express it in specifically anti-Semitic terms, as with new humanist fears of the Rousseauian *demos*.

Repeatedly, the new humanist desire for a disciplined, coherent subject traces lines of thought that draw it into the question of fascism. The new humanist precursors like Benda, Hulme, Sorel, and others demonstrate the modes by which fascism functioned as a plurivalent attractor for the multiple hopes, fears, and fantasies that accumulated around the perceived loss of community. Thus, humanism draws in and overcodes diverse elements. We can see this in another component of this new humanist assemblage: the religious sensibility for authority, hierarchy, and tradition that appealed to figures like T.S. Eliot.

It is important to note that Eliot was critical of Babbitt’s secular mode of humanism, and argued in his essay in Foerster’s *Humanism and America* collection for a marriage of humanism and religion. He further illustrates this in “The Idea of a Christian Society” (1939) when he advocates that the best way to preserve social cohesion is to safeguard religion and tradition against industrial modernity. Like Babbitt’s secular new

humanism, these theocratic aspirations are also drawn into the ambit of the question of fascism:

A compromise between the theory of the State and the tradition of society exists in Italy, a country which is still mainly agricultural and Catholic. [...] [T]he tendency of unlimited industrialism [on the other hand] is to create bodies of men and women – of all classes – detached from tradition, alienated from religion, and susceptible to mass suggestion: in other words, a mob. (*Selected Prose* 287)

In this essay, provocatively written in the same year as the Pact of Steel between Italy and Germany, Eliot contrasts his fears of the amorphous “mob” to the order and tradition he finds in religious communities. In opposing “unlimited industrialism,” fascist Italy provides a haven for the Christian values he also associates with new humanism.¹²⁵

Unlike Babbitt’s secular emphasis on the rational “inner check,” however, Eliot emphasizes what Hulme identifies as the “limited nature of man,” which requires strategies of social organization. For the new humanists these strategies were often found in concepts like Sorelian myth or the hope that fascist government would create order and discipline.

These important distinctions in the humanist views of T.S. Eliot and Babbitt illustrate the heliotropic mode by which different assemblages of hopes, fears, and fantasies find affinities with the question of fascism. Babbitt’s secular anti-romanticism resonates with Eliot’s ideal of religious hierarchy because they are drawn toward the same point of intensity around the concerns for organic cohesive community. This overcoding is not merely a shared language of tradition and hierarchy; as the contrasts between Eliot and Babbitt demonstrate, several different cultural segmentarities are at play in new humanist considerations. On the contrary, I argue that their isotopic

¹²⁵ Signed in the 1939, the Pact of Steel bound Italy’s fate to Germany’s just months before the outbreak of war.

similarities result from the active reconfiguration of different cultural concepts toward a central, resonant concern.

As we trace lines of affiliation that lead from Norman Foerster's simple description of new humanism as "an ideal of completeness," we see reticulations by which this desire is amplified into manifold points of resonance within the question of fascism. Figures like T.E. Hulme, Julien Benda, Georges Sorel, and the group around *Action Francaise* manifest the multiple linkages that subsist between fascism and new humanism via the desire for depoliticized classless society. Thus, it is not surprising that, after Irving Babbitt, the most important representative of new humanism, Paul Elmer More, directly associated himself with Seward Collins' pro-fascist *American Review*. Far from a passing relation, More's association with the *American Review* emerges from the wide network of affinities with the question of fascism that we have been tracing out.

More's contribution to Foerster's collection consisted of excerpts from his well-known article "The Demon of the Absolute" (1928), in which he attacks Lewis Mumford and others as "prophets of flux" who exemplify the modernist "will to power" in contrast to the balance and harmony of new humanism (32). He continues this discussion in his "Revival of Humanism" (1936), an article written specifically to defend and elaborate Foerster's *Humanism and America*. Calling the collection a "manifesto" and praising it lavishly as "the most significant event that has fallen under my notice in many years of reading and reviewing," More clearly saw it as a key moment in the "revival of humanism" (1). In this article, he is at pains to develop the familiar contrast between the alienated, hyper-rational "modernist" and the "modern" new humanist, who understands "the value of tradition" and "the limitations of the individual" (12). Repeatedly stressing

“discipline” and “responsibility,” More develops categories for recognizing “friend and foe,” naming Mumford, John Dewey, and Charles Francis Potter (among others) as false claimants to the title of humanist.¹²⁶ These “combined forces of anti-humanism” express the secular, technologically oriented and “naturalist” interpretation of the humanist tradition, whereas, More argues, “without a close alliance between humanism and religion the former is shut off from its chief source of vitality” (14).

In a commencement address published in Seward Collins’ *American Review* as “Church and Politics” (1934), More connects this emphasis on religion and humanism with an anti-democratic impulse that we have seen repeatedly in the new humanists. Arguing that “if the history of the last twenty years has taught us anything, it is that mankind is not capable of self-government,” More outlines the new humanist view that “equalitarianism” is not practicable because “it slurs over the fact of human depravity and so weakens the moral sense by attributing all the ills of life to society and none to the individual sufferer” (155). In keeping with familiar new humanist arguments, More concludes that this emphasis on the Rousseauian “rights of man” ignores “personal responsibility” in a world of original sin. Furthermore, fascism (along with communism and monarchism) understands and exploits what More would have considered the contradictions of fallen human nature. And yet, More argues, the most fundamentally humanist society would be Christian, joined in the otherworldly eschatology that would finally eliminate social and class distinctions in the true organic cohesive community. In his contention that “we must reawaken the minds of men to the fact that this earthly existence is only a small segment of everlasting life,” More comes the closest of any of

¹²⁶ Charles Francis Potter was a Unitarian minister and founder of the First Humanist Society of New York, which included John Dewey on its advisory board. Potter, along with Dewey, was also one of the signatories of the 1933 “Humanist Manifesto.”

the new humanists to a complete repudiation of the chaotic flux of mass culture and the “will to power” he associated with democracy.

Critique of Humanism

While the new humanist group expressed anti-democratic hopes for an organic cohesive community, they were not the only ones to try to locate a sense of human coherence that would counterbalance the disjunctive effects of industrial mass culture. In a symposium held the same year as Foerster’s *Humanism and America*, Babbitt was less charitably treated. The “Critique of Humanism” symposium brought together many of the leading lights of the day, including Edmund Wilson, Malcolm Cowley, Kenneth Burke, R.P. Blackmur, Allan Tate and Lewis Mumford, with the avowed purpose of redefining humanism. The symposium organizer, Hartley Grattan, summarizes the aims of the conference when he argues in his opening remarks that new humanism sought to hide its head in the sands of the past instead of acknowledging the incontrovertible fact of technological modernity. The speakers at the symposium also wanted to humanize modernity, Grattan was careful to point out, but not by turning back to pre-industrial times. The problem with humanism was thus not its putative goal, but its method. As a point of contrast with Babbitt, Grattan approvingly cites Walter Rathenau as an example of the ethos necessary to overcome the merely “purpose-ridden” existence of mechanized labor without succumbing to the facile Jeremiads of the new humanists.

Grattan’s choice to cite Rathenau was not neutral in the 1930s. Rathenau, a German-Jewish entrepreneur and sometimes diplomat, advocated that Germans become a “People with a soul”, or as Grattan puts it, “Rathenau saw [...] that there can be no retreat

from mechanization. It must be accepted as an irreducible fact. We must proceed to turn it to the service of man” (9). Although Grattan is seeking to position Rathenau in opposition to Babbitt, these two figures share important affinities in their desire for depoliticized and classless community. Rathenau’s philosophy is most thoroughly expressed in two influential works written in quick succession in 1921: *The New Society* and *In the Days to Come*. What is most significant in Grattan’s choice of Rathenau as a foundational figure for his counter-conception of humanism is that these works advocate measures that would later be successfully taken up by the Nazis.¹²⁷

In *The New Society*, Rathenau argues, “There is no democratic form of society, for democracy can be in league with capitalism, with socialism, or even with the class of clubs and castes. The unspoken fundamental conception which gives significance and stability both to the forms of a democratic constitution and to those of an organic society is called Solidarity” (137). According to Rathenau’s Hegelian formula, this solidarity will come with the realization of the spiritual coherence of the People through the State. Thus, Germany can be saved from becoming socialist by eliminating class differences in an all-encompassing spiritualized State.

Clearly, Grattan’s invocation of Rathenau neither circumvents the desire for organic cohesive community that he finds in Babbitt, nor does it absolve the critics of new humanism from the counter-accusation of advocating a totalizing state. Rathenau writes, “Our love goes out to the People; but the People are not a crowd at a meeting, nor are they the newspapers or debating-clubs. The People are the waking or sleeping, the leaking, frozen, choked, or gushing well of the German spirit. It is with that spirit, in the

¹²⁷ In a tragic irony, Rathenau was assassinated by National Socialist fanatics who thought he was one of the Elders of Zion.

present and in the future, as it runs its course into the sea of humanity, that we have here to do” (*New Society* 20). As we saw in the previous chapter on the Fair, the rhetoric of “the People” was an important mode of generating an idealized community that ignored social differences and class strife.

Notwithstanding Rathenau’s clear promotion of a totalizing state-oriented “solidarity,” Grattan asserts that it is in fact Babbitt’s new humanism that will lead to dictatorship and the loss of freedoms: “This business of giving Caesar a *carte blanche* and hoping to control him by making him subscribe to Humanism and by forcing his slaves to subscribe to some catchwords, the nature of which is to be dictated by Mr. Babbitt, leaves Babbitt himself in a position to be a complete conservative” (*Critique* 12). Thus, from Grattan’s perspective, Rathenau’s active intervention in the state is the only way to humanize the technologico-political apparatus that Lewis Mumford would call the “Megamachine,” while the conservative passivity he espies in Babbitt’s philosophy will assuredly result in slavery to the Caesarian state. However, despite Grattan’s strong critique of Babbitt, his sincere hopes for organic cohesive community trace a line of thought back to the question of fascism via Rathenau’s response to modern industrial culture.

Allen Tate’s essay for Grattan’s symposium, “The Fallacy of Humanism,” recapitulates this criticism of Babbitt in even stronger terms, condemning the new humanist notion of the “inner check” as “moral fascism”: “[Babbitt’s] doctrine of restraint does not look to unity, but to abstract and external control – not a solution of the moral problem, but an attempt to get the social results of unity by main force, by a kind of moral fascism” (132). Tate comes to this conclusion from an entirely different

direction than Grattan, however. The true solution, according to Tate, lies in joining humanism with religion. Echoing T.S. Eliot's religious humanism, Tate insists on a spiritualist attitude that would encompass the whole of the human in its relation to both the natural and the supernatural.¹²⁸ Although ethical standards are central to Babbitt's new humanism, the secular rationalism of the "inner check" has no absolute standards on which it can rely; the end result, Tate contends, is that the desire to transcend the flux of the natural world reproduces the arbitrary romanticism that new humanists claim to reject (134-135).

For Tate, as for T.S. Eliot, the religious community provides a more fundamental restraint than the new humanist faith in self-control, which Tate dismisses as merely "a mechanical formula for the recovery of civilization" (166). Indeed, Tate is a good deal closer to Eliot than he is to Grattan's idealization of the centralized technological state. Nevertheless, Tate and Grattan come to almost identical conclusions about Babbitt's new humanism, arguing that it will in fact produce an alienated state-centralization, an externalized "moral fascism" without the cohesiveness of a genuine community. What draws these diverse thinkers into proximity, in other words, is their desire for organic cohesive community that will overcome the tensions between the old and the new.

Babbitt, Grattan, Eliot, and now Tate all claim to have found a method for mediating between the extremes that threaten to disintegrate interwar American culture. Each of these claims relies on a notion of human culture that is termed humanism, despite the fact that these descriptions differ substantially from one another. Within the "Critique of Humanism" symposium, Grattan and Tate represent two radically divergent responses,

¹²⁸ Paul Elmer More, on the other hand, was entirely hostile to Tate's critique of Babbitt, calling Tate's article an "ignorant and conceited outburst" (*On Being Human* 14).

which we could take to mean simply that the term “humanism” does not have a clear definition. On the contrary, I would argue that humanism functions as a term of capture for these various modes of understanding human culture, and that each of these descriptions of humanism has at its core the hope for a more balanced, harmonious “brotherhood” that would resolve the tensions of modern civilization. This hope for a depoliticized community without the strife of social, technological, and economic changes brings the work of these figures continuously under the multiple, contradictory appeals emanating from the question of fascism.

Lewis Mumford’s career marks a path between the opposing views expressed by Tate and Grattan. In the “Critique of Humanism” symposium, he follows a line of argument developed from his current research into technics, arguing that humanism is the balance between extremes of inner and outer life, tradition and modernity. His contribution to the symposium, “Towards an Organic Humanism,” takes up Grattan’s effort to humanize modern industrial culture and directs it toward one of the overriding concerns of that period: the force of technology to reshape the human community. In Mumford’s estimation, “the New Humanists believe, like the New Mechanists, in adjustment to an external environment,” the only difference being that the former irrationally looks to the traditions of the past while the Mechanists look irrationally to the technological developments of the future (347). These responses to the loss of community are too extreme, Mumford argues. On the other hand, “The real problem of life, both for men and societies, is to keep the organism and the environment, the inner world and the outer, the personality and its creative sources, in the state of tension wherein growth and renewal may continually take place” (359). This “organic attitude

toward life can truly be called humanism,” Mumford maintains, because it brings together the “Romanticist and Classicist” attitudes in a more universal and harmonious balance (359).

In his later anti-fascist writings, *Men Must Act* (1939) and *Faith for Living* (1940), Mumford develops this notion of organic harmony into a universalizing image of camaraderie that relies heavily on the religious humanism we have noted in Allan Tate, T.S. Eliot, and Paul Elmer More. However, unlike the new humanists, Mumford argues that this Christian humanism is fundamentally democratic: “Christianity accords to all men that equality of whole personalities for which the present political name is democracy” (*Faith* 170). Conversely, fascism is a “new cult of power” that must be resisted through a “deep-seated, organic, religious” conversion, “so that no part of political or personal existence will be untouched by it” (*Faith* 195). Mumford’s efforts to “preserve civilization” draw on the language of new humanism, invoking tradition, authority, and a criticism of the “will to power.” For Mumford, the fundamental aspects of human culture are tradition, spirituality and self-discipline, just as they were for the new humanists (*Faith* 233).

On the other hand, this reworking of new humanist language also resonates with the question of fascism, as Mumford draws on concepts and language explicitly associated with fascism in the interwar period: he calls for a “rebirth” of culture, argues that Americans must switch to an “economy of sacrifice,” and employs pro-natalist rhetoric in his contention that “to bring more abundant life into the world is the only guarantee we have that our civilization will renew itself and endure” (*Faith* 248).¹²⁹ All

¹²⁹ Mumford’s language recapitulates much of the pro-natalist and racist logic of fascist regimes. See, for example, Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women* (1993).

this is couched in militaristic language that calls for “a war of the spirit against the Caliban in man and the old Chaos in nature: a war of the spirit against all that obstructs spirit. Fascism promises peace: fascist peace, which is death” (*Faith* 309). In this spiritual war, Mumford seeks to overcome both the disorder of the natural world and the animalistic self in a militarized discipline of individual and society, contrasting this dynamic struggle with the stasis of the all-encompassing fascist state.

Mumford’s combination of belligerent, vitalist imagery with his emphasis on universal tradition and culture traces the submerged lines of affinity between humanism and fascism we have been tracking. His martial language calls for a “democracy of comrades, as staunch in peace as in war; and,” he continues, “that way, too, lies the intimate knowledge of our human background that will guide effectively our efforts to make the community itself a high work of art” (*Faith* 276). In these passages, the ideal of depoliticized brotherhood coalesces in an aestheticization of the warrior ethos.

Mumford’s writing in this period functions as a relay station, bringing together and amplifying the multiple points of affinity between humanism and fascism. Repeatedly, Mumford invokes “Sacrifice: hard discipline: soldierlike devotion to duty at any cost of comfort or convenience,” contending that “these are the conditions that life imposes upon us if we are to escape the degradations and brutalities that fascism seeks to make once more the common lot of mankind” (*Men* 172). As the syntax breaks down in these and similar passages, the switching station function of his writing becomes more apparent; no longer subordinating his ideas to segmented routes, Mumford’s humanist ideals continuously jostle with the multiple contradictory appeals emanating from fascism.

Not surprisingly, Mumford's contradictory imperatives provoked the accusation from many quarters that his reaction to the rise of fascism was itself fascist. His furious cries for the "forced conversion" of all fascists caused Malcolm Cowley to call him the "Führer of anti-fascism." His friend and neighbor, Matthew Josephson, wrote to Mumford, "In a kind of sickness of soul, in an anguish of fear and passion, you have taken the tone and the methods of the enemy" (cited in Miller 400). An editorial in *The New Masses*, entitled "Lewis Mumford's 'Mein Kampf,'" denounced *Faith for Living* as "the most flagrant statement of the 'liberal case' for Fascism," and the *New Republic* and the *Southern Review* levied similar charges (cited in Miller 400).¹³⁰ It may seem surprising that Mumford could have swung so wildly from the Christian ideal of organic community to the totalitarian measures often associated with fascism; and yet, as we have seen, a continuum of concerns and strategies bridges the gap between fascism and the various forms of humanism in the interwar period. Thus, in *Faith for Living* and *Men Must Act*, Mumford's ideal of an organic community demonstrates its affinities with the question of fascism.

Mumford formulates these ideals of sacrifice and discipline in contrast to his fears of the alienating effects of mass industrial culture, arguing that the one-sided "scientific conquest of nature" and the economic reliance on "power machinery" has led to an imbalance in human culture ("Corruption of Liberalism" 572). The mentality that drives this alienation, according to Mumford, is "pragmatic liberalism," which expresses a "utilitarian" attitude toward the human environment. As he makes clear in *Faith for*

¹³⁰ The editor of *The New Masses*, Michael Gold, gave one of the most strongly worded of these critiques on Mumford: "After the Mumfords have succeeded in herding the American people into this great concentration camp of fascist slavery, after they have placed all power in the hands of a Wall Street dictatorship, what guarantees have they that the dictatorship will yield such power after the war emergency has passed?" (*Hollow Men* 106)

Living, this pragmatic utilitarianism generates the social anomie that fosters the rise of fascism:

[O]ur young people are starving for lack of real tasks and vital opportunities. Many of them live like sleepwalkers, apparently in contact with their environment, but actually dead to everything but the print of the newspapers, the blare of the radio, or the flickering shadows on the screen. Is it any wonder that they seek to dull their frustrations in speed and other forms of excited anesthesia; that they vote crooners into positions of political responsibility, follow screeching hysterics who promise to give them something to do, or are both bewildered and fascinated by an ignoble and addled personality, like Hitler? (*Faith* 174)

Instead of uniting individuals in an organic community, the technics of mass culture anesthetize the youth, making them vulnerable to popular figures and fascinating demagogues like Hitler. Conversely, “what is demanded,” Mumford argues, “is a recrystallization of the positive values of life, and an understanding of the basic issues of good and evil” (“Corruption of Liberalism” 573). In the debates over humanism we have examined up to this point, Mumford’s concern to “recrystallize” the “positive values of life” stands as the overriding desire uniting humanists as diverse as Hartley Grattan, Allan Tate, T.S. Eliot, and Irving Babbitt, each of whom can be considered humanist insofar as humanism functioned as a term of capture for their hopes to overcome the alienating effects of modernity. And, as we have seen, although they differ in their points of affinity and their assemblages of segmentarities, all of these figures are drawn into the orbit of fascism via this sincere desire for a depoliticized community.

Pragmatism and/or Humanism

Mumford is not alone in his criticism of the perceived moral relativism associated with pragmatic philosophy. Many of the debates over humanism traversed the uncertain

terrain of pragmatism, a philosophy that, as we have seen with Mumford, was often associated with industrial mass culture in interwar America. In *On Being Human* (1936), the new humanist Paul Elmer More attacks John Dewey for his “pragmatic materialism.” This pragmatic worldview has at its core a “desire for power,” espousing the doctrine of discontent that strives for the perpetual increase of experiences and possessions (134). More names this inexhaustible desire “*pleonexia*,” or the restless motivation “for ever more and more” (140). Referring to both biblical and classical literature, More deploys *pleonexia* to describe the multiple contradictory desires circulating through industrial mass culture.¹³¹ Like Waldo Frank’s fears of the “multiverse” of disparate “wills” and “appetites,” More’s concept of *pleonexia* describes a nebulous universe of scattered hopes, fears and fantasies that he associates with Dewey and pragmatism. The danger of this pragmatic world view (which More saw as increasingly dominant) manifested in the failure of contemporary American culture to cohere in a united social body.

Elaborating on this danger, More argues that Dewey’s philosophy, which he characterizes as “greed and animal rapacity,” is associated with the false concepts of democracy and progress (139). In contrast, new humanism seeks to tame this crudely overt “will to power” before it completely fragments the body politic. Following the line of thought mapped out in Julien Benda’s *Belphagor*, More describes the chaotic *demos* as rapacious in its desire for new experiences. While Benda depicts a dehumanized mob at the mercy of the demonic Jew because it cannot control its material desires, More worries that the essential aspects of humanity will be lost in the animalistic rapacity of *pleonexia*.

At the heart of these concerns, therefore, is the fear that mass culture, represented by

¹³¹ See for example *Luke* 12:13, in which *pleonexia* is translated as “covetousness” in the *King James* version. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle names *pleonexia* as the major motive for injustice (Anagnostopoulos 465).

pragmatism, would lead to the disintegration of the traditional ethical basis of civilization. As a philosophy of process and development, More argues, pragmatism generates a mood of dissatisfaction that leads to continuous revolution, and this, he concludes, is antithetical to a stable society.

In “What Humanism Means to Me,” published in the signal year of 1930, John Dewey explicitly contrasts his notion of humanism with the new humanism of Paul Elmer More. Arguing that *Humanism and America* expresses a purely negative doctrine, Dewey holds that new humanism “has much more in common with the romanticism it condemns than it is aware of,” as evidenced by its anxiety to transcend the problems of modernity (265). Instead of this “thoroughly dualistic” creed, Dewey hopes for a new harmony in which “nature and the sciences of nature are made the willing servants of human good” (266). This pragmatic humanism, Dewey believes, will generate “a vital sense of the solidarity of human interests,” thereby overcoming social strife (“What I Believe” 274).¹³²

Dewey considers the new humanist hopes for tradition-bound and hierarchical community to be “transcendental,” or detached from reality, because they refuse to take into account the clear social changes effected by technological modernity (“What Humanism Means” 265). At the other end of the spectrum of responses to the disintegration of human culture, Dewey locates the question of fascism. Although Dewey is sparing of his comments on fascism, in his unpublished writings from this period he describes it as the reaction to internal social division in an attempt to “establish the unity without which after all a society cannot endure” (*The Later Works*, vol. 17 459). While

¹³² Dewey also opens his important work on *Experience and Nature* (1925) with the statement that his philosophy of experience can be considered a “naturalistic humanism” (1).

the new humanists would found their social order on otherworldly principles, fascism seeks by brute force to reunify the body politic. In his desire to establish a cohesive democratic society, Dewey searches for a middle way between these reactions, arguing that “if the dignity of human life is not to be submerged” then “social life” demands the “integration” of machine and human culture (“What Humanism Means” 265).

Conversely, for More, as for Mumford, this pragmatic emphasis on “integration” interferes with the needful recurrence to absolute ethical standards; at its worst, this dangerous absence of an ethical touchstone encourages the ascendancy of despotic regimes like fascism.¹³³

For critics of pragmatism, the uncertainties running through its philosophy of adequation intensified around the question of humanism because of its ambivalent associations with mass industrial culture. While Mumford and More looked to stable social traditions like Christianity on which to build a universal human culture, Dewey saw humanism as a “portmanteau word,” capacious enough to contain the dynamic changes of future events as well as the accretion of habits and customs. As we have seen, the tensions between these divergent conceptions of humanism focalized in 1930 with the publication of *Humanism and America*, which emphasizes tradition and order, and *Critique of Humanism*, which stresses what Hartley Grattan called “the incontrovertible fact of technological modernity.” The debates between Dewey and More extend these

¹³³ Reinhold Niebuhr shares this criticism, arguing “Humanistic rationalism, forgetting that human reason as well as human physical existence is a derived, dependent, created and finite reality, makes it into a principle of interpretation of the meaning of life; and believes that its gradual extension is the guarantee of the ultimate destruction of evil in history” (*Christianity* 206). This is dangerous, Niebuhr concludes, because the humanist position lacks absolute ethical standards by which to judge an enemy of democracy like fascism.

polemics as they crystallize around the question of whether or not machine culture can be “integrated” into a vital human community.

Dewey was seconded in his debates with the new humanists by the influential social theorist Horace Kallen. A founding member of the experimental New School for Social Research, Kallen sought to redefine humanism in his efforts to innovate a conceptual model for democratic culture that would take into account recent developments like the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, Browning motion, and the experiential methodology of pragmatism.¹³⁴ Kallen’s 1928 symposium on “Freedom in the Modern World” brought together a number of speakers, including Dewey, to address the ambiguous notion of freedom in an increasingly standardized and mechanized environment. Criticizing the sensibility that looks for “ready-made” rules of behavior, Kallen instead envisions a world of “process” in which everyday actions and choices express a genuine freedom that is not predetermined by tradition or discipline. In “nature as a whole,” Kallen argues, “determinism is the result of mutual interaccommodation of discrete liberties” (289). In opposition to the new humanist insistence on ethical standards derived from tradition, Kallen affirms that the intensive interactions that make up democratic mass culture permit only a “ratio of predictability.” These “discrete liberties” are integrated into delimited social codes through a *modus Vivendi* that is never static:

[W]ithin any given *going* sequence of events, subsequent initiations take place, novelties, spontaneities. These are reacted to as blockings, distractions, diversions, interferences. They must come to terms with what is already there: either by way of conflict or by way of accommodation or both, usually both, the terms attained take shape as a *modus Vivendi*, a way of living together, which is a determination of the undetermined

¹³⁴ The New School was founded by Charles Beard and John Dewey (among others), bringing Kallen into contact with many of the most important thinkers of the interwar period.

novelty and is the essence of law. That such determinations can be accomplished and are, is an assurance to Human Freedom [...] (298)

In this passage, Kallen describes a world of blockages and flows, of prefabricated social traditions and the “spontaneities” of lived life. This world of differential segmentarities requires a process of “interaccommodation” through which “undetermined novelty” becomes determined.¹³⁵ Like Dewey, Kallen’s theory of social action aims to preserve freedom from the reactions that lead to the “new tyrannies of Mussolini, Hitler, Dollfuss,” while at the same time promising that an ordered and systematic world would emerge from this free interplay of forces (*The Liberal Spirit* 58).¹³⁶ Thus, Kallen concludes with a dynamic model of human community, in which “we are ourselves streams of events, modes of interplay of novelty and repetition, freedom and determinism (*Freedom* 301).

In an essay series on “Humanism and the Industrial Age” (1923), Kallen develops these theories of integration in explicit contrast to the new humanists. Paul Elmer More and Irving Babbitt are “anthropocentric and pre-Copernican” in their insistence on dualism; conversely, the new “sciences of body and mind show human nature not as a dualism, but as a true plurality; not as a balance of forces, but as an integration of dispositions” (192). And Kallen continues, “It is as if the energies of man, making history, make it by finding different channels composed of different stuffs, and the quality and timbre of what they work out are determined far more by the stuffs than by the energies that mould them” (192). Human nature is not an essence but the emergence

¹³⁵ Importantly, Kallen’s theory of freedom addresses the changing social environment that Ogburn saw as creating differential speeds, or “lag”: “because our bodies change so much more slowly than our minds, our ways of thinking, our habits, our skills outlive the objects of thought that called them forth and fulfilled them, and when new objects come, making for us a new mind, these old ways remain, irrelevant yet controlling” (*Humanism* 219).

¹³⁶ Eventually assassinated by Nazis, Engelbert Dollfuss was the leader of the Austrian fascist movement.

of qualities from the “integration of dispositions,” Kallen argues. While More fears that the *pleonexia* of mass industrial culture would distract us from our human essence, Kallen embraces the “plurality” of the multiple contradictory desires circulating through modernity. Nonetheless, he also acknowledges the dangers of this modern “economy of abundance,” which “deepens the distinction between living and earning a living,” and threatens to turn the worker into a “psychosomatic gadget” (*The Liberal Spirit* 18). This “*crise plethorique*,” or crisis of superabundance, must be overcome if the “humanization of industry” is to be accomplished (*The Liberal Spirit* 20).

Without a mode of dynamic “interaccommodation” that will integrate the human and the machine, Kallen warns, American culture will be vulnerable to plans “born of discontent” “devised by medievalists, communists, and fascists” to halt the *crise* of disintegrating social plurality (*The Liberal Spirit* 20). “Stasis is what comes to pass when organization hardens in whole or in part into hierarchy,” Kallen argues, “and any of the diverse movements of life are halted, dammed up and immobilized” (*The Liberal Spirit* 58). To avoid this catastrophic rigidity, it is necessary to “orchestrate” a balance between freedom and determinism. Like a symphony, the free society will exercise its differences harmoniously, balancing the differential speeds of tradition and novelty and integrating them in an organic whole. This “pulse of freedom,” Kallen assures his reader, will bring about the “orchestration of mankind,” accomplishing “the making of an international mind” that will overcome the threat of totalitarianism in a truly organic cohesive community (*The Liberal Spirit* 79, 86). Just as Waldo Frank wanted to “symphonize” the social “chaos” of the “multiverse,” Kallen hopes to “orchestrate” the tensions of modern industrial culture (*Rediscovery of America* 205). As we have seen repeatedly, this hope

marks out the paths by which the ideal of social unanimity is continuously drawn into the resonant question of fascism via the desire for genuine community and the end to strife.

Although Kallen's critique of tradition-bound humanism is unstinting, in his hopes for social integration he nonetheless commits himself to precisely the moral relativism that worried More and brought Mumford to attack "pragmatic liberalism." In "Fascism: For the Italians" (1927), written during a visit to Italy, Kallen claims that "Italy has become a better country to live in since [...] the historic 'march on Rome'" (211). And he continues, "To convert this piecemeal, too-localized life into a single political organization, and to animate it with a unity of national feeling and action" has been the great ideal of Italians since Mazzini and Garibaldi (211).¹³⁷ In his meeting with Mussolini, Kallen speaks of "the vivid force and magnetism of the man," and excuses fascist violence with the claim that "coercions are a measure of [the regime's] sense of insecurity" (212). Under fascism, Italy is now imbued with an "intellectual as well as an economic vitality," bringing Kallen to conclude:

The point is that administrative reform, the educational program and economic enterprise all make for a safer, more comfortable and more vital Italy. In these respects the Fascist revolution is not unlike the Communist revolution. Each is the application by force majeure of an ideology to a condition. Each should have the freest opportunity once it has made a start, of demonstrating whether it be an exploitation of men by a special interest or a fruitful endeavor after the good life. (212)

¹³⁷ In an interesting historical parallel, Ida Tarbell visited Italy at the same time as Kallen, and, likewise, found a great deal to praise in fascism. See my introduction for further discussion on Tarbell. Mazzini and Garibaldi were widely thought of as great Italian patriots.

Without a touchstone based on traditional evaluations of the “good life,” Kallen is unable to descry even the fascist social experiment, as long as it aims toward the orchestration of social harmony.¹³⁸

Returning to Kallen’s argument in “Humanism in the Industrial Age,” we see that his troubling approval of the ideals of social cohesion expressed in Italian fascism traces lines of affinity to his desire for the orchestration of mass culture. In contrast to Irving Babbitt’s elitist and classicist dogma of the “inner check,” Kallen’s ideal is “the Humanism of the industrial age” based on the “metaphysical democracy” of science (219). This humanism of the *demos* requires that “all items of experience, regardless of their status in the other institutions of society, receive in that domain equal recognition of their integrity, equal regard” (219). Rather than bowing to *a priori* ethical traditions, scientific rationalism will “lay profane hands upon all the sacred cows of our schismatic civilization, even patriotism and capital, even the proletariat and labor,” as it “dissolves and washes away the prerogatives of classes, the presumptions of special cultures, all the false perspectives of the arts of man” (219). This extreme expression of depoliticized social integration would “dissolve” social difference in a scientific humanism that resonates strongly with the dimensions of Italian fascism that attracted Kallen during his 1927 visit.

Kallen was not the only one to whole-heartedly embrace science’s capacity to integrate the new mass culture. In Lothrop Stoddard’s *Scientific Humanism* (1926), these hopes for cohesive community veered toward elitist, eugenicist theories of racial homogeneity. For Stoddard, the threat of the *demos* went hand-in-hand with the danger of

¹³⁸ Surprisingly, Kallen’s praise of fascism was published in the left journal *The New Republic*; furthermore, he was not alone in this praise. An editorial on Kallen’s article was also appreciative of the fascist experiment. See “An apology for Fascism.”

racial degradation. According to Stoddard's "neo-aristocratic" vision of biological supremacy, the answer to both social and racial degeneration is the "realism" of the scientific attitude, which promises an evolutionary adaptation to the changing environment of industrial mass culture (*Revolt* 263). "The basic flaw in nearly all past ideals," according to Stoddard, is that they "have been essentially static" (*Scientific Humanism* 152). In juxtaposition to this "Utopian goal" of "changeless perfection,"

Science discloses the fact that all life, from protoplasm to man, is, in the last analysis, a *rhythmic tension* requiring perpetual adaptations, and that the cessation of this essentially changeful activity spells death. (*Scientific* 152)

As a dynamic force of integration, science provides an adaptive method for bringing together and comprehending a changing environment. For Stoddard, this scientific outlook signals the "abandonment of the Utopian dream" in exchange for a "truly realistic philosophy" that will provide "a greater mastery over natural forces and a more perfect artificial environment" (*Scientific* 59). In his emphasis on the "rhythmic tensions" of life, Stoddard shares affinities with Kallen's dynamic, vitalist philosophy, but in his racist fears of the masses he is much closer to the elitism that we have seen with the humanism of Julien Benda.¹³⁹

As both an index of racial intelligence and an instrument of social adaptation, Stoddard maintains that scientific humanism describes a "realism" that orchestrates the total control of a threatening external environment and the irrational, subhuman emotions circulating in the new mass culture. "The low-grade and mentally defective elements of

¹³⁹ Probably the strongest influence on Stoddard was the extraordinarily powerful figure, Madison Grant, who argued in *The Passing of the Great Race* (1921) for the supremacy of the "Nordic race" and warned against democratic forms of government and universal suffrage (5).

the population are increasing,” Stoddard warns (*Scientific* 53), adding that these elements threaten “the entire future of mankind” because of their “instinctive reaction” to the “disturbing novelty” of social and scientific developments (*Scientific* 31). Drawing on theories of mass psychology, Stoddard argues that the reactions of these “degenerates” is “apt to spread by crowd contagion and may either flare into outbursts of mob violence or harden into dogmatic intolerance producing systematic opposition and persecution” (31).¹⁴⁰ In contrast to this dogmatism and violence, the “true realism” of scientific humanism “understands that reality is infinitely varied,” and “seeks truth but knows that truth manifests itself in countless ways (151). While the subhuman masses are incapable of grasping these infinite variations, the biological superiority of the scientific mentality is defined for Stoddard by its capacity to capture multiplicity and bring it into a vital, organic comprehension.

These arguments are based on the premise that race is the primary index of the human capacity to be guided by scientific humanism. In *The Rising Tide of Color* (1924), Stoddard directly connects racial heterogeneity with the problem of class warfare, and hopes to overcome this threat of revolution through the intellectual and organizational superiority of Nordicism racial solidarity (220). Perhaps the most influential eugenicist in the United States, Madison Grant, summarized this argument in his introduction to Stoddard’s *Rising Tide*: “Democratic ideals among an homogeneous population of Nordic blood, as in England or America, is one thing, but it is quite another for the white man to share his blood with, or intrust [sic] his ideals to, brown, yellow, black, or red men”

¹⁴⁰ Elsewhere, in *Revolt Against Civilization* (1922), Stoddard attacks the idea of “Natural Equality” as “one of the most pernicious delusions that has ever afflicted mankind,” designating Rousseau “a neurotic, mentally unstable, morally weak, sexually perverted” and, of course, “insane” (128). In contradistinction to Rousseauian democracy, Stoddard posits that the “Law of Inequality is as universal and inflexible as the Law of Gravitation” (*Revolt* 30).

(xxxii).¹⁴¹ Like Grant, Stoddard conflated “blood” with the scientific rationalism that was supposed to undergird civil community. Conversely, for Stoddard, the “mongrelized population” waiting outside the citadel of this brotherhood of science posed a constant threat: “Today, the progress of science may have freed our own civilization from the peril of conquest by the barbarian hordes; nevertheless, these peoples still threaten us with the subtler menace of ‘pacific penetration’” (5). Uniting fears of racial and cultural “penetration,” Stoddard juxtaposes the homogeneous Nordic community to the subhuman, “mongreloid” masses. Subtending these paranoid fantasies is the uncertain definition of the human, which can be “penetrated” in ways that change both its “blood” and the quality of the communal homogeneity. Stoddard thus imagines “scientific humanism” as a rationalist, eugenicist prophylactic against the threat of social revolution in the new conditions of mass industrial culture.

In the same year that Kallen visited Italy, Stoddard published his *Harper's Magazine* article, “Realism: The True Challenge of Fascism” (1927), in which he clearly associates the fascist experiment in Italy with his ideal of scientific humanism. Fascism is a new form of political realism, Stoddard maintains, developed from the experimental attitude of American pragmatism.¹⁴² At the outset of the article, Stoddard asks, “What, then, is this novel element which constitutes Fascism’s true challenge to our times?” He answers, “It can be expressed in one word: *Realism*” (578). The value of this realism is

¹⁴¹ F. Scott Fitzgerald gives these lines to Tom Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby*; citing “Goddard” (the combined names of Grant and Stoddard), Tom rehearses, “The idea is if we don’t look out the white race will be – will be utterly submerged. It’s all scientific stuff; it’s been proved” (18).

¹⁴² Mussolini claims to have been influenced by pragmatism in *The Origins and Doctrine of Fascism*: like fascism, pragmatism “actually rejects the universal character of knowledge, and posits the individual himself in his strict individuality, confronted with his thought. The knowledge of individuality, therefore, when it is knowledge is reduced to simple immediate *intuition*” (75). During Horace Kallen’s visit to Italy, he asked the Duce about pragmatism, but concluded that he was “more aware of James’ name than his teachings” (“Fascism: For the Italians” 211). See also John Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism* (1972).

that it is “opposed to theorizing” and avoids “crystallizing around formulas of any kind, except as working hypotheses which they may scrap tomorrow” (578). As we saw earlier, this dynamic integration of difference is vital to the organic cohesiveness of both the biological entity and the community. With the rise of mass industrial culture, Stoddard argues, it becomes all the more imperative to ask the central question in William James’ lectures on pragmatism: “Does it work?” (578). The pragmatic realism that Stoddard finds in fascism thus responds to his primary concern in *Scientific Humanism*, in which he worries that “The outstanding feature of contemporary world affairs seems to be a profound and general disharmony between Old and New, resulting in endless maladjustments, perplexities, and conflicts” (41). Just as Kallen saw in fascist Italy an aim toward the “good life,” Stoddard holds that the experimental pragmatism of fascism will effectively orchestrate the changing conditions and the sheer massiveness of industrial culture.

Although none of the figures we have looked at on the question of fascism and pragmatism would subscribe to Stoddard’s eugenicist theories, they demonstrate affinities with the desire for greater harmony between the “Old and the New” that Stoddard hopes to address in his racial humanism. As a term of capture in the interwar period, humanism magnetically binds these various notions of human culture to the hopes for organic cohesive community. As we have seen, “pragmatism” was frequently a term of contention in these debates over humanism. In a period when some sense of human essence was sought as a bulwark against industrial standardization and cultural disintegration, pragmatism seemed to operate at the perilous interchange between the need for experimentalism and the danger of relativism.

The Irrational Appeal of Fascism: Spectacle and Play between the Wars

Like Lothrop Stoddard, John Dewey hopes to integrate science and nature to find a greater harmony between the “Old and the New.” Although Dewey and Stoddard differ in substantial ways, Dewey’s particular principles and concerns are subjected to a process of overcoding whereby these notions are remagnetized around the desire for genuine community. Dewey’s humanist commitment to “solidarity” is expressed in the call for “a thoroughgoing philosophy of experience, framed in the light of science and technique” that can be “brought unitedly to bear upon industry, politics, religion, domestic life, and human relations in general” (“What I Believe” 278). A great deal of Dewey’s thinking and writing between the wars is oriented toward this project of an all-encompassing “philosophy of experience.” To signal only the promontories in this immense investigation, *Experience and Nature* (1925) and *Art as Experience* (1934) comprise some of his most important writing from the period. Both of these projects are grounded in a concern for the loss of integrative experience in modern industrial culture. As Dewey states at the outset of *Experience and Nature*:

Modern science, modern industry and politics, have presented us with an immense amount of material foreign to, often inconsistent with, the most prized intellectual and moral heritage of the western world. This is the cause of our modern intellectual perplexities and confusions. It sets the special problem for philosophy today and for many days to come. (ii)

Dewey’s philosophy of experience proposes a foundation for the orchestration of the old and the new, the traditionalism of the new humanists on the one hand, and, on the other, what Hartley Grattan called the incontrovertible fact of technological modernity. Like the

other modes of humanism we have been investigating, Dewey's philosophy has at its core the hope for a genuine communal solidarity, or in Norman Foerster's words, "the ideal of completeness" that would re-integrate the individual back into her lost social networks.

Dewey expresses these concerns again in *Art as Experience* (1934), in which he worries that, with the increasing dominance of industrial culture, "Life is compartmentalized and the institutionalized compartments are classified as high and as low; their values as profane and spiritual, as material and ideal" (20). This non-integrated psychology divides thought from experience, reflecting the alienated conditions of modernity. In contrast, our daily experience of creating and sharing art shows the way back to a reunited society, for "Art breaks through barriers that divide human beings," generating the possibility of genuine human community (244). This is because "art is the extension of the power of rites and ceremonies to unite men, through shared celebration to all incidents and scenes of life," rendering "men aware of their union with one another in origin and destiny" (271). As such, art is a living, present force that permeates experience, binding individuals together by communicating the act of giving form to perception.

As the aestheticization of experience, art is at the root of the "sights that hold the crowd," generating spectacles that overcome the alienating compartmentalization of modernity (5). In these moments of aesthetically integrated collective life, the masses are "infected" by the art that inheres in the vital forms of cultural expression (5). For Dewey, this aesthetic unity of the spectacle is manifested in daily customs, like play: "Athletic sports, as well as drama, celebrated and enforced traditions of race and group, instructing the people, commemorating glories, and strengthening their civic pride" (7). Just as art

gives form to a collective sense of “origin and destiny,” sports and theatricalized events effectively aestheticize national life. Although Dewey suggests that the power of spectacle to bind the masses and give them a sense of racial homogeneity has diminished since ancient times, at the time of his writing in 1934 the Nazi party’s rise to power in Germany demonstrated the continuing and disturbing vitality of these principles.

Thomas Wolfe, in his posthumously published fragment “The Dark Messiah” (in *You Can’t Go Home Again*, 1942), recognized the alarming capacity of aestheticized spectacle to draw the crowds together in a sense of unity and destiny.¹⁴³ The protagonist George Webber attends the 1936 Berlin Olympics, noting the “organizing genius of the German people” and the “sheer pageantry of the occasion.” Feeling that the spectacle of the games was “overwhelming,” George ruminated,

There seemed to be something ominous in it. One sensed a stupendous concentration of effort, a tremendous drawing together and ordering in the vast collective power of the whole land. And the thing that made it seem ominous was that it so evidently went beyond what the games themselves demanded. (625)

Whereas John Dewey found positive potential in the organizing force of art, Wolfe’s protagonist, George, worries about the “vast collective power” signaled in these games. In George’s estimation, these games were not free play, but rather the same ritualized “drawing together” that Dewey described as the one of the most potent aspects of aesthetic spectacle. While American pro-fascists like Lawrence Dennis idealized the

¹⁴³ In Robert Brinkmeyer’s important recent work, *The Fourth Ghost* (2009), he explores Thomas Wolfe’s complex relationship to Germany as he witnessed the rise of the Nazi regime. Brinkmeyer develops a convincing argument that Wolfe’s racism, anti-Semitism, and his fascination with populism all drew him into the ambit of the question of fascism.

“iron discipline” of top-down fascist dictatorship, “The Dark Messiah” presents the more subtle force of aesthetic spectacle to unite the crowds in a sense of shared destiny.¹⁴⁴

George’s meditation on the games signals the capacity of spectacle to attract the multiple, contradictory desires of the diverse crowd, uniting them in a sense of collective life. As we saw in the previous chapter, the New York World’s Fair likewise deployed aesthetic appeals in the capture of the crowd’s desires, drawing these diverse hopes, fears and fantasies into the idealized utopian vision of a depoliticized community. In the Berlin Olympics, what disturbs George most is the superabundant excess of energy that was displayed in the Nazi pageantry, in which the “stupendous concentration of effort [...] went beyond what the games themselves demanded.” Although play has often been situated as a mode of resistance or escape, fascism demonstrated the process of capture whereby the aesthetics of play was reconfigured as mass spectacle.¹⁴⁵ The Nazi pageantry witnessed by George is disturbing for its capacity to capture and fascinate this energy in what Walter Benjamin called the “aestheticization of politics.”

John Dewey, in the closing lines of *Art as Experience*, writes optimistically that “Art is a mode of production not found in charts and statistics, and it insinuates

¹⁴⁴ The full citation, from Dennis’ *The Coming American Fascism* (1936), reads, “The great contribution of fascism to mass welfare is that of providing a formula of national solidarity within the spiritual bonds and iron discipline of which the elite and the masses of any given nation, everyone in the measure of his capacity, can cooperate for the common good” (Griffin, *Fascism* 448).

¹⁴⁵ The capacity of fascism to capture play has broad implications for theoretical work on the notion of play, because it has often borne the weight of utopian hopes and the lingering residues of humanist longings. To briefly signal a few of these valences: Jacques Derrida, in his notion of play as linguistic and ontological residuum, argues that the differences that come from the play of language and life are disruptive of the standardization of meaning and being. Hans Georg Gadamer conceives of play or games as a way of overcoming the subject- object dichotomy. In a different way, Herbert Marcuse sees play as the release of vital instincts that could transform culture. Both Gadamer and Marcuse are influenced by Friedrich Schiller’s notion of a play instinct or “Spieltrieb.” Paul de Man’s work on Friedrich Schiller challenges this theory of play. This play impulse, which Schiller imaged as a way of resolving subject-object dichotomies, is, de Man argues, problematic because it collapses the aesthetic into immediate experience (see McQuillan 92-95).

possibilities of human relations not to be found in rule and precept, admonition and administration” (349). Dewey sees this creative potential of aesthetic display and the complexity of social play as innately resistant to control; and yet, as the Nazi pageantry of “The Dark Messiah” demonstrates, the aestheticization of cultural rites like the Olympic games made up a fundamental part of the Nazi appeal. As the capture of multiple desires circulating through the crowd, the aesthetic display deployed under fascism demonstrated that this basic property of “human relations” was available to the irrational, ultimately dehumanizing appeals of modern mass spectacle.

Stuart Chase shared Dewey’s hope that play could express a fundamentally human element in the midst of industrial regimentation and the standardization of experience. This hope was predicated on the humanist concern to unite what Lothrop Stoddard called “the Old and the New.” In *Men and Machines* (1929), Chase worries that the “play instinct” will die out along with the work instinct in the new mechanized society (256). As one of the architects of the New Deal, Chase was a definite proponent of Statist organization and bureaucratic rationalism, and, as I argued in the introduction, his hope for “practical dictatorship” has important affinities with the question of fascism in the interwar period (*Men and Machines* 346). Nonetheless, he also recognized the dehumanizing effects of hyper-rationalization.

In an anthology of essays, *Whither Mankind*, edited by the influential American historian Charles Beard on the perplexities and confusions of modernity, Chase writes that, “with the coming of the machine, and particularly in the U.S., the age-long biological balance is threatened by monotonies and muscular repressions in work which give play an unprecedented significance” (335). Estimating that Americans spend one-

fourth of their income, about twenty billion dollars, on “recreation,” however, Chase also worries that play is now a part of a mechanized industry of commodities (348). The purchase of cars, which he includes in recreation, comprises more “mechanical horsepower” than “all other forms of mechanical energy,” and, Chase darkly adds, it kills tens of thousands per annum, “which must make the emperors of Rome stir enviously in their graves” (338).¹⁴⁶ The contrast between the soft-bodies of the vulnerable humans and the hard metal bodies of the cars emphasizes the dehumanizing effects of this new mechanized “recreation.” In the extreme velocity of cars, the violence of mechanized forms of play makes physically palpable the differential speeds circulating in interwar American culture.

While Chase hopes for a humanized form of play “with no basic dependence upon a machine culture,” he acknowledges that,

Motoring, movies, second-hand thrills in sports, in tabloid crimes, and in confession magazines, the funnies, the radio, even the remorseless rhythm of jazz dancing – all are burdened with elements against which the spirit of play beats its wings in vain. (352)

Like the spectacle in New York World’s Fair events like Futurama and the Westinghouse exhibits, these aspects of recreation in the mass culture of interwar America leave behind the humanist “spirit of play.”¹⁴⁷ As I argue in the first chapter, this commercialized

¹⁴⁶ Chase estimates that 25,000 people are killed annually, while 600,000 are injured by cars (338).

¹⁴⁷ The concept of play was broadly deployed in the interwar period. The Dutch scholar and humanist Johan Huizinga, during his visit to the United States in 1926, writes, “Play is culture. Play can pass over into art and rite, as in the dance and in sacred stage presentations. Play is rhythm and struggle. The competitive ideal itself is a cultural value of high importance. Play also means organization. But now, as a result of the modern capacity for very far-reaching organization and the possibilities created by modern transportation, an element of mechanization enters sport” (*America* 115). In 1939, as the Nazis prepared to invade Holland, Huizinga would return to this theme of play, arguing that the ludic element presented a vital, fundamentally human aspect of the spirit that no totalizing, organizing regime could suppress. Key to Huizinga’s thinking was his notion of “fair play” as a mode of distinguishing between true and false modes of play. In an interesting parallel, T. V. Smith, in *The Democratic Way of Life: An American Interpretation*

production of organic cohesive community was oriented entirely toward an empty future, failing to integrate either the old social customs or acknowledge the social conflicts emergent in the new industrial era. This aesthetic overproduction (to use Jeffrey Schnapp's phrase) produced an immaculate, organized, coherent world without the element of play that Dewey and Chase identify as a peculiarly human trait.

In his summary introduction to *Whither Mankind*, Charles Beard gives a more hopeful account than Stuart Chase, arguing that, while human community can never return to old traditions, the changes wrought by machine culture could nonetheless be humanized:

Under the machine and science, the love of beauty, the sense of mystery, and the motive of compassion – sources of aesthetics, religion, and humanism – are not destroyed. They remain essential parts of our nature. But the conditions under which they must operate, the channels they must take, the potentialities of their action are all changed. (24)

Beard's thinking on American culture and history is permeated by this desire to locate a human quantum in the changing technological ecology of modernity. In his more thoroughgoing investigation of the same questions in *America in Midpassage* (1939), Beard returns to the question of "diversions"; however, he is less certain of the confluence between "aesthetics, religion, and humanism" in this later exploration of American mass industrial culture. Reflecting on the relationship between spectacle and violence, Beard writes, "the Nazi cult of 'Blood' gave [...] immediate and astounding examples of the relations which could exist between the State and diversions" (581). Just as Chase worried that the car introduced an unprecedented violence into recreation, Beard

(1939), argues that democratic culture can be distinguished from fascism in the democratic sense of "sportsmanship" (81).

is concerned that, far from presenting a humanizing dynamic, play in this context becomes a menacingly barbarous aspect of industrial mass culture.

Under this regime of fascist mass regimentation, apparently harmless amusements manifest the ominous aspects that Thomas Wolfe's protagonist, George Webber, glimpsed in the pageantry of the Olympic Games. As Beard writes:

Playing upon the instincts of wanton cruelty, Hitler turned his men loose on the Jews in a manner reminiscent of Roman holidays when Christians were the victims, without organizing this operation into a State pageant. He laid his heavy hands on every form of amusement. Mussolini and Stalin did the same. Giant parades and rituals, the tramp, tramp, tramp of men and women drilled in military manners, with modern lighting casting its exotic appeal, furnished spectacles that might have made a Claudius or a Nero green with envy. The theater, the film, athletics, and even ancient folkways were bent and twisted and subdued to the designs of a military State – a dictatorship – whatever avowed social and economic ends were associated with it. (580-1)

Like Stuart Chase, Beard compares the modern industrial organization of play to the cruelty of Silver Age Rome. Whereas Beard had earlier hoped for a humanist balance between old traditions and the new machine culture, at the late date of 1939, fascism evidences the connection between the spectacular coordination of the masses and dehumanizing forms of violence. The aesthetic spectacle that, for Dewey writing in 1934, provides one of the motive forces of human community becomes for Beard a spectacular “appeal” transmitted through media events like theater, film, athletics, and even the traditional culture of the folk.

Kenneth Roberts, in his infamous pro-fascist *Black Magic* (1922) signaled early on the ensemble of effects circulating between modern mass spectacle and the appeal of fascist violence that would later preoccupy the diverse figures we have been looking at:

[...] for rapid action, drama, excitement, romance, comedy, and the final overthrow of Vice by Virtue, with a deep-dyed villain getting it in the

neck every fifteen minutes, and the handsome hero pulling off a hair-raising stunt with equal frequency, the Fascisti movement had all the twelve-reel moving-picture thrillers in the world backed out of the projecting room. (34)

Roberts identifies fascism with the capacity of mass spectacle to draw the crowds into a network of irrational desiring appeals. Fascist violence is not masked by these aesthetics, but rather comes directly out of the theatricalized politics that Roberts admires. Thus, in this scene of fascist triumph, the “villain” is cartoonishly inhuman, and his elimination is simply an aspect of the achievement of a conflict-free community.

The implications of Roberts’ argument present an important challenge to thinking on humanism and democracy in the interwar period. This problem is especially significant for Charles Beard, because he aligns the potential of American democracy to survive the social conflicts wrought by technological modernity with what he called “democratic humanism.” In his article “Making the Fascist State” (1929), Beard favorably compares America with fascist Italy, arguing that “Hamilton, Madison, and John Adams, were voluminous and vehement as any Fascist could desire” in their “condemnation of democracy” (277). The fascist government, Beard writes with optimism, “is like the American check and balance system, and it may work out in a new democratic direction.” As proof, Beard points to the regime’s ability to bring about “by force of the State the most compact and unified organization of capitalists and laborers into two camps which the world has ever seen” (277). As we saw in the previous chapter, the organization of mass spectacle was one of the most important forces in the integration of the warring class factions of modern industrial culture. Beard’s positive assessment of fascism presents a significant challenge to his later thinking on violence and spectacle

under the Nazi regime, because it demonstrates the affinities between his democratic humanist hopes for the integration of the classes and the fascist project.

In *America in Midpassage* (1939), Beard returns to this question, asking what distinguishes American democracy from fascism. Significantly, his answer is “democratic humanism,” and he ends this monumental work with a panegyric to the humanist hopes for rational social integration:

Aware that Caesar’s empire of blood, if it came, would perish, as did even the colossal monument of Ozymandias the mighty with the sneer of cold command upon his lips, and fortified by a long and tenacious tradition, the humanistic wing of American democracy sought to provide the economic and cultural foundations indispensable to a free society, by rational methods of examination, discussion, legislation, administration, and cooperation, employing the sciences, letters, and arts in efforts to fulfill the promises of its heritage and aspirations. (949)

In this passage, Beard describes democratic humanism as the inversion of “Caesar’s empire of blood.” Democratic humanism is distinguished by its rationality, its organization and its cooperation, and yet, as I have sought to demonstrate throughout this chapter, the attempt to distinguish these elements from fascism continually fails to achieve the escape velocity by which it would leave the orbit of the question of fascism. Perhaps the most significant aspect of these affinities between fascism and humanism in the interwar period is demonstrated in Beard’s claims for democratic humanism, because they show that it was becoming increasingly difficult to think of American political and social culture outside the ambit of fascism.

Conclusion: A Million Hands, A Million Voices

The same year of *America in Midpassage*, in which Charles Beard contemplated the future of democracy in light of the new mass industrial culture, also marked the opening of the New York World's Fair. As we saw with E.B. White's response to this new mass spectacle, the Fair raised fears that human culture would be lost in this technological utopia. The multiple desiring appeals emanating from events like the Fair formed different linkages with each of the visitors, drawing them into a sense of organic cohesive community through these differential relations. Thus, the Westinghouse washing machine configured (for different female-gendered shoppers in different ways) the desires for convenience, middle class values, the feminist hope for more leisure, fears of drudgery and the attendant loss of beauty, and so many other more (and more particular) segmentarities that were drawn into the spectacle-commodity of the washing machine.

In the course of our exploration of humanism in interwar America, we have examined the ways in which the multiple appeals operating in mass events like the Fair presented important questions for the democratic humanist hopes for an integrated society. In William Ogburn's phrase, mass industrial culture brought together sets of "differential speeds" in which groupings of people, ideas and machines were assembling and breaking apart in unexpected ways. The humanist search for an essential quiddity that would not break down in this disjunctive plane of multiple appeals continuously constrained the thinkers we have been discussing to consider the role of the *demos* in this new polity. In contrast to the heterogeneous crowd, the humanist community would, it was hoped, find ways of integrating older social traditions with the new dynamics of

technological modernity. This hope for depoliticized, conflict-free society continually traced routes back to the question of fascism and the logic of multiple contradictory appeals that could bind the community together.

Nathanael West's *A Cool Million: The Dismantling of Lemuel Pitkin* (1934) provides an extraordinary replica of these dynamics. Looking to make his fortune, the protagonist, Lemuel, embarks on a series of misadventures across the country in which he is physically dismantled (losing an eye, hair, teeth, a leg, etc.), eventually becoming the unintentional martyr of an American fascist movement. William Solomon's excellent reading of *A Cool Million* brings a Lacanian analysis to bear on these events, as he argues that the subject formation described by Lacan as the mirror stage provides a theory of fascism.¹⁴⁸ As a satire on the Horatio Alger story of young male subject-formation, Solomon argues, West's novel fragments Lemuel's body into a *corps morcelé*, a site of "somatic wreckage" that "can be incorporated back into a system of ideological inscription" under fascism (174).

While I find this argument compelling, it is important to note that the influential interpretation of fascism that Solomon is following here depends on the juxtaposition of wholeness to fragmentation. As we have seen with the interwar debates on humanism, the concern over parts and wholes is formulated in response to the emergence of a non-human mode of social formation that does not rely on a stable subject for its coordination. Because fascism was an attractor for the multiple contradictory desires that circulated through interwar American culture, it also drew this humanist desire for organic

¹⁴⁸ Solomon is drawing on Susan Buck-Morss' argument that "the mirror stage can be read as a theory of fascism," and she continues "the significance of Lacan's theory emerges only in the historical context of modernity as precisely the experience of the fragile body and the dangers to it of fragmentation that replicates the trauma of the original infantile event" (cited in Solomon 256, footnote).

cohesiveness into its ambit, and yet to locate fascism studies exclusively in this problematic is to ignore the multiple contradictory modes by which it coordinated elements that were both larger and smaller than the boundaries ascribed to the psychological subject. Indeed, this would be to continue the humanist problematic that, I argue, fascism profoundly reconfigures between the wars.

In my read, West's novel is not concerned with wholes, but develops a fruitful engagement with the question of fascism because it explores the circulation of partial desires in a field of relations that assemble and disassemble continuously. Simply put, in *A Cool Million*, Lemuel never acts as though he has a wholeness to lose; he does not miss his body parts, nor is there any mourning, as the third-person singular narrative account dispenses with psychological interiority. For example, when he loses his eye (a classic sight of castration anxiety), the narrative simply states that "Lem was dismissed from the hospital minus his right eye" (171). From here, the narrative moves on without another mention of Lem's experience.¹⁴⁹ Instead of acting as a psychological character, Lemuel functions as a force field of prosthetic formations, adding and subtracting body parts as often as he shifts narrative scene and social context. In this sense we can say that *A Cool Million* formulates Lemuel's world as a site of interchange between different bodily and narrative possibilities as they come into the horizon of his story.

Events like the fascist takeover by the American National Revolutionary Party are not in the background or part of the context of the novel, but come into Lemuel's purview without causal motivation. In this sense, fascism is not necessarily an effect of social ills,

¹⁴⁹ West uses this technique continuously in the narrative. When he loses his thumb in a car accident, the intern who conducted the operation simply says, "I hope you are not a violinist." Because Lemuel is a "brave lad," "he forced himself to think of other things" (206). Once again, there is no process of mourning or sense of personal fragmentation, just a set of somatic reactions that are dominated by narrative content.

or caused by the fragmentation of the body politic, but functions as a machine that overcodes and binds multiple contradictory desires. Neither is fascism part of a narrative build-up of motivation within the ambit of the novel: it is a spike of force that warps the narrative in drawing it into its gravitational pull. The would-be fascist dictator, Nathan “Shagpoke” Whipple, for example, weaves in and out of the story, and lacks any psychological or narrative reason for leading a fascist movement. As an attractor that binds unlikely elements, Whipple causes the narrative to veer toward unanticipated possibilities, such as the conquest of America in the 1930s by the fascist “leather shirts.” West’s image for this moment of swerve is the riot, caused by Whipple’s speech in the Southern town of Beulah, which eventuates in the upsurge of the fascist National Revolutionary Party that pulls the narrative conclusively into its orbit.

Whipple’s language mimics the contradictory formulae of racism, nationalism, xenophobia and other appeals, as he speechifies to the mob that has gathered to hear him under the lynching tree, “I love the South I love her because her women are beautiful and chaste, her men brave and gallant, and her fields warm and fruitful. But there is one thing that I love more than the south... my country, these United States.” And he continues,

You stand here now, under this heroic tree, like the free men that you are, but tomorrow you will become the slaves of Socialists and Bolsheviks. Your sweethearts and wives will become the common property of foreigners to maul and mouth at their leisure. Your shops will be torn from you and you will be driven from your farms. In return you will be thrown a stinking, slave’s crust with Russian labels.” (228)

These contradictory elements (nativism, traditional ideals of chastity and gallantry, anti-communism, and so on) do not present psychological incoherence so much as the composition of a multiplicity of appeals through which the lynch mob is drawn together for violence. What distinguishes Whipple in the narrative is his ability to whip up a

frenzy by finding the right configurations of appeals with which to reach out to the crowd.

After making his way through the riot, Lemuel returns to New York, where he finds employment as a “stooge” thanks to his dis-integrated appearance. His job consists of being battered on stage until he loses wig, false eye, or leg, these prostheses often flying into the guffawing audience. The violence of the spectacle demonstrates that Lemuel is not an integral body, but a set of prostheses. Each time he loses an appendage, he reaches into a box and pulls out another one. Lemuel, we might say, is a dynamic rather than a body, a set of interlocking fields in tensile relation to one another. Acting in his illustrative capacity as a clown, Lemuel makes explicit the social process of assemblage and dis-assemblage through which Whipple’s mob formulates and reformulates its horrendous but cartoonish violence. Lemuel demonstrates this inhuman process of reconfiguration in all its distortion and *grand guignol* dimensions, and he illustrates this all the more forcefully for the reader by failing to act like an integrated, three-dimensional human in the first place.

At the conclusion of *A Cool Million*, fascism once more reemerges onto Lemuel’s narrative plane. Having overtaken the South and the West, the “leather shirts,” who are themselves characterized by their prosthetic skins, prepare to march on New York. In these closing episodes, Lemuel goes through his final permutation when he is improbably shot (most likely by Whipple), and made into a martyr for the fascist cause. Throughout *A Cool Million*, Lemuel’s body demonstrates the multiplicity of the social body in modern industrial mass culture. His sardonic apotheosis under the sign of fascism turns him into a pervasive configuration of the multiple contradictory desires that fascism

deploys to draw the crowds into super-subjective formations. In the closing lines of the novel, a million young fascist boys march and sing to honor their martyr's birthday. They sing, "Who dares? – this was L. Pitkin's cry, / As striding on the Bijou stage he came -- / 'Surge out with me in Shagpoke's name, / 'For him to live, for him to die!' A million hands flung up reply, / A million voices answered, 'I!'" (237). Rather than the "cool million" that represents Horatio Alger-style success, Lemuel ironically achieves his millions in his dispersal among the multiple desires of the crowd. Not fragmented *from* a whole, but re-assembled *in* a million "hands" and "voices," Lemuel's dismantling is completed in the pageantry that composes the fascist organic cohesive community.

Chapter 3. The Grain in the Vox Populi: The Logic of Radio Culture in Interwar America

In the United States between the wars, radio occupied a particular place in the hopes, fears, and fantasies that circulated through the newly technologized landscape. The interwar period saw the introduction of sound film and the rise of the star system, the widespread use of new hand-held cameras like the Leica that revolutionized photographic art, the arrival of electricity to the rural population, the emergence of the research laboratory, the introduction of home appliances like the washing machine, the vast expansion of the car industry and the building of the U.S. highway system, and radio was probably the single most important and influential of these developments to affect American culture between the wars.

As part of the pervasive concerns about technology, radio culture was central to considerations of the changing structure of democratic society. On the one hand, some of the most important intellectuals and writers of the period saw radio as part of a qualitative shift in human culture that extended even to the level of the human body. For writers like Lewis Mumford and Stuart Chase, technologies such as radio threw into question the very notion of human culture. On the other hand, many writers expressed a naïve faith that these new technologies could be used in the same way that mechanical instruments were used in the nineteenth century. This instrumental rationality, common but not dominant in the interwar period, conceived of radio as a tool that could and must be used for specific and delimited ends.

Although these two views of technology differed greatly, they shared the insight that democratic culture was being profoundly affected by these powerful new technical apparatuses. Some writers argued that technologies like radio would usher in a new utopian world of borderless communication and international enlightenment; for others, these technologies were hastening the breakdown of rational democracy and the sense of citizenship, thereby making the United States vulnerable to fascism. Situated in the context of the powerful appeals and the dynamic use of technology exhibited by European fascism, these hopes and fears extended throughout the debates on technology between the wars.

In his eccentric document *The American Mind: A Study in Socio-Analysis* (1932), socialist and critic Leon Samson develops what he calls a psychological “diagnosis” of the American mentality.¹⁵⁰ Summarizing the current social woes in the United States as the result of “infantilism” and “incompetence,” Samson rather surprisingly goes on to claim that this collective immaturity will lead to what he insistently names “American Fascism” (87). By fascism, he means “Caesarism,” or a kind of “hero worship” in which the “personal supersedes the political” in both government and society (78). This definition seems clear enough, but then he cannot keep himself from going on to add a litany of allied causes of American “infantilism”: chief among the causes of American Fascism are technocratic government, monopoly capitalism, “pragmatism,” “snobbism,” the writings of H.L. Mencken, and even Walt Whitman’s poetry, which, he claims, anticipates the fascist aspects of Futurist poetry (83). Samson also includes “humanism” in his list of dangers, holding that “The plebian origin of American Fascism has its

¹⁵⁰ As Michael Denning points out, Samson probably coins the term “socio-analysis” with this study (*Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* n. 246).

literary echo in New England humanism” (87). Because the humanist culls the best from many cultures, he is “the born consumer” for Samson, a sure sign of the dreaded “incompetence” that will surely result in fascism.

This list, capacious to the point of futility, is nonetheless important for its expression of the multiple, contradictory aspects that Samson, like so many Americans between the wars, found in fascism. His need to locate what seemed to him like the very real possibility of “American Fascism” in such diverse aspects of culture is indicative of the uncertain yet entrancing idea of fascism in the interwar period. The various appeals emanating from fascism in the United States had an attractive force that Samson felt without being able to locate it in any delimited way. In the previous chapter we looked at the shifting linkages between humanism and fascism as self-proclaimed humanists expressed both anti-technological fears, and at the same time, hopes for technocratic state organization based on instrumental reason. Likewise, for Samson, both anti-technological humanism and the emergent technocratic society equally carried the risk of the breakdown of American democracy and the attendant threat of fascism. The result of these partially articulated fears, hopes, and fantasies is a heteroclitic description of tendencies leading to an empty site labeled “Fascism,” a socio-political cipher that both demands and resists definition.

In this extended list of fascist tendencies, Samson also includes radio which, he argues, has the property of “concealing sense with sound” (199). As a key factor in the new technological ecology of interwar America, radio generates an unprecedented degree of “incompetence,” because it disables rational discourse, creating a new, anti-democratic variety of mass culture. The dissociation of acoustic, affective sensation from rational

discourse tends to bewilder radio's audience with a series of unrelated events, Samson argues. Like his notions of "humanism" and "pragmatism," Samson contends that radio reduces its listeners to randomly choosing between uncertain options in a decontextualized world, thereby turning democracy into a chaotic gamble and opening the way to fascism.

Samson was far from being alone in his concern about radio's capacity to break down democratic forms. The interwar period is profoundly marked by the debates on the emergent radio culture of the late 1920s and 1930s. Many of the figures we have encountered in previous chapters also expressed concerns over the powerful social changes wrought by the invisible radio waves permeating the landscape of technological modernity. Waldo Frank, for example, worried that

Radio, telegraph, "movie," like the palavers of diplomacy and trade, are noises emitted by special social appetites or cells: they are no Word: whatever Word remains they render less accessible than ever. [...] Religion and politics must form a whole, if either is to be a part of health. (*The Rediscovery of America*, 15-16)

Like Samson, Frank wants meaningful social discourse that does not confuse sense with sound. Similarly, in his article "Our Guilt in Fascism," Frank associates technologies like radio with the "lethal ersatz of social integration" that leads to fascism (607). Radio, by contrast, generates social confusion and reduces listeners to "cells" without real social integration.

Although we can fairly consider Leon Samson a marginal figure in the culture of interwar America, Waldo Frank cannot be similarly dismissed. What interests me here are the parallel tendencies manifested in their arguments on fascism within the context of technological modernity. The concern over the chaotic tendencies in technology, the

breakdown of meaningful democratic discourse, and the association of the new mass culture with fascism echo throughout the period, whether these fears are given voice by fringe characters or important intellectuals and cultural critics.

From social theorists like Lewis Mumford, to philosophers like John Dewey, and intellectual figures like Charles Beard, radio was a constant point of concern for Americans in the interwar period. In his work on urban planning, Mumford expressed the hope that the radio would allow the de-concentration of urban centers without the loss of culture and communication that made the cityscape attractive. But while works like *The Regional Framework of Civilization* (1931) communicate a vast optimism in the positive force of radio to help relieve the “congested metropolis,” Mumford radically changes his tone later in the decade (212). In *Faith for Living* (1940) and his other writings on fascism, Mumford argues that radio, as part of a larger set of social changes, tends to generate the intellectual inanition that Leon Samson also feared. “Our young people are starving for lack of real tasks and vital opportunities,” Mumford worries, and he continues, “Many of them live like sleepwalkers, apparently in contact with their environment, but actually dead to everything but the print of the newspapers, the blare of the radio, or the flickering shadows on the screen” (172).¹⁵¹ Along with film and other mass media, the radio signals a loss of contact with reality, resulting in an immature population, vulnerable to “crooners,” “screeching hysterics,” and even “an ignoble and addled personality, like Hitler” (172).

¹⁵¹ The American social critic Ralph Borsodi expresses a similar attitude toward radio in *This Ugly Civilization* (1929), in which he identifies radio with part of the ugliness that pervades the modern urban landscape. For Borsodi, the “herd minded” who can innure themselves to this ugliness are a threat to democratic culture (15).

As these diverse thinkers demonstrate, radio was seen in completely contradictory terms between the wars. On the one hand, social critics and intellectuals imagined it as a harbinger of greater democratic freedoms, and, on the other, as a profound threat to rational democracy that would pave the way to American fascism.¹⁵² In *The Public and Its Problems*, John Dewey meditates on the force of new technologies like radio:

[T]he movies, radio, cheap reading matter and motor car with all they stand for have come to stay. That they did not originate in deliberate desire to divert attention from political interests does not lessen their effectiveness in that direction. The political elements in the constitution of the human being, those having to do with citizenship, are crowded to one side. (139)

Repeatedly, intellectuals and critics group radio with a larger set of social transformations that are integral to an expansive and powerful new technological environment. These changes, in turn, are seen as presenting a threat to democratic rationality that opens the way to fascism. The concept of “technics,” introduced by Lewis Mumford in 1934, describes this increasing sense that technological and human culture are intermeshed. As we saw in the previous chapter, the humanist assumption that people and machines occupied separate spheres was profoundly troubled by these developments in technics.¹⁵³ If for Dewey the human being is constituted by its “political elements,” he also

¹⁵² In his science fiction novel, *Star Maker* (1937), the British author Olaf Stapledon imagines a series of worlds, each dominated by a different kind of government ranging from democracy and anarchy to fascism. In some of these worlds, radio is a “force making for cosmopolitanism,” but in others it is the “main stimulus to nationalism,” that Stapledon identifies with fascism (45).

¹⁵³ The English poet and author D.H. Lawrence expressed a similar fascination with the changes wrought by the new machine ecology, although with a greater sense of the threat posed by the machine. For example, in “Man and Machine,” he writes, “Man invented the machine/ and now the machine has invented man./ God the Father is a dynamo/ and God the Son a talking radio/ and God the Holy Ghost is gas that keeps it all going./ And men have perforce to be little dynamos/ and little talking radios/ and the human spirit is so much gas that keeps it all going.” Cited from *The Complete Poems of D.H. Lawrence*, eds., Vivian de Sola Pinto and Warrant Roberts, vol. 2 (London: Heinemann, 1964), 641.

acknowledges the force of technics like radio to change what this political “citizenship” means.

In *The Economy of Abundance* (1934), Stuart Chase echoes Dewey in insisting that there is no going back from the new human-mechanical integrations of technics.

“The individual may protest that he abhors the machine,” Chase argues, but nevertheless,

[h]e must constantly watch clocks, consult timetables, ride on railroad trains and in subways, thrust a forefinger in telephone dials, send telegrams; dodge if not use motor cars, taxicabs and busses; be hoisted in elevators, turn the cocks of water and gas faucets, twiddle with radio knobs, switch on electric lights, trust implicitly to the complicated equations back of suspension bridges. (298)

These “mass habits” mark changes not only in the cultural mentality but also at the level of the human body, as the technological environment induces a process of co-adaptation. For Chase, these changes signal the diminishing importance of political culture to decide social organization because, with the advent of technologies like radio, social adaptation happens between humans and machines, rather than through a process of rational debate. “Radio behavior is now a strong grove of branching habits” in which these co-adaptations take place (301). Indeed, since the imperatives of technics are more indicative of interwar culture than political organizations, Chase no longer holds out hope for a purely human society; fascism and democracy are thus similar in their attention to technics, even though they express different socio-political formations (316).

Chase and Mumford were not alone in theorizing that the introduction of a new machine ecology would change human culture at the profoundest levels.¹⁵⁴ The

¹⁵⁴ Echoing the arguments of Americans like Mumford and Chase, the French philosophy of technology Jacques Ellul held that technology was pervasive in the modern era, and tended to dominate other modes of social operation. See *Technology and Values: Essential Readings*, ed., Craig Hanks (UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

Ukrainian-born Futurist David Burliuk wrote the first radio manifesto, “Radio-Style” (1926) after he moved permanently to New York in 1922.¹⁵⁵ His manifesto imagines a shift from the “mechanical man” to a “mechanical mentality” with the introduction of radio:

Beginning with the dark ages up to the era of steel and steam the evolution of life constructed in its different stages a mechanical man. This development occurred in the muscles and bones of the human man and the rougher mechanical elements of man until we reached a purely physical mechanical man – the industrial worker of the present, being replaced by a purely mechanical construction. Today – the beginning of the historical radio era, we are witnessing the mechanization of the human mind or of the mental qualities of man. This is the beginning of the creation of a mechanical mentality. (paragraph 11)

For Burliuk, the “radio era” is the apotheosis of human mechanization, in which even the spirit becomes reproducible in the “super-nature” communicated via radio waves. Rather than looking to traditional democratic forms, Burliuk anticipates an entirely different, mystical community through radio that would transcend political concepts of the human.

In their attempt to fantasize the continuity of community, writers such as Chase, Burliuk, and Mumford (in his earlier work) express the sense that profound changes are being wrought upon democratic culture by emergent technologies like radio. Whether pessimistic or optimistic about the outcome of these changes, many thinkers and writers in the interwar period thought that democracy would not be the same after the advent of the “radio era.” In *Nine Chains to the Moon* (1938), the techno-philosopher Buckminster Fuller encapsulated the sense that human culture was shifting when he characterized social relations in terms of energy flows that could be rationally organized through

¹⁵⁵ The self-styled “father of Russian Futurism,” Burliuk left Russia in 1922, eventually becoming an American citizen in 1930. Although he traveled to Europe frequently, he made New York his permanent residence until his death in 1967.

instrumental reason. In this view, the strain of social and economic differences ought to be seen as “friction-retardments of perfect speed” that could be overcome with better planning (61). Borrowing from Einstein, Fuller conceptualized social and material relations in terms of differential speeds of energy flows rather than as an effect of socio-political conflict. As the “sense-extension into radiation,” Fuller saw the radio as a perfect actualization of the promise of technology to reduce social tensions and harmonize society by converting human sensation into frictionless energy (58). In its fullest realization, radio represented for Fuller both the complete transformation of the human and the epitome of human instrumental control over its environment.

As strange as Fuller’s ideas may seem, his notion that radio signaled an ideal relation between matter and energy, and that this newfound fluidity would liquidate social conflict was widely shared between the wars. Michael Pupin, in *The Romance of the Machine* (1930), argues that technologies like the radio facilitate American democratic culture. As the birthplace of radio broadcasting, the United States expresses the democratic potential of machine culture in the fluid communication that the radio makes possible.¹⁵⁶ “The radio of today is an American creation,” Pupin writes, “[i]t is a product of the American machine civilization” (91). With inventions like the radio, Pupin concludes, “[t]here will be no place for barbarism” in the world, because radio’s capacity to transgress borders will create an international and enlightened community (94). Like Buckminster Fuller’s fascination with overcoming “friction retardments,” Pupin’s hope

¹⁵⁶ Pupin is referring to the invention of an amplification device, the super-heterodyne conductor or “audion,” first discovered by the American Lee de Forest and perfected by Edward Armstrong before World War I. Of course, the original radio technology was invented by the Italian Guglielmo Marconi (see the documentary *Empire of the Air*).

for democratic radio internationalism is predicated on technology's capacity to convert social relations into a borderless space of energy exchange.

Michael Pupin's boundless enthusiasm for radio's potential was widely shared between the wars, but it came at the cost of simplifying the social changes effected by technics. The tension between instrumental control and the technological transformation of the human runs throughout the interwar discourse on the radio. If Mumford, Chase, Burliuk and others saw radio as part of a dramatic shift in human culture, another group of thinkers and writers tended to see technologies like radio in terms of instrumental rationality. Walter Dorwin Teague, in his influential *Design This Day* (1940), expressed the commonly held notion that rational design would alleviate the world's social and political problems, and that the environment should be "subjugated to humanized order and organized for human welfare" (28).¹⁵⁷ For Teague, radio was fundamental to this humanized order, although he was careful to separate radio's potential from its use by "[t]he duces and fuehrers and commissars and social reformers" (205). As a dimension of human rationality, radio is "abstract knowledge made operative," and has the important function of "building a humanized world" by enabling mass consensus, or what Teague calls the "crystallization of our wills" (209). "One of the most critical battles to be fought in these times is for the freedom of the ether waves," Teague argues, and "[w]hen this basic liberty is won throughout the world, we shall have established a primary condition for human unity" (209). Like Pupin, Teague sees a world that tends toward rationality

¹⁵⁷ The important design theorist and architect Walter Gropius shared Teague's attitude toward radio, and even incorporated the sense of streamlined rationality and fluidity into his arguments for modernist design techniques: "we want an architecture adapted to our world of machines, radios and fast cars...with the increasing strength of the new materials—steel, concrete, glass—and with the new audacity of engineering, the ponderousness of the old methods of building is giving way to a new lightness and airiness" (from *Idee und Aufbau*, cited in William J R Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900*, pp. 126).

and coherence without acknowledging that the effects of technological modernity were not always evidently democratic. The radio is troubling because it can be manipulated by autocrats, Pupin and Teague argue, but, left to its own devices, radio culture will organize a harmonious system of “human unity.”

These utopian hopes were predicated on the sense that technologies could be purposely manufactured by scientific researchers and shared for the benefit of all humankind. In *This Changing World* (1933), the American soap manufacturer and philanthropist Samuel Fels summarizes this optimism in the force of scientific technologies to end political conflict:

The automobile goes many times faster than the horse, the washing-machine saves many a backache, the telephone and the radio make distance almost a myth, the electric light conquers darkness, insulin takes away the terror of diabetes, and the X-ray lightens many another old scourge of mankind. So we meet the results of applied science every hour of the day. Drawing the world closer together, it is quickening our appreciation of our fellows, whether they hail from America or Siberia.
(248)

In almost an exact inversion of the litany of technological dangers we find in the writings of Leon Samson, Waldo Frank, Lewis Mumford, John Dewey, and others, Fels gives us a hopeful account of the practical application of scientific research and the technologies that devolved from these investigations. This naïve account was part of a widespread sense that democratic liberalism was best furthered by apparently neutral forms of technology rather than through political ideology. In the background of the writings of Fuller, Pupin, Teague, and Fels is the sense that, unlike fascism and other “totalitarian” regimes, American democracy is non-ideological; instead, it is organized around the

innate rationality of human society and the infinite capacity for technology to facilitate equalitarian human relations.

The hope that democratic forms could be maintained or even furthered by technologies like radio came from the sense that these inventions were instruments that could be deployed in specific and delimited ways. In other words, these thinkers imagined radio as a tool rather than as a technics, an instrument serving a coherent human will rather than emerging from a process of co-adaptation. At the heart of this debate was the question of fascism, and more specifically whether or not technological changes like radio furthered or hindered the movement of American culture away from democracy and toward fascism. As we have seen, the case was far from clear for those who addressed the extraordinary force of radio in the interwar period. Although Hannah Arendt, Leo Strauss and other influential post-Heideggerian thinkers of the post-War period have emphasized the naïve optimism expressed by writers like Samuel Fels between the wars, it is not accurate to maintain that this instrumentalist attitude dominated interwar culture. The debates around the emergence of radio culture, the changes in cinema technology, the new photographic forms enabled by the Leica camera, the effect of cars on pre-existing ways of life, etc., were polyvalent and uncertain, just as today our understanding of the force of the internet, genetic engineering, robotics, etc., is far from monolithic. Without an historically grounded understanding of the effects of technology on human culture, it is possible we may never fully grasp what consequences new technological developments hold for social and political culture. As debates over radio demonstrate, the linkages between technologies and anti-democratic forms of social organization were felt to be both powerful and uncertain.

These contradictory impulses can be found throughout the interwar period, sometimes in the same writer. At his most hopeful, the historian Charles Beard argues that “Railways, telegraph, airplanes, and the radio override historic political boundaries, weld this country into a single economic organism, and steadily weave it into the web of world civilization.” In the process of effecting this transformation, these technologies change social and political culture: “To speak of government merely in the political language of the 18th century is like talking of travel in the terms of gigs and schooners” (*The American Leviathan* 5). Beard maintains that a new, international political culture will result from radio’s capacity to saturate space and transgress borders:

Although nations have divided the surface of the globe and erected barriers along their borders to prevent visible objects from crossing, save at their pleasure, they cannot stop at their frontiers an invisible wave which has no bones, flesh, or substance, a wave that passes through the walls of houses, the very bodies of sentries, the offices of presidents and kings, and invades the redoubts of the strongest fortresses. (*The American Leviathan* 437)

Even a militarized state, Beard argues, is vulnerable to the pervasive, free-flowing communication of the radio. At the basis of this utopianism is, once again, the sense that radio technology is an instrument that can be deployed at will. Conversely, because radio is an instrument, Beard worries that it can be used, at least potentially, for anti-democratic purposes. For Beard, this explains why the fascist use of radio proved so efficacious in Italy and Germany. “In totalitarian countries,” he writes, “where the radio was a censored government monopoly, it was an instrument of sheer authority for enslaving the minds of auditors, crushing opposition, and producing a rigid uniformity of thought and feeling” (*America in Midpassage* 650). With American free enterprise, by

contrast, radio is in “private hands,” and therefore is allowed to develop in its natural course toward technological internationalism.

Beard’s sanguine account of technological development is troubled by the contradictory assertion that radio both naturally tends toward internationalism (which is synonymous with anti-fascism in the 1930s), and, at the same time, that it is available for the machinations of totalitarian regimes. Radio found a ready audience in the emergent mass culture of interwar America, but there was no way of telling whether this popularity guaranteed the freedom of democratic exchange or made the populace vulnerable to manipulation. The journalist and critic of the New Deal John Flynn articulates this uncertainty in *As We Go Marching* (1944), maintaining that, in the era of mass politics,

[T]he popular mind must be subjected to intense conditioning, and this calls for the positive and aggressive forms of propaganda with which we are becoming familiar in this country [i.e. the United States]. The chief instruments of this are the radio and the movies. In the hands of a dictator or a dictatorial government or a government bent on power the results that can be achieved are terrifying. (65)

For Flynn, the very instrumentality that, according to Beard’s argument, makes radio a tool of democracy also makes it a “terrifying” device of social control.¹⁵⁸ Beard’s hope that individualism and free enterprise would ally radio with the ideals of liberal democracy was far from self-evident, Flynn maintained, and this concern would be echoed in reflections on radio throughout the interwar period.

In the 1930s, radio was the only mass medium with growing advertising revenues. While Beard saw this as a guarantee of radio’s freedom, others followed Flynn in

¹⁵⁸ Flynn was publically critical of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, accusing the president of opening the way to fascism in the United States with his New Deal state planning. A key member in the establishment of the non-interventionist America First movement, Flynn was also seen as harboring fascist and anti-Semitic sympathies between the wars.

identifying what they perceived as radio's instrumentality with the increasing dominance of commercial interests. For social critics such as Ruth Brindz and James Rorty, the mass appeal of radio made it a dangerous avenue for what Rorty called "rule by radio." Unlike Beard, Brindz and Rorty saw American radio's dependence on advertising as another form of censorship, just as dangerous as dictatorial government fiat. In *Not to Be Broadcast* (1937), Brindz demonstrated that important information was actively withheld from the radio public through the influence of powerful sponsors, and, in a more polemical vein, Rorty argued in *Our Master's Voice: Advertising* (1934) that, through radio and other forms of advertising,

The raw ore of human need, desire and dream is carefully washed and filtered to eliminate all impurities of intelligence, will and self-respect, so that a deposit of pure gold may be precipitated into the pockets of the advertiser. (220)

As we saw in our discussion of the New York World's Fair, the capture of desire through mass spectacle had important affinities with the strategies deployed under fascism. Rorty's claim that radio advertising undermined democratic culture by drawing on multiple, contradictory desires parallels the pervasive sense that technologies of social organization were rending the weave of democratic rational culture.

In his article, "Order on the Air!" (1934), Rorty carried these arguments to larger considerations of community and politics as they were reflected in the mass culture of radio:

In general it may be said that the ether has become a great mirror in which the social, political, and cultural struggles and confusions of modern man are reflected and grotesquely magnified. What is reflected back from the ether over Germany is Hitlerism, Nordicism, anti-Semitism, militarism and other fantastic medievalisms. Hitler uses the radio to manufacture

Nazis just as in Italy Mussolini uses the radio to manufacture his brand of neo-Roman Fascists. (7)

The notion that radio allows regimes to “manufacture” fascists takes the logic of instrumental rationality to its extreme.¹⁵⁹ Rorty paradoxically blends the humanist notion that machines can be used for specific ends (such as manufacturing fascists) with the image of a dehumanized and passive people who are merely available to this radio manipulation. Surprisingly, Rorty uses this argument to maintain that the United States must also develop a centralized system of control over the radio, or risk being left behind by a more effective form of governmental organization that can manage mass technologies like radio to manufacture its desired subjects. “Any program of creative statesmanship in the modern era,” Rorty argues,

must take account of radio broadcasting as our major instrument of social communication. Every vested economic interest, every established or aspiring pressure group, expressing class, racial, religious and other interests, will struggle to use radio and if possible to control and manipulate it as an instrument of propaganda, i.e., as an instrument of rule. (10)

Given the ubiquity and undeniable power of radio in the era of mass politics, Rorty contends, the United States needs a “new body of law” to ensure that radio is not used for anti-democratic purposes (30). Rorty’s argument was, in effect, a blueprint for the new

¹⁵⁹ In *The Dance of the Machine* (1929), American social critic and author Edward O’Brien seconds Rorty’s fears that radio had the power to reshape a population. “[B]e thoroughly suspicious of the mysticism of the machine,” O’Brien writes, “its content is thoroughly primitive, so primitive that a new mystical religion is born in America every day, and comes to you as impersonal and mechanical experience over the radio” (78). O’Brien considered an apparatus of “hypnosis” that magnified the more general hypnotic effects of machine culture in the United States (200). The end-result of the mechanization of culture, O’Brien contends, is total alienation: “radio is powerfully assisting the machine by suggesting to us all that we are flickering atoms in a larger impersonal structure” (212).

governmental body called the Federal Communications Commission, just then in the process of being drafted by Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

For Rorty, the answer to the threat of commercial interests was more governmental control, even though he connected this kind of instrumental organization with fascism. Extending Rorty's logic, we can say that he wanted to "manufacture" democratic citizens, despite the risk that this would pave the way to totalitarian government. Although Roosevelt's government made concerted efforts to bring radio under its control, the radio culture of the interwar period was far too complex to lend itself to the delimited project of manufacturing a democratic citizenry out of the hectic chaos of the new mass culture. As Rorty acknowledges, the project of censorship and control of the radio was anything but linear, for what came back over the ether from Germany and Italy was not a single, dictatorial voice, but the "cultural struggles and confusions of modern man."

Radio and the Everyday

With so many contradictory notions of radio in circulation between the wars, it is hard to know how people encountered radio in their daily lives. What is certain is that it was the most potent form of mass communication in the interwar period. Roosevelt's project for bringing radio under governmental control, as well as the debates on the democratic or fascist tendencies of radio culture, must be understood in the context of the immense affective groundswell that accompanied the rise of radio culture in the United States.

Historian Charles Beard summarizes the situation when he writes that between the wars, “entertainment over the air went wider and deeper throughout American society than any other type of amusement, diversion or suggestion [...] receivers became almost universal in America” (*America in Midpassage* 644).¹⁶⁰ In the United States, commercial radio began in earnest in the mid-1920s, and grew exponentially each year until the Second World War. By 1932, Americans owned 16 of the 20 million wireless receivers in the world (Schivelbusch 66). With a nation-wide population of just over one-hundred million people, this meant that radio culture already had a wide diffusion by the onset of the Depression. At that time, radios were estimated to constitute up to one-third of the average household’s furniture expense (*Empire of the Air*). In the mid-nineteen thirties, at the height of interwar radio culture, “twenty-six million households owned at least one radio and spent an average of five hours daily listening” (Hilmes, *Radio Voices* 183). The cost of the radio persistently fell, until by 1938 the average price, ten dollars, was within the range of low-income families; the next year more than 10 million radios were sold. At the same time, radios became increasingly more accessible, so that by end of the decade almost three million cars had Motorola radios and portable battery operated radios were common (Brown 2). By 1940 there were 50 million receivers in the United States, making up more than one-half of the world’s radios, and over 90% of urban homes and 70% of rural homes had regular access to radio programs (Brown 2). This rapid shift in the American technological landscape is perhaps best illustrated by the 1939 Rockefeller Foundation study, which found that for unemployed families radio had become an

¹⁶⁰ Radio far outstrips its closest rival, film, in the amount of attention it consumes between the wars. Every week, radio garners about one billion total hours of listening as compared with 150 mil hours in front of the screen (Cantril, *The Psychology of Radio* 14).

important source of moral and psychological support, the loss of which would have been considered a sign of absolute impoverishment (Schivelbusch 68).

According to radio historian Michele Hilmes, “[d]uring the Depression radio had seized hold of the national imagination,” and she continues,

A hugely profitable industry had grown up. A national audience consisting of the vast majority of Americans tuned in to a wide variety of entertainment and information that reassured and unified the nation through hard economic times and wartime strife. (*Radio Reader* 3)

According to this argument, radio’s capacity to generate a sense of social unity was an important aspect of its success between the wars. The millions of heterogeneous listeners who tuned in daily shared a sense of community in the act of listening to the serial broadcasts of popular programs like Amos ‘n’ Andy. Similarly, important events suddenly took on a national character, as when thirty million listeners tuned in to “witness” Charles Lindberg’s return flight to the United States in 1927, or when Orson Welles’ broadcast of the *War of the Worlds* in 1938 caused widespread panic in several major cities.

The influential historian of American culture Warren Susman makes a similar argument, writing that “[radio] sound helped mold uniform national responses; it helped create or reinforce uniform national values and beliefs in a way that no previous medium ever had before” (“The Thirties” 228). The claim, expressed by Hilmes and Susman, that radio welded a national community seems so logical and intuitive that it has rarely been challenged. For example, in *Imagined Communities* (1983), Benedict Anderson holds that radio is merely an extension of the nineteenth-century print-nationalism that brought heterogeneous and far-flung populations together in the cultural imaginary (135). And yet

it is not at all clear that radio functioned simply by homogenizing its audience.¹⁶¹ In fact, as Michele Hilmes acknowledges elsewhere, radio appealed to an extraordinarily diverse group of listeners via a complex set of overlapping, contradictory appeals that found micro-points of connection with particular audiences, rather than insisting that listeners have the same tastes.¹⁶² Every hour brought something new, and every program carried within in it myriad opportunities for locating affinities with its listeners on a day-to-day basis.¹⁶³

Like the interpretation of fascism in the United States between the wars, radio has both provoked and defied attempts at a clear definition. Apparently homogenizing but clearly multiplicitous and chaotic, American radio has frequently been associated with the totalizing effects that, on the socio-political level, are so often confused with fascism. Among critics and intellectuals of the interwar period, the associations between radio and fascism extend from a parallel set of concerns about the new mass society and the socio-

¹⁶¹ Marshal McLuhan, in *Understanding Media* (1964), gives an account of radio that is similar to, but not identical with, this standard interpretation of radio-nationalism. He argues that radio has the power to “re-tribalize mankind” in countries that have not yet been fully transformed by print culture (265). When this happened in Europe in the first half of the twentieth century, “the old web of kinship began to resonate once more with the note of fascism” (259). Rather than the homogenization of a vast, impersonal public, McLuhan sees radio as re-establishing the intimate and personal ties of the tribe, which, in the context of technological modernity, he links with fascism.

¹⁶² See Michele Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922-1952* (1997), in which she argues that “one reason for radio’s neglect as a field of study is precisely that close analysis of radio begins to unravel the mask that U.S. commercial media have created for themselves: as a naturally arising, consensus-shaped, and unproblematic reflection of a pluralistic society, rather than the conflicting, tension-ridden site of the ruthless exercise of cultural hegemony, often demonstrating in its very effort to exert control the power and diversity of the alternative popular constructions that oppose and resist it” (xvii).

¹⁶³ Alice Goldfarb Marquis gives the following breakdown of radio programming in 1938 according to an FCC survey of 62,000 radio hours: 1/3 was advertising, and of the rest, 50% was music (mostly popular), 9% drama, 9% news and sports, 9% variety, 5% religious, 2% special events, 13% miscellaneous (mostly lectures) (404). With this kind of variety, a listener could find programs that specifically interested her, rather than having to homogenize her interests.

technological shifts that mark the epoch. Like fascism, radio seemed to magnetically draw in its listeners; however, radio was appealing to people, not because it simplified and homogenized desire, but because it attracted a diverse population by finding numerous particular avenues for appealing to its audience. Indeed, fascism and radio mirrored one another in their capture of discrete hopes, fears and fantasies as they circulated through the new mass public. At the everyday level, radio, like fascism, effectually attracted these desires to construct groupings that were both larger and smaller than the traditional boundaries of the individual citizen.

In order to better situate my interpretation of radio and fascism in interwar American culture, it is necessary to look more closely at our tendency to imagine radio as a homogenizing force. Perhaps the most tenacious prosecutor of radio as a homogenizing force has been Theodor W. Adorno. After the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research relocated from Europe to Columbia University in 1934, Adorno increasingly turned his attention to American culture, producing widely influential work on American radio; by 1939, Adorno was working on one of the most important early investigations of radio culture, the Radio Research Project funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. The outcome of this steady engagement with radio was a body of work that situates radio culture in Adorno's larger interpretation of fascism and the rise of mass culture. In particular, Adorno was interested in the presentation of music through the radio, and the attendant loss of individual experience for the listener. As the intellectual historian Martin Jay summarizes, Adorno argued that, "[i]nstead of experiencing the music with its 'auratic' qualities intact, the radio listener heard it in a depersonalized, collective, objectivized form, which robbed it of its negative function" (191). According to Adorno, this loss of

mass culture's critical capacity leaves it vulnerable to fascism. The critical function of music, its "negative function," is vitiated when it is filtered through radio; in this process, radio music is turned into a reproducible commodity rather than maintaining the particularity (or the "aura") of its performative interpretation. For Adorno, this results in the simplification of music, its reduction to the most palatable experience available, and thus the promise of a better world that inheres in the critical function of music is stripped away.

In his writings on radio and mass culture, Adorno caustically satirizes the pre-fabricated tendencies of radio, calling it the "ideal of Aunt Jemima's ready-mix for pancakes extended to the field of music" ("A Social Critique of Radio Music" 211). Radio's simplification of music results in the elimination of its most complex and "negative" elements in the creation of an insipid and banal popular taste: "The listener suspends all intellectual activity when dealing with music and is content with consuming and evaluating its gustatory qualities – just as if the music which tasted best were also the best music possible ("A Social Critique" 211). This "pseudo-individualism" produces what Adorno calls "spectatoritis," or the increasing passivity of the audience in the face of the musical pabulum pumped through commercial radio ("A Social Critique" 216). The end result of this radio passivity is the "retrogressive and sometimes even infantile type of person" ("A Social Critique" 213).¹⁶⁴ Like Leon Samson, with whom we began our study of interwar radio culture in the United States, Adorno wants to create a clear distinction between the critical and the uncritical, the infantile and the participatory

¹⁶⁴ Adorno makes the same argument in a more extended form in his "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda." Arguing that the Hitlerian dictator looks to strip the masses of their individualism and make them passive, Adorno equates propaganda with advertising in its tendency to standardize thought (*The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* 133).

citizen, and, as with Samson, Adorno's critique of this "infantilism" is closely allied with his interpretation of fascism.

In their co-authored *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer take their stand against what they call the "false clarity" of "myth," which they associate as much with the commercial aspects of mass culture as with the propaganda of fascist regimes (xv). As a purveyor of this myth, the "culture industry" persistently evacuates cultural forms of their complexity, they argue, and this "ruthless unity in the culture industry is evidence of what will happen in politics" (123). Under the "culture industry," technologies like radio become "psychotechnologies" in which the individual aspects of the personality are persistently whittled away, leaving the modern citizen "already virtually a Nazi" (155). Advertising, like the propaganda slogan, makes words into "trademarks" without any sense to their sound. In this terrifyingly depersonalized and uncritical environment, a dictator like Hitler finds a ready-made apparatus for subjugating the people:

The metaphysical charisma of the Führer invented by the sociology of religion has finally turned out to be no more than the omnipresence of his speeches on the radio, which are a demoniacal parody of the omnipresence of the divine spirit. The gigantic fact that the speech penetrates everywhere replaces its content [...] (159)

Just as Leon Samson worried that radio was "concealing sense with sound," Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the ubiquity of radio sound replaces its "content." Like Samson, Adorno and Horkheimer see the loss of our individual, critical capacities as leading to fascism, and they do not hesitate to suggest that the culture industry will result in what Samson called "American Fascism."

Adorno's assertions about radio are grounded in the notion that mass culture results in the loss of the individual's critical capacity, as technological reproduction homogenizes society and routinizes thought.¹⁶⁵ As we have seen, radio was frequently accused of "manufacturing" a passive public, but this requires seeing the radio apparatus as an instrument that could be directed at will. Adorno makes precisely this argument in his most sustained engagement with American radio culture, *The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas' Radio Addresses* (2002). "The more impersonal our order becomes, the more important personality becomes as an ideology," Adorno begins in his typically aphoristic style (1). Continuing in this vein, Adorno adds,

The more the individual is reduced to a mere cog, the more the idea of the uniqueness of the individual, his autonomy and importance, has to be stressed as a compensation for his actual weakness. Since this cannot be done with each of the listeners individually or only in a rather general and abstract manner, it is done vicariously by the leader (1-2).

¹⁶⁵ Adorno's influential interpretation of mass culture and radio extend to some of the most important documents of the interwar period. Shortly after he broke with the Institute for Social Research in 1939, Erich Fromm argued that radio contributed to the confusion and passification of mass audiences. Modern mass media, according to Fromm "paralyzes the ability to think clearly and causes the destruction of any kind of structuralized picture of the world." In the flow of decontextualized information that makes up the new technological environment,

Facts lose the specific quality which they can have only as parts of a structuralized whole and retain merely an abstract, quantitative meaning; each fact is just another fact and all that matters is whether we know more or less." Radio, moving pictures, and newspapers have a devastating effect on this score. The announcement of the (/) bombing of a city and the death of hundreds of people is shamelessly followed or interrupted by an advertisement for soap or wine. The same speaker with the same suggestive, ingratiating, and authoritative voice, which he has just used to impress you with the seriousness of the political situation, impresses now upon his audience the merits of the particular brand of soap which pays for the news broadcast (*Escape from Freedom* 250)

Emphasizing a different element of Adorno's theory of the "culture industry," Franz Neumann, in *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism* (1942), saw radio as part of a development toward fascism in which culture is orchestrated for the greater homogenization of the masses:

The radio prescribes the exact amount of culture to be digested by the public, how much classical and how much light music, how much talk and how much news. The powers extend to the most intimate relations of man, to the family (300).

Although both Fromm and Neumann differ from Adorno in important ways, their comments on radio illustrate the persuasiveness of Adorno's interpretation of the "culture industry" between the wars.

The fascistic radio demagogue Martin Luther Thomas exhibits this behavior, and as such he serves as Adorno's illustration of the dangers of radio culture. "Thomas's radio speeches offer an excellent example for one of the basic characteristics of fascist and anti-Semitic propaganda," in their "calculated" production of "irrationalism" in his listeners (29). In this interpretation, radio is a tool directed by a demagogue, rather than a complex field of human-machine interactions that we have been describing as "technics."

For Adorno, radio is merely an instrument for amplifying Thomas's calculated propaganda, which is aimed at generating a "sham individualism" that is all the more easily "incorporated" into a "collectivity where [the listener] may feel 'sheltered' but where he has no say at all" (27). The majority of Adorno's study offers a point-by-point account of the various "rhetorical devices" used by Thomas to create this "sham individualism." These devices, to which Adorno gives titles like "The Flight of Ideas Technique," or "The Unity Trick," are supposed to comprise a summa of Thomas's radio strategies for manipulating his audience; however, in his incapacity to see radio as a medium rather than a conduit for verbal tricks, Adorno has provided an account of radio demagoguery that explains almost nothing about the listeners' every day experience of radio culture.

It is strange that Adorno should have chosen for his study a relatively minor figure like Thomas, since there were many other, more popular, radio demagogues in the interwar period. Probably the most infamous, the Catholic radio priest Father Coughlin, had as many as ten million listeners at the height of his influence around 1935. Similarly, Huey Long gained a nation-wide following virtually overnight with his radio broadcasts advertising his "Share the Wealth" economic plan. Long was popularly known as the

“Kingfish,” after a character in the widely syndicated radio program Amos ‘n’ Andy. When Ezra Pound wrote to Long in 1935 offering his services as future U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, Long sent him some of these radio broadcasts (*Ezra Pound’s Economic Correspondence* 40).¹⁶⁶ Ezra Pound would also take up the microphone during the Second World War, completing 105 broadcasts between 1941 and 1943 on behalf of the Italian fascist regime (Campbell 134). After the war he was convicted of “radio treason” by the U.S. government (Redman 3). As Timothy Campbell has argued in his excellent study *Wireless Writing in the Age of Marconi* (2006), Pound conceptualized his role as a public poet through the model of radio reception and transmission, holding that “[a]rtists are the antennae of the race” (123).¹⁶⁷ In these three examples the priest, the politician and the poet all imagined radio differently and developed radio-audience hybrids that were particular to their individual styles rather than universal.

All three of these figures expressed identifiable affinities with fascism. Father Coughlin, for example, championed the adoption of Mussolini’s corporate state structure, and in an oft-cited comment in one of his broadcasts, he states: “We are at the crossroads. One road leads to Communism, the other to fascism. I take the road to fascism” (cited in Kramer 390). Given that there are so many fascistic radio demagogues to choose from, it is striking that Adorno not only chooses a relatively minor figure from the 1930s, but also declines to discuss Thomas’s contemporaries. If he had, he would have found that each of these demagogues (although they sought to use radio to create support for identifiably

¹⁶⁶ Pound received broadcasts of “Redistribution of Wealth,” “St. Vitus Dance Government,” and “Our Blundering Government,” which clearly express Long’s rhetorical strategies and his political program.

¹⁶⁷ The American fascist and leader of the Silver Shirts, William Dudley Pelley took the radio model even further, imagining it as a racial characteristic. He supposed that one of the superior aspects of the Nordic race was what he called their “radio eye,” which gave them stronger perceptual capacities (Sokolsky 264).

fascistic programs) is different from the other in his engagement with radio and use of what Adorno would call “rhetoric.”

The notion that there is a singular fascist rhetoric is unsustainable because any careful study of the period quickly makes obvious the superabundance of different, overlapping and contradictory radio-techniques both inside historically fascist countries and by fascistic demagogues outside of these countries. The homogenizing effects of radio described by Warren Susman, Michele Hilmes, Theodor Adorno and others was not a monolithic force, even in countries like Italy. Although “[r]adio was born and grew up in Italy within the Fascist era,” with the first Italian radio network established in 1924, “it was not until 1937 that a special section of the government was assigned to control and manipulate the radio” (Pugliese 14). This meant that much of the programming was, like other elements of Italian culture, the subject of debate and change throughout the course of the regime’s history.¹⁶⁸ Because the radio apparatus was expensive in Italy, most radio listening was done in groups and was frequently tied to other social activities (Forgacs 24). Even so staunch an opponent of the regime as the communist leader Palmiro Togliatti acknowledged the attraction of this social radio experience:

The worker always looks for the slightest thing that he can find to improve his situation. Even the fact of having the opportunity to go somewhere and listen to the radio of an evening is a pleasure. We can’t take it out on a

¹⁶⁸ David Forgacs provides a breakdown of some of the various radio programming that came and went in the interwar period in fascist Italy: In the 1920s, as much as seventy percent of airtime on Italian radio consisted of music. In 1933 the *Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale* (Institute for Industrial Reconstruction) developed programming specifically aimed at economic recovery, and the same year *Ente Radio Rurale* (Organization for Non-urban Radio) developed programming that would appeal to farmers and rural children. In 1934 the *Chronache del regime* (Chronacles of the regime) began a regular news broadcast. Beginning in 1936, *I dieci minute del lavoratore* (The workers’ ten minutes) aimed programming more specifically at industrial labor, and 1939 saw the emergence of a leisure-time program called “Radio Sociale” (66)

For details on Italian fascist uses of radio in education, see George L Williams, *Fascist Thought and Totalitarianism in Italy’s Secondary Schools: Theory and Practice, 1922-1943* (1993).

worker who agrees to go there, just because the sign of the *Fascio* is inscribed over the door. (quoted in Passerini 5)

Far from a monolithic form of culture imposed from on high, Italian radio demonstrated its multiplicity in its appeals to diverse groups of listeners. Like the after-work programs and fascist sports clubs that proved so popular among the laboring classes, Italian radio offered leisure and diversion as its primary mode of bringing participants under the sign of the “Fascio.”¹⁶⁹ Togliatti understood the active desire on the part of workers to seek out these gratifying experiences. In contrast to Adorno’s image of radio listeners being passively fed the same repetitious material, Togliatti recognized the diverse motivations of “pleasure” that drew together listeners who otherwise might not have acquiesced to the Italian regime’s policies and programs.¹⁷⁰

The greater complexity of radio culture evidenced in the United States and Europe was recognized by the few specialists who wrote on it between the wars. In what is widely regarded as the first major work on radio as a medium, German theorist Rudolph Arnheim’s *Radio* (1932, translated and published in the United States in 1934) explores the relationship between the technical features of radio and its peculiar appeal for audiences. Beginning his technical study with an anecdote about the force of radio in fascist Italy, Arnheim goes on to argue that the most important feature of radio is that it is pure sound vibration: “[I]t should be realized that the elemental force lies in the sound,

¹⁶⁹ For more on the fascist engagement with leisure culture, see Victoria De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

¹⁷⁰ Although less work has been done on these aspects of German radio, Peter Fritzsche’s historical investigations into Nazi Germany show that, of the regular broadcasts under the regime, the most successful program was the *Wunschkonzert* (made into a film by the same title in 1941), a musical variety request show, rather than official propaganda. Like the radio programs in Italy, the *Wunschkonzert* gave Germans a sense of community by appealing to personal interests (70).

which affects everyone more directly within the meaning of the word, and all radio art must make this fact its starting point” (28). Whereas Leon Samson and Theodor Adorno worried that radio tended to “conceal sense with sound,” Arnheim demonstrates that there is no ultimate “sense” behind or somehow grounding the sound. This does not mean that significance is free-floating, Arnheim is careful to point out, but rather that in radio culture, meaning is affective, inhering at the surface of the sound waves, the medium itself:

The “expressive characteristics” of sound affect us in a far more direct way, comprehensible without any experience by means of intensity, pitch, interval, rhythm, and tempi, properties of sound which have very little to do with the objective meaning of the word or the sound. (29)

The “intensity” of sound creates an affectively rich “aural world” that is full of meaning for each listener. Arnheim argues that this does not suggest that radio absents the significance of words; to the contrary, with radio “we should feel ourselves back in the primeval age where the word was still sound, the sound still word” (35). These Adamic overtones intimate that radio holds the capacity to change and enrich human speech, instead of unhinging signifier from signified. In this vision of an “aural world,” Arnheim sees radio as a technics.

The sound environment of radio culture expresses an intimacy that is linked to the particularity of the listener’s desire: “the wireless addresses those millions not as a mass but as individuals,” Arnheim maintains, because “[i]t talks to everyone individually, not to everyone together” (72). The “intensity” of radio sound appeals to the particularity of the desiring subject. In this “acoustic sphere,” aural appeals are not singular or discrete “as in visual space but overlay each other completely” (121). For Arnheim, the “aural world” draws in its listeners with multiple, contradictory appeals that “overlay each

other” in the complex interplay of competing radio programs, each of which evokes its own microcosm of the “acoustic sphere.” In radio culture, the diverse hopes, fears, and fantasies of the audience find multiple points of affinity with these overlapping appeals.¹⁷¹

In a chapter entitled “In Praise of Blindness: Emancipation from the Body,” Arnheim argues that our imaginations supplement this “acoustic sphere,” so that we reach out and create the radio environment as much as it reach into our psyches. In this technological ecology, the borders of the body no longer correspond to the organization of our desires, as we form linkages with the technical apparatus of the radio that change our experience as humans. For example, the radio announcer should be “dehumanized” as much as possible so that he can be understood as part of the “pure sound” of radio in the modulation and structure of his or her (or its) voice (143).

Arnheim does identify the same set of concerns and hopes that preoccupy so many thinkers and writers on interwar technology. “If our time seems destined to gather together in a unified popular community and culture people of different classes and educational status,” Arnheim writes, “it threatens, on the other hand, to create a uniform mode of life, which has nothing of the rich variety of the single form we so admire in nature” (260). If this affects radio culture, however, Arnheim makes it clear that it would be an artificial imposition on radio, rather than an attribute or natural tendency of the “acoustic sphere.” After developing these extraordinary insights into radio as a medium, Arnheim reverses himself by positing an ultimate distinction between the radio and the

¹⁷¹ Elsewhere in *Radio*, Arnheim makes the intriguing suggestion that this multiple, contradictory aspect of radio has the force of montage to draw together contradictory cultural elements. For example, Arnheim proposes placing microphones in different places and bringing them together in a single broadcast. In his writings on radio, Brecht cultivates a similar interest in the potential for radio montage. See *Brecht on Film and Radio*, trans. and Ed., Marc Silberman (London: Methuen, 2000).

listener, the “tool and the workman” (265). Nonetheless, Arnheim’s insights into radio “intensity” and the particularity of its appeal are extraordinarily rich for their usefulness in thinking about the everyday experience of radio between the wars.

In what is probably the most important American interwar study of radio, *The Psychology of Radio* (1941), the sociologist Hadley Cantril develops strategies for understanding radio that, like Arnheim’s, help us to render Adorno’s model more complex and functionally descriptive.¹⁷² Beginning with the observation that 78 million Americans are “habitual listeners” of radio, Cantril holds that “[i]f radio had not somehow satisfied human wants, it would never have attained its present popularity,” since “it is only the interests, the desire, and the attitudes of the listeners that can vitalize the vast inhuman network of the air” (3-4). He also finds that radio “skeletonizes” the personality of the speaker, and requires the development of “imaginative completion of the situation in the minds of the listeners” (14). Just as Arnheim found that radio “dehumanizes” the speaker while at the same time engaging the active participation of the listeners, Cantril argues that radio creates complex social assemblages that are built around human fantasy in ways that change the quality of human culture. However, whereas Arnheim focused on the technical aspects of radio culture, Cantril is most interested in the sociological effects, and he therefore dedicates the majority of his study to the question of propaganda and what he calls “crowd building.”

While Arnheim begins his technical survey of *Radio* with a story about its force of attraction in fascist Italy, Cantril begins *The Psychology of Radio* with a discussion of American radio demagoguery. In a direct comparison with Hitler and Mussolini, Cantril

¹⁷² Cantril’s study was the outcome of the larger Princeton Radio Project, the only research project of its kind at the time, which was begun several years earlier and directed by Cantril (Brown 229).

notes that “radio spellbinders” such as Huey Long and Father Coughlin use colloquial language to provide simple solutions in the form of slogans (7). The most important effect of these “spellbinders” is the “impression of universality,” in which each individual “believes that others are thinking as he thinks and sharing his emotions” (8). As Cantril argues, the demagogue accomplishes this, not by generalizing the crowd’s desires, but by speaking to each member of the audience in what he calls a “linear relationship between the speaker and his auditors” (9). With this ensemble of techniques, the radio demagogue is able to build crowds almost instantaneously, Cantril contends, because, unlike print, radio permeates space and is always available to its listeners.

Surprisingly, Cantril is optimistic about this “crowd building,” maintaining that through the “personal appeal” of the radio voice,

Millions of people listen to the same thing at the same time – and they themselves are aware of the fact. Distinctions between rural and urban communities, men and women, age and youth, social classes, creeds, states, and nations are abolished. As if by magic the barriers of social stratification disappear and in their place comes a consciousness of equality and of a community of interest. (20)

Tellingly, Cantril fails to connect his initial discussion of radio demagoguery (and its implication in fascism) with radio’s capacity to magically generate a depoliticized “community of interest.” On the contrary, the “crowd mind” shaped by radio is “[i]nherently a foe of Fascism and of cultural nationalism” because “[i]t presses always toward internationalism, toward universal democracy” (22). While radio culture naturally tends toward internationalism, Cantril considers fascism and demagoguery, like the influential force of advertising propaganda in the United States, to be artificial influences:

The length, content, the selection, the wording, the coordination of broadcasts are not now determined primarily, as they should be, by the

capacities and desires of the listener and by the intrinsic qualities of the medium, but by special autocratic interests. (270)

The relationship between the medium and the listener's desires is interrupted by what he elsewhere calls the "dictatorship" of autocratic interests such as "advertisers and shareholders" (271).

In contrast to these "minority" interests, Cantril associates radio with its vast appeal for "the middle classes and the underprivileged whose desires to share in the world's events have been most persistently thwarted" (259). "It is these classes," Cantril argues, "that are the most loyal supporters of radio" because their everyday encounters with radio offer many and diverse avenues for intensive experiences:

For them radio is a gigantic and invisible net which each listener may cast thousands of miles into the sea of human affairs and draw in teeming with palpable delights from which he may select according to his fancy. (259)

The populist appeal of radio hinges on this capacity to "draw in" the diverse, emotively intense linkages floating in the ether, Cantril argues. In *The Psychology of Social Movements* (1941), published the same year as *The Psychology of Radio*, Cantril uses strikingly parallel language to describe the populist appeal of Nazism: "[L]ike the people at a circus, potential Nazi followers were able to find, in a variety of appeals offered, some particular pattern which consciously or unconsciously attracted them" (233). While the mass spectacle of the "circus" has an anti-democratic ring for Cantril, it is not clear that radio's crowd appeal is different in its ability to draw the middle and lower classes into a sense of depoliticized, classless unity.

As with Arnheim's discussion of radio, Cantril has difficulty avoiding contradictory statements about radio's polyvalent qualities. Both private and widely

shared, diverse but intensively personal, the everyday experience of radio parallels many of the aspects of fascism between the wars that have made it so difficult to define. While Cantril and Arnheim sometimes veer toward the totalizing model of radio-nationalism, they also provide a description of the multiple appeals through which radio drew in the heterogeneous desires of its ever-changing audience.

Radio and the Body Politic

The radio undeniably drew in a mass audience, but, as we have seen, both contemporary and interwar critics have had difficulty explaining how it did this. The most frequent answer, influentially argued by Theodor Adorno, has been that radio homogenizes the masses, stripping away the listener's sense of individuality and her critical capacity. As part of a larger "culture industry," the radio is supposed to reproduce the same totalizing effects as fascism in its standardization of culture and its regimentation of the citizenry. However, this interpretive tendency has not been able to explain the everyday complexity of mass appeal, either in radio culture or in fascism. The diversity of radio programming, the broad array of listeners, and the complexity of oral effects achieved by radio between the wars suggests that Adorno's model is inaccurate.

In contrast, Rudolph Arnheim explains radio as an affective "aural world" of acoustic intensities. The radio changes the human voice according to the technical requirements of sound modulation, Arnheim argues, and the mutual adaptations that occur between the human voice and the radio apparatus form a "technics" that actively reshapes human culture. For Hadley Cantril, the subtle modulations of the radio-human assemblage draw crowds together by appealing to particular desires in each of the radio

listeners. Radio's ubiquity makes this intimate relationship between the speaker and the listener seem like a permeating aspect of daily life, immersing auditors in what Arnheim calls an "acoustic sphere."

One of the most important interwar radio speakers will serve as an example of this radio technics. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was a well-known voice in the 1930s because, as Warren Susman explains, he "was able to create a new kind of Presidency and a new kind of political and social power partly through his brilliant use of the [radio] medium" (228). John Dos Passos derisively referred to him as the "you-and-me president" because his radio addresses created an intimate atmosphere of personal relationship that strongly affected the American masses. Rather than seeking to homogenize his listeners, Roosevelt was careful to create rigorously modulated addresses that found multiple points of affective appeal in his diverse assembly of auditors.

Roosevelt accomplished this by modifying his own body, inserting a false tooth to eliminate a slight hiss that only came through on the radio (Schivelbusch 57). He also changed his voice by practicing his radio delivery daily, hiring a group of Hollywood technicians to record him throughout the day so that he could learn to modulate his speech. In fact, "[n]etwork engineers and technicians were pleased to find the 'modulation and pitch' of his voice so smooth during broadcasts that there was no need to 'touch the controls to remedy the usual peaks and valleys'" (Brown 20). With these practices, Roosevelt made his body a functional part of the radio apparatus. The rich timber of his voice created an "acoustic sphere" that never exceeded the technical limits of the broadcasting device.

For a president increasingly debilitated by polio, it was essential that listeners forget about his body and experience him as pure acoustic sound. The radio assemblages generated during Roosevelt's Fireside Chats were an essential part of his National Recovery Act, which many social critics on both sides of the political spectrum accused of ushering fascist governmental control into the United States.¹⁷³ The newly created Federal Communications Commission, for example, gave Roosevelt unprecedented control over the radio, which he used to put himself on the air in these weekly "chats." As Alice Kaplan argues in her important study of French fascism, *Reproductions of Banality* (1986), Roosevelt, along with fascist dictators, participated in a radio culture that appealed to the desires of the listening public:

With the advent of radio and the transformation of all the political figures into disembodied "speakers," wooing the public on microphone, the 1930s became a veritable festival of oral gratification. Fascist regimes weren't the only ones that "used" voice: Roosevelt did too. My point is not that all disembodied political voices were fascist but that the machinery of the media gave birth to a new kind of ideological vulnerability. It was mother bound, and fascism "knew" it. (23)

According to Kaplan's argument, the radio medium found psychological inroads by which it appealed to the listening masses. The "oral gratification" of the radio-listener relationship formed a powerful libidinal connection that had the political effect of binding the masses in a new form of irrational radio-nationalism (133). Like Leon Samson and

¹⁷³ See for example, Harold Lord Varney, "The Truth about American Fascism," *The American Mercury*, August 1937, Vol. 41, No. 164, pp. 385-398; George Sokolsky, "America Drifts toward Fascism," *The American Mercury*, July 1934, vol. 32, no. 127, pp. 257-264; *Toward an American Fascism?*, The New Republic (June 1, 1932) 58-59.

Mussolini was also interested in Roosevelt's apparent fascism, praising the "intensive culture of dictatorship to which President Roosevelt devotes himself with technique and single-mindedness" (in Emilio Gentile, "Impending Modernity" 18-19).

Theodor Adorno, Kaplan draws parallels between the infantilized radio listener and the potential for fascism.

Although Kaplan makes a convincing argument for the force of desire in the new radio culture, there is very little evidence that radio only provided one kind of “mother” gratification, since it is highly unlikely that a large listening public shared the same psychology. As I have argued, radio was experienced as a plurality of effects rather than as a homogenizing influence. In the United States, Roosevelt’s voice made up part of a larger ecology of radio-listener linkages that included soap opera, children’s fantasy, orchestral music directed by figures like Toscanini, and the latest jazz single. These voices formed a complex network of “gratification” that appealed to myriad psychologies in myriad ways, rather than reducing desire to a single expression. The intensive registers of these voices overlapped and intertwined with one another to create multivalent, rather than homogenizing, effects.

Drawing from one of the most famous radio events of the interwar period, we can observe this complex ecology of voices in Orson Welles’ 1938 staging of *The War of the Worlds*, which employed a voice that mimicked Franklin D. Roosevelt’s pitch and tone. In Hadley Cantril’s study of the *War of the Worlds* broadcast, *The Invasion from Mars* (1940), he concluded that the mimicry of Roosevelt’s voice contributed importantly to the effects of panic for which the broadcast has become famous. However, this “Roosevelt” voice made up only one of the disembodied speakers: there were also scientists, reporters, soldiers, narrators, the machine sounds of the aliens, etc. Each of these voices contributed to the “acoustic sphere” of the event in complex, overlapping ways that drew out multiple hopes, fears and desires in the listening public. Cantril

concludes that a plethora of interlocking factors contributed to the panic generated by the broadcast. Based on extensive interviews with listeners, he finds that some of the factors include: “general intellectual immaturity,” “the prestige of the commentators,” “general emotional immaturity,” “the mystery of science,” “insecurity from prolonged depression,” “insecurity from natural catastrophe,” “belief that the world will end sometime,” “religious beliefs,” and even “reading of Buck Rogers.” (209).¹⁷⁴ In a mass of listeners, radio can trigger some combination of these psychological conditions, creating what Cantril calls “bewilderment.” The end result of this bewilderment is that radio listeners “become highly suggestible to some simple and sovereign formula provided by a demagogue,” as the “tactics of Hitler” demonstrate (203).

In *Reproductions of Banality*, Alice Kaplan argues that the homogenization of desire created the conditions for radio-nationalism. Tracing key elements in the arguments of Theodor Adorno and Benedict Anderson, Kaplan finds that radio culture establishes the “nation as a group of like speakers” (133). Conversely, in an event like the *War of the Worlds* broadcast, coming as it did in the wake of the Munich Crisis, listeners were confronted with a multiplicity of effects that drew on different aspects of individual psychology, rather than experiencing the nationalizing effects of “like speakers.”¹⁷⁵ In fact, what Rudolph Arnheim called the “dehumanizing” force of radio sound is powerfully evident in Orson Welles’ broadcast, as it reproduces a vast array of intensive sounds, including, for a few startling moments, radio static silence. This variety of radio

¹⁷⁴ It must also be noted that each of these psychological categories expresses myriad personal experiences. For example, the prestige of the commentators would be experienced differently depending on the type of commentator voice and the individual listener’s particular response to that voice.

¹⁷⁵ The Munich Crisis or so-called Munich Pact involved Germany’s aggressive annexation of part of Czechoslovakia, thus manifesting in clear terms the Nazi program of militarized expansionism that would eventually precipitate the Second World War.

sounds, common in the “acoustic sphere,” is far from Kaplan’s argument that radio was a reductively nationalizing force.

The same year of the landmark *War of the Worlds* broadcast saw the largest event in the history of radio, the 1938 world heavy-weight boxing championship fight between the African-American Joe Louis and the German Max Schmeling. This event drew more than 70 million listeners in the United States alone. While about 45 million citizens voted in the 1936 presidential elections, events such as the Louis-Schmeling fight demonstrate radio’s ability to draw together a much vaster population. The fight was greatly anticipated in Germany as well, with millions tuning in at 3:30 a.m. to hear the brief two-minute bout. After his victory over Louis two years earlier in 1936, Schmeling was celebrated by the Nazi party as an illustration of Aryan racial superiority over his African-American opponent.¹⁷⁶ As only the second African-American heavy weight contender in the United States, Louis was also seen in ambivalent terms in the racially charged atmosphere of interwar America. Thus, the 1938 match was laden with nationalist and racist overtones.¹⁷⁷

Listening to the fight on NBC, the vast radio audience was certainly aware of this racist and nationalist context: American democracy against Nazism, the African-American against the racist institution, one nation against another. In the United States, writers on the left such as Mike Gold and Richard Wright emphasized the anti-fascist

¹⁷⁶ Schmeling was also an important ambassadorial figure for the regime, helping convince the Americans on the Olympic committee to allow Berlin to host the 1936 Olympics (Erenberg 59).

¹⁷⁷ Louis’ predecessor, the outspoken Jack Johnson, had been a controversial figure to such a degree that he had been stripped of his title for racial motives. Louis’ quiet demeanor was designed to anticipatorily allay the racial hostility that attended his rise to fame.

dimension of the fight (Margolic 298). The Nazi regime, likewise, saw this as an important match. As boxing historian Lewis Erenberg rather schematically puts it,

Hitler had long been a proponent of boxing, mentioning it along with hockey in *Mein Kampf* as sports [sic] that would transform the German youth into good Aryans and soldiers; and he intended to compete with the U.S. as the boxing center of the world. [...] To rebuild the body politic, the Nazis first sought to rebuild the male body. (59)

As Klaus Theweleit and others have argued, the Nazi regime was committed to a discourse of bodily integrity and physical impenetrability that shaped a wide range of social and political aspects of fascism, from its policies on homosexuality to its propagandistic images of the ideal male body.¹⁷⁸ As their reigning German champion, Max Schmeling seemed to represent this physical ideal.

These sedimented layers of interpretive assumptions about fascism and the ideal body risk ignoring the fact that listeners experienced the fight as a disembodied radio broadcast. Despite the binary lens through which historians and theorists have tended to see the Louis-Schmeling match, an account of the radio broadcast on June 22, 1938 communicates that it was in fact a complex, multivalent event. Just as Franklin D. Roosevelt's radio broadcasts translated his body into voice, the ideological and nationalist layering of the Louis-Schmeling fight is sublated into the radio sounds comprising the match. The affectively charged, emotional experience of listening to the fight makes no space for plodding, carefully organized, retrospective discourses on fascism and nationalism. The intensity of the acoustic experience, so difficult to explicate in a written document like this, did not give way to these larger contexts; rather, the

¹⁷⁸ See, for example, Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies* (1987).

experience of the fight submerged these political aspects in a broader field of intensities enacted in the “aural world” of radio culture.¹⁷⁹

While Theodor Adorno insists on the rhetorical strategies effectuated through radio, the overwhelming speed and force of the fight disorganized the practiced patter of the German and American announcers, Hellmis and McCarthy (Margolic 299). Far from a set of strategies designed to manipulate political discourse, this massive radio event, so important for understanding the American encounter with fascism in the interwar period, presented an emotive force that swept up the crowds in a utopian moment of depoliticized community.

Listening to the fight, the radio sounds increasingly break down into pure aural energy as the 70,000 spectators at Yankee Stadium reach a peak of irrational enthusiasm. At the climax of crowd excitement, at one minute and twenty-two seconds into the first round, Louis pins Schmeling against the ropes and delivers a decisive blow to Schmeling’s lower left back. At this punch, the German lets out a scream that one witness called “half human, half animal” (Margolic 298). Spectators at the fight said they had never heard anything like it. During his three week hospital convalescence for broken vertebrae resulting from this punch, Schmeling recounted in his broken English “it blinded me. It made me so I can’t feel” (Margolic 312). After the fight, Louis recalled,

I just hit him, tha’s all. I hit him right in the ribs and I guess maybe it was a lucky punch but man, did he scream! I thought it was a lady in the ringside cryin’. He just screamed, tha’s all. (Erenberg 146)

¹⁷⁹ You can hear the fight in its entirety at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/fight/>.

On the radio, this moment was heard by 70 million Americans as a non-sound, a crackle, something beyond the aural register that was experienced as a sudden blank in the waves of affective sound emanating from the event.

In a different context, the French critic Roland Barthes refers to this moment beyond register as “*jouissance*,” a pleasure of such intensive magnitude that it breaks down the discursive subject. As Barthes explains, this “atopia of pleasure” transports the language and ideology-bound subject to a point of crisis (*Pleasure of the Text* 14). Of course, Schmeling’s scream was not a mark of pleasure, but of extreme pain that, at the other end of the spectrum, functioned in much the same way as Barthes’ notion of “*jouissance*.” As a radio sound, this moment communicates through the ecstatic cries of the crowd that convert Schmeling’s loss of bodily integrity into the powerful pleasure of collective social integration. Described as partly animal, emasculating, and a moment of blindness, the German’s shriek of pain signals the sudden effacement of the discursive subject and the organizational structures that typically hold the individual together: race, class, gender, nationality, the humanistic sense of individuality, the specific physiological training of a boxer, the particularity of Schmeling’s bodily makeup, etc. This “atopic” blank space beyond register is without intelligible meaning outside the emotive force it had for the 70 million listeners networked together at this moment, as this pure sensation drew in diverse desires like a magnetic attractor. In contradiction to Adorno’s claim that the connection between discursive language and radio is “rhetorical,” this scream evinces what Barthes calls the “materiality of the body” coming through the radio as “the grain in the voice” or the sound that signals itself by moving off the register of the technological apparatus (“The Grain in the Voice” 181-2).

For Barthes, greater attention to “jouissance” would help us develop what he calls “a true science of becoming” that takes account of the particularity of our daily, personal experiences (*Pleasure of the Text* 61). According to this science of becoming, the subject is multiple, full of shifting desires that disrupt traditional notions of subjective coherence. These moments of “bliss” are always a private experience, Barthes maintains. In Schmeling’s scream, by contrast, the force of his bodily materiality, stripped of its subjectivity and even its humanity, comes through on the radio as a communal experience. Whereas this materiality is irreducibly particular for Barthes, the radio takes it up and converts it into an experience of ecstatic collective feeling.¹⁸⁰ By reproducing Schmeling’s scream 70 million times in the ears of the radio audience, the experience becomes an “atopic” space in which Americans unite in an organic cohesive community. In the 1938 fight, the radio is the medium that makes Schmeling’s loss of bodily integrity and the collective experience of the crowd realizable in the same acoustic sphere.

The fight, and more specifically the climactic moment in which Schmeling’s body disintegrates into a dehumanizing pain, was hailed by Mike Gold and Richard Wright as an important defeat for the Nazi regime, but it was in actuality a reduplication of the fascist strategies for creating an affectively charged but non-political People. The force of Schmeling’s scream evacuates his body of its ideological overcoding, but the reproduction of this moment as a blank in the waves of radio sound acts as a utopian space into which all the hopes, fears and fantasies of the listeners can flood. In an

¹⁸⁰ In her extraordinary work on Leni Riefenstahl, Erin Manning makes a similar argument about the film *Olympia*, made for the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Maintaining that Riefenstahl composes an open-ended body that is always becoming, Manning contends that “[t]he foregrounding of dynamic form suggests that Riefenstahl composes *with* fascism but does not compose *a* fascist (disciplinary) body. What she composes is the expression of a becoming-body symbiotically linked to fascism but in excess of its disciplinarity” (135).

extreme rendering of Rudolph Arnheim's Adamic vision, Schmeling's body is reduced to this inhuman radio emission as it communicates a powerful, instantaneous message without language. Between the wars, both radio and fascism demonstrated that intensive experiences, even the most profoundly individual of these experiences, could catalyze what Hadley Cantril called "crowd building."

The radio audience that heard the Louis-Schmeling fight was not a group of autonomous, self-conscious subjects, but something composed of partial human and non-human elements, assemblages of radio equipment, bodies, personal experiences, and the desires that networked these parts together. Like many of the interwar social critics we have looked at in this chapter, Roland Barthes distrusted the radio because he thought it made listeners passive (Allan 116), but the hopes, fears, and fantasies of the masses were actively engaged in events like the Louis-Schmeling fight and the *War of the Worlds* broadcast.

Although the Louis-Schmeling fight is a signal event in interwar American radio culture, I am not arguing that Schmeling's scream is unique; on the contrary, the "acoustic sphere" is necessarily replete with these kinds of granulations and crackles, moments outside the train of vocal coherence, where the codes of recognizable intonation break down into pure sound.¹⁸¹ Beyond specific events like the fight, radio provided such an important strategy for coordinating the shifting public because it formed territories that generated the possibility of intensive group experiences at any given moment. As media

¹⁸¹ For an excellent reading of the scream in interwar American radio game shows, see Jason Loviglio's article "Vox Pop: Network Radio and the Voice of the People," in *Radio Reader: Essays in the Cultural History of Radio* (2002). In framing the question of radio and nationalism between the wars, Loviglio argues that "[t]he merger of political and commercial publics is key to radio's powerful discourse of the people in the 1930s. [...] In order to merge the two into one national public, commercial radio had to accommodate the competing demands of unity and difference, inside and outside (93).

historian Friedrich Kittler has argued, the most indicative quality of radio technology is that it is not delimited by any directionality: broadcasts went everywhere within their area of coverage (*Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* 251).¹⁸² In other words, radio threw out a broad net of appeals that only gained real meaning when these diverse motivations of pleasure were picked up in a particular locale within the generalized field of transmission. Writers between the wars used the term “ether” (an outmoded concept from nineteenth-century physics) to describe the new sensation that radio linkups were permanently available but only experienced on a moment-to-moment basis, as a personal appeal that nonetheless had the force to create instantaneous, de-politicized collectivities. Radio’s promiscuous appeals blanketed the country with virtual worlds that were actualized in the moment of listening, bringing what James Rorty called “human need, desire and dream” into the ubiquity of everyday, social occurrences.

Fascism, Radio, Technology

The real shift in interwar American culture was not merely the development of new techniques and technologies, many of which pre-exist the First World War (including radio), but rather the expansion of their effects to the extent that they began to characterize the small, particular, or micro-aspects of daily life for the majority of Americans. In this sense we can say that these technologies did not exist for many Americans before the interwar period, and their integration into social forms required that the human-machine interactions be re-elaborated in the emergent mass culture. In this

¹⁸² In John Durham Peters, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (1999), John Durham Peters makes a parallel argument, maintaining that “[t]he term ‘listening in,’ the eventual verb for describing audience behavior in commercial radio, even borrowed the notion of eavesdropping on party lines, as if radio audiences were overhearing messages not originally intended for their ears” (207).

new technological environment, the force of radio lay in its ability to draw the masses together in ways that were communal without the politics of communism. As we have seen in radio events like the Schmeling-Louis fight, the intensive experience of radio absorbed and channeled myriad desires into collective experience, but not through anything that might be recognized as individual rationality or “communicative action.”¹⁸³ As radio historian Kate Lacey has argued, radio was the first mass medium that could be aimed at marginal and interior desires without losing the commercial mainstream (32). Far from being an implement of homogenizing control, or a paternalistic voice of authority imposed on the listening public, the radio nurtured heart-felt desires, and for this reason it was often the last material possession sold by destitute families during the Great Depression.

As an integral part of the technics of interwar American culture, the radio transformed the bodies of its listening public. To cite the popular economist Stuart Chase again, “radio habits” reconfigured the physical environment of auditors, making their ears acutely aware of a certain range and style of sound. Radio inventions like the “audion tube” amplifier were coupled with the new arrangement of the home space around the radio and the physical posture of its attentive listeners. Not just a public, but a *radio-public* was created in this new technological ecology.

¹⁸³ Michael Warner’s theory of “counterutopia” provides an important corrective to the Habermasian model of communicative protocol. Emphasizing heterogeneity and performativity in the public sphere, Warner argues that “[e]ven the most refined or the most perverse among us could point to his or her desires or identifications and see that in most cases they were public desires, even mass-public desires, from the moment that they were that person’s desires” (“The Mass Public and the Mass Subject” 386). Rather than bracketing differences, Warner contends, the public sphere presents numerous “counterutopias” that performatively engage in the potential for different kinds of social organization, and different avenues for desire.

In Nazi Germany, Goebbels predicted that “[s]ome day radio will be the spiritual daily bread of the whole German nation” (quoted in Cantril, *The Psychology of Radio* 60). However, as the historian Peter Fritzsche has pointed out, the most popular radio program in Germany was the *Wunschkonzert*, a music-variety show (70). Like radio programming in the United States, the *Wunschkonzert* offered a non-propagandistic event that generated collective experiences by bringing together diverse desires in a de-politicized community. Tellingly, it was during the Weimar period that German radio was organized and Germans learned how their desires could mesh with this strange piece of talking furniture. Thus, the Nazis inherited a virtually complete structure of radio communication, including a radio-audience (Lacey 30). This meant that the Nazi deployment of radio was already imbedded in a rich radio-culture, a complex set of desiring appeals that, nonetheless, the fascist government found coherent with its own project of uniting the German *Volk*.

As a political technology, fascism, like radio, offered responses to the problem of coordinating the new social body. Mirroring the incoherent desires of the crowds, fascism promised revolution coupled with stability, tradition and a modern youth culture, technological utopia and the agrarian pastoral, capitalist growth without strikes, socialistic mass organization without class politics, and so on. In sum, fascism was an effective response to the unpredictability and complexity of the new, politically empowered masses because it was able to subsume multiple, contradictory desires into a participatory community that stripped social relations of their political effects. As I have argued in the preceding chapters on mass spectacle and humanism and the present chapter on radio culture, the linkages between technology and fascism were based on the

process of attracting and canalizing the heterogeneous desires of the masses.

Homogeneity was no more a goal of fascism than was the elimination of desire in the subjects who thrived under these “totalitarian” regimes. Indeed, if we are to understand the role of desire in the assemblage of social formations that we call “fascism,” we cannot ignore the polyvalent techniques through which ordinary, everyday people were fascinated by fascist methods of social organization.

The first half of this study, which has dealt explicitly with questions of technology between the wars, is meant to establish a context for the literary investigations of the proceeding chapters. As the primary index of the new mass culture, technologies like radio and mass spectacle provide the first successful methods for organizing crowds based on the circulation of desires rather than through traditional forms of rational citizenship. The multi-form assemblages of technologies and mass audiences challenged traditional democratic modes, and they were therefore the primary locus in the United States for engaging with alternate models of social organization such as fascism. As a set of social techniques for drawing together the diverse hopes, fears and fantasies of the new masses, fascism effectuated on the political level what these technologies shifted on the social level.

In turning our attention to literature, we intensify our engagement with the quotidian effects of these new assemblages. Considerations of the everyday are essential if we are to move the focus away from the reductive and de-historicizing tendencies that are still common in the study of both fascism and technology. Some of the most interesting and important American literature of the interwar period stages debates about the new social technologies and new political forms like fascism. In the dialogic

expression of the conflictual desires that circulate through the fictional worlds of authors such as John Dos Passos and William Faulkner, literature offers an intensive engagement with the differential speeds of the new mass environment. The remaining chapters of this investigation will take up each of the areas of exploration we have so far mapped out: Chapter Four, dealing with literature and fascism between the wars, elaborates the lived effects of radio culture; Chapter Five, describing the literary and cultural criticism of the Southern Agrarians/New Critics, looks at questions of the human and technology in the United States, and the final chapter, focusing on Faulkner, deals with commodity culture and mass spectacle.

Chapter 4. The Scandal of Fascism: Everyday Politics and Interwar American Literature

In his retrospective on 1930s American literature, critic Malcolm Cowley contends, “[t]he international struggle against fascism and the disillusionment that followed the defeat of the Spanish republic and the Hitler-Stalin pact are subjects that have not, as a rule, been treated effectively by American writers” (“What Books Survive” 299). This claim, issued by such a formidable critic, and with the explicit intent of re-situating the canon of American interwar literature outside its political-historical framework, was widely held in the decades after the Second World War. Most of the literature of an explicitly political stripe has since been forgotten, Cowley argues, along with the overtly politicizing style of literary criticism that slotted prose into “Marxian, proletarian, petty-bourgeois, or subliminally fascist” categories (297). Thankfully, the New Criticism brought us back to a depoliticized approach to “textual analysis,” or so Cowley’s narrative runs.

Tellingly, while Cowley avoids spelling out these incongruities between political and literary culture, he equally fails to address New Criticism’s troubling “sympathies” with the deeply political Southern Agrarian movement (297). Instead, he maintains that all literary culture is united by an “apocalyptic dream,” a shared set of concerns about the future, through which writers, whether “radical or conservative, were affected by the same fears and aspirations for human society” (293). Far from evacuating the political, however, this shared “dream” problematically demonstrates affinities with the

depoliticized utopian vision of cohesive community effectuated under fascism. The aspirations toward utopia that Cowley locates as the hallmark of interwar literature, in other words, were deeply political in their resonance with the fascist impulse to eliminate conflict in an organic cohesive community.

The next three chapters will focus on different dimensions of Cowley's claim that literary culture between the wars did not effectively treat the question of fascism. In contrast to Cowley's assumption that fascism can only be understood in terms of universalizing ideological positions, I argue that numerous intellectuals, public figures, critics and authors were fascinated with the question of fascism, and that this engagement expressed a multiplicity of contradictory appeals emanating from an uncertain magnetic field that was only vaguely understood as "fascism." A more developed concept of the question of fascism based in a wealth of recent theoretical and historiographic research demonstrates that it was not monolithic but, as Andrew Hewitt has argued, a "scandal" that introduced the problem of "heterogeneity" into our thinking on both politics and culture (68). Intermeshing the apparently separate categories of tradition and technology, right and left, culture and politics, fascism was grounded in the shared hopes, fears and utopian fantasies that, for Cowley, made up the context of the "apocalyptic dream" uniting literary culture between the wars.

Interwar literature was fully political in its consideration of fascism's heterogeneous appeals, I would argue, although these explorations were not ideologically monolithic. For example, Cowley nominates John Steinbeck, John Dos Passos, and Ernest Hemingway as the three most important writers of the interwar period, and all three explicitly addressed fascism in their writings. They share this quality with the

majority of writers between the wars, but what I want to signal here is that they each encountered fascism differently. Steinbeck, in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) wrote about cartelization and thuggery among the Californian fruit growers; Dos Passos, in *Number One* (1943), looked at the force of radio demagoguery in the emergent mass culture of the United States; Hemingway, in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), explored the ethical quandary of individual responsibility during the Spanish Civil War.¹⁸⁴ Each of these writers develops important avenues for investigating fascism, but they also demonstrate the impossibility of cordoning off a static ideological position that would define fascism's heterogeneous dimensions.

While recent criticism has gone some way toward correcting Cowley's perceptual scotoma, so far there has been no thoroughgoing study of fascism's influence on the immensely important shifts in literary culture in the interwar period. Michael Denning's path-breaking study of *The Cultural Front* (1996) looks at the art and literature of the radical left in the 1930s, but without seriously addressing the question of fascism that haunted these leftist groups between the wars. On the other hand, Robert Brinkmeyer's excellent *The Fourth Ghost* (2009) explores the widespread concerns about fascism in interwar Southern literary culture, although his study does not explain why Southern authors developed such heterogeneous descriptions of fascism. Brinkmeyer's focus on race tends to overlook the multiple channels through which fascism appealed to the masses. Neither of these important investigations of interwar culture answers the two

¹⁸⁴ Many historians and other scholars have argued that the Spanish Civil War was the signal event in the rise of fascism in the 1930s, because, while both Italy and Germany entered the conflict on the side of Franco, the democratic nations refused to intervene on behalf of the democratically elected government, thus setting the pattern for increasingly bold transgressions of international law by fascist regimes. See, for example, Dominic Tierney's *FDR and the Spanish Civil War* (1977).

central questions guiding my work: why was fascism so fascinating to Americans between the wars, and why was it so hard to describe?

Answering these two central questions involves addressing fascism's scandalous confusion of the boundaries between culture and politics. The desiring appeals emanating from fascism functioned on an everyday, as well as on an official regime level. Cowley's claim that fascism was not treated effectively by American writers is predicated on a blind-spot in literary criticism by which the everyday social interactions that make up political culture are excised from our understanding of both literature and what Jacques Rancier calls "the political."¹⁸⁵ Because literary studies continues even today to be largely defined according the decontextualizing methodology laid out by the New Critics/Southern Agrarians, the powerful political expression of everyday interactions communicated in the fictional prose of the interwar period has been largely overlooked. And yet a rigorous study of fascism in American literature illustrates that this distinction between politics and culture is untenable. Along with Cowley, we have the deeply rooted habit of looking for the politics of fascism in the binarized model of an anti-democratic, dictatorial regime, despite the fact that this has not helped us to understand why the masses desired fascism between the wars. As with my preceding investigations of technology and mass culture, I am most interested in the next three chapters to draw out the particularity of American literary expressions of fascism in order to understand its operations at the micrological, everyday level of desire.

¹⁸⁵ See especially Jacques Ranciere, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (2004), as well as Ernesto Laclau's summary of Ranciere's concept of "the political" in *On Populist Reason* (2005). Briefly, "the political" can be understood as the interpersonal differences that shift or distort existing social forms. This can happen at the most micrological as well as at the largest levels of social organization.

The everyday and the regime: Two models of fascism

While there are several important representations of regime-level fascism in interwar American literature, mostly notably *It Can't Happen Here* (1935) by Sinclair Lewis, the most interesting explorations of fascism in literature occur in everyday settings full of interpersonal, rather than governmental crises. Although Cowley justifiably does not include Sinclair Lewis' anti-fascist polemic in his list of texts still worth reading, he does laud Carson McCullers' *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940) as a "brilliant" example of interwar literature (296). Set in a small Southern mill town in the 1930s, *Heart* does not effectively treat the subject of fascism as a totalizing ideological entity, and yet the novel is pervaded by diverse concerns about fascism at the everyday level.

Heart, McCuller's first novel, expresses important autobiographical themes of unrealized ambitions and a profound sense of loneliness that marks her later fiction as well. Developed in a contrapuntal structure of theme and counter-theme, *Heart* does not unfold a plot so much as explore interpersonal relationships between several characters, each of whom feels alienated from the community in one way or another. The most fully developed of these characters is Mick Kelly, a girl with precocious musical talent but with little access to the orchestral music she craves.

Caught between childhood and maturity, Mick awkwardly explores her burgeoning desires throughout the novel. In our first encounter with Mick, she wanders into a partially built house and, in imitation of the little vandals who came before her, she semi-consciously graffiti's the walls with the names of "EDISON," "DICK TRACY," and "MUSSOLINI" (37). Mick is meditative and quiet as she draws the "big block letters

very slowly,” and afterward she “stands in the middle of the room and stares at what she had done” (37). Her trancelike state during this operation gives this scene the feeling of an automatic writing séance, expressing her unconscious associations between an inventor of new technologies, a comic book and radio hero, and the leader of the Italian fascist regime. Signing her initials to this graffiti, Mick expresses the overlapping, contradictory social desires circulating through her developing psyche. On the opposite wall, she then writes “PUSSY” and likewise signs her initials. By facing this “very bad word” with famous names, Mick simultaneously associates and opposes her emerging sense of sexuality with these dense points of pop-cultural fascination (37). The sibilance between “MUSSOLINI” and “PUSSY” especially draws these last two together in a foreshadowing of her first sexual encounter with a Jewish boy named Harry who obsesses about fascism. Mick’s multiple, contradictory desires in this scene are not chosen based on rational principles; rather, they communicate a process of partiality and experimentation as she explores different nodes of identity developing from her overlapping, sometimes incoherent impulses. The significance of “MUSSOLINI” is not ideological for Mick, and yet the Duce intensively resonates with Mick’s intimate hopes, fears and fantasies.

Harry first comes into the narrative at a social gathering held by Mick. Hoping to cross the cultural threshold into womanhood, Mick organizes a party for the older kids in the neighborhood. Though she serves elegant finger food and borrows a dress and high-heeled shoes from her older sisters, she discovers that she herself is still a confusing mixture of maturity and childishness. When the party begins to fall apart, Harry asks her to “prom” around the block. As Mick tells him about her love for orchestral music, Harry

interrupts to ask, is “that Mozart a Fascist or a Nazi?” because, he explains, “I hate Fascists. If I met one walking on the street I’d kill him” (113). Sidestepping and shadowboxing, Harry excitedly tries to tell Mick about the fascists. “Gosh! Don’t you ever read the paper?” he wonders as she professes ignorance about what the fascists are doing (113). Mick’s graffiti earlier in the novel is not connected to the fascism that Harry reads about in the newspapers, but for Harry as well as for Mick the youthful process of self-exploration is drawn into the orbit of fascism.

Just as “MUSSOLINI” is connected to Mick’s internal fantasy world, Harry engages with fascism on multiple, contradictory registers. In their frequent later meetings, he lectures Mick that “the Nazis made little Jew children get down on their hands and knees and eat grass from the ground,” and accordingly they make plans to bring down the fascist regimes like a Dick Tracy hero: “The Nazis were terrible – everybody knew that. She plotted with him to kill Hitler” (245). Mick and Harry develop their naïve courtship through this obsession with fascism, but for Harry this fascination is also motivated by a profound fear, as he confesses, “I dream about killing Hitler every night. And I wake up in the dark very thirsty and scared of something – I don’t know what” (249). At the same time, Harry’s intensive concentration on fascism communicates an affective charge toward his object of hatred and fear: “I used to be a Fascist,” Harry explains, “I used to think I was. It was this way. ... I thought I was a Fascist” (247). Admitting this shortly before he and Mick make love for the first and only time in the novel, Harry confuses his complex feelings about fascism with his sense of intimacy with Mick. Both drawn to and anguished by fascism, Harry lives his childish romance with Mick through the magnetically charged question of fascism. Like Mick’s graffiti, Harry’s confessions about

fascism are overlaid with the private desires and fears that express his affective encounter with the larger world.

In like manner, many of the other characters in *Heart* grapple with their concerns about fascism from their own particular point of view. The two idealists of the town, Jake Blount and Dr. Copeland, communicate their commitment to different social principles in their divergent descriptions of fascism. As an unorthodox socialist, Jake worries about economic inequality:

In my life I seen things that would make a man go crazy. At least one third of all Southerners live and die no better off than the lowest peasant in any European Fascist state. The average wage of a worker on a tenant farm is only seventy-three dollars per year. And thirty-five dollars a year means just about ten cents for a full day's work. Everywhere there's pellagra and hookworm and anaemia. And just plain, pure starvation. (297)

Fascism represents economic and social backwardness for Jake. In his passion for social justice, he makes abstract parallels between the fascist state and economic inequality in Depression America, but these economic principles are also tied to his painful personal experiences with poverty in the South.

Jake makes these pronouncements in his only full conversation with Dr. Copeland, the sole African-American doctor in town and a champion of "uplift." Dr. Copeland is as passionate about race equality as Jake is about economic equality but, ironically, they cannot see their way to reconcile these parallel missions. While Jake generalizes about "the people," Dr. Copeland talks about "my people," despite the fact that neither of them are integrated into the communities they want to lead (223). This conflict between their philosophies is expressed in Copeland's very different interpretation of fascism:

So far as I and my people are concerned the South is Fascist now and always has been. Yeah. The Nazis rob the Jews of their legal, economic, and cultural life. Here the Negro has always been deprived of these. (299)

For Dr. Copeland, fascism is defined by its racial oppression. While Jake sketches broad socio-historical parallels between fascism and capitalism, Dr. Copeland sees the suppression of “legal, economic and cultural life” as above all a racial issue. This exchange between two tragically unfulfilled worldviews expresses different personal experiences through divergent interpretations of fascism. In each case, the intensity of personal experience provides the affective point of connection to the question of fascism. Neither of these understandings is incorrect, the novel suggests, and yet their incompatibility is unmistakable. In this way, fascism’s multivalent effects are distributed throughout the world of the novel, rather than being concentrated in the single ideological movement that Malcolm Cowley was looking for.

This passionate debate between Dr. Copeland and Jake is witnessed by the “deaf-mute” Mr. Singer, who acts as a point of connection between the various outcasts populating the small town. His room functions as a shelter for Mick as well as Dr. Copeland and Jake, especially after he buys a radio for their enjoyment. Previously, Mick’s fascination for radio had driven her to squat under her neighbor’s window for hours at a time to hear music, but with the aid of Mr. Singer’s radio her interest in orchestral music grows into a passion as she begins to compose her own music. In this isolated town, the radio connects Mick to the larger life of art and culture for which she instinctively yearns at the same time that it laces through the narrative, connecting these incompatible characters to Mr. Singer.

Just as Mr. Singer's visitors come to confess their different hopes, fears and fantasies to their silent witness, they likewise express their particular desires in the radio programs they listen to. The different appeals issuing from radio attract what Hadley Cantril called the "interests, the desire, and the attitudes of the listeners that can vitalize the vast inhuman network of the air" (*Psychology of Radio* 3-4). Likewise, echoing Lewis Mumford's prediction that technologies like radio would change rural life, *Heart's* continuous references to radio culture link the small town to a wider universe. The array of music and information that continuously pours from the radio functions as an ironic antithesis to Mr. Singer's welcoming silence. As a technology that replaces social intercourse and mutual understanding, however, the radio also represents the sense of loneliness thematized in *Heart*. After Mr. Singer loses his closest friend, another "deaf-mute" Antonopoulos, he kills himself in the room that had been a safe-haven for the other characters; he is only discovered when Mick comes up to listen to the radio, to follow her own passions, in other words, rather than to give Mr. Singer the sense of connection he desperately needs.

Besides Mr. Singer's room, the other locus of the novel's action is Biff Brannon's New York Café. The radio is always on here as well, and toward the end of the novel as the historical time of the fiction approaches the beginning of the Second World War, it constantly blares reports on Hitler: "The radio was on and there was talk about the crisis Hitler had cooked up over Danzig"; "The crisis voice still talked on the radio"; and again later "A foreign voice was now speaking over the radio. [Biff] could not decide for certain whether the voice was German, French, or Spanish. But it sounded like doom. It gave him the jitters to listen to it" (355-7). Like Mr. Singer's suicide, the radio signals the

disintegration of the weave of social relationships that were tenuously forming throughout *Heart*. In the closing scenes of the novel, the international theater of the Danzig crisis can only be understood in terms of the everyday experiences of the characters who encounter these events through the multivalent appeals of the radio.

Carson McCullers called *Heart* an “ironic parable of fascism,” and certainly the pervasive concern with the question of fascism in daily life makes up a fundamental part of the novel’s development (Rich 108). These diverse notions of fascism never cohere into an ideologically consistent interpretation of fascism, however; instead, it is presented as a set of fragmentary effects on disparate characters in an isolated, politically unimportant setting. McCuller’s “parable” is therefore ironic, I would argue, because its lesson is one of incompatibility and moral uncertainty rather than providing a story that assists in the ethical formation of its rational citizen-readers. The dense particularity of day-to-day interpersonal relationships is saturated by the question of fascism, but these diverse fascinations do not add up to a totalized image of fascism in interwar America.

McCuller’s novel of private life can be fruitfully compared to Sinclair Lewis’ *It Can’t Happen Here* (1935), which stages a binarized conflict between democratic humanist values and a totalitarian fascist regime. Unlike *Heart*, Lewis’ novel is guided by large-scale events that dramatically reshape daily life. The protagonist and unequivocal hero of the novel, Doremus Jessup, represents the humanist ideals of rational citizenship that come under attack when Berzelius “Buzz” Windrip is elected to the United States Presidency in 1936. Making extravagant promises to the electorate, Buzz comes to power on a populist ticket, but once in power he changes the constitution and becomes a dictator, censoring newspapers and opening concentration camps. His paramilitary group,

the Minute Men (or MM) terrorize the citizens under a permanently declared state of martial law, provoking the formation of an opposition force, The New Underground, which operates mainly by spreading factual information through their *Vermont Vigilance* paper. In this epic theater, middle-class Doremus becomes a hero of the people's resistance until he is put into the Trianon concentration camp. After escaping, he continues his proselytizing for rationality and truth in reporting, as the American fascist regime crumbles under its own ideological contradictions, and the novel ends with the United States on the verge of a new democratic revolution.

The driving, linear plot of *It Can't Happen Here* contrasts sharply with the loose framework of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*.¹⁸⁶ Like *Heart*, Lewis' novel connects Doremus' small Vermont hometown of Fort Beulah to the larger world of events through radio, although in this dystopia the uncomplicated middle-class hero who loves to stay at home reading his volumes of Dickens is wrenched from this idyllic world by an autocratic regime. While the radio was an instrument of multiple, contradictory appeals in *Heart*, here it is organized around a single voice, that of Reverend Paul Peter Prang, who is explicitly modeled on the American radio demagogue Father Coughlin. This is an inflated model of fascism, however, as the sententious narrator reminds us that "to the pioneer Father Coughlin, Bishop Paul Peter Prang was as the Ford V-8 to the Model A" (34). For Doremus, "Brother Prang [is] a worse tyrant than Caligula — a worse Fascist than Napoleon," and as "an honest fanatic" he presents "a real Fascist menace" (38).

¹⁸⁶ Although *It Can't* was based on contemporary interwar events, it belongs to the tradition of dystopian fiction that began in the late nineteenth century. Perhaps its closest literary predecessor is Jack London's *The Iron Heel* (1910), which stages a national coup by a violent conspiratorial group. The protagonist, Ernest Everhard, is an appealing, smart middle-class citizen who is radicalized by his sudden loss of freedom under the new despotic regime. Like *It Can't*, London's novel describes decisive events on an epic scale meant to convey pedagogical lessons about totalitarianism.

Whereas *Heart* expresses the heterogeneity of fascism in the characters' different encounters with its multiple, contradictory appeals, Doremus' description of fascism, combining autocratic authority with fanaticism, corresponds perfectly with the top-down model of fascism in *It Can't*.

During a key radio broadcast in which Prang announces his endorsement of Buzz Windrip for president, the radio preacher demands a labor system "like the syndicates in Italy" and that "Jewish Finance and, equally, International Jewish Communism and Anarchism and Atheism" should be "barred from all activity" (48). Like Doremus, who listens to the speech on a portable radio, the reader is meant to recognize these demands as unmistakable and ominous signs of fascism that require an immediate, ethically based response; we are supposed to realize that, as Doremus puts it, "History is being made!" (48). In true pedagogical fashion, Lewis also gives us a negative example of naïve incomprehension at this decisive moment in the figure of Doremus' wife, who "cheerily" chides her husband, "[w]hy, Dormouse, that bishop isn't a Fascist at all — he's a regular Red Radical" (50). Mistaking the right for the left, showmanship for policy, reaction for revolution, Mrs. Jessup embodies the failure of rational citizenship that worried intellectuals and public figures from Herbert Hoover to Walter Lippmann and John Dewey. In her irrational confusion of political categories, Mrs. Jessup's response manifests the same ignorance that, in the world of *It Can't*, nurtures the rise of American fascism. Importantly, Doremus' humanist values of democratic participation are situated in this misogynistic representation of his wife, whom he wants to murder "not oftener than once or twice a year" for her naiveté (50).

Doremus' blend of patriarchal misogyny and rationalism is presented as a coherent set of anti-fascist values in *It Can't*. By contrast, McCuller's *Heart*, which takes place in the same historical time-frame as Lewis' novel, expresses an uncertainty about fascism through the diverse ways that characters encounter it. Unlike the outcasts in *Heart*, Doremus is trained in clear moral values by his father, a Unitarian Universalist Pastor, and he carries these beliefs into all of his choices, such as his notion of who should court his daughter, Sissy. Preferring a freshman at Amherst named Julian to "the radio-and-motor-hypnotized eighteen-year-olds" that Sissy sometimes dates, Doremus reflects that this blond Swede comes from a family of Episcopalian rectors and "voluntarily" reads authors like John Strachey and Stuart Chase (45). Contrasting the hypnotic effects of mass technology to the pedagogical instruction of reading cultural critics like Strachey and Chase (who write about the negative effects of these mass technologies), Doremus thoroughly articulates the values recapitulated in the narrative world of *It Can't*.

Lewis makes it clear that the irrational appeals of hypnotic technologies endanger the humanist values represented by Doremus. Bishop Prang's radio nomination of Buzz Windrip stands in clear contrast to the Jeffersonian Party candidate, Senator Trowbridge, who "represented integrity and reason" (92). While Buzz provides bread and circuses for the masses, Trowbridge insists on talking about the nation's economic problems, a grave weakness at a time when,

the electorate hungered for frisky emotions, for the peppery sensations associated, usually, not with monetary systems and taxation rates but with baptism by immersion in the creek, young love under the elms, straight whisky, angelic orchestras heard soaring down from the full moon, fear of death when an automobile teeters above a canyon, thirst in a desert and

quenching it with spring water — all the primitive sensations which they thought they found in the screaming of Buzz Windrip. (92)

The multiple, contradictory desires of the unreasoning masses lead directly to fascism in Lewis' narrative. The "radio millions" who listen to Prang are equally vulnerable to the mass spectacle of Buzz Windrip's campaign, and he easily wins the vote.

After Buzz gains office, the rest of the novel describes a fascist reign of terror, consisting of a level of sadistic violence that we have since come to associate with totalitarian fascism. The novel ends with the American fascist regime tottering, having undermined itself through its own violence and irrationality. Doremus continues his resistance activities with the commitment of an ideologue all the way through *It Can't*, and the concluding line pays tribute to the novel's hero, "[a]nd still Doremus goes on in the red sunrise, for a Doremus Jessup can never die" (384). Combining Doremus' humanist values with the clichés of the cowboy and pioneer ethos, *It Can't* searches for its anti-fascist heroes in the democratic rationalist traditions that had already been superseded by the emergent mass culture of the interwar period. By simplifying the complexity of fascism's appeals, Lewis creates a world of neatly organized binaries, but in doing so he loses sight of the most dangerous and difficult aspects of fascism.

Lewis' *It Can't* was frequently cited immediately after its publication, often showing up in anti-fascist articles like Percy Winner's "Fascism at the Door" (1936). Even though it expressed a clear worldview, however, *It Can't* was not able to escape the contradictory dimensions of fascism that pervaded interwar American debates. In Stebelton Nulle's article "America and the Coming Order" (1936), the pro-fascist author argued that Lewis' heroes display genuinely fascist values. "Nothing better demonstrates the confusion of the author [i.e. Sinclair Lewis]," Nulle argues, than the fact that figures

like Doremus express “the same principles that lie at the root of fascism: authority, hierarchy, and discipline” (276). In a different vein, the socialist Norman Thomas writes,

Mr. Sinclair Lewis has given us an inadequate analysis of the way in which America may go fascist and of the forces which will fight fascism, but in *It Can't Happen Here* he does present a vivid and true picture of what an American Fascism will look like in action. Both Mussolini and Hitler appealed in their respective countries to maladjusted youth, including those very elements which in America make up our underworld gangs, and which along with men not so young, form our Ku Klux Klan and our even more despicable Black Legion. The United States is probably richer in these elements of potential strength to the dictator than was the Germany in which Hitler rose to power. (150-1)

Despite the presentation of a binarized model of fascism in *It Can't*, critics responding to Lewis' novel continuously reintroduced fascism's troubling heterogeneity. If Percy Winner agrees with Lewis' argument, Stebelton Nulle reverses it, and Norman Thomas shifts it into contemporary concerns about fascistic “gangs.” The diverse interpretations of *It Can't* illustrate the difficulty of Lewis' pedagogical project, demonstrating fascism's resistance to his clear binaries.

For his part, Lewis connected *It Can't* with his work in the 1920s, maintaining that the central theme of the novel was “Revolution in terms of Rotary” (Geismar 122). Like *Main Street* (1920) and *Babbitt* (1922), for which he was awarded the first Nobel Prize granted to an American author, *It Can't* was designed around the petty struggles of small-town life, although Lewis' attempt to expand these problems to a national level distorted and simplified the question of fascism in everyday life. In his exploration of the fascistic dimensions of radio culture, for example, he only considers radio demagoguery, rather than grappling with the troubling multiplicity of radio's overlapping appeals. Likewise, rather than engaging with the profound social changes wrought by the new

technologized mass culture, Lewis assumes that the masses are merely confused by the irrational, hypnotic appeal of these technologies. Thus, Doremus' factual journalistic exposés will win out in the end as the citizenry realize what is really going on.

Despite these reductionist arguments, however, Lewis clearly spoke to American concerns about fascism in the interwar period. The novel sold well, and a Works Projects Administration production of *It Can't* opened simultaneously on 20 stages in 1936, attracting 275,000 people in the first four months (Gold, *The Hollow Men* 54). As one of the most influential authors of the interwar period, Lewis' book garnered instantaneous, nationwide interest that brought the possibility of American fascism to the forefront of national consciousness.¹⁸⁷ Equally important, *It Can't* brought to light an argument that his friend, journalist George Seldes, had been trying unsuccessfully to publish in *Sawdust Caesar* (1935), an exposé on the brutality of Mussolini's regime. Drawing on Seldes' research, Lewis provided a vast audience for the arguments that had been suppressed in the United States for five years. As historian John Diggins explains, Mussolini was so popular in interwar America that Seldes' harsh denunciation of the Italian regime, publishers feared, would not find an audience (53). Significantly, Seldes situates his history of Mussolini's regime in the context of fascism's threat to the United States:

Fascism not only exists in America, but it has become formidable and needs only a Duce, a Fuehrer, an organizer, and a loosening of the purse strings of those who gain materially from its victory, to become the most powerful force threatening the Republic. (xiii)

Lewis' novel made these arguments more widely acceptable during a period of deep uncertainty about fascism. By modeling the rise of American fascism after actual

¹⁸⁷ An important index of Lewis' importance in this period comes from Malcolm Cowley, who writes in *After the Genteel Tradition* (1937) that Lewis' Nobel Prize speech defined the scope and goals of American letters for the interwar generation (20).

demagogues like Father Coughlin and Huey Long, Lewis made Seldes' fears more palpable.¹⁸⁸ In disseminating this simplified model of fascism, *It Can't* played an important role in the reshaping of public opinion as well as creating the totalitarian image of fascism that has since become a fundamental part of the American cultural imaginary.

Finding the "real fascists":
For Whom the Bell Tolls and the ethical challenge of fascism

Carson McCullers and Sinclair Lewis present us with two very different models for understanding fascism. While these models are evidently incompatible, they are both equally important for engaging with the question of fascism in interwar American culture. Both totalitarian and populist, fascism brought together heterogeneous elements that American writers understood in a multiplicity of ways. If McCullers emphasizes the supple politics of everyday life, Lewis only imagines the fascist regime as a rigid monolithic structure. Fascism brings these apparently incompatible expressions of political culture together, presenting interwar America with a new set of strategies for drawing the intimate hopes, fears and fantasies of the masses into large-scale movements. Any investigation of interwar American literary culture must therefore take into account the pervasive concerns with fascism at both the regime and the interpersonal levels. Nevertheless, as Malcolm Cowley demonstrates in his claim that interwar American literature fails to engage with the question of fascism, it is often difficult to see how the divergent models of everyday life and large-scale socio-political movements are interrelated.

¹⁸⁸ Sinclair Lewis' wife, Dorothy Thompson, was also perhaps the most widely known American journalist in Europe in the 1930s. Her book *I Saw Hitler!* (1932), as well as her other work on fascism, provided another important model for Lewis' *It Can't Happen Here*.

An investigation into American literature demonstrates that Cowley's initial distinction between official politics and the political aspects of everyday life is untenable, however. Conversely, I would argue that engaging with the textual world of interwar literature requires an examination of its cultural politics at the micrological level, and this is just as true of writing that deals explicitly with large-scale socio-political events as it is with literature that emphasizes quotidian life. In Cowley's discussion of 1930s American literature, for example, he judges Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) to be the great exception to his claim that American authors have not effectively treated the question of fascism, though this best-selling novel avoids universalizing claims about fascism or the Spanish Civil War. Rather than the sweeping historical generalizations of *It Can't Happen Here*, Hemingway's novel takes place on an isolated mountain in a concentrated seventy-hour period, and it focuses on minute, interpersonal exchanges that situate larger political conflicts within the characters' personal experiences. Much closer to *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* in its focus on the everyday, *For Whom* emphasizes the uncertainty of fascism for this heterogeneous band of Loyalists.

Throughout the novel, the protagonist Robert Jordan questions his role in the Spanish Civil War, as he wonders "[h]ow many of those we have killed have been real fascists?" (264). Challenging the interwar tendency to see the war in binary terms of fascism against socialism, tyranny against freedom, *For Whom* focuses on an ethically driven hero who questions his own imperatives:

But you like the people of Navarra better than those of any other part of Spain. Yes. And you kill them. Yes. [...] Don't you know it is wrong to kill? Yes. But you do it? Yes. And you still believe absolutely that your cause is right? Yes. It is right, he told himself, not reassuringly, but proudly. I believe in the people and their right to govern themselves as they wish. (264)

Explaining his motives to himself, Robert has recourse to the ideal of “the people,” but he simultaneously rejects this facile generality in his methodical self-examination. In fact, the need to find the “real fascists” proves as difficult as describing his own ideological position in dualist terms. Sacrificing everything to the Loyalist cause, Robert nonetheless rejects the philosophical underpinning of Marxist socialism, telling himself, “[y]ou’re not a real Marxist and you know it” (265). Instead, he commits himself to “Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness,” which he situates firmly outside the dualism of Marxist “dialectics” (265). Neither a “real Marxist,” nor able to combat “real fascists,” Robert inhabits an uncertain physical and ideological position behind fascist lines.

Like Doremus Jessup, Robert’s ultimate loyalty rests with the humanist principles of rational democracy expressed in the American Declaration of Independence. Correspondingly, as a former teacher, he conceptualizes the threat of fascism as a problem of public education. When the Loyalist Pilar asks Robert, “[b]ut are there not many fascists in your country?” he answers, “[t]here are many who do not know when they are fascists but will find it out when the time comes.” Pilar then asks [b]ut you cannot destroy them until they rebel?” to which Robert responds, “[w]e cannot destroy them. But we can educate the people so that they will fear fascism and recognize it as it appears and combat it” (182). The great irony of this humanist claim for education and rational leadership, an irony that pervades *For Whom*, is that Robert’s powerful ethical drive does not help him to establish an unequivocal sense of right and wrong, even in the face of fascism.

For Whom was criticized on both sides of the political spectrum for this nebulous depiction of what seemed to be a clear ideological struggle (Gold, *Hollow Men* 88). In the

world of the novel, however, these dogmatic generalizations melt away in the affectively charged encounters between Hemingway's characters. Faced with the complexity of human motivation, Robert meditates, "[t]here are as many sorts of Spanish as there are Americans," and the other characters in *For Whom* are similarly afflicted by a deep uncertainty about the interplay of action and impulse in such a vast socio-political theater as the Spanish Civil War (179). For example, the Loyalist Anselmo echoes Robert's perplexity in his claim that "[t]o me it is a sin to kill a man. Even Fascists whom we must kill" (36). Repeatedly, *For Whom* unsettles the clear imperative to destroy the "real fascists" by means of the same humanist ethics that, in the world of the novel, ground the Loyalist struggle.

The search for the "real fascists" also destabilizes the ethical basis of the Loyalist identity. Occupying a central position in *For Whom*, Pilar's story about punishing the fascists of her town is widely regarded as the finest part of the novel. Mirroring the reflections of Robert and Anselmo, however, she communicates the same ambivalence in her encounter with fascism. The people of Pilar's town "have a natural sense of justice and a desire to do that which is right," but in punishing the fascists, "cruelty had entered into the lines and also drunkenness" (102). Paradoxically, by exercising their "sense of justice," Pilar's people lose the human dignity they sought to protect. Robert's (and the reader's) immense respect for Pilar comes from her courage in facing this paradox, although she is unable to resolve it:

It was a thing of great ugliness, but I had thought if this is how it must be, this is how it must be, and at least there was no cruelty, only the depriving of life which, as we all have learned in these years, is a thing of ugliness but also a necessity if we are to win, and to preserve the Republic. (104)

Pilar's meaningless tautology ("this is how it must be"), and her nominalization of the act of murder ("the depriving of life") are clearly inadequate responses to the powerful emotion communicated by her story. For characters like Robert, Anselmo and Pilar, the open ended exploration of this ethical uncertainty subtends the drama of *For Whom*, as they encounter the question of fascism in their personal investigations of motives and actions without, however, finding an uncomplicated resolution.

While Sinclair Lewis' *It Can't Happen Here* offers an impoverished description of political culture in the interwar period, *For Whom* expresses a politics that is found in the very language of the dialogue, in the psychology of the characters, and in the structure of the novel. Although the plot of *For Whom* centers on the destruction of a bridge behind enemy lines, the development of the narrative is guided by the relationships generated around this mission. Later we find out that the bridge has no strategic importance for the war as a whole; nonetheless, the interactions that emerge from this historically unimportant moment present the reader with a concrete politics that addresses the uncertain question of fascism. Like the bridge that is vulnerable because it spans a vacuum, the relationships in *For Whom* are tenuously built and the ethics grounding the Loyalist actions are uncertainly founded. The destruction of the bridge is the climax of the characters' interconnections, but it is also the dissolution of this micropolitics. The binarizing pressure of the civil war forces into the foreground the distance between the micrological, everyday experiences of the Loyalists and the large-scale historical events in which they are involved. As the symbolic and structural core of *For Whom*, the bridge expresses a fragile, relational politics that resists the stable terrain of ideological positions.

Hemingway's novel brings the incompatibility between the two models of fascism in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and *It Can't Happen Here* to a point of crisis.

Highlighting the tensions between the micro and the macro dimensions of politics, *For Whom* puts an almost unbearable pressure on the disjunction between private life and large-scale movements, but the ethical quandaries that drive Hemingway's novel also leave unexplored fascism's ability to draw these contradictory elements together. In Depression Era America, this unresolved conflict became more threatening with the rise of technologized mass culture. If the politics of *For Whom* develops from the interpersonal relationships of the Loyalists, radio culture demonstrated that group cohesiveness did not depend on humanist principles of ethics and responsibility. In contrast to Robert Jordan's meditations on an isolated mountain, the majority of Americans were suddenly introduced to a universe of overlapping, contradictory appeals that generated affectively charged communities. Robert's hope to "educate the people so that they will fear fascism and recognize it" was superseded by an immersive radio culture that magnetized crowds by drawing on the heterogeneous desires circulating through the masses.

When you try to find the people:
Dos Passos' *District of Columbia* and interwar radio culture

While Hemingway never incorporated considerations of technology or its effects on crowds into his writing, John Dos Passos' interwar novels are consistently structured around these technological and political shifts in American culture. The same year that his monumental *USA* trilogy (1936) was published, Dos Passos and Hemingway, who

were longstanding friends, went to Spain together to witness the Civil War first-hand (Carr 358). Both authors were powerfully affected by their experiences, leading them to produce several important works on the question of fascism. For his part, Hemingway wrote an anti-fascist play, *The Fifth Column* (1938) as well as *For Whom*, while Dos Passos linked the question of fascism to the rise of technologized mass culture in his second trilogy, *District of Columbia* (completed 1949).¹⁸⁹

At the time of his voyage to Spain, Dos Passos was regarded as one of the preeminent American authors of the interwar period. His *USA* trilogy was immediately acclaimed as “the great American novel,” and few critics failed to write on it, whether in praise or in blame (Denning, *Cultural Front* 167).¹⁹⁰ In 1938, Jean-Paul Sartre wrote,

Dos Passos’ world – like those of Faulkner, Kafka and Stendhal – is impossible because it is contradictory. But therein lies its beauty. Beauty is a veiled contradiction. I regard Dos Passos as the greatest writer of our time. (Maine 175)

The New Humanist critic Paul Elmer More, by contrast, famously polemicized that Dos Passos’ writing resembled an “explosion in a cesspool” (Maine 78).¹⁹¹ At both ends of the interpretive spectrum, from Sartre to P.E. More, critics recognized the complex,

¹⁸⁹ Edmund Wilson, and film shown at Whitehouse and collaborated with Dos Passos on the script for a film, *The Spanish Earth* (1937).

¹⁹⁰ While a great deal of this praise came from the political left, Edmund Wilson complained that Dos Passos had been mistaken for “a Communist, who wrote stories about the proletariat, at a time when the real Dos Passos was engaged in bringing out a long novel about the effects of the capitalist system on the American middle class and had announced himself [...] politically a ‘middle-class liberal’” (207-8). After World War II, Dos Passos continued to be admired. In *Language and Silence* (1966), for example, George Steiner called Dos Passos “the principle American literary influence of the twentieth century” (cited in Pizer ix).

¹⁹¹ Irving Babbitt likewise criticized Dos Passos for exaggerating “the clutter and incoherency of the mundane spectacle instead of eliciting its deeper meaning” (Nevin 47).

contradictory, even incoherent effect of Dos Passos' chaotic style, with its multiple layers of voices and media.¹⁹²

The multiplicity of effects in Dos Passos' writing generates a world that is not organized by ethical meditations or the codes of action that drives Hemingway's protagonists. In fact, the disturbingly inhuman world of technologized mass culture represented in Dos Passos' oeuvre leaves little space for these humanist beliefs. Michael Denning notes that Dos Passos' imitation of "the speech of the people is mostly headlines, popular songs, and advertising slogans," and "[t]he sentence production of *USA* is less a renewal of perception than a Tayloring of the novel" in which language is "streamlined" in the "efficient elimination of unnecessary parts and motions" (177).¹⁹³ Likewise, as many critics have noted, Dos Passos saw himself as a "technician" or a "machine for absorbing and arranging certain sequences of words out of the lives of the people around him" (178). Abandoning traditional modes of composition, Dos Passos' writing mirrors the chaotic flux of a mass culture that was no longer organizing socio-political life according to the principles of rational judgment.

The *District of Columbia* trilogy continues the technical assemblage of words that marks Dos Passos' earlier novels, but in this later work he turns his attention from what Malcolm Cowley called the "collective novel" to the question of fascism in interwar American culture (Maine 136). The first novel in the trilogy, *Adventures of a Young Man* (1938), has often been understood to constitute a break with Dos Passos' earlier work in

¹⁹² Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari summarize Dos Passos' work "an extraordinary art of counterpoint in the compounds he forms with characters, current events, biographies, and camera eyes, at the same time as a plane of composition is expanded to infinity so as to sweep everything up into Life, into Death, the town cosmos" (*What Is Philosophy?* 188).

¹⁹³ Cecilia Tichi anticipates Denning's argument, maintaining that Dos Passos' "fast-paced" fiction "grew out of a larger realm indicated by the Taylorist Efficiency Movement" (198).

the *USA* trilogy.¹⁹⁴ Introducing the Spotswood family, the narrative follows the youngest member of the family, Glenn, as he struggles to find an outlet for his idealism. After many misadventures, he is disillusioned by the American radical left, and so he decides to leave for Civil War Spain in the hopes of finding, like Hemingway's Robert Jordan, a cause worthy of sacrifice. He is bitterly disappointed here as well, however, as he discovers from Loyalists that the ideological lines of combat are far from clear. Talking to a Spaniard named Frankie, Glenn finds out through the Loyalist's broken English that,

“Here several different kinds of war. We fight Franco but we also fight Moscow [...] They want to destroy our collectives. They want to institute dictatorship of secret police just like Franco. We have to fight both sides to protect a revolution.” (305)

Unable to square his ideals with larger historical events, Glenn loses his ethical bearing. Eventually, he is ignominiously imprisoned as a “Trotzkyist,” and the novel closes in a melancholy tone as Glenn sacrifices his life for a cause he no longer believes in.

Adventures surprised and disappointed critics, because it seemed to abandon both the ethos of the collective novel and the literary experimentalism of *USA*. Claude-Edmonde Magny called it a “regression, a return to the traditional, individualistic form of the novel, centered on one character cut off from the elements that would integrate him with impersonal history” (Maine 138). Just as Hemingway's Robert Jordan struggled to find his moral compass in the midst of the ideological struggle between the radical left and fascism, Glenn Spotswood cannot reconcile his particular experiences with the macro-historical events that sweep him up. Dos Passos' focus on a single character and his reduction of narrative devices serves to emphasize the same ethical tensions that drove *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Unlike Hemingway's novel, however, *Adventures* does

¹⁹⁴ See, for example, Claude-Edmond Magny and Granville Hicks (Maine 138, 249)

not end at this moment of meaningless self-sacrifice. Instead, Dos Passos uses this traditional narrative structure as a springboard for further novelistic explorations of the mass political culture from which Glenn and the rest of the Spotswood family emerge.

If *Adventures* is a traditional novel, the second novel of the trilogy, *Number One* (1943), reintroduces what contemporary critic Alfred Kazin called the “manifold rhythms” that made Dos Passos the “first of the ‘technological’ novelists” (Maine 227). Taking up the same socio-political questions that structured *Adventures*, *Number One* loosely follows Glenn’s brother, Tyler, in his work as campaign manager for the central figure of the novel, the appealingly down-home politician Chuck Crawford. Modeled on the Louisiana radio demagogue, Huey Long, Crawford drives the plot forward through his dictatorial ambitions. Unlike the focus on a conventional protagonist in *Adventures*, Tyler plays a muted role in the second novel of *District of Columbia*, which is structured around the powerful new radio culture that drives Crawford’s campaign. Returning to the multivalent experimentalism of the *USA* trilogy, the interludes between the chapters of *Number One* repeatedly come back to the central problem of identifying the shape and force of the new mass culture. In the novel’s narrative, the large-scale political dimension of this problem are illustrated in Crawford’s campaign, but Dos Passos also situates the fluctuating image of “the people” at the everyday level in the inter-chapter sections by means of an extensive exploration of the “manifold rhythms” of radio culture.

The novel opens, “[w]hen you try to find the people, always in the end it comes down to somebody, somebody working, maybe [...]” (1). The obvious clumsiness of this formulation emphasizes the uncertainty of “the people,” even as it insists on locating this socio-political generalization in a particular figure. The anonymous farmer of the first

inter-chapter section, for example, has “chapped knuckles,” and “there’s a bolt loose under the seat somewhere” on his horse-driven plow (2). This carefully described particularity is nonetheless tied into the immense network of radio culture that draws the farmer in with its overlapping appeals:

Each time [the farmer] passes his kitchen door the radio fills his ears, voices, bawling the price of fat stock in Kansas City, grains in Chicago, football scores, news of the fighting, smoothly a clause out of a government speech, swing moaning smokily from a late floorshow someplace where it’s still night, the voice direct from me to you of a candidate who wants to be nominated. (3 original italics)

The interplay of information, music, and political campaigning “fill his ears” with a multiplicity of “voices” from all over the country. In contrast to the farmer’s primitive agricultural equipment, the radio emits a sophisticated stream of desiring appeals that link him to what Hadley Cantril calls the “vast inhuman network of the air.”

In this opening passage, the “*voice direct from me to you*” of the politician participates in a rich, multivalent acoustic world. Directly referencing the Fireside Chats of Franklin D. Roosevelt, whom Dos Passos mordantly termed the “you-and-me president,” the radio interludes in *Number One* focus on the intimate, “direct” appeal of radio-politics in the new mass culture (Schivelbusch 57). Both universalizing and specific, radio culture in *Number One* demonstrates the myriad points of connection drawn between the particular listener and the emergent macro-political formations that shaped historical movements. While *Adventures of a Young Man* showed the ethical hero struggling to make sense of these large-scale events from his limited perspective, *Number One*’s exploration of radio manifests the linkages between these particular experiences and the mass-cultural developments that nurture Chuck Crawford’s campaign.

Like *Number One*, both *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and *It Can't Happen Here* thematize the socio-political force of radio. As we saw earlier, whereas *Heart* explores its personal affective draw for different characters, *It Can't* imagines radio as an instrumentalist tool for the domination of a confused public. Dos Passos' novel brings these two dimensions together in Chuck Crawford's radio demagogy, demonstrating the interchange between micrological, everyday experience and large-scale movements in the new technologized mass culture. Crawford's WEMM radio station, for example, unites his techniques of mass appeal with his political platform, which he summarizes with the slogan Every Man a Millionaire. Reconfiguring the voting citizen as a desiring consumer with unlimited means, the Every Man a Millionaire campaign combines the depoliticizing effects of commodity culture with the dictatorial ambitions of Chuck Crawford. Bridging the gap between private desires and massive political movements, Crawford's direct, intimate radio-style appeals to farmers like the one with whom Dos Passos opens *Number One*.

The combination of religious, commercial and political rhetoric in Crawford's speech imitates the overlapping effects of radio culture. "Born right out of the middle of the American people," as Tyler Spotswood proudly exclaims, Crawford began his political career as a door-to-door salesman. Denying that he is involved in politics at all, he argues "I never did start in politics... I been fightin' politics all my life" (35). Similarly, voters are not citizen-subjects, but customers. Recounting the early stages of his career, he relates that as a salesman,

I started to canvass voters..." Chuck started to laugh. "Well it was the customers in those days, but it's the same thing... that was when I began my card index of every family rich an' poor I canvassed." (32)

During this period, Crawford learned to appeal to his “customers” through the same sets of techniques deployed by radio and advertising culture. “The thing to do when you are tryin’ to talk folks into something’,” he explains in his typically colloquial manner, “is to kinder fool around till you find a gate or a break in one of them fences...” Claiming to have learned these strategies from “readin’ the Bible in that Sunday School,” Crawford assimilates heterogeneous cultural elements into a convincing style that attracts a broad audience (26).¹⁹⁵

In the course of the novel, Crawford develops these advertising techniques into a style with diverse points of resonance with the inter-chapter sections. As with the *USA* trilogy, these radio interludes are never directly associated with the plot of *Number One*; rather, they serve to contextualize the characters’ actions, situating them in a complex acoustic world of overlapping appeals. Besides the farmer, these interludes describe a wide range of anonymous figures, such as a “man in his business suit” who drives to work as he listens to his “*dashboard radio hurriedly whispering news, breakfastfoods, custommade clothes, credit, busy hillbillies, blues moaning low*” (222 original italics). In a different vein, *Number One* depicts a boy working at a “chainstore” who is “nuts” about his “two-way set” (132). Like the farmer, each of these figures is depicted with careful attention to the details that would make him particular. The boy, for example, is awash in an ocean of scattered hopes and fears:

¹⁹⁵ Crawford is partially modeled on the politician Bruce Barton, who argued in his influential *The Man Nobody Knows* (1924), “Surely no one will consider us lacking in reverence if we say that every one of the ‘principles of modern salesmanship’ on which businessmen so much pride themselves, are brilliantly exemplified in Jesus’ talk and work. The first of these and perhaps the most important is the necessity for “putting yourself in step with your prospect” (104).

Elected to Congress by Manhattan’s commercial Silk Stocking District in 1937, Barton was a staunch opponent of the New Deal. Uniting religion and advertising in a powerful psychological blend, Barton was also one of the most important early advocates of radio. See his *American Magazine* article, “This Magic Called Radio” (1922).

his folks don't understand him, his hours are too long and his pay too short, he needs a new pair of shoes, he's scared to pick up girls; he wants a sports model car, to own a messjacket, to be manager and sit at a broad slick desk, somewhere dimly sometime to be President (131 original italics).

As with the farmer, the heterogeneous appeals of the radio attract the businessman and the boy by echoing back to them their complex yearnings. With the short-wave, the boy is “*plugged in; his ears glow with the hum from the warmer tubes: he's on the air, resounding immensity, concave with voices, dotted with signals, limitless sphere: his ears are everywhere [...]*” (132 original italics). Just as radio culture responds to partially articulated drives and motives, it fragments and magnifies the boy's senses, allowing him to escape for a utopian moment from his awkward body. Like the “the radio-and-motor-hypnotized eighteen-year-olds” that Sinclair Lewis worries will empower an American fascist dictator, the boy is intensely attracted to the acoustic world of radio. The farmer, the businessman, and the boy are all brought into these intensively shared experiences in the “limitless sphere” of radio culture, and it is this environment that Crawford draws on to create his magnetic radio-style.¹⁹⁶

Like the radio culture that *Number One* explores in the inter-chapters, Crawford's language is designed to draw these diverse listeners together into a depoliticized community that he persistently refers to as “the people.” Speaking at a rally, he intones:

These are the years that will establish the victory of the common man, the reconquest of his government an' of his whole civilization by the plain or'nary citizen. This is the time to elect plain folks, who will stand up for the rights of plain folks an' who will see that government of the people, for the people an' by the people, shall not perish from the earth [...]

 (12)

¹⁹⁶ It should be noted that Dos Passos' radio interludes fail to represent female listeners, who constituted more than half the listenership in the 1930s. This is unfortunate, since the heterogeneous desires of this listenership would have been an excellent addition to his argument that radio appealed to diverse listeners.

The emotional impact of Crawford's reference to the Gettysburg Address has none of the tensions of Lincoln's speech; rather, it is meant to draw on a complex set of nostalgic and emotive responses to an all-but univocal moment in American history. The carefully structured rhythm of the speech combines the force of political rhetoric with the advertising jingle, just as his constant reference to the "plain folks" encompasses anyone who might be listening, from the farmer to the businessman or the boy.

The socio-political dimension of Crawford's radio-style is made even more explicit in another chapter interlude, in which a miner comes to the union local to hear his representative address his constituency on the air.¹⁹⁷ This miner, for whom "no amount of scrubbing will take the grime of the coal out of his knuckles and fingernails," gives all of his attention to the radio, and hears his representative, whose

sentences out of the loudspeaker lash the air in a summer squall, dictionary words hail on the ears, Shakespearean ironies, pulpitthumping denunciations, the slow stinging epithet of scorn direct from the convention hall in Atlantic City, the roar of the surf in the peroration, the will in the voice a bull charging blind [...] (180 original italics)

In this acoustic sphere, every sound produces a multiplicity of effects, as the intensity of radio's aural world draws in its listeners with the complex interplay of overlapping voices. The representative's harangue intertwines the righteous justice of his "denunciations" and his "scorn" with classic rhetorical devices and auditory effects that communicate at the level of pure sound. Like Crawford's use of pitch, interval and rhythm in his speeches, this radio-representative discharges a panoply of affective appeals that do not rely on rational subjectivity to effectively draw the "roar of the surf"

¹⁹⁷ Dos Passos is partially drawing on his own experiences in this sequence. Along with authors such as Sherwood Anderson and Theodor Dreiser, Dos Passos wrote a series of articles on the important Harlan County mine strikes. See his "Harlan: Working under the Gun" in *Years of Protest* (1967).

together as a unified community. Just as Crawford's speech is both attractive and meaningless, the radio-representative envelops the miner in an aural world charged with affect instead of argumentation.

In contrast to this utopian promise of justice communicated in the radio-representative's voice, the miner lives in a "company town" in which "nothing can live but rats and bedbugs and men." His home is one of "a row of identical unpainted houses set in a gash in the mountain," and "his landscape is slag, black tipples and railroad tracks" (179). Dos Passos emphasizes this disjunction between the miner's life and the attractive world of radio, as he and the other miners "sit in a grimy room, smoke and spit in the cuspidor," and listen to "the chesty voice that jangles loose panes in the windows" (180). Because the voice of the radio-representative is embedded in an acoustic world of depoliticized appeals, it functions through the same utopian promise subtending radio advertising. Correspondingly, the miner measures changes in his life in terms of his new "washingmachine" and the "highly varnished cabinet radio victrola" (180). Just as Crawford's Every Man a Millionaire campaign (conducted through his WEMM station) draws on his constituency's multiple, contradictory desires, the miner's ambitions are oriented toward the overlapping appeals of radio and commodity culture. Generating community without communism, the radio-representative magnetizes listeners through the same longing that draws the miner to the utopian promise of the washing machine.

In *Number One*, the quotidian concerns that pervade the radio interludes demonstrate the political effects of everyday life as they inhere at the level of language and psychology. In its exploration of this intimate, micrological level, the novel displays radio culture's capacity to fuse the diverse desires of "the people" with the vast scope of

Chuck Crawford's political campaign. In the world of the novel, this combination of effects is directly connected to the threat of fascism. Crawford's most important radio voice, for example, is the radio preacher Reverend Bigelow, whose rhetoric is charged with an incoherent but powerful set of anti-democratic appeals. Arguing that the "time has come for patriotic men to take the law into their own hands," Bigelow preaches,

No thinking man could face a situation in this country today without coming to the conclusion that our democracy is rotten beyond repair. No honest man can forbear to say that force is the only remedy. We are faced with a plot against the supremacy of all the ideals we hold most dear, against our deep faith in our father's God, against the sanctity of our beautiful American womanhood, against the existence of the white race itself... That vile conspiracy, that has subverted and degraded that great Christian civilized continent from which our forefathers sprang, has established itself in this country. Its slimy tentacles are twined about the executive and judiciary branches of the government... (247)

Bigelow integrates these incoherent elements into a powerful logic that magnetizes his audience into a constituency. Searching for language that might reach the farmer, the businessman, the boy and the miner, his speech ranges from appeals to rationality, religion, racial supremacy, fears of communism, etc., in its search for a register that will draw his listeners together.

Like Bishop Prang in *It Can't Happen Here*, Reverend Bigelow is modeled on the historical figure of Father Coughlin, a radio preacher who combined religious oratory with racism and fascist economic policy to create a listenership of more than ten million Americans. In one of the most significant events of the interwar period, Father Coughlin supported the powerful U.S. Senator Huey Long in his presidential bid before Long was assassinated in 1935. *Number One* mirrors this alliance between Coughlin and Long in

the relationship between Reverend Bigelow and Chuck Crawford.¹⁹⁸ Like these “radio spellbinders,” Bigelow and Crawford are both practiced radio speakers who appeal to millions with their broadcasts (Cantril, *Psychology of Radio* 7). And like Long, Crawford seeks to convert this radio popularity into a potentially dictatorial control over the nation. As Crawford tells Bigelow, “[y]ou wait till I’m President sittin’ up at my desk down there at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue... We’ll start to fix things so’s an American kin be proud of his flag” (247).

As the only historical figure Dos Passos included in the plots of his interwar fiction, Huey Long clearly occupied an important place in his writing. In *The Kingfish in Fiction* (2004), Keith Perry argues that, of the many representations of Huey Long in American fiction, *Number One*’s is the most believable (149).¹⁹⁹ Well before he wrote *Number One*, Dos Passos had been interested in Huey Long, several times considering him for the biographical sequences of the *USA* trilogy (127). During the composition of *USA*, while on assignment for the *New Republic* at the 1932 Chicago national convention, Dos Passos came up with the idea for Chuck Crawford’s character when he was able to observe Huey Long in action (Dos Passos, *Fourteenth Chronicle* 382). In these persistent

¹⁹⁸ Likewise, Sinclair Lewis mirrors the Coughlin-Long relationship in Prang’s support of “Buzz” Windrip. Lewis’ representation is importantly different from Dos Passos’, however, as Prang’s radio demagoguery is understood in instrumentalist terms of a conspiratorial, top-down dictatorship. Conversely, in *Number One* both Bigelow and Crawford are as much shaped by radio culture as they manipulate it.

¹⁹⁹ Probably the most famous representation of Huey Long is the character Willie Stark in Robert Penn Warren’s Pulitzer Prize winning *All the King’s Men* (1946). Unlike *Number One*’s emphasis on the overlapping appeals of radio culture, Warren’s novel is driven by a binary ideological struggle between “the man of idea” (represented by Adam Stanton) and “the man of fact” (represented by Willie). The novel’s retrospective narrator, Jack Burden, is most concerned with the traditional ethical concerns that we have also noted in Hemingway’s writing. To facilitate the narrator’s meditations on good and evil, Warren’s novel is written in a socio-historical vacuum designed to stage this ethical struggle, rather than the multiplicitous world of technological mass culture that actually characterized interwar America. By contrast, *Number One* is written in the present tense, engaging in the intensive interactions of a non-binary, multiple world, instead of the neatly coordinated retrospection Burden’s narrative.

considerations of Long, Dos Passos created a fictional character in Chuck Crawford that he envisaged as a new kind of “confidence man,” a practiced political salesman who could unite diverse strategies into a large-scale political movement (Perry 151).

In Crawford’s Every Man a Millionaire program (modeled on Long’s Share Our Wealth plan), in his conversion of citizens into “customers,” and most importantly in the diverse appeals emanating from his WEMM radio station, Dos Passos’ fictionalized Huey Long combines the commercial appeal of advertising culture with dictatorial political ambitions. As one of Long’s closest advisers, Gerald K. Smith confirms the accuracy of this representation.²⁰⁰ Reflecting on Long’s political career, Smith reports that Long told his supporters,

If we who are responsible to the great unschooled masses cannot learn how to make elections as interesting to the voters as Christmas is to the child, then we had better prepare to be defeated by someone who does know how. (61)

Long’s consciousness of the emergent mass culture led him to develop a program designed to fascinate the crowds. Tellingly, these “unschooled” voters are infantilized as children who must be drawn into political movements that resemble “Christmas,” combining the desire for abundant free commodities with a vaguely religious, tradition-based utopian celebration.

Because of his ability to draw these diverse elements together in a vast political movement, Long was frequently identified as an American fascist in the interwar period. Lewis Mumford claimed that Long had tried to start “a fascist movement” in the United States, while Lawrence Dennis considered him “the nearest approach to a national fascist leader” the country had ever seen (*Men Must Act* 44). Adding that “[i]t takes a man like

²⁰⁰ Smith joined Long in 1934, and ran his popular “Share Our Wealth” Program.

Long to lead the masses” Dennis also thought that he was “smarter than Hitler” (cited in Salzman 179). Dos Passos signals this interpretation of Long as an American fascist in the nickname that Chuck Crawford’s followers give him: “number one.” A common epithet for fascism, the phrase “number one” shows up in articles like Evelyn Seeley’s “Our Number One Fascists” (1936), and in more extensive considerations of the fascist mentality, such as T.V. Smith’s *The Promise of American Politics* (1936), in which the author argues,

[...] let no knowing one declare that fascism is not an individualism, nor yet deny that our Mussolini is an individualist of the deepest dye. It does not detract from an elemental individualist that out of all the numbers of men who are candidates for liberty he knows that liberty of life and happiness belongs first to Number One. Such practice represents the oldest and the rankest type of individualism. (97)

For Smith, the epithet “Number One” represents a “primitive egoism” that sustains dictatorships but, at the same time, enables a “splurge of gregariousness” that appeals to the “mob-mind” (119). In these extreme forms of individualism and crowd mentality, Smith argues, fascism represents the “denial of ethics” in its “substitution of coercion for consent” (228). However, Smith’s emphasis on “coercion” fails to explain why the masses desire fascism.

Abandoning this attempt to explain fascism in ethical terms, Dos Passos’ novel expresses the myriad points of affinity that tie the technologized masses to “Number One.” Chuck Crawford communicates this shift when he summarizes his dictatorial ambitions in Biblical terms, arguing that the people “want a Moses to lead them to the Promised Land” (171). As a narrative about the “mob-mind,” *Number One* signals the rejection of the traditional framework of individual responsibility and its replacement by

the complex set of overlapping appeals expressed in Crawford's radio-style. Importantly, while these considerations of fascism (from Lewis Mumford and Lawrence Dennis to T.V. Smith) conceptualize fascism as a top-down structure for manipulating the masses, *Number One* carefully explores the process by which the particular desires circulating through mass culture are drawn into a dictatorial movement. As what Alfred Kazin called a "technological novelist," Dos Passos conceptualized the world of *Number One* in terms of the fragmentary, partially articulated desires that are both larger and smaller than the human subject. For Kazin, this meant that Dos Passos' characters were "presented as human components integrated in a large-scale, dynamic system conceived on the model of machine and structural technology" (Maine 201). In its focus on radio culture, *Number One* demonstrates that these large-scale systems are predicated on the everyday, micrological force of intimate desires.

Dos Passos emphasizes radio throughout the *District of Columbia* trilogy, thereby signaling an important shift from visually-oriented film and news media in USA. This choice modifies the valences of technology in the second trilogy, because Chuck Crawford's ability to aurally integrate these "human components" into a "dynamic system" made him a dangerous figure in the fictional world of *Number One*. In the final chapter interlude, Dos Passos returns to the problem of defining "the people," finally concluding that "*the people is everybody*",

*and one man alone;
senses that start in the indelicate tracery of fingertips, awareness of
eardrums, focus of eyes, to and fro signalflashes of the sheathed nerves,
stock of memories incredibly immense, words made of wind, sounds,
aches, smells that tease feelings, wants, surges of need,*

making up the involved where ending? Where beginning? Time sculptured convolutions of the mind: each life taut in the net of lives [...] (303 original italics and format)

Moving from the most minute “surges of need,” to the “taut net of lives” at the macro-level of human community, *Number One* engages the complex question of technological mass culture when it occurs at levels both smaller and larger than the individual subject. In this radio ecology, however, the grouping of these particular desires into large-scale formations is vulnerable to capture by figures like Chuck Crawford (or his historical counterpart, Huey Long) who is able to feel his constituency “on the inside where the plane or’nary run-of-the-mill citizen is strugglin’ with the day-to-day business of livin’” (197). In *Number One*, Dos Passos identified this sensitivity to the everyday, and the capacity to wrap these quotidian hopes, fears and fantasies into large-scale movements, as the hallmark of Crawford’s radio-style and his strongest affinity with fascism.

In the course of Crawford’s rise to power, Tyler Spotswood has played a quiet role in background of the plot. As he begins to understand the scope of Crawford’s dictatorial ambitions, Tyler is faced with the traditional ethical dilemma that we have already seen in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *Adventures of a Young Man*. Instead of rationally reflecting on his choices, however, Tyler inebriates himself to an increasingly stupefying degree. At the same time that the radio culture of WEMM and the chapter interludes present utopian glimpses of fully integrated communities, Tyler illustrates the disintegration of interpersonal relationships in *Number One*. Unlike Pilar’s concern that drunkenness signals the loss of her people’s ethical grounding in *For Whom*, Tyler’s inebriation is purely physical: his habitual drunkenness closes his psychology off from

the reader, and we see Tyler from the outside engaging in a series of mechanical actions that do not correspond to an interiorized process of reflection.

In contradistinction to Hemingway's Robert Jordan, Tyler's actions are characterized by automatic responses. Many critics have noted this "naturalism" in Dos Passos' writing more generally.²⁰¹ The New Humanists Paul Elmer More and Irving Babbitt, for example, berated Dos Passos for evacuating rational choice and self-control from his characters' actions. As *Number One* demonstrates, however, this does not mean that his narratives are devoid of choices, even though these desiring movements are not grounded in humanist principles of what Irving Babbitt called "the inner check." Conversely, I would argue that the mass-technological environment of novels like *Number One* provides a complex interplay of motivation and action that the traditional, subject-centered narrative must reductively occlude in its presentation of subjective reflection and linear decision-making. As we have seen with novels like *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, this process of rational of self-organization came to a point of crisis between the wars around the uncertain question of fascism. Dos Passos' *District of Columbia* trilogy is an exploration of this crisis in the context of a new technological mass culture that was radically shifting the boundaries of human socio-political culture.

Increasingly, Tyler uses inebriation to hide his own participation in a fascistic movement from himself. The closer he comes to understanding what Chuck Crawford is doing, the further he moves from his capacity to reflect on his actions as a coherent subject. In the final scenes of the narrative, Tyler receives a letter from his dead brother, Glenn, sent just before he died in Spain for an ideological struggle he no longer

²⁰¹ See, for example, Brian Lee, who argues that the technological dimension of Dos Passos writing expresses an extreme form of "naturalism" in which characters become "automata" (213).

understood. Glenn's letter reintroduces the ethical concerns that drove *Adventures of a Young Man*, arguing, "[a]fter all it's what you do that counts, not what you say. One thing I've learned in all my life is that everything everyone of us does counts." Inspired by Glenn's ethical drive, Tyler decides to turn witness in a court case against Crawford for embezzling money from his WEMM station. In a traditional narrative, Glenn's letter would most likely signal *anagnorisis*, or the protagonist's sudden insight into the true nature of narrative events, but *Number One* is not structured on revelation.²⁰² Like Glenn's meaningless self-sacrifice, Tyler's gesture turns out to be futile, as he implicates only himself in the laundering charge.

Tyler makes one more appearance, in the third book of the *District of Columbia* trilogy, *The Grand Design* (1949). Returning to the loosely integrated narrative structure of *USA*, Dos Passos maintains the inter-chapter format of *Number One*, as well as its emphasis on radio culture. This time the focus is on Glenn and Tyler's father, Herbert Spotswood, who has a syndicated radio program with a large following. Herbert models himself on Franklin D. Roosevelt's radio-style, which the first inter-chapter describes as "*the patroon voice, the headmaster's admonishing voice, the bedside doctor's voice that spoke to each man and to all of us [...]*" (4 original italics). Herbert's adoption of this style signals the continuing pervasiveness of radio culture, despite Tyler's failed ethical gesture at the conclusion of *Number One*. Just as the Danzig Crisis signals the eventual outbreak of World War II, Tyler unexpectedly visits Herbert after a long estrangement in the hopes that his now powerful father will find him some work, but he is so continuously intoxicated that he cannot hold himself together for their meeting. Signaling the shift in

²⁰² The term is from literary hermeneutics. See, for example, Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). For a critical account, see Paul de Man's *Aesthetic Ideology* (1996).

social relations effected by the radio, Herbert fails to connect with his own son, even though he communes with millions of listeners during his radio broadcasts.

The tensions between the everyday, private encounter with fascism (in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*) and its macro-political configurations (in *It Can't Happen Here*) are brought to a point of crisis in Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Dos Passos' *District of Columbia* trilogy reproduces this crisis in *Adventures of a Young Man*, and reorients it toward questions of technologized mass culture in *Number One*. While the question of fascism puts a tremendous strain on the humanist ethical model, considerations of mass technologies like radio in *Number One* demonstrate the multivalent linkages between the micrological desires of quotidian life and the large-scale political formations of mass politics.²⁰³ Producing non-ideological effects with political ramifications, this radio culture drew the masses into volatile new social formations that reconfigured the forces circulating through the political dimensions of American life.

In *Dos Passos and the Fiction of Dispair* (1978), Ian Colley argues that “the fault of *Number One*” is that it fails to deal adequately with “political ideas.” According to Colley, the root of his “artistic failure lies precisely in the vagueness of his political formulations, which constantly undermines his efforts to locate ‘the people’ as presences made concrete” (129). Because Colley assumes that “political ideas” only inhere at the large-scale, official level, he fails to see that Dos Passos’ refusal to locate “the people”

²⁰³ Dos Passos carried these considerations of the micrological, everyday effects of the new mass culture into his own reflections on fascism. In a letter to the literary critic Robert Cantwell, Dos Passos wrote, “[f]rankly I don’t see all this fatalism about fascism on the part of the communists. If you mean repressive violence, sure, we’ve always had that tougher than anywhere; if you means Hearstian demagoguery, sure—Hearst is handsome Adolph’s schoolteacher—but fascism organized into the state I can’t see [...]” (*The Fourteenth Chronicle* 441). Refusing the ideological binaries of the “communists,” Dos Passos located fascism in the micro-effects of isolated events and the particularized appeals of mass-media. His inability to see that fascism can resonate into larger-scale formations perhaps signals the limits of his own approach.

enables him to explore the difficult terrain uniting interwar mass culture with the question of fascism. The superabundant, noisy excess of Dos Passos' texts express the multivalent appeals of the new technologized masses, making him the "first of the 'technological' novelists" (as Kazin argues) in his consideration of desiring formations that are both larger and smaller than the "political ideas" Colley is hunting.

From Carson McCullers and Sinclair Lewis to Ernest Hemingway and John Dos Passos, the diverse authors we have looked at in this chapter each describe fascism very differently. In "What Books Survive," Malcolm Cowley asserted that American literature has not effectively treated the question of fascism but, as we have seen, this claim hangs on an ideological, top-down model of fascism. Conversely, many of the texts we have examined demonstrate fascism's overlapping, micrological appeals in a rich exploration of everyday life that expresses the political dimensions of interwar culture at the level of language, character psychology and plot structure.

Chapter 5. The Soil-Bound Community and the Pastoral Ideal: The Humanist Legacy of the Southern Agrarians

The previous chapter examined Malcolm Cowley's claim in "What Books Survive from the 1930s" that the question of fascism had not "been treated effectively by American writers" between the wars (299). As we have seen, however, interwar literary culture evinces a pervasive fascination with fascism. Perhaps justifiably, Cowley also dismissed the 1930s models of literary criticism as "often more political than literary" (297). Figures such as editor of the *New Masses* Mike Gold insisted on a Zhdanovian ideological rigidity that evacuated the complexity of literature prized by more nuanced critics like Cowley.²⁰⁴ On the other hand, Cowley points out that in the 1930s New Criticism returned the study of literature to a focus on textual analysis (297). Named and developed by the "Nashville school," including John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and Cleanth Brooks, the New Criticism developed an analytical methodology that avoided asking "whether each work agreed with an accepted system of belief" (297). Rather than defining literature as "Marxian, proletarian, petty-bourgeois, or subliminally fascist," the New Critics focused on what Cowley considered the purely literary dimensions of textual criticism, thereby avoiding the crude manipulation of literature by ideological movements.

²⁰⁴ Andrej Zhdanov was a powerful figure in Stalin's regime. As Central Committee secretary, Zhdanov censored art that did not conform to the regime's official propaganda. In *Literature and Revolution* (1924), Leon Trotsky criticized this Zhdanovism, which censored literature according to an arbitrary, a priori concept of "Soviet realism."

Cowley's description of the New Criticism depends on a set of assumptions about both literature and the political that he leaves unexplored in his article. As I argued in the previous chapter, American literature continuously engaged with the question of fascism, although rarely at the macro-level of the official regime. Instead, works like Carson McCuller's *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940), Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), and John Dos Passos' *Number One* (1943) explore fascism's troubling complexity in everyday life. While the either/or categories of "Marxian, proletarian, petty-bourgeois, or subliminally fascist" are absent from these texts, they nonetheless provide a careful examination of the American interwar engagement with the uncertain question of fascism. On the plane of daily life, the question of fascism is intermeshed with the different hopes, fears and fantasies circulating through the novels' characters and contexts. In this chapter I will shift my focus from the political dimension of interwar literature to an investigation of the critical methodology subtending Cowley's claim that interwar American texts do not treat fascism. The blindness to the political dimensions of literature, so common in critics like Cowley, takes for granted the New Critical claim that literary formalism is divorced from politics.

Cowley's separation of literature and politics has long been a commonplace among literary scholars. As he rightly notes, the assumptions underlying this separation begin with the New Critical reaction to the crude political analysis that Cowley justifiably dismisses. At the same time, however, this dismissal of official politics has equally signaled the loss of the micro-political dimensions of literary studies. According to this understanding, texts such as *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* are not political because they do not deal with fascism as a monolithic, totalitarian entity. While fascism studies has

increasingly recognized the micrological dimensions of desire and everyday life in the organization of fascist regimes, literary studies has continued to depend on the ineffective New Critical contrast between official politics and literary form. Conversely, I would argue that this distinction between literature and the political ignores the socio-politics of everyday life as it inheres at the level of word choice, character psychology, and plot structure in American interwar prose.²⁰⁵

Tellingly, the New Critical distinction between politics and literature is complicated by their own political affiliations. As Cowley notes, the New Critics convey “Southern Agrarian sympathies” that are essential to understanding their depoliticizing methodology. Cowley names as the central figures in the New Critical movement John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and Cleanth Brooks, all of whom, (with the arguable exception of Brooks) were also centrally involved in the Southern Agrarian movement. As with their later incarnation as the New Critics, the Southern Agrarians rejected large-scale, regime-oriented politics; instead, they embraced a form of regionalism based on the belief that “the people” are connected to communal traditions through their common relationship to the soil. This soil-bound nativism was predicated on the notion that the people naturally form an organic cohesive community without the unpleasant socio-political conflicts that marked the interwar period.

As we have seen, this rhetoric of the people and the utopian promise of an organic cohesive community is also indicative of fascism’s micrological, everyday appeals. In this context, fascism often deployed a language of regionalism and pastoral utopia that strikingly parallels the logic of Southern Agrarianism. Once again, I should be clear that I

²⁰⁵ Although I do not have space here for a full-scale analysis of interwar poetry, I would make the same claims for the poetry of figures like T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and others.

am not accusing the Agrarians of being fascist, since that would imply that fascism has an ontologically determinate definition. On the contrary, I am arguing that fascism is a dynamic, multivalent assemblage that draws socio-political difference into a depoliticized unity. As such, it emits multiple, contradictory appeals that bring diverse elements into its orbit. Regionalism was one of the most significant of these appeals, expressing both fears of the dehumanizing effects of technological modernity and the hopes for a return to the traditional values often referred to in humanist terms. The Southern Agrarian movement retraces this logic in its regionalist nostalgia, developing an idealized image of the rural South free from the conflicts that they blamed on Northern industrialism.

As historian Emilio Gentile has shown, fascism also engaged in this critique of mass industrial culture. For many Italian fascists,

“The civilization of machines meant the death of the spirit, that is, the negation of civilization itself; and the United States was “the experimental ground in which all the deviations of the spirit bore abundant fruit,” where “the mechanical and technical civilization of our times celebrated its greatest triumph” by deforming every aspect of human life, “by removing it from the spontaneous rhythm of nature and from the soothing dominion of the spirit.” (“Impending Modernity” 12)

In the United States, these concerns about the deformation of human life were most often expressed in a humanist language that emphasized rationality and autonomy in the face of increasing cultural standardization.²⁰⁶ In the second chapter, I looked at the widespread

²⁰⁶ These fears of standardization were widespread. In *This Ugly Civilization* (1929), social critic Ralph Borsodi complains that industrialization is creating “a civilization of noise, smoke, smells, and crowds – of people content to live amidst the throbbing of its machines; the smoke and smells of its factories; the crowds and the discomforts of the cities of which it proudly boasts” (1). Arguing that the “distribution age” of department stores and mass advertising had turned people “buying animals,” Borsodi connected the threatening diminishment of democratic freedoms with the new industrial mass culture.

Similarly, American Vice President Henry Wallace argued in his 1939 speech “The Genetic Basis of Democracy,” “The ironic fact is that the economic maladjustments of the present day which threaten our democracy and the freedom of science are in large part due to the changes wrought by science” (119).

humanist fears that the “spontaneous rhythm of nature” was being destroyed by the pervasive effects of mass commercial culture. This chapter returns to these considerations, focalizing the widely diffused concerns about technological modernity in an investigation of the Southern Agrarian reaction to the threat of this “civilization of machines.” Like the self-identifying humanists of the second chapter who often found affinities with fascism, the Southern Agrarian anxieties about Northern industrialism brought them into contact with fascistic movements in the United States. More significant than this, however, is the shared pattern of thought connecting the fascist hope for “re-establishing a balance between man and machine” and the Agrarian commitment to the humanist principles of tradition and anti-industrialism (Gentile 21).

Contemporary American critics of the Agrarians were quick to note the similarities between fascism and American agrarianism. Philosopher Melvin Rader, in his book *No Compromise: The Conflict Between Two Worlds* (1939), identified Southern Agrarianism with the “Fascist praise of rural life” that Emilio Gentile indicated in the above passage (276).²⁰⁷ Arguing that the Agrarians “occasionally display Fascist tendencies,” Rader attacked what he saw as the irrational appeal to the soil as part of a strategy to “crush the insurgency of the masses” (21). Similarly, the editor of the *Modern Quarterly*, V.F. Calverton identified the “new agrarianism” as “fascist.” Calverton was especially critical of the openly pro-fascist editor of the *American Quarterly*, Seward Collins, who championed the Southern Agrarian cause and provided a venue for numerous Agrarian publications. Arguing that Southern culture was “bankrupt,”

²⁰⁷ A professor of philosophy at the University of Washington, Melvin Raider argued that fascism posed a major threat to democracy. His book names a number of movements that he considers dangerously fascistic, including the Southern Agrarians.

Calverton maintained that Seward Collins' naïve anti-industrialism was dangerously fascistic.

For their part, the Agrarians tended to have a convoluted response to these accusations. The question of Agrarian fascism came to a head when, in a 1936 interview with Grace Lumpkin, Seward Collins announced, "Yes, I am a fascist. I admire Hitler and Mussolini very much. They have done great things for their countries" (75). Allan Tate immediately wrote an open letter rejecting Collins' views. As he juggles various ideological movements in an effort to clarify his own position, however, Tate's language becomes increasingly confused. Initially he states that he is closer to communism than fascism, then he goes on to argue that he wants a more radical solution than communism affords, and he finally concludes that "when fascism comes, the Communist, in our view, will be chiefly responsible" (75). Similarly, John Crowe Ransom defended the Southern Agrarians from V.F. Calverton's attacks in his 1936 *Scribner's* article "The South is a Bulwark." Strangely, Ransom simultaneously argues that the loss of freedom in technological modernity will provoke a fascist reaction, and that any fascistic elements in regionalism are justifiable in an industrial culture that is losing its freedom. As he menacingly reminds his readers, "[w]e are not as Italy, to whom Il Duce, in the name of what we would call the planned society, addressed his famous remark: Italy cannot afford freedom'" (286). The contorted phrasing of this statement is full of implication, signaling the Agrarians' confusion about fascism.²⁰⁸ Far from being an either/or issue, the question

²⁰⁸ T.S. Eliot, who would become an important figure for the Southern Agrarians/New Critics was also famous for his distorted phrasing when he spoke about fascism. For example, in his statement, "the fascist form of unreason is less remote from my own than is that of the communists," he expresses his proximity to fascism with a litote instead of making a positive statement that could be identified as either fascist or anti-fascist (cited in Salzman 253). This style of contorted phrasing indicates the partial linkages connected figures like Eliot and Ransom to the diverse appeals emanating from fascism.

of fascism was as uncertain for the Agrarians as it was for the other interwar Americans we have been tracking. This uncertainty is itself a key aspect of fascism, indicating the multivalent appeals through which various movements, including regionalism, were drawn into its magnetic field.

The fears expressed by critics like Melvin Rader and V.F. Calverton centered on the uncertainty that characterized fascism, and its tendency to draw in movements like Agrarianism that seemed to have only a fringe contact with fascism as a regime. Often the boundaries between political positions were more nebulous and less ideologically monolithic than the Agrarians wanted to claim. In his article “Count Your Dead,” for example, Seward Collins claimed that fascism is “really the nearest thing to Democracy,” but that “it is a highly disciplined Democracy, framed for a time of emergency” (270). Despite their rejection of Seward Collins’ openly fascist position, the Agrarian manifesto, *I’ll Take My Stand* (1930), surprisingly matched this statement, as they argued for new regionalist myths of social cohesiveness that could overcome the “emergency” produced by the disorienting effects of mass industrial culture.

In his debate with Calverton over the “bankruptcy” of the South, John Crowe Ransom sought to revivify what he understood to be the values of Southern life through the aesthetically appealing myth of regionalism. As historian Robert Dorman argues, interwar American regionalism sought to develop these myths into a “civic religion” which used “social art to fill that gaping moral vacuum” created by industrial modernity (95). “Regionalism,” Dorman maintains, was “simultaneously an art and a religion” that

recovered the folk from the past as pure myth: the “high traditions” of the regionalist civic religion. This “mythmaking” recovery was, for many of the regionalists involved, a self-conscious procedure of cultural reconstruction. (94)

Regionalism, in other words, was a powerful form of “mythmaking” in the interwar period. For Southern Agrarians such as Ransom, this self-conscious production of myth was essential in the struggle against an encroaching Northern industrialism.

Importantly, fascism was also involved in this process of mythmaking. As Zeev Sternhell, Roger Griffin, and many other scholars of fascism have argued, myth was a central component of fascism’s multiple, contradictory appeals.²⁰⁹ Calling fascism a “political religion,” Emilio Gentile has emphasized its mythmaking practice, while art historian Mark Antliff has demonstrated the importance of Georges Sorel’s theory of myth for fascism, arguing that fascism united agrarian anti-industrialism with anti-rationalism to form powerful new social fantasies.²¹⁰

In the United States, this mythmaking practice was often directly tied to fascism. The British economist William Aylott Orton, who taught and travelled extensively in the United States, concluded in his *America in Search of Culture* (1933) that,

Fascism begins as “the revolt of the masses” against a system of collapsed ideals, and its first manifestation is a blind emotional outburst against all that is alien to the mass [...] But at once it seizes upon whatever of symbol, myth or tradition it can find as a positive rallying point; and from that focus it attempts to reconstruct some form of state to which entire *emotional* allegiance can be given. And it is noteworthy that the new form of the state tends to be associative, or corporate, in character; it seeks to utilize the psychological as well as the material energies of group activity, and to direct these toward ends which shall serve the ideal as well as the material needs of the nation. (303-304 original italics)

²⁰⁹ See, for example, Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (1993), and Zeev Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology* (1994).

²¹⁰ See Mark Antliff, *Avant-Garde Fascism* (2007), and Emilio Gentile, “Fascism as Political Religion” (1990).

According to Orton, fascism threatens America because the discombobulation of technological modernity renders it susceptible to irrational appeals.²¹¹ At the same time, however, the mythmaking capacity of a movement like fascism creates a “positive rallying point” that dangerously draws the heterogeneous desires of the masses together in an emotionally bound community. Both the Southern Agrarians and their critics recognized the force of mythmaking to create an affectively charged community.

Of course, the Agrarians were not the only ones to react to the “emergency” of mass culture. As social critic Ralph Borsodi put it, industrial culture “proliferates at a rate which man has found it impossible to control, and which is so relentlessly mechanizing the whole of life and reducing it [...] to mere cogs in a gigantic industrial machine” (*This Ugly Civilization* 14). While Borsodi had no sympathy for the Agrarian cause, he shared their concerns that technological modernity would “mechanize the whole of life.” The central difference between Borsodi’s concerns and the Southern Agrarian response is in the mythmaking practice that sought to draw on the various hopes, fears and fantasies of a heterogeneous population to bring them into an emotionally bound collectivity.²¹² The Agrarian emphasis on the aesthetic presentation of wholeness is essential to understanding its affinities with the depoliticizing, mythologizing force of fascism.

²¹¹ Political philosopher Eric Voegelin makes similar claims, although in starker terms, when he argues that fascism is primarily a myth-making structure: under fascism “the system claiming to be rational-theoretical, national-economic, or sociological is replaced by ‘myth.’ The ‘myth’ is created purposely to bind the masses emotionally and to arouse in them the politically effective expectation of salvation” (62). After Voegelin escaped Nazi-occupied Austria in 1938, he taught in the United States.

²¹² In contrast, Borsodi argued for the fragmentation of industrial centers into home-production facilitated by new machine technologies. Rather than a set of collective myths, in other words, Borsodi advocates a rational form of citizenship that, as we have seen, was associated with other humanists movements between the wars. See his *Flight from the City* (1929).

I also want to emphasize that the mythic dimension of Agrarian soil-bound nativism was a response, however dangerous, to real socio-economic changes in the South. Behind the Agrarian's aesthetic presentation of "the people" were a set of dramatic shifts in American culture that profoundly affected life in the South. Although the South had 21% of the nation's population, and the highest birthrate in the country, it earned only 9% of the national income. In 1929, farm prices fell 63%, even though production did not significantly fall, and by 1932 the purchasing power of the farmer was half what it had been ten years earlier (Salzman 14). While many thinkers, writers and critics were preoccupied by the crisis of technological modernity in interwar America, the Agrarians saw the rootless and immoral North as largely responsible for these changes. More importantly, they responded to this "emergency" by attempting to bring the South back to what they thought of as its humanist traditions through the creation of a "civic religion" built on powerful regionalist myths. While many important American critics addressed these problems, the Agrarian reaction turned to forms of mythmaking that drew on the same irrational appeals emanating from fascism. By the same token, this insistence on an aestheticized image of the organic whole without political conflict also laid the conceptual groundwork for the Agrarian reincarnation in the New Critical movement.

Genuine Humanism: The *I'll Take My Stand* Manifesto

Between the wars, regionalist movements were powerful factors of change in fascist countries as well as in the United States. In Italy, for example, the fascist Strapaese movement was an influential faction that argued for a regionalism paralleling

Southern Agrarianism in the United States.²¹³ As a literary and artistic movement, Strapaese championed a nationalist vision of soil-bound nativism that strongly influenced the regime's policies. At the same time that other movements like Futurism glorified machine culture, Strapaese expressed the converse hopes for a utopian pastoral society.²¹⁴ Through movements like Strapaese, fascism drew on the desire for a more coherent, human-centered society by reformulating the chaos of industrialization and conflictual politics into an image of organic cohesive community.

In their manifesto, *I'll Take My Stand* (1930), the Southern Agrarians take up these same idealized representations of a harmonious collectivity. Making the connections between humanism and the agrarian mythology explicit, *I'll Take* states at the outset,

Humanism, properly speaking, is not an abstract system, but a culture, the whole way in which we live, act, think, and feel. It is a kind of imaginatively balanced life lived out in a definite social tradition. And, in the concrete, we believe that this, the genuine humanism, was rooted in the agrarian life of the older South and of other parts of the country that shared in such a tradition. (xxxi)

²¹³ The Strapaese movement was, much like the Southern Agrarians, a critical movement within the regime that championed the virtues of soil-bound nativism. Like the Agrarians, they also constructed regionalist myths that sought to draw "the people" into an organic collectivity. Unlike the Southern Agrarians, however, the regionalism of the Strapaese movement was only one of the multiple appeals emanating from fascism.

²¹⁴ As a magnetic attractor drawing on multiple contradictory desires, fascism brought together movements as diverse as Futurism and Strapaese, even though they held contradictory principles. As fascism scholar Marla Stone writes, "Fascism used the 'vehemence' of the Futurists, the 'spirituality' of the Rationalists, the 'order' of the Novecento, the 'simplicity' of the *strapaese*" (227).

This “genuine humanism” emphasizes the integral wholeness that comes from a cultural life rooted in the mythical image of ancestral soil.²¹⁵ The Agrarians are careful to situate this “tradition” outside of the conflict-ridden political, economic and social struggles that had in fact marked the history of Southern culture. Instead, they look to a humanist “agrarian life of the older South” that is supposed to share a homogenous “tradition,” but that is nonetheless missing this history of conflict.²¹⁶

The hope for a humanist anti-industrialism often took the form of regionalism both in the United States and in fascist Italy, and the Southern Agrarians were the most thorough expression of that appeal in America. As with Ida Tarbell’s idyll of happy rural life under fascism, Agrarian regionalism evoked a pastoral fantasy in which the laborer’s connection with the soil sustained the socio-political institutions that were threatened by the rise of industrialism.²¹⁷ The Southern Agrarians took up this idyll and developed it into a Jeffersonian image of the gentleman farmer who understands that “the culture of the soil is the best and most sensitive of vocations” (xxix). The nativism of this soil-bound image depoliticized the notion of community by holding up the myth of an organic collective that was in touch with the rhythms of natural life. In this “culture of the soil,” class, race, politics, and other social tensions are regarded as external to the aesthetic image of integrated wholeness presented in the Agrarian pastoral.

²¹⁵ Apart from the Agrarian’s own statements, many critics connected Agrarianism with humanism as well. Granville Hicks, for example, called “Southern agrarianism” and “humanism” the “most characteristic and important developments of the period” (Maine 94).

²¹⁶ As I argued in the first chapter, the New York World’s Fair engaged in this same evacuation of historical complexity. Covering over the Corona Dumps, the Time Capsule, and many other aspects of the Fair actively reconfigured historical complexity into serial homogenous time.

²¹⁷ In the introduction, I cited Tarbell’s admiration for the Italian fascist regime. Praising the calm of pastoral life under fascism, Tarbell reflected on the terrible “clash of disorder and revolt” that had swept the country before fascism (381)

In contrast to the discordant socio-economics of the North, the South, the Agrarians argued, was a naturally concordant pastoral community. As John Crowe Ransom argued in his introduction to *I'll Take*, the Taylorist mechanization of labor in industrial modernity dehumanized the worker:

The contribution that science can make to a labor is to render it easier by the help of a tool or a process [...] Then it can be performed with leisure and enjoyment. But the modern laborer has not exactly received this benefit under the industrial regime. His labor is hard, his tempo is fierce, and his employment is insecure. (xxii)

For Ransom, the unskilled labor of the Fordist assembly-line rendered the worker expendable, vagrantly unattached to the place of work, while the Taylorist speed-up took away the leisure that was essential to the social traditions of agrarian life. Ransom's humanist hope of controlling scientific technology to increase social cohesion and eliminate its attendant social conflicts was widely shared between the wars, but the Agrarians were exceptional in their self-conscious combination of these hopes with an aestheticized myth of depoliticized collectivity.

Ransom attaches this Fordist-Taylorist alienation to "the rise of modern advertising," calling it the "most significant development of our industrialism." For Ransom advertising is a form of dehumanizing manipulation, a "means to persuade the consumers to want exactly what the applied sciences are able to furnish them" (xxviii). As such, "it consults the happiness of the consumer no more than it consulted the happiness of the laborer" (xxix). The industrial system functions only for itself, Ransom argues, multiplying human misery in a self-sustaining round of production and consumption. This "great effort of the false economy to approve itself" is antithetical to

the true American traditions that Ransom claims to want to protect from Northern industrialism.

The soil-bound regionalism that Ransom champions is intimately bound up with a form of humanist traditionalism that underlies the spiritual culture of this ideal pastoral community. Maintaining that, “out of so simple a thing as respect for the physical earth and its teeming life comes a primary joy, which is an inexhaustible source of arts and religions and philosophies,” Ransom unites particularly humanistic endeavors to an Agrarian pastoral image (9). Importantly, these elements of culture spring from the soil, autochthonous and fully formed, and are therefore completely outside the political conflicts of industrial culture. The primary expression of “arts and religions and philosophies” comes from a spiritualized agrarianism that avoids the “dehumanization” of industrialism (20). The farmer, Ransom argues, would work the soil “not too hurriedly and not too mechanically to observe in it the contingency and the infinitude of nature; and so his life acquires its philosophical and even its cosmic consciousness” (20). Like the Italian fantasy of *italianità* or the more extreme Nazi cult of blood, the Agrarians imagine the entirety of the cultural subject to emerge from this single native quality of the soil. In the unmechanical “contemplation and exploration, respect and love” for his “native province,” the worker is supposed to find the tradition-based identity that binds him to his co-nationals. Conversely, Ransom contends that this “man”

cannot contemplate nor explore, respect nor love, a mere turnover, such as an assemblage of “natural resources,” a pile of money, a volume of produce, a market, or a credit system. It is into precisely these intangibles that industrialism would translate the farmer’s farm. It means the dehumanization of his life. (20)

This humanist critique of Northern industrialism is central to the arguments of *I'll Take*, setting the tone and developing the key concepts for the manifesto. As Frank Lawrence Owsley summarizes in another essay for the manifesto, “[t]houghts, words, ideas, concepts, life itself, grow from the soil” (69). Growing from the native soil, the Agrarians argue, the pastoral traditions of rural life will regenerate the organic sense of community that industrialism is disintegrating.

With *I'll Take*, the Southern Agrarians developed this mode of regionalist traditionalism into an appeal to a nativist and humanist, anti-industrialist, anti-political set of myths.²¹⁸ *Mutatis mutandis*, this strategy runs through all the major Agrarian writings, both during and after the publication of *I'll Take*. In seeking to provide a third way between socialism and Northern industrialism, the Southern Agrarians generated myths describing an idealized pastoral cultural rebirth.

These core aspects of the Agrarian movement appear in the writings of all the Agrarians. Hence, David Donaldson, speaking about the arts, writes that “[h]armony between the artist and society must be regained; the dissociation must be broken down. That can only be done, however, by first putting society itself in order” (50). The anti-industrialism of the traditional South, he goes on to argue, offers hope for the rebirth of “an integrated life” (53). Likewise, Robert Penn Warren discusses the hope for cultural rebirth through soil bound traditionalism, concluding that, “[t]he chief problem for all alike is the restoration of society at large to a balance and security which the industrial regime is far from promising to achieve” (264). And again, Allen Tate expresses the same

²¹⁸ It is essential to note that not all agrarian movements have traced the myth-making patterns of the Southern Agrarians. In the 1890s, the Farmer’s Alliance movement and documents such as National People’s Party Platform anticipate many of the Southern Agrarian arguments without developing them into totalizing mythic appeals. For further reading, see Thomas Inge, *Agrarianism in American Literature* (1969).

ideas in a more aggressive tone, urging that the Southerner “must use an instrument, which is political, and so unrealistic and pretentious that he cannot believe in it, to reestablish a private, self-contained, and essentially spiritual life” (175). For Tate, the political is less real than life on the land, and thus the objective of political conflict is the return to a regenerated agrarian culture based on human-centered traditions rather than industrial production. While the subject matter differs from author to author, the same spiritualizing, nativist anti-industrialism inhabits each of these arguments. This emphasis on palingenetic rebirth, regeneration, and the re-establishment of rural traditions is perhaps best characterized in the obsessive use of the prefix *re-*, which appears continuously in *I’ll Take*. Davidson talks about “regaining” nativist traditions; Robert Penn Warren wants a “restoration” of humanist values; Tate hopes to “reestablish” the centrality of the soil in Southern life. In this emphasis on a palingenetic, depoliticized community, each of these writers draws on the nostalgic myth of a cohesive Southern community that flourished outside of the political tensions of industrialism and slavery.

This Agrarian narrative of rebirth was predicated on the exclusion of those groups who did not belong to this culture of the soil. From its title to the closing essay, *I’ll Take* is laden with the racial implications of a return to “traditional” Southern culture. While Agrarian Donald Davidson’s blatant racism has often been noted, the entire movement’s nativist vision is also complicit in their utopian image of bucolic community that would exclude racial and social conflict.²¹⁹ Similarly, Agrarian pastoralism denies the conflictual history of tenant labor. Just as the fascist discourses of depoliticized harmony negated the socio-economic conditions of its workers and racial minorities, the Southern

²¹⁹ See Emily S. Bingham and Thomas A. Underwood, *The Southern Agrarians and the New Deal: Essays After I’ll Take My Stand* (2001).

Agrarians developed an exclusionist narrative of organic cohesive community. As a core component of their vision of homogeneity, the implicit racialism and classism of Agrarian soil-bound nativism was central to their myths of cultural regeneration.

Significantly, these organicist views were also rehearsed by a wide array of figures attached to the core group of Agrarians in the interwar period. Participants of the Fugitive group that brought many of the Agrarians into initial contact, such as the modernist John Gould Fletcher and the drama critic Stark Young, also contributed to *I'll Take*.²²⁰ These linkages with literary culture would become more important in the late 1930s, when the Southern Agrarians would begin to transform the humanist principles I have been outlining into a full-fledged critical methodology for reading literature. In this feature the Agrarians display a remarkable consistency, developing their depoliticized pastoral vision into a concept of wholeness that would later ground their notion of the integral literary text, or the “well-wrought urn” in Cleanth Brooks’ famous designation. As with the exclusivity of their soil-bound nativism, the Southern Agrarians/New Critics excised from literary criticism the politics that disrupted the image of literature as a coherent icon.

In “The Southern New Critics” (1989), Mark Jancovich traces the transformation of the Agrarians into the New Critics, arguing that during the interwar period, figures like Ransom, Tate and Warren developed the theories and methods of literary criticism that would later be formulated as the New Criticism (204). Jancovich goes on to characterize

²²⁰ As an expatriate and part of the imagist movement, Fletcher was closely tied to European modernism. Like Allan Tate, he maintained contact with figures like T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. Stark Young, who wrote regularly for Herbert Croly’s *New Republic*, was one of the most famous drama critics in the United States between the wars.

the aim of these Southern Agrarians/New Critics as a humanistic challenge to utilitarian rationalism:

[L]iterature [the New Critics claimed], drew attention to the limits of scientific discourse, to those aspects of language which threatened rational coherence and control and which therefore needed to be repressed by rational discourse. [...] Since literature issued its challenge to rationality not through its statements or positions, but through its form, the New Critics greatly valued the term “irony” and saw it as the central feature of literary texts. (205)

Like the “affective fallacy” and other bywords of New Criticism, the concept of irony insisted on the text as an organic unity. Just as the Agrarians built their ideal of pastoral traditionalism around an anti-industrial, depoliticized image of organic cohesiveness, the New Critics imagined the work of art as a humanist rebuttal of scientific rationalism that engaged the work in its aesthetic integrity. This move was patently anti-political in intent, folding differences into the iconic consistency of the work of art and evacuating the contradictory historical context.

While the New Critics never espoused a specific political position, their anti-political attitude was perhaps the most significant force in theories of education in the humanities at the end of the interwar period. Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren’s *Understanding Poetry* (1938) was a watershed in the development of this influential New Critical theory. At the core of the New Critical pedagogy was the concept of the verbal icon. As Richard Godden has argued, the verbal icon provided a textual image of organic cohesiveness that “opposed the abstractions of capitalist rationalization” and “offered an alternative to the modes of representation associated with commodity culture” (cited in Jancovich, *Cultural Politics of New Criticism* 17). The New Critical demand that students deal with the text as a “entity” echoes John Gould Fletcher’s essay in *I’ll Take*, in which

he argues that a mode of “classical and humanistic” guidance must be reinstated against the current trend of scientific and technical training that turns the school into a “mass production factory” (118). The humanist anti-industrialism of this position is as strong in the New Criticism as it is in the Southern Agrarian’s manifesto.

Stark Young, whose essay closes *I’ll Take*, also recapitulates the Agrarian logic, affirming that “for no thing can there be any completeness that is outside its own nature, and no thing for which there is any advance save in its own kind” (359). For Young, this means that technology, if it is to have a place in agrarianism, must be subordinated to the soil-bound traditions of the culture, instead of dominating it. Rather than accept the “celebrated uniformity of American life” and the resultant “monotony of the American mind,” Young champions the image of a pure regionalism that resists these alien forces (356). In his fear of what Ida Tarbell called “standardization,” Young expresses the core aspect of the Southern Agrarians’ idealization of the “settled connection to the land” (349). This hope for an agrarian rebirth, expressed by many of the contributors to *I’ll Take*, appealed to a wide array of cultural thinkers on both the left and the right by drawing on the desire for an ideal organic homogeneity that could overcome the political strife generated by technological modernity.

During his 1931 visit to fascist Italy, Stark Young locates the same soil-bound nativism that the Southern Agrarians found in their mythic image of rural community. In a series of articles for the *New Republic* written just after *I’ll Take*, Young develops these agrarian notions in relation to fascism. His “Notes on Fascism in Italy Today” explores the “Italians’ sense of the land” in contrast to the alienation of American industrial society. While Americans mindlessly chase after the latest fad, “Italians are affable,

entertained with ideas, lighted with the passions of theory and theses; but their roots run deep into an ancient earth” (283). Young goes on to formulate this traditionalist regionalism into an idealized image of the Italian people:

They remain in their place, and only slowly comes any profound racial distraction and unsettlement. A kind of cynical, plain, natural, almost biological good sense, an old earth knowledge and animal, sound continuity, lie under that responsive surface of theirs. (283)

This racialized pastoral image of “the people,” according to Young, explains why the fascists have an innate antipathy to American industrial culture. This innocent land of the folk is too simple to realize the subtle manipulation of the masses through the advertising and cultural censorship that characterizes the United States. In an interview with the fascist Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Dino Grandi, Young learns that Italians have this naïve virtue because they “are a country people” (260). It is the regime’s ability to grasp this fact that has thoroughly integrated it with “the people,” and Young concludes that “it is already true that you cannot speak of Fascism as if it were merely a party that might win or lose” (314). Like Ida Tarbel’s admiration for fascism, Young’s praise for the regime comes from its ability to integrate “the people” into an image of cohesiveness outside the political strife of industrial culture.

Nature as Nature Naturally Is:
From the *American Review* to the New Criticism

As the essays in and around *I’ll Take My Stand* demonstrate, the pastoral fantasy of an organic polity was one of the most powerful desiring appeals of the logic of fascism, because it spoke so clearly to the hopes for an end to the discord that marked the Depression Era. Some of the contributors to *I’ll Take* carried this shared mythic core to

another level of association when they met in 1933 to discuss the idea of forming the Gray-Jackets. As historian Paul Conkin recounts, Fletcher, Owsley, Davidson and others talked over the possibility of gathering college students together to form a new fascistic paramilitary group, a practice that was surprisingly common in interwar American culture.²²¹ They were to wear Confederate uniforms and fly the Confederate flag, and to march on certain occasions in order to keep alive the memory of the battles and the leaders of “the holy war” (111). Further, they were to “destroy all movements that denied the fact of, or the glory of, the South’s war for independence.” One of the first targets was to have been a monument to Cyrus McCormick, whose mechanical reaper was an important element in the expansion of Northern industrialism. This black shirt model drew on some of the more typically noted elements of the fascist appeal to the war cult and paramilitary aggression, while also building on the mythic core of cultural regeneration through a nativist connection to the soil.

While some Agrarians were exploring these more familiar aspects of fascism, other members began looking for a broader outlet for their regionalism. *I’ll Take* sold poorly, although it received a great deal of critical attention.²²² In 1933, they found a publisher in the recently established *American Review*, a reactionary monthly that bound together prominent social critics from diverse backgrounds. Historian John Diggins writes that “the American Review offered its small circle of readers the programs of the ‘Revolutionary Conservatives’: the New Humanism of Babbitt and More, the Southern

²²¹ The extensive list of these shirt-groups include, Dudley Pelley’s Silver Shirts, the white shirts of Tennessee, and Art Smith’s Khaki Shirts. For further reading, see Harold Lord Varney’s *American Mercury* article, “The Truth about American Fascism” (1937).

²²² The Agrarian manifesto sold a little over 2,000 in the first decade. We can compare this to the 3,400 copies sold on its reissue in 1963

Agrarianism of Young and Alan Tate, the Distributism of G.K. Chesterton and Hillaire Belloc, and the Neo-Thomism of Christopher Dawson and Father D'Arcy" (211). As a self-identifying fascist, the *American Review*'s owner and editor, Seward Collins, brought these diverse movements together as a composite image of the change he wanted to effect in American culture. In his opening editorial for the *American Review*, he identifies the main target of his magazine as plutocratic capitalism, and names Lenin and Mussolini as two examples of a positive new "monarchical" response to this "disease" (124). In his solicitation of both Lenin and Mussolini, Collins encapsulates the complex nature of the *American Review*. Neither right nor left, Seward Collins's journal testifies to the heterogeneous cultural elements drawn together under the rubric of fascism. Like the confusion over the definition of fascism we noted in John Crowe Ransom and Allan Tate, Seward Collins' motley group was only vaguely united by shifting considerations of humanism, regionalism and anti-industrialism that they hoped would create a more cohesive, depoliticized community.

In his earlier days as editor and owner of the *Bookman* in the late 1920s, Collins was involved with the political left. He participated in the leftist *cause célèbre*, the Sacco and Vanzetti case, and Upton Sinclair's novel about the Sacco and Vanzetti trials was published with the *Bookman*. For the most part, Collins traveled in modernist circles, getting to know the same group that made up Allen Tate's and John Gould Fletcher's world. As the *Bookman* readership dwindled, Collins came up with a new project, a journal that would "give greater currency to the ideas of a number of groups and individuals who are radically critical of the modern world, but launch their criticism from a 'traditionalist' basis" (118). It was at this time that Tate put the Southern Agrarians in

touch with Collins; they quickly came to an agreement, with the Agrarians promising a heavy volume of essays for the new review.

The *American Review* was the major venue for the Southern Agrarians. More than two-thirds of the important Agrarian essays appeared here, alongside pieces by Wyndham Lewis and T.S. Eliot, reviews in praise of Charles Mauras' fascist *Action Francaise*, and conservative diatribes by Herbert Agar. Collins' review was not just a conservative reaction to modernity, however, as many of the arguments that appeared in the *American Review* in the 1930s also show up in more popular venues during this period.²²³ These widely shared concerns took on a new focus in the *American Review*, however, uniting contradictory hopes, fears and fantasies about technological modernity. The common element that drew these incommensurable movements together was also the core aspect of fascism as we have been discussing it. Like the permutations of commodity capitalism they resisted, these cultural critics appealed to a set of palingenetic myths that could affectively bind the whole community together in spite of the conflicts of the Depression Era.

The specific social and economic proposals made by each group mattered less than this shared interest in discovering a third way out of conflictual politics and the social tensions generated by industrialism. Hilaire Belloc's series "The Restoration of Property," for example, ran during the first year of the *Review* and presented a specific program of economic reform with the goal of developing a system that circumvented the problems of "both Capitalism and Communism" (123). Likewise, the Southern Agrarians made increasingly detailed attempts to outline an economic plan for a pastoral society. In

²²³ Stark Young, for example, mainly published in the centrist *New Republic*. Similarly, the regionalist position had a many influential representatives, including Lewis Mumford, who published widely in centrist and leftist periodicals.

his appraisal of “The *American Review*’s First Year” (1934), Collins unites these and other specific schemes of the diverse contributors under the title of fascism. For Collins, “[t]he question of politics resolves itself, broadly, into a discussion of the succession of Fascism to parliamentarianism.” He goes on to define fascism as “the revival of monarchy, property, the guilds, the security of the family and the peasantry, and the ancient ways of European life” (124). While acknowledging that there are many other interpretations of fascism, he insists both that these “humanist” elements are common to all fascist movements, and that this definition adequately describes the common aims and motives of the otherwise dissimilar contributors to the *Review*. The socio-economic positions published in the *Review* were thus meant to provide an alternative to the conflictual politics of “parliamentarianism,” promoting instead an agrarian-based, anti-industrial humanism.

The following year, the Agrarian Frank Owsley developed their most complete economic statement in “The Pillars of Agrarianism” (1935) for Collins’ *Review*. Allan Tate has praised this essay as the fullest expression of the Agrarian principles and the historian Paul Conkin has called it “the closest the group ever came to endorsing specific remedies for agricultural distress in the South” (113). Owsley begins by identifying the same “common enemy of the people” that Seward Collins attacks in his editorials. This hated plutocratic capitalist system

allows a relatively few men to control most of the nation’s wealth and to regiment virtually the whole population under their anonymous holding companies and corporations, and to control government by bribery or intimidation. Just how these giant organizations should be brought under the control of law and ethics we are not agreed. We are, however, agreed with the English Distributists that the most desirable objective is to break them down into small units owned and controlled by real people. We want

to see property restored and the proletariat thus abolished and communism made impossible. (202)

In the same maneuver that Collins makes in his discussion of fascism, Owsley contrasts “real people” to both monopoly capitalism and “the proletariat.” The solution to this dual threat of communism and industrial capitalism is not an intervention in parliamentary democracy, nor is it a reform of the economic structure; rather, Owsley’s proposal is a revolutionary appeal to an idealized image of a soil-bound community that actualizes, as a living embodiment, the traditions of American culture.

Owsley goes on to develop a number of concrete proposals for individualized small holdings of unalienable property “as the only permanent relief from permanent technological unemployment” (205).²²⁴ Nevertheless, underlying all of this accumulated economic data and bio-statistics rests the appeal to “the people” and the promise of a cohesive, anti-productivist community. The essay concludes with a clear statement of the mythic ideal that constitutes the cornerstone of Agrarian thinking:

Once this foundation is securely built, the agrarian society will grow upon it spontaneously and with no further state intervention beyond that to which an agricultural population is accustomed. The old communities, the old churches, the old songs would arise from their moribund slumbers. Art, music, and literature would emerge into the sunlight from the dark cramped holes where industrial insecurity and industrial insensitiveness have often driven them. (211)

The fantasy of an autonomous community that “spontaneously” arises from the soil actively excludes the political tensions of mass industrial culture. Owsley is proposing an economic model that integrates cultural elements like art and literature into an overarching agrarianism that was supposed to sustain the whole of life. In this indicative

²²⁴ Interestingly, Owsley’s Agrarian recommendations greatly appealed to the state apparatus, and “The Pillars of Agrarianism” was briefly circulated amongst New Deal politicians (Bingham and Underwood 7).

statement of Agrarian principles, Owsley rehearses the myths of a regenerated society whose contact with the land is an integral part of its cultural rebirth. Significantly, this traditionalist, regionalist appeal echoes the logic developed in Ransom's introduction to the Agrarian manifesto, *I'll Take*, which also promised the cultural rebirth of "the people" based on a pastoral ideal. For both Ransom and Owsley, the "culture of the soil" is the primary attribute of this organic society. As Ransom summarizes, "[a]rt depends, in general, like religion, on a right attitude to nature" (xxv).

While Owsley developed his Agrarian position through economic proposals, Ransom's *American Review* essay, "The Aesthetic of Regionalism" (1934) formulates these regionalist arguments around the aestheticization of the soil-bound community. Arguing for an innate connection between the people's bond to the land and cultural creativity, Ransom sets forth a nativist, pastoral image in which life and art are inseparably bound up in the activity of living close to the land:

As the community slowly adapts its life to the geography of the region, a thing happens which is almost miraculous; being no necessity of the economic system, but a work of grace perhaps, a tribute to the goodness of the human heart, and an event of momentous consequence to what we call the genius of human "culture." (296)

For the Agrarians, the economic system is not causally linked to cultural production; rather, Ransom argues that natural human culture is the very essence of these economic relations in the pastoral community. As Ransom writes, the people's "economic actions become also their arts."²²⁵ In this vision, the politico-economic sphere is closely identified with an aesthetic image of human culture. For both Owsley and Ransom, the myth of an organically cohesive community encompasses the entirety of productive

²²⁵ Ransom's argument echoes the arts and crafts movement that made up an important component of interwar American culture. See Robert Dorman, *Revolt of the Provinces* (1993).

social life. Importantly, these socio-economic positions do not start from a purely monetary standpoint; on the contrary, Owsley and Ransom insist that both human culture and economic life are expressions of the same organic, soil-bound community, and the most important expression of this unity can be found in the creative human arts.

In “The Aesthetic of Regionalism,” Ransom characterizes this central aestheticizing dimension of agrarian culture as a “loving” form of representation that unites nature and human culture. Living in the agrarian community, “men, secured in their economic tenure, delight in this charm [of nature] and begin to represent it lovingly in their arts.” “More accurately,” he summarizes, “their economic actions become also their arts” (297). “Love,” for Ransom, characterizes the intermeshing of the human and nature that generates an integrated sense aesthetic wholeness. This notion of “love” plays an important role in Ransom’s narrative about industrialism, signaling the genuine human culture that resists the threat of technological dehumanization. In the pastoral community, these “loving” modes of cultural representation emerge organically from the region and characterize the life of the land, which stands in opposition to the flighty “eclecticism” of alienated Northern urbanism (299). Until industrialism came to the United States, Ransom argues, the country was well on its way to developing its own “lovingly” creative, indigenous traditions. More ruinous than the Civil War, the new “machine economy” threatens the South with the homogenization demanded by efficiency (304). Finally, as a result of the North’s technological colonization of America, machines have come to increasingly mediate between nature and the people. Concluding that the “products of machines may be used, but scarcely enjoyed, since they do not have much aesthetic character,” Ransom describes the soul-deadening effects of technological

modernity (306). Alternatively, he argues that the soil-bound life of the Agrarian pastoral ideal “lovingly” integrates every aspect of life into a coherent aesthetic whole.

In later essays published in the *American Review*, Ransom develops this aestheticization of regionalist traditionalism in the direction that will come to define the New Criticism. Far from presenting a break with the Southern Agrarian philosophy, the aesthetic theory of John Crowe Ransom’s New Criticism proves to be a continuation and extension of Agrarian anti-political myth-making. In “The Mimetic Principle” (1935), for example, Ransom continues to explore the “love of nature” that is inherent in the organically cohesive community, this time in contrast to what he calls Aristotelian scientism (550). As a stand-in for the industrializing abstraction that deracinates the people, Aristotle represents the generalizing scientific attitude that inverts the natural relationship between “man and environment” (550). According to Ransom, the instrumentalist attitude that dominates Aristotle’s thinking leads the philosopher to characterize art’s usefulness merely in terms of its cathartic qualities, which help citizens to be better political animals by purging them of their more overpowering emotions. Ransom emphatically replaces this politicizing conception of aesthetics with a depoliticized, anti-rational model of mimesis that is based on what he continues to characterize as a “loving” engagement with nature.

As “perhaps the central figure in the institutionalization of the New Criticism,” Ransom was a foundational thinker in the establishment of the “formalist theory and practice that dominated U.S. teaching and literary criticism in the mid-twentieth century” (*Norton Anthology of Literary Criticism* 1105). In publications for the *American Review*, such as “The Mimetic Principle,” Ransom developed the aesthetic concepts that he

carries into the “formalist theory and practice” that shaped not only the interpretation of literature in the twentieth century, but also marked the exclusion of conflictual politics from his idealized image of aesthetic integrity. With the rise of New Criticism, insights about literature from the fields of history, biography, ethics, and other areas of study are replaced with a focused attention on the text as an integrated iconic unit, or what Ransom called the “totality of connotation” (*Norton* 1118). As Mark Jancovich notes, Ransom contrasts the utilitarian attitude of the economic outlook with a more complex approach that considers the “object in its totality” (*The Cultural Politics* 37). In this emphasis on integral wholeness, “Ransom is calling for a poetry in which the aesthetic and the ethical comprise a structural unity” (*The Cultural Politics* 40).

Returning to Ransom’s *American Review* essay on “The Mimetic Principle,” we find this emphasis on aesthetic totality repeated in his concerns about industrial culture and the loss of the human arts. Contrasting the photograph and the painting, for example, he argues that the camera demonstrates the alienating effects of “mimesis”:

The photograph is a mechanical imitation perhaps but not a psychological one. It was obtained by the adjustment of the camera and the pressing of the button, actions so characterless that they indicate no attitude necessarily, no love; but the painting reveals the arduous pains of the artist. We are excited by these pains proportionately; they give the painting its human value; and carrying this principle a little further, we never discover in the work a single evidence of technique, discipline, deliberation, without having the value enhanced further. (549)

The technological mediation of the camera threatens to replace the “love” that characterizes the painter’s labor. In contrast to the mediated uniformity of the camera (a sure sign of industrialism and the utilitarianism he identifies with “Aristotelian” science),

Ransom prefers the painter's proximity to his natural environment.²²⁶ Like the "loving" art forms of his idealized pastoral community in "The Aesthetic of Regionalism," Ransom's preference for painting is based on the notion that the proximity of labor produces a more integrated aesthetic representation. In these and other 1930s articles, Ransom generated the core components of what would become his New Critical concepts of literary interpretation.

Ransom returns repeatedly to these concerns in his post-World War Two writings. In "The Literary Criticism of Aristotle" (1948), Ransom continues his critique of "naturalism," which he contrasts to the "love of nature" (397). Defining nature broadly as "everything in the world," Ransom claims that this loving relation to the natural environment is essential to the poet. In opposition to this "love of nature," Ransom indicates the Hegelian notion of the "Concrete Universal," a philosophical concept that,

hopes to take into its grip *all* the qualities that sensibility discovers in the concretions of nature; till reason and sensibility shall have identical objects, and logic and aesthetics become one. (395)

Like the industrial conquest of nature, and the "Aristotelian" science that dominates the environment, the Hegelian Concrete Universal signals the controlling delimitation of "everything in the world." Ransom is especially resistant to this "abstract universal," because it deploys aesthetics as a tool for the subordination of the natural world to an overriding rationale. Although Ransom's post-war interests edge away from his 1930s proclamations about Southern culture, essays such as "The Literary Criticism of

²²⁶ This anti-technological polemic was a common feature of Agrarian thinking. In *I'll Take*, for example, Andrew Lytle wrote, "[t]hrow out the radio and take down the fiddle from the wall" (102). Both Lytle and Ransom paradoxically hoped to build a more integrated society by dismissing the technological developments that characterized interwar American culture.

Aristotle” demonstrate an abiding fascination with the notions of integral wholeness and anti-instrumentalism that characterize his writings for the *American Review*.

Even at the height of his influence as a New Critic, Ransom continued to elaborate these problems. In a series of essays entitled “The Concrete Universal” (1954-1955), Ransom persisted in his critique of the abstracting mentality that he had lamented as a Southern Agrarian. Arguing that the poem must be understood as an “organism,” Ransom maintains that the aesthetic work unites multiple, contradictory elements in a unified whole impervious to rational dissection (560). As an “icon of the universal,” the poem is richer than Hegelian abstractions can express. Just as the heresy of paraphrase cannot encompass the plenitude of the poem, after the concrete universal “the poem is still there, timeless and inviolable” (561). According to Ransom, the poem is too complex for this kind of summation because, in its proximity to nature, the poem expresses an irreducible abundance. In his second essay on “The Concrete Universal” (1955), Ransom argues that the poet “goes out into nature not as a predatory conquerer and despoiler but as an inquirer, to look at nature as nature naturally is.” The tautology of this statement expresses Ransom’s faith in the wholeness of the natural aesthetic work and his profound resistance to any contradiction to this sense of integrity. Refusing to acknowledge any obviously constructed elements, he banishes considerations of conflict or tension from his aesthetic vision. For Ransom, therefore, the poem must be understood as an integral part of the overarching experience of a totalizing nature, and not as an object that can be “ransacked for materials which are to be exacted of nature” (390). Against the mentality of the “conquerer and despoiler,” Ransom envisions a mode of aesthetic representation that springs autochthonous from “nature as nature naturally is.”

The dangers of this instrumentalist sensibility are not limited to literature for Ransom: the abstracting mentality, which he compares several times to the industrial “blueprint,” is part of a larger shift signaled by “modern urban life.” “Under the speed-ups of the Universals,” Ransom writes,

the moral pressure grows so brisk and demanding that the natural world simply becomes humanized, socialized, and made over, a pure convenience which in its own right is quite disregarded. (391)

Unlike the “genuine humanism” of the Southern Agrarians, this reduction of the “natural world” to a “convenience” marks the human domination of nature that Ransom identified with the “modern urban life” of Northern industrialism in the 1930s. In his focus on the “love of nature,” and in his hostility to instrumentalism, Ransom developed his core concepts as a Southern Agrarian, expanding his critique of technological modernity into a literary methodology based on the ideal of integral wholeness.

Ransom was not alone in transferring his concerns as a Southern Agrarian to aesthetic considerations. Although it is strange to say, the most important tradition in American literary criticism for decades to come began in the pages of a reactionary pro-fascist journal. Besides Ransom, the *American Review* frequently displayed literary essays by Robert Penn Warren, Cleanth Brooks, and Allan Tate side by side with articles defending Mussolini’s Abyssinian Campaign and sympathetic reviews of the French fascist Charles Maurras.²²⁷ Even after many of the Southern Agrarians claimed to have broken ties with Seward Collins, they continued to actively publish in his journal. As an important example of this continuing relationship, the unofficial sequel to the *I’ll Take*

²²⁷ See, for example, *American Review* publications such as Hoffman Nickerson, “Maurras” (1934) and Stebelton Nulle, “America and the Coming Order” (1936).

manifesto, *Who Owns America?* (1936), had more than a third of its essays appear in the *American Review*, and Collins called it “the most significant American book produced by the depression” (603).²²⁸

The Southern Agrarians continued to shift their attention to the question of aesthetic interpretation in their publications with the *American Review* as well as in *Who Owns*. Robert Penn Warren’s essay for *Who Owns*, “Literature as a Symptom” is an important index of this shift. In this essay, Warren echoes John Crowe Ransom’s anti-instrumentalist sense of literature as a natural organic whole. Bringing his traditionalist regionalism to the context of literature, Warren worries that “the proletarian writer has a bias toward industrialism” (355). By contrast, he argues, “[t]he regional movement, with some implied conception of an organic society in its background, denies the desirability of such a program” because the “focus of literary inspiration should be the individual, not the class” (353). Describing literature as emerging from an “organic society,” Warren proposes an aesthetic vision in which class conflict disappears through the depoliticized process of regionalist “literary inspiration.” These claims did not go unchallenged, however, as Warren complains that the Agrarians have been attacked in “politicized literature” as favoring “antiquated religion, patriotism, or even fascism” (353).

In response to this challenge, Warren reverses these accusations, charging that “proletarian literature,”

just like organized Nazi or fascist literature, is usually based on a conception of literature as instrument; both types, communist or fascist, are attempts to reason the writer into an appropriate relation to politics.

²²⁸ Scholars and historians have tended to agree that *Who Owns* is the unofficial sequel to *I’ll Take*. For example, Louis Rubin, Jr., in *The Wary Fugitives* (1978), argues that, “*Who Owns America?* is as close as [the Agrarians] ever came to a sequel to *I’ll Take My Stand*” (252).

But no political party stands behind the regional writer, in fact, no organization of any description. (356-357)

Associating “instrumentalism” with “politicized literature,” Warren launches a set of confused indictments that once again demonstrate his uncertainty about fascism’s multivalent appeals. Inhabiting aspects of both the right and the left, fascism found affinities in both the proletarian and the Agrarian movements, giving rise to accusations on both sides; nevertheless, Warren maintains that the regional writer cannot be a fascist because he does not belong to a political party. This apparently naïve claim should be understood as an integral part of the depoliticizing mythmaking of Agrarian regionalism, I would argue. As we saw in Malcolm Cowley’s claim that interwar literary culture had little to do with fascism, this depoliticizing methodology gained a much broader audience when John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren, and the other Agrarians transformed themselves into the New Critics. As the bookend to the Southern Agrarians and their relationship to Seward Collins’ *American Review*, Warren’s piece in *Who Owns* demonstrates the fundamental continuity between the *I’ll Take* manifesto and the Agrarian turn to aesthetic culture in the last of their essays.

More importantly, Warren articulates the homologies between the Southern Agrarian movement and the New Criticism. Like Ransom’s insistence that poetry is free from conflict because it emerges from nature, Warren claims that regionalist writing emerges from a depoliticized “organic society.” Just as Ransom expresses an anti-instrumentalist attitude, Warren contrasts industrialism to the depoliticized myth of a conflict-free autochthonous literature. Echoing Frank Owsley’s desire to “abolish” the proletariat, Warren and Ransom look to aesthetic forms that express a natural wholeness outside of the political conflicts produced by industrialism. In these indicative aspects of

their worldview, the Agrarians carry their thinking about the socio-politics of interwar American culture into their post-War work on literature.

Diffused and Scattered Creatures:
William Faulkner and the New Critics

As a coeval and fellow southerner, William Faulkner addressed the same concerns that fascinated the Agrarians. His novels explore the traditions of the Old South and the ideals of leisure that indicate a pace of life antithetical to the Taylorist speed-up of contemporary industrial culture. Likewise, his characters are attached to their region and often express a relationship to the soil that sustains long-standing racial and spiritual conventions. Unlike Balzac's more cosmopolitan world of the *comédie humaine*, to which Faulkner's fictional universe is often compared, the characters of his Yoknapatawpha world are bounded to a microcosm that is fundamentally regionalist in outlook. This "postage stamp" of territory looks intensively inward, and those adventures which exceed these bounds are centripetally reincorporated into this local ecology.²²⁹ Yet for all this, Faulkner is also a thoroughly modernist author, and his regionalist universe has been continually recast in terms of modernist problematics.²³⁰

Surprisingly, the Southern Agrarians, even as they effected their transformation to the New Critics, had little to say about Faulkner's writing until after the Second World

²²⁹ Faulkner first used the phrase "postage stamp" to describe his imaginative world in an "Interview with Jean Stein Vanden Heuvel" in which Faulkner elaborated, "by sublimating the actual into apocryphal I would have complete liberty to use whatever talent I might have to its absolute top." In *Paris Review* (Spring 1956).

²³⁰ For works dealing with Faulkner the question of modernism, see Richard Moreland, *Faulkner and Modernism* (1990); Philip Weinstein, *Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction* (2005); *Faulkner and Postmodernism*, ed., John Duvall and Ann Abadi (2002).

War. Although John Crowe Ransom planned a special edition of the *Kenyon Review* in 1946 to celebrate Faulkner's 50th birthday, and received promises for essays by both Robert Penn Warren and Allen Tate, neither of these essays materialized and the idea eventually had to be dropped (*Gentleman in a Dustcoat* 382). In his 1945 essay, "The New Provincialism," Tate glancingly referred to Faulkner as a "traditionalist" and praised him as the "most powerful and original novelist in the U.S" (*Essays of Four Decades* 545). Beyond a few remarks and uncompleted projects, however, the early New Critics failed to carry out a concentrated study of the most important author of the Southern Renaissance. Despite this lack of focused attention, the Southern Agrarians/New Critics saw Faulkner as a vindication of their claims that the traditions of the South provided fertile ground for genuine art. These clear sympathies notwithstanding, it was not until the late 1950s that Robert Penn Warren fully engaged with Faulkner's world.²³¹

In Warren's "William Faulkner" (1959), he distinguishes between two aspects of the South. According to his argument, in Faulkner's novels a "real" South coexists with a "symbolic" South. While Warren indicates that the "real" South expresses Faulkner's admirable documentary force, he spends the majority of his essay describing Faulkner's "symbolic" South. In this symbolic land, "the present is to be understood in terms of the past," and the Faulknarian doom that pervades the novels' present-time must be read in terms of the past failure of what Warren calls the "great design" of the Old South (96). Unaccountably, Warren attributes his ideal of the great design of antebellum culture to the ironically named "great design" of *Absalom, Absalom!* protagonist, the upstart Thomas Sutpen, whose dream of an ostentatious plantation is closer to Jay Gatsby's

²³¹ The same cannot be said for many of the other important authors of the interwar period, who received extensive treatment by the early New Critics. Cleanth Brooks is an exception, but for the purposes of this essay I am not considering him as a committed Southern Agrarian

tragic delusions than the gentlemanly birthright Warren apparently has in mind. Nevertheless, as Warren narrates, this inheritance is denied the Southerner by the Civil War and its aftermath, in which the attempt to continue the great design is foiled by “Yankee exploitation” and the rise of mass industrial culture. These Northern exploiters represent the “forces of modernism,” which, Warren explains, the older order cannot resolve because its codes of “honor and honesty” cannot compete with the machinations of this instrumentalist mentality (98). The greatest threat to this old order, he argues, is the Snopes family, an impoverished sharecropping family whose numerous members appear throughout Faulkner’s writings. In *The Hamlet* (1940), Faulkner introduces the most dangerous of the Snopes clan, Flem Snopes, who for Warren represents the “forces of modernism” that are ruining the South.²³²

As the essay continues, the Agrarian themes we have been exploring begin to emerge in clear terms from Warren’s explication of Faulkner’s texts. The “aimlessness and fragmentation” felt by the post-bellum Southerner is a result of this modern “society of finance capitalism” and its attendant “lack of discipline, of sanction, of community values” (98). In this manipulative Snopsian world, the “individual has lost his relation to society” and so the Southerner becomes the “victim of abstraction and mechanism” (99). According to Warren’s interpretation of Faulkner’s texts, the alienating force of this “mechanism” is opposed to the symbolic image of an organic community modeled on antebellum ideals.

²³² In *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (1963), Cleanth Brooks agrees with Warren, arguing that “Flem is essentially the trader, the man who buys cheap and sells dear and pockets the profit, and, most of all, the usurer, he may be taken to represent the commercial spirit in its purity – a spirit that is completely corrosive of all human ties and decencies” (181-182).

Warren's expression of Northern alienation inflicted on a pastoral community follows closely the themes that we have already mapped out in John Crowe Ransom's introduction to the Agrarian manifesto, *I'll Take*. With Warren in 1959, as with John Crowe Ransom in 1930, the image of a cohesive agrarian community expresses the ideal of a depoliticized community outside the strife of technological modernity. In support of this Agrarian argument, Warren quotes a fictional character as a stand-in for Faulkner's authorial voice, even though he does not name the speaker. Through *The Sound and the Fury*'s Jason Compson, Sr. Warren argues that people once "had the gift of living once and dying once, instead of being diffused and scattered creatures drawn blindly from a grab bag and assembled" (99). Because Warren does not name Mr. Compson as the speaker, his essay lends an apostrophic, universal quality to this pronouncement that ignores the textual ambiguity and the socio-historical tensions of Mr. Compson's character in *The Sound and the Fury*. Just as the Agrarians evacuated the historical complexity of the antebellum South in order to develop a mythical image of a cohesive pastoral community, Warren's insistently Agrarian reading of Faulkner covers over textual multiplicity with his "symbolic" interpretation.

Throughout the essay, Warren insistently characterizes Faulkner as an honorary Southern Agrarian who shares their idealized traditionalist regionalism. Developing a humanist, soil-bound world-view, the Agrarians argued that this regionalism generated organically authentic social relations that represented a "genuine humanism." Warren's interpretation of Faulkner would make of him a fellow Agrarian who morally indicts

modernity for its failure to live up to the humanist virtues that Warren locates in antebellum culture.²³³ Faulkner, Warren maintains, fundamentally believes that

The old order, even with its bad conscience and confusion of mind, even as it failed to live up to its ideal, cherished the concept of justice. Even in terms of the curse, the old order as opposed to the new order (in so far as the new order is equated with Snopesism) allowed the traditional man to define himself as human by setting up codes, ideas of virtue, however mistaken; by affirming obligations, however arbitrary; by accepting the risks of humanity. But Snopesism has abolished the concept, the very possibility of entertaining the idea of virtue. It is not a question of one idea and interpretation. It is simply that no idea of virtue is conceivable in the world in which practical success is the criterion. (99)

In this passage, the “risks of humanity” are grounded in a humanist ideal of the “traditional man,” while this ethics is juxtaposed to the Snopesian “new order” and all its implied industrialized alienation. In contrast to this new Snopesism, Warren’s Faulkner stands for the “concept of justice” and the “idea of virtue” which subtends his moral judgment against this destructive combine of Northern industrialism and Snopesian modernity. As with his discussion of the “great design,” and his attribution of Jason Compson, Sr.’s voice to Faulkner, Warren’s interpretive solecisms reveal unlikely points of connection between Faulkner’s oeuvre and the Agrarian outlook. By taking advantage of these affinities, the Southern Agrarian myths of organic cohesive community reconfigure Faulkner’s complex narratives into a pastoral refutation of industrialism. Warren might have been speaking of the Agrarians when he insists that Faulkner’s “savage attack on modernity” is most often carried out by the brave souls who remain “outside the stream of the dominant world” (99).

²³³ Allen Tate, in one of his few essays on Faulkner, “Sanctuary and the Southern Myth,” makes much the same argument for Faulkner’s commitment to a myth of the humanist antebellum South that rejects modern productivism.

As expressions of Faulkner's "symbolic" indictment of modernity, Warren recruits characters such as Ike McCaslin (in *Go Down, Moses*) or V.K. Ratliff (in *The Hamlet*) to the Agrarian cause of condemning the alienation of Northern industrial culture. Warren points out that in "Delta Autumn" Ike calls the exploitation of the land our "original sin," while his interpretation of the deer hunt turns it into a palingenetic "ritual of renewal" (101). On the other hand, Ratliff struggles against Flem Snopes, who "brings the exploiter's mentality to the quiet country of Frenchman's Bend" (102). In these readings, Warren finds important affinities between Faulkner's narratives and the Agrarian credo. Warren must actively force these points of connection into a totalizing vision of a cohesive, tradition-based community, however, because Faulkner's modernist narratives also engender the kind of diffusion and scattering that Warren condemned as inherent aspects of industrial modernity. In the next chapter, I will develop a counter-reading of Ike McCaslin and Flem Snopes that does not mesh with Warren's pastoral image of Faulkner's texts. If Warren insists on the coherence of the pastoral worldview, my reading emphasizes the multiplicity of Yoknapatawpha's "diffused and scattered creatures" as they form new desiring assemblages in the complex socio-technological ecology of interwar American culture.

Significantly, Warren locates Faulkner's most active critique of Northern industrialism in the representation of the Snopes clan. Although the Snopeses are not from the North (in fact they constitute some of Faulkner's most autochthonous and soil-bound characters), Warren's identification of Flem Snopes with "the forces of modernism" allows him to situate Snopsism in contrast to an idealized pastoral image of the South. Echoing John Crowe Ransom's juxtaposition between a "loving" relationship

to the soil and the instrumentalism of industrial culture, Warren maintains that Flem Snopes is the inverted image of an integrated life. For Warren, the “right attitude toward nature and man is love. And love is the opposite of the lust for power over nature or over other men [...]” (103). Warren claims that Snopesism is the calculating mentality of those without love for the soil or the people, while the moral position of figures like Ike McCaslin constitutes the last bulwark against the incursions of industrial mass culture. As with Ransom’s 1930s essays, “love” in Warren’s New Critical interpretation of Faulkner is linked to an aestheticized image of soil-bound nativism.

The Snopes clan is central to Warren’s discussion of Faulkner’s oeuvre because it contrastively highlights the key Agrarian concept of the “love of nature” as opposed to the alienating effects of “Northern” industrialism. Conversely, I will argue that Flem Snopes is very much a part of the conflictual political relationships that characterize his milieu. Likewise, Ike McCaslin’s experiences in “Delta Autumn” are far from a simple “ritual of renewal.” As the next chapter will demonstrate, Faulkner’s little “postage stamp” of territory is full of conflictual relationships and social tensions that dramatically complicate Warren’s pastoral idealism.

Chapter 6. Snopesism in the New South:
Faulkner's "Delta Autumn" and *The Hamlet*

We began our exploration into fascism and literary culture in interwar America with Malcolm Cowley's retrospective essay, "What Books Survive from the 1930s" (1973). In his argument that "as a rule" fascism has not "been treated effectively by American writers," Cowley encapsulates and summarizes the dominant attitude in literary studies even today (299). As I argued in chapter four, however, this claim depends on a macro-political conception of fascism that has not stood up to historical scrutiny. Historians and theorists from diverse backgrounds and critical perspectives have noted fascism's astonishing capacity to appeal to the diverse desires circulating through the crowds that made up the new mass culture.²³⁴ Literary studies, especially those still based in a New Critical methodology, have tended to ignore the micro-political dimensions of interwar culture that deeply mark the writings of authors as diverse as Carson McCullers, Sinclair Lewis, Ernest Hemingway, and John Dos Passos. Conversely, a greater attentiveness to the everyday question of fascism, I would argue, opens important avenues for further investigation into America's fascination with fascism between the wars.

²³⁴ To name only a few of the works that specifically address this question, see Andrew Stuart Bergerson, *Ordinary Germans in Extraordinary Times* (2004); Peter Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich* (2008); Luisa Passerini, "Italian Working Class Culture Between the Wars: Consensus to Fascism and Work Ideology" in the *International Journal of Oral History* (1980); and Victoria De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass organization of leisure in fascist Italy* (1981).

It is no surprise that Cowley left William Faulkner's name off of his list of authors who address political questions in their writing.²³⁵ Faulkner's literary world seems deeply internal, unaffected by the massive historical events addressed by writers like Ernest Hemingway and John Dos Passos. For the New Critics, this focus on an isolated "postage stamp" of territory expresses Faulkner's commitment to the soil-bound community. As Cleanth Brooks summarizes, "[t]hat Faulkner had some sense of an organic community still behind him was among his most important resources as a writer" (*William Faulkner* 69). This insistence on the "organic community" indicates the New Critics' abiding dedication to the Southern Agrarian ideals that they held in the 1930s. In the previous chapter, we looked at Robert Penn Warren's assertion that Faulkner described a "symbolic" South, in which the soil-bound community struggled against the forces of modernity represented by "Snopesism."²³⁶ Like Cleanth Brooks' claim that Faulkner's work is based in the "sense of an organic community," Warren maintains that characters like Ike McCaslin represent Faulkner's attachment to the organic cohesive community that is supposed to inhere in traditional Southern culture. On the other hand, the "new order" of Snopesism threatens to abolish "the concept, the very possibility of entertaining the idea of virtue ("William Faulkner" 99). In this neat binary image of Faulkner's literary world, Warren also expresses the Agrarian worldview, in which a

²³⁵ In my work on the micro-political dimensions of Faulkner, I am following Minrose Gwin's *The Feminine and Faulkner* (1990), which explores the "feminine economy" (in Luce Irigaray's phrasing) as it "pushes out boundaries and dissolves margins" of dominating binary configurations of rationality, certainty, and unity (2). In my read, the New Critical insistence on coherence participates in these binary configurations, whereas a micro-political consideration of Faulkner's texts demonstrates a far more fluid, less totalized narrative world.

²³⁶ Warren also cites George Marion O'Donnell's "Faulkner's Mythology" essay in support of his argument. O'Donnell argues that Faulkner's world is divided between the Sartoris and the Snopes worldview, "between traditionalism and modernity, between humanism and naturalism" (255).

rootless Northern industrialism, represented by Snopesism, undermines the Southern traditions of “virtue” and honor.

The dangers of rampant commercialism embodied by Flem Snopes (the character who defines Warren’s notion of Snopesism) can be summed up with the opprobrious term “usury.” This term, often tied to anti-Semitism and fascism between the wars, was frequently discussed in Seward Collins’ *American Review*, where the Southern Agrarians/New Critics regularly published.²³⁷ For New Critics such as Cleanth Brooks, “usury” also perfectly described the dangers of Snopesism:

Since Flem is essentially the trader, the man who buys cheap and sells dear and pockets the profit, and, most of all, the usurer, he may be taken to represent the commercial spirit in its purity – a spirit that is completely corrosive of all human ties and decencies. (181-2)

On the one hand, we have the “commercial spirit” that is “completely corrosive of all human ties and decencies.” On the other, we have the agrarian Southern community of Yoknapatawpha, which is victimized by this usurious trader. Like Warren’s distinction between the agrarian South and Northern industrialism, Brooks reads *The Hamlet* in terms that contrast usury and tradition, the corrosive spirit of trade and the human ties of decency.

Probably the most important American author to insist on the notion of usury in the interwar period is Ezra Pound. As early as *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920) Pound was integrating the term into his poetry (Nadel 56). With his turn to fascism and the economic theories of Social Credit, he becomes exponentially more vociferous in his

²³⁷ The most vociferous opponents of usury to publish in the *American Review* were Hilaire Belloc and the Distributists. See Michael Jay Tucker, *And Then They Loved Him: Seward Collins and the Chimera of an American Fascism* (2006).

anti-Semitic diatribes against the dangers of capitalist usury.²³⁸ In his poem “With Usura” from Canto XLV (1937), he describes a pastoral world that is rendered unproductive “with usura”: “Usura rusteth the chisel/ It rusteth the craft and the craftsman/ It gnaweth the thread in the loom [...]” (ll. 36-38). These rustic hand-crafts are ruined by usury, which Pound sums up as “CONTRA NATURAM” (ll. 46). Pound contrasts this unnatural usury with Mussolini’s fascist regime, writing that “Duccio came not by usura” (ll. 29). Uniting his economic diatribes against “usura” with his agrarian vision and his support of the fascist regime, Pound demonstrates the complex affinities at play in interwar culture. Importantly, Pound’s critique of usury went hand in hand with his celebration of the productive agrarian life.²³⁹ While Malcolm Cowley has excused Pound’s involvement in fascism with the argument that “when he supported fascism, it was largely because he dreamed of saving the world by abolishing usury,” other scholars have argued that Pound’s philo-fascism and his economic theories are a central to his writing (“What Literature” 294).²⁴⁰ I would add that his economic theories and his diatribes against usury must be understood in their anti-industrial, agrarian dimensions.

In his provocative *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* (1935), Pound compares the fascist Duce to an American president who championed the agrarian community over the buildup of industry. Pound writes,

²³⁸ In *Number One*, Dos Passos satirizes the combination of anti-Semitic rhetoric and this diatribe against usury, as Chuck Crawford preaches, For thirty years now that man’s been the suckin’ the blood of the people of the state an’ helpin’ the bankers an’ usurers an’ moneylenders, an’ their sinful usury an’ foreclosure at exorbitant rates of interests, them that our Lord Jesus Christ chased out of the temple with his own hands, helpin’ ‘em to make themselves rich in this world’s goods an’ poorer in the real wealth the Bible talks about that comes from honest labor an’ sweat an’ a days work well done. (68-9)

²³⁹ See Roxana Preda, *Ezra Pound’s Economic Correspondence, 1933-1940* (2007), pp. 44 and *passim*.

²⁴⁰ See Nick Selby, *Poetics of Loss in the Cantos of Ezra Pound: From Modernism to Fascism* (2005); and Tim Redman, *Ezra Pound and Italian Fascism* (1991). Redman argues, “[i]f Pound is to be legible, his politics must be confronted” (4).

If you are hunting up bonds of sympathy between T.J. [i.e. Thomas Jefferson] and the Duce, put it first that they both hate machinery or at any rate the idea of cooping up men and making ‘em all into UNITS, unit production, denting in the individual man, reducing him to a mere amalgam. (63)

In this passage, Pound worries that machine culture will standardize and homogenize “the individual man.” Instead, he argues that we should favor fascism because Mussolini, like Jefferson, is not “bamboozled by money,” instead promoting “agriculture” as a solution to the excesses of technological modernity (64). Perhaps surprisingly, Pound sounds a good deal like a Southern Agrarian in these passages, as he inveighs against industrialism and defends the “agricultural” life. For both Pound and the Agrarians, the danger of usury is situated against these values of the soil.

Even more strikingly, Pound’s ultimate hope in *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* is for a new social force that will “remagnetize” the people into an aesthetically whole community outside of the conflicts of industrial culture (95). Pound describes this ideal as “to kalon” (ancient Greek for “the beautiful), which he defines as “the will toward *order*” (99 original italics). Like the Agrarian myth of “nature” that draws the people into a depoliticized, soil-bound community, Pound’s image of “to kalon” describes the ideal society as an aesthetic image. Pound generates his concept of “to kalon” through his agrarian-oriented criticism of industrialism and usury.

In demonstrating the affinities between Pound and the Agrarians, I am not seeking to identify either one or the other as strictly or ontologically “fascist.” Rather, I want to illustrate that Warren’s distinction between industrialism and the agrarian worldview is a good deal messier than his clean binaries would suggest. In the micropolitics of interwar culture, the questions of fascism, usury, and industrialism were much more confusing

than the New Critical dismissal of macro-politics would suggest. In “William Faulkner,” Robert Penn Warren argues that “Delta Autumn” and *The Hamlet* are critiques of the industrial modernity that he identifies with Flem Snopes, but Faulkner’s exploration of these problems expresses the same complexity as the micropolitics of interwar culture.

Breeding and Spawning: Faulkner’s “Delta Autumn”

It is a commonplace in Faulkner criticism to point out that the Snopeses represent the rise of this new commercial mentality.²⁴¹ Faulkner himself seems to agree, as he has characterized Flem Snopes as a man “who can cope with the new industrial age” (*Faulkner in the University* 80). Flem is able to cope, I would add, because of his ability to draw on the multiple desiring appeals emanating from mass spectacle and advertising that characterize commodity capitalism in the interwar period. These points of affinity between Snopesism and the modalities of commodity culture are key to understanding Faulkner’s engagement with the question of fascism in his writings.

As we have seen, Robert Penn Warren argues that Faulkner expresses his proximity to the Agrarians in his negative depiction of Snopesism and “the new industrial age.” In texts like *The Hamlet* and “Delta Autumn,” Warren maintains, Faulkner explores the dangers of the Northern industrialism and technologized mass culture. Undeniably, Faulkner’s biography supports aspects of this interpretation. As Joseph Blotner recounts, Faulkner required that the new jukebox at his favorite café have an “out of order” sign put up during his visits (659). Such incidents express Faulkner’s ambivalent or perhaps

²⁴¹ See, for example, Ted Ownby’s “Snopes Trilogy and Consumer Culture,” in *Faulkner and Ideology* (1995). Ownby explores numerous aspects of consumerism in the Snopes Trilogy, and provides a many bibliographical references relating to the rise of consumer culture in the United States.

even hostile attitude toward this new culture of commodities. He is even more explicit at other moments. In his talks with students at the University of Virginia, he characterized the “new industrial age” as a process of endless consumption driven by advertising and the cash nexus, condemning the “Cadillac cars or the economy which will give everybody a chance to buy a Cadillac car on the installment plan, or the deep freezes. That is, all that’s advertised, it has to be advertised, in order to keep people buying it...” (*Faulkner in the University* 34). Faulkner comes out strongly against the modern culture of mass consumption in these episodes, making it is easy to imagine why Warren might have thought Faulkner shared his Agrarian position.

At the same time, however, Faulkner was continuously in debt for living above his own means. The installment plan that he disparaged also characterized his own mode of expenditure without economy, linking him with the same consumer’s mentality that he scorned. His ambivalent relationship to Hollywood is one index of this contradiction.²⁴² While Faulkner was drawn to Hollywood because he needed to pay off his continuously growing debts, he was also dismayed at the crass commercialism of the film industry. Another example of Faulkner’s ambivalent relationship to commodity culture can be seen in his first car, a yellow Model T with a modified racer body.²⁴³ Concretizing his engagement with the standardization that characterized American interwar culture, the car’s specialized outer shell comments incongruously on the veneer of desire expressed in the roadster body as it covers the humdrum machine parts of the most mass produced commodity available on the market. These elements of simultaneous participation and

²⁴² See Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography* (1991), pp. 289, 466 and *passim*.

²⁴³ See Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography* (1991), pp. 115. As Blotner recounts, Faulkner had to go into debt to buy the Model-T.

critical distance characterize much of Faulkner's engagement with commodity culture, and provide the backdrop for his writings in the interwar period.

Although Faulkner lived a complex relationship to commodity culture, it is undeniable that some of his fictional characters seem to echo his more vociferous anti-industrial sentiments. Perhaps most notable among this group of anti-modernists is old Ike McCaslin of the "Delta Autumn" story in *Go Down Moses* (1942), who resents the deterioration of the Mississippi Delta land that has sustained his strong connection to the soil. It must have been this aspect of the story that led Robert Penn Warren to characterize Faulkner's ambivalence toward modernity in terms of Ike's idealized relationship to the land, because old Ike seems to articulate a thoroughly Agrarian position. As we shall see, however, Ike's experiences in "Delta Autumn" demonstrate that even the heart of the wilderness does not express the purity that is so important to his pastoral fantasy.²⁴⁴

While *Go Down, Moses* was published in 1942, well after the beginning of World War II, the setting of "Delta Autumn" situates the narrative on the eve of war in Europe.²⁴⁵ This context enmeshes the story's characters in the tensions and debates around fascism that engaged American attention in the late interwar period. The story

²⁴⁴ Faulkner also published an earlier version of the story that replaces Roth Edmunds with Don Boyd, who is not related to Ike McCaslin. The themes of incest and miscegenation therefore have less impact. Faulkner's later version for *Go Down, Moses* suggest that he wanted a stronger emphasis on the problem of impurity and intermixing that trouble Ike's idealized vision of nature. For more on the earlier version of "Delta Autumn," see Joanne V. Creighton, *William Faulkner's Craft of Revision: The Snopes Trilogy, "The Unvanquished" and "Go Down, Moses."* (1977); and Carol Clancey Harter, "The Winter of Isaac McCaslin: Revisions and Irony in Faulkner's 'Delta Autumn'" (1970-1971).

²⁴⁵ In "'Delta Autumn': Stagnation and Sedimentation in Faulkner's Career," Michael Grimwood argues that Faulkner wrote his short story at a time was he was deeply concerned about the changes occurring in the new mass culture. Linking the rise of fascism to the anxieties that pervade "Delta Autumn," Grimwood maintains that Faulkner was especially drawn to the countryside while he was writing this short story.

mainly consists of the voyage into the delta wilderness and the debates that churn around Ike during the trip. Ike's concern for the degradation of the delta percolates through these more global considerations as they are voiced by the younger men. This interplay of voices is important for the story, because it illustrates the disturbing interconnections between Ike's regionalism and the younger generation's macro considerations of international capitalism and the new forms of social organization that characterize the interwar period.

Go Down, Moses links Ike's youthful initiation into manhood to his old age through a series of hunting trips.²⁴⁶ These strong invocations of Ike's memories are brought together in "Delta Autumn," which acts as a coda to old Ike's life and draws together his childhood experiences and his sense of being out of place in this new industrial world. As Ike recalls, his early mentor and father figure, Sam Fathers, part "negro slave," part "Chickasaw chief," taught Ike to hunt at the age of twelve (350). He remembers that after his youthful first kill, Fathers ritually admitted him to manhood by smearing the slain buck's blood on his face.²⁴⁷ The old Ike McCaslin of "Delta Autumn" thus came to maturity in the wilderness at the hands of a father figure who symbolizes a close connection to nature: "There was something running in Sam Fathers' veins which ran in the veins of the buck too" (350). The constellation of nature, ritual, and blood is

²⁴⁶ Many scholars have argued that *Go Down, Moses* can only be understood as a unified work. I agree, but I would emphasize that there are important elements that do not fit into a totalizing reading of these collected stories. In "Delta Autumn," Ike serves as an important link to the other stories of *Go Down, Moses*, and yet his importance in this story also derives from his intensive encounter with concerns about the disintegration of American culture and the potential threat of fascism, themes that are not part of the other stories. These particularities, I would argue, are essential to understanding the micropolitics at play in "Delta Autumn." For a discussion of *Go Down, Moses* as an integrated whole, see, for example, Carol Clancey Harter, "The Winter of Isaac McCaslin: Revisions and Irony in Faulkner's 'Delta Autumn'" (1970-1971); and Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner* (1963).

²⁴⁷ This episode is described in "Old People," included in *Go Down, Moses*.

also tied to an ethical code that Ike implicitly accepts in this ritual of manhood. A respect for nature is inherent in this ethical code, expressed in Ike's apostrophe to the buck: "I slew you; my bearing must not shame your quitting life. My conduct forever onward must become your death" (351). Ike's memories express a ritualistic ethical code of blood and the land that is closely tied to a naturalized process of renewal and death, although these beliefs put him out of step with his contemporary world.

In the present-time of "Delta Autumn," Ike mourns the steady loss of the land that once sustained his traditional, rooted way of life. The incursions of industrial monocropping and the processes of urbanization have destroyed the hunter's wilderness, and now Ike must drive 200 miles in a car to find the delta instead of the 30 miles he traversed by wagon in his childhood. Ike reflects on these changes, elaborating the process by which the land is converted:

At first there had been only the old towns along the River and the old towns along the hills, from each of which the planters with their gangs of slaves and then of hired laborers had wrested from the impenetrable jungle of water-standing cane and cypress, gum and holly and oak and ash, cotton patches which as the years passed became fields and then plantations. The paths made by deer and bear became roads and then highways, with towns in turn springing up along them [...] (363)

Whereas Ike's sense of rootedness comes from his respect for the uncultivated land, the industrialization of the delta expresses an instrumentalist attitude toward the soil. The emergence of class distinctions, the institution of slavery, and the destruction of the "impenetrable jungle" develop from this utilitarian attitude toward the delta.²⁴⁸ Such a

²⁴⁸ For a discussion of the relationship between slavery and industrialization in the South, see Mark Smith's provocative *Mastered by the Clock* (1997), in which he argues that the slave-era South was just as rigorously organized by the organization of time as was the Taylorized North. While his study is incomplete, he provides an important counter-argument to the Agrarians' claims that industrialism was indigenous to the North.

ruinous process reduplicates its own contradictions, evidenced for Ike by the paradox of needing mass produced automobiles to drive further and further out to find the wilderness.

Ike blames urbanization and the “usury” that supports it for the receding delta. The industrial mono-cropping that produces the cotton-wealth also generates a mentality that represents the central problem for Ike:

This land which man has deswamped and denuded and derivered in two generations so that white men can own plantations and commute every night to Memphis and black men own plantations and ride in jim crow cars to Chicago to live in millionaires’ mansions on Lake-shore Drive, where white men rent farms and live like niggers and niggers crop on shares and live like animals, where cotton is planted and grows man-tall in the very cracks of the sidewalks, and usury and mortgage and bankruptcy and measureless wealth, Chinese and African and Aryan and Jew, all breed and spawn together until no man has time to say which one is which nor cares [...] (364)

Whereas the Southern Agrarians persistently argued that the North imposed an industrial regime on the pastoral South, Ike’s meditation explores the troubling economic and social intercourse between North and South, black and white, “Aryan and Jew,” that he summarizes with the disdainful epithet “spawning.” The most significant threat in this general process of industrialization is the impure mixing that it permits. Ike’s representation of “measureless wealth” devolves into a series of class and race transgressions that disturb him as much as the loss of the wilderness. In each case, the degeneration of an ideal purity threatens to unbalance Ike’s sense of a natural, ethical commitment to the land and the cycles of regeneration that give it vitality. This anxiety about industrialization and usury is rooted in Ike’s fears of miscegenation that pervade “Delta Autumn.”

In this new world described by old Ike, the denigration of the wilderness is linked to the rootlessness of physical movement, in contrast to Ike's regionalist traditionalism. The flow of money and people, the accumulation of wealth and extreme forms of impoverishment correspond to the speed-up of capitalist exchange and the increasing transgression of social and national borders. The industrial development of cotton in the South, "the untreed land warped and wrung to mathematical squares of rank cotton," for example, is part of the economy of international war, in which that cotton is sold "for the frantic old world people to turn into shells to shoot at one another" (354). As with Carson McCullers' *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, "Delta Autumn" expresses the complex interconnections between the local and the global, the rural and the urban, the micro and macro-political configurations that intertwine Ike's pastoral world with the vast network of mass commodity culture. Far from being an isolated backwater, the production of cotton in the delta is mixed into the ubiquitous, churning nexus of over-production and "usury" that Ike loathes. Likewise, just as the promiscuity of the over-productive capitalist market crosses boundaries and brings nations together in these conflicts that muddle lands and peoples, Ike's preoccupation with miscegenation resurfaces in the partially suppressed image of blood mixing on the European battlefield. This mixing of bodies, spaces, and things in the new industrial mass culture disturbs Ike. Significantly, his reaction to this new world contrasts an ideal vision of the land with the deracinating alienation of the new industrial age.

Ike, who is continually referred to as "the old man" as if to insist on the immanent passing of his rustic world, expresses anti-Snopesian views that the Agrarians might have recognized as their own. In *I'll Take My Stand*, John Crowe Ransom develops the same

critique of the fluidity of urbanized industrial culture that Ike takes up in “Delta Autumn”:

[...] it is the character of a seasoned provincial life that it is realistic, or successfully adapted to its natural environment, and that as a consequence it is stable, or hereditary. But it is the character of our urbanized, anti-provincial, progressive, and mobile American life that it is in a condition of eternal flux. Affections, and long memories, attach to the ancient bowers of life in the provinces; but they will not attach to what is always changing. (5)

Ike is haunted by the “long memories” that attach to “the ancient bowers of life” in the delta. At the same time, he sees that the younger generation has not inherited the ethical codes he learned in the “seasoned provincial life” that connects him to the “natural environment.” Ike attributes this alienation to the fast-paced “mobile American life,” which strips away the affections that tie the community to the soil. Taken to its furthest extreme, the “eternal flux” of this new modern world engenders the usurious mixing and constant racial and cultural border-crossing that old Ike disgustingly refers to as “spawning.”

These parallels seem to support Warren’s contention that Faulkner, or at least some of his characters, shares the outlook of the Southern Agrarians, who condemn Northern industrialism and the new order they equated with “Snopesism.” This uncomplicated narrative of chaste nature pillaged by marauding capitalism does not align with Ike’s own story, however, as the old man’s “Agrarian” worldview originates in his relationship to Sam Fathers. Although Fathers embodies an image of idyllic nature for Ike, it is hard to imagine how he represents the purity that Ike idealizes, since he is part “Negro slave,” part “Chickasaw chief.” In other words, Fathers’ miscegenated blood expresses the same mixing that Ike rejects in the “spawning” of capitalist usury. The

idealized connection with nature that Ike experienced with Fathers thus comes from the troubling process of mixing that Ike denies in his search for a pure nature. We see this most directly in Ike's initiation into manhood, when Fathers wipes the buck's blood on his face. In a fluid exchange of metaphors, Ike's sense of manhood and responsibility toward nature originates from intermingling with an animal that shares blood with Fathers ("There was something running in Sam Fathers' veins which ran in the veins of the buck too"), whose blood, in turn, is part of the process of slavery and miscegenation generated by the "eternal flux" of industrialized monocropping and the international wars sustained by capitalism. Ike's birth to manhood is thus miscegenated from its inception, lacking the purity of natural origin that is represented for him by his fantasy of the delta wilderness. Far from presenting an Agrarian position, Ike's mixed inheritance from Fathers introduces the troubling aporia of miscegenation into his fairy tale of the chaste land corrupted by the promiscuity of commercial culture.

If we continue to follow Faulkner's mixed metaphors, we find that Ike's myths undo themselves one by one as the narrative develops. As Ike recounts, Sam Father's slave blood is paradoxically linked to the slavery by which the land was "warped and wrung to mathematical squares of rank cotton" (354). Incongruously, Father's connection to the land is also bound up with the slave-labor that denuded the pure nature which he is supposed to represent. Similarly, old Ike's approach to the still center of the delta is not an escape from, but rather an approach to the "spawning" of his own mixed birth to manhood and its vexed relation to industrial capitalism. As the "Delta Autumn" narrative moves Ike southward into the heart of the land, he approaches the point of confluence in which his tidy binaries miscegenate, mixing nature and the human, the soil and

industrialism, youthful vitality and decrepit old age. This dense confluence is signaled by the paradoxical inversion of the delta, which flows in reverse as it retreats, funneling to an increasingly concentrated tip:

[The delta], retreating southward through this inverted-apex, this ▼-shaped section of earth between hills and River until what was left of it seemed now to be gathered and for the time arrested in one tremendous density of brooding and inscrutable impenetrability at the ultimate funneling tip. (326)

Ike's progressive movement south brings him to a point of density rather than the dispersion and coordination into diverse channels at first suggested by the typical image of the delta (in which water moves from a singular origin to a more general diffusion). The inversion of the delta intensifies Ike's experience by forcefully bringing together incommensurable aspects of his life and ideals that he normally keeps segregated. Rather than escaping the "spawning" that horrifies him, old Ike finds that this continuous, transgressive mixing follows him even into the heart of his myth of idyllic nature.

Some critics have argued that the New Critics and Faulkner develop a preference for iconic forms of representation in order to escape the abstraction that they associated with commodity culture.²⁴⁹ As we have seen, however, the icon of the inverted delta condenses the points of exchange and flow that Ike associates with capitalism. Whereas the New Critical concept of the "well wrought urn" brings the tensions of the literary work into a cohesive whole that cannot be analytically broken down into abstract categories, the image of the inverted delta brings opposites together in a way that transgresses Ike's fantasy of a pristine natural world outside the "spawning" of

²⁴⁹ See Richard Godden, *Fictions of Capital* (1990). Godden argues that Faulkner's writing in this period addresses the desire provoked by the rise of capitalism between the wars.

capitalism.²⁵⁰ The key difference lies in the fact that the New Critics use the ideal of the icon to refer back to a holistically integrated culture that antedates the social disintegrating effects of Northern industrialism. In this sense, the icon is intimately bound up with the palingenetic myth expressed by the Southern Agrarians, which puts forward the ideal of a cohesive, Old Southern pastoralism in opposition to the encroachments of the new industrial order. Conversely, Faulkner's delta icon mixes incommensurable aspects of the new and the old, the North and the South. The negative prefixes "*in*," "*im*," "*ir*," "*de*," etc., so characteristic of Faulknerian prose, here signal the incomprehension that emerges from the same paradoxical points of narrative confluence signaled by the delta icon.²⁵¹ While the Agrarians constantly express their hopes for the rebirth of a depoliticized, cohesive community with the "*re*-" prefix, Faulkner's language and anti-symbolism refer the reader to points of uncertainty in which idealized binaries *flow* together rather than *hold* together. If the New Critical concept of literature insists on cohesion, Faulkner's "icon" draws together the uncertainties that would emerge from this cohesion. Unlike the New Critics' image of a totalized aesthetic vision, Faulkner's icons express the social tensions and conflicts that exemplify everyday struggles at the micro-political level.

²⁵⁰ *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947), authored by Cleanth Brooks, is the title of one most famous and definitional New Critical publications. As Douglas Mao summarizes in "The New Critics and the Text-Object," "The New Critics' propensity to regard the text as an enduring thing and to compare it to the work of plastic art (and particularly the object with hieratic associations: the well wrought urn, the verbal icon), after all, would tend to block historical inquiry to the degree that objectification implies a hardening of the boundaries that separate text from world" (228).

²⁵¹ Some of the uses of negative prefixes that occur in "Delta Autumn" include "denuded," "inscrutable," "impenetrable," and "inverted." For a further development of this theme, see especially John Matthews' *The Play of Faulkner's Language* (1982).

The young men who accompany Ike on the “Delta Autumn” hunting trip do not share the old man’s faith in the wholeness of nature. Instead, they complicate Ike’s myths of the wilderness with their Depression Era concerns about social disintegration. As a cynical new generation used to mass advertising and buying on the installment plan, these young men represent an alienated sensibility that refuses Ike’s pastoral vision of honor and tradition. In particular, Ike’s nephew, Roth Edmunds, acts as a foil to Ike’s idealization of the land. Roth fails to share Ike’s respect for the wilderness, a fact that comes up when he is teased about hunting female deer. As Ike preaches to the young men, female deer must not be killed, because this violates the principle of renewal and rebirth that figures so prominently in Ike’s myth about the purity of nature and the process of rebirth. In his lecture, Ike is confused by the linguistic slippage between the “doe” of his hunting code and the “doe” as a figure for the young woman whom Roth impregnated and abandoned during the previous year’s hunting trip. As an image of inviolate, reproductive nature, the “doe” is doubly despoiled by Roth, who refuses to follow the codes of chivalry or hunting that Ike seeks to pass on to the young men. Unlike the young men who play transgressively with language and social mores, Ike holds fast to his linear vision of the world. Whereas Ike was able to assimilate Sam Fathers to the wilderness as a buck, he is unable to stretch this image in the other direction to understand the doe as an image for Roth’s mistress. Old Ike’s sclerotic code of ethics holds him fast, and yet the narrative of “Delta Autumn” increasingly forces him to encounter different modes of metaphorical and social interchangeability as he approaches the inverted tip of the delta.

Toward the end of “Delta Autumn,” Ike’s encounter with this inscrutable, non-linear mixing intensifies. Roth and the other young men have gone off hunting, leaving the old man behind to rest. In the heart of the delta wilderness, at the very antipode of Ike’s flight from the capitalist “spawning” that horrifies him, he is confronted by Roth’s abandoned mistress, who has come to the hunting camp with Roth’s new-born child. As though to emphasize the sense of his return to the natural state of innocence and his childhood ideal of the wilderness, old Ike is naked and vulnerable under his blankets when she comes into the tent.

This traumatic meeting shakes Ike’s mythic pastoralism to its core, as his understanding of the world proves useless in grappling with the confluence of events swirling around him. As he guardedly talks with Roth’s mistress in his vulnerable state, he learns that she takes in washing. In the South, this class distinction is also a race distinction, and Ike responds by crying, “not loud, in a voice of amazement, pity, and outrage: ‘You’re a nigger!’” to which she replies, “‘Yes [...] James Beauchamp—you called him Tennie’s Jim though he had a name—was my grandfather. I said you were Uncle Isaac’”(361). With this, Ike discovers that she and Edmunds are related through slave-era miscegenation and thus their baby is a product of both incest and the same racial mixing that Ike has identified with capitalism and the North. As though to confirm these transgressions of Ike’s rigid social ecology, she explains that she came to see Roth before going “back North. Back home” (361). Although Ike has constructed his ethical code and his relation to the land in opposition to everything Roth’s mistress represents, he finds that he is linked to her by the relations of blood and soil upon which such distinctions are founded. As the daughter of a former slave on the land that Ike inherited,

this unnamed woman is connected to him through the soil that he honors, while he is also related to her by blood through slave-era miscegenation. Rather than clarifying their relationship, however, his double-bind demonstrates the mixing and impurity at the heart of Ike's Southern codes of chivalry and land-stewardship.

In a desperate gesture of capitulation to this baffling economy of exchange and interchange, old Ike attempts to give her the money that Roth has left for her. She responds, "I don't need it. He gave me money last winter. Besides the money he sent to Vicksburg. Provided. Honor and code too. That was all arranged" (361). As with the cash nexus that Ike sought to escape, Roth's money acts as the point of exchange among Ike, the woman, and Roth, replacing the code of honor, the ties of blood, and the care for the land that Ike wants so desperately to maintain as the basis for social intercourse. She eventually accepts the money, and it is at this moment of transaction that Ike and she touch, "the gnarled, bloodless, bone-light bone-dry man's fingers touching for a second the smooth young flesh where the strong old blood ran after its long lost journey back to home" (362). Ike's old body, like his enervated ideals, brushes against her vitality in a passing eroticism that is perversely related to the image of blood flowing back to its source. Like the inward funneling tip of the delta, the sexualized image of the blood's return to its home in the woman establishes the vital point of generation in a miscegenated body. In this scene, Ike's approach toward the natural origin of the life-giving delta reveals a complex confluence of relations that were already at the source of his relationship with Sam Fathers.

In a final effort, Ike tries to overcome this economy of exchange by additionally giving his niece the hunting horn that Roth inherited from General Compson. For Ike, the

horn represents an important symbol of inherited tradition that stands in opposition to the indiscriminate interchange of industrial capitalism. Like the codes of honor and stewardship that Ike wants to pass on to the young men, the hunting represents respect for nature and cycles of life. This gesture would have recognized the woman in a lineage that acknowledges her relation to the land, re-incorporating the incest and miscegenation represented by the Roth's child into the lineage of the Southern code of ethics. This tidy reorganization of the narrative is impossible, however, as Roth is at the same moment undermining this gesture by shooting a doe in the nearby forest. As we learn a moment after Ike's attempt to restore harmony to his worldview, Roth has once again betrayed the old man's sense of order and harmony in his thoughtless hunting of female deer. In contrast to Ike's ritualistic birth into manhood with Sam Fathers, Roth's cynical betrayal of tradition and ritual exposes the old man's own mixed heritage, derived as it is from the slave-era violation of the land and the "spawning" that horrifies him. Roth's killing of the deer closes "Delta Autumn," demonstrating that he has discarded the codes that Ike wanted to pass on to his abandoned son through the horn. More importantly, Roth's transgressions also expose the process of transgressive mixing from which Ike's traditions emerge, while the old man's attempts to escape this non-linear exchange always brings him back to the funneling, concentrated point of miscegenation.

In the end, the difference between the uncle and the nephew is Ike's willingness to generate myths of an inviolate nature to mask the "spawning" at the heart of the delta wilderness. By both shooting the doe and ignoring his child, the angry young Roth viciously destroys these myths with a cruel insistence on the transgression of Ike's

codes.²⁵² For Roth, the fading Old Southern world of *noblesse oblige* and land stewardship, of property and propriety, is doomed to the global sweep of interconnected events. His earlier reference to “Hitler” signals the uncertainty of a changing world in which the traditions of rural Mississippi are dramatically interconnected with the global sweep of events (338). As with *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, however, these concerns are not conceived as macro-events of historical import. Instead, Faulkner explores the micro-politics of the relationship between old Ike and young Roth as they struggle to account for these changes through the intimate hopes, fears and fantasies that make up daily life. In his reference to Hitler and the radical changes effected by technological modernity, Roth forces Ike to reckon with the incommensurability of the old man’s pastoral myths. The pervasive scope of the modern economy of endless exchange, as well as the aggressive regimes that emerge out of this economy without boundaries, situate the tense, interrelationship between uncle and nephew.

As Robert Penn Warren has pointed out, Ike’s nostalgic vision of tradition and soil has much in common with the Southern Agrarians. In his essay “Faulkner: The South, The Negro, and Time” (1965), Warren notes, “Ike echoes what we often find in Faulkner’s work, the notion of a world that has the right relation to nature, a relation that has long since been lost through the violations and destruction of modernity” (264).²⁵³

²⁵² In “The Illusion of Freedom in the Hamlet and Go Down, Moses,” in *On Faulkner* (1989), Margaret Dunn contrasts Ike’s freedom from greed with Flem Snopes’ acquisitiveness. She goes on to argue that Roth has fulfilled Ike’s sense of honor and code in relation to his mistress, and the old man is only upset by the killing of the dear. Not only does this reading ignore the problems of incest and miscegenation that are central to Ike’s thinking, it also passes over his own involvement in the cash nexus that he is supposed to be free from.

²⁵³ It must be mentioned that Warren goes on in this essay to connect this “modernity” to racism. Unaccountably, racism becomes the attribute of “white modernity,” while Warren fails to address the role of racism in the old Southern traditions and its “right relation to nature” (264).

This “right relation to nature” covers over the spawning at the heart of Ike’s wilderness, evacuating the complex social interchanges in favor of an idealized image of pristine land. “Delta Autumn” does not sustain this reading, however, and the codes and traditions that Ike seeks to propagate are disrupted by Roth’s actions. Warren’s attempt to isolate the North from the South, industrialism and pastoral regionalism, “modernity” and tradition is ultimately as limited as Ike’s hope to avoid the “spawning” that pervades all of these binary categories. In contrast to the clean, strangely hygienic notion of “love” that Warren and Ransom insist on, Faulkner’s “Delta Autumn” is fascinated by this messy “spawning,” with all of its ambiguous exchanges between money, materials, bodies, and worldviews.

While the Southern Agrarians/New Critics emphasize wholeness and integrity, Faulkner’s iconic delta is a figure of dissolution and intensity. The “symbolic” South that Warren claimed to find in Faulkner’s writings is far from expressing the integrity that he and the other Agrarians attributed to the myth of the soil-bound community. “Delta Autumn” dramatically complicates Ike’s “right relation to nature” through a spawning that Warren’s image of the “symbolic” South does not comprehend. In parallel fashion, Warren’s interpretation of “Snopesism” as an alien force of “modernity” is not so linear and coherent as it might at first seem (“Faulkner” 98). As I noted in the previous chapter, Warren contrasts Ike’s “antique virtue” with the Snopeses who are “pure exploiters” who come from “outside of society” (“Faulkner” 98). Warren’s binary interpretation, based on the distinction between the agrarian South and the industrial modernity represented by Snopesism, holds up no better than his insistence on the mythic purity of blood and soil in his reading of “Delta Autumn.”

The Forces of Modernity: Snopesism in *The Hamlet*

As a force of “modernity,” Flem Snopes represents the indiscriminate mixing generated by Northern industrial capitalism that undoes Ike’s idealized vision of nature. For Warren, the impurity that Roth aggressively brings into old Ike’s sanctuary is another aspect of the Snopesist reduction of every value to a rate of exchange. Faulkner’s novel *The Hamlet* (1940), published shortly before *Go Down Moses*, contains the author’s most sustained interwar engagement with “Snopesism.” Like “Delta Autumn,” *The Hamlet* at first seems likely to support Warren’s Agrarian interpretation of Faulkner, since the novel provides the scene for the rise of the Snopeses as they come to dominate the traditional and soil-bound community of Frenchman’s Bend. And yet, as I will argue, the people of Frenchman’s Bend do not quite square with Warren’s Agrarian mythic opposition between an organically cohesive soil-bound community and the invasive industrialized capitalism represented by Flem Snopes.

Faulkner continuously returned to the Snopes family throughout his long writing career. Clearly fascinated by this darkly comical family, Faulkner began writing on the Snopeses in 1926 as a young author, and he finally finished his work on the Snopes trilogy with *The Mansion* in 1959, near the end of his life.²⁵⁴ In this sense we can say that the Snopeses occupied Faulkner’s writing more persistently than any other group of characters, providing the narrative tension for numerous short stories and his only trilogy. *The Hamlet* is perhaps the core expression of this long engagement with the Snopeses,

²⁵⁴ For a description of Faulkner’s long engagement with the Snopes family, see Joanne V. Creighton, *William Faulkner’s Craft of Revision* (1977).

because the novel focalizes and coordinates many of the previously scattered short stories, while at the same time developing the foundation for the trilogy that completes his work on the Snopes family.

Surprisingly, the rise of the Faulkner industry in the academy has not translated into very extensive work on *The Hamlet* or the significance of Snopesism for Faulkner's oeuvre. Since Warren's essay, the Snopeses have been variously interpreted, but rarely with the focused attention that Warren gives them in his "William Faulkner" essay. Flem Snopes has been understood in ethical terms as "the unchanging amoral archetype," as a salesman who converts Yoknapatawphans into consumers, and even as an ultimate "enigma" that cannot be rationalized.²⁵⁵ Each of these interpretive maneuvers situates Flem as an outsider, an agent of corruption who stands apart from the community. Just as Warren described Flem as a figure of otherness in his essay, later investigations of Snopesism tend to use binarizing categories that implicitly or explicitly valorize a pastoral idyll over against the image of marauding Northern capitalism figured in Flem Snopes.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ See James Gray Watson, *The Snopes Dilemma: Faulkner's Trilogy*; Ted Ownby, "The Snopes Trilogy and Consumer Culture, in Faulkner and Ideology"; Own Robinson, "Narrative and Identity in Faulkner's Snopes Trilogy" in William Faulkner, Ed. Harold Bloom. These interpretations are repeated many times over in Faulkner criticism. For example, in *American Literary Regionalism in a Global Age*, Philip Joseph interprets Flem as a amoral salesman who brings alienation to the community; while Michael Wainwright in "The Enemy Within: Faulkner's Snopes Trilogy" sees Flem as the epitome of the "selfish gene" that provides the basis for capitalism.

²⁵⁶ Cleanth Brooks provides the classic example of this attitude, as he likens Flem's machinations against "the little backwater community" to Northern advertising culture (*William Faulkner* 185). John Matthews follows suit in "Shortened Stories: Faulkner and the Market," while Carolyn Porter gives an extreme version of the same interpretation in her characterization of Flem as a "sinister and sociopathic entrepreneur" (163).

Why or how Flem is an alien element is never made explicit in these Warrenesque interpretations. This tendency is especially strange in light of the fact that the Snopes family is clearly and very much a part of the Yoknapatawpha community, as the most sagacious character in *The Hamlet*, V.K. Ratliff, attests.²⁵⁷ Like the multitudes of other dispossessed small land owners, the Snopeses are now tenant farmers who scrape by on cash crops that barely cover their store credit. Following the rough chronology of *The Hamlet* places Flem Snopes' father, Ab, in the generation of yeoman farmers who were displaced by the chaos of the Civil War. But Faulkner's narrative does not tell a story of the aftermath of a "war of Northern aggression" and the ensuing domination by industrialized capitalism. Rather, *The Hamlet* explicitly develops an account of the Reconstruction period that is closer to the ambiguity of historical circumstances. As historian Worth Robert Miller summarizes,

During the Civil War [...] both Union and Confederate armies devastated the yeomen's herds. Railroad expansion after the war made commercial agriculture seem a quick way to recoup their losses. Thus, many expanded their commitment to cotton without any intention of remaining in the commercial world. This required credit, which merchants extended, taking farm mortgages as security. The rapid decline in cotton prices kept many farmers in debt until they lost their land and became tenants, frequently on the land they formerly had owned. (287)

In *The Hamlet*, Will Varner is that local merchant who extends credit to his neighboring farmers until he becomes the major landowner of Frenchman's Bend while the small landholders become mere tenants.²⁵⁸ Merchants like Will Varner preyed on local yeomen

²⁵⁷ Ratliff gives information on the Snopes family throughout *The Hamlet*. See especially his discussion of barn burning and the famous horse-trading scene, both of which characterize the Snopes family as long-time natives of Frenchman's Bend area.

²⁵⁸ This is an often overlooked point. Andrea Dimino, for example, in "Why Did the Snopeses Name Their Son 'Wallstreet Panic'?" (in *Six Decades of Criticism* 2002) argues that "Flem's extortion of enormous

farmers, situating Frenchman's Bend in a cash nexus that illustrates the micro-politics at play in the larger North-South conflict. The shift from subsistence to cash crop farming was an outcome of the Civil War, but it was exacerbated to an intolerable point because of the exploitation of Southern merchants. Flem would have seen his father struggling through a period in which neither the promises of the Union North, nor the idyll of the Confederate Old South would have held much appeal.²⁵⁹ Rather, someone in Ab's situation would most likely be drawn to the agriculturally based third-party politics that predominated in the South and Midwest in the late nineteenth century and was fueled by the desperate condition of these tenant farmers.²⁶⁰

Given the historical context of *The Hamlet* it is unlikely that the Snopeses can be understood as strangers in Frenchman's Bend, and they certainly did not represent attitudes particular to Northern industrial capitalism. Will Varner's usurious monopoly over Frenchman's Bend makes him the more likely villain for an Agrarian interpretation,

amounts of interest from poor blacks and white farmers brands him as a 'Northerner, that is, someone more concerned with the abstract uses of money than with fundamental questions of value and social responsibility. Flem has modeled himself on rapacious Northern contemporaries like JP Morgan, Hill, Harriman, Frick and Rockefeller, men whose frenzied speculation and ruthless pursuit of self-interest helped to bring about the ruin of smaller fish in such events as the panic of 1907" (350). This claim seems to overlook the abundant evidence that Flem had plenty of models of rapacious "extortion" right there in Frenchman's Bend.

²⁵⁹ Faulkner scholar Steve Marcus estimates that the narrative time of *The Hamlet* takes place around the turn of the century, placing Ab's horse trading debacle about a decade earlier ("Snopes Revisited," in *William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism* 388).

²⁶⁰ Third party groups like the Knights of Labor and the Southern Farmers Alliance eventually agglomerated into the People's Party in 1892. This populist movement became a major force in agricultural regions in the same period when Flem would have come to maturity. The radical platform of the People's Party focused on the banks' control of credit that continued to decimate small holders throughout the depression years of the 1890s. While the populist movement lost force by the turn of the century, the focus on what was often referred to as "usury" and its effects on small holders continued to circulate in third party groups. See the 1892 "National People's Party Platform" which mentions the "vast conspiracy" of "usurers" (cited in Thomas Inge 178-179).

but he too is as home-spun as Flem Snopes. On the other hand, what does cast Flem as a truly new kind of Faulknerian character is his ability to draw on the diverse desires circulating through the Yoknapatawpha community. This new kind of exploitation situates Flem solidly within the community, however, since it requires an intimate knowledge of the needs and hopes of the tenant farmers he exploits in *The Hamlet*. Flem's ability to out-do Will Varner thus emerges from his close understanding of the community he manipulates, rather than his status as an outsider who comes from "the world of advertising and Madison Avenue" (Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner* 185).

The Hamlet narrates Flem's discovery of a hybrid combination of Southern traditions and mass commodity culture. His non-committal, laconic air devolves from his superior manipulation of the local power politics that are continuously at play in Frenchman's Bend. While the men who sit in front of Varner's store observe the traditions of verbal play, Flem avoids talk and instead focuses on the actions that bring him into a position of domination. If Varner's store is the unofficial parliament of Frenchman's Bend, Flem is the usurper who demonstrates his power by the fiat of deed. By drawing on the desires of the community, Flem shifts the social dynamics of Frenchman's Bend as he reworks Will Varner's legalistic strategies of mortgages and deeds, instead appealing to the mobile, changeable desires that inhabit the community.

An early example illustrates this distinction. Whereas Will Varner operates through a precise debt structure based on crop output and percentage of mortgage debt, Flem starts as a small-time chiseler who is open to the diverse desires of his clients. If Will knows exactly where his loans are going, and accounts for items in a legalistic manner, Flem does not ask where his loans go or what they are used for. Loaning five

dollars to a black sawmill worker, Flem finds smaller avenues for profits than Will can imagine. As the sawmill worker recounts, “He lent me five dollars over two years ago and all I does, every Saturday night I goes to the store and pays him a dime. He aint even mentioned that five dollars” (70). In this episode, Flem demonstrates his ability to attract customers based on a mobile set of desires that are not limited by race or occupation. Although the humor of this scene depends on the apparent incomprehension of the black laborer, Flem consistently demonstrates that these open desiring appeals operate for everyone in the community, even his greatest opponent, V.K. Ratliff.

Faulkner’s friend Phil Stone describes this “Snopesism” as the “rise of the redneck,” but Flem represents an important shift from the barn-burning that characterized his father’s reaction to economic exploitation (Blotner 33). As Ted Atkinson explains, “Flem Snopes is not about to set a match to Jody Varner’s barn as long as he has in mind owning it someday” (220).²⁶¹ This important shift in mentality also signals Flem’s entry into the micro-politics of the Yoknapatawpha community. Investigating the Snopes family’s engagement in what he names “class warfare,” Atkins calls Faulkner’s short story “Barn Burning” (1938) “perhaps the most class-conscious work in his canon” (194).²⁶² Later, this story gets incorporated into *The Hamlet*, providing the mainspring of Flem Snopes’ rise to power. Importantly, Flem gets his foothold in the Varner family business as a store clerk because the Varners are afraid of the Snopes family’s reputation for barn-burning. As Atkinson emphasizes, the Varners’ concessions to Flem at the

²⁶¹ Atkinson also addresses the question of fascism in Faulkner’s prose, linking the author’s representation of violence to the filmic representations of American gangsterism between the wars. See “Power by Design” in *Faulkner and the Great Depression* (2006).

²⁶² Interestingly, in *It Can’t Happen Here*, Sinclair Lewis directly connects barn burning to fascism: the young fascist thug Shad Ledue is described as “the kind of vindictive peasant who sets first to barns” (89).

beginning of the novel are predicated on the Snopes family's desperation as tenant farmers. At the outset of the novel, the reader encounter the Snopeses as a family that represents many of the most dramatic aspects of the cycle of impoverishment and debt characterizing Southern culture at the turn of the century. The development of the narrative, by contrast, is driven by Flem's mastery of the local strategies of manipulation and chicanery that are indigenous to Yoknapatawpha.

The Hamlet carefully explicates Flem's learning curve as he witnesses the exploitation of his own "redneck" family in Frenchman's Bend. Flem's school is his father's embarrassing, socially degrading experiences at the hands of cleverer and crueler traders. In particular, the horse-trading episode with the notorious Pat Stamper becomes an important example for the mature Flem. Although some critics have argued that Flem is without a history, *The Hamlet* (mainly through V.K. Ratliff's stories) develops clear connections between Ab's experiences with horse-trading and Flem's fascinating ponies in "The Peasants" chapter.²⁶³ In many ways, the tale of Pat Stamper's outmaneuvering of Ab Snopes stands as the central trauma of the Snopes family, the moment at which they lost their livestock (a cow) and got "sour," as Ratliff euphemistically puts it.

In order to protect the "honor and pride" of fellow Yoknapatawpha farmers who lost in horse trading with Pat Stamper, Ab trades his mule for one of Pat's horses. On his way to town with \$24.68 (all of his wife's hard-earned savings) to buy a milk separator, Ab's new horse begins to skitter uncontrollably. The horse's behavior becomes so erratic that on his return trip home Ab is forced to take the horse back to Pat, this time losing the milk separator in a trade for another horse, which turns out to be his own mule painted

²⁶³ Flem has often been described as a character without a history. Cleanth Brooks calls him a "myth," and many other scholars have followed suit (William Faulkner 190). John Matthews, for example, argues that "Flem is less a character in the novel than a reflection of the deathly, impersonal conditions of play" (169).

and doctored up beyond recognition by Pat's black hostler. When Ab's wife finds out, she insists on trading their only cow to Pat to recuperate her milk separator.

Besides Ab's desire to recuperate the honor of his fellow farmers, the other factor in the horse trade is the cash-bought milk-separator that gets taken up in the flurry of horse swapping. While Pat Stamper represents the process of local exploitation that dispossesses yeoman farmers, Miz Snopes' desire for a milk separator links her rural life to the commodity culture of urbanized manufacture and cash-exchange. Pat Stamper works in tandem with the desires generated by commodity culture to despoil the Snopeses of their livestock. At the conclusion of Stamper's machinations Miz Snopes is able to keep the milk-separator, but without a cow to produce milk for the machine. Perversely, she gets a commodity that promises a better, easier life at the expense of the productive materials that made the separator appealing in the first place. In the end, Miz Snopes can only repeatedly run her borrowed milk through the machine: "It looks like she is fixing to get a heap of pleasure and satisfaction outen it," Ab comments with truthful irony (48). The Snopeses' loss of independence and their eventual farm-tenancy dates from this event, when Ab, as storyteller Ratliff describes it, "soured."

The comedy of this episode is tempered by the seriousness of the Snopes family's loss of their livestock. Like the loss of a farm through a mortgage, the loss of the family's only cow in Pat Stamper's wily deal stands in for the larger problems of exploitation and impoverishment that yeomen farmers experienced in the Reconstruction period. Yet where Will Varner maneuvers the farming community into a system of debt through legalistic machinations, the continuous swapping of the horse-trade indexes the manipulation of particular desires. From Ab's interest in preserving "honor" to his wife's

desire for home appliances, Pat Stamper draws on the particular hopes, fears and fantasies of his victims. As a student of these events, Flem learns these techniques from his father's humiliation and impoverishment, a lesson that he applies to all of his activities in the Frenchman's Bend community.

The young Flem grew up in the shadow of events like the disastrous horse trade, pulling the significance out of them like he broodingly sucks the "suction" out of the cud he continuously mulls over. By the time we meet him in *The Hamlet*, he has a Great Design as fully formed in his mind as Thomas Sutpen's, although he will not make Sutpen's mistake of attaching himself to anything that cannot be exchanged.²⁶⁴ Unlike the Agrarians' "love" for the soil, Flem sees how an attachment to the land and the community has been used as a strategy of capture in rural areas like Frenchman's Bend. Faulkner's novel underscores this attitude by allowing it to resurface in other important characters. The lonely but wealthy widower Sam Houston, for instance, feels the enervating pull of the soil as a tragic doom rather than as a redemptive connection to his roots. Even the traveling salesman V.K. Ratliff feels an ethical commitment to the people of Frenchman's Bend, an attachment that he demonstrates as the moral voice of the novel. On the other hand, the trauma of the Snopes family's disenfranchisement (figured as the process of horse-trading, extortion, and the desire embodied in commodities) has taught Flem that ideals like the land and the people are the hooks by which the tenant farmers are tied to their disempowering positions. *The Hamlet* thus chronicles Flem's

²⁶⁴ Sutpen is the hero of *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936). The novel describes his failed attempt to become a self-made aristocrat. Unlike Flem, Sutpen is attached to the "Great Design" that drives his hopes. Flem, by contrast, appears to have no emotional attachments, except his subtle fascination for getting the better of people.

experimentation with and perfection of the methods gleaned from local exploiters like Pat Stamper, so that he can avoid his father's fate.

The episode in "The Peasants" demonstrates Flem's response to the horse trading that "soured" his father in the thoroughgoing commodification of the horses he tantalizingly puts on display before the impoverished farmers. As one of the most discussed stories in all of Faulkner's writings on Snopesism, "The Peasants" has often been investigated in terms of the commercial manipulation of the Frenchman's Bend community, and yet what critics fail to mention is the community's desiring participation in this exploitation.²⁶⁵ Upon Flem's return from his Texas honeymoon, he brings with him a herd of wild Texas ponies. With a mountebank's flourish, Flem puts his ponies up for sale immediately upon his arrival. The narrative constantly compares these unmanageable creatures to stage-magic and the circus in order to emphasize their almost hallucinatory desiring appeal for the tenant farmers. Tapping into a long tradition of horse trading and the cultural symbolism of freedom and empowerment represented by the horses, Flem engages in a carefully choreographed set of appeals to hopes and fantasies that already circulate through the community. The men line up along the fence to stare at the ponies with a desire that exceeds their material needs. The farmer Henry Armstid mostly clearly demonstrates the excessive force of this attraction, as he is willing to spend his family's last five dollars on one of these vicious "phantoms." But every farmer there is in a similar position, with their "tobacco-sacks and worn purses, the sparse silver and frayed bills hoarded a coin at a time in the cracks of chimneys or chinked into the logs of walls" (290).

²⁶⁵ See, for example, Donald Greiner, "Universal Snopesism: The Significance of 'Spotted Horses'" (1968).

Flem's horse-sale represents a rare moment of univocal assembly in Frenchman's Bend, as the men are momentarily united around a shared myth of independence and empowerment embodied in the ponies. As the master magician, Flem works behind the scenes in "The Peasants," extricating himself from the play of desires that unites the rest of the community in this theatrical representation.²⁶⁶ His removed, impersonal gaze out onto the men who ogle the ponies parallels his strategy of selling the ponies by proxy, through a Texan. Like the machinations of indirect and multiple exchanges by which Pat Stamper works, Flem multiplies the intermediary complications between himself and the provocative objects he offers. However, Flem has gone further by appealing directly to the desires flowing through Frenchman's Bend, rather than manipulating their material conditions. Flem, in other words, trades on hope and similar enticements, because they are the most fungible commodities; his strategies are thus a powerful example of the mythmaking characteristic of commodity capitalism.

Flem's arrival with the tempting ponies creates a great deal of anticipation. The "men lounging about the gallery of the store" see Flem's magical caravan long before it arrives. In a foreshadowing of their flickering and shifting appeal, the horses are only glimpsed at first as the men stare at Flem's far-off wagon. Behind the wagon trailed

a considerable string of obviously alive objects which in the leveling sun resembled vari-sized and –colored tatters torn at random from large billboards – circus posters, say – attached to the rear of the wagon and

²⁶⁶ The image of the magician as the master-manipulator was anticipated in an important contemporary story by Thomas Mann, "Mario and the Magician" (1929). It had been translated in the collection *Essays of Three Decades* (1936), which Faulkner had owned since 1937. Broadly, "Mario and the Magician" deals with the rise of Italian Fascism, represented by the magician Cipolla, who draws his audience together in a hypnotic trance by appealing to their deepest desires. At the time that Faulkner was writing *The Hamlet*, Mann was conducting a nationally publicized tour of the U.S. to talk about the rise of fascism in Europe. Joel Hunt has drawn out similar connections between Faulkner's short story "An Error in Chemistry" (1946) and "Mario and the Magician" in "Thomas Mann and Faulkner: Portrait of a Magician," in *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, vol. 8, No. 3 (Summer, 1967), pp. 431-436.

inherent with its own separate and collective motion, like the tail of a kite.
(275)

Like a collage uniting the disparate appeals of advertising culture, the ponies seem like “tatters” of “billboards.” The theme of the circus, with all its implication of desire and fantasy, is a continuous theme in this chapter. When Flem finally arrives, he steps up to the men gathered to stare at the horses and says, “Gentlemen,” as though he were a ringmaster, but that is the only word he utters in the entire episode (275). Working behind the scenes, Flem emphasizes the desiring appeal of the ponies instead of his interactions with the farmers.

After the men get a closer look at the objects of sale, they find them no easier to discern than when they seemed like billboard tatters. “[L]arger than rabbits and gaudy as parrots,” the ponies seem like several creatures at once: “gaudy motionless and alert, wild as deer, deadly as rattlesnakes, quiet as doves” (275). Each of these flickering manifestations expresses a different set of hopes, fears and fantasies for the men who watch the creatures with intent fascination. Later, the ponies are described as a “mirror trick” and as “harlequin,” then as “phantoms” that “seem to multiply” (279, 286, 287). With each of these descriptions, these shifting commodities throw out more heterogeneous appeals, drawing “the peasants” together around the glow of these desirable illusions. Seen by night, the ponies “huddled in mazy camouflage, or singly or in pairs rushed, fluid, phantom, and unceasing, to huddle again in mirage-like clumps” (280). As unlocatable as the destitute farmers’ impossible hopes, the horses are fascinating in their fluid, unceasing “mirage-like” expression of desire.

This “Snopes circus,” as Ratliff calls it, ends badly for the farmers, as the ponies they purchase scatter into the night as “mirage-like” as the hopes that the men attached to

them. But before its dispersal into thin air, Flem's magic act draws the community together by reflecting their shared desires back to them in a commodified form. Like a magnet to metal shards, Flem's conjuration of shared affective impulses within the community gets the people of Frenchman's Bend to think and act with spontaneous isomorphism. The ponies are "inextricable" (a word used to describe them throughout "The Peasants") in the sense that they configure desires that are integral to the community, although the farmers cannot get a purchase on them. No incident more clearly demonstrates the complicity generated by desire than Mrs. Armstid's attempt to retrieve from Flem the five dollars her husband Henry spends for his pony. As the men lining Varner's store avert their gaze, Flem neatly denies having the money. Mrs. Armstid's quiet request depends on the honoring of verbal contracts and a communal sense of justice. Speaking of the Texan, she says, "He said you had the money and I could get it from you." In a recapitulation of the extortive process of diminution that Pat Stamper has taught him, Flem replaces her five dollars with five cents worth of candy, "A little sweetening for the chaps" (322). Flem does not simply take the Armstids' money; rather, he replaces it with an appealing object. In a miniature image of the multi-directional, distracting force of desire, Mrs. Armstid's child eyes the candy the way the men watched the ponies the day before. Flem is able to flaunt Mrs. Armstid's request for restitution because the men on the porch, in their desire for the ponies, find that they complicitously share points of affinity with the Snopesist commodification of desire.

With these strategies, Flem overcomes the parliamentary chorus of Varner's store. The force of these Snopesist appeals evacuates the everyday, political aspects of the farmers' lives in Frenchman's Bend at the same time as it binds them together by

drawing on the traditions and habits that channel their various hopes and fantasies. By appealing directly to the desires that underpin the community, Flem is able to dominate Frenchman's Bend not only financially, but emotionally. Typically a site of micro-political exchange, Will Varner's store-front porch is increasingly silent when Flem is around. The story-telling that characterizes this unofficial parliament of the community becomes dangerous when Flem is listening, because he uses these stories to isolate and manipulate communal desires. V.K. Ratliff, the greatest story-teller in Frenchman's Bend, discovers the dangers of expressing his schemes when, having told someone about his plan to buy up some goats at a profit, he later finds that Flem has overheard him and anticipated his purchase. In the scene with the wild Texas ponies, Flem constructs myths of freedom that the local farmers are vulnerable to. Modifying communal traditions that honor horses as emblems of freedom and power, Flem transforms the useless ponies into a myth, so that he is selling not just "horse flesh" (as his father Ab would have said), but a dream that draws on that hope for freedom and power residing secretly in each farmer. Flem's extortion of "the peasants" is most disturbing, I would argue, because he demonstrates that the desires circulating through Frenchman's Bend are mobile, versatile, and have the force to bind the people together by drawing on the myths that drive them.

As Faulkner recounted to Malcolm Cowley, he began *The Hamlet* with the spotted horses episode and built the rest of the narrative around it (cited in Watson 17). Flem and the spotted horses both made their first appearance as early as the short story "Father Abraham" (1926-1927), and Faulkner continued to rework this story throughout his writing career, producing seven different versions (Porter 164). Cleanth Brooks saw the episode as one of the central moments in the Snopes trilogy, arguing,

the tale of the spotted horses fits perfectly into the story of the rise of Flem Snopes. It is an account of the world of advertising and Madison Avenue, in this instance set down in a little backwater of the community and the faraway days of the dawning 20th century. The people of Frenchman's Bend are stirred up to buy what they do not want and cannot afford and will not be able to use. It is Flem, of course, who is the entrepreneur. (185)

Although Brooks rightly locates the logic of Flem's appealing ponies in advertising culture, he insists that these desires are manipulated from the outside. As I have been at pains to show, however, Flem's appreciation for the importance of horses in his local Yoknapatawpha community is essential to his success. His indigenous sense for the hopes and fantasies that circulate through Frenchman's Bend is central to his ability to "stir up" "the people." Significantly, Brooks fails to ask why these poor farmers are induced to "buy what they do not want and cannot afford and will not be able to use." I would suggest that Faulkner continuously returned to the story of the spotted horses because it explores the micro-dynamics of desiring appeals as they function on registers both larger and smaller than conscious reflection. More powerful than Pat Stamper's trickery, Flem's circus depends on the intimate hopes, fears and fantasies circulating through the community.

After the pony episode, Flem takes on Ratliff, who has acted throughout *The Hamlet* as an ethical counterweight to the rising dominance of Snopesist exploitation. In a show of his resistance to Flem's appeals, he even spurns the ponies, calling them "that Texas disease" (313, 327). However, as with Ike McCaslin, Ratliff's anti-Snopesism is compromised by a too great proximity to what he claims to repudiate as a foreign incursion. The next episode in "The Peasants," and the story that closes *The Hamlet*,

demonstrates Ratliff's susceptibility to the communal fantasies that drive Flem's mythmaking appeals.

In his marriage to Will Varner's voluptuous daughter Eula, Flem takes as a dowry the apparently useless Old Frenchman's Place. The house was originally part of a plantation owned by Louis Grenier, but in the lean times of the late nineteenth century it devolved to Will Varner during his voracious acquisition of neighboring land. This small, virtually abandoned plot comprises the scene of Ratliff's capitulation to Flem's desiring appeals. Though a broken down heap, Frenchman's Place still preserves the mythic aura of the Old South. The place continues to mark the site of a communal reverie, "where thirty years ago a courier" had come with news of the Battle of Sumter, "where perhaps the barouche had moved, the women swaying and pliant in hooped crinoline beneath parasols" (342).²⁶⁷ The "perhaps" signals the vague, permeating quality of this free indirect fantasy as it hovers over Ratliff's thoughts. As Ratliff knows in the back of his mind, however, this unwarranted myth is as groundless as his hopes to find a buried fortune on the abandoned land, but these desires have so many ties to ante-bellum ideals of soil and tradition that he cannot control his irrational impulse to excavate the site.

Convinced that this lost world of hooped crinoline was as opulent as they imagine, Ratliff and his two friends, Bookwright, and Henry Armstid, stake everything they own to buy the land from Flem. Little do they know, Flem has "salted" the place with a few coins. Ratliff and the others uncover these coins quickly enough with the help of Uncle Dick Bolivar, who uses a gold-filled tooth and some old incantations to locate it. In fact, it is this initial discovery that convinces Ratliff and company to buy the land. As

²⁶⁷ The implication is that the women were leaving because the Civil War was beginning (with the Battle of Sumter). In the narrative, this moment is imagined as the apex of Old Southern splendor.

soon as they acquire Old Frenchman's Place, the three men spend night and day working and sleeping there, all the while "dreaming of gold" (364). The further they excavate, the more the narrative uncovers the dilapidated state of the house:

[...] the hall in whose gaping door-frames no doors any longer hung and from whose ceiling depended the skeleton of what had been once a crystal chandelier, with its sweep of stairs whose treads had long since been prized off and carried away to patch barns and chicken-houses and privies, whose spindles and walnut railings and newel-posts had long ago been chopped up and burned as firewood. (364)

The exigencies of poverty have caused the Yoknapatawphans to cannibalize the house, scattering it throughout Frenchman's Bend. Just as individual members of the community maintain a degraded form of the fantasy that sustains the myth of the Old South, so too have they shared out its wood and crystal, converting both the idealized image and concrete materials through the banalizing alchemy of poverty. As they live and work in Old Frenchman's Place, Ratliff, Bookwright, and Armstid progressively uncover the barren emptiness of both the place and the fantasies that inhabit its dilapidated form. In their vain attempts to rediscover the opulence of the Old South, they discover merely the scrounged, second hand dreams that have been disseminated throughout the community.

Bookwright and Ratliff eventually affirm their suspicion that there is nothing to be found at the Old Frenchman's Place when they discover that their coins are newly minted, not part of a buried mythic past but of a present cash nexus. As with the ponies, Flem exchanges hard cash for the desires that circulate through this impoverished, traditionalist community. Ratliff, it turns out, was not immune to these desiring appeals, although he and Bookwright quickly realize their mistake.

Only Armstid cannot recognize the immateriality of his fantasies of buried Old Southern riches, and he goes crazy with desire for the gold that represents both the past glory of the South and the negation of his penurious present. Ironically, he does partially achieve this escape through his insanity, but in doing so he abandons his indigent family to the new, Snopesian South. In Henry's overwhelming desire to re-imagine his present condition, he ends as an automaton, a symbol of this alienated modern world. His "metronome-like labor" references the Taylorist speed-up and mechanization of modern work, but he is not driven by the Fordist assembly line work-ethic (366). As Flem's dominance of Frenchman's Bend attests, Armstid's fantasies of the Old South are a much more powerful compulsion than discipline or threats. Like his fascination for the mirage-like ponies, Armstid cannot free himself from these powerful images of antebellum riches. As he digs incessantly and meaninglessly into the soil, Henry comes to resemble a "mechanical toy," wound by the myths of Old Southern affluence (372). Part human desire, part mechanical compulsion, Henry brings to mind the semi-organic compound of the gold-filled tooth that Uncle Dick used to locate the treasure, but, in place of Uncle Dick's hoodoo spells, Flem has added the nostalgic fantasy of Old Southern opulence.

The people of Frenchman's Bend come to watch Henry with "the rapt interest of a crowd watching a magician at a fair" (370). As with the ponies, Flem is the magician, indirectly manipulating Henry with myth-making incantations in the same way that he forcefully drew the community together around the party-colored "phantoms" from Texas. This ability to play on the desires of the community differentiates him from Will Varner, who in all his years never managed to sell Old Frenchman's Place. On the other hand, what Flem has learned from Varner, as well as Pat Stamper, is not to attach himself

to anything that cannot be exchanged. This is why, unlike anyone else in the community, Flem is impervious to these soil-bound, traditionalist myths of the Old South. Reacting to his family's traumatic impoverishment at the hands of homegrown predators, Flem learns their extortive practices, but he also surpasses them by mobilizing the myth-making strategies that characterize Snopesism. Henry Armstid's insanity represents the most startling effects of these myths, but almost the entire community of Frenchman's Bend is complicitously drawn to these desiring appeals. At the end of accounts, this is what makes Flem most like a magician: the airy way he has of converting lived material conditions into hallucinatory utopian promises.

Conclusions: The End of Flem Snopes

In his magical ability to effect a continuous conversion of fantasy into coin, Flem embodies the force of mixing and exchange that Ike McCaslin associated with Northern industrial capitalism. As we have seen, however, Snopesian exploitation is not a foreign importation; instead, it emerges from tensions and events that are peculiar to the rise of mass culture throughout interwar America. Snopesism names the Southern permutation of the myth-making strategies that sought to overcome the impasses of modern industrial culture. In the previous chapters, we have already encountered similar maneuvers at the 1939 New York World's Fair and in the regionalism of the Southern Agrarians. The common denominator among these various responses to the crisis of modernity in the interwar period is the logic of fascism. Italian Fascism was the first and most thoroughgoing response to this crisis, and the strategies it developed found unlikely points of affinity with many diverse groups and events in interwar American culture. In

its myth-making coordination of desires, Flem's Snopesism is one strong example of this pervasive logic.

In "Delta Autumn," Roth Edmunds articulates the widespread fear that the pervasive problems of modernity would provoke a fascistic response. Wondering whether the tradition of the hunting trips will continue in the future, he suddenly asks, "After Hitler gets through with it? Or Smith or Jones or Roosevelt or Willkie or whatever he will call himself in this country?" (338). This outburst addresses Roth's concern over the fascistization of American culture more so than his fears about international war. When one of the other young men, Legate, responds, "We'll stop him in this country," Roth asks "How? [...] By singing God Bless America in bars at midnight and wearing dime-store flags in our lapels?" (338). In this exchange, Roth perceives the connection between the rising threat of American fascism and the commercialization of mass culture. The "dime-store flags" are no more of a talisman against fascism than Ike's musty codes. Although Ike affirms that enduring ethical values will hold the country together, by the end of the story Ike's rigid code has been swept away by the new commercial mentality that Robert Penn Warren has justly associated with Snopesism.

In *The Fourth Ghost*, Brinkmeyer argues that "Roth's words to Ike point to a diminished American democracy facing forces of dictatorship from both within and without" (188). Further, I would argue that this diminishment of democratic forms is directly tied for Faulkner to the rise of commodity capitalism that both disturbed and fascinated him throughout his life. In his lifelong engagement with Snopesism, Faulkner demonstrated that "old-fashioned southern heroism" was "entirely absent in the 1940s South, with little suggestion that any renewal is possible except in Ike's clouded mind"

(Brinkmeyer 188). In both “Delta Autumn” and the Snopes trilogy, the protectors of the ethical ideals of Southern nobility have “devolved into the little people of modernity, faithless and feckless, the shooters of does, not Germans” (188). Toward the end of Faulkner’s work on the trilogy, Faulkner increasingly associated this set of problems with the native southern Snopesism that had fascinated him for so many years.

In the last volume of the Snopes trilogy, *The Mansion*, Snopesism seems to finally come to an end when Flem is killed by his relative Mink. Significantly, Flem’s daughter, Linda helps to orchestrate his murder. More than any other character, Linda’s actions are instrumental to this dénouement of Faulkner’s thirty-year engagement with Snopesism. She not only maneuvers Mink’s release from Parchman Prison knowing that he will kill Flem, but she also helps him escape afterwards. Almost no one suspects her involvement, however, because she is deaf (the implication being that she could not have known about the gunshot). This biographical detail is key, because it indexes a set of experiences that are extraordinary among Faulkner’s characters. After signing over her portion of inheritance to Flem as a condition for escape, Linda moves to Greenwich Village, marries a Communist Jewish sculptor, and goes to fight fascism in Spain. Her husband dies there, but she continues on as an ambulance driver on the front lines, until she is deafened by an explosion. Her deafness is thus a symbol of both her abandonment of Flem’s commercial world and her active anti-fascism as a “commonist.”²⁶⁸

Nonetheless, despite clear instances of Linda’s hostility to Snopesism, Flem, even in his death, has the last word, for he is liquidated into cash through his life insurance

²⁶⁸ Linda is not the only Faulknerian female character to come into contact with fascism. In the 1945 appendix to *The Sound and the Fury*, Caddy shows up one last time, in a photograph sitting beside a Nazi general. In *The Fourth Ghost*, Brinkmeyer provocatively reads this final appearance of Caddy as a dual indictment of “southern and Nazi authoritarianism” (199).

policy, thereby perpetuating the constant cycle of exchange that has characterized his role in the narrative. Linda immediately converts Flem's fungible life into the mythic symbol of freedom *par excellence* when she uses his policy money to buy the Jaguar roadster that will allow her to escape Yoknapatawpha once and for all. While this makes her one of the few Faulkner characters to permanently leave the county, she realizes her fantasy of escape only by reinvesting her desires into a system of exchange that represents the myth-making appeal of Snopesism.

As we have seen with the Futurama exhibit at the 1939 New York World's Fair, the image of the car was a dense site of myth-making in the interwar period. Faulkner's own Model T with a modified yellow racer body and his comments about buying "a Cadillac car on the installment plan" also attest to its force to entice even the strongest anti-Snopesian. This ability to capture desire expresses the pervasive logic that we have been tracing in these chapters. The conversion of Flem's life into Linda's hopes conveys Snopesism's capacity to coordinate the complex flow of desires through myth-making. This narrative episode, culminating Faulkner's life-long engagement with Snopesism, characterizes his ambivalent attitude toward what Robert Penn Warren has identified as "the forces of modernity."

Conclusion:
American Culture and the Question of Fascism

We began this investigation of fascism in interwar American culture by exploring the fraught history of scholarship on European fascist regimes. As I noted in the introduction, locating a feasible definition of fascism poses a dual challenge: as one of the most important socio-political developments of the twentieth century, fascism demands a clear definition, and yet it has persistently resisted the binary framework through which social critics, writers and intellectuals have tried to view this multivalent phenomenon. To highlight the most significant of these simplifications, historical and cultural evidence does not sustain the claim that fascism can be understood as the inversion of democracy. If anything, fascism's populist appeal makes less certain the philosophical grounding of democratic capitalism in countries like the United States.

The contradictory elements of fascism that make it so difficult to delimit are also a central aspect of its ability to draw on an active popular base while at the same time creating a de-politicized context for this participation. As many critics and historians have observed, fascism has been difficult to define because it promised revolution coupled with stability, tradition and a modern youth culture, technological utopia and the agrarian pastoral, capitalist growth without strikes, socialistic mass organization without class politics, and many other cultural, social, and political antinomies. Far from representing the incoherence of an ad hoc regime, fascism can be understood as an overlapping set of techniques that deployed various and contradictory appeals as it

mirrored the vacillating and inconsistent desires of the new mass public. As an analogue to the rise of fascism in Europe, the social and technological ecology of the United States was dramatically reconfigured in the breakdown of traditional forms of political representation. In my investigation of interwar American culture, I have observed the co-emergence of strategies in fascist Europe and in the United States for drawing together a depoliticized, organically cohesive People. A vast array of writers and social critics in the United States between the wars manifest these shared concerns in their constant, obsessive recurrence to the question of fascism.

My argument can be summarized in the claim that American interwar culture evinces a continuous and heterogeneous engagement with the question of fascism. Offering a range of techniques for subsuming these multiple, contradictory desires into a participatory community, fascism was simultaneously appealing and frightening to Americans between the wars, showing that social relations could be stripped of their political effects while also offering the utopian hope for a conflict-free community.

The first aim of this project, therefore, has been to demonstrate beyond further dispute that Americans were indeed constantly engaged with the question of fascism, and that a serious consideration of fascism is essential to future work on interwar American culture. The second aim has been to explore the range and complexity of the American response to this abiding fascination. Some American writers and critics characterize fascism as an anti-democratic, totalitarian imposition from the top by a conspiratorial elite. The intellectual and self-identifying American fascist Lawrence Dennis, for example, hoped that fascism would bring a “radical program of sociological rationalization” to the United States by coordinating authority and control around a few

leaders (442). “Assuming that the old system is doomed,” Dennis posits, “what are the possible alternatives to ultimate social disintegration and chaos?” (438). His response, that top-down authority was essential to avoid “chaos,” was widely felt between the wars.

This image of fascism as a totalitarian regime instrumentally effectuating a policy of social control on a passive populace was common on both the right and the left. In *After the New Deal, What?* (1936), the leader of the socialist party, Norman Thomas, argues, “[i]n no country is it more important than in the United States that there should be a correct understanding of the nature of fascism” (143). The primary risk in the United States, according to Thomas, is the likelihood of “a new crisis, whether of war or of economic collapse, which will bring the occasion for an American Fascism” (147). Like Dennis, Thomas contends that this impending chaos will generate a totalitarian dictatorship in the United States:

The dictator will therefore be under the same necessity as a Mussolini or a Hitler to divert the attention of the masses [from economic and social collapse] and to hypnotize them by a passionate nationalism expressed through the totalitarian state. (150)

The image of the hypnotic dictator controlling the passive crowds (one of the most common images of fascism in the interwar period) characterizes the same instrumentalist vision of conspiracy and manipulation behind Lawrence’s hopes for the fascistization of the United States. Despite their apparent differences, Lawrence and Thomas share a parallel sensibility about the totalitarian structure of fascism.

As I argued in the introduction, this description of fascism as a totalitarian institution has contributed importantly to thought and scholarship both before and after

the Second World War.²⁶⁹ At the same time, however, this model has tended to understand fascism as a monolithic phenomenon to such an extent that it has been ineffective at explaining fascism's evident populist appeal. The challenge posed by Deleuze, that "the masses certainly do not passively submit to power," has guided my own rethinking of the totalitarian model (*A Thousand Plateaus* 215). The multivalent lines drawing together personal desires and regime policies will not be fully understood until we abandon the notions that power only functions at the macro-level, and that desire is linear. The fact that the American fascination with fascism has been mainly ignored up to this point is indicative of the shortcomings of this totalitarian model which, ironically, reproduces some of the same reductive effects as it accuses fascism of carrying forward. Exploring fascism at the regime level, in other words, equally necessitates grappling with what Deleuze calls "micro-fascisms," or the everyday affective appeals that made fascism a populist (as well as a regime) force.

Understanding the active flow of desires in the new American mass public has meant conceptualizing social change at scales both larger and smaller than the traditional citizen-subject. As Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari argue, "[d]esire is never separable from complex assemblages that necessarily tie into molecular levels from microformations already shaping postures, attitudes, perceptions" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 215). Evidence for this "segmentarity" of desire abounds in the interwar period. While scholars such as Peter Fritzsche and Andrew Stuart Bergerson have recently begun to

²⁶⁹ While the argument for fascism as totalitarian can be located in specific studies like Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), this conclusion unexpectedly finds its way into a wide variety of studies. For example, Richard Etlin's very interesting work on culture and architecture under European fascism tends to develop a causal relationship between regime policy and the cultural and political effects of these strategies. See, for example, Etlin's *Art, Culture, and Media under the Third Reich* (1996); and *Nationalism in the Visual Arts*, edited by Etlin (1991).

explore everyday life under Nazism, important studies of Italian and French fascism have by now conclusively demonstrated the multivalent dimensions of life under the regime.²⁷⁰ In the United States between the wars, considerations of fascism were often tied to the day-to-day experiences of Americans. Langston Hughes, for example, writes “[o]f course, I am against fascism with its spread of color prejudice and race hatred and working class oppression. How could any sensible Negro be otherwise?” (*Writers Take Sides* 31). His question, so apparently charged with tensions in American culture, forcefully demonstrates the felt linkages between the everyday experience of racism and the coalescence of a systematically oppressive regime. While “race hatred and working class oppression” were enacted in the United States on an interpersonal level, rather than being carried out by a top-down dictatorial regime, it was clear to many writers and social critics in the interwar period that there was an intimate connection between the hopes, fears and fantasies that circulated through culture, and the accumulation of these effects into the resonating network called fascism.

Despite their differences, Lawrence Dennis, Norman Thomas and Langston Hughes are drawn to the question of fascism. In the introduction I diagrammed fascism as an intensive spike at the point of the perceived disintegration of community, drawing into itself a wide network of related concerns: technological changes, aesthetic wholeness, cultural myths, organicist ideals, and many others. In the United States between the wars, these elastic segmentarities conjoin into large, dense assemblages that attract the

²⁷⁰ Bergerson argues in *Ordinary Germans in Extraordinary Times* (2004) that “the Nazi revolution from above depended to a large degree on a parallel, relatively independent revolution from below, a transformation in everyday habits” (253). Some of the most important studies of fascism and everyday life include work by Jeffrey Schnapp, Mark Antliff, and Victoria De Grazia, as well as the sociological investigations of Luisa Passerini. For an extensive discussion of the scholarship on Italian and French culture under fascism, see my introduction.

extraordinary array of figures we have looked at in this investigation. Whether nominally sympathetic or hostile to fascism, the heterogeneous descriptions of this phenomenon in interwar America mirror the diverse cultural segmentarities drawn into its orbit.

The Larger Picture

Each of these experiences with fascism can be further explored as an aspect of the terrain characterizing this “plateau” in interwar American culture. I have not dealt with the many and significant points of contact between racism and fascism that Langston Hughes writes about, nor have I looked at the fascistic use of violence that John Steinbeck witnessed firsthand as a journalist in Salinas Valley, California. To take two more examples, Jonathan Dahlberg explores the connections between American anti-Semitism and fascism in *Those Who Perish* (1934), while Dashiell Hammett’s *Red Harvest* (1929) depicts fascistic gangsterism in the United States. These diverse accounts have important affinities with my project, emerging from the same plateau of complex effects we refer to as “culture,” but they also present different sets of intensities that demand their own studies by experts in the related fields of Jewish-American and African-American studies, the history of labor and the rise of organized crime in interwar America.

Rather than attempting to encompass once and for all the question of fascism, my investigation has been meant as an invitation to further study. The multiplicity of fascism requires an ongoing examination that moves beyond reductive binaries to a more sensitive inquiry into the contradictory hopes, fears and fantasies that make up the socio-politics of American culture. The aim of this study has been to provide a basis for future

explorations emerging from the questions posed by figures like Hughes, Steinbeck, Dahlberg, Hammett and others.

Although I have focused on the interwar period, the Second World War did not signal the end of the American fascination with fascism. Further avenues of study also include the post-war cultural and literary examinations of fascism via the continuing emergence of mass technologies, the destabilization of traditional modes of political representation, and the abiding commitment to an idealized image of a depoliticized, conflict-free collectivity. Literary works ranging from Philip K. Dick's *Man in the High Castle* (1962) and Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969) to Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* (2004) and Norman Mailer's *The Castle in the Forest* (2007) all take fascism as their theme. Each year in the United States, there are countless educational courses, conferences, and publications focusing on fascism. Equally important in the cultural debates of our period, fascism has shown up in the Bush administration's use of the epithet "Islamofascism" and, conversely, in the journalist Naomi Wolfe's accusation that the Bush administration represents the revival of fascism. In yet another mutation of the term in these ongoing debates, Jonah Goldberg's best-selling *Liberal Fascism* (2008) attempts to reverse Bertram Gross's *Friendly Fascism* (1980), which situated the foreign policy of the American right in the context of fascism. The contradictory interpretations of fascism in these various texts, media, and events continue to attest to both its importance for American culture and the challenge of locating this heterogeneous phenomenon.

Altogether, the scholarly work alone on the subject of fascism is by now far too large for a single scholar to encompass. And yet despite the ubiquity of our

considerations of fascism, there has been relatively little concerted investigation of the American fascination with fascism. Fields like American studies can benefit from the body of scholarly research on European and other forms fascism while also making their own important contributions through investigations that illuminate central aspects of American culture. I have made the foregoing study in the hopes that careful scholarly work on the interwar period will help us to explore the uncertainties about technology, mass culture, and political representation that continue to characterize the United States today.

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