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I loved well those cities;
I loved well the stately and rapid river;
The men and women I saw were all near to me;
Others the same—others who look back on me, because I look'd forward to them;
(The time will come, though I stop here to-day and to-night.)

Walt Whitman, from "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," 1856.

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Abstract

This dissertation argues that realism – however fraught the term – stages scenes of community in order to make claims upon the "real world" in the twentieth century. It identifies and analyzes forms of vernacular realism from 1941 to 1984 as well as aesthetic experiments that consider themselves to mimetically represent the "real world" in order to reconceive scenes of attachment and counterpublics. The project tracks how realism, conceived here as the interplay between image and narrative, changes in the twentieth century in response to moments of social crisis. In the process, it pays particular attention to realism's elusive nature. Fredric Jameson's 2013 book *The Antinomies of Realism,* begins with the observation that when we consider realism, it "is as though the object of our meditation began to wobble, and the attention to it to slip insensibly away from it in two opposite directions, so that at length we find we are thinking, not about realism, but about its emergence; not about the thing itself but about its dissolution." This "wobble," the way realism as an object of study tends to deflect attention away from itself and toward its origins or its destruction, guides this project. My dissertation argues that visual-narrative projects, primarily but not exclusively the phototext, provide a unique mechanism for representing the "real" in the twentieth century United States: the growth of social-image culture and the simultaneous cultural fear around the possibility of "representation" open up a fissure in narrative possibility that visual-narrative objects attempt to heal. By tracking four quite different scenes of belonging and nonbelonging over the course of the mid-twentieth century, this project pulls realism into the contemporary era by providing a genealogy of the narrative/visual "snapshot."

This project began in the archives of the Bureau of Indian Affairs at the Newberry Library, which has a surprising aesthetic congruence with a much more familiar but understudied set of photos – Allen Ginsberg's snapshots. Evaluating avant-garde and bureaucratic images together reveals a developing mode that I have come to call experimental realism or "unfiction." "American Snapshot" situates the development of photography/film and its attendant narrative contingencies in the American city at the moment of urbanity's apparent rupture, and in so doing, traces an emergent realism's broaching of politics and aesthetics.

The first chapter, "Revising Documentation: Richard Wright, Realist Modernism, and Representing the City," reframes the critical conversation around Richard Wright through an evaluation of his 1941 *Twelve Million Black Voices*, a photo-text co-authored with Edwin Rosskam. It pairs this text with Horace R. Cayton and St. Clair Drake's 1945 *Black Metropolis*, with an introduction by Wright, in order to underline how Wright, profoundly attached to and also alienated by socialistic feeling, utilizes real happenings and images of the real world in order to call attention to how a documentational epistemology provides a diagnostic for political crisis. *12 Million Black Voices*, a photo-text that cleaves to what Michael Denning calls a "ghetto pastoral," also invents a critical mechanism for reading text and image together with respect to urban space. Wright's evocation of the kitchenette, his discussion of urban scenes, and his relationship with the Great Migration combine to demonstrate that this formal experiment responds particularly well to a moment of political upheaval.

From readings of a formally organized phototextual project the argument shifts to an encounter with a governmentally organized archive, one that underscores how photo and text together describe emerging communities and alternative forms of belonging. Between 1951 and 1955, The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) organized what it called the "relocation project,"

which moved American Indians from rural reservations to major American urban centers. The Bureau maintained an archive of photographs of relocatees both before and after relocation and produced pamphlets, internal documents, newsletters, and other bureaucratic material. This chapter illustrates how realist genres narrate new claims on urban belonging in the US in the early 1950s. It contextualizes American Indian relocation as an institutionalized endeavor that produced a series of overdetermined images. I juxtapose these pictures with an archive of aestheticized modernist-realist images of a group of poor whites and show how artists and journalists made this migrant Appalachian population visible to demonstrate that emerging liberal conceptions of race affected those thought to be racially "unmarked." Furthermore, it explores an aesthetics of the ordinary that demands rethinking the "work" of photography, as it performs a purported social function while also inducing visual pleasure.

The third chapter shows how the Beat collective and Allen Ginsberg in particular deploy the photograph and narrative together to give permanence to the historical moment and its attendant political problems. In Ginsberg's archive, photographs are accompanied by extended, unfolding captions written directly on the prints. Using Ginsberg's phototexts as primary multimedia objects I ask how an aesthetic community "opts out" of its political present by turning to experiments in ways of being and an expansive model of documentation. As a response to a moment of social repression (as they perceive it) the Beats turn to this mode and other experiments in documentation in order not to participate in the flawed "mainstream." I provide a new perspective on the Beat canon in considering Allen Ginsberg's poetic practice as part of a *documentary* canon, one that enfolds his poetry, photography, and the extended captions that accompany most of his images. Furthermore, I provide an expansive realist framework that allows us to rethink the Beat canon through Ginsberg, pointing to how its practitioners demanded

an un-fictional framework in order to assert their significance. This chapter argues that when we consider "realism" in generic, modal, historical, and constructed terms, it appears as a *practice*, and even as an effect of efforts to make claims upon the "real world."

The final chapter rewrites the genealogy of the L.A. Rebellion to acknowledge the multitude of aesthetic influences that informed it, and asserts that this fuller account provides a way of revising twentieth century realist cinema. This group of filmmakers produced a series of films centrally dedicated to describing the black working class in Los Angeles in the post-industrial 1970s. For this group, different questions about the practice of representing reality – indexing national and urban belonging, self-documentation, labor, and everyday life – demanded a dynamic aesthetic practice that stood accountable to a wide swath of aesthetic and political movements, including the French, English, and Italian New Waves, Cuban and Argentinian radical cinemas, and Senegalese and Nigerian anti-colonialist film movements. The chapter demonstrates that, after the broken promise of the liberal consensus, filmmakers like Burnett and Woodberry continue to evaluate belonging, despite the seeming impossibility of community among the urban ruins. It shows how the commitment to a collaborative, improvisational style opens up new possibilities for the long-established *realist* mode and captures a practice of *narrative* autodocumentation.

Introduction

It is often, rightly, argued that texts like *Let us Now Praise Famous Men* produce the conditions for seeing photography and literature as mutually constituted in the 20th century. When James Agee and Walker Evans publish the text in 1939, they are introducing a version of photo-literature that asserts the impossibility of representation. Agee argues early on,

> If I could do it, I'd do no writing at all here. It would be photographs; the rest would be fragments of cloth, bits of cotton, lumps of earth, records of speech, pieces of wood and iron, phials of odors, plates of food and of excrement. Booksellers would consider it quite a novelty; critics would murmur, yes, but is it art; and I could trust a majority of you to use it as you would a parlor game.
> A piece of the body torn out by the roots might be more to the point.[1]

For Agee, even the mutually-inflecting words and pictures that make up this book fail to capture the conditions that he and Evans are studying. The picture is better than the word, of course; the ideal text would have photographs and tactile objects. The conditions of representation are showing themselves to be in crisis, and the book enjoys no more "real" potentiality than the plate of food.

Furthermore, the book's physical layout contributes to this assertion that words and pictures seem to fail each other. Constructed of sixty-some photographs at the front and 416 pages of Agee's prose after the images, the text attempts, almost obsessively, to document the conditions of living of three tenant families. From here, it looks like an object that cleaves to the framework that this project advances: committed to documentational specificity by virtue of text and image together.

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[1] 10.

But the text withdraws from representation as a goal: this is demonstrated by Agee's words, as well as from the separation of text and image – in fact, the pictures do not even have captions attached, such that the reader might view them with some hint of interpretive specificity. It is her job, as the modernist reader, to produce the conditions of "meaning," such as they might appear (they won't – Agee's goals is that the pictures' meaning is infinitely deferred.) When the images are cordoned off from the text in this way, the reading experience forecloses the montage principle, and demands that the reader take the two pieces as independent, if mutual, collections.

Further, the pictures themselves have an aesthetic particularity that moves them into the category of art photography and away from a snapshot aesthetic. The snapshot is, as I argue later in this project, a mode, an unposed or seemingly unposed, tenuous memento, that gestures toward the durability of the moment itself. The snapshot's subject is always moments that are made uneventful – ordinary – by their being recorded in this way. This mode helps us to see versions of truth claim that dilate the historical present, and to see vernacular recording as an attempt at realism.

The dissertation, then, asks: how do groups of people, particularly those considered very marginal, become photographically and textually actualized in urban spaces across the 20th century? How do micro-events, flashes, snapshots, happenings, and scenes come into representative form? What do racial ordinaries look like – and I mean this both figuratively and literally – how do they appear in images, and how are they narrated? The primary argument of the project demonstrates that the photographic book projects of the 1930s begin to lay the groundwork for versions of what this project terms "unfictions" – photo-narrative interplays that attempt to represent unfolding terms of belonging in the US across the 20th century. As this

technology emerges, it provides a structure for imaging the "real world" and the communities that form across the midcentury.

The phototext is not necessarily unique in its capacity to communicate "truth," but it is an unusually concentrated form of truth claim that makes its appearance in the twentieth century. Further, this medium, in its entwined narrative and visual modes of communication, is taken to imagine political frustrations in a particularly cogent way. Experimental realism, I argue, is a practice that has a deep history in realism more generally, since it privileges affective intensities and microevents at the expense of "plot." I contend that such realism describes a number of collective projects and animates the documentary potential of gesture, contingency, and improvisation. Realism, even after modernism's suspicion of its versions of representation, turns out to be sticky, intransigent – particularly groups that consider themselves political, biopolitical, or politicized turn to this new iteration to address the "real world." Furthermore, the genres of unfiction that I outline provide a way of crossreading – a version of montage – that demonstrates the richness of intermediality as a mechanism for seeing the "real."

This project engages three primary conversations, which may also reflect on its genres of claims. The first is a conversation in literature and cinema, about what Sergei Eisenstein, mediated through Roland Barthes, calls the "third meaning." What I consider the "third space" constitutes the relation between image and text and the essential practice of cross reading, reading both between image and text as well as between images, a practice endemic to the phototext. It is from this center that this project develops: the third space, between image and narrative, produces an ideal location for disclosing actual happenings and revealing the structural undergirding that makes them meaningful. For Barthes, the "third meaning" is the supplemental, the suspended. "My reading," he argues, "remains suspended between the image and its

description, between definition and approximation." My engagements with Benjamin's "approximity [ungefarhen]" – Barthes also uses this term, "approximatif" – here enfold the problem of narrative and image.

Secondly, I show that realism, which undergoes a serious critique under modernism, demonstrates through phototexts a troubling persistence that traces through intermedia in particular. *Let us Now Praise Famous Men,* as I have argued, fits into the critique of realism that characterizes the 1930s. The text forecloses the possibility of truth claim, and steers toward art photography and modernist language in a way that avoids managing facticity.

During the so-called "realism debates" of the 1930s, critics struggled over representational possibility and the capacity to produce an image of the "real world." Realism is pared down, for Bertolt Brecht, to its capacity to "tell the truth" and to provide "a faithful image of life." Realism had been, even by 1938 when Brecht writes his polemic against Georg Lukacs, an ongoing struggle and a category whose criteria were difficult to decipher. He notes:

> The demand for a realistic style of writing can also no longer be so easily dismissed today. It has acquired a certain inevitability. The ruling classes use lies oftener than before – and bigger ones. To tell the truth is clearly an ever more urgent task. Suffering has increased and with it the number of sufferers. In view of the immense suffering of the masses, concern with little difficulties or with difficulties of little groups has come to be felt as ridiculous, contemptible.
> There is only one ally against growing barbarism – the people, who suffer so greatly from it. It is only from them that one can expect anything. Therefore it is obvious that one must turn to the people, and now more necessary than ever to speak their language. Thus the terms *popular art* and *realism* become natural allies. It is in the interest of the people, of the broad working masses, to receive a faithful image of life from literature, and faithful images of life are actually of service only to the people, the broad working masses, and must therefore be absolutely comprehensible and profitable to them – in other words, popular.[2]

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[2] Brecht in Jameson 492.

Realism is a theoretical and social "problem" itself, as well as a category that attempts to make human and political "problems" representable. Where literature and photography meet, and where realist cinema engages photography explicitly, artistic and cultural producers strive for a documentational method that produces ongoing meaning about the historical present. This method also marks the priority that Richard Wright, Allen Ginsberg, the Bureau of Indian Affairs agents, and Billy Woodberry have in addressing *future* audiences: these artistic and cultural producers go to great lengths to expose the injustices of the social moments in order to creative archival memory for those they expect to delve into this material at a later date. The practice of experimental realism, what I call the practice of unfiction, is fundamentally about the capacity of cultural actants to archive in the interest of a long narrative about anti-normativity, racism, and economic inequality.

The third primary conversation that I see this project working through is the ongoing concern in literary studies with "minor literatures." I take minor literatures to serve as a conceptual node around which a number of important conversations happen. For me, in tracing the cultural histories of very minor – micro – objects, we can see how objects that seem exceptional, outside, outlying, strange, and untouched provide unique cases for seeing parts of American literature, narrative, photography, cinema, and history differently. That the Bureau of Indian Affairs engages in an aesthetic project in its photo-textual construction of an Indian community in the 1950s does not just trace an understudied archive, it demonstrates that this aesthetic program redraws the boundaries of what get to "count" as aesthetic projects. This conversation about smaller scenes of resistant literature, as the title indicates, also traces the arc of the liberal consensus in the middle of the 20th century, showing that in the moments of both Old and New left uneventful, ordinary and ongoing aesthetic problems get smoothed out in favor

of stable and non-intermedial forms. The "snapshot," as a capacious category, allows us to see much smaller, and yet crucial, scenes of belonging and nonbelonging across the 20th century. In the four chapters, which I describe as "scenes," I provide versions of the kind of realism that I'm advancing, showing four different methods. The first, with Wright, asks what a project of "modernist realism" looks like. It takes seriously Werner Sollors's claim on Wright, that "the point was not to choose between realism and modernism, but to use any technique that was likely to shake up readers and direct them toward the serious questions of the times." From there, I suggest that Wright chooses both of these strategies in order to suggest that there is space within modernism's goals for texts – in this case *12 Million Black Voices* – that account for happenings in the ongoing historical present. The second method, in the second chapter, I have come to think of as "minor snapshots." These are the BIA and "hillbilly" photographs and their attendant text – they divulge problems of seeing the early 1950s in "factual" ways. The term here intends to hold open many possibilities for meaning – minor, in the sense of referring to "minority" subjects but also to the Deleuzian notion of the minor (and again, micro). With the Beat pictures and poems, Ginsberg calls this practice "snapshot poetics." This is the piece of the project where a method we might call "approximity" begins to take shape – the caption and image relationship begins to be formed. We learn here that the caption tells us what to see, but also that the picture tells us how to read; the caption both dilates and contracts. The final chapter shows that Billy Woodberry and Charles Burnett strive for a method of "imperfect realism," prioritizing deep tension over plot. Here, urban cinema after the "urban crisis" discloses wearings-away – of people, places, and the American dream.

The project, then, asks us to consider these practices, and itself takes up interwoven methods. It employs formalism in the discussion of "third meaning," shows a strong cultural

studies methodology in the description of microliteratures, and deploys a historically-inflected analysis of realism that both situates these archives and demonstrates how they aspire to durability. It also engages to a lesser extent with themes that have yet to be fully developed: the dissertation, for example, often engages with scenes of the "post-facto": the withdrawal of factory labor from Watts in Los Angeles; the postwar insistence after relocation and termination that the American Indian population could be selectively assimilated; the post-41 fall of Richard Wright from a stable communist politics. Finally, it still attempts to provide new genealogies of other microliteratures that influence those that I study.

Ultimately, this project shows how the socio-spatial form of the city provides a microcosm in which a diversity of communities strive to define themselves and their textual objects by redrawing the lines of how people – and documentary as well as literary forms – constitute affective groups. It demonstrates that the emergent phototextual form provides new ways of seeing the world, a way of seeing that attempts to make explicit moments of politicization and of belonging and nonbelonging.

The Cases

The chapters here are organized historically, to give a sense of an emergence of a form and a problem. The four cases may be thought of us intensifications of the more general problem of finding an appropriate, "realistic" mechanism for detailing problem sociality. As Lauren Berlant argues, "the case is not a thing but a cluster of factors that looks solid only at a certain distance,"

and these examples help to demonstrate that the photo-text form produces possibilities for montage representation as realist principle.[3]

Richard Wright and Edwin Rosskam's *12 Million Black Voices*, published in 1941, marks an important juncture at which photo/textual projects assert political and social ends. Deeply concerned with the "representable" and attached to a concern with belonging, texts like Richard Wright and Edwin Rosskam's *12 Million Black Voices* (and others) posed that the notion of representation might be shored up by intermedia – in the case of this project, the interplay of photo and text. This project begins with *12 Million Black Voices*, and it demonstrates how a great number of artists, journalists, novelists, filmmakers, photographers, poets, and bureaucrats produced photo-textual projects in order to make sense of the shifts in belonging that characterize the American 20th century. There are other photobooks that pre-date it; many of these are art and avant-garde books, and while *12 Million* is deeply invested in an aesthetic project, its ends are political first. "Social problem" photography has an established history in the 1930s; Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White's *You Have Seen Their Faces* and the already-discussed *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* serve as exemplars. There are earlier examples too, as mentioned: in Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* and Edwin Curtis's study

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[3] *Cruel Optimism* 103. In her discussion "Conceiving the Genre of the Case" in "Slow Death: Obesity, Sovereignty, and Lateral Agency," Berlant frames the "obesity epidemic" as a case for the broader concept of "slow death." She asks, "So what is our object, our scene, our case? The following description mobilizes the catalogue as a genre, aiming toward clustering disparate explanations of the phenomenon; this is the state of analytic improvisation our case requires even from bio-related and social scientists, as analysis cannot help but cross over dissimilar domains of bodily, subjective, and institutional practice. How does it matter, for example, that overweight, obesity, morbid obesity, and a mass tendency, in industrialized spaces, toward physically unhealthy bodily practices amass a weirdly compounded scene of a system and persons gone awry? The case is not a thing but a cluster of factors that looks solid from a distance."

The North American Indian. There is a great deal of excellent study on the goals of social problem photography in the 1930s and how the pictures work. William Stott outlines the representational fractures that this movement opened up; the movement negotiated the (still open) question of whether photographs, particularly in concert with text, denote the "factual" (raw, truthful, unalloyed) or the "actual" (communicating larger structures beneath).[4] *12 Million Black Voices* is both decidedly in this tradition, but it takes up other projects too, and its particular aesthetic project and amplification of what Barthes calls the "third meaning," described below, demonstrates its centrality to a study of literature and photography.

12 Million Black Voices also demonstrates a concern with other disciplines committed to the representation of the "real," namely the social sciences. Wright, working with Robert Park and the Chicago School of Sociology as well as in the tradition of black sociologists like WEB DuBois, insists that the representation quality for which literature (and photography) should strive is a "scientific" one. I take up Wright's introduction to, and the text of, St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton's *Black Metropolis* to provide an analysis of a discipline committed to world building that inflected itself upon the photographic and literary imaginaries, particularly of the 1940s. As mentioned, for Wright as well as other aesthetic producers in this dissertation, the urban space necessitates a version of realism that measures and describes the real world. Wright's introductory remarks provide a perspective on the relationship between the phototext and emerging institutionalized disciplines that contributes to the study of African-American literature and the mid-twentieth century generally by insisting upon the significance of the phototext to the black realist enterprise.

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[4] *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* 77-80.

The second chapter is an engagement with two archives: the first, the collection of images belonging to the Newberry library and featuring a number of American Indians during, before, and after "relocation" between 1951 and 1957. The second is a collection and not an institutionalized archive: the photographs of street photographers Tom Pallozzolo and Vivian Maier. In particular, I discuss how these photographers' pictures of poor whites in the city in the 1950s disclose major cultural assertions on the problem of "race." I refer to these two groups of readings as in "negative," in the sense of the photo-negative: the "darks" of one archive map onto the "lights" of the other, showing how the development of racial liberalism necessitated new imagistic frames whereby race is made to matter in a new way.

The early 1950s are well documented as a moment of major political and racial upheaval. In general, this conversation is framed either as being about the civil rights movement and black activism in the United States, or as a part of a world-wide nexus of political activism in the moment of global decolonization. These are, of course, useful frames for analyzing the development of race and Cold War liberalism in the United States. The American Indian "case," however, continues to be a generative and problematic one for a number of reasons. First, the political-legal relationship of tribes to the federal government, characterized by "domestic dependent" sovereign status, is a peculiar national relationship. Second, the spatial management of tribal citizens is unique: after the move to reservations and the allotment act, members of Indian nations were controlled in a particular way by location. Third, epistemologies of race with respect to Native people are particular and distinct. The notion that Indian people might be assimilated has been an element of US racial discourse since the 19th century. Continuous efforts to "kill the Indian and save the man" demonstrate the way first the Department of War and then the Department of the Interior made numerous efforts to enfold Indians into a particular kind of

assimilated status: these included boarding schools, allotment (intended to break up traditional tribal lands, previous held in federal trust), and the termination acts that were enacted between the 1930s and 1970s.

Relocation is one effort on the part of the Bureau of Indian Affairs to reframe American Indian citizenship, modifying it from a rural-industrial category into a working-class urban belonging that felt legible under the economic and social order of the 1950s. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) took and collected a significant archive of texts and images that they used for different kinds of persuasion. Using this archive, which is composed of images, brochures, scrapbook pages, letters, and bureaucratic documents, I describe how models of belonging are inscribed on American Indians in the urban center, and how this emergent public came to redevelop its belonging along intertribal lines.

With the images of Tom Pallozzolo and Vivian Maier, I describe how the influx of rural whites into Chicago's north side neighborhoods, contemporaneous with American Indian relocation, produced a complementary narrative about race and class as entangled categories. The arrival of "hillbillies," as most of the archives called them, concerned the mainstream white and black presses as well as photographers. *The Crisis* argued in 1958, "Chicago's toughest integration problem happens to involve whites, hillbillies, and not Negroes."[5] This, again, serves as a contrapuntal study to that of Native relocation because the aesthetic rendering of two groups – one "primed for" integration and another seemingly resistant – provide new cases for reconsidering Cold War racial modernity.

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[5] "Looking and Listening," *The Crisis* March 1958.

In the third chapter, the photographs and writings of Allen Ginsberg produce an ambivalent feeling about the possibilities of community, and index a point of view that aligns more closely than any other works in this dissertation with the category of "outside belonging."[6] Despite Ginsberg's deep attachments to friends, partners, and family that appear in his poems and images, he also details a strong desire to adhere to others in loose, proximate, and casual ways. Ginsberg took and saved images beginning in 1947, and added photo-captions over several years leading up to an exhibition in 1984. His image collection is a snapshot project, devoted to outlining the relationship between snapshot and caption. For Ginsberg the documentarian, the image/caption medium tracks in tandem with the subject of his documentary project: the self and the community. His photographs and writings record an ambivalent feeling about the possibilities of community, and index a point of view that shows that the image/caption as medium characterized by suspension serves as a particularly descriptive method of documenting the self/community gap. As a devotee of the self-portrait, additionally, Ginsberg retrains the photographic lens in such a way that disturbs the model of photographic subject/object – his mode of self-documenting is one that questions the notions of a "core self," and as such, shows that the relation of individuated self to community, characterized by the liminus between these, is described particularly well by the auto-snapshot. His images frame close attachments and loose ties, friendliness and strangeness, and situate themselves assertively within history.

This chapter also evaluates the genre of the caption, which is understudied in the field of literature and photography. Walter Benjamin's notion of Ungefähren, the approximate, helps to elucidate how the relationship between photographs and their attendant text combine and engage

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[6] See Elspeth Probyn, *Outside Belonging* 8-9.

each other. I note here how the entwined archives of image and caption are the approximations of what Ginsberg calls the "raw material of your own actual experience" that produce a fuller picture of the historical moment he wishes to describe. Recording the raw material of experience allows for experimentation, improvisation, and extemporizing in the production of an alternate version of realism.

The films of Billy Woodberry and Charles Burnett, described and analyzed in chapter four, exemplify how an aesthetic movement produces realist projects to diagnose social problems. Burnett and Woodberry's films demonstrate how deep tension and anti-plot can also characterize this version of realism. By moving away from a cinema that prioritizes event and toward a recording of the ordinary that inflects the political present, these directors engage in experimental realism as well. Using a mix of improvisation and written script, actors and non-actors, and shot entirely on location, these films gesture toward the possibility of framing the "real" in a cinematic way. In *Killer of Sheep*, a narrative structure that works defiantly against plot expectations allows the film to trace the contours of ordinary inequalities in Watts in the 1970s. The film concerns a black slaughterhouse worker and his neighbors and family. I argue that the film, particularly in its realist project of reading its social world in the "third meaning" between image and narrative, stages structural inequalities through its resistance to plot. Its unfolding describes systemic problems through micro-scenes, disclosing how fatigue, insomnia, back-breaking labor, and even play are ever tinged with the effects of late capital.

> As *Killer of Sheep* progresses, viewers witness the various ways, legal and otherwise, in which Stan and one of his friends raise money to purchase the engine. What becomes painfully clear is that, for members of the Watts neighborhood, nothing is ready to hand in the Heideggerian sense. Nothing in Stan's world simply works. Everything must *become* a "theory" in the sense of a self-conscious encounter with the world. In slow neo-realist time, we watch as Stan and his friend are absorbed into and resist the chaos of local gray economies. They finally purchase a used engine for fifteen dollars from a local

> purveyor of such items, lug it down a precarious set of stairs, nearly but not quite dropping it along the way, and then heave it into the back of a borrowed truck. But by the time that they have reached this final platform of their desire, they experience themselves as having no energy left. And this is not a metaphor. It is a fact of muscle, bone, and will, whatever we mean by this last term. The motor sits on the edge of the truck bed. They do not move it any further. Their bodies exhausted, as well as their minds, they convince each other the motor is secure. They start the truck, move a few feet, and the engine falls off. That's it. The engine is busted. The motor won't run now if it ever would have.[7]

Elizabeth Povinelli's description of *Killer of Sheep* helps us to better understand the infusion of capitalism's effects into every second of the film. The scene that she outlines exemplifies the film's unwillingness to cleave to traditional notions of plot: the hauling and eventual destruction of the engine indeed demonstrate how efforts to engage in economic systems (legitimate and illegitimate) are always characterized by tragedy and farce.

Bless Their Little Hearts is written by Burnett and directed by Billy Woodberry, and it has enjoyed almost no academic attention. In some sense, I am aware that I champion this film, and that my writing on it is a sense a desire to see further engagement with it. The film also takes place in Watts, and like *Killer of Sheep*, concerns a worker and his family. This picture, however, is concerned more with intimacy, gender, and sexuality than *Killer of Sheep*, and my discussion of it highlights how the writer and director introduce an important critique of gender inequality into the aesthetic movement that we now call the LA Rebellion. These works demonstrate a crucial turn in the last half of the twentieth century to an evaluation of late capital through the mode of the narrative-image, and demonstrate the degree to which the "third meaning" communicates political struggle.

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[7] Elizabeth Povinelli, "Hospices of Late Liberalism" in *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* 102-103.

Realism, Representation, Montage

Realism as a practice in historical durability that records as it interprets emerges in the moment of modernism's anxiety and documentary's canonization; realism as a historical framework continues to spark major intellectual questions, and its definitions to change shape almost constantly. In his 2013 book *The Antinomies of Realism,* Fredric Jameson begins with the observation that when we consider realism, it "is as though the object of our meditation began to wobble, and the attention to it to slip insensibly away from it in two opposite directions, so that at length we find we are thinking, not about realism, but about its emergence; not about the thing itself but about its dissolution."[8] This "wobble," the way realism as an object of study tends to deflect attention away from itself and toward its origins or its destruction, serves as a term at the center of an intellectual centrifuge. Historically speaking, American realism describes 19th century authors concerned with life in the post-industrial revolution United States; Amy Kaplan calls realism in this context a "strategy for imagining and managing the threats of social change."[9]

One of historicism's many epistemological contributions is the way that it frames literary and aesthetic coteries. This critical movement helped – and helps – enormously in destroying the cult of the author as a creative singularity. But there are major historical junctures in which the coterie and, as such, the question of belonging, falls into rupture. As belonging and the "group" demand documentational evidence of their having existed, so too do historical junctures that

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[8] *Antinomies of Realism* 1.
[9] *The Social Construction of American Realism* ix.

seem to strip an aesthetic producer of his "group" in moments of instability. Wright's relationship with the "fact" makes reading his work a challenge, as it is always concerned with a unique indexing of the historical present. His contemporaries in the 1930s were more committed to allegorical framing, particularly in the case of left, Trotskyite, and Communist authors. The writers who were his later peers, particularly James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison, adhered to narrative models that were closer to those of the New Critics of the early 1950s.[10] Wright's facticity needs an outlet, and it comes primarily in the introduction to *Black Metropolis* and *12 Million Black Voices*.

This facticity, however, did not find much of an audience, and is still without much of one in an academic context. Ideological rupture does not make for promising literary movements, and even those who think of themselves quite resolutely as "political" authors suffer in the moments in which political movements demonstrate themselves to be deeply flawed. This is the case for Wright in his relationship to the Communist Party: although he had drifted from the party line in the years leading up the Nazi-Soviet pact, the treaty demonstrated to Wright that

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[10] Baldwin's "Everybody's Protest Novel," from *Notes of a Native Son* and originally published in 1949, fires at Wright for his "violence" to the written word at the expense of an ideological claim. For Baldwin, "truth" is the characteristic at play: "But that battered word, truth, having made its appearance here, confronts one immediately with a series of riddles and has, moreover, since so many gospels are preached, the unfortunate tendency to make one belligerent. Let us say, then, that truth, as used here, is meant to imply a devotion to the human being, his freedom and fulfillment; freedom which cannot be legislated, fulfillment which cannot be charted. This is the prime concern, the frame of reference; it is not to be confused with a devotion to Humanity which is too easily equated with a devotion to a Cause; and Causes, as we know, are notoriously bloodthirsty. We have, as it seems to me, in this most mechanical and interlocking of civilizations, attempted to lop this creature down to the status of a time-saving invention. He is not, after all, merely a member of a Society or a group or a deplorable conundrum to be explained by Science." *Notes of a Native Son* 15. For Baldwin, "truth," the essential quality of humanness, wins out over the depiction of "fact," which takes the human subject as science-object or "member of a Society."

the Communist ideology was impossible to adhere with uncritically. For writers with politics but without a scene of belonging, the "science" of literary and phototextual observation becomes crucial.

"Popular" is a difficult category for Wright to content with – although *Native Son* was wildly popular at the moment of his publication, his commitment to particular aesthetics, including those of earlier Russian realists, put him in an ambivalent position. But Wright is certainly closer, aesthetically speaking, to Brecht than to Lukacs.

> What has all this [Lukacs's previous discussion of "totality" or wholeness] have to do with literature? Nothing at all for any theory – like those of Expressionism or Surrealism – which denies that literature has any reference to objective reality. It means a great deal, however, for a Marxist theory of literature. If literature is a particular form by means of which objective reality is reflected, then it becomes of crucial importance for it to grasp that reality as it truly is, and not merely to confine itself to reproducing whatever manifests itself immediately and on the surface. If a writer strives to represent reality as it truly is, i.e. if he is an authentic realist, then the question of totality plays a decisive role, no matter how the writer actually conceives the problem intellectually.[11]

Putting to the side the issue of "objective reality" – whether it exists or not, and the Hegelian discussions that Lukacs raises elsewhere – literary movements' relationships to it seem to be misattributed. Andre Breton's manifesto on surrealism underscores making of the everyday "these elements [that] are outwardly *as strange to you who have written them as to anyone else*." Eugene Miller and Robin D.G. Kelley have argued on behalf of considering *Native Son* in particular as a surrealist text, and Wright's surrealistic impulses (although he was ambivalent about surrealism's purported relationship to a disclosure of the "unconscious" and the possibilities of Freudian expression) seem to be well supported by their evidence. The gesture that I make, however, accounts not only for Wright's work having surrealistic qualities but for

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[11] Lukacs in Jameson 34.

the ways that Wright opens a new kind of realism, one based on *actual events* and necessarily framed by turns to facticity. Surrealism finds many ties to objective reality, Wright's surrealism in particular.

Brecht's version of realism, the one that opens this introduction, converges best with the version that this project advances. The final chapter of this dissertation opens with a quotation from the filmmaker John Sayles: "Cynicism is saying, it's all fucked up, there's nothing to be done. Realism is, yeah, it's all fucked up, but it's still important to talk about it." For Brecht, what may sound like Sayles's moral realism becomes folded into the question of aesthetic and political realism. Here, the problem of realism's polyvalence is "an issue not only for literature: it is a major political, philosophical, and practical issue." Realism in the beginning of the 20th century followed a number of paths, including the naturalism of Crane and Dreiser that had such a strong influence on Wright. The 1920s and 30s saw the birth of American modernism, although its canonization was long in coming and established in the 1950s. For Wright as much as McKay, the modernism of the Harlem Renaissance and the realism of writers like Dreiser opened up new questions about representative possibility that had to be disclosed through photographs as mimetic objects as well as texts that detailed real events. The disclosure of "facts," tied to a modernist impulse, presages the problems of social-problem representation and aesthetic image production in the second half of the twentieth century.

The problem of the "real" forms an epistemological matrix that is inescapable in the context of the 20th century. The imposition of intermedia forms – photo-text, narrative cinema, concrete poetry – demonstrates a need for aesthetic forms to mark the shifts in public conceptions of the "real." In Sergei Eisenstein's language, this is a version of *montage*, the cinematic method that has come to characterize much of international film. This mechanism is

taken up by Barthes as well, in his discussion of the "third meaning" produced in image-narrative relations, as I will discuss below. For Eisenstein, "Montage has a realistic significance when the separate pieces produce, in juxtaposition, the generality, the synthesis of one's theme. This is the image, incorporating the theme."[12] Where the "theme" is the social world, the separate pieces, image and text, oppose and support each other in the interest of actuality – posing a question about what the real world is like.

Too, Eisenstein's discussion interpellates the reader-viewer, describing how she is called to experience the space between, constituted by, the image and the text.

> And now we can say that it is precisely the montage principle, as distinguished from that of representation, which obliges spectators themselves to create and the montage principle, by this means, achieves that great power of inner creative excitement in the spectator which distinguishes an emotionally exciting work from one that stops without going further than giving information or recording events.[13]

Montage *as opposed to* representation provides both "inner creative excitement," or the emotional response parallel to Barthes's *punctum*; it also goes beyond "giving information or recording events." It is from this center that this project develops: the third space, between image and narrative, produces an ideal location for disclosing actual happenings and revealing the structural undergirding that makes them meaningful.

For Barthes, the "third meaning" is the supplemental, the suspended. "My reading," he argues, "remains suspended between the image and its description, between definition and approximation." In "The Third Meaning: Research notes on some Eisenstein stills," Barthes describes the third meaning, not outside of or exclusive to the signifier and the signified, or the

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[12] *The Film Sense* 30.
[13] 35.

denoted and connoted, but extant to them. "In other words, the third meaning structures the film differently without – at least in SME [Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein] – subverting the story and for this reason, perhaps, it is at the level of the third meaning, and at that level alone, that the 'filmic' finally emerges. The filmic is that in the film which cannot be described, the representation which cannot be represented. The filmic begins only where language and metalanguage end."[14] "The filmic," then, is the ephemeral quality that emerges at the edge of language.

I suggest, however, that this is not *exclusively* the filmic, or rather, that the filmic as a quality might be transposed upon the phototext. In the case of the objects in this study, the phototext produces precisely the "third meaning," and the producers of these objects find the third space an ideal one for political assertions. The objects' narrative projects are diverse: for Wright, the narrative is a historiographical one, a story that demands a position for black Americans in both the past and present of the national imaginary. For the agents of the American Indian relocation project, the narrative is persuasive, and attempts to produce a teleology that ends up being utterly unrealizable. The objects in the final chapter are the only two that are "filmic" in the traditional sense, narratives that produce a critique of the political and historical present in an effort to expose the broken promises of late liberalism, but all the cases here adhere to montage principle to some degree.[15]

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[14] *Image Music Text* 53, 64.
[15] See Povinelli.

Representation and belonging, then, are yoked together in the third space, and the ongoing effort of writers, photographers, curators, and auteurs to produce an accurate, durable account of the historical moment depends upon producing accurate accounts of collectivity and belonging. For a number of cultural producers in the 20th century, belonging describes the complicated, interwoven terms by which a group might be named, or by which a person's set of attachments might be managed. The term attends to the inside/outside problem that reconsiders the stakes of group formation. Elspeth Probyn's concept of "outside belonging" supposes a desire on the part of the subject to adhere to others; she frames this concept as helping to displace the concept of "identity" in its essential sense:

> I want to figure the desire that individuals have to belong, a tenacious and fragile desire that is, I think, increasingly performed in the knowledge of the impossibility of ever really and truly belonging, along with the fear that the stability of belonging and the sanctity of belongings are forever past. While one might chalk this fear up to postmodernism, or more likely to a pessimism wrought out of the economic crises that most have lived through, I think the desire to belong lives on, placing us on the outside.[16]

It flies in the face of many writings on race in particular to assert that the terms of adherence to the category aren't predicated on an "inside." The other "inside" categories that this project reconsiders – sexuality, nation, politics – are still utilized as a site of analysis in the study of "culture."[17] This project begins with an analysis of a national problem, being Jim Crow segregation, blackness as a national category, and race and economic inequality. Richard

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[16] *Outside Belongings* 8-9
[17] See Jace Weaver, Craig S. Womack, and Robert Warrior, *American Indian Literary Nationalism.*

Wright's project exposes the capacity for the "third space" to address the tangle of political-aesthetic issues at play among the deteriorating Old Left and the emerging civil rights movement.

The second case too is an account of the nation; here, citizenship as a problem of national belonging is produced in the context of American Indian relocation. Because the discussion of nationalism necessarily abuts the problem of citizenship, and because the aim of relocatees is "to become urban citizens outwardly," the subjects of relocation seem constantly engaged in a struggle with the outside, and with the complex terms of belonging that relocation yet again brings to the fore.[18] Relocation appears to demand that Indians enfold themselves into a generalized, poor urban ordinary, but in fact produces loose intertribal ties based around the American Indian Center, neighborhoods, bars, and later, political movements.

As the war years and post-war unfold, and this project follows, emergent political forms color the perception of categories of race and nation. Forms of liberalism after the New Deal purport to keep together the relation between the state and capital. David Harvey outlines:

> What all of these various state forms had in common was an acceptance that the state should focus on full employment, economic growth, and the welfare of its citizens, and that state power should be freely deployed, alongside of or, if necessary, intervening in or even substituting for market processes to achieve these ends. Fiscal and monetary policies usually dubbed 'Keynesian' were widely deployed to dampen business cycles and to ensure reasonably full employment. A 'class compromise' between capital and labour was generally advocated as the key guarantor of domestic peace and tranquillity. States actively intervened in industrial policy and moved to set standards for the social wage by constructing a variety of welfare systems (health care, education, and the like). This form of political-economic organization is now usually referred to as 'embedded liberalism' to signal how market processes and entrepreneurial and corporate activities were surrounded by a web of social and political constraints and a regulatory environment that sometimes restrained but in other instances led the way in economic

[18]Steiner in Neils, 37

> and industrial strategy. Stateled planning and in some instances state ownership of key sectors (coal, steel, automobiles) were not uncommon (for example in Britain, France, and Italy). The neoliberal project is to disembed capital from these constraints.[19]

Liberalism is also a "problem" that critics of the mid-century note that activists and cultural producers address. Thomas J. Sugrue argues:

> But the New Deal was riddled with ambiguities and contradictions that left room for opposing interpretations of what constituted proper government action. Most threatening to the seeming unity of the New Deal order were unresolved questions of racial identity and racial politics, dilemmas that would become inseparable from the mission of liberalism itself. Part of the story of the African American challenge to liberalism is well known: civil rights groups in the 1950s launched a fierce attack on Jim Crow in the South. But at the same time, the combination of deindustrialization and black population growth upended the racial order of Detroit and other northern cities. The disruption of old patterns of work, residence, and race coincided with a massive political challenge to the structures of racial inequality nationwide."[20]

The city itself is undoubtedly a particular location for unfolding problems of and challenges to liberalism. Where aesthetic producers capture the shifting city, political problems too disclose themselves.

Photography and "Truth" in Representation

The capacity for photo-texts to represent belonging is an ongoing problem of this project in that the photograph itself is located both at a disciplinary shift and a theoretical impasse. The work of the photographic image is profoundly overdetermined, as it must *be* and *do* history, and record peoples in their life and death. The latter in particular haunts recent thinking:

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[19] *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* 11.
[20] *The Origins of the Urban Crisis* 10. For more on the challenges to liberalism by African Americans in the mid-century, see Penny Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism*, 1937-1957.

"Photographs state the innocence, the vulnerability of lives heading toward their own destruction, and this link between photography and death haunts all photographs of people," is Susan Sontag's quotation, invoked by Judith Butler at the beginning of "Torture and the Ethics of Photography."[21] Death is what Eduardo Cadava and Rey Chow find in Benjamin's description of the photographic ontology: "The photograph is a farewell. It belongs to the afterlife of the photographed. It is permanently inflamed by the instantaneous flash of death."[22] Siegfried Kracauer says, "The image wanders *ghostlike* through the present… a shudder goes through the viewer of the old photograph for they do not illustrate the recognition of the original but rather the spatial configuration of the moment."[23] It seems, if I am to preserve all of these truisms – and this is the goal, after all – that I will have to make peace with the two death masks that photography wears: the one that underlines a human's inevitable mortality, the being-toward-death that Barthes describes, and the one that locates a person in her historical present with the purpose of preserving her there forever, alive as always in the dead image.

How can the photographic image do everything that it is called upon to do in both the theoretical canon *and* US history in photos? How can the image be both a displacement of the very concept of origin and a motivated practice of fixing people – and *a* people – in historical time? Judith Butler asserts, "I want to understand how the *frames* that allocate the recognizability of certain figures of the human are themselves linked with broader *norms* that determine

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[21] "Torture and the Ethics of Photography," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space,* Vol 25 (April, 2007), pp. 951-966.
[22] Cadava 13.
[23] "Photography" 56, my emphasis.

questions of humanization or dehumanization."[24] For me, the "frame" is also of central importance, but, at the risk of contaminating Butler, I need to rework the recognizability of certain figures of the human in order to describe the project of making image-subjects "general." Butler also calls up the problematic register of "humanization," which as far as this dissertation is concerned, is an ambivalent project that runs into all kinds of problems when it encounters the political and economic systems of liberalism. The BIA images de-politicize the subjects where previous images of Indians overflowed with the political – in this case, the capacity for the subjects of the images to disappear as "a people" or to wage war against the US government. Butler notes that "the operation of the frame, where state power exercises its forcible dramaturgy, is not precisely representable or, when it is, it risks becoming insurrectionary and becomes subject to state punishment and control."[25] This is true here too.

Again, the photographic/textual object produces a particular kind of "realism" that argues against the concerns about the end of representation. For critics during the period, "representing reality" and the problems of representing actual happenings forces an emerging analytic contingent on evaluations of the "realist" mode. Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*, published in English for the first time in 1953, argues that, "if we take the word realism a little more strictly, we are forced to conclude that there could be no serious literary treatment of everyday occupations and social classes – merchants, artisans, peasants, slaves – of everyday scenes and places – home, shop, field, store – of everyday customs and institutions-marriage, children, work, earning a

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[24] 951, emphasis in original.
[25] Butler 952.

living – in short, of the people and its life."[26] For Auerbach, models of "everydayness" define the realist impulse: "For it is precisely in the intellectual and economic conditions of everyday life that those forces are revealed which underlie historical movements; these, whether military, diplomatic, or related to the inner constitution of the state, are only the product, the final result, of variations in the depths of everyday life."[27] Here, the "realist" mode is one based on subject matter: the representation of real events matters because it elucidates the social and political context undergirding the events of a given scene. This provides a critical intervention such that the frame for amateur, bureaucratic, and social-problem photography can be seen less as a purely social gesture and more as a simultaneous social, journalistic/persuasive, and aesthetic gesture. It is a way of reorienting the historical and aesthetic conception of the compulsion to render the "real," such that even institutions like the Department of the Interior find themselves producing and reiterating an ideology of realism.

This historiographical reconsideration of realism further attaches itself to Auerbach's assertion that without realism there is no literary communication of everyday life. The images in this study, however, demand an attention to some of the theoretical musings on the relationship between photography and everyday life, particularly given that I assert that these photographs occupy an "everyday" *aesthetic*, but that they nonetheless take as their point of origin another variable that can't be ignored: they also serve as documents of persuasion. It is because of these multiple aesthetic tasks that my methods problematize the distinctions between "social" and "art" photography. For theorists of the photographic image, the terms of artistic and persuasive

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[26] *Mimesis* 31
[27] 33.

photographs seem rarely to interact by virtue of their styles or methods; the moments of interaction produce insurmountable problems. The practicalities of images both teaching or persuading and simultaneously taking an aesthetic "stance" demanded that theorists condemn one in favor of the other. In some cases, theorists manage to change the *terms* such that the problems of the aesthetic and the pedagogical become commensurable. Susan Sontag argues that in the modernist era, the attention to what is aesthetically "beautiful" shifts, such that the photographer renders unbeautiful objects in lovely ways.[28] When, in *On Photography,* Sontag reframes the terms of aesthetics, she argues that photography has managed to rearrange the human relationship to the "beautiful." The "leveling" that she finds in Edward Steichen, and then later in her extended critique of Diane Arbus, connects to their projects of making politics "irrelevant." For Sontag, the "beautiful" is incommensurate with the "political," *even when the beautiful is made into the ugly*.

> The Arbus photographs convey the anti-humanist message which people of good will in the 1970s are eager to be troubled by, just as they wished, in the 1950s, to be consoled and distracted by a sentimental humanism. There is not as much difference between these messages as one might suppose. The Steichen show was an up and the Arbus show was a down, but either experience serves equally well to rule out a historical understanding of reality….
> Arbus's photographs undercut politics just as decisively, by suggesting a world in which

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[28] "In photography's early decades, photographs were expected to be idealized images. This is still the aim of most amateur photographers, for whom a beautiful photograph is a photograph of something beautiful, like a woman, a sunset. In 1915 Edward Steichen photographed a milk bottle on a tenement fire escape, an early example of a quite different idea of the beautiful photograph. And since the 1920s, ambitious professionals, those whose work gets into museums, have steadily drifted away from lyrical subjects, conscientiously exploring plain, tawdry, or even vapid material. In recent decades, photography has succeeded in somewhat revising, for everybody, the definitions of what is beautiful and ugly—along the lines that Whitman had proposed. If (in Whitman's words) "each precise object or condition or combination or process exhibits a beauty," it becomes superficial to single out some things as beautiful and others as not." *On Photography* 28.

> everybody is an alien, hopelessly isolated, immobilized in mechanical, crippled identities and relationships. The pious uplift of Steichen's photograph anthology and the cool dejection of the Arbus retrospective both render history and politics irrelevant.[29]

Here, it is crucial to retain the subtleties of the aesthetics that these photographs intend, an aesthetic practice that situates them in and actively produces a vision of everyday life. Furthermore, these images are not "aestheticizing politics," both because they make work into an aspiration and not as a site of politics and because they image an enterprise that is invested in divesting its subjects of their political sovereignty.[30]

Space, Place, and Affect

Physical space in the city provides the context for these projects. But there is an ambivalence among these producers about overdetermining space. While it is impossible to do justice to the term as it emerges in philosophy and cultural criticism, there are again a number of traditions that converge at "Nowhere." Thomas L. Dumm quotes Stanley Cavell's discussion of Nowhere:

> The condition of disappointment has been expressed philosophically by Stanley Cavell as leaving us in a place he calls "Nowhere." This Nowhere is not the utopia it might seem to some, but it might be the last refuge for a kind of philosophical thinking. When Cavell suggests that a task of philosophy is to preserve the skeptical argument, it is this Nowhere he is hoping, against hope, to save. 'Here my thought [is] that skepticism is a place, perhaps the central secular place, in which the human wish to deny the condition of human existence is expressed; and so long as the denial is essential to what we think of as the human, skepticism cannot, or must not, be denied.' The place of skepticism is a place of disappointment.

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[29] *On Photography* 30.
[30] This is how Walter Benjamin accuses fascism in his famous essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, Second Version" (page 42).

This is the model of Nowhere as the point of resignation, of disappointment – "quitting," says Dumm.[31] For a much earlier group of cultural thinkers, Nowhere took on a different meaning: when Ralph Ellison, writing in 1948, characterized "Harlem [as] Nowhere," he wrote,

> For this is a world in which the major energy of the imagination goes not into creating works of art, but to overcome the frustrations of social discrimination. Not quite citizens and yet Americans, full of the tensions of modern man, but regarded as primitives, Negro Americans are in desperate search for an identity. Rejecting the second-class status assigned them, they feel alienated and their whole lives have become a search for answers to the questions: Who am I, What am I, Why am I, and Where? Significantly, in Harlem the reply to the greeting, 'How are you?' is very often, 'Oh, man, I'm *nowhere*' – a phrase revealing an attitude so common that it has been reduced to a gesture, a seemingly trivial word.[32]

In the same year, Anatole Broyard characterized the "hipster" as Nowhere: "A Portrait of the Hipster" begins, "As he was the illegitimate son of the Lost Generation, the hipster was really *nowhere*. And, just as amputees often seem to localize their strongest sensations in the *missing* limb, so the hipster longed, from the very beginning, to be *somewhere*. He was like a beetle on its back; his life was a struggle to get *straight.*"[33] If Ellison categorizes Harlem as Nowhere, it seems likely that he would characterize Watts similarly. But for the auteurs of the LA Rebellion, Nowhere is both Ellisonian *and* Cavellian – epistemological and spatial, the scene of "quitting" and the scene of alienation.

Belonging and non-belonging, then, the knowledge that one is "nowhere" but may want to have "somewhere," determine each other, and demand a realist – an unfictional – recognition. For the writers, bureaucrats, photographers, and filmmakers of the project, this tension is an open

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[31]"Resignation," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Autumn, 1998), pp. 56-76.
[32]"Harlem is Nowhere," *Harpers* 1948, *Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison* 323, emphasis in original.
[33]*Partisan Review* 1948, emphasis in original.

and deterministic one. For critics and producers of the midcentury, the problem of being among others determines our aesthetic categories.

The emergence of the phototext, then, helps to disclose how even after the crisis of representationality and reproducibility that characterizes modernism, collectives and publics turn to intermedia forms to find truth claims. In the disclosure of everyday life, these groups use experimental methods to expose the unfolding of the political climate in the United States of the midcentury. The phototext, then, provides the aesthetic textures to the rise and fall of the "class compromise" of the midcentury.

Chapter One: Revising Documentation: Richard Wright, Realist Modernism, and Representing the City

Richard Wright notes in 1945, in his introduction to St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton's *Black Metropolis*, "[Upon moving to Chicago] I felt those extremes of possibility, death and hope, while I lived half hungry and afraid in a city to which I had fled with the dumb yearning to write, to tell my story." For Wright, this "story" initially takes the form of poetry and short fiction written for Communist publications until the breakthrough publication of his collection *Uncle Tom's Children*. For Wright, the "truth" of the "story" comes to matter early in his self-anthologizing. He continues, "But I did not know what my story was, and it was not until I stumbled upon [social] science that I discovered some of the meanings of the environment that battered and taunted me. I encountered the work of men who were studying the Negro community, amassing facts about urban Negro life, and I found that sincere art and honest science were not far apart, that each could enrich the other."[1] Among the telling references here is Wright's commitment to "facts." Even his great novel *Native Son*, by Wright's own account, is based on a case that he avidly followed in the Chicago newspapers.[2]

The academic and popular writing on Richard Wright has remarkable breadth and depth, with critics attending to his realist and naturalist influences as well as his modernist, Russian and (particularly) French interests, both literary and philosophical. His friend Margaret Walker claims that he told her to read John Reed, Karl Marx, Adam Smith, Friedrich Nietzsche, Gustave

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[1] *Black Metropolis* xvii-xviii.
[2] See Paula Rabinowitz's excellent account of Wright's allegiance to "true crime" in *American Pulp*.

Flaubert, Stephen Crane, John Dos Passos, DH Lawrence, and William Faulkner.[3] The diversity of Wright's literary interests underscores the possibilities for his own writing: that he accommodated not only different periods and writers but different methodologies – including social scientific ones – is clear in his own writings about the development of his thinking, in interviews, essays like "How Bigger was Born," and his introduction to *Black Metropolis*. But the simultaneous debates of the late 30s on the matter of realism and its relationship to the greater world demonstrate a common theme that remains without intellectual discussion. Bertolt Brecht's discussion of realism as meaning "a great deal for a Marxist theory of literature" matches Wright's thinking on the possibility for literary/scientific inquiry and the essential problem of the relationship between the "real world," its representation, and leftist critique. Wright's interest in German philosophy is easily demonstrated; his library includes a great deal of Hegel, Nietzsche, and Marx. In 1947, Michel Fabre notes, "Wright had a copy of Husserl's *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* rebound in black leather so he could take it wherever he went." He met Hannah Arendt in 1946, and was close with the French philosophical community of the moment as well.[4] And while these do not necessarily guarantee that Wright was a reader of Brecht, his late-1930s concern with the representation of the real marks an importance epistemological convergence between the Continental and American forms of Marxism.

For Werner Sollors, Wright's 1940s writings are necessarily determined both by the Chicago atmosphere and his modernist contemporaries. "For Wright, the central question was the

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[3] Hazel Rowley, *Richard Wright: The Life and Times* 120.
[4] *Richard Wright: Books and Authors* 7, on Arendt, and 76, on Husserl.

one he asked in his preface to *Black Metropolis* (1945): 'What would life on Chicago's South Side look like when seen through the eyes of a Freud, a Joyce, a Proust, a Pavlov, a Kierkegaard?' The point was not to choose between realism and modernism, but to use any technique that was likely to shake up readers and direct them toward the serious questions of the times, among which class inequality and racial segregation were prominent."[5] In this dissertation's final chapter I show that the Los Angeles film group called the LA Rebellion produces a mode of cinema (and world-building) that I call improvisational realism. This term is informed by Sollors's and Paul Gilroy's use of the term "populist modernism" to describe aesthetic-political strategies that account for historical problems and aesthetic vantage points.

> A preliminary resolution of these problems may lie in embracing an aesthetic and political strategy that many black artists have evolved in an apparently spontaneous manner. I will call this option 'populist modernism,' [Gilroy's note five: I borrowed this term from Werner Sollors's study *Amiri Baraka/Leroi Jones: The Quest for a Populist Modernism*, Columbia University Press, 1978] a deliberately contradictory term which suggests that black artists are not only mindful of their historic obligation to interrogate the dubious legacies of occidental modernity premised on the exclusion of blacks. This distinctive aesthetic and ethico-political approach requires a special gloss on terms like reason, justice, freedom, and 'communicative ethics.' It starts from recognition of the African diaspora's peculiar position as 'step-children' of the West and of the extent to which our imaginations are conditioned by an enduring proximity to regimes of racial terror. It seeks deliberately to exploit the distinctive quality of perception that Du Bois identified long ago as 'double consciousness.' Whether this is viewed as an effect of oppression or a unique moral burden, it is premised on some sense of black cultures, not simply as significant repositories of anti-capitalist sensibility but as counter-cultures of modernity forged in the quintessentially modern condition of racial slavery.[6]

As Sollors persuasively argues with respect to Wright, "the point was not to choose between realism and modernism, but to use any technique that was likely to shake up readers and direct

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[5] "The Clock, the Salesman, and the Breast." In *The Cambridge History of American Literature* 495.

[6] "Cruciality and the frog's perspective," in *Diaspora Identities, Diaspora Aesthetics* 103.

them toward the serious questions of the times." I would like to modify this claim slightly, to suggest that the point is indeed not to choose between realism and modernism, but by virtue of the phototext and sociological writings, to engage both with the purpose of bringing realism and modernism into aesthetic and political conversation.

Wright is constantly toggling between representational quality, in the sense that he wants his work to serve certain aesthetic ends, and the problem of representation that has a strong tie to the political problems of the world in the historical moment of his writing. In the Drake and Cayton, Wright makes this tie explicit with his appeal to art as a vector of "science."

> Chicago is the city from which the most incisive and radical Negro thought has come; there is an open and raw beauty about that city that seems either to kill or endow one with the spirit of life. I felt those extremes of possibility, death and hope, while I lived half hungry and afraid in a city to which I had fled with the dumb yearning to write, to tell my story. But I did not know what my story was, and it was not until I stumbled upon science that I discovered some of the meanings of the environment that battered and taunted me. I encountered the work of men who were studying the Negro community, amassing facts about urban Negro life, and I found that sincere art and honest science were not far apart, that each could enrich the other. The huge mountains of fact piled up by the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago gave me my first concrete vision of the forces that molded the urban Negro's body and soul (I was never a student at the university; it is doubtful if I could have passed the entrance examination.)[7]

Leaving aside the fact that it is the university's and not Wright's loss never to have had him as a student, when Wright asserts that "sincere art and honest science were not far apart," he is opening a particular kind of realist possibility, not one that cleaves well to earlier definitions of realism (primarily 19th century, but 20th century as well) but one that imagines its goal as an evocation of actual facts and happenings. "Amassing facts" proves crucial for Wright as he turns

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[7] *Black Metropolis* xvii-xviii.

to literary and literary-photographic modes at the moment of his disillusionment with the mainline Communist Party.

Yet Wright's 1941 phototext *12 Million Black Voices* is often taken as an exclusively modernist-aesthetic text whose origins lie with projects like James Agee and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Wright's text, like Agee and Evans's, wears its modernist affinities on its sleeve, and takes the "problem" of medium very much to be a one of the modern moment. But Wright's text poses a number of essential distinctions – formal, in the sense that the pictures and text are laid alongside each other, demanding a cross-reading that the Agee and Evans doesn't – as well as methodological, in the sense that Wright postulates that the confluence of image and text presents powerful realist possibilities. Agee's ambivalence about the production and presentation of the real is well-established; he famously notes in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, "If I could do it, I'd do no writing at all here. It would be photographs; the rest would be fragments of cloth, bits of cotton, lumps of earth, records of speech, pieces of wood and iron, phials of odors, plates of food and of excrement."[8] The representation of the real in the form of the written word is unavailable to Agee, but for Wright, the possibility of seeing the "real world," making claims upon it, and accurately interpreting it, survive the modernist refusal to see "realistically."

Wright's and many of his contemporaries' works in this moment might be considered commentaries on the problem of the representation of "real events" in a moment of ideological undoing. We might think of *12 Million* and Wright's introduction to *Black Metropolis*, written within an four-year period, as exemplary considerations on the question of what happens to the

[8] Agee and Evans 10.

terms of "the group" when a person's group (in this case, Communist) affiliations come into question. Under what conditions, and with what effects, do members – in this case, a former member – of political groups try to factually represent the moments of their historical location, or arrive at an impasse of representation? How do ambivalences about representability and membership to groups produce objects of aesthetic import?

This chapter proposes a reconsideration of documentary practice as an aesthetic program *and* a social demand in a moment of political tension, particularly given the shift in the perception of photographic possibility in the late 1930s and early 1940s. It argues, with Bill Nichols, that documentary practice, with its narrative techniques, allegiance to photographic realism, and social desires, is necessarily produced historically in the moment of the emergence of modernist aesthetics.[9] In this sense, *12 Million Black Voices* opens the conversation that continues through the 20th century: the analogue photograph and its attendant text can be collectively utilized to demonstrate satisfaction and dissatisfaction, political engagement and forms of belonging. This analytic method and historical revision reframes Wright's relationship to the problems of realism and belonging, and argues for a greater theoretical understanding of the relationship between the "factual" project and the category of realism, showing that the emergence of the phototextual genre demonstrates ongoing concerns with representability and facticity.*12 Million Black Voices* provides a way of seeing, a set of unfictional accounts that reframe the way an audience considers the relationship between the "fact" and the "archive," as well as between the text and the image.

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[9] "Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-Garde," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Summer, 2001).

This moment, as discussed in relation to Wright and Agee/Evans, also sees a shift in the way that phototextual projects are seen in their relation to the "real." The social-awareness photography of the 1930s, seen in texts like *You Have Seen Their Faces* as well as *Life* Magazine and numerous exhibitions, takes a turn to a photojournalistic approach by the 1940s as Americans take an increasing interest in war imagery and as photographers like Dorothea Lange move from working for the FSA to working for magazines.[10] In 1939, Paul Taylor (the economist and husband of Dorothea Lange) "admitted that because of mechanization and low crop prices it would be impossible to keep many poor families on the land." In fact, urban migration may not have been the panacea that leftists had hoped; as Guimond notes, "To phrase the matter more cynically, the overseer would be replaced by the factory foreman, the sharecropper's shack by the ghetto tenement, and the plantation commissary by the neighborhood pawnshop."[11] And the FSA's work began to be used as propaganda: the FSA's 1941 exhibit at Rockefeller Center, *The Way of the People* showed productive, strong, healthy workers: shoring up patriotism had taken over. This shift, from a certainty that photography was capable of changing minds to a claim that the photographic project was primarily one of recording national achievement, sees Wright creating projects that illustrate photography's factual possibilities as well as its instability as a form.

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[10] Literary historian James Guimond tracks the evolution of the phototext in the 1930s, noting that, by the end of the 1930s the ideological tide expressed in poverty images was shifting, as well as the awareness of what, in fact, *could* be socially achieved after the New Deal. See *American Photography and the American Dream.*

[11] *American Photography and the American Dream* 136.

The Hitler-Stalin pact of August 1939 threw leftists into an ideological tailspin. While Wright had been uneasy about the Communist party for some time, an issue that he detailed in print in 1944 in "I Tried to be a Communist," part of the problem for Wright was an uneasiness with generalizing ideology itself. This opens up a problem in the folding of Wright easily into aesthetic, ideological, and canonical groups. Wright develops close friendships with other writers (although these are often temporary, like his famous relationship with Ralph Ellison) but a major dynamic of his professional and personal life is his discomfort with the trappings of belonging.

Other writers acknowledge their crises of ideological "faith" in this short time frame. In the late 1930s, the poet, critic, and novelist Claude McKay wrote, "My faith in the cause of social justice and a new social order broadly based on the dignity and democracy of labor has never wavered. But my intellect is not limited to the social interpretation of Marx and Lenin. It… finds its roots in approached social theories and problems with open minds; and from them extracted the genuine and rejected the spurious."[12] For Wright, with his essays like "I Tried to be a Communist," his ideological uneasiness makes a clear appearance. But, as the later chapters in this project argue, as much as collectives demand a particular kind of realism that underscores their significance, radicals without collectives, writers in a political "break" like McKay and Wright in 1938-1941, also feel the need to produce factual accounts of crisis. Where this project otherwise accounts for factual depictions of belonging, this first chapter accounts for realist descriptions of nonbelonging – accounts that justify the necessity of making group-less-ness legible.

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[12] "On Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.," from *The Passion of Claude McKay* 252. Quoted in Cooper, 337.

Modernist Realism and Richard Wright's Documentary Aesthetics

For Richard Wright in 1945, the American consciousness that has been in long crisis makes its "problem," its "fatal division" known. It has turned out that DuBois's exhortation of 1903 has come into its fullness, that the problem of the 20th century is "the problem of the color line."[13] For Wright this claim remains useful – particularly the notion of the "line" which has expanded its symbolic meanings to enclose the "rift" in American consciousness. The color line, for Wright, is both line and gap, the form that helps us to understand "modern man."

The line both expands and contracts at the moment of war, the moment of Wright's writing the introduction to *Black Metropolis*. Our "fatal division of being," he notes, pushes the United States toward war, toward a catastrophic break. How might it be otherwise, Wright wonders, when the world has just come off of one of its most damaging historical events and the loss of some 52 million lives? But Wright, ever the aesthete, ever invested in how the problem of the historical present entwines with the "representational," turns to documentary for his evidence while simultaneously preserving his interest in modernist methods.

The evocation of a "modernist realism" necessarily puts pressure on the criteria for what qualifies as "modernist," let alone realist, but Wright's realism is not of the earlier generation as they are characterized by an ongoing attention to factuality, literal representation, and visual-textual interplay. It is not that the photo-text provides the only way to see modernist realism, or to see how Wright and makes aesthetic and political claims based on ideological disillusionment

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[13] WEB DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* 19.

and an interest in new forms; it is that the phototext provides an unusually *efficient* model for disclosing factualities.

Wright's facticity also aligns him with the modernist aesthetic that has characterized the earlier literary period. Bill Mullen outlines, in particular, Wright's rejection of popular aesthetics: "In 1943 Wright began work on *American Hunger*, the autobiography that would cast a plague on the houses of both the CP and the "lust for trash" of American consumer culture. Significantly, this period also coincided with Wright's attempts to retrofit his life and work to the Chicago school of sociology."[14] While Mullen doesn't specifically point to the photographs of the FSA as "modernist," nor to Wright's style as owing much to modernism, the rejection of consumer culture in concert with the ongoing concern with the image serves as evidence that Wright was, in fact, deeply invested in modernism.[15]

The late 1930s in African-American literature is a study in the tension between literature as the index of human "truth" and as a vehicle for social change. In magazine reviews, as well as in meetings and at social events, black writers debated the possibilities for "real" representation and artistic superiority. Lawrence Jackson refers to the period 1937-1940 as "the triumph of Chicago Realism," demonstrating how writers like Wright, Margaret Walker, and Waters Turpin negotiated the events of their historical present. These debates produce emerging aesthetic readings, but they also produce political argument. What Jackson rightly characterizes as the split between left and liberal critics demonstrates that political achievement in the form of the realism was taken as a site of contestation. Wright's own critique of fellow authors demonstrates

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[14] *Popular Fronts* 36.
[15] See Paula Rabinowitz, "Social Representations within American Modernism," in *The Cambridge Companion to American Modernism*.

the struggle that he finds to be emerging in black fiction; his review of Turpin's *These Low Grounds*, now long out of print, and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, now celebrated as a black, modernist, and black-modernist classic, demonstrates his commitment to fictional "representations" that carry with them political intentions. Wright's review of Turpin's novel demonstrates his and his contemporaries' difficulty negotiating the line of "realist" representation.

> *These Low Grounds* represents, I believe, the first attempt of a Negro writer to encompass in fiction the rise of the Negro from slavery to the present.... The first half of the book is interesting, for Turpin deals with a subject which he knows intimately. Those sections depicting post-war Negro life in the North do not ring true or full; in fact, toward the conclusion the book grows embarrassingly sketchy, resolving nothing. Oddly enough, Turpin seems to have viewed those parts of his novel which deal with the modern Negro through the eyes and consciousness of one emotionally alien to the scene. Many of the characters… are splendid social types; but rarely do they become human beings. It seems that Turpin drew these types from intellectual conviction, but lacked the artistic strength to make us feel the living quality of their experiences."[16]

Wright criticizes Turpin's characterological flatness – the writer's seeming to be "emotionally alien to the scene" precludes him from realizing characters as "human beings" and not "social types." Wright's takedown of Hurston is, of course, the much more recognized part of this review. In it Wright eviscerates the novel, arguing, "Miss Hurston voluntarily continues in her novel the tradition which was forced upon the Negro in the theater, that is, the minstrel technique that makes the 'white folks' laugh." He continues,

> Her characters eat and laugh and cry and work and kill; they swing like a pendulum eternally in that safe and narrow orbit in which America likes to see the Negro live: between laughter and tears.
> Turpin's faults as a writer are those of an honest man trying desperately to say something; but Zora Neale Hurston lacks even that excuse. The sensory sweep of her novel carries no theme, no message, no thought. In the main, her novel is not addressed to the Negro, but

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[16] *New Masses* October 5, 1937 22-25.

> to a white audience whose chauvinistic tastes she knows how to satisfy. She exploits that phase of Negro life which is "quaint," the phase which evokes a piteous smile on the lips of the "superior" race.

For Wright, literary technique necessarily negotiates both representational "quality," in the sense of giving to a particular audience or set of audiences an unexpected "treatment." But his aesthetic impulses nonetheless cleave to a portrait based on realism that manages to account for character. This is the quality that he critiques in Turpin, that his characters are "social types" and not "human beings."

This is a distinction that other contemporaneous critics will recognize in Wright himself, particularly with *Native Son*. For Baldwin the "protest novel" can't meet the criteria of "good" fiction, but for others the distinction is not so straightforward. In *Phylon*, Joseph H. Jenkins, Jr. argues, "In *Native Son* society is the real criminal. Bigger is only a small sore, however annoying, upon the social body, symptomatic of a chronic malady pervading the whole system."[17] In a mixed review in *The Journal of Negro History*, J.D. Jerome states, "This novel is historical in more than one sense. The book deals with an important present-day situation which is deeply rooted in the past and the success with which the book has met the test is epoch-making."[18] The very abbreviated description in *The English Journal* is telling: they note, "This powerful study of the Negro in American life is written by a Negro born and educated in the South but now living in Chicago. It is well written, sensational, dramatic – horrible. Bigger, the colored youth, never had a chance."[19] When the reviewer underscores the novel's "historicity," Jerome argues that Wright's text is significant because of its working through of a "present-day

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[17] "Saucy Doubts and Fears," *Phylon* Vol. 1, No. 2 (2nd Qtr., 1940) 195-197.
[18] "Review," *The Journal of Negro History* Vol. 25, No. 2 (Apr., 1940) 251-252.
[19] "In Brief Review," The English Journal, Vol. 29, No. 5 (May, 1940) 427-433.

situation." Even the novel's "sensationalism" is taken to be referential in the sense that it reminds the reader of the high stakes of racial animus in the historical moment.

That Jackson calls this historical moment the "triumph of Chicago realism" is significant not just for its commitment to a realist practice, but also because he asserts that one of the qualities of realism at this historical juncture is its urban quality. For Wright, the city is the case for documentary analysis. He notes in *Black Metropolis*:

> Sometimes northern white men, seeing the misery of the northern urban Negro, exclaim: "why do Negroes leave the sunny South to live like this?" When a white man asks such a question, he is either deliberately or conveniently forgetting that white men once left the slumberous feudal world and eagerly took the risks of, as William James phrased it, an "unguaranteed existence." So, too, when the Negro, responding to the cultural hopes of his time, leaves the South and comes to the cold, industrial North, he is acting upon the same impulses that made the men of the West great. The Negro can do no less; he shares all of the glorious hopes of the West, all of its anxieties, its corruptions, its psychological maladies. But, too, above all, like a warning, he shares those tendencies toward surrendering all hope of seeking solutions within the frame of a "free enterprise" society. To the extent that he realizes that his hopes are hopeless, he will embrace Communism or Fascism, or whatever other ideological rejection is offered.[20]

Wright tracks "ideology" as well as the Northern Migration within the context of an economic model that holds out promises that it necessarily fails to deliver. This is the question to which he responds in his text and image projects in *12 Million Black Voices*, particularly the chapters that attend to urbanism.

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[20] *Black Metropolis* xxv-xxvi.

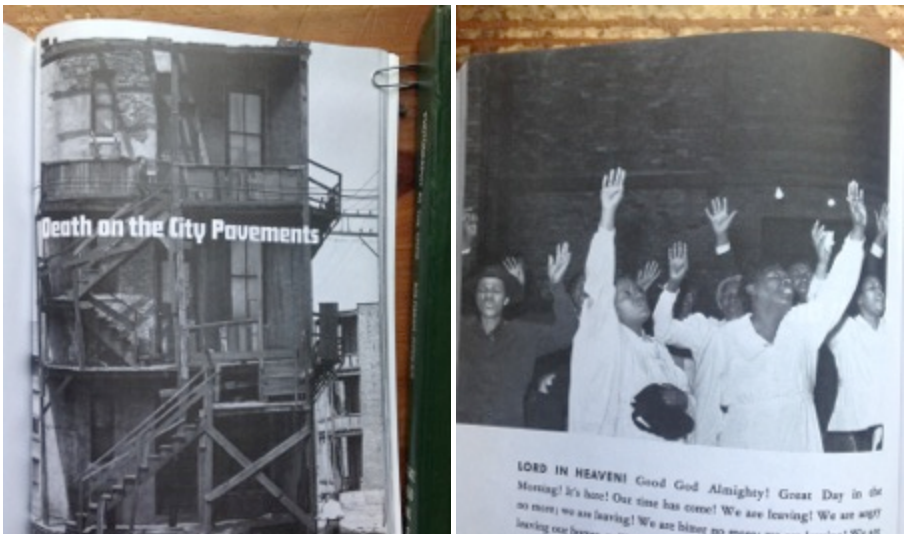

Figure 1. Death on the City Pavements, from Wright and Rosskam, *12 Million Black Voices* 91.

Figure 2. Church Scene, from Wright and Rosskam, *12 Million Black Voices* 92.

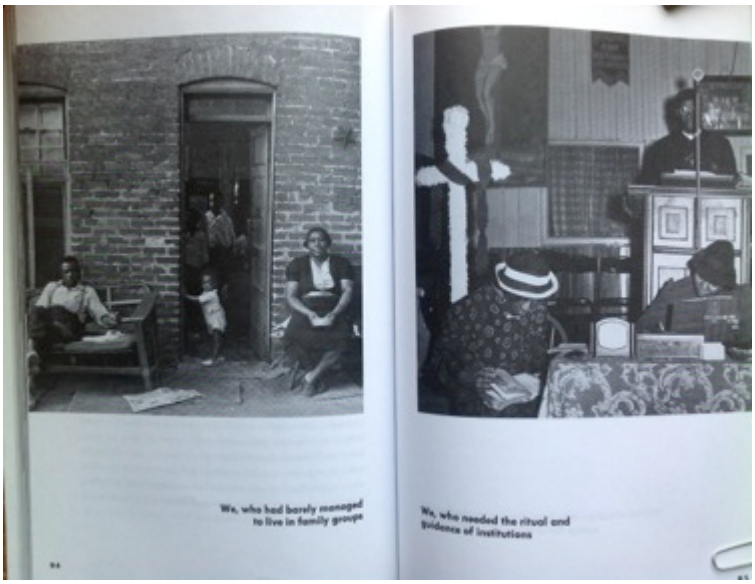

Figure 3. Family Group and Guidance of Institutions, from Wright and Rosskam, *12 Million Black Voices* 94-95.

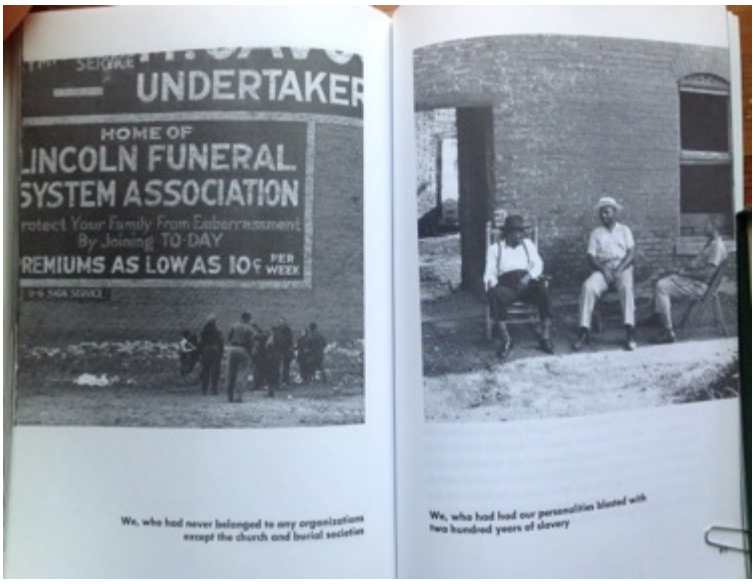

Figure 4. Burial Societies and Personalities Blasted, from Wright and Rosskam, *12 Million Black Voices* 96-97.

In *12 Million Black Voices*, the viewer/reader encounters the images and text in the form of the framing narrative – the "folk history" – but also in chapters, each laid out and narrated to provide texture to a historical and conceptual moment. The above images are the first pages from chapter three, "Death on the City Pavements." The first image presents the back of a tenement, the second a scene from a church service, the third a double-page bleed of family and church, and the fourth another double-page bleed, this one a crowd of men below a billboard opposite a smaller group of men in chairs, having a conversation on the street. "Death on the City Pavements" is, for Wright, a continuation of a narrative about migration that lands in the city (in this case, it's almost exclusively Chicago, although Sara Blair makes a most persuasive case for these images inflecting their influence on the image cultures of Harlem.[21]) Physical location, for

[21] See "From *Black Voices* to *Black Power*," in *Harlem Crossroads: Black Writers and the Photograph in the Twentieth Century*.

Wright, is a polyvalent intellectual and social problem; it is also one of the constitutive dynamics of Wright's realist modernism, in the sense that this provides both a critique of modern social life and a critical viewpoint on actual moments. These six images that open the chapter produce a crucial understanding of physical space: from the apartment to the church to the street, physical space produces particular kinds of psychic space. The subjects of the images, who for Wright both stand in as generalities for social problems while also opening out to the audience through looks and direct eye contact, demonstrate how physical space is psychic and social.

The left-hand page of the bleed on pages 96 and 97 shows a group of men below an ad for the "Lincoln Funeral System Association." It asserts that those called to by the ad can "save [their] family from embarrassment" by joining with a low premium. Wright's text reads, "We, who had never belonged to any organization except the church and burial societies" and continues onto the next page of the bleed. For now, however, I will evaluate the image, its included text, and its mutually constitutive caption without attending to its facing image and will return to the work of this particular pairing. As is true of nearly all of Wright's images, the text demands a fresh reading of the image as the image demands a particular engagement with the text. The business referenced in the image itself is the "Lincoln network," which provided burial insurance to a black clientele. In *The Black Image in the New Deal*, Nicholas Natanson outlines the development of funerary insurance:

> As Lee and Rosskam discovered, the funeral business was one of the few corners of the commercial world largely controlled by blacks. The competition was intraracial, with established undertakers challenged increasingly during the 1930s-1940s by funeral systems that not only offered low-premium, easily accessible burial insurance – insurance that did not have to be claimed as an asset when holders were applying for public relief –

> but often operated their own funeral parlors. In this competitive environment, undertakers were eager to show off their handiwork to the FSA photographers.[22]

It is noteworthy that the ad makes an affective, or rather, emotional offer: that those who take advantage of burial insurance will save their family "embarrassment." Wright's text makes a further claim when he asserts that "we… had never belonged to any organization except the church and burial societies" in the sense that he is underlining how the black populace has been neglected by institutions other than the two mentioned. Wright's ambivalence about the black church is well-established; in "Blueprint for Negro Writing," originally published in "New Challenger" in 1937, he describes the relationship that he perceives to have arises between black people and the church.

> [Negro] culture has stemmed mainly from two sources: (1) the Negro church; and (2) the fluid folklore of the Negro people….It was through the portals of the church that the American Negro first entered the shrine of Western culture. Living under slave conditions of life, bereft of his African heritage, the Negro found that his struggle for religion on the plantation between 1820–60 was nothing short of a struggle for human rights. It remained a relatively progressive struggle until religion began to ameliorate and assuage suffering and denial.
>
> Even today there are millions of Negroes whose only sense of a whole universe, whose only relation to society and man, and whose only guide to personal dignity comes through the archaic morphology of Christian salvation. With the gradual decline of the moral authority of the Negro church, and the increasing irresolution which is paralyzing Negro middle-class leadership, there is devolving upon Negro writers this new role. They are being called upon to do no less than create values by which their race is to struggle, live and die.[23]

For Wright, the belief structure that the church teaches (its "archaic morphology") leaves much to be desired; its institutional importance, however, is inarguable. Nonetheless, it is not

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[22] Natanson 155.
[23] Reprinted in *Race and Class* April 1980, vol. 21 no. 4: 403-419.

accidental that he would choose to place the church against burial societies, demonstrating that institutions that pledge help, even salvation, would also take predatory form.

It's also significant that in this particular image the characters are made into a group as opposed to individuated. What the viewer initially takes as a mass, perhaps of men, finds on second viewing that those included in this image are children. This redoubles Wright's critique: even children aren't guaranteed a future in the institutional order of the text. Furthermore, this helps to establish the images in the context of the FSA pictures more generally: children were often photographed, for a number of reasons. The organizers of the photo projects of the New Deal felt that children, particularly poor children, communicated the special need of the poor for government assistance, and bore none of the stigma that adults did. The presence of children also provoked affective responses: Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange both frequently imaged nursing mothers, and the image-making of this relationship provided sympathetic diegesis. Unlike other curators of these images, however, Rosskam and Wright's text frames them with adults not to overdetermine the "family" but instead to show how spatial location and institutional dominance, for both adults and children, are responsible for the plight of the impoverished.

The pairing of adults and children that occurs in this spread is also significant for the text: the left image's "We, who had never belonged to any organization except the church and burial societies" sits adjacent to the right image's "We, who had had our personalities blasted with two hundred years of slavery." The right image shows three men sitting in chairs outside, next to a building that allegorizes the struggle of the depression era in its decrepit state. These images are

taken, respectively, by Russell Lee and Rosskam himself; between Lee and Rosskam the two were primarily responsible for the Chicago images included in *12 Million*.[24] These caption/narratives, along with the images themselves, are intended to be read alongside each other, not just from caption to image but across as well. When Wright asserts, "We, who had had our personalities blasted with two hundred years of slavery" with the photograph of the three men, he intends as well to refer to the *facing* image – not just because the layout invites cross-reading but because the two images and their text are united by a concern with institutional dominance. Where the left image calls up the existing problem of the institutions that dominate black lives, the right image provides a recognizable point of historical reference for these institutions, taken to be problematically imbricated with Jim Crow, in no small part because the funeral societies and the church are taken by most to be the few institutions over which black people have some control.

For Wright, these two institutions offer false promise, again, despite the fact that the black church in particular has offered what strikes Wright as a thin palliative. His non-theism demands that he critique the church, and his anti-capitalist stance insists that he critique funeral societies. These caption/narratives are not intended to be perfect mirrors of each other; for Wright, this would be too easy a reading. Instead, we are intended to take these facing words as *questions*: were it not for the institution of slavery and the effects that it continues to have, would the black church, in fact, be necessary? It is in this vein too that we should see these *images* as mutually constitutive questions. Children, early in their lives, are already under the heavy yoke

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[24] See Maren Stange, "Not What we Seem," from *Iconographies of Power* and the appendix "About the Photographs," *12 Millon* 151.

of a too-early death whose potentially "embarrassing" effects may reposition their families to poverty. The three men in the other image carry into Wright's present the specter of the institution of slavery. Here again, he's making particular demands on the spatial location; he's also reorganizing historical time and demanding that his viewership rethink the boundaries of cause and effect. An image with a funerary advertisement included might, initially, suggest that the human subjects would be elder, and that it would in this sense imply – even dictate – chronology. But with children in the image, Wright is gesturing to a future that he argues is already determined by institutional burden and the seeming inevitability of the poor dying without any resources. Causality is under an important revision: not simply that children are predetermined by the impositions of institutions but that future and past events mutually constitute the present of the image.

These images, furthermore, are also inflected with those that come before, in particular the two-page bleed, pages 94 and 95. The images focus on a family sitting on a stoop and on a church service. The left caption reads, "We, who had barely managed to live in family groups," and the right, "We, who needed the ritual and guidance of institutions." If, as I have argued, institutional surveillance permeates the images for a number of reasons – the subjects are intended to be made into special kinds of the "needy," the past and future holds of institutionality are inflecting themselves on the moment of Wright and Rosskam's evaluation – Wright here makes explicit that institutions are both necessary and harmful.

That the subjects had "barely managed to live in family groups" also troubles the notion of what actually qualifies as an institution. Slavery, as an economic, affective, and spatially-demarcated institution reframes the companion institution of the "family" – "barely managing" to live in family groups recalls the brutalizing practice of forcible family separation under

slavery. But the "family" is still in the institutional position in Wright's language. Again, in much FSA imagery, the family is held up as the binding force that keeps individuals from starving to death; many of Dorothea Lange's and Walker Evans's images put the nursing mother at the center of the frame. But for Wright, any form that provides a mechanism for belonging, whether helpful or not, must be viewed as institutional. The language itself, in addition to the relationship between the image and text, and between the two images, insists on an uneasy demarcation of the "value" of family. Wright asserts not, "we barely managed to keep our families intact," but the much more sociologically-inflected "we who had barely managed to live in family groups." This wording implies kinship mechanisms above affective ones: the family is much less a unit of feeling than it is a group in which one resides. Feeling, for Wright, seems to take the marginal category where institutions and social orders occupy the center.

What's Left of the Left: Realism and Social Science

It seems that one of the major dynamics not just of Wright's canon but of the forms of belonging to which he attaches is that they're characterized by anger, loss, dejection, detachment, and rage. This dissertation has made claims about belonging, in that it provides a crucial rubric for thinking of how groups of people, particularly "minor" movements that cleave to realism, imagine themselves as a collective in order to provide a durable reading of – and for – the historical present. For Wright, the "scientific" approach to detailing human social bodies provides a mechanism for seeing the real while preserving the critical, aesthetic, and social distance that satisfies a drive for detachment.

Documentary as "documentation," or as social science, seems to run counter to the questions of "aesthetics" that I have asserted Wright takes into account. But an aesthetics of the real – not a pedagogical or didactic realism but one based on recording – sits comfortably next to documentary *both* as device for recording and a genre that encounters modernism. One dynamic of Wright's originality, however, is the way that both trace an impasse in belonging in this moment. Bill Nichols, in "Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-Garde," describes documentary's allegiance to modernist programs. Referring primarily to institutional documentary – the films of John Grierson in particular – Nichols argues in favor of a hermeneutics that accounts for modernist techniques in the "document."

> The approach to documentary representation adopted by these works [state-funded documentaries] no longer requires a strategic separation from modernist techniques. The power of the state, along with its achievements and failures, is secondary to the development of a heightened sense of solidarity among specific subcultures and minority groups. The perspectives, histories, and initiatives of such previously unheeded groups command attention. Collaboration between filmmakers and their subjects replaces collaboration between filmmakers and government agencies. With this shift the form and style of documentary representations expand to encompass a breadth of perspectives and voices, attitudes and subjectivities, positions and values that exceed the universal subject of an idealized nation-state.[25]

This is all compelling – Nichols is demonstrating that documentary expands beyond the confines of the state and its will. Wright too, in discussing *The Triumph of the Will,* distinguishes between the drive to record and the automatic interpellation of the viewer. The development that occurs *after* the 1920s and early 1930s, however, in which aesthetic producers like Wright become profoundly alienated from their "subcultures" and "minority groups" demands my historical

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[25] Bill Nichols, Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-Garde, *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 27, No. 4: Summer, 2001, 580-610.

revision. Under the circumstances in which political attachments become decoupled from group belonging, practical realism, a "scientific" way of seeing holds out the promise of good representation.

Documentary in the late 1930s and early 1940s takes on particular realist forms, and "documentation" provides the necessary conditions for ideological coherence. Wright's introduction to *Black Metropolis* serves as a marker for an emerging form, the problem of unfiction, which brings together visual pleasure and text in an effort to show the emerging and collapsing of particular kinds of bodies public. The specter of the failure of Communism haunts Wright here, and his investment in proof, science, and the durability of the "real" show an emerging form, indebted to modernism, and dependent on narrative as the mediator of the present. Realism's long-established relationship with the "everyday" makes its entrance into the 20th century here, demonstrating that the aesthetic dismantling of that-which-is-happening is considered crucial for the "real world's" coherence and interpretability. Realism as committed to an aesthetics of the ordinary is a long-established critical tradition, but Wright contributes to the change whereby realism goes from *genre* to *techne*.[26]

In her chapter on *12 Million Black Voices* the photo scholar Maren Stange notes Wright's sociological impulse in that he argues that black history presents "a mirror of all the manifold experiences of America." Stange acknowledges John Reilly's assertions that *12 Million* is about the "voice" – although, for her, it's more about the *vernacular*. The vernacular register, Stange argues, emerges in part because of the collaborative nature of the undertaking – "Wright and Rosskam remained in touch throughout their compositional process, Rosskam writing of plans to

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[26] See Roland Barthes, "The Reality Effect," from *The Rustle of Language*.

show Wright 'the pictures and dummy,' insisting that Wright would be surprised 'how the pictures will help you' in composing a final draft of the urban chapters. Rosskam felt that these chapters 'say the most important things in the whole book,' emphasizing in a later interview his fondness for the text as a whole.'"[27] Stange takes the strong position that the text is collaborative and not strictly the result of Rosskam having selected images and then sent them to Wright without regard for Wright's own selection process. She notes, "Besides these historical data, there are, I contend, eloquent traces in each formal feature of the book that underscore the textual message as both men understood and agreed on it." She notes that, because in part of the full-page bleed, the images serve as illustrations and not (just) as stand-alone "images."[28]

The collaborative nature of the text and the assertion on the part of Rosskam in particular that both writer and photo-editor contributed their ideas fully to the text also shores up the question of how the text attends to the "real world." This necessarily opens up historical and theoretical questions about how the photo-text is at an impasse in 1939. As noted, for James Guimond, the war as it begins for the United States in 1941 marks a professional photographic shift in that photographers like Dorothea Lange and Rosskam turned from "documentary" to "photojournalism." The 1930s also opened up great possibilities for a social image practice that nonetheless had aesthetic potentiality. But the impasse of 1939 to 1941 has certain historical and aesthetic texture with respect to the photograph. In her classic *Photography at the Docks*, Abigail Solomon-Godeau notes that the introduction of documentary photography is "historical and not ontological" because there was a moment in early photography when *all* images were taken to be

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[27] Doud, 1965 interview; Stange 182.
[28] Stange, "Not What we Seem," 182, 185.

making particular kinds of documentational truth claims. With the historical invention of documentary Solomon-Godeau finds that problems of photographic representationality "all finally converge… around the problem of realism," by which she means "photography's ostensible purchase on the real." She quotes Brecht: "realism is an issue not only for literature: it is a major political, philosophical, and practical issue and must be handled and explained as such." Because of the particular historicity of documentary emergence, "we cannot legitimately speak of a nineteenth-century documentary practice." It's only with Jacob Riis that we can elucidate the term, although (per Guimond) Solomon-Godeau doesn't distinguish between documentary and photojournalism.[29]

The documentational impulse also converges with the muckraking aspect of Wright's text and its images. The dynamic of Wright's text that makes its commentary both physical and psychical in its critique of urban space is, particularly, his work on the kitchenette, the new form of apartment living that emerged in part because of exploitation of black tenants in the post-migration urban north.

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[29] "Who is Speaking Thus?" in *Photography at the Dock* 170, 172.

Figure 5. Rooms for Rent, from Wright and Rosskam, *12 Million Black Voices* 104-105.

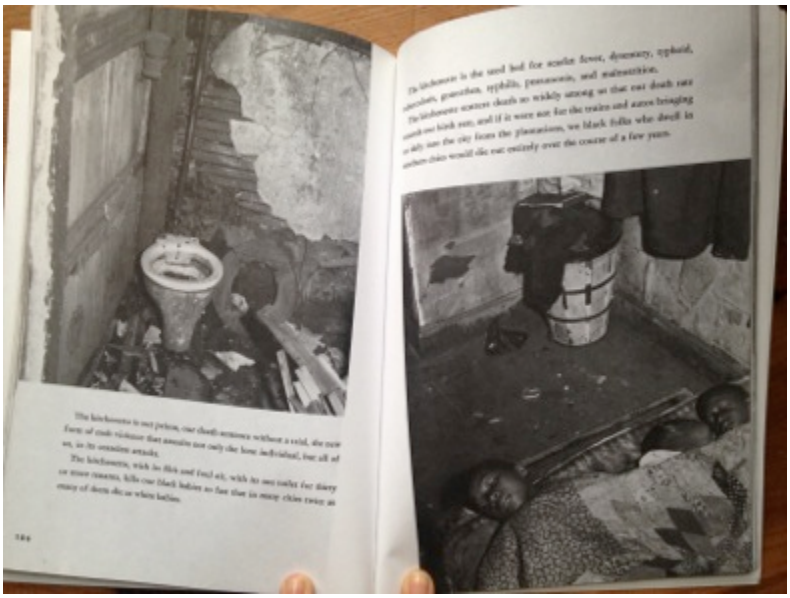

Figure 6. Kitchenettes, from Wright and Rosskam, *12 Million Black Voices* 106-107.

Wright's transition in this moment is a telling one. He moves from a very direct economic critique to a particular takedown of the kitchenette. Page 104 reads, in part:

> When the white folks move, the Bosses of the Buildings let the property to us at rentals higher than those the whites paid.
> And the Bosses of the Buildings take those old houses and convert them into "kitchenettes," and then rent them out at rates so high that they make fabulous fortunes before the houses are too old for habitation. What they do is this: they take, say, a seven-room apartment, which rents for $50 a month for whites, and cut it up into seven small apartments, of one room each; they install one small gas stove and one small sink in each room. The Bosses of the Buildings rent these kitchenettes to us at the rate of, say, $6 a week. Hence, the same apartment for which white people – who can get jobs anywhere and who receive higher wages than we – pay $50 a month for what is rented to us for $42 a week![30]

Wright's critique leading into his discussion of kitchenettes outlines the problem of white flight, and the benefit to landlords of renting to black tenants at an outrageous markup. For Wright, the Communist Party line about the issue of labor is reanimated through the use of the kitchenette: as other institutional beneficiaries are referred to in the text as "Bosses," so too are landlords as the "Bosses of Buildings" because the reorganization of families into uncomfortable, expensive apartments is also a "labor problem."

As noted previously, Wright and Rosskam's deliberate presentation of text and image together, along with the bleed that removes any framing space around the pictures, suggests that the viewer/reader interpret across images and text. The pictures on pages 106 and 107, of the broken toilet and overcrowded bed are accompanied by text that achieves a scientific and, particularly, diagnostic quality. Furthermore, this text block begins at the bottom of the page and finishes at the top of the second, demanding, a reading of these short paragraphs as one argument.

> The kitchenette is our prison, our death sentence without a trial, the new form of mob violence that assaults not only the lone individual, but all of us, in its ceaseless attacks. The kitchenette, with its filth and foul air, with its one toilet for thirty or more tenants, kills

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[30] *Voices* 104.

> our black babies so fast that in many cities twice as many of them die as white babies.
> PAGE BREAK
> The kitchenette is the seed bed for scarlet fever, dysentery, typhoid, tuberculosis, gonorrhea, syphilis, pneumonia, and malnutrition.
> The kitchenette scatters death so widely among us that our death rate exceeds our birth rate, and if it were not for the trains and autos bringing us daily into the city from the plantations, we black folks who dwell in northern cities would die out entirely over the course of a few years.[31]

Again, for Wright, social scientific inquiry is the method that provides the interpretation "not only [of] the lone individual, but all of us." Furthermore, he takes advantage of the photographs' content to stage his sociological arguments about quality of life and lifespan. It is no accident that Wright pairs arguments such as "[The kitchenette] kills our black babies so fast that in many cities twice as many of them die as white babies" and "The kitchenette scatters death so widely among us that our death rate exceeds our birth rate" with an image of sleeping children, whose crowded sleeping situation can be read as their death bed. This is particularly the case because here, Wright is addressing the death of *children*: that the death rate exceeds the birth rate is taken to be *caused* by the death of so many black babies. Macabre as this reading may seem, for Wright the production of social scientific discourse demands seeing these children as case studies for larger social problems.

The images that close the chapter in *12 Million Black Voices* called "Death on the City Pavements," detail Wright's proposed relationship between social science and representation.

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[31] *Voices* 106-107.

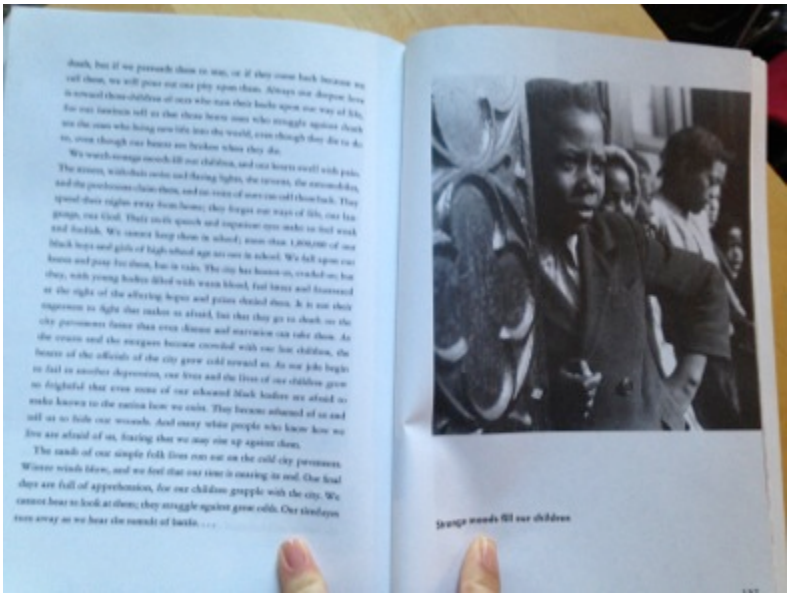

Figure 7. Strange Moods, from Wright and Rosskam, *12 Million Black Voices* 136-137.

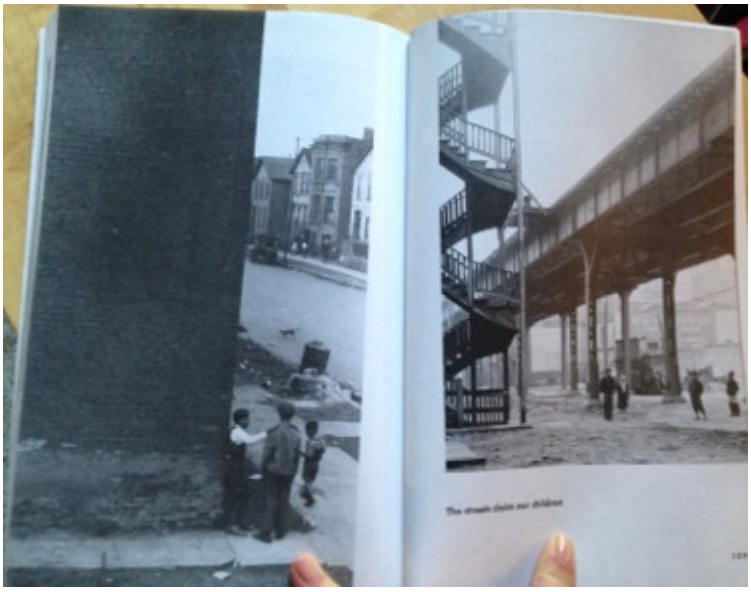

Figure 8. City Streets, from Wright and Rosskam, *12 Million Black Voices* 138-139.

These two page sets (displayed in this same way in the original version) show the closing text opposite Rosskam's evocative photograph called "Boy in front of an apartment house, Chicago, Ill" in the books appendix; the final two pages (138-139) display photographs both called "Street

scene under the elevated, Chicago, Ill"; these are taken by Rosskam and Lee, respectively. The text from page 137, under the image, reads "Strange moods fill our children"; the text of 139 reads, "The streets claim our children." But as is previously the case, the closing text of the chapter inflects itself upon *all* of the images, as Wright's text serves not just as a mutually-constituting "caption" but also as a narrative enclosure for the images. The final two paragraphs of the chapter read:

> We watch strange moods full our children, and our hearts swell with pain. The streets, with their noise and flaring lights, the taverns, the automobiles, and the poolrooms claim them, and no voice of ours can call them back. They spend their nights away from home; they forget our ways of life, our language, our God. Their swift speech and impatient eyes make us feel weak and foolish. We cannot keep them in school; more than 1,000,000 of our black boys and girls of high school age are not in school. …As our jobs begin to fail in another depression, our lives and the lives of our children grow so frightful that even some of our educated black leaders are afraid to make known to the nation how we exist. They become ashamed of us and tell us to hide our wounds. And many white people who know how we live are afraid of us, fearing that we may rise up against them.
>
> The sands of our simple folk lives run out on the cold city pavements. Winter winds blow, and we fell that our time is nearing its end. Our final days are full of apprehension, for our children grapple with the city. We cannot bear to look at them; they struggle against great odds. Our tired eyes turn away as we hear the tumult of battle…[32]

As is the case in a great number of Wright's writing with respect to these images, the push and pull of the language makes new meanings and new contradictions out of the photographs. The child of page 137 looks out of the frame with a charming rakishness, his fist on hip and right hand balled in such a way that he looks as though he's flipping a coin. The attachment of this child to a "strange mood" seems more to capture the image's affective uncertainty – the furrow of the brow seems to contradict the insouciant stance.

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[32] *Voices* 136.

The next two images cleave to the modernist project that owes much to the pictures of Berenice Abbott and her contemporaries. The two vectors of the right-hand image – the train track and the spiral staircase of the fire escape – produce multiple vanishing points: at the top, left, and right hands of the frame. The train track seems to stretch on to infinity as well as to frame the children in the image: the train tracks serve as a stand-in for greater industrialized systems, evident in particular because of Wright's mutually constituting text: the space under the tracks details "the streets, with their noise and flaring lights," as well as the position of supplication to the grand industrial urban structures. Wright also relies on figures standing in for statistical data here – the child and then children as representations of the "1,000,000 black boys and girls of high school age not in school." These images and writings, providing narrative closure to the chapter on the city, enact scientific discourses through the disclosure of affective and practical realism.

On Belonging Badly, or, How Bigger was Born

Wright's work in experimental realism, which at first seems to be a style he abandons, in fact develops further into his later career. Wright's social location begins to resemble misanthropy in the late 1930s or early 1940s, and as he begins to take up existentialist and continental philosophy, his work refigures the problem of the other as the problem of (perhaps

all) others.[33] Wright is a standout in nonbelonging in this moment. The critical conversations around Wright sometimes go to great lengths to determine his attachments. Wright takes an unexpected and decidedly un-politically correct tack in *Black Power* where he travels to Africa and continually fails to read the social cues of the people he meets. Sara Blair's chapter concludes with Blair's analysis of the images in *Black Power*, taken after Wright's turn to "exile." For Wright, Africa is profoundly problematic, recognizable and utterly foreign: he mourns, "Why could I not feel [racial belonging]?"[34]. In *Black Power*, "Wright was revisiting his own engagements with photography and the conventions of documentary in order to extend their possible uses and meanings."[35] The section recounts many of Wright's funnier stories (about the funeral procession, about his being "robbed" of a dollar) in order to underscore his ongoing "awareness of the possibility for productive tension and disjunction as defining facts of a text that seeks to explore both the historical grounds and the affective dialectic of cultural sameness and difference."[36] Despite his left attachments, and they were many, Wright continually expressed a sense not *quite* of outsiderness but of discomfort among others. The net of belonging always seems to feel a bit like a cage to Wright, as his attachments vacillate: he wants them to be aesthetic and modernist but he also wants them to be diagnostic, "real," "hard and deep," and to communicate particular kinds of political certainties when he himself was profoundly ambivalent about certainties. This seems one of the many reasons that he remains such a productively

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[33] See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, a crucial philosophical text for Wright. Besides being an avid reader and friend of Sartre, Wright wrote a translation of Sartre's introduction to *Being and Nothingness* called "In Pursuit of Being." Fabre, *Books and Writers* 141.
[34] Blair 99
[35] 99.
[36] 104.

difficult figure: his refusal to remain in a group, and his difficulty with ideology *qua* ideology makes for a literary figure difficult to pin down.

The relevance here lies not just in Wright's "problem" fitting in, or with belonging badly, but with the turn that this dissertation probably takes for granted – that literary production should be seen not primarily as a matter of "Great Minds" but as an ongoing work of communities, collectives, movements, and counterpublics. Wright provides a corrective to this narrative, in the sense of being one of a set of edge figures: those who want to attach and yet can't; those for whom movement politics have real stakes but betray their followers; those for whom literary and even scientific methodologies offer *and withhold* promise. This work will asserted that even micro-movements – the Los Angeles rebellion group, the origin of AIM in the form of Indian relocation – show that collectivism, with or without politics, provides a way of seeing the "real world" in moments of true, flattened ordinariness. But Wright compromises this position in being around the edges of major and minor movements, from party-line Communism to the black Parisian avant-garde.

The problem of "bad belonging" is reflected in Wright's critical and literary methodologies. For Wright, even the craft of character operates by virtue of a sociological study. As I have suggested, where Wright's introduction to Drake and Cayton demonstrates a commitment to "sincere art and honest science," he foreshadows this assertion in *Native Son* as demonstrated by his later commentary on it. The essay "How 'Bigger' Was Born" demonstrates Wright's commitment to realist/sociological principles in that it agglomerates a set of cases in order to produce a character that fulfills a commitment to realist-modernist principles. Wright tracks "not just one Bigger, but many of them" in his development of the character,

adding them up to create the outline of a sociological case. The "first Bigger, whom [Wright] calls Bigger No. 1," is:

> A boy who terrorized me and all the boys I played with. If we were playing games, he would saunter up and snatch from us our balls, bats, spinning tops, and marbles. We would stand around pouting, sniffling, trying to keep back our tears, begging for our playthings. But Bigger would refuse…. That was the way Bigger No. 1 lived. His life as a continuous challenge to others. At all times he *took* his way, right or wrong, and those who contradicted him had to fight. And never was he happier than when he had someone cornered and at his mercy; it seemed that the deepest meaning of his squalid life was in him at such times.[37]

The first data point in Wright's case is the child that he has described in *12 Million Black Voices*, both subject and resistant to the conditions of his "squalid life." The developmental narrative of the character's production continues in is Wright's description of his second case, "Bigger No. 2."

> He was about seventeen and tougher than the first Bigger. Since I, too, had grown older, I was a little less afraid of him. And the hardness of Bigger No. 2 was not directed toward me or the other Negroes, but toward the whites who ruled the South. He bought clothes and food on credit and would not pay for them. He lived in the dingy shacks of the white landlords and refused to pay rent. Of course, he had no money, but neither did we. We did without the necessities of life and starved ourselves, but he never would. When we asked him why he acted as he did, he would tell us (as though we were little children in kindergarten) that the white folks had everything and we had nothing…. We would listen and silently agree. We longed to believe and act as he did, but we were afraid…. Bigger No. 2 wanted to live and he did; he was in prison the last time I heard from him.

The second case here outlines a particular figure of economic resistance, clearly a category that matters enormously to Wright. But as is true in the text of *Native Son* as well as in *12 Million Black Voices*, the specter of institutions looms large over the life of Bigger No. 2. This is further evidence that Wright is documenting a "case": persons characterized by their institutional position fill in for literary characters.

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[37] "How 'Bigger' was Born," in *Native Son* 435.

The third Bigger, Bigger No. 3, "the white folks called a 'bad nigger.' He carried his life in his hands in a literal fashion." This case would walk into the theater in which Wright had been a ticket-taker, pinch Wright, and walk into the theater without paying. "Bigger No. 3 was killed during the days of Prohibition: while delivering liquor to a customer he was shot through the back by a white cop."[38] "And then there was Bigger No. 4, whose only law was death," Wright asserts. This character "oscillated between moods of intense elation and depression," breaking Jim Crow laws at will; bemoaning the fact that "'white folks won't let us do anything.' Bigger No. 4 was sent to the asylum for the insane."[39] Bigger No. 5 rides the Jim Crow street cars without paying and sits in the white section; when confronted, he claims not to be able to read. Bigger No. 5, when told to move by the conductor, replies "Make me." "A small angry conference of white men took place in the front of the car and the Negroes sitting in the Jim Crow section overheard: 'That's that Bigger Thomas nigger and you'd better leave 'im alone.' The Negroes experienced an intense flash of pride and the streetcar moved on its journey without incident. I don't know what happened to Bigger No. 5. But I can guess."[40]

These are persons of acquaintance or members of the Southern community of Wright's youth. But they're much more importantly objects of sociological significance, serving as generalizable subject *positions* that help Wright to marshal his specific kind of realist critique. Again, this is the concern that he takes up in the introduction to *Black Metropolis*, where he braids together an ongoing theoretical concern with subjectivity generally and the relationship between the individual subject and his social world. The description of "Biggers" uses narrative

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[38] 436.
[39] 436.
[40] 437.

cases to outline a social type, the character whose interface is with a social world composed of bad actors and worse institutions. These figures merge in the exemplar that is "Bigger Thomas," the stand-in in Wright's book for a social "problem."

In *Black Metropolis*, however, he both found and articulated theoretical questions that are based on a different kind of social science discourse. He quotes William James as discussing "the ways in which the 'social self' of man exists in society; [he says], '… a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their minds.'"[41] This expression, it seems, demands further contextualization, as it speaks to the other side of Wright's sociological impulse, one characterized by the theoretical tradition running through James, DuBois, and Durkheim. James describes the four constituents of the self as the material self, spiritual self, social self, and the pure ego – the social self is, as Wright notes, variably inflected by all social conditions.[42] Wright quotes further:

> No more fiendish punishment could be devised, were such a thing physically possible, than that one should be turned loose in society and remain absolutely unnoticed by all the members thereof. If no one turned round when we entered, answered when we spoke, or minded what we did, but if every person we met 'cut us dead,' and acted as if we were non-existing things, a kind of rage and impotent despair would ere long well up in us, from which the cruellest bodily tortures would be a relief; for these would make us feel that, however bad might be our plight, we had not sunk to such a depth as to be unworthy of attention at all.[43]

Wright's use of James, in a moment shot through with Hegel's notion of mutual recognition, uses the scene of sociality to figure his literary realism. Wright continues:

> There can be, of course, no such thing as a *complete* rejection of anybody by society; for, even in rejecting him, society must notice him. But the American Negro has come as near

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[41] *Black Metropolis* xxxii.
[42] William James, *The Principles of Psychology* 293.
[43] *Principles* 293-294.

> being the victim of a complete rejection as our society has been able to work out, for the dehumanized image of the Negro which white Americans carry in their minds, the anti-Negro epithets on their lips, exclude the contemporary Negro as truly as though he were kept in a steel prison, and doom even those Negroes who are as yet unborn.

This is the crucial other side to Wright's sociological and epistemological method. "Those Negroes who are as yet unborn" bear the potentiality and the certainty of a structuring condition that guarantees their suffering. These are importantly imagined figures and not "cases," in the way that Wright's "five Biggers" are, as those figures serve as case studies: these are children made general, made into theoretical concerns. This, again, is the notion that DuBois raises when he poses that the question of being black in America is one of "being a problem" – Wright poses that any black person whose position is to be born into his historical moment is being born into "problemhood."

DuBois's own methodological specifications seem to allow Wright to develop the notions of character and personhood that he will advance at this – and later – stages of his career. Between *Native Son* and his later works like *The Outsider* seems to be a shift from a socialistic realism to an existentialist concern with "otherness" and "outsider" status. But while Wright's interest in theoretical traditions from continental thought advanced during the middle phase of his career - *The Outsider* begins with a quotation from Kierkegaard – there is nonetheless a common thread between the texts with respect to their fictive and sociological methodology.[44] Influenced by Kierkegaard here, DuBois's and William James's theoretical methods, and the quantitative studies of Drake and Cayton and others, Wright advances both qualitative and

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[44] "Dread is an alien power which lays hold of an individual, and yet one cannot tear oneself away, nor has a will to do so; for one fears what one desires." Kierkegaard in Wright, *The Outsider* 1.

quantitative methods in literary form. This is precisely what James Baldwin finds unappealing in Wright, in *Native Son* in particular: a drive for fiction to have a social method attached. But for Wright, this is the means of being both a literary producer and a kind of "scientist" – by using qualitative *and* quantitative methods he opens the field of literary production to include texts on humankind that account for literary character.

After Ideology

While it seems that a strong politics without a group affiliation can't, in fact, count as a politics, the mechanism of diagnosis in the form of practical realism provides an aesthetic answer to a moment of crisis. Diagnosis helps us to know the "split" and the "crisis." As Wright attests,

> Lodged in the innermost heart of American is a fatal division of being, a war of impulses. America knows that a split is in her, and that that split might cause her death; but she is powerless to pull the dangling ends together. An uneasiness haunts her conscience, taints her moral preachments, lending an air of unreality to her actions, and rendering ineffectual the good deeds she feels compelled to do in the world. America is a nation of a riven consciousness.[45]

For Wright, political attachment falls into the "split." This is also, of course, taken to be the moment of major historical split in the United States, the period to which we refer as the "post-war." But the war years themselves, and those leading up to them, make visible problems of belonging that have been there all along. The choice to diagnose, to illustrate, and to make visible the aesthetic projections of actual happenings and events places Wright as both apart from and very much a part *of* his historical specificity.

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[45] *Black Metropolis* 21.

Wright's desire to opt out of the social world produces a new point of view on the "problem" of belonging and demonstrates how group affinity comes into question in moments of ideological closure. The desire not to belong, as much as the desire to belong, comes to characterize essential dynamics of twentieth-century literary formation. This tension, characterized by inside and outside status, takes a rather different form in the next chapter, in which the color line shows itself to cross the Native case.

Chapter Two: On Belonging and Imagining: Chicago's Photo Archives and the Liberal Articulation of Citizenship

When the Bureau of Indian Affairs produced a series of newswires, brochures, and advertising material between 1953 and 1957 hoping to motivate American Indians to move from reservation to city, one of the dynamics of its project was the promise of "equal economic opportunity."

Figure 9. Edward Burns, Bureau of Indian Affairs Indian relocation records [manuscript] 1936-1975, Box 2.

This 1953 image is captioned, "Edward Burns, Chippewa from Redby, Minn., reports to work at plant."[1] Edward Burns and the plant supervisor frame a small sign reading "Equal Economic Opportunity," a turn of phrase that implies a commitment to economic equality among "the races," to use the language of the time. The two subjects of the photograph face each other,

[1] United States, Bureau of Indian Affairs. Bureau of Indian Affairs Indian relocation records [manuscript] 1936-1975.

producing a mirrored effect that rearticulates the image's claim to "equality." Together, the photograph and its caption make evident the viability of the relocation enterprise by showing the willingness of Edward Burns to report to his purported "equality" and the easy acceptance of the tribal worker by the plant's supervisor. The sign as ideological marker demonstrates the purported intentions of the relocation enterprise. For the unknown photographer, the central focus on "economic opportunity" performs the claim of the photograph and lays the groundwork for why relocation might be an aspiration. What the caption belies, and what the image demonstrates, is how the project of making American Indians economically "equal" in the 1950s, had, in fact, been deteriorating since after the end of the Second World War with the passage of the termination and relocation acts and the growing deindustrialization of the American city. The programs that intended the assimilation of Native people to a kind of working class urbanism were predicated on changing the aesthetic and political terms by which Indians are known as workers, subjects, and, particularly, citizens of an emerging liberal economy that demanded reframing the terms of "race."

The archive of images collected by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the 1950s is housed at the Newberry library, having been collected from the Chicago office of the BIA. The collection houses several hundred images taken between 1953 and 1958, many taken from scrapbooks curated by BIA agents, others taken by anonymous agents in order to convince reservation-dwellers to relocate to Chicago, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Seattle, or another major American city with a BIA office.[2] The archive records a major moment in American Indian history and in

[2] According to the government office website for the Department of the Interior, "Indian Affairs (IA) is the oldest bureau of the United States Department of the Interior. Established in 1824, IA

the cultural and aesthetic history of urbanization that remains largely ignored, as the predominating histories of Native life attend to the periods either before the closure of the frontier in 1890 or after the commencement of the "Native American Renaissance" in 1968.[3] Despite the neglected history of Natives in urban space, the images collected and organized by the BIA provide one of the limit cases for the terms of Cold War domestic belonging in the United States: both because the actions of the participants work in defiance of the calls for assimilation and because the images' aesthetic production of the present shows how, under the US's racialized liberal framework, the terms of "equal economic opportunity" shift, such that "equality" is defined as a matter of individual feeling and not a problem of collectivism, anti-state politics, or changes to the economic order. This dissertation broadly asserts that the problem of the juridical and affective modalities of post-war belonging become aesthetically actualized in

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currently provides services (directly or through contracts, grants, or compacts) to approximately 1.9 million American Indians and Alaska Natives. There are 566 federally recognized American Indian tribes and Alaska Natives in the United States. Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) is responsible for the administration and management of 55 million surface acres and 57 million acres of subsurface minerals estates held in trust by the United States for American Indian, Indian tribes, and Alaska Natives. Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) provides education services to approximately 42,000 Indian students. BIA and BIE's missions are:

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) mission is to:

'... enhance the quality of life, to promote economic opportunity, and to carry out the responsibility to protect and improve the trust assets of American Indians, Indian tribes, and Alaska Natives.'

The Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) mission is to:

'... provide quality education opportunities from early childhood through life in accordance with the tribes' needs to cultural and economic well being in keeping with the wide diversity of Indian tribes and Alaska Native villages as distinct cultural and governmental entities. The Bureau considers the whole person (spiritual, mental, physical and cultural aspects.)'" (www.bia.gov, accessed 27 January 2013).

[3] In the aesthetic register, this date marks the publication of N. Scott Momaday's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *House Made of Dawn*. In the theoretical register, it marks the publication of Stan Steiner's *The New Indians* and Vine Deloria Jr.'s *Custer Died for your Sins*.

realist, aspirationally realist, and autobiographical modes of mediation: and also that those mediations are specifically associated with the emergence of urban space as national exemplar. In context, this chapter demonstrates that during this time the city as physical and social space becomes the primary location in which racialized citizenship reforms for Indians in particular, and that one of the contingencies of reframing the racial problem is depoliticizing Indianness.[4] The Newberry Library's archive of photographs shows how the aesthetic rendering of relocation serves as symptomatic of a realist pragmatism that records the historical present in the 1950s, and these photographs demand a new perspective on everyday citizenship formation in its racial, social, and economic guises and the problems of staging removal to and from already-liminal places.[5]

This chapter is the story of how realist genres narrate new claims on urban belonging in the US in the early 1950s. It explores American Indian relocation as an institutionalized

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[4] While this term may not be particularly cogent for my intentions, what I mean by depoliticizing in this context is the process whereby "the Indian" goes from being a political problem to a social problem. The political problem is exemplified in such considerations as the problem of whether or not Indians are citizens, which isn't considered in federal jurisprudence until 1924, or whether they are "domestic dependents," as asserted by Justice John Marshall in 1831, or how they should be "governed" by the Department of the Interior. The "social" problem framework uses different terms. It argues that with proper education and "opportunities" Indians will become "just workers," and asserts that termination of federal trust status is a process of "integration." This shift occurs over an extended period of time, probably beginning with the transfer of the Office of Indian Affairs from the Department of War to the Department of the Interior in 1849 and ending with the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

[5] In American Indian studies, "removal" usually refers to the actions of the Department of the Interior in the 19th century that pushed Indians from more diffuse tribal lands onto reservations and other areas that were designated by the government. Federal removal began shortly after Supreme Court Justice John Marshall wrote the decision in Cherokee Vs. Georgia, 1831, that decided that Indian nations have a "domestic dependent" status in relation to the United States federal government. Mass removals were most common between 1831 and the end of the "treaty era" in 1871 (www.bia.gov, accessed 27 January 2013).

endeavor that produced a series of overdetermined images and mines the aestheticized modernist-realist images of a group of poor whites called "hillbillies" and how artists and journalists took up the project of rendering them visible to show how the emerging liberal conceptions of race affected those thought to be racially "unmarked." In the late 1940s and early 1950s, The Bureau of Indian Affairs instituted a number of programs that incentivized moving reservation-dwellers into urban centers. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs at the time, Dillon Myer, coined the term "relocation"; other scholars have noted Myer's penchant for the word, as he was the director of what were then called "Relocation Centers" for interned Japanese and Japanese Americans during the Second World War.[6] When the historian Stan Steiner wrote *The New Indians* in 1968, his chapter on "The Cement Prairies" featured quotations from the institutional and academic left that impressed upon the readers how Indians are badly suited to city living; he quotes Ralph Nader, who wrote an article for the *Harvard Law Review* entitled "American Indians: People Without a Future." Steiner quotes Hubert Humphrey as arguing that relocation is aimed at "'encouraging Indians to move off the less promising reservations and into industrial centers where work opportunities are more plentiful… A package program – vocational training and job placement, with all expenses paid for trainee and family – has lured 50,000 Indians into successful urban living.'" For Steiner centrists like Humphrey – champions of the Cold War liberal economy – encourage Indians to move to the city and thus cut them off from what is perceived to be a more "authentic" way of life on the reservations.[7] In this 1968

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[6] Stan Steiner, *The New Indians* 178 and 179.
[7] In *The New Indians*, Steiner quotes a Native relocatee who experienced racist violence upon moving to New York in the 1950s. The woman tells the story of being struck by an Italian woman who told her to "go back home."

book it becomes clear that Indians do have some trouble "adapting" to the urban sphere, but this chapter shows that the decline of industrial jobs for which they moved to the city seems to be far more responsible for this shift than "culture loss." *The New Indians* and Vine Deloria, Jr.'s polemical *Custer Died for your Sins* (1969) are perceived to be the benchmarks in an emerging "identity based" study of "the Indian," books that critique efforts on the part of the US government to relocate or reorganize American Indians despite, in the case of relocation, the fact that the move to the city put in place the capacity for American Indians to engage in intertribal organizing.

In the Bureau of Indian Affairs' collection at the Newberry, the photographs are arranged in files in the same order that they appeared in a series of scrapbooks put together by agents located both on reservations and in urban relocation offices. The first files include mostly photographs of reservation dwellers with captions created by the agents.

> She sighed, "I am aware that [we] can become victims of the 'lonely people."'
> Who are these "lonely people"?
> The "lonely people" are, of course, "the lonely crowd." It is the remoteness and coldness and self-interest of the harassed urban populace that has created the "cold-blooded city" of Richard McKenzie's image. And it is this that is so strange to the tribal Indian (184).

In David Reisman, Nathan Glazer, and Reuel Denney's 1950 classic in sociology, *The Lonely Crowd*, the authors characterize the recent American generations as "other-directed," demonstrating that the immediate post-war generation will be the most vulnerable to an attitude that they would rather "be loved than revered." The title of the book was chosen by the publisher; Douglas Black was at the time the head of Doubleday, but it's not entirely clear if he was the arbiter of the book's title or not (Al Silverman, *The Time of Their Lives: The Golden Age of Great American Publishers, Their Editors and Authors*). For this reason, it seems that Steiner is referring to a cultural impression of the term and not to the text.

Figure 10. Chicago Welcomes American Indians, Bureau of Indian Affairs Indian relocation records [manuscript] 1936-1975, Box 1.

Figure 11. Snow Queen, Bureau of Indian Affairs Indian relocation records [manuscript] 1936-1975, Box 1.

These photos are some of the very first in the Newberry's collection. While the files progress in a way that implies chronology (the last images feature only people in their urban homes and places of work) the evidence in the files, in the form of date stamps on the photographs, demonstrates that the Newberry archivists produced this narrative. The date stamps show that the photographs are arranged for narrative and not in strict chronological fashion.

The archivists did preserve the original scrapbook pages and include them in the files.

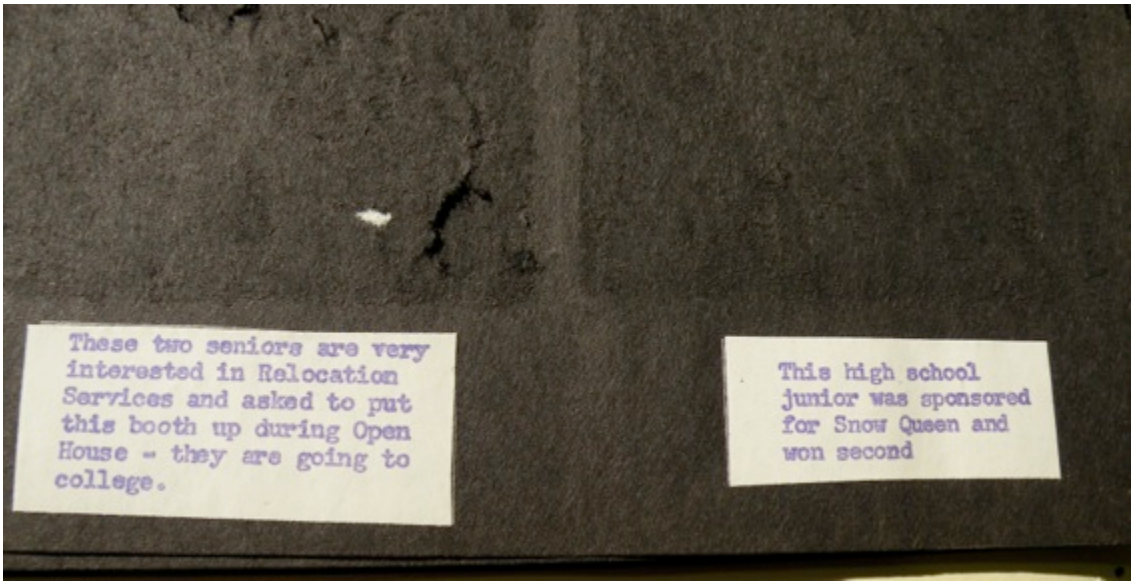


Figure 12. Captions, Bureau of Indian Affairs Indian relocation records [manuscript] 1936-1975, Box 1.

These captions were originally attached to the pictures above – the two seniors "going to college" represent Relocation Services at their high school, and the girl in the ball gown is the runner-up Snow Queen.

These images represent one of the several "types" of photographs included in the archive. The Great Lakes agency produced the largest number of images of relocating subjects in their reservation "readiness"; the images above fit in this category, as does the following one of "'Junior' Relocatees waiting to depart":

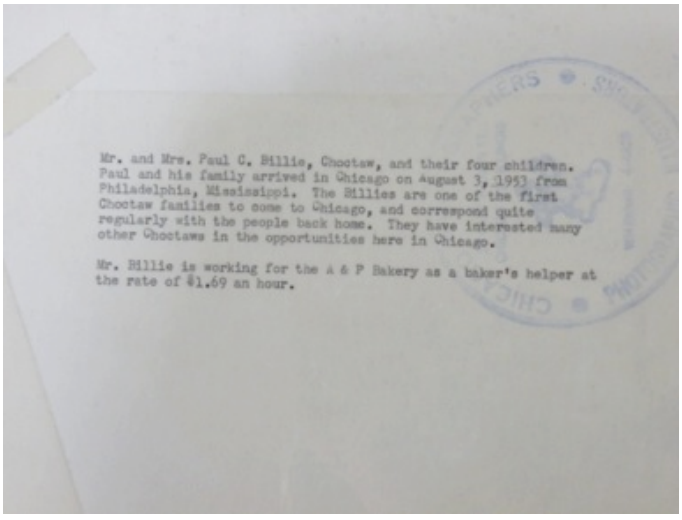
Figure 13. Junior Relocatees, Bureau of Indian Affairs Indian relocation records [manuscript] 1936-1975, Box 1.

The archive preserves memorabilia from institutions allied with the relocation enterprise (a yearbook from Taos Pueblo, a set of images from a large training high school); letters between BIA agents; propagandistic documents that were sent between agents and posted in reservation relocation agencies; and post-relocation photographic fantasies of city living (Indians on the job and in the home). Additionally, the agents maintained, in their original scrapbooks, propaganda from a number of significant corporations; it is impossible to know, from the archive, whether these corporations hired a significant number of relocatees or not. Monsanto, a still-extant and now multinational corporation, sent to the Relocation Office in Great Lakes a pamphlet detailing their "house of tomorrow," composed entirely of plastic.

The bulk of the images, however, focus on Indians before relocation and Indians after relocation. The above photographs demonstrate the conceptual rendering of the pre-relocation Indigene; the following are representations of post-relocation.

Figure 14. Billie Family, Bureau of Indian Affairs Indian relocation records [manuscript] 1936-1975, Box 2.

This photograph includes a description taped onto the back:


Mr. and Mrs. Paul C. Billie, Choctaw, and their four children. Paul and his family arrived in Chicago on August 3, 1953 from Philadelphia, Mississippi. The Billies are one of the first Choctaw families to come to Chicago, and correspond quite regularly with the people back home. They have interested many other Choctaws in the opportunities here in Chicago.

Mr. Billie is working for the A & P Bakery as a baker's helper at the rate of $1.69 an hour.

Figure 15. Billie Family Description, Bureau of Indian Affairs Indian relocation records [manuscript] 1936-1975, Box 2.

Mr. and Mrs. Paul G. Billie, Choctaw, and their four children. Paul and his family arrived in Chicago on August 3, 1953 from Philadelphia, Mississippi. The Billies are one of the first Choctaw families to move to Chicago, and correspond quite regularly with the people back home. They have interested many other Choctaws in the opportunities here in Chicago.
Mr. Billie is working for A & P Bakery at a baker's helper at the role of $1.69 an hour [about $66 a week; about $560 a week, adjusted for inflation].

Other images of post-relocation Natives are less obviously posed, but figure the aesthetic imperative of the snapshot.

Figure 16. Mrs. Ortiz and Mrs. Miller, Bureau of Indian Affairs Indian relocation records [manuscript] 1936-1975, Box 2.

This image also features a contemporaneous caption.

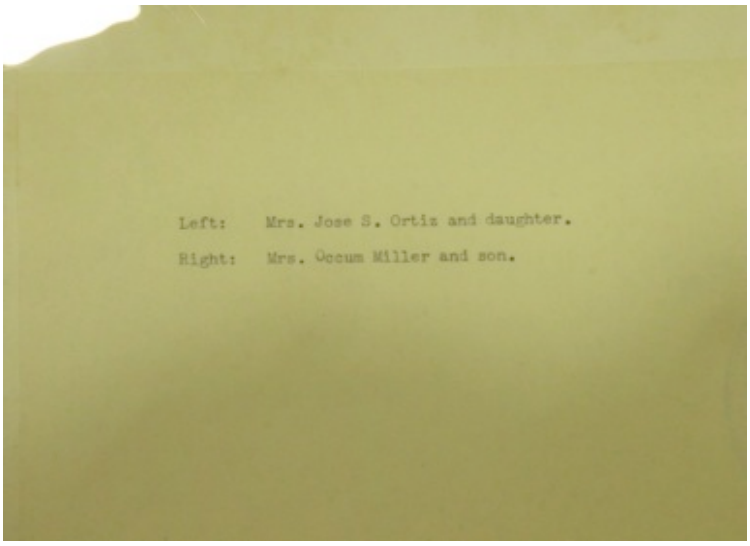


Figure 17. Mrs. Ortiz and Mrs. Miller Description, Bureau of Indian Affairs Indian relocation records [manuscript] 1936-1975, Box 2.

Left: Mrs. Jose S. Ortiz and daughter.

Right: Mrs. Occum Miller and son.

This description does not speak to the tribal origins of the women or woman, and doesn't detail their economic circumstances. Instead, it speaks to the drive to show how relocation produces domestic companionship, the capacity for women to walk with their babies in the urban utopia.

The photographic BIA record, which is strongly committed to an ideology of "realism" and a campaign to persuade, produces a narrative of how American Indians became re-differentiated – persons ideal for adaptation to the "American dream." While images of "workers" have been in wide circulation for many decades by this time, and despite the fact that photographs of Indians have been figured as nationally exemplary at least since Edward Curtis, this particular archive shows how aestheticizing Indian workers reflects a particular kind of liberal reorganizing of race that was endemic to the Cold War United States. Furthermore, it explores an aesthetics of the ordinary that demands rethinking the "work" of photography, as it

performs a purported social function while also producing visual pleasure. Simultaneously, the narrative of the liberalization of race is an ongoing urban historical problem, and making Indians into citizens and urban-dwellers in a *general* sense demands a constant policing of the boundaries of belonging; this boundary is also enforced by my secondary collection, a group of two photo archives and a set of print articles on the migration of white rural workers to the American city. This is a result of a tension that exists in the photographs that is also a tension of the historical moment: by moving Indians toward "normalcy," the Bureau hopes to be rid of them as a potentially politicized or organizing bloc. At the same time, the preservation of "traditionalism," or some mythical originary universal Native culture is looked at as a matter of national urgency, the property of American mysticism. The BIA photo collection, then, reveals how native people in the US are the limit case for the conditions of belonging to the nation and to the city, the exemplar for demonstrating how the state longs to preserve the originary source of its perceived history and to depoliticize its citizens.

There can be no doubt that implicit in the terms of reorganizing racial modernity is the emergent form of economic organization that David Harvey, quoting John Ruggie, refers to as "embedded liberalism,"[8] the drive of which is to architect a "compromise" in which citizens' (this term itself becoming problematic) economic roles get shored up by "social and political constraints." Additionally, the emergence of "racial liberalism" as a term and an ideology provided a social and political mechanism whereby the terms of inequality seem to originate around "prejudices" or a lack of mutual recognition, as I will describe as respects Bill Moyers's picture, "Why Did Gloria Die?" Jodi Melamed argues, in *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing*

[8] *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* 10.

Violence in the New Racial Capitalism, that the United States hegemony needed "to develop a framework for race matters that portrayed race as a contradiction to modernity rather than one of its structuring conditions":

> It had to signify that racial domination (past and present) was not constitutive of liberal freedoms but in contradiction with them. Racial liberalism, the first official US antiracism, achieved this through a framework that conceived of racism as prejudice and promised to release liberal freedoms from racial restrictions by extending equal opportunity, possessive individualism, and cultural citizenship to African Americans.[9]

The inclusion of the phrase "equal opportunity" here speaks directly to the concern for "equality" that the Bureau of Indian Affairs tried to manufacture in the image that opens this chapter. I suggest that the government-manufactured *intentions* of relocation and termination are very much in keeping with the ideology of racial liberalism that characterized much of postwar American politics; the *results* of relocation, however, were different than this, and produced, perhaps surprisingly, new terms for pan-tribal community building.

Furthermore, as we have begun to recognize, the efforts on the part of the US government to "desegregate" Indians through the termination of the federal trust relationship is exemplary of the terms of racial and economic liberalism: the intervention of the Department of the Interior on the trust relationship presumes that by denuding Indian nations of their domestic dependent "nation" status the citizens of those erstwhile nations will easily assimilate to a working class urban generality. Unlike the African American "case," or the "Negro problem," and particularly in contrast to the emerging global left of decolonization, "the Indian" had been subjected to an effort at desegregation since the mid-19th century, and, while it had rarely been argued that

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[9] Introduction, 9-10. While the "Negro problem" and the "Indian problem" operated under very different terms in the 1950s, the particular structure of racial liberalism, with its calls for "equal opportunity," affects both of these groups.

Indians were inassimilable, it had just become clear that, as a group, Indians were *unwilling* to assimilate.

My secondary archive, a set of images by the Chicago street photographers Vivian Maier and Tom Palazzolo and a series of articles in Chicago publications, shows another side to racial reorganization in the case of poor white migrants. The hillbilly "case" problematizes the familial structures that the BIA photographs worry over, and shows, like the BIA photos, in what ways the family and the "worker" come to be seen as national exemplars, in this case in a negative sense. In most of the images, the attention paid to the individual subject demands that the audience parse the tension between seeing the faces and subjectivities of the photographed and acknowledging the ultimate unknowability of these subjects; in the BIA images, recognition of the "worker" in particular orders the relationship between the subject and the viewer. Social problem photography has an established tradition with significant attention paid to the problem of seeing/knowing the subjects; nowhere is this plainer than in the title of Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White's 1937 classic in the social photography genre, *You Have Seen Their Faces*. Like Jacob Riis before them and his 1890 commentary *How the Other Half Lives*, Caldwell and Bourke-White image the subjects of the photographs in such a way that the face of the imaged and her subjectivity sit in an uneasy relationship to each other, with the face serving as a model, an exemplar for the social problem of poverty and the interiority of the subject fundamentally unknowable, perhaps even to the subject herself. These are in no small part *generic* concerns: the modernist affective realism of the "hillbilly" photographs and the aspirational and pragmatist realism of the BIA photographs show how the "realist" impulse shapes both of these archives.

Abutting the problem of Indianness, the reorganization of the political sphere on the basis

of racial liberalism, and the changing vision of the urban space, then, is the demand for realist, documentary, and realistic images. In no small part because of the political climate of the 1950s, the reliance on the kinds of realism admired in the 19th century and first half of the 20th century fades, and realism as interpretation, or, most strongly, "ideology," seems to become an object of critical study. Furthermore, the critical concern with the realist project demonstrates the obsessive interest, in the 1950s, in figuring out whether or not models, forms, media, and genres that consider themselves "representational" can actually "represent."[10] The terminology is clearly quite slippery even during the historical moment; as such, we must think carefully about the definition of "realism" and how genres of representation fit into this rather capacious category. Taking after the description of the BIA archive, it makes sense at the moment to think of the images and narratives of this project as being aspirational factualities, gesturing at "facts," and aspiring to the mimetic representation of "real" happenings.[11]

Media, as exemplified here in the image, that attend to "the real," or to the "having happened," characterize how problematic groups agglomerated or were formed (institutionally), and how those belonging to those groups resisted or ascribed to the "generalities" that were

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[10] Contemporaneous critics engaged with the "problem of representation" cut a wide swath of interests, and staked a number of different kinds of claims. Erich Auerbach in particular, but also Ian Watt, Leslie Fiedler, and others worked on how to understand the disjunctions and conjunctions between the aesthetic object and what it "represents."

[11] Bruno Latour uses the expression "factish" to describe "that which had been broken by iconoclasm, and had always been there; that which always has to be carved anew and is necessary for acting and arguing. That is what I call the *factish*. We can retrieve the factish from the massacre of facts and fetishes when we explicitly recover the actions of the makers of *both*" (*Pandora's Hope* 274). We might consider this expression as describing the simultaneous reference to reality and utter constructedness of "fact" and also the reference to reality and constructedness of the fetish. Latour describes *both* fact and fetish as "that which is fabricated and not fabricated."

invented on their behalves. The BIA photo collection and Vivian Maier and Tom Palazzolo's photographs reveal how the aesthetic and social rendering of problematized people in the United States produces a vision of the limit cases for the conditions of belonging to the nation and to the city. These two groups of images show how problematic liberalism's enforcement of its individualizing mandate turned out. These groups of images serve as exemplary for demonstrating how divergent aesthetic tasks together produce a vision of the problem of social and visual attachment.

At the same time and in the same city, *Harper's Magazine*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and two Chicago photographers dedicated themselves to an aesthetic project of photographically interpreting the Appalachian migrant population. When Harper's Magazine publishes its 1958 article, "The Hillbillies Invade Chicago,"[12] it defines the city's racial problems in oppositional terms. "They [white Appalachian migrants] seem to be the American dream gone berserk," argues author Albert N. Votaw. "This may be the reason why their neighbors often find them more obnoxious than the Negroes or the earlier foreign immigrants whose obvious differences from the American stereotype made them easy to despise. Clannish, proud, disorderly, untamed to urban ways, these country cousins confound all notions of racial, religious, or cultural purity."[13] That *Harper's*, as well as the *Tribune* and the *Chicago Defender,* framed the "hillbilly problem" as one of *race* matters deeply here because it shows that the drive to preserve race as the criterion for social organization permeates the conversation on not only Indians but also poor

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[12] The magazines and newspapers of this moment consistently use the word "hillbilly" to refer to a specific group of poor white migrants: non-ethnic whites from mostly Kentucky and Tennessee.

[13] Votaw, Albert N., THE HILLBILLIES INVADE CHICAGO, Harper's Magazine, Feb 1958 p.64.

whites; it is also significant that the "hillbilly" images produce an aesthetic index that differs to an extraordinary degree from the Bureau of Indian Affairs' images[14]. Furthermore, these articles and photo collections demonstrate how urban space reorganizes under the terms of liberalism such that "whiteness" as a category takes on greater reliance of location. The recently rediscovered photographer Vivian Maier and the longtime Chicago documentarian Tom Palazzolo dedicate their photo archives to an aesthetic that takes as its point of origin the elegant, modernist impulse of photographers like Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans. When considered in this context, Vivian Maier's street photographs of New York and Chicago render strongly individuated subjects who are often made to serve as exemplary of this failure of aspiration to the American dream.

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[14] This line of inquiry owes much to studies in "critical whiteness" that suggest that "white" as a category is under revision during the moment of racial liberalism. David Freund argues that the United States was under "a fundamental transformation during these years [the post war]. [This book] explores an important facet of that transformation, by showing how whites grew deeply invested in new ideas about the relationship between race and property. And it argues that this new racial thinking was decisively shaped by the powerful new institutions and private practices that fueled postwar suburban growth while also successfully excluding most black people from its benefits. Rather than describe how other variables interacted with a presumably static white racism, I argue that white identity and white racism were being remade and that these changes were inextricably linked to a revolution in metropolitan political economy." *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* 21. In the context of this chapter, I quote Freund to demonstrate that part of the evolving urban scene was the reorganization of how whites recognized themselves often in spatial ways that were determined as much as – or more than – property as appearance.

Figure 18. Children, Chicago, Vivian Maier, Chicago IL.

These two archives – the images and oral history narrative of relocation and the articles and images documenting white Southern migration – form companion pieces that define the political and aesthetic problem of managing "race" and belonging in the urban space after the war. One of these collections is an archive – explicitly collected by the BIA for academic and historical purposes – and the other is a looser collection, composed of a set of newspaper articles and the works of two photographers, both explicitly dedicated to the capturing of the urban scene. The BIA and the US government generally define American Indians here, as well as earlier, as being prime for "integration," a population whose "intrinsic" racial qualities could be removed from their "true" personhood. The relocation and termination programs were utopian efforts on the part of a Cold War liberal political system whose position on race as respected Indians stated that the Indian problem could be solved by a mass project of assimilation, thereby "killing" the

Indian while saving the man. It will be clear that this project failed in no small part because the urban scene produced the crucible for intertribal radicalism. The "hillbilly" archives demonstrate the need for such liberal publications as *Harper's* to produce renewed visions of the race problem, demonstrating frustration with the failure of poor whites to enfold themselves into the mainstream. If the Indian "case" demonstrates here and elsewhere that race as a construction is constantly undergoing political, social, and legal reorganization, the case of the Appalachian migrants to the urban scene demonstrates how liberalism also needs to consider its *failures* a problem of race. If Indians are here problematizing racial definition, constantly being demonstrated to be the best and the worst at becoming generalized, so too are the poorest whites, who seem to be ideal for integration but "choose" alienation. These concerns are underlined by the major aesthetic divergences between the archives: Palazzolo and Maier's dedication to composition and commitment to modernist aesthetic qualities with the BIA's "realist" persuasive commitment to utopian and pedagogical desires. The apparent lack of persuasion in modernist-influenced images will not be taken for granted here, but it is worthwhile to note that these photographers did not *explicitly* think of their work as pedagogical. The divergent aesthetic commitments that operate here produce two very different sets of conditions for the rendering of the political, but both collections serve to describe and invent new terms for aestheticizing urban belonging.

Figure 19. Girl, Chicago, Vivian Maier, Chicago, IL.

All in a Day's Work

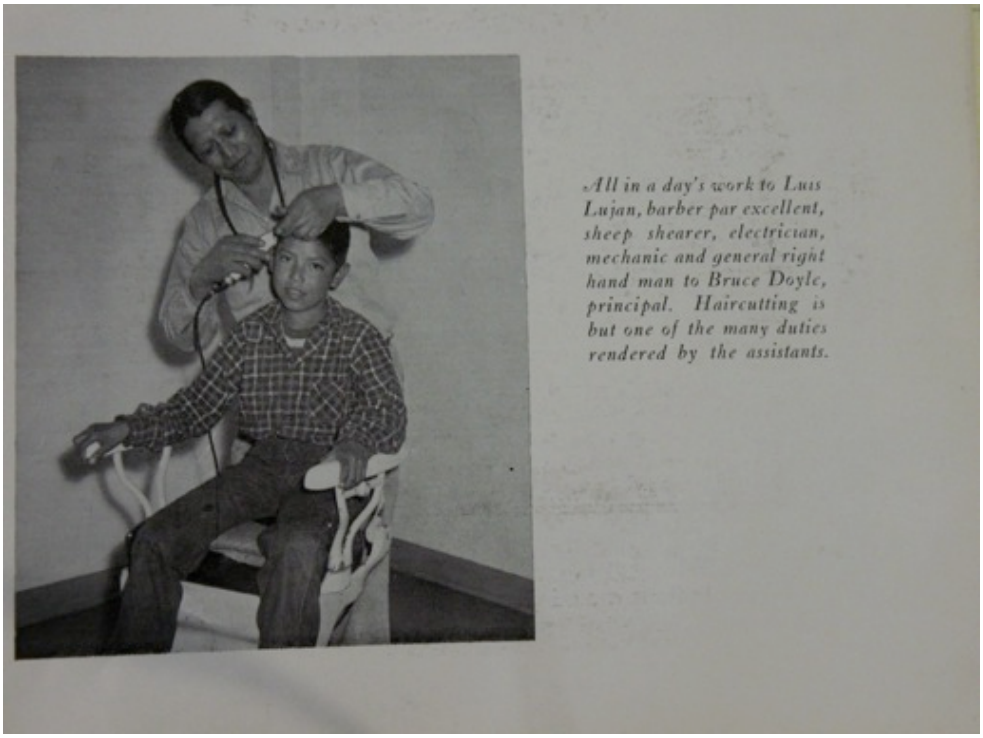

Figure 20. All in a Day's Work, Bureau of Indian Affairs Indian relocation records [manuscript] 1936-1975, Box 1.

The above image comes from the 1957 yearbook of the Taos Pueblo Junior High, which is included in the BIA archive.[15] While it's necessarily speculative to try to produce an explanation of why the yearbook might have been included, it seems that having a record of the vocational programs that the students engaged in would be important for gauging the relative success of the post-relocation industrial worker. Additionally, many of the images in the yearbook show the

[15] This archive, again, is put together first in scrapbook form by relocation agents and then organized into a defined collection by the profoundly knowledgeable librarians at the Newberry. All of the records that exist are included in the archive, so if there is a "case" for why certain objects were included, it's not clear who made it.

faculty and staff and their relationships to their work. This image shows Luis Lujan (Taos Pueblo), "barber par excellent [sic], sheep shearer, electrician, mechanic and general right hand man to Bruce Doyle, principal. Haircutting is but one of the many duties rendered by the assistants." Luis Lujan and the student whose hair he's cutting demarcate how the projected "reservation Indian" and the (also projected) "urban Indian" look or seem to look when imaged together, and what the terms of their "work" are. In this image, the barber's projected status as a "reservation Indian" and the boy's status as a (future) "working Indian" is complicated by the fact that the elder subject, Lujan, is the "worker" of the caption. The Bureau of Indian Affairs, in this image, produces a twofold narrative: it notes the capacity of *all* Indians to work, by showing a "reservation" person working and a child subject to "desegregation," while making the potential subject of relocation compositionally superior: the boy is "framed" by the armchair; he meets the viewer's gaze; his eye line falls at the point of ideal recognition.

This section explores how the Bureau of Indian Affairs pushed its subjects toward the aspiration to working class subjectivity, already beginning to disappear in the post-New Deal era, and works to define a depoliticizing agenda on the part of the BIA. In other words, it will become clear that, while the relocation project intended to turn poor reservation dwellers into poor city workers while preserving some aspect of "Nativeness," the central aim of these images is to produce an aesthetic program to push Indians into work to avoid their finding solidarity. It demonstrates how Indians, as shown both in this image and in others, are made into aspirational subjects: "bad citizens" and ideal citizens simultaneously. It also contributes to the body of research on how the urban space becomes reiterated as the national site of "work" and "labor," despite the fact that the urban landscape as the scene of class mobility had already demonstrated itself to be in crisis by the 1950s. This is yet another tension that this archive outlines: the BIA

pushes Indians toward the "working class," despite the fact that urban work was already declining.

An image that speaks to the aesthetics of working and to the practice of aestheticizing indigenous labor is the picture of "Miss Irene Snowball, Winnebago, from Black River Falls, Wisconsin, came to Chicago, April 19, 1955."

Figure 21. Irene Snowball, Bureau of Indian Affairs Indian relocation records [manuscript] 1936-1975, Box 2.

The caption continues, "Irene is working for Nelson-Eismann as a typist at $60.00 a week. There are many schools for typing, stenography and business machine operation. Girls can go to these schools while working on a job to earn living" [sic]. Here, the relationship between "social" photography and the problem of rendering visual aesthetics comes to the fore. This is not to assert that this image does not occupy the grounds that other amateur photography occupies, in the sense that it does seem to project the kind of self-conscious posed-spontaneity of the home movie or amateur image. But because of the physical placement of these two women's bodies,

and the interpellation that produces Irene as a "worker" in the caption, the image depends on its production of style.[16] Compositionally, the photograph doesn't conform to traditional photographic aesthetics, in the sense that the photographer mismanages the headspace of the two figures and grants each of them half of the frame instead of adjusting to acknowledge the rule of thirds[17]. However, the subject herself and her "project" communicate clearly in the frame; Irene Snowball's face is clearly visible, and her seeming cheerful relationship to her work is underlined by her expression in regard to what appears to be a supervisor. The supervisor is smiling too, implying an easy rapport between these two women, and a congenial engagement with what is taken to be the "primary" subject. Irene Snowball's "legibility" comes through clearly here, as her appearance intends to produce a particular kind of relational reaction in the viewer: she, the viewer, recognizes the cheerful attitude and willingness to fit easily into the working world. Most important to the composition of the image, however, is the machinery of the subject's job: her typewriter is clearly visible and the horizontal composition perfectly emphasizes the sheet of paper in the supervisor's hands and the top of the file cabinet that is behind Irene Snowball.

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[16] I'm aware that the "problem" of photographic style has been up for discussion since the form's advent, and that in particular Roland Barthes, in *Image-Music-Text* and *Camera Lucida* implies that photography represents without style by calling the form "a perfect analogon" (*I-M-G* 196). He does, however, insist that the photograph has both connotative and denotative properties. At this juncture, I will use "style" to refer to the photographs relationship to its *intention*: because this image serves as propaganda, its propagandistic "style" seems appropriate for evaluation.

[17] The "rule" is originally credited to John Thomas Smith (1797) but my use comes from a reference in Mike Stracco, "What is Right with this Picture?" *The English Journal* 96, 5: 73. It refers to the practice of dividing a photo or painting's frame into horizontal "thirds," which places the primary subject's eyes 33% of the way down the picture, and vertical "thirds," which arranges the subjects in such a way as to make one of them appear more significant.

Close to this image is a picture of "Mr. LaRoy Miller, Jr., Chippewa, from Shawano, Wisconsin. He came to Chicago April 18, 1955."

Figure 22. LaRoy Miller, Jr., Bureau of Indian Affairs Indian relocation records [manuscript] 1936-1975, Box 2.

The caption continues, "He is working at the Teletype Corporation as a machine operator trainee at $1.72 an hour [about $70.00 a week]. LaRoy came to Chicago upon the advice of his brother, Roger." While this image demonstrates compositional superiority in comparison to the image of Irene Snowball, it nonetheless cleaves to the same aesthetic principles. The mechanics of LaRoy Miller's work *frame* the subjects here, instead of occupying the spaces of aesthetic division: while the subjects occupy middle ground, the teletype cards and machine occupy the foreground while stacked boxes occupy the background. This image, taken in tandem with the photograph of Irene Snowball, demonstrates how the Bureau of Indian Affairs' collection produces a "realism"

that attaches it to a project of everyday aesthetics as well as a realism predicated on persuasion: how the image makes claims upon subjects in the real world.

The urban sociologist Thomas Sugrue and other sociologists, geographers, and economists of the "urban crisis" argue that deindustrialization characterizes the United States in the 20th century, particularly the mid-20th century. Sugrue's case is the once-reigning industrial stronghold of Detroit, but the process of deindustrializing is a national and international phenomenon.[18] While Sugrue criticizes what, at the time (1995), was the inattention to the racial dynamics of deindustrialization, this has become an important aspect of the academic body of work around urbanism. That said, the body of academic work on deindustrialization, race, and embedded liberalism tends to ignore the Indian "case" and the exemplarity of its process. Because of the unique, protected "national" status of American Indians, the cultural and economic history of the city in the 20th century is necessarily incomplete without a rigorous attendance to the "Indian problem." Furthermore, the attention to the events of relocation within

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[18] "But the process of deindustrialization, the closing, "downsizing," and relocation of plants and sometimes whole industries, accelerated throughout the twentieth century. In the 1920s, New England textile towns were ravaged by the flight of mills to the Piedmont South, presaging similar shifts of capital that would devastate much of the industrial North later in the century. By midcentury, what had been a trickle of manufacturing jobs out of the industrial heartland had become a flood. In the 1950s, the decline of urban manufacturing and the loss of industrial jobs reconfigured the landscape of the most prominent industrial cities across the North. Detroit, Chicago, New York, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Trenton, Boston, and Saint Louis all lost hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs beginning in the 1950s. The labor and economic historiography on industrializing towns and cities is voluminous, but the history of deindustrialization and responses to it remains largely untold." "Forget about Your Inalienable Right to Work": Deindustrialization and Its Discontents at Ford, 1950-1953" 113. I would argue that the significant body of work published since this article (1995) has begun to make a significant impact on the story of deindustrialization. Furthermore, the investment in describing and analyzing the history of embedded liberalism in the mid-twentieth century necessarily must manage the history of deindustrialization.

the canon of American Indian history tends to take the stance that the Bureau's relocation and termination projects, because of their *intended* desire to enfold Natives into a generalized "working class," were "neocolonial" projects and not *depoliticizing* projects that turned out, paradoxically, to encourage organizing. Whatever the intentions of the BIA in regard to domestic forms of imperialism, the project of relocation and other events of urban restructuring produced scenes that fomented indigenous – and, crucially, intertribal – forms of radicalism. Intertribal organizing as an enterprise acknowledges a political solidarity over a tribal one – it argues for terms of political reorganization that necessarily include economic equality.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs clearly wants to demonstrate to both its relocatees and the potential hirers that they understand the capacity and willingness of the reservation inhabitants to work. Images show men on-reservation hauling water in a pickup truck (presumably because of substandard irrigation in South Dakota) as well as women working in a rutabaga field. The capacity for Indians to acclimate to regular work must be underlined because the popular perception, in some ways based on the reliance on social services because of the complex economic history of Indian labor, is that Indian people don't work. The BIA mounted small studies of reservations in an effort to determine the number of people willing to work, as demonstrated in the following chart, created by an agent at the Sisseton office:

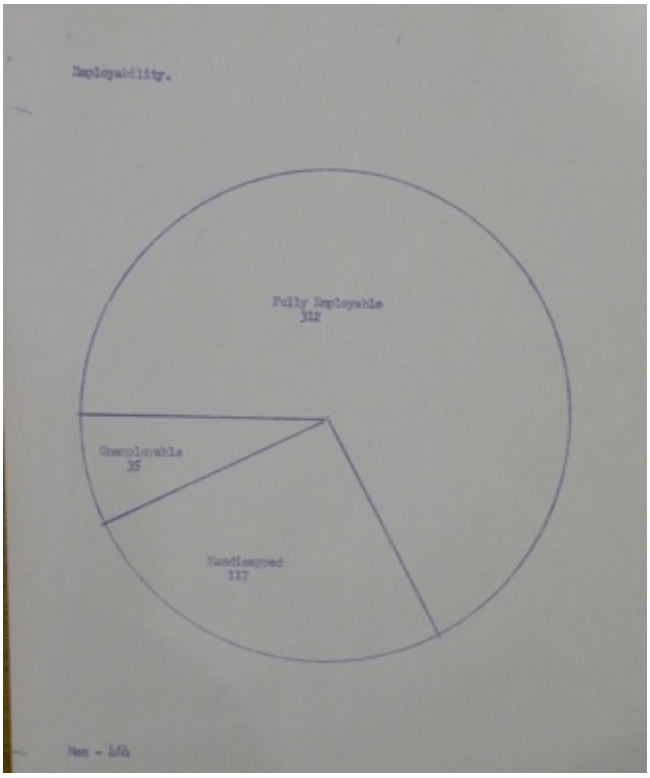

Figure 23. Employability Chart, Bureau of Indian Affairs Indian relocation records [manuscript] 1936-1975, Box 1.

While most of the images of pre-relocation Natives working are of people working at agricultural labor, the presumption of the post-relocation Indian worker is that he will be an industrial worker, in any one of a number of enterprises. This is quite explicitly described as an "ambition" on the part of as well as *for* Indians: in the Taos Pueblo junior high yearbook included with the archive, dated 1957, more than one boy states that his life's ambition is to be an electrician, which is framed as "urban" work. The bulletins that circulate between relocation officers also underline the importance of the industrial work that greets Indians in their new city homes; the following is excerpted from a letter between Jack Womeldorf, the relocation officer at Intermountain School, and Rudolph Russell, a Chicago relocation agent in Joliet:

> Intermountain Schools is the largest off-reservation school operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Under separate cover we are mailing you an information album to better acquaint you with our program. Since the first graduating class four years ago [1953], approximately 714 young men and women have been placed in employment off the reservation…
> Because of the limited time these young people are in school it becomes necessary to give them specialized training. This, in simple language, means to train them to do one job (or trade) rather than a general course of doing many things. We find that our most successful graduates are those who have been placed in jobs for which they have been trained.
> We will have approximately 57 boys this year seeking employment and a start through Relocation Services. If it is at all possible, I would like to see each one of them have an opportunity to work in his field of training... [19]

When Womeldorf repeatedly requests that the Native students be placed in their "fields of training," he is referring to the exclusively industrial trades in which Intermountain School provided training, including driving (trucks and other manufacturing vehicles), equipment maintenance, cabinet and millwork, electrical engineering, etc. The letter demonstrates yet again the near-obsessive interest on the part of the federal government to kill the Indian by *employing* the man.[20] It does not seem to be a concern, again, that these trades are beginning to decline both

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[19] Jack Womeldorf to Rudolph Russell, December 3, 1957, BIA Relocation archive.

[20] The expression "Kill the Indian, Save the Man" originates with Captain Richard H. Pratt, a supporter of the Carlisle Indian school. His speech to the school in 1892 shows the ongoing problem in the period of the relationship between Indian interiority and abstract citizenship. "We are just now making a great pretense of anxiety to civilize the Indians. I use the word "pretense" purposely, and mean it to have all the significance it can possibly carry. [George] Washington believed that commerce freely entered into between us and the Indians would bring about their civilization, and Washington was right. He was followed by Jefferson, who inaugurated the reservation plan. Jefferson's reservation was to be the country west of the Mississippi; and he issued instructions to those controlling Indian matters to get the Indians there, and let the Great River be the line between them and the whites. Any method of securing removal - persuasion, purchase, or force - was authorized…
> It is a great mistake to think that the Indian is born an inevitable savage. He is born a blank, like all the rest of us. Left in the surroundings of savagery, he grows to possess a savage language, superstition, and life. We, left in the surroundings of civilization, grow to possess a civilized language, life, and purpose. Transfer the infant white to the savage surroundings, he will grow to

in rural but particularly in urban settings, and that manufacturing begins to lose jobs in the 1950s, not gain them.

Why, then, does it matter that the process of deindustrialization occurs contemporaneously with the drive to industrialize and assimilate the Native population? As noted, it seems that a significant dynamic of this tension is caused by some of the conflicting aspects of liberalism in its largest sense. The principle of "liberty," a dynamic of philosophical and governmental principles since the 18th century, necessitates a value in the individual as the unit of appropriate social order.[21] Furthermore, the points of view demonstrated by white liberal thought makers in the post-relocation era demonstrate how relocation as an intended liberal project failed. Relocation was a strategy that intended to *depoliticize* Indians; its proponents seemed startled when, in some particularized cases, it had a multitude of effects, including the production of social movements. Also, the cultural record on the urban space in the 1950s, again, ignores the Indian case because it problematizes the typical narrative about urbanization and, later, deindustrialization, because it demonstrates that the failures of the "good life" are in some ways predicated on the "success" of liberalism. It's important, however, to note how relocation as an enterprise affected the history of intertribal activism, and showed how the 1970s liberal interest in the Indian problem reframed relocation as a failure of the liberal project. The post-

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possess a savage language, superstition, and habit. Transfer the savage-born infant to the surroundings of civilization, and he will grow to possess a civilized language and habit. These results have been established over and over again beyond all question; and it is also well established that those advanced in life, even to maturity, of either class, lose already acquired qualities belonging to the side of their birth, and gradually take on those of the side to which they have been transferred."

[21] John Stuart Mill refers to this as "Civil, or Social Liberty" as opposed to "Liberty of the Will," *On Liberty* 1.

relocation (and post-deindustrialization) liberal interest in the "Indian problem" mourns that liberalism seems to have been unable to save the Indian from herself. It also places the blame for Indian disaffection on "culture loss," instead of on institutional racism and entrenched poverty; it of course ignores the proletarian groups like the radicalized American Indian Movement, which prioritized intertribal organizing over an adherence to traditionalisms.[22]

The journalist Bill Moyers, best known as Lyndon Johnson's press secretary and as a commentator on media, myth, and language, made a 1978 documentary called *Why did Gloria Die?,* a comment on an Anishinaabeg woman's death in Minneapolis of acquired hepatitis. The film unapologetically outlines what it perceives as culture loss in the post relocation era. In his introduction Moyers argues, "Like thousands of Indians, she began to die the minute she left the reservation for the city," and states, "the plight of Indians in the city is the plight of aliens in a foreign land." It seems here, in particular, that Moyers is ascribing to the notion that many liberal scholars have advanced, which is that the poverty of Indians as city-dwellers is a problem of modernization and imperialism, and not the advancing of capital, and that the notion of the "modern Indian" is an unavailable one. The central argument of the movie is that its subjects are stuck "between an old culture" and "a modern way of life" and that Gloria's "life and death represent the tragedy of Indians in the city." This seems mostly a dynamic of life after relocation,

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[22] Daniel M. Cobb documents the range of American Indian organizing, primarily after the American Indian Chicago Conference in 1961. He details AIM and its militancy, as well as the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), which, under the direction of Vine Deloria Jr., acted under the notion that "[t]ribes had much to gain and nothing to lose from working the system" (154). In an increasingly volatile America, Indians were viewed as a "'safe' minority" and representative of the "deserving poor" (152) In *Native Activism in Cold War America: The Struggle for Sovereignty* and review by David R.M. Beck, *Wicazo Sa Review* Volume 25, Number 1, Spring 2010.

in the sense that Gloria, primarily a victim of a rather specific institution (she is turned away from one hospital and treated badly at the second; it's not clear if this treatment is because she's a poor Indian or a poor person generally) is seen rather as a victim of the modern world. "The Indian" as essentially victimized by modernity is a well-worn trope, but it is important to note the *effect* that relocation was perceived as having on its participants, whether they "succeeded" according to its terms or not – it seems that relocation tries to make Indians "modern" but that Indians are in some fundamental way unsuited to the modern world. But Moyers's documentary is one of the *only* mainstream liberal evidentiary objects of the post-relocation era, and Indian commentators have a diverse point of view, some of them perceiving relocation as beneficial, others as "genocidal," and most as a mixed bag. If relocation is perceived as a liberal failure in that its subjects refuse the model of "traditional cultural" sustenance coupled with assimilation to the working class in favor of a radical collectivist politics, why isn't it seen as problematic in the Cold War era, but seen as potentially the exemplar for assimilation? Is it the rise of Indian nationalism and AIM that changes the perceptual apparatus for relocation? It seems most likely that the changing architecture of the urban space itself in the sense of its proletarianization coupled with white flight to the suburbs and the shift in what we perceive to be the aims of liberalism (from a model of individual/economic liberty to a paradigm that blames inequality on matters of feeling) are responsible for shifts like this one, in which the Indian goes from being perceived as the perfect potential liberal subject to the ultimate victim of modernity.

It seems essential to return to a critique of the urban crisis, and to reiterate how important an economic critique of the postwar era remains in this discussion of the problem of American Indian work and workers. The 1950s, where this dissertation takes up, produces a particularized liberal conception of race and racial deviance from economic normativity. To quote Thomas J.

Sugrue again, "In place of an economic analysis of racial inequality emerged an understanding of racism as at root an individual pathology, an anomalous feature of American society, which could be eradicated through education and persuasion. 'The Negro problem,' wrote Gunnar Myrdal in his pathbreaking *American Dilemma*, the singlemost influential guide for postwar integrationists, 'is a problem in the heart of the American. It is there that the interracial tension has its focus. It is there that the decisive struggle goes on.'"[23] This is the view, again, espoused by those like Moyers, whose assertion reiterates how Indians are victimized by the movement of modernity. If the problem at the heart of racial inequality is one of attitude and not one of institutional and economic failures, then surely the failure of the liberal project of relocation is in part with Indians themselves, and their unwillingness to transform in the projected space of improved white "attitude." Moyers and the tone of his movie certainly succeed in their attachment to their subject; as a victim of the modern Gloria and her death by hepatitis work quite effectively. She also serves, for Moyers, as an exemplar of the bad *results* of relocation; according to the movie, "her life and death represent the tragedy of Indians in the city." Gloria's "representative" status, however, exists in tension with the fact that she can't appear in the movie, can't speak for herself; the movie is necessarily an after-the-fact recollection of her life, and this is one of the ways in which it differs from the BIA photographs. In the BIA images, the lives of the subjects are also in tension with the points of view apparently espoused, but because they are supposed to serve as aspirational, and ultimately exemplars of the consensus that liberalism is of significant benefit, the images project their subjects into an imagined but

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[23] "Affirmative Action from below: Civil Rights, the Building Trades, and the Politics of Racial Equality in the Urban North, 1945-1969." (2004)

undiagnosed future. For these images, the problem at their center is connected, not to the "race problem" of the 1940s and 50s but to the "Indian problem" as it began to shift after the closure of the frontier in the 1890s. If, as I have argued here, the benefit of "killing the Indian and saving the man" has been in common parlance since 1892, then it is of the essence to note that Indians have been on the edge of liberalism's knife since its infusion into American economics at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Still Successfully Relocated

Figure 24. Our Largest Family Unit, Bureau of Indian Affairs Indian relocation records [manuscript] 1936-1975, Box 1.

One of the pre-relocation images in the Newberry collection figures a family of thirteen and

bears the caption, "Our largest Family Unit – Still successfully relocated." The photograph shows an array of dress that represents at least a thirty year period; the family itself reflects the length of time that the photograph represents in the sense of its being intergenerational. The caption itself, of course, directs the viewer toward a series of contradictions that reflect the very contradictory nature of the relocation enterprise. Relocation is itself troubled in the sense that most American Indian people are being relocated from what is already a relocation site – the reservation, which as a physical place has yet to recover from the effects of the mass removal projects of the 19th century – and it is also worth noting that, because of the termination efforts of the federal government, a number of reservations are potentially about to be converted to individually-held lands.[24] Furthermore, the history of photographing American Indians as an

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[24] Framing the Indian presence in the social history of the American city, through a photographic and archival discourse, means reframing the cultural history of the 1950s such that the object of inquiry is not just the embedded liberalism of the Cold War, but the policies that affected Indians and their communities. Concurrent with relocation are is the federal programs of "termination." Termination and relocation tend to be discussed in tandem, as they occur at the same time and have the same ultimate goal: the end of Indiankind, by virtue of the dissolution of a number of indigenous nations and the ultimate assimilation of indigenous Americans to the "mainstream." Termination is often referred to in Indian political history as seeming a program of "desegregation": the termination of a number of nations was intended to acclimate t he members of thes e nations to their surrounding communities. Worth noting, however, is the political utility of terminating the *specific* tribes that the federal government targeted. Among those tagged for termination were the Wisconsin Menominee, viewed as having already achieved "financial independence" because of their significant holdings in timberland; the Oklahoma Osage (The 1906 Osage Allotment Act, which established the Osage Mineral Trust, "Provided that the tribe retained all mineral rights to the entire reservation in undivided ownership; and provided for the distribution of royalties from development of mineral resources to each of the enrollees, such shares in the royalties are called `headright shares,'" Library of Congress: http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/cpquery/R?cp108:FLD010:@1%28sr343%29), also deemed financially solvent because of their oil holdings, and the Oregon Klamath, who resided on a piece of land held in federal trust that the US Army had plans to permanently inundate with the imposition of the Dalles Dam (Center for Columbia River History; records of the Oregon Historical Society). Between 1952 and 1954, a number of House Resolutions was voted upon

attempt to capture a "vanishing race" in the 19th century casts its shadow over this chapter, and the development of photographic technology itself, particularly in the US, was predicated on a perceived need for an anthropological device that would render "disappearing" peoples in their "authentic" guises.[25] In some ways too, this is a particularly "American" problem: as the US gained headway as an imperial and global power, the need to document for posterity its "disappearing" subjects demanded the advancement of photographic technology.

The word "still" in the caption above is troubling. In the context of the photograph the two available meanings are "still," as in, they remain relocated, a distinction which itself might be broken down still further – as reservation dwellers they remain in the relocated site of the reservation or the family remains in the city, in their second site of relocation (this is not

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regarding termination, with mixed results: some Indian nations were more willing to end the relationship of federal paternalism than others, which disagreed strongly with the removal of federal services. As Donald Fixico notes in *Termination and Relocation*, which remains the only comprehensive history of the era,

> Under public scrutiny, the Bureau of Indian Affairs worked out a program for every tribe listed for termination. Each tribe had two options for disposing tribal properties: 1, to organize into a corporation for continued management under a trustee of their choice, or 2., to sell all properties and assets with the proceeds to be distributed among tribal members. If a tribe failed to exercise either option, the Secretary of the Interior had authority to transfer titles of properties to a trustee of his choice, who would then assume temporary ownership for liquidation purposes. (103)

Termination's project is similar, again, to that of relocation: ultimate depoliticization of Native peoples through the end of their nationhood status and the drive to disperse Indians in cities, but separated from each other. I t's quite apparent that any effort on the part of the United States to maintain a relationship with Indigenous people *predicated on politics* or nationhood is disastrous to the ultimate aims of capitalism and globalization. The mistake that the US made in the case of Native people was in assuming that Indian embrace of the modern and its identificatory categories would equal a widescale Indian rejection of a collective politics.

[25] For a thorough study of 19th century practices of imaging Indians, see Alan Trachtenberg, *Staging Hiawatha*. For a discussion of how developing photographic technology inflected relationships with dispossessed peoples and colonial practices on the part of the US, see Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence*. For a description of the ongoing relationship of the photographic problem to the "Indian pr oblem," see Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*.

necessarily a given – it seems that a significant number of families returned to the reservation after a few weeks or months, if they were unable to find work or affordable housing.) The more obvious meaning of the word, of course, is that the family was relocated *despite* its large size. This meaning of the word still reminds the viewer of the contingency of relocation and the possibility that "success" is dependent upon a rearrangement of the family unit. The families pictured in Chicago are almost exclusively two-parent, several-children families, although in one case the maternal grandmother is included. The intergenerational arrangement seen here interrupts and displaces the nuclear family setup and must as a result of this be managed linguistically by the caption included such that the large family is considered "previous" to urban relocation.

The need to narrate events with images that don't actually capture said event is evident in a number of captions, particularly here. The staging of the image and the importance of the event demonstrate how the BIA manages to decouple the results of its plan ("successfully relocated") from the images that it arranges (the family, after all, is pictured on the reservation and not at the site of their relocation.) This section attends to the development of the relationship between the historicizing project that was relocation and its images, and the "success" that the BIA locates in the images. The above photo performs a kind of temporal sleight of hand that manages to delaminate the criterion of the photographic image that, historically, is thought to be permanently fused: the "before" and "after" of the photograph. That this image maintains the trace of its *aftereffect* as opposed to the traces of its histories demonstrates that this image's temporality adheres aggressively to a redefining – even rearranging – of the historical present. After all, the image shows the *before* but projects the *after,* and the bureau's agenda demands that these events be collapsed: the management of this people means the reorganization of their temporality; their

modernity. This also helps to cement the aesthetic distinction that exists between the "art" photos of Chicago street photographers and the "persuasive" photos of the BIA. Here, the caption's work necessitates that we think critically of these photos' genres: how "art" and "social" images produce different forms of meaning.

The terms of racial liberalism must negotiate the divide between encouraging Indians to fully assimilate to the American class structure and allowing Indians a certain amount of "cultural autonomy," while discouraging them from organizing, living close to each other, or arguing for unique relationships with the federal government. This negotiation is exemplified in the opening to a 1957 report *The Indian: America's Unfinished Business*:

> The Indian himself should be the focus of all public policy affecting him. Money, land, education, and technical assistance should be considered as only means to an end – making the Indian a self-respecting and useful American citizen. This policy involves restoring his pride of origin and faith in himself after years of crippling dependence on the federal government and arousing his desire to share in the advantages of modern civilization. These are deeply human considerations. If disregarded, they will defeat the best-intentioned government plans.
> To encourage pride in Indianness is not to turn back the clock. On the contrary, it is to recognize that the United States policy has hitherto neglected this vital factor as a force for assimilation, with a corresponding loss to our national culture. As a result, Indians who have already entered our greater society have tended to disdain their historical background, drawing away from it as though ashamed. Instead of seeing it as a bridge to enable others to follow in their footsteps, they have too often misinterpreted their heritage to the dominant race and misrepresented their adopted culture to their own people. Yet men who have a foot in each world with an appreciation of both can effectively lessen the gap that divides the two and thus cross-fertilize both.[26]

As a lesson in racial liberalism there are few more compelling than this one. This line of argumentation outlines a number of dynamics of the transition to liberalism that characterized the early Cold War. For example, that the transition to "useful American citizenship" is

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[26] Aberle and Brophy 3.

characterized as a "deeply human consideration" outlines the purported universality of the desegregation project. Aligned here is also the problem of how to produce productive citizens while enabling Indians in particular to retain something that we might term cultural pride; the authors insist that the US government must encourage, simultaneously, "pride of origin" and an end to "crippling dependence." As most of the commentary on the "unfinished business" of "The Indian" notes in the midcentury, the loss of "cultural pride" or "pride of origin" is considered a fundamentally *national* problem. The authors do not refer to a nuanced vision of the nation that might accommodate Indian nations or nationalisms; when they assert that a loss of Indian "pride of origin" is a loss to "our national culture," they are asserting that "the Indian" is a fundamentally – and irrevocably – American construction.

In keeping with the terms of racial liberalism, the authors of this text insist that cultural pride is a *force* for assimilation. This is undoubtedly evidence in support of the argument that the terms of termination and relocation outlined an ideology whereby Indians were both the best kinds of American citizens *and* the worst. The authors of *The Indian* were members of the Commission on the Rights, Liberties, and Responsibilities of the American Indian, which was founded in the wake of House Concurrent Resolution 108 (the Termination Act, passed in 1953). Additionally, the claim that Indian assimilation should be considered a fundamentally *modern* phenomenon problematizes the terms of that assimilation. Because the commission favors racial liberalism, it must insist that Indians be "permitted" to retain parts of their culture that are defined along tribalistic, religious, or familial grounds – and that the existing problem of "the Indian" is a confluence of dependence on social services and a suffering under prejudicial attitudes. It is clear that the cultural practices that they are calling for are apolitical ones that put no pressure on the American national cultural paradigm. As such the imbrication of the ideology

of racial liberalism and the practices of termination and relocation is obvious in this work of political commentary.

The large family imaged above, still successfully relocated, and the management of its exemplarity point out the primary units of relocation, the nation and the family. As described above, the terms of Cold War liberalism demand that groups be defined as "families," or "tribes"; these groups are also fundamentally defined spatially, and by the character (urban or rural) of their location. Relocation, again, developed in no small part because of the impetus on the part of the federal government to provide American Indians with some way of earning a legitimate living, and the impression that the urban location provided greater earning opportunities was obviously prevalent even among members of the legal bodies that saw themselves as offering to Indians greater "opportunity." According to the US Government Printing Office,

> Public Law 84-959 and Public Law 88-230 [which amended PL 959] authorize the BIA to enter into contracts or agreements with Federal, State, and local government agencies or associations with non- apprenticeship programs, apprenticeship programs, or on-the-job training that leads to skilled employment.[27]

The BIA notes in the text of this law that the only persons eligible for this training program are adult individuals *residing on reservations*. This is of note because it demonstrates how the BIA designed this program with the exclusive intention of *moving a potential workforce from the rural to the urban landscape and providing them with the training that would enable these border-citizens to gain lucrative employment*[28]. The precondition for urban citizenship, for the

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[27] Government Printing Office website.
[28] In the context of the BIA's record of its own acts of relocation concurrent with termination, the old question of American Indian citizenship status resurfaces. The relocation effort as well as the

BIA, is rural status; for the conditions of the agreement to be realized, the persons being relocated have to be residents of the space that is already one of removal.

None of the analyses of relocation, of course, acknowledges what seems to be the consensus of relocation participants: a great number of them became far *more* involved in organized social movements after relocation.[29] In what seems more and more to be a

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termination acts intend to reduce the American Indian presence by reforging American Indians in the model of the ethnic whites that benefitted from both the increasing economic gains of the Cold War and from the particular kind of urbanization that occurred after the second American Industrial Revolution. And again, as happened in an earlier historical period, the United States government comes up against a problematic aspect of its own relationship to Indian racial formation: *the best subjects for assimilation are in important ways the worst, being always already resident citizens, the limit case for the natural born citizen model.* In fact, the citizenship model and the enclosure of American Indians into the category of "citizen" is in some ways responsible for the policies of relocation and the resultant political collectivity that formed despite all efforts to scatter native people away from each other. American Indians are made citizens in 1924, with the passage of the General Citizenship Act in no small part because of demands for citizenship recognition because of the service of a number of American Indian men in the first World War. Because American Indians were drafted for the first time into the second World War (most Indian service members actually signed up of their own volition because of the strong value of military service in Indian communities) the discrepancies of citizenship rights and responsibilities became much more obvious in the immediate post (first world) war period.

[29] Elaine M. Neils notes, correctly, that as respects relocation as a federal program "its origins belong to the stormy post-war political scene, rather than to a concerned appraisal of the needs of the Indians" (46). She also quotes Steiner's *The New Indians* in an effort to provide texture to the narrative of relocation. Steiner notes that after the war, "Indian youths took to the roads, but there was nowhere for them to go, and nothing for them to do. On the reservations, the interest in cars was a symbol of their unrest. In these post-war years, the use of cars eclipsed that of the horse and wagon; and this expressed the need to "get somewhere," to "get going," to escape the despair. Still, these restless youths hardly carried their discontent outside the reservations, into the outside world. The youths' angers rarely left home." Steiner, quoted in Neils 47.
Neils also quotes Nancy Oestrich Lurie's article "Historical Background" from *The American Indian Today*, and this is one of the few historical commentaries that takes into account the multitude of complicated variables of relocation and termination:

> Because Indian people showed a marked aptitude for industrial work during the war, and it was obvious they would not succeed as farmers, the solution was simple. Relocate them in urban centers, preferably in each case as far from the home reservation as possible, and legislate the reservation out of existence so that Indian people could not run home when

disingenuous identity politics, analysts of the events of relocation insist that Indian relocatees moved from reservations and passively accepted the demands of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Interviews with relocatees, however, reject this hypothesis. In the series of interviews conducted by the Chicago American Indian Oral History Project, transcripts of which are also owned by the Newberry, a number of commentators describe their early efforts at meeting other native people. Phyllis Fastwolf notes that when she moved to Chicago in the 1950s with her family, "at the time we met at the Two Crow [a bar frequented by relocatees], there were quite a few families that

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> things got tough or share their good fortune periodically with kinsmen who lacked the gumption to get out on their own.
> Like the grand scheme of 1887 to solve the Indians' problems by the simple expedient of allotment in severality [she refers to the Dawes Act, which in many cases carved reservation land into individual "allotments" with the hope of turning communally-held land into family plots], the relocation-reservation termination plan of the 1950s was out of date for its time in terms of national social and economic trends. If the ideal of the Allotment Act [Dawes Act] was to ensconce Indian people in a kind of average, small farm middle-class, which was actually disappearing, the ideal of the policy of the 1950s was primarily to get the government out of the Indian business and scant attention was paid to where Indian people might be able to fit in American life…
> At the very time that suburbs were burgeoning, commuting was a way of life for much of the nation, and far-sighted people were anticipating greater segmentation of industrial operations and dispersing them to where the people live, Indian policy was based on models of concentrating population in large urban centers. (Quoted in Neils 52).

Lurie, unlike a number of analysts of the relocation and termination projects, notes that one of the problems with relocation was the way that it deposited Indian people into an urban environment which had already demonstrated the beginning of its collapse from a 19th century ideal. But like most analysts of these events, Indian and non-Indian alike, one of the problems that she identifies is that Indian people become detached from their tribal, and therefore Indian, subjectivities. Indian analysts in particular resort to hyperbole in their description of the events of relocation: Ward Churchill describes the program as "neocolonialism." (Ward Churchill, "The Earth is Our Mother: Struggles for American Indian Land and Liberation in the Contemporary United States," in M. Annet te Jaimes, *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization, and Resistance.)* Donald Fixico insists that relocation is "pro-assimilationist" and that the era and its programs attempted to push Indians away from Indianness and toward "cītīzenshīp," or participation in larger society (*Termination and Relocation*).

were here on relocation. There were some from South Dakota. We had met a lot of families. It didn't take that long. In fact, we met quite a few Indians. "[30] The unidentified manuscript author describes the intertribal alliance that formed: "The relocation program attempted to scatter the Indian relocatees throughout the city, but as soon as families learned about the various neighborhoods and could afford to move, they sought to rent apartments close together to form their own ethnic enclave. Uptown became a popular Indian neighborhood, where the Indian population has gravitated" (88). Indeed, Inez Running Bear Dennison, an early relocatee, notes the intertribal connections, and shows how terms of attachment began to form around broad terms: "I don't think I'd ever want to move out of Uptown because that is where the Indians are. I said I don't care what tribe they are, if they are Indian – they are Indians. I love all Indians" (14). Again, implicit in this disjunction – between what the BIA and Native commentators and Native people themselves describe – is the *status of the political*. A number of smart and well-established Indigenous intellectuals fail to recognize that in what seems a move to "assimilate" indigenous people to a "mainstream" (read: modern) – and apolitical bloc – actualizes as a gesture toward political solidarity. What they care about is the disappearance of a particularized culture that might also be described as tribalism.

Additionally, the reliance of some natives on social services (a lifestyle shared with many other members of the working class) exposed many of the problems between the institutions of federal aid and the people enjoined to take advantage of that aid. For example, the House Subcommittee on Indian Affairs's *Indian Relocation and Industrial Development Programs* noted

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[30] Hoover, Herbert T. Miller, David Reed. (Eds.) *Chicago American Indian oral history project records,* manuscript page 22.

that in Los Angeles, "Relocatees are advised that the relocation office cannot be used as a crutch indefinitely and that they must learn to utilize the same community resources as do other residents of the city," despite the fact that social services were being cut for *all* poor urbanites during the 1950s and 60s.[31] This push to cut Indian "reliance" draws attention to the way in which the Indian subjects of this archive and the oral history (literary) project are pushed by institutional policy and the threat of the removal of institutional aid to the limits of social precariousness: as a group whose terms of belonging were undergoing a fundamental change as a result of the process of racial liberalization and the changing city, Indians and the "problem of Indianness" are located at the edge of American citizenship.

At a practical level, what does it mean to read a photograph as a "realist" object and not as a "document," within the documentary framework that considers photography simply mimetic or a "perfect analog"? This method accepts that within the photographic "frame" the subject communicates without speaking, and the photographer or artist renders without describing. The archives that are at the center of this inquiry are also heavily coded, because they are supposed to work in a number of ways: as propaganda; as "realist" depiction of urban living for the Department of the Interior, which oversaw the project; as art; as historical description of the changes in Indian life and supposed change for the better that urbanism would produce. As such, regarding and evaluating these images demands that we consider them contingent, fragile, descriptive and prescriptive. Furthermore, thinking of these images within the scope of a complex analytic allows us to reconsider the "failure" of the Bureau of Indian Affairs' project.

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[31] Quoted in Neils 61.

Rebels with Good Cause

The social and aesthetic narration of the early 1950s demands the consideration not only of the little-acknowledged Indian "case" and its significance to history, but also of a pair of archives and set of articles that I consider to occupy its "negative," in the sense of the photo negative. Concurrent with the Indian relocation program was a non-government organized effort to relocate poor whites to the Midwest from the Southeast to ease the interwar and postwar job shortage[32]. The influx of white migrants to Chicago was highest between 1955 and 1960, although the movement began with the laying off of workers from Kentucky coalmines in 1949 and 1950 and continued into the 1970s.[33] There are a number of exposes that describe the white migrants in terms that demonstrate that the primary problem of American urbanism in the 1950s was managing what was seen to be the push and pull of "integration" of the "invisible minority"[34]: enfolding the impoverished or formerly impoverished into the good life while demanding particular kinds of assimilation.[35] Norma Lee Browning, a reporter for the Chicago

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[32] Albert N. Votaw, "The Hillbillies Invade Chicago" Harper's 1958.
[33] Clyde B. McCoy and James S. Brown, "Appalachian Migration to Midwestern Cities" 50.
[34] This is the title of a 1981 geography survey by William W. Philliber & Clyde B. McCoy. Like *The Invisible Minority*, a number of texts on urban white migration focus on the "minoritized" element of the struggles of integration.
[35] While I have already quoted much of the Votaw article, it's worth including a selection: "These farmers, miners, and mechanics from the mountains and meadows of the mid-South – with their fecund wives and numerous children – are, in a sense, the prototype of what the "superior" American should be, white Protestants of early American, Anglo-Saxon stock; but on the streets of Chicago they seem to be the American dream gone berserk. This may be the reason why their neighbors often find them more obnoxious than the Negroes or the earlier foreign immigrants whose obvious differences from the American stereotype made them easy to despise. Clannish, proud, disorderly, untamed to urban ways, these country cousins confound all notions of racial, religious, and cultural purity" (64).

Tribune, published a nine-part exposé on hillbillies; she narrates "hillbillies" into the group to which she refers as urban "undesirables":

> Skid row dives, opium parlors, and dens of iniquity collectively are as safe as a Sunday school picnic compared with the joints taken over by clans of fightin', feudin' southern hillbillies and their shootin'-cousins, who constitute one of the most dangerous and lawless elements of Chicago's fast growing migrant population.
> Most authorities rate them at the bottom of the heap, socially, morally, mentally - and at the top of those migrant "undesirables" contributing to the city's increased crime rate.[36]

The language seems to invite an analysis that capitulates to the demands of liberalism; it is tempting to accept the magazine's supposition that the "problem" here, with the poor, is that they are resistant to "assimilation," and that social services, often agglomerated into a description called "the city," serve this group badly. But what emerges from a closer analysis of Albert Votaw's and Norma Lee Browning's writings is their near-obsessive regard for the "hillbillies" as a "race problem." Harper's and the Tribune remind their readers that, while the "hillbillies" are "the prototype of what the 'superior' American should be," their character is defined by their unwillingness to assimilate to the demands of the city. The "white Protestants of early American, Anglo-Saxon stock" as exemplars of poor adherence to the group[37] startles the article's speaker, given that it seems to accept the supposition that this group *should* want to assimilate to a particular kind of urban dwelling.

Furthermore, the problem of "hillbillies" also concerned the black press. *The Crisis*, the official magazine of the NAACP, in 1958 published commentary in its "Looking and

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[36]"Girl Reporter Visits Jungles of Hillbillies," Chicago Tribune, March 3 1957.
[37] Some geographers and historians argue for Appalachian migrants as an "ethnic group" (Philliber et al 9-18). For me, this gesture seems, at best, aspirational: naming this group by "ethnicity" seems to give these scholars license to study white migrants through a "minoritized" lens, a methodology that I am not using here.

Listening…" column on the "hillbilly problem"; the comment begins, "Chicago's toughest integration problem happens to involve whites, hillbillies, and not Negroes," and ends with a certain kind of ominous warning about the future of the urban scene: "In the long run, the Southern whites will probably make their own compromise with city ways. But this is no answer to the very real problems of today, and city authorities have been reluctant to recognize that they require special attention."[38] For *The Crisis* it seems that the solution to this problem is structural and not simply a matter of a change in attitude or a refusal to assimilate, but the concern, even in a publication like this one, is with a call for ethnic groups to "get along" in close quarters.

And why do poor whites who "refuse" to assimilate serve as the problem of the American dream, its poor representation? It is no accident that they serve this role contemporaneously with projects like American Indian relocation, because arguing for white specificity during the "integration" era necessitates retaining the very tenets of midcentury liberal conceptions of race: the assignation of particular kinds of liberties like voting rights concurrent with the retention of hierarchies that put Natives, Latinos, and African Americans in particular at the bottom of the urban hierarchy. Furthermore, the American dream-as-nightmare, and the nightmare of integration as aspirational dream is a familiar trope of this moment. Assimilation to the working class, the exemplar of the postwar economic subject position, paints figures like the relocatees with a particular shade of propriety; because Indians are both the best and worst subjects for assimilation, the picture of them in relocation must emphasize the completeness with which they are expected to join the mainstream. In the second case, the "hillbilly" case, that the relocatees are seemingly able to fully integrate because of their skin color, and their seeming refusal to do

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[38] "Looking and Listening," *The Crisis* March 1958.

so, demonstrates that the terms of liberalism necessitate an analysis of the social system, the set of organizational strategies that prioritize assimilation over equality.

Furthermore, as the photographs that I will analyze demonstrate, the "hillbilly" case produces particular aesthetic demands and an interest in a modernist aesthetic construction of the social case. From an aesthetic position, the BIA photographs are located at the intersection of intimate snapshot (like home movies) and propaganda: they are intended to direct reservation dwellers to the appeals of urban life. The photographs of the white migrant Chicago residents owe their aesthetics to a tradition that has much more continuity: the social problem photograph, but particularly the modernist photograph canonized in work by photographers working for the Farm Security Administration in the 1920s and 1930s. While these photographs are an important departure from some images of poor whites in the sense that their particular relationship to space and politics is contingent upon the historical specificity of the era, it is important to note that the tradition from which they arise is markedly different than the tradition in which we might have previously seated the BIA photographs. This distinction is characterized not only by the artistic composition of the images, but most importantly, by the discrepancies between how the modernist-influenced images produce inscrutable, sometimes blanked subjects while the BIA photographs produce legible and even knowable subjects.

For Chicago photographers Tom Palazzolo and Vivian Maier, again, the rendering of the white migrant population sits in the tradition of aesthetic photography alongside modernist social photographers.

Figure 25. Mother and Child, Tom Palazzolo, Chicago IL.

Tom Palazzolo's photograph of a woman and child owes far more to the photography of Dorothea Lange than it does to the persuasive images to which the BIA photographs owe their aesthetic – for example, the pictures used by the Office of War in the 1940s to convince black men to join the service. The aggressive contrast of this image is in keeping with many of the "hillbilly" photographs, which are characterized by high contrast, reliance on shadow, and a kind of characterization that simultaneously frames the individual subject while addressing a particular kind of inscrutability in the human face. In this case, Palazzolo makes a relatively literal case for the inscrutability of the human subject by shooting into the light source and making the subject's visage dark. The images need to preserve the abjectness of the subject's situation, which is highlighted in the Vivian Maier photograph referenced earlier with the dirt on the children's faces. In this image, the missing pieces of the linoleum floor, the single chair, the

dirty walls, and the distinct lack of privacy demonstrated in the inclusion of the stranger walking outside the window intend to show that this woman is in a precarious position. Again, however, the photograph's tension lies in the way that it places the subject at the center while simultaneously masking her: her position, her status, and her situation characterize the image while her expression and interiority remain particularly inaccessible.

The inscrutability of the subject, and the closure of her interiority to the viewer is one of the dynamics of these images that marks their distinction from the BIA's photos. For the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the dynamics of the enterprise seem to necessitate that their subjects be "knowable": after all, the purported audience is supposed to undertake the same program that subjects have undertaken, and the imagined viewer is intended to "relate" to the people and their positions that the images render. Furthermore, the subjects are nearly always referred to relationally: "our largest family unit" demands thinking of the group of people as having permanent connectedness, and other family images refer to "the Louie Sam family," for example, knitting the people into a relational arrangement.

Figure 26. City Stoop, Tom Palazzolo, Chicago IL.

Another of Tom Palazzolo's photographs, this image of a man sitting outside a business in Uptown, closes one subject in shadow and presents another in the kind of pose that points to his uniqueness, his subjectivity, while allowing him the kind of expression that *disallows* commentary on his situation. The "blank" or flat expression seems to be typical of this particular archive, and also of Vivian Maier's: it forecloses a particular kind of commentary and seems to invite the kind of "analysis" that would allow the person in the image to retain control over his own positioning. Sometimes, as I have noted, the subject's face is made blank by composition, as in the previous Palazzolo photo, but sometimes it is blank because of the timing of the image: the photograph "happens" to capture nonexpression, or the kind of expression that demands a refusal to comment.

The aesthetic principle utilized in these images also expects that the viewer would appreciate the particular kinds of beauty that James Agee and Walker Evans found in their archives of poor whites from the 1930s, the collection *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. For Agee and Evans, the lyricism of the photo encloses the subjects in a kind of dignity, and the compositional and aesthetic strategies (they think) allow the photographed to stand only for him or herself and not for a social problem.[39] This, again, is a concern of liberalism, that the individual be entitled to stand only for herself, to "represent" only herself, and Palazzolo and Maier answer this call in their images when they utilize individuated subjects in such a way that emphasizes their individual "dignity." The "problem," then, is in part with the "blank" expression, and how it refers to the subject's interiority while existing in tension with the drive for the subject to represent only herself. It seems that this is not the flatness of the mug shot, or of other images that intend to typify, but is in a sense characterized as being an expression of the subject's choosing. There is evidence, however, to the contrary, as it happens that in cases like Palazzolo's mother and child the expression is *made* blank by being closed in shadow. This actually occurs in the second Palazzolo photograph as well: the woman who is in the right-hand

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[39] "…how each of you is a creature which has never in all time existed before and which shall never exist again and which is not quite like any other and whose existence is all measured upon a still mad and incurable time; how am I to speak of you as 'tenant' 'farmers,' as 'representatives' of your 'class,' as social integers in a criminal economy, or as individuals, fathers, wives, sons, daughters, and as my friends and as I 'know' you? Granted – more, insisted upon – that it is in all these peculiarities that each of you is that which he is; that particularities, and matters ordinary and obvious, are exactly themselves beyond designation of words, are the members of your sum total most obligatory to human searching of perception: nevertheless to name these things and fail to yield their stature, meaning, power of hurt, seems impious, seems criminal, seems impudent, seems traitorous in the deepest: and to do less badly seems impossible: yet in withholdings of specification I could but betray you still worse." *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* 88-89.

side of the frame has her body represented from feet up to mid-chest, but her head and face are hidden in shadow, while the man with the actually-blank expression is imaged in full light.

Finally, the children who are the subject of Vivian Maier's photograph (shown on page four) also serve as exemplary for the construction of the blank look. The boy looks toward, but beyond, the camera and photographer, and the girl toward something out of frame. Their clothes demonstrate their apparent poverty, as does the dirt on their faces – although there are certainly other cogent explanations for these qualities. For Maier, as for Palozzolo, the blank expression communicates the capacity for the viewer to inflect a negative subjectivity onto these subjects, a negative or lack in subjectivity that demonstrates that these people serve as a "problem" that has to be aesthetically rendered. The academic work on Vivian Maier is small, because her works were rediscovered by a number of archivists in 2009, when the contents of her storage locker were found. As such, much of the commentary on her work comes from curators and her two primary archivists, John Maloof and Jeffrey Goldstein, who purchased much of the content from her private collection. The introductory commentary to the 2012 book *Vivian Maier: Out of the Shadows*, by Richard Cahan and Michael Williams, produces a hypothesis about Maier's work that, at first glance, seems to run counter to my assertion that her work prioritizes the blank expression:

> [Her] photography shows an exceptional ability to relate to and connect with people. It was a very short connection – sixtieth of a second – but in that sliver of time Maier and her camera did something remarkable. They seemed to unmask people, to see beyond the surface of their skin. Her ability to get close to her subjects is what makes her pictures so irresistible. She's not gawking, or judging, or creating caricatures. Her subjects – the

> men, women, and children who hardly noticed her – were often deep in thought. They seem isolated or perhaps lonely.[40]

What Cahan and Williams don't seem to recognize is the way that two of their statements might contradict each other – that her images unmask and yet simultaneously image people who don't respond to her, are deep in thought, and seem "isolated or perhaps lonely." It seems that Cahan and Williams's analysis emphasizes the interpretive window that Maier's images open for a projected and particular kind of viewer. Cahan and Williams offer no particular evidence for Maier's purported capacity to see beyond the blank look, in part because the "seeing beneath the surface of the skin" is the work of the *viewer* and not, in fact, the work of the photographer. For the viewer to produce a particularity for the subject of the image demands an imaginative and interpretive invention. If, as I have argued, the blank expression communicates the capacity for the viewer to inflect a negative subjectivity onto these subjects, Cahan and Williams's assertion and mine are, in fact, arguing the same thing: that the viewer produces the subject, and the subjects own projection is foreclosed in the aesthetic logic of Maier's archive.

History Reverses

Among the few newspaper articles published about the phenomenon of relocation is a piece in the Waukegan Sun. It is undated and appears in the BIA archives in the file called "Hardy and Gonzales families, photographs, newsclippings, 1957."

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[40] Richard Cahan and Michael Williams, *Vivian Maier: Out of the Shadows* 15.

WAUKEGAN SUN

History Reverses Indians Returning

(Picture on Page 16)

Reversal of an historic movemen of several generations ago, when sturdy Americans from the eastern seaboard moved into the Indian territories of the midwest in Conestoga wagons to homestead the prairie lands and establish settlements, has come in the form of relocation program of the Bureau or Indian Affairs.

Under the program, four American Indian families have come from reservations in various parts of the country to establish residence in the Waukegan area.

While the reversal movement of the Indians from the reservations has none of the colorful aspects of the westward struggle of the early pioneers, the purpose and fundamental motivating are the same.

The program of the Bureau of Indian Affairs seeks the relocation of volunteer families to provide them with a new outlook on life and with new opportunities for advancement.

Latest arrivals in Waukegan are Elizabeth and William Hardy and their two small daughters, who left the village of Red Lake, near

(Continued on Page 6, Col. 2)

Figure 27. History Reverses, Bureau of Indian Affairs Indian relocation records [manuscript] 1936-1975, Box 2.

The Sun claims here that history is reversing, and that Indians are "returning" to cities as a result of the relocation project.

> Reversal of an historic movemen [sic] of several generations ago, when sturdy Americans from the eastern seaboard moved into the Indian territories of the midwest in Conestoga wagons to homestead the prairie lands and establish settlements, has come in the form of relocation program of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.
> Under the program, four American Indian families have come from reservations in various parts of the country to establish residence in the Waukegan area.
> While the reversal movement of the Indians from the reservations has none of the colorful aspects of the westward struggle of the early pioneers, the purpose and fundamental motivating are the same.

While the Waukegan Sun doesn't mention it, this claim figures two different kinds of historical "reversal": first, the movement of Indian people "back" into areas that the Sun considers "white," or conquered by pioneers, and second, the shift in the population of migrants: history has "reversed" who moves, but it hasn't changed *why* people are moving. Furthermore, it implies that the Indian people on the move have the same frontier mentality and motivation as did the earlier pioneering migrants. The Sun seems ambivalent about the lack of "color" inherent in relocation, but nonetheless ties the Indian drive to "return" to a noble motive.

What does it mean for history to "reverse" here, for Indian people to be imagined as "returned" to the site of origin? Why is this project not considered "progressive," but a reversal? It seems important to reiterate that this gesture is a mode of conceptualizing relocation, a method that simultaneously imagines Indian people as "historical," which is necessary given the insistence on Indians not being "modern," but also a gesture that reclaims historical language to make an argument about progress. For history to "reverse" here means to bring an amodern people into the modern world, and in so doing, efface the quality that makes them amodern to begin with: that quality of "Indianness."

Clearly, this effort was unsuccessful; instead of assimilating or clinging to tribalisms and traditionalisms, relocatees began organizations like Oakland's Intertribal Friendship House and Chicago's American Indian Center; they were spurred to radicalism as well by the social shifts that characterized city life and antiracist organizing in the 1950s. That liberalism's "failure" makes itself felt in the aesthetic rendering of the problematic relationship of subject to identificatory category is also visible in the discrepancy represented in the "hillbilly" photographs between the subject's expression and her veiled subjectivity. The "communities" that resulted from relocation and from Appalachian migration were characterized by the practicalities of city life: people involved in these projects joined unions, began organizations, and otherwise involved themselves in the ordinaries of their cities. But for artistic producers, intent on opting out of a constructed mainstream in the interest of a more generalized, less class-based rebellion, the genealogy of the photo-text moves in a different direction. Avant-gardes, unlike forcible, relocated communities, demand that realist photo-textual production narrates the mechanism whereby they *choose* to be "outside.

Figure 28. Jack Kerouac, by Allen Ginsberg, from *Beat Memories: The Photographs of Allen Ginsberg*.

> Jack Kerouac, railroad brakeman's rule-book in pocket, couch-pillows airing on fire-escape three flights up overlooking backyard Clothesline South. He'd already published *The Town and the City*, completed a treasury of half-dozen unprinted classic volumes including *On the Road*, *Visions of Cody*, *Doctor Sax*, early books of Blues and Dreams, & had begun *The Subterraneans*' adventurous love affair with Aileen Lee, "Mardou Fox." Aileen typed for W.S. Burroughs then in residence editing Yage *Letters* & *Queer* mss. [manuscripts], unpublishable that decade, censorship ruled. I scribed "The Green Automobile," Gregory Corso visited that season, 206 East 7th Street near Tompkins Park, Manhattan, probably September 1953. Allen Ginsberg

Allen Ginsberg's captions to his photographs were mostly written in 1984, "inspired by

[Berenice] Abbott's one-paragraph comments taped to her photographs… he revises and adds to

the text every time a picture is reprinted."[1] Ginsberg, however, kept a significant archive of snapshot prints, photo booth strips, postcards, and negatives both 35mm and large format starting at some point between 1944 and 1947.[2] The snapshot image as a mode, an unposed or seemingly unposed, tenuous memento, gestures, as Walter Benjamin asserts, toward the death of the photographic subject and to the incomprehensibility of the moment itself. The snapshot's subject is always moments that are made uneventful – ordinary – by their being recorded in this way. The snapshot caption, however, finds itself filling up suspended time, asserting meaning, attempting to manage the overdetermined image.

Allen Ginsberg's 1953 photograph of Jack Kerouac shows Ginsberg's usual style of extended, unfolding captions handwritten directly onto his prints, most of which were developed at drugstores and taken on his Kodak Retina.[3] He inscribes the image with a dilating and expansive lyric narrative, referencing his own work, the work of others, the urban location, and what he perceived to be the dominant cultural mode of the time: "unpublishable that decade, censorship ruled." For Ginsberg the documentarian, the image/caption medium tracks in tandem with the subject(s) of his documentary project: the self and the community. His photographs and writings record a desire to frame the formation of a community, and index a point of view that shows hoe the image/caption as medium and the long-established genre of the portrait, both

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[1] *Beat Memories* 127.
[2] According to Gregory Corso, who wrote the 1990 introduction to *Allen Ginsberg Photographs*, in which he refers to Ginsberg's images as "authocthonic," meaning indigenous or endemic, the collection begins in 1947. The finding guide for Stanford University's collection of photographs identifies the "drugstore" snapshot series as beginning in 1944: Allen Ginsberg, *Photographs by and Relating to Allen Ginsberg.* http://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/4783696
[3] *Snapshot Poetics*.

characterized by codeterminacy, serve as particularly descriptive methods of documenting the self/community gap.

Writing on the Beats tends to lean toward a strong historicism that places their aesthetic labor in the context of a Cold War moment, one characterized as censorial and aesthetically conservative.[4] This chapter is a contribution to the robust study of the Beats as primary contributors to the aesthetic movements of the 1950s and 1960s, and takes seriously the ongoing work on Beat life and practice as contributory to the "counterculture" aesthetic and political movements that followed it.[5] But the primary problem that it articulates is, how does an aesthetic community "opt out" of its political moment by turning to experiments in ways of being and an expansive model of documentation to make sense of the political climate? What new perspective does it grant to consider Allen Ginsberg's poetic practice part of a *documentary* canon, one that enfolds his poetry, photography, and the extended captions that accompany most of his images?[6] Furthermore, how does an expansive realist framework allow us to rethink the Beat canon in more general terms, pointing to how its practitioners demanded an un-fictional framework in order to assert their significance?

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[4] See Michael Davidson's *Guys Like Us* in particular, but also Elizabeth Wheeler's *Uncontained: Urban Fiction in Postwar America*, Robert S. Litwak's *Rogue States and U.S. Foreign Policy: Containment after the Cold War,* Alan Nadel's *Containment Culture,* and Stephen Whitfield's *The Culture of the Cold War*.

[5] The study of subcultures has been mostly sociological, with a number of contributors taking a cultural studies approach. See Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, and Leerom Medovoi, *Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity*.

[6] Ginsberg's poetic catalog can be considered "documentary" or "self-portrait" in a much more straightforward way. Thinking of "Howl" as e͟i͟t͟h͟er calling into existence a new community, as Jennie Skerl does, or inscribing an emerging self, as does Marjorie Perloff, is by no means incorrect. The goal would seem to be not just to place Ginsberg's work in the correct historical and aesthetic context, but to demonstrate that the particularly "realist" gesture that characterizes this photography speaks to the problem of community that Ginsberg's work opens up.

While radical aesthetics and political nonparticipation seemed sufficient in asserting the group's significance, these questions nonetheless show how "marginality" was desired, if not actually achieved. And when we consider "realism" in generic, modal, historical, and constructed terms, it appears as a *practice*, even as an effect of efforts to make claims upon how the "real world." In narrower terms, and in the works of theorists, realism is thought of, accurately, as "mimetic," or attendant "eventfulness." Here, we should consider that even artistic producers like Ginsberg whom we think of as "avant-garde" and therefore antithetical to realism attend carefully and at length to realism as *a series of interconnected, motivated practices* that record and make claims upon the world. This model of realism assumes that the practice of documentation desires a "truthful" index of history's events as a need for preservation. Furthermore, the community that Ginsberg wants to document in the interest of history is produced in a paradox – it demands non-participation in the culture at large while underscoring its influence on it. As Jacques Rancière discusses in *The Future of the Image*, image-texts call attention to "the community between 'signs' and 'us': signs are endowed with a presence and a familiarity that makes them more than tools at our disposal or a text subject to our decoding; they are inhabitants of our world, characters that make up a world for us."[7] In producing image-texts that he insists are "inhabitants of our world," Ginsberg asserts both that the photo archive is a sufficient index for recording the historical present *and* external to popular aesthetics.

These motivated, interconnected practices provide a unique modality for considering how Ginsberg's images denaturalize the terms of "friendship," which tends to be taken to indicate a one-to-one relationship, as well as the terms of infatuation and hero worship. Michael Davidson

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[7] *The Future of the Image* 35.

describes a moment in Joyce Johnson's memoir of Beat life in which John Clellon Holmes sends a "dream letter" to Allen Ginsberg detailing how "the social organization which is most true of itself to the artist is the boy gang." In Holmes's dream, Ginsberg records in his journal in response to this, "Not society's perfum'd marriage." Davidson goes on to assert that Ginsberg, far from distinguishing between "marriage" and "the gang," notes that "the dream of homosocial community depends in its differentiation from 1., society, 2., marriage, and 3., 'perfum'd' women."[8] Davidson's evaluation of the beat community is in a way contingent on his use of the term "homosocial," which he borrows from Eve Sedgwick. An important difference emerges here from Davidson's excellent analysis, in the sense that particular media and a particular impetus to truth-claim are critical to this study, but also socially, in the sense that the "homosocial" bond between men (Davidson's modality with respect to this conversation) seems less important than the composition of community *among* men (Sedgwick's concept), an arrangement that, when seen through Ginsberg's photographic lens, operates across both time and space.[9] Again, it is imperative to note that by thinking of community and belonging as a structure of *among* and not *between*, the subject position becomes necessarily problematized. The subject position becomes a node in a network of relations: his connections with many matter more than his relationships between two people, as exemplified in images like that taken by Peter Orlovsky of Ginsberg and Gregory Corso. This is the site of analytic inquiry, then, at which the compositional subject renders his community in negative terms and produces revised versions of realism in this vision of the self and its worlds. Where problems of liberalism, realism, politics,

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[8] *Guys Like Us*, 13-14.
[9] See Sedgwick's construction of "erotic triangles" in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*.

and aesthetic producers' desire to turn to "the real" in moments of crisis and rupture appear, these works attempt to manage these appearances.

On the Text-Image: Caption as genre

Figure 29. Front Room, by Allen Ginsberg, from *Snapshot Poetics*.

> My front room 1010 Montgomery Street San Francisco Spring-summer 1955, wherein I wrote Part I Howl, Peter Orlovsky's room down the hall thru the kitchen. Robert LaVigne's portrait of me & his Cezanne-like watercolor landscape pinned to wall above lit fireplace. Bollingen books & Bach, Letters or Essays of Ezra Pound, bed-table clock. Checkered blanket hung over alley window. "Blessed be the Muses/for their descent/dancing round my desk/crowning my balding head/with laurel." Allen Ginsberg

Ginsberg, quoting himself in a poem from *Reality Sandwiches*, marks time, space, company, visual spectacle, and history in his caption, attached to a 1955 photograph. The image is unusual in Ginsberg's canon because it images no human subjects, but typical both in that it includes humans in its description and in that it includes a handwritten caption that proliferates the image beyond the room studied. The caption transmutes the room from an address – 1010 Montgomery

Street – to a site of literary and artistic inquiry and production. Robert LaVigne's portrait of Ginsberg grounds the image, underscoring Ginsberg's centrality as the auteur of this community's emergence. Ginsberg invites into the photo other musical and literary figures – Bach, Pound, winners of Yale University's Bollingen prize for poetry – tracing how his own and Peter Orlovsky's poetic livelihoods came to be. Finally, the narrative loops back on itself as Ginsberg quotes his own work at the end of the caption, describing his poetic practice – "Blessed be the Muses/for their descent/dancing round my desk/crowning my balding head/with laurel," – and calling up a classical image for the purpose of inscribing into poetic permanence the process of creation.

One of the understudied dynamics of Ginsberg's canon and the photographic canon in general is the problem of the caption. The caption itself as a subgenre, or a sub-subgenre, or perhaps a mode, remains profoundly under-analyzed. For all of the extraordinary attendance in recent years to the many things the photograph can do and to its capacity beyond mere representation, its attendant medium, the text that defines and describes it, is not the subject of much discussion.[10] An analysis of the caption might potentially yield evaluations that demonstrate that it can be a supplement; an antithetical co-text; an enclosed narrative; a gesture

[10] Roland Barthes's and Susan Sontag's seminal texts on photography include brief discussions of the caption, and tend to assume that the caption is a *supplement*: it gives further information than the photo itself gives, or can give; it can also be interpretive, but only to a certain extent. In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Sontag notes that "all photographs wait to be explained or falsified by their captions" (10), and in *On Photography* she asserts, "Captions do tend to override the evidence of our eyes; but no caption can permanently restrict or secure a picture's meaning. What the moralists are demanding from a photograph is that it do what no photograph can ever do – speak. The caption is the missing voice, and it is expected to speak for truth. But even an entirely accurate caption is only one interpretation, necessarily a limiting one, of the photograph to which it is attached. And the caption-glove slips on and off so easily" (97). This seems both true and insufficient.

at context. Ginsberg's archive of images and attendant captions serves as a particularly good case study for an ongoing theoretical inquiry into the constitutive dynamics of the photo caption because he is both the photographer and the writer. His captions attempt to manage the image in question *as well as* its interpretive possibilities, and call attention to the dialectical relationship between an image and the words used to describe it. For Ginsberg the documentarian the image/caption becomes one of the media through which he draws together depictions of the "real world" and his logic of framing ordinary, fleeting moments. Walter Benjamin notes that, in a general sense, the caption works as a "directive," and serves a different purpose than the "title" of a painting, producing a prescriptive demand. "With Atget… captions have become obligatory. And it is clear that they have an altogether different character than the title of a painting. The directives which the captions give to those looking at pictures in illustrated magazines soon become even more explicit and more imperative in the film where the meaning of each single picture appears to be prescribed by the sequence of all preceding ones."[11] Benjamin's statements on the significance of the caption underline how the written language that attends to the visual language demand that the reader/viewer reconsider her reactions to an image. The dialectical relationship implicit to Benjamin's text, in the sense that he does not detail how the image inflects upon the caption, seems in part to be related to a generic distinction – between the caption as co-determinate archive and the caption as purely descriptive enterprise. Benjamin continues his inquiry into the significance of the caption in his "Little History of Photography":

> The camera is getting smaller and smaller, ever readier to capture fleeting and secret images whose shock effect paralyzes the associative mechanisms in the beholder. *This is where inscription must come into play, by means of which photography intervenes as the*

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[11] *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility* VI.

> *literarization of all the conditions of life, and without which all photographic construction must remain arrested in the approximate* [Ungefähren]. … 'It is not the person ignorant of writing but the one ignorant of photography,' somebody [Moholy-Nagy] has said, 'who will be the illiterate of the future.' But mustn't the photographer who is unable to read his own pictures be no less deemed an illiterate? Isn't inscription bound to become the most essential component of the photograph? These are the questions in which the span of ninety years that separates contemporary photography from the daguerreotype discharges its historical tension.[12]

It seems that the generic category of the "approximate" approaches the apt description of the photo-caption as aesthetic documentarians, Ginsberg not least among them, perceive it. Ginsberg finds the medium (photography) to be one of "sacramental documentation, and of using the raw material of your own actual experience in your work, whether it fits accepted aesthetics or not."[13] The entwined archives of image and caption are the approximations of "raw material" that, together, produce a fuller picture of the moment that these artistic producers wish to inscribe, uniquely suited to the documentation of a historically and socially contingent aesthetic scene. Ginsberg himself produces the category of experimental realism here: the desire to record the "raw material" of one's experiences through improvisation, extemporizing, and spontaneity.

If the caption works in a number of ways, including opening the possibilities for aesthetic and social "approximation," we may be back where we started – asking what the caption can do, particularly in the context of considering how it makes an image relate more or less to the "real world." When Lyn Heijinian introduces the category of the "wild caption," she pulls apart the accepted notion that captions refer, like titles, to "what happens": "The syntax and terminology

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[12] The original for the italicized sentence reads, "An dieser Stelle hat die Beschriftung einzusetzen, welche die Photographie der Literarisierung aller Lebensverhältnisse einbegreift, und ohne die alle photographische Konstruktion im Ungefähren stecken bleiben muß." In *Gesammelte Schriften* Bd. 2, 385, and *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, 294-295, my emphasis.
[13] *Snapshot Poetics* 15.

pertaining to ways in which things are named or referred to belongs to a language of captioning: something is named, known as, or called, as well as known to be, considered/thought to be, and so forth, something in addition to whatever it is." Her generic distinction opens numerous possibilities for considering how the image/caption toggles between image and text, and "wild captioning," as a category, argues for a narrative possibility implicit to the caption: "Captioning allegorizes, interprets, parodies, denigrates, elevates. Wild captioning shifts things, destabilizes them, redeploys them, appropriates them. A caption may bring things to a halt, but if it does, it's a false halt. A wild caption is never left in place for long."[14] If captioning "allegorizes, interprets… elevates," and "wild captioning shifts things, destabilizes them… appropriates them," how might we think of these two terms as coexisting with the definition of the caption that I have suggested, one that allows for the possibility of the caption being *both* its own "piece" and a codetermining archive? It seems that embracing Heijinian's definitions here is most useful – while taking "caption" and "wild caption" as two categories that may not be quite so easily distinguished. Ginsberg's "caption" certainly does all the things that Heijinian suggests that it does; it also invents, reframes, and, like "wild" captioning, destabilizes and appropriates. It may help to think of the caption as being less about "meaning" than most of the literature suggests, and to think of it as endlessly referring out, to a perception of the "real" world.[15] This

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[14] "Wild Captioning," *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* Vol. 20, No. 1 (Fall/Winter 2011): 292.

[15] Barthes opens two possibilities for captioning in "Rhetoric of the Image": "Hence in every society various techniques are developed intended to fix the floating chain of signifieds in such a way as to counter the terror of uncertain signs; the linguistic message is one of these techniques. At the level of the literal message, the text replies – in a more or less direct, more or less partial manner – to the question: what is it? The text helps to identify purely and simply the elements of the scene and the scene itself; it is a matter of a denoted description of the image (a description

categorization also allows for the possibility that, like two archives, the caption determines the photo but the photo also determines the caption: it's not just that the text tells the viewer what to see, but that the photo tells the reader what to read.

Ginsberg's captions work particularly well in detailing how he draws into dialogue the "raw materials" of his documentation. They also help us to understand the distinction between "caption" and "title" that concerns theoretical inquiries like Benjamin's, Barthes's, and others'.

Figure 30. Ginsberg and Corso, by Allen Ginsberg, from *Beat Memories: The Photographs of Allen Ginsberg*.

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which is often incomplete) or, in Hjelmslev's terminology, of an operation (as opposed to connotation). The denominative function corresponds exactly to an anchorage of all the possible (denoted) meanings of the object by recourse to a nomenclature. Shown a plateful of something (in an Amieux advertisement), I may hesitate in identifying the forms and masses; the caption ('rice and tuna fish with mushrooms') helps me to choose the correct level of perception, permits me to focus not simply my gaze but also my understanding. When it comes to the 'symbolic message', the linguistic message no longer guides identification but interpretation, constituting a kind of vice which holds the connoted meanings from proliferating, whether towards excessively individual regions (it limits, that is to say, the projective power of the image) or towards dysphoric values." "Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image, Music, Text* 39.

> Gregory Corso and myself double-portrait sainted poetry twins, my whitewashed-walled room in Tangier, 1961. Peter Orlovsky held camera?

Ginsberg is in the background and Corso in the fore, and it's an important detail that Peter Orlovsky is (maybe) holding the camera, although the later-captioning Ginsberg is uncertain about this (there is also a third possibility in terms of the "author," which is the presence of a timer.) Ginsberg as captioner brackets himself with Gregory Corso and Peter Orlovsky. The interwoven relationships here are left deliberately opaque, although looking at other Ginsberg photographs will make clear how Ginsberg's relationship with Corso was rather different from his relationship with Orlovsky. There are scores of photographs of Ginsberg and Orlovsky that denote their relationship, double-nudes, bedroom scenes, etc. But the nature of these individual ties is less important to me than the *network* of connections that is produced when Ginsberg folds both Orlovsky and Corso into his frame of reference, being that he controls the photograph and probably the camera as well. When Ginsberg produces the caption and the image, controlling for both text and subtext, he nonetheless leaves open the possibilities for conversation between them. This is in part why he leaves the relationships opaque here too – he continues to emphasize the aesthetic "approximation," a mode of relation that allows for both sameness (or doubleness) and difference – a photograph as an affective, preservational object that *refers* to the thing it images *as well as* a documentary form that *represents* what it images.

Compositionally, Ginsberg places himself behind Corso, and while the frame includes more of Gregory Corso's face, Ginsberg nonetheless offers the eye contact that Corso's profile cannot. His nudity or relative nudity also positions him in a way that demands that the viewer wonder who the subject might be, given that the viewer can see the edge of Corso's collar. And Orlovsky's position – does he serve simply as the synecdochal hand of Allen Ginsberg? This

seems simplistic as a reaction to his role in the image, given that Ginsberg and Orlovsky were frequent collaborators; there's no reason to believe that one ever "stood in" for the other, or that Orlovsky felt any need to take credit for work that was in fact Ginsberg's. So the remaining role of Orlovsky seems to be necessarily a polyvalent one: he acts both as proxy for Ginsberg while also serving as interpreter himself. The question mark, too, leaves the interpretive frame available to the larger community: again, Corso, Ginsberg, and Orlovsky, but also Kerouac and Burroughs were participants in the trip to Tangiers; it makes sense that Ginsberg's gesture of uncertainty would also mean to include the possibility of others. The angle of the photograph, the straight-on shot, seems to place Orlovsky, if we are assuming that he is in fact the photographer, given that the photographer inhabits the question space, on the same horizontal plane as Ginsberg and Corso, to whom Ginsberg refers as "sainted poetry twins." In other photos, Ginsberg and Corso don't bear much relation to each other, but in this one their proximity and qualities rendered similar by the black and white film (skin and hair color, for example) make them simultaneously "twinned" and made "one." Ginsberg and Corso resemble each other more by virtue of composition than they do in other people's photographs. A major dynamic of Ginsberg's photographic work is in the sublimation of one self to another, in the interest of reframing the personal. Finally, the "snapshot" form that Ginsberg chooses as the way to refer to his images produces a series of questions about how "posed" a photograph can be and still remain a "snapshot." For Ginsberg, the "?" of who holds the camera shows how improvised the photograph's composition was. In keeping with a "realist" framework, we should see this image *as* an improvisational (and therefore snapshot) gesture despite its posed-ness.[16]

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[16] This generic distinction also recalls the distinction that Robert Lowell makes, recalling what

Furthermore, for Ginsberg, the image/text produces a unique index for the historical and aesthetic moment that he captures. Inspired by both his conversations with Berenice Abbott and his experiences of her work, he explicitly ties his photographic and poetic practice to a deep history, a documentary recording project imbricated in historical time and part of a rich poetic tradition. "[Robert Frank's photography] is the appreciation of the poignancy of the passing moment that we all share, but arrive at by quite different roads, Jack [Kerouac] by way of his Buddhist studies, Robert [Frank] through his photography, and myself by way of a literary tradition that includes Whitman and William Carlos Williams – a "tradition" I started teaching recently as Photographic Poetics on snapshot poetics."

> In January of 1988, Robert was invited to teach at the Camera Obscura School in Tel Aviv. He asked me it I wanted to come along and teach jointly with him – he photography and I poetry – so we developed a course called Photographic Poetics. I traced the origins of the imagistic grounding of poetry that I had learned from Williams [as a college student and later in the 1940s and 1950s] and its relation to the photographic practice. For instance, take Williams' poem *The Red Wheelbarrow*:
>
> so much depends
> upon
>
> a red wheel
> barrow
>
> glazed with rain
> water

Claude Lévi-Strauss calls "the raw and the cooked": "Two poetries are now competing, a cooked and a raw. The cooked, marvelously expert, often seems laboriously concocted to be tasted and digested by a graduate seminar. The raw, huge blood-dripping gobbets of unseasoned experience are dished up for midnight listeners. There is a poetry that can only be studied, and a poetry that can only be declaimed, a poetry of pedantry, and a poetry of scandal." He is almost certainly referring to Ginsberg here as the "raw." This does seem to support my argument that the photograph is amateur or snapshot despite being highly posed; I'd prefer to avoid, however, making binary oppositions based on judgment.

beside the white
chickens.

It's just like a photo. I realized that Williams and the avant garde photographers of his day, people like Alfred Stieglitz and Charles Sheeler, were in close rapport with each other. They shared a common aesthetic of precise observation, and understood the importance of close attention to detail.[17]

Ginsberg takes the approach here that poetry *is just like* photography, instead of staking the claims that his own work articulates: the poem-caption and its attendant image are co-archives, and the snapshot photo both refers to and represents its subjects. As his photograph of Kerouac that opens this chapter describes, the caption enacts historical and social realities on the aesthetic and visual rendering that the photograph produces.

One of Ginsberg's photographs takes the cover of Ann Charters's *The Portable Beat Reader,* one of several major collections of Beat poems, stories, and other media. This is one of the contexts in which Ginsberg's use of the photo-text opens the possibility for reading the image-caption as a medium uniquely suited to the rendering of community and its discontents.

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[17] *Snapshot Poetics* 15-16.

Figure 31. Burroughs and Kerouac, by Allen Ginsberg, from *Beat Memories: The Photographs of Allen Ginsberg*.

> "Now Jack, as I warned you far back as 1945, if you keep going home to live with your mamère you'll find yourself wound tighter and tighter in her apron strings will you're an old man and can't escape…" William Seward Burroughs camping as an Andre Gideian sophisticate lecturing the earnest Thomas Wolfean all-American youth Jack Kerouac who listens soberly dead-pan to "the most intelligent man in America" for a funny second's charade in my living room, 206 East 7th Street Apt 16, Manhattan, one evening Fall 1953. Allen Ginsberg

Here, the caption invests the image with a different kind of community function. In the context of its inclusion on the cover of Charters's book, the image seems intended to serve a function of canonization: these are two sainted Beat figures as imaged by a third. Charters's book collects a number of writers into a frame that necessitates distilling the writings and curating the selections. This is an image that produces the Beat canon, and the caption produces an interest in canonization as well. For Ginsberg, the caption allows him to knit this twosome into a communitarian fabric, replete with external influences. Where Ginsberg embraces influence on his own works (he's particularly invested in retaining the voices inherited from Walt Whitman and William Carlos Williams; William Blake is another crucial ancestor) he also posits influence

on his peers. In this case, as in many of the other images, Ginsberg's caption rearranges the sphere of sociality – he not only embraces the purpose of the image in producing an aesthetic community to be remembered later, he also expands the community to accommodate the influences that he sees as central to his peers. Thomas Wolfe's influence on Kerouac is well known, and is one of the few influences to which he admits. The Gide reference seems less transparent: Ginsberg assigns Gide the label of "sophisticate," so it seems that his role here is to point to a particular kind of style. Read the first quotation that Ginsberg ascribes to Burroughs, and he's part teacher, part psychoanalyst, a slightly-cynical appraiser of Kerouac's relationship with his mother.[18] These are among the suspensions between caption and image, but another is the cultural weight of the image: how these figures of literary significance get imported into Ginsberg's present of "my living room." He even insists on removing from Burroughs his title by referring to him as "the most intelligent man in America," the quotation marks serving both to underline and undercut the statement.

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[18] Both Ginsberg and Burroughs were contacted by Kerouac's mother, Gabrielle-Ange Levesque Kerouac, whose relationship with her son was characterized by both protectiveness and paranoia. A letter from her to Ginsberg (1958) demonstrates the hyperbolic tone that she tended to adopt in her dealings with poets besides Jack: "When my husband was on his death bed he made me promise to keep you [Ginsberg] away from Jack and I swore I'll keep that promise. I don't want Burroughs to ever write Jack either. You two miserable bums all you have in your filthy minds is dirty sex and DOPE. Well this is to warn you. I've sent your name to the FBI so when you get back they will be on your tail. You better stay clear away from us because you will have to reckon with the FBI and another warning don't ever mention Jack's name or write any more about Jack in your 'dirty' 'books' I'll sue you and have you in 'jail' it's about time you realize you are not wanted and I'll see that you keep FAR FAR away" (Ginsberg's personal correspondence, Columbia University). Despite what seems like cynicism on Ginsberg's part, it is obvious from the historical record that Kerouac's relationship with his mother was, at the very least, fraught.

In producing an imaged response on the part of his "characters," and asserting their significance both in his invented narrative world and in the "real," or better, historical, world, what kind of linguistic intervention is Ginsberg's? Considering the image and its caption as contiguous archives may make more rigorous demands on the possibilities for the caption, and the caption as *mode* produces series of meanings that serve not as supplementary to, but as constitutive of, an "approximation" of reality that is linked to a photographic ontology. Another theoretical consideration of the caption here is Clive Scott's; he distinguishes between two kinds of caption in the interest of finding how photography and language can be thought of as mutually constitutive.

> It should be said immediately that a rebus title is, more accurately, a caption. The distinguishing characteristic of the caption is that it is already a step away from the image towards its assimilation by, and interpretation through, language. While a title does not belong to discourse, is no more than an identifying tag, the caption is spoken; it is an intervention, a response forestalling the response of the viewer. There are basically two kinds of caption: (1) the rebus, which makes the photograph dependent on its purveyor (usually the photographer, or a newspaper editor) to achieve its very meaning (the punning photo-captions in *The Guardian* are a good example of the popular rebus); and (2) the quotational or direct-speech caption, which creates meaning by address, or by a spoken complicity between purveyor and viewer. We find the quotational caption in the literary images of Pictorialist photography, and the direct-speech caption in the family album and the tabloid press. As with the rebus, the innate candor of the image is subjugated to the guile of language.[19]

When Scott argues, "the distinguishing characteristic of the caption is that it is already a step away from the image towards its assimilation by, and interpretation through, language," he argues for an analytic that takes as given the primacy of "language." The insistence on caption-as-rebus produces a theoretical Möbius strip: the OED notes that rebus "has been explained as denoting 'by things', on account of a representation with a rebus being *non verbis sed rebus* 'not

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[19] *The Spoken Image: Photography and Language*, 49, 52.

by words but by things.'"[20] Here, then, the caption is a "thing" that represents, but also an explanatory object that produces the terms for representation. Ginsberg's captions in some senses certainly fit into this category, but "rebus" is nonetheless insufficient in naming the mutually constitutive indexes. How does the caption as archive fit in? And furthermore, why, in captioning, is "the innate candor of the image… subjugated to the guile of language?" For Ginsberg's photographs to be taken as "representational," the caption has to serve as a diagnostic tool that asserts the image's meaning in the context of social history or aesthetic particularity. But if the images are taken out of the *exclusive* sphere of representationality, they are allowed to refer, and to become metonymic *as well as* metaphorical. Between the caption and its image is a series of relations, modes of articulation that consider how the photograph and its accompanying text produce meanings as possibilities, and that show how community formations, in their most Utopian guises, can be thought of as mechanisms of *among* and not *between*.

Ginsberg's signature appears on all of his photographs, seems to affix "a seal of authenticity." Furthermore, the signature makes Ginsberg not only "authorial," but also the *subject* of these works, nearly always making them "self portraits." While not all of the images that Ginsberg signs include him, his narrative co-archive, the caption, is always engaged in a project of manifesting an atomic self in a moving community. In self-portraits, the caption and the signature serve slightly different purposes than they do when called upon to make metonymic reference to the community that Ginsberg is trying to call up.[21] He is, however, willing to

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[20] "rebus, n." OED Online, September 2013.

[21] Ginsberg's captions invariably include his signature at the end of each work, and the presence of the signature produces a new set of questions about the facts of "authorship." Jacques Derrida, in his short work on photography *Copy, Archive, Signature*, responds to a question about the

subsume his own particularity to the "cause" of the image-caption, and places the images of himself firmly in historical time, while avoiding extended meditation on his own historical or aesthetic significance.

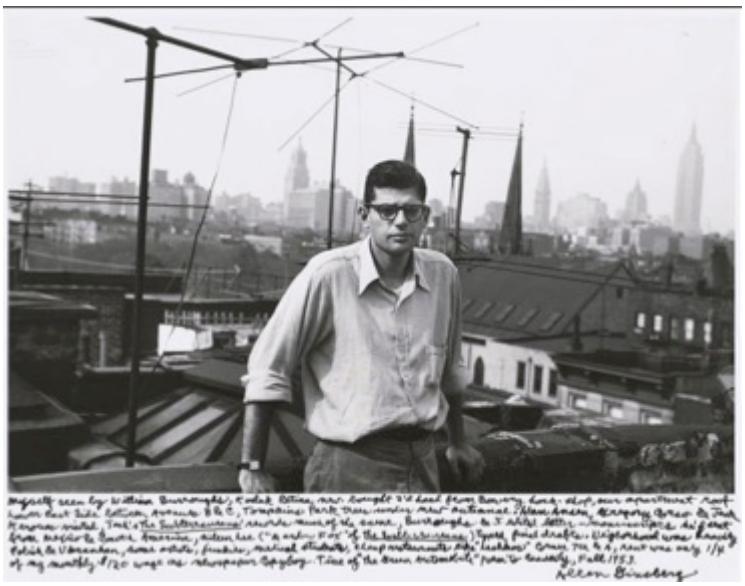

Figure 32. Rooftop, by Allen Ginsberg, from *Beat Memories: The Photographs of Allen Ginsberg*.

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habit of "great men" in the early twentieth century handing out photographs of themselves with their own signatures – although the translation elides the potential distinction between "signature" and "autograph," which may be significant: "The appearance of the signature is interesting. What does a signature do? It introduces a small transformation of the photographic portrait, making it a self-portrait (hence the supplementary risk of narcissistic complacency: there is always an element of the comic, I mean the ridiculous). It is a matter, too, of affixing a seal of authenticity: by means of a superimposition, a kind of double exposure (a writing upon writing – a name that calls for the audible present voice and performatively refers one to the giver shown on a silent photograph), one notes, and gives notice, that this photograph has been presented by the subject in the photograph; what is valuable is not that one has a photograph of Freud, which could be purchased; it is rather that one has entered into possession of a portrait that can be seen but that also directly concerns you, that looks *at you,* and bears a signature from the hand of the subject." *Copy, Archive, Signature* 23, emphasis in original.

> Myself seen by William Burroughs, Kodak retina new-bought 2'd hand from Bowery hock-shop, out apartment roof Lower East Side between avenues B & C, Tompkins Park trees under new antennae. Alan Ansen, Gregory Corso, & Jack Kerouac visited, Jack's The Subterraneans records much of the scene, Burroughs & I edited letter-manuscripts he'd sent from Mexico & South America, Aileen Lee (Mardou Fox of The Subterraneans) typed final drafts. Neighborhood was heavily Polish & Ukrainian, some artists, junkies, medical students, cheap restaurants like "nashkos" [?] corner 7th & A, rent was only ¼ of my monthly $120 wage as newspaper copyboy. Time of "the green automobile" poem to Cassady, Fall 1953. Allen Ginsberg.

The handwritten caption, despite being produced about 30 years after the taking of this image, underscores how this collection serves both as realist enterprise, in the sense of it being an endeavor to produce a community in keenly recognizable form for viewers after the fact, and as a site for revisions. Ginsberg's signature, the marker of his authorship and the proof of "authenticity" speak to the rewriting that he characterizes as typical of the moment – "Burroughs and I edited… Aileen Lee typed." Ginsberg's writing and rewriting elevates the category of narrative approximation: he takes different approaches in an effort to approximate in writing and image the moment of the snapshot. His approach to analogue composition – handwriting the notes on the images – furthers the argument that these images perform a kind of realist vernacular: the image/texts are both ephemeral *and* durable, records *and* narratives. Furthermore, even in a picture that includes exclusively Ginsberg, he uses his own historical position to call up the community of which he was a part. He also discloses the origins of his photographic career – discussing the Kodak Retina, the purchase of which inaugurated his meticulous documentation. He is "seen" here by Burroughs, and the "scene" that is an indelible part of this image's subtext gets called up as well. The authorial signature produces a surprising "relative" self, one whose appearance in the image gestures endlessly to others, shifting the possibilities for the genre of the portrait. In the next section, we will consider how the drive to portraiture animates Ginsberg's

archive, and how self- and group-portrait produce peculiar kinds of modalities for considering the group.

Knowing One's Self (Portrait)

I walked on the banks of the tincan banana dock and
sat down under the huge shade of a Southern
Pacific locomotive to look at the sunset over the
box house hills and cry.

Jack Kerouac sat beside me on a busted rusty iron
pole, companion, we thought the same thoughts
of the soul, bleak and blue and sad-eyed,
surrounded by the gnarled steel roots of trees of
machinery.

The oily water on the river mirrored the red sky, sun
sank on top of final Frisco peaks, no fish in that
stream, no hermit in those mounts, just ourselves
rheumy-eyed and hungover like old bums
on the riverbank, tired and wily.

"Sunflower Sutra," 1955

While "Howl" is Ginsberg's most famous poem devoted to calling up a public, many of his "snapshot" poems attend deeply to the self-group portrait as a method of calling upon the "real world" for meaning. In "Sunflower Sutra," Ginsberg produces the community of his aesthetic origin around Jack Kerouac, one of the figures that, for Ginsberg, serves as both a motivating muse and an aesthetic co-conspirator. The poem shuttles between three central subjects – "I," "Jack Kerouac," and "we" (or "ourselves.") For Ginsberg in first person, the piece has narrative thrust – he relates the action of "[walking] on the banks… [sitting] down under the huge shade of a Southern Pacific locomotive… to cry." Ginsberg's usual parataxis, while not in

its fullest effect here, nonetheless appears to differentiate between the central speaker and the "ourselves" that follows: the "I" stanza does not use parataxis, while the final stanza does.

The first, "I" stanza is also the most replete with allusion, perhaps owing to Ginsberg's need to always frame his own poetic subjectivity relationally. In 1948, Ginsberg had an auditory hallucination of William Blake reading his poems "Ah, Sunflower," "The Sick Rose," and "Little Girl Lost" – these are the works referenced in line six of "Howl": "who passed through universities with cool eyes hallucinating Arkansas and Blake-light tragedy among the scholars of war."[22] The title of Ginsberg's work "Sunflower Sutra," refers to Blake's piece, translated into a "sutra" (an aphorism or collection of aphorisms), despite the fact that the works are dissimilar.[23] An equally strong referent that Ginsberg frequently alludes to is Walt Whitman, whose works frequently concern themselves with the juxtaposition of the natural and industrial worlds. Ginsberg's lines eight and nine are particularly indebted to the mode of lyric work that pushes together the natural and the industrial: "surrounded by the gnarled steel roots of trees of/ machinery."

For Ginsberg, the multiplied methods of turning himself into others, particularly his literary referents, is one of the ways in which he displaces the notion of a "true" or stable

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[22] *Collected Poems 1947-1997* 134.

[23] Ah! sunflower, weary of time,
Who countest the steps of the sun,
Seeking after that sweet golden clime
Where the traveller's journey is done;

Where the youth pined away with desire,
And the pale virgin shrouded in snow,
Arise from their graves and aspire;
Where my sunflower wishes to go.
(1797)

subjectivity through the use of photographic and poetic portraiture and self-portraiture. While his oeuvre is replete with self-portraits, and a number of his poems might also be thought of as "self portraits," the category becomes complicated if we consider that Ginsberg's framework for "self" is always dependent upon multiplicity.[24] Ginsberg's portraits produce a method of engaging with community formation that attempts to arrest the primacy of the self.

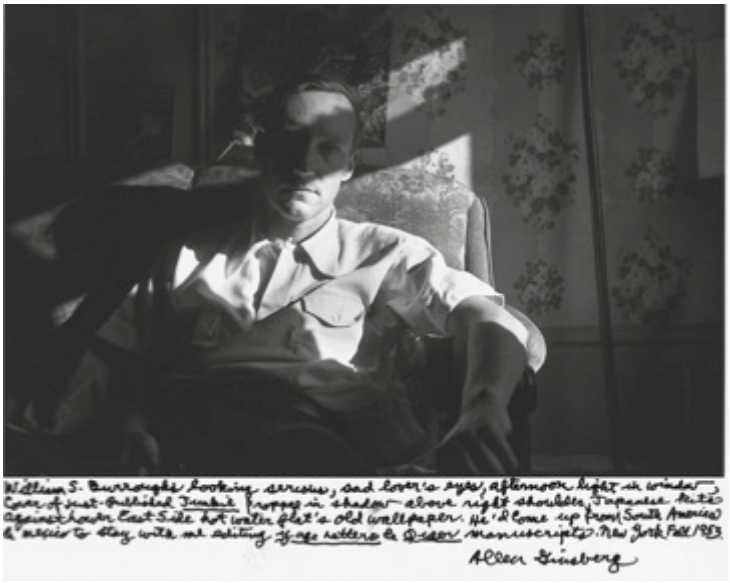

Figure 33. William S. Burroughs with Junkie, by Allen Ginsberg, from *Allen Ginsberg Photographs*.

> William S. Burroughs looking serious, sad lover's eyes, afternoon light in window, cover of just-published Junkie propped in shadow above right shoulder, Japanese kite against Lower East side hot water flat's old wallpaper. He'd come up from South America & Mexico to stay with me editing Yage Letters & Queer manuscripts. New York Fall 1953. Allen Ginsberg

Ginsberg's self-group portrait comes under scrutiny when his subject is the lone figure, particularly a singular figure like William S. Burroughs, whose identity as "l'homme invisible"

[24] Both the interior self and the multiplied self as subjects have a long tradition in lyric poetry, but the tension that Ginsberg's realist methods raise are particularly historically located.

saturates his works and his presence in the Beat group. Because he, Ginsberg, wants the image and its attendant archive to accommodate both Burroughs's "aloneness" or "invisibility" *and* his relational status, Ginsberg frames him as "the lover," with "sad lover's eyes." Ginsberg (or Burroughs) also includes in the photograph a paperback copy of *Junkie*, an Ace paperback with a salacious cover. The book, however, is "propped in shadow," intended both to be revealed *and* concealed. For Burroughs as member of "the group," his status is inextricably tied to his artistic production and collaborative mode. When Ginsberg notes, "he'd come up from South America & Mexico to stay with me editing Yage Letters & Queer manuscript," the dearth of punctuation produces two distinct meanings around "me": either "he'd come up from South America & Mexico to stay, with me editing…" or "he'd come up from South America & Mexico to stay with me, editing…" and both of these meanings are possible, given that Burroughs sent nearly all of his material to Ginsberg to edit, and that *Yage Letters* is a collection of letters between them. Ginsberg discusses the unfolding of Burroughs's project in a 1986 interview:

> AG: … He sent me routines of Dr. Benway and others in letters, and the central material of *Naked Lunch*, Benway, the parties – the Factualists, the Liquidationists, and Divisionists – were all either part of letters or appended to letters to me – many of which letters were love letters. *The whole point of sending the material was the enactment of different fantasies of attachments and addictions – not only to drugs but also to sex – and a self-parody also of his relation to me*.
> JS: That's really interesting.
> AG: All of that you can find in the letters. It's a complete narrative history, just like a novel, about his life between '53 and '57 in relation to his art and in relation to me.[25]

It seems crucial to disentangle – or to mull over the entanglement – that Ginsberg introduces in this interview. When he asserts, "the whole point of sending the material was the enactment of

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[25] Jennie Skerl, "Ginsberg on Burroughs: An Interview." *Modern Language Studies,* Vol. 16, No. 3 (Summer, 1986), pp. 271-278. "JS" is Jennie Skerl and "AG" is Allen Ginsberg.

different fantasies of attachments and addictions – not only to drugs but also to sex – and a self-parody also of his relation to me," he produces the terms for evaluating Burroughs relationally – in his "fantasies of attachment." For Ginsberg, commenting later on the terms of their literary friendship, mutual editorship, and love affair, Burroughs's relationality is "self-parody," by which Burroughs's texts, including his letters, become commentaries on the status of selfhood in the context of an emerging aesthetic community with its own expectations relating to "style."[26]

Parody, narrative history, and the enactment of fantasy, terms that Ginsberg applies to Burroughs, underline the gesture that the Beats in general make as respects producing a version of their own emergence as a realist enterprise. In contrast to, but also in *relation* to this problem, is another Ginsberg photograph of Burroughs, this one an immediate commentary on group construction and intimacy.

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[26] Many of Ginsberg's and Burroughs's aesthetic terms of portraiture share with previous models an investment in the portrait as performative. Jaime Hovey argues, in a discussion of Modernist portraiture, "Unlike their less self-conscious Victorian precursors, modernist-era portraitists emphasize the personas, imagoes, and personalities produced by perverse subjects to escape the rules of normal gender, sexuality, speech, looking, and social comportment more generally. In doing this, these portraits perversely circulate the particularity, strangeness, or unique 'personality' produced by the art of portraiture as a quality more indicative of style than it is a signifier of a person's true essence or 'real' nature. Personality style can thus be appreciated by performers, audiences, spectators, and readers as an act of artistry and invention, an aesthetic that is all about participation in a shared social world. Many of these portraits are directly concerned with a variety of perversities, including sexual and gender queerness, homosexuality, or lesbianism; however, these emphasize personality as self-presentation, as a series of aesthetic gestures that bring normative assumptions into question, rather than as indicative of innate abnormality, pathology, or freakishness." *A Thousand Words* 6.

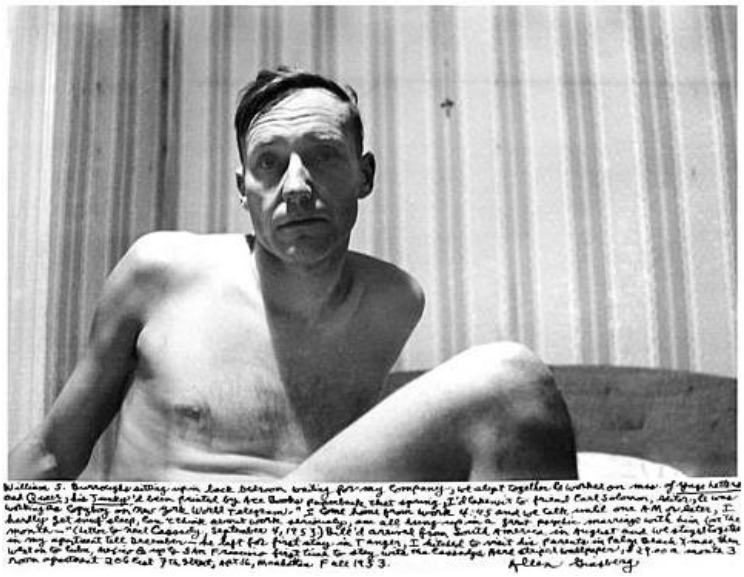

Figure 34. William S. Burroughs Nude, by Allen Ginsberg, from *Allen Ginsberg Photographs*.

> William S. Burroughs sitting up in back bedroom waiting for my company, we slept together & worked on manuscripts of Yage Letters and Queer, his Junky'd been printed by Ace Books paperback that spring, I'd taken it to editor friend Carl Solomon, was myself working as copyboy for $30 a week on "New York World Telegram," I came home from work 4:45 and we talk until one AM or later, "I hardly got enuf [sic] sleep, can't think about work seriously, am all hung-up in a great psychic marriage with him for the month—" (letter to Neal Cassady, September 4, 1953). Bill'd arrived from South America in August, [met Corso first time, Kerouac visited writing *Doctor Sax*, Alan Ansen dropped by – Bill went crosstown to score for Dolophine in the village, then left in and we stayed together in my apartment] till December – he left for first trip to Tangier, I hitched to Palm Beach to visit his parents X-mas, then went on to Cuba, Mexico, & Bay Area California to dwell awhile with Cassady family: Here striped wallpaper, $29 a month three room small apartment 206 East 7th St. # 16, [Lower East Side] Manhattan, Fall 1953. Allen Ginsberg.[27]

This caption is among the richest and most detailed in Ginsberg's significant collection. It includes, as usual, other members of their "scene" – Alan Ansen, Gregory Corso, Jack Kerouac, Neal Cassady, and Ginsberg's friend Carl Solomon, some of whose experiences inspired "Howl"

[27] Brackets denote additions to this caption, changed after an exhibition. The later version is owned by the US National Gallery.

– and details the literary efforts in which they were engaged in the historical moment. But this caption also meditates on the intimacy of Ginsberg and Burroughs's relationship not only because of the setting (the bedroom scene) but also because of the inclusion of quotations from Ginsberg's letters and his brief discussion of Burroughs's scoring Dolophine (methadone) in the Village. This is a version of intimacy that Ginsberg's other portraits generally exclude – one that both navigates the two-person pairing while simultaneously placing the subjects within the larger frame of the public. The image is one that narrates *both* "among" and "between": the particularity of Ginsberg's relationship with Burroughs but also their status together (not as a permanent couple, but as people in a "month-long marriage") in the context of the larger group. This is emphasized as well by Ginsberg's compositional strategy: Burroughs's direct gaze and erotic pose address the photographer, but also the viewer, who is imagined as being already knowledgeable about the Beats – Corso and Kerouac aren't given job titles or even first names, and Ginsberg's and Cassady's close but fraught relationship is alluded to in Ginsberg's mention of his trip to San Francisco to stay with Cassady's family.

For all Ginsberg's efforts to displace the atomized "subject" from the portrait, the problem of self-hood is nonetheless constantly significant to the Beat poets' counter-cultural posture. The Beat community, focused on opting out of the "mainstream" as they perceived it in the 1950s, eschewed a more rigorous politics in favor of nonparticipation (as a group – many *members* of the Beat communities were involved in politics, Ginsberg included.) Where poetic and photographic authorship, subjectivity, and portraiture may be seen as efforts to reconsider the significance of the whole self in an emerging aesthetic community, efforts like Ginsberg's show how the construction of a "whole self" doesn't always survive the changes implicit in the formation of community. Ginsberg's efforts should not be taken as "failures," as such – his

poetic and photographic portraiture and self-portraiture produces many of the conditions for thinking outside of the ordinary bounds of the "portrait" and the aesthetically rendered self. But in the end, it does seem that nonparticipation, a fundamentally individuated practice, ended up being the politics of the scene.

In displacing himself from the center of the portrait frame, Ginsberg as auteur and community documentarian, again, displaces the notion of the "true self" as well as the notion of the photographic subject as captured in the image. Not only in self-portraiture but also in the diverse modes of portraiture that he produces, Ginsberg trains the photographic lens in such a way that disturbs how the subject and auteur communicate their mutual and respective positions in "the group."

Figure 35. Neal Cassady and Natalie Jackson, by Allen Ginsberg, from *Beat Memories: The Photographs of Allen Ginsberg*.

> Neal Cassady and his love of that year the star-cross'd Natalie Jackson conscious of their rôles in Market Street Eternity: Cassady had been prototype for Jack Kerouac's 1950 On the Road saga hero Dean Moriarty, as later in the 1960's he'd taken the driver's wheel of Ken Kesey's psychedelic-era day-glo painted Merry Prankster cross-country bus

> "Further." Neal's illuminated American automobile mania, "unspeakably enthusiastic" friendship & erotic energy had already written his name in bright-lit signs of our literary imagination before movies were made imitating his charm. That's why we stopped under the marquee to fix the passing hand on the watch, San Francisco, maybe March 1955. Allen Ginsberg

The marquee denotes three movie titles and one actor's name; Brando, however, only appears in *The Wild One*. The other two movies are the little-remembered western *The Stranger Wore a Gun*, pithily summarized, "Stranger Wore Gun," and the steamy 1932 *Tarzan the Ape Man* with Maureen O'Sullivan and Johnny Weissmuller. *The Wild One* was subjected to much Hays Code revision, despite the passage of the 1952 "Miracle Decision," for its violence and displays of teenage rebellion; Brando himself described it as exploring "why young people tend to bunch into groups that seek expression in violence."[28] While Ginsberg never endorses violence on the part of "the group" as a mode of rebellion, the form of the group itself, the project of "opting out" as sufficient protest, fuses *The Wild One* with the Beats. The object of this rebellion, however, is diffuse, for the Beats as well as for the subjects of teenage rebellion pictures. Again, the project of "opting out" was generalized for many of the Beats, a project of rebellion, even antagonism. The fictionalized Cassady of this picture wasn't asked, "what are you rebelling against?" but it seems almost certain that his answer, like Brando's, would have been "what do you got?"

Another way that Ginsberg evacuates photographic object from ontological subject – and his primary mode of refiguring the "I" and subject of his portrait projects – is his alignment of one cultural figure with another: again, here Neal Cassady aligns with Marlon Brando, not just

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[28] Quoted in Jerold Simmons, "Violent Youth: The Censoring and Public Reception of "The Wild One" and "The Blackboard Jungle," *Film History* Vol. 20, No. 3.

because of the name in the marquee, but also because of how Ginsberg rhetorically superimposes Neal Cassady's name onto "the bright-lit sign" of the literary (and filmic, and erotic) imagination. Cassady as "subject" is also narrativized into a particular travelogue: his "mania" for the automobile as well as his enthusiasm for "the road" pushes him into the cultural frame of *The Wild One*. Also, Neal Cassady's "love of that year" (he was married to his second wife, Carolyn Cassady, from 1948 until his death in 1968) gets glossed over in favor of the other male subject of the image and again, this dynamic of attachment is not between the two people in the image, nor between Cassady and his alter-ego Marlon Brando but among the assumed photographer and the multiplied photographic subject. For Ginsberg as photographer and documentarian, the snapshot comes into focus as the object of history.

This moment also describes Neal Cassady's biography: Ginsberg outlines Cassady's inclusion in *On the Road*, underlines his presence in the work of other authors, and describes his role in the Merry Pranksters adventures, during the course of which he met his death in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. As the (notably, and particularly) male muse of many of his peers, Neal Cassady almost demands framing: he has to be endlessly described, not as a person but as a subject of literature, the location at which all social ties cross for the Beats. Furthermore, while Cassady seems to be an ideal literary subject, of both the novel and the poem, Ginsberg here is claiming that he is, in a sense, an ideal photographic subject because he needs to be firmly located in a definitive time. "That's why we stopped under the marquee to fix the passing hand on the watch," Ginsberg reminds his reader/viewer: to underline Neal Cassady's presentness to the moment, and to describe one of the moments in which his "eternity" becomes iterated. It's

inaccurate to refer to this practice as hagiography; Ginsberg often enfolds even his own religious leaders into the overlapping social ordinary.[29] In rearticulating the framework of thinking about "the group" and its aesthetics I propose that, in this particular case and in the Cold War-era United States, even hero worship of this kind gets reframed as a kind of aestheticized action, even though the relationship with 1950s era politics is uncertain and based upon the desire to opt out of a generalized "mainstream."

As is true of the caption, the photographic portrait enjoys less theoretical attention than it might. For some, the history of portraiture helps to describe how industrial capital turned the portrait photograph from luxury object to document, a piece of evidence intended to document the surveilled.[30] For others, the photographic portrait refers to its subject's having-been, and also reminds the viewer of the subject's death, as Ginsberg reminds his viewer, albeit subtly, of Neal Cassady's death in his caption of the "movie marquee" photo through references to the subject's

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[29] A transcript of an extended conversation between Ginsberg and Gregory Corso at Nairopa discusses Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche alongside pop culture figures. Ginsberg says, "What do you do with Christopher Marlowe who insists on going into a bar and getting his eye pricked out and getting killed in a drunken brawl? What do you do with… Shakespeare created Falstaff who inspired Kerouac who'll drink a hole in his stomach. What do you do with Chogyam Trungpa and his saki [sic]? What do you do with Gregory and his rounded 24,000 years?" Transcript of Lecture from "History of Poetry": http://www.allenginsberg.org/index.php?page=history-of-poetry-shakespeare-with-gregory-corso-1975

[30] See Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* Vol 39, 1986 and John Tagg, "A Democracy of the Image: Photographic Portraiture and Commodity Production," in *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*, 1988. The first sentence of Gisele Freund's *Photographie et Société* is, "Le portrait photographique corresponds à un stade particulier de l'évolution sociale: l'ansension de larges couches de la société vers une plus grande signification politique et sociale. Les précurseurs du portrait photographique surgirent en relation étriote avec cette évolution." [The [rise of the] photographic portrait corresponds to a particular stage in our social evolution: the ascension of large sections of society to much greater social and political significance. The precursors of portrait photography surged in direct relation to this evolution.]

remembered presentness. When philosopher Cynthia Freeland suggests that there are a number of categories of portrait, including likeness, proof of presence, psychological characterization, and evocations of essence, she retains the aesthetic inquiry into how a portrait functions while also leaving open the possibility (particularly with categories like "proof of presence") that portraits often have a social function as well.[31] The portrait, for all its aesthetic significance, is nonetheless inextricably bound to the production of social ties: because Ginsberg both reduces his social self in the presence of others and produces networks of close ties to document the construction of his aesthetic community, the portrait's subjects refer endlessly to each other, other historical figures, and the auteur. The social subject of the portrait is in some senses the site of aesthetic development here, both in the sense of the city and its denizens being central to the inquiry and in the sense that the aesthetic community being called into being produces and is produced by the photographic portrait.

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[31] See "Portraits in Painting and Photography," *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, Vol. 135, No. 1 (2007) and *Portraits and Persons* page 49. She asserts that the "evocation of essence" or "air" that portraits can produce is taken from Barthes, so it seems necessary to acknowledge that Barthes does in fact allow for the portrait to fall into both aesthetic and social categories.

Figure 36. Gregory Corso, Rue Git-le-Coeur, by Allen Ginsberg, from *Allen Ginsberg Photographs*.

> Gregory Corso, his attic room 9 Rue Git-le-Coeur, wooden angel hung from wall right, window looked on courtyard and across seine half-black away to spires of St. Chappelle on Ile-St-Louis Gregory's *Gasoline* was ready at City Lights, in attic he prepared "Marriage," "Power," "Army," "Police," "Hair," and "Bomb," for Happy Birthday of Death" book. Henri Rishaux (?) visited liked Corso's "mad children of soda-caps" phrasing. Burroughs came from Tangiers to live one flight below, shaping *Naked Lunch* manuscript, Peter Orlovsky and I had window on street two flights downstairs, room with two-burner gas stove, we ate together often, rent $30 a month. I'd begun *Kaddish* litany, Peter his "Frist Poem." Allen Ginsberg

As noted, there are a few images that have alternate captions; this is one of them. Few include very many changes, but this has some differences. The later caption, for an exhibition, is as follows:

> Gregory Corso, Paris 1957, his attic 9 Rue git-le-Coeur with magic wand, Louvre postcards tacked to wall left, wooden angel kid on wire right, window on courtyard. Burroughs cane to live a flight below, Peter Orlovsky & I had window on street two

> floors down, room with two burner gas stove. Leroi Jones (Yungen Magazine) and Irving Rosenthal (Chicago Review) wrote us from US for poems, Gregory had "Marriage" ready, "Power," "Army," & "Police" also. I began *Kaddish*, Peter "Frist Poem" Burroughs shaping *Naked Lunch*. Madame Ranchou, concierge. Allen Ginsberg.

The Parisian location produced a series of experiments for Ginsberg, Orlovsky, Burroughs, Kerouac, and Corso. The presence of Paul Bowles and Brion Gysin too helped to turn the poetic and fictional mechanism from the documentary mode that characterized the early 1950s into the surrealist and, in Ginsberg's case, philosophical mode that characterized the late 1950s on. Their presence marks the turn to a location that works as a place of production more than a major cultural location. Again, both the primary subject (Corso) and the secondary subject (the affective community) are called upon in this portrait, and Ginsberg produces the aesthetic conditions by which we recognize them. The aesthetic shift that Ginsberg details here pulls Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka) and Irving Rosenthal into the image; this also necessarily includes other publishers, particularly Lawrence Ferlinghetti, who published most of Ginsberg's works. Gregory Corso in Paris serves as a hinge here: Ginsberg uses the image to draw attention to the community in its new, expatriate form, and notes the literary/cultural figures – including still more in the later caption – who were interested in the work that the Beats were producing from abroad.

Alienated Together: Hipsters, Desubjectivity, and Documentational Practice

Jack Kerouac's first vision of *On the Road* was as a "factualist" piece of writing that would capture his experiences in a realist style. He wrote Ginsberg in December 1948, "The realization that art is cracked anyway (mostly) only makes me become a Factualist now. I will begin again

with a Factualist art, perhaps a la Dreiser-Burroughs-'On the Road.' Like you, I consolidate my lines and move on. On our deathbeds we will realize one thing is as good as another anyway; as you yourself say, 'nothing can be lost, nothing can be saved.' Relax."[32] Later putting aside this initial manuscript, he turned to the form of hard bop as the primary influence on his writing style, wanting to preserve the spontaneity that he felt his journals and letters – and others' letters – had in describing jazz performances.[33] For Kerouac, this turn from Factualism to jazz-driven documentarism – a realism of improvisation – produced the novel for which he is best known.

The documentary impulse, again, fueled William S. Burroughs's works as well. When critic and novelist Mary McCarthy reviewed Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* in 1963, she closed her article with a discussion of his realism: "For the first time in recent years, a talented writer means what he says to be taken and used literally, like an Rx prescription. The literalness of Burroughs is the opposite of 'literature.' Unsentimental and factual, he writes as though his thoughts had the quality of self-evidence."[34] For McCarthy, the "Rx prescription" stands in for "literalness": a compulsive recording practice that avoids venturing into the symbolic order. Beat realism, the practice of improvisational documentation, infuses the work of other practitioners here, underlining how Ginsberg as documentarian is both typical *and* exemplary: committed to a recording practice but also serving as the ultimate auteur whose job it is to manage that imagery of the world.

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[32] *Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg: The Letters* 63.
[33] Ann Charters, "Introduction" to *On the Road* xiv-xv.
[34] Mary McCarthy, "Dejeuner sur l'Herbe," in *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. 1 February 1 1963.

During the time of its writing, and certainly after its publication, Kerouac's documentary novel became the sine qua non for "hipster" aesthetics. As my earlier consideration of Neal Cassady as portrait subject demonstrates, the project of opting out, and of realizing one's ideological position through "documentation" practice and revisionary portraiture is supported by a series of meditations on hipster aesthetics in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Essays like Norman Mailer's famous "The White Negro" and other less-recognized pieces like Anatole Broyard's "Portrait of a Hipster" produced many of the conditions that opened the possibility for Beat artists to respond to what they considered the dominant mode of literary production by choosing a model of the collective subject at the expense of the atomized subject, a practice that critics take to be unrooted, empty, "nowhere."[35] The dominant mode of these critiques is a takedown of the "hipster" aesthetic, which most cultural critics, particularly those of the literary elite, considered exclusively appropriative. It is, in a sense, Broyard's essay that introduces the vocabulary that we now use to describe the "Beat generation," and not Norman Mailer's.

> As he was the illegitimate son of the Lost Generation, the hipster was really *nowhere*. And, just as amputees often seem to localize their strongest sensations in the *missing* limb, so the hipster longed, from the very beginning, to be *somewhere.* He was like a beetle on its back; his life was a struggle to get *straight*. But the law of human gravity kept him overthrown, because he was always of the minority—opposed in race or feeling to those who owned the machinery of recognition.
> The hipster began his inevitable quest for self-definition by sulking in a kind of inchoate delinquency. But this delinquency was merely a negative expression of his needs, and, since it led only into the waiting arms of the ubiquitous law, he was finally forced to *formalize* his resentment and express it *symbolically*. This was the birth of a philosophy—a philosophy of

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[35] See Philip Ford, Somewhere/Nowhere: Hipness as an Aesthetic. *The Musical Quarterly* , Vol. 86, No. 1 (Spring, 2002), pp. 49-81, for a more in-depth conversation about how Mailer's essay has eclipsed Broyard's in the popular imaginary.

> *somewhereness* called *jive*, from *jibe*: to agree or harmonize. By discharging his would-be aggressions *symbolically*, the hipster harmonized or reconciled himself with society.[36]

By contemporary standards, we might be tempted to interpret Broyard's evaluation as artificially generous: his claim that the participants in hipsterdom were "always of the minority" seems to allude to a strong political significance, and it's not clear whether Broyard intends this to remain ambiguous. His evaluation of "minoritism" is a gesture toward elucidating the opt-out politics that characterize the Beat portraits – a negative social position that finds a dismissal of mainstream "morals" sufficient as a claim on politics.

In Philip Ford's article on the birth of "hip," he argues that the first wave of "hipsters," like Anatole Broyard, Chandler Brossard, and Delmore Schwartz, were far more connected to the New York intellectuals than were the later "Beats," whose opt-out politics were characterized (in Ford's view) by a particularly 1950s romanticism and attachment to appearance-driven models of affective performance. Ginsberg's letters, however, demonstrate how he in particular but other Beat poets and photographers were acquainted with the New York intellectual scene.[37] This is particularly true given his long relationship with Lionel Trilling, who was his professor in the 1940s at Columbia. That said, the Beats were rarely focused on cultural criticism as such, and often eschewed the kind of aesthetically conservative writing that the New Critics touted in favor of pop culture references and literary and aesthetic influences that cut across the high and

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[36]Anatole Broyard, "Portrait of a Hipster," originally published in *Partisan Review*, 1948.
[37] The most robust evidence of this lies in Ginsberg's letters with Trilling, but he also had contact with writers from Partisan Review, again documented in his correspondence. The New York intellectual scene tended to dismiss Beat writing for a number of reasons: it was considered too popular; it garnered too much attention from the mainstream journalistic press; it hewed too unevenly to the modernist aesthetic practices that the New York intellectuals valued (despite Ginsberg's clear use of Pound as a poetic ancestor.)

lowbrow spectrum. Furthermore, the Beat "illegitimacy" in relation to the Lost Generation describes the attention to mimesis and documentation that Ginsberg and his ilk valued, demonstrating their ambiguous relationship, often seated in ambivalence and irony, to the modernist formal innovations that Trilling and others championed.[38] The quality that Broyard calls "unregenerate individualism," that gives way to boring routine, seems always, in a sense, to have been rhetorical: the gestures toward opting out that these writers produce necessarily fail in the context of growing political unrest.

The displacing of self, then, turns out to be insufficient for a positive politics, one based theoretically and not negatively. In part, this is because of a lack of agreement among the aesthetic producers who were the central writers in this movement as to what their politics should be – Ginsberg and Burroughs had equally strong political views that skewed hard to the left and right, respectively.[39] Burroughs, at least, seems to think of this difference of opinion as

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[38] Again, from Anatole Broyard: "And here [the hipster] was ruined. The frantic praise of the impotent meant recognition—*actual somewhereness*—to the hipster. He got what he wanted; he stopped protesting, reacting. He began to bureaucratize jive as a machinery for securing the actual—really the *false*—somewhereness. Jive, which had originally been a critical system, a kind of Surrealism, a personal revision of existing disparities, now grew moribundly self-conscious, smug, encapsulated, isolated from its source, from the sickness which spawned it. It grew more rigid than the institutions it had set out to defy. It became a boring routine. The hipster—once an unregenerate individualist, an underground poet, a guerilla—had become a pretentious poet laureate. His old subversiveness, his ferocity, was now so manifestly rhetorical as to be obviously harmless. He was bought and placed in the zoo. He was *somewhere* at last—comfortably ensconced in the 52nd Street clip joints, in Carnegie Hall, and *Life*. He was *in-there*...he was back in the American womb. And it was just as hygienic as ever."

[39] Responding to a letter in which Ginsberg detailed his becoming involved in labor politics, William S. Burroughs wrote him:

> I think the US is heading in the direction of a Socialistic police state similar to England, and not too different from Russia. I congratulate myself on my timely withdrawal. Everything I hear from the US makes me glad I am not there. At least Mexico is no obscenity "welfare" state, and the more I see of this country the better I like it. It is really

generational – between youthful idealism and experienced cynicism. But this opposition helps us to understand in part why the political cleft that remained between Burroughs and Ginsberg in particular did not allow for a particular positive politics on the part of the Beats. For Ginsberg, problematizing the "self" is at the center of his aesthetic project; for Burroughs, the loss or erasure of the self *becomes the problem*, and the aesthetic projects become the modes of working through this loss; for Kerouac, experimental self-fashioning through novels and letters provides the mechanism for yoking oneself to the world. Even if the multiple possibilities for the self-portrait are unequal to both the revision and the erasure of the self, the practice of auto-documentation shows the effort on the part of this community to render problematized, collective, denaturalized, *and* experimental selves.

As a devotee of the self-portrait, Ginsberg retrains the photographic lens in such a way that disturbs the model of photographic subject/object – again, his mode of self-documenting is one that questions the notions of a "core self," and as such, shows that the relation of self to community, characterized by the in-between, is described particularly well by the auto-snapshot and the collective self portrait. His images frame close attachments and loose ties, friendliness

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> possible to relax here where nobody tries to mind your business for you, and a man can walk the streets without being molested by some insolent cop swollen with the authority bestowed upon him by our stupid and hysterical law making bodies.
> …
> I hope you are not serious in this labor leader idea. My opinion of labor leaders and unions is very close to the views so (???) and vigorously expressed by Westbrook Pegler, the only columnist, in my opinion, who possesses a grain of integrity. Dec 24, 1949.

Westbrook Pegler was an anti-union and anti-New Deal newspaper and magazine columnist who went on to write for the John Birch society newspaper before being asked to leave for his extreme views. For more, see David Witwer, "Westbrook Pegler and the Anti-Union Movement," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 92, No. 2 (Sep., 2005), pp. 527-552. The letter quoted is housed at the Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library among Allen Ginsberg's personal correspondence.

and strangeness, and situate themselves assertively within history. Ginsberg's pictures serve as indices of historical moments, of which he seems unusually conscious; they're a means of note taking, which he describes in *Snapshot Poetics* ("As a matter of habit I carry a camera where I used to carry a notebook. I'm finding that I write less and less in my notebooks now – I do my sketching with the camera instead") they're a poetic practice; and they're simultaneously a way of making his poetic persona both real *and* minimized in favor of the group "identity" that he's trying to call up.[40]

Ginsberg's practices of autodocumentation are gestures of folding himself into the context of community. Again, this assertion encloses its opposite: Ginsberg's awareness of himself as community and photo subject pushes to the fore the problem of the unbridgeable gap between self and others and Ginsberg's desire to simultaneously eradicate it and define it. The desire to place oneself within the scope of the "scene" means tracing the boundaries of *both* of those categories through efforts at photographic construction. "Self-portrait with group," the following image calls itself.

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[40] *Snapshot Poetics* page 11.

Figure 37. Group, by Allen Ginsberg, from *Beat Memories: The Photographs of Allen Ginsberg*.

Ginsberg's caption reads:

> Peter Orlovsky legs crossed, William Burroughs with camera and hat for sun, myself white pants, Alan Ansen (W.H. Auden's & Burroughs' part time amanuensis) Gregory Corso sunglassed & minox'd, the late Ian Summerville (Burroughs's stroboscope-electronics sound assistant technician) on right, Paul Bowles seated squinting in bright noon light along Burroughs' doorway. Garden wall, 1961 Tangier. My camera likely in Michael Portman's hands. Allen Ginsberg

A later caption revision goes into more detail:

> peter orlovsky legs crossed mysterious-haired, w.s. burroughs with camera & hat shading mediterranean sun, myself (allen ginsberg) white pants earnest, alan ansen resolute visiting from vanish to help type new apocalyptic cut-up overflow material from naked lunch, gregory corso sunglassed & minox'd, a gambler at casino, ian sommerville assisting sound-collage electronics & stroboscope alpha-rhythm dream machine experiments with bill b. & brion gysin then in town, paul bowles squinting in bright mid-day light seated on ground, all assembled outside bill's single room, villa muniria garden, my camera in michael portman's hands, tangier maroc july 1961. Allen Ginsberg

Again Ginsberg refers to the photographs that he directs as "self-portraits"; we can reasonably assume, then, that Ginsberg is responsible for the image's composition, if not for the actual pressing of the button – his camera is (likely?) in Michael Portman's hands. That Ginsberg

places himself at the center of the frame pushes him to the fore, suggesting that he might be the "subject" of this image, but that he refers to his own affect as "earnest" while giving his peers full description or backstory ("legs crossed mysterious-haired," "assisting sound-collage electronics and stroboscope alpha-rhythm dream machine experiments") might either suggest that his appearance would speak for itself, or that he is more interested in providing narrative texture to the state of his peers. The practice of double captioning, which characterizes a number of Ginsberg's images, demonstrates his increasing desire over time to include as many poetic practitioners – and practices – as possible in the image. He breaks open the text to include further meditations on his friends' canonical materials: "apocalyptic cut-up overflow material from naked lunch" only makes its appearance in the second caption. The inclusion of Brion Gysin is also significant in terms of Ginsberg's canonization of Burroughs, as his cut-up method was so instrumental in the eventual form of *Naked Lunch*. While Ginsberg, captioner, may be speculating about certain aspects of his friends' moods, his assignation of emotional states or description of events is predicated on his interpretation of their group status. The second caption also allows him to produce still more relays between text and image, pointing to Peter Orlovsky "mysterious-haired" and himself "earnest." He's narrating the theoretical structure I've called the "among" here, and scripting the "diagonal": defining, for example, Burroughs in relation to Ian Sommerville, and vice versa, and himself in relation both to Michael Portman, who holds his camera, and Peter Orlovsky, because Ginsberg reflects his own affective response through his description of the image: responding to Orlovsky's "mystery."

Portraiture as a means of defining community demonstrates how the terms of realism open up when documentation is considered a mode of reframing both self and group. The problem of selfhood and belonging, considered by Ginsberg through the multiplied mechanisms

of group and self portraiture, take on different terms when considered in the context of Burroughs's absent self. Between 1949 and 1953 Burroughs worked on two novels, the first to be published as *Junkie* under his oft-used pseudonym William Lee and the second, *Queer*, which would remain unpublished until the 1990s. For a time, Burroughs considered these two texts not only companions but even pieces of the same book, and was unsure about the order or arrangement in which to publish them.[41] It is with some degree of Burroughs's permission, then, that we might evaluate these two early texts as companionate. The Lee character in *Junkie* and *Queer* often experiences problems related to self-evaluation, but the fundamental question that the books raise is, how does a subject, gradually becoming more and more dis-assembled and removed from spheres of contact, gesture toward other people? Burroughs noted himself, in his 1985 introduction to *Queer*, that these two texts were concerned with the problem of contact:

> What Lee is looking for is contact or recognition, like a photon emerging from the haze of insubstantiality to leave an indelible recording in Allerton's consciousness. Failing to find an adequate observer, he is threatened by painful dispersal, like an unobserved photon. Lee does not know that he is already committed to writing, since this is the only way he has of making an indelible record, whether Allerton is inclined to observe or not. Lee is being inexorably pressed into the world of fiction. He has already made the choice between his life and his work.

That Burroughs-Lee "has made the choice between his life and his work" helps us to understand how, for Burroughs, the work as an act of auto-recording produces the necessary conditions for minimizing the self in the presence of another. As Burroughs's character demonstrates his increasing disassemblage, it becomes clear that Ginsberg's vision of a community defined by

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[41] He wrote Ginsberg on April 14, 1952, "I think Queer is excellent title. I personally think it would be better to publish Queer as a sequel to junk rather than together, but in this life we have to take things as we find them as the torso murderer said when he discovered his victim was a quadruple amputee." Allen Ginsberg Papers.

loose contact and opting out takes on the "parody" of realism to which Burroughs is committed, a realism characterized, as by Mary McCarthy, as "literal," inscribing. In displacing the central character in such a way that he dissolves the notion of self, has made the character having "made the choice between his life and his work," positions the "self" as in absentia and as such incapable of action other than negative.

In the same introduction, Burroughs argues, "in my first novel, *Junkie*, the protagonist "Lee" comes across as integrated and self-contained, sure of himself and where he is going. In *Queer* he is disintegrated, desperately in need of contact, completely unsure of himself and of his purpose."[42] Burroughs's perceptions of his own character's relative "integration" in *Junkie* should be taken as skewed, given that his claims on being "integrated" seem to hinge on the character's feeling of relative "wellness" while on heroin. What Burroughs perceives as "integrated," and what other critics have taken as numb, apathetic, or autistic, seems more aptly described as flattened or even *abstracted*: an effort to write into existence the outline of the self that Burroughs perceives to be disintegrating.[43]

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[42] Introduction to *Queer*, xii.

[43] The "autistic" construction haunts much criticism. His biographer Graham Caveney argues the text sets the stage for later writing: "The book [*Junkie*] does provide the blueprint for many of his later concerns. The project may be what he called, "Comparatively simple: to put down in the most accurate and simple terms my experience as an addict," though this summary underplays the way in which his novel captures the deadpan laconic drawl of the junkiesphere. His prose does not simply describe the junkie lifestyle, it mimics it. In its detached understatement the narrative enacts its own autism. Bill Lee is not the subject of the novel but its object; a character with no inner life who recounts his progression through four habits and his search for Yage – the junkie's Holy Grail. The stunned, anaesthetized voice that he adopts speaks from within the junk condition as well as about it – a technique that would later inform the work of writers such as Joan Didion and Bret Easton Ellis." *Gentleman Junkie* 77.

Critics' assertion that Burroughs's voice enacts junkiedom while writing from within it supports, in addition, the assertion that the concern of these two early books is providing a "realist" method of recording the efforts at contact as enacted through the non-character. The literalist impulse in Burroughs's early prose is the missing dynamic of this critical conversation. When Burroughs characterizes his own work as "to put down in accurate and simple terms my experiences as an addict," the gesture that he makes is toward mimesis, and despite his own fame as a "post-modern" writer, he is primarily invested in how his prose refers to and calls up a version of the "real." That Caveney refers to Bill Lee as having "no inner life" demonstrates a fundamental interpretive error – for Burroughs's character, the narrative rotates around the problem of the particular voice, and Burroughs's hyper-particularity produces the conditions for a consideration of how to be a junkie serves as the limit case for a person's being unable to connect or even to recognize him or herself.[44]

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[44] It is worth mentioning that some of the work on Burroughs is concerned with minoritizing his place in society. Michael Taussig writes:

> This would make color even more of a flaneur than Burroughs, who liked to call himself *el hombre invisible* in his walks through the market in Tangier in the late 1950S. What was invisible in Tangier became color in Paris, thanks to Gysin's paintings painted in Tangier. Maybe a person has to lose themselves first and become invisible as a long-term resident in a third-world country before being readied for the color walk? But then Burroughs was continuously marginal in utterly realistic as well as in utterly romantic ways. He was queer. He was a heroin addict. He loathed Amerika yet was quintessentially American. And he had weird ideas about most everything, especially writing. Being marginal can mean you switch on and you switch off because you are either too conspicuous or invisible. Too invisible, that's the point at which you emerge as color – walking color, at that.
> And remember, the original insight for the color walk lay in Gysin's playing with letters, letters that form words.
> …
> The old writer caresses these pictures.

The narrator of *Junkie*, which was sold as a memoir and initially assumed to be in the tradition of the social problem novel, akin to Nelson Algren's *The Man with the Golden Arm*, articulates the problems of his affect in ways that run contrary to the claim of his having "no inner life."

> A lot of nonsense has been written about the changes people undergo as they get a habit. All of a sudden the addict looks in the mirror and does not recognize himself. The actual changes are hard to specify and do not show up in the mirror. That is, the addict himself has a special blind spot as far as the progress of his habit is concerned. He generally does not realize he is getting a habit at all.
> …As a habit takes hold, other interests lose importance to the user. Life telescopes down to junk, one fix and looking forward to the next, "stashes" and "scripts," "spikes" and "droppers." The addict himself often feels that he is leading a normal life and that junk is incidental. He does not realize that he is just going through the motions in his non-junk activities. It is not until his supply is cut off that he realizes what junk means to him. 'Why do you *need* narcotics, Mr. Lee?" is a question that stupid psychiatrists ask. The answer is, 'I need junk to get out of bed in the morning, to shave and eat breakfast. I need it to stay alive.'[45]

The first part of Burroughs's argument here runs counter to the narrative that suggests that addiction is an "autistic" or unfeeling affective register by asserting that the problem is in an ability to recognize oneself, and in finding one's subjectivity replaced with a barely-recognizable subject/object whose selfhood is sublimated to the high. The addict here sees himself, and seems still to recognize the effects (and affects) of his pre-junk life, but becomes aware of the deceptive

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> After all, "I have been a cut-up for years;' the writer told us. "I think of words as being alive like animals. They don't like to be kept in pages. Cut the pages and let the words out." [Taussig's note: from "Literary Techniques of Lady Sutton-Smith 682].
> Now the words and the animals become united in the stories the old writer finds welling up inside himself as colors pour from tar. (*What Colour is the Sacred?* 29-30)

In the context of this project, Burroughs's status as "other" is characterized by the absent self and the literary voice that records how the character responds to a recognition of emotions he does not feel. This does not, however, dismiss the "utterly realistic as well [as] utterly romantic ways" in which Burroughs can be thought of as "outside" of American society.

[45] *Junkie* 22-23.

reflection. Where the reflection, the de-authenticated self is the primary mode of accessing the world, it demonstrates that the problem of contact characterizes how the Beats forged notions of community.

Where problems of contact characterize Burroughs's work, they no less strongly characterize Jack Kerouac's. When Kerouac published *On the Road* in 1959, he introduced into the American landscape a peculiar writing practice, a mode of engaging with the real world that shook postwar notions of style. In a September 5, 1957 review in *The New York Times*, Gilbert Millstein noted, "Its publication is a historic occasion in so far as the exposure of an authentic work of art is of any great moment in an age in which the attention is fragmented and the sensibilities are blunted by the superlatives of fashion (multiplied a millionfold by the speed and pound of communications)." His insistence on the book's "authenticity" reflects much critical attention in the moment. He continues,

> This book requires exegesis and a detailing of background. It is possible that it will be condescended to by, or make uneasy, the neo-academicians and the "official" avant-garde critics, and that it will be dealt with superficially elsewhere as merely "absorbing" or "intriguing" or "picaresque" or any of a dozen convenient banalities, not excluding "off beat." But the fact is that "On the Road" is the most beautifully executed, the clearest and the most important utterance yet made by the generation Kerouac himself named years ago as "beat," and whose principal avatar he is.
> Just as, more than any other novel of the Twenties, "The Sun Also Rises" came to be regarded as the testament of the "Lost Generation," so it seems certain that "On the Road" will come to be known as that of the "Beat Generation." There is, otherwise, no similarity between the two: technically and philosophically, Hemingway and Kerouac are, at the very least, a depression and a world war apart."[46]

Both in his degradation of the "new academy," which I take to refer to those engaging in canonizing the British and American modernists, and in his insistence that the novel stands

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[46] Gilbert Millstein, "Books of the Times," 5 September 1957.

"outside" of fashion, Millstein makes a case for the book's "newness."[47] But even in the moment of the text's publication, its status as community epistolary is already noteworthy. "Beat" is still emergent, but Millstein takes it as given, and Kerouac as its "avatar." Only three days later, however, the Times published what may count as a rejoinder in the form of David Dempsey's review, "In Pursuit of 'Kicks,'" in which he asserts:

> "On The Road" belongs to the new Bohemianism in American fiction in which an experimental style is combined with eccentric characters and a morally neutral point of view. It is not so much a novel as a long affectionate lark inspired by the so-called "beat" generation, and an example of the degree to which some of the most original work being done in this country has come to depend upon the bizarre and the offbeat for its creative stimulus. … the hot pursuit of pleasure enables Mr. Kerouac to serve up the great, raw slices of America that give his book a descriptive excitement unmatched since the days of Thomas Wolfe.[48]

Even in disagreeing with Millstein – the assertion that *On the Road* is not a novel is intended to be negative – Dempsey produces some of the same commentary, relying on the status of the book as call to a generation. If we remove, however, the negative connotations of "it is not so much a novel," considering that *On the Road* may serve a function other than novelistic, it seems clear, even from contemporaneous reviews, that the text works as a series of epistolary gestures: a network of communiqués to the emerging public that Kerouac considered his audience.

The style for the text, of course, was adapted from letters between Kerouac and Cassady.[49] A letter from Cassady to Kerouac from 1953 begins:

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[47] It is likely that he is referring to critics like Trilling and other New York intellectuals here.
[48] Daniel Dempsey, "In Pursuit of 'Kicks,'" 8 September 1957.
[49] See Carolyn Cassady's *Heart Beat: My Life with Jack and Neal* and a 1968 interview with Ted Berrigan in *The Paris Review*: "I got the idea for the spontaneous style of *On the Road* from seeing how good old Neal Cassady wrote his letters to me, all first person, fast, mad, confessional, completely serious, all detailed, with real names in his case, however (being letters)." "Art of Fiction" No. 41.

> Well it's about time you wrote, I was fearing you farted out on top that mean mountain or slid under while pissing in Pismo, beach of flowers, food and foolishness, but I knew the fear was ill-founded for balancing it in my thoughts of you, much stronger and valid if you weren't dead, was a realization of the experiences you would be having down there, rail, home, and the most important, climate, by a remembrance of my own feelings and thoughts (former low, or more exactly, nostalgic and unreal; latter hi) as, for example, I too seemed to spend time looking out upper floor windows at sparse, especially nighttimes, traffic in females—old or young.[50]

While the style strongly recalls that of *On the Road*, for Kerouac, the "authenticity" at stake in adapting the epistolary form to a "novel" relies on the recording of other media. Recording, documentation, and even copying – the mode of transmitting from letter form to book form – tracks with the realism that critics and Kerouac saw in his seminal work.

Lost Battalion of Platonic Conversationalists

> Homosexuality is a historic occasion to reopen affective and relational virtualities; not so much through the intrinsic qualities of the homosexual but because the "slantwise" position of the latter, as it were, the diagonal lines he can lay out in the social fabric allow these virtualities to come to light.[51]

What about the realist project makes "virtualities come to light," as "slantwise" social relations do? If the realist project is inextricably linked to something like an "approximation," does this definition entwine approximity with virtuality? It seems that the photographic medium provides a useful mechanism with talking about how approximity and virtuality produce themselves in the real world. When Roland Barthes reminds us of the "virtuality" of "myself," he discloses that the dispersed self desires not to signify.

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[50] Quoted in Scott Staton, "Neal Cassady: American Muse, Holy Fool," *The New Yorker* 12 December 2012.
[51] Michel Foucault, "Friendship as a way of life," 138.

> What I want, in short, is that my (mobile) image, buffeted among a thousand shifting photographs, altering with situation and age, should always coincide with my (profound) "self": but it is the contrary that must be said: "myself" never coincides with my image; for it is the image which is heavy, motionless, stubborn (which is why society sustains it) and "myself," which is light, divided, dispersed; like a bottle-imp, "myself" doesn't hold still, giggling in my jar: if only Photography could give me a neutral, anatomic body, a body which signifies nothing![52]

How does the body not signify, and how does the image attempt to relate its necessary approximation? Ginsberg seems simultaneously comfortable with acknowledging that "myself" is a moving specter, "giggling in a jar," but he is also invested over the course of his photographic project in attempting to "fix" that self, if relationally. The "slantwise" or diagonal links that pull the group together demand, for Ginsberg, recording them, even if this process of recording demonstrates the insufficiency of the medium for itself producing a political stance. The third meaning that the introduction to this project advances as central to the genealogy of the photo-text, then, provides Ginsberg and his ilk with some political traction, but demonstrates that the medium seems not to have an inherent politics. For cinema, as we shall see, the question of an inherent politics to medium persists.

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[52] *Camera Lucida* 12.

Chapter Four:
Toward an Imperfect Realism: National Cinema After the Urban Crisis

> Cynicism is saying, it's all fucked up, there's nothing to be done. Realism is, yeah, it's all fucked up, but it's still important to talk about it.[1]

It's impossible to pin down a particular moment in which the American liberal consensus demonstrates itself always to have been a broken promise. When Lyndon Johnson introduces the "Great Society" measures of the mid-1960s he notes, "we have the opportunity to move not only toward the rich society and the powerful society, but upward to the Great Society. The Great Society rests on abundance and liberty for all. It demands an end to poverty and racial injustice."[2] The federal programs that intended to modify the status of the working class, however, had been ironically demonstrating themselves to be *particularly* ineffective in the context that Johnson points out: the entanglement that is poverty and racial injustice. The "great society" measures were a final, weak attempt to set right a set of inequalities that had been exposed by social movements and popular and avant-garde culture for the preceding 30 years. The changing nature of economic policies through the 1960s, the shifts in the populations of cities and suburbs, and the decreasing availability of industrial jobs were also major variables that prevented the Great Society from flourishing. The Great Society is the end, in some senses, of the New Deal: it called attention, even through its failure, to how federal programs held out particular promises on which they never intended to deliver.

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[1] John Sayles, Conversation with Maggie Renzi, conference of the Modern Language Association, 11 January 2014. Sayles is talking about an attitudinal position here, "moral" realism, but a connection can nonetheless be drawn between "doing realism" and "being realistic."

[2] Johnson, quoted in Sar A. Levitan and Robert Taggart, "The Great Society Did Succeed," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 91, No. 4 (Winter, 1976-1977), pp. 601-618.

In the Hollywood mainstream, the vision of liberalism that characterized the New Deal era was one invested in critiquing "social problems," as the movies about race (as well as drug addiction, post-traumatic stress disorder, and divorce) were called.[3] The era of the "race film" is generally conceived of as ending in the early 1950s with the rise of McCarthyism and the House Un-American Activities Committee, and a revision of the "social problem film" occurs with the "message" films of the late 1980s and early 1990s.[4] But in the moment of the Great Society efforts, brought on by deindustrialization, economic problems following the oil crisis of 1973, and the purported end of Keynesianism, mainstream American cinema's attendance to "race relations" was mostly absent. Contemporaneously, producers of racially nationalist art and aesthetics struggled with the problems of "representation" – how to do justice to the historical present and its charged politics. Thinkers and artists who argued for a "Black aesthetic" directed their critiques toward Hollywood pictures, "western" art ideals, and canonical genres.[5] This

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[3] See Peter Roffman and Jim Purdy, *The Social Problem Film: Madness, despair, and politics from the Depression to the Fifties* for an overview of the social ambitions of liberal and leftist cinema; Marianne Conroy's "Acting Out: Method Acting, the National Culture, and the Middlebrow Disposition in Cold War America," *Criticism*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Spring, 1993), pp. 239-263, for her description of social problem films, method acting's call to realism, and middlebrow aesthetics; and Ralph Ellison's essay, "The Shadow and the Act," from *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John F. Callahan, for a discussion of some of the canonical social problem films like *Home of the Brave* and *Pinky*.

[4] "Message" films include *Jungle Fever* and *Boyz n the Hood*; the expression owes its popularity to Paris Barclay's satire *Don't be a Menace to South Central While Drinking your Juice in the Hood*, in which Keenan Ivory Wayans's character (a mailman) periodically appears to announce a "message."

[5] It is quite impossible to fully account for every project that considered itself engaging with a black aesthetics or performing a Black Arts, but practitioners included poets Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, and Hoyt Fuller; novelists like Ishmael Reed; playwrights like Adrienne Kennedy; and other kinds of intermedia artists and critics. Amiri Baraka, writing then as Leroi Jones, scribed the poem "Black Art" in 1965, which reads in part:

interplay of historical variables produced a multitude of conversations about aesthetics, genre, practice, and politics to which the artists of the Los Angeles School of black filmmakers responded.

The LA Rebellion group, or LA School, founded by a loose collective of filmmakers in the early 1970s at UCLA, offered a pointed critique of liberal "social problem cinema" and spoke to the problem of aesthetic production without "bad representations." For the group, different questions about the practice of representing reality, indexing national and urban belonging, self-documentation, labor, and everyday life demanded a dynamic aesthetic practice

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we want "poems that kill."
Assassin poems, Poems that shoot
guns. Poems that wrestle cops into alleys
and take their weapons leaving them dead
with tongues pulled out and sent to Ireland.
…
Poem scream poison gas on beasts in green berets
Clean out the world for virtue and love,
Let there be no love poems written
until love can exist freely and
cleanly. Let Black people understand
that they are the lovers and the sons
of warriors and sons
of warriors Are poems & poets &
all the loveliness here in the world

We want a black poem. And a
Black World.
Let the world be a Black Poem
And Let All Black People Speak This Poem
Silently
or LOUD

that stood accountable to a wide swath of aesthetic and political movements.[6] The LA Rebellion tends to be discussed in the scant critical literature either as anachronistic (Nelson Kim refers to Charles Burnett as a "one man African-American New Wave") or merely folded into narratives about the black aesthetic and black nationalist movements that were particularly important in Los Angeles in the 1970s.

The filmmakers in question, however – Gay Abel-Bey, Charles Burnett, Larry Clark, Julie Dash, Zeinabu irene Davis, Jamaa Fanaka, Haile Gerima, Billy Woodberry, and others – conceptualize their work in a variety of ways, emphasizing diverse influences and referencing a number of earlier filmmaking and aesthetic "schools." Furthermore, they put pressure on the problem of a cinema that produces easy answers – a cinema of "good representations" – and work toward a polyvalent, multiplied aesthetics.[7] When Charles Burnett asserts "we needed the spectrum," he describes how the force of his critique of social realist and proletarian cinema is directed at its seeming to arrive at a "solution": Burnett and his peers, members of the LA Rebellion school of filmmakers, document the ongoing problem of forming – and keeping – any

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[6] One of the better representations of this practice is Haile Gerima's habit of referring to his role in his film productions as "answerable," and not "director." The title frame for *Bush Mama*, for example, reads "Answerable: Haile Gerima."

[7] Charles Burnett notes, "So we were very conscious of knowing that's who the enemy was [Blaxploitation movies in the 1970s], so to speak. And then there were the seemingly positive images like Sidney Poitier movies, which were great but they spoke more to the white community than the black community. We needed the spectrum, the full range of the black experience. Then there were also attempts at being positive and political with social-realist pictures where the issues are very clear: for example, there's exploitation in a shop, the manager is exploiting the workers, so you have to have the people come together and form a strike. And then boom, you get your worker's rights, and everyone is happy. But it wasn't the case where I was living. And there were too many films I saw like that. And that troubled me equally as much as the black exploitation films." Interview with Nelson Kim, *Senses of Cinema* Issue 26.

semblance of belonging in cities after the "urban crisis" events of the 1960s and 1970s.[8] For Burnett, Woodberry, and others, the problem of chance – the organizing principle that works against plot or solution – holds up the diegetic logic of these pictures, particular to this era. *Killer of Sheep* and Billy Woodberry's *Bless Their Little Hearts* take as their central questions: how are we to get by when the institutions that intended to help us have failed us? Why must the terms of attachment to and documentation of minoritized groups be rewritten?

This chapter is an evaluation of these two films and the propositional "answers" they give to these questions – although it insists that these are not answers at all. It demonstrates how after the promise of the liberal consensus filmmakers like Burnett and Woodberry continue to evaluate belonging, despite the seeming impossibility of community among the urban ruins. Here, the works of the LA Rebellion pay homage to established, "old" and "new" Left modes of belonging, and engage in a collaborative project that underlines the productive aesthetic possibilities of "ruined space." Additionally, it will demonstrate how the commitment to a collaborative, improvisational style opens up new possibilities for the long-established *realist* mode and captures a practice of *narrative* autodocumentation: with their verité methods, short shooting schedules, and shoestring budgets, filmmakers like Burnett and Gerima participated in the now-lauded era of American independent cinema. For Burnett in particular, the drive to self-document through realist fictional cinema provides, ironically, an ideal location for collaborative politics: despite the seeming self-focus of the works, the assertion of community challenges the mere concept of a myopic "self-direction."

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[8] Sugrue, "Prologue."

Still, preserving the status of this movement as "minor" – resistant to and influenced by its moment's "New Waves," responding to and against a particular thread of Los Angeles black nationalism, critiquing American social problem cinema, evaluating and using Cuban, Senegalese, Brazilian, English, and other national realisms – retains both the collaborative and the exceptional dynamics of the movement. This description points to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's evocation of "minoritism": "the three characteristics of minor literature are the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation."[9] In Ilka Saal's discussion of Deleuze and Suzan-Lori Parks, she elaborates on minoritism in the context of Parks' "minor theater": for Deleuze, she suggests, "offers an entirely new answer to Jameson's inquiry into the political potential of postmodern art: 'it is the elimination of all occurrences of power in language and representation that enables theater to surge forward as something representing nothing but what presents and creates a minority consciousness as a universal-becoming' (256)." In the LA Rebellion, as we shall see, the "problem" of representation, and the question of how filmic language can operate within a mode of *chance* or *contingency* characterize a significant dynamic of their aesthetic and political response. For Burnett and Woodberry, the "languages" that Deleuze describes and Saal elaborates upon are both English and the structural language of the film; the modes by which their characters are tethered to a shifting political present; and the deployment of the notion of the collective in visual and affective registers.[10] Conceptualizing the LA Rebellion as "minor" demands de-prioritizing the entrenched notions of "schools" or "movements": it is essential not

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[9] *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* 18.
[10] The concept of filmic "language" originates with Christian Metz, probably in "Le cinéma: langue ou langage?" *Communication* Vol. 4, No. 4 (1964), pp. 52-90.

to enfold this project *simply* into American realism, American New Wave, or Black cinema, but to preserve as well its minor, resistant, and singular status.

Vernacular realism, ordinary aesthetics, and the net of influence

> JS: Sometimes your films seem to have the surrealistic quality – like the car engine in *Killer of Sheep*.
> CB: What you call is surreal is just an everyday occurrence… it's not exaggerated, it's just that strange things happen. There's more of that than anything else. What you call 'surreal,' it's just reality. Then what do you call that? Strange happenings in the community?[11]

Where we might see the "surreal" in Charles Burnett is in a scene like the one mentioned from *Killer of Sheep* or, at least, surrealism of a particular kind, that which exhibits an "extreme degree of immediate absurdity."[12] The absurdism that Stewart finds and Burnett acknowledges – these are "strange happenings in the community," if not exaggerated ones – points to how, for Burnett, the absurd is nestled in the everyday, where the comic/tragic are always two sides of one coin.

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[11] Conversation with Jacqueline Stewart, University of Chicago 9 May 2013.
[12] Andre Breton, *Manifesto of Surrealism,* http://www.tcf.ua.edu/Classes/Jbutler/T340/SurManifesto/ManifestoOfSurrealism.htm.

Figure 38. Unknown actor, Charles Burnett, *Killer of Sheep.*

In this scene from *Killer of Sheep*, the movie's protagonist and a friend buy a car engine from another acquaintance; after carrying it down two flights of stairs and failing to secure the engine in the back of their truck, the motor falls out of the truck bed and breaks. Their labors, it turns out, are for nothing. Entwined in this scene are the absurdism of the indoor engine; the irony of the engine falling out of the car; the anger at the loss of what would have been a revenue source. We see how Burnett, managing a number of affective registers and posing scenes that resolve in unsatisfactory ways, pulls into conversation a vast number of filmic and literary influences to illustrate "strange happenings in the community" and to establish a filmic language that rests on chance and "failed" possibilities in order to expose how aesthetic bricolage and political multiplicity are the most effective methods for accounting fully for the political and aesthetic moment of the postindustrial urban scene.

It is essential to establish how the LA Rebellion group came to fruition through the exposition of its influences, and to demonstrate how these entangled political and aesthetic

methods tend to arise in "post-facto" moments and spaces – postwar London and Rome, postcolonial Dakar, postriot LA. Background, framing, and scene-setting help us to understand the significance of how an endemic American realism can critique the social and political world of the 1970s and 1980s, the world at the moment of deindustrialization. When Deleuze suggests that decoupling representations from power "enables theater to surge forward as something representing nothing but what presents and creates a minority consciousness as a universal-becoming," he speaks to the LA Rebellion practice of multiple address: calling to itself as an aesthetic community, to its physical location, to its sense of "community" as mobile category, as well as to its historical moment. The LA film movement not only sits at the intersecting nodes of aesthetics and politics, it provides a case for the 20th century's emerging experiments in realism through improvisation.

When the practitioners of the LA Rebellion school establish their movement one of the irruptions that occurs is to cinematic genre. For Abel-Bey, Burnett, Dash, Fanaka, Gerima, Woodberry, and others, the practice of realism as an *experimental* project wherein *chance* is the structural logic, one contingent upon gesture and dedicated to the deprioritization of the "event" emerges as a response to the moment of crisis and a mechanism for collective enunciation. The mode of realism that these directors inhabit incorporates the global problem of late capital both by enfolding global influence and by responding in both explicit and implicit ways to how late capital and neoliberalism take hold. Furthermore, the cinema of the city, also an established tradition, serves as both a recorder of and narrative frame for the post-industrial moment.

I revisit the origin narrative of the LA Rebellion in order to demonstrate how its genres, styles, and claims contribute to the narrative of an *improvisational* realism, a method of calling upon the real world to provide the scene of political response, and a practice that characterizes its

political project as open-ended, unresolvable, and imperfect. Furthermore, in tracking how the movement came into being, it produces the conditions for throwing out the "margin/center" model because it demonstrates how the radical practice of the movement considered *both* as well as innovating a relation to space – the city in particular – that exemplifies the modern concern with "Nowhere."[13] The concern of margin/center, the production of Nowhere as epistemological and ontological problem, and the concern with the problematic category of "diaspora" – these underline how the LA Rebellion innovates a model of emergent realist practice.

First wave British documentary exemplifies the falseness of the dichotomy – long taken to be guaranteed – between the documentational and the modernist or avant-garde – a tenuous distinction that Burnett also addresses in the scene that opens this section. Bill Nichols notes, "The established story of documentary's beginnings continues to perpetuate a false division between the avant-garde and documentary that obscures their necessary proximity… The appearance of documentary involves the combination of three preexisting elements – photographic realism, narrative structure, and modernist fragmentation-along with a new emphasis on the rhetoric of social persuasion."[14] In Nichols's thinking, then, the documentary – even the early documentary – is necessarily the effect of social and aesthetic principles coming into collision. His persuasive thesis – that documentary and the modernist avant-garde are not movements so easily disentangled – allows us to think of the British documentary movement, with its attendance to the social order and concern with "everyday life," as contributing to the

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[13] See Thomas Dumm on Stanley Cavell and Anatole Broyard, "The Hipster is Nowhere."
[14] 581-582, "Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-Garde," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 27, No. 4. (Summer, 2001), pp. 580-610.

emerging aesthetics of later movements concerned with both radical aesthetics and radical politics.

Among the originating directors of the second wave of documentational practice in cinema were the British filmmakers of the 1930s. Films like *Coal Face* and *Song of Ceylon* establish a British documentary canon that influenced the LA Rebellion practitioners both directly and indirectly – Charles Burnett "was greatly influenced by… Basil Wright—the English documentarian famous for *Night Mail* and *Songs of Ceylon*" – Wright was also one of Burnett's teachers.[15] Although the British documentary movement thought of itself as resistant to aesthetics in favor of politics – John Grierson argued that "the affairs of our time should be brought to the screen in any fashion which strikes the imagination and makes observation a little richer than it was" – the practice of recording the ordinary nonetheless made aesthetic claims and influenced later practitioners.[16]

The British documentary movement's influence on the British New Wave – also called "Kitchen Sink Realism" – is the indirect link between British documentary and the LA Rebellion. One of the first documents of the movement, a manifesto printed in the program for a 1956 exhibition of films called "The Free Cinema," asserts, "No film can be too personal. The image speaks. Sound amplifies and comments. Perfection is not an aim. An attitude means a style. A style means an attitude."[17] Kitchen Sink Realism, as a movement, is part of the global New Wave in cinema of the 1950s and 1960s, and its styles and politics bridged the gap between

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[15] www.killerofsheep.com, accessed 24 February 2014. See also Ntongela Masilela, "The Los Angeles School of Black Filmmakers," in *Black American Cinema*, ed. Manthia Diawara.
[16] See Stephen Tallents's "The Birth of British Documentary Part I," *Journal of the University Film Association*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (1968), pp. 15-21.
[17] Quoted in Sean Martin, *New Waves in Cinema* 96.

an older British documentary movement and a realist evocation of ordinary life with a series of documentaries in the late 1950s, among them *Momma Don't Allow* (1956, a 22-minutes short about a night in a North London jazz club) and *We are The Lambeth Boys* (1959, about a South London social club for boys.)[18] Following these documentaries were a series of realist features, many of them adapted from plays. *A Taste of Honey* is Richardson's 1961 picture that won a host of BAFTAs as well as the Best Actor and Actress awards at Cannes.[19]

The film concerns a young woman, Jo (Rita Tushingham) who becomes pregnant after a brief relationship with a black sailor (Paul Danquah). Angry with her alcoholic mother, Jo leaves her house and strikes up a friendship with Geoffrey (Murray Melvin), a gay art student, asking him to move in to her small apartment. Jo's mother eventually finds her and insists that she return home; in the last scene Jo watches neighborhood children play around a fire while Geoffrey slips out of their apartment with a duffle bag. This is an ending typical of kitchen sink realism, and one that would also characterize the LA Rebellion – a fragile peace, an anticlimax.

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[18] The sociologist Richard Hoggart wrote of *Lambeth Boys*, in a review in *Sight and Sound*, "Your new film has no plot, no invented characters or dialogue and no imposed dramatic pattern. But it has one of the characteristics of art which distinguishes it from the documentaries I've mentioned. It does not seek to be objective, balanced, or comprehensive. It says nothing about juvenile delinquency, home relationships, personal problems, or private sex-life (though all these would affect the people in the film.) It sets out to show, not the whole truth, but some aspects of the truth, wholly. It is imaginatively committed and seeks to communicate, in the area it explores, a felt emotional depth." *Sight and Sound* (Summer/Autumn 1959): 164.
[19] Martin 108-109.

Figure 39. Rita Tushingham and Paul Danquah, Tony Richardson, *A Taste of Honey.*

A Taste of Honey moves through its microevents by pushing the characters through the bombed-out buildings and blighted streets of postwar London. While London in the early 1960s enjoyed exponentially greater investment in rebuilding than did Watts in the 1970s, nonetheless disorder inflects its energy on the city in this picture, which elucidates what Richard Hornsey calls the "new urban choreographies."[20] Furthermore, Kitchen Sink Realism's mode of deprioritizing the event in favor of mood or feeling may be thought of as its major contribution to the LA Rebellion. A much more explicit connection comes from the Senegalese, Mauritanian, and Ethiopian films that were said to influence Haile Gerima in particular (Gerima is himself Ethiopian; he emigrated to Chicago in 1968 and moved to Los Angeles for film school in 1970.) Ousmane Sembène's *Borom Sarret* and *La Noire de…* released in 1963 and 1966 respectively, as well as Med Hondo's *Soleil Ô* (1967) and Djibril Diop Mambéty's *Touki Bouki* (1973)

[20] *The Spiv and the Architect* 52.

introduced the rest of the moviegoing world to the cinema of (mostly) Francophone Africa. *La Noire de…*, Ousmane's first feature and among the first features to gain international recognition out of Africa, concerns a young Senegalese woman called Diouana (Mbissine Thérèse Diop), who is hired in Dakar as a governess for a white French family. This film is generally translated *Black Girl*, but the translation elides two subtleties of the original: "La Noire de…" implies both possessive – as in "[someone's] Black Girl" – and endemic, as in "The Black Girl from [somewhere]." These subtleties help to underline the problems that the movie wants to address – that of the "possessive" relationship between the domestic worker and her employer (and the employee/employer relationship more generally) and the place-bound problem of the Senegalese woman in France. When the family and Diouana move to Antibes, the terms of her employment change without her knowledge and she is expected to clean and perform other domestic labor. Frustrated and alienated, Diouana kills herself and her employer is forced to return to Dakar to break the news to her family.

Figure 40. Mbissine Thérèse Diop, Ousmane Sembène, *La Noire de…*

Diouana's suicidal rebellion, her "scene of quitting," demands that her employer confront Dakar, one of West Africa's oldest colonial cities and itself undergoing significant revision after its uneven journey to independence between 1960 and 1963.[21] The end of the film follows a convention that Charles Burnett will take up in *Killer of Sheep*: a masked child follows Diouana's employer through the streets of Dakar; the final shot of the movie is the child lowering his mask. The mask is one of the few objects that Diouana takes from Dakar to France, and she initially hangs it in the common room of the family's house until she reclaims it for her own room. After her death, her employer takes the mask with him to the city, and after finding Diouana's family, leaves it and her suitcase in their yard – he tries to offer her mother money as well, which the mother refuses to take – "gardez votre argent!" A neighborhood boy picks up the mask and holds it to his face, following the employer – "patron," in the movie – until the last frame. Seeing the child, the employer is forced to confront his participation in the economic arrangement of colonialism by seeing the mask – the mobile synecdoche of place for Diouana – as well as the child beneath it. Where Burnett both subverts and pays homage to the long tradition of the filmic mask, allowing the girl in the mask to have a multitude of symbolic references (or perhaps none at all), for Ousmane the mask occupies a more particularized symbolic logic, referring to a person, a people, and a place.[22]

Furthermore, the producers and directors of Senegalese and Mauritanian films also

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[21] See Cheik Faty Faye, *Les enjeux politique à Dakar (1945-1960)* (*Political Issues in Dakar*) for a description of events leading up to decolonization and its effects on Dakar.

[22] This is another tradition with a long and dense history in both the filmic and postcolonial African contexts. Ousmane Sembene is quite explicitly influenced by the philosophical writings of Frantz Fanon, and the mask as symbolic node appears in movies by a plethora of directors, from Luis Buñuel to George Lucas.

published treatises on how film should be disseminated, and circulated manifestos on African Cinema. Some represent the medium as a weapon, to be used either by or against African populations. In "What is Cinema for Us?" the filmmaker Med Hondo notes, "Cinema is the mechanism *par excellence* for penetrating the minds of our peoples, influencing their everyday social behavior, directing them, and diverting them from their historic national responsibilities. It imposes alien and insidious models and references, and without apparent constraint encourages our people to adopt modes of behavior and communication based on the dominant ideologies."[23]

Where the problem of "consciousness raising" arises, it meets with other models of "Third World" cinema – which, in the minds of some of the black radicals who participated in the LA Rebellion, was a useful globalistic model for the black experience in the US. Haile Gerima and Charles Burnett both note pulling aesthetic influence from Brazilian, Cuban, and Argentinian filmmakers. Discussing the nascence of the ideas for his 1976 *Bush Mama*, Gerima describes the movie's emphasis on an "aesthetics of hunger," a model that he explicitly borrows from the Brazilian Cinema Novo auteur Glauber Rocha.[24] Furthermore, the UCLA community, headed by Clark, Burnett, Gerima, and Dash, began the Third World cinema club in 1974. The club, funded by the university (albeit with some reluctance) screened films not only by Rocha

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[23] *Jump Cut*, No. 31 (March 1986), pp. 47-48. The Algiers Charter on African Cinema, from 1975, argues, "To assume a genuinely active role in the process of development, African [film] culture must be popular, democratic, and progressive in character, inspired by its own realities and responding to its own needs. It must also be in solidarity with cultural struggles all over the world… Within this perspective the cinema has a vital part to play because it is a means of education, information, and consciousness raising, as well as a stimulus to creativity." *Black Camera*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Winter 2010), pp. 165-167.

[24] Conversation with Jacqueline Stewart, University of Chicago 9 May 2013.

but by fellow Brazilian Nelson Pereira dos Santos, Argentinians like Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanes.[25]

The Third World Film Club also worked – and succeeded – to break the US boycott on all objects of Cuban cultural exchange.[26] This shift in policy allowed the Film Club to import such pictures as Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's pathbreaking *Memorias del Subdesarrollo* (*Memories of Underdevelopment,* 1968) and Humberto Solás's *Lucía* (1969). These aesthetic objects were supported by a vigorous defense of the "imperfect cinema," from which this chapter takes its title. Julio García Espinosa wrote, in 1971, "a new poetics for the cinema will, above all, be a 'partisan' and 'committed' poetics, a 'committed' art, a consciously and resolutely 'committed' cinema — that is to say, an 'imperfect' cinema. An 'impartial' or 'uncommitted' (cinema), as a complete aesthetic activity, will only be possible when it is the people who make art. But today art must assimilate its quota of work so that work can assimilate its quota of art."[27]

This diaspora of ideas, produced and forged in Cuba and South and Latin America and spreading through the Third and First Worlds, is visible in *Memorias del Subdesarrollo* in

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[25] Solanes wrote the radical manifesto *Toward a Third Cinema* in 1969, which begins with a quotation from Fanon and reads, in part, "The anti-imperialist struggle of the peoples of the Third World and of their equivalents inside the imperialist countries constitutes today the axis of the world revolution. Third cinema is, in our opinion, the cinema that recognizes in that struggle the most gigantic cultural, scientific, and artistic manifestation of our time, the great possibility of constructing a liberated personality with each people as the starting point - in a word, the decolonization of culture." Masilela 111 and *Toward a Third Cinema*, accessed via http://documentaryisneverneutral.com/words/camasgun.html, 25 February 2014.

[26] Masilela 110.

[27] Espinosa, *"Por un Cine Imperfecto," originally published in Cine Cubano 66/67 (1971); this translation, by Julianne Burton, originally published in Jump Cut*, no. 20 (1979), pp. 24-26. It is worth noting at this point that Espinosa, like a number of other Cuban and Latin American filmmakers and critics, was strongly influenced by the Soviet film movement of the 1920s and 30s as well.

peculiar ways. The film concerns a bourgeois Cuban man living in Havana, whose friends and family have all fled Cuba following the 1959 revolution – "Todos los que me querían y estuvieron jodiendo hasta el último minuto se fueron," he writes in his diary.[28] He finds Havana after the revolution difficult to recognize, and begins a relationship with a much younger woman, hoping to rekindle some interest in his own life and in his surroundings. He notes in voiceover, early in the movie, while looking at Havana through a telescope, "Todo es igual.... Aquí, todo es igual. Pero de pronto se ve como una senora fea, una ciudad de cartón... Sin embargo todo se ve tan diferente. ¿He cambiado yo o ha cambiado la ciudad?"[29] The loose plot is punctuated by images from newspapers, real headlines, still photographs, and documentary footage. It was the Cuban filmmaker's reliance on avant-garde methods, coupled with a radical politics, that inspired the filmmakers present at the Third World Film Club screenings.

Alea articulates the problem that the LA Rebellion takes up: "have I changed, or has the city?" Here, as well as for the LA Rebellion and for Kitchen Sink Realism, social and political factors converge with the aesthetic and affective problems produced in the postrevolutionary city.[30] With this continuance attendance to the urban scene, another point of reference for the auteurs of the LA Rebellion is the Italian neorealists of the 1940s and 50s. This is the influence that is most often deployed in formal evaluations of the movement – in interviews with Burnett

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[28] The US DVD primly translates this as "All those who loved and nagged me up to the last moment have already gone."

[29] Again, following the DVD translation, "Everything is the same… here, everything's the same. But suddenly it [the city] looks like a set, like a cardboard city… However, today everything looks so different. Have I changed, or has the city?"

[30] Havana in particular, but other parts of Cuba as well, shifted greatly after the Revolution because of the structural changes designed to reorganize the economy. See Joseph L. Scarpaci, Roberto Segre, and Mario Coyula, *Havana: Two Faces of the Antillean Metropolis*.

in *Senses of Cinema* and *Black Camera* the interviewers often call upon the Italian neo-realists, particularly Vittorio De Sica's *Ladri di Biciclette,* translated *The Bicycle Thief* or *Bicycle Thieves*. In an interview with Michael T. Martin and Eileen Julien, recorded at the New Orleans African Film and Arts Festival and published in *Black Camera*, Martin and Burnett discuss this dynamic.

> M: So you engaged Italian neorealism for your aesthetics, as well as for a way of framing the reality of the black experience?
> CB: Yes, more or less, even though I really didn't appreciate it until after I figured out what I wanted to do. That came about by the combination of two influences: looking at documentaries and thanks to my teacher in film school, Basil Wright. I was also influenced by, especially, Pare Lorentz's documentaries. The rhythm, cadence, and language of his films during the 1930s came together in a very poetic and informative way and more clearly than the neorealists. By his work, I understood better the process of integrating these different elements. By contrast, I was more influenced by the strength of the story in the films *Paisan* and *The Bicycle Thief*. Neorealism was unique because it gave you the illusion that it was simple in the use of basic terms, minimal dialogue and scenes, yet the films were very complicated.

Here we might borrow Burnett's terms and enfold "poetic" practice into the concept of style, one that Burnett characterizes as something like "poetic realism." Furthermore, the knotting together of Burnett and Woodberry with De Sica and Rossellini is also a dynamic of the desire on the part of contemporary critics to elevate the discursive and aesthetic projects of the LA Rebellion to that of the Italian neorealism. In his essays "De Sica: Metteur en Scène," published in *What is Cinema?* and "Neorealism and Pure Cinema: The Bicycle Thief," published in *Cahier du Cinema*, Andre Bazin produced many of the canonical terms for evaluating De Sica and neorealism generally. He praised the street scenes (none of *The Bicycle Thief* is shot on a stage), the nonprofessional actors, and the dynamic that recalls Deleuze and Guattari's assertions about the connection of an individual to political immediacy: "Clearly, and I could find twenty more examples: events and people are never introduced in support of a social thesis but the thesis

emerges fully armed and all the more irrefutable because it is presented to us as something thrown in into the bargain. It is our intelligence that discerns and shapes it, not the film. De Sica wins every play on the board without ever having made a bet."[31] The thesis emerging "fully armed" both despite and because of the emphasis on characterization occurs as well in Burnett and Woodberry: both *Bless* and *Killer* enfold the thesis of a universal class struggle into narratives about family and a particular section of Los Angeles.

Furthermore, the dynamics that Bazin praises in De Sica include the deprioritization of the "event" in favor of the ordinary.

> Few films have been more carefully put together, more pondered over, more meticulously elaborated, but all this labor by De Sica tends *to give the illusion of chance, to result in giving dramatic necessity the character of something contingent*. Better still, he has succeeded in making dramatic contingency the very stuff of drama. Nothing happens in *Ladri di Biciclette* that might just as well not have happened. The worker could have chanced upon his bicycle in the middle of the film, the lights in the auditorium would have gone up and De Sica would have apologized for having disturbed us, but after all, we would be happy for the worker's sake. The marvelous aesthetic paradox of this film is that it has the relentless quality of tragedy while nothing happens in it except by chance.[32]

Taking seriously Bazin's claims to "contingency," we can add another strand to the LA Rebellion's net of influence. This contingency, the constant force of chance motivates *Killer of Sheep* and *Bless Their Little Hearts* just as much as *The Bicycle Thief.* Again, this is one of the dynamics that characterizes what I've called improvisational realism: the sense that "nothing

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[31] He also notes: "In other words, a propaganda film would try to prove that the workman could not find his bicycle, and that he is inevitably trapped in the vicious circle of poverty, De Sica limits himself to showing that the workman cannot find his bicycle and that as a result be doubtless will be unemployed again. No one can fail to see that it is the accidental nature of the script that gives the thesis its quality of necessity; the slightest doubt cast on the necessity of the events in the scenario of a propaganda film renders the argument hypothetical." "Neorealism and Pure Cinema: Bicycle Thieves," *Cahiers du Cinema.*

[32] "De Sica: Metteur de Scene" 68, emphasis added.

happens… that might just as well not have happened" lends greater significance to the articulation of political questions through characterological methods.

When Billy Woodberry articulates that *Bless Their Little Hearts* is about "the universal working class," he explicitly references his connection to filmmakers of the old left, both by and about Americans. For Woodberry this aesthetic allegiance to street photography and old left documentary imprints itself on his films. Helen Levitt, who Woodberry explicitly references as a visual influence, was an American street photographer in the tradition of Vivian Maier, whose work is explored in more depth in the second chapter of this project.[33] Furthermore, she was a contributor to the few little-remembered street cinema projects like *In the Street*, a 16-minute short edited by Levitt and shot with hidden 16mm cameras by Levitt, Janice Loeb, and James Agee. Levitt's images, which might be characterized as professional snapshots or lyric street photography, present urban visions, often of children. She frequently captured children's street chalk drawings, calling attention to forms of tenuous and amateur art.[34]

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[33] Conversation with Jacqueline Stewart, University of Chicago 25 May 2013. See chapter two of this project.
[34] "Helen Levitt, Who Froze New York Street Life on Film, Is Dead at 95," *New York Times* 30 March 2009.

Figure 41. Untitled Photograph, Helen Levitt, 1939.

Levitt's trick-or-treaters refer yet again to the trope in documentary and realist modernism of the masked child or masked children – one that both Ousmane Sembene and Charles Burnett will take up later. In referring to Levitt's works as professional snapshots, we can see in this image the posing and tenuousness that characterizes her work. The carefully posing child at the right of the frame and the gesturing child of the far left of the frame enclose the child in the middle, who looks toward the camera but is unable to make eye contact through the obscuring mask. As is true in Sembene's *La Noire de…,* the mask here conceals the "true" (individual) identity of the children while revealing a different subjectivity – these children become tied to place more strongly that ontology. The masks that make these children alike on their New York stoop make them also "New York-ness," a quality that allows them to be enclosed in an arrested time and space.

In addition to Levitt and other "minor" documentary filmmakers like Sidney Meyers, Billy Woodberry underlines his influences in the American improvisational-realist avant-garde

of the late 1950s and early 1960s – he points in particular to Shirley Clarke's *The Cool World* (1963) and to John Cassavetes's *Shadows* (1959).[35] *The Cool World*, like Clarke's other pictures *Portrait of Jason* (1967) and *The Connection* (1961), centers around a narrative of New York, describing the struggles of a young black gang leader, Duke, and his efforts to resuscitate the reputation of his street gang, the Royal Pythons. In an early scene, a white teacher leads his black students on a tour of landmarks in Manhattan. He stops at Wall Street to show his students a statue of George Washington, trying to inculcate in them the impressiveness of treading on ground on which Washington walked when the country was "just one day old." The tour moves on from Wall Street, and the teacher continues his directives: "We're going to go to the stock exchange now. Eddie, make sure everyone has one of those pamphlets, 'Own a Share of America.'" The problem of "owning a share" is central to *Bless Their Little Hearts*: where in *The Cool World* the scene demonstrates how physically near and "a world away" are Harlem and Wall Street and the incapability of its characters to "own a share," the characters in *Bless Their Little Hearts* are barely even "workers," let alone "owners."[36]

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[35] Woodberry and Stewart.

[36] Woodberry's other reference is to John Cassavetes's directorial debut, *Shadows*; it focuses on three siblings, Benny, Leila, and Hugh, who drift through New York's hipster scene in the 1950s. Both an evaluation of colorism and race in the urban setting (the family is black but among the three Leila and Benny are light-skinned and Hugh is dark) and a sustained, improvisational meditation on the hipster moment, the film is both a major contribution to American independent film and a comment on racial politics – particularly interracial romance – in a moment in which race on film in the United States was dominated by the social problem picture. As is true for the LA Rebellion, particularly Larry Clark's *Passing Through*, but also *Bless* and a number of shorts like Woodberry's own "The Pocketbook," Cassavetes leans heavily on his jazz influences, both as a matter of aesthetics and to create the score. The movie famously closes with a text screen, which reads, "the film you have just seen was an improvisation." Furthermore, Cassavetes shows his own Italian neorealist sensibilities here, not only using a

While Woodberry's and Burnett's films are definitively independent and anti-mainstream, popular films by black filmmakers (as well as independent features that reached a larger audience than those of the LA Rebellion) also influenced this era and later moments in American cinema.[37] Ivan Dixon's *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* (1973), Mario Van Peebles's *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971), Gordon Parks's *Shaft* (1971), and Ossie Davis's *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1970) paid homage to the Black Arts Movement and inaugurated Blaxploitation, which was quickly co-opted after the success of *Sweetback* and *Shaft* by the Hollywood mainstream.[38] Burnett notes that Blaxploitation, despite its tendency to be apolitical, nonetheless opened opportunities for some black filmmakers.[39] Again, while the LA Rebellion practitioners critique the way that Hollywood pictures distort black aesthetics, the movement was

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number of non-actors (the characters and actors all share the same first names) but filming on location, mostly in tiny Manhattan apartments.

[37] Most criticism that falls under the category of "black American cinema" explores mass culture – Ed Guerrero's *Framing Blackness* focuses on early and classical Hollywood and their "othering" racial modes, as well as Blaxploitation and the late 20th century black movie boom, a movement which includes such directors as John Singleton, Reginald Hudlin, and some of Spike Lee's more "Hollywood" films like *Do the Right Thing* and *Jungle Fever*. Amy Abugo Ongiri's *Spectacular Blackness* explores popular culture after the Black Arts Movement, an evaluation that pays close attention to the conditions that helped to produce movements like Blaxploitation. The Valerie Smith-edited *Representing Blackness* takes a slightly different tack, attending carefully both to the theoretical exigencies and the context for black popular culture – the text does include a chapter on Burnett and one on Gerima. Manthia Diawara's *Black American Cinema* is a collection that takes not just a longer period of study (beginning with Oscar Micheaux and ending with Spike Lee) it also takes a more open approach to popular culture, exploring some independent cinema in addition to popular cinema. There are also excellent evaluations of early black cinema like Pearl Bowser et al.'s *Oscar Micheaux and His Circle: African-American Filmmaking and Race Cinema of the Silent Era* and of black participation in early cinema culture, like Jacqueline Stewart's *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity*.

[38] Mark Reid, *Redefining Black Film* 90.

[39] Quoted in Michael T. Martin and Eileen Julien, "Charles Burnett—Consummate Cinéaste." *Black Camera* Vol. 1, No. 1 (Winter 2009) pp. 143-170.

influenced very much by the notion of a "black aesthetic" that penetrated radical circles in the Black Arts moment. Larry Neal's "Some Reflections on the Black Aesthetic," Hoyt W. Fuller's "Towards a Black Aesthetic," Ron Karenga's "Black Cultural Nationalism" and other essays published in *The Black Aesthetic* and elsewhere describe an emerging theoretical standpoint that argued against "traditional Western" thought or aesthetic criteria and for a "motivated" art (a "committed" one, in the words of Espinosa) that cleaves to functionality, dismissing the "false doctrine of 'art for art's sake.'"[40] Among the members of the LA Rebellion, however, notions of a "black aesthetic" are not universal among practitioners of the movement. For example, when Fuller asserts that a black aesthetics begins with but goes beyond "that philosophy articulated by the late Frantz Fanon which holds that, in the time of revolutionary struggle, the traditional Western liberal ideals are not merely irrelevant but they must be assiduously opposed," he is posing a rather particular claim about the oppositional force that a black aesthetics asserts. It is also crucial to note how the filmmakers of the LA Rebellion were influenced by a notion of a black aesthetic *in addition to* a rich field of cultural production coming from Cuba, Italy, France, the UK, Senegal, Argentina.[41] Furthermore, the invocation of an aesthetics of suffering appears in a number of contexts and is important not to dismiss, although some critics like Karenga chafe against the notion of representing suffering – "we say the blues are invalid, for they teach resignation, in a word, acceptance of reality."[42] For the practitioners of the LA Rebellion

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[40] Karenga in Gayle, 32.
[41] Fuller in Gayle, 8. See also Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* for this term.
[42] Karenga in Gayle, 36. When Amy Abugo Ongiri quotes Cornel West as referencing "black nihilism," she is responding to criticisms of Larry Neal and others, implying that nihilism is present in a philosophical way in West. In fact, West's nihilism is explicitly an anti-philosophical one: *"*Nihilism is to be understood here not as a philosophic doctrine that there are no rational

movement, a "black aesthetics" takes on a multifold character – not only stridently political and responsive to its historical present, but meditating on suffering and loneliness, boredom and the inability to cope. More nuanced discussions of black aesthetics occur in the later scholarship of cultural theorists like Stuart Hall, Fred Moten and Paul Gilroy.[43] Hall notes, "By definition, black popular culture is a contradictory space. It is a site of strategic contestation. But it can never be simplified or explained in terms of the simple binary oppositions that are still habitually used to map it out: high and low; resistance versus incorporation; authentic versus unauthentic; experiential versus formal; opposition versus homogenization."[44] For the LA Rebellion, its contradictions constitute the vibrancy of its aesthetics and binary oppositions clearly reduce the movement and its significance. In particular, the polyvalent influences – Gerima's evocation of an "aesthetics of hunger," Woodberry's allegiance to an old left style – require retaining the

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grounds for legitimate standards or authority; it is, far more, the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important) lovelessness. This usually results in a numbing detachment from others and a self-destructive disposition toward the world. Life without meaning, hope, and love breeds a coldhearted, mean-spirited outlook that destroys both the individual and others" (West, *Race Matters* 14.) The critiques of West's assertion of "black attitude" have been many and rigorous; Eric Lott's "Cornel West in the Hour of Chaos: Culture and Politics in *Race Matters*" is the strongest (he argues, "this breathtaking misnomer [black nihilism], an allegation of felt black meaninglessness and destructiveness worthy of William Julius Wilson, evinces so little regard for the inherent resources of black cultural life that it is a wonder West has much faith in black folk as he does" (In *Social Text*, No. 40 (Autumn, 1994) 40.) While there is not space here for a rigorous consideration of "black nihilism" or "Afro pessimism" as either a philosophical or an experiential problem – assuming that these are separable in the first place – it seems important to acknowledge Ongiri's intriguing invocation of a "black nihilism" as expressed by members of the Black Arts movement as it may preserve not only the complicated philosophical discourse in which the community participated but also frame the strongly oppositional stance in terms that are both directed (against structures and institutions of racial dominance and terror) and diffuse (a general pessimism that permeated both art and criticism.)

[43] See Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*.

[44] "What is this Black in Black Popular Culture?" In *Representing Blackness* 128.

contradictions that Hall outlines. Another concept that helps to pose the question of how the LA Rebellion responds to and produces emergent politics and aesthetics is Paul Gilroy's (and Werner Sollors's) "populist modernism."

> A preliminary resolution of these problems may lie in embracing an aesthetic and political strategy that many black artists have evolved in an apparently spontaneous manner. I will call this option 'populist modernism,' [Gilroy's note five: I borrowed this term from Werner Sollors's study *Amiri Baraka/Leroi Jones: The Quest for a Populist Modernism*, Columbia University Press, 1978] a deliberately contradictory term which suggests that black artists are not only mindful of their historic obligation to interrogate the dubious legacies of occidental modernity premised on the exclusion of blacks. This distinctive aesthetic and ethico-political approach requires a special gloss on terms like reason, justice, freedom, and 'communicative ethics.' It starts from recognition of the African diaspora's peculiar position as 'step-children' of the West and of the extent to which our imaginations are conditioned by an enduring proximity to regimes of racial terror. It seeks deliberately to exploit the distinctive quality of perception that Du Bois identified long ago as 'double consciousness.' Whether this is viewed as an effect of oppression or a unique moral burden, it is premised on some sense of black cultures, not simply as significant repositories of anti-capitalist sensibility but as counter-cultures of modernity forged in the quintessentially modern condition of racial slavery.[45]

It seems, then, that "improvisational realism" or "imperfect realism" might be seen as the shadow of "populist modernism," a way of changing some of the frameworks to accommodate a particular mode of making claims on the world, as the members of the LA Rebellion group were explicitly trying to do. M. Lynn Weiss claims, "Gilroy argues that it is possible to reconcile the 'aesthetics of personalism and the matching politics of racial individualism' and that this reconciliation is best expressed by the idea of populist modernism."[46] By challenging and engaging with racial individualism and personalism, using and confronting modernism (which, as we've learned from Bill Nichols, is far closer to realism and documentary than we may have thought), and modeling an aesthetics of experimentation and improvisation, the LA Rebellion

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[45] "Cruciality and the frog's perspective," in *Diaspora Identities, Diaspora Aesthetics* 103.
[46] *Gertrude Stein and Richard Wright: The Poetics and Politics of Modernism* 7.

movement makes clear its significance to "black aesthetics," working-class cinema, and American independent cinema generally. The questions introduced by Cuban, Italian, and Senegalese cinema – "have I changed, or has the city?" – are reflected in the LA Rebellion, but so too are the mechanisms of chance and contingency that Italian, American independent, and English films introduce. And the LA Rebellion preserves a way of engaging with black aesthetics that doesn't take the category as unified or fixed, instead tying it to the open questions of how an aesthetic project can inhere with a political movement. It puts into play the category of imperfect realism to preserve its engagement with a diverse field of influences and to articulate its multifold aesthetics and affective politics.

Radical aesthetics and endless work: getting tired with Billy Woodberry

"I'm tired, I'm tired, I'm tired, I'm tired, I'm tired." *Bless Their Little Hearts*

In Billy Woodberry's 1984 *Bless Their Little Hearts*, a family of five learns what it is to labor.[47] Billy Woodberry, in fact, claims that the goal of the movie is a picture of the "universal working class."[48] The father, Stan, works as a day laborer sometimes; at other points he resorts to fishing in the Pacific ocean and selling the fish on the side of the road. The mother, Andais, works both within and outside of the home: the film includes scenes of her doing laundry and cleaning, although she mostly seems to fall asleep, expressing her exhaustion: on public transportation, at the dinner table, in a chair. The three children argue, attend church and school,

[47] The reference here is to Paul Willis's 1977 *Learning to Labor*.
[48] Woodberry and Stewart.

and boss each other around. The plot revolves around Stan's quest for employment; the film begins with a scene in an employment office: Stan is looking for a job. The camera meditates on the minutiae of bureaucracy: forms, writing tools, a sign that reads, "are you looking for a casual labor job?" We learn when and where a person has to be to be considered for day laboring.

The second scene – all of this occurring before the simple title frame – watches Stan in a long take that follows him through a railyard and the Los Angeles industrial landscape. The film – like *Killer of Sheep* – directs an abundance of its critique toward the postindustrial urban landscape but also attends to the urban scene as a node of visual inquiry by including such long takes. For Woodberry, an attentive recording of space, of the physical frame of reference, not only sets the location for the film but serves as a signifier for a strident political and economic critique and provides a backdrop for what Bazin, referencing De Sica, called, "The marvelous aesthetic paradox of this film… it has the relentless quality of tragedy while nothing happens in it except by chance." Los Angeles as a site of economic tension presents an unusual case – the literature on deindustrialized urban space focuses primarily on northern Midwest and Rust Belt cities.[49] But for Woodberry and Burnett, Los Angeles is both general and particular – mired in the effects of the neoliberal project of deindustrialization and yet "representing" only itself and its neighborhoods.

Bless hums with the energy of the most rigorous postindustrial critique; it happens also to be concerned with affects that serve as its foundation: physical and emotional fatigue in particular, but also low-grade anger that can have no outlet. When liberal commentators describe Watts – and they often do – as "miles away" from "white culture," they fail to acknowledge the

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[49] See Sugrue for his canonical analysis of Detroit's deindustrialization after 1945.

critique of inequality that pictures like this produce.[50] Failed prospects hang over every scene in *Bless*, although it's important to note that these aren't Charlie or Andais's failures but the failure of the city and its economy to keep alive industries that employ the working class.

They're also the failures of an urban development mentality that neglected redevelopment in Watts and other neighborhoods in South Central Los Angeles after the "race riots" in 1965.[51] The race riots figure into the evaluation of these filmic realist projects for a number of reasons: a desire to make sense of crises and, particularly, environmental destruction characterizes a number of movements in the realist tradition (like the Italian neorealist and Cuban radical cinemas) and connecting the LA Rebellion to long durée narrative about realism is essential to this chapter. Furthermore, the 1965 riots seem to be figured in the popular and academic imaginaries as a moment of the crisis of the left; Gerald Horne argues, "the repression of the left created an ideological vacuum that would later be filled by black nationalism, and this nationalism exploded in Watts in August 1965. This nationalism eventually had at least three strands: the Nation of Islam, 'cultural nationalists,' and the Black Panther Party; the first two assumed primacy during the 1960s, while the latter – which had ties to the reviled left – disappeared."[52] For the minor arts movements that flourished in post-riots South Central, critique of postindustrial capital in addition to a cultural nationalism were essential, although *Bless* makes a leftist critique that makes its connection to nationalism uneasy. Furthermore, because *Bless* is

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[50] Thomas Pynchon, "A Journey into the Mind of Watts," *New York Times* 12 June 1966.
[51] It's speculative to suggest that the boom in black movie production in South Central by auteurs like John Singleton in the early 1990s is also tied to a different set of "race riots," those following the acquittal of the officers who assaulted Rodney King, but worth mentioning that arts movements invested in a realist modality of recording South Central life flowered after both 1965 and 1992.
[52] *Fire This Time* 5.

filmed eighteen years after the riots, its concern is with the "post facto" – the environmental destruction that remains in South Central after a significant span of time. This distinguishes it and the other pictures of the LA Rebellion from films like *A Taste of Honey* – the absence of rebuilding, the persistence of wastelandscape, undergirds the economic critique.

Watts, where *Bless* takes place and was filmed, is in South Central Los Angeles, on the East side. The neighborhood began to develop between the 1920s and 1940s, as railroad workers and then factory workers began to inhabit the neighborhood. As is the case in a number of formerly working class mixed neighborhoods, the combined problems of white flight, deindustrialization, and institutional racism produced a crucible for alternative economies. Among the most cutting commentaries in the movie about the problem of economies both legitimate and underground comes about two-thirds of the way through, when Charlie is working one of his many temporary jobs. Here, he's painting houses.

Figure 42. Nate Hardman, Billy Woodberry, *Bless Their Little Hearts.*

The graffiti read, "Fuck Lil Brigs Big Spud Avalon Crips East/Side Crips," and appear on the side of a single-family home. Charlie, visible in the foreground of this still, paints the house white, covering over the graffiti. In this moment, in which the graffiti are made clear as a dynamic of a long shot, the film meditates on the text and its centrality to the movie's commentary. Filmed in 1983 and 1984, the movie sits on an important historical moment with respect to the economic history of Watts. The gang economies present in Watts at this time have an older-than-expected history in LA, going back at least into the 1960s and the post-Civil rights moment.[53]

Furthermore, there are a number of historical/aesthetic comments on life in Watts – a Life Magazine photo essay, discussed in the next section, attempts to "make sense" of the rebellion and its effects. But present to Woodberry's film and not to other means of discussing the economic realities of life in Watts after the riots is the presence of economic conflict *within* the community, another way of demonstrating, as for other pictures of imperfect realism, the problem of "chance." Charlie, looking for piecemeal work and trying to support a family, is in

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[53] Gerald Horne draws together the dearth of union organizing in southern California with the growth of a "gang ideology" predicated on the development of underground, corporatized commercial ventures: "Blacks [in the 1960s and 70s] were faced with a paradox: at the same time they were undergoing a proletarianization process in their move from the fields of Texas and Louisiana to the factories of Los Angeles, unions and working-class ideology were declining while the fundamentally middle-class ideology of the NOI [Nation of Islam] was ascending. This "Nation of Shopkeepers" ideology not only created illusions about the economic destiny of blacks, it also served to reinforce the passive acceptance of the decline of unions. Gangs, with their dream of emulating other racial and ethnic groups by constructing illicit commercial empires, played a similar ideological role. Significantly, both gangs and the NOI recruited heavily in prisons, where the Civil Rights Congress previously had chalked up some of its more important victories; with the decline of unions and working-class organizations there was a concomitant growth in the ranks of the 'lumpen proletariat and its own distinct ideology." [note 23, which quotes Marx, Engels, Jurgen Kuczynski, and Henry Winston's *Strategy for a Black Agenda*.] *Fire This Time* 11.

near-constant conflict about his refusal to turn to underground means of wage earning.[54] In an early scene, Charlie is playing poker with some friends, who are discussing ways to earn money when one suggests a robbery. Charlie responds:

> I don't want to do nothing that's going to separate me from them [his family]. See, I don't feel I'm no loser. I feel that basically all I got to do is look hard at my situation and just try and figure out what's going wrong. I must believe in God, because I feel that all this is just a test. See, I feel that there comes a point in a man's life where he has to make a decision between the spiritual and the material and we're always choosing the material. But, let me finish now, by saying that I believe, through a little faith.

This relative optimism – or, perhaps, reliance on the "spiritual" instead of the "material" – wanes through the course of the movie, in large part because of Charlie's unwillingness to verge off the straight and narrow when it comes to economic opportunity. The film makes clear, as Charlie is forced out of a traditional wage economy toward piecemeal and temporary work, that the problem of material conditions is so central to the lived experiences of its characters that remaining "on the books" may produce problems that exceed moral dilemma. "I must believe in God," Charlie muses, although this turn of phrase opens up the possibility of contingency – while Charlie wants to turn to "the spiritual," he is doubtful of its origin and understands that the microevents that the movie will eventually detail are uncertain.

The house painting scene speaks to the crux of this problem: the presence of underground economies – beginning to model themselves after corporations by 1984 – and the mutual presence of the worker with a desire to remain within the bounds of the law. When Charlie paints over the graffiti on the house he is working a one-day job, not one to which he will return during the movie. The individual names here matter far less than the presence of the "Avalon Crips" and

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[54] The phrase "underground economy" comes from Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh's illustrative *Off the Books: The Underground Economy of the Urban Poor*.

"East/Side Crips," which refer to the notorious street gang founded in the 1970s in the political vacuum left by the riots.[55] If by 1984 the Avalon Crips, a gang with a presence in Watts since about 1972, are established as an economic force in the neighborhood, the practice of erasing their tags marks itself as entirely futile – the erasure here being one of the *image* but never the structure.

Woodberry's film is, as he asserts, "about the universal working class," and its commentary necessitates presenting a multifaceted, unfolding portrait of economies both structural and minor. *Bless Their Little Hearts*, however, is concerned not just with economies both affective and postindustrial but with money itself. In the picture, exchanges of money reiterate how the problems of working and not working impinge on the psyches of the movie's subjects. In a scene about one-third of the way through the movie, the couple's three children are going to church on a Sunday morning. As they get ready in the kitchen, Andais tells the oldest daughter, "Your daddy's going to give you some money to put in the collection plate." She leaves the room and, encountering Charlie in the hallway, opens her wallet and gives him some change. He returns to the kitchen and gives each child a coin, after which each thanks him.

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[55] The debate continues among sociologists with respect to the moment at which the Crips in particular shifted from a model of radical belonging forged in the wake of the riots and inflected with a nationalist sentiment to a model of entrepreneurialism or corporatism. See Horne as well as Carl S. Taylor, *Dangerous Society* and Brenda C. Coughlin and Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh, "The Urban Street Gang After 1970," *Annual Review of Sociology,* Vol. 29 (2003): 41-64.

Figure 43. Kaycee Moore and Nate Hardman, Billy Woodberry, *Bless Their Little Hearts.*

Minor exchanges like this one – in which Andais gives Charlie money to give to their children so he can save face and appear to be the primary breadwinner – are the scenes of aesthetic import to this film and a number of others in the LA Rebellion. Attendance to small (ordinary) moments is essential to this evaluation, because attendance to ordinary moments is what characterizes the picture itself. The extra-close quarters of their home, the double framing that occurs here with the inclusion of the hallway walls, elevate the tensions of the picture, already introduced because of the thematic importance of cash. Again, this discussion of money between Andais and Charlie underscores how the diegesis attends at great length to how economic realities affect interpersonal, familial, and subjective affects.

In a number of scenes – between Andais and Charley, between Charley and his mistress, and between Andais and a friend of hers – the movie considers another node of exchange: sex and heterosexual relationships. After another job search letdown, Charlie encounters a woman called Rose, who he has known years before, in a Laundromat. He begins an affair with this

woman, but it swiftly becomes clear that their relationship has taken on economic terms in addition to sexual ones. Rose and her husband are estranged (the movie doesn't describe in detail the nature of their separation) and she is having difficulty managing both her children and her household expenses. In a scene that takes place some weeks after the beginning of their affair, Rose needles Charlie about the status of their relationship.

> Rose: I'm sorry to keep bringing it up, but my kids need a man around the house.
> Charlie: I have three kids at home myself, and I can't even be to them what I want to be... I thought around here I could forget about all that. I could just have a little peace, baby, a little time. I'm so tired. You know, baby, I got a lot of responsibilities right now that I can't handle. And you're talking about you – I can't help that.
> Rose: So what are you looking for – a freebie?

When Charlie begins the affair with Rose, it is clear that he is looking for an escape from his economic and domestic responsibilities – "I thought around here I could forget about that." But the conversation between them as well as the previous scene discussed, in which Andais gives Charlie money to give to their children, makes clear that the burden of economic management falls disproportionately on women. Despite Charlie's efforts to look for work – and it is clear that he is earnest in his search and willing to take nearly any kind of work provided it is legal – he has "responsibilities he can't handle." Andais is keeping their family afloat with her job, which is clearly exhausting, and Rose is left in the lurch to fend entirely for herself. Her plea to Charlie for monetary and domestic help is not viewed by the movie as a moment of chicanery but a demonstration of the difficulty of this neighborhood's economic reality. The conversation between them demonstrates the inequality between men and women in this movie's economic logic – his understanding that he might have a place where he "could forget about all that" is incongruent with her understanding of how heterosexual coupling "works" – in order for Charlie to continue to enjoy her company he must attend to her family's economic needs, at least in part,

or else he is looking for a "freebie." For Rose, as for Andais at their home, the hope for a place where she can "forget about all that" is clearly impossible – both of them are put in the position of constantly working, either within or outside of the home.

Andais, in fact, learns of Charlie's affair when she figures out that part of his paycheck from doing piecework clearing vacant lots has disappeared. She finds that the family is missing fifty dollars per week. She discusses this with a friend – also in a Laundromat – and their conversation exposes the stakes of extramarital affairs in the family arrangement.

> Andais: You know I'm good, girl. I know Charlie's got himself another woman. But I'm going to play on his conscience, going to make him feel real bad, just like the dog that he is.
> Friend: Listen, I haven't had sex with Bob [her husband] in almost a year. And I know that don't make him less man. I think I know that bitch didn't screw him. But I don't care, because I'm going to find me a young man, a fine, handsome young man. And what's more, if he sees us together I don't give a damn.
> Andais: You're going to wind up getting yourself hurt, maybe killed. You know they're jealous, and they spy on you, take on all kinds of head-trips. You ain't seen no hurt until you hurt his little manhood. Just wait until he calls you 'old, tired something or other.'
> Friend: Well, I guess I'll have to wait until I get hurt. I don't have a choice. I don't have no sadness, and that's what counts.

For Andais, the stakes of the extramarital relationship that her friend fantasizes about are bodily injury: "You're going to wind up getting yourself hurt, maybe killed." The narrative makes clear that money, sex, and family, all bound together by the structural inequality produced by advanced capital and exacerbated by the postindustrial urban ecology, produce divergent narratives for men and women. When Stan ventures outside of his marriage, he allows himself to think that his fantasy might be realized – that he might "forget about all that," meaning the money that he has to make to support his children. But when Andais's friend even fantasizes about an extramarital affair, the projection turns into a life or death narrative, one that she immediately accepts: "I'll have to wait until I get hurt."

Furthermore, these two discussions of sexuality and its effects also underscore Woodberry's critical project of evaluating structures of feeling in postindustrial Los Angeles – and again, the way that structures of feeling here are mechanisms of the overarching logic of chance, of the possibility that anything that does happen might just as well not have happened.[56] *Bless Their Little Hearts* analyses a community and family's sense of the seismic shifts caused by a crumbling local economy, and wrestles with what it perceives to be persistent values in an emerging economic moment. The movie's tensions build to a scene near the end, in which Andais and Charlie fight over their troubled marriage and the state of their finances. It is a long scene of around 15 minutes, and shot entirely in one take. According to Billy Woodberry, the scene is mostly improvisational; he speaks of responding to "their [the characters'] motives," and "their knowledge."[57] This experimental, improvisational method produces an unusual visual register – because it's shot in one take and by handheld camera, the camera is occasionally behind the action, moving from one actor to another after they begin to speak, sometimes cutting one of them out of the frame. The improvising camera and actors work in the same register here, responding in an appearance of spontaneity. The liveness, the imperfection, underscore the infinite possibilities of this scene's resolution – more than any other scene, the aesthetics of chance are visible here. Because of the tension in the scene and the shaky quality of the camera (and the lack of scoring) this scene resembles, more than any in the film, documentary. It cleaves to the aesthetics of the real in a tighter way than does most of the movie, whose realist aesthetics are owed primarily to the projects of recording everyday life, making claims about the moment

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[56] "Structures of Feeling," in *Marxism and Literature* 132.
[57] Stewart and Woodberry.

and its economies, and critiquing its historical present. When Andais finally confronts Charlie about his affair, she brings up the missing money in the first few beats.

> Andais: Where are you coming from?
> Charlie: What's wrong with everybody?
> Andais: 'Everybody?' It's just me. It's me that does without everything all the time. You leave part of your money across town. Don't try to make me think that I'm crazy, everybody's laughing at me when I leave this house.
> Charlie: You don't have no understanding, baby.
> Andais: What am I supposed to be understanding?
> …
> Charlie: I've been trying, I go out every day. I had a job.
> Andais: What am I supposed to do with 'my husband had a job'? Can I buy my kids shoes with 'my husband had a job'? I'm tired, Charlie. I'm tired, I'm tired, I'm tired, I'm tired, I'm tired.

Again, Andais's sense of fatigue permeates this scene, with its high tension, as much as the scenes with deep tension that attend to the microevents of family life. After this scene, Charlie tries to earn money by fishing the Pacific with some friends and selling the fish from one of their cars; the final scene is him walking away from their selling site through an empty lot. For Woodberry, the only way not to be flattened by the economic order is to walk away from it, despite the fact that this gesture – walking, or even running – does not allow anyone to become disentangled from the economic structure. Charlie can walk away, but toward nothing in particular, and away from a scene of exchange that is, in fact, inescapable.

Wasteland and landscape: getting Nowhere with Charles Burnett

> If film is to aid in the process of redemption, how does it work its magic? It seems that old question of why we are here, and not getting a satisfactory answer, makes man's fate intolerable. I think that it is the little personal things that begin to give a hint of the larger picture. The story has the effect of allowing us to comprehend things we cannot see, namely feelings and relationships. It may not give you answers but it will allow you to appreciate life and maybe that is the issue, the ability to find life wonderful and

> mysterious. If the story is such, film can be a form of experience, and what is essential is to understand that one has to work on how to be good, compassionate. One has to approach it like a job. Until there is a sharing of experiences, every man is an island and the inner city will always be a wasteland.[58]

Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep* has enjoyed much more critical attention than has *Bless Their Little Hearts*. Released in 1977, the film has since been rereleased and it one of the very few LA Rebellion pictures available on DVD – in this case, it's owned by Milestone Films.[59] So, despite the fact that *Killer* is considered "resurrected," as opposed to other films of the LA Rebellion, it is important to remember that the context of its distribution is still among "minor" films with relatively small audiences.[60]

In part, however, because of the rediscovery of *Killer*, and the relative exclusion of other films, Burnett's opus is considered anachronistic or a lone example of black filmic genius. In the article on Burnett in the "Great Directors" series in *Senses of Cinema*, Nelson Kim argues for Burnett's significance by pointing to his resistance to generic terms:

> [Burnett's] scenes remind us how eagerly the vast majority of movies—genre films, of one type or another—seek escape in melodrama and spectacle. Against this, Burnett would show us how to escape from mere escapism. Genre films by definition speak in codes easily accessible to the culture at large, and the more interesting ones can serve as powerful metaphors for social and psychological phenomena. But genre also can be a straitjacket to perception. It restricts the depiction of human behavior to a narrow range of acceptable clichés, and limits narrative to a series of stock situations. *My Brother's*

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[58] Charles Burnett, "Inner City Blues," in Jim Pines and Paul Willeman, *Questions of Third Cinema* 226.

[59] Milestone owns an extraordinary number of strange-but-excellent movies: from little-remembered early Hollywood pictures like *Beyond the Rocks* with Gloria Swanson and Rudolph Valentino and *The Cook* with Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle and Buster Keaton, to a vast collection of classical Soviet cinema, to the classics of the American underground like *Killer*, Shirley Clarke's *The Connection*, and Kent McKenzie's *The Exiles*.

[60] Milestone, in addition to *Killer of Sheep*, also owns *My Brother's Wedding*; Haile Gerima's company Mypheduh films owns most of his titles; Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* was initially released by PBS's *American Playhouse* and the DVD rights are owned by Kino Video.

> *Wedding* fits no genre. The film asks viewers to find *its* rhythm and move to it. What the Italian neorealists accomplished in the years after World War Two, and what a handful of daring Iranian directors have done more recently, Burnett—a one-man African-American New Wave—achieved with his first two features: he gave a culture, a people, a nation new images of themselves.[61]

Kim's description of Burnett captures some important dynamics of Burnett's work – he points to the critical attention that Burnett pays to the rhythms of ordinary life, describing *My Brother's Wedding* in particular but Burnett's other films as working against a "traditional" – here, generic – mode of measuring and presenting historical time. He points to the Italian neorealist tradition, which clearly has influence over many of these directors. But there are two major problems here – the first being the description of Burnett as a "one-man African-American New Wave," when the collaborate nature of Burnett's enterprise is clear from interviews, public conversations, and even the credits of his and others' films. This assertion – of the LA Rebellion as a "minor" movement – not only frames this material historically, it also demonstrates that Burnett, like Woodberry and others, makes movies at the intersection of a vast number of cultural movements. Furthermore, within the LA Rebellion the filmmakers do *not* universally agree on their influences and particularly on the centrality of those influences – Gerima's evocation of the Brazilian "aesthetics of hunger" sits in an uneasy relation to Woodberry's reliance on the aesthetics of the old left. The second problem with this evaluation is Kim's description of Burnett's pictures giving "a culture, a people, a nation new images of themselves." Because of the aesthetic and epistemological distinctions that exist *among* the members of this movement, the unificatory gestures "culture" or "nation" smooth out the important differences that exist *within* this movement. That Haile Gerima looks at his contributions as parts of an African

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[61] *Senses of Cinema.*

diasporan cinema and a Third Cinema, against cultural imperialism, does not place him as an outlier in relation to the LA Rebellion. Woodberry's trenchant analysis of class structures and attendance to the small moments of the postindustrial city have a significant tie to the city-based evaluations of some cinemas of "the African diaspora," but that makes them no less embedded in this movement.

Killer of Sheep concerns a Watts family and the relationships among the parents, children, working community, and social community. Henry Gayle Sanders plays Stan, who works at a slaughterhouse and otherwise tries to keep his family financially afloat by looking for side projects. Kaycee Moore (the same actor from *Bless Their Little Hearts*; she also went on to star in Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* and is, like Barbara O, one of the actors who appears repeatedly in LA Rebellion pictures) plays Stan's wife, who remains unnamed. Her struggles are primarily household, and she manages the care of the couple's children, Stan, Jr. and Angela (Jack Drummond and Angela Burnett).

If the 1960s in some sense manufactured a sense of possibility about radicalism (Burnett says, "it was a radical time") and produced an image of the future as potentially fruitful, *Killer of Sheep*, particularly as a film of the mid-1970s, takes place after the end of a revolution that never really arrived. Los Angeles as a "post-industrial" city occupies a particular location: because factory industry was relatively short-lived here (beginning during the second World War and lasting, unevenly, until the 1980s) the strong union presence of Rust Belt cities like Detroit and Pittsburg never really appeared in LA.[62] As is clear from the discussion earlier in this chapter of the 1965 rebellion in Watts and the resultant images that this conflict produced in the extended

[62] See "Prologue" and "The Hammer and the Rock" in Mike Davis, *City of Quartz*.

period of time afterward, this particular part of East South Central was also deeply affected by the withdrawal of even small industries from this area after the riots and the police state that infringed upon the lives of the residents thereafter – a withdrawal of institutions that continues to this day. The photo essay in Life Magazine – called "The Fire Last Time: Life in Watts, 1966" – characterized Watts as "seething":

> *Watts seethes with resentments. There is anger toward the paternalism of many job programs and the neglect of Watts' needs. There is no public hospital within eight miles and last month Los Angeles voters rejected a proposed $12.3 million bond issue to construct one. When a 6-month-old baby died not long ago because of inadequate medical facilities, the mother's grief was echoed by a crowd's outrage. "If it was your baby," said a Negro confronting a white, "you'd have an ambulance in five minutes."*[63]

What Life Magazine neglects in its article is the "populist modernism" that Burnett brings to the picture – the images that Life uses as "representative" are charged with the causal logic that Life tends to bring to most of its subjects. While the subjects of the images may be similar to Burnett's, these images are "documentary" in the stricter sense: an effort at social problem photography, and frame the children captured in them as problematic, "seething."

[63] The original Life issue was titled, *Watts: Still Seething* and published in July 1966.

Figure 44. *Life Magazine,* unknown subjects, photograph by Bill Ray, July 1966.

One of the similarities, however, between the Life Magazine images and *Killer of Sheep* is how the lack of industry and attendant opportunity is noted in the visual register in particular spatial ways. Like *Bless Their Little Hearts*, *Killer of Sheep* attends to the urban setting as wastelandscape. This trope, the urban-Los Angeles space of Nowhere, appears in a multitude of media after the riots.

Figure 45. Running Still, Charles Burnett, *Killer of Sheep.*

The above image is from the first several minutes of the picture; in it, neighborhood boys are running alongside the camera. In the next minute, they're throwing rocks at an industrial train.

Figure 46. Train Still, Charles Burnett, *Killer of Sheep.*

The first of these images illustrates the DVD, and is one of the more recognizable images from the picture. Together, these two microscenes begin to produce the economic atmosphere of the

movie: the dusty urban landscape of Watts in the first and the flat trainyard in the second. The train (and its tracks) also figures in *Bless Their Little Hearts*, of course: Charlie traces a path through the trainyard on his way home from the employment agency. These scenes are both typical and unusual in Burnett's work: typical in that they pay sustained attention to people as part of a visual urban landscape and unusual in that they are not accompanied by musical scoring; it seems, in fact, that Burnett's fondness for difficult-to-acquire music was one of the variables that delayed the release of *Killer* to DVD.[64] It is here, as well, that we might see another dynamic of Burnett's structural register: trains *refer* instead of *represent*: they serve to remind the audience of the movement of industry not to but through the neighborhoods in question.[65] The boys throwing rocks at the train, at least here, seem to be less up to mischief as bored; in the next scene, when one of the boys wants to go "down to the Brixton Club to watch the hos go in and out," it's clear that the interest is curious, even prurient, but not aggressive.

Additionally, by starting his movie in this mode, with diffused characterization, Burnett points to the significance of the neighborhood and the community as constitutive of the narrative, perhaps even bearing equal significance as the family that gets more of the movie's attention. It's not until several minutes into the movie that Stan Jr. peels away from his peers and heads for home: "I'm going to get my BB gun."

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[64] www.killerofsheep.com.
[65] See Roman Jakobson, "Two aspects of language and two types of aphasic disturbances," from *On Language*.

Figure 47. Jack Drummond, Charles Burnett, *Killer of Sheep*

In this moment, as registered in the screen still above, Burnett's investment in developing deep tension, atmospheres of feeling, and anti-plot is evident. In the above image, Stan Jr. is lacing up his shoes and telling his friends that he is going to get his BB gun – this promise is not, in fact, delivered upon: Stan Jr. returns home, where he finds his father fixing the kitchen sink. Another element of anti-plot development is that the other boys are working together to push a train car over one of their group – one of the boys is lying under the wheels while others are trying to move the car. In generic filmic language, the "promise" here is that this kind of dangerous activity needs to resolve itself in injury or near-injury to one of the children; Burnett manufactures the scene such that none of the children are injured here – in fact, the audience does not actually get to witness what happens with the train car, instead joining Stan Jr. as he heads home. This is what is meant by "deep tension" and by "anti-plot," both of which are functions of *Killer of Sheep*'s logic of contingency: Burnett not only finds expectations in his audience in which he refuses to participate, he demands that the audience itself recognize its

moments of expectation. On his way back home, additionally, Stan Jr. witnesses a pair of men stealing a TV, another element of "plot" that would, in movies that follow generic convention, need resolution. Here, however, the men get away with the TV.

The early scene of the men stealing a TV presages the movie's central concern: Stan works at a slaughterhouse, doing difficult and physically tiring work, but the labor barely sustains his family. Where in *Bless Their Little Hearts* the effects of labor and worklessness make Charlie restless and Andais exhausted, in *Killer of Sheep* the bulk of the labor falls on Stan and the effects of his fatigue and anxiety radiate into the rest of the family. The affective universe rests on fatigue, low-grade anger, and dissatisfaction in both pictures, but Stan is the most *visible* node in a network of affective relationships, and his tiring efforts to better support his family and near-constant anxiety (he is often unable to sleep; he has lost his sex drive) permeate all of the characters to greater or lesser degrees. In *Bless*, the anger, guilt, resentment, helplessness, and fatigue that characterize the relationship between Andais and Charlie become the mechanism for seeing more general affective economies. Minor literature and minor cinema argue for "the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation," and these two films demonstrate the different possibilities for how the individual can be tethered to a political immediacy – a couple's strife serves to open up one movie's political register where in another an individual's feelings and multitude of interactions become the site for an affective politics.

Stan's efforts, like Charlie's, work within legitimate and underground economies. He is also invited into more dangerous illegal labor, which exposes again the problem of morality and work. Stan's friends Smoke and Scooter invite him to be an accomplice in a murder they are planning, an offer he declines. When Stan's wife overhears this offer she confronts his friends.

> Stan's wife: Why you always want to hurt somebody?
> Scooter: Who me? That's the way nature is. I mean, an animal has his teeth and a man has his fists. That's the way I was brought up, god damn me.
> Smoke: Right on.
> Scooter: I mean, when a man's got scars on his mug from dealing with son of a bitches everyday for his natural life. Ain't nobody going over this nigger, just dry long so. Now me and Smoke here, we're taking our issue. You be a man if you can, Stan.
> Stan's wife: Wait! You wait just one minute! You talk about being a man and standing up. Don't you know there's more to it than with your fists, the scars on your mug, you talking about an animal. Or what? You think you're still in the bush or some damn where? You're here. You use your brain; that's what you use. Both of you nothing ass niggers got a lot of nerve coming over here doing some shit like that.

As *Bless* did, *Killer of Sheep* pushes hard against notions of masculinity – Scooter's insistence that his masculinity is bound up with scars and fighting, Stan's wife's argument that "you use your brain." And Burnett's masterful composition underlines the complicated politics of this scene.

Figure 48. Homer Jai, Johnny Smoke, Henry Gayle Sanders, and Kaycee Moore; Charles Burnett, *Killer of Sheep.*

Smoke and Scooter stand over Stan and Stan's wife appears behind the screen door. What at first appears to be a composition about a two-sided power struggle – Smoke/Scooter versus Stan's

wife over Stan – might also be seen as a composition that rests its emphasis on Stan and his wife as a united front, particularly given that they're both at the center of the frame. Her presence here, particularly given her argument about "talking about an animal," underlines the movie's assertion that the dichotomous relationship that it's interested in exposing is not between men and women or between men and "not men," but between men and "animals," a relationship that is characterized by differences in vulnerability to base instincts, by power imbalance (particularly in slaughterhouse scenes), and by a distinction, perhaps illusory, between "predator" and "prey."

It is, then, the slaughterhouse scenes, the killing of sheep, that provide the microconflict that points to how labor impinges itself on affective atmospheres, and how working at killing exposes the precarity of the character and community. There are three primary slaughterhouse scenes, one that occurs early in the movie, one about three-fourths of the way through, and one that is the picture's last scene. The scenes are shot without dialogue – not unusual in this film – and they are all scored – with Gershwin, Rachmaninoff, and Dinah Washington's "This Bitter Earth." The composition lingers over the work of killing sheep: showing Stan and others pushing sheep up a ramp, hauling organs, moving suspended sheep that have been bled.

Figure 49. Henry Gayle Sanders; Charles Burnett, *Killer of Sheep.*

It seems clear that the act of killing, which appears mundane in these scenes, inflects other aspects of this character's (and therefore these characters') lives. In an early scene in which Stan admits to his friend Bracy that he hasn't been sleeping, Bracy replies, "counting sheep." This moment points to the conflict that the movie allows to unfold – work pervades sleep, absorbs, and isn't nearly enough.

Working through realism; realism of working

The entangled aesthetics and politics of the LA Rebellion demand a reconsideration of the terms of American realism such that the mode includes the gestures of improvisation, experimentation, and attendance to moments of deep tension. Considered in this way, *Killer of Sheep* and *Bless Their Little Hearts*'s realism – imperfect, revisionary, and engaged with a political project without easy answers – is not just one borne of an allegiance to the methods of the Italian neorealism but a project devoted to the evocation of the most minor happenings.

When Stan's daughter Angela takes on the dog mask in *Killer of Sheep,* her performance of a modernist trope both references and undercuts the masks of previous works: Helen Leavitt's children who we come to recognize spatially, and the child in *La Noire de…*, whose being obscured reveals how the movie insists on the centrality of indigeneity, on the mobile site of "home."

Figure 50. Angela Burnett and unknown actor; Charles Burnett, *Killer of Sheep.*

Angela's mask might, in fact, "mean" nothing – in defiance of the tradition in cinema that insists that visual particularities serve symbolic ends, Burnett inserts a potentially charged image to call attention to how the movie resists strictly symbolic readings. Angela is not an indicator of "place," nor strictly representative of a larger problem, as the children are in the Life magazine photograph. The mask refers without representing, pulls apart the mechanisms of filmic causality, and serves as an indicator – not a symbol – of chance.

In this context, a mode of experimentation and attendance to ordinariness that holds up an emergent realism takes on the problem of how to represent or be represented, as characters,

individuals, or "a people." Responding to a pastiche of influences, Burnett's and Woodberry's movies insist on a realist project that records without an insistence on a solution, a very different version of realism than that of previous schools of thought. It is in part for this reason that it is crucial to preserve the "minor" status of the LA Rebellion – its methods demonstrate how the emergence of experimental forms of realism demands a reconsideration of the term. These pictures and others of the LA Rebellion, to return to Deleuze, are where film "surge[s] forward as something representing nothing but what presents and creates a minority consciousness as a universal-becoming."

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