

**Spectra of Singularity: Episodes of Improvisational Lyricism from Hip-hop to
Pragmatism**

by

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Sensitized to the power of the phatic and the ineffable . . .

■ Paul Gilroy

Words can take us so far; words can take us to the edge of the forest. Now we have to go in.

■ Sakyong Mipham

And the singular soul meditating in solitude is better than any talking, because it is only in the depths of individual experience that the spiritual can be discovered and lived in a fully real way.

■ Reginald Ray

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Chapter One

Introduction: My Hiphop Philosophy—“A Strange Affinity”

This project works backwards: a contemporary concern—my deep engagement with hiphop music—is used as a heuristic device through which to resound the historical trajectory of American modernism. The intention is not so much to explicate an airtight genealogy as to dwell upon the juxtaposition of two bodies of work separated by a temporal gap but nevertheless possessing significant and unexplored similarities. Such a comparison can provide a novel understanding of both terms. Pragmatism—especially as enunciated in the work of William James—is chosen as a starting point due both to its prominence in the history of American modernism and because I believe it holds a strange, but compelling, affinity with hiphop. As soon as I began reading James’s work, I intuited a connection between it and hiphop and as I grew more familiar with it my sense that he and the contemporary musicians I had been studying were concerned with the same issues and had developed remarkably similar approaches to their engagement became stronger. To a large extent, the current project comes down to giving voice to this intuition, despite the difficulty involved in articulating it. I am given assistance, however, by the wide-ranging literature tracing the rich interaction of pragmatism and the African American vernacular, particularly the work of Carrie Bramen, Michael Magee, Ross Posnock, and, of course, Cornel West.¹

James's pragmatism—especially as elaborated by his students Gertrude Stein and W.E.B. Du Bois—touches deeply upon two related concerns that have arisen through my study and enjoyment of hiphop music: improvisational lyricism, on the one hand, and the interaction between personal development and artistic achievement, on the other. The philosophy of affect and expression issuing out of James's work and the variations his successors performed upon it must be considered acts of art as well as of thought. Pragmatism, as I use it, is a means for enacting thinking as improvisational lyricism and thereby eliciting affective resonance from one's audience. It is also, at the same time, a method of achieving and reflecting upon self-realization—and thereby reshaping reality—through aesthetic practice and theory. Pragmatism as improvisational lyricism infuses language with music, working with found materials to achieve the unforeseen. In this capacity, it serves as a means for working through and struggling to communicate one's most unique and deeply felt—and by the same token most difficult to articulate—experiences. That is, it is a program for engaging what I call the existential problematic of singularity in order to trigger an ongoing process of attunement that gives rise to an ever-expanding ensemble of practitioners dedicated to fully sounding singularity's plural potentials, dwelling upon the differences that we all share. As such, it serves as a touchstone from which to begin explicating the independently invented but deeply similar philosophy that lies behind and motivates the music of hiphop. At the same time, hiphop can be heard as the fulfillment of the promise implicit in the work of James, Stein, and Du Bois. In order to begin unpacking this argument, I will now tell the story of how I got from hiphop to pragmatism in the first place.

Once Upon a Time Not Long Ago

well now you're forced
to listen to the teacher
and the lesson
class is in session
so you can stop guessin

if this is a tape
or a written down memo
see I am a professional
this is not a demo in fact
call it a lecture
a visual picture
sort of a poetic
and rhythm like mixture
listen

well ^{now} you're **for**
ced
to **lis**
ten to the **tea**cher
and the **les**son
CLASS is in **ses**sion
so can stop guess **in**
you
if this is a **tape**
or a ^{writ}ten down **mem**^o
see **I** am a **profes**sional
this is not a **dem**^o **in fact**
call it a **lec**ture
a **visu**al **pic**ture
sort of a **po**etic
and **rhy**thm **like** **mix**ture
listen

■ KRS-One, "Poetry"²

One of the first hip-hop records I bought, a few years after a friend sent me a dubbed copy of Run-DMC's *Raising Hell*, was Boogie Down Productions' *By All Means Necessary*. The reference to Malcolm X meant something to me, and it was a major reason why I picked up the album in the first place. As it turned out, more than the cover photo of KRS-One holding an Uzi in one hand and lifting back the curtains to peek out his front window with the other, it was the record's first track that mixed up the future of hip-hop with my own. The DJ drops the question "So you're a philosopher?" and cuts the

response “Yes, I think very deeply” with the emphasis on the first syllable so the listener is crystal clear about the positive response. My head starts to bob as the scratched rhythm blends into one of hip-hop’s perfect beats—a loop of “Sister Sanctified,” composed by Weldon Irvine and performed by Stanley Turrentine. KRS starts spitting lyrics, and I am hooked for good. More than what he is saying, it is his style that gets me open. It is cool that KRS plays the role of the teacher against wannabe kings and sucka MCs, letting me know “it’s not about a salary, it’s all about reality.” But what makes it real are not these words by themselves, but the way they are transformed by the sound of KRS’s voice and mixed with the beat.

The whole style of the song teaches me what it means to be fresh, dope, wild, chill. These are the main qualities that make hip-hop what it is. Fresh: smooth, swift, brilliant. Dope: solid, steady, deep. Wild: explosive, exceptional, eccentric. Chill: cool, composed, concentrated. Listening to “My Philosophy” is the first time I remember hearing hip-hop in full effect, the optimal balance of fresh, dope, wild, chill. I wanted to follow in KRS’s footsteps. He presented a powerful example of how these four potentially conflicting qualities could be mixed into coherent fusions of language and music, creating improvisational sounds of edutainment. It would take a few years for this lesson to really sink in. Although I knew how to appreciate these sounds, I had yet to learn how to make them my own. I needed to find my own style, make my own voice out of the gifts I had been given. I was in search of a new element, my own original contribution to the world of hip-hop.

The summer after my junior year in college, I was living in New York City researching my honors thesis, checking out graduate schools, and in general planning my

future. Given my limited budget, one of my favorite pastimes—other than free movie screenings and the concerts I absolutely could not miss—was browsing in bookstores. I especially enjoyed the large chains, because the volume of customers could easily camouflage the fact that my casual shopping would often take many hours. I would skim books that I could not afford to buy, taking notes. It was roughly equivalent to the access I had to the university libraries in the area, but the ambiance was better. One day, when I found myself in the Barnes and Noble in Astor Place, I decided to take a break from my studies and check out the magazines. Of course, I went straight to the music section and was struck once again by the sad state of American hip-hop journalism.³ My mood improved when I came across a British magazine called *Trace*. The latest issue caught my eye because Goldie was on the cover, one of the musicians broadcasting the hip-hop-spawned genre of “drum and bass” from London to the rest of the world.

I had started to get into this kind of music a few months before, digging the way it flipped the hip-hop script by smashing breakbeat and speed records. I turned immediately to the cover story. After a few lines, I went to the bookstore café, splurged on a cup of coffee, and transcribed pretty much the entire article in the same notebook where I had been bouncing back and forth between planning my honors thesis on American literature and drawing up outlines for my dissertation on hip-hop. The combination was somewhat of a mess, but my current find would help me clear things up a bit. What struck me most about the interview was how Goldie presents the way he moved from being a hip-hop head to becoming a drum and bass musician by drawing on his experience as a graffiti writer. Hip-hop sampling, he suggests, grows into drum and bass the same way plain old block letters grow into wildstyle. Will Ashon, Goldie’s

interviewer, explains that “in wildstyle, the writer ‘processes’ letters again and again, twisting them into ever more abstract shapes until they are unrecognizable as the original letters.” Hip-hop sampling does the same thing, with sounds rather than letters, forming the foundation for drum and bass’s further advances. “It’s all about processing sound and taking sound forward,” Goldie tells Ashon, “as opposed to just using the sample.”

Goldie’s view of making music meshes with his broader understanding of style. Just as in sampling you have to use what you find to make something new rather than just repeating the old, to be a hip-hop head “you can’t just take it up and think that’s it—go and buy a baseball cap, get some sneakers and you’re down. It’s about progressing your own space.” Ashon noted that “Goldie’s approach to life/music/art” vibed with “KRS-One’s notion that the root of hip-hop is self-creation.” In fact, a shorter interview he did with KRS is published as a sidebar along with the Goldie article, in which Ashon continued exploring the comparison. “The zenith of hip-hop, the movement, the forward movement of hip-hop is exactly what you’re talking about,” KRS agreed, “create new things, create self. Now we’re in a position where we can create new laws and new philosophies where before we could only re-create the turntable and dance and art and singing.”⁴ Reading this brought me back to the experience of hearing “My Philosophy” for the first time. The notion of hip-hop philosophy was resounding with both old meanings and new possibilities. Thinking through this mix I started to hear my own voice, the first sounds of my own style. I would give back what hip-hop artists had given me by working to transform what I had learned from their examples into something of my own, contributing to the development of a new element of our common culture. Before I could present my version of hip-hop philosophy, though, I would have to find a

way to render in words what these art forms mean to me, how they make this meaning, and why they are so important. The notion of processing that Goldie put together from his experiences with sampling, graffiti, and hiphop style in general was a clue. But I would have work to do on my own in order to realize this glimmering prospect by mixing it up with what I was learning in school.

In college I majored in English, but my interest in the world beyond literature placed me as part of a trend within that discipline migrating towards an evasive destination called cultural studies. Even within this broader field I felt a bit hampered, though. Much of the work in cultural studies, especially when it is informed by the study of literature, takes literature as a model for culture in general. At its extreme this approach reduces the world to one big “text,” nipping my extracurricular ambitions in the bud. Assuming that everything works like literature makes it hard to understand why anyone would study anything else. In particular, I found this overemphasis on the “literary” discouraging because it resulted in a picture of hiphop music in which lyrics and beats are treated just like words on a page. The sounds at the heart of hiphop culture were nowhere to be heard. In short, there was little that was fresh, dope, wild, or chill about the current state of hiphop scholarship. In my first year of graduate school, though, I began to learn more about other disciplines that suggested promising approaches to forms of cultural activity other than literature. Particularly interesting for me were anthropology and intellectual history. These two disciplines may seem to conflict, one focusing on the foreign yet ordinary and the other on the familiar yet obscure. As I learned about them, however, they have been complementary. For me, both present thinking as an ordinary activity, a shared experience that forms an important part of everyday life across various

settings. This mix of anthropology and intellectual history infused the ways of reading and writing I had learned through studying literature, and I began to get a sense for how I could transform cultural studies into a way of studying culture that could voice my hip-hop philosophy. I would begin working through this fusion by studying improvisation.

In order to begin exploring my way of studying culture, I started an ethnographic project on the hip-hop scene in Detroit. I was a participant observer at a local open mic night during the year that it lasted. My first night there I started a friendship with the organizer of the open mic, an aspiring hip-hop musician who goes by the name Lacks (aka Ta'Raach). Over the next few weeks Lacks introduced me to Hodgepodge (aka Big Tone) and Elzhi, the other members of his crew, the Breakfast Club. During this period of listening to hungry MCs battle over the mic and hanging out with the Breakfast Club I would become familiar with freestylin, the art of improvisational lyricism that would give me a sense of how to express what hip-hop means to me.⁵ I wrote an essay about my experience of doing ethnography, working to present freestylin not only as the art of kicking lyrics off the top of the dome but also as a way of thinking on your feet. Freestylin involves diligently improvising, not only on stage or in the studio, but throughout the different parts of the world an MC moves through. The experience of learning how to do improvisational lyricism flows through artistic activity to infuse other aspects of his or her life in the form of meaningful and effective ways of doing things in general, ways that balance the competing demands of structure and spontaneity, convention and singularity.⁶ Freestylin, then, is hip-hop's equivalent to the pragmatism

James developed and that Stein and Du Bois elaborated upon. Or, James and his students could be understood to have been engaged in freestylin before the letter.

From this perspective, it seemed to me that independent hiphop musicians like Lacks, Tone, and El—artists who strive to retain a sense of artistic integrity throughout the inevitable compromises they make—provide compelling examples of how to go about doing my own work as a hiphop scholar. This lesson was brought home for me during the interview I did with the Breakfast Club, capping my experience as a participant observer. We had been trying to arrange a time when we could all get together for a while, without success. Finally, when we were all hanging out after an open mic one night, around two in the morning, we decided to head over to a nearby all-night café to talk for a few hours while we ate. Admittedly, this was not exactly what came to mind when I heard the word “interview,” but the results were beyond what I could have expected. Rather than asking a series of preformulated technical questions, I was more interested in just talking about how Lacks, Tone, and El had gotten into hiphop, what it meant to them, why they wanted to be musicians. We reminisced about our similar experiences digging the sounds of our favorite MCs, DJs, and producers, wanting to make those sounds our own by learning how to put together our own versions of hiphop style. When our conversation turned to the present, the tone shifted as the positive energies of aspiration met the resistance of the reality of being an independent hiphop musician in Detroit, where venues, labels, and audiences are unpredictable and often temporary.

By the time we did the interview, Lacks had become frustrated with the experience of organizing his open mic. He explained that he wanted to recreate the freestylin events

that had played such an important role in his own hiphop education, to provide an opportunity for younger MCs to learn their craft. But he found that the effort was more of a struggle than he had expected. The people who showed up to claim their share of the mic time seemed more interested in imitating the sort of artists who made platinum records than developing new styles and participating in the common activities that make up the shared experience of hiphop that he was working to maintain. The frustration of trying to teach his peers the basic principles of the art of freestylin with limited success compounded the struggles he was having getting his career off the ground. Lacks felt less sure that he could bring back the vibe of freestylin on his own, and decided to take a less active role in organizing the open mic, letting the owners of the venue do what they could with it. “I’m just going to let it continue itself,” he said, “and if it rises it rises. I’m not going to put everything into it, but I felt like I had to because there was nothing.” Lacks still wanted independent hiphop to be as strong in his home town as it seemed it could be during the freestylin sessions he participated in a few years back, but he had learned that “only the people can bring the vibe back.” Although he held out hope, Lacks was less positive about this possibility than he had been at first. “People are lost,” Lacks told me, “they don’t know what to do.”

Lacks’s sense of struggle resonated with me, but I was also a bit taken aback by what I took to be a note of defeat in his voice, an assumption that soon proved to be mistaken. I asked what he thought needed to change, putting the emphasis on the last word. Lacks rose to the challenge, straightening his posture, his eyes widening. “Thinking!” he said with force. “Howdoyouhowdowehowdoyou go about c h a n g i n g t h i n k i n g?” I asked, clearly thrown for a loop, “Or do you just assume that it’s

going to change?” By this point Tone was laughing as he listened to our exchange, but not in a mean way. It was more like he was saying, “I know how you feel. I’ve been there myself. But that’s just the way it is.” As Tone gave me what sounded like a pat on the back, Lacks answered my question. “Hope . . . teach,” he said, more relaxed but his voice still sounding strong, “teach through being an example, yaknowwhati’msayin.” The note Lacks ended on, one that had been sounded continuously throughout the course of our conversation, made it clear that my mistake had not strained our relationship. He knew that the learning process is a bumpy road, and still considered me someone with experiences similar to his, pursuing the same prospects. Like me, Lacks wanted to communicate and contribute to what hip hop means to us. What he had learned, and what he was teaching me, was that there are certain limits to what anyone can do on their own. Lacks recognized those limits and decided that his example could be made more effective through his music than through struggling to keep a mediocre open mic alive.⁷

Although at first this decision confused me, the more I thought about Lacks’s position, the more it made sense. It made sense because I began to realize that Lacks was also teaching me that there are limits to what hip hop as a whole can do. It was not just the harsh realities that the open mic Lacks started would pass away and the coffee shop where it took place would also soon go out of business that tempered my expectations. Despite these failures, hip hop was still meaningful for us, perhaps more so. In fact, such mistakes are valuable in themselves because without them we would not continue learning and striving to change for the better. My experience doing ethnography taught me that what makes freestylin a meaningful way of thinking and doing things is not necessarily its practical applications, although these are important. What makes this kind

of improvisation a common activity in our everyday life is simply the fact that it is artistic. As the example of James's pragmatism will show, the aesthetic dimension is in fact at the very heart of practicality. Art can shape a shared experience that teaches a lesson and touches on ethics without being anything other than art. It is through the engagement of the existential problematic of expressing singularity that the pedagogical imperative of turning an audience into an attuned ensemble is pursued. This is what it means to "teach through being an example." This is how one keeps hoping that more and more people will catch the drift of "yknowwhati'msayin." This was the tone that I would seek to emphasize as I revised my paper about doing ethnography. During the process of revision, I would infuse the presentation of my experience doing ethnography with an additional stream of meaning that was now my strongest point. What I now knew about freestylin mixed with my interest in rendering the sounds of hiphop, and the combination painted a picture of hiphop lyricism as a form of music, infusing music through language by treating words as sounds. In making this presentation, I compared the process of lyrical improvisation with the notion of sampling as "processing" that I had picked up from Goldie, and which I found further fleshed out in the work of Joe Schloss.⁸

The aspect of Schloss's work that I found particularly insightful was his definition of the basic operations that make up the sampling process. Interviewing a number of hiphop producers, Schloss found that they shared a way of talking about three basic ways of working with samples. He traces these ways of sampling back to the unique forms of working with records developed by the DJs who provided the initial spark setting off the whole style of hiphop. For producers, the most fundamental form of sampling—the basic concept that the other two main techniques are in fact variations on—is flipping.

Flipping is a matter of creating an unexpected effect through the manipulation of sampled sounds—or, more difficult, taking something familiar, thin, uninteresting, or corny and making it sound fresh, dope, wild, chill. Often this is done through making effective mixes of things that do not seem to go together, drawing out real commonalities while also maintaining a certain independence for each of the various elements. For example, part of what makes a hiphop record remarkable is that drums from a funk 45 and strings from a classical LP, when layered one on top of the other, sound good together without sounding like the same thing. Not that a hiphop track is always in pieces. A good song is a whole, but a whole that is composed through the ongoing tension of its parts, making constructive use of dissonance. Further, since sampling works with readily available sound recordings, flipping is rooted in that aspect of improvisation that involves using the limits of the materials we are currently given in order to change them. The tension that sustains a good record is neither steady equilibrium nor swirling randomness. It is regular fluctuation achieved and sustained through constructive dissonance. At the heart of sampling, freestylin, and hiphop style as a whole is this sensibility of constructive dissonance, a feel for mixing what we find to improvise new things. This is one of the main things it shares in common with Jamesian pragmatism.

As Schloss points out, one of the main things producers enjoy about flipping is the challenge of achieving self-expression through the processing of found objects, channeling spontaneity and building structure by drawing upon—and stretching—the embedded constraints of source material. Towards this end, producers often alter the tone, timbre, or tempo of the sample. Sometimes they break a sample into pieces and rearrange them, engaging in the second main technique of sampling, called chopping.

Chopping is often contrasted with looping, the third basic form of sampling. Looping entails making a beat out of one or more sampled phrases that are layered and repeated. Chopping is more technically complicated, but even in looping a certain degree of skill is involved in making the breaks that form a sample in the first place. Both kinds of flipping can sound just as good. The way hip-hop producers chop samples into small pieces and put them back together to make a seamless beat is astounding. Loops can be equally entrancing by letting the energy of a favorite sample build through repetition and, especially when loops are layered, bringing out unexpected nuances from the background of a familiar stream of sound.⁹

Schloss's work proved useful for my interest in freestylin because I found the same processes of flipping, chopping, and looping to be basic forms of lyricism as well as producing.¹⁰ The difference is that while producing transforms sound recordings through the process of sampling, lyricism transforms language by treating words like sounds. In combination beats and lyrics hold together overlapping sequences of potentially conflicting materials to form connections that are as flexible and fluid as they are sound and sensible. A good hip-hop joint is one that balances singularity and convention by making constructive use of dissonance. This hip-hop improvisation composes a unique, balanced, and versatile fusion of words and sounds that motivates us to keep reworking what it means to be fresh, dope, wild, chill. Freestylin and sampling are overlapping aspects of hip-hop style, forming shared experiences and common activities through which we take up the challenge of continuously making and remaking culture. The forms of hip-hop art, and the sensibility of constructive dissonance through which we approach and sustain the regular fluctuation of hip-hop style, not only makes music. In making

music it sounds unique ways of thinking and living. In short, when successfully combined through constructive dissonance, lyrics and beats make a music of fusion that configures our experience through hip-hop culture, organizing a common way of life and a shared world of sounds in which improvisation plays a leading role. As episodes of improvisational lyricism in their own right, the works of James, Stein, and Du Bois also work to infuse language with music and realize the ethical implications of this type of aesthetic experimentation. That is to say, what I experience hip-hop doing at the turn of the twenty-first century, they experienced pragmatism doing at the turn of the twentieth.

Forming this picture went a long way towards helping me express what the sounds of hip-hop mean to me, but it was not the end of the task that I had set myself. I was not just interested in presenting this view of hip-hop as a fact. The music does this on its own, and if I was going to contribute to the development of what musicians have created I would have to make a further contribution that gestures towards the broader prospects of hip-hop. In addition to painting a picture, I wanted to find out and make known how this picture works. As Lacks had taught me, this question of working did not begin and end with the question of how hip-hop music could have practical, even political, effects. In order to get into this ethical territory I would first have to figure out how, artistically, these fusions of sounds and words can be made.¹¹ Further, I needed to get a sense of how musicians learn to do so. Finally, I wanted to know what exactly hip-hop music does that sounds good and why these sounds are so meaningful. Working to address these questions led me to consider what lessons I could draw for my way of studying hip-hop from the more developed field of studying jazz.¹² This comparison would help me to realize how hip-hop's sounds of fusion moved through a broader field of improvisation. In the

process, I would begin to get a sense for how hip-hop culture, beyond forming meaningful experiences of its own, composes a promising way of thinking about life and the world in general. In particular, being a hip-hop scholar came to mean not only studying hip-hop. What I really wanted to do was make studying into a way of doing hip-hop. The unique rendition of American modernism, with improvisational lyricism at its heart, that this project performs is an attempt at just that. According to the terms of this undertaking it makes sense to view contemporary independent musicians as latter-day pragmatists, *and* to hear James, Stein, and Du Bois as hip-hop artists before the letter.

Pursuing this second possibility, James can be heard—in the many lectures that he gave, some of which formed the basis of his most significant publications—sounding the same sort of edutainment KRS-One both prescribes and performs on “My Philosophy.” Stein can be read to “process” grammar in the same way wildstyle graffiti processes typography. Du Bois can be understood to “teach through being an example” like Lacks does, thereby working to inspire the formation of an attuned ensemble that stages a plumbing of the depths of singularity, breaking conventions to make way for the sort of affective resonance that catalyzes liberatory experiments in sociality. Both hip-hop and pragmatism are aesthetic practices with ethical upshots. They are ways of changing thinking (enriching feeling, broadening experience) in order to craft new modalities of personal interaction. Hip-hop can be understood as a remix of American modernism, but this is so only because pragmatism’s practical aesthetics enacts operations similar to those that form the core toolkit of sampling and freestylin.

In charting this course I am informed by, engaging, and intervening in several overlapping bodies of scholarship, the most obvious and prominent being the secondary

literature on James. This material is quite voluminous, covering a vast range of topics from epistemology to ethics. Most pertinent for my own purposes has been the work of a handful of scholars who have chosen to stress an aesthetic approach and in doing so have written, so to speak, the prolegomena to my own rendering of Jamesian pragmatism as a philosophy of improvisation including as a core component an insistence that its articulation be artful. Pioneering this strain of inquiry, Jacques Barzun has illustrated how James's experience as a painter shaped the composition of his first major work, *The Principles of Psychology*. In doing so he makes a compelling case for the argument that for James matters of aesthetics suffuse consciousness, experience, and everyday life in general and writ large. On this basis, he goes on to argue that what distinguishes pragmatism as a philosophy is that it is also an art, going so far as to claim that "the artist is the pragmatist par excellence."¹³ In his extensive reading of *Principles*, Barzun pieces together a picture of the human psyche as born and bred improviser. It was on the basis of this psychology of improvisation, he goes on to suggest, that the lectures collected under the title of *Pragmatism* both outline and embody a philosophical program of artistic expression.

Following Barzun's lead, Richard Poirier seizes on James's call for "the reinstatement of the vague" in *Principles* as the opening salvo of an improvisational campaign of experimental literature. Arguing that the distinguishing feature of pragmatism is "a kind of rapid or wayward movement of voice," Poirier suggests that for James philosophy was equivalent to poetry—particularly, I would add, of the lyric variety.¹⁴ Supplementing and working to make concrete the claims of Poirier, in *Mallarmé's Children: Symbolism and the Renewal of Experience*, Richard Cándida Smith shows how the French Symbolists

and the members of the American avant-garde informed by them drew on James's notion of the self as something that is constantly improvised rather than ready made from the outset in order to pursue their artistic experiments. My own work seeks to add to this aesthetic approach to James by foregrounding, more than has been done previously, the role of musicality in his work. Part of this slight retuning is drawing on *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, rather than *Principles* or *Pragmatism*, as the primary point of reference. By examining how in his lectures James not only meditated upon the philosophical import of music but also attempted to approximate its experiential effects, I provide a fuller picture of pragmatism as improvisational lyricism—that is, singular, affectively intense experience conveyed through a spoken-word art in which aurality is emphasized. In doing so, I not only forge a connection between James and the hip-hop artists whose work he provides an echo for but broach, to an unprecedented extent, the role that topics that have come to the forefront of the theoretical scene, such as affect, enaction, and embodiment, play in their joint efforts.

This development of the aesthetics tacit in James suggests, as will be heard to sound in Chapter Three, a reading of Stein that can be placed in conversation with the Freudian approach that has thus far been most prevalent in the scholarship on her work. It also intimates a novel approach to the work of Du Bois, one that draws on the recent work on pragmatism and the African American vernacular in which he has played such large a part but also goes beyond it in addressing some of its shortcomings. Most relevant here is Posnock's *Color and Culture: Black Writers and the Making of the Modern Intellectual*. As Poirier draws on "the reinstatement of the vague" to hint at a hearing of pragmatism as improvisational lyricism, Posnock draws on another oft-cited Jamesian

figure—“the unclassified residuum”—to bring into relief the visceral uniqueness of personal experience—what I call *singularity*. Towards this end, Posnock launches a critique of identity politics that never lacks in passion but nevertheless ultimately fails to shift the terms of debate, providing a mere antithesis to his *bête noire* (pun intended) rather than a full-fledged sublation and therefore continuing to trade in the same old stale conventions. Posnock attempts to draw on Du Bois as a primary influence, but in doing so fundamentally misreads him. Rather than simply being “antirace,” as Posnock would have it, my work shows that Du Bois struck a more complex and nuanced position—one that combats racism’s positing of “race,” while at the same time sounding an antiracist raciality, a possibility Posnock appears either to be unaware of or to hastily reject. My reading of Du Bois, by contrast, is more responsive to recent advances in critical race theory that go beyond the terms by which one is simply “for” or “against” racial identity and are more focused on understanding and counteracting the ongoing operations of racism. This theoretical purchase is attained by tuning in to the sort of raciality characteristic of the ongoing play of differentiation and mutual borrowing at work in hip-hop rather than the stultifying effect of mainstream white neoliberalism’s terse and self-interested dismissal of any further discussion of “race,” and by implication racism.

On a similar note, but from a somewhat different angle, the complexity and nuance of Du Bois’s position and positionality may be perceived to have hindered his “popularity,” when compared to other leaders of the era such as Booker T. Washington and Marcus Garvey, among his contemporaries. In fact, Washington and Garvey could be considered more “pragmatic” than their erudite foil. But this is true only if one has a gross and inadequate definition of pragmatism, one that most certainly does not foreground an

aesthetic approach. It should be recalled that Du Bois was always respected and admired by creative artists and intellectuals, even those who disagreed with him on certain points. Moreover, Du Bois is more generally remembered and embraced today than either of his competitors. At the end of the day, Du Bois's work evidences a richness and depth that so far exceeds that of Washington or Garvey that an attempt to compare them always runs the risk of fundamentally misunderstanding them.

My critique of Posnock is informed by West's contentious engagement with the "neopragmatism" of Richard Rorty, whom Posnock—with his exemplification of "postmodern bourgeois liberalism"—often seems much closer to than either James or Du Bois. West encourages a regrounding of Rorty's airy formulations in the sense of tragedy he finds inherent to any pragmatism worth the name, as well as its comic upshot: namely, parody—a modality I find fundamental to Du Bois's work. Contra Washington and Garvey, West follows Du Bois (and James) in holding that an appreciation of "the ordinary experiences of common folk" goes hand-in-hand with "genuine artistic concern." Only by striking this balance does one occupy what West calls "the common ground of pragmatism," upon which "[u]nique selves acting in and through participatory communities give ethical significance to an open, risk-ridden future."¹⁵

This is exactly the territory that the divergently circular trajectory of improvisational lyricism pursued by my project—running from hiphop to pragmatism and back again—both limns and inhabits. Chapter One begins covering this ground by exploring how James, the seminal psychologist and philosopher, crafted a sound-based performance art in order to articulate his version of pragmatism. Departing from generic conventions, he developed a distinctive style of public speaking that crossed the distinction between

academic and popular and bordered on poetry. Further, he sought to embed artifacts of this oratorical situation in the published works that came out of his lectures, producing a blueprint of the enactive model of literature Stein and Du Bois worked to implement. In the process, he surveyed the aesthetic as a domain of affectively intense experience. Doing so required him to wrestle with such experiences from his own life, past and present, engaging and thereby delineating the outlines of the existential problematic of expressing singularity: the double conundrum that what is most meaningful is the most difficult to communicate and that one feels most oneself when in closest touch to otherness.

His students would undergo similar personal journeys. That is to say, the existential problematic of expressing singularity would form the chord sequence they performed variations on as they pursued their creative endeavors in improvisational lyricism. The latter, in fact, can be considered as the resource through which they enabled themselves to work through the former. Chapter Two explores how Stein, the *doyenne* of the fin-de-siècle avant-garde, launched a vast program of literary experimentation to effect an always partial and incomplete communication of the singular experiences that served both as her most powerful motivation and heaviest burden, most meaningful but also most difficult to put into words. In order to work through this conundrum, Stein attempted to infuse musicality—understood not only as mellifluousness but also as signature patterns of semantic departure and syntactic disruption. By being imbued with a sonority that broke with conventional language, Stein’s work triggered novel and distinctly musicalized responses in those who engaged it. In effect, Stein wrote scores. And the instrument meant to play these pieces was the reader’s body. In this way she

sought to trigger in her audience a reenactment of the feelings motivating and inhabiting her creativity. Stein thus sketched the outlines of a model of literature as the staggered enaction of affective resonance, the sharing of simulated states of being across otherwise unbridgeable spatial and temporal gaps. In the process, she liberated imagination from ocularcentrism, repurposing this faculty as the visceral immersion of fully embodied responsivity in affectively intense experience.

While Stein sought to realize this enactive model of literature with all her readers, during her lifetime it was only fully implemented in her intimate and working relationship with her lifelong companion, Alice B. Toklas, and even today it remains easily accessible only to a select and highly trained few. Chapter Three shows how Du Bois—the preeminent African American scholar, leader, and artist—took over Stein’s program and not so much made it less complicated as endowed his interlocutors with the skills needed in order to engage it, in all its complexity. He took the prototype she developed and duplicated it into a device available to the multitude. Du Bois tended the seeds of affective resonance Stein sowed, facilitating its growth into an enveloping ecosystem sustained through an ongoing process of attunement that expands to global proportions. Through this generation of an attuned ensemble, the line between artist and audience is blurred, as receivers are empowered to become senders, in turn. To a large extent Du Bois was able to pioneer these innovations by virtue of emphasizing the ethical upshot of an aesthetics that has at its heart the capacity for and cultivation of affectively intense experience. More than either James or Stein, and to the same degree as contemporary hiphop artists, Du Bois insisted that the breaking of conventions to make way for expressions of singularity was necessary not only in the creation of art and

philosophy but also in forming patterns of sociality and the design of political systems. Particularly important for him on this front was the deprogramming of the racist codes nested into the deep structure of American society that prevented those individuals who fell on the wrong side of the racialized divide from realizing their full potential and in fact compromised the humanity of those who were, conversely, granted privilege and entitlement. Believing oneself to be inherently superior due to the overconventionalization of certain variations in superficial appearance, it turns out, prevents one from truly plumbing the depths within.

In charting this trajectory, this project puts unique, interweaving spins on pragmatism, modernism, and hip-hop. As far as modernism is concerned, my efforts here contribute to the body of work that seeks to take leave of the “high” and “proper” to focus on the marginal and dissident. Though not unprecedented—I am thinking here particularly of the work of Poirier and Jonathan Levin—placing James as the prime instigator of literary modernism remains a noncanonical yet nonetheless productive maneuver.¹⁶ While Stein and Du Bois are often addressed under the rubric of modernism, it is more likely to find them cited as accessory figures rather than main components. Taking them as the main exemplars of American modernism allows us to foreground rather than dismiss issues of gender, sexuality, and race in our discussion of aesthetic matters. Their examples also (as does James’s, in fact) emphasize the degree to which mixed-media experimentation was integral to the modernist literary enterprise. The enactive literature they crafted drew for inspiration upon innovations in visual and, especially, musical and performance arts. Finally, by placing it in direct juxtaposition with hip-hop, my work comes at modernism from a unique and illuminating angle. Jumping off from this approach to modernist art,

this project seeks to address a methodological shortcoming shared by the existing secondary literature on both pragmatism and hiphop, and thereby make similar interventions in both fields of scholarship. Students of hiphop seem at times myopically focused on its social and political effects, often to the detriment of the artistic accomplishments through which any such consequences would be achieved. Similarly, those who research pragmatism remain for the most part occupied with its epistemological and ethical aspects, failing to consider that aesthetics too was a major concern and in fact provided the foundation upon which pragmatists made advances in other philosophical subfields. To the end of addressing these oversights, and getting this project underway, I would like to turn now to the thus far unaddressed issue of the fundamental role that musicality and the affective intensity of experience it conveys played in the work of James. Following this line of inquiry, we will discover that the crafting of a distinctive sound-based performance art was elemental not only to the voicing of his philosophy, but to its very formulation. In addition, this artistic achievement was crucial to his ongoing personal development, serving as the breakthrough through which he engaged the existential problematic of expressing singularity that he had left unattended for much of his career.

¹ See Carrie Bramen, *The Uses of Variety: Modern Americanism and the Quest for National Distinctiveness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Michael Magee, *Emancipating Pragmatism: Emerson, Jazz, and Experimental Writing* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004); Ross Posnock, *Color and Culture: Black Writers and the Making of the Modern Intellectual* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989) and *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

² For a partial illumination of these parallel notations see the parsing of “yaknowwhati’ msayin” and the discussion of “listening transcription” in the Conclusion.

³ The two major publications—*The Source* and *Vibe*—had by this time, in my opinion, become disreputable.

⁴ The quotes from Goldie, KRS-One, and Ashon are from “Goldie: ‘1997, Year of the B-Boy’” and “KRS-One: B-Boy #1” in *Trace*, June 1997, 34-44.

⁵ For a more detailed account of this experience see my “‘Hope, teach, yaknowwhati’msayin: freestylin knowledge through Detroit hiphop” in Richard Cándida Smith, ed. *Sounds and Gestures of Recollection: Art and the Performance of Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 181-201. In the time since this essay was published, both Lacks and Big Tone have released solo albums: *Re: Lacks, vol. 1: With the World* (Groove Attack, 2003) and *The Drought* (ABB, 2005), respectively. Elzhi has joined the ranks of seminal Detroit hiphop group Slum Village which has since release the albums *Trinity (Past, Present, and Future)* (Capitol, 2002), *Detroit Deli (A Taste of Detroit)* (Capitol, 2004), and *Slum Village* (Barak, 2005). He recently released his first solo album, *The Preface* (Tablesauce, 2008). Lacks now records exclusively under the name Ta’Raach. His latest work can be heard on the album *The Fevers* (Sound in Color, 2007) and the instrumental collections *Elovee* (Earth Angel, 2007) and *Raach City Riot* (Poo-Bah, 2007). His work can also be heard on a superb collaboration with Los Angeles-based MC Blu: C.R.A.C.’s *The Piece Talks* (Tres, 2008). Big Tone just released his second solo album, *The Art of Ink* (Tres, 2009).

⁶ Insofar as it thus blurs the boundary between “art” and “life,” freestylin (and the stream of improvisational lyricism that I trace from James—through Stein and Du Bois—to hiphop in general) could be considered, according to Peter Bürger’s influential definition, “avant-garde.” I would add, however, that this blurring, in the cases of hiphop and pragmatism, does not necessarily preclude (as Bürger seems to suggest) the autonomy of art—or, more to the point, the self-sufficiency of the aesthetic as an important and perhaps fundamental aspect or area of everyday experience. Clearly, this is a sense of “autonomy” distinct from that championed by the “bourgeois aestheticism” that is Bürger’s antagonist. See Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

⁷ This account is drawn from the sound recording and transcript of the interview I did with the Breakfast Club on 1 April 1999.

⁸ See Schloss’s *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop* (Hanover: Wesleyan UP, 2004).

⁹ It should be noted that, contrary to the potential implications of the foregoing analysis, looped phrases may themselves be assembled through chopping. Accordingly, the distinction between chopping and looping may perhaps best be drawn according to the length and breadth of their respective basic units. While chopping usually works with a few notes played by a single instrument, looping is composed of melodic and rhythmic passages that are often the work of multiple instruments.

¹⁰ Further, I would argue, these notions derived from hiphop aesthetics can illuminate the procedures of experimental writing. This is especially true of the work of Stein. Comparing her compositional methods with the way hiphop artists flip, chop, and loop their various materials can provide new insights into her semantic divergences, syntactic disruptions, and stylistic repetitions.

¹¹ This point, and the general bent of my approach, accords with Charles Sanders Peirce’s intuition that logic grows out of ethics, which in turn grows out of aesthetics. See, “The Three Normative Sciences” in Nathan Houser et al. eds. *The Essential Peirce, 2* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 196-207.

¹² Particularly influential were Paul Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) and David Sudnow, *Ways of the Hand: The Organization of Improvised Conduct* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1978). Each is exemplary of a mode of participatory observation that I have found methodologically useful: the ethnographic (Berliner) and the phenomenological (Sudnow). The latter bears resemblance to the approach suggested by Wolfgang Iser’s phenomenologically-oriented theory of aesthetic response. As such, Sudnow—like Iser—can be considered to foreshadow the *enactive* model of literature I explore in later chapters.

¹³ Jacques Barzun, *A Stroll with William James* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983), 100. See also Jacques Barzun, “William James and the Clue to Art” in *The Energies of Art* (New York: Harper, 1956), 325-355.

¹⁴ Richard Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 45.

¹⁵ *Keeping Faith*, 56-57; 112-113.

¹⁶ Jonathan Levin, *The Poetics of Transition: Emerson, Pragmatism, and American Literary Modernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

Chapter Two

The Music of William James: Pragmatism as Improvisational Lyricism

In 1890, with the publication of *The Principles of Psychology* after twelve long years of research and writing, William James made the leap from struggling academic to established scholar. The early and middle years of the decade found him making use of the respect this success granted him to broaden the reach of his work. In addition to publishing *Psychology: A Briefer Course* in 1892, a condensed and more straightforward version of *Principles*, James added public lectures to his repertoire. The first of these popular talks were delivered before small groups of students or fellow teachers and scholars, but many of them were made available for a larger audience in *The Will to Believe* and *Talks to Teachers in Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals*—published in 1897 and 1899, respectively. The publication of these volumes coincided with the expansion of the venues in which James was called on to speak his mind. In addition to academic lectures and popularizations thereof, James was increasingly asked to talk on topics and occasions of broader concern. The unveiling of the Robert Gould Shaw memorial in 1897, at which James gave the keynote speech, is a case in point. Shaw was the Civil War colonel who led the North's first black regiment. James had a personal reason to be excited—and anxious—about the opportunity to play a key role in the mythologization of this national figure. His brother Wilkie had served as one of Shaw's subordinate officers, and had been gravely injured in the unsuccessful attack on

the Confederates' Fort Wagner. James himself, by his father's request, had not participated in the war.

While pleased by the offer, James privately admitted to having “hesitated a good deal” when confronted with the challenge of “haranguing the multitude.” He was understandably wary about shouldering the additional degree of public exposure this speech would entail, and probably shy to speak expertly upon military heroics when he himself had been a nonparticipant. Perhaps, too, he felt that in immortalizing Shaw he would also be performing a eulogy for Wilkie—who had died in 1883—and was overwhelmed by these joint responsibilities. Nevertheless, realizing that this speech was an opportunity to popularize his work in yet another arena, James eventually accepted the invitation. He eased his worries about his ability to perform up to expectations by acknowledging that the problem he faced “resolves itself into the labor of making one’s phrases impressive.”¹ In this moment, James can be heard making his initial recognition that the voicing of his unique brand of philosophizing would be achieved through the practice of improvisational lyricism. More than saying new things, this poetic task would involve developing a new way of saying that could partially convey the unsayable. In order to pull this off, James would draw on his knack for using dissonance constructively. This aesthetics of constructive dissonance saturates James’s version of pragmatism, which he began giving voice to a little over a year after he gave his Shaw speech. For James, “making his phrases impressive” would mean talking in a way that used the old to make the new, that balanced structure and spontaneity, and that infused language with music by treating words like sounds.

Producing the “immed[i]ate oratorical effect” he desired, James argued, would mean playing upon “the instinctive reactions of the audience.” In order to accomplish this sensorimotor rapport between his voice and the ears of his listeners, James sought to model his speech on the shape of the Shaw memorial itself. He would begin by directing his audience’s attention towards the sculpture, tracing its outlines with his words, showing how “the very soul and secret” of Shaw, his regiment, the Civil War, the United States are “symbolized and embodied” through “the mingling of the elements which the sculptor’s genius has brought so vividly before the eye.” To provide the setting for this opening gesture, James hoped to give his speech “in the open air somewhere near the monument.” “The hearing seems to me a secondary affair, compared with the *ensemble* of the ceremony,” James argued. As far as he was concerned, to have to speak somewhere lacking direct visual reference to the Shaw sculpture would be “curiously divided and discordant.” It would be to errantly make a supplementary part stand in for what should be an integral whole. The organizers of the event felt differently, however, and insisted that his speech be given inside the nearby Music Hall. Consequently, James’s work became more difficult—but also more rewarding, insofar as he could draw upon rather than be frustrated by the discord caused by the need to abandon his original plan. James would still begin with the gesture towards the sculpture. Lacking direct visual reference, however, this gesture would have to be accomplished by arousing the appearance of the monument in the minds of his audience—and thereby summoning the ritual setting of which his speech was a part—through the sound of his own voice. The necessitated indirection, in short, would allow him to achieve affective resonance as well

as sensorimotor rapport. To have this absorbing and expansive effect, James concluded, his speech would have to be “executed like a musical composition.”²

Music, in fact, would come to play an important role in James’s thought. It serves as a symbol of the fundamental, though nearly inexpressible, message his philosophy is meant to convey—that which he finds it difficult to put into words but nevertheless continues struggling to do. What made James’s public speaking so complicated was that he not only wanted to create an effect that could capture the imaginations of a broad audience, but also to use this effect to convey a rather weighty message. Consequently, as in the case of the Shaw speech, he feared that what he had to say would be “too quiet and pensive,” “too academic for any real effect.” What was required, James believed, was “to get a little more colour and rankness and flavor into it.”³ He sought to do so by taking oratory lessons and working to memorize the speech, to lend his performance the degree of flexibility and vibrancy—the *musicality*—that comes from not having to rely completely on a written script. James was beginning to develop the *improvisational stance* that he would utilize when giving the lecture series that later works like *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, *Pragmatism*, and *A Pluralistic Universe* were based upon. The effect of the lectures rests in large part upon the way they convey philosophy through a kind of performance poetry, an aural enactment that infuses the intellectual constructions of language with the affective weight of music. The effect of the books that served as their written reports depends upon James’s ability to simulate these sounds of improvisational lyricism in writing, to give the reader a feel for the oratorical situation out of which his words emerge.

This chapter follows James as he moved from inventing a modern psychology that balanced laboratory experimentation and impressionistic description to crafting a philosophy that sought a third way through the seemingly irresolvable conflict between the two schools that reigned prior to his intervention: British materialism and German idealism. In the process he trail-blazed the approach to creative inquiry and endeavor that his students sought to make their own and expand upon, and that can be heard echoing through the work of contemporary hip-hop musicians. This artistic undertaking—the accomplishments it facilitated, the personal crises that precipitated it and that it worked to address—form the crux of what is at issue here. To this end, the chapter begins with a closer consideration of James’s Shaw speech. Finding it necessary to work in circumstances not of his own choosing and upon a topic that pushed the limits of his expertise, James almost stumbled into an improvisational mode. Working with found objects that fell into his lap as if by accident, he made up his method as he went along, assembling the components of the lyricism that would infuse his later work and bringing himself to the brink of achieving the unforeseen. In his efforts to prepare for and perform this public talk, James begins sketching the outlines of the work in his imminent effort to give voice to a philosophy that bordered on poetry. While the Shaw speech itself failed to fully live up to what it promised to be, James would make progress in fulfilling its potential as he purposefully took on further projects to articulate the philosophy implicit in it, a new turn of thinking that is also a renewed recognition of the fundamental role feeling plays in intellectual activity. The upshot is pragmatism as improvisational lyricism, a train of thought made manifest only through the pursuit of an artistic itinerary.

This chapter next considers “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results” (1898), a piece in which James manages the initial phrasing of his distinctive brand of pragmatism. In doing so, he warms up for the lecture series that would occupy much of his time and energy in the coming years and result in the publication of *Varieties*. In “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results” James adds additional detail to his mapping of improvisational lyricism, though it still remains more of a destination to survey than a habitation that he was ready to fully occupy, jump and immerse himself in. The prospecting that he does in this essay, however, sets the stage for the dive he was soon to make in impending projects. Here James draws on the work of his friend and colleague Charles Sanders Peirce, but puts a unique spin upon it and in doing so adds a crucial something that was missing or downplayed in its previous incarnations. For both Peirce and James, pragmatism is a philosophy of experience. But whereas the former focuses merely on its practical nature, the latter wishes to foreground its particularity. That is, James seeks to supplement Peirce’s protocol for the motivation and organization of inquisitive habits with an equal interest in the at times unruly affects that form, as it were, the unavoidable other side of the coin, the excitement that accompanies and in fact propels even the most formalized programs of research. In short, James makes a break with Peirce’s concern with conventionalization in order to make room for singularity. In doing so, he makes explicit what remains implicit yet overlooked in Peirce: that aesthetics generates the foundation for ethics, which in turn lays the groundwork for both epistemology and politics.

Finally, this chapter turns to *Varieties* itself, showing how James takes an experiential and ultimately (and paradoxically) secularizing approach to religion, tracing an indirect

path into a more general consideration of aesthetics as a realm of affective intensity. In pursuing this itinerary, philosophy itself becomes a type of art. In *Varieties*, James broaches the existential problematic of expressing singularity both as a topic of concern and a performative predicament, something he not only needed to explicate but to enact an engagement with during the course of composing and delivering his lectures. Undertaking *Varieties*, then, not only resulted in an addition to his bibliography but entailed a signal event in his biography. In wrestling with the intellectual puzzles involved in this project, James was also working through personal issues that haunted his present and in doing so brought his past back to life. The latter endeavor was inextricably interwoven with the former. Art—particularly music and performance—wove the common thread here. An enactive musicality emerged as the primary resource for cultivating and conveying singularity, tapping a capacity for affectively intense experience and crafting an expression capable of eliciting affective resonance from a large and diverse audience. Aesthetic issues were thus paramount in James's work. Exactly because they were so important, however, he was often ambivalent about them. Consequently, they tended to surface as fugitive elements in seeming digressions that both belied and emphasized their centrality. Jamesian aesthetics are accessible not so much in what he said or did but rather in how he went about saying and doing. Stein and Du Bois were able to pick up on what more scholarly commentators overlook because they were just as interested in the style as in the content of James's work. In fact, they took the two as inseparable and thereby drew on their teacher as both an intellectual influence and, more importantly, an artistic example.

The Demicadence of Democracy

James would eventually take his art of improvisational lyricism to great heights. The initial attempt, however, left something to be desired. The day before he was to deliver his Shaw speech he lost his voice. When the time came to actually perform, James had recovered enough to go through with it but he nevertheless found it “a curious kind of physical effort to fill a hall as large as Boston Music Hall.” Despite his discomfort, James still tried to communicate his message. But he found it “very difficult to manage.” He opens, of course, by gesturing towards the sculpture—a large bronze relief with Shaw on horseback in the foreground and a group of his African American troops marching alongside him in the background. What is interesting about James’s evocation of this piece is that he directs attention towards the rendering of Shaw only after focusing upon the subordinate figures: the African American soldiers. He attempts to utilize this flipping of figure and ground as an emblem of “our American religion,” “the faith that a man requires no master to take care of him, and that common people can work out their salvation well enough together if left free to try.” It is almost as if, with his opening rhetorical move, he effaces the man who is, at least in title, the primary subject of his speech. Almost, because honoring Shaw in this case means insisting that, though he may have been a leader, he was “no master.” In placing the background of the artwork on display before its foreground James is also attempting to illustrate that, according to the democratic faith he is preaching, a nation at peril stays on the road to recovery when “the civic genius of the people does the saving day by day, by acts without external picturesqueness.” The stirring shapes of the memorial are turned against themselves, as James insists that the actions they portray are nothing if not ordinary, everyday occurrences. At the same time, however, he emphasizes that this quotidian activism is

exceptionally difficult, possesses an internal drama that compensates for its lack of “external picturesqueness.” The ethos of democracy is materialized through “common habits” that—despite their commonality—are possessed of an “inner mystery,” a mystery that though shared defies complete communication. Thus, sustaining “civic genius” can often be experienced as the most private of trials.⁴

James took it as his job to remind his audience of this, and in reminding them prepare them for the task they faced as citizens of the United States. “What we really need the poet’s and orator’s help to keep alive in us,” he explains, is a “lonely kind of courage.” Without their aesthetic and idiosyncratic labors the tenets of “our American religion” would, as he would put it a couple years later in the introduction to *Talks to Teachers and Students*, lose their “passionate inner meaning.” They become slogans “so familiar that they sound now rather dead in our ears,” mere words extracted from a mysterious penumbra of simulated music. These beliefs need be kept close to one’s heart, but insofar as they are they will, somewhat paradoxically, retain an essential strangeness. Released from the immanent complication of “inner mystery,” the “common habits” become automatically repeatable, unthinking routine lacking the affective charge—the “ontologic emotion of wonder”—that triggers intellectual activity. Bereft of their “passionate inner meaning,” they are unable to fulfill their function as the manifestation of democracy. This is especially true, James suggests, of what he takes as the most fundamental element of “civic genius”: “the well-known democratic respect for the sacredness of individuality.” Respect becomes insult, individuality becomes a travesty of itself, the profession of democracy becomes sacrilegious, when there is no room for singularity to struggle with and reshape, remake convention. As long as an untempered

attachment to conventionality drowns out the affective intensity that characterizes the singular, we lose access to the “crepuscular depths of personality” that, as he argues in another talk to students given two years before the Shaw speech, are “our deepest organ of communication with the nature of things.”⁵ Thus, according to James, fostering the political health of a nation is tied up with broader philosophical (some may say mystical—at the very least existential) concerns and is accomplished through a deeply personal development motivated and actualized by an artistic achievement: namely, a performance of improvisational lyricism that exemplifies an aesthetics of constructive dissonance.

The problem with James’s Shaw speech, however, is that he fails to follow his own hypothetical example. He underplays the ambivalence lurking in the depths of the monument he draws inspiration from and seeks to commemorate, and is thereby unable to follow through on his oratorical mission. His initial poetic gesture is drenched with tension—between the ideal and the actual. In attempting to create a popular effect, he hastily defuses rather than draws on this discord. Consequently, his effort to exemplify and inspire the lonely courage he finds to be essential to the functioning of democracy falls somewhat short. The challenge the Shaw sculpture poses—and that James references in pointing towards it—is to dwell upon the difficult fact that despite all its unquenchable promise, democracy as actualized in the United States has been at times “a thing of falsehood and horrible self-contradiction.” This is so not just because of questionable practices, but because of a “singular anomaly” woven into the very fabric of the theoretical ideal that practical arrangements are designed to approximate. “Democracy is still upon its trial,” James argues. It is so, in large part, because “the

founders had not dared to touch the great intractable exception” lodged in the semi-sacred documents of “our American religion.” The United States may be, when compared to certain other nations, “a land of freedom.” But it is only “boastfully so called” as long as its citizenry fails to acknowledge and attempt to redress all the consequences of the fact that its constituting plan has “human slavery enthroned at the heart of it.” James himself resists sounding the depths of this dilemma, in effect drawing a hasty conclusion to the democratic trial he is seeking to initiate. To suggest, as he finds himself doing, that—in the face of the tension between freedom and slavery that is fundamental to its founding—“the only alternative for the nation was to fight or die” is to short-circuit the sort of open-ended soul-searching that forms the substance of “civic genius.” It is also to foreclose the ground from which the artistic motivation of democratic action issues.⁶

In the end, James—as he was to acknowledge himself —fails “to break away from the vulgar claptrap of war sentimentalism.” He seems to be arguing that the Civil War was not only inevitable but desirable—transforming historical contingency into normative appeal. This implies the espousal of a sort of fate-based view of history that would seem to undercut what he is actually trying to say. In downplaying the tension at the heart of American democracy, he also smoothes over the dissonance between achieving an affecting delivery and conveying a complex message. Despite his disappointment with his performance, he received positive feedback from trusted acquaintances who heard the speech. He did manage to create a powerful effect amongst his audience, in the form of “the most harmonious and ideal waves of sentiment.”⁷ This was not, however, the effect he had been going for. Lacking was a sense for the messiness of actuality, an appreciation of discord, an unfeigned foregrounding of the

“singular anomaly.” In order to sound a better balance between the affective force of his voice and the complexity of what he had to communicate, future performances would have to avoid this sort of false harmony—a forced conclusion bought at the price of violence: the exploitation and hasty erasure of singularity. In order to master the art of improvisational lyricism and convey his philosophical viewpoint James would have to aim to find a way of cultivating rather than muting dissonance, a way of using it constructively.

James would begin applying this new-found knowledge when he embarked on his next, and more involved, project. Soon after completing the Shaw speech, he was offered the Gifford Lectureship on Natural Religion at the University of Edinburgh and quickly accepted. During the course of his Gifford Lectures—which were delivered in 1901 and 1902 and became *Varieties* when they were published shortly afterwards—James continued to dwell upon the democratic ethos he had begun to survey and in doing so transgressed the boundaries of American exceptionalism that had originally circumscribed it. The result was a portrayal of “*the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude*” that simultaneously broadened the reach and refined the focus of his exploration of the personal development and artistic motivation of “lonely courage.”⁸ In approaching “religious experience,” James reverses what he sees as the conventional treatment of the topic by viewing it as primarily a matter of private feelings and only secondarily of public institutions. Consequently, the “religious” is figured as a synecdoche for the broader realm of intimate and visceral—*singular*—experience that he sought to place at the heart of his philosophy.⁹ Though James’s approach here initially focuses on the private at the expense of the public, the democratic (and pragmatic) ethos

that is his ultimate end and cause implies an imperative to leap the chasm between the one and the other. James would make this move not by including issues of organized religion among the materials he covered, but through the very act of delivering his lectures—and publishing the book based upon them. Thus, his own struggle to convey what he called his “music” through language is itself exemplary of the “lonely courage” he sought to profile. In composing and performing *Varieties*, James crafted a work of art capable of communicating the nearly inexpressible aspect of personal experience—the affective intensity of singularity—that was most fundamental to his viewpoint. In the process, he began to give voice to pragmatism—not just as a philosophical position, but also as a practice of improvisational lyricism guided by and manifesting an aesthetics of constructive dissonance.

The Keynote of the Universe

At the outset of his preparations, James considered the task undertaken by his Gifford Lectures to consist of “setting forth the philosophy best adapted to normal Religious needs.” During the long and at times convoluted course of laying down the tracks that would eventually assemble themselves into *Varieties*, however, it became clear that the “normality” of the urges and yearnings he sought to document did not preclude their oddity. Although experienced everyday by ordinary people, there is something about them that is irreducibly extraordinary. In seeking to make “philosophy” accommodate these desires, then, James was doing something more than fashioning a mere adaptation. He was, in fact, embarking on an out-and-out redefinition. James was led to such lengths because he felt compelled “to defend (against all the prejudices of my ‘class,’) ‘experience’ against ‘philosophy’ as being the real backbone of the world’s religious

life.” In other words, against his professional interests as a philosopher (and perhaps his better judgment!), he aimed to show that the search for “our destiny and the world’s meaning” requires that we pay attention to what is “immediately and privately felt” before moving on to consider “high and noble general views.” In the process, philosophy would become as much a matter of the former as it had been of the latter. Pragmatism is an issue of improvising this fusion between feeling and thinking—this *feelingful thinking*. Accordingly, a philosophy is pragmatic insofar as it is inseparable from the artistic practice through which it is enacted. As a philosophical work, the aim of *Varieties*, James explains, was “to make the hearer or reader believe what I myself invincibly do believe.”¹⁰ This is accomplished primarily through aesthetic means, through a poetry that lends substance to—and thereby makes felt—what could otherwise be dismissed as empty rhetoric.

In this case, the message James sought to convey to his audience was that religion reduced to “mere creeds and theories” is an utter absurdity. Nevertheless, he immediately amends, “the life of it as a whole is mankind’s most important function.” Religion, taken in this broader and more significant sense, functions as something more than itself, strictly so-called. As James uses it here, I would argue, it stands for nothing less than the root of culture, the prologue to art. Divinity and grace are, in effect, secularized—made primarily an issue of ontology rather than of theology. The “religious experience” portrayed in *Varieties* consists of “what goes on in the single private man, as he livingly expresses himself.”¹¹ In order to adequately speak upon this topic, James would have to enact it at the exact same time as he surveyed it. In making this move he would place himself in a difficult position: both an exemplar and one example among

many, a figure simultaneously occupying both foreground and background and as such seeming both overwhelmingly present and hard to focus upon. These contortions would make the composition of *Varieties* a struggle, but the conditions in which James worked made them necessary. For, his joint philosophical and artistic mission motivated and drew its substance from an ensemble of intensely intimate moments, a constellation of personal developments. The communication of his thinking would fall flat unless infused with the feeling of these nearly incommunicable experiences. Improvising this fusion would lead James to supplement the intellectual clarity of language with the affective force of music. Philosophy thus becomes like poetry, insofar as its performance involves treating words like sounds.

During the summer of 1898, a few months after he officially received and accepted the Gifford Lectureship, James strained his heart hiking in the Adirondacks. By November he complained that it was “kicking about terribly.” This was the beginning of a long series of cardiac troubles that would eventually lead to James’s death in 1910. Despite the ill consequences it held for his physical health, however, he had no regrets about his excursion in the Adirondacks. “I’m glad I had the experience,” James confessed, “even at that price!” The mountains were a place he had vacationed since 1875, and in 1898 it was the setting for not only the usual relaxation and refreshment but also a singular moment of insight that granted him primary material to work into his Gifford Lectures. On a morning at the beginning of July, James woke up at three and left his lodgings by seven, hiking for five hours with a pack weighing nearly twenty pounds to the top of Mount Marcy, the tallest in the range. After resting for a few hours, James descended a ways, coming to a camp where he met his young friends Pauline and Charles

Goldmark and a group of their college-aged acquaintances. When night came his companions dropped off to sleep, but James “was not aware of sleeping at all.” Instead, he experienced “a state of spiritual alertness of the most vital description.” The next day he recounted the moment—something like a waking dream—in a letter his wife would compare to “a piece of exquisite music.”¹²

Infused with the visceral, affectively intense experience of singularity, James’s writing simulates the sounds of improvisational lyricism, is transformed from a hollow report into a “vital description.” James here can be heard stumbling upon not only the substance of his philosophy but also the artistic practice through which it will be made manifest, through which raw material will assume the shape of crafted form. “The temperature was perfect,” he writes, “the moon rose and hung above the scene.” These “influences of Nature” mixed with “the problem of the Edinburgh lectures” and, he explains, “fermented within me till it became a regular Walpurgis nacht.” “I spent a good deal of it in the woods,” James goes on, “where the streaming moonlight lit up things in a magical checkered play.” This external scene is interwoven with the internal course of his thinking at the points where they both impact affect. Or as James puts it, “the gods of all the nature-mythologies were holding an indescribable meeting in my breast with the moral gods of the inner life.” Although the two parts of this fusion “have nothing in common,” “the whole scene” they create in their unforeseen combination has an “intense *significance* of some sort.” It is because of the intensity of this experience of constructive dissonance—the feeling of finding a common ground between otherwise dissimilar elements—that James finds it so significant. But it is also for this very same reason that he begins to doubt whether he “could *tell* the significance.” The weight of meaning,

James seems to be suggesting, is proportional to the difficulty of its communication. Within his experience on Mount Marcy, “intense inhuman remoteness” and “intense *appeal*” extraordinarily coincide. Meditating upon and struggling to “livingly express” the meaning of this moment, James strives to preserve both “its everlasting freshness and its immemorial antiquity and decay.” He sets off in search of a balance of the old and new, the familiar and the foreign, the near and the far. The experience is one of “memory and sensation all whirled inexplicably together,” one that “was indeed worth coming for, and worth repeating year by year, if repetition could only procure what in its nature I suppose must be all unplanned for and unexpected.”¹³

Hoping to work through the interwoven fusions of this moment—the innumerable ways in which dissonant elements are held together and mixed up, retaining their identity at the same time they construct something new together—James was faced with the problem of improvisation: how to balance the demands of structure and spontaneity, how to make one a means for the other and vice versa, how to repeat and renew what in the end “must be all unplanned for and unexpected,” how to express singularity by struggling with and remaking convention. These issues would beat themselves into the very fiber of the work he had in front of him. This intense, visceral, and solitary experience on Mount Marcy provided the theme James would repeatedly riff upon—altering the tempo or rhythm a bit, changing a note here and there, modulating the phrasing or emphasis—as he prepared his Gifford Lectures, eventually getting them into their artfully unfinished form. First and foremost, despite (or perhaps because of!) all of its poly- and pantheistic (honestly, downright pagan) over- and undertones, the “indescribable meeting” of exterior (“influences of Nature”) and interior (“inner life”) that James partook of that

night serves as the prototype from which he abstracts the basic definition of “religious experience” operative in *Varieties*. “Were one asked to characterize the life of religion in the broadest and most general terms possible,” James proposes, “one might say that it consists of the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmonious adjusting ourselves thereto.” The harmony that James posits here as his end, though, is of a strange sort. For, James seems to suggest, it is only via “a certain discordancy or heterogeneity in the native temperament” that “the religious attitude” flowers in its fullest.¹⁴

It is as a run of blue notes limbering up the lines of a prewritten score that “harmonious adjusting” realizes itself. A fundamental part of this self-realization is the recognition that it will forever remain incomplete. It is by eliciting a sensibility of constructive dissonance that this interweaving of the personal and the cosmic “adds to life an enchantment which is not rationally or logically deducible from anything else.” What James is pointing towards here is the feeling of experience’s mysterious self-sufficiency, its improvisational constitution, the “self-sustaining in the midst of self-removal which characterizes all reality and fact.” What James finds himself endlessly circling around—as if he were navigating the impossible trajectory of Escher’s staircase—is the felt meaning attainable through “effective occupation of a place in life, with its dynamic currents passing through your being.” In characterizing this enmeshing of world and person as of “an unseen order,” James is making both a negative and a positive qualification. The affective force of intense experience is “unseen,” not a matter of vision. Nevertheless, it is undeniably and strongly sensed. It is heard. It is fundamentally *musical*. James describes it as “the keynote of the universe sounding in

our ears.” The feel of “religious experience” is “the sense of perceiving truths” that are “more or less unutterable in words”—or, at the very least, are saturated with a “deeper significance” that is “not confined to rational propositions.” Thus, it is “not conceptual speech, but music rather,” that forms the substance of our “conversations with the unseen.” It is music that best conjures “vague vistas of a life continuous with our own, beckoning and inviting, yet ever eluding our pursuit.”¹⁵

In short, James argues, “[m]usic gives us ontological messages non-musical criticism is unable to contradict.” Music conveys and thereby provides the occasion for reenacting those moments when “[o]ntological emotion so fills the soul that ontological speculation can no longer overlap it.” Consequently, James suggests, “the erection of its procedure into a systematized method would be a philosophic achievement of first-rate importance.” This is exactly what pragmatism, as a philosophy, attempts to accomplish. It functions as a cultivation of “ontological imagination” that makes constructive use of the dissonance—and therefore sounds the common ground—between “emotion” and “speculation.” This is a somewhat difficult proposition because “[p]hilosophy lives in words, but truth and fact well up into our lives in ways that exceed verbal formulation.” Because of the fundamental musicality of experience, when language—and especially philosophical language—attempts to approach it “[s]omething forever exceeds, escapes from statement, withdraws from definition, must be glimpsed and felt, not told.” But there is something in James’s phrasing even here—in its rhythm, its forward-falling movement, its style, its *sound*—that nevertheless manages to convey (or at least effectively hint at) that which he cannot state or tell. Although language is “purely tentative and suggestive” here—although “the subtlety of nature flies beyond it”—it still

remains “an imperative human function to go on verbalizing and formulating *as if* the end might so be reached.” Towards this end, James seeks to use words to “stir chords within you which music and language touch in common.” He infuses language with music by striving to enact words as sounds. The overlap is only ever partial, but an interchange—a mutual enrichment—is opened, a fusion improvised. In the process, philosophy becomes akin to “lyric poetry.”¹⁶ Pragmatism emerges through and as the practice of improvisational lyricism.

This is something James began to realize as early as the night of his experience on Mount Marcy, as attested to by his wife’s response to the letter in which he recounts it. Part of what made it “one of the happiest lonesome nights of my existence” is that afterwards he could say: “I now understand what a poet is.” “He is,” James explains, “a person who can feel the immense complexity of influences that I felt and make some partial tracks in them for verbal statement.” In July 1898, immediately after his Marcy experience, James felt unable to accomplish this poetic task. Nevertheless, he saw that the conveyance of his philosophical message would depend upon resolutely facing up to it—and with it his potential failure. Nothing for James was more significant than feeling, nothing more deserved the attention of thinking. In the moment, however, he had little purchase for this meditative and communicative work because he was unable to “find a single word for all that significance.” Consequently, “the immense complexity of influences” he experienced occupied and overwhelmed his mind as “a mere boulder of *impression*.” He remained hopeful, however, that with the passage of time he would become able to unravel and reconnoiter the rich texture of this concentrated and concretized moment of experience. It is this sustained hope that led him to predict that

“things in the Edinboro’ lectures will be traceable to it.”¹⁷ The articulation of *Varieties* would emerge out of James’s struggle to get a handle on—to track—initially slippery and elusive traces, his struggle to remake convention in a way that made room for singular reverberations. During the course of composing and performing his Gifford lectures, James found himself directly confronting a fundamental difficulty, an existential problematic that he had faced earlier in his life and managed to set aside, but which his experience on Mount Marcy had begun to rekindle: the complication of expression, of conveying the density of felt meaning that comprises the experience of singularity, of making peace with the fact that whatever affective resonance that can be enacted between sender and receiver is forever partial and incomplete. Before the fire of James’s creative turmoil burst into flames, however, it remained for a time a mere pile of smoldering embers. As long as it did so, James was able to observe the source of its heat without becoming engulfed. Despite its safety, James ultimately found this critical distance unsatisfactory and impossible to permanently sustain. His reconnoitering of the topic would serve as a prelude to a plunge into its very heart.

The Symphony of Intellectual Life

In August 1898, two months after his night on Mount Marcy, James gave a talk at the University of California at Berkeley. The lecture was organized under the auspices of the school’s Philosophical Union, but was open to the general public. This location at the margin between the academic and the popular was similar to the site he would be working within during his Gifford Lectures, so James viewed his Berkeley address as an opportunity to prepare for his larger project. “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results” can be read—in this case, *virtually heard*—as the opening gambit of his poetic

pursuit of experience's aftermath. As such, it functions as both a "rehearsal for Edinbro" and the initial voicing of a philosophy built on the model of poetry, improvised *as* lyricism.¹⁸ James here begins enacting pragmatism as a reshaping of language saturated with musicality, a thinking that dwells upon and conveys the felt meaning of experience. It is as much the style as the content of this talk that marks it as a precursor to *Varieties*—and to *Pragmatism* and *A Pluralistic Universe*, for that matter. In fact, from the outset the lecture foregrounds what is usually left in the background: that when language seeks to inhabit experience, style and content are inextricable, at times nearly indistinguishable. Sound enmeshes with sense when feeling infuses thinking. James focuses his audience's attention on this fact by opening his talk with a gesture towards the context within which it occurs. By thus expressing a concern with the particularities of his oratorical situation, James manages to convey what it means for "philosophical conceptions" to have "practical results." In effect, he offers a vivid—if partial—illustration of what gets lost in the telling.

"An occasion like the present would seem to call for an absolutely untechnical discourse," James tells his audience at the beginning of his lecture. "I ought to give a message with a practical outcome and an emotional musical accompaniment." He attempts to fulfill this imperative by paraphrasing—and putting his own spin on—one of pragmatism's founding documents: Peirce's "How to Make Our Ideas Clear" (1878). According to James, it turns out that clarity of thought is attainable only by recognizing its inescapable fuzziness. In other words, thinking is inextricably intertwined with feeling. The latter, in fact, is at the very heart of the former. While Peirce may shy away from drawing this conclusion in such stark terms, it nevertheless can be shown to follow

from his assumption that “the production of belief is the sole function of thought.” Especially given that he characterizes belief as “the demi-cadence which closes a musical phrase in the symphony of intellectual life.” Hoping to play off of the connection between feeling and music he figures during the opening of his talk, James lifts this phrase verbatim in his exposition of “Peirce’s principle.” As Peirce writes and James rehearses, belief brings thinking to this incomplete closure—brings it into partial touch with the feelings that motivate it—because “it involves the establishment in our nature of a rule of action, or, say for short, a *habit*.” “[T]he establishment of habit,” Peirce argues, “is the *final* upshot of thinking”—that which it continuously points towards but beyond which it cannot go, which thereby serves as the criterion for marking off one moment of thinking from another, distinguishing different thoughts.¹⁹

Consequently, as James puts it, “to develop a thought’s meaning we need only determine what conduct it is fitted to produce.” He is quick to point out, however, that this approach to interpretation is double-sided. To attend to the conduction of belief is to pay attention to not only “what reactions we must prepare” but also “what sensations we are to expect from it.” According to James, then, the meaning that pragmatism points towards is both what we could do and what we can feel. In making this move, he puts his mark on “the principle of pragmatism,” implying that “it should be expressed more broadly than Mr. Peirce expresses it” in print. But part of the reason James feels compelled to lobby for this expansive expression is that before he read Peirce’s argument he “first heard him enunciate it.” Having attended one of Peirce’s first lectures, given in the fall of 1866, James reported to his sister that he “cd. not understand a word but rather enjoyed the sensation of listening.” It was the aesthetic appeal of the *sound* of Peirce’s

enunciation that motivated James's effort to make sense of the *words*—which he had, as he suggests in “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results,” by the early 1870s. For James, then, there was something fundamental in Peirce's vocal delivery of pragmatism that Peirce was unable to convey in writing. Consequently, in making his own voicing of the topic he urges his audience's awareness towards the ways in which “[m]y very words to you now are an example of what I mean.” The oratorical situation through which James's pragmatism is conveyed—its enactive arena—serves as its chief illustration. “As I talk here, and you listen,” James is saying, I'm able to convey something of the felt meaning of experience. Affective resonance “cannot take place at all and leave your conduct unaffected,” because thinking emerges out of feeling and leads into action.²⁰ Thus, the “emotional musical accompaniment” of James's philosophy—the sound of his voice—is instrumental, not incidental, to its “practical outcome.” By infusing music into language, James is able to stimulate an embodied response in his listeners. Responsivity is as much a matter of finely-grained affective undulations as it is of gross sensorimotor movements. Anything like what we would call today “political activism” is, I would argue, distinctly secondary.

In other words, pragmatism has an integral, perhaps primary, aesthetic component. Through the practice of improvisational lyricism James is able to resound the “ontological message” of musicality motivating his philosophical explorations. Further, he seeks to echo this aural conduction in writing by making an additional twist in the feedback loop that comprises its enactive arena. James's procedure for making books out of lectures involves “taking my cue from what has seemed to me the feeling of the audiences.” Of course, he could draw this hint from nothing other than their reactions,

their conduct, spoken or unspoken (or written). Although he describes the resulting interchange as “absolutely untechnical,” it involves less the rejection of “technicality” than its redefinition. Rather than drawing on the analytical rigor of scientific method as his guide, James is aligning philosophy with the imaginative subtlety of artistic technique—foreshadowing the enactive approach to literature that his students, Stein and DuBois, would pursue. In doing so, he suffuses Peirce’s focus on the reliable repeatability of habit with an enveloping awareness of the unruly particularity—the *singularity*—of feeling that accompanies, and in a sense complicates and exceeds, any given performance of habitual conduct. The effect is less a reversal than an enrichment of Peirce’s position. The conductance of belief comes to an incomplete closure, James shows, because the affective intensity of experience that motivates the attempt to communicate also entails the perpetual partiality of communication. Language, and conventionalized conduct more generally, provides an imperfect and uncertain access to the felt meaning of individual experience. Consequently, “[t]here is no point of view absolutely public and universal.” After every attempt to manifest and convey the interiority of feeling, “[p]rivate and uncommunicable perceptions always remain over.”²¹

It is this unavoidable surplus of meaning that effects belief’s demicadentiality, imbuing each movement of the mind’s symphonic maneuvers with just enough discord to keep thinking on the trail of a complex harmonics that exceeds any and every easy harmony. It is this dissonance that James seeks to use constructively in his attempts to realize two paradoxically enfolded goals. In part, his realignment of philosophy away from science and towards art is meant to broaden its appeal. At the same time, however, this concern with accessibility is engendered by an intensity of feeling that pushes the

limits of experience's communicability. In other words, James's effort to make his lectures "popular in the extreme" is complicated by the very thing that motivates it: "the well-known democratic respect for the sacredness of individuality."²² Part of what makes experience such a powerful resource for philosophy is that while we somehow know that it serves as something of a common fund, this knowledge is both compromised and enriched by the fact that each individual has his or her unique access into and way of processing felt meaning. These differences mark distances that are only ever incompletely closed. This abiding openness both frustrates and perpetuates our efforts to convey our experiences. In fact, the ongoing efficacy of communication depends as much on these ineluctable divergences as it does on the establishment of shared ground. Channeling this double-sided message entails not merely crafting communicative conduct to efficiently convey its proper content. Perhaps more importantly, communication must be made to gesture towards that which it draws upon but ultimately cannot contain: the inner complexity of a singular moment of experience. In the end, in any given instance, what the individual feels exceeds what the group can comprehend. Beyond the limits of communication, the most anyone can hope for is a still partial and incomplete communion with—at most—a handful of significant others.

To fulfill its function, philosophical language must foreground its partiality by imperfectly conjuring the nascent presence of that which simultaneously inspires and exceeds it: the musicality of experience and the intimate exchanges it motivates. This is the task James's pragmatism sets itself, the spur for its pursuit of improvisational lyricism. Forever lacking tools that could secure perfection, James makes do with—in a sense, misuses—the available instruments to approximate an end that will always remain

to a certain extent unprecedented. He troubles the working of words as words, modulating their movement by enacting them as sounds, attempting to simulate the breadth of felt meaning that cannot be simply told and can only be imperfectly conjured, the aspects of experience music comes closer to than language. The message he has to convey, James tells his audience in Berkeley, is “something simple enough . . . yet with just enough of ingenuity and oddity about it.” In short, what he wants to get across is a feel for the constructive dissonance at the heart of experience’s somewhat paradoxical dynamic—the productive tension between accessibility and particularity, communicability and intensity, “self-sustaining” and “self-removal.” Success in this endeavor is indicated by his ability to “catch and inspire.” The “perfectly ideal discourse for the present occasion,” James suggests, “would let loose all the right impulses and emotions” in his auditors. Ideally, he would know that this sensorimotor rapport and affective resonance was accomplished because

everyone, on hearing it, would say, “Why, that *is* the truth—*that* is what I have been believing, that is what I have really been living on all this time, but I never could find the words for it before. All that eludes, all that flickers, all that invites and vanishes even whilst inviting, is here made a solidity and a possession. . . .”²³

Of course, the genre constraints of a formal lecture make the actualization of such an ideal call and response unlikely—and those of a printed essay more so. It would be unlikely to hear something like this coming out of someone’s mouth during even the most unconstrained and informal conversation. Even if this imagined rejoinder were somehow manifested the original speaker would forever remain uncertain of its veracity because of the unavoidable imperfection of affective resonance and the consequent partiality of belief’s conduction. The moment of communion James gestures towards never achieves

the status of “a solidity and a possession.” But his flickering evocation of it nevertheless *sounds* good. There is something in its carefully phrased insistence, artfully placed emphases, striking combination of smooth and rough timbres that points towards the elusive fullness of experience in the very act of underscoring its inability to completely grasp it. This is the work of improvisational lyricism: playing on communication’s limitations, it keeps it open to that which both inspires and escapes it. Pushed to its margins, language is shown to be submerged in an ocean of musicality too vast to fully absorb. Worried, words melt at their edges, becoming fringed with the shadow and shimmer of the sounds they strain themselves to approximate. Enacting words as sounds is the ideal, but is only ever incompletely actualized in writing. “I have something of this kind in my mind,” James confesses. His imperative is to “produce it on the present occasion,” to enact its manifestation before his audience’s ears, actual and virtual. “—and yet, and yet, and yet” he cautions while continuing to promise, “I simply cannot. I have tried to articulate it, but it will not come.”²⁴ James is unable, at this point, to abandon his critical distance, to plunge into the existential problematic of expressing singularity. Highlighting this breakdown of articulation, however, is part and parcel of persevering in the effort of improvising fusions between music and language, feeling and thinking, experience and philosophy, ideal and actual, self and other. This is true because loosening the bounds of expression makes way for a style that provides a partial inroad to that which cannot be completely circumscribed, that in doing so compensates for—takes the place of—an elusive content.

Maintaining the hope of finding words that communicate the felt meaning of experience means working against the philosophical habit of making truth “a solidity and

possession.” It means amplifying the fluidity of language by playing on the way music is simultaneously there and not there, how words are haunted by sounds. James knew this by the time he delivered “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results,” and he attempted to get it across to his audience by sharing the moment of poetic insight he experienced on Mount Marcy, dramatizing it by figuring its workings in terms of the ground upon which it occurred. “Philosophers are after all like poets,” James explains. “They are path-finders. What everyone can feel, what everyone can know in the bone and marrow of him, they sometimes can find words for and express.” The unpredictable frequency with which this trail-blazing hits its mark imbues language—both poetic and philosophical—with an “accidentality.” Words and phrases trace workable trajectories. No matter how systematic, however, this routing of thinking is unable to fully comprehend the “forest of human experience.” Therefore, philosophers should cultivate an awareness “that what their formulas express leaves unexpressed almost everything that they organically divine and feel.” Effective thinking, then, depends in large part upon an abiding appreciation for the intractability of feeling. Not only is there always more work to do, but going the wrong way and getting lost are ever-present dangers. The condition of getting somewhere is therefore knowing that you are never exactly where you wanted to end up. Once launched upon the search for a way to convey the felt meaning of experience, however, there is no going back. The only option is to keep going. Over time, the effort pays off but it also takes its inevitable toll.

“So I feel that there is a center in truth’s forest where I have never been,” James tells his audience in Berkeley,

to track it out and get there is the secret spring of all my poor life’s philosophic efforts; at moments I almost strike into the final valley, there

is a gleam of the end, a sense of certainty, but always there comes still another ridge, so my blazes merely circle towards the true direction; and although now, if ever, would be a fit occasion, yet I cannot take you to the wondrous hidden spot to-day. To-morrow it must be, or to-morrow, or to-morrow; and pretty surely death will overtake me ere the promise is fulfilled. . . . Of such postponed achievements do the lives of all philosophers consist. Truth's fulness is elusive; ever not quite, not quite!

This passage, perhaps better than any other, exemplifies James's practice of improvisational lyricism—it both enacts it and illustrates it, treats it as both style and content simultaneously. James's work is punctuated—in fact, held together and moved along—by bursts of this sort of artful voicing, this infusion of language with music, thinking with feeling. While it works at tracking the mystery of experience's musicality, part of fulfilling this function is remaining conscious of the fact that this habitation has a “complex sacrificial constitution.”²⁵ As James acknowledged in the first reports of his epiphany on Mount Marcy, to have an experience is always also to pay a price. The more it gives—the more it accumulates and yields to articulation—the more it demands in return and disappears into the distance. The actual springs out of the ideal as philosophy undertakes the endless struggle to dwell upon and make known the felt meaning of experience. Somewhat paradoxically, however, the boundlessness of ideality is borne witness to through the marked finitude—the *mortality*—of its actualizations. This is a key component of the message James spent the rest of his career attempting to articulate. As such, it was not merely a topic of discussion but rather was a problem he lived through. To a significant degree, then, his philosophy can be heard as a resounding of his biography.

Things that Sound a Knell

The lack of center that James tracks in “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results,” the perpetual postponement of completion—the elusive “ever not quite” that compromises any final homogeneity or equilibrium but in doing so secures the continued possibility of “fulness”—is something James mourned and fretted over. It was also something he celebrated and eventually found to be a relief. Because, ultimately, the end that gleams is death. The moment it becomes something more than an ungraspable flicker, when it attains that status of a “sense of certainty,” is the moment it overtakes life. This is why James’s sense that he would expire before reaching his destination was so strong. To cope, he had to redefine the terms of his journey. The demise of taking hold of truth as “a solidity and a possession,” he came to recognize, is the rebirth of something else—of a protean multitude of potentials. While this brings hope, this hope rests on the fact that “life and its negation are beaten up inextricably together.”²⁶ Warding off death’s biggest blow, then, relies upon keeping a sense of its numerous partial infringements close to heart. The realization of one possibility depends upon the abandonment of another. While what was abandoned can return, it is forever marked by its intervening absence. Further, its recovery often necessitates the passing of that which had stood in its place. Consequently, as much as maintaining the widest spectrum of possibility requires turning away from narrow paths, it also unavoidably involves letting go of the drive to actualize the totality of potential’s range. In fact narrowness of focus and reaching towards totalization are two sides of the same coin. Steering a delicate course between these obstacles, James figures an ambivalent incompleteness—of truth, of meaning, of life—as the motivation of his philosophy and the art through which that way of thinking is enacted. What is more, it is also the guiding thread of his career: the

dominant theme of both his body of work and his pattern of personal development. Like hiphop freestylin, pragmatism's improvisational lyricism blurs the boundary between art and life in a way that supports rather than attacks the autonomy of aesthetics and affect, that seeks to foreground without exhausting the musicality of experience.²⁷

At the end of the previous section, I placed the telling and characteristic phrase of thought that James sounds as the opening phrase of his initial voicing of pragmatism within the context of what he had lived through in the Adirondacks a few months earlier. In doing so, I suggested that the former echoed the latter. There seems to be little room for doubt that the force of the figure that structures the passage quoted above derives in large part from the fact that it is drawn from James's experience of hiking and mountain climbing, pastimes that gave him deep enjoyment and as such he considered essential. That these activities had recently granted him a moment of preternatural insight, an experience of affective intensity, grants additional weight to the language, infuses it with musicality. A year later, James would again make his annual pilgrimage to the Adirondacks. While from the perspective of 1898 his speech in Berkeley seems merely to be shaped by his experience on Mount Marcy, from the vantage of 1899 James's poetic profession of his philosophy reveals itself to be an extrapolation of that happenstance—an invention based upon, but exceeding, found materials. As such, it foreshadows what would occur upon his return to the site of discovery. The line of influence between life and art curves back on itself in a spiral without end. Rather than one deriving from the other, the two terms of the relation turn out to be mutually constitutive and revisionary. Sandwiched between his two experiences in the Adirondacks, "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results" speaks to the way figurative work and literal labor

intertwine to form the recursive fabric of experience and its philosophical exploration: a form of self-reflection that is transcendent to the exact degree to which it remains rooted in immanence. In particular, as concerns James's situation, placing the speech within its dual context reveals the degree to which spiritual awakening is inseparable from physical suffering. What happened to James in the summer of 1899 both follows and departs from what occurred the year before. It is both a reversal and a complement: one could say consummation—although one that is incomplete, at best. That is, what James faced was a case of closure in which partiality turns out to be for the best. The perambulations of James's poetic and philosophical path-finding serve as an amplification of experience's "complex sacrificial constitution," bear witness to the fact that what James considered to be the source of "primeval sanity and health of soul" was also a cause of bodily pain and mortal fear.²⁸

What is more, this duplicity—this ineliminable discrepancy—is ultimately what James found so engaging.²⁹ The effort of improvising, of making constructive use of this dissonance, is what gives life its broadest significance. For James, it was "human nature strained to its uttermost and on the rack, yet getting through alive, and then turning its back on its success to pursue another more rare and arduous still" that "inspires us, and the reality of which it seems to be the function of all the higher forms of literature and fine art to bring home to us and suggest." What makes this aesthetic motivation so extraordinary is that it can be observed happening every day, in the most seemingly ordinary and uninspiring of conditions. It remains true that for a considerable proportion of the earth's human population just getting through the day constitutes an amazing achievement. Especially when (infrequently) we turn our attention to those areas of the

globe that are struck by extreme poverty and destabilized by sectarian violence (some of which, despite what we would like to believe, are within our very own borders), we find endless examples of human bravery and fortitude “snatching victory from the jaws of death.”³⁰ We read a novel or see a photograph that “brings home” an instance of such everyday heroism, and a large part of the effect it has on us is the not-quite-articulated knowledge that the chosen example stands out not because it is isolated but because it is in fact indicative of countless other examples. The choice is ultimately arbitrary, but this heightens rather than diminishes the significance of what is chosen. Such art is successful to the degree that it extrapolates upon the story that inspires it to evoke the others that remain untold, some of which are right under our noses in the most seemingly undramatic and inconsequential of circumstances. Some of which are beating silently within our own chests. This multiplicity does nothing to decrease the impressiveness of any given instance. In fact, to a large degree singularity is uncanny exactly because it is inherently plural.

James wrestled hard with this paradox, and this struggle of his is one reason why the composition and performance of *Varieties* offers not only a suggestion but also an enactment of mortality’s strange—but also strangely common—ability to momentarily and ever-so-partially exceed itself. In fact, I would argue, it is on the basis of this previous achievement that James would be able to conclude the monumental argument of his 1908 Hibbert Lectures at Oxford on “The Present Situation in Philosophy” (which would form the basis of what would turn out to be his last major work, *A Pluralistic Universe*) via a reference to “experiences of an unexpected life succeeding upon death.” “By this I don’t mean immortality,” James cautions, distinguishing his worldly approach

from that of traditional Christian theology. “The phenomenon,” he clarifies, “is that of new ranges of life succeeding on our most despairing moments.” In other words, while literal death hovers as an ever-present and perhaps pressing concern at these times of despair (it was a distinct possibility for James in 1899—and 1908, for that matter), what he attempts to bring to the forefront of attention is something figurative, symbolic: “the deathlike termination of certain mental processes within the individual’s experience.”

During the course of *Varieties*, drawing on numerous case studies, James sketches the experiential pattern he finds typical of people who have a feel for the “religious.” To paraphrase, this pattern consists of: first, opening oneself to the passing of habitual trains of thought and behavior; second, realizing that this act of “letting go” sets the stage for the birth and (particularly significant in James’s case) *rebirth* of wider streams of feeling and ways of being. Specifically, for James the “unexpected life succeeding upon death” consists of flashes of feelingful thinking that “open out the strangest possibilities and perspectives,” experiences that due to their emotionally-charged inspiration easily find themselves buried by conventional means of expression but that—by virtue of that very same affective intensity—can motivate a revisionary struggle with convention that can effect their unforeseen resurrection.³¹ In short, at the heart of *Varieties* (and James’s work in general) is the confrontation and partial resolution of the mortal difficulty of manifesting, and thereby making communicable, *singularity*. As he wrote his Gifford Lectures, he was living through this struggle at the same time that he was compiling other case studies and defining its general structure. To a large extent, the quality of his description depended on the playing-out of his enactment behind the scenes and in the process of delivering his lectures.

As intimated above, it was during his time in the Adirondacks in the summer of 1898 that James first developed the heart troubles that would eventually lead to his death in 1910. It was the day after his nocturnal rapture on Mount Marcy, he believed, that the damage was done—“racing with those greyhounds of Goldmarks,” his much younger friends. “We plunged down Marcy,” he wrote his wife at the end of the day. Charles, who had “blazed a trail the year before,” was in the lead. They then hiked up and down a series of nearby peaks. “It was the steepest sort of work,” James wrote, “and, as one looked from the summits, seemed sheer impossible.” He complained of sore hands and legs during the next few days, but the injury of his heart would not become apparent until later in the summer. The price James was paying, then, was not only for the revelation he had experienced the night before but also for the ability to look away (for a little while longer at least) from the fact that the process of aging would hamper his athletic routine. Maintaining this illusion was so important to James because a large part of the significance hiking and mountain climbing had for him had to do with the fact that he had sublimated into these activities certain aspirations—in particular, *artistic* ambitions—from his youth, which he had set aside (if not abandoned) in navigating his difficult passage into adulthood. When, in *Talks to Teachers and Students*, James speaks of the widespread inability to follow through on the youthful hope “to enjoy poetry always, to grow more and more intelligent about pictures and music, to keep in touch with spiritual and religious ideas, and even not to let the greater philosophic thoughts of our time develop quite beyond our view,” it is hard not to hear him as talking to himself as much as to his audience.³²

“We say abstractly,” James writes, applying his pragmatic maxim to the particular issue at hand:

“I mean to enjoy poetry, and absorb a lot of it, of course. I fully intend to keep up my love of music, to read the books that shall give new turns to the thought of my time, to keep my higher spiritual side alive, etc.” But we do not attack these things concretely, and we do not begin *to-day*. We forget that every good that is worth possessing must be paid for in strokes of daily effort. We postpone and postpone, until those smiling possibilities are dead. Whereas ten minutes of day of poetry, of spiritual reading or meditation, an hour or two a week at music, pictures, or philosophy, provided we began *now* and suffered no remission, would infallibly give us in due time the fulness of all we desire. By neglecting the necessary concrete labor, by sparing ourselves the little daily tax, we are positively digging the graves of our higher possibilities.³³

This passage rings somewhat hollow, I would argue, unless we recognize that James is speaking from personal experience. For him, hiking and mountain climbing—and, as it would turn out, philosophizing—were the “necessary concrete labor” that maintained the aesthetic dimension as an active—if not fundamental—aspect of his experience. They led into his insight into poetry on Mount Marcy and no doubt reminded him of the landscape painting he had engaged in (and shown a proficiency for) as a teenager. Such substitutive labors, however, lack something that attacking the problem more directly would offer. Perhaps more to the point, though, what James was obscuring from view by ignoring the degree to which his advancing age would inhibit his physical activity was the suspicion that it was too late for such a direct attack. But there are different indirect routes, and in combination they can come close to hitting home. James would rescue his “higher possibilities” from an early grave, and his means for doing so is suggested by the proximity of the religious and the philosophical to the poetic and artistic in his (re)enlistment of youthful ambition. At the time leading up to his Gifford Lectures, James was shifting his energy from psychology (which he associated with science, and

saw to be increasingly dominated by attention to what he considered to be the trivialities of laboratory research) to philosophy (which, as we have seen, he associates with art in its aspiration to engage broader and more intimate concerns). As James's physical health deteriorated, the "philosophy of religion" that he pursued in *Varieties* would open up into a new means of securing the survival of artistic aspiration. In setting off in this new line of work, he would continue to draw on his embodied and affectively intense experiences in the Adirondacks as a figurative resource for foregrounding the aesthetic dimension.

Before being carried away by this upshot, however, we need to trace the downstroke that preceded and set the stage for it. Perhaps the most expedient way to do so is to juxtapose this most recent passage from *Talks to Teachers and Students* with that from "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results," with which I concluded the previous section. The latter bears witness to the inevitability of postponement. The difficulty of expressing the musicality of experience—the affective intensity of singularity—in language leads towards the acknowledgement that the actualization of our ideality is unavoidably incomplete. The former, however, reminds us that there is a crucial limit beyond which it is fatal to postpone, that although our dearest ambitions will always be marked by incompleteness we must nevertheless struggle to make the fullest accomplishment we can muster (partial though it may be). At the same time, we must always keep in mind that pushing too hard broaches mortality as much as not pushing hard enough. Navigating this threshold, then, is like walking a tightrope, or tiptoeing across a razor's edge. It involves an elaborate balancing act that Michel de Certeau has called "tact": the ability "to maintain a balance that is never permanently acquired," in part because "the practitioner himself is part of the equilibrium." This tactical occupation

of the margins involves an effort to manifest “a formal relationship in spite of the variation of the elements,” to create a fusion of found materials that exceeds its sources and thereby can recall and reenvision that which—as James puts it—“must be all unplanned for and unexpected.”³⁴ This improvisational struggle has a sharp duplicity, an inherent doubleness: it is both exciting and dangerous, and these two qualities are both in tension and mutually constitutive. If the former aspect is what James took away from his ascent of Mount Marcy in 1898, the latter is what he would be left with upon his return the next year. That is, in 1899 James would come face-to-face with and be unable to turn away from the danger of trail-blazing’s literal labor. Having this brought home would have a commensurate impact on his figurative work of poetic and philosophical path-finding.

James’s health had stabilized during the 1898-1899 school year, so much so that despite his lingering concerns about the condition of his heart when early summer rolled around he saw fit to take advantage of the window of time between the end of the term and leaving for Europe (where he was to spend his sabbatical preparing for the Gifford Lectures) to revisit his favorite haunts in the Adirondacks. What ensued would haunt him, serving as a reminder of the ever-unfinished and often confusing nature of exploratory endeavors. Exploration promises discovery. But it can make one lost, as well. Further, insofar as our “spurts and sallies forward” are “like the thin line of flame advancing across the dry autumnal field,” they can start burning out of control in the very process of clearing away unwanted undergrowth. James’s entry into this maelstrom would begin innocently enough. He was lured by a deceptive sense of ease, aggravated by his willed ignorance of his ailments. Having thus misled himself, in June of 1899

James “got lost in the Adirondacks and converted what was to have been a ‘walk’ into a 13-hour scramble without food and with anxiety.” As he would explain the incident to Pauline Goldmark, his companion from the prior year: “after some slow walks which seemed to do me no harm at all, I drifted one day to the top of Marcy.”³⁵ Perhaps he hoped to revisit and renew the ecstasy he had experienced in 1898, but if that was the case he did so only to find these hopes dashed. This painful disappointment of aspiration, however, would—paradoxically—enable him to realize the revisitation and renewal he had been aiming for in the first place by forcing him to face and to a certain extent resolve difficulties which he had been avoiding. Having made a crucial sidestep, what seemed like an indirection was in fact an entry into the necessary labor that would get him back on track—or, rather, allow him to forge new tracks.

James made his way leisurely up to this familiar peak, paused to admire the view momentarily, and then set off on what should have been an easy “downward saunter.” Not realizing that new paths had been cleared since his last visit, however, James mistook an unknown trail for the one Goldmark’s brother had blazed and led him down the year before. Being made myopic by a false bravado, and over-estimation of what can be accomplished through sheer willpower alone, James failed to do in practice what he professed in theory: always pay attention to the particular—and in doing so maintain an awareness of experience’s messiness, its tangle of irreducibly plural possibilities. “My carelessness was due to the belief that there was only one trail,” James explained to Goldmark, “so I didn’t attend particularly.” Consequently, he found himself at a dead end and spent a long and laborious time hacking his way through uncharted wilderness, returning to camp four hours later than he had intended. By the time he recounted the

incident to Goldmark, he was appropriately humbled. “Anyhow I was an ass,” he confessed, “and you ought to have been along to steer me straight.” Much of his vigor, James discovered, had to do with the company he kept. Without the friends who served for him as the symbolic manifestation of what he now considered his forever-lost youth, he exhausted himself. That his mortality had been brought home to James is attested to by the way he concludes his recounting to Pauline: “I fear we shall ascend no more acclivities together.”³⁶ His present failure made him afraid of a severely circumscribed future: one in which his activity would remain permanently grounded and solitary.

As it would turn out, however, this brush with death is what would enable him to reclaim his youthful possibilities and achieve new heights. This work was hindered by the fact that his misadventure had injured more than his pride. It had also caused “a very much worse condition of the cardiac organ, with entirely new symptoms.”³⁷ Beyond being unable to hike or mountain-climb, James experienced unbearable pain when he took only a few steps in the least strenuous of conditions. As a result, he would leave for Europe earlier than expected, seeking what was then considered state-of-the-art medical care at a retreat center in Germany. But it was exactly the hindrance of his heart problems that, in an important sense, made James’s work of recovery and renewal possible. First of all, it enabled him to take an extra year of leave from his teaching duties at Harvard and to lighten somewhat the load of delivering his Gifford lectures. Giving his first lecture in May 1901 rather than January 1900, as originally planned, James shortened what was traditionally a two-year appointment to a mere seven months. The drawing-out of his preparation time proved productive, however, as he was able deliver a full course of lectures within his abbreviated time-frame. More significantly,

however, because for James physical ailments were always symptoms of broader psychosomatic syndromes (and it should be noted that *psychosomatic* is used here in the non-derogatory sense that has become current in contemporary behavioral medicine), James's heart condition complicated and consequently enriched what was already a difficult task. In prolonging his work on *Varieties*—and tripping him up when he actively applied himself to research and writing—his physical complaints opened the room for (and, in a sense, forced) James to delve further into the aftermath of his moment of insight on Mount Marcy in 1898. His struggle to verbalize the meaning of the “boulder of *impression*” this experience left him with marked the initial resurfacing of the existential problematic of expressing singularity. James had seriously and extensively wrestled with this issue at the outset of his career, found it overwhelming, and side-stepped it in order to move on with his life. His heart condition and the psychological complications it involved fanned the flames set off by the initial spark he had experienced in the Adirondacks and in doing so brought him back even closer to the time during which—up to then—the fire had burned most fiercely.

Much was riding on the Gifford Lectures for a variety of reasons: the prestige of the appointment, the breadth of the material he had to cover, the pivotal place the lectures played in James's program of moving away from psychology narrowly conceived and into the wider possibilities of philosophy. The heaviest weight, and the biggest payoff, however, came from the fact that his Gifford Lectures would give him the opportunity to focus his attention on religion. It came with such freight, not only because it was a topic he had long been interested in and wanted to explicitly address, but also because he utilized it primarily as a synecdoche for a larger (and more dangerous) concern. By

arguing that “[i]f religion is to mean anything definite for us” it must be defined as “an added dimension of emotion,” James in effect *secularized* it. He made it a part of the broader and more worldly aesthetic dimension of affectively intense experience, which is exemplified for him by music and can be accessed through words only insofar as they “stir chords within you which music and language touch in common.” James was not alone in ascribing such a preeminent role to music: this position was shared by many of his contemporaries. Walter Pater’s well-known contention that “[a]ll art constantly *aspires towards the condition of music*” can be taken as emblematic of this stance. According to Pater, this aspiration is motivated by the fact that of all media musical sound is the most autonomous from the demands of representation. The meaning of music is, essentially, itself. It refers to something, but something that it itself manifests and that is derived from our inner lives rather than the outer world. As philosopher Susanne Langer suggests, music serves as an exteriorization of the “*knowledge of human feeling*.”³⁸ It enacts, and arouses in its auditor a reenactment of, a topological exploration of our affective landscape—what James charts as the felt meaning of experience.

For James, the project that came to be *Varieties* was meant not only as a survey of this vast territory and winding terrain of musicality. It was also to be, in itself, a further manifestation of this aesthetic dimension. James had set himself a tough task, and it was made even more difficult by his health problems. His frustration was compounded by the fact that, while it seemed that his physical condition was improving, his suffering continued unabated. “The doctor finds the objective state of my heart and aorta greatly improved,” James reported to a colleague shortly after his arrival in Europe in the fall of 1899. “Subjectively,” he hastened to add, “my discomfort is as great as ever and I can

make no exertion of any sort without symptoms of severe distress.” Further, the work James found himself unable to do involved not only physical effort but also—and perhaps more so—“mental hesitation, trepidation, or flurry.”³⁹ In short, James had to face the fact that his heart condition was not at the root of his problems. Rather, it had aggravated the psychological burden of depression and anxiety that James had managed to keep at bay for much of his professional career but which had been nearly insurmountable during his early adulthood. His physical ailments—and the threat of mortality that they harbored—were significant barriers, but they were so in large part because they brought back to the surface a deeper strain of suffering. The challenge of James’s Gifford Lectures may have unearthed this buried freight even if he had not injured his heart. In order to get *Varieties* into satisfactory shape, James would have to trace this psychosomatic syndrome (what would today be diagnosed as a mood disorder) back to its origins and, in effect, relive an existential problematic he had set aside. The act of abandonment and compromise that had once allowed him to get on with his life had outlived its usefulness and was preventing him from going any further. He would have to thematize anew what had been avoided and attempt to address it more satisfactorily. It was, in fact, this process of recovery (in a double sense) that offered him the primary example from which he derived the model of “religious experience” he would put forth in his Gifford Lectures. What James lived through—and relived—during the course of composing *Varieties* would make up a large part of its content.

Upon beginning his convalescence in Europe, James reported that he had “no hopes of *delivering* my Edinburgh lectures, and hardly any of writing them.” This was because he was finding the effort of getting them written, and envisioned the endeavor of their

deliverance, to be “a curiously exciting and prostrating performance.” “The old way of just sitting at a table and sweating through a lot of hours with a solid resistance and solid result,” he confessed to his brother Henry a few months into his stay, “is so far away as to seem as if it never could have been a daily possibility.” James was forced to alter his work routine. Rather than spending extended periods of time sitting at a desk—a practice which we now know to be a prime cause of repetitive stress injuries such as carpal tunnel syndrome and back pain (the latter of which James was known to suffer acutely, and which Linda Simon has gone so far as to call “the barometer of his emotional state”)—he found himself “spending an hour in bed, each morning over my Gifford lectures—writing them, I mean.” As the awkwardness of his phrasing here suggests, the reasons for slowing his pace and making his workspace more comfortable went beyond physical complaints. What truly made *Varieties* taxing in a way his previous projects had not been was the mental strain James experienced due to the fact that processing the material he was working with was particularly difficult—in large part because the putative content of his lectures was freighted with what he was going through while he wrote them. This present struggle, in turn, was complicated by the resurfacing of buried issues from the past, which also beat themselves into the substance of *Varieties*. So, the problem was not that James was drawing a blank but that he was buckling under the weight which he had taken (somewhat unintentionally) onto his shoulders. “The internal mind of me is actually boiling over with Gifford lectures,” he explained, “and I only lack the strength to write them down.”⁴⁰

Rather than athletic prowess, say, the vigor James found himself lacking was most distinctly the “*intellectual vitality*” that had sustained his career up to that point. His

weakness, as he saw it, was less a matter of being unable to power his way through marathon writing sessions and more of having a hard time making his way through a complex subject matter that he had intense feelings about. Even more to the point, the work of composing *Varieties* required James to relive problems that he had abandoned and recover potentials that he had compromised. Doing so would require letting go of much that he had depended on and profited from, which James feared he was not strong enough to do. When, in a notebook he kept while working on his Gifford Lectures, James dwelled upon “the probability of dying soon with all my music in me,” what he fretted would remain unsung was not only the “great Philosophy of Religion” he aspired to manifest but also his capacity for cultivating affectively intense experience and holding open a plenitude of possibilities—in short, his singularity—that had led him to pursue art at the exact moment his late adolescence was passing into his early adulthood.⁴¹ James had given up painting within a year of deciding upon it as a vocation, moving on to study at Harvard’s Lawrence Scientific School and later at the university’s medical school. Throughout his childhood James had displayed an impressive knack for drawing and he seemed to enjoy his time studying in Newport, Rhode Island, with the painter William Morris Hunt, so his abrupt decision to turn towards another path warrants some explanation. Multiple justifications have been offered up in the existing scholarship: James’s father disapproved of art and wanted his son to be a scientist, artists were not held in high regard by society in general, it was an impractical line of employment, he just decided that painting was not for him and his talents would be better applied elsewhere. But one reason has yet to be considered, and it is—I would argue—most

likely the most dominant: James was overwhelmed by the burden of affective intensity and protean possibility artists have to continually carry, dwell upon, and work with.

With *Varieties*, he was asking himself to shoulder this freight once again. “Religion” functioned for James as a synecdoche for a wider aesthetic dimension. Philosophy and art are inextricably intertwined for James, in large part because—as with hiking and mountain climbing—he sublimated into the former the energies driving his artistic impulse. This was most likely why, in the spring of 1873, he decided against “philosophical activity as *a business*,” and instead took a job teaching anatomy and physiology at Harvard, effectively opening a door into the emerging science of psychology. He would keep up philosophy “on the side,” as it were. Insofar, it fared better than drawing and painting—which, as early as the fall of 1872, James “regretted extremely letting . . . die out.” For a time, the combination of philosophy and mountain climbing—a unique blend of speculative and physical activity—served to keep the aesthetic dimension alive in his experience. But, as his physical health declined, a more sophisticated retapping of the artistic impulse was in store. James had a message to share, a message that had been with him for a long time, a message worthwhile because it grew out of singularity and was consequently difficult to express. Working to get this message across he had begun to discover that insofar as his philosophy would be made manifest it would be so by virtue of being enacted through an art of improvisational lyricism. James had begun to make inroads towards actualizing this program in the lectures he gave in the 1890s. Further, the seeds of this development can be observed in the artistic flourishes many commentators have found scattered amongst the voluminous and for the most part scientifically-oriented pages of *Principles*. Particularly significant

in this regard are the places where James uses metaphors drawn from the aesthetic dimension to navigate points at which the psychological verges upon the more broadly philosophical. Key instances include his use of musical overtones to illustrate the “fringe” that surrounds each pulse in the stream of thought, the margin that defines (and in doing so both transcends and suffuses) each field of consciousness, and his comparison of the process of cognition with the work of sculpture.⁴²

In *Principles*, however, James remained hampered by having to accommodate his views to scientific conventions. There was little room for change in this regard, and consequently the fringe of singularity was limited to merely poking its head momentarily above the water of the stream of thought. James’s hesitation, his drawing up short, in “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results,” suggests that even in the summer of 1898 James still found himself confined by the conventional—unable to alter it sufficiently, to make it serve rather than compromise his purposes. It would not be until *Varieties* that the “extramarginal” would truly wind its way through and enrich the typical field of consciousness, thus allowing psychology to pass fully into the philosophical. In order to work towards the simultaneous enactment and description of this potential, during the course of writing his Gifford Lectures James would have to dive more directly into the existential problematic of expressing singularity, challenging convention to a greater degree, grappling with it until it was remade to make more room for divergent—feelingful—thinking. In large part, this challenge would involve suggesting that art, as much if not more so than science, provided the means for epistemological guidance and ontological insight. Making this leap would require James to revisit a time in his life after he abandoned painting but during which the pursuit of art

was still a live—if tenuous—possibility. It was also the time when he most seriously struggled with the psychosomatic syndrome of depression and debility, anxiety and ailment, that would once again rear its head in the wake of his heart injury. The “boulder of impression” that cannot quite be put into words, the “internal mind boiling over” that will not spill satisfactorily onto the page, were foreshadowed by and in turn evoked an “endless fullness” that “bursts and cracks at every seam,” that James was both attracted to and repelled by in the late-1860s and early-1870s, a period during which—like when he took up and then quickly abandoned painting—he was at an important transition in his life: on the brink of turning thirty and near the completion of his professional training, facing the necessity of definitively assuming adult responsibilities.⁴³ The fact that in order to make it through the phase of maturation he traversed circa 1870 James abandoned this daunting territory and compromised his artistic impulse set the stage for the return of the aesthetic dimension and revocation of his scientific compromise when the next major turning point in his life came around, circa 1900.

Between a Piano-String and a Damper

It is in a letter to his brother Henry written in the winter of 1869 that James gives his clearest and most general statement—until *Varieties*—of the dilemma he faced when attempting to put his experience on Mount Marcy into words as well as trying to get his Gifford Lectures written, delivered, and published. He had been back in Cambridge for about a year, returned from an eighteen month stay in Germany (most of which was spent in the city of Dresden) during which he partook of a much needed break from his scientific studies and sought to find relief for a variety of physical ailments (headaches, digestive problems, and back pain) as well as the broader state of malaise and angst of

which they were symptoms. He had finally managed to finish his professional degree, but having decided against practicing medicine he floundered around, engaging in his cherished speculative pursuits, and yet “so sickened & skeptical of philosophical activity as to regret much that I did not stick to painting.” He fretted over his future acutely and, in general, was more at sea than he had been during his unsuccessful convalescence in Europe. This state of uncertainty bordering on hopelessness—broken up, luckily enough, by fleeting but strongly felt bursts of hope—would last six years. In 1875 he finally assumed himself to have found a workable answer to the elusive query of what to do with himself, the sticky “question of ‘what to be’” that had been “tormenting” him since he was sixteen.⁴⁴ For James, this issue was surprisingly far-reaching because he took it to be a matter not merely of employment, or even of personal identity, but of ontological status. Henry, meanwhile was in the midst of beginning his own European tour. Having published a number of short stories and reviews, to which he received a positive response, he was preparing to write his first novel. Hampered by his own psychosomatic syndrome (similar to, but less intense than, his brother’s), he was finding it difficult to handle the vast emotional territory and extensive network of possibilities this longer and more involved project required that he navigate.

Presented with Henry’s concerns, James replied—in rhapsodic, rhythmic language that would not be matched in his writings until his report of his moment of insight in the Adirondacks he wrote to his wife thirty years later (and his figural use of it in “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results”)—that he could “well sympathize with what must be the turmoil of your feeling before all this wealth—”

that strange impulse to exorcise it by extracting the soul of it and throwing it off in words—which translation is in the nature of things impossible—

but each attempt to storm its inaccessible heights produces, with the pang of failure, a keener sense of the reality of the ineffable subject, and a more welcome submission to its yoke.

We have sketched here, perhaps in the firmest lines it can be, the existential problematic of expressing singularity. While James acknowledged the extreme difficulty of capturing in conventional language the preeminent realm of affective intensity and protean potential that is the aesthetic dimension, he encouraged his brother to struggle with and remake convention in an effort to approximate its manifestation. In part, because it is the very matrix of the “[i]deals of which the very essential peculiarity consists in the fact that they are *not* realized—certainly not here, possibly not anywhere.” As James would recollect while writing *Varieties*, “our dumb fidelity to such ideals [is] our deepest vocation.” For a man engaged in the struggle, perturbing conventional conditions in the service of such a cause “is the deepest meaning of his existence” because in doing so “one certainly feels as if one were in a very central, very real ontological position.” “One feels as if no formula could exhaust the life,” he adds, “or be quite adequate to its mystery.” In short, “the aesthetic relations of things,” James believed, “reveal a deeper part of the universal life.” Because of this fundamental importance, he urged Henry, “[i]t does not do to trust the matter remaining in the mind—Nothing can take the place of notes struck with the animal heat of fever upon them, and I hope you are making some for your own use all the time.”⁴⁵ In other words, writing infused with the musicality of experience can set the stage for achieving a partial, yet ever so important, communication of affective intensity and its plurality of possibilities, a resonance between sender and receiver that always remains incomplete yet nevertheless serves a definite and significant function even (or especially!) when one person occupies both positions. For, if

singularity is to exceed convention at any given moment, it must exceed itself over the course of time, necessitating that even the one that gives witness to it reflect upon it, take time to process it with the aid of traces it leaves through works of art.

“I had a touch of fever at Dresden,” James confessed to his brother upon his return to Cambridge, “and I can’t help hoping that with your larger opportunities, there will be a distinct intellectual precipitate from your experience, which may be communicable to others.” In envying what he took to be his brother’s greater artistic abilities, James suggests that—at least in 1869—he was himself unable to cultivate and convey the aesthetic dimension. In encouraging his brother, he was in effect designating a surrogate for an undertaking he found too demanding. His singularity was, perhaps, *too* real—overwhelming to the extent that he soon found his “submission to its yoke” to be intolerable. If so, it was in large part, I would argue, because he conflated communicability with the achievement of “a distinct intellectual precipitate.” In other words, James found it hard to accept the partiality and incompleteness of the affective resonance that could be generated through the improvisational effort to remake conventions. In fact, James would be unable to make peace with this state of affairs until the time of *Varieties*. To understand why the “touch of fever” James experienced in Dresden flared out before it actualized itself in “notes struck with the animal heat of fever upon them” and thereby became a sustainable (and endurable) creative heat, it is necessary to return to the locale of its enactment, paying attention to its prelude and aftermath as well as its climax. The way he framed the issue, the only options seemed to be a fire raging out of control or an extinguished blaze. At the time he found the latter to be ever so slightly more bearable, and was resigned to the fact that this choice would

define who he was for all time, without any room for alteration or variance. In short, James chose to adopt “the belief that there was only one trail” in order to alleviate the need to “attend particularly.” Pursuing a narrow, conventionalized path, singularity was put on hiatus—if not assumed to be eclipsed. For, as he would argue in *Principles*, “in most of us, by the age of thirty, the character has set like plaster, and will never soften again.”⁴⁶ In 1869, it did not occur to James that he may be among the exceptions that prove the rule, or that the stuff out of which people are made remains plastic even after the passage into adulthood (as recent neurophysiological research suggests).

The previous year in Dresden, however, the “plaster” had yet to set and James found that it was still responsive to his efforts to sculpt himself. Taking a much-needed break from his unfulfilling medical studies, he even found himself entertaining the notion that he may be made of a different material altogether—one that would prove more pliable over time. James was unable to fully embrace this possibility and consequently found his constitution hardening because getting back in “touch” with his own “larger opportunities” proved to be not only thrilling but also overwhelming. Trying to launch himself on an alternative career-path, James spent much of his time in Germany testing his hand at philosophy. Further, James’s philosophical ruminations during his time in Dresden focused upon the point where the life of the mind most directly impinged upon the practice of art: aesthetic theory. As evidenced by the diary he kept at the time, he pored over the works of the German masters in the field: Lessing, Goethe, Schiller. Under their influence, he launched himself on a program of aesthetic appreciation, gathering first-hand experiences that could serve as primary material for his own speculations. Things seemed to be coming together during the second week of April

1868, during which James viewed a sculpture exhibition—plaster casts of Greek originals—at a local museum and attended a German production of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. With these two examples at the ends of the spectrum, James found himself pondering “the difference between Classic & Romantic” in an effort to put his finger on that elusive quality that characterizes the contemporary moment of modernity. In doing so, he was in effect charting the same territory that would be revisited by poets like T.E. Hulme, T.S. Eliot, Wyndham Lewis, and Ezra Pound half a century later. Like these “high modernists” James found himself wondering in particular whether the romantic mode—which he considered to emerge out of the Italian and English renaissances and to come into its own in the culture of late-eighteenth and nineteenth century German culture—is “a final one or only a mid stage on the way to a new and fuller classical one.”⁴⁷ In querying this cultural transition he was also trying to navigate his own maturation process. For, while attracted to the affective intensity and protean possibility championed by proponents of romanticism, he also feared that laboring under its weight would make him lose his sense of direction and cause his life to spin out of control.

While he undertook a brief flirtation with the romantic in Dresden in 1868 (and would return to and explicitly embrace it by the time of *Varieties*), back in Cambridge a year later he would find himself for all intents and purposes beginning to propose and put into action (at least insofar as his personal development was concerned) a new classicism. Grasping after the stability implied by clean lines, static shapes, and solid volumes, it could be said (drawing on James’s own imagery from *Principles*) that he essentially made himself into yet another “plaster cast” of a Greek model. Specifically, the pose he adopted was none other than “the Stoic.” Rather than being purely a positive step

forward, this posture—the outline of which began to be sketched in 1869, but would not truly take hold for another six years—was in large part an expression of desperation and fear, a defense mechanism against the turbulence James experienced in Dresden and the extreme state of flux he found himself in upon his return home. As James would put it in a notebook he kept while preparing his Gifford Lectures, “the Stoic” manages to stand his ground only “by deliberately annulling certain considerations and keeping himself insensible to a lot of naturally depressing objects of attention that all the while are hammering away at the gates of his instinctive constitution.” Stated in this way, this “cast” shows itself to be hollow rather than solid through and through. Instead of a stable foundation, the “plaster” is but a shell containing a more fluid and exploratory “constitution” that seeks for the smallest crack to escape and regain contact with the exterior world. Thus, the strength of Stoicism is found to be grounded on “an element of weakness.” Due to the “instability” hidden at its core, it is “an attitude which is ready to break down, and at the last extremity always does break down.”⁴⁸ This fact was borne home to James as he worked on *Varieties*, by his life-threatening heart condition, and—more to the point—by the way his physical symptoms summoned back to the surface the strains of depression and anxiety that he had managed to keep at bay for the most part during his professional career up to that point.

In order to persevere in the work of negation and desensitization, James would go on to argue in *Varieties*, the Stoic “must hold his breath and keep his muscles tense.” This “athletic attitude” takes its toll, and becomes especially problematic “when the organism begins to decay, or when morbid fears invade the mind”—as was the case for James while he was preparing his Gifford Lectures. When this happens, he writes, putting a

new spin on a metaphor we have been working with, the Stoic stance “appears but as a plaster hiding a sore it can never cure.” Stoicism had outlived its usefulness and came with a heavy and unexpected downside. As this out-dated palliative began to crumble, James had no choice but to develop a new way of dealing with the wound it covered up, a treatment that would work to heal it rather than merely hide it from view by revealing that the putative cure was in fact the true cause of pain. This is in effect what James accomplished during the course of *Varieties* by pushing aside “the Stoic” and bringing “the Twice-Born Sick Soul” to the center of the stage. The latter is a figure more of a romantic than a classical cast, and while it is drawn from a multitude of sources (as James’s voluminous citations indicate) it was ultimately a matter of James’s own invention (as attested to by the fact that perhaps his most significant citation is a disguised and probably at least partially fictionalized account of his own past experience). James’s “Twice-Born Sick Soul” was a work of improvisation, of using found materials to generate novelty. When compared to “the Stoic” it was not only a different posture but a different *kind* of posture, a dynamic pattern of experience rather than a static pose. Taking James’s secularization of religion seriously, it should be viewed as not only a model of spiritual insight but also of creative growth. With his Gifford Lectures, James not only described but enacted this role. In order to do so—in order to be “Twice-Born”—he would have to revisit and recover what had disturbed him in Dresden in 1868, the after-effects of which continued to reverberate upon his return to Cambridge and drove him to the brink of breakdown. He would have to let go of the crutch that had propped him up but was now reduced to splinters. He would have to open himself once again to the experience of being a “Sick Soul,” dwelling within it—as hard

as it is—in an attitude “of happy relaxation, of calm deep breathing.”⁴⁹ In the process, he would realize that his wound was less a fault and more a loss, and launch himself onto the path of recovering the positive value that could be derived from his suffering.

The position of “the Stoic” is relatively easy to sum up: Stoicism essentially amounts to reigning in affect in order to make way for a focused actuation of the will. The influence of this stance is readily apparent in the pivotal portion of *Principles*’s “Will” chapter, in which James argues that when “any strong emotional state” grips the mind “no images but such as are congruous with it” are allowed to step upon the stage of the mental theater. It is the mark of the “strong-willed man,” however, that he is able not only to smuggle “reasonable ideas” (which are assumed to run counter to the sway of affect) into the scene but also to hold them so steadily, solidly, and inertly at the center of attention that they swallow the emotion and usher in the advent of volitional action, properly so-called.⁵⁰ Exactly what “the Twice-Born Sick Soul” amounts to is much harder to comprehend, in part because it challenges the conventional dichotomization of affect and volition and overturns the scheme of valuation that frames the latter as somehow “better” or “more effective” than the former. More to the point, though, this second bearing is less a static stance than a dynamic sequence of events. It comprises a compound figure, made up of multiple parts—or, more accurately, phases. There are the two obvious segments of “Sick Soul” and “Twice-Born.” Hidden in the interstice between the pair is a third, intermediary stage: “the Divided Self,” which gets an entire chapter of its own in *Varieties*. Further complications arise when we consider how this pattern was manifested in James’s own particular case. To begin with, for James “the Divided Self” was none other than “the Stoic” viewed from the perspective attained by

recovering and renewing singularity's affective intensity and plurality of potential. With this revision, James was able to recognize that the division of consciousness is an inherent feature of being alive and that the attempt to "get it together" that constitutes "the Stoic" is merely one, provisional way of coping with the sense of loss that flows from the concurrence of this inevitable duplicity and the singular nature of biological existence. Another reason why "the Twice-Born Sick Soul" is more complex and nuanced, then, is that its constitution necessitates a greater degree of maturity, an additional leap of personal development. Finally, perhaps the most obvious factor making the comprehension of this pattern of experience difficult is that over the course of listening or reading it has to be constructed gradually from bits and pieces scattered across the thick volume of *Varieties*.

This presentation of the issue was not accidental. Not only is the extra interpretive effort necessary for the listener or reader to take the content of these Gifford Lectures to heart, but James's primary source for "the Twice-Born Sick Soul" was his own example. His enactment of this process of recovery and rebirth, like its recounting, is messy and protracted. It stretches from the time he was trying to figure out what to do with his life circa 1870 through the period thirty years later, when he found himself at another crucial transitional point in his life. In order to make sense of what James was trying to describe circa 1900, then, I propose tracing how it played out—from "Sick Soul," to "Divided Self," to "Twice-Born"—in his own experience. Doing so, I would argue, activates what could very well remain implicit but is of the foremost importance to recognize: the intertwining of art and life that *Varieties* consists of. This requires that we approach the work less as a finished product and more as an ongoing process, an unfinished

performance. It is therefore nothing but appropriate that the staging of *Hamlet* that James attended in Dresden during the spring of 1868 serves as our point of entry into this reconstructive process. “Unsuspectedly from the bottom of every fountain of pleasure,” James writes, trying to put across what life is like for a “Sick Soul” in some of the most oddly lyrical phrases that grace the pages of *Varieties*,

something bitter rises up: a touch of nausea, a falling dead of the delight, a whiff of melancholy, things that sound a knell, for fugitive as they may be, they bring a feeling of coming from a deeper region and often have an appalling convincingness. The buzz of life ceases at their touch as a piano-string stops sounding when the damper falls upon it. . . . Of course the music can commence again;—and again and again—at intervals. But with this the healthy-minded consciousness is left with an irremediable sense of precariousness. It is a bell with a crack; it draws its breath on sufferance and by an accident.⁵¹

In essence, James describes here (in terms both generalized and particular in their metaphoricity) the strong ambivalence towards the aesthetic dimension—the simultaneous attraction and resistance to affective intensity and protean potential—that threw him into a state of insecurity and flux, thereby compelling him to abandon the existential problematic of expressing singularity and compromise his artistic impulse.

While it could be imagined that this is what shattered his initially “healthy-minded” (which, in James, is a euphemism for naïve, small-minded, and one-dimensional) flirtation with painting in 1860, it doesn’t truly begin to surface in the record which we have of his experience until his report of the impression left upon him after seeing—and hearing—Shakespeare’s iconic tragedy during his failed German convalescence. It is no accident that when he sought to revisit and render this condition for the audience of his Gifford Lectures he would do so through a swath of performative prose poetry woven from musical threads, with the figure of a piano at its heart. James’s first response to the

play was positively ecstatic. “What a thing the human voice is though!” he exclaimed to his brother in a letter written upon returning to his pension after the performance, sounding “notes struck with the animal heat of the fever upon them.” James was giddy with the way in which the vocal efforts of the actors—especially the lead Emil Devrient, member of a theatrical family and the preeminent German actor of the era—infused the language of the script with a musicality that both exceeded it and amplified its effect. “I never felt the might of it so before,” James wrote the same night in his diary. “The endless fullness of it—How it bursts and cracks at every seam.”⁵² While part of him found this affective intensity and protean possibility alluring, a split second later another part of him rose in revolt against the audacity of singularity and the force of the aesthetic dimension. Immediately, “something bitter rises up” from this “fountain of pleasure,” especially insofar as it is channeled through and concentrated in its central figure. To understand why this is so, it must be remembered that James was not content merely to sublimate his frustrated desire to paint into an appreciation of the artistic works of others. He also wanted to draw on some of its dormant energies to motivate the philosophical pursuit of aesthetic theory. This additional aspiration brought him face to face with the problem of how to evoke the musicality of experience through the limited means of language, of singularity struggling with convention in an effort to express itself.

As we have seen, James later made advances in solving this problem in his lectures, peppering the printed versions with enactive traces of the oratorical situation through which they emerged and thereby triggering the embodied responsivity of the reader, activating echoes of their previous experiences of witnessing performance. In 1868, however, he found himself unequal to the task. His attempts to tackle it in his letter to his

brother and his diary are quickly swamped by doubts. In large part, this occurred because James's powerful feelings about this particular performance of the play led him to strongly identify with its main character, something that he was predisposed to do at any rate. What motivated this identification, and at the same time made it troublesome, was that this fictional prince of Denmark was gripped by forceful emotions of his own—to tragic and fatal effect. "Hamlet," then, insofar as it gives a shape to what James was experiencing circa 1870, could be considered one of the earliest sources of "the Sick Soul." James was not unique in being drawn to this figure and making use of it to understand his own life. As George Cotkin notes, in America and Europe during the late-nineteenth century "Hamlet" had a marked currency as the exemplar of one of the central concerns of modernity: "the plight of an individual facing an uncertain and chaotic world." Informing this "cultural commonplace" were the reigning interpretations of the character's plight: Goethe's opinion (voiced via the character of Wilhelm Meister, who himself undergoes his own prolonged identification with "Hamlet" as he labors to prepare to play the lead role in Shakespeare's play during his *Apprenticeship*) that this "fine, pure, noble and highly moral person . . . goes to pieces beneath a burden that it can neither support nor cast off," and Coleridge's amendment that the reason why this happens is because he is possessed by "an overbalance of the imaginative power" and therefore is unable to effect "a just coincidence of external and internal action." By James's time, an alternative take on the character had arisen, one which was less a revision than a reevaluation. For the French Symbolists—most notably, Stéphane Mallarmé, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Jules Laforgue, and Paul Valéry—Hamlet exemplified the solitary artist hampered by a hostile society, yet trying to realize his impossible

dreams in works that were valuable yet difficult to comprehend. This Symbolist spin on Hamlet may be what allows James Livingston to argue that Hamlet suffers less from indecision than from the difficulty of accommodating received frames of reference and fresh happenings to one another.⁵³

But, especially in light of this latest way of phrasing the issue, it is important to remember that, as Cotkin writes, “James encountered *Hamlet* not only through the hermeneutic of previous interpretations but also through direct experience.” The existing takes influenced his understanding of the play, but they did so at least in part because they resonated with what he himself was going through. Further, he put his own twist on the diagnosis of the dilemma of “Hamlet,” grasping it as exemplifying the existential problematic of expressing singularity—in particular, the difficulty of putting affectively intense experience into words. This issue was paramount to James in 1868 because he had been unable to fully act on his artistic impulse, and had instead sublimated it into aesthetic theorization. The overflowing passion of Shakespeare’s play evoked the wider potentials he was on the brink of abandoning, reminding him of the lack of confidence he felt in the face of them and his consequent inability to manifest them through his own works of art. The resources of philosophical language are brought in to save the situation, but ultimately prove incapable of this application because “the fullness of emotion becomes so superior to any possible words, that the *attempt* to express it adequately is abandoned.” The effort to philosophize—especially when it is trained upon the aesthetic dimension—turns out to be yet another rehearsal of the trouble art itself broached. Even at this additional distance, the material—as fascinating as it is—proves overwhelming. In large part, this is because the means through which art is placed at

arm's distance—conventional language—proves incapable of grasping it. Confronted with a powerful work, James's meditations begin spinning out of control like one of Hamlet's soliloquies. With "one form of words seeming as irrelevant as another," he explained to his brother Henry, "crazy conceits & counter senses slip and 'whirl' around the vastness of the subject, as if the tongue were mocking itself."⁵⁴ It did not occur to James—or, perhaps more accurately, he was not yet prepared for the undertaking—that this challenging of linguistic convention, this injection of singularity, sets the stage for the remaking of words that would prove capable of pursuing his desired end: the evocation of experience's musicality. This latter step would require him to sincerely embrace the challenges of art once again, something he would not devote himself wholeheartedly to until the late-1890s.

"In this matter I am prevented from expressing myself clearly by reason of the fogginess of my ideas," James confessed to Henry by way of wrapping up his comments on *Hamlet*. To query the philosophical import of artistic endeavor, he found, was to "clutch at straws of suggestions that the next day destroys." Unable to get his thoughts into what he considered clear and lasting—much less communicable—shape, James entertained the possibility that "such analyses are made by everyone more or less for himself and understood by no one else." Here he touches upon the fundamental paradox of singularity: it is both what makes everyone unique and the most universal of conditions. Each of us finds it exceedingly difficult to put across to others exactly how—and in what multitude of at times dissonant forms—we grasp the felt meaning of experience; yet it is exactly this difficulty, and the struggle to come to terms and perhaps partially overcome it, that is the condition of possibility for any genuine connections we

are able to make. Unable to make this leap—at least in 1868—James resigned himself to the fact that the philosophical inroads into the aesthetic dimension that he had begun to make were, in the end, utterly illusory. “All I have written or may write about art is nonsense,” James chastised himself in his diary. “Perhaps the attempt to translate it into language is absurd—for if that could be done what wd. be the use of art?”⁵⁵ But it is exactly the challenge affectively intense experience and its plurality of possibilities pose to the conventions of language that constitutes one of its most significant functions. Realizing this, though, requires the willingness to take on the burden of the aesthetic dimension and thereby pursue without reserve an artistic endeavor such as painting or the poetic remaking of philosophical terms, the infusion of words with the musicality of experience. Because at the time James was ultimately overwhelmed by the weight of singularity, he was unable to follow through on such a program and consequently questioned whether art was of any use at all. James was frustrated by the confines of language, but felt unable to get around them.

Usefulness, he believed, depended on the ability to motivate purposeful action. This motivation, in turn, James thought in 1868, depended upon the capability of framing clear ideas; clarity, here, being synonymous with being able to be stated in easily understandable language. Not meeting this criterion, art—and, most particularly, the artistic endeavor of struggling with and remaking convention to effect a partial expression of singularity that James would eventually embrace as the primary upshot of his philosophizing—was not considered to be action properly so-called. In retrospect, then, James’s inability to act or even make decisions circa 1870 could be considered a consequence of working with a perniciously narrow definition of what constitutes an

effective undertaking. In the midst of this paralyzing condition, James laid blame on the weight of affective intensity and protean potential he was attempting to shoulder. To get on with his life, he eventually decided, would require him to abandon—at least temporarily—this burden. Drawing on the example of Shakespeare’s play, it seemed to him that the very pretension of being able to carry this load bordered on delusion. Just as the effort to put the conundrum he faced into words led inevitably into “the slipping aside into some fancy,” James wrote in his diary, “so does action of any sort seem to Hamlet inadequate and irrelevant to his feeling.” He considered this presumed swamping of volition by affect to be the very definition of craziness, a primary cause of uncertainty and instability. Thus he found himself begging his brother to overlook “the bosh wh. my pen has lately got into the habit of writing” almost as soon as he had got it on the page. “I fear you begin ere now to be in the same doubt about *my* sanity as most people are about Hamlet,” James added in explanation of his request.⁵⁶ The threat of insanity would be ever-present and very real in the years that followed. It was so not only because of the overwhelmingness of shouldering singularity but also because pursuing the artistic impulse to dwell with affective intensity and its plurality of potentials came to be understood by James as unproductive and consequently irresponsible.

Wholeheartedly devoting himself to the exploration of the aesthetic dimension may indeed have been too much for him to handle. Or, perhaps James drove himself crazy by closing the trail he most passionately wanted to follow. That the latter is at least possibly true is attested to by the fact that circa 1900, in turning towards philosophy, James was able to reclaim and renew his artistic impulse. Part of doing so was destabilizing the boundary between and overturning the relative valuation of affect and volition, coming to

understand “action in the widest sense”—a category that most definitely included not only works of art but also responsivity to them. “You must remember that when I talk of action here,” James told the audience of his *Talks to Teachers and Students*, “I mean yeses and noes, and tendencies ‘from’ things and tendencies ‘towards’ things, and emotional determinations; *and I mean them in the future as well as in the immediate present.*”⁵⁷ This last clause is crucial, because comprehending how affect can facilitate as well as impede action often requires allowing it to play out across an extended period of time. This was something James found himself, somewhat to his surprise, capable of doing while he labored over his Gifford Lectures. During that feverish spring in Dresden, however, he simply lacked the patience. James was desperate for something to happen, to get something done, to cross some decisive threshold. The weight of affective intensity and protean possibility was packed into a small space, given a short time to unfold its effect. This made singularity very powerful, but also difficult to tolerate—as can be observed in the aftermath of James’s confrontation with “Hamlet” and even more so in the next major artistic event that he experienced, about a month and a half later. James would spend the latter part of April 1868 at a spa in Teplitz recovering, one assumes, from the excitement and pressure of his artistic flirtation. While there, he would spend much of his time reading Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, empathizing no doubt with the main character’s struggle to find himself, especially his own interest in but eventual departure from the theater, *Hamlet* in particular.

Upon his return to Dresden in the second week of May, he was in for a surprise that—in intensifying his courtship of the aesthetic dimension—proved to be both tantalizing and devastating. In the time while he was away, James’s pension had acquired a second

boarder: another American of his age who was also in Europe seeking relief from the psychosomatic symptoms that appear to have been so prevalent amongst their demographic in the late-nineteenth century. Thus, James fell into the company of a young woman named Kate Havens and was soon enjoying not only her conversations but also her daily recitals on the piano that constituted a prominent piece in the common area of their boarding house. Havens and her performances—momentarily, at least—helped James to get past the sense of futility he was struck with in the aftermath of attending Shakespeare’s play. Her example, James confessed to his good friend Tom Ward, “stirred chords in this desiccated heart wh. I long thought turned to dust.” He went on to add that “she has a real genius for music. I never heard a piano speak as she makes it.” Here, in James’s response to this musical revelation, is the seed which would bloom once he sincerely took up the challenge he confronted and backed away from in his attempts at aesthetic theory. If a piano could be said to “speak,” perhaps there was a way of speaking that was itself “music.” Philosophical terms, in order to be adequate to art, would have to be artistically remade in their own right. Language would have to be infused with the musicality of experience. Havens’s example proved more heartening and suggestive than “Hamlet,” not simply because she was a real person and not a fictional character but also by virtue of the fact that she was someone he could both identify with and imagine as a counterpart. His appreciation for her “extraordinary musical talent” was inseparable from the fact that he found her “a peculiar and agreeable person in every way.”⁵⁸ That is, in admiring her he allowed himself to entertain a healthy desire towards her. She awakened not only his artistic impulse but his need for

companionship and love, and while this made their encounter promising it also led James to view it as ultimately too risky.

James's "feelings came to a sort of crisis" one night, a couple weeks into their acquaintance, while listening to Haven's play. It followed the same pattern that the predicament that swamped him in the face of *Hamlet*, the feeling of pleasure in the end being tainted with something bitter that is so characteristic of "the Sick Soul." James took in the "buzz of life" sounding from the strings of Haven's piano, but found that "the reverberation dies away so soon in the soul and the bog closes around one again." The only conclusion he could come to was that he himself was the "damper." As he had told Ward, Haven's music "has struck into me so deeply as quite to rejuvenate my feeling." It did so because it was the means of manifesting "an absoluteness in the phenomena of this young person." This "absoluteness" should be distinguished from the capital-A "Absolute" that became James's philosophical *bête noire*. For James, the imperative was: "To get at something absolute without going out of your own skin! To measure yourself by what you strive for & not by what you reach!" Rather than an extraphenomenal totality, then, this "something absolute" is a node in a network of singularity immanent to phenomenality, in which each burst of affective intensity can be felt to be "hanging by some sort of navel-string to the Infinite womb" without their combined result ever exhausting this source of protean potential. The "absoluteness" of the aesthetic dimension invests each of its exemplars with "a something whereby their place in the phenomenal series of which they were members seemed *not* to exhaust their significance." An individual pursuing the artistic impulse exceeds any category that could be used to contain their singularity, remaking convention to improvise the

unforeseen. In doing so they undercut any pretension to “the Absolute,” resisting the reification (if not deification) of a narrow view into a totalizing gesture by activating the cutting-edge of phenomenality, the mainspring inherent to it that is generative of novelty. While James would eventually embrace and enact this improvisational stance, and was encouraged by Havens’s exemplification of it, on that fateful evening in the middle of May 1868 he would feel unequal to it. “The intuition of something here in a measure absolute,” he conceded in his diary, “gave me such an unspeakable disgust for the dread drifting of my own life for some time past.”⁵⁹

In part, James was allowing his feelings for Havens to get in the way of his enjoyment of her music. He longed for her companionship and love, but—given her imminent departure from Dresden—he despaired of cementing a bond that would survive being at a distance. In addition, he had more general doubts about his ability to be a successful suitor, much less a good husband. But on a more profound level something else, although something connected to this failed “romance,” was going on. James had witnessed Havens manifesting singularity through works of art, and feared that he was incapable of responding in kind. Overwhelmed by the burden of affective intensity and its plurality of potentials, James had abandoned art and aesthetic theory. Not even his desire to be a suitable companion for Havens could make him shoulder this load again. Ultimately, James could not pursue the promise of love that he heard in her playing because he found himself unable to reciprocate. Given his limits, he decided, he should buckle down and navigate a narrow course into the responsibilities and fruits of maturity. Doing so would mean leaving off the entertaining of “ideas disproportionate to any practical application,” among which he included “emotions of a loving kind indulged in

where one cannot expect to gain exclusive possession of the loved person.” Here we see again that James’s perceived incapacity was the effect less of a lack of potential than a mistaken definition of the task at hand. Unable to take up the challenge of working with the unavoidable partiality and incompleteness of affective resonance, James framed both art and love as matters of all or nothing. Finding the “all” too much to handle (or, it may be more accurate to say, impossible), he felt that he had no choice but to settle for “nothing”—adopting the pose of “the Stoic” and turning his back on what he had lost. The only problem was that with the fact of loss thus obscured, James worried that he suffered from an irremediable fault. That James was able to eventually navigate this impasse, at least as far as personal relations were concerned, is attested to not only by his marriage to Alice Howe Gibbens in 1878 but also by the fact that in courting her he was able to claim that it was in the act of making an effort “without any *guarantee*” of success that he heard “a voice inside which speaks & says ‘this is the *real* me!’” and thereby “felt himself most deeply and intensely active & alive.”⁶⁰

James would begin setting the stage for transferring this personal development into artistic achievement as early as his honeymoon in the Adirondacks, during which Alice listened to and recorded him vocally improvising his first major philosophical articles. These experimental essays included “On Spencer’s Definition of Mind as Correspondence” and “The Sentiment of Rationality,” in which he argued for importance of “the personal and aesthetic factor” in speculative endeavors as well as more concrete instances of cognition (which, we should remember, is for James always a mode of action). In doing so, he not only undercut the “viciously intellectualist” position of the proponents of “the Absolute” but also began to disassemble his own “Stoic” stance,

which set affect against volition and thereby suggested that “emotions” were nothing but “ideas disproportionate to any practical application.” This reintegration of James’s “Divided Self,” this work of recovery and renewal that constitutes the state of being “Twice-Born” would play out over the twenty years between James’s marriage and his struggle over *Varieties*. Meanwhile, back in the spring of 1868 James was still in the thick of “the Sick Soul” phase. Havens left Dresden around the end of May, and while she and James would keep up a correspondence for a number of years he proved prophetic in his letter to Ward when he suggested that he would “probably see her in this life no more.” James himself would head back home within a matter of months, returning to his lackluster medical studies and completing his degree in the spring of 1869. Having decided against practicing medicine, James was, as suggested above, at a loss about what to do with himself. In the beginning of December, James found himself reminiscing about—and perhaps wanting to reclaim—the “touch of fever” he had experienced while in Germany. But its overwhelmingness once again speedily swamped its appeal, and by the end of the month James found his mood deteriorating to an unprecedented degree, his physical symptoms becoming so severe that for much of the time he had to give up “all pretence to study or even serious reading of any kind.”⁶¹

A Bell with a Crack

This waning of “intellectual vitality” aggravated the sense of isolation he felt in Germany (especially in the wake of his perceived inability to make a connection with Havens). He explicated and generalized this feeling of alienation in an effort to get a handle on it and face it head-on, in the guise of “the Stoic.” “Nature and life have unfitted me for any affectionate relations with other individuals,” James concluded in his

diary near the end of December. Because of this perceived affective shortcoming, James found himself unable to “study, make, or enjoy.” While he believed “it is well to know the limits of one’s individual faculties, in order not to accept intellectually the verdict of one’s personal feeling and experience as the measure of objective fact,” however, he also thought that “to brood over them with feeling is ‘morbid.’” Distrusting “feeling,” James faced the predicament of living under an imperative for action even though its main source of motivation had been undercut. Or, as he put it: “The difficulty: ‘to act without hope,’ must be solved.” James hypothesized that the solution may lie in willingly adopting a stance of studied detachment. “I can find some real life in the mere respect for other forms of life as they pass,” he told himself, “even if I can never embrace them as a whole or incorporate them with myself.” Here we have another instance of James stating the matter of affective resonance in all-or-nothing terms. Again, this framing of the issue set the stage for the rapid vacillation between extremes that he was so prone to during this period of his life. In this respect he was typical of “The Divided Self,” which he described in *Varieties* as an individual “whose existence is little more than a series of zig-zags, as now one tendency and now another gets the upper hand.” At the turn of 1870, James was pushing himself towards the brink of a severely confined optimism. He was unable to maintain his balance on this working edge, however, plunging off the cliff into the depths of “morbidly.” By the first of February, he confessed in his diary, he had “touched bottom.”⁶²

It was during these first, harrowing months of 1870, I would argue, that the incident he uses to conclude his chapter on “the Sick Soul” in *Varieties* occurred. He cites this ordeal of his as an instance of “[t]he worst kind of melancholy”: “that which takes the

form of panic fear.” This experience is so paradigmatic of what life is for “the Sick Soul,” that after recounting it he proclaims that “[t]here is no need of more examples” and promptly brings the chapter to a close. James’s somewhat hasty treatment of this material indicates not only expository economy, but also how difficult—and therefore important and resonant—he found it circa 1900 when he was struggling to get his Gifford Lectures in shape. James found the matter so sensitive that, though he wanted to draw on it, he also disguised its source. James ascribes the account to an anonymous correspondent in *Varieties*, only revealing that it was in fact his own experience in a letter to its French translator in 1904. The fact that James thus “disguised the *provenance*” of this episode is one reason why many commentators have suggested that this passage is at least in part fictionalized.⁶³ I am willing to accept that this is the case. But I want to suggest, however, that its literariness is in fact an indication—rather than an indictment—of its genuineness. Because of his prominent use of figurative means, James is able to convey the felt meaning of this experience to his audience better than he would have through a literal report. Artfulness here is synonymous with effectiveness. Therefore, in returning to and recounting this incident during his Gifford Lectures, James is able to embrace what he could not bring himself to accept at the time. Around the age of thirty, James had abandoned art, and even philosophy to a lesser degree, in order to gain the stability of a career in science. Having established himself, as he approached the age of sixty, James felt at liberty to pursue the wider possibilities that he had felt unequal to three decades prior. His return to philosophy would involve, as a key component, its enaction as art: pragmatism manifested as improvisational lyricism. Given that James’s last fling with the aesthetic dimension took the form of a responsiveness to drama and

music, it makes sense that when he once again opened himself to the affective intensity and protean possibility of singularity, an aurally-based performance art would be the outcome.

According to James's account of his panic attack in *Varieties*, he found himself in a protracted "state of philosophic pessimism and general depression of spirits about my prospects." One night during this period, he goes on,

suddenly there fell upon me without any warning, just as if it came out of the darkness, a horrible fear of my own existence. Simultaneously there arose in my mind the image of an epileptic patient whom I had seen in the asylum, a black-haired youth with greenish skin, entirely idiotic, who used to sit all day on one of the benches, or rather shelves against the wall, with his knees drawn up against his chin, and the coarse gray undershirt, which was his only garment, drawn over them inclosing his entire figure. He sat there like a sort of sculptured Egyptian cat or Peruvian mummy, moving nothing but his black eyes and looking absolutely non-human. This image and my fear entered into a species of combination with each other. *That shape am I*, I felt, potentially. Nothing that I possess can defend me against that fate, if the hour for it should strike for me as it struck for him. There was such a horror of him, and such a perception of my own merely momentary discrepancy from him, that it was as if something hitherto solid within my breast gave way entirely, and I became a mass of quivering fear. After this the universe was changed for me altogether. I awoke morning after morning with a horrible dread at the pit of my stomach, and with a sense of the insecurity of life that I never knew before, and that I have never felt since. It was like a revelation; and although the immediate feelings passed away, the experience has made me sympathetic with the morbid feelings of others ever since.⁶⁴

Here we have the climax of "the Sick Soul" stage, the entry into "the Divided Self" phase, and the seed for becoming "Twice-Born"—although the last would not begin to sprout until James recultivated it while composing and performing his Gifford Lectures, having had "the insecurity of life" brought home to him again by virtue of his heart problems. If James's psychological state in Dresden could be described as "a bell with a crack," this phenomenon of an inner barrier melting away—thereby creating an opening

to influences of questionable consequence whose force is measured by the fact that they come somehow simultaneously from both the interior and the exterior—that James recounts registers the moment when this fissure reaches the status of acute awareness. It could no longer be ignored and was as such intolerable. Oddly enough, by the time of *Varieties* James would find such giving way of solidity to be promising, liberating, even empowering—insofar as it makes possible an acceptance of the fact that “the healthy-minded consciousness . . . draws its breath on sufferance and by an accident.” In the winter of 1870, however, James was unable to acknowledge much less turn to his advantage this “irremediable sense of precariousness.” The ground under his feet was too unstable and he was enveloped in a “quivering fear” that refused to pass into fluid motion and thus threw into question his very being.

At the very moment of its coming to awareness, to dwell upon this wound—to treat it attentively and take the time to make peace with the fact that it would never heal completely or without scar—was to suspend himself over what seemed a bottomless pit. If he had done so, James confesses in his rendition of the incident in *Varieties*, “I think I should have grown really insane.”⁶⁵ He coped with the fracture by aggravating it, but in a way that obscured its location within him, framing it rather as something that separated him from certain sectors of the external world. Although in the wake of this incident James claimed that, while he gained the ability to be “sympathetic to the morbid feelings of others,” he himself would never again entertain such sentiments—a pretension that what he experienced while struggling over his Gifford Lectures would prove incorrect. There were people who could not “Stoically” push this “horrible dread” aside, and then there was him: able to sympathize yet falling short of true empathy, and in consequence

assuming a somewhat patronizing pose. For the short-term at least, James was able to keep his mind off the fact that in positing this separation between himself and others he was in fact exacerbating rather than alleviating a division internal to himself. The crack in the bell was rent fully asunder, the curved space of the psyche being bent back and flattened. Once close, the two edges of the fissure were now at opposite ends of a rigidly regular plane. The blunter of the two was foregrounded while the sharper receded into the distance. The effort to keep the cutting (in a double sense) edge obscured entailed overshadowing much of the material in-between. Consciousness dulled, incisive insights promising both risk and reward are jettisoned. Between James's marriage and his work on *Varieties*, the bell would gradually recover its curvature but the crack would remain. It was by accepting and taking advantage of this fracture, in fact, that he would achieve the greatest degree of affective resonance. Upon being struck, a curved instrument gives a fuller sound than a flat sheet. But it is the break in the circle that traces that instrument's surface that allows it to sound the strange harmonics that strike a chord with singularity's powerful feelings and multiple possibilities.

That the institution of detachment could be instigated by "a species of combination" may seem odd. But it only makes sense that James's effort to separate himself from that which he believed ailed him would start by his projection of it into a figure both alien and familiar. This act of externalization raises the potential of connection but it also allows for the possibility of severance. This may have been a necessary stage in the maturation process James was charting for himself. For, he seems to imply, it is impossible to become "Twice-Born" without first suffering the condition of "the Divided Self." Or, at least as far as James's case is concerned, "the Sick Soul" sets the stage for its own

division. For, James's response to witnessing Shakespearean tragedy in Dresden constituted a rehearsal of this quick shift from identification to separation. The brooding, inhibited form of the "epileptic patient" James feared he himself would become indistinguishable from was prefigured by what James had diagnosed nearly two years earlier as "this awful Hamlet, which groans & aches so with the mystery of things, with the ineffable."⁶⁶ Perceiving the depth to which this "*shape*" thus weaves itself through the fabric of James's experience helps us understand why his "momentary discrepancy" from it was so difficult to manage. His ability to lengthen this breach—to such an extent as to, in effect, put it out of sight—was not the greatest cause of concern: he proved perfectly able to do so. What truly unsettled James was that while this hiatus would be an at least temporary source of relief, it would also entail a definite loss. While it would ease his mind and prevent him from being perceived (by himself and others) as crazy, it would also necessitate that he abandon something he held to be valuable. Delineating precisely what was at stake in James's compromise is difficult. Grasping the overlap between the "black-haired youth" and "this awful Hamlet" in James's imagination offers the inkling of a clue, which some comments offered by his contemporary Stéphane Mallarmé help to more fully unearth and flesh out.

In an 1886 essay on Shakespeare's play, Mallarmé argues that from the Symbolist perspective the central figure of this drama is none other than "*the prince of promise unfulfillable, young shade of us all.*" "That adolescent who vanished from us at the beginning of his life and who will always haunt lofty, pensive minds with his morning," he writes, "is very present to me now as I see him struggling against the curse of having to appear."⁶⁷ He could very well be recounting James's own episode of "panic fear."

“Hamlet”—and by extension the “epileptic patient”—is emblematic of the “young person” who is capable of manifesting (as Kate Havens did) the “something absolute” of singularity. Exploring the aesthetic dimension, however, this figure is also prone to “seizures” of powerful affect. Pursuing the aesthetic impulse without any clear sense of direction, he is swamped by a multitude of possibilities. The ineffable mystery this shape “groans & aches” with is the both exciting and troubling “question of ‘what to be.’” This figure sounds and suffers the full array of its vocational, psychological, and ontological implications. As late adolescence bleeds into early adulthood, this query is complicated by an additional twist: “the curse of having to appear.” One of the reasons James was overwhelmed by the burden of singularity was his belief that maturity entailed adopting a socially recognized and as such conventional role. This would require, he thought, compromising his protean potential, tempering his capacity for affectively intense experience. “Appearing” responsible, it seemed, meant abandoning the artistic impulse that defined to a large extent his sense of “being,” taking leave of the aesthetic dimension to take root firmly in the “real” world of “effective action.” “Hamlet”—and presumably the “black-haired youth” as well—had buckled under the pressure of this imperative. James was determined that he would not. Surviving this particular transition may indeed have necessitated that he set aside certain problems and resources to come back to when he was better able to wrestle with and make use of them. The trouble was that James came to frame the “question of ‘what to be’” in an uncharacteristically linear and deterministic fashion that seemed to rule out the possibility of recovery and renewal.

James persisted in his attempts to assume the pose of “the Stoic.” Rather than viewing it as a protracted version of the half-way stage which “the Divided Self”

constitutes, he took it to be a whole, integral, and finished product in its own right. As James would discover during the course of his Gifford Lectures, while compromises often have to be made they are never set in stone—or plaster, as it were. What was abandoned can be reclaimed, and while this involves making other compromises, suffering different losses, letting go of what has come to be valuable, one ultimately gains from being able to shift between multiple partial perspectives rather than sticking with just one. This is in essence the model of “reintegration” that James would argue comprises the state of being “Twice-Born.” In staging selfhood as a multiplicity of always unfinished processes rather than an isolated and completed achievement, it—somewhat paradoxically—challenges the very notion of wholeness. In the wake of having “touched bottom” during the first months of 1870, however, James felt the need to cut things down to a size he felt capable of fully grasping and which could be, as such, perceived as complete. By the end of April, he began building the justification for this move, in essence sketching the reductive treatment of volition that he would offer in *Principles*, drawing on two major influences: one a French philosopher and the other a Scottish psychologist. In a diary entry, he relates his discovery of Charles Renouvier’s definition of “free will”—the “sustaining of a thought *because I choose to* when I might have other thoughts”—and his determination to put it into action in his own life. He goes on to note that his reading of Renouvier provides an example of “the exceptionally passionate initiative” that Alexander Bain argues is the precondition of “moral action.”⁶⁸ But, as I have shown, in “The Will” chapter of *Principles* James suggests that the thoughts that volition chooses to sustain are “reasonable ideas” that counteract a “strong emotional state.” Thus, affect provides motivation for “moral action” only to the extent

that it provides material to strive against and reduce. It is channeled strictly into “the acquisition of habits” and prevented from effecting their reworking.

Somewhat contradictorily, then, the “acts of thought” that allowed James in this moment to “believe in my individual reality and creative power” are ones that led him to adopt a conventional role, thereby eliminating the protean possibilities of affective intensity. In doing so, he narrowed his ambitions to an isolated path—the following of which he assumed ruled out any subsequent backtracking or change of direction. This course of action was, in fact, foreshadowed in a letter from James to Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., sent in the spring of 1868, a time when his options seemed more fluid but during which he was also feeling overwhelmed by strong feelings and multitudinous possibilities. “I am firmly convinced that by going straight in almost any direction you can get out of the woods in which the young mind grows up,” James wrote, “for I have an idea that the process usually consists of a more or less forcible reduction of the other elements of the chaos to a harmony with the terms of the one on wh. one has taken his stand.” From April 1870 onward, James would make every effort to achieve this “forcible reduction.” His means of doing so was adopting the stance of “the moralist” (which in *Varieties* is synonymous with “the Stoic,” and as such is contrasted with the richer “religious” attitude of “the Twice-Born Sick Soul”) as it is propounded in the works of Renouvier and Bain. In the summer of 1872, this pursuit gained additional definition when James was offered a job teaching physiology and anatomy at Harvard. “The moralist” was further refined into “the scientific educator.” From the beginning, James’s resolve was tried by his ambivalence. It was during his first term as an instructor, in October 1872, that James wrote his brother Henry that he regretted the fact

that he “did not stick to painting.” Even at this early point, he had an inkling of what he would rediscover during the course of his Gifford Lectures: “A man needs to keep open all his channels of activity; for the day may come when his mind needs to change its attitude for the sake of its health.”⁶⁹

At the same time, however, in the 1870’s—in fact, through the early-1890s—James was working with a narrow conception of “activity,” which most certainly did not include aesthetic exploration. Consequently, the same condition of being “sickened & skeptical of philosophical activity” that made James suggest to his brother that he would “make an effort to begin painting in water colors” was instead used as the motivation for concentrating upon a scientific career. During his first two terms teaching James was tempted to switch gears and attempt to make a play to become a professor of philosophy. When, in the spring of 1873, he was asked to teach the same courses in physiology and anatomy during the next school year, however, he accepted. “Philosophy I will nevertheless regard as my vocation and never let slip a chance to do a stroke at it,” he promised himself in his diary. “But as my strongest moral and intellectual craving is for some stable reality to lean upon, and as a professed philosopher pledges himself publicly never to have done with doubt,” he added,

I fear the constant sense of instability generated by this attitude wd. be more than the voluntary faith I can keep going is sufficient to neutralize—and that dream conception, ‘maya,’ the abyss of horrors, would ‘spite of everything grasp my imagination and imperil my reason.⁷⁰

Still strongly associated with art in his mind, philosophy posed risks that critically threatened his newfound belief in volition: namely affective intensity and protean potential, which threaten to swamp “reason” with “imagination” and thus open an “abyss of horrors” where a mountain of promise seemed to lie but a split second before. Getting

on with “life,” it seemed, meant letting go of “that dream conception” that singularity spins itself out into. Yet, the aesthetic dimension was still something that he found it hard to give up, as evidenced by the fact that after completing the courses he taught in the fall of 1873 he took an extended leave of absence, traveling to Europe to be with Henry, perhaps vicariously enjoying his brother’s literary endeavors. James returned to Harvard to teach the fall term of 1874, but it was not until the following year that the cast he was attempting to assume began to set. In 1875, James taught his first course in psychology, finding in the new science room to inject a limited portion of his artistic impulse and philosophical bent—enough, at least, for him to strike a workable compromise for the time being. His position would become even more established in 1876, when he was promoted from the rank of instructor to assistant professor.

At the outset of his academic career, then, James believed that he was—as he would put it in *Principles*—“confronted by the necessity of standing by one of my empirical selves and relinquishing the rest.” At the outset, he thought, people are imbued with “ambiguous potentialities of development.” To actualize—to “disambiguate,” as it were—any one of these possibilities, however, “the rest must more or less be suppressed.” “So the seeker of his truest, strongest, deepest self, must review the list carefully,” James explains, “and pick the one on which to stake his salvation.” James is in effect describing what occurs during “the Divided Self” phase and framing it as an end point rather than a moment of transition. A narrow point of calm and safety is staked out and a barrier is erected between it and a wider realm of affective intensity and protean potential—the fruits of singularity that are overwhelming but, James would rediscover during his work on *Varieties*, ultimately life-saving. But making this move would mean

redefining “salvation.” Up until that revisionary point, to be saved meant merely staving off “the Sick Soul.” Defining deliverance as a simple act of escape rather than a complex process of recovery, James refigured “the Divided Self” as “the Stoic” and staked his life on maintaining this pose. Thus “the psychologist” seemed to definitively unseat “the artist.” As James described the process in 1880:

Little by little, the habits, the knowledges, of the other career, which once lay so near, cease to be reckoned even among his possibilities. At first, he may sometimes doubt whether the self he murdered in that decisive hour might not have been the better of the two; but with the years such questions themselves expire, and the old alternative *ego*, once so vivid, fades into something less substantial than a dream.

Gradually, as well, however, the surface of James’s classicalized cast would begin to crack and the romantic “dream” would prove to be of more substance than he had originally thought. The alter ego would be discovered to be not so much dead as in suspended animation. James’s artistic impulse would be reborn when he turned from psychology proper to make way for his broader interests. Turning to philosophy, James would describe it as a means to “paint pictures” and enact it as a performance poetry infusing language with musicality.⁷¹

James can be observed to make this realization and work to unfreeze this expansive realm of “ambiguous potentialities” as early as 1884, when he made a case for “the reinstatement of the vague to its proper place in our mental life”—a rallying cry he would repeat in *Principles*, thereby setting up an internal tension in that work between “The Stream of Thought” and “The Will.” But the possibility of recovery and renewal did not really hit home until, while struggling over his Gifford Lectures, James came to the conclusion that “[t]he tense and voluntary attitude” of “the Stoic” eventually outlives its usefulness and then becomes “an impossible fever and torment.” Thus, he devised—and

enacted—the alternative of the “Twice-Born Sick Soul.” As I argued above, during his work on *Varieties* the difficulty of trying to manage immense and complicated materials, compounded by his physical health problems, led to a relapse of the intense depression and anxiety James experienced circa 1870. In order to finish his project, he would have to return to the stage of “the Divided Self” and renavigate it, softening up the “margin” drawn and reified between “actual” and “possible,” loosening up his mental stance, making it permeable to incursions of the “extramarginal” once again. Thus, James’s recipe for becoming “Twice-Born” is a virtual replication of the moment when, as he put it, “something hitherto solid within my breast gave way entirely.” To pass beyond “the Divided Self” phase, James argues in *Varieties*, one has to let go of the division at its core. “Something must give way,” he writes, “a native hardness must break down and liquefy.” This “critical point,” James adds, is foreshadowed by “those temporary ‘melting moods’ into which either the trials of real life”—like facing an uncertain future or struggling with the most challenging project of one’s career—“or the theatre”—*Hamlet*, for instance—“or a novel”—say, *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, the plot of which revolves around a production of Shakespeare’s tragedy—“sometimes throw us.”⁷² The aesthetic dimension triggers one’s capacity for affective intensity, opening up a realm of protean potential to be explored via the artistic impulse.

While this reverberating responsivity was experienced by James as “quivering fear” in 1870, in 1900 its valence would invert. What changed was not the experience, per se, but the way James experienced it. The change was made possible by James being at a different place in his life. Having occupied conventionality and achieved a certain degree of success he began to feel pent in by its confines. Perhaps just as important—because

compromise is unavoidable—having established a certain reputation for himself he now had something to sacrifice other than his unfulfilled ambitions and was able to thereby revisit these dreams. Thus, when the surface of “the Stoic” began to crumble James was able to feel “[a]n immense elation and freedom, as the outlines of the confining selfhood melt down.” “This auroral openness,” he argues, “gives to all creative ideal levels a bright and caroling quality.” James is not suggesting that—in order for the aesthetic dimension to thus sing again, to retap the artistic impulse to express singularity, to accept the incompleteness and uncertainty of this effort—one needs to relinquish selfhood altogether. Rather, what James is proposing is its revision. This, in turn, entails a refiguring of “salvation.” The mechanism offered in *Principles* is not so much rejected as put in motion and multiplied, making way for the ever-present possibility of retracing one’s steps and following out new leads. “Being saved” is not a finality, but a phase in an ongoing process. “No man is homogenous enough to be fairly treated, either for good or ill, according to the law of one ‘type’ exclusively,” James wrote in a notebook he kept while working on his Gifford Lectures. “So a man to ‘save’ himself, can throw himself in turn on this or that one of the functions or aspects of character in which he has least failed, and treat that as if it were the essence for which alone he should be judged and held responsible.”⁷³

At no point does a person have to choose a role once and for all and abandon all others. It always remains possible to “choose which of his *ones* to take a stand on” and alter this choice over time. Our various tendencies may be in tension or make for some turbulence as we shift back and forth from one to another and continuously add to our repertoire. But, as James writes, “[i]t is only as being always out of equilibrium that man

manifests any infinity of destiny.” This condition of irreducible plurality, unfinishedness, and disequilibrium is that of singularity struggling to remake convention through constructive dissonance: the improvisational stance. Manifested in language this effort to channel the capacity for affective intensity and its protean potential is lyricism: the infusion of words with experience’s felt meaning, with musicality. It was because he was able to not only describe but also enact these happenings during the course of composing and delivering *Varieties* that it met a “warm reaction” from its audience. He achieved this affective resonance while accepting its unavoidable uncertainty and incompleteness. He could claim at the conclusion of his Gifford Lectures to be “in possession of an entirely new *tone*.” He was thus able to “look towards the future with hopeful eyes” because he had embraced the fact that “one can never again feel invulnerable!”⁷⁴ It was through this emphatic proclamation of vulnerability—this reengagement with the existential problematic of expressing singularity—that James became open once again to his capacity for affectively intense experience and its plurality of possibilities, able to reactivate his artistic impulse to embark on new explorations of the aesthetic dimension.

In doing so, he was charting a path that would be followed by two of his most singular students: Stein and Du Bois. The next chapter examines how Stein’s own belated engagement with the aesthetic domain required her, like James, to revisit certain dilemmas secreted in her past, memories she had sought to keep at a distance but that nevertheless reared their heads as they echoed with the current crisis she found herself in. In 1901, Stein was in her late twenties, disaffected from her graduate studies and all but certain that she would not be following her original plan to become a laboratory psychologist. Also reeling from her first major break-up, Stein left the U.S. for Paris and

turned from science to the writing of fiction, reigniting an artistic ambition evidenced in the theme papers she wrote for her undergraduate composition course but that her instructor had done his best to discourage. It was no surprise that she soaked in the encouragement James, by contrast, offered and followed his suggestion to attend medical school to pick up the physiological knowledge one needed to be a psychological researcher in the modern era. But James's influence continued even after she abandoned this career path—perhaps became even stronger. In fact, he was one of the few authorities who praised her first published piece of literary art, *Three Lives* (1909). In this work, Stein picked up the Jamesian project of improvisational lyricism, infusing musicality into language in an effort to convey affectively intense experience and elicit affective resonance among readers. With *The Making of Americans* (written during the same period as *Three Lives*, but not published until 1925) Stein deepened her engagement with the existential problematic of expressing singularity and made further advances on the enactive model of literature James's oratorical experiments provided the blueprints for.

¹ William James to Henry James, 7 February 1897, *The Correspondence of William James* 3 (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1992-2004), 1-2.

² William James to Booker T. Washington, 16 April 1897, *Correspondence* 8, 261. William James, "Robert Gould Shaw" (1897) in *Essays in Religion and Morality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 65. William James to Henry Lee Higginson, 20 March 1897, *Correspondence* 8, 249. William James to Henry James, 4 April 1897, *Correspondence* 3, 6.

³ William James to Henry Lee Higginson, 7 May 1897 and William James to Alice Gibbens James, 22 April 1897, *Correspondence* 8, 262; 266.

⁴ William James to Henry James, 5 June 1897, *Correspondence* 3, 8-9. "Robert Gould Shaw," 66; 73-74.

⁵ William James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983 [1899]), 4. William James "The Sentiment of Rationality" (1879) in *William James: Writings, 1878-1899* (New York: Library of America, 1992), 980. William James, "Is Life Worth Living?" (1895) in *The Will to Believe* (New York: Dover, 1956 [1897]), 62. Stein, at the time a sophomore at Radcliffe College, was in the audience when James first delivered "Is Life Worth Living?" and was so affected by it she immediately went home and wrote the theme paper due the next day in her composition class on James's lecture. Stein's theme is reprinted, along with the other "Radcliffe Manuscripts," in Rosalind Miller, *Gertrude Stein: Form and Intelligibility* (New York: Exposition, 1949), 146-147.

⁶ "Robert Gould Shaw," 72-73; 66-67.

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- ⁷ William James to Henry James, 4 April 1897, *Correspondence* 3, 6. William James to Henry Lee Higginson, 15 June 1897, *Correspondence* 8, 276.
- ⁸ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Collier, 1961 [1902]), 42.
- ⁹ It is in part because it is adept at playing this synecdochic role, I would argue, that the “religious” remains a central concern in both “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results” (1898)—James’s initial voicing of his version of pragmatism—and in the series of lectures that would form the basis of *Pragmatism* (1907) and *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909).
- ¹⁰ William James to Fanny Morse, 12 April 1900, *Correspondence* 9, 185.
- ¹¹ William James to Fanny Morse, 12 April 1900, *Correspondence* 9, 186. The last phrase is taken from a drafted section of *Varieties* held in the William James Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, bMS AM 1092.9, item 4481. Further references to this manuscript will be cited as “*Varieties* Draft.”
- ¹² William James to George Howison, 27 November 1898, *Correspondence* 8, 460. William James to Henry James, 21 June 1899, *Correspondence* 3, 64. William James to Alice Gibbens James, 9 July 1898 and Alice Gibbens James to William James, 12 July 1898, *Correspondence* 8, 390; 394.
- ¹³ William James to Alice Gibbens James, 9 July 1898, *Correspondence* 8, 390.
- ¹⁴ *Varieties*, 59; 144.
- ¹⁵ “*Varieties* Draft.” *Varieties*, 54; 380; 55; 202; 301-302; 330. William James, “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results” (1898) in *Writings, 1878-1899*, 1090.
- ¹⁶ *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 330; 73; 356; 330; 302. “The Sentiment of Rationality,” 983. “*Varieties* Draft.”
- ¹⁷ William James to Alice Gibbens James, 9 July 1898, *Correspondence* 8, 391.
- ¹⁸ William James to Henry James III, 26 July 1898, *Correspondence* 8, 399.
- ¹⁹ “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results,” 1077; 1079. Charles Sanders Peirce, “How to Make Our Ideas Clear” (1878) in *The Essential Peirce*, volume 1 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 127; 129.
- ²⁰ “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results,” 1079-1080. William James to Alice James, 14 November 1866, *Correspondence* 4, 144. William James, *Talks to Teachers and Students*, 48; 25.
- ²¹ *Talks to Teachers and Students*, 3-4.
- ²² *Talks to Teachers and Students*, 3-4.
- ²³ “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results,” 1077.
- ²⁴ “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results,” 1077-1078.
- ²⁵ “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results,” 1078-1079. *Varieties*, 56.
- ²⁶ *Varieties*, 123.
- ²⁷ An accident of this sentence’s phrasing provides an occasion to acknowledge the influence the work of Brian Massumi has had on my approach here. See his *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002). Of particular relevance is that work’s first chapter, entitled “The Autonomy of Affect.”
- ²⁸ William James to Henry James, 21 June 1899, *Correspondence* 3, 64.
- ²⁹ This is yet another instance where my word-play references a debt. I have profited enormously from my exposure to the example of Nathaniel Mackey’s *Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality, and Experimental Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
- ³⁰ William James, “What Makes a Life Significant” (1898) in *Talks to Teachers and Students*, 153. Currently, the most telling example is perhaps the situation in Darfur. Dave Eggers fictionalizes a memoir from an earlier phase of the Sudanese civil war in his novel *What is the What* (San Francisco: McSweeney’s, 2006).
- ³¹ William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996 [1909]), 303-306.
- ³² William James to Alice Gibbens James, 9 July 1898, *Correspondence* 8, 391. *Talks to Teachers and Students*, 51.
- ³³ *Talks to Teachers and Students*, 52.
- ³⁴ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 73-74.
- ³⁵ William James, “A World of Pure Experience” (1904) in *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996 [1912]), 87. William James to Henry James, 8 August 1899, *Correspondence* 3, 76-77. William James to Pauline Goldmark, *Correspondence* 9, 22.
- ³⁶ Williams James to Pauline Goldmark, *Correspondence* 9, 22.

³⁷ William James to Henry James, 8 August 1899, *Correspondence* 3, 77.

³⁸ *Varieties*, 54. Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980 [1873]), 105-106. Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (New York: Mentor, 1948), 188.

³⁹ William James to François Pillon, 26 November 1899, *Correspondence* 9, 89-90. William James to Théodore Flournoy, 18 June 1909, *Correspondence* 12, 270.

⁴⁰ William James to François Pillon, 26 November 1899, *Correspondence* 9, 90. William James to Henry James, 4 May 1900, *Correspondence* 3, 117. Linda Simon, *Genuine Reality: A Life of William James* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1998), 115. William James to Harriet Jackson Lee Morse, 19 February 1900, *Correspondence* 9, 148. William James to Josiah Royce, 8 September 1900, *Correspondence* 9, 298.

⁴¹ William James to Henry James, 1 January 1901, *Correspondence* 3, 1901. "Notebook (15) 1901-," William James Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, bMS AM 1092.9, item 4509. William James to Théodore Flornoy, 1 January 1900," *Correspondence* 9, 113. Further reference to the second source will be cited as "Notebook 15."

⁴² "Diary (1), 1868-1877," William James Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, bMS AM 1092.9, item 4550. William James to Henry James, 10 October 1872, *Correspondence* 1, 173. William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, volume 1 (New York: Dover, 1950 [1890]), 258; 288. Further references to the first source will be cited as "Diary."

⁴³ "Diary."

⁴⁴ William James to Henry James, 10 October 1872, *Correspondence* 1, 173. William James to Edgar Beach Van Winkle, 4 January 1858, *Correspondence* 4, 8.

⁴⁵ William James to Henry James, 5 December 1869 and 10 October 1872, *Correspondence* 1, 128; 173. "Notebook 15." I would like to thank Richard Cándida Smith for drawing my attention to the first source. See his *Mallarmé's Children: Symbolism and the Renewal of Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 102.

⁴⁶ *Principles* 1, 121. Stein employs a similar model of maturation in the "ontology of character" she undertakes during the course of her experimental novel, *The Making of Americans*: "It happens about the twenty-ninth year of life that all the forces that have been engaged through the years of childhood, adolescence and youth in confused and sometimes angry combat range themselves in ordered ranks, one is uncertain of one's aims, meaning and power during these years of tumultuous growth when aspiration has no relation to fulfillment and one plunges here and there with energy and misdirection during the strain and stress of the making of a personality until at last we reach the twenty-ninth year, the straight and narrow gateway of maturity and life which was all uproar and confusion narrows down to form and purpose and we exchange a dim possibility for a big or small reality." See Gertrude Stein, *The Making of Americans* (Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1995 [1925]), 436-437.

⁴⁷ William James to Henry James, 13 April 1868, *Correspondence* 1, 47. "Diary."

⁴⁸ "Notebook 15." For James eventual embrace of romanticism and critique of classicism see his "Frederic Myers's Service to Psychology" (1901) in *Essays in Psychical Research* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 193-194. While James didn't make his romantic leanings explicit until this point, it could be argued that it was in evidence implicitly as early as his call for "the re-instatement of the vague" in "On Some Omissions of Introspective Psychology" (1884) in *Essays in Psychology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 157. This argument was famously repeated in "The Steam of Thought" chapter of *Principles*. James's romanticism came to the fore in his championing of the "extramarginal" in *Varieties* and is the primary motivating factor behind the argument he wages in *A Pluralistic Universe*. Additionally, what James calls "the Stoic" bears a resemblance to what Hegel analyzes as "unhappy consciousness" in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, a work James was familiar with and deeply critical of. Hegel sought to eliminate the instability and division that he believes ruins the happiness of consciousness through sublation, establishing the certainty of "Reason"—always with a capital-R. James, however, resists this totalizing maneuver and works towards the revaluation of flux and plurality, departing from his initial resistance to uncertainty and eccentricity to reclaim them and keep them open as sources of growth and pleasure, the cultivation and effusion of singularity.

⁴⁹ *Varieties*, 54.

⁵⁰ *Principles* 2, 563.

⁵¹ *Varieties*, 120-121.

⁵² William James to Henry James, 13 April 1868, *Correspondence* 1, 47.

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- ⁵³ George Cotkin, *William James: Public Philosopher* (Urbana: University of Indiana Press, 1994), 9; 40. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (New York: Suhrkamp, 1989 [1795]), 146. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Hamlet" (1818) in *Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare and Other English Poets* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1904), 344; 353. James Livingston, "Hamlet, James, and the Woman Question," *Raritan* 17.2 (Fall 1997), 60.
- ⁵⁴ *Public Philosopher*, 43. "Diary." William James to Henry James, 13 April 1868, *Correspondence* 1, 48.
- ⁵⁵ William James to Henry James, 13 April 1868, *Correspondence* 1, 48. "Diary."
- ⁵⁶ "Diary." William James to Henry James, 13 April 1868, *Correspondence* 1, 48.
- ⁵⁷ *Talks to Teachers and Students*, 25-26 (my emphasis).
- ⁵⁸ William James to Thomas Wren Ward, 24 May 1868, *Correspondence* 4, 305. William James to Alice James, 14 May 1868, *Correspondence* 4, 295.
- ⁵⁹ "Diary." William James to Thomas Wren Ward, 24 May 1868 and 9 October 1868, *Correspondence* 4, 306; 347.
- ⁶⁰ "Diary." William James to Alice Howe Gibbens, 7 June 1877, *Correspondence* 4, 571.
- ⁶¹ William James, "Absolutism and Empiricism," *Mind* 9.34 (April 1884), 285. William James to Thomas Wren Ward, 24 May 1868, *Correspondence* 4, 306. William James to Henry Pickering Bowditch, 29 December 1869, *Correspondence* 4, 396.
- ⁶² "Diary." *Varieties*, 145.
- ⁶³ *Varieties*, 137-138. William James to Frank Abauzit, 1 June 1904, William James Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University bMS AM 1092.12. It's poetic in a strange sort of way that this revelation would come about through these means, since James's "quotation" of this document in *Varieties* includes the claim that "[t]he original is in French." James purportedly took the liberty to "translate freely," and encouraged Abauzit to do the same. This phrase appears in both sources cited in this footnote.
- ⁶⁴ *Varieties*, 138.
- ⁶⁵ *Varieties*, 139.
- ⁶⁶ William James to Henry James, 13 April 1868, *Correspondence* 1, 48.
- ⁶⁷ Stéphane Mallarmé, "Hamlet" (1886) in *Selected Prose Poems, Essays, and Letters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956), 57.
- ⁶⁸ "Diary."
- ⁶⁹ "Diary." William James to Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., 15 May 1868, *Correspondence* 4, 298. William James to Henry James, 10 October 1872, *Correspondence* 1, 173.
- ⁷⁰ William James to Henry James, 10 October 1872, *Correspondence* 1, 173. "Diary."
- ⁷¹ *Principles* 1, 309-310. William James, "Great Men and Their Environment" (1880) in *The Will to Believe*, 227. William James, "Introduction: Philosophies Paint Pictures" (1903-1904) in *Manuscript Essays and Notes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 3-6.
- ⁷² "On Some Omissions," 157. *Principles* 1, 254. *Varieties*, 101; 191; 217.
- ⁷³ *Varieties*, 221. "Notebook (14) 1899-1901, William James Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, bMS AM 1092.9, item 4508. Further references to the second source will be cited as "Notebook 14."
- ⁷⁴ "Notebook 14." William James to Henry James, 16 May 1901, *Correspondence* 3, 170. William James to Sarah Wyman Whitman, 25 June 1901, *Correspondence* 9, 508.

Chapter Three

Gertrude Sings: Stein and the Reenactment of Writing

A cup is neglected by being full of size. It shows no shade, in come little wood cuts and blessing and nearly not that with a wild brought in, not at all so polite, not nearly so behind. . . . Why is a cup a stir and a behave. Why is it so seen. . . . A cup is readily shaded, it has in between no sense that is to say music, memory, musical memory.

■ Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons*

The most obvious thing about the work of Gertrude Stein is that it is voluminous, heterogeneous, perplexing, at times contradictory. The most common scholarly tactic for managing these difficulties has been simplification, the pretension of finding some underlying pattern that makes sense of the seeming chaos. Thus, for instance, it has been all too easy for critics to assume an isomorphism between Stein's biography, *Q.E.D.*, and "Melanctha" (where Stein = Adele = Jeff, and May Bookstaver = Helen = Melanctha). While Adele may be assumed to be a somewhat accurate account of Stein when she was a medical student at Johns Hopkins, however, the college themes she wrote a few years earlier during her studies at Radcliffe suggest an author possessed of a temperament much closer to Helen's. Despite some defensive posturing as an exemplar of buttoned-up bourgeois banality, Stein was in fact a bundle of subtly powerful emotions. The irresolution of this conflict between affective intensity and the anesthesia of convention is indicated early in *The Making of Americans* by the near simultaneity of Stein's lobbying

for “ordinary middle class existence” and her brief on the part of a “vital singularity” that exceeds the bounds of this regime of repeatable habits. The latter eventually trumps the former. This outcome of Stein’s long novel was foreshadowed by her depiction of Adele in *Q.E.D.*, which registers a critical distance and thus space for the reemergence of suppressed aspects of self. Further, as Stein continued to rework this material during the composition of “Melanctha,” she came to invest herself at least as much in the “wandering” titular figure as in her foil, the straight-as-an-arrow doctor Jeff Campbell. This recalibration of the affective register enabled the emergence of an unconventional style that is often characterized as symphonic or orchestral. It is imbued with the *musicality* that is characteristic of improvisational lyricism, distinguishing the piece as an iconic achievement of modernism in literature.¹

This chapter follows Stein as she built off this initial hint of artistic achievement to develop a full-fledged literary project, transforming what was in essence a glorified hobby into a bona fide career. Stein struggled long and hard to gain confidence as a writer. These persistent doubts stayed with her throughout her life, but they became less pernicious after she crossed a crucial threshold in the years between 1907 and 1911. A number of factors can be pointed to as contributing to Stein’s increasing poise during this period. The collection *Three Lives* (of which “Melanctha” is the second, the featured attraction bookended by a matched set of shorts) was published in 1909, and greeted by a positive response by a small group of aficionados. More importantly, it was during this time that Stein met and cemented her relationship with Alice B. Toklas, the woman who would become her life-long companion. Most fundamental, however, was the composition and completion of Stein’s monumental *The Making of Americans*, a book

that redefined what a novel could be, what it could accomplish. The assurance Stein gained from undertaking this work had nothing to do to an immediate increase in notoriety. The book would go unpublished until 1925, nearly fifteen years after its last word was written. What made *The Making of Americans* so significant is that in it Stein was able to step-up her engagement with the existential problematic of expressing singularity, which had dogged her since she was a small child, became more heated as she entered into early adulthood, and is heavily registered in *Q.E.D.* and *Three Lives* as a cause for broken relationships and ultimately premature death.

It was in *The Making of Americans* that Stein would dive deeper into this conundrum, exploring its intricacies, and in the process make it into a means of growth as well as hardship. Drawing on the influence of James's example, she would not only bear the weight of affectively intense experience but revel in it. This cultivation of singularity enabled her to more fully realize the model of literature as the staggered enaction of affective resonance that had been implicit in her work, even in the apprentice pieces of fiction she wrote during college. What follows is a detailed reading of *The Making of Americans*, focusing on a fugitive strain of this dense and entangled work that comes to the fore when the long novel is juxtaposed with the short stories Stein wrote while at Radcliffe, a story both told and *reenacted* through the process of its telling. Following this itinerary requires a brief detour to address the inordinate influence that Freud has had upon the secondary literature on Stein and, by extension, literary criticism in general. While there are useful aspects that can be extracted from psychoanalytic theory, it has crucial shortcomings that are put into relief especially when applied to a figure influenced by James like Stein. In particular, it is revealed to have certain key presuppositions that

prevent a productive encounter with the existential problematic of singularity and thus foreclose the cultivation of affectively intense experience and the elicitation of affective resonance. Replacing Freud with James serves as a way to bust through these roadblocks. To this end, this chapter sketches what a Jamesian approach to literature would sound like. Involved in this revisionary undertaking is a brief but incisive critique of psychoanalysis that, although building off the alternative picture of psychic life offered by James and the counterexample constituted by Stein, is ultimately of my own making. Though critical of Freud, I also believe that certain useful formulations can be extracted from his work: namely, those that resonate with and are reshaped by a rendezvous with James. Thus, the stance I take is both Jamesian and post-Freudian.

I noted at the outset that the secondary literature on Stein has for the most part staked its claims through the maneuver of simplification. In fact, Stein herself was the first, and perhaps most masterful, simplifier of Stein. Part of what lies behind the “folksy” tone of her autobiographies is a desire to camouflage the eccentricity of her “serious” writing, relating the domestic routines of her daily life as a smokescreen to cover the complexity of her artistic methods. The present account is as dependent upon simplification as those it follows. The aim, however, is to simplify *differently*. The hope is that by sampling at an unusual frequency, some of what has as yet gone unaccounted for will be made accessible. The belief is that an admittedly simplified approach to Stein and her work can nevertheless preserve more of her and its complexity than has yet been managed, to the extent that it diverges from critical precedent and received opinion. Thus, just as I have briefly noted certain discrepancies that compromise the integrity of the Stein = Adele = Jeff isomorphism, I also wish to undermine the interpretive overemphasis on the opening

of *The Making of Americans*. The two extremely brief (especially compared to those that will come later) paragraphs that begin the novel retell and interpret an already twice-told tale lifted from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. (Stein had previously made use of the fable in one of her undergraduate essays, a coincidence that has encouraged overlooking other of the themes as well as certain eccentric strains of *The Making of Americans* that follow from them.) The opening sentence of each paragraph—the first a retelling, the second an interpretation—set the stage for, respectively, what have been taken as the two major projects underway in *The Making of Americans*: a narrative of intergenerational striving, struggle, and strife (“Once an angry man dragged his father along the ground through his own orchard.”) and a cataloguing, collating, and categorizing of personality types (“It is hard living down the tempers we are born with.”).² With this tidy little two-paragraph passage—isolated from the print that follows by four lines of blank space—Stein seems to be laying out a relatively straight-forward roadmap that can be used to successfully navigate her admittedly difficult work. It is more accurately read, however, as an attempt at subterfuge, the camouflaging of potentially incriminating admissions. Stein is in fact dropping a red herring meant to lure her potential readers into an oversimplification that misses the point altogether.

What is truly compelling about *The Making of Americans* is neither the intergenerational saga nor the charting of what Stein—with her penchant for idiosyncratic terminology coined from simple, common words—calls “bottom natures.” What makes this thousand-page-long experimental novel worth reading is a minor, intrusive strand that is discrepant, dissonant with declared aims but is nevertheless, as Stein would put it in her *Lectures in America*, insistent. This marginalized element is none other than the

story of writing the novel itself, a story that includes as a crucial chapter a consideration of the writing's reception and echoes the tale told in the last chapter about James's struggle to compose and deliver *Varieties*. Compared to the fable that opens *The Making of Americans*, the fragment of narrative that sets the stage for this side-story is placed at a further remove, interwoven more intricately into the recursive fabric of the novel. Yet, as a fictionalized account of a seemingly banal, but strangely significant and moving event from Stein's own childhood, it derives from a source that is equally mythic, if more privately so. Its importance can be indexed by the fact that she returns to it repeatedly. In this regard, this passage—which I designate “The Umbrella Incident”—is conspicuously unlike the well-scripted beginning, and is more indicative of where Stein and her work eventually end up.

Event: Of Umbrellas and Affect

Most of us balk at her soporific rigmaroles, her echolaliac incantations, her half-witted-sounding catalogues of numbers; most of us read her less and less. Yet, remembering especially her early work, we are still always aware of her presence in the background of contemporary literature—and we picture her as the great pyramidal Buddha of Jo Davidson's statue of her, eternally and placidly ruminating the gradual developments of the processes of being, registering the vibrations of a psychological country like some august human seismograph whose charts we haven't the training to read. And whenever we pick up her writings, however unintelligible we may find them, we are aware of a literary personality of unmistakable originality and distinction.

■ Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle*

The most compelling and evocative readings of Stein are more often than not performed by scholars who draw upon, as a primary resource, the repertoire of second wave feminism. To a large extent, this stance embodies the skill-set necessary to make

sense of the figurative seismography Wilson and his generation of critics could not make heads or tails of but nevertheless felt compelled to grant a grudging respect. (“My sentences do get under their skin, only they do not know that they do,” Stein writes in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, by way of explaining the ambivalent response of this cohort of readers.) To be a contemporary practitioner of feminism, then, means to have undergone the sensitivity training needed in order to not pathologize a writer like Stein. It leads to the development of an unabashed enthusiasm for “her echolalic incantations.” From Marianne DeKoven’s pioneering study *A Different Language* to Lisa Ruddick’s more recent *Reading Gertrude Stein*, this strain of scholarship has traced a looping series of interconnected phenomena in Stein’s writing: in this body of work an attention to repetition spirals into a concern with rhythm, a feel for chant, a sense of aurality, an embrace of musicality. Stein herself prefigures the aesthetic corkscrewing undergone by these empathetic readers in a passage from a notebook she kept while writing *The Making of Americans*: “I believe in repetition. Yes. Always and Always. Must write the eternal hymn of repetition.”³

While Stein never went back on this proclamation, she did invoke a crucial alteration, explicitly in *Lectures in America* but implicitly during the writing of *The Making of Americans* itself. With time, Stein came to redefine repetition as *insistence*. In doing so, she foreshadows a further twist in the circuitous path of the feminist approach, flipping from music in general to improvisational lyricism in particular. My interest is in how Stein made use of and reshaped (at times to the point of making a *break*) found materials—namely, conventional language—in order to achieve the unprecedented. The unforeseeable accomplishment, in this case, is the expression of singularity in all its

affective intensity through a *singing* that can not only be heard but also jumps off the page when offered to and engaged by a responsive audience. In undertaking this project, Stein picks up on James's effort to craft books punctuated by traces of the oratorical situation out of which the lectures they were based upon first issued. As we will see in the following chapter, Du Bois also works to instantiate the Jamesian blueprint for an enactive literature, infusing language with the musicality of experience by writing works that simulate the resonance effected by the sounds of the "sorrow songs."

More than any other demographic, it has been contemporary feminist critics who have been willing to undergo the *auditions* this aesthetic approach seeks to elicit. They are equipped to do so, in part, by their borrowing of certain tricks of the psychoanalytic trade. Drawing specifically on Julia Kristeva's early work in *Desire in Language* and *Revolution in Poetic Language* (which, in turn, is indebted to the work of Jacques Lacan, who instigated the amalgamation of poststructuralism and Freudian psychoanalysis), second wave feminist scholars have adopted a posture capable of relishing linguistic unconventionality, valuing the seemingly irrelevant or accidental, observing the degree to which the life of the mind is inextricably intertwined with bodily experience—or, to put it in more specialized terms, how the aesthetic emerges out of the affective.

When critics influenced by psychoanalysis cease taking liberties with the "law of the father" and adopt a more textbook Freudian position, however, they suddenly become much less apt readers of Stein. A case in point is Ruddick's contention that Stein's modernist innovations occurred by virtue of the fact that "her thinking swerved away from James and toward Freud."⁴ It is true that Stein is not a simple imitator of her mentor, champion, and friend. But, as Stephen Meyer has demonstrated in detail, she

consciously developed her approach to thinking and writing by running variations on key themes in the Jamesian program. While she was most likely familiar with Freud's work, there is no evidence to suggest she either studied it in depth or took his ideas very seriously. Contrary to Ruddick's claim that Freud served as a liberating foil to James's example, Stein's approach challenges many presuppositions of the Freudian stance. It is something of a slight, then, to suggest that his theory somehow serves as a necessary justification of her practice. While she always grappled with uncertainty, she also maintained a dogged insistence on the importance of her work, even when it was only she who found it interesting or even acceptable. When confirmation came, it came from a place other than the rather rigid topography of Freud's metapsychology—a place more intimate and at the same time open to difference, one mapped by James's more flexible illustration of psychic life. Stein put her own spin on the Jamesian approach to creative inspiration. That said, she nevertheless continued to work under his aegis. Ruddick is able to make Freud look liberatory only by mischaracterizing both him and James, ascribing certain qualities to the work of the former that are actually better exemplified by that of the latter.

While Stein struggles with but ultimately delights in the exploration of repetition, the only curiosity which the topic elicits from Freud is of the morbid variety, insofar as he frames it as a dead-end—and therefore something, ultimately, to be feared above all else. For him, repetition is unavoidably compulsive, an “unconsciously” manifested symptom that requires an interpretation undertaken by the analyst, from his position of external authority, to be granted any degree of meaning whatsoever. Further, this “compulsion to repeat” is the main piece of evidence for “the assertion that drives are *regressive* in

nature”—the claim that, as Freud repeatedly states it in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, each and every drive is reducible to “a powerful tendency inherent in every living organism to restore a prior state.”⁵ Thus, insofar as repetition-as-compulsion can be considered to be expressive of anything, it is “the expression of the *conservative* nature of organic life”—that is, its compulsive need to return to an inorganic state. It is this line of argument that leads to Freud’s postulation of “the death drive” as the drive *par excellence*, the drive which all other drives (which, to the degree that they differentiate themselves from “the death drive,” can be, according to Freud, only “partial drives”) can, in the end, be traced back. Conclusively rebutting Freud’s postulations, or even following them to the extremes to which he takes them, is beyond the scope of this chapter. Nevertheless, I want to throw into question his interpretation and propose an alternative understanding, a Steinian/Jamesian perspective. This latter positioning starts with a notion of insistence as the making of difference rather than the strict replication of sameness (repetition-as-choice), proceeds to a postulation of the will to live (which replaces regressive drives with progressive affects as the primary source of motivation and thereby asserts the fundamentally *liberal* orientation of organisms, their desire for novelty), then enacts an appreciation of art as the channeling and broadcasting of excitement (that is, affectively intense experience), and finally instantiates a model of literature as the staggered enaction of affective resonance (and in doing so effects a shift from Freud’s *economic* index of pleasure and pain to an *aesthetic* register of liveliness and dullness that it entails).

As an actual phrase, “the will to live” is nowhere to be found in James’s writing, but the general gist of it can be traced back to a lecture he gave in 1895, “Is Life Worth

Living?” Stein attended this lecture and in fact wrote an enthusiastic response to it as one of her themes for her sophomore composition course at Radcliffe. (The notion that “the will to live” emanates from this source is supported by the fact that it is collected in a volume called *The Will to Believe*, that James gives a positive response to his query, and that—as Stein’s wording seems to suggest—it is James’s *calling* even more than that which is called that provides the reason for living.) Stein may also be drawing upon an essay published, at around a midpoint between James’s lecture and Stein’s own, by the poet and critic Max Eastman (also a student of James) entitled, quite simply, “The Will to Live,” in which he takes as his subject “a thirst for experience that is very general,” a yearning for affective intensity that not only revels in pleasure (*liberally* redefined), joy, and inspiration but also displays, as Silvan Tomkins writes, “a tolerance for the distress and discouragement and shame that are inevitably evoked” when we try to share these experiences, broach the existential problematic of expressing singularity, confront the partiality, incompleteness, and uncertainty of affective resonance. Going back to James, we find that the reveling and the tolerance are in fact two sides of the same coin. “It is indeed a remarkable fact that sufferings and hardships do not, as a rule, abate the love of life; they seem, on the contrary, usually to give it a keener zest,” he writes in “Is Life Worth Living?” This capacity for affective intensity, James would argue in another lecture given around the same time, depends upon the exercise of embodied responsiveness. “It all depends on the capacity of the soul to be grasped, to have its life-currents absorbed by what is given,” he writes. “Life is always worth living if one has such responsive sensibilities.” This facility for improvisational lyricism—to make use of what one finds even when it is a negative affect conventionally coded as not only useless but dangerous

to entertain—is what enables the acceptance and even enjoyment of dissonance, to engage it constructively (and aesthetically). Doing so, we become aware that, as James puts it, that which truly “excites and interests” us about our interactions with the world we inhabit is “the element of precipitousness.”⁶

The contrast between James and Freud I have briefly but starkly outlined—and the Jamesian influence on Stein that I have documented in the process—throws into question Ruddick’s claim that Freud’s “ideas of the unconscious confirmed the value of what was happening in her artistic practice,” that the formulations of classical psychoanalysis definitively designate the agency behind her writing. Stein herself definitively quashed any such suggestion in her refutation of B.F. Skinner’s contention (based on his familiarity with research Stein conducted and published on motor automatism under the auspices of the Harvard Psychological Laboratory while an undergraduate at Radcliffe—studies in which Stein served as one of her own subjects) that her literary works were the product of automatic writing. “Gertrude Stein never had subconscious reactions, nor was she a successful subject for automatic writing,” she writes in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Ruddick claims that for Stein repetition was “a force within herself and her prose that she identifies with unconscious process.”⁷ Freud (and Ruddick) may make this identification but Stein herself did not. Repetition was in fact a crucial aspect of Stein’s manner of working, but it is a mistake to conflate the Freudian and Steinian stances on the issue. Confusing their positions short-circuits the switch to insistence and collapses the looping that leads towards musicality and improvisational lyricism. All of this is not to say that Stein was not interested in and did not engage through her art the psychic activity outside “normal” consciousness that Freud attempted to address under the rubric

of the “unconscious.” She did so, however, against the Freudian grain by charting her own explorations according to the alternative guidelines set down by James.

As Fred Matthews notes, Freud sought to shore up his stature by “claiming full scientific standing for his theory” and James felt that this move “was unwarranted.” “James also disliked the kind of reduction indulged in by Freud,” Matthews adds. In short, as Ignas Skrupskelis writes, James “found Freud too rationalistic, too willing to sacrifice the flux and variety of concrete experience for a single explanatory principle.” Contra the reductionist explanation of eccentric psychic activity—of which affectively intense experience makes up a considerable portion—as merely the source of crippling symptoms, James argued that it could also generate growth and enrichment. Taking an artistic rather than scientific approach to this subject matter, he painted consciousness as a mobile node in an open field rather than the fixed point in a restricted enclosure that Freud takes it to be. Instead of being bound by a thick rind of “resistances,” then, it is instead surrounded by, as James writes in *Varieties*, “a leaky or pervious margin,” “a margin so faint that its limits are unassignable.” What for Freud was “unconscious,” was for James “extramarginal.” Instead of being inaccessible without the assistance of an external “expert,” it was in fact, James writes, “ready at a touch to come in.”⁸ In other words, what Freud takes to be unalterable standards of “normality,” James reveals to be merely habitual limitations that have outlived their usefulness and therefore are in need of being broken through incursions of singularity. The “extramarginal” serves as a much better model of creative inspiration than does the “unconscious.” It is no wonder, then, that it is the one Stein adopted in order to make the leap from repetition to insistence. The “unconscious” is cold, cramped—a one-way road to a dead end. The

“extramarginal” is the lively beginning of a long journey in multiple directions. The “unconscious” is old and derivative. The “extramarginal” is novel and fresh. The “unconscious” is an enclosed realm of disembodiment and disconnection. The “extramarginal” opens out into embodied responsiveness and immersion.

As far as Stein and her work are concerned, then, Freud functions better as a point of departure than a final destination. There are most definitely points of comparison and commonality between their standpoints. But, rather than using Freudian paradigms to give Stein’s work a seemingly more intelligible shape, I propose we make use of this partial overlap as an opportunity to consider how her modified Jamesianism complicates Freud’s views and in doing so unravels certain conclusions he wishes to make.

Approaching him improvisationally, Freud functions not merely as a foil but also a source to sample and flip. By taking phenomena like repetition seriously, Freud, like Stein, but to a lesser extent, broke ranks with a Eurocentric and masculinist model of linear development. To suggest that early childhood experiences have a significant impact on adult life—or more generally that growth involves working through an unruly erotic life that is never completely amenable to any supposedly all-encompassing program of cultural conventions—destabilizes what has been the predominant model of progress in the West. But having broken the line, Freud wanted to close the circle: the idiosyncratic beginnings he uncovers (e.g., “The Oedipus Complex,” “penis envy,” “infantile sexuality” in general, etc.) are taken to be universal, and therefore completely determinative of present life in general. The future is, in effect, foreclosed in order to prevent any chance accidents other than those he takes as foundational, and therefore falsely universalizes, from interfering with the smooth execution of his

metapsychological master narrative or destabilizing the purported *timelessness* of the “unconscious” that functions as both the beginning and the end of his narration. In this sense, his work is two-dimensional. Stein, by contrast, adds an extra dimension, traces a circularity that continuously returns only to diverge from itself and thus has temporal thickness.

She does so, in part, by challenging Freud’s corralling of desire within the confines of a heterosexist pornography and thereby opening an embrace of an erotic life that is irreducible to sexuality, that rather includes the sexual as a subset of itself. Stein foregrounds a more generalized notion of desire as motivated by “unexpressed or unrecognized feeling,” suggests a posing of the erotic in a way that shows it to be, as the poet Audre Lorde writes, “not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing.” Our deepest cravings, according to this view, issue from singularity and are freighted with the supreme difficulty of its expression and the trickiness of its recognition. The upshot is an erotic life that, as Lorde has it, is not “relegated to the bedroom alone” but rather can be enacted in addition through “dancing, building a bookcase, writing a poem, examining an idea”—any activity, in short, that draws out the curiosity, interest, enthusiasm, thirst for experience, being moved that more than anything characterizes the dynamic quality of our lives from the very beginning but which is often stymied by sedimented conventionalities, static expectations. The emphasis here is on a renewed sense of *enaction* suffused with *affective intensity*, which upsets habitual patterns and thereby makes room for unexpected (and always partial, incomplete, at times awkward) *resonances* between, in the words of critic Brad Bucknell, “parallel interiorities.”⁹ This is exactly what is entailed in the relationship between reader

and writer choreographed by a literature designed to effect the staggered enaction of affective resonance. As Bucknell argues for the modernist project at large, and as I will demonstrate in regard to the particular case of Stein's improvisational lyricism, this literary endeavor drew its primary motivation from and sought to emulate the example of *music*. This emulation amounted to more than a simple attempt at imitation through a superficially "rhythmic" and "melodious" language. What is at stake, rather, is a strange *sonority* effected through disruptions of syntactic and semantic conventions that serve less to imitate musicality than to approximate or *simulate* effects that are activated between musicians and their listeners. Stein thus sounded a potential that hip-hop lyricists would actualize. What she gestures towards, they take hold of with both hands and shape into ever more intricate shapes. What they accomplish is more tangible, the result of sound technology that has been developed subsequent to Stein's passing. But hip-hop lyricism remains inspired and enriched by her exemplification of ecstatic word-play.

With the intervention of the aesthetic wrinkle that Stein makes, then, the break resists what Freud presents as an insurmountable force of foreclosure and replicates itself beyond the foreseeable horizon. His unitary circle becomes, for her, a helix that is always already doubled. "The broken circle demands a new analytic (way of listening to the music)," Fred Moten writes vis-à-vis black radical aesthetics, embodied most emblematically—in my mind—by the jazz pianist, composer, bandleader, and poet Cecil Taylor. The same could be said apropos Stein. The two share a sense of *queerness*—that is, singularity, a resistance to and wrestling with convention. They have in common a manner of feeling that is also a *modus operandi*. Certain aspects of psychoanalysis can be adapted to explore the intricacies of this working method. Involved in this vital

adaptation is a reversal of the standard approach. Rather than applying theory to art to make sense of it, art is applied to theory to complicate it down to its most central presuppositions. Thus, as Moten writes, “lingering in the psychoanalytic break is crucial in the interest of a certain set of complexities that cannot be overlooked but must be traced back to this origin precisely in the interest of destabilizing its originarity and originarity in general.”¹⁰

Loitering here, then, is something of a ruse, a means for enhancing the incisiveness of cutting against the grain of Freudian foreclosure. One cuts back to the break, and in doing so underscores the fact that it was there to begin with, before Freud laid claim to it. The misdirection involved in this maneuver—a syncopated choreography of leaning back and darting forward—is part of a strategy to rescue that which Freud simultaneously relies upon and disavows. The aim here is, borrowing James Snead’s phrasing of the stylistics of black culture, “to confront accident and rupture not by covering them over, but by making room for them inside the system itself.”¹¹ In preparation for tracing this approach to the issue of repetition, I want to consider the complex process of psychodynamic fabrication that Freud limns as the common denominator of memory, dream, imagination, and literary fiction. Doing so will instigate an approach to “The Umbrella Incident” that in turn will resound Freud’s initial figuration and thereby open a fruitful space for engaging in a rethinking of repetition—as *insistence*, as the break that instigates improvisational lyricism, the cut out of which an enactive model of literature emerges.

The passage—or passages—that comprise/s “The Umbrella Incident”—a scene in which a small child is burdened, ignored, and abandoned to her own only partially

developed devices of expression and wellbeing—occur in the pivotal “Martha Hersland” section of *The Making of Americans*. It occupies the heart of the chapter—arising first roughly in the middle, and resurfacing (prefaced each time with the refrain “As I was saying . . .”) three times over the span of ten pages. Critical consensus has it that the titular character of this part of the novel functions as Stein’s alter ego (as does, I would argue, David Hersland later in the book; but the dual identification belies no contradiction—not only because of the multifaceted nature of selfhood, but also because each character acts for Stein as an echo of herself at a distinctly different time of her life). Consequently, although presented by Stein as a moment in Martha’s childhood, it is assumed that the basic outlines of “The Umbrella Incident” are drawn from Stein’s own past. Involved in the composition of this tableau-in-motion, then, is not only literary fiction-making, but also the activity of remembering. Simultaneously employing these two faculties, in turn, involves a speculative adventure that skirts the fine line between imagining and dreaming. Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) has been a favorite resource of literary scholars, most notably for its recognition of the significance of the seemingly irrelevant and for its elegant charting of the work of figuration along the intersecting axes of displacement and condensation. I propose that a pair of less heralded essays, pieces of smaller stature on memory formation (“Screen Memories” [1899]) and the life of the imagination (“The Creative Writer and Daydreaming” [1908]) are equally useful for students of Stein. Chronologically and thematically, these pieces bookend Freud’s opus on the fabrication of dreams, in effect forming a resonant chamber in which its echoes can resound and amplify themselves. Together, then, they function as a resource for gauging the multilayered texture of a composite fiction like “The Umbrella

Incident,” assist in discerning and following the complex interweaving of its mobile strata.

“The Umbrella Incident” has, as it were, four facets: (1) *dramatic event*; (2) *primal scene*; (3) *screen memory*; (4) *artistic reenactment*. While these aspects are clearly distinguishable, presenting them serially is somewhat misleading, given that their relation to one another is nonlinear. They are entangled, enfolded into one another in a recursive circuitry that is simultaneously self-referential and self-divergent. I will treat them sequentially here, but only after cautioning that the value of doing so is purely heuristic. In order to complicate the sequence, they are arranged in nonchronological order, forming what could be thought of as a temporal ricochet. The momentum of a remembered present carries us deeper into that present’s past, which in turn flings us back beyond the original starting point, demarking later memories that echo back upon the presumed origin and traveling further into the contemporaneous act of remembrance itself.

Facing the first facet, what strikes us about “The Umbrella Incident” is that it is by far the most *dramatic* of the *event*-like episodes that periodically punctuate what is for the most part an odd amalgamation of straightforward exposition and abstract wordplay, with the latter eventually overwhelming the former—in part because the drama encapsulated in “The Umbrella Incident” is eventually able to play itself out through the writing of *The Making of Americans* itself. The passage moves us, and becomes increasingly moving as we repeatedly read its repetitive recounting, despite the fact that on the surface it seems to be an occasion of small consequence that stands out merely by virtue of the fact that it is a relatively lively moment in an otherwise humdrum existence. This superficial

impression of banality is reinforced, first, by Stein's tendency to deprecate Martha Hersland and, second, by her stated belief that the telling of this "little story" is a distraction from what she takes to be (at the time she wrote this section) the main purpose of her novel: the narrative of family progress that expands into an encyclopedic character typology. And yet she feels compelled to tell it, and to tell it again and again. The simultaneous attraction and revulsion on Stein's part has to do, in large part, with the fact that "The Umbrella Incident" not only crystallizes a number of interconnected concerns from her past but is also invested with the ongoing problems Stein struggled with, and to a certain extent resolved, during the course of writing *The Making of Americans*. These issues of, on the one hand, personal development and, on the other, artistic achievement are intricately intertwined. Stein relates "The Umbrella Incident" in a series of four rehearsals:

[1]

This one, and the one I am now beginning describing is Martha Hersland and this is a little story of the acting in her and of her being in her very young living, this one was a very little one then and she was running and she was in the street and it was a muddy one and she had an umbrella that she was dragging and she was crying. "I will throw the umbrella in the mud," she was saying, she was very little then, she was just beginning her schooling, "I will throw the umbrella in the mud" she said and no one was near her and she was dragging the umbrella and bitterness possessed her, "I will throw the umbrella in the mud" she was saying and nobody heard her, the others had run ahead to get home and they had left her, "I will throw the umbrella in the mud," and there was desperate anger in her ; "I have throwed the umbrella in the mud" burst from her, she had thrown the umbrella in the mud and that was the end of it all in her. She had thrown the umbrella in the mud and no one heard her as it burst from her, 'I have throwed the umbrella in the mud,' it was the end of all that to her.

[2]

As I was saying Martha was throwing the umbrella in the mud with angry feeling as she was telling and nobody was hearing.

[3]

As I was saying Martha Hersland when she was a little one a very little one and the others were running ahead and she had the umbrella for one of

them and she was struggling to catch up to the rest of them and they were disappearing and she was being filled fuller always with angry feeling and resentment and desperation and she was crying out, “I will throw the umbrella in the mud,” and nobody was hearing and she was repeating again and again and then in a moment of triumphing she did throw the umbrella in the mud and then she went on crying and saying, “I did throw the umbrella in the mud,” this is a description of an action that many very different kinds of children could have been doing when they were left behind struggling, Martha Hersland did this and she was a little girl then and slowly now there will come to be a complete description of the nature in her that this I have been just describing does not now help very much to be understanding.

[4]

As I was saying she went to school with the children near them, the for the Hersland children, poorer children near them. As I was saying when the Hersland family moved to the ten acre place Martha was already old enough to begin her schooling. As I was saying then when she was a very little one and she was coming home with them, they went faster than she could then, they left her then and she was running with the umbrella one of them had left with her after saying she would carry it for her and she was saying I will throw the umbrella in the mud and then she was crying, I have thrown the umbrella in the mud, and then later she got home and the umbrella was not with her but one of the other ones one of those what had left her went back that day later and got it for her.¹²

The first of these passages is clearly the primary account: the others put the event itself at arm’s reach through summary, commentary, and details missed in the immediacy of the initial run-through. The account starts with a third-person perspective but soon morphs into the simulation of a real-time, immersive account of what happened from the point of view of the young Martha herself. Here we have in *The Making of Americans* the odd blending of the voices of narrator and character that DeKoven argues distinguishes “Melanctha.” This vocal layering is one tactic Stein used to elicit the embodied responsivity of the reader, to instigate the reenactment of literature. As DeKoven describes the effect: “We feel as if we are living through an experience rather than reading about it; we come away with a feeling of deep familiarity with or rootedness in the dimensions of the situation unextended to a coherent intellectual grasp of them.”¹³

A story told in this way refuses to grant the reader the additional distance generated when a scene is *recollected* rather than *reenacted*. The three variations that follow, however, engage exactly in the work of recollection, elaborating on the original account, but in a way that places Stein (and her reader) at a further remove from the event that is being narrated. She evidences here a deep ambivalence, a fluctuation between situational embeddedness and detached observation that runs throughout *The Making of Americans*. If, by the end of the “Martha Hersland” chapter she has displayed a marked leaning towards the latter, by the time she began writing the next section on “Alfred Hersland and Julia Dehning” she seems to swing back towards the former, but in a way that shifts the moment of immediacy from a remembered event to the acts of writing and reading themselves.

Stein’s ability to blend her own point of view with that of Melanctha Herbert is an act of imagination growing out of her own experiences of erotic “wandering” and “wisdom”—and the struggle with convention this exploration of singularity entailed—during her emotionally tumultuous undergraduate years and her even more turbulent affair with May Bookstaver—made all the more poignant by coinciding with the unraveling of her career at the Johns Hopkins Medical School and her decision to relocate to Europe to pursue a literary life. The means by which she manifests her empathy for Martha Hersland, while no less fictional, is more a matter of memory than of imagination, insofar as it involves looping back to embrace (albeit momentarily, ambivalently, and partially) a former self rather than projecting oneself into a potential alter ego. Stein’s mixed feelings about Martha, much like her ambiguous stance towards Melanctha, should be taken as an indication that her involvement with this material runs

at a depth that involves an ineradicable intimacy but also entails a reflective distance. This distancing, however, is exactly what sets the stage for an approach, or return—a reenactment via fiction. Or, more precisely, a *second-order* fiction, a literary fiction, since memory itself—with or without the intervention of a concerted effort of artistic crafting that aims to reenact rather than merely recollect—is endowed with an inherent fictionality of its own. As Freud states the issue, since memories do not “arise simultaneously with the experiences they relate to and as a direct consequence of the effect these produce” they “show us the first years of our lives not as they were, but as they appeared to us at later periods, when the memories were aroused.” “At these times of arousal the memories of childhood did not *emerge*, as one is accustomed to saying,” he goes on to explain, “but *were formed*.”¹⁴

The formation of memory can be considered to occur when an affectively intense experience in the present resonates with an experience of a similar quality from the past. This affective resonance between past and present selves—like that between one person and another—is always partial, incomplete, and disorienting, being hard to pin down and locate definitively. As Stein puts it, “to be feeling ourselves to be as children is like the state between when we are asleep and when we are just waking, it is never really there to us as present to our feeling.” Putting the matter in these terms suggests that “The Umbrella Incident” partakes of dream as much as memory—or that the two are both products of the same dynamic process of figuration.

Imagination, too, plays a role in this literary crafting of fiction, as evidenced by the close of the incident’s fourth rehearsal. The sequence of aspects can be perceived folding back upon itself here. For, as it turns out, artistic reenactment is a precondition for

staging the dramatic event. But there are two sides to artistic reenactment: the work of dramatizing the event and the *reliving* of it through the process of writing and reception itself. It is the latter that will be considered under the heading of artistic reenactment below, even though reference to the former is unavoidable. The immediacy that Stein's reenactive literature generates is achieved via mediation. It is a literary effect. The dramatic event is realer than reality, more moving than the original occurrence. This is due to the fact that while in the latter, as Freud writes, "the subject was then in the middle of the scene, paying attention not to himself, but to the world outside himself," in the former self and world, interiority and exteriority, are simultaneously grasped in their dynamic interaction and interweaving.¹⁵

There is another reason why the immediacy of "The Umbrella Incident" in its first run-through is necessarily accessed through the mediation of literature: it was only through the composition of the second-order fiction of Martha's life that Stein was able to grapple with the first-order fiction of her own childhood memory. Approaching this material, Stein admits, gives her "a horrid losing-self sense." The simultaneous banality and crucial significance of this event—and her inability to "just get over it," as evidenced by her returning to it again and again—makes Stein lose her composure, throws into question the standing she seeks to secure for herself by writing a monumental piece of literature, "*The Great American Novel*." But there is something even more fundamental going on here, something that is endogenous to the very mechanics of accounting for oneself across time. "That is really the trouble with an autobiography you do not of course you do not really believe yourself why should you," Stein would come to diagnose the problem later in *Everybody's Autobiography*, "you know so well so very well that it is

not yourself, it could not be yourself because you cannot remember right and if you do not remember right it does not sound right and of course of course it does not sound right because it is not right.” What is interesting here is that the imperfection of memory is registered as a matter of *sounding*, as a resonance marred by interference. Even more stunning is what Stein concludes on the basis of memory’s ineradicable *artificiality*: “You are of course never yourself.” Insofar as it involves telling stories that—like any narrative—span a temporal breadth traversed via a recursive, divergently circular trajectory that generates odd and disorienting echoing effects when one strains to hear what travels through it, it is not only past (or future) selves but *selfhood itself* that is “never really there to us as present to our feeling.”¹⁶

This is perhaps why Stein will come to argue—drawing on the fluid, multiple “Consciousness of Self” that James illustrates in *Principles*, as it continuously makes and remakes itself during the duration traversed by the “Stream of Thought”—that the attempt to convey affectively intense experience through writing entails the composition of a “prolonged” or “continuous present,” in which there is no such thing as “identity.” There is, in other words, no easily identifiable label under which everything that goes into making a self can cohere as a unity and thereby serve as the basis for an understanding—of self and other—that is somehow something other than a complex and messy process of *feeling*, an undertaking that continually overthrows itself. A sincere embrace of the existential problematic of expressing singularity requires a repeatedly renewed effort to sustain the recognition of its endogenous plurality. This inborn turbulence of selfhood and the comprehension it enables can be the cause of much confusion. It is also the source, however, of whatever genuine empathy, whether towards oneself or other people,

that we are able to achieve. As Stein would come to phrase the issue in *Narration*, even given the knowledge that “one is never really feeling what any other one is really feeling,” two (or more) can approximate one—can achieve an admittedly partial, incomplete, affective resonance—because “one is always two.”¹⁷ This calm acceptance of disjuncture, however, comes a quarter century after the completion of *The Making of Americans*. And during the writing of the first half of that novel (up to the end of the “Martha Hersland” section), Stein’s feelings towards the dynamic instability of selfhood and comprehension were far less tranquil. At that time she was overwhelmed as much as invigorated by affectively intense experience, had only begun to make inroads on the existential problematic of expressing singularity, and had yet to be convinced that empathetic connection was possible to any degree whatsoever.

In these circumstances the untenability of identity seemed less like liberation than *dispossession*. As Priscilla Wald suggests, during much of *The Making of Americans* the disruption of conventional patterns that affective intensity effects by sounding the endogenous plurality of singularity to its furthest reaches amounts to “an incomprehensibility symbolically tantamount to nonexistence.” “The fear of self-loss corresponds, in this work,” Wald writes, “to the fear of not being comprehended or comprehensible: the estrangement of a terrain that is more than alien, that simply makes no sense.”¹⁸ Not being understood, then, is the cousin (once removed) of death. Going unheard, one might as well be dead. Or, perhaps, it is the other way around. Perhaps knowledge of the fact that one’s life was the consequence of a rather grim game of chance makes one’s existence hard to hear, hard to understand, isolated, estranged. What this amounts to is a figurative death—a bad dream one only partially wakes up from—

that is worse than the literal variety, in that it must intensely felt over a long period of time. This feeling of mortality is hard to put into words, and thereby begin counteracting, in exact proportion to its intensity. This is the core issue that Stein struggled with from the beginning of her life, that she wrestled with and partially resolved during the course of composing *The Making of Americans*, and that continued to haunt her even after the completion of this monumental novel. Given how heavy these matters weighed on Stein, what is possibly most impressive about this work is that she managed to embrace the incomprehensible as its own remedy. By risking incoherence, risking a further intensification of the isolation of her tenuous existence, she demonstrated that the breaking of convention, the misuse of found materials, can serve as the means of conveying affectively intense experience, infusing language with music, as well as the source of its difficulty. That is, she discovered and put into practice improvisational lyricism. A key step was made towards this artistic accomplishment in the crafting of “The Umbrella Incident” as dramatic event. Here the interior dissonance of alienation is put to constructive use. Through the dual fictionalization of herself as Martha and as semi-omniscient narrator, Stein was able to simultaneously occupy the positions of both actor and observer and in doing so managed to perambulate a dangerous territory, circle around an issue that was too painful to address more directly.

What “The Umbrella Incident” portrays is an affectively intense experience broaching the existential problematic of expressing singularity. At first, this seems rather obvious: this is what literally happens. But, then, it must be remembered that there is nothing literal about what is going on here. Not only is the dramatic event figurative through and through, but the primal scene and screen memory on which it is based and the artistic

reenactment which it gives rise to are themselves complex processes of figuration. This would be true even if the four facets could be disentangled. But, in reality (which itself is far from literal), they cannot. Which is what makes unpacking any one of them such a painstaking process: they demand to be explicated simultaneously, but thinking them through generates an artificial degree of seriality. Getting to the heart of the matter necessarily involves peeling through layers of significance that have accrued around it, whether because of the nature of the material, or the unavoidable limits of method. We get at what “exactly happened” by paying close attention to the convoluted way Stein presents these actions, examining her composition in fine detail in order to tell a compelling story in such a way that it evokes a web of interconnected stories that exemplify the same basic pattern. Stein’s method of story-telling dramatizes the existential problematic of expressing singularity, the difficulty of conveying affectively intense experience in a way that is easily understandable.

Stein’s *metastory* solicits readers’ embodied responsivity through techniques that make them feel like the story is theirs as well. Stein’s writing engages readers in such a way that they come to occupy not necessarily the same but the *same sort* of position vis-à-vis the dramatic event that she does: that of participant observer. Reading becomes a way of reenacting the experience that motivated the writer to write, that Stein herself reenacted in the very process of writing itself. Literature (the recursive circuitry of reading/writing), then, functions for Stein as, in the words of Richard Cándida Smith, “a score that the reader plays using his or her body as an instrument.”¹⁹ The aim is the staggered enaction of affective resonance, the partial and incomplete conveyance of affectively intense experience, and the means is infusing language with music. There is

an inherent musicality to the dramatic event—and, consequently, the artistic reenactment—that serves as a clue to the mystery of what exactly makes the memory it draws upon musical. Turning back, then, to the initial rehearsal of “The Umbrella Incident,” we notice that it opens with an incantatory prelude that all of a sudden slides into a register more reminiscent of an operatic aria or even a Beethoven sonata, composed of a quick concatenation of nearly isomorphic, but slightly off-kilter prepositional phrases: “and she was running and she was in the street and it was a muddy one and she had an umbrella that she was dragging and she was crying.” We as readers are placed *in media res*. The balance and subtle internal variation of this passage places us right with the child, Martha. But in the background of our awareness, and upon repeated readings, questions arise.

We empathize with her distress: she is small, trying to catch up, moving across a messy terrain, carrying an unwieldy load. But, where has she come from? what is she trying to catch up to? why is she carrying an umbrella? The muddiness of the road suggests that it has been raining, so the inclusion of the umbrella is hardly a non sequitur. But should not someone other than a child this young be carrying it? Perhaps it was given to Martha in case it starts raining again, but would she even know or be able to operate it in that eventuality? It is only with the subsequent rehearsals that these details are filled in: Martha is on her way home with a group of older children, one of whom owns the umbrella in question and asked her to carry it. So, already handicapped by shorter legs, Martha’s attempt to keep up is made even more difficult by an additional burden someone has unthoughtfully pawned off on her. Maybe Martha agreed to carry the umbrella because being asked to do so seemed like a gesture of inclusion. But in

practice, it turns out to be merely another way of leaving her behind. Martha may be small, but she is sharp. As the troubling facts of the situation quickly become apparent to her, she issues the protest that serves as the predominant motif threading its way through these interwoven passages. It is repeated and varied, but no matter what it remains unheard. Not being heard only intensifies her frustration with being left behind:

“bitterness possessed her . . . there was desperate anger in her . . . she was being filled fuller always with angry feeling and resentment and desperation.” This ramping up of affective intensity sets the stage for the expressive act that temporarily resolves this dramatic event, if not the metastory, the complex process of figuration of which it forms merely one component. In fact, to the degree that it is evocative of the other aspects of “The Umbrella Incident,” the resolution offered here is made compelling only as long as it is simultaneously thrown into question.

Returning once again to the first rehearsal, we need to pay close attention simultaneously to: (1) Martha’s action; (2) Martha’s utterance; and (3) how Stein phrases both action and utterance in a way that highlights their inextricability. Action and utterance move together, interlock, like dance partners, tracing out the steps through which a wave of feeling passes. “I will throw the umbrella in the mud.” Stein first introduces this insistent phrase directly after the sentence that moves from incantatory prelude to a musical pacing of the scene, drawing the reader in, placing us in Martha’s shoes. She repeats it four times, each time adding an additional circumstantial detail as a sort of tag line, highlighting her vulnerability, her isolation, her frustration, her lack of recognition. With each repetition, tension builds. The effect is not to wear a rut, but to build momentum. There seems to be something slightly different being evoked with each

instance of the motif, until it and the action it accompanies are brought to a crisis, a need for dramatic change. Stein marks this crucial moment with a typographic stroke, interrupting the stream of writing with a semicolon. This is a very rare instance of Stein using this punctuation: usually she sticks to periods and commas, and as she got older she worked to wean herself progressively from the latter. Not only does it come out of nowhere, so far as the precedent set in the preceding pages would have seemed to indicate, but its syntax is slightly off. The semicolon is preceded as well as followed by a space. The reader is jarred: it becomes not clear, but powerfully registered that something has happened here. Only later do we realize this disjunctive typography coincides with the crest leading up to the climax of the event: Martha finally—“in a moment of triumph,” the third rehearsal adds—throws the umbrella in the mud. The action and its punctuation is the crest, not the climax. It is the cut that instigates the break, an operation that differentiates and in doing so joins. For the climax comes, the break is made, by running a vital variation on the motif: “I have throwed the umbrella in the mud.” The slight syntactic departure of the extraspaced semicolon serves as a pivot around which a more dramatic grammatical disruption revolves, the linguistic equivalent of throwing the umbrella in the mud.

The intertwined concatenation of action, utterance, and its second-order phrasing is how Martha/Stein expresses herself, evoking the affective intensity of her experience in this moment and in general, and in so doing embodying singularity and its endogenous plurality in a way that resonates. Martha/Stein is making an implement that has been foisted upon her, an unwieldy medium, useful for her purposes by misusing it, dragging it through the mud, marring it with an ungrammatical construction. Consider: “have

threwed.” More than anything it *sounds*. These are not words but a musical phrase, or at the very least a musical phrasing of words. It is more dramatic than the regularized versions Stein offers in subsequent rehearsals: “did throw”; “have thrown.” Its sonority makes felt her smallness, her struggle, her exuberance at the belated issuing of her expression, the enactment of her singularity. But this moment of triumph is noticed only by the writer who relives it and the reader who responds, viscerally, to it. Martha does manage to leave her mark, but her fellow actors remain as unresponsive as always. Stein implies that, at least at this moment, the climaxing of dissident action into divergent utterance is enough for Martha: “it was the end of all that to her.”

Indeed, the character of Martha that develops as the chapter progresses bears little resemblance to this willful, emotional child. The adult Martha is complacent, subdued, as if she has accepted a life the precondition of which is being ignored. Martha, in other words, becomes something less than herself. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that Stein gives up on Martha, abandons her, files her away in her family history and characterological survey—an abandonment indicative of her ambivalence towards her own past and present, her own uncertainties regarding her literary endeavor, her own fear that it had no future, that it would fail to elicit a response other than rejection. Much better, the fate of Martha seems to imply, would be to just remain ignored. Nevertheless, Stein cannot help but keep hold of “The Umbrella Incident.” It was hers to begin with, it is what she reenacts—relives—through the writing and reception of *The Making of Americans* itself. Martha may or may not have been content with the dramatic action backed by the emphatic utterance, but what is certain is that Stein herself remains dissatisfied with the fact that “no one heard her as it burst from her.”

This is why, a page after closing the initial run-through of Martha's moment of crisis, Stein once again interrupts her attempt to achieve "a complete description of the nature in her" to return to "the acting in her of her being," even though the latter supposedly "does not now help very much to be understanding" the former. Regardless, she cannot help but offer a second rehearsal in the form of a condensed summary that enumerates the action, the affect, the utterance, but ends on the note of still going unheard. She feels compelled to rehearse the event two more times, adding at the end of the last an imaginative revision, an as-yet-unfulfilled hope fictionally actualized in the past. One of the older children, readers are told, retrieves the umbrella. This is suggestive of closure, but upon scrutiny it can be felt to miss the mark. The umbrella is retrieved, but there is no suggestion that it was returned to Martha, much less returned with an understanding of what the action meant to her or a belated audition of the echoing of her utterance.

Stein herself stubbornly strives for more, needs to even more powerfully convey affectively intense experience and be greeted with resonance—even given how partial, imperfect, incomplete this responsiveness will always be. Even after she is done reenacting "The Umbrella Incident" as dramatic event, the existential problematic of expressing singularity of which it is indicative sticks with her. The seed of improvisational lyricism it contains is recursively planted into her own aesthetic practice, blossoms into her model of literature as the staggered enaction of affective resonance. All of this is to say that "have thrown" continues to resound throughout the entirety of *The Making of Americans*. Its echoes can be felt in the unpunctuated repetition—"a very little one a very little one"—with which the third rehearsal begins. They can be felt in the lack of quotation marks in the fourth and inconclusive run-through. More importantly, they can

be heard to *amplify* as Stein's writing becomes increasingly musical, eventuating in what she calls the "Beethovenian passages" of its latter sections, the "rhapsody" with which it ends. When explicating how she went about writing in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein writes that often she would "set a sentence for herself as a sort of tuning fork and metronome and then write to that time and tune."²⁰ While composing *The Making of Americans* in the wake of "The Umbrella Incident," "I have thrown the umbrella in the mud" was that sentence. It is the theme Stein riffs on; the key in which her composition is written; the punctuated, cut, variegated motif she sounds as her time signature; the break she chops, flips, and loops in her recursive self-sampling.

Scene/Screen: The Mud of Memory

They ask me to tell why an author like myself can become popular. It is very easy everybody keeps saying and writing what anybody feels that they are understanding and so they get tired of that, anybody can get tired of anything everybody can get tired of something and so they do not know it but they get tired of feeling they are understanding and so they take pleasure in having something that they feel they are not understanding. I understand you undertake to overthrow my undertaking. . . . That is all understanding is you know it is all in the feeling. . . . My writing is clear as mud, but mud settles and clear streams run on and disappear, perhaps that is the reason but really there is no reason except that the earth is round and that no one knows the limits of the universe that is the whole thing about men and women that is interesting.

■ Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography*

The character of Martha Hersland on its own hardly offers an adequate likeness of Stein. A fuller account of Stein's self-portraiture in *The Making of Americans* must include a consideration of how she invests herself in Martha's younger brother David as well. Nevertheless, the critical and somewhat anomalous wrinkle in Martha's

characterization that “The Umbrella Incident” amounts to does serve to capture a particular moment in Stein’s life. By the same token, details of Stein’s own biography when “she was just beginning her schooling” serve to augment Martha’s fictionalized experience. When she was seven, Stein’s family relocated from urban Europe to the still semi-rural East Oakland (“Gossols” in the novel). A clue to the source of Martha’s grammatical peculiarities is given by the fact that the young Stein was not exactly a native English speaker: although it was the language she first learned to read and write, the linguistic surround in which her first six years were enveloped, and thus the idiom from which she drew her earliest utterances, consisted as much of French and German as of the language Stein would eventually come to claim as her own. Like the Herslands, the Steins lived “not in the part of Gossols where the other rich people mostly were living,” but rather in “an old place left over from the days when Gossols was just beginning.”²¹ While enjoying a privileged life on their ten-acre estate, the Stein children also lived amongst and attended public school with a peer group that for the most part were less fortunate than themselves, a class difference that—in addition to the age gap—could account for Martha’s sense of estrangement from her schoolmates. But while these surface biographical details serve to flesh out the young Martha’s situation to a certain extent, they do not quite account for the odd poignancy with which “The Umbrella Incident” is saturated. Something to the effect of what occurs in the dramatic event may have happened to Stein, it may be based on an actual memory that she embellished to encapsulate this time in her life. But what makes “The Umbrella Incident” uncannily gripping is the way in which it surreptitiously draws on the periods immediately preceding and following Stein’s primary school years. This is where the aspects of

primal scene and *screen memory* come in, which it turns out are parallel surfaces enclosing and providing the means of activating a resonant chamber.

These terms are drawn from the Freudian corpus, and in this body of work they are intimately intertwined. While I will consider them sequentially, we must always remain attentive to the constant sliding back and forth that takes place between the two, the near elision of scene/screen, the paradoxical blurring of the lines between source and echo. Although Freud does not coin the phrase “primal scene” until his celebrated “From the History of an Infantile Neurosis” (aka “The Case of the ‘Wolf Man’”)—written in 1914 but not published until 1918 because of the interruption of World War I (in the interim he had made a passing reference to it a year earlier in his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*)—he had referred to the phenomenon in the less heralded “Screen Memories,” published fifteen years prior. Freud in fact begins and ends this piece pondering the prototype of what would come to be the primal scene, touching upon the titular notion only three-quarters of the way through the manuscript, and then only briefly. Screen memories, it seems, cannot be considered apart from primal scenes, and are in a sense supplementary to them. But this supplementarity does not make them any less meaningful. To the contrary, it is through their action alone that primal scenes can be accessed. Necessary though it is, however, this mechanism is off-putting as well, at least for someone engaged in the sort of analysis that Freud (and I) are attempting to perform. Generating the motivation for launching this endeavor would be impossible without a strong conviction that “our earliest childhood experiences have left indelible traces on our inner selves.” But immediately upon trying to unearth these traces they seem to amount to “either nothing at all or a relatively small number of isolated

recollections, often of questionable or perplexing significance.”²² Seemingly disconnected and confusing artifacts at best. More likely trivia, if not junk. Like, for example, the throwing of an umbrella in the mud.

Freud strives to rescue this psychic debris from the figurative dump. He argues that “those impressions that have the most powerful effect on our whole future need not leave a memory image behind.” Or rather, their force is so strong that leaving their stamp directly would crush rather than leave a legible imprint. Consequently, “instead of the memory image that was justified by the original experience, we are presented with another, which is to some extent associatively *displaced* from it.”²³ The banal intervenes to cushion the blow, to register in a roundabout way that which cannot be directly apprehended. But, how to identify and explicate this relation between “memory image” and primal scene? For Freud, this is where the analyst intervenes, filling the gaps left by these displacements and uncovering condensations through his masterful interpretation, to which patients must completely submit in order to overcome their resistance to remembering the most significant moments of their early lives and thereby become cured of their neuroses. I want to phrase the issue differently, however, in a way that evades the unquestioned license of the external authority, that leaves room for a fruitful self-analysis through reenactment, that flips “resistance” into *complexity* and “symptoms” into *problematics*. Part of doing so involves questioning Freud’s almost automatic pathologizing of this sort of psychic entwining, his evasion of the possibility that it is something all healthy individuals work through (a fact that undermines to a certain extent the idea of an authority that can be “external” to the symptoms it diagnoses). Another part entails subverting Freud’s ocularcentrism.

According to his formulation, memory is a matter of what can be *imaged*, pictured in clear, straight, static lines. No credence is granted to the possibility of a memory that *sounds*, that is fuzzy, distorted, vibratory, but which nevertheless is powerfully affecting, available for audition—a “musical memory” that Stein locates in the “in between” of her cup, a resonant chamber that is yet another self-portrait. (For is not the resonant chamber exactly what resides within and emanates from the “great pyramidal Buddha” that the sculptor Jo Davidson—and the critic Edmund Wilson after him—uses to figure the bearing Stein assumes when engaged in the activity of writing?) Along related lines, we need to consider an issue Stein herself was deeply interested in: the potential of synesthetic interaction between seeing and hearing, choreographed by touch into a dance of sight and sound that issues as sculpture—or, enactive literature. Doing so entails questioning Freud’s metaphor of the “screen.” Through this revisionary query the alternative figure of the *tympan/i/um* is arrived at: a device that both marks the entrance of and enfolds the resonant chamber and in so doing acts as a means of facilitating the exteriorization of interiority, intervenes as a cushion in the potentially painful and unavoidably difficult transition between memory and writing, sight and sound.

Here we have a clue to the synesthetic impulse inherent to the artistic methods Stein would develop as an adult: because it is so easily evoked by words on a page, sound threatens the sanctity of printed language; but while being thus sonorously infused makes reading and writing more dangerous, it also makes it more interesting and powerful. Sound frightened Stein, but it also fascinated her, and she longed to become able to *handle* it. While not the medium she worked within, she longed to make it into a resource for unsettling and remaking—infusing—that medium. And this aspect of her

mature writing arose out of her childhood reading. “I loved to read in spite of the fact that often when thus engaged there came suddenly into my consciousness a fear of something unknown, intangible, that seemed to be everywhere,” Stein confesses in an autobiographical theme written while she was an undergraduate at Radcliffe. It would not be until over forty years later that she would specify the source of this enveloping anxiety, explicitly touching upon her primal scene in *Everybody’s Autobiography* while remembering a moment soon after her family relocated to Oakland, the period of her life “The Umbrella Incident” draws upon and elaborates. “When I was eight I was surprised to know that in the Old Testament there was nothing about a future life or eternity,” she writes. “I read it to see and there was nothing there.”²⁴

How this indication of an abrupt end made Stein feel is suggested by a detail about Martha Hersland that she uses to punctuate her recounting of “The Umbrella Incident.” “When she was a very little one sometime she wanted not to be existing,” Stein writes. “I wish I had died when I was a little baby and had not any feeling, I would not then have to be always suffering, I would not then now have to think of being frightened by dying, I wish I had been dead when I was a very little one and was not knowing anything.” The lack of quotation marks here is another way in which Stein blurs the line between narrator and character (and thereby draws the reader in), suggesting that she is speaking as much for herself (and us) as she is for Martha. From very early in her life, then, Stein/Martha seems to have been endowed with a troubling knowledge that elicited in her a strong and persistent sense of angst, which could predispose her to be sensitive to something like being left behind to carry someone else’s umbrella through a muddy street. And at first glance, it appears as if this intimation of mortality comes via a written

source, and not just any book but a book that is (especially for someone who comes from a Jewish background) *the* canonical authority. But if we listen closer to Stein as she moves closer to the primal scene in *Everybody's Autobiography*, we hear that she was primed to perform this reading by a previous audition, an accidental eavesdropping upon whispers behind her back. "Then there was the fear of dying, anything living knows about that," she writes, "and when that happens anyone can think if I had died before there was anything but there is no thinking that one was never born until you accidentally hear that there were to be five children and if two little ones had not died there would be no Gertrude Stein, of course not."²⁵ A scrap of devastating trivia separates what "anyone can think" from what will always remain somewhat unthought even by those who lived through it, and as such will keep arising to be reenacted, worked through.

So, Stein—according to her own account—would not have been born if two potential siblings had not died in infancy. This early knowledge of the contingency of her existence imbued Stein with the need to justify it, to express herself in a way that was both true to her experience and considered valuable by others. She was driven to manifest her singularity, make it partially communicable, and thereby stimulate and resonate with other singularities, evoking the plurality out of which they all emerge. This would be the project of her life's work, a crucial step of which she would make while writing *The Making of Americans* and falling in love with Alice Toklas, an intimacy that was made possible by Toklas's reading (and transcribing, if not to say rewriting) of Stein's work. Before she could reach this joint threshold of artistic achievement and personal development, however, she would struggle long and hard to build her repertoire of expression, become capable of not only *having* but *sharing* affectively intense

experience. As a child, her attempts to make herself heard were frustrating. Given the lack of recognition, however, Stein salvaged even unsuccessful acts of expression by falling back on the pleasure it gave her. This tension between frustration and elation is at the heart of “The Umbrella Incident.” No one hears Martha cry, no one sees her throw the umbrella, but the action gives her a certain satisfaction nevertheless. If nothing else, she left a mark that registered what she felt, which someone could possibly come back to and recognize for what it is. This, however, remained for the most part a hypothetical occurrence. For the time being, struggling with her early internalization of mortality and the need to make something special of her life that it stimulated was for the most part overwhelming, which caused Stein to turn inward. This was not all bad: there was joy as well as angst. Her experiences of affective intensity ran the gamut of valence. As a college student, Stein claimed to “have lived in my short life all the intensest pains and pleasures that human nature is capable of experiencing.”²⁶

Biding her time, she focused on finding the means of expressing herself: through reading but also, I would argue, through the piano lessons she took and the theater (especially opera) she attended, while living in Oakland. Even more important, she worked on cultivating the self-sustaining and other-empathizing richness of imagination that is perhaps the most crucial ingredient of what would come to be her *métier*: literary fiction. “My mind from childhood was one which constantly fed on itself,” Stein explains. “I would seize every possible excuse to be alone so that I might dream, might lose myself in intense emotions by the side of which all else paled into insignificance.” Her valorization of introversion, while genuine, also functions as a way of compensating for the perturbation of the primal scene, the instigation of her need to be understood as

well as the potentially crippling complication of that desire. Also, the note of isolation she strikes is somewhat curious given the fact that the premature awareness of birth being inextricably intertwined with death was something she in fact shared from the outset. For, as she has herself *insist* in *Everybody's Autobiography*, "two died in babyhood or else I would not have come nor my brother just two years older." Stein and her brother Leo were close, nearly inseparable, but, she adds "we never talked about this after we had heard of it that they never intended to have more than five children it made us feel funny."²⁷ Although Stein portrays this silence as a mutual agreement, I would speculate that it was Leo who, as the elder sibling, issued the injunction against a joint revisitation of what they overheard of their parents' reproductive plans, and how their near nonexistence made them feel. While it would be characteristic of Leo to interpret adjectives like "funny" as derogatives, Stein herself had a boundless curiosity for all things queer that would eventually win out over her Leo-like squeamishness.

This could explain Leo's extremely negative reaction to Stein's writing. Likewise, the failure to acknowledge this shared experience could account for why the two had a falling out and parted ways in 1910. (It should be noted, however, that this break also coincided with the increasing importance of Toklas in Stein's life.) This lack of connection, even (or, perhaps, especially) with those to whom one is supposed to be closest, surfaces in *The Making of Americans* shortly after the fourth rehearsal of "The Umbrella Incident." "No one knew very much what Martha was feeling about anything when she was in her young living," Stein writes.

She was not ever telling very much of her feeling then to any one, and never to any one in the family living. Not any of the Hersland family ever were telling each other very much about what feeling they had in them. Martha was really not telling any one very much in her young living the

feeling she had in her about anything and then in a way too it was not in her ready for telling. It had not form in her, feeling in her, there was really then no way for her to tell any one anything about her feeling.

Stein/Martha's isolation as a child has to do not only with the fact that the "ordinary middle class existence" that provides the bearings for "a decent family progress" carefully evades "vital singularity." It is not just a matter of not having acquired adequate means of expression. Rather, in the end, what is at the heart of Stein/Martha's introversion is that the early stages of the maturation process traced by the existential problematic of expressing singularity involves for the most part the internal processing of affective intensity. It is this endogenous dynamic that sets the stage for any externalization of affectively intense experience that may occur. Shortly after the passage quoted above, there occurs an abbreviated sequel to "The Umbrella Incident" that broaches this next phase of development. Martha witnesses something that brings her to the brink of attempting to navigate the tricky interchange between interior and exterior. A somewhat older Martha, perhaps a preteen Martha, is engaging in some Melancthaesque wandering after wisdom "in another part of town from that in which the Herslands were living" and comes across a singularly evocative scene: "a man hitting a woman with an umbrella."²⁸

The reappearance of the umbrella in this way is telling. We are back in the arena of "The Umbrella Incident"—that is, "in the street," a potentially messy public thoroughfare. The assumed burden—the abandonment or at least misuse of which has amounted to an expressive act—is returned, but it returns with a vengeance that threatens to violently countermand not only the sort of expression Stein was interested in making but the very private life that would motivate such an expression. The umbrella is now

coded as an upstanding male implement, used to fend off and punish the effrontery of female need. (The sequel is recounted twice, and the second instance implies that the assaulted woman is either soliciting or panhandling: the man strikes her “to rid himself of her and of the asking in her.”) Witnessing this has a profound effect on Martha, an effect that Stein suggests echoes and continues the momentum of “The Umbrella Incident.” In short, Stein writes, “it gave her direction to getting for herself a university education.”²⁹ Her reasons for wanting to do so go beyond gaining enough socioeconomic leverage to avoid ever being put in the position of the beaten woman. Rather, pursuing higher education is a means for turning the burden into a resource, claiming the implement as her own and (as the phrasing of Martha’s aspiration and the linguistic liberties taken in Stein’s college themes suggest) doing so in a way that flings mud in the eye of patriarchal authority, remaking it as a means for expressing exactly what it was previously meant to beat down: female desire, queerness, affective intensity, singularity. After this promising prelude, however, Stein tells the story of Martha’s college days by interpellating her into an already prewritten script (the story “Fernhurst,” completed before she began *The Making of Americans*, and based on an actual incident that happened to an acquaintance of Stein’s at Bryn Mawr) in which chasing her ambitions leads only to being the subservient, silent wife of a man who, despite being full of promise and claiming to be a champion of women’s rights, cheats on her, leaves her for the other woman, and dies a premature death.

It may be that Stein is attempting to tell a cautionary tale here, a reminder of the difficulties even a privileged and talented woman faces in seeking to break convention. This impression is strengthened when we consider the conditions under which Stein was

writing this section of *The Making of Americans*. Martha Hersland's chapter comes to an abortive end, because identifying with her places strict and powerful limits on how far Stein can travel upon the path towards exteriorizing her interiority, leaves her vulnerable to attacks that demean the possibility that her writing could be received well. In order to move beyond the stage of early childhood in a way that evades the fate of Martha, Stein needed to invest in an alternate alter ego. This is exactly what happens when she once again takes up the issues dropped in this chapter in the David Hersland section. And she does so by explicitly invoking the primal scene. Stein delays this confrontation by making Martha the eldest of the Hersland children. It is David who is the youngest and who, consequently, has to work through—rather than indirectly evoke—the premature knowledge of mortality that haunts “The Umbrella Incident” and the simultaneously troubled and rewarding expression it dramatizes. “As I was saying he was a younger one,” Stein writes towards the beginning of the David Hersland chapter,

he came to be living after Martha and after Alfred Hersland had each of them been sometime living. Mr. Hersland had always intended to have three children and as I was saying there had been two and these two had not gone on being living and so David Hersland came to be living and sometime later in some way he heard this thing when he was still quite a young one and he had it in him then to be certain that being living is a very queer thing, he being one being living and yet it was only because two others had not been ones going on being living. It was to him then that he was certain then that being living was a queer thing. As I said of him in a way he was needing it that every moment he was one being one being living by realising then that he was one needing then being one being living. He certainly was one for sometime going on being living. He went on for some time being one going on being living. As I was saying he could have it in him to be feeling that it was a very queer thing to be one being living. He was one that could be realising very much and very often that he was needing being one being living. He was one needing to be understanding every minute in being living what meaning there was to him in his needing to be to him one being being living. He certainly then could have it in him to be going on being living. He

certainly could have it in him to feel it to be a queer thing to be one being living.³⁰

Prior to the content, what one first notices about this passage is the style—that is to say, style and content are here inseparable. One can hear Stein refining her method of insistence: the repetitions are more intricate and varied, the phrasing imbued with an amplified sonority when compared to the passages from the Martha Hersland chapter. This artistic advance coincides with a leap of personal growth. In the shift from Martha to David, Stein is able to face her early awareness of death head-on and in doing so realize that when one embraces the queerness that this knowledge entails it becomes an affirmation of life, an avowal of the craving for affectively intense experience. Able to act towards the enrichment of his desires, David's consciousness is endowed with the endogenous dynamic of internal processing that Martha strived for yet fell short of. David is given the leeway to make an effort to understand his complex feelings, continuously suss out the dense meaning of affective intensity. This is the work that sets the stage for expression and resonance. Singularity has reached the next stage in its development, the next twist in its existential problematicity. If Martha serves to portray the experience of the young Stein, the introduction of David allows her to move towards a reenactment of her adolescence and early adulthood. In this way, inhabiting the latter character gives her additional purchase on the issues crystallized in the dramatic event portrayed earlier in the novel. This passage from the David Hersland chapter, then, can be used to mark the shift to the next aspect of "The Umbrella Incident": from primal scene to screen memory. This is hardly the end of the road: the fourth facet of artistic reenactment remains to be realized, and this is something David fails to do. He dies young, before his efforts at feelingful contemplation issue into a lasting work of art. This

last step is something that Stein could not achieve by proxy: she would have to make this move under her own guise. This is exactly what begins to happen, I would argue, through the writing of *The Making of Americans*, an activity that includes as an integral component the registration of its reception.

Screen memories are, according to Freud, fabricated “like works of fiction.” The primal scene—insofar as it is accessible—is also a figural fabrication. The mechanism of its activation is replicated by screen memories, only in inverted form. Whereas in the former a memory is suffused with the shadow of earlier experiences, in the latter the very same memory is imbued with “thoughts and impressions from a later period.”³¹ The screen, then, is always already double-sided, filtering material that comes simultaneously from both directions. Through this dynamic interweaving of before and after, screen loops back into scene, tracing the boundary of a spacious interiority, a resonant chamber. The result is the composite figuration of the *tympan/i/um*. Unfolding this enfolded formulation extracts three elements: tympani, tympanum, tympan. A kettle drum (which, it should be noted, is shaped quite like a cup); a sculpture in relief that marks the entrance to a resonant chamber; the cushioning fabric that facilitates the transmission from printing plate to sheets of print. Each strike on the drum, each knock on the door, each typographic impression constitutes an expressive act that bounces back and forth, generating a knotted network. As evidenced by the epigraph that opens this chapter, Stein would explicitly foreground this “musical memory”—so *touching* that it feels sculptural—in *Tender Buttons*. She would embrace and occupy this reverberating room in early portraits like “Ada” and “Orta or One Dancing,” in later poems like “Susie Asado” and “Preciosilla,” and especially in her opera *Four Saints in Three Acts*. But she

first began realizing the possibility of the resonant chamber in the David Hersland section of *The Making of Americans*. But as with any, this “first” is immediately thrown into question. It comes in to being only because the chapter that it occupies resounds strains first heard in Stein’s earliest literary efforts, undertaken when she was skirting the border between adolescence and adulthood. In these early pieces, we are offered a clue as to the source of the musicality that Stein would use to break and remake the conventions of writing and endow the medium with an increased capacity for conveying affectively intense experience.

Included in the “Radcliffe Manuscripts,” the collection of themes Stein wrote during her sophomore year at college, is a series of interconnected fictions, stories that are more deeply autobiographical than anything else she wrote due to the fact that the time of their composition was nearly contemporaneous with the experiences they sought to revisit and literarily elaborate. Before David, before Martha, before Melanctha—before, even, the self-parody that is the character Adele in *Q.E.D.*—Stein invested herself in a fictional counterpart named Hortense Sanger. This assemblage of fragmentary fictions serves to supplement the David Hersland chapter of *The Making of Americans*, further fleshing out the screen—or, I should say, *tympan/i/um*—memory facet of “The Umbrella Incident.” They allow us to hear in greater detail how the primal scene and the childhood memories it impinges upon are resounded and refracted by later experiences, resoundings and refractions that bounce back and come to be echoed in the space of memory that precede them, amplifying both the internal activity and exteriorizing emanations of this resonant chamber. In particular, the story of Hortense Sanger serves to sound what Stein would refer to as “the dark and dreadful days of adolescence, in which predominated the fear of

death, not so much of death as of dissolution.”³² Here we have an instance of insistence and sonority that registers a more mature engagement with the primal scene. Having made it through the challenges of childhood, and having developed a rich interior life (for the most part through the solitary activity of reading, but also through learning the piano and playing duets with her older siblings Michael and Bertha), the adolescent Stein is able to accept the *eventuality* of death but still sits uneasy with the thought of it as an ongoing process that is initiated at the moment of birth. In an important sense, the failure to come to terms with dissolution functions as a hindrance to further maturation. Specifically, it serves to aggravate the difficulty of developing a fertile interior into a compelling and evocative exteriorization. The Sanger material registers Stein’s growing frustration with this state of affairs and suggests how the experiencing of theater—and particularly *musical* theater (mainly Wagnerian opera but also symphonic performances)—inspired the means for remedying this situation.

We have already heard from Hortense. It is from her perspective that the theme I cited above in my discussion of the primal scene is narrated. This piece (titled “In the Red Deeps” after a chapter in George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*—note how Stein flips the phrase, inverts it from referring to occupying a location in the exterior world to intimating the inhabitation of interiority) portrays the introversion, intensity of feeling, and imaginative activity of Stein’s early years. Just as Hortense here serves as a surrogate through which Stein can process her childhood, in a subsequent theme she will serve as the means of ruminating upon the passage into adolescence. This latter essay includes a passage that summarizes the former, thus instantiating the connection between the two: “Circumstances had forced Hortense Sanger to live much alone. For many years

this had suited her completely. With her intense and imaginative temperament, books and her own visions had been sufficient company.” This summary, however, turns out to serve merely as a prelude to an alteration of circumstances that immediately follows upon it. “She had now come to a period in her life when she could no longer content herself with her own nature,” Stein announces. “She fairly lived in her favorite library. She was motherless and so at liberty to come and go at her own pleasure. Now the time had come when her old well-beloved companions began to pall.”³³ The penultimate sentence here drops a clue as to the “later impressions” that resound the primal scene and in doing so instigate an echoing back and forth that constitutes “The Umbrella Incident” as *tympan/i/um*. For, if Stein felt isolated as a child, her loneliness only increased when she entered her teenage years. Death informs both moments of solitude: whereas in the former it impinges in the guise of an illicitly acquired knowledge of her own mortality, in the latter it is the fact that Stein’s adolescence coincided with the protracted illness and death of one of her parents that is crucial. Stein’s mother, Milly, was diagnosed with cancer in 1885 and finally passed away three years later, when her youngest daughter was fourteen. Stein implies that being “motherless” entails a new sense of freedom, but we also have to ask ourselves why she felt the need “to come and go,” why she found pleasure in being away from home. At root here, as in “The Umbrella Incident,” is a failure to establish intimacy and an inability to express the frustration and fear this situation generates in a manner more articulate than throwing an umbrella in the mud.

As Linda Wagner-Martin documents, with the passing of Milly the Stein household lost the nurturing presence that held it together. With only an excessively stern and erratic father left presiding, the Stein family devolved into chaos, leaving the children to

fend for themselves. (This, as hard as it was, may have turned out to be for the best, however, in that it prepared them for life after their father's death, a mere three years after their mother's.) Even before her passing, Milly was consumed with her cancer and had little energy or attention left over to perform the vital caretaking role that she did prior to her illness. And while the individual members of the Stein family were all disturbed by Milly's declining condition, they were not predisposed to talk about how the looming threat of death affected them. Thus, as Wagner-Martin notes, at this time of crisis Stein "was shut off from both comfort and information." And this dual inaccessibility was made more acute insofar as she was deeply worried "not only about her mother's condition but about her own changing body."³⁴ For Milly's passing coincided with Stein's passage into adolescence, with all the complications this maturation process entails—in particular growing complexity of embodiment and the erotic. Bereft of her main source of nurture and advice about these matters, Stein's sense of not belonging to her family increased. Even the rich interior life that she had managed to carve out in the midst of her estranged household "began to pall." She would have to find another location where she could cultivate her capacity for affective intensity. But this was not all. In addition, her developing literary imagination began to be drawn towards supplemental sources of inspiration. Registering her discontent "with her own nature" and seeking an external environment that would resonate with her interior state, Stein sought out experiences that would push her to her limits, that felt as dangerous as exciting, that were strange and potentially uncomfortable, that she would at times disavow while simultaneously continuing to draw on them.

After her mother's death, Stein—like Hortense—“fairly lived in her favorite library.” This occupation brought her closer to the brink of encountering the means through which she would allay her isolation. This discovery is dramatized in “In the Library,” the most developed of Stein's college essays. She begins with a vivid description of its locale: “It was an ideal library for a literary browser; Out of the noise and bustle of the city yet within easy reach. The books were all in one vast room with high ceilings and great windows that let in a flood of sunshine.”³⁵ The library is spacious and illuminated, a greenhouse encouraging the cultivation of fertile minds. The roominess, however, also serves as a constant reminder of what remains at its margins, calling its occupants out. While the library is not in the midst of “noise and bustle,” it is within its vicinity. “Sometimes the strains of Chopin's funeral march would reach the ears of the quiet readers,” Stein writes.³⁶ The external world intrudes upon the library via the medium of music, but in so intruding brings attention to the fact that it too can be a resource for enriching interior life. The particular piece Stein calls upon in crafting Hortense's story is significant. What Hortense overhears is the minor-keyed “march” that begins and ends the third movement of Chopin's Piano Sonata No. 2. The composition (which Stein was likely familiar with, being a practiced piano player) also includes, however, an interlude in D flat *major* that periodically steps in to take the place of the dominant theme in B flat *minor*, an uplifting interruption that models the affective dynamic of coming to terms with the paradoxical interweaving of life and death. Drawing on this new, musical material as an enhancement of reading involves leaving one's comfort zone. But at the same time it elicits a powerful longing, leading Stein further along the path of

exteriorizing her interiority, crafting a way of writing that engages initiates the staggered enactment of affective resonance.

Striving towards this achievement, however, would involve weathering a welter of growing pains, the beginnings of which Stein figuratively documents in the story of Hortense Sanger. “One day as the last long sad notes of the march died on the air,” Stein writes by way of introducing the heroine of “In the Library” vis-à-vis its musical intrusion, “a young girl who had been listening intently, threw down her book with an impatient gesture, and dropped her face on the arm of the leathern couch.” The familiar face of the printed page pales in comparison with the passing strains of this resounding Chopin’s sonata cuts through the silence of the library, generating the break that unleashes Stein/Hortense’s dissatisfaction about the compromise she has struck, trading affective resonance for an elaborate and guarded interior. Interiority at its highest pitch—that is, affectively intense experience—cannot, it turns out, be reached without the intimate, if imperfect, connections this music promises to facilitate. Hortense attempts to return to her reading, “to catch the broken thread” of her book, but to no avail. The break has been made and, tired of the placidity of the prosthetic womb of a literature held at a remove, “a wild impatience possessed her.” Having passed out of childhood and into adolescence, Hortense is gripped by a desire to stand on her own two feet and begin exploring the further reaches of the outside world. “She was a dark-skinned girl in the full sensuous development of budding woman-hood,” Stein declares.

Her whole passionate nature had been deeply stirred by those few melancholy strains and with the sun light heating her blood, she could not endure to rest longer. “Books, books,” she muttered, “is there no end to it. Nothing but myself to feed my own eager nature. Nothing given me but musty books.” She paused, her eyes glowing, and her fists nervously

clenched. She was not an impotent child, but a strong vigorous girl, with a full nature and a fertile brain that must be occupied, or burst its bounds.³⁷

Stein has herself cutting a Melancthaesque figure. What may first stand out is that Hortense, like the protagonist for whom she serves as a prototype, is endowed with a complexion that racializes her. More importantly, though, for Stein this coloring is the mark of “sensuous development”—that is, the transition from a capacity for affective intensity (the erotic in general) to an exploration of sexuality (a particular aspect of the erotic).

The very thing that serves as the source of the library’s illumination is what now gets Hortense’s heart rate up. Her literary surroundings having come to feel stale and claustrophobic, she is impelled to leave for the fresh air of the big, wide world—to wander after wisdom. Stein’s conflation of darkness (that is to say, *blackness*) with sensuality is questionable, and will be endlessly questioned. But she discovers and in effect argues that inhabiting a body full of passion (having “a full nature” that is acutely animated and stirs at the slightest touch, or even promise of touch) is not contrary to, but rather a corollary of having “a fertile brain.” Where does Stein/Hortense’s passionate peregrination lead her? In “In the Library,” following the suggestions of her Romantic inspiration, Stein has her protagonist and alter ego leave the library in order to climb, in the face of a mighty wind and a steep incline, a high promontory overlooking the ocean. There she is able to experience a moment in which the sublimity of the natural world mixes with the satisfied sense of exertion resulting from her physical effort. The barriers securing her isolation are temporarily breached and Hortense experiences a connection between her internal condition and her external environment. In short, she has undergone catharsis. Despite communing with nature, however, socially she is still alone, even

more so than she was within her household or in the library. While catching her breath, Hortense in effect enjoys a brief respite from her trying everyday routine. But after taking in “great gulps of ocean air,” she is left with the anticlimax of “muttering her satisfaction to herself.”³⁸ The report of this affectively intense experience is muffled, and therefore unheard by anyone other than Hortense herself. Having reached a dead end, she returns home only to, it is to be assumed, repeat the same cycle again the next day, and the next, and so on, *ad infinitum*. Some source of divergence must be introduced into this circuitry in order for Stein/Hortense to make headway in her engagement with the existential problematic of expressing singularity.

Unlike her fictional counterpart, Stein herself was able to integrate such an extracurricular activity into her educational program. For after her mother’s death Stein spent much of her time across the Bay away from her family, not only visiting the Mercantile and Mechanics Library but also frequenting San Francisco’s vibrant Theater District. The dual shock of Milly’s passing and her own passage into the perilous phase of puberty, and the bundle of unruly desires it amplifies and/or redirects, brought Stein’s childhood to an abrupt end. She was for a time at a loss, dissatisfied with the resources she had managed to acquire thus far but unsure where else to turn for inspiration and guidance, until all of a sudden what she was looking for was standing right there before her, as if by accident. But it was the sort of accidental occurrence that unexpectedly enabled a greater degree of resolution, a spontaneous variation on which to base concerted efforts of improvisation. “Then the next thing I knew was adolescence and going to the theater all the time,” Stein explained apropos this fortuitous happenstance during her 1934-1935 lecture tour of the United States in the wake of the sensation that

was *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, “a great deal alone, and all of it making an outside inside existence for me, not so real as books, which were all inside me, but so real that it the theater made me real outside of me which up to that time I never had been in my emotion.”³⁹ The theater, like the library, is an enclosed space, a resonant chamber. But it facilitates the same sort of excitement and satisfaction Stein had Hortense experience via her vigorous hike to the shore by virtue of the fact that, when compared to its strictly literary counterpart, it resounds with a heightened degree of resonance. Music, which for the library is an external perturbation, is in the theater an integral and at times primary component. Also, while Stein attended these performances alone, it was an environment that encouraged a sense of shared participation (partial, imperfect, and incomplete as it may inevitably be) amongst audience members and between the audience and the actors.

At the theater—particularly when it was an opera or a symphony orchestra that she was attending—Stein was able to see and hear before her very eyes and ears something that not only aroused the same sort of feelings she experienced while reading, but gave them an external form. Rather than the wonders of the natural world, what Stein feels connected to is the expressive acts of other people. Consequently, she is granted an important clue about how to craft the exteriorization of her interiority, begins to realize the possibility of “an outside inside existence”—not *as* real as internal life itself (because of the inevitable partiality, imperfection, incompleteness of the transposition) but still *real* nevertheless because it is *moving* and thus can be *felt*. To be clear, however, Stein was not completely won over to musical theater. Literature would remain her *métier*, the medium through which she would work to express her singularity, the means she would

use to choreograph the staggered enaction of affective resonance. But in pursuing her literary endeavors, trying to achieve via her own creative activity what she had witnessed through that of others, she would draw on the resources of and seek to simulate the effects produced by theatrical performance. In particular, she would work to infuse her writing with the *musicality* that suffused the theater, its capacity for exteriorizing the interiority of affectively intense experience and thus facilitating a more mature engagement with the existential problematic of expressing singularity. This is especially true of the works that followed upon the heels of the completion of *The Making of Americans* and her definitive coupling with Toklas, and even more particularly in *Tender Buttons*. It was with this motley compendium of prose poetry that Stein felt she truly began simulating the effect of musical theater by “mixing the outside with the inside.”⁴⁰ The composition of *The Making of Americans* was for the most part an introverted and isolating endeavor, although in the later sections (at a point roughly coinciding with Stein’s getting to know Toklas and sharing her writing with her) the reader can discern a certain *opening outward* that is registered by the writing becoming increasingly infused with musicality. *Tender Buttons* took this fortuitous development in Stein’s aesthetic practice and pushed it further, drawing upon it as the seed out of which not only technical methods but a full-blown artistic methodology blooms.

With *Tender Buttons* (whose title undeniably connotes the affective, erotic, sensuality, sexuality and thereby bears the mark of Stein’s growing intimacy with Toklas), Stein began “describing the inside as seen from the outside.” This flipping of realistic conventions creates a divergence that veers not away from reality but rather closer to it. As one of Stein’s many post-World War I acolytes reports her saying: “I

reproduce things exactly as they are and that is all there is to it. The outer world becomes the inner world and the inner world becomes the outer, and the outward is no longer outward but inward and the inward is no longer inward but outward.” Oriented towards the enfolding of interiority and exteriority that defines reality, description (or, reproduction) here is neither the direct transcription of interior life that she attempted in *The Making of Americans* nor the conventional imaging (i.e., representation) of external objects. Rather, Stein draws upon particular features of her domestic environment as epicenters of affectively intense experience. The writing, then, does not so much portray the “subjects” of the prose poetic “portraits,” but rather serves as a score that elicits the embodied responsiveness of the reader and thereby enables him or her to reenact an echo (which necessarily includes a degree of noise or interference) of the interior state elicited in the writer by these found objects. Literature develops this capacity when infused with a musicality that manifests not merely in the melodiousness of the language but in the disruption of conventional syntactic and semantic patterns, making cuts that effect a shattering of representational conventions and the subsequent collaging, assemblage of the fragmentary imagery that results from these breaks. The comparison with cubist painting and sculpture is obvious, and has been noted frequently in the secondary literature on Stein. But what often goes overlooked is that, as Stein came to understand it, this movement in the plastic arts—especially as it moved from cubism proper towards dada and surrealism—itself had a musical inspiration or model. What is also interesting is that the authority Stein draws upon in making this claim is not Pablo Picasso but another friend, the lesser-known but equally interesting Francis Picabia. According to Picabia, Stein writes, “a line should have the vibration of a musical sound.”⁴¹ And she

extrapolates upon this principle, making it applicable not only to strokes of paint and planes of bronze but also *lines of print*.

It is this notion of Picabia's that Stein claims lies behind Marcel Duchamp's infamous *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (1912), the painting that made a splash at the legendary Armory Show in New York City around the same time Stein was composing (while luxuriating in the domestic bliss of the household she and Toklas had recently established together) the pieces that would come to be collected in *Tender Buttons*. Stein does, however, issue an important caution regarding "the vibrant line": "it is not yet created and if it were it would not exist by itself, it would be dependent upon the emotion of the object which compels the vibration." At no moment can the creation of the vibrant line, musicalized plasticity or typography, be located definitively in the past tense. It is *virtual*, a simulation that depends for its realization on a process of activation that spans a temporal breadth that never ceases to potentially stretch into the future. What activates the vibrant line is the affective state of an entity that, while endowed with singularity, is inherently multiple. The "object" in question fills itself out, at the very least, in *quadruplicate*. It is the creator, the thing that arouses the affectively intense experience, the creation that this experience motivates, and the audience members as they reenact (approximately) this experience by "playing off" the creation. Affective intensity, then, while it may be partially localized within a singular interiority, is ultimately a distributed, pluralized phenomenon that necessitates a passage through exteriority and thereby a partial, imperfect, and incomplete resonance across parallel interiorities. Thus, we can observe in the work of Picabia, Duchamp, and Stein a phenomenon Moten limns in the performances of the contemporary philosopher and conceptual artist Adrian Piper:

“*Sound gives back the visuality that ocularcentrism had repressed.*” The dramatic infusion of musicality ruptures representationalist conventions, frustrating the casual observer but eliciting in the receptive audience an enactive mode of seeing, one that is registered as a visceral, embodied immersion rather than a distanced surveillance, what Mark Hansen has called apropos new media art “haptic vision.”⁴²

There are times, however, when, in the interest of championing this enhanced visuality, Stein downplays the role dramatic musicality plays in this synesthetic achievement. She does so for two reasons. On the one hand, Stein denies the influence of musical theater because she becomes increasingly invested in what Jean-Luc Nancy and Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe call “the literary absolute”: the idea that modern literature is utterly autonomous and in so being absolutely novel. As Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela have shown, however, the maintenance of autonomy depends upon participating in a consensual domain. This entails drawing on found materials. It is the latter that, through improvisation, serve as the source of novelty. On the other hand, Stein never gave up hope that perfect communion could be accomplished. Literary novelty, then, was meant to secure both absolute autonomy and a complete agreement that evades the messy process of consensus-building. “I have destroyed sentences and rhythms and literary overtones and all the rest of that nonsense, to get to the very core of this problem of the communication of the intuition,” another of the many young white men who apprenticed themselves to Stein during the 1920s quotes her as claiming. “If the communication is perfect, the words have life, and that is all there is to writing.”⁴³ According to the terms Stein would go on to enunciate in *The Geographical History of America*—literature channels interiority (the “human mind”) in such a way that the

passage through exteriority (“human nature”) is made unnecessary. Contrary to what Stein claims, however, this would make affectively intense experience inaccessible and thereby deactivate the animation of the vibrant line, leading to writing that is lifeless. Luckily, Stein is perhaps the most masterful oversimplifiers of Stein, and this is a signature case. Her dismissals of influence almost never actually entailed ceasing to draw upon that which she disavowed. Her self-commentary here serves to obscure rather than illuminate what she was actually achieving. Her enactive model of literature actually, as Wagner-Martin notes, “erased the line between (literary) play and (staged) event” and was therefore inherently synesthetic, involving hearing and touch as well as sight.⁴⁴

Stein’s defensive posturing served to mischaracterize not only what was going on in her own work, but also her enjoyment of the creative activity of others. It shifts attention away from the vital interplay that existed between creation and reception in her aesthetic engagements. For example, Stein downplays her attachment to theater in the past in order to deflect any suspicion that she drew inspiration from it in the present. “She says it goes too fast,” she has the narrator report in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, “the mixture of eye and ear bothers her and her emotion never keeps pace.” But it was exactly its troublesome invigoration that resonated with Stein’s internal state as an adolescent and drew her to drama in the first place. It was the syncopated choreography between audience and actors—facilitated by the touching, moving synesthetic infusion of the visual with the aural—that served as the model for the staggered enaction of affective resonance she would later attempt to effect through literature. Indeed, this interest in and craving for musical theater was something that outlasted Stein’s adolescence. It also

characterized her college years and in fact is a notable element that accompanied—if not enabled—her entry into adulthood and beginnings as a self-assured writer. As Wagner-Martin notes, in the years following Toklas’s taking up residence with her, Stein “faced life with a new assertiveness.” This reinvigoration, a more mature revisitation of the desires that made Stein’s adolescence so turbulent, was facilitated by the fact that she and her new companion “attended concerts, plays, and films”—enjoying a program that included the Paris debut of Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*, Strauss’s opera *Elektra*, as well as the ballet *Parade*, a collaborative effort by her acquaintances Erik Satie, Jean Cocteau, and Picasso.⁴⁵ Perhaps most important were their attendance of performances by the Spanish singer Preciosilla and the innovator of modern dance, their friend Isadora Duncan—both of whom (along with Toklas) are subjects of portraits Stein wrote as she was warming up to tackle the pieces included in *Tender Buttons*.

In addition, according to Toklas it was Stein’s *vocality*—a voicing imbued with an inherent musicality—that, more than anything, accounted for her ability to draw her interlocutor’s “complete attention.” When Stein spoke one heard singularity expressed in a way that underscored its endogenous plurality. “It was unlike anyone else’s voice—deep, full, velvety like a great contralto’s, like two voices,” Toklas writes. Stein’s own voicing, then, manifests the same sort of marginal self-syncopation that she found to be distinctive of musical theater. And presumably it was her ability to infuse this vocality into her writing that attracted Toklas and later readers. Toklas’s casting Stein as an opera singer indexes their mutual love of music. Amongst their most precious possessions was a state-of-the-art phonograph, and the sound of records playing was pretty much a constant companion while they were at home. Toklas, like Stein, was an experienced

pianist—in fact she earned a BA in Music from the University of Washington. A shared musical acumen drew the two together and served as a resource for their literary experimentation. During her college years it was Stein’s proficiency as a musician and enthusiasm for music in general that was her major source of joy and camaraderie. While at Radcliffe, Stein attended the musical theater quite frequently with classmates. As Wagner-Martin documents, she “played themes on the piano for her friends beforehand, because she did not want them to miss key motifs.” These impromptu recitals of hers and her enhanced appreciation of musical performance distinguished Stein for her peers. “What set her apart from all the others was her personal quality,” the anonymous authors of an obituary published in the Radcliffe alumni magazine upon Stein’s death wrote. “Knowing her intimately enhanced every interest one had. To attend a symphony concert or opera with her was to gain new enjoyment from it.”⁴⁶

This contagious excitement incited by musicality left traces in Stein’s school work. In the margins of “In the Library” she wrote: “I would like to have rewritten the whole theme but the German opera threw me back in my work.” This statement could be taken in both a literal and figurative manner. Literally, because she was spending so much time brushing up on her Wagner, she did not have time to do her theme “properly.” Figuratively, however, Stein’s wording here strikes a much less self-critical note and serves more as an explanation than as an excuse. The inspiration of music is what led Stein to return to the theme again (“threw me back in my work” could be understood in this sense, rather than merely as an admission of procrastination), but it is this musical resounding that prevented her from moving forward, to getting it rewritten along more conventionally appropriate lines. Stein wanted to simulate the effects music had on her

and her friends in writing, but had yet to find a way to do so in a wholly satisfying manner. Thus, even upon a second consideration, it seemed most true to her intentions to leave the theme only partially complete, leaving room for further developments that would only come with time. Stein begins charting the course of this artistic growth through her portrayal of the “wild impatience” Hortense exhibits in the library and in the wandering after worldly wisdom that this emotional turmoil motivates. “One could not live on books,” she has her alter ego insist at the end of the theme,

she felt that she must have some human sympathy. Her passionate yearnings made her fear for the endurance of her own reason. Vague fears began to crowd on her. Her longings and desires had become morbid. She felt that she must have an outlet. Some change must come into her life, or she would no longer be able to struggle with the wild moods that now so often possessed her.⁴⁷

Lured out into the open by strains of music Hortense allows her capacity for affective intensity to stir up “wild moods” that Stein herself experienced as well. She was disturbed by these “passionate yearnings” at the same time that they gave her pleasure.

In this story music means more than itself, narrowly defined. Insofar as it acted as a facilitator of affective resonance, it also broaches the issue of sexuality. Although Stein remained ambivalent about touching upon the erotic, there is evidence that her enthusiasm was appreciated by her fellow female students. It is this that lies behind the claim made by the unnamed authors of Stein’s *Radcliffe Quarterly* obituary that “her unconventionality” was in large part what made her “a good companion with a genuine warmth of interest in those about her.”⁴⁸ This approval was voiced only when it was too late, however, and even then not in an easily attributable form. After graduation, most likely unaware of the impression she had made on her Radcliffe peers, Stein would continue to struggle with the issue of how to navigate the ambivalent—one moment

encouraging, the next moment alienating—reception of her attempts to elicit affective resonance. This protracted labor would come to a head with her complicated relationship with May Bookstaver, famously recounted in *Q.E.D.* and reworked not only in “Melanctha” but also in “Redfern.” In these works, processing her memories of the affair served Stein as a means for resounding the dramatic action of “The Umbrella Incident,” bouncing back off the primal scene this childhood remembrance encapsulates, and in so doing reinfusing the present with the past in a way that set the stage for a future that included, as a key component, the artistic reenactment that the process of writing *The Making of Americans* entailed. During the course of this protracted and at times disenchanting labor Stein managed to remake literature once again into a way of coming to terms with painful disappointment and actualizing her potential for affective resonance. It was the introduction of Toklas’s presence—especially the effects of her enthusiastic reception of Stein’s writing and eventual involvement in the very process of its composition—that facilitated this transposition and gave Stein a renewed hope and an unrivaled degree of joy, a less encumbered exercise of curiosity and desire.

Reenactment: Repetition—or, Insistence

The uncanny that we find in fiction—in creative writing, imaginative literature—actually deserves to be considered separately. It is above all much richer than what we know from experience; it embraces the whole of this and something else besides, something that is wanting in real life. . . . Towards real experience we generally adopt a uniformly passive attitude and succumb to the influence of our material environment. To the writer, however, we are infinitely tractable; by the moods he induces and the expectations he arouses in us he can direct our feelings away from one consequence and towards another, and he can often produce very different effects from the same material. All this has been known for a long time and has no doubt been studied in depth by experts in aesthetics. We were led into this field of inquiry without any real intention because we yielded

to the temptation to explain why certain instances of the uncanny conflicted with our thesis regarding its origin.

■ Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny”

Thus far in this chapter we have considered how Stein works to infuse a theatrical musicality into her writing, transforming repetition into *insistence* and thereby facilitating a processing (in the sense detailed in the Introduction vis-à-vis hiphop sampling) of “The Umbrella Incident.” Through the interweaving of memory and the making of literary fiction she works through the “originary” emergence of the existential problematic of expressing singularity, both as a locatable moment in her childhood and as it travels, continues to resound, generating echoes with the affectively intense experiences of her early adulthood. Through these efforts to trace the outlines of the vibrant line, Stein installed and inhabited a multidimensional spacetime of visceral, immersive imagination. In this section we will explore how Stein’s dwelling within this resonant chamber enabled Stein to perform a reenactment of a past event that also functioned as a means to dramatize her present struggle. Through this aesthetic experimentation Stein crafted an ensemble of resources that she drew upon to weather the enduring tensions of her personal development and artistic ambitions. The upshot was her model of literature as the staggered enaction of affective resonance, of which her relationship with Toklas provided the prototype. As we will see in the next chapter, Du Bois picks up on this project of improvisational lyricism that runs from James through Stein, working to broadcast it to a broader audience, in doing so broaching the question of the ethical and political efficacy of an affective, enactive, embodied aesthetics. In order to begin surveying these maneuvers, another brief consideration of Stein’s break with Freud is called for, which in turn involves some further fleshing out of James’s alternative

approach to the psychodynamics, upon which she drew to blueprint a relationship between engaged reader and creative writer that departs from the adversarial interaction between critic and literature operative in scholarship informed by classical psychoanalysis. It is this seed of revitalized *sociality*, this spark of affective resonance, that Du Bois cultivates into his ethics of attunement and draws on to inflame his politics of dispossession.

Approximately twenty years after completing *The Making of Americans*, Stein would rephrase the dynamic process of “musical memory” that begins to be sounded in that novel in terms of the *sonorized*—and thereby immersive, embodied, haptic, enactive, postrepresentational—visuality she pioneered in *Tender Buttons*. In the process, the *tympan/i/um*—the entrance to the resonant chamber, the resonant chamber itself, and the internal fabric of spacetime that entering and occupying the resonant chamber generates, through which one can process difficult material, create *responses* to blows that would otherwise trigger mere *reactions*—takes on the guise of a more familiar, but no less hybrid and enduringly strange, device. It is significant that she executes this maneuver by imagining herself into the perspective—narrating the life—of Toklas, who by that time had become Stein’s trusted partner in both life and art. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* is structured in such a way that spacetime multiply enfolds itself. It begins with a short chapter on Toklas’s life before coming to Paris, followed by a chapter on her arrival in Paris, which abruptly breaks off to fill the reader in on Stein’s life, this time working in reverse. The third chapter covers Stein’s time in Paris prior to meeting Toklas in 1907, and the fourth is concerned with her life in America prior to her expatriation. Only with the fifth chapter (of seven) does Stein/Toklas take up what she/they had broken

off in the second. “But to return to the beginning of my life in Paris,” Stein has Toklas say, drawing one digression to a close before momentarily charting yet another elliptical path, “it was like a kaleidoscope slowly turning.” With this moving, gripping metaphor Stein/Toklas not only characterizes this phase of her life but the structure of this work of literature itself. By facilitating this dual characterization the gradual—but no less momentous—turning of the kaleidoscope that this passage evokes serves to distill, as Wendy Steiner argues, “the treatment of experience in the autobiography.” “The reader is constantly returned to events in such a way as to superimpose the present onto the past, to destroy linear temporality,” she explains. “At the same time, any single event is at the center of a constantly shifting set of accompanying events or associations, like a kaleidoscopic image. The pattern keeps changing, and virtually anything can be incorporated into the design.”⁴⁹

The kaleidoscope, in short, is an agent of the *vibrant*—that is, curving, spiraling, tracing a broken circularity that delays any premature closure—*line*. It is one form this recursive figure takes as it simultaneously refracts conventions and superimposes the resultant fragments, improvising the unforeseen by infusing writing with musicality, reenacting literature, sculpting a postrepresentational, enactive (and affective) model of the interweaving of its creation and reception. DeKoven elaborates upon Steiner’s initial tracing of this dynamic, in particular arguing that Stein’s work—especially when *scored* (emphasizing the cuts that make breaks, divergent acts that make possible articulations that join at the same time that they distinguish) by Virgil Thomson’s music, as it was in the operatic production of *Four Saints in Three Acts*—generates an immersive, mixed-media environment that “shifts continually, like a kaleidoscope turning, from fragment to

unresolved fragment, mode to mode.” By way of further fleshing out what we could call the *installational upshot* of Stein’s literary reenaction, DeKoven writes:

Not only the number of simultaneous images, but their very irreducibility, their unresolvedness, gives rise to a sudden sense of an infinite, limitlessly rich, filled, and open mental, imaginative world, in which we can wander at will without pressure or obstruction: a maze in its complexity, density, and multiplicity of choices, but the opposite of a maze in that there are no wrong turns, no blind alleys, no single correct path, no necessity of forward movement toward exit, no necessity of exit at all.

Immersing oneself in the complex, synesthetic system of imagery that comprises this aesthetic dimension, one becomes aware that—in the words of Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch—art, like cognition in general, “is not the representation of a pregiven world by a pregiven mind but is rather the enactment of a world and a mind on the basis of a history of the variety of actions that a being in the world performs.” In terms more specifically geared towards the case at hand, as Harriet Chessman argues, putting an additional spin on the line of thought instigated by Steiner and furthered by DeKoven, Stein’s literary fictions “ask for the active and intimate presence of a reader,” elicit “a responsiveness on the reader’s part which is both bodily and imaginative”—that is to say, *affective*. “Rather than taking place from a distanced point outside the play of voices, a stance which would assume the possibility of mastery over the writing,” Chessman writes, “reading becomes understood as a lively participation.”⁵⁰

To read Stein’s writing, then, at least according to the second wave feminist scholars whose readings are the most compelling and evocative, is to have one’s embodied responsivity engaged, to be immersed in a mixed-media environment (a sculpted habitation, a virtual architecture) that is simultaneously a welter of images and a collage of sound (that is, as Chessman would have it, a “play of voices”) whose carefully

choreographed movements lead one on a journey through affective intensity that simulates the experiences undergone by the writer that motivated the creation of literary fiction in the first place. On first glance, the psychodynamic process of figural fabrication that Freud limns as the common denominator of memory, dream, imagination, and literary fiction bears an uncanny resemblance to the kaleidoscopic spacetime enacted through the reading of Stein's writing. But upon review, this seems to be the case if we overlook the fact that for Freud the figuration that takes place within the patient's psyche—and through the interaction of patient and analyst—can be properly scrutinized only from the vantage of the analyst himself, and thereby disciplined according to the dictates of psychoanalytic technique. For Freud ultimately insists upon coming at the therapeutic process from “a distanced point outside the play of voices.” Doing so requires him to take issue with the “treatment of experience” necessitated in the performance of an *autobiography*. In short, Freud—except during those rare instances where he admits to have indulged in genuine *responsivity*—engages in a knee-jerk *reactivity* and thereby refuses to be the sort of reader Stein's work asks for, insofar as his claim to authority involves asserting “mastery over the writing.” According to the psychoanalytic program thus prescribed, an enactive literature (the simultaneous product and source of an embodied imagination and its dream of affective resonance) such as Stein practiced would have to be approached as an externally diagnosed symptom rather than an endogenously meaningful expression. Taken on its own terms, it would “resist” the masterful interpretation Freud takes to be the analyst's duty and privilege. To avoid any such “resistance” (which is the index of *complexity* rather than “repression,” given that a strictly Freudian interpretation of the psychoanalytic encounter proves to be an

oversimplification rather than an elucidation), memory is separated out from the figurative complex of which it partakes, remade into something accessible only via the external authority of the analyst, placed at arm's length as it were and in so being subjected to a retrenched and unreformed representationalism that demands linearity and ocularcentrism.

This impasse between Freud and Stein was foreshadowed by a similar parting of ways that occurred in the wake of the one and only meeting between the former and James. In September 1909, a month after *Three Lives* was published, Freud delivered a series of five lectures at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. As Saul Rosenzweig documents, when he found out that James would be making the short trip from Cambridge to attend the fourth talk he “decided that the topic of dreams would be particularly appropriate.” This was an abrupt change in plans, since he had previously come to the conclusion that to devote a portion of his first—and what would turn out to be his last—visit to the United States expounding upon this subject matter would be, in his own words, “almost scandalous.” Somehow James’s presence made “a thorough consideration of the *interpretation of dreams*” consistent with rather than contrary to “practical goals.” Faced with this interlocutor, Freud felt inspired to relax somewhat his tight grasp of “scientific” scruples. This limited loosening of inhibitions, however, proved to be insufficient. The presentation of this material did leave quite an impression on James, just not of the kind that Freud most likely hoped for. “I strongly suspect Freud, with his dream-theory, of being a regular *halluciné*,” James admitted afterwards. “I confess that he made on me personally the impression of a man obsessed by fixed ideas,” he added for good measure.⁵¹

Freud began his talk on dreams by admitting that he had oversimplified psychodynamics in his previous lecture on therapeutic technique in order to manufacture assent to his predetermined notions, which was bound to rub James the wrong way. He was probably even more annoyed when Freud immediately went on to confess his continued adherence to the “prejudice” that led him to open on this false note: “a strong belief in the rigorous determination of mental processes.” In the case at hand, this meant that the puzzling content of dreams were without exception determined by and thus could be made sense of through the exposure of certain “immoral longings” left over from “the early years of childhood.” Patients, Freud argues, are incapable of effecting this “disclosure of what is the hidden life of the mind” on their own and therefore require the expert assistance of the analyst to unearth the meaning of their dreams. While he may have been willing to grant that dreams were sometimes derived in the way Freud believed them to be, James would have rejected the claim that they always were. Even in cases where dreams could be considered to be motivated by long-held and deep-seated desires, James would have questioned the way Freud automatically classified these “longings” as “immoral.” Further, he would have been predisposed to disagree with the implication that the imposition of external authority was a necessity. Freud seems to believe that for some unexplained and seemingly magical reason analysts themselves are the only people capable of interpreting their own dreams. James would have been inclined to grant unassisted self-analysis on the part of those untrained in or suspicious of psychoanalysis a greater degree of efficacy. Freud’s method may be applicable to his own dreams, but that did not necessarily mean it necessarily applied to those of others. James implied as much when he confessed that he could “make nothing in my own case of his dream theories.”⁵²

Despite all these reservations, James came away from Freud's lecture believing that his approach would eventually "throw light on human nature." In order to do so, however, it would be inevitable that psychoanalysts "push their ideas to the utmost limits," thereby challenging unexamined assumptions and making Freud's rigid framework more flexible. What Freud offered was a "dream-theory" not only in that it spelled out an approach to the interpretation of dreams, but that it was itself dreamlike. It could be useful as long as it did not take itself too seriously and was willing to continuously question itself and allow creative liberties. It was when it was invested with "scientific" certitude—framed as a "fixed idea"—that it attained the status of a hallucination, a defense mechanism against the inevitability of uncertainty and amorphousness, especially in the case of the matter at hand. Claiming to have gained a "great advantage" by virtue of having "clung to a prejudice," Freud turned psychoanalysis into the type of symptom it supposedly diagnosed and alleviated. This can be heard in the frustration over having been led into unfamiliar territory by the necessity of accounting for evidence contrary to his expectations that he voices in the epigraph that heads this section. Writing back from the realm of "imaginative literature" that would give Freud such fits in "The Uncanny," James threw the Freudian protocol for decoding dreamlife into question. In doing so, he was in fact challenging the most fundamental aspect of Freud's work. "The interpretation of dreams is, in fact," Freud argued "the *via regia* to the knowledge of the unconscious—the most secure foundation of psychoanalysis and the field in which every worker must acquire his convictions and gain his education."⁵³ James not only took issue with the notion that psychoanalysts were the only ones capable of traversing this privileged route, but threw doubt upon the

supposed necessity of following it at all. He questioned the very existence of the destination it was thought to lead towards, and thereby pulled the ground out from under the “knowledge” Freud’s itinerary claimed to yield. James found the endeavor Freud outlined interesting and shared a fascination with the territory he was attempting to cover. He merely sought to encourage a broader approach by mapping a different route.

To this end, a couple months after his encounter with Freud he began writing a piece in which he recounted a series of dreams a few years earlier, outlining his own approach to working through this type of material, one that opened out into the “extramarginal” rather than sought to keep everything contained within the “unconscious.” The result was “A Suggestion about Mysticism,” one of the last essays James published before his death.⁵⁴ Stein picked up on the alternative approach to psychic activity hinted at by her mentor, resounding it to shatter the Freudian mirror, using certain fragments as found material with which to improvise unforeseen options. Stein, then, *sonicizes* Freud’s vision, breaks his circle by insisting upon a certain cut: the impossibility of complete satisfaction, bound up inextricably with a persistence that tolerates hardship, in fact reveals in it. To become absorbed by the sort of mixed-media environment an enactive literature installs entails partaking in a circuitous wandering that Stein and responsive readers approach with untrammelled curiosity and joy. For Freud, however, this improvisational exploration evokes trepidation and anxiety in addition to a concerted interest, insofar as it constitutes both what blocks external diagnosis as well as what is reigned-in in order to carry out psychoanalytic interpretation. For Stein, the spacetime of embodied imagination, of affective daydream, that the creation of literary fiction generates is a place to inhabit. For Freud, it is a nice place to visit, but he would not want to live there.

He remains fundamentally ambivalent. He wants to believe that it is after all just a maze, and his primary aim is to pass through as fast as possible. Yet moments arise when he is unable to completely disown that he is tempted to *linger*. Traveling the maze-that-is-not-a-maze that DeKoven charts, however, inevitably involves covering the same territory repeatedly. Is such repetition functional? That is to say, does it *make a difference*? For Stein the answer is an *insistent* “yes”; for Freud, a defensively stated “no” that at times wavers into a simultaneously fascinated and fearful “maybe.” Freud takes these instances of repetition to be automatic reactions (consequences of a *compulsion*) that are meaningless unless made subject to the interpretive resources that the analyst, as external authority, can bring to bear. Stein, however, in her own *insistent* practice shows that recurrent enaction can indeed be a matter of *choice*, a self-conscious attempt at expression suffused with inherent significance.

This is the difference between repetition and insistence, which—as Stein suggests—is also the difference between “thinking clearly and confusion.”⁵⁵ It is important to note that Stein’s phrasing of this analogy reverses the expected valuation of the latter pair. As she states it, repetition is to thinking clearly as insistence is to confusion. By valorizing insistence over the alternative, then, she is in effect registering a protest against the false clarity of a linear, ocularcentric, distanced, representationalist approach like Freud’s. Stein encourages an appreciation of the complexity, vibrance, even *muddiness* of the existential problematic of expressing singularity, soliciting a response that remains open to the unexpected developments that can arise through the recursive, synesthetic, immersive, enactive dynamic of affectively intense experience. By imposing predetermined notions with underexamined assumptions upon the autonomous dynamic

of experience, Freud in effect eludes the possibility that the “acting out” and “working through” of repetition can be a self-conscious performance rather than a “compulsion.” That is, the enactive recurrence that is *insistence* can be therapeutic in and of itself, can not only signal that something is awry but also provide the means of addressing this wrong. Further, this course could be successfully pursued without the guidance provided by the external authority of the canonical analyst. What Freud prescribes as occurring only within the confines of a process of countertransference the analyst elicits and institutes, can also take place in what D.W. Winnicott calls the “potential space” of “transitional phenomena,” in which the enactions of the patient take precedence over any given interpretation thereof. While this latter occurrence is perhaps not possible in all instances, it was in Stein’s case. The dual leap in personal development and artistic achievement that the completion of *The Making of Americans* constituted in effect takes psychoanalysis out of the office and into the world, altering its therapeutic topography. The orientation shifts from uncovering something that exists beneath experience altogether to following experience as it unfolds beyond itself, manifesting an internal difference that enables it to simultaneously become other than itself and remain the same. In other words, the example of Stein’s enactive literature encourages a shift from the Freudian “unconscious” to the Jamesian “extramarginal.” The modernism of her aesthetic practice shows the former to be dated and insists upon the enduring relevance of the latter. Stein, in short, beats Freud at his own game by showing that his rules do not necessarily hold. In doing so, she embodies the “creative writer”—“the strange personality” that Freud approaches with both fascination and contempt. He both admires

and takes offence at her ability “to arouse in us emotions of which we might not even have thought ourselves capable.”⁵⁶

Through her artistry, the creator of literary fiction in effect psychoanalyses the psychoanalyst, thereby exemplifying the uncanny (that which is both familiar and frightening, something that was to remain hidden but nevertheless wriggles its way to the surface) and effecting a radical return of the repressed. She undermines the authority of the analyst, revealing the target of repression to be distinctly different from what Freud took it to be. Rather than a phallogentric infantile sexuality, we are confronted with a polymorphous autoeroticism (*auto* not necessarily in the sense of self-directed, but rather in terms of a fundamental autonomy as regards programs of conventionalization such as that instituted by “basic concepts” such as “the Oedipus complex,” “penis envy,” “the pleasure principle,” and ultimately “the death drive”). Stein reveals that, as Tomkins would later argue contra Freud, it is affects rather than drives that are “the primary motivating sources” of human behavior. Coming from this refracted perspective, we can ascertain that it is his subordination of affect to drive that leads to his definition of pleasure as the minimization—if not elimination—of excitation. The later, in turn, led not only to the seeming inevitability of the death drive but, more to the point, the assumption that the affective life of human beings is dominated by fear and anxiety. Rather—as Winnicott, Tomkins, and Ernest Schachtel argue and Stein demonstrates— affectivity is primarily an issue of interest, excitement, curiosity, a creative impulse that manifests not only as a thirst for experience (especially that which is affectively intense—or, quite simply, *exciting*) but also an active engagement with life that crosses the distinction between fiction and reality.⁵⁷ This is evidenced in the play of children,

which—as Winnicott argues—unfolds into and is carried on in the artistic achievements of adults and cultural activity in general. By demonstrating the continuity of this dynamic process of development, Stein counters Freud’s positioning of the death drive as ultimate explanatory principle, replacing it with James’s notion of “the will to live.” In making the move from repetition to insistence, then, she also reorients the evaluation of the quality of life from Freud’s *economic* scale of pleasure and pain to an *aesthetic* metric of liveliness and dullness.

All this should be kept in mind as we return to “The Umbrella Incident,” turning towards its fourth facet. For, while Freud’s “The Creative Writer and Daydreaming” provides an entry into the comprehension of this final aspect of our focal figuration, the artistic reenactment that Stein performs via *The Making of Americans* encourages a revision of Freud’s take on the creation of literary fiction (and the operation of the psychodynamic of fabrication in general) that throws into question some of his most crucial—and unexamined—assumptions. In order to get a sense for the full breadth of this *revisiting*, it needs to be emphasized that the enaction of recurrence Stein manages to accomplish through the exercise and honing of her aesthetic practice is irreducible to the fictional recounting of a dramatic event. This climactic phase of “The Umbrella Incident” does return us to this originary happening and the resonating chamber of memories with which it surrounds itself, but it manages to do so not so much to the degree that Stein images this surround sound of past occurrences (which she in fact does, through the musicalized modality of vision that is the “vibrant line”) but rather insofar as she, as Freud writes, “acts it out” and in doing so demonstrates that “working through” this “acting out” is itself a “way of remembering.”⁵⁸ Without this crucial performative

component, the throwing of an umbrella in the mud would remain a minor incident in the fictional life of Martha Hersland. The fact that it is based upon an occurrence in Stein's own life would be more difficult to discern. By reenacting rather than merely recounting this dramatic event, Stein makes evident the extent to which the past and present are enfolded and foregrounds the navigation of this enfolding as the route towards future development, achievement, and satisfaction. "The Umbrella Incident" is saved from being reduced to a happenstance confined to a previous period in the life of Stein or her fictional alter egos. Rather, it is shown to be the encapsulation and means of broadcasting an existential problematic—that of expressing singularity—that she continued to *live through* as she worked up to and began the composition of her long novel—that, in fact, was a persistent element active within and motivating her artistic endeavors throughout the course of her career. In this sense, *The Making of Americans* (and, indeed, the entire body of work that would follow in its wake) could be heard—with the rather extreme stylistic liberties it took with conventional language use—as a means for Stein to throw the figurative umbrella into the proverbial mud over and over again until somebody (and then, a steadily increasing audience of similarly attuned somebodies) was willing to wade through the muck and retrieve what Stein threw away, recognizing the throwing for the expressive act and elicitation of resonance that it was and at long last making a genuine response in return to excited and enactive exclamations like "I have throwed the umbrella in the mud."

Addressing an audience he defines as his fellow "laymen," Freud suggests that the most favorable means for gaining "some initial enlightenment in the matter of literary creation" would be to "discover in ourselves, or the likes of us, an activity that was in

some way akin to creative writing.” As the title of his essay implies, the discovery that enables one to confront the problem (which he would characterize in “The Uncanny” as a matter of *betrayal* and *trickery*) posed—for “laymen” and “psychoanalysts” alike—by the creator of literary fiction is the phenomenon of “daydreaming.” Such “fantasizing” can clue the average reader into how literary fictions manage to undermine the “uniformly passive attitude” towards “our material environment” that Freud considers the norm, how they *insist* that “real experience” is in fact—insofar as affect impinges upon (indeed, constitutes) it—“infinitely tractable.” Since Freud is unable to own up to the active engagement with life and the world in which it unfolds/with which it is enfolded that creative writing enacts and elicits, he interprets this enaction and elicitation as a form of manipulation. The extra degree of agency that this blurring of the boundary between reality and fiction effects is assumed, by him, not to be the possession of readers (their capacity for embodied responsivity and affective resonance) but rather a mysterious power by which writers *possess* (in both a supernatural and proprietary sense) their auditors. (This is an assumption that Stein and Toklas prove to be faulty.) This being the case, Freud utilizes the connection he discerns between the creation of literary fiction and the fabrication of everyday fantasies as a means of (in his eyes) demystifying the (for him) ultimately inexplicable and unmanageable force of aesthetic engagement. Thus, although he claims to be “by no means unaware that very many imaginative writings are far removed from the model of the naïve daydream,” he nevertheless “cannot suppress the suspicion that even the most extreme deviations from this model could be linked to it by an unbroken series of transitions.”⁵⁹

Freud is in effect closing the circle, reining in deviance, divergence, difference—a maneuver that I wish to contest. The point I want to insist on in doing so is not that there is a discontinuity between fantasy (the casual exercise of imagination) and artistic creation (although, in the movement from one to the other, a certain threshold is crossed). Rather, the upshot of my insistence is that daydreaming itself is never “naïve”; it is endowed with an internal break insofar as it (as much as creative writing) cannot help but to cross the distinction between fiction and reality. The circularity that Freud brings to closure is inevitably broken, divergent. This plays out not only in terms of the relation between “real experience” and affective intensity, but also as regards the interpolation of past, present, and future that he argues takes place through the psychodynamic of daydreaming (and, therefore, creative writing). As it turns out, we will want to follow Stein by approaching the former as well as the latter via the model, not of “the naïve daydream,” but rather of enactive literature itself. Through the operation of fantasy, Freud argues, “past, present and future are strung together on the thread of one desire that unites all three.” A daydream is triggered when a person registers “a current impression, an occasion in the present that has succeeded in arousing one of his major desires.” (In Stein’s case, this would be the longing *to be heard*, to communicate the meaningfulness of affectively intense experience, to approximate an expression of singularity by instigating the staggered enaction of affective resonance.) This registration of a present situation then “harks back to the memory of an earlier experience, usually belonging to his childhood, in which the desire was fulfilled.” Finally, based upon this superimposition of present and past, the imagination “invents a situation, lodged in the future, that represents the fulfillment of this desire.” Thus, in short, “a person’s desire

uses an occasion in the present in order to construct a vision of the future modeled on the past.” Further, Freud argues, the process of creative writing is in essence isomorphic with this psychodynamic of daydreaming: “A potent experience in the present awakens in the writer the memory of an earlier experience, usually belonging to his childhood; from there proceeds the desire that finds its fulfillment in the literary work.”⁶⁰ (Again, in Stein’s case, an affectively intense experience—across the gamut of valence—resounds with a similarly freighted happening in her past, and memory and present moment together motivate the creation of the literary fiction that is *The Making of Americans*.)

At first glance, the path Freud charts here bears a resemblance to the enfolding of kaleidoscopic, resounding spacetime that Stein navigates. As we apply scrutiny to his position and explore hers in more detail, however, we discover subtle—yet crucial—differences. The first thing to note is that, in Freud’s account, the “literary work” initially seems to occupy a strange spatiotemporal location. Insofar as it is, unlike most daydreams, actualized it could be considered contemporaneous with the “current impression.” And yet it is also somehow irreducibly “lodged in the future,” an always ongoing and unfinished work. Creative writing could be said, then, to activate the *futural* aspect of the present. Freud smooths over the tension entailed in this activation by claiming that the “vision” that literary fiction carries out is strictly “modeled on the past,” insofar as the memory involved in this process is considered to involve the complete satisfaction of desire that is lacking in the present and is to be sought again in the future. To this extent the tendency of Freud’s phrasing is fundamentally *regressive*. For Stein, however, the memory conjured (throwing the umbrella in the mud and scoring one’s action with an effusive and unconventional exclamation) registers both satisfaction and

frustration. The present she occupies is similarly ambivalent, suffused with both promise and difficulty, sounding a precarious and precipitous encouragement. It can be considered to be comprised of: the inspiration of music; Stein's failure to connect with Bookstaver; the mixed relief and trepidation of expatriation; the invigorating and challenging influence of postimpressionism's musicalized visuality; her measured success in *Three Lives* at infusing literature with music and manifesting the "vibrant line" in writing; her increasing disaffection from her brother Leo, connected with his denigration of her literary endeavors; her growing affinity with Toklas, having much to do with her embrace of those self-same artistic efforts. The future, finally, is merely a more developed phase of the dilemma that wends its way from the past through the present. It would involve a fuller satisfaction of her enduring desire, but it would also leave room for further improvement.

Further, Freud frames the "fulfillment of desire" that he believes creative writing manifests as achieved by means of a plot that incorporates to some degree a fantastic element. This way of approaching the issue founders when confronted with a novel like *The Making of Americans*, given that it contains little of what would usually be considered "fantastical" (although its style does have a certain hypnotic, even hallucinatory effect) and even lacks a proper plot, comprising rather a fabricated complex of interwoven stories (which tell of Stein and her projects as much as they do of her characters). This foundering suggests that a writer like Stein not so much "represents" the affective motivation (and aim) of her aesthetic practice, but rather *enacts* it. Thus, returning our focus to "The Umbrella Incident," we can say that its artistic reenactment takes place not so much through Stein's narration of what happens to her fictional alter

egos but rather through the process of writing and gauging the reception of *The Making of Americans* itself. The reporting of this artistic yearning, struggle, discouragement, and eventual partial fulfillment is sprinkled throughout the novel, in fact comprises one of its interweaving storylines. Indeed, it could be considered the metathread that holds all the rest together, in a mutually supportive but nevertheless *tense* amalgam. The opening act of this self-reflexive drama, this recursive performativity, occurs well before the recounting of the dramatic event of “The Umbrella Incident” in the Martha Hersland chapter. It comes early on in the first, untitled section of the novel, after a break in the text following Stein’s portrayal of the incipient sensibility of Julia Dehning (yet another alter ego), the encouragement and disapproval of her father, her courting and impending marriage to Alfred Hersland. It sounds at first like an anachronistic harking back to the sort of reader address that could be found in novels prior to modernism, but almost immediately it takes on a distinctly modernist twist. “Bear it in your mind my reader,” Stein writes

but truly I never feel it that there ever can be for me any such creature, no it is this scribbled and dirty and lined paper that is really to be to me always my receiver,—but anyhow reader, bear it in your mind—will there be for me ever any such a creature,—what I have said always to you, that this that I write down a little each day here on my scraps of paper for you is not just an ordinary kind of novel with a plot and conversations to amuse you.⁶¹

By announcing the *extraordinariness* of *her* novel, indicating that by this point thoroughly conventionalized entertainment is not the reaction she is looking for (as could be gathered by the garbled grammar of this passage itself), Stein in effect casts herself in the role that Julia had been playing in the pages leading to this break and the passage that follows it: a modernized young woman attempting to ventilate and revitalize an old order

through what Stein has Henry Dehning, Julia's father, call "the artistic kind of new improvement."⁶² The response Stein is seeking to elicit is a liberated, unconventional amusement, one that foregrounds its origin in the autonomous (and therefore precarious, precipitous) affect of *bemusement*. She fears, however, that this is too much to ask. In order to smooth over the disjuncture effected by her aesthetic choices, Stein samples not only an outmoded form of address (realism and naturalism had already thrown into question the advisability of gesturing towards a "Dear Reader" with such obviousness) but marks it with a soon-to-be archaic punctuation: ",—". But she cannot help but to flip what she samples. Her address to the reader is chopped by her dawning awareness that it lacks guarantee, making the cut that sets the stage for her model of literature as the staggered enaction of affective resonance. In doing so, she portrays the relationship between her desire to be heard and the uncertainty of its fulfillment as a *break*, a distinction that joins what it distinguishes. This break is looped, pivoting around an instance of the modernized, independent em dash: "bear it in your mind—will there be for me ever any such a creature." Stein worries, however, that the repetition that this spiraling phrasing—this *improvisational lyricism*—involves will be too off-putting, a poor substitute for "a plot and conversations." In this early moment, Stein is in effect reliving the denouement of Martha's throwing of the umbrella. She has made her point, but doing so involves *muddying* the means of expression. Rather than writing clear and flowing prose, Stein feels herself to be scribbling a collage of soiled scraps. And she has the intimation that the somebody who would retrieve these tossed-off lines, return them to her, genuinely respond rather than automatically react with distaste is an as yet

unprecedented and perhaps impossible personage, at least as far as she is concerned.

(Haunting the scene here is Bookstaver's rejection, Leo's disapproval.)

Faced by this dispiriting proposition and yet caring for and in a strange way confident about her artistic undertaking, Stein is in search of a way to keep working without exhausting her morale. She discovers and enunciates such a strategy on the first page of the Martha Hersland chapter. "I am writing for myself and strangers," Stein declares. "This is the only way that I can do it. . . . I write for myself and strangers. No one who knows me can like it. . . . I love it and I write it. . . . I want readers so strangers must do it." Lacking encouragement from her acquaintances yet needing motivation to continue with her writing, Stein stubbornly hangs on to the hope that somewhere out there is somebody who would value her efforts, love what she loves—in point of fact love not only what she loves, but love what she cannot completely bring herself to love: herself. The rather desperate tack Stein takes here keeps her afloat for a while, but soon enough she realizes it is but a temporary measure. The notion that somebody can appreciate one's work while still remaining a stranger—and therefore remaining unable, among other things, to give positive feedback—is ultimately, Stein eventually acknowledges, an instance of "complete disillusionment." As long as one's audience remains anonymous and/or hypothetical, writing is only a means of self-satisfaction. Writing merely for oneself for too long, she realizes, prematurely "makes an old man or an old woman of you."⁶³ In order to avoid this crippling world-weariness, Stein comes to understand, it is necessary to undergo the experience of a having a stranger become an acquaintance, a close friend, a lover. This is what happened—both a dawning understanding and the initiation of fulfilling what is then understood—when Toklas entered and insinuated

herself into her life and art. Finally, someone picked up the umbrella, admired it mud and all, and not only returned it but asked that it be thrown again—again and again, the impact of umbrella with mud generating ever changing, ever new patterns.

Stein and Toklas met in the middle of the writing of *The Making of Americans*. And a crucial moment in their deepening intimacy was when Stein shared her writing with Toklas, who greeted it with enthusiasm. Like the initial stage of the artistic reenactment of “The Umbrella Incident,” this later phase is referenced directly in the novel. “It is a very strange feeling,” Stein writes, laboring the point,

when one is loving a clock that is to every one of your class of living an ugly and a foolish one and one really likes such a thing and likes it very much and liking it is a serious thing, or one likes a colored handkerchief that is very gay and every one of your kind of living thinks it a very ugly or foolish thing and thinks you like it because it is a funny thing to like it and you like it with a serious feeling, or you like eating something and liking it is a childish thing to every one or you like something that is a dirty thing and no one can really like that thing or you write a book and while you write it you are ashamed for every one must think you are a silly or a crazy one and yet you write it and you are ashamed, you know you will be laughed at or pitied by every one and you have a queer feeling and you are not very certain and you go on writing. Then someone says yes to it, to something you are liking, or doing or making and then never again can you have completely such a feeling of being afraid and ashamed that you had when you were writing or liking the thing and not any one had said yes about the thing.⁶⁴

This registering of a mutual recognition and cherishing of queerness—of *singularity*—is perhaps the most touching passage in *The Making of Americans*. It is the novel’s climax. Eventually, Toklas not only read but transcribed Stein’s work. Establishing the routine that would endure until the end of Stein’s life, Stein would write her novel in the evening, Toklas would type it up the following morning, and they would spend the afternoon talking about the section that had just been completed as well as what was to come next. It was this working relationship between Stein and Toklas that would serve as the

prototype of the enactive model of literature that Stein (and Toklas!) would work to refine and find an ever-wider audience for from *Tender Buttons* on—achieving their greatest success around 1935, with the popularity of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein’s lecture tour in the United States (documented in *Lectures in America*), and the stage production of *Four Saints in Three Acts*. This heyday is, in effect, retroactively foreshadowed in *What Is Remembered*—the actual autobiography Toklas wrote nearly twenty years after Stein’s death, and at a time when the first wave of her revival was in full swing—as she reminisces about her first meetings with the woman who would soon come to be her partner in life and art.

“It was Gertrude Stein who held my complete attention,” Toklas writes of her first days in Paris, “as she did for all the many years I knew her until her death, and all these empty ones since then.” More than anything, what drew her in and filled up her life (to the point that this mesmerizing *effulgence* survives the passing of its source) was Stein’s sound, her vocal stylings, a laughing punctuated with talking that is ever verging upon *singing*. “It was unlike anyone else’s voice—deep, full, velvety like a great contralto’s, like two voices,” Toklas marvels. Presumably, it was to the degree that it echoed this deep vocality—a *timbre*, a *voicing* that evidenced the endogenous plurality of singularity and thereby crossed conventional distinctions, cutting across divisions that were simultaneously ones of *range* and *gender*—that Toklas also found Stein’s sonorized writing eminently absorbing. “It was very exciting,” she writes about her first forays into the draft of *The Making of Americans*, “more exciting than anything else had ever been. Even, I said to her laughing, more exciting than Picasso’s pictures promise to be.” It is the *laughter* that runs through these two moments in their first days together, and the

attitude of bemused wonder that it emblemizes that more than anything characterizes the relationship between Stein and Toklas. By helping her bring this attitude to the fore, making it the keynote of her life, Toklas helped Stein further refine her understanding of what exactly it was she wanted to accomplish through her aesthetic practice. (As Stein would tell a group of college students during her U.S. lecture tour, “the business of an artist is to be exciting.”) In doing so, Toklas placed her in a favorable position vis-à-vis her closest *male* peer and rival (a positioning that assumably was generalizable: Stein is to Joyce, Proust, Eliot as she is to Picasso; perhaps it is Picabia and Duchamp who come closest to matching her accomplishments). For, according to Toklas, Stein accomplishes what Picasso only *promises* to. But this is only part of the reason that, as Wagner-Martin notes, Stein, under the influence of Toklas, “became more confident about both her vision and her writing”—and, in general, “faced life with a new assertiveness.” Perhaps an even more significant factor in this regard was that Toklas enabled Stein to reinvigorate her interest in and appreciation of music and musical theater. Together they “attended concerts, plays, and films; listened to music on their phonograph.” The last activity, in particular, “filled many hours”—formed the constant background against which “the steady tranquility” that Stein’s “writing began to reflect” emerged.⁶⁵ The needle making its way along the spiraling groove can in fact be considered a movement analogous to Stein’s artistic maneuvers.

Stein and Toklas’s shared background in playing the piano facilitated the transition from longhand to typescript—infusing the latter as well as the former with musicality—and thereby set the stage for the broadcasting of their enactive model of literature. It was, Toklas implies, her expertise with one keyboard that enabled her virtuosity at another. “I

commenced to teach myself to become an efficient typist,” she writes of her initial attempts at transcribing *The Making of Americans*, “and gradually achieved a professional accuracy and speed. I got a Gertrude Stein technique, like playing Bach.” It was her training as a pianist, Toklas suggests, that enabled her to transcribe the “Beethovenian passages” that make up the latter sections of Stein’s novel, the “rhapsody” with which it ends. The professionalism she evidenced in performing this office is that of a fellow artist, rather than a mere functionary. For, as Toklas goes on to note, because of her fluency with Steinian prose “writing business letters proved difficult.” She would have to engage someone else to execute such perfunctory tasks. In large part what made Stein’s musicalized manuscripts difficult to process—what made the processing of them like transposing a musical score into an audible performance, and therefore only partially commensurable with engaging in conventionalized language use—was the way they ran ever more intricate variations on interweaving themes, manifesting complex patterns of repetition, and the sonorized (unconventional) grammar, the improvisational lyricism they involved. Stein herself was well aware of this. For, at the beginning of the Martha Hersland chapter, immediately after stating the fact that no one she knows can stand her writing, declaring the consequent need to write for only herself and strangers (for the time being at least), Stein identifies the reason for her going (as yet) unheard as her desire to pursue “the loving of repetition” until that pursuit itself became an exemplar of “the loving repetition.” That is, motivated by Stein’s yearning (against all odds) to be heard, repetition is transposed from an object of desire into a modality of longing in its own right. “Loving repeating is one way of being,” Stein writes on the section’s third page. “This is now a description of such feeling.” This portrayal of affective existence goes on

for nearly a hundred pages before it leads into—quite naturally—the repeated recounting of “The Umbrella Incident” as dramatic event. The desire for/through repetition leads from here into the resounding of the *tympan/i/um*—the kaleidoscopic spacetime—of remembering, which in turn motivates artistic reenactment. Stein’s artistic rendering of her own affectively intense experience would finally resonate with Toklas, initiating an affectionately recurrent interplay between the two that instantiates the prototype of an enactive model of literature. In this way, the dogged assertion that—against all odds—repetition can not only be loved but also can be a means of loving gives rise to the “full sound telling” that is *insistence*.⁶⁶

Phrases of repetitive vocality, such as that practiced by Stein, are endowed with an irrepressible tendency towards internal variation, but picking up on this requires an attunement responsive to the musicality of these utterances. While they could each be said to, in every instance, sound the same general *pitch* or *tone*, each sounding remains open to a wide range of alterations manifested via *timbre*, through *voicing*. This is the phenomenon that motivates and is amplified through repetition-as-choice, what Stein calls *insistence*. She works to infuse her writing with this sort of musical (affective) variety not by having multitudes of fancy or extravagant terminology pile up on top of themselves, but rather through the careful choice of a limited palette of relatively common wordings that are *worked over* again and again, *insistently*. In other words, as Stein puts it in *The Making of Americans*, although she has a hard time “using a word I have not yet been using,” this limitation is more than made up for by the fact that she enjoys and easily utilizes “a word that can have many ways of feeling in it”—that is capable of a certain affective *density* conducive to the conveyance of affective intensity.

“I like it that different ways of emphasizing can make very different meanings,” Stein concludes. And it is this faculty of *loving repetition* as a self-conscious choice, as a carefully crafted means of expression that leads it to surpass itself into insistence. As she would put it in one of her *Lectures in America*:

once started expressing this thing, expressing any thing there can be no repetition because the essence of that expression is insistence, and if you insist you must use emphasis and if you use emphasis it is not possible while anybody is alive that they should use exactly the same emphasis.

The insistence upon expression that grips and animates living bodies seeks to sound singularity in all its plurality, *voice* (emphasize) the draw towards and results of exploring affectively intense experience, running the gamut of valence, exercising and broadcasting *liveliness*. “That is what makes life that the insistence is different, no matter how often you tell the same story if there is anything alive in the telling the emphasis is different,” Stein writes. “This is what William James calls the Will to Live. If not nobody would live.”⁶⁷

The Jamesian notion of the will to live, then, was—in addition to Toklas’s enthusiastic reception—another factor that influenced Stein’s notion that “the business of the artist is to be exciting.” “By exciting,” she adds, “I mean it really does something to you really inside you.” Excitement, then, is the registration of the reality of aesthetic engagement. The hope is that what it elicits will eventually be affective resonance, but in order to even aim towards this goal Stein had to risk provoking resistance, annoyance, rejection. Her writing, insofar as it sought to channel affective intensity, and was consequently infused with music, was unavoidably *difficult*. And it manifested a quite particular difficulty: the breaking of representationalist conventions, the fabrication of an alternative, enactive model of literature. The most conspicuous effect of this transitional

phenomenon is *loving repetition*—that is, *insistence*. And the most obvious indication that this provocation is effective—that resistance will eventually phase into acceptance—is that the only way the dismissal of Stein’s work can manifest is as an echo of that which it seeks to dismiss, as a sort of *counterrepetition* that is, unavoidably, *insistent*: becoming more and more different until it goes beyond itself, and annoyance becomes enjoyment. Thus, Stein’s writing gets under the skin of her reluctant audience, even though they do not at first know it. When awareness surfaces, however, they will be pleasantly surprised. “You know that is what happens over and over again,” Stein says in one of her own talks to students, “the statement made that it is ugly—the statement made against me for the last twenty years. And they are quite right, because it *is* ugly. But the essence of that ugliness is the thing which will make it beautiful.” That is, Stein’s work *breaks* conventions, but in such a way that *makes use of them* in the process, *remakes* them by making them more accommodating of singularity. This is the work of *improvisational lyricism*. As Stein summarized her artistic methodology: “one must realize what there is inside in one and then in some way it comes into words and the more exactly the words fit the emotion the more beautiful the words.” Thus, aesthetics—insofar as it encompasses an enactive model of literature—remains the theorization of beauty, but it also becomes the practice of exteriorizing interiority, infusing music into writing, channeling affectively intense experience and eliciting affective resonance. In this way, Stein was able to achieve what she called “exactitude,” one consequence of which was “the destruction of associational emotion.”⁶⁸ This should be understood not as the dulling of emotion but rather of its liberation from the associations that have been imposed on it by programs of conventionalization—making spacetime for singularity by foregrounding

affect's fundamental autonomy vis-à-vis any predetermined pattern of socialization. As we will see, this is exactly what Du Bois aims towards as well, as he parodies sentimentality in order to sound the degree to which sympathy has been complicated by racism and craft an enactive literary project of improvisational lyricism that engages the promise and danger involved in generating affective resonance across the color-line.

Once again, we will be concerned with the tricky and fascinating navigation of the break.

¹ *The Making of Americans* 34; 47. The musicality of "Melanctha" has been heard to be particularly evident in the lengthy dialogues between the two main characters that make up much of the story. Thus, one of Stein's most influential explicators, Richard Bridgman: "The voices sing across one another, following an independent melody, yet influenced by one another's music." See his *Gertrude Stein in Pieces* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 58.

² *The Making of Americans*, 3.

³ Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* in *Gertrude Stein: Writings, 1903-1932* (New York: Library of America, 1998), 730. Jayne Walker, *The Making of a Modernist: Gertrude Stein from Three Lives to Tender Buttons* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 43.

⁴ Lisa Ruddick, *Reading Gertrude Stein: Body, Text, Gnosis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 2. See also Marianne DeKoven, *A Different Language: Gertrude Stein's Experimental Writing* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983) and Stephen Meyer, *Irresistible Dictation: Gertrude Stein and the Correlations of Writing and Science* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings* (London: Penguin, 2003), 98; 76-77.

⁶ Max Eastman, "The Will to Live," *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* 14.4 (February 1917), 103. Silvan Tompkins, *Affect, Image, Consciousness* 1 (New York: Springer, 1962), 363. William James, "Is Life Worth Living?" (1895) in *The Will to Believe* (New York: Dover, 1956 [1897]), 47. William James, "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings" (1896) in *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983 [1899]), 146; 152.

⁷ *Reading Gertrude Stein*, 2. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 739.

⁸ Fred Matthews, "Freud Comes to America: The Influence of Freudian Ideas in American Thought, 1909-1917" (M.A. Thesis, University of California, 1957), 32-33. Ignas Skrupskelis, "Introduction" in *Correspondence* 12, xxxv. *Varieties*, 198; 190-191.

⁹ Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" in *Sister Outsider* (Freedom: Crossing Press, 1984), 53-56. Brad Bucknell, *Literary Modernism and Musical Aesthetics: Pater, Pound, Joyce, and Stein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 2.

¹⁰ Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 24; 4-5.

¹¹ James Snead, "On Repetition in Black Culture," *Black American Literature Forum* 15.4 (Winter 1981), 150. Bringing the field of African American Studies to bear at this point is purposeful, but is performed as if by accident in order to avoid the perennial and belabored question of Stein's drawing upon/paying homage to/travesty black vernacular in "Melanctha." Matters are made much more interesting when rephrased along lines Snead suggests. Perhaps Stein's work as a whole—and European/American modernism in general—even that in which the issue of race remains unbroached—is the instigation of an "ongoing reconciliation with black culture." And just maybe this reconciliation is made possible in the first place by virtue of "elements of black culture already there in latent form" (153). In that eventuality, we have again the paradoxical simultaneity of divergence and return, singularity and plurality: or, as Stein

would call it, *insistence*. Michael North touches upon some of these possibilities in his *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹² *The Making of Americans*, 388-389; 393-394; 406-407.

¹³ *A Different Language*, 41-42.

¹⁴ Sigmund Freud, "Screen Memories" (1899) in *The Uncanny* (London: Penguin, 2003), 19; 21.

¹⁵ *The Making of Americans*, 5. "Screen Memories," 20.

¹⁶ *The Making of Americans*, 5. Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1937), 68-69.

¹⁷ Gertrude Stein, *Narration: Four Lectures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935), 57.

¹⁸ Priscilla Wald, *Constituting Americans: Cultural Anxiety and Narrative Form* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 243.

¹⁹ *Mallarmé's Children*, 34. Approaching Stein's writing from an enactive point of view, then, unearths an influence that, while obviously relevant to anyone writing in France around the turn of the 20th century, has been overlooked in recent scholarship. Curiously, this was a connection that was foregrounded in the first English-language criticism that took Stein somewhat seriously: Wilson positioned her work as emerging directly out of French Symbolism. The Symbolists were also, it should be noted, deeply concerned with practicing a certain linguistic unconventionality that sought to simulate the effects of music. That is, their understanding of poetry echoes my notion of improvisational lyricism, at least insofar as they both involve, as perhaps their most vital component, infusing music into language in an attempt to convey affectively intense experience, to express singularity.

²⁰ Gertrude Stein, "A Transatlantic Interview 1946" in Bonnie Kime Scott, ed. *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 503-504.

²¹ *The Making of Americans*, 35.

²² "Screen Memories," 3.

²³ "Screen Memories," 20; 7.

²⁴ "The Radcliffe Manuscripts," 108. *Everybody's Autobiography*, 114.

²⁵ *The Making of Americans*, 399. *Everybody's Autobiography*, 115.

²⁶ "The Radcliffe Manuscripts," 108-109.

²⁷ "The Radcliffe Manuscripts," 109. *Everybody's Autobiography*, 134.

²⁸ *The Making of Americans*, 413-414; 33-34; 47.

²⁹ *The Making of Americans*, 426.

³⁰ *The Making of Americans*, 743-744.

³¹ "Screen Memories," 14-15.

³² Gertrude Stein, *Wars I Have Seen* (New York: Random House, 1945), 14.

³³ "The Radcliffe Manuscripts," 141.

³⁴ Linda Martin-Wagner, "Favored Strangers": *Gertrude Stein and Her Family* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 20-21.

³⁵ "The Radcliffe Manuscripts," 140.

³⁶ "The Radcliffe Manuscripts," 141.

³⁷ "The Radcliffe Manuscripts," 141.

³⁸ "The Radcliffe Manuscripts," 141.

³⁹ Gertrude Stein, *Lectures in America* (1935) in *Gertrude Stein: Writings, 1932-1946* (New York: Library of America, 1998), 257.

⁴⁰ *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 814.

⁴¹ *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 814; 865. Samuel Putnam, *Paris Was Our Mistress, Memoirs of a Lost and Found Generation* (New York: Viking, 1947), 139.

⁴² *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 865. *In the Break*, 235. See also Mark Hansen, *New Philosophy for New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004).

⁴³ Bravig Imbs, *Confessions of Another Young Man* (New York: Henkle-Yewdale, 1936), 121. See also Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988) and Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* (Boston: Reidel, 1980).

⁴⁴ "Favored Strangers", 203.

⁴⁵ *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 736. "Favored Strangers," 102.

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- ⁴⁶ Alice B. Toklas, *What is Remembered* (New York: Holt, 1963), 23. "In Memoriam," *Radcliffe Quarterly* 30.3 (August 1946), 21.
- ⁴⁷ "The Radcliffe Manuscripts," 142.
- ⁴⁸ "In Memoriam," 21.
- ⁴⁹ *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 753. Wendy Steiner, *Exact Resemblance to Exact Resemblance: The Literary Portraiture of Gertrude Stein* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 187-188.
- ⁵⁰ *A Different Language*, 141; 15. Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 9. Harriet Scott Chessman, *The Public is Invited to Dance: Representation, the Body, and Dialogue in Gertrude Stein* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 2.
- ⁵¹ William James to Mary Calkins, 19 September 1909 and William James to Théodore Flournoy, 28 September, 1909, *Correspondence* 12, 331; 334. Saul Rosenzweig, *Freud, Jung, and Hall the King-Maker: The Historic Expedition to America (1909) with G. Stanley Hall as Host and William James as Guest* (St Louis: Rana House Press, 1992), 129. Sigmund Freud, "Third Lecture" in *Freud, Jung, and Hall*, 418.
- ⁵² William James to Théodore Flournoy, 28 September, 1909, *Correspondence* 12, 334. "Third Lecture," 415; 419; 421; 423.
- ⁵³ William James to Théodore Flournoy, 28 September, 1909, *Correspondence* 12, 334. "Third Lecture," 415; 418.
- ⁵⁴ See William James, "A Suggestion about Mysticism" (1910) in *Essays in Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 157-165.
- ⁵⁵ *Lectures in America*, 292.
- ⁵⁶ *Lectures in America*, 292. D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (New York: Basic Books, 1971), 96; 101. Sigmund Freud, "The Creative Writer and Daydreaming" (1908) in *The Uncanny*, 25.
- ⁵⁷ Silvan Tompkins, "What Are Affects?" (1962) in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, eds. *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tompkins Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 33. See also Ernest Schachtel, *Metamorphosis: On the Development of Affect, Perception, Attention, and Memory* (New York: Basic Books, 1959), 8-9 and *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness* 1, 352-353.
- ⁵⁸ Sigmund Freud, "Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through" (1914) in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, 36.
- ⁵⁹ "The Creative Writer and Daydreaming," 25. Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny" (1919) in *The Uncanny*, 157-158.
- ⁶⁰ "The Creative Writer and Daydreaming," 28-29; 32.
- ⁶¹ *The Making of Americans*, 33.
- ⁶² *The Making of Americans*, 32.
- ⁶³ *The Making of Americans*, 289; 484-485.
- ⁶⁴ *The Making of Americans*, 485.
- ⁶⁵ Gertrude Stein "How Writing is Written" (1935) in *How Writing is Written* (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1974), 157. *What is Remembered*, 23; 41-42. "Favored Strangers", 95; 102; 116.
- ⁶⁶ *What is Remembered*, 54-55. *The Making of Americans*, 290-291.
- ⁶⁷ *The Making of Americans*, 539-540. *Lectures in America*, 288-289.
- ⁶⁸ *Narration* (1935) in *Gertrude Stein: Writings, 1932-1946*, 347-348. "How Writing is Written," 154. *Everybody's Autobiography*, 267. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 865-866.

Chapter Four

Method of Error: Du Bois and the Aesthetics of Illegitimacy

God knows I am sorely puzzled. I am firmly convinced that my own best development is now one and the same with the best development of the world and here I am willing to sacrifice. That sacrifice is working for the multiplication of Youth **X** Beauty and now comes the question how. The general proposition of working for the world's good becomes too soon sickly sentimentality. I therefore take the work that the Unknown lay in my hands and work for the rise of the Negro people, taking for granted that their best development means the best development of the world.

■ W.E.B. Du Bois, "Celebrating His Twenty-Fifth Birthday"

The black is a black man; that is, as the result of a series of aberrations of affect, he is rooted at the core of a universe from which he must be extricated. . . . I believe that the individual should tend to take on the universality inherent in the human condition.

■ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*

In a recent essay collection devoted to W.E.B. Du Bois, Alys Eve Weinbaum levels a perennial complaint: his work is "uncomfortably sentimental." Confronted with Du Bois's writing, there is undeniably something that makes readers uneasy. But an as yet unprecedented pitch of investigation needs to be struck before we can decide whether this discomfort has to do with his uncritical adoption of sentimentality; or whether, rather, it is a consequence of the way in which he breaks its conventions. One of the things contemporary critics find hard to swallow about the tradition of sentimentality is its maudlin moralism. James—of whom Du Bois was, by his own admission, "a devoted

follower”—takes such ineffectual apologetics head-on when, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, he paradoxically secularizes its religious foundation, replacing an adherence to dogma with a capacity for affectively intense experience.¹ In doing so, he transforms orthodox morality into a thoroughly modernized ethics, timely and tangible by virtue of being an outgrowth of aesthetics, embodied through an art of improvisational lyricism that infuses language with music as a means of wrestling with the existential problematic of expressing singularity.

Du Bois joined Stein in not only following James’s example but further elaborating it into an enactive model of literature capable of facilitating an always partial, but no less crucial, affective resonance. He outpaced her by expanding the staggered enaction of affective resonance into an ongoing process of *attunement*. He broadcasts her efforts, surpasses her achievement, but his goals were consistent with her intentions. He works to instantiate the broader potential of the prototypical relationship between Stein and Toklas traced in the last chapter, to amplify it into a dynamic that takes place between a rapidly proliferating body of artists and a multitudinous audience. In the process, the definition of what constitutes art becomes broader and the distinction between sender and receiver becomes more elastic. Du Bois picks up from Stein, pushing even further a Jamesian aesthetic according to which “the *highest* ethical life—however few may be called to bear its burdens—consists at all times in the breaking of rules which have grown too narrow for the actual case.”² That such a break occurs through Du Bois’s engagement with sentimentality may be somewhat difficult to grasp because he is constantly following its winding way one second and departing from the charted path the next. What Du Bois offers is neither a simple acceptance nor an offhand dismissal of the sentimental. He

enacts a *parody* of sentimentality. This modality is pointedly self-reflexive and critical, but not wholly derogatory.

What Du Bois does with the sentimental is analogous to what, as Schloss shows, hip-hop producers do when they sample “corny records.” Such an artistic maneuver is not a straight-up dis. It is the acknowledgement that “some records may have sincerely valuable elements, regardless of their overall corniness” and that “making a good hip-hop beat out of a corny record shows one’s skills.”³ Using the terminology introduced in the Introduction, Du Bois flips sentimentality, an artistic program that includes chopping and looping as subroutines. What Du Bois values about sentimentality is its foregrounding of the life of feeling. Its corniness entails the reduction of affect to overconventionalized “sentiment.” Du Bois’s aesthetics of illegitimacy breaks this restrictive “social” ordering of the life of feeling, flipping it into the feeling of life, reopening it to what we can call either autonomous affect or affect of autonomy: in short, singularity as a capacity for and cultivation of affectively intense experience.

Du Bois’s parody remains attached to the life of feeling/feeling of life but cuts ties with the static identities and behaviors that the regime of “sentiment” prescribes, putting motion back into emotionality, giving affective intensity spacetime to unfold into the condition of, as Brian Massumi writes, “being outside of oneself, at the very point at which one is most intimately and unshareably in contact with oneself and one’s vitality.” Through his engagement with sentimentality Du Bois began to articulate his notions of “double-consciousness” and “artificial sensitivity”—integral components of how he charted affectively intense experience and the existential problematic of singularity. The modality of parodic embodiment Du Bois pursued has for the most part gone unnoted in

the extant scholarship, although a stray gesture in its general direction can be found here and there. For example, Michele Elam and Paul Taylor elucidate an undeniably tangible eroticism in Du Bois's work. This risky engagement was so integral to his project that he insisted on elaborating it at length despite the fact that doing so involved "violating customary societal proscriptions" and thereby "courting the risk of excess and moral error." It may be that rather than being "disturbingly normative"—as Weinbaum would have it—Du Bois disturbs the Victorian norms through which conventional wisdom frames him.⁴ Quite possibly, it is not Du Bois but rather his critics who remain attached to sentimental morality—as implicit norm and/or convenient straw man.

The history of *Dark Princess*'s reception—Du Bois's "favorite book"—suggests that this is in fact the case. To the extent that its eroticism is acknowledged at all, it is found to be distasteful. Contemporary commentators merely follow in the footsteps of "sympathetic critics" (my emphasis) who, upon the novel's initial publication, wrote reviews that sought, as Claudia Tate writes, "to efface the novel's eroticism and to recast the work in the more favorable light of racial propaganda." What such commentators, then and now, overlook is that Du Bois's "Criteria of Negro Art" (1926) makes it abundantly clear that he considered "eroticism" and "racial propaganda" to be inextricable. As Elam and Taylor argue, mobilization of the erotic, while far from unproblematic, is fundamentally "a development in ethical expression." It ultimately boils down to the following illegitimate claim: "Aesthetic pleasure here is not an aside but an end in itself."⁵

Just as James shook up the "antique bric-a-brac museums" of philosophers whom "new conditions have rendered obsolete"; just as Stein refused the "escape into imitative

emotionalism” and labored to effect “the destruction of associational emotion in poetry and prose”; Du Bois broke sentimental conventions by parodying sentimentality in order to instantiate an alternative to its overconventionalization.⁶ Their efforts are united by a goal that is most fully developed in Du Bois: to effect the reemergence of autonomous affect/affect of autonomy as the catalyst of a *sociality* that precedes and exceeds any given institutionalization of “society.” By misusing found materials in order to achieve the unforeseen, Du Bois sounds the opening measures of an ongoing process of attunement that works to manifest the plurality that is endogenous to singularity. The fact that he does so by parodying sentimentality can be truly appreciated only through the realization that the “sentimental” encompasses not only the domestic fictions that populated the nineteenth-century American literary marketplace and the eighteenth-century British novels of sensibility that influenced them, but also the moral philosophy upon which both were founded.

It is the last that can be said to truly epitomize sentimentality. Of particular importance in this regard is the plotting of sympathy at work in Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and the “impartial spectator” that is its protagonist. Du Bois aimed his parodic arsenal at this target. His lampooning of the sentimentality that dominated the mainstream culture of his own time was collateral damage. Though employing indirection, Du Bois hits the sentimental at its heart. Smith’s theorizing had far-reaching practical effects. The “sympathy” he worked to institute formed the connective tissue of the “social” order being put in place at the time. It thereby acts as the medium through which the sentimental weaves its way through the work of one of the primary architects of new world governmentality: Thomas Jefferson. And it is through the Jeffersonian

connection that Du Bois accessed Smith. This traffic is hard to trace because it travels via the “veil”—a trope fundamental to the work of both Founding Father and Seventh Son. Du Bois’s pointed reference back to Smith can be followed only through an uncredited citation of Jefferson’s fugitive figure. This is a consequence of the necessity of taking what he has been given to go places he is not supposed to go.

As Du Bois surreptitiously sounds it, sentimental sympathy is heard to rest on an unexamined assumption of normativity that inaugurates a process of racialization. Racism takes its place among the most archetypal of “sentiments.” While this remains implicit in Smith, it becomes explicit in Jefferson. The somewhat paradoxical consequence is that his work is simultaneously more egregiously racist and capable of a greater degree of self-critical reflexivity. He, like Du Bois, engages the promises of sympathy only as they are betrayed. He makes clear from the outset that his project “to form a more perfect Union” can only be embarked upon after declaring that conditions have made it “necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another.”⁷ He remains fundamentally attached to the regime of sentimental sympathy, figuring independence from the British empire as a process akin to mitosis. Du Bois, on the other hand, aims for an altogether more intricate mutation: an attunement before and beyond sympathy.

Du Bois takes on canonical moral philosophy and its practical effects through the oblique means of literary figuration. Illegitimacy is a matter of aesthetics intervening in spheres that have traditionally been considered off-limits. Du Bois infiltrates and arranges a series of small explosions that destabilize the foundations of representational discourse, instantiating the alternative offered by an enactive model of literature. He

writes a language modulated through the infusion of a musicality encoding affectively intense experience in order to bridge an occulted priority that has been buried under sedimented convention. Recourse to code is both a mechanism for coping with the pain caused by the way racism interferes with affective resonance and a means of protecting the potential pleasure of hacking through such “security” measures. This move is particularly prevalent in Du Bois’s sampling of the spirituals. In *Souls*, the “sorrow songs” function both as a resource for improvisational lyricism and as a line of attack in his parody of sentimentality.

At the end of the nineteenth century the spirituals were a major target of sentimental sympathy. Du Bois rescued them from being passive objects of sympathy, transforming them into active conduits of attunement. He worked to reimmerge them in the atmosphere of the “ring shout” and “camp meetings” in which they were initially generated, musicalized and kinaesthetic spacetimes populated by immersed participant observers. Of course, access to any “originary” performative context can only be partially reenacted, not wholly recovered. As Alexander Weheliye has argued, Du Bois’s treatment of the spirituals in *Souls*, especially the way he “mixes” them with other disparate materials, foreshadows the techniques of contemporary hip-hop DJs.⁸ By tapping their experiences with contemporary sound technologies, twenty-first century readers can cultivate the embodied responsiveness necessary for triggering and engaging the enactive potential of Du Bois’s literature and reenact the ambiance of the “ring shout” and “camp meetings.” What results is the sounding of a world of human differences liberated from the “color-line.” In the globality that Du Bois opens, raciality does not so much disappear as disperse. Qualities conventionally labeled as “white” or “black” are

recoded in such a way that they can be singularly embodied by people who, according to the dictates of racism, should be incapable of doing so.

The remainder of this chapter provides a detailed account of Du Bois's intervention upon American modernism. It begins with a consideration of the role sympathetic sentimentality played in the betrayal of Reconstruction's promise and the re-entrenchment of racist conventions that was "Redemption." In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois aimed to draw attention to this deficiency of the postbellum "social" order and sought to remedy it by putting a pedagogy of liberation into play that would make room for emancipated blackness to edify those who misunderstand and/or seek to cause harm to African Americans. He set the stage for this performance through his own example, crafting and circulating extensively writing infused with a parodic musicality. Du Bois launched a program of enactive literature choreographing moments of affective resonance into a broader pattern of attunement. In doing so he embodied an aesthetics of illegitimacy. Through the practice of artistic experimentation Du Bois made a break with the overconventionalized, improvising a spacetime in which autonomous affect/affect of autonomy could live and breathe. With these overtures he encouraged his audience to embrace dispossession: a political commitment to let go of the notion of "inherent" properties and embrace the alternatives offered by an ongoing process of mutual borrowings across multiple lines and on global proportions. In *Souls* and its sequel, *Darkwater*, Du Bois sounded a world reopened to a widespread engagement with the existential problematic of expressing singularity, receptive to the capacity for and cultivation of affectively intense experience. In this he was inspired by the creators of the spirituals, and in turn influenced the work of contemporary hip-hop musicians.

Bespoke Goods

“Reconstruction is a failure, then?” asked Mr. Withington.

“Reconstruction is not a failure, although the whole South will tell you so, and the North is being persuaded to so believe[,]” replied Will.

“All of which goes to show that race is stronger than law,” broke in the Southerner.

“Rather that barbarism is superior to civilization.”

“What about the crime of rape?” asked Mr. Withington.

“In nine cases out of ten,” replied Lewis, ‘you will find that the Negro is guiltless of this awful crime. It is brought forward to alienate the sympathy of all decent men from us. It is a crime that strikes the home ties, and as such is the most deadly weapon that has yet been used against us. We invite investigation in this direction, and you will then find that it is *not* a characteristic of the black man, although *it is* of the white man of the South.

“You cannot prove your assertions!” exclaimed the Southerner, white with passion.

■ Pauline Hopkins, *Contending Forces*

What Du Bois aims for is a reconsideration of what has come to be known as “*the Universal*,” a project of reclamation that involves its transformation into an open source, an active agent of its own change. This is what Fanon indexes as “the universality inherent in the human condition” (my emphasis) and what Du Bois calls the “general proposition of working for the world’s good.” To “take on” this challenge, those individuals placed among the “darker peoples of the world” must work through the “aberrations of affect” within which they are enmeshed—foremost of which is the supposition that affect is aberrant. As Fanon suggests, the “Negro”—the potential “black man”—“is rooted at the core of a universe from which he must be extricated.” In order to enact this unearthing, it is necessary to confront the ruling principle of this cosmological enclosure: sentimental sympathy. It is not that sentimentality causes the “general proposition of working for the world’s good” to be “too soon sickly.” Rather, this

adjectival phrase, if Du Bois's grammar is correctly parsed, is applied to the sentimental itself. There is something about sympathy that is valuable. Whenever this fugitive component surfaces, however, it is swiftly infected by the normative machinations of the regime. In order to counteract this defensive maneuver it is necessary to bide one's time, taking a series of detours that circumscribe sentimentality and in doing so go beyond it. In order to get to the attunement made possible by the liberation of autonomous affect/affect of autonomy, it is necessary to gain a certain familiarity and facility with sympathetic sentimentality. Similarly, activating the revamped philanthropy that is *universality* necessitates developing a new understanding of selfhood and racialized difference. Both of these tasks are part of the cryptic "sacrifice"—"working for the multiplication of Youth **X** Beauty," striving to let go of standards that risk lulling their adherents into an odd sort of premature decrepitude—Du Bois vows to make. It is a matter of chance rather than destiny, being "the work that the Unknown lay in my hands" before becoming a chosen profession. It is by virtue of understanding choice as the offspring of necessary chance that "my own best development" and "the rise of the Negro people" become synonymous with one another *and* together are made "one and the same with the best development of the world."⁹

It is through this circuitous process that the novelty of youth will illegitimize existing standards of beauty (including the "goods" of sentimental moralism). Among Du Bois's contemporaries, Pauline Hopkins offers a singularly interesting foil, putting these innovative maneuvers of his into relief. She was a student of his social theory and his follower on matters of politics, but also served as an important influence when Du Bois turned to the writing of fiction. Her novel *Contending Forces* provides a thumbnail

sketch of the context in which Du Bois wrote the essays collected in *Souls*. One of the insights made available by her rediscovery is that though sentimentality is conventionally considered the province of women, the generative space of sympathy at its center is a bastion of homosociality dominated by men. Bringing Hopkins to the foreground opens up a thematization of Du Bois's own discomfort with the homosocial, which manifests as antisexism and illegitimacy. The latter can be limned by contrasting Du Bois with the two African American protagonists who speak in the passage at the top of this section. All three contest the charge that Reconstruction was a failure. The tack Du Bois ultimately took, however, could be said to flip that of his fictional counterparts. While Will Smith and Arthur Lewis take a sentence and merely revise the proper noun that functions as its subject, Du Bois enacts an improvisationally lyrical alteration of its syntax that makes it say something completely other from the meaning originally intended.

To argue that "barbarism is superior to civilization" is only to hold a mirror up to the claim that "race is stronger than law." It merely places the key terms of the central proposition of "the philosophy of lynching" in inverse order, rather than turning this conceit inside out, as Du Bois seeks to do. If, for the Southern Senator, the threat of rape "strikes the home ties," for Smith and Lewis the false accusations that cover up its inverse actuality do so as well. Enabling this conflict is the fact that a certain "decent domesticity" can be conceived of as a property, the possession of which must be fought over exactly because it is already assumed to emblemize shared values. At the heart of the issue here seems to be the question of who the rightful heirs of the "Anglo-Saxon" tradition of sympathetic sentimentalism is: "Southerners" or "Negroes." According to the

terms of the debate it can only be one or the other. It is only by virtue of buying into these firmly established ground rules that Smith is licensed to provide the proof the Senator denies and propose “using the methods of the South” to “create sentiment *for* the race and *against* its detractors.” But for Du Bois sentimentality, as constrained by “decent domesticity,” is always already its own violation. The phrase “to alienate the sympathy of all decent men” would mean something completely different coming out of his mouth. And this has everything to do with the fact that he has a more critical understanding of “decency.” This is why he proposes that, although they, like all Americans, are “reared and trained under the individualistic philosophy of the Declaration of Independence and the *laissez-faire* philosophy of Adam Smith,” “Negroes” embody something other than “a servile imitation of Anglo-Saxon culture.”¹⁰ Du Bois uses sympathetic sentimentality as a means to recover that which it claims to be by bringing its obsolescence to the surface. He does so by embracing the errant aesthetic method of illegitimacy. Illegitimacy is all about being prematurely turned out of house and home without any “rightful” inheritance. It is about making do with found materials that one may or may not be authorized to access, utilizing them in a way that breaks conventions in order to broach the unforeseen. Its upshot is the experimental, the musical, the affective, the embodied.

An itinerary of this project can be drawn up by tracing one of the central threads of *Souls*—the issue of higher education—that comes most markedly to the fore in the essay “Of the Training of Black Men.” Here Du Bois thematizes a question that hangs over *Contending Forces* but which neither its protagonists nor its author explicitly ask. In doing so, he brings us back to the query with which Hopkins’s scene begins: the non-

failure of Reconstruction. He offers the response Smith and Lewis are prevented from making to its fullest. Du Bois bears witness to the fact that freedmen (and women) and their sons (and daughters) did not fall short of their own accord. Rather, they were betrayed. The “education” Du Bois proposes would work to depart from this unfortunate situation. It is still (at least initially) of the “sentimental” variety. By showing how something so central to the moralism of normative sentimentality as sympathy can be made to depart from the restrictions of “decent domesticity,” however, Du Bois gestures towards a modernized ethics of attunement that emerges through the aesthetics of illegitimacy and in turn gives rise to a politics of dispossession. It is only by intervening upon sentimental sympathy, he suggests, that we can go beyond it. Du Bois takes this tack along two convergent lines. First, by foregrounding a topic such as higher education—rather than, say, marriage, normative gender roles, and “sexual propriety”—he troubles the split between “public” and “private” that “domesticity” both posits and exploits.¹¹ Second, he shatters the presumptions of “decency” by uncovering its constant and repeated self-violations. Du Bois is aided on both these fronts by the fact that whereas the argumentation of *Contending Forces* seeks to minimize or gloss over racialized differences while simultaneously and unavoidably acknowledging their ubiquity, he embraces the contemporary institutionalization of these variations exactly in order to overturn it. Du Bois takes the proposition of racial binarism at face value, only to demonstrate that although it is a key component of dominant “socialization” it is in the end ineffective as a means of comprehension. It is simply not the way variety, through its generative *naturung*, manifests. Du Bois makes use of this insight to develop a new

method of instantiating and processing differentiation, one that is decidedly nonracist without rejecting the significance of racial*ity* altogether.

“Of the Training of Black Men” opens by tracing the outlines of the “Negro” mind as poised precariously at the intersection of “three streams of thinking.” Perhaps the strongest current feeding into this reservoir is the notion that “the multiplying of human wants in culture-lands calls for the world-wide coöperation of men in satisfying them,” which in turn entails “pulling the ends of earth nearer.” This is what we could call the “vision of empire.” Its would-be “new human unity” violates itself from its inception due to being unavoidably coupled with an economics of scarcity.¹² Though the satisfaction of imperial desires may involve “all men, black, yellow, and white,” the proliferating “wants” that drive this industry are properties of only one segment of this mixed population. This new world ordering is only euphemistically achieved through “coöperation.” The imperial reach of falsely universalized “culture-lands” depends upon the forced labor of those who serve but who are not served by it. It is as if “*the Universal*” were a scarce resource, generated by the many but reserved for the few. And it is racism that both enables this rampant exploitation and downplays exactly how fundamental it is to this particular instantiation of the adjective “world-wide.”

As Du Bois writes, “behind this thought lurks the afterthought of force and dominion.” This lurking is performed by the second major current he identifies: “the sincere and passionate belief that somewhere between men and cattle, God created a *tertium quid*, and called it a Negro,—a clownish, simple creature, at times even lovable within its limitations, but straightly foreordained to walk within the Veil.” Generating credence in this “sentiment” is the notion that being marked by racialization makes one

sub- or non-human and prevents mutual understanding. As if “the Veil” were the “waste” and/or “surplus” of “*the Universal*,” the by-product of its false scarcity. This is how sympathetic sentimentality disfigures embodiment and affective intensity. The “Negro” bears this portion of the fruit of their labor. There is something that marks “him” as “other,” at the same time that the call to recognize “him” as one’s fellow cannot be completely silenced. Consequently, “he” is the target of a patronizing, paternalistic affectation. Thus gently mastered, “that third and darker thought,—the thought of the things themselves” is positioned at the limit of sympathy, exactly where the first two currents intersect. Things that can think: something like the photographic negative of people whose status as men rests on their perpetuation of inhuman practices. Thus is the “Negro” constituted as a self-conscious being, irresistibly desiring equal access to “Liberty, Freedom, Opportunity,” but also unable to realize this longing as anything other than a “mad impulse.” “So here we stand,” Du Bois writes, “among thoughts of human unity, even through conquest and slavery; the inferiority of black men, even if forced by fraud; a shriek in the night for freedom of men who themselves are not sure of their right to demand it.” Du Bois goes on to phrase “the problem of training men for life” as a matter of turning “Negroes” into “black men” by promulgating belief in the fraudulence of racism.¹³ Such training does not so much resolve “the tangle of thought and afterthought” as sound it at a greater depth, reformulating “*the Universal*” as *universality*, transforming the vision of empire into an anti-imperialist globality, claiming a retooled *raciality* as the means of this reformulation.

Du Bois performs an archaeology of the postbellum pedagogy that preceded him. The first problem confronted by the pedagogical imperative that Du Bois unfolds and in

turn undertakes is the recruitment of a workforce. At the end of the Civil War the most readily available applicant pool was ruled out by the very same thing that could have made them the perfect candidates: “the sudden volcanic rupture of nearly all relations between black and white” that attended the beginning of Reconstruction. It could be assumed that personal interactions were so poisoned under the regime of slave “society” that such a seismic jolt was necessary for the design of a workable patterning of sociality for the postbellum South. And, in large part, this is true. Yet, as Du Bois’s contemporary Thomas Nelson Page suggests in his eulogy for “The Old-Time Negro” (published a year after *Souls*), there is something worth allowing to jump the gap between ante and post. *The question is how this leap is to be accomplished: whether it is to be pursued through the replication of norms, or rather through their mutation.* Page lobbies for the former. “Curiously, whatever the Southerners may think of slavery,” he writes, “there is scarcely one who knew the Negro in his old relation who does not speak of him with sympathy and think of him with tenderness.” Further, “not the least part of the bitterness of the South over the Negro question as it has existed grows out of resentment at the destruction of what was once a relation of warm friendship and tender sympathy.” While even Du Bois finds something regrettable about the loss of “that finer sympathy and love between some masters and house servants,” the remedy for this regret will “come to replace”—rather than merely reinstitute—that presumed understanding.¹⁴

At the outset a revolution internal to sympathy is necessary, an overturning of both the “tenderness” that Page hankers after and the “bitterness” it gives rise to within an altered historical situation that renders it obsolete. By refining the definition of what exactly qualifies as “finer,” “that sympathetic and effective group-training and

leadership” that circumstances demand will arise and “The Old-Time Negro” will become not only a “New Negro” but potentially a “black man.” It is not so much “the social separation between the races” that prevents (always, by implication, white) “Southerners” from being agents of this (re)education, as the fact that their “resentment” of any effort to envision bridging the breach of Southern “society” in any way other than returning to the stereotypical relationships that existed under slavery “is so thorough and deep.” Framing of “the Negro question” as nothing other than a “Problem” (with a capital P)—one that “Southerners” can lay privileged claim to—effects “the more uncompromising drawing of the color-line” that Du Bois argues came to the fore after the Civil War, the figuring of racialization as a “frightful chasm . . . across which men pass at their peril.” Involved here is not just segregation as we normally think of it—in terms of balkanized residential patterns, separate schools, political disenfranchisement, economic inequality—but, further and deeper, racism as a barrier to an affective resonance that troubles Page’s “warm friendship,” an attunement that necessitates a reconstruction of the “tender sympathy” he wishes to Redeem. By entertaining a racist nostalgia that would seek to recapture “the Negro in his old relation,” Page and his ilk disfigure blackness as a simultaneity of feeling’s absence (its irreducibility to overconventionalized “sentiment”) and overwhelming presence (its ultimately undeniable embodiment of autonomous affect/affect of autonomy). This juxtaposition of lack and plenitude overloads and thereby reveals its secret inhabitation of the most intimate operations of whiteness. In order to continue fending off the recognition that “decent domesticity” depends upon the smuggling of certain illicit goods, that interiority is always already miscegenated, agents of Redemption act to circumvent Reconstruction by reinstating a situation in which “life

among free Negroes was simply unthinkable, the maddest of experiments.”¹⁵ The desire to preserve the overconventionalized sympathy of sentimental moralism doubles here as a project to perpetuate the racist protocols of slave “society.” To the extent that this undertaking was successful, a regime of “peculiar feelings” continued to remain in force even after the “institution” through which it was entrenched was nominally abolished. A shadow governmentality is cast, effecting a (mis)conception of the emancipation of blackness, framing it as a self-destructive thinking with decidedly morbid consequences.

Criminal Minded

“Don’t you think we must educate them?”

“No; I think it is a crime.”

“Would you leave them in ignorance, a threat to society?”

“Yes, until they can be moved. When I see these young Negro men and women coming out of their schools and colleges, well dressed, with their shallow veneer of an imitation culture, I feel like crying over the farce.”

“Surely, Mrs. Durham, you believe they are better fitted for life?”

“They are not. They are lifted out of their only possible sphere of menial service, and denied any career. It is simply inhuman. They are led to certain slaughter of soul and body at last. It is a horrible tragedy.”

Allan looked at her, smiled, and replied: “I knew you were a bitter and brilliant woman but I didn’t think you would go to such lengths even with your pet aversion.”

“It’s not an aversion, or a prejudice, sir. It’s a simple fact of history. Education increases the power of the human brain to think and the heart to suffer. Sooner or later these educated Negroes feel the clutch of the iron hand of the white man’s unwritten laws on their throats. They have their choice between a suicide’s grave or a prison cell. And the numbers who dare the grave and the prison cell daily increase. The South is kinder to the Negro when he is kept in his place.”

■ Thomas Dixon, *The Leopard’s Spots*

According to Du Bois, southerners, like Mrs. Durham in the epigraph above, adopted an intransigent “opposition to Negro education” because such edification unavoidably

involves “an element of danger and revolution, of dissatisfaction and discontent.” Contrary to Dixon’s claim that such turbulence and the innovative role-playing it involves is a mere mockery that only causes unnecessary suffering, it is in fact unavoidable and even enjoyable when the experimental is understood as that which makes comprehension possible. Southerners, denying that any unfair discrimination was involved in the matter, and with the paternalistic implication that certain restrictions and threats of violence were “for their own good,” refused to participate in efforts towards liberating the thus far captive capacities of “free Negroes” when they did not actively frustrate them. Unable to find adequate teachers amongst their closest neighbors, nascent “black men” in the aftermath of the Civil War had to look elsewhere for role models. Through the “planting of New England schoolhouses among the white and black of the South,” “social settlements” were created in which “the best of the sons of the freedmen came in close and sympathetic touch with the best traditions of New England.” Thus was effected a communicability of “sentiment” that set the stage for its expansion and eventual eclipse. This latter development, however, involved a breaking of conventions and a changing of the guard that, while it sought to retain and repurpose that aspect of sympathy that was potentially productive, took leave of the broader regime of sentimentality insofar as it acknowledged the latter’s inextricability from racism. For, as Emancipation continued to play itself out, (always, by implication, white) “Northerners” proved themselves susceptible to the “acute race-sensitiveness” that pervaded the South (and, in fact, the Union as a whole). The “society” they sought to settle, despite its positive effects, was fundamentally structured by the isomorphism of two binarisms (teacher/student and white/black) that never ceased to demand that their two terms remain

utterly distinct. Consequently, while “Northerners” and their “Negro” charges were “sensitive to mutual thought and feeling,” they remained “subtly and silently separate in many matters of deeper human intimacy.”¹⁶ While it instituted a kinder, gentler paternalism, this sentimental education maintained a racialized hierarchy ultimately no less intransigent than that of the Old (slave) South.

As long as the “actual formal content” of so-called “emancipatory” courses of study remained “doubtlessly old-fashioned,” “the contact of living souls” broached by postbellum institutions of learning was unable to exercise its “educational power” to its fullest. Such reticence to innovate curricular activities created a situation in which this “gift of New England” to “Negroes” had become “a gift which to-day only their own kindred and race can bring to the masses.” By making blackness a guiding principle of pedagogy, sympathy is disarticulated from the overconventionalized “sentiment” of racism and transmogrified into something other than itself: a potential for affective resonance and multitudinous differentiation liberated from the logic of binarism. It should be noted that blackness here is not so much a “race” phenomenon that is necessarily coded either “black” or “white.” It has become, however, due to the contingencies of history, undeniably *racialized*—that is, framed as accessible by a particular population marked by certain superficial characteristics. It is a *raciality* (complementing rather than opposing *universality*), the pursuit of which elaborates spectra of singularity that would otherwise remain nonmanifest. Given that they cling to conventions that repress affectively intense experience, it is unlikely that “the mass of the whites”—whether “Southern” or “Northern”—“can be brought to assume that close sympathetic and self-sacrificing leadership of the blacks which their present situation so

eloquently demands.” (It is telling that Du Bois’s grammar here leaves the question of exactly which group—“whites” or “blacks”—find themselves in this “situation.”) The “leadership” that is needed, the “social teaching and example” that is truly called for, “must come from the blacks themselves.” And their pupils will be both “Negroes” *and* (always, by implication, white) “Southerners” and “Northerners.” Du Bois places himself among this cadre of “men who thoroughly comprehend and know modern civilization, and can take hold of Negro communities and raise them and train them by force of precept and example, deep sympathy, and the inspiration of common blood and ideals.”¹⁷

By staking this claim, however, he does not get off scot-free. As his continuing usage of conventional phrasing (especially “common blood”) in this last passage suggests, he is initially not altogether successful at locating “modern civilization” somewhere other than at the intersection of sentimentality and racism. At the outset, his educational efforts were “haunted by a New England vision.” This stubborn kink in his project brings to the surface the fact that his aesthetics of illegitimacy is double-edged. Being black, his access to “higher education” is compromised from the get go. But, at the same time, being born and raised in provincial Massachusetts, his assumption of blackness is under question. So, while Du Bois found it necessary to complete a Bachelor’s degree at Fisk prior to being accepted for undergraduate study at Harvard, it is also true that his attempts to teach in the common schools of rural Tennessee during his summers off from the former institution were complicated by that fact that where he expected to see “neat little desks and chairs” he was brought into touch with “rough plank benches without backs, and at times without legs.” Du Bois was aided in weathering this rude contact and

making this synaesthetic transition by one of his would-be pupils. This young woman, Josie, “had about her a certain fineness,” a qualification distinct from the “finer sympathy” of the antebellum in that it sought “to make life broader, deeper, and fuller.” Her ambition to learn instructed Du Bois that educators need to temper their adherence to “technical normal methods” with the capacity to be “broad-minded.”¹⁸ Working with Josie and her peers Du Bois was forced to make-do with found materials, break conventions, and accommodate a certain irregularity. He was faced with the realization that those whom he would train in the ways of “modern civilization” come equipped with the very capacity that qualifies him to inspire and lead. Thus, a certain reciprocity that belies the implied hierarchy of binarism is established between “white” and “black,” “teacher” and “student.” Such training as Du Bois would perform constitutes an equal exchange and enrichment rather than a one-way transmission of received ideas.

Having learned this lesson, he was able to depart from the preconceived notions of sympathetic sentimentalism and open the way for an affective resonance that promised to give rise to a modernized ethics of attunement. Du Bois’s connection with his exemplary student brought home to him that the difference between him and her people was not so much one of ability as an inequality of opportunity to make a shared potential manifest. Due to the persistence of this disparity, the limning of the special “gift” that Du Bois holds in common with “the mass of the freedmen” (and women) involves coming to terms with the ways in which that which initially made it evident is unavoidably placed at risk of “sacrifice.” This is the function performed by Du Bois’s recounting of what he learned upon returning to the site of this educational interchange a decade after its inception: namely, the manner in which Josie’s ambitions, by broaching unbridled

potential, unfortunately served to exemplify not only ability but also its brutal denial.

Her fate is sealed by the failure to free her endeavors from the “dangerously clear logic of the Negro’s position” at the intersection of sentimentality and racism. While Du Bois is able to leave a Southern locale constantly threatened by the re-entrenchment of the “society” of slavery, earns a doctorate, and begins his ascent into the upper reaches of academia, Josie—inextricably tied to the region by family allegiance and hampered by the hindrances of heterosexism—remains subject to an enduring economy of engineered scarcity. She is forced to prematurely make the shift from education to menial employment. Beset by personal misfortune brought on by the betrayal of Reconstruction, she is overworked and dies before her time. Heeding the tragedy of Josie’s example leads Du Bois to suggest that, as much or even more than he himself, “the masses of the Negroes” possess that capability that eludes whites. For, even without formal training, black folk, Du Bois tells his white readers, “see all too clearly the anomalies of their position and the moral crookedness of yours” and resolutely bear witness to the evidence of these “burning truths.”¹⁹

The capacity at work here is the “second-sight” of “double-consciousness.” Its operations trace out what actually happens when people try or have no choice (due to their subordinate status within a given “society”) but to follow out Smith’s prescriptions for instituting the “impartial spectator” to the letter, rather than taking the shortcuts open to the overprivileged. This figure is immediately split down the middle as soon as it is brought into existence, born with a constitutive lack at its center that makes plain the fact that the best way to approximate impartiality is through the juxtaposition, rather than elision, of diverse particularities. The clarity of this supplementary seeing is “all too” and

“dangerous” because it is always already refracted. It is rent by “a vast veil” cast by the ocularcentrism orienting sentimental moralism. By banning fully embodied responsiveness, stunted “sympathy” outlaws autonomous affect/affect of autonomy. The existential problematic of expressing singularity is suspended. The people for whom Du Bois speaks are embedded in a bifurcated habitat from which they are alienated, but which nevertheless would cease to exist without them. They end up functioning as this environment’s estranged exemplars because they are that population that has been (re)located along the bifurcation. They not only have unique awareness of “the Veil,” they also know—in a way others do not—that both sides are occupied. Consigned to inhabit the unknown, their struggles for recognition take the form of an attempt to approximate the standards of the “beyond” to which they will never gain true access unless this binaristic cosmos is overthrown in the name of a pluralistic universe. Thus, “the Negro” finds himself in “a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world.” In such a situation, a “gift” can also be a “curse,” insofar as it is forced to spell out its own “sacrifice.” The efforts of “the Negro” “to husband and use his best powers and his latent genius” in order “to escape death and isolation” have been inhibited because their singular capabilities “have in the past been strangely wasted, dispersed, or forgotten.”²⁰

Ultimately, however, double-consciousness cannot be confined to that which has already come to pass. It is preeminently of the moment, occupying the present in a way that nudges it toward a future broader than otherwise imagined. The “secondness” of this seeing always already fills itself out in triplicate, is infused with a musicality that muddies the stark lines of ocularcentrism and engages fully embodied responsiveness. With

the spirituals as his inspiration, Du Bois illustrates how double-consciousness entails not merely an initial difficulty to ascertain oneself and the consequent necessity of relying on the reports of others, but also—*thirdly*—an awareness of the interdependence of these two conditions, a realization that leads towards what he will articulate as “artificial sensitivity” in *Darkwater*. We can understand the emergent third of double-consciousness to be a recognition that the “anomalies” besetting the positionality of blackness and the “moral crookedness” that permeates whiteness are two sides of the same coin. As Du Bois implicates it, “second-sight” is imbued with connotations of the “superstitious” or the “enthusiastic”; the illicitly religious and strangely spiritual happening of an affectively intense experience at the crossroads of autonomy and attunement. Applicants for whiteness, the operating license of racism, would label such occurrences disreputable, confined solely to the province of blackness. At the same time, as the widespread interest in the “occult” at the turn of the twentieth century suggests, they also desired to claim them as their own.

Double-consciousness is both generated and occulted by the fact that while the “impartial spectator” placed at the center of sympathetic sentimentality’s moralism is advertised as setting aside particularities, it in fact acts as a container in which a select few are smuggled in to provide the unsounded metric by which the standards of civil intercourse are measured. Those who assume the possession of such privileged particulars are exempted from the *requirement* of behaving “impartially.” Those who must *prove* their ability to be “impartial” are those who are considered unable to do so, excluded from normative “sympathy” by definition. Double-consciousness is the by-product of this tortured logic/logic of torture. It speaks to unattended difficulties with the

project of using “impartial spectatorship” as a plan for manufacturing self-critical agency on an empirical plane. This unforeseen onus of traditional moralism is unequally parceled out, along lines drawn according to that most overconventionalized of “sentiments”: racism. Double-consciousness is that process undergone by people compelled to behave as if they were “impartial spectators,” under real (new) world conditions. It is the “curse” that hangs over the head of those coerced into bearing the burden of an impossible task.

But once one becomes conscious of this affliction, it becomes a “gift.” Double-consciousness becomes something altogether other than “impartial spectatorship” when it is embraced purposefully as a means of giving rise to an emergent third. What was supposed to be a regulative ideal turns out to be a “peculiar sensation,” what was taken to be a norm is revealed to be a limit case. This eventuality demands “a loftier respect for the sovereign human soul that seeks to know itself and the world about it; that seeks a freedom for expansion and self-development; that will love and hate and labor in its own way, untrammelled alike by old and new.” The itinerary of double-consciousness broaches autonomous affect/affect of autonomy and opens a reactivation of the existential problematic of expressing singularity. And insofar as the capacity for affectively intense experience has been racialized, liberation in general means that “the longings of black men must have respect.” Not only is double-consciousness the revealing upshot of the attempt to institute the “impartial spectator,” the examples of those who enact it could very well be instructive for *all* those who would go beyond the moralism of sympathetic sentimentalism. As Du Bois writes, “the rich and bitter depth of their experience, the unknown treasures of their inner life, the strange rendings of nature they have seen, may

give the world new points of view and make their loving, living, and doing precious to all human hearts.”²¹ This pursuit of *universality* through the appreciation of *raciality* takes place through improvisational lyricism. The emergence of a streaming thirdness of sonicity through the playing out of supplemental seeing registers as a writing infused with the musicality of the “sorrow songs.” Du Bois’s treatment of the spirituals is the epitome of his overall strategy. Double-consciousness and its second-sight not only constitute a parody of the “impartial spectator,” they also trace a metafigure of the parodic in general, manifest the cognitive and visual analog of the musical and otherwise sonic phenomena at its heart.

As literary theorist Linda Hutcheon notes, the English “parody” derives from the Greek *parodia*, which loosely translates as “counter-song.” It is not enough to merely draw this etymological connection and leave it at that. One must also unfold the implicit multivalence involved in this derivation. The qualifying prefix *para* can mean either “against” or “beside.” When defining parody it makes as much sense to speak of a singing that facilitates an *encounter* with as much as one that simply *counters* pre-established conventions. If in one of its aspects the parodic acts as a means of “opposition or contrast,” in another—one that is interdependent with the first—it performs “a suggestion of accord or intimacy.” Consequently, its “final meaning”—one that hovers “between complicity and distance”—“rests on the recognition of the superimposition of these levels.” Through parody issues a thirdness that emerges through the overlap of two terms that seem contradictory but are in fact complementary, although irreducible to one another. It thus avoids functioning merely as “ridiculing imitation” and thereby “marks the intersection of creation and re-creation, of invention and critique.” It

involves not discarding but rather recycling, is “endowed with the power to renew” and “revitalize.” While parody, since its antique inception, has gone beyond “song” to become a multimedia modality, in all its manifestations it retains an echo of its indigenous musicality, which surfaces as a distinct intonation. It is irreducibly “double-voiced.” “Its two voices,” Hutcheon writes, “neither merge nor cancel each other out; they work together, while remaining distinct in their defining difference.” While it may be initially perceived as “aggressive,” it is ultimately “conciliatory,” “building upon more than attacking its other, while still retaining its critical distance.”²² Parody sounds a mode of engagement in which difference is accommodated as a spur to fuller understanding. Rhetorician Eric King Watts has located the sort of dual voicing Hutcheon draws attention to in the work of Du Bois, taking his parody of “My Country ’Tis of Thee” as an example. Du Bois effects what he calls “little changes” in the song’s phrasing (for example, altering the second line of its opening couplet from “Sweet land of liberty” to “Late land of slavery”) in order to sound a revamped and more fully nuanced patriotism.²³

Du Bois presents this parodic maneuver not only as a survival tactic utilized to weather ocularcentrism (which is, ironically, so vigilantly focused on the visual as to miss the “little changes” of intonation proposed) but also as a surreptitious and good-humored affront that enacts a sonicity making way for a (re)cognition of fully embodied responsibility. He describes “the dilemma” faced by black people when attending a public occasion in which the conventional declaration of love for one’s country is called for. It is not just that white people stand there, ready to judge whether adherence to the standardized cant is whole-hearted. What impinges on a more fundamental stratum is the

mere fact that “they look at you.” As Watts writes, “Du Bois understands this moment of transfixion by the white gaze as an event that prohibits mutual understanding between the races.” Through such surveillance any embodiment of blackness “is held actionless and is muted; it, thus, does not constitute a being to which one must answer.” Du Bois’s parody of “My Country” shakes up this restricting situation, mobilizing “double-consciousness” to enact a dual voicing—the sonic analog of supplementary seeing—that “is constitutive of *ethical and emotional dimensions that make it an answerable phenomenon.*” By foregrounding “the *sound* of specific experiential *encounters* in civic life,” Du Bois thus disturbs the ocularcentric eviscerations of “sympathetic” moralism, liberating autonomous affect/affect of autonomy and thereby casting seeds of a modernized ethics of attunement. Du Bois’s parodic sounding thus makes inroads on the imperative that “the longing of black men must have respect.” It takes the first step of making these yearnings communicable, modeling a “mutual understanding” that allows the emergence of that eloquence that is the fruit of ambivalence, the thirdness promised by double-consciousness. After Du Bois’s intervention, “two moods and motivations interpenetrate one another in the singing of ‘America’ and, thus, they coax a closer affiliation among diverse interests.” By performing alterations that nevertheless *rhyme* with the original, his parody “mediates the incoherence among black feelings”—makes them coherent in a nonreductive manner—“by proposing both resistance and atonement.”²⁴

In retooling “My Country,” Du Bois is following the example set by the “sorrow songs.” In *Souls* he draws on this inspiration for a similarly parodic maneuver: the intonation that surfaces in the climactic passage in “Of the Training of Black Men.” And

his target, once again, is the tradition of normative sentimentality. While in “My Country” he is concerned with how it compromises a performance of patriotism ripe for reconstruction, here he aims to renegotiate its role in the composition of the population that manifests contemporary American nationality. He calls out the way “sympathy” clandestinely cultivates racism, breaking moralistic conventions by making them answerable to a “sovereign human soul” previously held captive on trumped up charges. He lobbies for the accommodation of such a singularity’s “freedom for expansion and self-development.” The passage in question comes immediately after Du Bois’s resounding of the “dangerously clear logic of the Negro’s position.” After working to amplify these reverberations caught up in the tortuous chain of reasoning forged through the hidden confluence of “anomalies of affect” and “moral crookedness,” he insists upon the fact that even without his assistance those caught up in this intricate enmeshment persevere in the face of “strong indictments against them,” leveled through the institutional force of “decent domesticity.” “Negroes” become “black men,” strive towards their liberation, by issuing “*counter-cries*” (my emphasis) that run “beside/against” the refracted clarity of twisted logic, emitting a sonicity that cuts through ocularcentrism and voices a demand for fully embodied responsivity that—Du Bois warns pointedly—“you may not wholly ignore, O Southern Gentlemen!”²⁵

In what follows this declaration of interdependence, Du Bois makes explicit what this breaching of ignorance implies. The sampling of apostrophic convention with which it is rung in—as well as the foregrounded particularity of the readers Du Bois addresses—marks it as a parody of sentimentality. “If you deplore their presence here,” Du Bois writes,

They ask, Who brought us? . . . And finally, when you fasten crime upon this race as its peculiar trait, they answer that slavery was the arch-crime, and lynching and lawlessness its twin abortion: that color and race are not crimes, and yet they it is which in this land receives most condemnation, North, East, South, and West.²⁶

Du Bois opens the passage by redirecting the trajectory of “the Negro problem” away from its supposed and explicitly named subjects towards those who brought it into being in the first place: slave-traders and -holders. In doing so, he does not so much shift blame as make it moot. Just as white America depended upon the labor of those whom it would come to “deplore,” normative sentimentality—particularly the “whiteness” that is its so-called “virtue”—implicates blackness not only as public nuisance but also as illicit inspiration. This leads into the note on which he ends: a debunking of the criminalization of “color” perpetrated by instituted patterns of racialization. The true culprits are not “misguided” individuals but rather the agents of a shadow governmentality that would make any move towards emancipation a crime. Du Bois proposes a divergent circularity of renewed responsibility and mutual recognition. At the heart of this effort is a reclaiming of partiality as an instrument for a fuller orchestration of cross-cultural interaction, of racial*ity* as a vehicle for universal*ity*.

While he is willing to grant that the “counter-cries” he champions are something other than “wholly justified,” he insists that they “daily present themselves in the guise of terrible truth” because the hailings that they parodically respond to fall short of holism as well. Poised at the juxtaposition of these partialities—exercising double-consciousness—Du Bois enacts an emergent thirdness “gifted/cursed” with a unique grasp on “the question of the future.” In the wake of Reconstruction’s betrayal, the most pressing concern regarding America’s black population “is how best to keep these millions from

brooding over the wrongs of the past and the difficulties of the present, so that all their energies may be bent toward a cheerful striving and co-operation with their white neighbors toward a larger, juster, and fuller future.” The complaints of “black men” must be heard so their longings can be respected, their strivings (foremost, it is implied, “the pursuit of happiness”) facilitated. This involves securing for them basic material necessities *and* granting them access to the possibilities of “higher education.” The prospects for an always already self-wounded “Union” depend in a fundamental way on “gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy” so that they can partake of “the Freedom of Art that is the Beauty of Life.” Only such measures will address how such a sizable and significant portion of the nation is “cut off from the main effort by the lesions of race.” Standing in the way of this updating of existing patterns of racialization are not only the enemies of “the Negro”—who would deny such “Truth” calling for recognition “above the Veil”—but also those who are nominally “sympathetic” with the cause of blackness but nevertheless have a difficulty perceiving what it entails in full.²⁷

Thus, “knightly America,” both “North” and “South,” seems to hold a “grudge” against the fact that “loosing the possibilities of mankind for the development of a higher and broader and more varied human culture” necessarily involves “the opening of opportunity to the disinherited to contribute to civilization and the happiness of men.” This affliction is caused by a failure to question normative moralism. Sentimentality and the “impartial spectator” who is its agent have epistemological as well as ethical shortcomings. This double fault is a consequence of disciplining the life of feeling/feeling of life to an excessive extent and is remedied through an aesthetics of illegitimacy that sketches the outlines for a politics of dispossession. By striving to bring

into play a modernized ethics of attunement, Du Bois seeks to encourage not only the enjoyment of “the right of the so-called unfathered child to be.” Further, as philosopher Thomas Slaughter explicates, he proposes that “a state of ‘indebtedness’” can be empowering, that a certain freedom comes from the necessity to “borrow things” and the promise to “own nothing.”²⁸ Both these propositions were crucial to making Du Bois’s own existence bearable. In undertaking this program, Du Bois was up against not only those “Southern Gentlemen” who would take moralistic norms to unforeseen extremes—such as Dixon, who in *The Leopard’s Spots* (published a year before *Souls*) draws on them to rally for a “Redemption” orchestrated through the “knightly” efforts of the Ku Klux Klan. His parodic maneuvers reached all the way down to the founding document of sentimental sympathy drawn up by Smith.

A Stigma(tism)

The nineteenth was the first century of human sympathy,—the age when half wonderingly we began to descry in others that transfigured spark of divinity which we call Myself; when clodhoppers and peasants, and tramps and thieves, and millionaires and—sometimes—Negroes, became throbbing souls whose warm pulsing life touched us so nearly that we half gasped with surprise, crying, ‘Thou, too! Hast Thou seen Sorrow and the dull waters of Hopelessness? Hast Thou known Life?’ And then all helplessly we peered into those Other-worlds, and wailed, ‘O World of Worlds, how shall man make you one?’ . . . And herein lies the tragedy of the age: not that men are poor,—all men know something of poverty; not that men are wicked,—who is good? not that men are ignorant,—what is Truth? Nay, but that men know so little of men.

■ W.E.B. Du Bois, “Of Alexander Crummell”

The last four chapters of *Souls* reweave its thematic fabric, flipping the texture of the piece so that where before the reader felt warp she or he now feels weft. They turn what

has come before inside-out, being the consequence of the author having “stepped within the Veil, raising it that you may view faintly its deeper recesses.” Having limned the barrier to affective resonance racism institutes, he now defies it, bringing to light a previously unknown interiority that, while it can just be barely seen, issues an effulgent sounding. Du Bois meant for these four essays to be read together. Though parsing them piece-by-piece is unavoidable, it is best to avoid doing so in strict sequence. I will jump directly into the thick of things, wrestling with the “tale twice told but seldom written” that Du Bois brings to attention in “Of Alexander Crummell” and “Of the Coming of John” before moving on to the unique responses to this cautionary story that Du Bois bookends it with, in “Of the Passing of the First-Born” and “The Sorrow Songs.”²⁹ It will come in handy to keep in the back of our minds the loss that Du Bois suggests has taken place in the passage from orality to literacy (“twice told but seldom written”). Doing so will prepare us for the treatment at the end of this chapter of the ways in which Du Bois goes beyond the strictly literate. Through improvisational lyricism Du Bois nudges writing to its very limits, enacting a use of language infused with and functioning as music that comes fully into its own with the advent of sound recording technologies and is exemplified by how these found materials are utilized by hip-hop artists.

In doing so, he performs the re-engagement with the existential problematic of expressing singularity his “tale told twice” has called for all along. Du Bois presents both the promise and the danger of this undertaking in “Of Alexander Crummell” and “Of the Coming of John,” allowing their insistent story to echo throughout his work, to become the narrative of its own making. If there is a “moral” here, it is that traditional moralism needs to make way for a modernized ethics. Du Bois thoroughly diagnoses and dissects

the “sympathy” that resides at the intersection of sentimentality and racism. His most concise statement of this critique—that sympathetic sentimentality had become, by the turn of the 20th century, as much a force for misunderstanding as fellowship—comes in “Of Alexander Crummell,” but it is only accessible to those who hear past the many sleights-of-hand through which Du Bois encrypts it. The titular figure of this chapter is only nominally its subject, and in two related senses. First, if Du Bois was, around the turn of the twentieth century, interested in the recently deceased Crummell, he was so insofar as the latter emblemizes his own unfinished story: the career of a “would-be black *savant*.” Duplicity, here, almost automatically doubles-up on itself—is quadrupled—as the “knowledge” that is to be the product of this “tale told twice” is itself “a twice-told tale.” Those things of value Crummell, Du Bois, and others like them are thrilled to discover are taken to be mere tacit assumptions by their “white neighbors.” That the same thing can, depending on one’s point of view, be either novel or customary, however, seems to suggest that it deserves a different audition. This is what the example of Crummell suggests. Playing off slight variations of phrasing like that between “twice-told tale” and “tale twice told,” Du Bois comes at what motivates the telling from an acute angle. Only thus can he “know the world and know himself.”³⁰

Which brings us to the second subterfuge in “Of Alexander Crummell.” An argument that is paradoxically both covert and explicit is secreted between the lines of this “history of a human heart.” It is the rationale behind Du Bois’s parody of sentimental moralism, and I have managed to piece it together in the epigraph with which this section opens. Du Bois is well aware that the concept of “sympathy” was first brought to the fore in the 1700s, but his implication is that it was not until the following century that it would bear

fruit and in the process reveal certain unintended consequences. The parodic bent of Du Bois's argumentation can be gleaned from its first, long phrase. That those who embody blackness are endowed with "a human heart," Du Bois implies, remains a questionable proposition. This anomaly exists not because "Negroes" are thought to lack feeling, but rather because they elicit a degree of affective intensity that can thoroughly short-circuit the regime of overconventionalized "sentiment." That Du Bois is not just paying tribute to the tradition of "human sympathy" but also leveling a critique that seeks to reclaim its unfulfilled promise, however, does not become undeniable until the second sentence of this passage—and only then when juxtaposed with what follows, its displaced complement. What comes before the ellipsis is from the beginning of "Of Alexander Crummell." What comes after is from the end. Sympathetic sentimentality seems at first to have effected a recognition and welcoming of singularity. Those practicing it, however, seem to become quickly overwhelmed by the incalculable differentiations broached by the potential for attunement across certain lines assumed to be unbreachable. What results is an imperial vision that seeks to contain the singularity's endogenous. And it is this disciplinary regulation that constitutes "the tragedy of the age," establishes a supposed "collaborative" effort in which, especially insofar as it is founded upon an implicit racialization that institutes a wide range of injustices and inequalities, "men know so little of men." Normative sentimentality and its constricted sympathy eventuate not only in an ethical dilemma but also an epistemological knot that the parodic maneuvers of Du Bois are meant to untangle.

For, as Susan Mizruchi has shown, around the turn of the twentieth century American social theorists increasingly showed an "interest in the function of sympathy as a means

of differentiation and exclusion” as much as in its role in securing unity and cohesion. This intellectual orientation created a situation in which “sympathetic actions have themselves become the pathway of estrangement.” “Where we expect to find instinctive recognition of another’s feeling,” Mizruchi writes, “we now find race hatred.” Such an outcome “implies that the act of sympathy may require not only the exclusion but the disappearance of certain groups.” This pernicious combination of consolidation and elimination surfaces in Jefferson and is implicit in the work of Smith. Through its operation, racism is shown to be the constitutive limit of sentimental sympathy. In the face of this, an aesthetics of illegitimacy that reopens the existential problematic of expressing singularity is the most pressing need. In “Of the Coming of John,” Du Bois seeks to enact this artistic endeavor by narrating the predicament it seeks to remedy, thereby making patently obvious hidden assumptions. This piece performs a fictional extrapolation of the argument made in “Of Alexander Crummell.” The closing of the latter essay, which immediately precedes the opening of “Of the Coming of John,” illustrates “the tragedy of the age”—“that men know so little of men”—by taking its titular figure as a key example. Although Crummell “brought within his wide influence all that was best of those who walk within the Veil,” “he worked alone, with so little human sympathy.” Because he champions the longings and strivings of “black men,” he dies unknown. “They who live without knew not nor dreamed of that full power within,” Du Bois writes, “that mighty inspiration which the dull gauze of caste decreed that most men should not know.”³¹ It becomes apparent that sympathy not only limits knowledge, but has limits of its own that are isomorphic to that of the field of knowledge it allows access to. Sympathy itself is knowledge put into power, the refracted clarity of vision

enforced by new world governmentality. Marking the limits of this regime is “the Veil”: a concatenated figuration comprised both of “the dull gauze” and that which it obscures—that which, in fact, it invents in the first place.

“Of the Coming of John” offers a graphic illustration of the way that sentimental moralism can act to violently eliminate those who broach its signature limitations. Even aside from its content, there are a number a features that mark this story as illegitimate. The genre of the piece is a strange mixture of allegory and social realism. The point of view is equally off-putting, beginning as an odd first-person *plural* (the “we” and “us” that introduce the protagonist) that evaporates into a stunning, visceral omniscience (the enactive eliciting of affective resonance with the protagonist’s most intimate experiences of interiority—which are, somewhat paradoxically, occasioned by the sudden impact of exteriority upon his life). While the former conveys the conventional window-dressing of the narrative, the latter puts it into motion, immersing the reader in the moments of affective intensity that pace the action. Thus, the voicing of the “twice-told tale”/“tale twice told” is endowed with parodic duality. The figure of the double pops up, as well, as a structuring device for the story’s plot. The action is structured around the comings and goings of two Johns: the black protagonist (John Jones) and his white counterpart (John Henderson). Both come from “the far-away Southern village” of Altamaha, Georgia, and are sent north for college. The Jones and Henderson families are deeply intertwined. The latter owned the former before emancipation and in the postbellum period during which the narrative takes place continued to employ them. Jones was named after Henderson, who was a year or two older than his “dark boyhood playmate,” a *de facto* and somewhat illicit foster-brother—a “darker namesake.” The Hendersons’ informal

adoption of the young Jones was underwritten by the fact that his ancestors were the property of theirs. They may have felt an additional degree of responsibility for his well-being given that he grew up for the most part without his father, who died before his time because of the undue stress of excessive physical labor. But that the relationship between the two Johns was nevertheless “off-color” is attested to by the imperative of their going separate ways once they came of age. Only through such explication of a segregation that had thus far remained implicit could Henderson simultaneously fondly remember Jones as his “closest playfellow in boyhood” and scorn him at present as “the darky that tried to force himself into a seat beside the lady I was escorting.”³²

Henderson’s slur is a consequence of him and Jones crossing paths again prior to their coordinated returns to Altamaha. This chance meeting offers the reader a brief but evocative accounting of the degree to which they have been given distinctly different training during their early adulthood. Both have changed, in ways that make going back to where they came from problematic, but to different degrees. While Henderson has witnessed preexisting assumptions take on a different cast given his exposure to life beyond the provincial, Jones has experienced his previous understanding being completely overturned. He finds that what made him such “a good boy” among the “white folk of Altamaha”—being “a fine-plough hand, good in the rice fields, handy everywhere, and always good-natured and respectful”—does not make the grade insofar as the tasks he is asked to undertake as a college student are concerned. He finds it necessary to reconceive his inborn capacities not as a *naturalized* “social” role that remains static over time but as an ongoing process of human *naturing* that opens up room for role-play. The extent to which he is “behind” is indicative not of incapability but

rather of untapped potential. His intellectual growth is all the more impressive given that it did not come easily. It is by virtue of “pausing perplexed where others skipped merrily” that Jones is capable of “walking steadily through difficulties where the rest stopped and surrendered.”³³

His ability to do the latter is put to the test when he begins to contemplate reentering “society.” As Jones’s knowledge has broadened, so has his affective life been enriched. Bringing his “queer thought-world” gradually into contact with “a world of motion and men” leads him “slowly to feel almost for the first time the Veil that lay between him and the white world.” Having heard whispers of singularity and the new attunements it makes available, Jones becomes privy to the sort of unvoiced assumptions someone like Henderson knew all along and took for granted. Coming at these reservations from a different angle, he experiences them as the limits they are rather than the entitlements they purport to be. As Du Bois puts it, “he first noticed now the oppression that had not seemed oppression before, differences that erstwhile seemed natural, restraints and slights that in his boyhood days had gone unnoticed or been greeted with a laugh.” In consequence of this new knowingness—in essence, an intensification of affect—Jones “found himself shrinking from the choked and narrow life of his native town,” even though he fully intends to return.³⁴ He wrestles with the suspicion that neither half of his segregated home may be receptive to what he has to teach them. He therefore jumps at the opportunity to join his school’s vocal quartet and tour the North singing spirituals the summer after his graduation, a brief reprieve before undertaking demanding work. Even during this vacation, however, Jones is reminded that the interwoven pursuits of knowledge and pleasure are, for “a would-be black *savant*” like him, darkened by the

constant threat of danger. The past still hangs over the new world he yearns to freely explore as long as the edification of blackness is assumed to cause only suffering—that is, as long as the joy it entails is banned by an obsolete yet intransigent “social” order.

On “a bright September afternoon” near the end of his pilgrimage, Jones finds himself with a free afternoon to explore New York City, his group’s current stop. He gets caught up in the dazzling crowd he meets upon entering public space. Whimsically following “a tall, light-haired young man and a little talkative lady,” he unintentionally finds himself at a ticket office and buys a ticket, entering a theater to witness what turns out to be a performance of Wagner’s *Lohengrin*. In his somewhat dazzled condition, Jones ends up in front of the couple he had followed as they make their way to their seats, his slow pace holding up their progress. The male member of the couple is irritated by the hold-up, and simultaneously “flushed at the roots of his hair” and “grew pale with anger” (undergoing a coloring that both asserts and hides itself) when he discovers that “there directly beside his reserved orchestra chairs sat the Negro he had stumbled over on the hallway.” He complains to the management, and petulantly takes his seat, as the woman who accompanies him “deftly changed the subject.” Earlier she had cautioned him “to not lynch the colored gentleman simply because he’s in your way,” to which her “fair-haired escort” had, with “a shade of annoyance” and “half impatiently,” responded that Northerners like her misunderstood Southerners like himself, that “despite all your professions, one never sees in the North so cordial and intimate relations between white and black as are everyday occurrences with us.” He is led to reminisce about his childhood friendship with “a little Negro named after me” but abruptly stops short (“surely no two,—*well!*”) when he almost commits the impropriety of owing up to the

sincerity involved in this always already compromised intimacy. Consequently, he fails to connect the “little Negro named after me” who populates his past with “the Negro he had stumbled over” who haunts his present. Jones, for his own part, is too absorbed in the immersive “dreamland” surrounding him to notice this small drama of manners.³⁵ The woman at the sidelines of this opening act is soon placed right in the middle, sitting between the two estranged but unknowingly connected men.

The lights fall. The curtain rises. Nevertheless, Jones is still taken unawares “when, after a hush, rose high and clear the music,” which “lingered and swept through every muscle of his frame, and put it all a-tune.” (Du Bois here is both moving his narrative along and modeling the sort of response he expects of his readers, insofar as he seeks to emulate in writing the effects of musicality.) Swept up in sound, Jones “closed his eyes and grasped the elbows of the chair, touching unwittingly the lady’s arm,” who in turn “drew away.” Her date for the afternoon also notices this illicit contact. In part, the tension here has to do with what Sandra Gunning has identified as the “translation of the freedman’s impulse toward democracy”—here the longing for the freedom to enjoy operatic virtuosity—“into ultimately a threat against the most personal, most sacred aspect of white life”: its, riffing off Ann Du Cille, “coupling conventions.” Involved as well, however, is the fact that the sort of embodied responsivity elicited by an enactive art and exercised by Jones in this scene does indeed violate norms of sentimentality, and thereby threatens to compromise the “virtue” that such moralism endows whiteness with, especially in its feminized forms. The touch is made “unwittingly,” but there is no denying that it occurs. Aesthetic engagement is illegitimate, a fact underlined when the narrator has Jones wonder why his fellow audience members seem so “listless and idle.”

They have been ingrained with the discipline of “impartial” spectatordom, while he alone remains open to being immersed in the music. This not only marks him as deviant, but leaves him unprepared when the intermission comes and with it an usher sent to escort Jones out of the theater, in response to the complaint by the man sitting two seats away from him. Jones complies without a fuss. As he rises from his seat the two men lock eyes for the first time and recognize each other. Our protagonist is shaken and hurries out, forgetting to collect the proffered refund of the price of admission or register the manager’s assurance that he “indeed felt the matter keenly.” Jones leaves convinced that his belief that he could freely enjoy the wonders of urban modernity makes him “a natural-born fool” and immediately writes a letter to his mother and sister announcing his imminent return home.³⁶

His afternoon at the opera, however, proves to be but a euphemistic foreshadowing of what is to come, sexual transgression a red herring to draw attention away from the real worry: the edification of blackness and the possibility of having to learn from it. The question is not so much whether you want your sister to go “black,” but rather how far “society” “dare let the Negro”—and, consequently, his “white” neighbor as well—“be a modern man.” Met with confusion, incomprehension, and finally “scorn and scathing denunciation” from the elders among the darker half of his people, Jones is initially crestfallen. Buoyed by the understanding, admiration, and desire for emulation evinced by his younger sister, Jennie, he gathers the courage to petition “the Judge”—Henderson’s father, Jones’s sibling’s employer, and apparently the foremost authority in Altamaha—“for the privilege of teaching the Negro school.” He is met with quintessential ambivalence. After putting Jones in his place by turning him away from

the front door and making him use the servant's entrance, "the Judge"—after some delay—hails him and "plunged squarely into the business":

"You've come for the school, I suppose. Well, John, I want to speak to you plainly. You know I'm a friend to your people. I've helped you and your family, and would have done more if you had n't got the notion of going off. Now I like the colored people, and sympathize with all their reasonable aspirations; but you and I both know, John, that in this country the Negro must remain subordinate, and can never expect to be the equal of white men."³⁷

Plainness reveals itself to be crooked, as sympathy is shown to be regulated by a "reasonableness" that "white men" have only to nominally abide by insofar as they are assumed to be endowed with it from the outset, and that "the Negro" can apparently never attain because they actually have to submit themselves to it in order to ensure their survival. The "aspirations" of would-be "black men" have to be limited not only to ensure their continued subordination but to prevent the eventuality that "white men" will learn something from them. At the intersection of racism and sentimentality, to hinder is to "help" and what "white men" and "the Negro" are supposed to "both know" is a positive fact only insofar as normative moralism is assumed to be in force. "Knowledge" is restricted to that which follows from preconceived notions.

Only by trying to wrap our minds around this torturous logic/logic of torture can we make sense of what "the Judge" next says to Jones:

In their place, your people can be honest and respectful; and God knows, I'll do what I can to help them. But when they want to reverse nature, and rule white men, and marry white women, and sit in my parlor, then, by God! we'll hold them under if we have to lynch every Nigger in the land.

Any alteration in interpersonal relations is understood as a complete overturning of the dominant "social" order. The emancipation of blackness is consequently understood to "reverse nature" rather than constitute the latest phase in an ongoing process of *naturing*.

A non-negotiable attachment to whiteness as “virtue” and the entitlements it “naturalizes” leads inexorably to the proposal of genocide. The exposition of “reasonableness” so easily transitioning into an outburst of extreme “passion,” revitalized sociality is reduced to degraded sexuality. The broaching of the erotic—broadly understood as the realm of affect—is met with the threat of violence because it promises to shake up “society.” And in this circumstance, “reasonableness” and “passion” are in effect the same thing: an indication of the short-circuiting of “sentiment,” the exhaustion of “sympathy.” The resistance to the potential of affective resonance is so strong as to turn assistance into murder in the blink of an eye. It is under this strain that “the Judge” demands that Jones “accept the situation and teach the darkies to be faithful servants and laborers.” He attempts to use Jones’s manufactured illegitimacy as leverage, appealing to him to follow in the footsteps of a denigrated paternity: “I knew your father, John, he belonged to my brother, and he was a good Nigger.” This is the first and only time Jones’s father is mentioned. He otherwise fails to register as a significant presence, an indication of how much of himself Du Bois puts into this character, his own father having absented himself before his son turned two. “The Judge” seems to overestimate the influence this paternal example will have over Jones, and thus his appeal to illegitimacy backfires. Jones does indeed agree “to accept the situation,” but this is an instance of insistence rather than repetition. The “situation” as he voices it is different from that which comes out of the mouth of “the Judge.” Jones cannot help but be parodic even when making a sincere effort to follow the rules because he has cultivated singularity and thus outgrown the “mutual understanding” his interrogator assumes is still in effect. In spite of his best intentions Jones “found it so hard and strange to fit his old surroundings again, to find his

place in the world about him.”³⁸ And it is only in a world in which this illegitimacy can be embraced as a distinctive aesthetic stance with ethical and political upshots that Jones can survive. This is the world that Du Bois seeks to realize for himself and other real-world black artists and intellectuals, if not for this particular fictional exemplar.

By virtue of what turns out to be a misunderstanding, Jones is allowed to teach. His example would have proved instructive for “the Judge” as well as his pupils, if Altamaha allowed itself to actually hear what he had to say. For, in the meantime, Henderson has returned to town and is feeling similarly “misplaced.” Upon his son’s homecoming, “the Judge” is “proud” of Henderson’s cultivation of instilled privilege, believing that his son has come back to follow in his footsteps. But “the younger man could not and did not veil his contempt for the little town and plainly had his heart set on New York.”

Henderson needs a broader stage, a higher vantage from which it is easier to overlook those “black men” who he believes can only be “stumbled over” and as such call to be removed. Just like his father, Henderson attempts to face the challenges of modernity by (mis)figuring it according to the dictates of the archaic. He is merely attempting to do so on a larger scale. Where “the Judge” seeks to pump new blood into a regional slaveocracy, his son aspires to enforce a nationwide white supremacy with its sights set on a new, American imperialism. (This is, of course, what Du Bois’s enactment of antiracist globality is meant to derail.) The expectations of his father stand in his way as much as the ambitions of a “would-be black *savant*” like Jones. Thus, as the two rapidly become reacquainted, “the argument often waxed hot between them.”³⁹

The conflict comes to a head in the following exchange:

“Good heavens, father,” the younger man would say after dinner, as he lighted a cigar and stood by the fireplace, “you surely don’t expect a

young fellow like me to settle down permanently in this—this God forgotten town with nothing but mud and Negroes?” “*I did,*” the Judge would answer laconically; and on this particular day it seemed from the gathering scowl that he was about to add something more emphatic, but neighbors had already begun to drop in to admire his son, and the conversation drifted.

The Judge is prevented from voicing his disappointment about his son refusing his example. “Society” intrudes upon the “decent domesticity” it is supposed to protect. Polite discourse gets in the way of resolving the clash of “sentiment” and “passion,” as one neighbor interjects a particularly juicy piece of gossip: that Jones “is livenin’ things up at the darky school” with “his almighty air and upish ways.” “The Judge” inquires whether his guest has “heard him say anything out of the way” and is met with the reply: “I don’t need to heah: a Nigger what won’t say ‘sir’ to a white man, or—” Oddly, then, conventions of Southern manners serve to silence both Jones and “the Judge.” The neighbor breaks off his complaint because Henderson jumps in to inquire exactly who this “dangerous Nigger” is, and he “flushed angrily” upon finding out that it is the self-same “darky that tried to force himself into a seat beside the lady I was escorting.” By this point, however, his father “waited to hear no more.” “He had been nettled all day, and now at this he rose with a half-smothered oath, took his hat and cane, and walked straight to the schoolhouse.” The transgressions of the two Johns are conflated in the mind of “the Judge,” and Jones is about to become accountable not only for the fear he provoked but also for the indignity that Henderson has inflicted. Thus, after “a long, hard pull to get things started in the rickety old shanty that sheltered his school”—just when he “seemed to see at last some glimmering of dawn”—our protagonist has his lesson interrupted by “the red, angry face of the Judge.” The latter declares the school closed and orders the children to “go home and get to work,” declaring that the town’s elite “are

not spending their money”—that is, the child labor they could otherwise be extracting—
“on black folks to have their heads crammed with impudence and lies,” the existence of
which remain unsubstantiated and indeterminate—and just that much more frightening.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, Henderson “wandered aimlessly about after his father’s abrupt
departure,” by chance coming across an opportunity to ease his boredom and exact
vengeance for his discontent. In the woods that border his father’s property he comes
across Jennie and forces himself on her. Jones, making his own way home through the
same woodland, absorbed in his own worries and discouragement, is brought back to his
surroundings by a “frightened cry” and is met with the vision of “his dark sister
struggling in the arms of a tall and fair-haired man.” He does what any “sentimental” and
“sympathetic” brother would do at the mere threat of his sister being sexually assaulted:
grabbing what is at hand (in this case “a fallen limb”) and defending her. Given the
“pent-up hatred of his great black arm,” he inadvertently kills Henderson. One is left
wondering if he would have done so had his broader hopes not been so cruelly dashed.
One is left wondering, as well, if Henderson would have put himself in such a
compromising position had not his own ambitions been inhibited as well. These
questions, though, are mooted by the torturous logic/logic of torture constituting the
governmentality of the slave South. “The Judge” rounds up a posse and lynches Jones,
who is waiting for them at the scene of the “crime.” Thus, Du Bois graphically illustrates
how, as Mizruchi writes, “the ritual sacrifice of strangers” serves as the “monstrous
fulfillment of the sympathy crisis: a frenzied unification of White sentiment, a
segregated, incestuous sympathy gone wild.”⁴¹

He also shows that whiteness pays as big a price for perpetuating this regime of sympathetic sentimentality as blackness does. Confronted with “that haggard white-haired man” that “the Judge” has been reduced to, Jones does not rage, does not run, but in a demonstration of affective resonance despite his dire situation “pitied him.” This act of earth-bound grace is made possible by a final exercise of the aesthetic illegitimacy. In response to the call of “the noise of horses galloping, galloping on,” Jones finds himself “softly humming” along with a “strange melody”: the bridal chorus from *Lohengrin*.⁴² This citation is illegitimate in multiple ways. First of all, this part of the opera comes from the beginning of the third act, which most likely would have been performed after Jones had been forced to leave the theater. More importantly, he effects a slight change in the lyric he riffs on. Jones sings, “Joyfully guided, draw near.” In the original, however, the first word is “Faithfully.” In the ultimate expression of singularity, Jones denies the injunction to “teach the darkies to be faithful servants and laborers” and demands that the longings of “black men” be respected by being emulated. If his fictional murderers do not hear him, those who read his tale do. Du Bois’s story leaves us with the question of exactly how “sympathy” led to this state of affairs. The answer has to do both with the historical conditions shaping postbellum America and with some of the most fundamental assumptions of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

Teutonic Plague

The discovery of personal whiteness among the world’s peoples is a very modern thing,—a nineteenth and twentieth century matter, indeed. The ancient world would have laughed at such a distinction. The Middle Age regarded skin color with mild curiosity; and even up into the eighteenth century we were hammering our national manikins into one great, Universal Man, with fine frenzy which ignored color and race even more

than birth. Today we have changed all that, and the world in a sudden, emotional conversion has discovered that it is white and by that token, wonderful!

■ W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Souls of White Folk”

In a rather infamous passage from *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson argues that “Negroes” are static and opaque entities. He complains of “that eternal monotony, which reigns in their countenances, that immovable black veil which covers all the emotions of the other race.” Here, as in Page, blackness is disfigured as the simultaneous absence (irreducibility to overconventionalized “sentiment”) and presence (ultimately undeniable embodiment of autonomous affect/affect of autonomy) of feeling. In the opening pages of *Souls*, Du Bois takes up this Jeffersonian disfiguration to cast doubt upon the provenance of the “veil,” implying that in the end it is actually a projection of whiteness, always already in motion. He makes plain that what are taken to be deep differences are in fact merely superficial. This makes their positing, however, more rather than less harmful. “I remember well when the shadow swept across me,” he writes. As a prepubescent initiation into courtship rituals, the children at the public school Du Bois attended played a game in which they exchanged visiting cards. “The exchange was merry,” Du Bois notes, “till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card,—refused it peremptorily, with a glance. Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil.”⁴³

That a “newcomer” can so easily push a long-time resident out of the “society” he had up until then felt to securely belong to and the unexpected quickness with which her gaze effects rejection underscores the degree to which the presumption of being

“impartial” is a refraction of partiality rather than its inverse. Through the intrusion of “polite society,” Du Bois is made the object of an ocularcentric spectatordom that simultaneously alienates and lays claim to him. According to Victor Wolfenstein, this “*situation of insult and injury both personal and racial*” forms the “affective and aesthetic core” both of *Souls*. It gives rise to a condition “where the freedom of self-expression can be enjoyed” only after “the renunciation of the desire to be at home in the world of ordinary human intercourse and sympathy.” The intertwining of alienation and “property” claims that Du Bois’s parody of sentimentality would dismantle, liberating estrangement as a positive potential for illegitimacy and dispossession, is apparent in Jefferson’s *Notes*. Shortly after positing the “immovable veil of black,” he seems to imply that it “covers all the emotions of the other race” only through a concerted demobilization undertaken by the “impartial spectator.” Under the influence of emancipated blackness “the imagination is wild and extravagant, escapes incessantly from every restraint of reason and taste.” But the imposition of “reasonableness” that Jefferson would prescribe as an antidote to this imaginative unruliness is nothing other than “a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions”⁴⁴ The stress of an illicit recognition of the singularity of blackness compromises a regime that seeks to preserve the “virtue” of whiteness. The effort to ward off the incipient resonance blackness’s affective intensity elicits enlists the assistance of an ocularcentric occlusion. The barrier erected here is a contrivance of the “impartial spectator” rather than an inherent “property” of those rendered a “spectacle.” This “veil of blackness,” made “immovable,” is consequently invested with more significance and indelibility than a superficial and contingent feature warrants, framed as indicative of “deeper” differences that are

assumed to necessitate inequalities. This investment is able to be made only by overlooking the movement that instituted its beneficiary in the first place.

The “veil” that figures so significantly in both Jefferson and Du Bois is foreshadowed in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Smith argues that those labeled “savage”—of which he takes “a negro from the coast of Africa” to be exemplary—are, from the vantage of an “impartial spectator,” “impenetrable” and therefore ineligible for admission into a “civilization” held together by orthodox moralism, a “society” that trades in “sentiment” to ensure “sympathy.” This ineligibility is of their own making because they willfully “conceal the truth.” But it is the prior assumption of overconventionalization on the part of the observer rather than a concerted effort on the part of the observed that leads to the belief that the latter not only “never express themselves by any outward emotion” but are also “possessed” by “concealed” “passions” that are “mounted to the highest pitch of fury.” The status of the “truth” Smith posits remains highly uncertain. We can hear here the same sort of simultaneous projection and obscuration that we heard in Jefferson. The exclusion and exploitation of blackness and the ignorance and insensitivity of whiteness are unforeseen yet inevitable consequences of certain overreachings and shortcomings that form the very foundation of sympathetic sentimentality. For Smith sympathy is the glue that holds “society” together only insofar as it provides the means for evaluating the “propriety” of the actions undertaken by one’s neighbors and—with an additional degree of effort that requires a program of discipline—oneself. By tracing the intricate workings of this spectatorial “impartiality” we can observe exactly how it is that Smith is able to take it for granted that “the emotions of the by-stander always correspond to what, by

bringing the case home to himself, he *imagines should be* the sentiments of the sufferer” (my emphasis).⁴⁵

Brought to the surface here are the fundamental role of imagination in the institution of sympathy and the normative ambitions of overconventionalized “sentiment.” In making this maneuver Smith smuggles in his own unexamined assumptions; for, as David Marshall argues, in his account “sympathy depends upon a theatrical relation between a spectator and a spectacle.” And this “theater of sympathy” is fundamentally structured by an ocularcentrism that deproblematizes the doings of the “impartial spectator” at the cost of inhibiting the imagination from realizing its broadest potential as fully embodied responsiveness. Smith believes that “virtue” is achieved through submission to the protocols of overconventionalized “sentiments.” They are in the end what enables us “to observe in other men a fellow-feeling with *all* the emotions of our own breast” (my emphasis). This totalizing agreement is what motivates and rewards the sacrifices one has to make to assume the role of an “impartial spectator.” It also demonizes and discards difference for the sake of securing a uniform positioning that wards off the flexibility that can be realized through a more mobile positionality. Cramped by assuming a static pose, an actor in Smith’s ocularcentric “theater of sympathy” enters the scene suffering, and thus “longs for that relief which nothing can afford him but the *entire* concord of the affections of the spectator with his own” (my emphasis). Laboring under this imperative of absolutism, however, “he can only hope to obtain this by lowering his passion to that pitch, in which the spectators are capable of going along with him.” “He must flatten, if I may be allowed to say so,” Smith writes, “the sharpness of its natural tone, in order to reduce it to harmony and concert with the emotions of those who

are about him.” In the ocularcentric “society” that Smith is modeling actors can be sympathized with only to the extent that they gain “possession”—through “self-mastery”—of “emotions” that are not actually their own. The open-ended variety of the life of feeling/feeling of life is reduced to a closed set of overconventionalized sentiments that enforce the compulsory muting of affectively intense experience and thus cause pain where there could otherwise be joy. Only thus is the so-called “harmony and concert” promised by sympathetic sentimentality secured. Only thus does Smith feel “allowed to say so.”⁴⁶

On Smith’s account, one gauges the propriety of other’s actions by imagining (more accurately, *imaging*, ocularcentrically) their life of feeling/feeling of life and judging whether one sympathizes with them—that is, whether they are what they “should be”: reducible to overconventionalized “sentiments.” One gauges the propriety of one’s own actions by imaging the imagination of an average member of one’s society, superimposing it upon one’s own awareness of the situation, and judging whether that internalized other would sympathize with one’s motives. As D.D. Raphael writes, an actor in Smith’s ocularcentric theater “has to imagine that he is an uninvolved spectator who in turn imagines himself to be in the position of the involved agent” *and* “ask himself whether the feelings that he imagines he would then experience do or do not correspond to the feelings that he actually experiences now.” Thus is the “impartial spectator” instituted, installed as “the great inmate of the breast.” Such a “feat of imagination doubling back on its tracks,” Raphael opines, “is not impossible but it seems too complicated to be a common experience.” Or, rather, the possibility that the mechanism of the “impartial spectator” aims for ultimately necessitates its undoing,

insofar as Smith's desire for secure unity gets in the way of the duplicitous complications that are inevitable in the undertaking he proposes. Smith wishes to forget that "impartiality" is always already partial, and thus inadvertently suggests that those assumed to be within the bounds of sympathetic sentimentality are relieved of the need to demonstrate their qualifications for inclusion, while those of the margins of this "society" have to make the case for their continued presence and thereby cannot be embraced—indeed, may need to be removed. By parodying what Smith would play straight, Du Bois not only brings these difficulties to the surface but rehabilitates spectatorial "impartiality" as "double-consciousness," thus refiguring critical engagement as entailing alienation and intimacy rather than detachment and possession. This is, indeed, "a strange experience." But this does not imply that everyone could not potentially partake of it. One endowed with double-consciousness embodies "a problem" insofar as he is immersed in "a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world."⁴⁷ One must keep in mind the dual-voicedness of Du Bois's parody to hear how this familiarity with estrangement opens out into singularity's endogenous plurality. Doubling leads to a tripling, that gives rise to a quadrupling . . . and so on—exactly through the disruption of so-called "self-consciousness." Involved here is not the denial of truth, but rather its reclamation and reactivation.

Resistance to this vast undertaking is registered by the fact that, as Du Bois plots it in the epigraph heading this section, a widespread "discovery of personal whiteness" followed immediately upon the fruition of "human sympathy." If we read Du Bois parodically, he can be heard to suggest that the finely frenzied ignorance that was practiced in eighteenth century Europe and came into maturity in nineteenth century

America involved not keeping an open mind when it came to matters of “color and race” but rather making tacit assumptions about this issue, prejudices couched like explosives at the base of a building set to be demolished, eventuating in what Du Bois calls “a sudden, emotional conversion.” This eruption of whiteness—which is also a disfiguration of blackness—was predestined by normative sentimentality. By the time he was finishing *Souls*—drafting “The Sorrow Songs,” its last chapter—the extent to which “white” Americans still clung to “impartial” spectatordom and were therefore resistant to “double-consciousness” left him with no other option than to bluntly confront “a headstrong, careless people” with the pointedly rhetorical question: “Your country? How came it yours?”⁴⁸ The phantom answer: “white” people have the United States because, to a large extent, “black” people made it for them. Everyone is borrowing, especially those who deny it the most.

Emancipated blackness is “the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side the seas,” but those who pale in comparison stubbornly refuse to hear. “It has been neglected, it has been, and is, half despised, and above all it has been persistently mistaken and misunderstood.” “The Passing of the First-Born,” when audited in this context, sounds not only personal grief but political anguish, as the death of Du Bois’s infant son becomes emblematic of this broader fatality. Du Bois narrates the funeral procession through the streets of Atlanta, registers the disrespect and disregard of the longings and strivings of “black men” that reigns especially in circumstances that seem to call for overwhelming sympathy. “The busy city dinned about us,” Du Bois writes, “they did not say much, those pale-faced hurrying men and women; they did not say much,—they only glanced and said, ‘Niggers!’”⁴⁹ These “white” people want to alienate

blackness, keep it in its place and at a distance, ocularcentrically. But, at the same time, they want to lay claim to it *audibly*, so much so that their epithet of choice saturates the atmosphere. They want to profit by it and assume an insulting familiarity with it that forever threatens to pass over into fully embodied responsiveness and thereby overturn itself. In Du Bois, this sort of, to riff on Eric Lott, “love and theft” is evident most plainly in the Anglo-American reception of the “sorrow songs.” It is on the ground of the spirituals that he stakes his strongest case for emancipated blackness, as well as for the aesthetics of illegitimacy and politics of dispossession it opens up.

Sounding Joy

It was the Supreme Adventure, in the last Great Battle of the West, for that of human freedom which would release the human spirit from lower lust for mere meat, and set it free to dream and sing. . . . And then some unjust God leaned, laughing, over the ramparts of heaven and dropped a black man in the midst. . . . It transformed the world. It turned democracy back to Roman Imperialism and Fascism; it restored caste and oligarchy; it replaced freedom with slavery and withdrew the name of humanity from the vast majority of human beings. . . . But not without struggle. Not without writhing and rending of spirit and pitiable wail of lost souls. . . . A great song arose, the loveliest thing born this side of the seas. . . . It was a new song and its deep and plaintive beauty, its great cadences and wild appeal wailed, throbbed and thundered on the world’s ears with a message seldom voiced by man. It swelled and blossomed like incense, improvised and born anew out of an age long past, and weaving into its texture the old and new melodies in word and in thought.

■ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*

I have seen and known several persons who have been exercised with *falling down, jumping up, clapping of hands, and screaming*, all in a manner to disturb the whole congregation, who could habitually when at home, live careless and sometimes trifling lives. They appeared to make religion *a business of passion and emotion*, and studied *most* to acquire *occasional frames and feelings*. . . . We have too, a growing evil, in the

practice of singing in our places of public and society worship, *merry* airs, adapted from old *songs*, to hymns of our composing: often miserable as poetry, and senseless as matter, and most frequently composed and first sung by the illiterate *blacks* of the society. Thus instead of inculcating sober christianity in them who have least wisdom to govern themselves; lifting them into spiritual pride and to an undue estimation of their usefulness[.] Here ought to be considered too, a more exceptionable error, which has the tolerance at least of the rulers of our camp meetings. In the *blacks'* quarter, the coloured people get together, and sing for hours together, short scraps of disjointed affirmations, pledges, or prayers, lengthened out with long repetition *choruses*.

■ John Fanning Watson, *Methodist Error*

Shortly after Du Bois composed the journal entry that heads this chapter he experienced firsthand what he renders in a third-person narrative forty years later in the passage from *Black Reconstruction* that opens this section. In “The Shadow of Years,” the first essay in *Darkwater*, he builds up to the earlier occurrence by way of conveying the atmosphere within which he discovered and cultivated the hopes propelling the celebratory dedication to what would become his life’s work. Du Bois’s twenty-fifth birthday occurred while he was pursuing graduate studies in Europe. During this transatlantic sojourn, the world opened up for him: hints of an antiracist globality flickered on his horizon:

On mountain and valley, in home and school, I met men and women as I had never met them before. Slowly they became, not white folks, but folks. The unity beneath all life clutched me. I was not less fanatically a Negro, but “Negro” meant a greater, broader sense of humanity and world-fellowship. I felt myself standing, not against the world, but simply against American narrowness and color prejudice, with the greater, finer world at my back urging me on.

But when the fellowship that was financing his European education ran out, he was forced to return home to “Days of Disillusion”: “I dreamed and loved and wandered and sang; then, after two long years, I dropped suddenly back into ‘nigger’-hating

America.”⁵⁰ In our considerations of double-consciousness, we usually think of it as something momentary: a flash of insight, a flinch against surroundings that have suddenly become predatory. The juxtaposition of these two passages, however, illustrates a case in which double-consciousness is a matter of facing an insistent situation that recurs irregularly over the course of a lifetime. It is only through bridging the temporal expanse, superimposing the end of the passage from *Darkwater* and the beginning of that from *Black Reconstruction*, that the dual phrasing of Du Bois’s parody sounds to its fullest. By making this connection, we observe how the gesture towards universality made by a counter-racist raciality is too easily assimilated and consequently defused by “*the Universal*.” It is also made plain, however, that the problem at hand is not so much the presence of an enthusiastic blackness upon the American scene, but rather the way it is disfigured by a racist “society.” These overconventionalizations get in the way of “Negroes” transforming themselves into “black men,” but at the same time they offer a point of friction against which the momentum for making this very move can be generated. This is the work that the “sorrow songs” do: registering, with spirit, the pain inflicted by “*the Universal*”; joyously mending a rent universality; sounding a counter-racist raciality through the cracks of a calcified white supremacy.

Just as the career of double-consciousness is often truncated, so too is that of the music that it gives rise to and is inspired by. The spirituals are for the most part considered solely via their modified concert renditions and the transcriptions on which they were based. Consequently, as Albert Raboteau argues, the “sorrow songs” are often reduced to merely “words and notes printed on a page.” When Du Bois implies, in the passage from *Black Reconstruction* cited above, that the spirituals mark the inception of

African American agency, he suggests that they sound strains deeper than those foregrounded around the time he was writing *Souls*. In order to pick up the Ellisonian “lower frequencies” of the “sorrow songs,” attentive listeners need to, as Raboteau writes, “imagine them as performed” in contexts other than the formal concert setting instituted by the Western classical tradition. One of these would obviously be the black church, which Du Bois got a taste of while he was teaching in rural Tennessee. Further, in sampling this music within the context of African American worship, Du Bois subliminally picked up on certain intangible traces of earlier settings that shaped the black spirituality of his time. These faint echoes take us back to the turn of the 19th century to revisit the massive, miscegenated happenings orchestrated by heterodox evangelical sects—particularly the Methodists—on the margins of the South: “camp meetings.” In a move that prefigures the way James paradoxically secularizes religion by defining it in terms of cultivating “*the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men*” rather than instituting churches or adhering to dogma, these multi-day outdoor festivals were enacted in order to open an ever-widening circle of individuals to certain affectively intense experiences.⁵¹ “Camp meetings” provided an escape—all the more precious and powerful for being transitory and interstitial—from the overconventions of slave “society.” African Americans not only participated in these gatherings but were among their leaders. Through a motley ensemble of syncretic artistic practices—singing, dancing, exhortation, enthusiasm, ecstasy—that fall under the figure of the “ring shout,” emancipated blackness was embodied as an enjoyment of freedom/freedom to enjoy (all the more poignant for being achieved under conditions of enslavement), offering participants of European descent a model for reaching towards the altered states that were

the *raison d'être* of “camp meetings.” Here we can witness an early instance of people conventionally labeled “white” willingly, self-consciously, jubilantly learning from African Americans. We can also hear how blackness sounds itself out not as the property of a group of people conventionally labeled “black” but rather through ongoing processes of interaction and borrowing among multiple groups from a variety of backgrounds. Thus, an aesthetics of illegitimacy sows the seeds of a politics of dispossession. Most telling for our purposes, however, it was through the immersive enactment of the “ring shout” at “camp meetings” that the spirituals were first cobbled together and began to be broadcast. Within this context, not only singing but listening involved the mobilization of fully embodied responsivity.

When Du Bois cites the spirituals, it is this performative ambiance that he seeks to draw his readers into. A couple of barriers, however, stood in his way. First, by the time Du Bois was writing, the particular pocket of liminality opened at the intersection of “camp meetings” and “ring shout” had long been closed. By the 1820s, as presaged by the passage from Watson above, published in the last year of the 'teens, evangelicals—especially Methodists, who would soon be practicing the most popular form of Protestantism in America—were making the move from sect to denomination, abandoning dissent and seeking “respectability.” In part, this meant making compromises with the regime of overconvention that governed the slave South. The focus of their practice shifted from affect and experience to institution and orthodox doctrine, and they began distancing themselves from the things that previously went on at “camp meetings.” This meant, in particular, disappearing the “ring shout” from the stage. As we can hear in the words of Watson, a concerted effort was made to alienate the

blackness that not so long ago had been at the heart of Methodist vernacular. Those qualities associated with it—spirited embodiment, an enactive approach to expression, improvised musicality, mobilizations of language in which the written or printed word was peripheral—were made taboo. What is more, Watson put his finger forcefully upon what he believed to be the most “exceptionable” Methodist error: allowing African Americans a venue in which to cooperatively work out techniques of expressive autonomy. By Du Bois’s own postbellum moment, the singing of spirituals had found a way to work its way through this dense cloud of censorship but it had in large part done so by downplaying the wildness of its appeal. This dulled voicing was exactly what its predominantly “white” audience craved. It was such attempts to simultaneously alienate *and* lay claim to blackness that triggered Du Bois’s double-consciousness, set it vibrating at such a pitch that his own attempt to properly modulate what he had to say was shaken up by his consternation at the insolubility of his “strange experience” of “being a problem.”⁵²

In “Of Beauty and Death,” the last essay in *Darkwater*, Du Bois responds to the accusation of at least one “pale friend” that he overreacts to this stubborn conundrum, that he is “too sensitive.” “I admit,” he writes, “I am—sensitive. I am artificial.” The hyphen here serves both to insist upon Du Bois’s existence as a problem that cannot be neatly swept away and to imply that “sensitivity” is not quite the right word for what it feels like to labor under these constraints. It will do, for now. But only by being immediately qualified as being “artificial.” The artificiality of Du Bois’s cultivated sensitivity is a consequence of its departure from the *naturalization* of overconventionalized sentiment. It is an assertion of the ongoing *naturing* that is

autonomous affect/affect of autonomy. Artificial sensitivity is singularity living under the stress and strain of everyday racism. Du Bois attempts to give his interlocutor a sense of what this is like by providing a catalog of insults and injuries in the form of “a day in the life,” only to be faced with the charge of once again exaggerating. In his own defense, Du Bois tries to key his audience into the fact that insofar as these acts of violence are racialized, their reality is virtual as well as actual. And the very real impact of their virtuality, encoded in the cadence of the passage below, should not be underestimated:

They do happen. Not all each day,—surely not. But now and then—now seldom, now, sudden; now after a week, now in a chain of awful minutes; not everywhere, but anywhere—in Boston, in Atlanta. That’s the hell of it. Imagine spending your life looking for insults or for hiding places from them—shrinking (instinctively and despite desperate bolsterings of courage) from blows that are not always but ever; not each day, but each week, each month, each year.

Du Bois responds to this dilemma by making the virtual reality generated through racialization his own. Artificial sensitivity opens out into counter-racist raciality. The emancipated blackness that Du Bois works with is a repertoire of affective techniques, a matter of both inborn capacity and cultivated aptitude. According to his account in *Dusk of Dawn*, he was raised like any other child growing up in New England. Thus, “racial feeling was then purely a matter of my own later learning and reaction.” Because this artificial sensitivity tapped autonomous affect/affect of autonomy, however, “it was nonetheless real and a large determinant of my life and character.” The virtual reality of this raciality made it something Du Bois could “feel better than explain.” Being a “Negro”—especially one who is attempting to become a “black man”—involves “an intensity of feeling” that is “difficult, strangely difficult, to translate . . . into words.”

“Nevertheless,” Du Bois insists, “as the feeling is deep the greater the impelling force to seek to express it.”⁵³

The spirituals were a key component in the education that set the stage for his program of counter-racist raciality. It was by infusing their music into his writing that he was able to begin articulating this project, engaging the existential problematic of expressing singularity in order to trigger the staggered enaction of affective resonance. Through this means Du Bois sought not only to persuade his “white” audience to learn from blackness, but also to make themselves open to the possibility of embodying it themselves. He sought to broadcast his aesthetics of illegitimacy and politics of dispossession by eliciting ethical attunement. Du Bois’s “later learning” of the affective techniques of blackness can be considered to have begun when, while he was in high school, a concert was given in the provincial Massachusetts town where he grew up by a group of spiritual singers. “I was thrilled and moved to tears and seemed to recognize something inherently and deeply my own,” he writes. At the same time, he was aware that this initial exposure to “Negro folksong” was “second hand.” After moving on to Fisk, he was able to make more intimate contact with the “sorrow songs” during “a Southern Negro revival” he attended in rural Tennessee, experiencing an “intense excitement.”⁵⁴ Du Bois attempted to trigger a reenactment of such an immersive experience on the part of his readers by evoking the atmosphere at the intersection of “camp meetings” and “ring shout,” *understood not so much as historical locations and occurrences as an imaginative spacetime*, one suffused with fully embodied responsivity. The tactic he used to thus emulate the effects of music in writing was to render the artifacts taken to be most representative of the spirituals fragmentary. By providing only

a few bars from transcriptions, without the words, at the heading of each essay, Du Bois was prompting his readers to supply what was missing, initiating an enactive literature that would elicit bodily responses through which the ambiance of “camp meetings” and the “ring shout” could be imaginatively invoked. According to Weheliye, Du Bois was able to enact blackness and elicit attunement by using compositional operations similar to those utilized by contemporary DJs. An unstated corollary to this argument is that the experience Du Bois’s contemporaries had with the emergent technology of the phonograph enabled them to interact with his writing in a way that facilitated his desired result. As my own portrait of Du Bois as a hiphop producer before the letter suggests, our own experiences today with a gamut of sound technologies—from multitrack recorders to digital samplers, Walkmen to iPods—grants us an even greater facility for catching on to his model of literature as the staggered enaction of affective resonance. In this sense, listening to and enjoying hiphop—as well as taking the time to understand the way in which it is made—prepares one to read Du Bois in the immersive, embodied, affectively intense manner he sought to stimulate and, by extension, can also provide novel approaches to the respective works of Stein and James.

¹ Alys Eve Weinbaum, “Interracial Romance and Black Internationalism” in Susan Gillman and Weinbaum, eds. *Next to the Color Line: Gender, Sexuality, and W.E.B. Du Bois* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 119. W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007 [1968]), 83.

² William James, “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life” (1891) in *The Will to Believe*, 209.

³ *Making Beats*, 149.

⁴ Michele Elam and Paul Taylor, “Du Bois’s Erotics” in *Next to the Color Line*, 221-222. *Parables for the Virtual*, 35. “Interracial Romance,” 119.

⁵ “Du Bois’s Erotics,” 224. W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (1940) in *W.E.B. Du Bois: Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1986), 751. Claudia Tate “Introduction” in W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dark Princess: A Romance* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1995 [1928]), xxiv; ix. “Du Bois’s Erotics,” 224.

⁶ “Philosophical Conceptions,” 1088; 1096. “Du Bois’s Erotics,” 230. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 865.

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- ⁷ “The Constitution” (1789) in *The Debate on the Constitution, Part One* (New York: Library of America, 1993), 968. “A Declaration by the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress Assembled” (1776) in *Thomas Jefferson: Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1984), 19.
- ⁸ Alexander Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 82-83.
- ⁹ Franz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks* (New York: Grove, 1967 [1952]), 8; 10. W.E.B. Du Bois, “Celebrating his Twenty-Fifth Birthday” (1893) in *Against Racism: Unpublished Essays, Papers, and Addresses, 1887-1961* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985).
- ¹⁰ Pauline Hopkins, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988 [1900]), 287; 300. W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Conservation of Races” (1897) in *Writings*, 817; 820.
- ¹¹ See Laura Wexler, “Tender Violence: Literary Eavesdropping, Domestic Fiction, and Educational Reform,” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 5.1 (1991), 151-187 and Amy Kaplan, “Manifest Domesticity,” *American Literature* 70.3 (September 1998), 581-606.
- ¹² *Souls*, 68.
- ¹³ *Souls*, 68-69.
- ¹⁴ Thomas Nelson Page, “The Old-Time Negro” in *The Negro: The Southerner’s Problem* (New York: Scribner’s, 1904), 165-166. *Souls*, 73; 134.
- ¹⁵ *Souls*, 73; 134; 26.
- ¹⁶ *Souls*, 29; 76; 24; 79.
- ¹⁷ *Souls*, 76; 124.
- ¹⁸ *Souls*, 50-51; 74.
- ¹⁹ *Souls*, 73; 80.
- ²⁰ *Souls*, 8-9.
- ²¹ *Souls*, 8; 81-82.
- ²² Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000 [1985]), 32; 34; 5; 101; 115; xiv.
- ²³ W.E.B. Du Bois, “My Country ’Tis of Thee” (1907) in *Creative Writings* (White Plains: Kraus-Thomson, 1985), 15.
- ²⁴ “My Country,” 15. Eric King Watts, “‘Voice’ and ‘Voicelessness’ in Rhetorical Studies,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 87.2 (May 2001), 190; 180; 188. Big up to Ali Neff, who brought my attention to Watts’s work.
- ²⁵ *Black Skins*, 10. *Souls*, 80.
- ²⁶ *Souls*, 80.
- ²⁷ *Souls*, 80-82. W.E.B. Du Bois, “Criteria of Negro Art” (1926) in *Writings*, 1000. W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Revelation of Saint Orgne the Damned” (1938) in *Writings*, 1060; 1056.
- ²⁸ *Souls*, 82. “Revelation,” 1064; 1051. Thomas Slaughter, “Epidermalizing the World: A Basic Mode of Being Black” in Thomas Harris, ed. *Philosophy Born of Struggle: Anthology of Afro-American Philosophy from 1917* (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, 1983), 285-286.
- ²⁹ *Souls*, 3.
- ³⁰ *Souls*, 9; 156.
- ³¹ Susan Mizruchi, *The Science of Sacrifice: American Literature and Modern Social Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 272. Susan Mizruchi, “Neighbors, Strangers, Corpses: Death and Sympathy in the Early Writings of W.E.B. Du Bois” in Robert Newman, ed. *Centuries’ Ends, Narrative Means* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 191-192. *Souls*, 163-164.
- ³² *Souls*, 167; 171; 170; 177.
- ³³ *Souls*, 166; 169.
- ³⁴ *Souls*, 169.
- ³⁵ *Souls*, 169-170.
- ³⁶ *Souls*, 170-172. Sandra Gunning, *Race, Rape, and Lynching: The Red Record of American Literature, 1890-1912* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 7.
- ³⁷ *Souls*, 174-175. W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Atheneum, 1992 [1935]), 633.
- ³⁸ *Souls*, 175-176.
- ³⁹ *Souls*, 176.

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- ⁴⁰ *Souls*, 176-177.
- ⁴¹ *Souls*, 177-178. *Science of Sacrifice*, 336.
- ⁴² *Souls*, 179.
- ⁴³ *Souls*, 7-8. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787) in *Writings*, 264-265.
- ⁴⁴ *Notes*, 267; 288. Victor Wolfenstein, *A Gift of the Spirit: Reading The Souls of Black Folk* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 1-2; 22.
- ⁴⁵ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976 [1759]), 205-208.
- ⁴⁶ *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 21-22. David Marshall, "Adam Smith and the Theatricality of Moral Sentiments," *Critical Inquiry* 10.4 (June 1984), 608-609.
- ⁴⁷ *Theory of Moral Sentiment*, 134. *Souls*, 7-8. D.D. Raphael, *The Impartial Spectator: Adam Smith's Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 51-52.
- ⁴⁸ *Souls*, 189. W.E.B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (New York: Dover, 1999 [1920]), 17. Thomas Dixon, *The Leopard's Spots: A Romance of the White Man's Burden—1865-1900* (New York: Doubleday, 1902), 162.
- ⁴⁹ *Souls*, 180-181; 153.
- ⁵⁰ *Darkwater*, 9.
- ⁵¹ Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004 [1978]), 243; 245. *Varieties*, 42. See also Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) on the "ring shout." For the cutting edge in "camp meeting" studies, as well as an exhaustive summary of scholarship in the field to date, see William Johnson "'To Dance in the Ring of All Creation': Camp Meeting Revivalism and the Color Line, 1799-1825," (diss., University of California, Riverside, 1997).
- ⁵² *Souls*, 7. John Fanning Watson, *Methodist Error or, Friendly Christian Advice, To those Methodists Who indulge in extravagant emotions and bodily exercises* (Trenton: Fenton, 1819), 30-31.
- ⁵³ *Darkwater*, 130-131. W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Souls of Black Folk," *Independent* 57.2920 (17 November 1904), 1152. *Dusk of Dawn*, 638-639.
- ⁵⁴ *Autobiography*, 67; 75.

Chapter Five

**Conclusion:
yaknowwhati'msayin**

I'm the poetical poltergeist
I heist tracks from the past
and return them to the
present time and rhyme form

what was once dead
is now resurrected
on the record

I'm the PO^e al POL geist
tic ter
I heist TRACKS PAST
from the
and reTURN em to the
time and rhyme
pre sent FORM
what was once dead
is NOW surrected
re
on the rec
ord

■ Pharoahe Monch, “The
Extinction Agenda”

My project is *counterhistorical* in two related ways. It seeks to tell a story that cuts against the grain of the “official” record and it does so by undertaking an engagement with that past motivated by concerns grounded in the present. Listening through the filter of my ethnographic fieldwork in Detroit, I heard James as a hip-hop lyricist before the letter, enacting a sound-drenched performance art that is instrumental, in multiple senses, rather than merely incidental to the effort of conveying his distinctive brand of feelingful thinking. Pragmatism, that is, was as much an art as it was a philosophy. Sounding it as improvisational lyricism foregrounds how fundamental an engagement with the aesthetic

dimension is to its interdependent communicative and speculative ambitions. This comes most prominently to the fore in *Varieties*, where James sought to infuse language with the musicality—that is, the affective intensity—of experience in order to confront the existential problematic of singularity. The central problem that James and his students struggled with was that what one finds most meaningful is also that which is most difficult to communicate, that one sounds the deepest strains of one’s interiority only by coming in the closest possible touch with exteriority. Hip-hop picks up where they left off, utilizing newly developed resources to address this ultimately insoluble conundrum.

The upshot of all this is an appreciation for the way in which James, responsive to the novel contingencies of the modern world and the needs of its inhabitants, paradoxically secularized religion, taking it beyond what it would be if restricted to existing institutions and dogma. This same move is evident in the work of contemporary hip-hop artists. A case in point is Erykah Badu’s “The Healer,” produced by the inestimable Madlib. Constructed as a call-and-response pattern between the titular figure and a singularly plural voicing designated “The Children” (both vocalized by Badu), this song functions both as a psalm for hip-hop and a eulogy for one of its foremost sacred technicians: the late great J Dilla (Madlib’s kindred spirit). Much of what the “The Children” have to say boils down to the insistent chant “*hiphop*” (the italics here indicating that these syllables are sung). They seem to know what they are but seek guidance for their efforts to realize their multifarious potentiality, and “The Healer” attempts to steer them in the right direction. Replying to their signature chanting, he informs them that “*it’s bigger than religion*” and consequently also “*bigger than the government.*” By constituting itself as

an enactive art that elicits fully embodied responsivity, hiphop surfaces a sociality before and beyond any instituted “society,” sounds an ethics of attunement—an ongoing process of working through and with the partialities of affective resonance to redefine communion, communication, and community—that, if realized, would work to overturn existing political regimes. According to the terms of this postreligious spirituality, the superstitious is demystified, shown to be an emergent property of cutting-edge technology. This is evidenced both in the lines from Pharoahe Monch that serve as the epigram for this Conclusion and in Badu’s song. In addition to their “hiphop” chant, as a direct corollary, “The Children” also insist on their continued vitality:

*we ain't
dead said the children
don't believe it
we just made ourselves invisible
...
I told you
we ain't dead yet
we've been living through you internet*

The exemplars of hiphop are “invisible,” but nevertheless exist as an assemblage of affective techniques coursing through a global sound system of iPods and MP3s. “The Children” are both the senders and receivers in this recursive network. Every pronouncement they make is followed by an equally insistent refrain: a sampled “*hungry hungry hungry hungry*.” This music is the source of its own sustenance, both its nourishment and that which builds up its appetite again. The Jamesian paradox, as spun by hiphop, issues in an immersive spacetime for innovative performances of embodiment.

As I intimated at the end of the previous chapter, this zone at the crossroads of affect and experience was broached already at the turn of the nineteenth century by

experimental evangelists operating on the fringes of the antebellum South. As Richard Rabinowitz shows, it is also tapped in the “devotionalist” exercises through which a strain of New England Congregationalism was enacted, which remained vibrant up to the brink of the twentieth century. “Devotionalism offered an escape,” Rabinowitz writes, “a way to attenuate the social pressures of playing one’s assigned role with great scrupulosity without leaving the religious sphere.” It was able to make this departure from convention by “making religious feelings into goals worthy in themselves” and “finding the best technical means for producing such feelings.” Devotionalists, in effect, enacted religion as the capacity for and cultivation of affectively intense experience. This is how they foregrounded and asserted their singularity, a singularity that was endogenously plural insofar as it constituted “a kind of internal ‘society’”—a *sociality* before and beyond any institutionalization of the “social”—through “projecting one’s inner feelings as an extreme otherness,” infusing interiority into exteriority. In short, as Rabinowitz writes, “devotionalists felt that the intensity of their personal experience set them apart from those Christians whose claims resided only in proper behavior.” By calling on the “powerful penetration of intense affections . . . to replace the dull obligations of one’s role in moralist organizations,” devotionalists practiced an ethic according to which “the right thing was more often done in opposition to what others were supposed to think.” In doing so, they made “a step toward empowering the mind to create its own world” that entailed “the newly developed sense of the history of one’s life as a work of art.”¹ They forecasted a radically constructivist epistemology made operational through artistic enaction. In doing so, they provided not only the immediate

background against which James wrote *Varieties*, but instantiated a model that both Stein and Du Bois would seek to emulate and update through their own efforts and careers.

By picking up and expanding on the way James sought to infuse the printed version of his lectures with traces of the oratorical situation through which they were originally delivered, Stein and Du Bois developed a model of literature as the staggered enaction of affective resonance. Engaging the existential problematic of expressing singularity, Stein developed a prototype for a media technology through which affective intensity could be always incompletely restaged across spatial distances and temporal gaps, which Du Bois refined and wheeled out for use by the multitude. In doing so, they choreographed an interaction of self and environment that went beyond the devotionalists. For, as it turns out, the latter remained attached to certain scraps of dogma that prevented them from living up to the examples they set. For them, “a number of dangers lurked in identifying deeply moving experiences with the life of faith.” In particular, and most acutely, by clinging to “the inner self as the only safe refuge from the disappointments of social life,” “the alarming discovery was made that no self was there.” But, as Stein and Du Bois discovered, danger became promising when faith ceased being a matter of allegiance to a celestial power placed at an infinite distance and became instead participation in the worldly ambiance of immersive creativity. Through this unleashing of fully embodied responsivity, the self becomes less a static entity than a dynamic process. And thereby an “alarming discovery” becomes an exciting possibility. For, if allowed to play itself out to its fullest, affectively intense experience shows, as Abraham Maslow argues, “that precisely those persons who have the clearest and strongest identity are exactly the ones who are most able to transcend the ego or the self and to become selfless.” This is not the

nihilation of self but rather its expansion. It does not disappear so much as become diaphanous. As Mihaly Csikszentmihaly illustrates, a person who immerses herself in the embodiment of an enactive art “no longer feels like a separate individual, yet her self becomes stronger.” She “grows beyond the limits of her individuality by investing psychic energy in a system in which she is included.” By engaging the existential problematic of expressing singularity, coupling interiority with exteriority in order to communicate what is most intricately meaningful and thus least simply communicable, “the self emerges at a higher level of complexity.”² These are things Stein and Du Bois realized as they repurposed a paradoxically secularized religion into a postreligious spirituality that would be most fully realized by those who would follow in their footsteps. In making this move, they each made themselves emblematic of a stream of experimental endeavor feeding into hiphop and thereby facilitating its channeling of a Jamesian aesthetics of constructive dissonance, or illegitimacy: mixed-media poetics and the art of blackness.

It is only after this long review that I realize that I have been concerned with the existential problematic of expressing singularity, affectively intense experience, the staggered enaction of affective resonance, and the ethics of attunement from the very beginning. This constellation came together through my aesthetic engagement with hiphop. My consideration of James, Stein, and Du Bois came later and served as a means of unfolding this knot of thematic density, developing an improvisationally lyrical phraseology of my own, enabling a more nuanced account of “the interaction between personal development and artistic achievement” with which I began. Of particular importance in making this move from music to literature, from the methods of musicians

to the way I myself went about doing scholarship, were my interactions with my ethnographic consultants around the issue of freestylin, hiphop's take on improvisational lyricism. Pertinent here are not only face-to-face encounters like the interview I conducted with the Breakfast Club, but—perhaps even more so—my listening to the sound recording of this interview and my efforts to satisfactorily transcribe it. Let me immerse you in the moment: I unplug my headphones from the sampler that sits on my desk next to my laptop. I plug them into my portable tape recorder and begin listening to the recording of our talking, thumb on the speed-control dial to slow down the tape at crucial moments, to open up the words and stretch out their sounds. My concern is not merely to understand (or remember, since it all made perfect sense to me at the time) what Lacks, Tone, El, and I were saying. More to the point, I am trying to develop a way to visually echo the sounds of these words and in doing so be true to the experience of the interview, retain the sense of that time. Throughout this recomposition I am guided by “yaknowwhati'msayin,” and in the process I become aware that this phrase is the sound I am trying to resound in concentrated form, stretching out and winding its way through all the words. Somehow the visual fixity of my writing has to reverberate with the movement of this sound, capture it without reducing it to simply a straight line.

As the linguist Dwight Bolinger notes, the “stream of sound that issues from the human voice box can be cut up into many kinds of segments, some of which everyone knows or thinks he knows.” He cites sentences, clauses, and syllables as examples. “But running through this fabric of organized sound,” he writes, “is a master thread that holds it all together and by its weavings up and down and in and out shows the design as a whole.”³ This is particularly true, I would argue, of hiphop lyricism, especially as it is

composed through freestylin. For the most part hip-hop lyrics have been analyzed in terms of their literal or figurative word content. Some attention has been paid to the rhythmic and percussive flow of the words. In short, in approaching lyrics scholars have started with words and only afterwards, if at all, considered sound. To a large extent this orientation is the result of assessing meaning on the basis of hasty transcriptions and therefore overlooking the processes through which lyrics are made. Through my ethnographic research I found that MCs often, especially when they are improvising, start with sounds rather than words. Or, better, they treat words like sounds from the beginning, infusing music into language and thereby reorganizing its standard patterns. This discovery has led me to insist that rather than content or flow, what I call style is the most meaningful element of hip-hop lyricism. Style, in short, is a way of working through a mix of tune and timbre to make use of, coordinate, and transform the resources of content and flow. Content and flow are important, but without style they lose that aspect of meaning that is most fundamental to the art of hip-hop lyricism.

Thus, I would say that hip-hop lyricism renews language by emphasizing sound, thereby making language an element in a broader musical composition. To a considerable degree, this stylin consists of weaving one's voice through a track's collage of sampled and layered tones and timbres in a way that is fresh, dope, wild, chill. In the process of doing so, however, the MC creates distinctive patterns of accentuation that make the style his or her own—make it seem as if the music was made precisely to channel his or her voice—that are often the most noticeable elements of stylin. As Bolinger writes, such “points of emphasis” are made “naturally by the human voice.” But the freestylin MC has developed an unusual awareness for this ordinary occurrence,

has a sense for how to coordinate his or her voice with music, recreate it through music's influence to keep innovating new styles, in effect remaking (or at the very least actively working through) nature. Bolinger suggests that stylin "can only be suggested in writing," but I would argue that this is true only if we assume writing itself cannot be remade.⁴ In hip-hop lyricism, all stylin is freestylin, in the sense that the emphasis on sound that MCs develop through improvisational performance without exception informs the craft of writing lyrics. This is not to say that the influence is not mutual, that the experience of writing does not in turn inspire unprecedented performances. But I would say that writing plays a role in an MC's continuing musical development only insofar as it has itself been reshaped through a unique sense for sound.

Saying that all stylin is freestylin is not meant to imply that freestylin is simply *a* style. Rather, it is an approach to style in general, a way of using different styles during the course of ongoing stylin, an openness to whatever styles—and therefore whatever contents and flows—suit the continuing musical development of an MC. Or as Tone and Lacks explained it to me:

T: Freestylin is whatever you feel by the time you done picked the mic up or the beat drops, yaknowwhati' msayin.

L: Freestylin *is* the expression of your heart.

T: Word up.

L: Without havin to confine yourself to *content*. Any sorta content. It's gonna expose what your style is. What your *personality* is. Or it's an expression of your heart, what your personality is.

T: Yaknowwhati' msayin. Just some clever rhymes, man, on the stage.

L: Yeah.

T: Take the stage any beat, rock it, look at the crowd you see your peoples. Yaknowwhati' msayin, it's just whatwhats'up, man, get right up here, yaknowwhati' msayin.

L: The reciprocation. I feel you, man. The reciprocation. Your consciousness.

R: Flip it upside down?

L: But you get it back.⁵

Freestylin is working through your sense for sound in the heat of the moment and being able to rock any beat. It is maintaining style—and therefore personality—as an ongoing process rather than a static accomplishment, a stylin that remains open to the unexpected and new. To express heart means to confront potentially dissonant elements—an odd beat and one’s all too limited voice—and mix them constructively, not necessarily resolving the tension but making it sound good, making something listeners can feel. Freestylin is both a means of divergence and a thread of coherence running throughout hip-hop culture. As such, it is one of the interwoven streams of hip-hop style’s way of shaping a complex aesthetic system, and thereby making a dynamic way of life.

As the end of this last exchange suggests, during the course of our interviews—as well as through their examples as artists—Hodge and Lacks were teaching me how to freestyle. Some dissonance occurs around the word “reciprocation.” I take it in the sense of “reciprocal”—inverting a fraction—whereas Lacks takes it in the more active sense of “reciprocate”—giving back what you receive. But rather than brushing my meaning off, he manages to combine it with his to make a more complex yet coherent sense out of our initially divergent elements—flipping something in a way that gives it back. Since words here are sounds, vibrations rather than static images, dissonance can be treated constructively rather than avoided or taken to mean an incoherent wavering between extremes. Through experiences like these I came to realize the degree to which art shapes life through hip-hop style. Learning this, I began to develop a way of studying hip-hop that approaches art not merely as a topic, but also as an example, a way of studying aesthetics that aspires to be a form of hip-hop itself. I became aware of this possibility and of my ability to pursue its development through my experience of

“yaknowwhati’msayin”—hearing it live and on record, thinking through it, and working to resound it. Quite simply, “yaknowwhati’msayin” was the most persistent theme running through my interactions with the Breakfast Club. A line like “Yaknowwhati’msayin, it’s just whatwhats’up, man, get right up here, yaknowwhati’msayin” may seem somewhat meaningless just written down like this, but it is in fact overflowing with meaning for me, both as I first heard it and as I transcribed and read it and reread it again and tried to craft an even better transcription. And this excessive meaning comes from more than just the line’s context within a longer course of discussion. More than anything this meaningful surplus results from the weight of “yaknowwhati’msayin.” Rather than mere hesitation, pause, or elongation—something like “um”—“yaknowwhati’msayin” is a nodal point of style composed through the weave of hiphop’s sound sensibility.

It never occurred to me to transcribe it as “you know what I’m saying.” I did try at first to write it as “ya know what i’m sayin,” but this felt too much like breaking a chord into its component notes. All the overtones and voicings were lost, which in this case were most of the meaning. It comes as one chunk, heavily but evenly percussive. Not: “yak**know**whati’msayin,” “yaknowwhati’**msayin**,” or any other such variation. Just: “**yaknowwhati’msayin**.” There is variation, but this occurs within the even percussive flow as tonal and timbral variation. Tone-wise, it usually sounds like:

“**ya** ^{know} **what** **i’m** ^{say} **in**.” Timbre-wise, there is of course a broad array of individual

voicings that alter this basic pattern, but as far as tone goes there are two major

alternative versions: “**ya** ^{know} **what** **i’m** ^{say} **in**” and “**yaknow** ^{what} **i’m** ^{say} **in**.” While the

basic form sounds like a statement, the first variation sounds like a question and the latter sounds like a gentle command, a reminder to pay attention to what is being said. Most of the meaning of the phrase works through the simultaneity of this percussive evenness and tonal variance, insofar as it can take on a rich variety of subtly divergent senses while at the same time maintaining a loose but steady coherence. Through the filter of this sound mixing, its word elements carry a persistent yet unique content, slightly different from what they mean if they were first taken as separate words and only afterwards considered as a combined stream of sound. Content-wise “yaknowwhati’msayin” means less “you understand what I’m talking about” and more “I’m talking in a particular way that you and I share.” It means “you understand my talking because you know what it feels like to talk this way” or “you know what I’m talking about because you know how it feels.” “We’ve had similar experiences and we know what they mean because we have a sense for that kind of thing.” In short, it is a way of emphasizing and thereby sharing affect through words by treating them like sounds.

By sharing “yaknowwhati’msayin” with me—teaching it to me through their examples and in doing so making me aware that it was something I felt and did before I learned to purposefully think through it—Lacks and Hodge led me to consider the possibility that hip-hop could be not only an art but also a way of studying aesthetics. “Hip-hop, man,” Hodge warned me, “I mean a lot of people go to real lengths to put a label on it. It ain’t music. It’s not necessarily culture, either. It’s vaster, yaknowwhati’msayin. It goes deeper than just the culture.” For him, it began as “a curiosity,” then it became “a game.” “But,” Hodge added,

beyond that, yaknowwhati’msayin, it’s like it’s like a family member almost, yaknowwhati’msayin. You take it for granted a lot. But at all

points of time it's a part of you, yaknowwhati'msayin. You don't even think about it anymore. You're at that point, yaknowwhati'msayin.

As Lacks went on to explain, "hiphop is a state of being, yaknowwhati'msayin." It is that aesthetic existence that makes you curious, and you start playing around with it. Before long it becomes less like a game and more like a mission, something you stick with and that you are stuck with even though, as Hodge puts it, "you ain't into it sometimes." In that sense, "it's like a family member." Or better, "it's a part of you." It is a clue to a continuously new you, which for Lacks makes it "like an escape from oppression." To evade constriction, however, is not to avoid coherence, but rather to redefine what coherence means. When talking about hiphop, Lacks told me, "there's only one way to understand what's being said and that's to live it, yaknowwhati'msayin. If you don't live it, you won't ever get it. You'll be a fake and anyone can tell if you bein fake or not and they won't feel it. And that's the whole thing." To be a fake is not to feel or be felt, not to put your heart into it. To live it means to actively organize your experience through hiphop's aesthetic, and therefore make it meaningful.

Hiphop, Lacks insisted is "who you are. It's who you are. It's *who* you are and it screws us up if you ain't bein real with it, then it ain't. It's like two left feet if it ain't real." Note, however, that as far as hiphop goes not being real is not just awkwardness. It is awkwardness that results from trying too much to be in control, to "put a label" on hiphop, to keep treating it like a game even after "you're at that point, yaknowwhati'msayin," to lose your curiosity. To be real, to be true to the style of hiphop, means improvisational lyricism as a way of life, participating in the composition of art through the process of self-creation. Having learned this from Lacks and Hodge, I developed a sense for studying hiphop as a way of working to form a new element, a new

stream of hip-hop activity. To study hip-hop means to challenge the degree to which we “take it for granted.” Particularly, it means to question the assumption that once hip-hop becomes “a part of you” you “don’t even think about it anymore.” But this renewed emphasis on curiosity does not necessarily mean getting hip-hop out of your system. Rather, it means taking hip-hop to be a way of studying as well as a topic of study, both “a state of being” and a way of thinking through that state of being. Hip-hop’s sound sensibility becomes not merely a way of feeling, but a way of feelingful thinking, a way of thinking through feeling, and feeling as a way of thinking. It is this affective exploration that I heard echoed in James and students, and that I have mobilized to put a new spin on their work.

Listening Transcription: A Methodological Coda

“Yaknowwhat’msayin” is a manifestation of hip-hop lyricism in casual conversation. My experiments in transcribing it not only attempt to simulate its sound in writing but in doing so constitute a new application of the enactive model of literature James, Stein, and Du Bois pursued. In this coda, I would like to briefly illustrate how this “listening transcription” can be used to work with not only occasional phrases but exemplary verses. Once again, immerse yourself in the moment: Press play and the first sound Boogie Down Productions’ “Poetry” makes is a syncopated and looped triplet, a bass line that is either synthetic or heavily filtered. A percussive collage of sampled drums in between drum machine hits backs and follows the bass. A James Brown scream, framed and flickering like a snapshot caught in the act, is followed by DJ Scott La Rock scratching in an anonymous “get down.” A strummed guitar riff simultaneously

completes the sonic landscape and marks its perpetual incompleteness, ushering in a chopping-up and flipping-around of the cobbled drum pattern. This jagged and shifty groove opens the way for, envelops, and propels KRS-One's verse.

well now you're **for** ced to **lis** ten to the **tea** cher and the **les** son **CLASS**
is in **ses** sion so can stop **guess** **in** if this is a **tape** or a writ ten down **mem** o
you
see **I** am a **pro** fes sion al **this** is not a **dem** o in fact **call** it
a **lec** ture a **visu** al **pic** ture **sort** of a **po** etic and rhy thm like mix ture **lis** ten
I'm not **diss** in but there's **some** thin that you're **miss** in **may** be you
should **touch** real ity **stop** wish in for **beats** with plen ty **bass** and **lyr** ics in **haste** if
its **mean** ing doesn't **mani** fest **PUT IT** to rest **I am** a **poet** **you** try
to **show** it yet **blow** it it **takes** con cen trat ion for **fresh** com mun i ca tion
SPEAKING
ob ser va tion **that** is to **see** with out **take** off your coat
take notes **I am** teach in the class or rather **school** **cause** you **need** school **ing**
I am not a king or queen **I'm** not **ing** **this** is an **intro** duc tion to
po try a small **ded** ica tion to those that might **know** of me

The sound of KRS-One’s rhymes here—inseparable from the musical track through which it is woven—vibrates through word processing, leaving as its echo an unusual yet compelling transcription. Without this attention to how sounds perturb sights it becomes all too easy to forget what type’s standard display misses. Nevertheless, what we have here initially comes across perhaps as a handful of words, syllables, and letters thrown on the page to form a chaotic mist. Like such a random distribution, however, these transcribed lyrics manifest an intricate and complex order when attended to closely. This weird way of writing reaches for and echoes the music of hip-hop lyricism. Listening transcription poses the same question Fred Moten suggests can be heard through the poetry of Amiri Baraka—“what if we let the music (no reduction to the aural, no mere addition of the visual but a radical nonexclusion of the ensemble of the senses such that music becomes a mode of organization in which principles dawn) take us?”⁶ The soundscape of “Poetry” suggests a possible destination.

Following hip-hop’s musically organized movements, listening transcription can distinguish three interwoven currents of lyricism’s angular stream: content, percussion, and style. Content comes through simply as the literal and figurative meanings of words as processed through the visual media of script, print, and type. Meaning is not confined to content, but the recording, mixing, and broadcasting of its other frequencies is primarily accomplished through nonvisual means—sound technologies such as samplers, turntables, and microphones, for example. Listening transcription resonates with this broader bandwidth by echoing the percussion and style of sound, thereby perturbing the serially linear pattern of writing and registering the divergent circularity of musical motion. First, two varieties of percussion are marked: upbeat and downbeat, accent and

emphasis, bold face and small caps. Second, style—the more complicated issue of tonal and microtonal (or *timbral*) variation—is traced in a way that seeks to present the paradoxically broken flowing of hip-hop. Each syllable is lifted above or pushed below the central axis of a standard line, depending on whether its timbre is “high” or “low.” While granting a wave-like continuity, this vertical spacing also marks the breaks—words flying apart, unruly syllables launching flights between lines, strange trajectories tracing the outlines of a conspicuous and irregularly shaped emptiness—that make for lyricism’s disjointed articulation, the angular fluency it shares with wildstyle graffiti, breakdancing, turntable technique, and sample-based production. The limitations of the page, however, present a further difficulty. In a perfect world, lyrics could be visually and graphically experienced—that is, simultaneously seen and touched, as well as heard—as twisted fibers of enormous length, entangling each other in a wavy fabric that enfolds the globe. But given the relatively small wingspan necessary to make script, print, and type workable as means of recording, mixing, and broadcasting, the transcription of a musical world system runs up against limits that make horizontal spacing as much of a problem as vertical spacing is a solution. That spacing would constitute such a central issue for the aesthetic criss-crossing listening transcription seeks to accomplish—its mixing of media through the juxtaposition of senses—should come as no surprise. Spacing is after all, as Jacques Derrida in particular has brought to our attention, the fundamental characteristic of writing—and therefore that which most radically distinguishes it from other arts, such as music.⁷

The diversification of vertical spacing itself begins to loosen up the rigidity of writing’s horizontal spacing. I utilized two additional means of limbering the line and

getting around page limits: a lack of punctuation and unjustified margins. Together these two aspects reinforce a sense of broken flowing, the continuity of unpunctuated lines interrupted by boundaries displaced inside the body of the page, the interruptions in turn jumped by the off-beat push of the lyrics' syncopation. Presented between page and eye is a twisting, folding, entangled corpus infused with the sound of hiphop. It is a sight that breathes, hears, and touches. Emerging through this mixed-media experimentation is a network of overlapping embodiments laying the groundwork for the consensus of autonomous and potentially dissonant positions. Navigating this tricky and tense domain calls for continually sustaining a perpetually off-kilter balance of structure and spontaneity, singularity and convention, by combining what happens to come within reach into a coherent shape that maintains the independence of juxtaposed elements. Listening transcription, then, is an aesthetic system of simultaneously composing, performing, and interpreting enactions that clear a space for, house, and motivate embodiments of consensual autonomy (of affect). By marking margins via two "Tab" key hits, breaks become internal to lines and vary in length depending upon their exact location on Microsoft Word's virtual page. Horizontal spacing achieves a degree of variability enabling precise scoring of silent voices, broken flow echoed through a collage of shattered rigidity's shards, interanimated and reanimating fragmentation. Through this means I hope to both simulate the effects hiphop lyricism has upon listeners and emulate the way James, Stein, and Du Bois sound American literary modernism.

¹ Richard Rabinowitz, *The Spiritual Self in Everyday Life: The Transformation of Personal Religious Experience in Nineteenth-Century New England* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 210; 157; 171; 174; 233; 169; 172; 212.

² Abraham Maslow, *Religion, Values, and Peak-Experiences* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1964), 67. Mihaly Csikszentmihaly, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990), 212. *The Spiritual Self in Everyday Life*, 169; 216.

³ Dwight Bolinger, *Intonation and Its Parts: Melody in Spoken English* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 3.

⁴ *Intonation and Its Parts*, 3.

⁵ This, and the other words from Lacks and Tone in this Conclusion, are drawn from the sound recording and transcript of our interview on March 17, 2000, at St. Andrews Place in Detroit, Michigan.

⁶ *In the Break*, 96.

⁷ Derrida calls the borderland between writing and music “*the fissure*,” marking it as the exact place where “the necessity of interval, the harsh law of spacing” is born, forming a distinction that crosses itself. “This fissure is not one among others,” he comments via Jean Jacques Rousseau (who could be considered as much an ethnomusicologist as a linguist). “It could not endanger song except by being inscribed in it from its birth and in its essence. Spacing is not the accident of song. Or rather, as accident and accessory, fall and supplement, it is also that without which, strictly speaking, the song would not have come into being.” Derrida insists on the immanence of this fundamental and definitive divergence in part to prevent any strict alignment of writing/spatial distance, on the one hand, and music/durative present, on the other. In fact, spacing should be understood to be “the articulation of space and time, the becoming-space of time and the becoming-time of space.” Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1974 [1967]), 200; 68. As the tracing of this spacetime of articulate fissure, Derrida’s writing can be seen, heard, and touched as complementary to Moten’s music—as mass is to motion, particle to wave. No reduction to the visual, no mere addition of the aural, his graphics present the animate image of a hand dancing around “a radical nonexclusion of the ensemble of the senses”—such that writing “becomes a mode of organization in which principles dawn.” Moten may argue, however, that this choreographic journey ultimately rings hollow as long as its score remains a mute backdrop. Asking “what if we let the music take us?”—much less striking out towards an answer—is impossible if sounds are unheard. This is a plea for complementarity, not an invalidation of Derrida’s project.

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