

**AMERICAN MULTITUDES: IMMUNITY AND CONTAGION AT THE TURN  
OF THE CENTURY**

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By  
Phillip Mahoney  
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Examining Committee Members:

Daniel T. O'Hara, Advisory Chair, English  
Alan Singer, English  
Sheldon Brivic, English  
Donald Pease, External Member, Dartmouth University

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## ABSTRACT

In 1895, French sociologist Gustave Le Bon proclaimed the era of crowds upon us, in his influential work, *The Crowd*. Le Bon's work was translated into English a year later, inspiring a number of similar works by American sociologists, and almost singlehandedly creating the discipline of crowd psychology. Interest in the new masses was not limited to sociologists, however. Due to advances in transportation and communication technologies, and the rise of the city, the problem of "man in the mass" came to pervade the atmosphere of America, at the turn of the twentieth-century.

Thus, American writers also wrestled with the difficulty of representing this catch-all entity "the crowd," often speculating about what the psychology of the crowd might mean for the future of democracy. But, whereas early crowd theory was overwhelmingly conservative in its depiction of the crowd mind as a site of primitive impulses, irrational emotions, and affective contagion, authors like Frank Norris and Sherwood Anderson, though largely ceding to this description, saw in the crowd the possibility for an entirely new social consistency.

Contrary to sociological prescriptives designed to brace the individual against the imminent threat of crowd contagion, however, Norris and Anderson identify what contemporary theorist Roberto Esposito terms the "immunitary regime" as the true difficulty to overcome. For Esposito, the biopolitically engendered immunitary *dispositif* protects modern individuals from "a risky contiguity with the other, relieving them of every obligation toward the other and enclosing them once again in the shell of their own subjectivity" (*Terms* 49). It is this hard shell of subjectivity that Norris and Anderson attempt to break down in their works.

In this way, the two authors represent a small segment of a genealogical thread in American fiction—one stretching from Whitman, to Steinbeck, and beyond—that takes a

gambit on what Badiou calls the “communist hypothesis.” Perhaps most importantly, though, the texts of Norris and Anderson demonstrate, either deliberately or otherwise, that such a gambit must preclude any recourse to substantialist notions of innate gregariousness, primitive sympathy, or herd instinct. Thus, while refusing to endorse the immunitarian paradigm as the final word on being-together, Norris and Anderson demonstrate how we must work and think *through* immunity to arrive at an adequate concept of collective life in the modern era.

While other studies of the crowd or the masses often ask what the multitude *stands for*, in a metonymical or metaphorical register, this one asks how it is formed, how it functions, and what it could mean for the possibility of collective life in modernity. Similarly, whereas other studies often judge a particular representation of the crowd against a preformed model of what constitutes the properly political, the following study attempts to unearth the crowd’s immanent possibilities to potentially change those very models.

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## CHAPTER 1

### THE UR-SCENE OF MASS PSYCHOLOGY

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, in a chapter titled, “Walking in the City,” Michel de Certeau begins, contrary to the title’s suggestion, rooted to the spot. The spot is none other than the top of the World Trade Center, from which Certeau’s narrative persona looks down on “the most immoderate of human texts” (92). At this Icarian height, Certeau reflects,

One’s body is no longer clasped by the streets that turn and return it according to an anonymous law; nor is it possessed, whether as player or played, by the rumble of so many differences and by the nervousness of New York traffic. When one goes up there, he leaves behind the mass that carries off and mixes up in itself any identity of authors or spectators [...] His elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was “possessed” into a text that lies before one’s eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god. The exaltation of a scopic and gnostic drive: the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more [...] The voyeur-god created by this fiction, who, like Schreber’s God, knows only cadavers, must disentangle himself from the murky intertwining daily behaviors and make himself alien to them. (92-3)

Here Certeau describes what I would like to call the Ur-scene of sociological and literary representations of “the many.” This scene, with the “author” or “spectator” standing aloft, looking down upon the dense, tangled “mass” below, repeats itself with uncanny insistence in American literature of the crowd, each time with a slight variation. In some permutations, the setting is not New York, but Chicago; the setting may not be urban at all, as in Norris’ *The Octopus*, where the aspiring poet, Presley, gazes down on the broad plains of the San Joaquin and tries to conceive of a poetry for the “People”; the “crowd” is sometimes a procession of marchers, a group of miners ambling home after work, or a loose agglomeration of shoppers; and sometimes, as in the final moments of *Winesburg, Ohio*, there is not just one spectator, but two. But in all of these variations, we can detect the presence of a certain foundational distribution of bodies and a gaze.

In the above passage, Certeau links the Ur-scene to nothing less than the whole of the Western episteme. Did not Descartes, in a move that predicts the schizophrenia of Judge Schreber, gaze down from his window and imagine that he saw automatons shuffling in the streets below? As this example makes clear, however, we are not talking simply about a relationship between an observing subject and an object, but one between a subject and subjects. This is the Ur-scene of social relations, the seemingly necessary starting point of a conception of the many.

In *The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (1991), Dana Brand isolates many instances like this in an effort to identify how the European figure of the *flâneur* was incorporated and revised in American literary texts. Even though the *flâneur* is typically thought of as someone who is at home among the bustling crowd, who finds it, as Baudelaire writes, “an immense joy to set up house in the heart of

the multitude” (qtd. in Brand 5) this is only one side of his relation to the crowd. As often as he is a part, he is apart. We find him seated, like the narrator of Poe’s “Man of the Crowd,” at a café where he can gaze, unmolested, at the passing throng. We find him, in *The House of the Seven Gables*, looking down from a second story balcony, or, in “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” gazing down at the “flood-tide below.” In fact, it seems that no matter where he is, the *flâneur* is always in the same place. He may, as Baudelaire says, “feel everywhere at home” (Brand 5), but this is because he is at home nowhere, because he is always in a sense insulated from the world and the people around him.

As Certeau points out, “Medieval or Renaissance painters represented the city as seen from a perspective that no eye had yet enjoyed” (92). The earliest aerial, or bird’s eye view, renderings of cities required the artist to project himself up and out of his place of immanence, to imagine himself floating high above the streets upon which he tread. Similarly, the actual physical location of the *flâneur* is of secondary importance. Even as the *flâneur* is jostled by the crowd, he is able to hover safely above it. This transcendent, voyeuristic relation to the world “below” is, as one begins to see, not the exclusive domain of the *flâneur*, but, I will argue, something much more generalized and pervasive, a kind of condition of modern subjectivity itself. The French collective, Tiqqun, christen this disposition, “the Bloom,” after the famously alienated protagonist of Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Whereas the *flâneur* is not only a quintessentially nineteenth century figure, but a quintessentially urban one, the Bloom covers all of modernity and, through what we might call a kind of metaphysical sprawl, begins to pervade the countryside and the small town, as well. If the *flâneur* is a historical reality, the Bloom is a metaphysical one, less a “subject,” and more a *Stimmung* or tonality of being (*Theory* 15). Even though

the *flâneur* and the Bloom are paradigmatic figures of alienation and immunity, I will argue, even though they express so clearly Sloterdijk's claim that "humans are the beings that establish globes and look out on horizons" (28), they nevertheless stand as the necessary precondition for modern collective life.

Brand makes clear that American writers of the nineteenth century were responding to and revising the European tradition of literary *flânerie*. Hawthorne's sketch, "Sights from a Steeple," is an obvious early example. Here the narrator climbs to the top of a steeple and describes his panoramic view of the scene below, in which he can "discern cultivated fields, villages, white country-seats, the waving lines of rivulets, little placid lakes," and so on (*Tales* 42). As if at the center of a panopticon, he fancies himself "a watchman, all-heeding and unheeded," and reflects that "the most desirable mode of existence might be that of a spiritualized Paul Pry, hovering invisible round man and woman" (43). The desire to be a transparent eyeball, this "lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more" (Certeau 93), is, as Brand points out, "classic in the literature of the *flâneur*" (108-9).

The narrator goes on to observe three processions, "converging," from two different streets, "at right angles towards [his] watch-tower" (45). On one street is a band of voluntary soldiers, followed by a "battalion of school-boys" (45). On the second street is a funeral procession. From the narrator's height "differences are scarcely perceptible," however (45). It is difficult to tell the men from the boys; the funeral procession and the marching soldiers "excite identical reflections" (45). Details vanish, at such a vantage, so that even a somber funeral procession becomes merely cute, and marching soldiers appear "toy-like" (45).

In reference to another of Hawthorne's crowd scene, in *The House of the Seven Gables*, Mary Esteve argues that Hawthorne uses a motley procession to provide an illustration of what she terms the "mimetic sublime" (Esteve 17). In "Sights from a Steeple," by contrast, Hawthorne has situated the aesthetic experience in the realm of the beautiful, if not simply the agreeable, or the good. As Brand notes, the narrator of "Sights from a Steeple" "observes a world of social order, of extreme propriety" (109). Following Benjamin, Brand argues that one of the primary services provided by the *flâneur* is to turn the confusing welter of urban experience into a legible text. The *flâneur*'s job was to "impose order upon the potentially disorienting diversity of the city, by reducing it to accessible images that could be collected and consumed" (Brand 7). While Hawthorne's narrator turns the soldiers into toys in a shop window (45), the ability of the narrator in Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" to sort out each individual in the passing throng according to his profession, must have assured readers that, in the words of Walter Benjamin, "life in the big city was surely not as disquieting as it must have seemed" (Benjamin 71).

From the Icarian height of the steeple, troubling particulars melt to create a gratifying, totalizable homogeneity. Similarly, in *The House of the Seven Gables*, the narrator reflects, "In order to become majestic, [a procession] should be viewed from some vantage-point [...] for then by its remoteness, it melts all the petty personalities, of which it is made up, into one broad mass of existence—one great life—one collected body of mankind, with a vast, homogeneous spirit animating it" (*House* 165). In scenes such as this we find the literary counterpart to, what, at the time, were the hugely popular bird's eye view drawings of the burgeoning American city. While life on the ground

presented a confusing overload of new stimuli, literary and visual representations of the city offered the viewer, what Lydia Maria Child calls a “sheltered nook,” from which one can exercise a disinterested aesthetic detachment.

Lydia Maria Child’s *Letters from New York* (1843) actually shows both parts of this operation, as Child’s narrative persona oscillates from an embedded perspective, in which she is immersed in the crowds of the city’s streets, to a transcendent one, from which she is able to gaze down at those very same streets and contemplate “the Infinite” (10). Child constructs a series of oppositions—public/private, city/country, many/one, below/above—whose rigid dichotomy she is never quite able to overcome. Descending to the street, she is overwhelmed with the “dense crowding of human existence” (44). Just as the narrator of *The House of the Seven Gables* imagines the procession below as a homogeneous totality, Child, on the street, experiences a “sensation of vanishing identity,” as if she were an “unseparated drop in the great ocean of human existence” (44). Her individual self, we are led to believe, would be “swallowed up” and merged with the “Great Mundane Soul” (44), if it weren’t for her ability to retreat to the “shaded alcoves” of New York’s “public gardens” (10). Thus, whenever she becomes overwhelmed by the “din of crowded life,” Child’s persona flees to the Battery, the Bowery, or Staten Island, where she is able to gain a panoramic perspective on the city:

From the high grounds [of Staten Island] three hundred feet above the level of the sea, may be seen a most beautiful variety of land and sea, of rural quiet, and city splendor. Long Island spreads before you her vernal forests, and fields of golden grain; the North and East rivers sparkle in the distance; and the magnificent Hudson is seen flowing on in joyful

freedom. The city itself seems clean and bright in the distance—its deformities hidden, and its beauties exaggerated, like the fame of far-off heroes. (92)

The object below becomes the spectating subject above, in the manner of Freud's *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*. Child takes up a transcendent vantage in order to see and make sense of her former position of undifferentiated immanence.

It is a tactic she will employ again and again. When a parade of Scotchmen becomes too “commonplace and vulgar,” to excite her imagination, Child simply climbs the “steep banks of Hoboken” (23). From this height, “Banners and mantles, which might not have borne to close inspection, looked graceful as they floated so far beneath me” (23). All the ugliness of New York needs, Child realizes, is a little “effect of distance to dazzle the imagination” (22).

The only problem with the “sheltered nooks” of retreat offered by the city's public gardens is that they are too public. “The Battery is growing charming again,” Child writes, “now that Nature has laid aside her pearls and put on her emeralds” (77). But with the renewed beauty of spring, there comes a price: “The worst of it is, crowds are flocking there morning and evening” (77). Though Child is “ashamed of that anti-social sentiment,” she “cannot overcome [her] aversion to a multitude” (77). In instances such as these, we see that in Child's working series of binaries—public/private, city/country, many/one, below/above—the term “public garden” is a complete oxymoron. These are vantages to which “one” retreats in order to gain a transcendent perspective on the many below. Unfortunately for Child, this individualized gaze has itself become common, available to all.

Through the simple device of narrative perspective, these literary depictions of the individual and the many make explicit a recurrent, yet veiled, structural element of sociological texts on the same subject. Published in France in 1895 and translated into English the following year, Gustave Le Bon's *La psychologie des foules*, or *The Crowd*, famously theorizes that when individuals form a crowd, they transform into a new, "single being" (2). Le Bon gives several explanations for this phenomenon, primary among them the notion that when individuals gather together, the differences of their conscious personalities are cancelled out by their underlying, unconscious sameness:

It is precisely these general [unconscious] qualities of character, governed by forces of which we are unconscious, and possessed by the majority of the normal individuals of a race in much the same degree—it is precisely these qualities, I say, that in crowds become common property. In the collective mind the intellectual aptitudes of the individuals, and in consequence their individuality, are weakened. The heterogeneous is swamped by the homogeneous, and the unconscious qualities obtain the upper hand. (5-6)

Here, in the sociological theory of the crowd, the behavior and consistency of the crowd is explained through—one should say, a very problematic—reference to its internal psychology. By contrast, the narrator of *The House of the Seven Gables* credits the homogeneous character, the essential oneness of the procession below, to an entirely visual effect of distance on the part of the observing subject. For Child, too, proximity to the many reveals mundane particularities that can only be overcome when the observer removes herself to a higher vantage point.

We must ask ourselves, at this point, whether the explanation of crowd psychology is anything more than that—an attempt to explain, after the fact, a phenomenon that is originally caused, not by some law internal to the crowd or procession, but by the act of observation itself. Unlike the narrators of Hawthorne and Child, the crowd psychologist makes no explicit reference to his spatial position with respect to the object of study, despite the fact that the very terms of the explanation are dictated by ineluctable realities of space, distance, perspective. From what view could Le Bon see an agglomeration of bodies transform into a “single being”? How high must he be in order for the object to fit within the visual frame? The prevalence of the cellular analogy in early crowd psychology is telling, in this respect, for the analogy implicitly identifies the crowd psychologist as a disembodied eye gazing down on a mute, biological material that is neatly framed by the limits of the lens.

What we are dealing with is not simply the fact that the very structure of observation entails, by necessity, a split between observing subject and object. More decisive is the fact that there is an initial movement of separation that creates the two poles of the observing act itself. The content of early crowd psychology, I argue, is explainable as an effect of this initial movement of separation. Thus, as we will see, Le Bon posits a situation in which there is absolutely no transitivity between individual experience and crowd experience. The individual who was once a part of the crowd cannot report on that experience, because, according to the strict terms of Le Bon’s argument, the individual was not there to experience it; he was only there as a crowd-being. For Le Bon and others, the internal psychology of the crowd cannot be arrived at

through direct reportage of the participants, but only through the deductions of the individual observer.

Again, it is the literature of the crowd that reveals to us the very thing that would seem to be disallowed by the strict logic of early crowd theory. Child's narrative persona reports, as an individual, on her "sensation of vanishing identity" while immersed in the crowded streets. There is a form of transitivity, albeit tenuous, between these two limit experiences of individuality and crowd-being. Child's account too reveals the full affective range behind the scientific literature of the crowd. True, it is difficult to see Le Bon's theory of the crowd as anything other than a bitter indictment when he says that crowds are a pox on civilized society, comparable to those "microbes which hasten the dissolution of enfeebled [...] bodies" (xiii). Child's account, however, reveals not a mere dismissive superiority, but a kind of metaphysical terror at the thought of dismemberment at the hands of the crowd.

Does Child's reportage on her own experience of vanishing identity confirm the specious explanation of crowd behavior offered by early crowd theorists, or does it merely conform to it? Child's *Letters* certainly predates Le Bon's seminal study of crowd psychology, but perhaps the initial act of separation is not only responsible for the explanation of the internal psychology of the crowd, but for the very experience of being in one. We have suggested that the *theory* of "mental unity," of the contagious power of crowd experience, is but an effect of an a priori optic, or perspective. But what if this optic is so powerful as to write the *experience* of the crowd itself? To what extent is Child, like the renaissance painter of the bird's eye view cityscape, already looking down from above even as she is immersed in the oceanic blur of the multitude?

The American literary texts I examine in the chapters that follow straddle the turn-of-the-twentieth-century, perhaps the most fertile era for the burgeoning discipline of crowd psychology. Frank Norris' wheat novels, *The Octopus* (1901) and *The Pit* (1903), were published in the first years of the twentieth century, but they look back to the latter decades of the previous one. *The Octopus* is steeped in the tensions that came to a head in the 1880s, with the formation of the Farmer's Alliance and the Populist Party, when farmers began to organize against the abusive practices of the railroad. The action of *The Pit*, meanwhile, is based on a real attempt to corner the wheat market in 1897. Similarly, Sherwood Anderson's *Marching Men* (1917) and *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), were written immediately before what I will describe as the "Freudian turn" in crowd psychology, but they too share a backward glance. *Marching Men* is explicitly set in the final decade of the nineteenth century and many readers place the action of *Winesburg* around the same time (Yingling 108).

Depending on whom you listen to, these decades mark either the era of crowds (Le Bon) or the era of publics (Tarde). What is clear is that the growth of American cities and the creation of a new national mass media meant that man in the mass had become a central character in the national consciousness. There are several literary studies that touch on this issue and this general time period. As the directness of the title suggests, Nicolaus Mills' *The Crowd in American Literature* (1986) was the first full-length study of the crowd in literature, stretching from the Revolution to World War II. Mary Esteve's *The Aesthetics and Politics of the Crowd in American Literature* (2003) covers a broad range of texts from Hawthorne and Child, through James and Crane, to the Harlem Renaissance and the immigrant texts of Cahan, Yeziarska, and Roth, while Benjamin

West's *Crowd Violence in American Modernist Fiction* (2012) focuses almost exclusively on the twentieth century. It is Dana Brand's *The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (1991), which I have already mentioned, that is most relevant to my own work on the crowd in American literature. Although Brand is less concerned with the crowd *per se*, than with the whole disorienting panoply of urban life in the nineteenth century, his decision to view the subject through the problematic gaze of the *flâneur* is one that I would like to follow through with here.

Brand closes his account in the middle of the century, with Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry." In one sense, then, I would like merely to continue to pursue the questions he opens up into the next century, when the psychology of crowds and masses becomes part of the national consciousness in a decisive manner. At the conclusion of his look at Whitman's peculiar brand of *flânerie*, Brand argues that Whitman "tried to convert a kind of freedom and power experienced by a detached spectator" into the "basis of a new social bond appropriate to the conditions of urban life" (Brand 184). Whitman's ultimate failure on this front, Brand concludes, comes from his "innocence of the degree to which his ideal [...] retains the narcissistic characteristics of panoptic spectatorship" (184-5). Whitman remains yet one more example of the "inability of nineteenth-century spectators to look at crowds with a questioning rather than an imperial gaze" (185). It is this wrong, I argue, that Norris and Anderson attempt to right in their own explorations of crowds, publics, masses, and communities, by working through and beyond a strictly immunity perspective on the many.

In looking closely at consecutive major works by two authors whose careers nearly touch, I hope to limn something like a developmental narrative in which the

“imperial gaze” of the nineteenth century—or, in terms resonant with Roberto Esposito’s work, the immunitary optic—gives way to a more complex form of vision adequate to the peculiarly paradoxical nature of collective psychology. Certainly, this is not the only manner in which this problem may develop, but, as I hope to show, it is one which bears directly on the roughly contemporaneous sociological forays into the same topic. Furthermore, if these texts cannot stand exactly as paradigms of thought on the collective, they nonetheless reveal in a unique way the common problems, dead ends, and blind spots that plague any attempt to think the many.

One such misstep, we find, is that of trying to simply obliterate the immunitary optic and seize its opposite number, the sublime substance of the multitude, directly. In *The Octopus*, Frank Norris begins by setting the author-figure, Presley, on the peak of a summit, only to have him learn the folly of apprehending the people from this god-like vantage. The plot of *The Octopus* roughly follows the formal dialectic Norris institutes in his critical writings, in which he argues that the author-as-leader has a responsibility to renounce his detached perspective and live among the people. Norris is unable, by the conclusion of this novel, to find a satisfying resolution to this dialectic, so he takes up the attempt again in his subsequent wheat novel, *The Pit*, where he depicts the humiliation of the immune individual and his incorporation into the sublime, inchoate crowd. The overthrow of the individual by the Force of the many is ultimately unconvincing, however, because it believes too optimistically in the historical inevitability of such an event.

Nevertheless, in his novel *Marching Men*, Anderson tries to put the sublime substance of the naturalist multitude to practical political use. One crucial difference is

that here we already see traces of what will be the truly innovative dimension of *Winesburg, Ohio*. Whereas Norris saw the two poles of the author-leader-individual and the sublime force of the multitude as a stable dichotomy, Anderson begins, in *Marching Men*, to perceive a new, more complex social consistency, in which the ravages of Biopower have led to mass alienation and isolation, to what Esposito terms “common separation” (*Immunitas* 25) Anderson imagines an immune individual, much like Curtis Jadwin of *The Pit*, who attempts nothing less than to mobilize a mass movement of marchers and thus heal, through the contagious activity of bodies moving in concert, the fractured population. Unfortunately, by novel’s end, the immune individual and the body politic still exist in a purely external relationship to one another and Anderson can do nothing but abandon the movement under the auspices of a more mature realism, or what often amounts to the same thing, “capitalo-parliamentarism” (Badiou 1).

It is not until we reach the Freudian-turn instituted in Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* that we are able to see the precise nature of the misstep in these previous attempts to think the many. This is none other than the belief in the myth of collective Oneness, of “mental unity.” The task of *Winesburg, Ohio* is not to bemoan the death of collective life, as many critics have supposed, but to form the groundwork for a community to come, without resorting to the myth of spontaneous, harmonious group-feeling. As Roberto Esposito argues in *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*, “all of the figures of identity, fusion, and endogamy that the representation of community will assume in modern political philosophy are nothing other than the unavoidable result of this first conceptual short-circuit,” the “myth” of “fullness” (15). Critics who see in *Winesburg* a lament for the bygone days of true community fail to see that it is in fact a

critique of illusory forms of collectivity that are no longer available to us, if they ever were at all.

The valorization of communal fullness is but the inverted effect of the assumption of immunity, the belief—either bitter or satisfying—that one is different, set apart, distinct from those others who share in the collective substance. These two myths are so constitutive of collective experience, so deeply rooted in modern subjectivity that is misguided to think of them as simple “errors” (*Communitas* 15). This is the only charitable way, I think, to understand Mary Esteve’s argument that American literary representations of the crowd overwhelmingly warn against its absorptive power—that, in essence, immunity is a positive good, proffered to the reader as a beneficent defense against the disintegrating effects of immersion. If we take away the conservative prescriptive dimension of her argument, which offers public reason as the only viable antidote to the crowd mind, we can see Esteve’s work as simple descriptive proof of the overwhelming persistence of the immunitary paradigm in American literary representations of the many.

Indeed, the concept of immunization, Esposito argues, “is so important that it can be taken as the explicative key of the entire modern paradigm, not only in conjunction with but even more than other hermeneutic models, such as those we find in ‘secularization,’ ‘legitimation,’ and ‘rationalization’” (12). The name for this paradigmatic modern subject, or more accurately this disposition toward the many, is the Bloom, Tiqqun’s conceptual figure of the “everyman” who is alienated even from his own alienation. The Bloom is not something that can simply be wished away through sanguine invocations of community. What is needed is a philosophy of community that

begins with and travels through immunity, that reveals what it is in the Bloom that is common to us all.

Before moving into an analysis of American literary representations of the multitude, we must familiarize ourselves with the basic logic and terminology of the early crowd psychology that plays such a crucial, if sometimes subterranean, role in these texts. The dialectical movement that I will trace in the texts of Norris and Anderson, in which the two terms of immunity and contagion begin as simple oppositions but eventually come to be seen as intimately linked, can be found in the work of crowd theorists as well. There are no shortage of works on the origins and developments of the discourse of crowd psychology. J.S McClelland's *The Crowd and the Mob: From Plato to Canetti* (1989) is widely cited, as are Susan Barrow's *Distorting Mirrors: Visions of the Crowd in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (1981), and Robert Nye's *The Origins of Crowd Psychology: Gustave Le Bon and the Crisis of Mass Democracy in the Third Republic* (1975). What I would like to offer here is a brief and focused genealogy of this discourse, taking Le Bon's *The Crowd* and Freud's *Mass Psychology and Analysis of the 'I'* as the main points of my trajectory. In this manner, I follow the lead of Ernesto Laclau's *On Populist Reason*. But whereas Laclau sees a "progressive theoretical renegotiation of the duality between social homogeneity (or indistinctness) and social differentiation" (61) I see a parallel movement which entails the gradual universalization of immunity. Beginning in Le Bon's discourse as the exclusive property of the individual leader, immunity comes to infect, as it were, the entire membership of the multitude.

Of course, as Christian Borch and others have pointed out, Le Bon employs an inherently racist and misogynist recapitulation theory (Borch 274), in which, he says, the

“special characteristics” of the crowd—“impulsiveness, irritability, incapacity to reason, the absence of judgment and of the critical spirit, the exaggeration of the sentiments, and others besides”—can be found in all “inferior forms of evolution—in women, savages, and children, for instance” (10-11). We can miss an important lesson, however, if we simply dismiss Le Bon’s discourse out of an initial disgust with his musty racism. Indeed, if we fail to penetrate to the depths of his logic, we risk allowing this inherently racist disposition to reenter through the back door of our thinking, for it is not possible to trim the offending statements off of his theory, as if they are simply diseased excrescences. We must begin then by recognizing the extent to which this antiquated philosopher of the many is still very much with us.

Gustave Le Bon begins his massively influential work on the psychology of crowds with a grim pronouncement: “Today,” he writes, meaning the year 1895, “the claims of the masses are becoming more and more sharply defined, and amount to nothing less than a determination to utterly destroy society as it now exists” (xi). To modern ears, Le Bon’s assertion that “the divine right of the masses is about to replace the divine right of kings” (xi), must sound like an emancipatory cry, but for Le Bon, it is a deadly serious prognostication. “The advent to power of the masses,” he prophesies, “marks one of the last stages of Western civilization, a complete return to those periods of confused anarchy which seem always destined to precede the birth of every new society” (xii).

Le Bon is responding to what he and many other thinkers of his country saw as the failures of the Third Republic, but his conservative, anti-egalitarian sentiments were soon taken up in America by a budding enclave of social psychologists. America, in the

latter half of the nineteenth century, witnessed the emergence of two new mass phenomena: the urban crowd and the new national public. The former was generally identified in terms of class, as a site of working-class brutality and promiscuity. Even a thinker as conscious of bourgeois ideology as Philippe Aries refers casually to the fondness of the lower classes for the jostling and rubbing of crowds (414). Often considered apolitical in its intentions, the urban crowd was understood as an agglomeration of directionless physically proximate bodies.

But, for crowd and social psychologists, I would argue, physically proximate crowds were primarily interesting only as exaggerated instances of the newly formed national public, which arose out of advances in mass communication.<sup>i</sup> Le Bon's definition of the crowd drew much of its power of application, in fact, because it defined the "psychological crowd" as any formation in which individual members shared a common goal. "[A]n entire nation," he famously argued, "may become a crowd under the action of certain influences" (2). As in the theories of Freud, the particular, pathological case gained a universal application and the exception became a means of understanding the rule. Thus, in a somewhat counter-intuitive manner, the crowd was defined, not as an agglomeration of physically proximate bodies, but as a "mental unity" whereby individual desires, beliefs and attitudes were subsumed by the desires, beliefs and attitudes of the many (Le Bon 2).

For American social psychologists, such as Edward Ross, Boris Sidis, and James Mark Baldwin, it is this sense of the crowd, as an exaggerated example of the national

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapter 2 of Ohmann, Richard. Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century. New York: Verso, 1996.

public, which exerted the most fascination. This small group of writers was concerned not, as Ericka King argues, with delimiting the differences between the crowd and the public (335), but with understanding what the psychology of the crowd proper might mean for a national, democratic public. Ross points to the key issue raised by Le Bon's study of the crowd for the discerning democratic subject. After providing a picture of the mob that partakes of all the essential characteristics of Le Bon's crowd, including suggestibility, single-mindedness, fickleness, instability, criminality and violence, Ross provides his own solution for preserving the liberal subject of reason and reflection against the unruly chaos of the burgeoning national mob:

Without lessening obedience to the decision of the majorities, let us cultivate a habit of doubt and review. In a good democracy blind imitation can never take the place of individual effort to weigh and judge. The frantic desire of frightened deer or buffalo to press to the very center of the throng does not befit civilized man. The huddling instinct has no place in strong character... We must hold always to a sage Emersonian individualism, that, without consecrating an ethics of selfishness, a religion of dissent, or a policy of anarchism, shall brace men to stand against the rush of the mass. (398)

As writers discover that beneath the façade of civilized rationality, man is an irrational, suggestible, and unconscious animal, they respond by reaffirming the values of radical individualism as the only ones capable of stemming the horrors of the mass mind (Esteve 5). The success of democracy, for turn-of-the-century psychologists, thus requires the double-effort of actively suppressing the crowd instincts, what Sidis calls the "demon of

the demos” (*Psychology* 313), while simultaneously “bracing” the voluntary, conscious actions of the individual.

Early crowd psychology thus functions quite openly as a form of immunization training. It is necessary to learn how crowds operate, Le Bon admonishes, or “resign ourselves to being devoured by them” (61). Hence, much of *The Crowd* reads like a tutorial for the leader or “statesman who wishes not to govern [crowds]—that is becoming a very difficult matter—but at any rate not to be too much governed by them” (xiv). The best prophylactic against the contagion of the crowd, it seems, is to make more leaders. Indeed, even though Le Bon openly addresses the “statesman,” we know that the audience of *The Crowd* was much larger, a fact that suggests to us that what we are really doing when we read this text is taking part in a private communication between individuals about *them*. In this manner, the reader of *The Crowd* is given a position that is structurally analogous to the position of the leader in relation to the crowd.

Even when the project of affirming the mastery of the individual over and against the threat of the crowd is not explicitly formulated, the discourse is structured in terms that allowed for little else. Three intimately related features of Le Bon’s crowd psychology come to function as motifs in the wider discourse of the crowd. These are: one, the total incommensurability of the “individual self” and the “mob self,” two, the lack of any a priori content on the part of the crowd or collective, and, three, the structural necessity of the leader as a means of providing the crowd with discernible properties.

Le Bon insists, throughout his study, on the radical non-relation of the individual and the collective. Though the group, as we will see, literally *cannot be thought* without

the counterpart of the individual or leader, the two terms are in no way commensurable. In Le Bon's most extreme formulations, the crowd is not only "always intellectually inferior to the isolated individual" (9), it is a different kind of being altogether. In order to truly understand the psychology of the crowd, Le Bon argues, "the mental quality of the individuals composing [it] must not be brought into consideration" (15). "This quality," he continues, "is without importance" (15), for by the mere act of entering the crowd, "the learned man and the ignoramus" become indistinguishable from one another (15-6). In an article for *The Atlantic Monthly*, Boris Sidis goes so far as to claim that there are two distinct selves: an "individual self" and a "mob self" ("Study" 191). The former, for Sidis, is associated with the "waking self," whereas the latter is identified with the "indifferent subwaking self" (*Psychology* 310). "Apparently one," he writes, "they are in fact two—the warm stream of waking self-consciousness does not mingle its intelligence with that of the subwaking self" (*Psychology* 162). The phenomenon of the crowd thus involves the complete "disappearance of the conscious personality [and] the predominance of the unconscious personality" (Le Bon 8).

In terms of the formal features of the discourse of crowds, this means that the psychology of the many cannot be arrived at through the introspection of the individual. Even an individual who was once a member of a crowd is altogether useless as a source of information about what goes on in its midst; he cannot give a report of his experiences in the crowd, because, as an individual, he simply was not there to have them. The "cleavage" that Boris Sidis describes, between the "individual self" and the "mob self," is so insurmountable as to circumvent any possibility of the one communicating with the other. This belief in the radical incommensurability of the two "selves" accounts for the

fact that crowd psychologists rarely rely upon first-hand testimonies of crowd behavior. In fact, Le Bon takes pains to demonstrate that the testimony of crowds is, by definition, unreliable. “To say that a fact has been simultaneously verified by thousands of witnesses,” he writes, “is to say, as a rule, that the real fact is very different from the accepted account of it” (20). As a hypnotized, unconscious entity, the crowd, in an entirely literal manner, cannot speak for itself. Only the individual, safely removed from the influence of the crowd, is capable of reporting on its observable characteristics.

Turning to the second essential feature of Le Bon’s crowd psychology, where we are given an account of the basic characteristics of the crowd, we see precisely why it is so difficult to imagine the crowd as a speaking subject. As we have already seen, the crowd can hardly be considered a subject at all. By the same token, the psychology of the crowd barely qualifies as a psychology, since the individual ego and its subjective will totally dissolve in the collective. As Borch-Jacobsen points out, Le Bon’s crowd “has no content of its own” (138). The true character of the crowd lies precisely in its total lack of character, in the absolute effacement of the differentiating properties of the individuals composing it (138). Le Bon insists that the crowd represents an entirely new entity with new characteristics. It is not simply a summing-up or averaging of its composite parts, as Herbert Spencer argues, but rather constitutes “a new body possessing properties quite different from those of the bodies that have served to form it” (Le Bon 4).

But, Borch-Jacobsen argues, these new characteristics are themselves non-specific (139). After listing the three basic attributes of Le Bon’s crowd mind, “a sentiment of invincible power, mental “contagion,” and “suggestibility,” Borch-Jacobsen points out that “the second and third (the most decisive, in [Le Bon’s] argument) are manifestly

non-characteristics, or nonspecific characteristics” (139). “Neither substratum nor substructure,” Borch-Jacobsen argues, “but rather a soft, malleable, plastic, infinitely receptive material without will or desire or any specific instinct of its own,” the crowd cannot even be said to possess a spirit or character at all (139). The two predominant characteristics, mental contagion and suggestibility, besides being just two different terms for the same characteristic (Borch-Jacobsen 139), represent nothing more than the ability of the crowd to absorb what would properly be called characteristics.

James Mark Baldwin gives the most extreme version of the radically denatured quality of the crowd in his ambitious *Social and Ethical Interpretations in Mental Development*. In his chapter on the “Theory of Mob Action,” he asks, “Has man collectively no thought, no sense of values, no deliberation, no self-control, no responsibility, no conscience, no will, no motive, no purpose?” and immediately answers, “No, he has none” (246). “The suggestible consciousness,” he continues, piling negation upon negation, “is the consciousness that has no past, no future, no height, no depth, no development, no reference to anything; it has only in and out” (246). The man of the crowd is, quite simply, a man without qualities.

In his *Mass Psychology and Analysis of the 'I'*, Freud, attempting to discredit the far-reaching concept of “suggestion,” shows how virtually every attempt at crowd psychology eventually resorts to this “magic word” (or one of its many variants), as one that “explains everything,” even as it “evade[s] explanation itself” (40). Tarde’s concept of “imitation,” McDougall’s “primary affective induction,” and Le Bon’s “contagion,” Freud argues, are all merely synonyms for “suggestion” and “suggestibility” (39-40). We could add Baldwin’s “reflexive sympathy” to the list as well. Ross argues that the

“irrational unanimity of interest, feeling, opinion, or deed” in a collective “results from suggestion and imitation” (395). Sidis, too, argues that “[s]uggestibility is the cement of the herd, the very soul of the primitive social group,” and that “[s]ocial life presupposes suggestion” (*Psychology* 310). Clearly, as Freud himself points out, such reasoning is tautological and only begs the question of where suggestion comes from (40).

In truth, though “contagion” and “suggestibility” both refer to the constitutive openness of the crowd-being to external influence, they are, as Freud shows, distinct concepts, in Le Bon’s discourse. “Suggestion” refers to the vertical relationship between the leader and the crowd, while “contagion” refers to the horizontal, reciprocal influence of one member on another. There is, here, an implied temporality: first, the leader suggests an idea to the entire mass and then it is “communicated” from member to member, through a series of augmenting concatenations. As, I show in chapter 3, this distinction points toward a significant bifurcation in Le Bon’s discourse. Suggestion and contagion not only refer to two distinct directions of influence, but each concept has its own linguistic register, the former “psychological” and the latter “biological.” Such a radical dehiscence of the two registers encourages one to isolate one from the other. That is to say, we can already find, in Le Bon’s discourse, the seeds for a radical, *acephalic* theory of the collective by simply detaching the vertical dimension of the leader’s suggestions from the horizontal dimension of pure crowd-being. This is a temptation that thinkers of the many will succumb to in various ways, but it is not, as I will attempt to show, a direction that is possible to sustain.

Barrows traces the belief in the constitutive openness of the crowd back to the “the late nineteenth-century French research on hypnotism” (115). Indeed, hypnotism is

nearly as common a motif in discourses of the crowd as is the concept of “suggestibility,” the former being a favorite method of illustrating the latter. Tarde, Le Bon, and Sidis all mention the deep connection between “hypnotic” phenomena and the behavior of the crowd. “The most careful observations,” Le Bon writes, “seem to prove that an individual immersed for some length of time in a crowd in action soon finds himself...in a special state, which much resembles the state of fascination in which the hypnotized individual finds himself in the hands of the hypnotizer” (7). The hypnotized individual provides the most powerful means for writers of the crowd to represent the man in the crowd as completely vulnerable to the influence of the other. This figure establishes the crowd member, less as a being or a self, and more as a denuded medium which possesses only the continual ability to become other.

In order to fully understand the manner in which the notion of suggestibility functions in these discourses, however, it is necessary to introduce the third, intimately related, feature of Le Bon’s crowd psychology. Tarde, Le Bon, and Sidis all point to the logical necessity of the leader. As Sidis argues, “[A] mob is not formed of its own accord; it needs an instigator, a leader, who shall ferment the crowd and give it an impulse” (“Study” 188). This is less an empirical claim than it is a logical exigency resulting from the second feature of crowd discourse. Since, at root, the crowd is without any content of its own, it cannot appear without the placeholder of the individual leader, who exists outside of it, or on its border. The hypnotized crowd, in other words, presupposes a hypnotist to “suggest” ideas to it. It is the individual who literally imbues the crowd with distinct properties and causes it to come into being as a properly “psychological crowd.” The leader’s will, Le Bon writes, “is the nucleus around which the opinions of the crowd

are grouped and attain to an identity” (72). Thus, according to the late nineteenth-century discourse of the crowd, there is absolutely no such thing as a crowd in itself, for “[i]f in consequence of some accident [...] the leaders should be removed from the scene the crowd returns to its original state of a collectivity without cohesion” (Le Bon 75).

When Sidis claims, “A mob...can be analyzed into two principal elements: a single person initiating, directing, and a crowd that follows and obeys blindly” (“Study” 188), he demonstrates how the third and first features of the discourse of the crowd ultimately reconnect through the logical exigencies produced by the second. The theory of the necessity of the leader merely repeats, on another level, the theory of the radical disjunction between the individual and the collective. The individual with his distinct characteristics disappears in the undifferentiated mob only to rematerialize outside of it in the figure of the leader. It is not simply, as Sidis would have it, that a mob *can* be analyzed as two distinct elements; it *must* be analyzed this way if the “empirical” non-attributes of suggestibility, imitation, and contagion are to be made manifest at all.

The leader and the crowd are thus inverted images of one another. If the crowd is a site of contagion, of a basic openness to the influence of the other, the leader is the bearer of immunity par excellence. His whole being as leader is reducible to this quality. The leader suggests but is not suggestible, the leader influences without being influenced. Whereas the crowd-being is dependent, dispersed, and immersed, the leader is autonomous, complete, and external. For early crowd psychology, collective being, contagious being, cannot be thought without its obverse, the immunitary character of the *principium individuationis* (Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* 17).

In fact, leaders are everywhere in early crowd theory, for along with the basic structural identity between the leader and the reader, there is a basic structural identity between the leader and the writer. McClelland points out that, in his study, Le Bon employs many of the leaderly techniques that he describes: “Le Bon is the first crowd theorist to use the discoveries of crowd psychology to write a book to frighten readers into an ideology, and he is the first to use the techniques of mass persuasion which crowd psychology laid bare to sell the finished product” (201). But McClelland fails to point out that this is true only because the leader himself is a thoroughly writerly figure, a master rhetorician who employs “affirmation and repetition” (Le Bon 77) and “images, words, and formulas” (61). The work of writing the crowd, of inscribing it with its contents, is thus performed simultaneously at two levels in Le Bon’s discourse—by the crowd theorist and by the leader. The logic behind the necessity of the leader becomes embarrassingly apparent when we realize that the figure of the leader is simply invented to explain how the content that the theorist attributes to the crowd gets there. Thus, if crowds are labile and suggestive, leaders are forceful and manipulative. If crowds are docile and obedient, leaders are ruthless and power-hungry. If crowds think in images and formulas, leaders speak in them.

When the crowd theorist duplicates himself in the form of this avatar he does something that the fictional writer does all of the time. Such a doubling of figures is recognized in the latter case by the common distinctions between implied author and narrator, narrator and character, etc. But this distinction is alien to scientific observation which usually involves a transparent subject and an object. In Le Bonian crowd psychology, there is an individual subject observing an individual subject in interaction

with a plural object. Though this formal arrangement is never explicitly referred to, it is not very different from the arrangement we get in, for instance, Sherwood Anderson's *Marching Men*, in which the narrator reports on the interactions of the main character Beaut McGregor and the crowd that he comes to lead.

In this manner, what is presented as a sociological reality, in early crowd theory, always carries a note of suspicion in literary representations. In the performance of crowd psychology, an individual subject apprehends, or attempts to apprehend, a multitude. This is of course obvious, but it not only remains unthematized in sociological accounts, it is a fact that is deliberately suppressed in the theorist's pretensions to scientific objectivity. In literary representations, by contrast, one is never allowed to forget that the object under consideration is filtered through the perspective of a particular individual subject, with his or her own passions, prejudices, and motives. Thus, whereas sociological accounts of the crowd can be reformulated in the form, "The multitude is...", literary representations force us to include the qualifying statement, "According to X,..." This is particularly clear in the case of an unreliable narrator, such as that of Poe's "The Man of the Crowd," who watches the throng passing his café window, in a state of convivial convalescence, in which, he tells us, the "film" has passed from his "mental vision." In this manner, literary representations reveal the suppressed truth of sociological accounts. Not only are they told from the point of view of an individual, and hence an individual-bias, but they are filtered through a fundamentally immunitary *optic*.

Setting out to understand the contagious scene of the many, Le Bon ends up with not one immune subject, but two. It is as if he cannot present the many itself, without continually discovering the individual. But, in this doubling of the immune figure, the

crowd psychologist unconsciously grasps the thing he set out to apprehend—namely, a plurality of subjects. Lacan is fond of saying that it is difficult enough to count to two and that is what Le Bon has effectively done here, though the achievement goes unrecognized by him. In a certain manner of speaking, Freud’s rereading of Le Bon will capitalize on this unrecognized achievement.

Le Bon’s theory fails to conceive of social relations as relations, so that what we have, in effect, is a situation not unlike the one found in Hegel’s critique of Hume:

This identity (the individual/leader) remains simply a tautology and this diversity (the crowd) is only a specific being-for-itself of substances; identity and diversity remain external to each other; the relation of diverse substances is in no way necessary, because this relation is not internal to them. (qtd. in Hyppolite 130).

The leader is treated, as might be expected, as a self-created, autonomous individual (critics point out that Le Bon’s theory cannot explain how leaders arise in the first place), while the crowd is seen as a kind of featureless substance or blank slate awaiting inscription. Furthermore, the members of the crowd do not relate to one another in this formulation. The contagious communication between members is so automatic, crowd members are so affectively open to one another that they cannot really be said to be interacting, but behave more in the purely biological manner of microbes or cells.

The radical nature of Freud’s revaluation of early crowd psychology is easy to miss, not least of all because Freud himself refers to his *Mass Psychology and the Analysis of the ‘I’* as a mere trifle, the product of a “simple-minded idea [*Einfall*]” (Kerr 4). In this text, by his own account, Freud “attempted a Psy-A foundation for group

psychology” (Kerr 4). This notion that Freud is simply performing the perfunctory work of connecting the dots, of supplementing the discourse of crowd psychology with a few points from psychoanalytic doctrine, is reinforced in the opening chapters of the text itself, which, given the heavy citation, is virtually co-authored by Le Bon. As Kerr wryly notes, “Freud let’s Le Bon have his say all right” (Kerr 7).

But Freud’s relationship to Le Bon’s discourse is highly ambivalent. On the one hand, he criticizes Le Bon because “none of his statements bring forward anything new” (*Mass* 19). On the other, his theory of the group mind is laudable because it “shows not a single feature which a psychoanalyst would find any difficulty in placing or in deriving from its source” (13). Similarly, despite the fact that Le Bon’s statements are often “completely contradictory” (20), he nonetheless manages to give a “brilliantly executed picture of the group mind” (18).

When we read statements like “Le Bon himself shows us the way” (13) we cannot help but note that Freud is adopting here the same “identificatory voice” that Webber says he adopts in his case study of Schreber (Webber xxiv). Such an identification is not necessarily an endorsement, but is one of Freud’s common analytic techniques. As Lacan says of a similar situation, there is a sense here that it is “by virtue of a certain naivety, a certain poverty, a certain innocence” that Le Bon’s theories are most instructive for Freud (*Lacan Four* 160). Freud let’s Le Bon have his say, but we should keep in mind that this is, after all, the cornerstone of analytic praxis, to let the analysand blather on. Thus, Freud’s reevaluation does not come in the style of a polemic or even a critique, but rather reworks the basic terms of Le Bon’s discourse from the inside out. For much of his

reading of Le Bon's text, then, Freud merely attempts to show how Le Bon's theory "fits in so well" with the basic doctrine of psychoanalysis (*Mass* 19).

This makes those rare occasions when Freud is openly critical all the more crucial for us. One such moment involves what we could call a radical subtraction, or emptying out, of the essentialist concepts of early crowd psychology. We have already mentioned Freud's skepticism toward "suggestion" which "explain[s] everything" (40), but it is worth exploring a little more thoroughly here. "What we are offered [...] as an explanation by authors in the fields of sociology and mass psychology," Freud complains, "is always the same, albeit under different names: the magic word suggestion" (39). Freud takes issue with this idea that "suggestion (more correctly, suggestibility) is in fact something fundamental, something irreducible, a basic fact of human mental life" (40). It is a very personal moment, in the text, and Freud's language betrays intense feelings of bitterness and indignation. He recounts the time he saw Hyppolite Bernheim, the famous hypnotist, perform one of his demonstrations. "I remember a vague hostility to this tyranny of suggestion even then," Freud writes.

If a patient who was not proving submissive was told forcefully: But what are you doing? *Vous vous contre-suggestionnez!* I said to myself that this was a clear case of injustice and an act of violence. The man (I felt) had every right to counter-suggestions if an attempt is being made to subjugate him with suggestions. My resistance took the form of a rebellion against allowing suggestion, which explained everything, to evade explanation itself. (40; emphasis in original)

The anecdote refers, of course, to the “two-party” scenario of hypnotist and subject, but Freud maps this scenario onto the relationship between leader and mass. Note, in particular, the politically charged language: Freud foments a “rebellion” against the “tyranny” of suggestion. Freud identifies here not with the position of the analyst/leader, but with the position shared by the analysand and the crowd. Interestingly, he does not reject the idea of suggestibility for strictly logical reasons, but for ethical ones—the crowd *should* have the right to make counter-suggestions.

This feeling of indignation is supported by a simple observation from experience. “[N]o doubt,” he writes, a certain “tendency does exist in us [...] of succumbing to a particular affect when we become aware of [...] that affective state in someone else” (40). “But how many times,” he continues, “do we successfully resist it, repudiating the affect, often reacting in the diametrically opposite fashion?” (40). Of course, as the affect theorists remind us, we are emotionally open to others, prone to experience their emotions, despite our conscious efforts. But just as often we are unable to sympathize precisely when we consciously want to and we remain sealed in our existential immunity.

With this simple observation, Freud effectively cuts the entire ground out from under early crowd theory. The psychology of the masses will no longer have recourse to a positive anthropology that sees humankind as an innately gregarious, social animal. Freud’s examples here are all notable for what we might typically describe as their negative, antisocial character. He has tasked himself, not with showing how collective bonds form *in lieu* of an innate sociality, but how they form in the face of open hostility, resentment, envy, and selfishness. Thus, the child in the nursery is “forced” to accept and even to love the other children, because if he does not he will lose the love of his parents

(74). Similarly, one would expect “the throng of infatuated women and girls who surround the singer or pianist after the performance” to be consumed in mutual jealousy. However, “they repudiate envy” and “[r]ather than tear one another’s hair out, they behave like a uniform mass, paying homage to their hero in joint operations” (74). “Originally rivals, they have been able, through bestowing equal love upon the same object, to identify with one another” (74). Even in the classic crowd psychology scenario of “mental contagion,” or as Freud puts it here, “psychical infection,” Freud finds a negative dimension at work. “If [...] one of the girls at a boarding school receive[s] a letter from her secret lover that provokes her jealousy and to which she reacts with a fit of hysteria,” other girls at the school “who are in the know will adopt the fit [...] through the medium of psychical infection” (59). But, Freud cautions, “[i]t would be wrong to say that they appropriate the symptom out of sympathy” (59). “[T]he proof is that such infection or imitation is sometimes also engendered where presumably there was less prior fellow feeling than customarily exists among female boarding-school friends” (59). The common sense notion that the social bond is predicated on sympathy, on a suspension of self-interest, will have to be discarded, Freud suggests, if we are to penetrate the mystery of collective experience.

There is no quasi-mystical—or, what is the same thing, biological—force compelling humans to group together. If there is any such force at work, in fact, it moves in the opposite direction. “Community spirit,” Freud says, “undeniably springs from an original envy” (75). Paraphrasing Schopenhauer’s allegory about the “family of hedgehogs” that huddle together for warmth only to be immediately repelled by “one

another's prickles"(55), Freud writes that human beings are similarly unable to "bear the intimacy of too-close contact" with each other (53).

After having emptied the discourse out of its foundational principle, however, Freud must bring some factor back in in order to explain how masses form. "[T]he mass is obviously held together by some kind of force" (43), he reflects, but what is the nature of that force and how can it be distinguished from the insufficiently grounded concepts of suggestion, contagion, imitation, and primitive sympathy? Whereas I intimated above that Le Bon does nothing else, Freud criticizes Le Bon for not devoting *enough* attention to the figure of the leader (24-5). Freud's complaint that, "in Le Bon's work, the role of leaders and the emphasis on prestige are [not] brought into proper harmony with his quite brilliant picture of the mass mind," (28) is really a complaint about the lack of a clear relationship between the leader and the masses. If the mass is entitled to make counter-suggestions, if suggestion is incapable of explaining everything, then the relationship between the leader and the mass can no longer be one of simple inscription of the latter by the former.

Freud still makes recourse to a "force"—not just any force, furthermore, but "love," with all of the problems that entails. What is more, Freud offers a lengthy justification of this term in which we are warned against "giving way" in words, lest we do so in deeds as well (42). By "love," Freud means love in the "extended sense," which includes of course "sexual love and the goal of sexual union," but also "self-love [...] parental and infant love, friendship, general love of humanity, and even dedication to concrete objects as well as to abstract ideas" (41). Quite simply, love in all of its

fuzziness is a perfectly adequate term and “we cannot do better than place our scientific discussions and descriptions on the same foundation” (42).

In this manner, Freud offers “love” as the unstated, unrecognized foundation for “suggestibility” (43). But we would do well to inquire into the precise manner in which love is deployed in Freud’s analysis of mass psychology. If it is merely a substitute for “suggestibility,” if it merely trades one “magic word” for another, it is of little value. Similarly, if it simply fills in the empty spot left from draining the essentialist concepts of suggestion, imitation and contagion, there has been no progress in our discussion. Despite Freud’s insistence on the commonsense transparency of this term, we are potentially misled into understanding “love” here in vitalist terms, as a primitive drive, a biological given, or a force. In fact, what “love” really expresses, in Freud’s actual deployment of the term, is something much more in the order of the power of the negative.

But in order to see this we have to understand that Freud’s contribution to the theory of group dynamics brings with it the entire groundwork of psychoanalysis, from the Oedipal triangle to the primal horde and the origins of civilization. Here, against the positive anthropology of innate gregariousness, which essentially says that groups form because men have a tendency to form into groups, Freud offers his own anthropology, which begins with the diametrically opposite assumption: man is not innately gregarious, but egoistic and anti-social.

The “Just-so Story” from *Totem and Taboo* is inserted into Freud’s account to explain the precise nature of the relationship between the leader and the mass and it is here too that the true character of Freudian “love” is revealed. First, he follows the regressive strain of Le Bon’s discourse, by locating an “atavistic residuum” (Le Bon 22)

in the modern crowd. Thus, Freud writes, the “mass [...] appears to us as a resurgence of the primal horde” (77). The primal father, chief, and leader was of a distinctly different nature than the mass of individuals making up the horde (78). He was “the superman, the *Übermensch* whom Nietzsche expected only the future to produce” (78). Already, we receive an intimation of how far Freud’s rereading of Le Bon will go, for this initial scenario is nothing if not a distillation of the basic Le Bonian schema, in which we are presented with two distinct orders of beings (the individual leader and the crowd members) that share little relation between them.

But this is only the initial scenario, one that is fundamentally related to, but distinguished from, the modern form of group relations. Corresponding to these two distinct beings, Freud argues, there are two psychologies: individual psychology and mass psychology. Eventually the father dies and is replaced by a horde member, which means that “there has to be a possibility of turning the psychology of the mass into individual psychology” (78). Laclau sees this as proof of Freud’s incipient democratic impulse and other commentators have made too much of what is really an imprecision. What Freud really means is that there are two different types of mass psychology, one corresponding to the primitive, Le Bonian scenario, in which a despotic leader possesses complete authority over his horde, and another corresponding to the new scenario that comes about after this head, as it were, is decapitated.

We know the familiar story. The primal father was the embodiment of unbridled *jouissance*, taking and enjoying all the women of the horde for himself and forcing his sons into abstinence. Once he is killed by the outraged sons, the latter make a pact that they will not kill each other so long as none of them ever tries to claim total enjoyment

again. This renunciation of enjoyment results in the fundamental discontent of civilization. “[A] person denies himself much in order that others, too, shall have to deny themselves,” Freud writes (75). Just as importantly, the murdered father is now internalized in the form of the individual super-ego, so that, in a certain sense, the leader’s position becomes immanent and universal.

We see echoes of the primal horde in the church and the army, the two group formations that Freud chooses for his analysis. “[I]n these highly organized masses,” Freud explains, “certain circumstances are very clearly in evidence that are much more hidden elsewhere” (45). Both groups are “governed by the same pretence”—namely, that “a supreme head exists who loves every individual in the mass with an identical love” (46). Whereas Le Bon’s crowd psychology offered an undeveloped relationship between the individual leader and the mass, here Freud reveals the operation of two libidinal ties that move in different directions. Each member possesses a relationship to “the leader (Christ, the commander),” on the one hand, and to “the rest of the individuals in the mass,” on the other (47).

But these two ties are not of equal status. The first tie has a more “determining influence [...] than the other” (52), so that “what binds each individual to Christ [the leader, etc.] is also the cause of what binds those individuals to one another” (46). The situation, when plotted out in a more diagrammatic fashion is one of “[m]any equals, capable of identifying with one another, and a single person who stands above them all (75). The libidinal attachment to the father, leader, or Christ figure is of decisive importance and functions as the ground or cause of the attachments formed between

members. This is perhaps clearest in the case of the church, where it is the love of Christ that compels individual members to accept each other.

It is here with this initial and foundational tie between the crowd member and the leader that Freud flirts with reinstating the very essentialism that he had already vitiated. The love of the father partakes of Eros, libido, that “energy” (41) that “holds the whole world together” (43). As in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Eros is conceived here as a unifying impulse, a drive to “combine organic substances into ever larger unities” (*Beyond* 51). In that work, of course, Freud is highly conscious of avoiding any “mysticism or sham profundity” (*Beyond* 45). Here too Freud is careful to point out the element of negativity at the heart of the relationship between the group member and the leader by referring to the ambivalence of the child’s identification with the father. “The small boy exhibits a special interest in his father, wanting to become like him, be like him,” but this identification also “assumes a hostile note and becomes identical with the desire to take his father’s place with his mother too” (“Mass” 57). Thus, “identification is ambivalent from the outset [and] can easily turn into an expression of tenderness as into a wish to remove” (57). In this manner, even the founding relationship of the group member to the leader is not one of simple positivity, but includes a negative kernel.

The apparent resort to a primitive form of attachment, or a natural drive toward unity, is further complicated in the suggestive questions Freud poses about the necessity of the leader. Despite the fact that he continually critiques writers like Le Bon and Trotter for not emphasizing the leader enough, Freud asks, at one point, whether the leader is “truly indispensable so far as the essence of the mass is concerned” (53). Freud wonders if in some cases the leader may not be “replaced by an idea, an abstract concept” (52),

such as, for instance, socialism, or democracy. Even more, the “guiding idea might [...] become negative,” so that a rejection of another group (immigrants, for instance), or idea “might have as unifying an effect as positive devotion” (52-3). In this sense, Freud points the way toward a form of group formation that is conditioned precisely by what it excludes, by what it rejects and keeps outside of itself. One could easily push this notion, in other words, towards Bataille’s idea (already clearly indebted to Freud) that what unites men is nothing other than what repels them (Hollier xix). “The social nucleus,” Bataille writes in this connection, “is, in fact, taboo, that is to say, untouchable and unspeakable” (106).

The second tie—that between members—is even more radical in its eradication of positivity. Individual members do not identify with each other directly, but through the figure of the leader. Thus, “what they have in common consists in the manner of their attachment to the leader” (“Mass” 60). Le Bon’s concepts of “suggestion” and “contagion” expressed two simple relations occurring in an equally simple succession. First the leader suggests an idea to the mass as a whole and then it is communicated from one member to another. There is, in this simple arrangement, a vertical relationship of inscription and a horizontal one of communication. A similar temporal dimension exists in the Freudian schema, in that identification with the leader is primary. The major difference, however, is that the second relationship, the bond between members, is not simply horizontal. In a typical Freudian manner, the relationship between individuals is triangulated. Thus,

A streak of democracy runs through the church—precisely because, before Christ, all are equal, all have the same share in his love. Not without good

reason is the similarity of the Christian community to a family evoked, and if believers address one another as brothers in Christ, they mean brothers *through* the love that Christ has for them. There can be no doubt about it: what binds each individual to Christ is also the cause of what binds those individuals to one another. (46; emphasis mine)

Members do not “love” each other, in the sense of a direct sympathetic attachment or outpouring of fellow-feeling. Rather, they love each other through the mediation of, or more pointedly, *from the place of*, the leader. The “original envy” (75) that one individual feels for another is not so much effaced as sublated in a higher order identification born from the knowledge that to harm “the least of these my brethren” is tantamount to harming Christ directly. The same is true, of course, for siblings who accept each other only in the knowledge that doing so will preserve their good standing with their parents. Such love among members of the mass, at any rate, looks very little like the vulgar psychoanalytic libido, that unifying force of the world. If it is love at all, it is surely of a peculiar kind, because it is conditioned negatively, as a willful *overcoming* of enmity.

With his analysis of the group dynamics of the church, Freud answers his question as to whether the leader may be replaced by an idea in the affirmative. At this juncture, we have only to jump to a slightly higher level of abstraction to bring the full force of Freud’s revaluation to the fore. What, after all, is the “idea” behind the leader? With what do the members of the mass identify? Is it really necessary that he remind me of dad? Is it only, as Freud also suggests, a unary trait that sparks identification—some singular, meaningless mark or identifiable feature, such as the dictator’s moustache? (59) We can make a welcome detour around the fraught scene of family dynamics, I believe, by

suggesting that *what* the leader really stands for has much to do with precisely *where* he stands—namely, outside. The individual in the mass identifies, at the most basic level, with the one who is not of the mass, the “single person who stands *above* them all” (75; emphasis mine). This is not to discount the power of the paternal imago, or even the mystic “prestige” of the Le Bonian leader; rather, I would suggest that even these aspects can be reduced to this basic structural element of *difference*—the leader as the exception to the purported homogeneity of the mass. On this structuralist reading, the individual identifies with the exception to the mass of which he is himself a part. What makes this a mass phenomenon, of course, is that each and every individual in the mass does this, so that the exceptional and external place of the leader has become immanent and universal. The result is not an acephalic collective, but one in which the position of the leader has been multiplied as many times as there members.

In addition to the charge that he reinstates the mysticism of early crowd psychology through his resort to libido as the grounding force of mass psychology, Freud also leaves himself open to the charge of simply trading one form of positive anthropology for another. Whereas writers like Le Bon, Trotter, and McDougall find an inherent disposition toward sociality, whether in the form of “suggestibility,” the “herd instinct,” or a “primitive sympathetic response” (34), Freud merely finds the opposite, but no less essentialist, tendency. Thus, while Le Bon calls on child psychology to demonstrate the innate suggestibility of the crowd, Freud argues that “it is a long time before the child reveals anything like a herd instinct or mass sentiment” (74). Freud speaks, by contrast, of the human’s “readiness to hate,” which, he says, betrays “an aggressiveness whose roots are unknown and that one would be inclined to characterize

as elemental” (54). Surely such an anthropological description lends itself to the prescriptions of free-market capitalism.

Though this is hardly the place to rehearse the Lacanian rereading of Freud’s oeuvre, we can at any rate note that Lacan revealed the Other’s desire, the *desir de l’Autre*, as constitutive of the Freudian subject and its drives. More relevant to our purposes here is the fact that the anthropological dimension of Freud’s analysis is not really necessary. Envy, aggressiveness, and self-love need not be originary to be primary and pervasive in collective dynamics, nor is it necessary that this description leads to the prescription to pursue self-interest. We are less interested in the origins of mass psychology than in an accurate description of how it does in fact function and how it is structured in the modern world.

In my reading, the Freudian turn is crucial in setting up the scene for the revelation of immunity as part of the very fabric of community. Freud’s radical reevaluation of Le Bon’s discourse turns the smooth, homogenized space of the crowd into a dynamic field of negatively charged relations. Here it is not the innate, vitalist force of fellow-feeling that is activated, but the empty spaces, the interstices between individuals. As Žižek writes, “what Freud called “crowd/*Masse*” is precisely not a distinct communal network but a *conglomerate of solipsistic individuals*—as the saying goes, one is by definition lonely in a crowd. Thus the paradox is that a crowd is a fundamentally *antisocial* phenomenon” (*Parallax* 311; emphasis in original). Freud installs relation, as negativity, back into the heart of collective dynamics, not by doing away with the leader, in some kind of sanguine democratic gesture, but by multiplying him, making him reappear everywhere in the crowd.

Freud encourages us to see that immunity cannot only be *discovered* in the seemingly most spontaneous, affective instances of mass phenomenon, it is just as capable of *accounting* for them, as their basic constitutive logic. In this connection, Žižek offers the example of a toilet paper shortage in *really existing socialism*:

Our hypothetical starting point is that there is an abundance of toilet paper on the market. But, suddenly and unexpectedly, a rumor starts to circulate that there is a shortage of toilet paper—because of this rumor, people frantically begin to buy it, and of the result is that there is a real shortage of toilet paper. (*Sublime* 185-6)

Initially, this scenario has all the appearance of a blind, spontaneous, affective panic. But it is, as Žižek writes, a “little more complicated” (186), for each participant reasons as follows:

I’m not naïve and stupid, I know very well that there is more than enough toilet paper in the shops; but there are probably some naïve and stupid people who believe these rumors, who take them seriously and will act accordingly [...]; so even if I know very well that there is enough, it would be a good idea to go and buy a lot. (186)

One could analyze the famous fire-in-a-crowded-theater scenario in the same manner: “I know that there is no real fire, that someone is just playing a prank, but there are a lot of stupid people who will believe that there is, so I better step on whomever I can to get out of here.” The point here is that the individual in the crowd relates to the others *from the position*, through the very optic, of the leader. What is more, his own behavior is guided by a thoroughly Le Bonian form of crowd psychology.

In the Freudian mass, one individual relates to the others as a leader to a crowd, as an immune ego to a “they.” Freud thus anticipates what Baudrillard identifies as “the law today”—that is, “To each his own bubble” (39).

Each individual sees himself promoted to the controls of a hypothetical machine, isolated in a position of perfect sovereignty, at an infinite distance from his original universe; that is to say, in the same position as the astronaut in his bubble. (15)

Thus, “original envy” may be read as Freud’s attunement to the immunological aspects of modern collective life, the negativity at the heart of group dynamics.

With these thoughts, we approach the immunitary paradigm of Esposito and its phenomenology in the figure of Tiquun’s Bloom. Roberto Esposito sees immunity, not so much as an anthropological given, but as part and parcel with the biopolitical regime of modernity. Contemporary political philosophy, Esposito argues, is virtually unanimous in declaring that “community is a ‘property’ belonging to subjects that joins them together” (*Communitas* 2). According to such a conception community is either “an attribute, a definition, a predicate that qualifies [subjects] as belonging in the same totality, or [...] a ‘substance’ that is produced by their union” (2). “In each case,” Esposito continues in a Heideggerian vein, “community is conceived of as a quality that is added to their nature as subjects, making them *also* subjects of community” (2; emphasis in original). “For all these philosophies,” community is a “fullness” or a “whole,” or even a “good, a value, an essence, which depending on the case in question can be lost and then refound as something that once belonged to us” (2). Community as a “property” means quite literally that one can own it as an object, resulting in the paradox that the “common” is conceived

through its very opposite—the proper. What members of the community have in common is, according to this conception, also what is “most properly their own” (3).

Trading one paradox for another, Esposito, by contrast, makes recourse to the etymology of the Latin term *communitas*. “In all neo-Latin languages (though not only), “common” (commun, comun, kommun) is what is not proper [but] begins where what is proper ends” (3). The common, Esposito shows, “is what belongs to more than one, to many or to everyone,” and is therefore the opposite of the “private” or “individual” (3). This definition is hardly surprising, but Esposito goes on to unearth another meaning, “less obvious” than this “first canonical one” (4). *Communitas* is traceable back to *munus*, which is connected, Esposito argues, to *onus*, *officium*, and *donum*—“obligation,” “office,” and “gift.” The first two of these, he writes, are immediately clear. It is the third term, the gift, that will play a crucial role in Esposito’s reading of the *munus* of *communitas*.

Following Marcel Mauss’s anthropological work on the gift, Esposito understands the *munus* as “the obligation that is contracted with respect to the other and that invites a suitable release from the obligation” (5). Esposito emerges from this etymology with a radically negative definition of collectivity. *Communitas* is

the totality of persons united not by a ‘property’ but precisely by an obligation or a debt; not by an “addition” but by a “subtraction”: by a lack, a limit that is configured as an onus, or even as a defective modality for him who is “affected,” unlike for him who is instead “exempt.” (6)

It is here that we arrive at the crucial opposition for Esposito’s theory of community—*communitas* and *immunitas*.

[I]f the idea of community expresses a loss, removal, or expropriation—if it recalls not a fullness, but a void and an alteration, this means that the idea of community is felt as a risk, a threat to the individual identity of the subject precisely because it loosens, or breaks, the boundaries that ensure the stability and subsistence of individual identity. It is because community exposes each person to a contact with, and also a contagion by, an other that is potentially dangerous. In the face of precisely such a threat, which has been mythically transcribed in all of the accounts that associate the origin of the human community with a founding offense, modernity activates a process of immunization [...] If [*communitas*] binds individuals to something that pushes them beyond themselves, then the latter reconstructs their identity by protecting them from a risky contiguity with the other, relieving them of every obligation toward the other and enclosing them once again in the shell of their own subjectivity. (*Terms* 49)

For Esposito, immunization is *the* modern paradigm, the one that, in a sense, underlies a whole series of “hermeneutic models” of modernity, such as “secularization,” “legitimation,” and “rationalization” (*Communitas* 12). The immunitary *dispositif*, Esposito argues, which “originally belonged to the medical and juridical fields, has spread to all sectors and languages of our lives, to the point that [it] has become the coagulating point, both real and symbolic, of contemporary existence” (*Terms* 59).

As in Nietzsche and Bataille, there is an obvious bias for one term of the opposition. Like the Apollonian worldview and the restrictive economy, the immunitarian

*dispositif* is a life-negating principle, whereas community, Esposito says, paraphrasing Rousseau, is “the modality of vital existence, of life as pure existence” (*Communitas* 56). Esposito wants us to pass through the “destructive and self-destructive logic of *immunitas*” and begin “thinking about its opposite: the open and plural form of community” (*Terms* 65). But, Esposito is insistent that one cannot simply grasp the life-affirming element of community directly, nor can one simply wish away the immunitary *dispositif*. The object, for Esposito, is to “think an affirmative biopolitics *through the lens of immunity*” (Campbell xvii; emphasis mine). This would seem to entail making immunity itself once again the beneficent “custodian and producer of life” (Lemm 7).

In the chapters that follow, I allow Esposito to go on alone in pursuit of his “affirmative biopolitics” (though we will glimpse something like it in Anderson’s *Marching Men*), in order to tarry a little longer in the negative. I turn, instead, to Tiqqun’s *Theory of Bloom*, which takes Joyce’s famous protagonist as a figure for the subject of Empire and its immunitarian *dispositif*. The work of Tiqqun (also sometimes called The Invisible Committee) is shrouded in rumors and speculations about the identity of its authors, who have maintained individual anonymity. It is largely believed that the authors of the anarchist text *The Coming Insurrection*, which was translated into English in 2009 and made famous by Glenn Beck’s fear-mongering review of the text on his Fox News program, are associated with the members of the Tarnac 9, a group of French youths who were arrested on suspicions of sabotaging a high-speed rail line (Toscano).

Much of Tiqqun’s work, which originally appeared in underground French magazines, has been translated into English and published by Semiotext(e). Refusing the conventions of academic discourse, their texts switch easily from Situationist-style

polemic, to post-structuralist theorizing, to practical anarchist strategy. Tiqqun's work builds on the tradition of Franco-Italian political theory, particularly that of Foucault and Guattari, to diagnose the threat to life under the twin forces of Spectacle and Biopower. In *This Is Not a Program*, Tiqqun look back to the confusing multiplicity of movements known as the Movement of 77 in Italy, to offer a "program" for collective action today. *Introduction to Civil War*, by contrast, is a dense theoretical speculation on the nature of contemporary society that ranges from Hobbes to Foucault.

*Theory of Bloom* supplements the broad-scale narratives of Empire and the biopolitical regime, found in the work of Foucault, Hardt and Negri, and Agamben with a kind of phenomenology of the immune individual. The Bloom—with the definite article—is not so much a subject, as a "Stimmung," a tonality of being, a disposition to the world and others that is universalized in modernity. Under the combined workings of Spectacle and Biopower, the Bloom emerges as the "aggregation of a dual nothingness, that of the 'consumer,' that *untouchable*, and that of the 'citizen,' that pitiful abstraction derived from impotence" (34). The Bloom is not another avatar of the familiar "alienated man," but "the man who has become so conjoined with his alienation that it would be absurd to try and separate them" (20).

A thing among things, Bloom stands outside of everything in an abandonment identical to the abandonment of his universe. He is alone in every company, and naked in all circumstances. There he remains, in exhausted ignorance of himself, his desires, and the world, where, day after day, life says the rosary of his absence. For him all of life's

experiences are interchangeable, and undergone according to a kind of existential tourism. (24)

His alienation runs so deep, is so much a part of his very being, that the Bloom no longer experiences a “particular finitude or separation, but *the* ontological finitude and separation that are common to all human beings” (103; emphasis in original). In this way, he offers an opening, a line of flight, toward a truly ecstatic form of life.

But we should caution that Bloom is not “mass man,” a demographic “they.” This is how he is often portrayed, particularly by sociologists, who see the Bloom with a “shallow gaze” (91). However, when sociologists speak of things like the “fallback to the private sphere,” Tiqqun argue, they fail to see that “this sphere itself has become *completely socialized*” (91). The Bloom is a figure who cannot be thought except as a relation, an entirely negative relation, to his others. This is the precise sense in which he represents a collective phenomenon. In a radical way, what we find in the Bloom, is that, indeed, “he lives like a foreigner in his own country, non-existent and marginal to everything, but all Blooms inhabit the land of Exile together” (103). The Bloom is thus the name for a modern social relation, in which the “estrangement of the Common only refers to the fact that what is common to men appears to them as something particular, proprietary, private” (104). What appears to the Bloom as his most private, internal essence—his immune and alienated individuality—is precisely the thing that he most widely shares.

The Bloom is, thus, the perfection of the *flâneur*, his ontological essence, become massified. Our task, in what follows, will be to maintain skepticism toward his own utterances about his fundamental difference, alienation, and immunity from others, in

order to maintain a steady gaze on the precise manner in which these feelings are collective and shared. It is worth clarifying, however, that although I argue that a theory of collectivity must traverse the immunitary paradigm of the Bloom, this does not count as a vote *for* immunity against community. Nor is it a proclamation about the inevitability or ineradicability of the immunitary paradigm. Rather, this methodological decision comes from the belief, often uttered by Agamben, that “history does not offer return tickets” (*Man Without Content* 15). The power and pervasiveness of the immunitary paradigm, I hope to show, is attested to in the texts that I examine, particularly in their inability to dispense with the immunitary optic, even when they expressly attempt to do so. But even though I tarry in the negative dimension of the immunitary paradigm, I do so only in the interest of discovering the basis for a possible community to come.

With this genealogy in place, we can begin to place recent critical studies of the crowd in literature in their respective theoretical positions. Nicolaus Mills’ *The Crowd in American Literature* was published in 1986, but it was not until the new millennium that work in this area began in earnest. Still studies of the crowd in literature are sporadic and often remain ignorant of each other. Sometimes, as in the recent *Crowd Violence in American Modernist Fiction*, the author proceeds as if he or she is the first in the field. Two studies of the crowd in literature, Mary Esteve’s *The Aesthetics and Politics of the Crowd in American Literature* (2003) and Christian Borch’s essay, “Body to Body: On the Political Anatomy of Crowds” (2009), illustrate the tension, but also the fundamental sameness, in approaches to this topic.

Though their conclusions could not be further apart in the affective disposition they evince toward the crowd, Esteve and Borch share certain powerful and deeply held

beliefs about their subject. Esteve comes at an understanding of American literary representations of the crowd through a classically liberal lens. One of her goals is to “broaden the view of the Enlightenment project’s historical presence in American literature and culture” (10). In particular, Esteve wants to highlight the echoes of Kant’s moral and political philosophy when it comes to American literary accounts of the many (10). In fact, a certain version of Kant is so pervasive throughout her work that his name is seldom directly invoked beyond the first chapter, Esteve tending to refer in the later sections to American political theorists, such as Rawls and Dewey.

One might reasonably wonder what Kant ever wrote about crowds. Esteve, unfortunately, has not exhumed any references to the subject. This seeming misfit of philosophical lens and subject matter is only baffling until we realize that the title of Esteve’s book is misleading and should really begin with the word “against.” The crowd, in her estimate, is not properly political; it is an aesthetic phenomenon. But the aesthetic, in Esteve’s mind, is a debased form of judgment that has not yet graduated to reason.

If there is a positive dimension to Esteve’s analysis of the crowd it involves the manner in which the crowd immediately proves the necessity of a properly political mode of being-together.

[T]hese crowds had a crucial discursive role to play, one that, for reasons elaborated below, can be termed aesthetic. Such figures of the crowd did ultimately bear political meaning, but it was a negative meaning; it entailed the negation of their place at the political-liberal table. In other words...they made visible the idea of a categorically separate sphere, wherein this politically defined populace could be seen as engaged in a

distinctly non-political, but nevertheless deeply attractive and arguably humanly essential, activity. Such representations thus clarified the value of conceiving the political as *not* being everywhere, of conceiving it instead as a set of specific principles and procedures pertaining to a circumscribed sphere of social life. (3)

Crowds, in Esteve's analysis, are valuable insofar as they make explicit their utter lack of value as political forms, insofar as they point toward the need for a separate "public sphere." Her introduction thus ends with a warning about the "implications of mistaking" the "illiberal crowd" for the "liberal public square" (21).

The—surely unintended—consequence of these theoretical presuppositions is that Esteve's work oftentimes appears to simply repeat Gustave Le Bon's conservative denunciations of the irrational crowd. Reading Lydia Maria Child's *Letters from New York*, for instance, Esteve finds that, for Child, immersion in the crowd "amounts to subjective death, to a vanishing of identity" (38). Luckily, though, Child possesses a "resilient reflective capacity to separate her moral and political 'identity' from these forces" (38). For the sake of argument, we can agree with Esteve's description of Child's account of the hellish crowds of mid-nineteenth century New York. The difficulty is that Esteve is not offering a mere description. Rather, she is endorsing such "abstract, disinterested, secular reason as the most viable and readily justifiable political-moral principle" (20).

In the Le Bonian universe, the crowd is equated with the irrational, the primitive, and the unconscious, while the individual is rational, civilized, and conscious. Little has changed in Esteve's analysis, which again and again shows American writers reaffirming

the need to preserve the limits of the individual against the ego-rending Dionysian orgy of the many. The negative value of crowds, in Esteve's work, clearly obviates the possibility of the crowd, mob, riot, demonstration, or march having any political value in and of itself.

There is something unsettlingly deterministic in Esteve's mode of approach. She presupposes that crowds are apolitical and pathological and that the public is properly political and normal and then proceeds to classify various literary representations of collectives in one or the other of these categories. In this way, she simply reaffirms what she already believes and the literature is reduced to the status of the example. Even more problematic is that, in Esteve's examples, it is often the "central consciousness" that is the voice of "public reason" against the "illiberal crowd," but the fact that this narrator, persona, or character is invariably also an individual makes it unclear how the public is in any way collective. The public is always arrived at through the individual consciousness, while the crowd is always seen as a multiplicity—even if this multiplicity is problematically counted as a One. The perspective of the individual consciousness is never questioned sufficiently, so that its immunitary pronouncements about the crowd are simply taken as authorial prescriptions. In this manner, the crowd/public distinction, for which Esteve argues, threatens to collapse into the broader dichotomy of the many and the individual, where the latter is unquestioningly accepted as superior.

On the other end of the spectrum, we find Christian Borch's essay "Body to Body: On the Political Anatomy of Crowds," which proceeds in the poststructuralist vein derided by Esteve (Esteve 20). Borch's essay contains a thumbnail view of many of the ideas in his more recent book *The Politics of Crowds: An Alternative History of*

*Sociology* (2013), which in the spirit of Howard Zinn, presents “a history observed not from the winner’s point of view, as it were, but from the perspective of the defeated” (Borch 18). In addition, “Body to Body” has the benefit of allowing us to see how Borch’s ideas can be put to the study of literature, for it offers a brief reading of Whitman’s “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry.”

Borch, a sociologist, wants to “rehabilitate” (“Body” 272) the negative image of the crowd inherited from classical sociology. However, rather than contest the terms given to us by Le Bon, Sidis, Freud and others, Borch attempts to change our understanding of those terms themselves. Early crowd theorists, Borch explains, gave us a crowd that was associated with the irrational, the bodily, the affective, and the contagious (273). In the 60s and 70s sociologists of the Chicago School began contesting this negative view of the crowd, arguing that there were crucial rational aspects to crowd behavior (276). Borch does not follow this “rational turn,” but instead tries to locate democratic possibilities in the very irrational, bodily aspects theorized by the early sociologists. Through a reading of Whitman and Elias Canetti, Borch shows how the dissolution of individuality can be understood as a positive, democratic good. In the sense of release that comes from immersion in the crowd, the individual is temporarily liberated from the repressive normative strictures that subtend every day, divided existence (285).

Precisely what Le Bon calls the contagion of crowd experience and Esteve the temptation of absorption, Borch celebrates as an antidote to the more common and, by his view, toxic experience of alienation and isolation. Early crowd psychologists like Le Bon were right, Borch argues: the crowd does consume the rational individual in a sublime ocean of bodily sensation. It is just that this is a situation to be embraced rather than

feared. There are obvious resonances here with Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque, those communal, ritualistic, and Dionysian moments when the roles of the powerful and the powerless are temporarily reversed, and with Bataille's notion of continuity, the experience of merging with the infinite for which all of us discontinuous beings yearn (*Erotism* 15).

This is a view that we will have occasion to explore further in the chapter on Sherwood Anderson's *Marching Men* (1917), a highly problematic work that attempts to put contagion to use as the basis for a massive political uprising. For now, I would simply like to point out that both Esteve and Borch take as a matter of fact the suspect scientism of early crowd psychology, particularly its emphasis on the affective, spontaneous, and bodily dimension of crowd experience. In unintentionally adopting Le Bon's conservative attitude toward the crowd, Esteve takes over wholesale his emphasis on the unconscious, irrational, and contagious nature of collective experience. In trying to thwart this stuffy, liberal democratic stance, Borch too can only conceive of the crowd as a welcome bodily counter to the immunitary paradigm of the rational individual.

Though the immunitary paradigm must certainly be overcome, though the object for Borch and for us is to reach a viable form of collective experience, it is not sufficient to simply adjust our affective disposition toward the Le Bonian crowd, but to contest it at its deepest level. Clearly, Esteve's call for a continuation of the immunitary paradigm is hardly necessary, but we must not make the mistake of extolling the virtues of the Dionysian sublime crowd, as if the only antidote to immunity is a holiday from consciousness.

My work departs from the historicist bent of many studies of the crowd in literature, because I am less interested in what a particular crowd stands for or symbolizes for its contemporaries than in how it is constructed, and how its parts relate—or fail to relate—to one another. Of course, it is useful to know how the crowd was apprehended by its contemporaries, what associations it triggered and which discourses were called upon to describe it, but the focus throughout the present work is to put the Blooms that we are back into relation, even if an agonistic one, with our others.

Thus, while it is important to note, for instance, how the discourse of hypnosis was incorporated into theories of crowd psychology and literary representations of the mass, I try to move beyond merely noting this fact to understand the implications that this discursive incorporation has for a viable and working theory of collective action. To put it more simply, noting the presence of the discourse of hypnosis in crowd psychology is largely useful in helping us to see how these terms are still very much with us, how they affect our own behavior when we are ourselves a part of a crowd. Luckily, others have done the purely descriptive work of historicizing this discourse. I would like to take the crowd out of the museum, as it were, and set it down in our world; for there is something ultimately true about Le Bon's insistence on the inscriptive power of the individual leader with respect to the many. The crowd will be what we individuals repeat to each other about it. Here then is where I advance my own small utterance.

The texts that I will look at all try, to varying degrees of success, to subvert the immunitary paradigm. The attempt is explicit in Norris' two wheat novel, *The Octopus* and *The Pit*, and Anderson's *Marching Men*, all of which express some version of the naturalist credo about the death of the individual and the ascendancy of the "social." In

his critical writings, Norris articulates a theory of authorship in terms of mass psychology, directly equating the author with the leader and calling for a new kind of leadership that abdicates its lofty position in order to live, more humbly, among the People. *The Octopus* begins with a version of the Ur-scene of mass psychology, with Presley, the poet, gazing down at the San Joaquin valley from the grand height of a summit and wondering how he can forge his great epic of the West. Norris immediately reveals this immunity as a corrupt and illusory perspective and we see Presley reeling, drunk and stupefied, by his own God-like power. Presley renounces his romantic impulses to embrace a new found “realism” as a poet of and among the people. Strangely, though, Norris does not end here, but attempts to push the dialectic into a third moment, forging an unsuccessful synthesis of transcendent romance and immanent realism through a closing apostrophe to the indomitable Force of wheat.

*The Pit* retraces the progressive humiliation of the Ubermensch leader in the story of Curtis Jadwin and his brazen attempt to corner the wheat market. This is, in essence, a bid to demonstrate his own immunity against the Forces of the stock market, but also against the “crowd” of speculators betting on his inevitable demise. We are treated to a number of scenes in which Jadwin, in the initial attitude of Presley, gazes “down” on the seething swarm of the Pit, but more importantly the spatial and perspectival immunity of the previous novel is transmuted into an existential immunity. Jadwin’s immunity is not merely the effect of a spatial distribution or an optic, but is part of his very being and identity. Significantly, against popular contemporary accounts of financial panics, which warned of the dangers of mass hysteria, Norris reveals the crowd here as a source of

stability and reason, while the immune individual almost literally breaks down into a fractured and hystericized multiplicity.

In both novels, Norris evinces a misplaced optimism in the inevitability of Forces, the various “congeries” of which he is so fond: wheat grains, crowds, and flows of capital. All of these are equated in what can only be described as a semantic sloppiness and elevated over the single, insignificant individual solely because of their number. As a result, the two terms of the conceptual matrix—immune individual and sublime, contagious multitude—are never brought together in a relationship beyond the purely external and agonistic one in which they begin.

Though he is unable to effectively deploy it in his novels, Norris’ critical writings nonetheless point toward what the economist Yanis Varoufakis calls an “open” model of collective action. This is a basically Kantian insight regarding the concatenating effects that individual actions can have on the social field, or, in the case of *The Pit*, the stock market. The responsibility of the novelist, in my reading, is Norris’ way of warning about the self-fulfilling and performative nature of discourse about the many. The “Pit,” that gaping cloacal maw at the heart of Chicago’s stock exchange, can thus be read, in Lacanian terms, as the text’s figure of the “real,” the site where the symbolic world of utterances and transactions meets the imaginary world of the visual sublime. Norris employs the most amplified effects of sublimity to render this void, because it is the site of representation itself, where material goods are turned into symbolic currency, where objects are made equivalent and fungible. Norris, without quite realizing it here, effectively describes the weird space and the strange consistency, of collective action, where utterances about the social world immediately begin to compose it.

We do not see hints of a truly immanent and universalized immunity until Anderson's *Marching Men*, where we find a population of fractured bodies that are dispersed and alienated under the twin forces of Spectacle and Biopower. Taking up the sublime multitude of Norris' wheat novels, Beau McGregor tries to put this power to practical political use by fomenting a mass movement of contagious bodies. The attempt here is to put bodies, with their affective forces and gestures, to work, to make them produce—just what is unclear. The first step, as Anderson describes it, entails nothing more, nor less, than wresting back from the vitiated populace the force and vitalism of a collective gesture. Because of its misguided critique of all language, which is identified with the Spectacle, the novel plunges into ambiguity. The force of the *Marching Men* cannot be presented or articulated except as a certain “something” that stands, we must assume, for a pure force, a presence and a plenitude.

Furthermore, the mass movement that proclaims the death of the individual owes all of its existence to McGregor, the immune individual par excellence, whose power and superiority comes from a hatred of his fellows. McGregor's father, also an outcast, ritualistically takes his son to a summit overlooking the small town of his birth, so that he can see the hive of workers below. Thus begins what I call McGregor's immunity training; it is an optic and metaphysical disposition that will remain with him through the course of the novel, which like Norris' wheat novels, offers us the immune individual, on one hand, and a mystical mass substance, on the other.

But, the portrait of a biopoliticized and atomized population has paved the way for the Bloomesque figure of the *Winesburg* grotesque, an “alienated” individual who defines herself, negatively, against an illusory “they.” In *Winesburg*, immunity is

conceived as a mass condition, so that what the various Blooms of the text truly share is their separation, finitude, and exposure. *Winesburg* does not bemoan the death of collective experience, as is usually assumed; it rather sets the conditions for the coming collective through a double-edged critique against two related myths of communal presence and plenitude. The first myth says that the truly harmonious community exists somewhere else, but certainly not here, while the second insists that it must have existed once upon a time, but has become lost. In mounting this dual critique, Anderson refashions the ambiguous “something” of the previous novel. Where this term initially referred to a presence and plenitude, it now refers to a void, a negativity. Toward the close of the text, Anderson places two Blooms atop a summit, where they “observe” the procession of a phantasmal crowd and thus offers a radical rewriting of the immunitary optic of the *flâneur* .

## CHAPTER 2

### THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LEADER AND THE REVENGE OF THE MANY IN NORRIS' WHEAT NOVELS

“Congeries” is one of Frank Norris’ pet words. It is also an odd word, with an arcane ring that calls attention to itself—a word that one would likely only come across while studying for the SATs. Grammatically singular and plural, it not only sounds and looks like a plural noun, it also denotes a plurality: a “congeries” is a disorderly heap or pile, an aggregation, a collection. Norris uses the word in one of his most quoted lines, from “The Novel with a ‘Purpose’”, about the “highest form of the novel,” which, he writes, “draws conclusions from a whole congeries of forces, social tendencies, [and] race impulses” (*Responsibilities* 26). The word can also take on negative connotations, as in “An American School of Fiction?”, where Norris writes that after Howells established a foundation for a truly American literature, lesser writers

commence[d] to build upon it a whole confused congeries of borrowed, faked, pilfered romanticisms, building a crumbling gothic into a masonry of honest brownstone, or foisting colonial porticos upon facades of Montpelier granite. (*Responsibilities* 196-7)

The best proof that this is a pet word of Norris’, however, is found in the fact that, just as Bartleby’s coworkers do with the phrase “I would prefer not to,” critics of Norris often unconsciously take up the word. Regarding the use of mysticism and Force in *The Octopus*, Tsu-Ching Lu writes that Norris “attempted to experiment with a congeries of narrative modes” (127). In the introduction to volume two of *The Apprenticeship Writings of Frank Norris*, we read:

These writers, like Norris, had not matured in a vacuum [...] What made them great was that, from the congeries of influences to which they were susceptible, they emerged having synthesized their own stylistic signatures and senses of how life should be represented in art” (McElrath xxxii).

Then, there is Don Gifford, explaining how the ideas of Darwin operate in Norris’ work:

The attempt to reflect and express ‘contemporaneous thought’ is obvious; but the result seems to be a congeries of undigested influences—not only the influences of Darwin and his popularizers, but also the influences of Zola, of Howells and the realists and of sentimental and melodramatic popular fiction (Gifford 11-12).

The word not only seems to have a contagious power, but it seems to evoke, for critics, some essence of Norris’ style, his own peculiar unary trait.

Perhaps, Norris likes the word so much because it is able to suggest the vast and infinite, as well as the mundane and bric-a-brac. The Wheat, with a capital W, that serves as a kind of spiritualized substance in Norris’ uncompleted wheat trilogy, is also a form of congeries, one that brings together the plural and singular, and the micro and macro levels of nothing less than life itself. The wheat, this simple grain harvested from the earth, becomes a vast nexus in which global economic and natural forces coalesce:

It was as if the Wheat, Nourisher of Nations, as it rolled gigantic and majestic in a vast flood from West to East, here, like a Niagara, finding its flow impeded, burst suddenly into the appalling fury of the Maelstrom, into the chaotic spasm of a world-force, a primeval energy, blood-brother of the earthquake and the glacier, raging and wrathful. (*Pit* 54).

The above passage, about a “congeries,” is itself an example of the second meaning of congeries. For “congeries” is also a term for a rhetorical strategy, which involves “piling up words of different meaning [...] for a similar emotional effect” (rhetoric by figures). The term is closely related to “synonymia,” which entails the repetition, or stringing together, of synonyms. Perhaps no other word more succinctly describes Norris’ own stylistic penchant, particularly in the wheat novels, *The Octopus* and *The Pit*, for here Norris’ manner of figuring the sublime almost always entails the construction of a string of synonyms, or an accumulation of metaphors. We see this technique at work in the climactic scene of *The Octopus*, when the railroad magnate, S. Berman is buried alive in a torrent of wheat.

A frenzy of terror suddenly leaped to life within him. The horror or death, the Fear of The Trap, shook him like a dry reed. Shouting, he tore himself free of the wheat and once more scrambled and struggled towards the hatchway. [...] Like a storm of small shot, mercilessly, pitilessly, the unnumbered multitude of hurtling grains flagellated and beat and tore his flesh. [...] He was forced back and back and back, beating the air, feeling, rising, howling for aid. [...] And all the while without stop, incessantly, inexorably, the wheat, as if moving with a force all its own, shot downward in a prolonged roar, persistent, steady, inevitable. (352-3)

The passage is typical of Norris’ more amplified moments. The repetition of synonyms (terror, horror, Fear; mercilessly, pitilessly; without stop, incessantly, inexorably; persistent, steady, inevitable), and the use of polysyndeton (flagellated and beat and tore; back and back and back), alongside asyndeton (beating the air, feeling, rising, howling),

results in a rhetorical piling up of words and phrases that itself mimics the torrential onslaught in the action of the novel. Norris tends to heap up words particularly when he is describing a heap, or congeries. Just as a single grain of sand, no bigger than a “small shot,” becomes deadly when it is part of an “unnumbered multitude” (352), Norris seems to imagine, words can gain power when they are amassed in vast assemblages.

After Whitman, perhaps no other nineteenth century American writer betrays such a Deleuzian fascination with concatenations, flows, and multiplicities, on both the level of content and the level of style. Of course, this also includes a fascination for human congeries, such as crowds, mobs, groups, and publics, as well as inhuman herds and swarms. Human agglomerations are often presented, in Norris’ texts, in similarly violent, verbal torrents:

To [Jadwin’s] ears the early clamour of the street, the cries of the newsboys, the rattle of drays came in a dull murmur. It seemed to him that very far off a great throng was forming. It was menacing, shouting. It stirred, it moved, it was advancing. It came galloping down the street, shouting with insensate fury [...] It’s clamour was deafening, but intelligible. For a thousand, a million, forty million voices were shouting in cadence: “Wheat-wheat-wheat, wheat-wheat-wheat.” (219)

The wheat novels that are the focus of this chapter are loaded with various forms of human and inhuman aggregations. The central plot of *The Octopus*, with its large cast of characters and its multiple narrative threads, involves a protracted battle between two factions: the ranchers who are attempting to organize and the railroad monopoly, the titular octopus, whose network of tentacles covers the whole of the country. At the literal

and diegetic center of the novel, Norris depicts three “crowd” scenes in quick succession. First, there is Annixter’s barn dance, in which mass pandemonium ensues, when a shootout erupts (141). Here Norris seems to be primarily concerned with showing, over the course of twenty pages, how a crowd grows and then disperses. Norris’ technique here is painterly, even pointillist:

At every moment the crowd increased [...] There was a babel of talk in the air—male baritone and soprano chatter—varied by an occasional note of laughter and the swish of stiffly starched petticoats [...] For a long time the guests huddled close to the doorway; the lower end of the floor was crowded! the upper end deserted; but by degrees the lines of white muslin and pink and blue sateen extended, dotted with the darker figures of men in black suits. (131)

But when the shootout ensues, all is “bedlam” (140), and

the throng of guests, carried by an impulse that was not to be resisted, bore back against the sides of the barn, overturning chairs, tripping upon each other, falling down, scrambling to their feet again, stepping over one another, getting behind each other, diving under chairs, flattening themselves against the wall—a wild, clamouring, pell-mell, blind, deaf, panic-stricken; a confused tangle of arms, torn muslin, crushed flowers, pale faces, tangled legs, that swept in all directions back from the centre of the floor. (141)

Soon after the shootout, the ranchers gather in the harness room to discuss the organization of a “league” to fight back against the railroad. Drunk and verging on rage,

the “crowd” of ranchers nominates the sensible Magnus Derrick as president of the league. But when he proposes moving slowly and returning to the question the next day, the crowd all but forces him to accept.

En masse, the crowd surged toward the erect figure of the governor [...] Half a hundred hands stretched toward him; thirty voices, at top pitch, implored, expostulated, urged, almost commanded. The reverberation of the shouting was as the plunge of a cataract. (153)

And again, the rhetorical overproduction—the use of congeries, synonymia, and the haphazard mixing of metaphors:

It was the uprising of The People; the thunder of the outbreak of revolt; the mob demanding to be led, aroused at last, imperious, resistless, overwhelming. It was the blind fury of insurrection, the brute, many-tongued, red-eyed, bellowing for guidance, baring its teeth, unsheathing its claws, imposing its will with the abrupt, resistless pressure of the relaxed piston, inexorable, knowing no pity (153).

The wording (resistless, inexorable) is, at moments, identical to the description of the flow of wheat that buries S. Berman. Thematically, the human congeries will function as a support for the classic naturalist motif of the insignificance of the individual. Just as Dreiser’s *Carrie* is swallowed by the sublime human current of Chicago’s streets, Magnus Derrick is overwhelmed by the crowd of ranchers, and Curtis Jadwin, of *The Pit*, is figuratively dismembered by the crowd of speculators.

Jadwin’s hubristic individualism is impossible to sustain in the “economy” of *The Pit*, and thus he learns the lesson of Musil’s *The Man Without Qualities*:

The expenditure of energy made by a citizen quietly going about his business all day long is considerably greater than that of an athlete who lifts a huge weight once a day. Physiologically this has been established; and so doubtless the social sum-total of little everyday exertions, as a result of their suitability for such summation, does bring far more energy into the world than do the deeds of heroes; indeed, the heroic exertion appears positively minute, like a grain of sand laid, in some act of illusory immensity, upon a mountain-top (7-8).

This, however, is not merely a thematic content that concerns Norris' characters alone. Running parallel to this common naturalist motif, we find a carefully considered theory of authorship, more specifically of the relationship between the writer and the crowd, or the social field at large. In Norris' literary essays and in his wheat novels, *The Octopus* and *The Pit*, we can trace something like a dialectical progression involving these two poles, in which the god-like transcendence of the *flâneur* is revealed as the pure fiction that it always was and the author is presented as an embedded player in a dynamic and fluctuating social field. Gone is the safe position of the Hawthornian narrator, who climbs a summit to observe an agreeable, toy-like procession below. Instead, the social field has become a sublime, swirling vortex ready to dash all claims to rational, disinterested distance.

The two novels offer an allegory of authorship, but it is an allegory that is coded in terms of the burgeoning discipline of crowd psychology. Running beneath and through Norris' naturalist praxis, undergirding his understanding of the relationship between the author and his readers, is a theory about the relationship between the leader and the

crowd. Thus, the central characters, Presley, the poet, and Jadwin, the speculator, should be read as stand-ins for both the author and the “leader.” Presley brings these two figures together by imagining himself the voice of the People. Similarly, Jadwin continually fancies himself a Czar, Caesar, and satrap (*Pit* 235), who will corner the wheat market with his “master hand” (*Pit* 175). We see that the metonym of the “master hand” brings all of these identities together, when Norris figures “Literature” as a crowd in the street, “clamouring for a leader to guide it with a master hand” (*Responsibilities* 53). Norris combines in a kind of metaphoric congeries the figures of the financial speculator, the novelist, and the leader, to address a new collective dynamic. This dynamic will reach its apogee in the complex economic field of *The Pit*, where Norris points toward what, borrowing a term from contemporary economist, Yanis Varoufakis, we will call an “open” model of the social field. In dramatically representing the death of the individual, Norris undoes the transcendent, immunitary optic of the *flâneur*, and presages a theory of collective dynamics in which author and public, leader and led, speculator and crowd exist together in a field pulsing with the concatenating effects of individual actions.

As this “open” model of collective dynamics reaches its highest complexity in the economic field of *The Pit*, it will be helpful to begin the analysis of both novels with an example of a “closed” economic theory. According to Sir John Browning, David Ricardo’s success [on the stock market] was “based upon his observation that *people in general* exaggerated the importance of events” (Heilbroner 87; emphasis mine):

If therefore, dealing as [Ricardo] dealt in stocks, there was reason for a small advance, he bought, because he was certain the unreasonable advance would enable him to realize; so when stocks were falling, he sold

in the conviction that alarm and panic would produce a decline not warranted by circumstances. (qtd. in Heilbroner 87)

Here we have a concise example of how a theory of group psychology is applied in the realm of financial speculation. If Browning is to be believed, Ricardo begins with an understanding of how “people in general” (87) will react to a slight deviation in the stock market. In Ricardo’s thought experiment, the stimulus of the rising or falling stock produces a direct, unmediated effect on, or affect in, the individual. We might say that, from Browning’s account, Ricardo’s success is based on a basic distinction between “people in general,” who act spontaneously (but predictably) and Ricardo, who functions primarily as a scientific observer of this spontaneous and “unreasonable” (87), human behavior.

This is what Žižek calls “ideology at its purest,” which, he claims, was posited “for itself” in the

liberal universe, with its founding distinction between the ordinary people immersed in their universe of Meaning...and the cold rational observers who are able to perceive the world the way it is, without moralistic prejudices, as a mechanism regulated by laws (of passions) like any other natural mechanism. (*Living* 150)

This difference between Ricardo and “other people” partakes of the same brash elitism that characterizes the great majority of early work on crowd, group, or mass psychology. In the work of Gustave Le Bon, “the crowd is always intellectually inferior to the individual” (9), so that “by the mere fact that he forms part of an organized crowd, a man descends several rungs in the ladder of civilization” (8).

At the most fundamental level, the difference between the one and the many, in Le Bon's study, is a purely structural matter: to be an individual outside is to be intellectually and evolutionarily superior to the many within—regardless of one's race, class, innate intelligence, etc. Similarly, defining "people in general," in the example of Ricardo, involves making a distinction like the one Nancy notes in *Being Singular Plural*, in which, "'People' clearly designates the mode of 'one' by which 'I' remove myself, to the point of appearing to forget or neglect the fact that I myself am part of 'people'" (7). Here, the content of this distinction—e.g. they are irrational and labile, I am a conscious, rational individual—matters less than the fact of the distinction itself. In other words, the crucial difference between Ricardo and the people he observes is spatial. The very act of disinterestedly "observing" this field of human passions involves absencing oneself from it through a movement of separation and transcendence.

The fallacy of Ricardo's thinking can be demonstrated through a simple mental experiment. For everything to work out in precisely the same manner, it is not necessary that the "people in general" really exist, only that speculators such as Ricardo believe they do. According to this logic, the "people in general" is nothing more than a productive myth. A market composed only of Ricardos would produce the same result—that is to say, massive buying at the sign of a slight increase and massive selling at the sign of a slight decrease. The economic market, after all, is a kind of crowd. Unlike the material of, say, the physicist, the market is made up of humans who, to make matters more complicated, act upon beliefs about humans, crowds and markets. This element of belief, particularly what people in general believe about people in general, must be countenanced in any crowd psychology.

But to recognize this basic truism, which should be but is apparently not, taught in Economics 101, is to embroil oneself in the kind of infinitely recursive dilemma pointed out by Žižek .

Long ago, John Maynard Keynes rendered this self-referentiality nicely when he compared the stock market to a silly competition in which the participants have to pick several pretty girls from a hundred photographs, the winner being the one who chooses girls closest to the average opinion: “It is not a case of choosing those which, to the best of one’s judgment, are really the prettiest, nor even those which average opinion genuinely thinks the prettiest. We have reached the third degree where we devote our intelligence to anticipating what average opinion expects the average opinion to be. (*First 10*)

The basic problem is that of separating the subject of the enunciation from the enunciated subject. This is the simple way to read Greek economist Yanis Varoufakis’ critique of the “closed” models of contemporary economists. Varoufakis explains his critique of the economic fantasy of “closure” by way of a simple comparison between physics and economics:

Physics is blessed with an object of study – let’s call it Nature – that does, normally, not give a damn about the physicists’ theories of it (the Heisenberg Principle excluded) [...] So, if a particular model cannot be ‘closed’ (because it is not solvable), Nature will ensure that the physicists come clean and admit that this is so. Economics on the other hand, by virtue of being a social science, is caught up in the famous infinite regress

problem. What this means is that there exists no neat separation between (a) the economists' object of study and (b) our theories about it. Indeed, our theories are part and parcel of the world of phenomena that we are trying to theorise about (unlike a theory of thermodynamics which is quite independent of the thermodynamic phenomena under study). Thus, on the one hand, our models can never be properly 'closed' (since they are, by construction, 'open' theories/beliefs about theories/beliefs etc.) while, on the other hand, when they are illegitimately 'closed-shut' by the economists (by means of hidden axioms whose purpose is to 'close' the damned models at all cost) there is no objective test that can either confirm or deny the validity of these models. Put differently, the Social Economy can never come to an objective verdict on our economic models (e.g. on some theory of bond markets) simply because these models are an intimate part of our Social Economy (i.e. of the larger game within which agents form beliefs about particular bonds and about the bond market in general). (Varoufakis)

Varoufakis is crystal clear on this point: there is no way to "close" the field of economic activity, no way to take a transcendental position outside of it and merely describe it, because the very same actors who make (necessarily erroneous, because closed) theories about it, also act in it and change it (sometimes even helping to produce the results their erroneous[?] theories predicted).

That such clear-headed thinking is still viewed as a kind of "rogue theory" is truly baffling. The naturalist tension (the famous "divided stream") between determinism and

free will (Pizer 3) is underwritten, I would like to suggest, by this more fundamental formal contradiction. On the one hand, a work like *Sister Carrie*, for example, demonstrates that the human subject—in this case, the labile, impressionable, Carrie—is hopelessly immersed in the thoroughly biopoliticized field of social pressures and injunctions. On the other hand, we cannot escape the fact that such a “theory” of the human agent can only be put forward by someone who stands outside this field, in the position of a “Balzacian commentator” (Pizer 6).

Here the very act of enunciation undermines the content of the statement. One can only say that humans are hopelessly mired in their environmental and biological circumstances, without reflective capacity, by exempting oneself from the class “humans.” That is, unless there are at least two degrees of humanity—the “people in general,” unconsciously directed by “social forces,” and the author or “critic” who, sits back like an indifferent god, refined out of existence, paring his fingernails. Walter Benn Michaels attempts to demonstrate the illusory nature of these pretensions to transcendence, by pointing out the fact that the “naturalist, as a bourgeois functioning in a bourgeois society, is in fact, and unaware to himself, held captive by the very social values he believes he is criticizing” (qtd. in Pizer 3).

Strangely enough, Norris’ own writings on authorship appear to take this very critique as their logical starting point.

You may believe if you choose that the novelist, of all workers, is independent—that he can write what he pleases, and that certainly, certainly he should never “write down to his readers”—that he should never consult them at all. On the contrary, I believe it can be proved that

the successful novelist should be more than all others limited in the nature and character of his work; more than all others he should be careful of what he says; more than all others he should defer to his audience; more than all others—more even than the minister and the editor—he should feel “his public” and watch his every word, testing carefully his every utterance, weighing with the most relentless precision his every statement; in a word, possess a sense of his responsibilities (*Responsibilities* 3-4).

Such sentiments about what Norris will call the Little People may appear as nothing more than the reverse elitism characteristic of liberalism. Against the conservatism of a Le Bon, the Little People are not pictured as a dangerous menace in themselves; they are drawn, rather, as neutral subjects at the whim of forces beyond their control. What they need, above all, is sound advice and direction from responsible leaders.

Speaking of the immense responsibility of the author in the age of mass publishing, Norris employs a set of terms that correspond neatly with the theory of crowds and imitation put forth by Le Bon’s contemporary, Gabriel Tarde. Norris writes,

[F]or every one person who buys a book there are three who will read it and half a dozen who will read what someone else has written about it, so that the sphere of influence widens indefinitely, and the audience that the writer addresses approaches the half-million mark. (*Responsibilities* 50)

Similarly, Tarde develops a general theory of social progress, in which “Inventions, the creations of talented individuals, are disseminated throughout social systems by the process of imitation. These imitations spread...like the ripples on the surface of a pond, regularly progressing toward the limits of the system” (Clark 21). The

recent technological advances of the telegraph, the telephone, the locomotive, mass-produced books, and the mass-circulation newspaper (Clark 54), inspire Tarde to imagine a near future in which the “transmission by imitation” of a “happy initiative” will be “almost instantaneous, like the propagation of a wave in a perfectly elastic medium” (Tarde 191). This “elastic medium” is of course nothing other than the “public,” which Tarde will argue has superseded the physical crowd as the most important form of social aggregation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The obvious conclusion of such a theory is that the “action of imitation [has] become very powerful, very rapid and very far-reaching” (Tarde 181). Reasoning in these terms, Norris offers an injunction for “sincerity.” “If the audience is so vast, if the influence is so far-reaching, if the example set is so contagious,” Norris admonishes the novelist, “it becomes incumbent to ask, it becomes imperative to demand that the half-million shall be told the truth and not a lie.”

As we saw in the previous chapter, early crowd psychology identifies the role of the leader as one that is quintessentially writerly. Le Bonian crowd psychology asserts a simple temporality in which the leader offers “suggestions” to the crowd that are subsequently communicated from member to member through the operation of “contagion.” Thus, much of Le Bon’s *The Crowd* reads like a how-to manual for the would-be leader, who must become a master of rhetoric, by using “images, words, and formulas” (61). Le Bon refers several times, in this connection, to the “astonishing power of advertising” (78), while Tarde explicitly identifies the journalist as the new leader in the late nineteenth-century: “Far more than statesmen, even the most elevated, these men make opinion and lead the world. And when they have become indispensable, what a solid throne is theirs!” (Tarde 284). .

Norris goes on to bring the crowd psychological dimension of this prescription to the forefront, drawing, as he does so, a tableau that will reappear throughout these chapters. Replying to the novelist who would complain that it is so hard to find original material, Norris enjoins, “[L]ook from your window. A whole Literature goes marching by, clamouring for a leader and a master hand to guide it. You have but to step from your doorway” (*Responsibilities* 53). The novelist is here placed in the role of a leader of the masses. Here is the “house of fiction” with a protagonist/narrator looking from the vantage of a window at a bustling “human scene” below. This is the position that Brandt has analyzed so thoroughly in his work on the influence of the European *flâneur* position on 19<sup>th</sup>-century American literature. It is the optic that I will term, following Esposito, the immunitary optic. Here, the author-consciousness stands apart from and above the crowd that he observes, occupying a position that is spatially analogous to the platform of the leader.

In this passage, Norris makes the connection between the author and the leader explicit, thus seeming to set us down in the liberal universe with which we began. But, then he has the transcendent observer “step from [the] doorway” to become, as it were, part of the very scene he was just observing. “The difficulty,” Norris writes, “is to get at the immediate life, immensely difficult, for you are not only close to the canvas, but are yourself part of the picture” (*Responsibilities* 20). This is no mere rhetorical flourish, for the movement of the imaginary interlocutor from the window to the street below is echoed in Norris’ reprisal of the all-powerful and charismatic leader of crowd psychology. Thus, after invoking the Leader and the Little People whom he guides with a “master hand” (a phrase that will return, significantly, in reference to Curtis Jadwin of

*The Pit* (175), Norris explains that he is thinking of an altogether different leader than the ones we are used to. It is a “misconception of the Leader [that] creates the picture of a great and dreadful figure, wrapped in majesty, solemn and profound” (*Responsibilities* 54). As Norris envisions him, the novelist-leader “is no vast, stern being, profound, solemn, knowing all things, but, on the contrary, is as humble as the lowliest that follow after him” (54)

In these parallel gestures of moving the novelist from the window to the street and of humbling the leader, Norris effects an immanentization of the author-function. The blurring of the roles of reporter and novelist is an acknowledged feature of naturalism, but here is a rare case where this feature is directly expressed as a relation between an individual leader and his crowd. From this perspective, what is new about naturalism is the fact that the authorial consciousness no longer stands over and above his “subjects,” but lives within and among them.

In this manner, Norris begins with a transcendental optic typical of the liberal universe, but soon goes on to institute a decisive shift in perspective that will open up a wholly new problem. After arguing, in Tardean terms, for the immense influence of the novelist and his responsibility to truth, Norris invokes the realm of financial speculation, where the effect of telling lies has clear consequences.

[T]ruth in fiction is just as real and just as important as truth anywhere else—as in Wall Street, for instance. A man who does not tell the truth there, and who puts the untruth upon paper over his signature, will be very promptly jailed. (*Responsibilities* 51)

Unfortunately, Norris continues, no such penalty occurs for the novelist who “puts the untruth upon paper.” Strange, Norris reflects, because the effects are equally disastrous. Norris only hints here at what these effects are and how they are spread. That will be the substance of the subsequent wheat novel, *The Pit*. But even with this brief analogy, equating the novelist and the Wall Street speculator, or, more specifically, the effects their actions and words have on the general public, he forges a rough synthesis of the two seemingly antithetical perspectives we have been discussing. As in the liberal universe, the speculator and novelist appear as “master hands” whose actions have a decisive impact on the Little People below. But, precisely in recognizing this contagious influence, the transcendent figure is placed squarely within the field of social activity. What Norris actually evokes then is not the distinct spheres of the liberal universe, but an immanent field in which each individual agent must bear the burden of an immense responsibility—the responsibility that comes from knowing that his or her actions produce a ripple-like effect on the whole of society.

I would like to suggest that what Norris does, in essence, is correct Ricardo’s market theory with the moral metaphysics of Kant’s categorical imperative. As you will recall, the categorical imperative states that you must “act in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law” (Kant 31). To point to this connection between Norris’ Responsibilities of the Novelist and Kant’s categorical imperative is to reveal a Kant quite different from the one who buttresses Mary Esteve’s critique of the illiberal crowd mind. Though Esteve pays lip service to the Kantian “sensus communis,” which, as Esteve herself quotes, is a “*public* sense... a critical faculty which in its reflective act takes account (*a priori*) of the mode of

representation of every one else, in order, *as it were*, to weigh its judgement with the collective reason of mankind,” her actual deployment of Kant owes more to his aesthetic philosophy (Esteve 10; emphasis in original). In her reading, the famous Kantian “disinterest” of aesthetic judgment lends support to an immunitary disposition that wards off what Esteve considers a dangerous “mimetic identification” with the sensuous particulars of group experience (Esteve 17).

Such a view of crowd experience supports the fear-mongering conservatism of Le Bon. Once absorbed in the crowd, Esteve writes, the “beholder-subject is no longer aware of itself as an organizing receiver of experience” (Esteve 16). The subject who becomes absorbed in the crowd is, for Esteve, one who fails to sustain a perspective in which the crowd remains a mere painting. Accordingly, the paradigmatic exponent of a Kantian aesthetic of the crowd, for Esteve, is the same Hawthornean narrator that Brand criticizes for “painting” rather than “seeing” (Brand 112). Thus, where Brand sees a 19<sup>th</sup>-century writer struggling to retain “epistemological control” in the face of the overwhelming changes of a modern, urban world, Esteve sees a champion of aesthetic disinterest.

We should recall, instead, Foucault’s analysis of Kant’s “What Is Enlightenment?” with which he opens his lectures of ’83-84, titled, *The Government of Self and Others*. Foucault begins by pointing to the conditions of its publication. The fact that this text was originally published in a journal is significant, Foucault points out, because the text itself is concerned with articulating the concept of *Publikum*, of public, which means nothing other than “the concrete...relationship between the writer (the qualified writer, translated in French as *savant*; *Gelehrter*; man of culture), and the reader (considered as an any individual)” (Foucault 7). “In a sense,” Foucault says, “[Kant’s]

notion of Aufklärung, the way he analyzes it, is nothing other than the explanation of this relationship between the Gelehrter (the man of culture, the savant who writes) and the reader who reads” (8). Kant’s text is unique, for Foucault, in that it is the first philosophical text to ask “the question of the present, of present reality” (11). This question, Foucault argues, will become “a distinctive feature of philosophy as a discourse of modernity and on modernity” (13). The “present” here is defined in its fullest sense, so that it not only comprises something like the cultural moment or zeitgeist, nor even simply what in the present is worthy of philosophical reflection; it entails all of this but it also includes a reflection on how he, Kant, “is part of this process...how...as savant, philosopher, or thinker, he has a role in this process in which he is thus both an element and an actor” (12). It is with Kant, then, that “we see the appearance of the question of the present as a philosophical event to which the philosopher who speaks of it belongs” (12).

This self-reflexive action of taking account of one’s own intervention into a given situation—is it not, in essence, a practical application of the categorical imperative, as applied to the situation of authorship? The categorical imperative refers the subject to the totality of the social field, the Publikum, but precisely as non-totalized, as open to the subject’s own intervention. In so doing, the distinction between writers and readers, between leaders and the Little People, becomes blurred, nearly to the point of extinction, for I must imagine that every free agent will act in precisely the same manner that I do. This is what Ricardo fails to do, what Varoufakis says economists in general by necessity *cannot countenance*, and, finally, what Norris says the novelist must do.

Reading in an allegorical mode, one finds this Kantian questioning of the “present” and the author’s role in it is as “both element and actor” at the heart of the wheat trilogy.” H. Willard Reninger has shown that the concerns voiced in Norris’ literary essays, where “the attitude of the novelist toward his fellow men and women is the great thing, not his inventiveness, his ingenuity, his deftness, or glibness, or verbal dexterity” (qtd. in Reninger 221), are central to the plot of *The Octopus*. The struggle of Presley, the socialist-poet, to find “the great song that should embrace in itself a whole epoch, a complete era, the voice of an entire people, wherein all people should be included” (*Octopus* 7) is a transparent dramatization of the theoretical claims voiced in *The Responsibilities*.

Norris shows how the writer, Presley, works through the dialectic of Romance and Realism. At the start, Presley’s penchant for Romance continually comes up against “the stubborn iron barrier” that is the railroad. Searching for the “True Romance” of the West, he finds only “grain rates and unjust freight tariffs” (*Octopus* 9). By the novel’s midpoint, his writing had “undergone a complete change,” with the social-realism of his new poem, “The Toilers” (202). The “vague, impersonal” romance has given way to a deep concern for the everyday troubles of the “People” (203). This simple movement from one term of the dichotomy to the other finally gives way, at novel’s end, to an attempted synthesis of the two, embodied in the figure of the Wheat, which functions as something like spirit-matter. In discovering the spiritual quality of something as seemingly mundane as wheat, Presley follows Norris’ famous injunction to “find romance and adventure in Wall Street or Bond Street” (*Responsibilities* 20).

The subtle movement, in “The Responsibilities,” from “window,” to “street,” to living “if not among people then in people,” runs parallel to Presley’s dialectical progress through “romance” and “realism” to their synthesis in the symbol of the Wheat. Thus, at the start of *The Octopus*, Presley is spatially rooted at the metaphorical window. After a conversation with Vanamee, which provides the young writer with some “local color,” Presley’s mind is filled with “picture after picture,” as he contemplates his great Epic of the West. Employing a metaphor that looks backward to Clifford Pynchon watching a parade from the upper-story window and forward to the vignette of the “old writer” visited by a procession of grotesques that opens *Winesburg, Ohio*, Norris writes, “The epic defiled before his vision like a pageant” (27).

Presley climbs to the “summit of one of the hills—the highest—that rose out of the canyon, from the crest of which he could see for thirty, fifty, sixty miles down the valley” (26). Lazily smoking his pipe at this sublime height, Presley pulls out his copy of the *Odyssey*, reads a few lines and feels the “desire of creation, of composition, grow big within him” (26):

Once more, he shot a glance about him, as if in search of the inspiration, and this time he all but found it. He rose to his feet, looking out and off below him. As from a pinnacle, Presley, from where he now stood, dominated the entire country. The sun had begun to set, everything in the range of his vision was overlaid with a sheen of gold. (27)

What follows is a minute detailing of the landscape stretching below, in which Presley’s vision ranges farther and farther. As his eyes traverse miles, each successive series of landmarks becomes “only foreground, a mere array of accessories—a mass of

irrelevant details” in relation to the expanding view. The details of the Seed ranch, “close at hand,” are soon dwarfed by the “huge scroll” of the Los Muertos ranch that stretches in the distance. But even this view is but a microcosm of the broader one.

Then, as the imagination itself expanded under the stimulus of that measureless range of vision, even those great ranches resolved themselves into mere foreground, mere accessories, irrelevant details [...] Ha! there it was, his epic, his inspiration, his West, his thundering progression of hexameters...As from a point high above the world, he seemed to dominate a universe, a whole order of things. He was dizzied, stunned, stupefied, his morbid supersensitive mind reeling, drunk with the intoxication of mere immensity. Stupendous ideas for which there were no names drove headlong through his brain. Terrible, formless shapes, vague figures, gigantic, monstrous, distorted, whirled at a gallop through his imagination. (27-28)

Referring to this passage, Ron Mottram reminds us of Norris’ early training as a painter and gives credible support for the influence of late nineteenth century techniques of visual representation, particularly photography and early cinema, on Norris’ work (Mottram 575). Like other naturalist writers, Norris employed the “camera eye” (575), but passages like the above also point to the influence of pre-cinematic forms like the “panorama” (578).

In truth, the visual counterpart to this literary perspective is still rather difficult for us to imagine. The unfurling and ever-expanding view is not quite the same thing as a shot afforded by a moving aerial camera, in which the landscape is gradually eaten up by

the bottom of the frame. Perhaps, this panoramic view is closer to the first half of the Eames' short film, *The Power of Ten*, in which the lens progressively widens, so that small details give way to a bigger picture.

On the one hand, this scene would seem to be an ideal example of Mottram's thesis regarding Norris and his employment of contemporary techniques of visual representation. In contrast to other naturalist writers, Norris

was not content with merely rendering the visible world; rather, he sought to capture the dynamic of turn-of-the-century America through a creative act of perception that included the relativity of point of view and the transforming power of movement on what is perceived. The result was a complex rendering that portrayed the meaning of events in relation to the perspective, both physical and ideological, from which they were viewed. In this light, Norris should be seen as an important transitional figure, a writer who bridges the gap not only between the static photographic conceptions of the previous century and the more dynamic conceptions of the present century but between a fixed idea of reality and a relativistic one. (575)

But the "physical and ideological" relativity remains a mere suggestion, in Mottram's analysis. Thinking beyond the descriptive coincidence of contemporary forms of visual representation—such as the panorama—and the perspective of a character like Presley, we would do well to consider what Norris is saying about the ideological meanings embedded in these material practices of visualization. In his quote of this early passage

from *The Octopus*, Mottram significantly leaves out all indication that we are supposed to regard Presley's god-like view with suspicion.

First of all, Presley "seemed to dominate a universe" (28; emphasis mine). In a kind of inebriated enactment of the experience of the sublime, the "mere immensity" of the landscape transmutes into an intoxicating feeling of Presley's own "immensity." What, on the one hand, looks like a complete coincidence of subject and object, is, in a thoroughly Kantian manner, a kind of negative pleasure of transcendence. Presley is left "dizzied, stunned, [and] stupefied," precisely with his own power.

Presley's god-like domination of the scene below, furthermore, is the perspectival corollary to his "vague" romantic pretensions. Presley tells himself that he is part of the people, and that he sympathizes with their hopes and fears, but when he is confronted with an actual farmer, Hooven, he is merely revolted—revolted precisely by what he considers Hooven's "contracted horizon" (9). "In the picture of that huge romantic West that he saw in his imagination," the "bickerings between the farmers of the San Joaquin and the Pacific and Southwestern Railroad" stuck out as "the one note of harsh colour that refused to enter into the great scene of harmony" (9). The transcendental perspective of the summit is ideal for creating false harmonies, for blending particulars into a homogeneous whole, but it is a pure illusion that is unable to incorporate the details of banal reality.

When, just prior to this scene on the summit, Presley encounters his old friend Vanamee, the psychic shepherd, the relationship between Presley's god-like optic and the masses becomes apparent. The pervasiveness of the comparison of the masses with sheep, in both popular and sociological discourse, might be enough to convince us that

Vanamee is another stand-in for the charismatic leader of the crowd, but the addition of Vanamee's strange "sixth sense" leaves little room for doubt. After "calling" Presley, without uttering a sound, Vanamee confesses to him that he is able to telepathically guide his sheep by closing his eyes and pressing his fists into his temples (20). "I believe," Vanamee says later, "in a sixth sense, or, rather, a whole system of other unnamed senses beyond the reach of our understanding" (119).

Like the phrase "master hand," which Norris uses in reference to Jadwin, in *The Pit*, and to the author-leader, in *The Responsibilities*, "sixth sense" is a phrase that does double duty. Just after admonishing the would-be novelist that he must learn to live "among people," Norris adds, in *The Responsibilities*, that he must almost possess that "nameless sixth sense" shared by "great musicians," "great inventor," "great scientists," "the financier and the poet" (21). Early crowd psychology often made an equation between the hypnotist and the leader as, for instance, when Le Bon writes, "[A]n individual immersed for some length of time in a crowd in action soon finds himself...in a special state, which much resembles the fascination in which the hypnotized individual finds himself in the hands of the hypnotizer." Freud's *Mass Psychology and Analysis of the 'I'* (1921), provides the most elaborate application of this analogy, clearly mapping the "two party" scenario of hypnotist and hypnotic subject onto the relationship between the leader and the crowd. "[T]he hypnotic relationship is (if the expression will be permitted) the formation of a mass of two," Freud writes (68). In fact, he continues, hypnosis is "actually identical" to the phenomenon of "mass formation," in so far as the behavior of the mass toward the leader is formally analogous to the behavior of the hypnotized subject toward the hypnotist (68).

Presley's grand realization at the novel's close will come from heeding Vanamee's cryptic utterances regarding the "larger view" (*Octopus* 356), a concept that combines the mystic powers of the hypnotist and the more literal "view" from a transcendent height. It is fitting then that Presely comes upon the sight of Vanamee's herd of sheep from atop yet another "higher ridge."

Now, as he turned half way about, looking down into the shallow hollow between him and the curve of the creek, he saw them very plainly [...] But the number seemed incalculable. Hundreds upon hundreds upon hundreds of grey, rounded backs, all exactly alike, huddled, close-packed, alive, hid the earth from sight. It was no longer an aggregate of individuals. It was a mass—a compact, solid, slowly moving mass, huge, without form, like a thick-pressed growth of mushrooms, confused, inarticulate, like the sound of very distant surf, while all the air in the vicinity was heavy with the warm, ammoniacal odour of the thousands of crowding bodies. (*Octopus* 19)

Here, we might say, is early crowd psychology in its most naked form. Domesticated, herd animals are a favorite analogue of the crowd for early crowd psychologists, especially sheep, for their blind obedience. Le Bon writes, "A crowd is a servile flock that is incapable of ever doing without a master" (72). The "herd-instinct" popularized by Nietzsche and employed again by Wifred Trotter and Freud refers to the collective's unthinking adherence to the leader or majority sentiment. Le Bon employs this metaphor again when he tries to describe how ideas in a crowd become "contagious" (78).

This phenomenon is very natural, since it is observed even in animals when they are together in number. Should a horse in a stable take to biting his manger the other horses in the stable will imitate him. A panic that has seized on a few sheep will soon extend to the whole flock. (78)

Not only is this metaphor literalized in Presley's vision of the herd of sheep that blindly follow the telepathic suggestions of their leader, a crucial element of crowd theory is visually represented here. In a crowd, Le Bon writes, the "sentiments and ideas of all the persons in the gathering take one and the same direction" and the "conscious personality" of the individual "vanishes" (2). In this way, a "single being" is formed (2), and "the heterogeneous is swamped by the homogeneous" (6).

To be more precise, and to recall the ideas about the relationship between the sociological discourse of the crowd and the American literary counterpart with which the first chapter opened, Norris is not simply providing a kind of visual analogue or aid to a high theoretical concept in this passage. He is indicating that the visual and the theoretical perspectives are thoroughly imbricated in one another. This is not to say that a theorist like Le Bon, gazing from a height, sees a crowd that appears homogeneous and then imagines that they must be acting and thinking homogeneously, too. Le Bon never "looks" in such a clearly literal manner as Presley does. But the understanding of the crowd as a single being, as a homogeneous One, is inseparable from such a visual perspective.

But Norris goes further, to effect a transition from an aesthetic of the agreeable to the sublime. Presley's romantic desire to "see everything through a rose-coloured mist—a mist that dulled all harsh outlines, all crude and violent colours," is in a sense granted in

his panoramic view of the “gigantic sweep of the San Joaquin” (*Octopus* 27). However, the contrast between Presley’s experience and that of the narrator of Hawthorne’s “Sights from a Steeple” is striking. In Hawthorne’s sketch, the narrator climbs to the top of a steeple, where, like a “watchman, all-heeding and unheeded,” he plays the part of “Paris on the top of Ida” (*Tales* 45), judging the unwitting actors in the scene below. As Brand points out, everything here is “legible” and “benign” (109). The narrator observes a “well-maintained” world of “social order [and] extreme propriety” (109). Similarly “all-heeding and unheeded,” Presley’s domination of the scene below nevertheless has an altogether different effect on him, as he is struck dumb by a kind of vengeance of the sensible. What begins as complete mastery of the scene, ends with Presley “reeling, drunk” (28). The two passages, of the San Joaquin valley and the herd of sheep, echo each other, so that the “compact, solid...mass,” of sheep, “huge [and] without form,” parallels the herd of “formless ideas” that “gallop” through Presley’s imagination.

The very fantasy of transcendence with respect to the multitude gives way to its opposite: a sublime and terrifying occupation of the most intimate space of reflection by the object itself. It is as if the object has surged up and extended beyond the limits of the visual field. Placed in what Mary Esteve would consider the ideal perspective of the Kantian viewer before the canvas, Presley is not afforded a rational disinterested view of the herd. This is a moment in which we must be very precise. Presley’s experience on the summit is not a warning, a la Esteve’s reading of American literature of the crowd, about the dangers of over-identification with or immersion in the multitude. The problem is not that Presley too easily succumbs to the sublime dismemberment of crowd experience. Rather, his drunken stupefaction is a direct *result* of the desire to maintain the “larger

view,” the immunitary optic. Norris is demonstrating here how this desire is perverted, at its very core, and liable to turn into its direct opposite.

The naturalist “sublime,” at least the version of it that Norris offers us here, is directly identified as a result of a “distorted” vision. A writer like Lydia Maria Child experiences a terrifying disintegration of identity when immersed in the crowded streets of New York City, but is able to recover herself on the literal “higher ground.” In the naturalism of Norris, this safe retreat no longer exists. The transcendent position of the author-leader with respect to the crowd becomes impossible to maintain. The author-leader, Norris suggests, can no longer remain immune to the contagion of the crowd.

Significantly, just after the herd scene, Vanamee “calls” Presley without uttering a sound. He stands for a moment watching the herd, and then suddenly, a “curious thing” occurs. He thinks, at first, that someone had called his name, but there is no sound but the “vague noise of the moving sheep” (*Octopus* 19). Then, he wonders if perhaps someone had beckoned to him from below with a motion of the arm, but “nothing stirred” (19). Nevertheless, the next moment finds Presley hurrying toward the shepherd, a mere black dot below, “wondering all the time that he should answer the call with so little question, so little hesitation” (20).

Having just viewed the herd from his summit, Presley is now one of the sheep. Just as he advises in *The Responsibilities*, Norris has his novelist leave the upper window and walk out the door to become “part of the picture” he was just painting. Thus begins the second moment of Presley’s progress, when Presley forsakes his illusory, romantic transcendence and becomes committed to the gritty, realistic details of the People, as evidenced in his poetic breakthrough. His successful poem, “The Toilers,” comes about

through a “complete change” in his writing and outlook (202), itself inspired by the injustice of the increased tariff imposed on the ranchers by the railroad company. Overhearing a conversation between Dyke and Carraher about the new tariff, Presley experiences a complete sympathetic identification with the abused ranchers, so that “[h]e too “saw red” [and] a mighty spirit of revolt heaved tumultuous within him” (203). Presley suddenly realizes why his “vast, vague, IMPERSONAL Song of the West” could never come off.

At the time when he sought for it, his convictions had not been aroused; he had not then cared for the People. His sympathies had not been touched [...] Now he was of the People; he had been stirred to his lowest depths. His earnestness was almost a frenzy. He BELIEVED, and so to him all things were possible at once. (203)

Flinging his old work aside, he composes his “Socialistic poem” (215) in a fit of inspiration, his pen seeming to “travel of itself” (203). Norris’ advice from *The Responsibilities* would seem to have been accomplished here, and yet Norris persists into a third moment. The fame that comes with the success of his poem forces Presley into several ethical compromises, but his final disillusionment comes with the defeat of the agrarian cause.

The third and final moment of Presley’s dialectical progress comes in the closing paragraphs of the novel, when he achieves the “larger view” in which good, or FORCE, ultimately triumphs: “[S]uddenly Vanamee’s words came back to his mind. What was the larger view, what contributed the greatest good to the greatest numbers?” Presley’s mentally recounts the manifold miseries he has witnessed throughout the course of the

novel: men had “perished...in the very noon of life, young girls were “brought to...shame,” old women died “for lack of food” [...] (356). But, much like the scene on the summit, in which details dissolve into a grand totality, these tragedies are but fleeting illusions when compared to the “larger view” (356).

THE WHEAT REMAINED. Untouched, unassailable, undefiled, that mighty world-force, that nourisher of nations, wrapped in Nirvanic calm, indifferent to the human swarm, gigantic, resistless, moved onward in its appointed grooves.

Thus it is, we read, that the “larger view always and through all shams, all wickedness, discovers the Truth, that will, in the end, prevail, and all things, surely, inevitably, resistlessly, work together for good” (356-7). The “larger view” has, finally, to do with the many as opposed to the individual. “[T]he individual suffers, but the race goes on. Annixter dies, but in a far distant corner of the world a thousand lives are saved” (356).

This is clearly unsatisfying on a number of levels. The gospel of a FORCE that sublates all “minor” human tragedies is one preached not only by the psychic shepherd Vanamee, but by the capitalist Shelgrim, as well, who lectures Presley on the inexorable Forces of “supply and demand,” which “no man” can “stop” or “control” (314). Indeed, looking back over the novel with this realization in mind, we find that the word “Capital” would work just as well in nearly any of Norris’ bombastic apostrophes to “Wheat.” Is not Capital, too, “wrapped in Nirvanic calm, indifferent to the human swarm, gigantic [and] resistless” (356)? One thinks here of Žižek’s oft-repeated notion that Buddhism is the official religion of global capitalism.

This view is entirely too optimistic, not because it finds the silver-lining in the catalogue of everyday human miseries, but because it imagines that natural forces, like wheat, are actually impervious to the machinations of mere men. This lesson will be repeated in *The Pit*, where Norris' London Whale, Curtis Jadwin, meets his just deserts for imagining that he can control the wheat market with his "master hand." Of course, today we regularly see powerful individuals performing these kinds of massive market manipulations without ever suffering anything like a revenge of the inexorable natural laws.

Though it is not at all clear that Presley simply "disowns his freshly developed agrarian radicalism" and is "converted to the cause of corporation," as Den Tandt argues (Den Tandt73), in the end, Norris does not give us enough grist, so to speak, to decide whether Presley's "larger view" at the novel's close is to be read as a true revelation or as a mere repetition of his earlier illusory perspective of god-like transcendence. It is possible that Norris himself cannot quite decide. However, it would seem that Norris at the very least *wants* to find a way to resolve the dialectical progression that he set in motion, to hammer home more decisively what is suggested in *The Responsibilities*: that the very dichotomy of Romance and Realism is a false one.

Finally and most importantly for our purposes, the conclusion is unsatisfying because it would seem to renege on the ultimate lesson of *The Responsibilities*—namely, the responsibility part. Shelgrim's apology for capitalism, so close in spirit to Presley's peon to wheat, is also an apology for the actions of individuals. Norris is not praising capitalist corporations, per se, but all forms of corporation, all kinds of congeries, assemblages, and multiplicities, through a broad act of linguistic equation that leaves

everything sublimely ambiguous. But in getting carried away on the tide of his own linguistic congeries, Norris forgets his warning from *The Responsibilities* about how an individual action *can* have significant consequences. The author must be careful about how he describes reality, because his description is capable of changing the very reality he describes. This is all the more true, because he deals, like the leader of the crowd, like the financial speculator, in the self-reflexive realm of beliefs and opinions. “[M]ore than all others [the novelist] should [...] watch his every word, testing carefully his every utterance, weighing with the most relentless precision his every statement” (*Responsibilities* 4). The gospel of Force acquits all individuals of responsibility, but it also involves a completely irresponsible use of language, in which all terms become fungible.

Having attempted and failed, in *The Octopus*, to play out the dialectic of authorship that moves from transcendence, to immanence, to some yet-defined third moment, Norris takes up the difficulty again, this time through the figure of the unapologetic capitalist. In telling the story of Curtis Jadwin’s hubristic bid to corner the Wheat market, Norris offers a familiar naturalist moral about the inevitable tragic end of the individual who attempts to rise above the crowd of common men. This is “irresponsible trading” on par with the kind seen in our own recent financial crisis. Instead of being defeated by the impersonal Octopus that is the railroad monopoly, or buried by a torrent of wheat, however, Jadwin is assailed by the human crowd of traders whom he is pitted against throughout the course of the novel.

Though the sublime elements of *The Pit* offer a familiar echo of those found in *The Octopus*, they are decidedly darker and more diabolical this time around. This time,

too, Norris makes no motion toward a third moment, instead suspending the first moment through almost the entire narrative, and delaying the second moment until the final pages, when Jadwin plunges into the Pit and is devoured by the “herd of wolves” (266).

Interestingly, too, though the transcendent optic of the summit is preserved in muted form, particularly in the scenes in which Jadwin gazes down into “seething” crowd of the Pit, the floor of the Board of Trade, below, this visual orientation becomes, I would like to suggest, more metaphysical in nature. As we will see, the transcendent, god-like optic of the summit is internalized, in Jadwin, as a form of metaphysical immunity from the crowd.

Furthermore, in *The Pit*, there is no attempt at a higher synthesis, no gesture toward a silver-lining. Norris does try to preserve the thematic of the wheat, that “world-force,” that “Nourisher of Nations,” that outruns all minor human tragedies, but what he really means in these instances is not “wheat” but something much closer to what G.C. Selden, in *The Psychology of the Stock Market* (1912), calls the “They.” This is, admittedly, a “hazy general notion” that “the trader or investor would do much better to rid his mind” of (Selden 22), but it is far less hazy than the “People” of *The Octopus*, a collective subject that never effectively *appears* in *The Octopus*.

In place of the abstraction of the People, *The Pit* details the suffocating, physicality of the crowd:

Arms were flung upward in strenuous gestures, and from above the crowding heads in the Wheat Pit a multitude of hands, eager, the fingers extended, leaped into the air. All articulate expression was lost in the single explosion of sound as the traders surged downwards to the centre of

the Pit, grabbing at each other, struggling towards each other, tramping, stamping, charging through with might and main. (65)

In these descriptions of writhing piles of dismembered body parts, Norris achieves some of his most sublimely terrifying prose, anticipating, even, the close framing techniques of the contemporary zombie film. This is a version of horror, surely, but there is something else involved, too.

David Zimmerman has already pointed out the crowd psychology elements in *The Pit*, particularly where the discourses of hypnosis and mass hysterias coincide (Zimmerman 135). It is precisely in this overlap, in fact, where we find a similarity of style, for despite its pretensions to scientific objectivity, early crowd psychology is not without its own sublime moments. It is not uncommon, for instance, for early writers of the crowd to call upon the sublime imagery of nature to help them represent the inchoate figure of the crowd or the masses. Le Bon describes the individual in the crowd as a “grain of sand amid other grains of sand, which the wind stirs up at will” (8). In his 1897 essay for *Popular Science Monthly*, titled “The Mob Mind,” Edward Ross draws upon water imagery to illustrate the fickle minds of the American masses, which “drift without helm or anchor” on the “ripples” and “currents of opinion” (397). Meanwhile, for Boris Sidis, “The mob is like an avalanche, the more it rolls, the more menacing and dangerous it grows” (303). The threat of the many pushes against the boundaries of linguistic representation itself, undermining the putatively rational and scientific discourse of crowd psychology and revealing it, instead, to be motivated by a complex mixture of fascination and horror.

Indeed, when Le Bon announces, in perfectly naturalist terms, the dawning of a “new power,” a new “sovereign force” in this “ERA OF CROWDS” (x), one cannot help but sense a note of delight mingled in the alarmist tone. *The Pit* amplifies this subtle note into a kind of perverse glee over the dismemberment of the individual by the seething multitude. Norris lingers over the Jadwin’s slow, torturous demise, sadistically forcing Jadwin to experience a veritable DSM IV’s worth of hysterical symptoms. The odd note of glee presages Anderson’s *Marching Men*, where, in a Futurist fashion, the death of the individual is proclaimed and the sublime force of the many is celebrated. Cheerful celebrations of the many are not so rare—one thinks of Whitman’s multitudes, the democratic crowds of Gerald Stanley Lee, and of the more recent claims, from the business-tech world, about *The Wisdom of Crowds*. What is noteworthy about Norris’ approach here is the manner in which the horror of the crowd, inherited from conservative sociology, is still inseparable from a kind of exuberance about it.

Thus, we arrive at the peculiar nature of Jadwin’s fall, which entails what we might call a becoming-many of the individual. That Jadwin is the arch-individual is clear. As Landry insists, “There’s no man—no, nor gang of men—could down him. “He’s heads and shoulders above the biggest of them down there” (177). In reference to Jadwin, Zimmerman has argued that “Norris’ contemporaries routinely equated the speculative titan and the mesmerist” (135). But, we should say that Jadwin is linked to the mesmerist insofar as he is linked, first, to the leader of early crowd psychology. It is this association, at any rate, which is made most explicit, in *The Pit*, where Jadwin is often referred to as the “Napoleon of La Salle Street” (*Pit* 225). “Within his own sphere,” we read, “no Czar, no satrap, no Caesar ever wielded power more resistless” (235).

Particularly as the action builds up to its climax, the drama of the *Übermensch* Jadwin is interspersed with descriptions of the “crowds” of the financial district of Chicago.

The sidewalks on either hand were encumbered with the “six o’clock crowd” that poured out incessantly from the street entrances of the office buildings. It was a crowd almost entirely of men, and they moved only in one direction, buttoned to the chin in rain coats, their umbrellas bobbing, their feet scuffling through the little pools of wet in the depressions of the sidewalk. They streamed from out the brokers’ offices and commission houses on either side of La Salle Street, continually, unendingly, moving with the dragging sluggishness of the fatigue of a hard day’s work. Under that grey sky and blurring veil of rain they lost their individualities, they became conglomerate—a mass, slow-moving, black. All day long the torrent had seethed and thundered through the street—the torrent that swirled out and back from that vast Pit of roaring within the Board of Trade. (178)

The wording is almost identical to that used, in *The Octopus*, to describe Vanamee’s herd of sheep—that “compact, solid, slowly moving mass” (*Octopus* 19). Here, the human crowd of traders takes over the sublime power that had been reserved for “the Wheat” in the previous novel.

The adoption of the major elements from early crowd psychology is, again, plain. Norris’ early readers would have been familiar, too, with popular accounts of mass financial panics, as found, for instance, in Charles Mackay’s *Extraordinary Popular*

*Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* (1841). But Norris does something unusual in that it is Jadwin, the supposedly immune leader and mesmerist, who falls under a kind of hypnotic spell of contagion; it is he who falls prey to mania. Just as Presley's very transcendent distance on the summit was the root cause of his drunken stupor, it is Jadwin's presumed immunity that becomes the source of his hysterical and quite literal "breakdown."

What preoccupies Norris [...] is the possibility that such supervisory power and hermeneutic mastery [...] might easily give way to seduction, subjection, and finally mimicry. *The Pit* records how the satisfactions of such detachment and control are constantly threatened by the epidemic or colonizing nature of suggestion itself: if one relaxed, one might become subject to and identical with the thing one's manipulation and gaze was meant to withstand. (Zimmerman 140)

Thus, we are told, at the eve of Jadwin's destruction, that the "nervousness of the 'crowd' increased" (221), and pages later we see Jadwin himself becoming a bundle of nerves:

This was a sensation, the like of which he found difficult to describe. But it seemed to be a slow, tense crisping of every tiniest nerve in his body. It would begin as he lay in bed—counting interminably to get himself to sleep—between his knees and ankles, and thence slowly spread to every part of him, creeping upward, from loin to shoulder, in a gradual wave of torture that was not pain, yet infinitely worse. A dry, pringling aura as of billions of minute electric shocks crept upward over his flesh, till it reached his head, where it seemed to culminate in a white flash. (237)

Jadwin is literally de-individuated, broken down into his constituent parts (knees, ankles, loin, shoulder) and transformed into a quivering mass of tiny nerves and electrical pulses. His head, furthermore, becomes crowded, as it were. Sitting in his office, overlooking the street, he hears the “clamour of the street, the cries of the newsboys, the rattle of drays [...] in a dull murmur” that suggests to his excited imagination that a “great throng was forming” (219). In the next moment, he imagines this great, “menacing” throng “galloping down the street, shouting with insensate fury,” shouting with a “thousand, a million, forty million voices” (219). Later, lying in bed, when all is quiet, “the gallop of hoofs [...] the beat of ungovernable torrents [begins] in his brain” (237). The sublime crowd has moved from the street to the inside of his own head.

It is in this manner that we are prepared for Jadwin’s headlong plunge into the heart of the Pit, where he will be torn up by “herd after herd of wolves” (266): First, Landry enters the Pit and is assaulted:

Hands clutched and tore at him, his own tore and clutched in turn. The Pit was mad, was drunk and frenzied; not a man of all those who fought and scrambled and shouted who knew what he or his neighbor did.

And then the “Great Bull” himself enters:

There in the middle of the Pit, surrounded and assaulted by herd after herd of wolves yelping for his destruction, he stood braced, rigid upon his feet, his head up [...] With one accord they leaped upon him [...] [A]gain and again the clamour broke out. It would die down for an instant [...] only to burst out afresh as certain groups of traders started the pandemonium again, by the wild outcrying of their offers. (267)

The victory of the “mob” over Jadwin is depicted as a triumphant rebellion against a tyrannical leader (268). “Hats went into the air,” we read. “In a frenzy of delight men danced and leaped and capered [...] clasping their arms about each other, shaking each others’ hands, cheering and hurraing till their strained voices became hoarse and faint” (268). They had been “too cruelly pressed” by “the weight of the Bull’s hoof” (268). Having “pulled him down” their “jubilee was irrepressible” (268). This is, in one sense, a very literal, very violent and physical illustration of Norris’ admonishment to the author-leader that he must learn to live “among” or “in” people. It is also a strange inversion, for here the people live inside the leader, galloping through his head in the privacy of his own bedroom and shredding him into a million little nerve endings.

There is a further inversion, which we can recognize when we consider the precise nature of Jadwin’s “irresponsibility.” Surely, Jadwin does exactly what C.G. Selden says a speculator should not do. Jadwin is the embodiment of the “stubbornness” Selden warns against (47). Most damaging, of course, is Jadwin’s inability to “forget entirely his own position in the market,” as Selden advises (30). Jadwin’s bid against the many becomes a personal crusade, and while Selden cautions that the market “cannot be budged by our sophistries” (30), Jadwin believes until the last minute that it can be moved by his will.

But the more interesting irresponsibility is related to the problem of authorship with which we began. We will remember that Norris cautions the novelist to “weigh his every utterance” precisely because it can have a drastic impact when it flies out onto the current of opinion that is the People. Jadwin, however, far from underestimating the power of his utterances and actions on the marketplace, overestimates them. What is

irresponsible about his behavior is in imagining that he can predict the ultimate outcome of his actions, once they become a part of the market. The individual author and the individual speculator must be very careful about their utterances and actions because they can have a profound effect, but one should never presume to know, beforehand, what that effect will be. For once an utterance or action enters the dynamic field of the market it is transformed through uncountable and unknowable concatenations and iterations.

The sublime depiction of the human crowd of traders, I would like to suggest, is Norris' way of representing this basic insight of chaos theory. And this is how we should, ultimately, answer the charges of Den Tandt and Zimmerman about Norris' ambiguous use of language and rhetorical overproduction. Such rhetorical overproduction is most evident in the sublime passages that try to "represent" the Thing itself, the swirling, gaping vortex that is the Pit.

[A] great whirlpool, a pit of roaring waters spun and thundered, sucking in the life tides of the city, sucking them in as into the mouth of some tremendous cloaca, the maw of some colossal sewer; then vomiting them forth again, spewing them up and out, only to catch them in the return eddy and suck them in afresh. (53)

The enormous anal orifice of the Pit is not only the "center" of the city of Chicago, but of the entire world. A "sudden eddy spinning out from the middle of its turmoil," creates a wave of force that stretches to "continental Europe," the "Old-World banks," the "vine dressers of Northern Italy," the "coal miners of Western Prussia," and the "hunger-shrunken coolie of the Ganges" (54). Zimmerman argues that Norris' amplified language,

in such moments, indicates a “defensive [...] retreat [...] a sign of the failure, not the power, of figuration to make sense of the sublime” (148).

But I think something else is at work here, for in such moments Norris is not attempting to figure a “thing,” a brute materiality, such as wheat. Of course, the “life force” is the crowd of real traders—the men, “mere flotsam in the flood,” that go in and out of the Board of Trade on La Salle Street to create an “incessant tide of coming and going” (53). But the Pit is much more than a real location. Like “Wall Street” it refers above all to an imaginary “space,” the whole network of communications, the multitude of transactions and flows of capital that make up the market. Similarly, though Norris tries again to bury the capitalist in a torrent of wheat, this time it is not actual wheat, but something like the sign of wheat. What is transacted in the Pit is a voucher for a monetary value, a mere representation of a representation. When Jadwin exclaims that the wheat has cornered him, he is talking about wheat in the abstract, a truly bizarre notion.

In this sense, the Pit does not signify a thing or a substance, but a complex social process—the very manner in which individual utterances and actions get caught up in the concatenating effects of the social. The Pit is a kind of black box, a great input/output machine in which the “life force,” or wealth, of the city gets “sucked” in, processed in some unknown manner, and “spewed” back out again, in a never ending cycle of exchange. It is difficult to represent the Pit without recourse to an overblown sublimity, because the Pit is itself the site of representation, the place where material things are turned into signs, the metaphysical realm where equivalencies are manufactured.

It is in this Lacanian Real, this cloacal void at the heart of global capitalist exchange, that Norris’ sublime prose finds its full power and resonance. There is

something strange about applying this sublime rhetorical overproduction to brute, natural forces, but it is superb for rendering the abstract “stuff” that is the social substance. Of course, Norris can never fully leave the brute realities and, again, his otherwise mercilessly bleak novel ends on an unmistakably optimistic note. For again, we are given the moral that a revenge of natural force is inevitable. The wheat goes on, the tyrannical dictator will inevitably be deposed by the crowd, the irresponsible speculator will get his just deserts. Of course, we know that nothing could be further from the truth. Capital continues to accumulate regardless of the bleak realities of the material referent, tyrannical leaders remain in power, and individual speculators become too big to fail.

As Den Tandt perspicuously points out, “the dizzying vortex of speculation embodies the ability of the financial market to create value [...] without a referent in commodity production” (90). Norris’ sublime rhetoric thus mirrors the very “irresponsible” and deregulated form of speculation that he appears to be criticizing. Italian theorist Franco “Bifo” Berardi makes an apt comparison between Rimbaud’s call for a *dereglement de tous les sens*, after which “poets have experimented with the forgetting of the referent and with the autonomous evocation of the signifier” and the deregulation of the financial world, in which financial “signs” enjoy a strangely similar “autonomy” (18). “Financial signs have led,” Berardi writes, “to a parthenogenesis of value, creating money through money without the generative intervention of physical matter and muscular work” (19). What results in Norris’ wheat novels is a productive but ultimately unrecognized contradiction between form and content. Thus, Norris’ chance to perform a kind of formal detournement of speculative speech acts by mimicking them too

closely is undercut by the moralistic content of these texts which try to guarantee the unshakable reality of the referent.

### CHAPTER 3

#### A MOVEMENT OF MOVEMENTS: THE GESTURAL POLITICS OF ANDERSON'S *MARCHING MEN*

Following the work of turn-of-the-century French sociologist Gabriel Tarde, liberal-democratic theories of the many make a sharp distinction between the crowd, understood as an agglomeration of bodies united under traditional forms of identity, and the public, understood as a “spiritual unity,” an assemblage of “physically separated” individuals, in which differences of identity enjoy a healthy degree of “free play” (Tarde). Taking this invidious distinction between the crowd and the public as its basic starting point, Mary Esteve’s *The Aesthetics and Politics of the Crowd in American Literature* warns against the dangers of mistaking “the illiberal crowd” for “the liberal public” (21). While crowd bonds are based on the mute, irrational particularities of biological and identitarian essences, Esteve contends, the public is founded upon an “abstract universalism” that does not eradicate such differences of identity so much as overwrite or sublimate them. In the process, Esteve continues, the public substitutes “rational pluralism” for “pluralism as such.” According to this Rawlsian logic, abstract, disinterested, public reason stands as the only proper political position against the affective, absorptive, and contagious power of the crowd.

Reading Esteve further, we find that underwriting the liberal-democratic valorization of the public over the crowd is not only a distinction between the public spirit and the crowd body, but a privileging of the individual over the many. Esteve concludes her analysis of Letters from New York, for instance, with praise for Child’s “resilient reflective capacity to separate her moral and political ‘identity’ [from] the

multiple force relations acting upon and within the world, such as are materialized in New York's mercantile crowds" (38). In this manner, Esteve explicitly offers as a program what Dana Brand, in his study of the *flâneur* tradition of 19<sup>th</sup> century American literature, describes as one of the "many human tragedies of that century"—namely the "inability of [its] spectators to look at crowds with a questioning rather than an imperial gaze" (185).

The tragic disposition of the *flâneur* is perhaps the best example of what Roberto Esposito identifies as "immunity," "the means by which the individual is defended from the 'expropriative effects' of the community, protecting the one who carries it from the risk of contact with those who do not" (Campbell xi). Leaving aside a critique of such a tragic position on principle, we can nonetheless see how abysmally it serves our understanding of the many, which can only appear negatively here, as either a quaint aesthetic object or an ungraspable sublime force. Rather than simply repeat, as Esteve advises, the immunitarian and defensive program of the "disinterested" *flâneur*, we should rather follow Brand and Esposito and "turn toward the crowd a gaze that...accept[s] the reality of its otherness...and reduce[s] it to neither insubstantiality nor coherence" (Brand 185).

Accepting this injunction, our natural impulse might be to construct a politics of the many that is in direct opposition to the liberal-democratic prejudice toward spirit over body and individual over crowd. This is, in fact, what Sherwood Anderson's *Marching Men* of 1917 attempts to do, reveling in the sublime physical force of the multitude and gleefully pronouncing the death of the individual. Set in America at the close of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, in what we might call the historic battleground of the public and the crowd,

*Marching Men* advances a kind of inverted Le Bonianism, taking over many of the arch-conservative's descriptive statements about the crowd, but converting their Machiavellian cynicism into an open longing for a future in which "men will cease to be individuals" and become "a moving all-powerful mass" (183). Thus, what Esteve excoriates as an "absorptive crowd aesthetics," inimical to the abstract, disinterested reason of the public sphere, *Marching Men* lauds as the only antidote to the grave "disorder" affecting the modern American public.

It is precisely in this attempt to horrify the liberal-democratic sensibility that *Marching Men* proves so problematic. In response to what its narrator diagnoses as a weak, effeminate, neurotic, and overly intellectual public life, the novel offers a vitalist, militaristic, masculine, and unapologetically anti-intellectual politics of force. Charges of misogyny and fascism are defensible only on the grounds that the text pulls back, at the last instant, in what ultimately amounts to a tacit admission of failure on Anderson's part. We will examine this odd distancing maneuver in the final stages of our analysis, for it gets to the root of the difficulty that Anderson has created for himself in this work.

For now, it is perhaps sufficient to point out that the novel's many weaknesses stem from a deeper and more basic problem. As is often the case, in attempting to pose a direct opposition to the liberal-democratic bias, the novel not only cedes to the enemy's terms, but comes dangerously close to taking over the its entire optic. The fact that *Marching Men* revels in the ecstasy that comes from a complete "loss of self in the mass" means that it only proffers a different affective response to what is ultimately the same object.

However, in following this seemingly ill-advised tactic out to its end, *Marching Men* not only offers an instructive caution against such an approach; nor, though this is certainly important, does it simply indicate how far we must go in order to disturb the hegemonic hold that liberal-democratic thought enjoys on conceptions of the many. One of the singular virtues of *Marching Men*'s headlong flight from sanguine notions about the public sphere is that it allows Anderson to attempt something that is unheard of from a liberal-democratic perspective: *Marching Men* tries to turn to practical account what we might call the naturalist fascination with the inarticulate and sublime power of the many. Whereas the naturalist critique of the individual documents her horrifying incorporation in the maelstrom of the multitude, Anderson goes beyond this mute fascination to offer what, following an indication from Agamben, I call a politics of the gesture. Here Anderson reveals himself as a member of the large group of "affect" theorists of his day. Whereas liberal-democratic thought on the many can only ever speak in terms of representation Anderson tries to imagine a politics that is non-representational in the full sense of the word. "Where bodies rediscover their aptitude for gesture" (*Introduction* 207).

The novel opens with a portrait of a national public fractured by the degenerating effects of the mass media, which has monopolized and banalized communication between people. This critical dimension of *Marching Men*, which will continue directly into *Winesburg, Ohio*, anticipates contemporary theoretical work on the topic of Biopower. By fashioning individual atoms, the twin forces of Spectacle and Biopower work at the most fundamental level to disrupt relationships—between one person and another and between a person and whatever contributes to the fashioning of a "world." The

routinization of the factory, with its calculated segmentation of movement into discrete units, combines, in *Marching Men*, with the mass media spectacle to create a nation of living dead, who have lost the entire context of their life-worlds.

The *Marching Men* movement is Anderson's solution to this problem, a putatively apolitical, anti-ideological and anti-intellectual intervention meant to revitalize the ailing public through the automatic and contagious communication between physical bodies acting in concert. In defiance of the liberal-democratic spiritualization of the public, *Marching Men* seeks to forge an affective, thoroughly biological, "body" politic. As this last phrase suggests, this fictional program entails a literalization of many of the metaphorical figures of political action. "Acting in concert" means quite literally doing the same thing together until a kind of music is produced by the "threshing" of so many feet, while organizing a "movement" means nothing other than getting men to "move" en masse. In a final literalization, we find that Anderson's gestural politics is no more than a gesture toward an eventual politics; first "men" must recover the ability to make gestures together, to move in unison, and to communicate, not as subjects, but as bodies. Then perhaps someday, as McGregor, the leader of the *Marching Men* says, "a brain will grow" (215). The central theoretical drive of *Marching Men* thus involves the belief that a vital organization of mass scale must begin with the individual body, that a successful movement must take back from the Biopolitical regime the basic materiality of the human.

It is important to point out, however, that *Marching Men* does not advise a simple return to the localized, particularity of the traditional crowd, but a refashioning of the public along lines usually reserved for the local, physical gathering. That is to say, the

public will adopt the organizational logic of the crowd, but this crowd will itself enjoy the “universality” typically associated with the public. From a liberal democratic perspective, this is a simple “category mistake,” in wanton ignorance of Esteve’s injunction that we must not confuse the “illiberal crowd” and the “liberal public.” In *Marching Men*, however, it is not so much a matter of comparing and distinguishing between crowds and publics, as if the particular and the universal, or part and whole, could somehow exist side by side and independently, but of diagnosing precisely how such an interpenetration of intellectually distinct organizational forms is already endemic to the national life itself. The question then is one of competing organizational logics, which fight for pride of place on the terrain of each individual body. As we will see, Anderson follows the liberal-democrat in the belief that the public overwrites or overcodes the particularity of the crowd. The difference is that, in *Marching Men*, such a sublation results in an unequivocal loss of the body’s very ability to gesture and communicate.

In light of this apparent nostalgia for the touch of physical bodies, we must consider what Anderson’s quasi-futurist celebration of the crowd in *Marching Men* means for his more successful *Winesburg, Ohio*, which is often read as an elegy of lost community. When we disconnect the two novels, as critics are wont to do, *Winesburg* easily appears as a lament over modern alienation and isolation. Reading them together, however, we see Anderson progressively revising the diagnostic of modern collective life opened up in the earlier novel. What emerges, in *Winesburg*, is not a simple statement about the existence or nonexistence of community, but a subtler appreciation of the texture, structure, and ontology of common life in turn-of-the-century America. Moving from the grand molar optic of the body politic of *Marching Men* to the molecular field of

intersubjective relations in *Winesburg*, we find Anderson himself showing why a program like the one advanced in *Marching Men* is impossible, not because collective life is dead, as a critic like Yingling would have it, but because the social substance cannot be submitted to a teleological “project.” As Anderson continues the search, begun in the early novel, for an adequate form of collective communication, he comes to the thoroughly Batailleian revelation that “‘private’ experience is shared from the outset,” and that the author of collective experience must penetrate to the “silent, elusive, ungraspable” part of discourse, beyond the “region of words” that exists within us all (Mitchell and Winfree 14).

Reading *Marching Men*, it is impossible to escape the sense that it was born from an idea, that Anderson crafted a clumsy fictional tale around a didactic purpose. We begin at the end of the nineteenth-century, at a time when the American people, the narrator tells us, are “like a vast, disorganized, undisciplined army, leaderless, uninspired, going in route-step along the road, to they know not what end” (*Marching* 10). Anderson imagines a roughly hewn Übermensch, by the name of Norman “Beaut” McGregor, who rises up out of this chaos to ignite the “love of order” that “lies sleeping” in the “heart of all men” (48) and thus foment a national movement of *Marching Men*.

Growing up in the small, narrow-minded mining town of Coal Creek, Pennsylvania, the young Norman McGregor is teased for his “huge mouth and nose and...flaming red hair” (12), for which he earns the ironic nickname, “Beaut.” Beaut’s father before him, already dead when the action of the novel begins, was also treated as an outcast, despite the fact that, according to his son, he was “braver than any of them” (24). An early chapter recounts a ritual that father and son often performed together, in

which they would ascend a hill and look down upon the town below. Through this ceremony, the two outcasts objectify their separation from the small mining community and literalize their shared sense of being *above* the members of the town, who appear from this vantage as “cattle” (25) or insects in a “black hive” (21). The father-son ceremony operates as a kind of immunity training for the young misanthrope, who in the course of the novel undergoes an unbelievable transformation from wanting to gather the miners together and push them off a cliff to wanting to gather them together into a mass movement against the labor bosses.

This scene on the hill is worth pausing over for a moment, because Anderson will have Beaut return to the hill several times in the opening chapters of the novel, once with a young girl he awkwardly courts, and again with some boys from the town, whom we cannot quite call friends. The motif of the hill sets up an optic that the novel can never overcome, despite the apparent intentions of the author. The *Marching Men* movement, which is supposed to represent the affective concord of bodies communicating in the physical immediacy of their combined force, can only ever be seen from the perspective of this god-like height. While the theoretical content of the movement stresses the immanent and contagious relations between members of the crowd, the narrative itself remains trapped in the position of the leader looking down upon the many. This problem of perspective remains suspended until *Winesburg*, when Anderson finally figures out how to represent the interior, phenomenological workings of the collective itself.

Beaut’s feeling of exclusion from the mining community soon develops into an “intense hatred for his fellows,” a hatred, the narrator tells us, that “marked the boy and made him stand forth among his fellows” (*Marching* 10). Beaut is thus cast as the

inveterate individualist, a “hero of a popular romance” (12), who has “besides a huge body, hard as adamant, a clear and lucid brain” (47). In truth, the lucid brain is less in evidence; Beut is offered up for our admiration because he is stubbornly anti-intellectual. Suspicious of rhetoric and often unable to articulate his feelings, Beut tends to deal with problems by lashing out with his fists. From the opening pages, *Marching Men* asks us to take Beut’s complete impatience for “wagging jaws” and empty words as a harbinger of his eventual greatness.

Seeing no future in Coal Creek, Beut soon leaves for the bustling world of Chicago in the 1890s, to become a successful lawyer. Now known simply as McGregor, he has two halting romantic affairs that culminate in a melodramatic scene in which he is forced to choose between the women competing for his love. It is perhaps too generous to call this long middle-section of the novel a subplot. As one contemporary review puts it, “A slight love story runs through the book” (“Dignifying”). Ray Lewis White’s edition of *Marching Men* takes great pains to connect the minor events of this narrative to Anderson’s life and, indeed, it feels as though Anderson is padding out the novel with autobiographical material. From a formal perspective, however, we see that nothing much can happen with the romantic storyline, because, in the vitalist conceptual matrix of the novel, romantic love is closely associated with all of the other feminine, dissipative aspects of modern life.

The actual *Marching Men* movement does not get under way until the later sections of the novel and, even then, it is not so much presented to us as talked about, referred to, and recounted in a series of strangely distancing mediations. This is not so surprising given the severe limits Anderson has set for the logic of this movement.

Because, as we will see, “words” are at the origin of the modern sickness, the movement must come about through a spontaneous, anti-linguistic, and anti-intellectual fusion of physical bodies. The diremption of language and being posed by the novel is so severe, in fact, that all commentary on the movement becomes suspect, so that when it comes to describing the movement, how it works, what it will produce, where it is headed, the narrator is forced to throw up his hands, offering, at best, a kind of circular riddle. To see our way out of, or at the very least, through this riddle, it is imperative that we determine how Anderson arrives at this impasse.

In the introduction to the critical edition of *Marching Men*, Ray Lewis White directs us to Anderson’s *Memoirs*, where the author offers an explanation of the origins of the novel. The germ of the book, according to Anderson, came from his experiences training with other soldiers in the Spanish-American War. On one day in particular, having ducked into the woods during military maneuvers because of a stone in his shoe, Anderson was suddenly assailed by a “strange feeling”:

I was there, an individual, a young man, half boy, sitting on the ground under a tree, but I was at the same time something else. We had been marching for hours, I was not weary. It seemed to me, that day, that into my legs had come the strength of the legs of thirty thousand men. I had become a giant. I was, in myself, something huge, terrible and at the same time noble. I remember that I sat, for a long time, while the army passed, opening and closing my eyes. Tears were running down my cheeks. ‘I am myself and I am something else too,’ I whispered to myself. I remember that later, when I got back to camp...I...threw myself down on my cot...I

was a man in love. I was in love with the thought of the possibilities of myself combined with others. (*Memoirs* 186)

This ecstatic experience of mass sentiment, of being at the same time an “individual” and “something else,” Anderson tells us in the *Memoirs* (1942), taught him an important lesson about collective psychology:

There is here, in this little understood impulse that is in all men, to lose self in the mass... a kind of relief in it, perhaps to the pain of living... It can lead men to the committing of unbelievable acts they could never do as individuals. It can make common men act like heroes. It explains lynching. It is the strength of fascism. It is labor’s greatest weapon. Someday it may be understood and used. (*Memoirs* 184)

Anderson’s description of mass sentiment is in keeping with the popular understanding originated by Gustave Le Bon’s famous study of 1895, *The Crowd*. In a “psychological crowd,” Le Bon warns, attempting to explain this “it” to which Anderson refers, “a collective mind is formed,” so that “the sentiments and ideas of all the persons in the gathering take one and the same direction, and their conscious personality vanishes” (1-2). Because of this “mental unity” (2), Le Bon argues, individuals immersed in a crowd are capable of acts, both horrendous and heroic, that they would never contemplate in isolation. Thus, a “crowd may be guilty of murder, incendiarism, and every kind of crime, but it is also capable of very lofty acts of devotion, sacrifice, and disinterestedness, of acts much loftier indeed than those of which the isolated individual is capable” (27).

But Anderson's personal account is notable for its peculiar neglect of the psychological dimension so prevalent in turn-of-the-century theories of the "crowd mind." Notably absent in this account of the military "crowd," furthermore, is the leader, a virtually indispensable subject of early crowd theory. This helps us to clarify even more precisely the relationship between Anderson's vision of the crowd and that of the conservative Le Bon.

In Le Bon's study of the crowd, we find a distinction between suggestion, which proceeds vertically, from the leader to the crowd, and contagion, which operates horizontally, between members. We can actually trace something like two different discourses, two distinct linguistic registers, in Le Bon's treatment of suggestion and contagion. Christian Borch intuits this distinction when he points out, "Although Le Bon was primarily interested in explaining the psychological constitution of [collective formations]—the mental unity of the crowd—his descriptions contained numerous references to bodily aspects" ("Body" 273). In Le Bon's discourse, suggestion occurs within the realms of psychology and ideology. The successful leader is, like an adman, a master of rhetoric, persuasion, and manipulation.

When it comes to contagion, however, the discourse changes and Le Bon's language takes on a biological and even bacteriological bent, invoking cells and microbes. From the leader's rhetorical mastery, an electrical or, perhaps, aquatic "current of opinion" is formed in the crowd. Here, a "natural" impulse takes over that can be observed "even in animals when they are together in number" (Le Bon 78). By a "contagious power as intense as that of microbes," the "emotions" of "men collected in a crowd" are "rapidly" propagated in the same way that a "panic that has seized on a few

sheep will soon extend to the whole flock” (78). Contagion in early crowd discourse functions similarly to what Anna Gibbs calls “mimesis,” which describes the “immediacy of what passes between bodies and which subtends cognitively mediated representation” (193). Though, like Freud would shortly after, Anderson focuses here on the military crowd, it is, in contrast to Freud, as a way of pointing to the horizontal contagious relations between crowded bodies in the absence of a leader. This is important, because, as I will show later, McGregor, the leader of the *Marching Men*, is, according to the inner logic of the novel itself, a supplemental, ancillary figure.

The first-person narrative of the above crowd experience comes much closer to the idiosyncratic, vitalist perspective of Elias Canetti in *Crowds and Power*. Also inspired by an experience in which he became “fully dissolved” in a crowd, Canetti attempts to analyze the crowd in its “nakedness, in what one might call its biological state” (Canetti 22). Rather than focus, as Le Bon did, on the suggestive powers of the leader, who manipulates the crowd mind to his own ends, Canetti tries to explain crowd phenomena from the inside, offering a phenomenological description of the crowd experience that centers on the elemental, primitive aspects of “density,” “discharge,” and “rhythm.”

Thus, what Anderson explains as a “relief from the pain of living,” Canetti ascribes to the freedom that results from losing one’s existential “fear of being touched” (15). This occurs most strikingly in “the dense crowd, in which body is pressed to body” (15). According to Canetti, this feeling of relief increases in proportion with the density of the crowd:

Suddenly it is as though everything were happening in one and the same body [...] the more fiercely people press together, the more certain they

feel that they do not fear each other. This reversal of the fear of being touched belongs to the nature of crowds. The feeling of relief is most striking where the density of the crowd is greatest. (15-6)

The “pain of living” that Anderson refers to in his *Memoirs*, a pain which finds relief through immersion in the many, inevitably reminds us of *Winesburg’s* grotesques, who, Irving Howe writes, are all “in search of a ceremony, a social value, a manner of living, a lost ritual that may, by some means, re-establish a flow and exchange of emotion” (qtd. in Yingling 102). For Anderson and Canetti, to “lose self in the mass” is to be liberated from the common pain of isolation, from precisely the immunitarian disposition of the modern individual. Whereas the liberal-democratic perspective sees the many as the site of a horrifying dissolution of identity, Anderson and Canetti adopt the Bataille belief that we humans are “discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation” and who “yearn for our lost continuity” (*Erotism* 15).

Though for Le Bon and other early theorists of the crowd, the physical proximity of individuals is of decidedly less importance than the mental unity that can obtain over great distances, Anderson and Canetti find physical density, the press of body against body, to be the decisive factor in the production of a unified, or organized, crowd. For both, the crowd is understood in the vitalist terms of “impulse,” “force,” “feeling,” and “passion.” When Canetti explains that the crowd “wants to experience for itself the strongest possible feeling of its own animal force and passion and, as means to this end, it will use whatever social pretexts and demands offer themselves” (22), he is indicating that psychological, ideological accounts of crowd phenomena do not penetrate the surface of what Anderson calls the “little understood impulse that is in all men” (*Memoirs* 184).

Anderson and Canetti both point to something like an originary, primitive urge to combine, an urge that exists before or regardless of particular historical and political situations. This is the Nietzschean herd-instinct divested of its pejorative dimension.

The experience of total immersion left a lasting impression on Anderson. Years later, standing on the platform of an elevated train station in Chicago, Anderson beheld another crowd, “pouring out of offices and stores” (*Memoirs* 186). Issuing forth by the “thousands out of side streets and into the broad city street,” the people struck Anderson as a pitiful, “broken mob” (186). “They did not keep step,” Anderson recalls. “There were thousands of individuals, lost like myself. As individuals they had no strength, no courage” (186). The disparity between the strength and purpose of the marching soldiers of his memory and the “lost” members of the city crowd inspire Anderson to imagine “a figure, a man, a kind of combination of Abraham Lincoln and...John Lewis,” who would organize factory workers into a “solid mass of men” and thus create a “new terror” for the owners of industry (*Memoirs* 186). Such is Anderson’s account of the birth of *Marching Men*, which was to be “a great epic poem of movement in masses” (*Memoirs* 186).

The “disorderly mob” reappears throughout the pages of *Marching Men* as the symptom of a widespread disease that can be found “in a mining town or deep in the entrails of one of our American cities” (11). In terms of the local, particular attachments between bodies, there is, in fact, no difference between the city and the country, for in both cases traditional “crowd” bonds, those bonds operating between individuals who can touch and see one another, have been overwritten by a powerful new, national bond created by the mass media. It is here that *Marching Men* offers a decisive counter to sanguine, liberal-democratic accounts of the public.

In this context it becomes apparent why Anderson highlights the year 1893, in particular. McGregor moves to Chicago in 1893 and though the Chicago World's Fair is not mentioned explicitly, it is clear that this event, which Esteve describes as "one of the era's most prominent crowds-producing and nations-imaging events" (Esteve 120) is a crucial subtext. Analyzing photographs of the crowds at White City, Esteve finds evidence of an absolute confusion between public and crowd, the one turning into the other and back again (131). 1893, furthermore, is the year that Richard Ohmann identifies as the decisive moment in the birth of the mass media in America (Ohmann 25), which Gabriel Tarde links to the transition from a world ruled by crowds to one ruled by the public.

Gabriel Tarde's subtle critique of Le Bon's theory of the psychological crowd could be said to stem from the insight that the latter's announcement, in 1895, that we had entered the "era of crowds" was virtually contemporaneous with the displacement of the crowd by the public. In "The Public and the Crowd," Gabriel Tarde writes, "I therefore cannot agree with that vigorous writer, Dr. Le Bon, that our age is the 'era of crowds.' It is the era of the public or of publics, and that is a very different thing" (Tarde 281). It is important to grasp the precise nature of Tarde's objection, which may initially appear as a mere quibbling over words. Le Bon's "crowd," after all, is an extremely broad and malleable term meant to include a number of collective arrangements, including the national collectivity of the public. Le Bon's text begins by distinguishing his definition of the "psychological crowd" from the "ordinary sense of the word 'crowd,'" which denotes "a gathering of individuals of whatever nationality, profession, or sex" brought together under "whatever" circumstances. The "crowd" in its typical

usage suggests, to take a metaphor from Marx, “a simple addition of isomorphous magnitudes,” so that individuals form a crowd just as “potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes” (qtd. in Thoburn 64). For his part, Le Bon is not interested in individuals who find themselves “accidentally side by side,” but in psychological crowds in which “all the persons in the gathering take one and the same direction, and their conscious personality vanishes” (2). Le Bon is therefore emphatic from the start of his study that the crowd has no necessary connection to questions of number or physical proximity. “At certain moments half a dozen men might constitute a psychological crowd,” Le Bon writes. But at others “an entire nation, though there may be no visible agglomeration, may become a crowd under the action of certain influences” (2).

On the one hand, then, Tarde simply saw that what the furthest reaches of Le Bon’s crowd pointed to was something that could more properly be termed a “public.” On the other hand, he grasped that Le Bon’s “psychological crowd” could, in fact, cover two heterogeneous kinds of collective groupings. Tarde thus begins by discrediting the catch-all definition of the crowd, which, he says, “certain writers [i.e. Le Bon] use... to designate all sorts of human groupings” (277). But here Tarde goes one step further, to define two distinct logics ruling organized groupings. Like Le Bon, Tarde has nothing to say about accidental gatherings, or crowds in the typical usage, but he insists that when we move to the terrain of organized groupings displaying the characteristics of mental unity, we must make an important distinction between the psychological *crowd*, which is “a collection of psychic connections produced essentially by *physical* contacts” and the *public*, which is “a purely spiritual collectivity, a dispersion of individuals who are physically separated and whose cohesion is entirely *mental*” (277; emphasis mine).

Tarde's definition of the public, therefore, *excludes* agglomerations of physical proximity, *even if* these agglomerations achieve the mental unity characteristic of the psychological crowd. Thus, Tarde's intention here is to keep the term "crowd" within the clearly defined limits of bodily presence, "organized" or not, and reserve for the "public" the spiritual unity that can only be attained by individuals who are not physically present to one another. Tarde insists that this strange new "spiritual" bond between physically isolated individuals represents an entirely new form of social organization that is, finally, much more interesting than the out-dated sympathetic bonds of the crowd.

[N]ot all communications from mind to mind, from soul to soul, are necessarily based on physical proximity...It is not the meetings of men on the public street or in the public square that witness the birth and development of these kinds of social rivers, these great impulses which are presently overwhelming the hardest hearts and the most resistant minds...The strange thing about it is that these men who are swept along in this way, who persuade each other, or rather who transmit to one another suggestions from above—these men do not come in contact, do not meet or hear each other; they are all sitting in their own homes scattered over a vast territory, reading the same newspaper. (Tarde 278)

The unity of the public, according to Tarde, is inherently different from the unity of the crowd, because, unlike the latter, the public is no longer based on the old distinctions of "identity": "[W]hatever the nature of the groups into which society is fragmented, be they religious, economic, political, or even national, the public is in some way their final state and, so to speak, their common denominator" (286). For Tarde, we

might say, the cohesion of the crowd can be traced back to some kind of pre-existing sociological reality, such as race, nationality, class, occupation, etc. For this reason, the crowd is inherently conservative, representing “the social group of the past.” In fact, “after the family,” he continues, “it is the oldest of all social groups” (281). The public, by contrast, represents a radically new distribution of the social, conditioned, not by the properties or predicates of the people assembled under its banner, but by a tripartite technological assemblage consisting of the press, the railroad, and the telegraph (281). Because of these “three auxiliary inventions...the public can be extended indefinitely, and since its particular life becomes more intense as it extends, one cannot deny that it is the social group of the future” (281). Most important, the universalizing bond of the public, though “newer,” has come to occupy a place that is logically antecedent to crowd bonds, which now exist in the subdued state of a remainder or a holdover of an older logic.

Though conservative by today’s standards, when compared to Le Bon’s jeremiad against collectives, Tarde’s theory of the public appears quite progressive. In the first place, it is clear that the “enormous leap” from the crowd to the public is an upwards one of evolutionary progress when Tarde “admits” to the “fairly rare” case in which the situation proceeds in the opposite direction; when, for instance, we witness the “fall from public to crowd” (282).

Indeed, though the public is described at one point as *more homogeneous* than the crowd, Tarde’s analysis often resonates presciently with recent Neo-Gramscian theories of hegemony. Even though Tarde equates the journalist with the leader who is so central to Le Bon’s account of crowd psychology, he points out that there is a productive

interchange between public and journalist. The balance of power is clearly in favor of the latter, the public “sometimes” merely “reacting” to the journalist, who is “continually acting on his public” (283), but the indication of even this minimal degree of mutual interest, in which the journalist courts the opinions of the common man in order to “please him and to keep him” (283) represents a significant revision of the absolutely unilateral action of the Le Bonian leader upon the crowd. This “mutual selection” and “mutual adaptation” of reader and journalist seems always to work in the journalist’s favor, but the result is a mutually beneficent relationship in which “[t]he one has a paper which pleases him and flatters his prejudices and passions” and “the other has hold of a reader to his liking, docile and credulous, whom he can easily direct with a few concessions to his positions” (283).

Tarde’s analysis of the mutual interaction of public and press could have been taken from a work like Richard Ohmann’s *Selling Culture*. In his look at the birth of mass media in late-nineteenth-century America and its role in forming a new class of readers, Ohmann professes to take the median approach between “modernization theory,” which naively assumes that “people hold more sovereignty over the producers of culture” (Ohmann 41), and theories of the culture industry, which maintain that “the social order produces consciousness” (41). Striking a balance between these two extremes, Ohmann expresses an affinity for the theory of hegemony which “admits more autonomy on the part of various actors in and outside the [media] industry, and sees ideology as the always-contested and often inconsistent product of various interests and outlooks” (46).

Tarde’s revision of Le Bon dovetails neatly with the dominant strain of critical Marxism today—really, as Thoburn points out, a post-Marxism—which “mark[s] a

passage from...concerns with class, capital, and the economy, into a...concern with...difference, agency, popular practices and new social movements in a struggle for inclusion in the 'chain of equivalences' of social-democratic political space" (Thoburn 10). Indeed, in *On Populist Reason*, Ernesto Laclau, one of the premier theorists of hegemony, lauds Tarde as an early thinker who was able to "bypass and transcend Le Bon's limited approach" (44). Laclau centers his reading on those moments in Tarde's analysis when the public is described as a site of plurality and difference, the consequence of which is that publics represent "a progress in tolerance, if not in scepticism" (Laclau 45).

In more extreme moments, Tarde's progressive account of the public even begins to work backwards to add complexity and differentiation to the crowd:

In spite of all the dissimilarities that we have noted, the crowd and the public, those two extremes of social evolution, have in common the bond between the diverse individuals making them up, which consists not in *harmonizing* through their very diversities, through their mutual useful specialties, but rather in reflecting, fusing through their innate or acquired similarities into a simple and powerful *unison*...in a communion of ideas and passions which, moreover, leaves free play to their individual differences. (286)

Here, Tarde reveals a complex dialectical relationship between tendencies of homogeneity and heterogeneity. Though he insists that the public is, in fact, more homogeneous than its ancient ancestor, the crowd, he wants also to show how the media creates a new bond that does not so much ignore innate properties as overwrite or sublimate

them. The material of this bond is no longer biological or essential, but ideological, so that “[e]verything is reduced to this entirely psychological group of states of mind” (286). This advance to the new terrain of ideas, beliefs, and opinions, allows for a minimal, but nonetheless important, degree of “free play” when it comes to “individual differences” (286).

It may initially appear contradictory that the public should be at once more homogeneous and more tolerant toward individual differences. But it is precisely this insight that makes the Tardean distinction between public and crowd so palatable to hegemony theorists and liberal-democrats like Esteve. Really a critique of the aesthetics and politics of the crowd, Esteve’s work argues that “political power is ultimately the power of the public, that is, the power of free and equal citizens as a collective body” (21). As with Tarde, the crowd is made to stand for the inarticulate, irrational differences of biological essence and apolitical clinamen, whereas the public instantiates an “abstract universalism” that does not exclude individual differences, but makes them appear as such. Thus, “Habermas himself argues that the strength of a democratic rational polity lies in the way its abstract universalism secures, rather than eliminates, concrete, subjective, individuation” (149). Cutting transversally across the older crowd bonds, the organizational logic of the public subsumes group identities and forces them to reappear in the sphere of the individual. In the very act of bracketing biological and cultural identity categories and submitting them to reason, the public bond simultaneously rewrites them as mere contingencies and “secures” their continued existence as a persistent materialist remainder. The key to Esteve’s Rawlsian, liberal-democratic prescriptions lies then, not in eradicating the crowd’s meaningless particulars of biology,

aesthetics, and morality, but in making them always cede the first place to the public realm of “abstract, disinterested, secular reason” (20):

Rawls explains how liberal democratic society builds itself on the fact of reasonable pluralism, that is, on the fact that a diversity of non-political religious, moral, and philosophical doctrines animates reasonable persons’ affirmation of political liberalism. This political conception is nevertheless “free-standing and expounded apart from, or without reference to, any such wider background.” Rawls is careful to distinguish reasonable pluralism from pluralism as such, so as to disallow the inclusion of “doctrines that are not only irrational but mad and aggressive.” An absorptive crowd aesthetics would count as one of these disallowed doctrines. (18)

In *Marching Men*, this new mode of social organization, which overwrites the old bonds between physically proximate individuals, is, far from an occasion for celebration, the root of what the text continually refers to as the “disorder” of modern America. Here, relations between bodies existing in physical proximity are not only of secondary interest to the new “spiritual” mode of organization, as Tarde suggests; they are completely deactivated, so that now even the members of a city crowd or local community relate to each other, first and foremost, as members of a public. In this way, *Marching Men* belongs to a radically anti-liberal tradition that is taken up today in the work of anonymous French collective Tiqqun. Writing under the name of The Invisible Committee, in *The Coming Insurrection*, these authors argue that, for those of us living under Empire today, “nothing remains except citizenship—a pure, phantasmatic sense of

belonging to the Republic” (36). At stake in this tradition is recovering the relations between bodies, between presences liquidated by the public, and thus reestablishing the basis through which beings may communicate and gesture with one another.

The word “disorder” appears eighty three times in the novel and operates on a number of closely intertwined levels. Disorder refers, on the macro level, to the lack of consistency in large group formations, such as a nation, a disorganized urban mob, or a mass of factory workers. On the micro level, the text describes a nervous disorder of crippled, weak, and febrile bodies. Though the text does not explicitly define the relationship between these two senses of disorder in a systematic or hierarchical manner, it is clear that both have their ultimate source in the same mass media that Tarde identifies as crucial to the formation of the public.

In the following passage, typical of the didactic style found at the beginning of many of the novel’s chapters, the narrative lens zooms in from the panoramic to the detailed view:

In a country of so many and varied climates and occupations as America, it is absurd to talk of an American type. The country is like a vast, disorganized, undisciplined army, leaderless, uninspired, going in routestep along the road, to they know not what end...In a mining town or deep in the entrails of one of our American cities...the disorder of our American lives becomes a crime for which men pay heavily. Losing step with one another, men lose also a sense of their own individuality so that a thousand of them may be driven in a disorderly mass in at the door of a

Chicago factory morning after morning, and year after year, with never an epigram from the lips of one of them. (*Marching* 10-11)

We can follow the movement of this passage and elaborate step by step the text's diagnosis of the American disorder. The passage begins at the molar level, describing the lack of cohesion of the American people. Tarde's "free play" of differences is depicted as a complete atomization of society, in which we see, in the words of the novel, "the very spirit of the bourgeoisie gone drunk with desire" for monetary gain (113). The fractured, aimless spirit of the people echoes what Badiou calls the "Get rich!" "imperative" of capitalism, which he translates as, "Live without an idea" (Badiou 67).

"Disorder," in this sense, operates much the way "degeneration" does in Max Nordau's influential 1892 text of the same name. According to Eric Santner, Nordau "helped to establish [degeneration] as the central metaphor for the diagnosis of cultural decline up to its fateful appropriation by National Socialist ideologues" (Santner 6). For Nordau, Santner continues, degeneration signals a "state of cultural fatigue in which symbolic forms, values, titles, and identities have lost their credibility, their capacity to elicit belief, and so structure the life-worlds of individuals and communities" (Santner 6). The result is a "general sense of ideological fatigue, which Nordau specifically links to that most famous of fin-de-siecle maladies, hysteria" (Santner 7).

Following Anson Rabinbach, Santner describes the connection between the "nineteenth century preoccupation with fatigue and enervation" and "the discovery, in the middle of the nineteenth century, of the second law of thermodynamics—the law of entropy—which drastically undermined the optimism inspired by the first law, that of the conservation of energy" (7). The finite store of human energy, according to this vitalist

worldview, is dissipated through the “jarring rhythms” of modern, industrial life.

*Marching Men* partakes of this same economic logic of force. Without order or direction, the crowds and mobs of America represent a great chaotic dispersal of potential energy.

As with Tarde, the endless array of isolated particularities, identified in the above passage, is counterbalanced by a seemingly paradoxical homogeneity, which eradicates the differences between the city and the “small mining town.” Nordau, again, writes that by reading a provincial newspaper, “the humblest village inhabitant...takes part...by a continuous and receptive curiosity, in the thousand events which take place in all parts of the globe” (Santner 7). Because of this, he possesses a “wider geographical horizon, more numerous and complex intellectual interests, than the prime minister of a petty, or even a second-rate state a century ago” (Santner 7). In *Winesburg*, in what sounds like a paraphrase of Nordau, we read,

[M]agazines circulate by the millions of copies, newspapers are everywhere. In our day a farmer standing by the stove in the store in his village has his mind filled to overflowing with the words of other men. The newspapers and magazines have pumped him full. Much of the old brutal ignorance that had in it also a kind of beautiful childlike innocence is gone forever. The farmer by the stove is brother to the men of the cities, and if you listen you will find him talking as glibly and as senselessly as the best city man of us all” (34).

Both writers point to the “continuous and receptive curiosity” produced by the mass media, but Anderson also emphasizes the peculiar bondless bond that is formed, in which the farmer becomes “brother” to the urbanite. Breaking down the “innocence” of

traditional communities, the mass media induces a national “crisis of symbolic investiture” (Santner 7). What unites the farmer and the urbanite are the glib words that both of them now utter. With no relation to each other except as fellow citizens and consumers, communication through speech and gesture becomes impossible.

In this context, McGregor tries to “fathom the mystery of the power that made [men] [...] mere slaves of words and formulas” (*Marching* 88). The critique of the mass media Spectacle in *Marching Men* is prescient of Agamben’s meditations in *The Sacrament of Language* on the disjunction between the human being and his own proper language and the resulting a general impoverishment of collective life (Campbell, *Improper* 60-1). Summarizing Agamben’s argument in this text, Campbell writes, “Agamben will speak of a proliferation of spectacles [...] in which empty words follow on empty words and, on the other” (61). In this explosion of biopolitical *dispositifs* “it becomes increasingly difficult, when not impossible, for the living being called man to speak, which means precisely to ‘take the word’ and ‘make it his own’” (Campbell 61). As in *Winesburg, Ohio*, we see a kind of mass epidemic of stuttering in *Marching Men*. McGregor, in particular, is afflicted: “He sputtered and glared over his shoulder up the hillside, struggling for words” (25). Repeatedly, we are told that “[w]ords failed him” (25). He speaks “hurriedly,” and his words come out “in short broken sentences” (183). Or he spits “incoherent words and bits of sentences” (15). Continually, McGregor experiences the “utter futility of try to express what was in his mind” (124).

Finally, in the above passage, Anderson zooms in to take a look at factory workers, in particular, who, we can assume, display the effects of this mass individuation in the most exaggerated form. The motif is repeated a number of times in the novel:

A hundred times [McGregor] had seen men pouring out of factory doors at the end of the day. Always before they had been just a mass of individuals. Each had been thinking of his own affairs and each man had shuffled off into his own street and had been lost in the dim alleyways between the tall grimy buildings. (191)

In an 1895 film from pioneers of the new media, Auguste and Louis Lumiere, informatively titled *Workers leaving the Lumiere factory*, the still camera captures the hive-like flow of male and female workers exiting the factory at day's end. As we watch the streams of workers diverge and crisscross in a dizzying, epileptic ballet, we realize that this is not simply a quaint observation of the common man en masse, but a study of mass movement, perhaps even a questioning of the very dichotomy order/disorder. Released from the monotonous movement of the factory, the workers disperse in a disorganized frenzy. The staccato skip of the film emphasizes their sporadic, jerking gait, so that they appear as so many prototypes of Chaplin's character in *Modern Times*. When Anderson writes that "men," in this world, "did not move, but drifted like sticks on a sea washed beach" (*Marching* 126), he provides an accurate metaphor for the complex movement captured by the film.

Here we can see how "disorder" refers to a kind of bodily sickness affecting the American people. Anderson describes a mass degeneration of the soul, evidenced in slouching shoulders and erratic gestures. The novel offers a detailed nosology of "pale, bloodless, and bent" women (21) "loose" (101) and "wagging" jaws (157), "vacant" stares (125), "scuffling" feet (125), "bent" backs (17), "deformed" (14) and "stoop[ed]"

shoulders (180). Unlike the Lumiere Brothers' film, the text is able to zoom in to give us a close look at mouths:

The people of Chicago go home from their work at evening. Drifting they go, in droves, hurrying along. It is a startling thing to look closely at them. The people have bad mouths. Their mouths are slack and the jaws do not hang right. The mouths are like the shoes they wear. The shoes have become run down at the corners from too much pounding on the hard pavements and the mouths have become crooked from too much weariness of soul. (71)

This nationalized nervous disorder is the symptom of a general waning of physical vitality, evidenced in the "jelly-like fleshiness of weakness" (48) or "down-at-the-heels" quality of modern man. Special attention is paid to the mouth, because in the world of mass communication, only the mouth "wags," while the rest of the body is weak and diseased.

In his "Notes on Gesture" Agamben claims that "[b]y the end of the nineteenth century, the Western bourgeoisie had definitely lost its gestures" (Agamben 48). Citing Georges Gilles de la Tourette's "Clinical and physiological studies on the gait" (1885) and "Study on a nervous condition characterized by lack of motor coordination accompanied by echolalia and coprolalia" (1886), which established a connection between lack of motor coordination and psychological illness, Agamben argues that "In this phase the bourgeoisie, which just a few decades earlier was still firmly in possession of its symbols, succumbs to interiority and gives itself up to psychology" (52). Thus, lacking all naturalness of gesture, life, for the bourgeoisie, becomes "indecipherable" (52).

Having diagnosed the disorder, Anderson attempts to propose a solution, the early hints of which are shocking in their brutal simplicity. One night, walking the streets of Chicago, McGregor notes the city's "restless moving people," the "groups of girls" laughing, and the gangs of working-class men "loitering before the cheap lodging houses" (*Marching* 75), whose dirty clothes seem to gather all of the "filth of the city" in their "little fine interstices" (75). Suddenly, McGregor is seized with a "madness" for "some kind of activity." He desires to "shake mankind out of its sloth" with "the strength of his arm." At this moment, McGregor notices a large man shuffling down the street. He "did not walk with any suggestion of power in his legs," but "shambled along...like a huge child...a child without muscles and hardness, clinging to the skirts of life" (76). The large man comes to "personify all of the things against which [McGregor's] soul was in revolt" (76) and so he crouches out of sight and pounces on the man as he approaches, knocking the poor, unwitting stranger into the gutter (76). As simplistic and childish as it is, this moment represents an apt precursor to McGregor's later desire to organize mankind into "a great fist ready to smash and strike" (102). The desire for a vitalist movement is born of a kind of metaphysical fastidiousness, on the part of McGregor.

After settling for a while in Chicago, where he spends much time observing the disorderly urban crowds, McGregor is forced to return to Coal Creek for his mother's funeral, where he finds the same squalid disorder that he had come to loathe in the urban environment of Chicago:

Sharply he remembered the walks he had sometimes taken at night in the city streets and the air of disorderly ineffectiveness all about him. And

here in the mining town it was the same. On every side of him appeared blank empty faces and loose, badly knit together bodies. (102)

In the city and the rural town alike, there is the same dissipation of power, the same ineffectual atomization, and hopelessness.

The solution comes to him after the funeral, as the miners of Coal Creek follow along behind the hearse that carries him and the body of his dead mother. “[K]neeling in the open carriage at the top of the hill and watching the *Marching Men* slowly toiling upward,” McGregor has a flash of insight:

“It seemed to him that they, like himself, were marching up out of the smoke and the little squalid houses, away from the shores of the blood red river into something new. What? McGregor shook his head slowly like an animal in pain. He wanted something for himself, for all these men. It seemed to him that he would gladly lie dead like Nance McGregor to know the secret of that want” (105).

At this moment, “as though in answer to [his] cry” the loose gang of miners suddenly falls into step. “An instantaneous impulse seemed to run through the ranks of stooped, toiling figures...and the long subdued song of life began to sing in their bodies” (105). In a flash of “Napoleonic insight” McGregor realizes that “someday a man will come who will swing all of the workers of the world into step like that...He will make them conquer, not one another, but the terrifying disorder of life” (106).

This provides the inspiration for his grand vision of a militaristic movement of *Marching Men*. “Suppose they could just learn to march, nothing else,” McGregor thinks to himself. “Suppose they should begin to do with their bodies what their minds are not

strong enough to do—to just learn the one simple thing, to march, whenever two or four or a thousand of them got together” (106). McGregor understands, even at this early moment, that this “must come first” (107). “They must march fear and disorder and purposelessness away.”

Certainly the most unique, but also perhaps the most insightful, aspect of the *Marching Men* movement is its complete lack of a teleological dimension. Though the “movement... become[s] really big” (182), and though McGregor insists that once men have learned to move their bodies in concert, “a brain will grow,” the ultimate purpose of the movement seems to be nothing more nor less than a kind of mass rehabilitation program. The object of this experiment is to reestablish the marchers as embodied presences to one another but also to reestablish a domain in which they can communicate and gesture.

In its more far-seeing moments, I think, the text suggests that the purpose of the movement is not to overthrow capitalism (though this is suggested), or even to instantiate a new political content, but simply to establish, what Tiquun call, a “contagious formation” (*Introduction* 179). In this respect, Anderson emerges as an early affect theorist. As we saw, although the theory of contagion was present, even fundamental, to early accounts of collective psychology, it tended to retain a secondary status with respect to the leader’s suggestions, which occurred in the domain of rhetoric—involving, for Le Bon, the affirmation and repetition of master signifiers like “democracy” or “hope.” The under-theorized aspect of contagion is not surprising, because, unlike the “psychological” category of suggestion, contagion was often seen as a brute, biological given that operated beyond, or perhaps before, linguistic representation. Often, when early writers

do attempt to theorize contagion, their discourse is forced to take on a figurative dimension.

With his “principle of direct induction of emotion by way of the primitive sympathetic response,” or, as Freud helpfully summarizes, “emotional contagion,” William McDougall gives one of the most detailed accounts of how contagion operates:

The perceived signs of an affective state are such as automatically to evoke the same affect in the person doing the perceiving. This automatic compulsion will be the stronger, the more people are seen to exhibit the same affect simultaneously. The individual’s critical faculties will then fall silent, and he will allow himself to slip into the same affective state. In the process, however, he will heighten the excitement of others who had aroused him, and thus the individual’s own affective charge will increase as a result of reciprocal induction (Freud, *Mass* 34-5).

This account will not change very much in more recent affect theory. However, in “After Affect: Sympathy, Synchrony and Mimetic Communication” Anna Gibbs attempts to explain how such contagion leads to an effective communication. Like early crowd theorists, who used terms such as contagion, sympathy, imitation, and even suggestion interchangeably, Gibbs assembles “sympathy, synchrony, and the various forms of mimicry and imitation under the broad heading of mimesis” (187). For Gibbs “affect contagion” is “[a]t the heart of mimicry” (191). “Mimetic communication,” Gibbs writes, quoting Condon, is “the fundamental communicational principle” (187). But, Gibbs argues, “it might equally be conceived as a contagious process that takes place transversally across a topology connecting heterogeneous networks of media and

conversation, statements and images, bodies and things” (187). Contagion names the “immediacy of what passes between bodies and which subtends cognitively mediated representation...It is not analyzable within a semiotic model, nor does it require an ‘I’: it is essentially asubjective even though it plays a crucial role in the formation of subjectivity” (193).

Gibbs then moves on to a discussion of gesture. “Movement, sound, and rhythm are neither vestigial to language, nor unorganized accompaniments to it. Gesture, for example, is a ‘forceful presence’ in language (Agamben 1999, 77). It seems to actively facilitate thought and speech, lending form to the sweep of an idea, helping to draw it out” (199).

Gesture, then, is “a ‘material carrier’ that helps bring meaning into existence” (McNeill 1992). So sympathetic modes of communication not only persist alongside linguistic modes: they also inhabit and actively shape them. These are not rudimentary, infantile, or so-called primitive modes of communication: rather, they are the essential prerequisites for, and working collaborators with, verbal communication. (199)

Movement, sound, and rhythm will play crucial roles in the development of the *Marching Men*. The phrase “shoulder to shoulder” appears often in descriptions of ideal collective assemblages. Here, in the press of body to body, in the physical contact of another, a kind of communication occurs. “They will not put their thoughts into words,” McGregor thinks, “but nevertheless there will be a thought growing up in them” (183).

Thus, the predominant metaphor, in the descriptions of the burgeoning movement, are musical. As McGregor explains to an excited reporter, “The legs and feet of men,

hundreds of legs and feet make a kind of music” (183). Nearly a hundred years later, Tiqqun will write that “the revolutionary question is now a musical one” (*This* 204):

Something that is constituted here resonates with the shock wave emitted by something constituted over there. A body that resonates does so according to its own mode. An insurrection is not like a plague or a forest fire—a linear process which spreads from place to place after an initial spark. It rather takes the shape of a music, whose focal points, though dispersed in time and space, succeed in imposing the rhythm of their own vibrations, always taking on more density (Coming 12-3).

Thus, in the *Marching Men*, will produce a “song of labor” (216) through the “steady, never-ending thrash of [their] feet” (217). This is not so much a political program, as a kind of contagious rhythm.

In fact, the movement remains completely allergic to master signifiers. Anderson even denies that there is a political content to the movement, unless we understand politics, as Agamben does, as the “sphere of the full, absolute gesturality of human beings” (85). We are continually warned about squeezing the movement into preexisting political frameworks. “The whole thing was not an outbreak of labor,” the narrator informs us, “it was something different from anything that had come into the world before” (202). “Socialist” buzzwords, such as “brotherhood,” are prohibited (214) and McGregor continually instructs his marchers to remain absolutely silent. As Dunne writes, “By not confining the movement’s purpose to a conventionalized platform of ideas and grievances, McGregor creates for the public something of a vacuum, for people

cannot readily assign meaning to the movement without having any linguistic markers with which to compare it” (Dunne 28).

It is not *a* movement, in the end, but a plurality of small platoons. “The unions were in it but besides the unions there were the Poles, the Russian Jews, the Hunks from the stockyards and the steel works in South Chicago. They had their own leaders, speaking their own languages” (202). In this manner Anderson tries to imagine a movement that forms a transversal connection between groups who are not necessarily unified in terms of their political demands. Unfortunately, he cannot go so far as to include women and the text makes no mention of non-white minorities.

Nevertheless, the *Marching Men* movement anticipates more recent theories of collective action. In fact, we must look to the work of the radical French collective, Tiqqun, to find an appropriate theoretical analogue. Tiqqun is the name of an underground journal published in France between the years 1999 and 2001. This work, which combines the styles of the Situationist manifesto and the anarchist zine, was written collectively and anonymously. An excerpt from the journals published by La Fabrique in 2007 as *L’insurrection qui vient (The Coming Insurrection)* was attributed to The Invisible Committee. Other material that La Fabrique has published from these journals has been attributed to the author “Tiqqun.” When Semiotext(e) published these works in English several years later, they followed the precedent set by La Fabrique, attributing *The Coming Insurrection* to The Invisible Committee, but *The Introduction to Civil War*, *This Is Not a Program*, and *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young Girl* to Tiqqun.

Tiqqun describe themselves as the “conscious faction of The Imaginary Party,” a concept that is formulated as a counter to Negri’s “multitude,” which they criticize as a barely disguised revolutionary “subject.” The Imaginary Party by contrast names a whole constellation of diverse and often conflicting factions. Furthermore, the fact that Tiqqun is merely the conscious faction of this party suggests that the bulk of the party’s membership is unconscious of its inclusion. Tiqqun therefore take Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “minor politics” seriously. In fact, the original source for much of their thought is the fractious terrain of Italian politics in the late 70s. They look to *Autonomia*, which was not a singular, cohesive movement, but rather an “archipelago” (Thoburn 76) of disparate forces, groupuscules, and strategies as a kind of progenitor of the Imaginary Party.

As anti-liberals par excellence, Tiqqun reject nearly the entire panoply of pre-given political signifiers, aside from communism, which they try to distinguish from its statist manifestations. In *This Is Not a Program*, Tiqqun eschew any pretensions to a molar, unified movement. The point for them is not to confront Empire with a revolutionary subject, but to multiply the zones of resistance. Though, like Hardt and Negri, they suggest that all of the conditions are already present for a truly radical form of collective life, they abstain from the messianic notion of a coming revolution of the multitude. For them, there is no singular political objective to accomplish as a collective totality. Whether that totality takes the name of the multitude, the people, or the plebs, is somewhat immaterial. In lieu of a molar political horizon, Tiqqun advocate nothing more, nor less, than the recovery of gestures and relations between bodies, or, as they often call them, forms of life.

Tiqqun's critique of Empire can be read as a direct continuation of Anderson's diagnosis of the abstract individualization of the public sphere. Like Anderson, The Invisible Committee describe the terrain of Empire as a vast metropolis, an undifferentiated, global territory. In *The Coming Insurrection*, The Invisible Committee use the word "metropolis" to name this "simultaneous death of city and country" (54). Clearly a result of the centralizing force of the media and advances in transportation, the metropolis "is one single urban cloth, without form or order, a bleak zone, endless and undefined" (25).

Whereas Anderson describes a bloodless public that has overcoded the relations between members of communities and crowds, The Invisible Committee argues that we have been "expropriated from our own language by education, from our songs by reality TV contests, from our flesh by mass pornography..." (36). The state "instinctively grinds down any solidarities that escape it until nothing remains except citizenship—a pure, phantasmatic sense of belonging to the Republic" (36). For Tiqqun, "'Citizen' is anything that shows some degree of ethical neutralization, some attenuation that is compatible with Empire" (*Introduction* 140). "Difference is not done away with completely," under Empire, but it must be "expressed against the backdrop of a general equivalence" (140). In this manner "difference [functions as] the elementary unit used in the imperial management of identities" (*Introduction* 140).

The result is something beyond simple "alienation." It is, rather, a total collective "psychological misery," a "physical and metaphysical weakness of being" (*This* 193). In light of the same disorder, Tiqqun recommend a very Andersonian solution.

All bodies are in movement. Even when it is immobile, a body still comes into presence, puts into play the world it bears, and follows its fate.

Certain bodies go together [...] Within the community of each form-of-life there are also communities of things and gestures, communities of habits and affects, a community of thoughts (*Introduction* 41).

The movement to come will have “[n]o leader, no demands, no organization,” but will be founded instead on “words, gestures, complicities” (*Invisible, Coming* 113). Like *Marching Men* Tiqqun speak of encouraging contagious formations, in which bodies group together, not on the basis of predicates (working class, white, male, etc.) but on the basis of penchants. The idea of marching and nothing else might be thought of as a way of expressing a penchant that is itself rather meaningless, but operates as a point to which the movement can hold. The contagious formation is not built around a political program or an identification. It is, first and foremost, the expression of a desire to relate to others as physical presences, to accumulate a consistency and density inimical to the smooth space of Empire.

We might think of the indistinction that surrounds the subject of the *Marching Men* movement in a more positive light, as what Tiqqun identify as the “pleb.” Following from Italian political theory of the 70s, Tiqqun dismiss the efficacy of the “revolutionary subject” (43). Like the emarginati, the precariat, or the untorelli, the “pleb” names the “inassimilable alterity” within the “omnivorous universality of Empire” (*This* 44). They are fond of quoting Hegel’s remark that there are plebs in every class.

*Marching Men* asks us to forgo politics by the standard means. Here, against the post-Marxist politics of Ernesto Laclau who describes how a cluster of competing

demands become unified under an empty signifier, Anderson suggests that we abandon the representative terrain of coherent demands altogether. Because the *Marching Men* movement rejects a teleological goal and all available political master signifiers (socialism, communism, democracy, etc.), Anderson forces us to consider a return to the fundamental aspects of common being, of living together.

Looking back on *Marching Men*, Anderson writes, “When I saw the dream I had put into action I grew afraid of the dream. Man, it seems, must still march alone... The democratic ideal is in the end safer for man than the ideal of my dream” (*Memoirs* 187). Seeing the fascist potentialities of his imaginary movement, Anderson accedes to what Churchill famously termed, “the worst form of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.” The movement fails by the end of the novel. Anderson drops the story of McGregor, shifts the narrative voice to that of an ex-follower, who is now looking back on the “madness of the Marching Men” (*Marching Men* 198), and concludes with the insipid realism of David Ormsby, the capitalist. The effort to find the essence of collective being will be resumed in *Winesburg, Ohio*, where Anderson has clearly learned something from his previous mistake—though one would be hard-pressed to call it a “democratic ideal.”

It is easy to make criticisms of this strange dream of Anderson’s. In closing, I would like to avoid a facile critique and focus on the novel’s fundamental failure of thought, its inability to think the collective in its true complexity. Aside from the obvious sexism and racism, there are two major criticisms that pertain directly to the issue of writing the many. First is the strictly supplementary logic of the leader, in this novel. Once the movement is underway, we have good reason to question McGregor’s position

with respect to it. Since, the movement articulates no demands, has no political goal in the vulgar, progressive sense, since, finally, it functions by the affective contagion produced by bodies in contact, the necessity of a leader becomes questionable. In fact, just as Le Bon's discourse seems to be cut into two discreet halves, so does the logic of this text. On the one hand, is the celebratory declaration of the death of the individual, while, on the other, there is the exaggerated figure of the ubermensch leader. Virtually all of the text's major difficulties can be located in this basic contradiction, so that the real problem with the text is the presence of its protagonist.

Thus, while the movement is predicated on the contagious interaction of bodies, the leader of the movement, in truly Le Bonian fashion, represents the essence of immunity. As Esposito describes it, "*immunitas* [...] protects the one who bears it from risky contact with those who do not" (*Bios* 50). It therefore operates as a "defense against the expropriating effects of *communitas*," the common (*Bios* 50). McGregor looks upon other men as mere "pygmies" and determines to become "master" over them (*Marching* 47). His "hatred and contempt of mankind," meanwhile, finds its objective correlative in his "huge body, hard as adamant" (47). In this way, the leader of the movement stands as living proof against the fitness of his own theory, because he remains entirely immune to the revolutionary fervor he has created. Norris, at the very least, showed how the immune individual can become absorbed into the many. Here, by contrast, the workers have simply traded one merciless master for another, a fact that severely undermines the revolutionary promise of the movement. From this perspective, the movement's avoidance of a master signifier is sustained by a complete dependence upon a simple master and we see that the potentially radical emptiness of the *Marching Men* movement

merely opens the door for the whims of a dictator. Thus, in the end, what is supposed to be a movement *for itself*, becomes a movement exclusively for the one who is not a part of it.

Anderson cannot think the many without the immune individual at its border, and the crowd returns to its Le Bonian status as a blank slate to be *written* by the individual outside of it. The sublime, embodied swarm of Norris is replaced here by an airy abstraction, so that it seems as if Anderson is unable to embrace the affective theory that forms the theoretical basis of the movement. But this, as we will see, is accidentally fortuitous, because it means that the next time around Anderson will be forced to think community through the concept of immunity, through what Esposito calls a “principle of common separation” (*Immunitas* 25).

The second criticism of the novel is related to the first in that what Anderson ultimately struggles with is how to give the movement substance without undermining his own critique of empty words. In trying to avoid the empty words of the media machine, the novel makes all of language, all thought, even, ineffectual. The result is that we are forced to believe in a kind of mystic “substance” that cannot be described in anyway. We are told that the movement is a “thing that can’t be put into words” (*Marching* 182), that it “was never a thing to intellectualize about” (179). Again and again we are subjected to the ambiguous noun “something,” as in the pivotal scene when McGregor gets the inspiration for the movement:

Then he fell upon his knees on the carriage seat and watched them eagerly his soul crying out to *something* he thought must be hidden away among the black mass of them, *something* that was the keynote of their lives,

*something* for which he hadn't looked and in which he had not believed.  
(104)

Words, Anderson should have realized, turn out to be an unfortunate polemical target for a novel, as the conceptual flaccidness of the following passage will attest:

It is a terrible thing to speculate on how man has been defeated by his ability to say words. The brown bear in the forest has no such power and the lack of it has enabled him to retain a kind of nobility of bearing sadly lacking in us. On and on through life we go, socialists, dreamers, makers of laws, sellers of goods and believers in suffrage for women, and we continuously say words, worn-out words, crooked words, words without power or pregnancy in them. (87)

We aren't quite halfway through the novel when we read this. The limitations of this philosophy become apparent when Anderson can no longer put off an account of the movement itself. But here, we are not presented with the sublime spectacle of thousands upon thousands of men marching in lock step. Instead, we are *told* about it, through a strange series of distancing mediations. Thus, rather than see it directly, we learn of the amassing movement through the words of newspaper men:

I tell you there is something growing up here... There is an element in men that up to now has not been understood—there is a thought hidden away within the breast of labor, a big unspoken thought—it is part of men's bodies as well as their minds. (188)

We are even treated to the lyrics of the *Marching Men* Song, which had “in it just the weird, haunting something the Russians know how to put into their songs” (201).

The more we are told about this something, the more we become convinced that we will never see it, that it is incapable of showing itself to us. Here Anderson imagines the essence of the collective as a substance, as some *Thing* that can be put to work, made to produce, used. “There is no tissue, no flesh, no subject or substance of common being,” Jean-Luc Nancy writes (*Inoperative* 30). Therefore, “One does not produce it, one experiences [...] it” (31).

In a novel about the contagious communication of bodies, Anderson never leaves the optic of the immune individual on his summit. For this reason, the collective being is simultaneously and paradoxically a complete cipher and an overwhelming abundance, but one, again, that can never appear as such. In *Winesburg, Ohio*, the “something” returns, but it is of a completely different status, no longer functioning as the empty signifier of a fullness and presence.

## CHAPTER 4

### ***WINESBURG, OHIO AND THE COMING COMMUNITY: A THEORY OF BLOOM***

Thomas Yingling begins his essay, “*Winesburg, Ohio* and The End of Collective Experience,” with a simple, but important question: “Does this book about a town have any collective experience or identity at its center?” (102). “The question of the collective” is all the more pressing, Yingling argues, because *Winesburg* “is itself a collection, a series of stories” (102). The very form of the book, therefore, begs one to consider “what binds it (and the town it represents) together” (102). For Yingling then the presence or absence of a “coherent community” (102) in *Winesburg*, will bear important consequences for what Dunne has called the “decades’ long debate of whether the book is a novel or not” (Dunne 43). Two interrelated questions: the question of the collective and the question of the form of the work itself. The formal innovation of *Winesburg, Ohio*, Yingling seems to suggest, would be merely that if it did not also relate to the important thematic issue of collective life. Similarly, whatever answer one finds to the “question of the collective” should provide a clue to that most basic and irritating question regarding the text—namely, “What is it?”

Having highlighted the importance of the question, it is all the more curious that Yingling should dispense with it so quickly. Citing Irving Howe’s claim that the characters in *Winesburg* are all “in search of a ceremony, a social value, a manner of living, a lost ritual that may, by some means, re-establish a flow and exchange of emotion,” Yingling—true to the title of his essay—squarely situates the action of *Winesburg* in the modern moment of already “vanished harmony and collectivity” (102).

“As we now understand it historically,” Yingling writes, “the modern world was witness to the collapse of collective experience and midwife to the birth of what John Brenkman calls a ‘culture of privatization’ in Western societies” (103). Since, this reasoning goes, *Winesburg* is a quintessentially modern text, and since modernity is coterminous with the death of collectivity, *Winesburg* must naturally be read as a monument to fallen community.

In this manner, after briefly wondering *whether* there is any collective experience in *Winesburg*, Yingling goes on to the presumably more important question of why there is none. By argument’s end, the important formal question he had raised about how the theme of collective life relates to the basic question of what kind of text *Winesburg* is, has, one must imagine, been presumed pointless. Thus, whatever questions his analysis has raised, in his final conclusions, Yingling follows in the footsteps of the critical majority, which tends to read the text as an “elegy” of community (Yingling 125) and an unsparing look at modern alienation.

Such a reading is not without ample textual support. It is indeed true that virtually all of *Winesburg*’s “grotesques” are lonely beings, who feel excluded from what they perceive as a harmonious, collective “they.” The insistence that *Winesburg* announces the death of collective life is nonetheless a hasty assertion that takes a particular perspective thematized *within* the text—that of the alienated, individual character against the collective “they”—and sees it as the text’s ultimate verdict on collective life. In this sense, the critic merely restates the conclusions of the work’s characters, without investigating the crucial paradox whereby “everyone” in the town rails against the purportedly unified beliefs and values of “everyone else.” More importantly, such a

reading not only obscures the fact of Anderson's long fascination with the themes of "group feeling" and "man in the mass" (*Hello Towns!* 25), but also suggests that, when it comes to the subject of the collective or the group, a given text or individual, must be either *for* or *against*. By approaching the text in this way, by, in essence, forcing its careful analysis of modern collective life into what is most often seen as a negative judgment about the possibility of collective life, the critic speaks more about his or her own judgments about that possibility. When it comes to the "question of the collective," I would argue, *Winesburg* emerges as a premier case in which the text reads us.

Viewing *Winesburg, Ohio* as a continuation and reworking of difficulties opened up in his earlier and much less successful novel, *Marching Men* (1917), I hope to add a corrective to that critical vein which views *Winesburg* as either a radical break with the previous novels, or a happy anomaly in an otherwise mediocre corpus (Trilling 296). Looking back at the earlier novels is all the more pressing when one is concerned with unraveling the riddle of the many that lies, I argue, at the foundation of *Winesburg's* theoretical approach. Taking this longer view should make it clear that whatever Anderson's answer to "the question of the collective" is it is certainly not a simple yes or no. To this end, I read *Winesburg* alongside the theory of community opened up, first, by Bataille and extended by Nancy and the French collective, Tiquun. Like Anderson, all of these thinkers of collectivity are taxed with penetrating that modern paradox: the community of those without community. At the root of this problem, Nancy and Tiquun suggest, is an originary experience of separation, exposure, and finitude.

Read alongside *Marching Men*, the apparent and peculiar absence of collective experience in *Winesburg* takes on a whole new consistency. We begin to understand the

text, less as a lament for a bygone day and more as an adumbration of the true community to come. This comes about, first, I think, through an unsparing ethical dedication, on the part of Anderson, to penetrate to the roots of the modern collective experience, without—and this point is at once absolutely paramount and at odds with the vast tradition of critical interpretations of the text—falling back on the position of the “beautiful soul,” who, by mourning the loss of community, productively contributes to the sense that life in common has become an impossibility.

Leaving grandiose ethical commitments aside, Anderson’s tremendous conceptual leap from the proto-fascist vision of *Marching Men* to the complex collective consistency of *Winesburg* is achieved by the simplest and subtlest of turns on the formal level. Having failed, in the previous novel, to disclose the inner workings of that mysterious “something” that compels men to come together, Anderson begins again, to rework what we might call his own “first philosophy” of being-together. Through a simple twist of the Le Bonian leader/crowd model that he found so appealing in the early novels, Anderson effectively universalizes the position of the leader, hence rendering common the feeling of uncommonness itself, and converting the previous failure to present the multitude in its overflowing plenitude into a positive feature of the collective to come. Thus, whereas in *Marching Men* the thematic insistence on the effulgent presence of the multitude was rendered, on the formal level, as a failure and an absence, in *Winesburg*, the very ontology of the collective is revealed to be founded, in a positive sense, on singularity—as distinct from individuality. The subtle turn of the screw is only that from an absent presence to a present absence, but the implications for collective life are decisive.

As Yingling himself intuits, the question of the form of the book, its complex relation between part and whole, does indeed bear important consequences for the thematic question about the relation between the individual and the many. Before jumping into this difficult terrain, however, it will be useful to tarry with the undeniable fact that so much of the book's content focuses on the "alienated" individual. Indeed, this figure is often simply equated with Anderson's infamous "grotesque." Rather than contest this tradition, I want to deepen its analysis by drawing a connection between the "grotesque" and "the Bloom" of Tiquun's recent work, *The Theory of Bloom*, which takes Joyce's everyman as its conceptual "figure." This will allow us to question the easy equation of the grotesque and the modern, alienated subject and thus provide a picture of the grotesque that will support the text's subtle analysis of the many.

Yingling is not alone in his judgment that *Winesburg* is an essentially nostalgic work that bemoans the loss of connectedness. Joseph Dewey notes the "sense of irresistible yearning for communion" that pervades *Winesburg* (Dewey 194). Summarizing the critical consensus regarding Anderson's entire oeuvre, Fussell writes that Anderson is "indubitably the man who writes about discontinuity among persons and about the behaviors and feelings that spring from that discontinuity" (Fussell 105). Irving Howe provides one of the most potent descriptions of the loneliness that permeates *Winesburg*. Contending that the "book's major characters are alienated from...the community...and...from each other" (Howe 96), Howe constructs a metaphor in which the grotesques are "communicants" and George Willard the "young priest who will renew the forgotten communal rites by which they may again be bound together" (Howe 97).

Howe calls *Winesburg* a “vision of American life as a depressed landscape cluttered with dead stumps, twisted oddities, grotesque and pitiful wrecks” (94).

Yingling’s reading of *Winesburg* as a document of the end of collective experience begins by acknowledging the debt to Howe:

As we now understand it historically, the modern world was witness to the collapse of collective experience and midwife to the birth of what John Brenkman calls a "culture of privatization" in Western societies. Irving Howe perceptively wrote almost forty years ago that *Winesburg* reads "as if the most sustaining and fruitful human activities can no longer be performed in public communion but must be grasped in secret." Its citizens, Howe suggests, "seek not merely the individual release of a sudden expressive outburst, but also a relation with each other that may restore them to collective harmony. They are ... in search of a ceremony, a social value, a manner of living, a lost ritual that may, by some means, re-establish a flow and exchange of emotion." As we continually discover in *Winesburg*, this loss of collective identity places a terrible burden on interiority, on how an individual may fashion the meaning of his or her life. (103)

Such a description of alienated, modern man is by no means unfamiliar. This portrait of the grotesque as a hopelessly lonely creature in search of a lost communion, furthermore, folds neatly into Tiquun’s diagnosis of the “dual nothingness” that is the Bloom:

The bourgeois republic can pride itself on having furnished the first historical expression of any importance, and in the last analysis the model, of this controlled ecstasy [that is the Bloom]. In it, in a novel way, man's existence as a singular being is categorically separated from his existence as a member of the community. Thus, in the bourgeois republic, where man is a true, recognized subject, he is cut off from any quality of his own, he is a figure without a reality, a 'citizen,' and there where, in his own eyes and in those of others, he passes for a real subject in his everyday existence, he is a figure without truth, an 'individual.' (25)

But, if there is any sense in attempting a theory of the Bloom, if, by the same token, there is any value in returning to the grotesques of *Winesburg*, it is because, at root, both of these figures stand as very real challenges to a facile term like "alienation," which seems to explain everything. Echoing Tiqqun's *Theory of Bloom* we should say that the grotesque is not simply "alienated man," but rather the one "who has become so thoroughly conjoined with his alienation that it would be absurd to try and separate them" (16).

Like much of Tiqqun's work, *Theory of Bloom* is a heady and eclectic blend of discourses, switching back and forth from the agitprop of the manifesto to "serious" metaphysical reflections. Described as a "textual virus," in the note accompanying the text, *Theory of Bloom* is a strategic writing that attempts nothing less than the deconstruction of the "dead forms" of "Man" and "The Book." In more specific terms, *Theory of Bloom* can be seen as a necessary step in Tiqqun's broader project. Whereas other works dealt with politics and "society" on the grand molar scale, *Theory of Bloom*

is Tiquun's attempt to present something like a "phenomenology" of the "subject" of Empire.

As Tiquun point out, in the opening section of *Theory of Bloom* there is no shortage of alienated protagonists in modern literature. In fact, "for more than a century," they write, "Bloom has been almost the sole 'hero' of all literature, from Jarry's Sengle to Michaux's Plume, from Pessoa himself to *The Man Without Qualities*, from Bartleby to Kafka" (29). It is no surprise then that we find traces of the Bloom throughout American literature. With his seemingly congenital inability to be anything but a passive observer, Miles Coverdale may be considered one of the earliest Blooms. In addition to Melville's Bartleby, there are the sad, suburban phantoms that populate the fiction of Cheever, Yates, and Carver. Even a non-Bloom like Ignatius J. Reilly can be seen as an exception that proves the rule. With his affinity for the truly great beings of the Medieval era, with the radical purity of his egoism, and his flagrant physicality, Reilly is refreshing precisely because he represents a flight from the Bloom.

*Theory of Bloom*, however, is no mere literary exercise, much less an excursus on a famous "character." In fact, Tiquun suggest that the proliferation of the Bloom in the pages of literature and philosophy represents a hindrance to our ability to truly see him: "Thus far, too much has been written and not enough has been thought, on the subject of the Bloom" (22-3). As a result, "THEY have long been able to ignore, as a merely literary phenomenon, as a purely philosophical exaggeration, the massive evidence of Bloom in all its manifestations" (29). Beginning with the observation that "If Bloom is encountered in books, it's because each of us has already passed him on the street, and seen him subsequently in ourselves" (7), the *Theory of Bloom* is Tiquun's attempt to

redress this imbalance and uncover the very existential paradigm that would allow for the proliferation of this “literary” figure in the first place.

Perhaps the best reason for attempting a theory of the Bloom, then, is precisely because, like “alienated, modern man,” he has become so familiar to us. His very reification in the classics of modern literature and philosophy, and in undergraduate humanities courses, means that we have ceased to see him for what he is, and, subsequently, that we no longer feel the need to recognize him in ourselves. Whatever Bloom is, at this stage, it is not simply another term for alienated man, nor does the term “exotically fill the absence of a word in the common lexicon for a human type which has recently appeared on the surface of the planet” (15). The relationship between the Bloom and alienated, modern man is rather one of a paradoxically distant proximity, in which the surface similarity gives way to a deep, existential gap.

Given Tiqqun’s caution against the literariness of the Bloom, it is all the more odd that the *Theory of Bloom* opens with a recognizably literary/philosophical vignette, akin to one of those little scenes that appear in the pages of *Being and Nothingness* and *The Critique of Dialectical Reason*:

The lovely snow-covered countryside glides quickly past the window. The distance between V. and R., which was once a week’s affair, will be traversed in a short time. For an hour you’ve been the occupant of an assigned seat in one of the twenty identical cars of this high-speed train, like so many others. The regular, and no doubt optimal, arrangement of the seats replicates itself in the abstract harmony of a toned-down neon. The train follows its rails, and in this coach, so sensibly attuned to the idea

of order, it seems that human reality itself follows its invisible rails. A healthy and polite indifference inhabits the space separating you from the woman in the seat nearby. Neither of you will feel the superfluous need to speak to one another during the trip, let alone to engage in conversation. That would disturb your distraction, and your neighbor's concentrated study of the women's press. (6)

The false idyll, with its snow-covered hills, sets critical consciousness down in familiar territory. The almost reflexive damnation of the locomotive, whose tracks crisscross the country, annulling physical distances and, no doubt, physical communities, can be found by flipping the pages of any standard naturalist novel or sociological tome of over a hundred years ago. In fact, it was Georg Simmel, who spoke, in *The Metropolis and Mental Life*, of the new and unusual situation confronting passengers of public transportation in the nineteenth century: "Before the development of buses, railroads, and trams in the nineteenth century, people had never been in situations where they had to look at one another for long minutes or even hours without speaking to one another" (qtd. in Benjamin 69).

The "abstract harmony" of the interior, with its "toned-down neon," its identical cars full of identical seats, furthermore, cannot help but bring to mind the "little boxes" of the upper-middle class suburbanites, whose sad lives provide today's television audiences with so much smug glee. The scene is, in this respect, little more than a distillation of any number of weary depictions of alienated modern man, from Yates' *Revolutionary Road* to the standard dystopian sci-fi fare of contemporary Hollywood.

Rather than an excoriation of literary representations of the Bloom, then, the *Theory of Bloom* is an attempt to work *through* the literature of the Bloom, but *away from* a brand of reified “literariness” that impedes a real apprehension of our own “Bloomification.” Thus, although it is clear from the beginning of *Theory of Bloom* that Tiquun are not exactly talking about *that* Bloom, we can nonetheless identify a familial resemblance. Like Leopold, the Bloom floats through a world that is entirely “metropolitan.” Indeed, from this perspective, Joyce’s decision to set *Ulysses* within the limits of Dublin can be read as a tacit acknowledgement of Tiquun’s insight that, today, there is no outside of the metropolis, that all spaces have become metropolitan in texture, density, and speed. “That Bloom is essentially the metropolis man,” Tiquun write, “in no way implies the possibility, through birth or by choice, of escaping this condition, for the metropolis itself has no outside” (34). The metropolis and the Bloom, then, are not necessarily discrete entities, but parts of the same assemblage, each reacting to and producing the other.

This insight runs not only throughout *Marching Men*, but *Winesburg* as well. In both texts, Anderson refuses to make an easy distinction between the city and the country, revealing instead a basic homogeneity between the member of the small town and the urbanite. This is perhaps one reason why Anderson disparaged his inclusion in the group of writers associated with the “revolt from the village” (Hoffman 229). If we take *Marching Men* and *Winesburg* at their word, *Winesburg* is not a parochial suburb, but is notable precisely for its similarity to a bustling metropolis like Chicago. The point, for Tiquun as well as for Anderson, is that under the domination of the Spectacle, the

public sphere fashions “individual citizens” who, as we saw in the previous chapter, have been denuded of their particular, embodied relationships with others.

Again, like his literary counterpart, Tiquun’s Bloom has given up “sensuality” for “sexuality,” so that in “the thoroughly semiotized world of Bloom, a phallus and a vagina are merely signs that refer to something else” (*Theory* 17). We are reminded here of the symbolic overdetermination of Leopold’s key. Similarly, Howe’s bleak description of *Winesburg* as “a landscape in which ghosts fumble erratically and romance is reduced to mere fugitive brushings at night” (Howe 94), comes close in spirit to what Tiquun refer to as the “weary dance” of today’s “Bloom males and Bloom females” (*Theory* 18).

Blooms are ethical relativists, as well, preferring to live and let live rather than risk the danger of taking a principled stand. Both Leopold and “the Bloom” have caught what Tiquun describe as a certain “infection of do-gooding” (*Theory* 95). Just as Leopold goes all soft over Stephen, the Bloom is not incapable of escorting a complete stranger to an address he is looking for, while asking nothing in return (93). These particular qualities are perhaps rarer in the characters of *Winesburg*, though George Willard certainly betrays aspects of the Good Samaritan; like the Bloom, it is easy for the young Willard to be kind to others, because he maintains a fundamental distance and disinterestedness toward “them.” For Tiquun, the Bloom’s ethical dimension can thus be summarized in the injunction of the *Gospel of Thomas* to be as “passers-by” (31).

Perhaps the most salient feature of all Blooms, and the one that we will focus on for the remainder of this essay, however, is a condition of existential “homelessness.” Heidegger argues that “Homelessness is coming to be the destiny of the world” and that Marx’s famous “alienation” “has its roots in the homelessness of modern man”

(Heidegger 243). Contemporary theorists, like Sloterdijk and Virno have followed Heidegger's lead by offering the figure of "homo habitans" as a paradigm for the contemporary subject of globalization (Campbell, *Improper* 88). "There is nothing more shared and more common, and in a sense more *public*," Virno writes, "than the feeling of 'not feeling at home'" (Virno 34). It is in keeping with this tradition that Tiquun assert that Bloom is "the rootless man, the man who has adopted the feeling of being at home in exile, who has rooted himself in placelessness, and for whom uprooting no longer evokes banishment, but on the contrary an ordinary situation" (*Theory* 45).

This metaphysical condition of homelessness is perhaps most observable in a certain peripatetic predilection shared by Leopold, the Bloom, and, of course, the *flâneur*. The *flâneur* we will remember is the one who remains apart from the crowd even as he is immersed in its throbbing center; the one who walks "down" in the streets, but sees everything as if from the inoculated, contemplative solitude of the "hill" or the "high place." In Sloterdijk's formulation, the homelessness of homo habitans is indissociably linked to the "immunitary regime" of the personal "sphere," a kind of psychic bubble that shields the contemporary subject from contact with the contagious elements of the contemporary globalized world in which it moves—or rather, glides (86). Just as Leopold remains a perennial tourist of his hometown, the Bloom has a "terminal way of being a spectator of the world, himself included" (*Theory* 26). Young George Willard's wanderings around Winesburg are basically contemporaneous with Bloom's jaunt through Dublin, but they reveal that flânerie has moved beyond the confines of the city.

The persistence of the definite article, in "the" Bloom of Tiquun, however, suggests that we are dealing, not so much with a character from a book, but with a

strange blend of metaphysical essence and historical type. “Although [the Bloom] was given an earlier look by the young Lukacs,” Tiquun write, “it was not till 1927, with the treatise *Being and Time*, that he became, properly speaking, under the threadbare frock of Dasein, the central non-subject of philosophy” (29). It is with the Heideggerian phenomenology of Dasein’s “average everydayness” that philosophy begins to focus on mass man, a “they-self,” whose world is ordered by the idle chatter of the public realm. But just as Heidegger’s unveiling of Dasein reaches back to classical Greece to find the moment when “self” and “world” became distinct entities, Tiquun’s Bloom “corresponds to the subject’s withdrawal from the world and vice versa, to “the moment when the self and the real find themselves abruptly suspended” (18). Bloom is “modern” in the sense of Plato and Descartes, standing in for man’s metaphysical comportment toward the external world.

Thus, like Benjamin’s *flâneur* , the Bloom is understood, metaphysically, as a practitioner of an existential immunity, as one who “saves himself from chaos and indeterminacy through his improbable pretensions to epistemological control” (Brand 7). But like the *flâneur* , again, the Bloom offers “philosophical insight into the nature of modern subjectivity” precisely “by placing it within specific historical experience” (Brand 7). In historical terms, the Bloom thus marks the point at which the metaphysical enters history in an unequivocal manner:

The epoch that opens in 1914 sees the ontological extrude into history in a pure state and at every level, when the illusion of ‘modern times’ finishes falling apart while metaphysics on the other hand makes a reality breakthrough. (*Theory* 12)

In this sense, then, “the man without qualities *is not* a certain quality of man, but on the contrary *man as man*, the final realization of the generic human essence” (33).

Bloom is not a historical subject, not only because he cannot be isolated within a particular epoch, but, more importantly, because he is not a subject at all. Rather, taking up the Heideggerian term “*Stimmung*,” Tiquun write that the Bloom is “a fundamental tonality of being,” the very “ground on which...the subject and object, the self and world, were able to exist as such, that is, as clearly distinct” (15). Though it must undoubtedly begin there, a theory of Bloom, then, will not have recourse to the philosophical safe haven that is the Hegelian distinction between the in-itself and the for-itself. Indeed, the crucial difference between the Bloom, as *Stimmung*, and the *flâneur*, or alienated man, as a subject, is that the latter presents the fiction of something that is explicable through a disinterested, anthropological—one should say, an essentially Bloomian—observation. “Bloom,” on the contrary, “lives inside Bloom” (19).

“Having reached this point,” Tiquun declare, “every sane mind will have concluded that no ‘theory of Bloom’ is constitutively possible” (37). I will argue though that this is precisely what a careful reading of *Winesburg* allows us to do. We must dispense once and for all with the predominant belief that *Winesburg* is a document of alienated, modern man and take seriously Anderson’s decision to name a new figure, the grotesque. As Tiquun write, “The last man, the man of the street, of the crowds, of the masses, mass man—that is how THEY portrayed Bloom to us initially” (*Theory* 8). As a result, “THEY have long been able to ignore, as a merely literary phenomenon, as a purely philosophical exaggeration, the massive evidence of Bloom in all its manifestations” (39). To return to the “literary” figure of the grotesque today is to

acknowledge the necessity of going back and removing *Winesburg* from its comfortable dwelling on the shelf of classic works we pretend to know so well.

When we go back to uncover the origins of the grotesque we find that this figure developed out of a simple formal transformation. In *A New Book of the Grotesques* (2005), Dunne points to early prototypes of the grotesque in *Windy McPherson's Son*, *Marching Men*, and the unpublished *Talbot Whittingham*, identifying what we might call two distinct, even diametrically opposed *types* or *classes* of beings that occupy the two sides of an overdetermined semantic chain. On the one side is the mass figure represented most often by urban crowds and rural groups and communities. On the other side is the protagonist, most often a superior individual, or artist-consciousness. The transformation of the proto-grotesque into the full-blown grotesque of *Winesburg* will come through a dialectical turn in the relationship between these two beings, which Fussell defines as a “center of tension” in Anderson’s oeuvre (Fussell 106).

The roughly adumbrated figure of the “common man” (Dunne 22), in *Windy McPherson's Son*, reappears, in *Marching Men*, as the downtrodden masses (Dunne 26), and again, in *Talbot Whittingham*, as hordes of defeated people begging to be understood (Dunne 34). In all three novels, these masses, groups, or crowds, suffer from a debilitating physio-psychological “disorder,” which causes them to wander through the streets, bent-backed and vacant-eyed, and which prevents them from communicating their common suffering, their common wants and desires, with others. In the early novels, the proto-grotesque is almost always a mass figure. In *Marching Men*, in particular, individual grotesques seem only to appear so that McGregor can punch them in the face, or knock them into a gutter, thus sending them back to the mute anonymity of the crowd.

It matters little, in these early works, whether this mass is located in the city or the country; the major characteristics will stay the same. Thus, the prototypical “grotesque” really names something like a biopoliticized population, an undifferentiated and homogeneous mass of bodies, robbed of their vitality by the capitalist forces of Biopower and Spectacle. Stouck has accurately characterized these masses as “living dead” (Stouck 184), for the closest analogue we have today for these proto-grotesques are the cinematic zombies of the latter half of the twentieth-century.

On the other hand, Dunne argues, each of the early novels features a male protagonist who often displays the aspects of a simplified Nietzschean Übermensch, a Napoleon, or a Christ-figure. These protagonists are the central characters precisely because they stand apart from the featureless mass of men. Sam McPherson is a proto-Randian self-made man, McGregor is an adamantine individualist who possesses a deep “hatred of his fellows,” while Talbot, who “feels superior to his peers” (Dunne 33), is described as someone who “stood looking instead of burying himself in the mass” [qtd. in Dunne 34]. Often, Anderson attempts to connect this Übermensch figure to the artist, so that, in *Marching Men*, for instance, McGregor is “a kind of crude artist, drawing pictures on the mind[s]” of his marchers (*Marching* 204).

Dunne clearly links the proto-grotesque to the “downtrodden masses” (29). For Dunne, Anderson’s art matures as he slowly divests himself of his earlier preoccupation with exaggerated Supermen and focuses on the more democratic concern with the many. But even Dunne takes the opportunity to point out that the Supermen themselves contain germs of the later grotesque, particularly in their single-minded pursuit of “truths.”

“Ironically,” Dunne writes, “in light of the insights he would invoke in ‘The Book of the Grotesque,’ each protagonist of these early novels would be deemed a grotesque” (14).

In fact, this is no irony, at all; it only appears as such through the misguided assumptions of Dunne’s analysis. Whereas Dunne treats these manifestations of grotesque qualities in Anderson’s early protagonist as merely accidental, they are actually crucial to the dialectical turn that occurs with *Winesburg*. Dunne makes the transition from the early novels to *Winesburg* sound like a process of “democratic leveling,” as if Anderson’s sympathies began to gravitate away from individuals and toward the masses of common men. The “quasi-Nietzschean preoccupations” displayed in *Windy McPherson’s Son* “will grow in intensity over Anderson’s next two novels,” Dunne writes. “But he will also begin to turn his attention to those figures who will evolve into the grotesques” (22). This is to suggest that the grotesques of *Winesburg* result from a more faithful rendering of the biopoliticized populations of the earlier novels.

Dunne’s explanation conforms to a comforting and familiar narrative, in which the little people rise up and depose the king. But the formal innovation from *Marching Men* to *Winesburg* involves precisely the opposite. It would be more accurate to say that the full blown grotesque emerges, not when the superior individual is displaced by the many, but when the former is himself revealed to be a mass figure. In *Winesburg*, far from dispensing altogether with the figure of the immune individual, Anderson multiplies him such that now there are only immune individuals without a common, or shared, substance. Thus, the proto-grotesque becomes a proper grotesque when the external split between the one and the many is simultaneously internalized and universalized as a split within the grotesque itself.

What remains from the depictions of the biopoliticized populations of the earlier works is the trace of a mass psychological and physiological debility. Thus, “Hands,” the first story after the opening vignette, picks up the motif of the broken gesture that was so prominent in *Marching Men*. Not only are Wing’s overly-expressive hands “forever striving to conceal themselves,” but his voice is uneven, modulating from “slow and trembling” to “shrill and loud” (10). Like the laborers who drift through the earlier novel, his spine is “bent,” and his body is periodically racked by inexplicable, “convulsive” movements.

In brief, the story of the transition from *Marching Men* to *Winesburg*, is the story of how we all became Beaut McGregor. Thus, Jesse Bentley has aspirations “to rule over men” (*Winesburg* 33). He begins to think of himself as an “extraordinary man, one set apart from his fellows” (33). Just as McGregor saw nothing but pigmies on all sides, Jesse “looked about at his fellow men and saw how like clods they lived” (33). Joe Welling is, like McGregor, a powerful orator and a natural leader, who is able to “get everybody working together” (56). Wash Williams possesses the same “hatred of his fellows” as McGregor—like the young McGregor, he wants “nothing to do” with the “men of the town” (65)—while Seth Richmond possesses McGregor’s contempt for empty words. An inveterate loner, Seth feels “resentment” for the “men of the town who were, he thought, perpetually talking about nothing” (73). When, in a spasm of frustration, he exclaims, “Everyone talks and talks,” he echoes McGregor’s frequent excoriations of the idle chatter endemic to the public realm (77).

Some of the episodes from George’s bildungsroman, furthermore, appear to be lifted directly out of the pages of *Marching Men*. As George walks alone along Main

Street, after leaving a bawdy conversation about women, he begins talking to himself, as McGregor often did, about the need to establish order:

I must get myself into touch with something orderly and big that swings through the night like a star. In my little way I must begin to learn something, to give and swing and work with life, with the law. (*Marching* 101)

The language directly echoes McGregor's "*big, grim thought*" that someday a "man will come who will *swing* all of the workers of the world into step" (106). Thus, with the story of George's maturation into an adult, the central concern of *Marching Men* reappears in *Winesburg*, but it is revised such that the superior individual, apart from the mass, is himself a mass figure.

In order to understand the importance of this idea to the subtle but crucial transition we have been describing, it will be helpful to take a closer look at *Winesburg*'s opening vignette, "The Book of the Grotesque." The well-known anecdote regarding *Winesburg*, we will remember, is that Anderson originally intended to call it *The Book of the Grotesque*, but his publisher suggested *Winesburg, Ohio*. This factoid, along with the apparent didacticism of the opening vignette and the presence of the "old writer," have contributed to the sense that "The Book of the Grotesque" provides a kind of metafictional key or commentary on the rest of the text.

In this opening tale, an old writer hires a carpenter to raise his bed so that he can look out of the window immediately upon waking. The old man, the narrator tells us, had "something...altogether young" inside him—a "youth," perhaps, or a "woman...wearing a coat of mail like a knight" (*Winesburg* 5). Lying in the newly-raised bed, one night, the

writer has a “dream that was not a dream” (6). In it, the “young indescribable thing within himself was driving a long procession of figures before his eyes” (6). “[T]he procession of grotesques” lasts an hour, until the old man gets up from bed and begins writing, because “[s]ome one of the grotesques had made a deep impression on his mind” (6). Commentators have taken it as a matter of course that these grotesques are prefigurations of the characters who occupy the tales and the town of Winesburg. The young thing, furthermore, appears to be linked to the gestation of Winesburg itself. In his *Memoirs*, Anderson explains that he felt like a “woman having...babies” as he gave birth, “one after another,” to each of the stories that would become *Winesburg* (182).

On the one hand, the basic structure of the individual-masses relation from *Marching Men* has changed very little in this scenario. The old man has little of the *Übermensch* about him, but he obviously shares McGregor’s need to give voice to the “people.” We might say that the artist-figure has been retained, even as his despotic and sadistic predilections have fallen away. We are encouraged, at any rate, to follow Ray Lewis White’s tendency to see parallels between Anderson’s fiction and his life. Is not the old writer Anderson himself and the indescribable young thing leading the procession a figure for the book and its cast of grotesques? From this perspective, “The Book of the Grotesque” appears, quite simply, as a kind of manifesto announcing the “theory” of the text of *Winesburg*. Ray Lewis White’s by no means unanimous editorial decision to set this opening vignette off from the following tales certainly supports this reading. Thus, the tale that purportedly explains all the others is also formally positioned apart and, as it were, “above” the other tales.

We could accept the convention of reading this opening vignette as a metafictional manifesto or commentary on the remainder of the text. We could, by the same token, accept the semantic chain that connects the old writer to Anderson, on the one hand, and the *Übermensch*, on the other. Given this, we might say that Anderson, unable to decapitate the leader completely and thus present the many in itself, was forced to import the leader-masses framework from *Marching Men* into *Winesburg*. This would betray a simple inability to think the many without the inscribing function of the individual consciousness. The advantage of setting this vignette apart from the other tales is that, although it represents a holdover from the fascist paradigm of *Marching Men*, it does not intrude all that much on the substance of the proper text, which involves the intimate revelation of the lives of the grotesques.

Deeply troubling to this reading, however, is the fact that *Winesburg* is full of references to artists and fictional texts. Enoch Robinson, the painter, creates his own fictional “people,” a group of imaginary spirits not unlike the old writer’s procession of grotesques (94). Nor is the old writer, the only writer. Doctor Parcival tells George that he is at work on a book animated by a very “simple idea”—namely, that “everyone in the world is Christ and they are all crucified” (27). Such a statement would seem to operate on the same metafictional level of “The Book of the Grotesques.” Does not the presence of Doctor Parcival’s book challenge the metafictional status of the old writer’s book? Can we place either one in the dominant position of a hierarchy? More significantly, Doctor Parcival’s book points to the paradoxical logic of the “inclusive exclusion” that is, I argue, at the heart of the formal innovation of *Winesburg*. Christ is Christ precisely because he is unlike the run of normal humans, for whom he functions, especially in

Freud's *Massenpsychologie*, as both figurative "leader" and ego-ideal. The paradox of *Winesburg*'s formal status is the paradox of a world of Christs, in which the duality of common humanity and the singularity has been completely subverted.

With respect to "The Book of the Grotesque," then, it may be more appropriate to appeal to the logic of the Master Signifier, as simultaneously just one more element in the series and the element that, in a paradoxical manner, accounts for them all. According to this subtler reading, "The Book of the Grotesque" is privileged, not because it articulates, in a metafictional manner, the ultimate origin and meaning of all the other character-portraits, but because it is an initial and paradigmatic type of all the others. I use "type" here in the sense of the Christian exegetical tradition which identifies Adam, or Noah, or Moses, as a type of Christ. In other words, "The Book of the Grotesque" is not unique in *comparison* to the other chapters; rather it is singular *in the same way* that the others are. The result is a radical immanentization of the leader-position with respect to the crowd and an effective subversion of the imperial gaze that Brand saw as characteristic of the 19<sup>th</sup> century *flâneur* .

The status of "The Book of the Grotesque" as a paradoxical "part apart" thus points toward an answer to Yingling's suspended question regarding the form of the book. If "The Book of the Grotesque" is a transcendent, metafictional commentary on the rest of the text, it is, in that very respect, like every other tale, for each tale presents a similar relation between an individual and a "they," though in a slightly different permutation or mode. Thus, the ontological texture of the "book," if we can use this kind of terminology, is that of an "immanent transcendence" (Esposito, *Bios* 60).

*Winesburg* is not a novel, then. Nor is it a “collection” of tales aggregated together under a common theme. With its suggestion of turning and revolving, “short story cycle” comes much closer to an apt description of the text. Cycle also implies repetition, which is perhaps the most crucial formal feature of *Winesburg*. The term, “*Winesburg, Ohio*,” does not name anything as substantial and whole as a town or a people or, even, a book. Rather, *Winesburg* can be said to name a “people” only in the sense suggested by Nancy: “Not only are all people different but they are also different from one another. They do not differ from an archetype or a generality” (*Being* 8). They differ in a primordial way, so that each is an “origin” (9). “[T]he world,” Nancy writes, “has no other origin than this singular multiplicity of origins” (9). The question then is not whether *Winesburg* presents either a cohesive generality, such as a town, a people, or a book, or a mere repetition of discreet atoms, but a repetition, each time and with each tale, of the non-locatable space that accounts for this either. The form that Anderson adopts in *Winesburg* is the form of singularity, a new form for the “presentation” of the true community to come.

One effect of this formal gesture of repetition is, indeed, a careful critique, not of community itself, nor the possibility of collective life, but of two of the most pervasive and mutually supporting illusions regarding community. Or, more precisely, *Winesburg* deconstructs a single illusion of community that can be expressed in two modes, one synchronic, the other diachronic. Through the ironic repetition of individual statements of alienation, the text denies the reader the illusion that the cohesive community exists “over there.” Similarly, the text thwarts the nostalgic insistence that true community existed once upon a time, or “back then.” This allows us to be very precise: What critics often

take as an excoriation of community and a statement of alienation is, in truth, a deconstruction of a certain illusion regarding the harmonious, communal One. Following Tiquun, moreover, we will see that this is an illusion that historically has only obviated the possibility of a “true community.”

In a recent book on *Winesburg*, Clarence Lindsay has gone so far as to identify two distinct articulations of alienation in synchronic dimension of the novel. While some characters lament the fact that they do not fit in, others appear to take pride in their non-conformity. Thus, we find the grotesques of *Winesburg* either wishing to be “a part” of a putatively vibrant community from which they imagine themselves to be excluded, or boasting that they are unique individuals who will forever remain “apart” from it. Louise Bentley, for instance, believes that, “between herself and all the other people in the world,” there exists a “wall” (*Winesburg* 46). She imagines that she is “living just on the edge of some warm inner circle of life that must be quite open and understandable to others” (46). Similarly, the “queer” merchant, Elmer Cowley, wants nothing more than to be “like other people” (107), and yet believes that he is “condemned to go through life without friends” (108). Wing Biddlebaum, we are told, “[does] not think of himself as in any way a part of the life of the town” (9). Seth Richmond, we read, is “depressed by the thought that he [is] not a part of the life in his own town” (74). He does not “belong” and feels like an “outcast” (74). On the other hand, Enoch Robinson decides that “he [does] not need people anymore,” and thus plans to “invent his own people to whom he could really talk and [... explain] the things he had been unable to explain to living people” (94). As we have already seen, Jesse Bentley and Wash Williams both have pretensions to superiority with respect to other men. Tom Foster, finally, brings both of these forms

of alienation together with his odd “power to be a part of and yet distinctly apart from the life about him” (118).

The fact that some characters bemoan their alienation while others celebrate it should not blind us to the fundamental satisfaction derived by all. Though the affective response is different in both cases, the libidinal investment is likely very similar: It is simply the pleasure of imagining oneself to be different from everyone else. By imagining themselves as “either excluded from or superior to” the community of Winesburg, each grotesque “lays claim to a remarkable singularity” (Lindsay 33).

For Lindsay, this is the central irony of the text that Anderson clearly intends us to see: in professing their uniqueness, their absolute individuality and radical difference from everyone else, the grotesques of *Winesburg* all resemble one another.

The grotesques are not in any way peculiar or radically distinct from the norm. They are the norm, a notion especially suited to the interrelated-tale format, the perfect form for registering the democracy of singularities, and perfect for revealing the ironies and contradictions connected to this common insistence on uncommonness. (33-4)

Though Lindsay uses the term “singularity,” the irony he points out is one more appropriate to what Heidegger calls the “private existence” of the “individual,” which comes into being through a negation of the public realm:

[S]o-called “private existence” is not really essential, that is to say free, human being. It simply insists on negating the public realm. It remains an offshoot that depends upon the public and nourishes itself by a mere

withdrawal from it. Hence it testifies, against its own will, to its subservience to the public realm. (Heidegger 221)

Thus, when first, Seth Richmond, and then, later, Elmer Cowley think, “It’s different with me” or “With me it’s different,” we cannot help but see that it is precisely the *same difference* that is being expressed. The problem, of course, is that these characters so often only think these things, without saying them out loud to each other. As a result, we become painfully aware of the commonness of their uncommonness, while they remain mired in what almost seems a willfully imposed isolation.

Lindsay sees the irony of the text as part of Anderson’s critique of the romantic literary mode, particularly its narratives of selfhood (xvii). But Anderson’s scope is much larger here. The ultimate irony is not in the contradictions of a particular literary mode, but in the fact that such mass appeals to individuality are part of the complex workings of what Tiqqun, following Debord, Foucault, and others, call Biopower.

Dunne has attempted to draw out the Foucauldian themes of Anderson’s work. But, he has ultimately done so through a misapplied humanistic framework, seeing the “alienation” present in Foucault and Anderson as a result of a simply repressive society. Connecting Foucault’s theory on the roles of “surveillance and judgment” in establishing societal norms, to Anderson’s development of the grotesque, Dunne writes, “One result for the individual is a constant tension between his outer conformity to social norms and his silenced inner self” (3). Despite the Foucauldian update, such a reading offers little advancement on the themes of Puritanical repression so prevalent in early readings of Anderson’s work.

As a result, Dunne fails to establish the connection at its strongest, most fruitful point. Foucault is not the theorist of “repression,” but of the paradoxically positive effects of the myth of repression. Whereas humanism had discussed the need of the individual to escape the bounds of a restrictive society, Foucault shows how “individuation” is itself a major protocol of Biopower.

As Tiqqun write, Biopower is the “life affirming” force that calls upon the individual to, in the words of advertising, “Be oneself!” (*Theory* 107). Thus, “The power regime under which we live,” is no longer “characterized by a mechanism of blockage, of purely repressive coercion” (27-8), but the very opposite:

[T]he contemporary form of domination is essentially productive [...] The Spectacle is the power that insists you speak, that insists you be someone. Biopower is benevolent power, full of a shepherd’s concern for his sheep, the power that desires the salvation of its subjects, the power that wants you to live. (*Theory* 28)

The pressure evidenced in *Winesburg* is not the pressure to conform, but the pressure to become a unique individual. If the presence of Biopower has not been identified as the source of the individual-mania in *Winesburg*, it is most likely because critics have failed to note the continuity between it and the earlier novel, *Marching Men*. There, as we saw, the “empty words” of the media Spectacle were regularly invoked as a primary source of mass alienation and were ultimately responsible for both the dissolution of the city/country duality and a kind of metaphysical infection of the body politic. The mass media is less in evidence in *Winesburg*, but not absent. We are told, for instance, that “magazines circulate by the millions of copies” and that “newspapers are everywhere”

(*Winesburg* 34). The result is the “farmer by the stove is brother to the men of the cities,” so that you can find him “talking as glibly and as senseless as the bet city man” (34). To really read those moments in *Winesburg*, we need the background supplied by the earlier novel, for it is in *Marching Men* that we learn about the content of these media messages, where thanks to “[m]agazines and newspapers” the “word regarding the making of money” has spread throughout the nation (*Marching Men* 113). The message is the quintessentially capitalist one of personal gain and the result, we are told, is a “vast gulf of disorder” (113). What is transmitted is a paradoxical message, in which the mandate to act for one’s own individual interests is itself common, universal.

It is only by turning back to *Marching Men* and its molar analysis of Biopower that we can supply the absent cause for the obsessive drive of the grotesques to become unique individuals apart from the mass. Dunne’s humanist framework continues to break down when we consider the special—we should say, spectral—character of the “they” that, according to a repressive hypothesis, would be the source of the purported coercion to conform. It is Lindsay again who points out that, although it is much talked about, the “community” is conspicuously absent from the text. Although the grotesques often consider themselves as outsiders, as exiles sadly or willfully apart from the communal One, such a community rarely appears in the text. In fact, as Lindsay writes, “The overall large coherent community exists...only as a fictional construction in the consciousness of *Winesburg*’s citizens, part of their rhetoric of selfhood” (30). That is to say, though this community is often talked about, it is almost *exclusively* talked about—by those very individuals, furthermore, who claim to be ignorant of its secret essence.

As Lindsay points out, Anderson uses the repetitive form of the short story cycle to point again and again to the absence of the “they”:

When characters imagine their specialness, they often imagine others at the center of warm communal or conventional life. For a number of the grotesques, George Willard serves as a central character in several of their narratives, representing the normal life to or from which they either aspire or flee... When we discover that Willard himself feels apart, that he too feels estranged, we understand that the cohesive communities that the grotesques imagine in order to dramatize their singularity are constructions, distinctly different narratives that share an emphasis on the self's imperious isolation” (34).

Thus, in one chapter Seth Richmond thinks that Willard “belongs to this town (*Winesburg* 74); in another, Willard himself feels like an outcast and permanent onlooker (133). Similarly, Elmer Cowley believes that “George Willard...belonged to the town, typified the town, represented in his person the spirit of the town” (107). He could never imagine that “George Willard had also his days of unhappiness, that vague hungers and secret unnameable desires visited also his mind” (107). After all, George Willard represented “public opinion” (107). Of course, by juxtaposing Cowley’s illusions regarding young Willard with Willard’s own feelings of alienation and isolation, Anderson places under severe skepticism the notion that there is even such a thing as “public opinion” in *Winesburg*. The form of the text is specifically designed so that we can register this truth.

We must be careful, then, about how we read those rare instances when “everyone” is invoked, as though it represents the homogeneous body of the “people.” The point that Anderson drives home here is analogous to the one Nancy makes apropos Heidegger’s “one”:

Heidegger understood that “one” would only be said as a response to the question “who?” put to the subject of Dasein, but he does not pose the other inevitable question that must be asked in order to discover who gives this response and who, in responding like this, removes himself or has a tendency to remove himself. As a result, he risks neglecting the fact that there is no pure and simple “one,” no “one” in which “properly existing” existence is, from the start, purely and simply immersed. “People” clearly designates the mode of “one” by which “I” remove myself, to the point of appearing to forget or neglect the fact that I myself am part of “people.”

(*Being* 7)

If the “people” in *Winesburg* represent a repressive, coercive force, as Dunne suggests, they do so in absentia. But what is decisive, a la the Foucauldian reversal, is not the notion that the “they” of I impede individual expression, but how the myth of the “they” facilitates the “ever more exorbitant...demand to ‘be oneself’” (*Theory* 107). The “they” does not exist, but rather “ek-sists” in *Winesburg*, as always elsewhere. It is not a social substance that one can grasp, but a productive mythology that supports the fiction of the individual. Nevertheless, this does not prevent critics from believing that the cohesive community must have existed at some point in the past.

Many critics see the absence of community as indicative of the deep nostalgia running through the text. But, the irony that Lindsay notes cuts across the diachronic as well as the synchronic dimensions. Yingling's misreading of the text is helpful in illustrating this point. Yingling attempts nothing less than to answer "the whole question whether or not there is any coherent community to *Winesburg*" (102). "The question of the collective ought to arise in discussion of *Winesburg*," Yingling continues:

for although the book examines the burden of separation in some detail, it is itself a collection, a series of stories that cannot but raise the question of what binds it (and the town it represents) together. (102)

But Yingling's analysis will countenance no possibility of a collective bond. Instead, he begins with a traditional historical narrative that contrasts the pre-industrial era, in which, presumably, people enjoyed a rich communal life, with the modern industrial era, which, by Yingling's own—one should say, circular—definition, is associated with alienation and individualism. Having set up the grand narrative in this way, he has only to twist and force all the evidence to fall on one side or the other. Yingling's adherence to a pat version of "materialist history" thus forecloses the "question of the collective."

Yingling's first step will be to identify those moments, when the town *appears* to exist as a "single social unit" (102). Those two or three moments he cites, however, turn out to offer nothing more than "the trace of an already vanished harmony and collectivity" (103). Everything has already been decided at this point, as the phrasing itself suggests that such harmony and collectivity did exist at some point in the past. But when we compare his analysis with the text, we can see that he is either misreading or

deliberately distorting it. Consider, for instance, the following passage in which Yingling quotes from a description of the crowds at the Winesburg County Fair.

We see a number of ritualized moments when the town exists as a single social unit, as in the description of the Winesburg County Fair in "Sophistication": "Farmers with their wives and children and all the people from the hundreds of little frame houses have gathered within these board walls. Young girls have laughed and men with beards talked of the affairs [of] their lives. The place has been filled to overflowing with life" (p. 240). And we see similar moments in gatherings about the warm winter stove in Ransom Surbeck's poolroom and in the claim that "ideas in regard to social classes had hardly begun to exist" (p. 92), making all citizens of the town "equal". But such moments are awash in nostalgia. The foregoing description of the fairgrounds, for instance, continues: "the life has all gone away. The silence is almost terrifying. ... One shudders at the thought of the meaninglessness of life while at the same instant, and if the people of the town are his people, one loves life so intensely that tears come into the eyes. (Yingling 102)

We should pay particular attention to what Yingling does here with the description of the scene at the fairground, from the penultimate chapter, "Sophistication." As Yingling presents it, the "foregoing description of the fairgrounds," which had been "filled to overflowing with life" is immediately undercut by a contrasting statement: "the life has all gone away." If the text is not simply confused or contradictory, then the reader of Yingling's analysis must imagine that the two statements describe two distinct moments.

Once upon a time, “people...gathered within these board walls,” but now “the life has all gone away.” And, indeed, Yingling has conveniently kept the duration between these two moments vague, because he no doubt wants this passage to support the historical narrative about the transition to the modern, industrial age of alienated labor. By keeping this duration ambiguous Yingling is able to use the momentous phrase, “the life has all gone away,” as compelling proof that this passage is “awash in nostalgia” (102).

The two contrasting moments presented here, however, are not separated by years, months, weeks, or even days. “Sophistication” opens, in the “early evening of a day in the late fall” with the County Fair in full swing. George Willard pushes his way through the densely crowded fair grounds, thinking of Helen White, and wishing he could tell her about the new feelings he is experiencing. At the same time, Helen is strolling around the fairgrounds with a potential suitor, a college instructor, whom she naturally finds quite dull. Coincidentally, we read, “Helen White was thinking of George Willard even as he wandered gloomily through the crowds thinking of her” (*Winesburg* 132). Through another coincidence, or perhaps a kind of magnetic attraction, Helen and George both end up at Helen’s house later that night, where they meet on the lawn and, with barely a word between them, decide to return to the fair. This is when we read the passage quoted by Yingling:

There is something memorable in the experience to be had by going into a fair ground that stands at the edge of a Middle Western town *on a night after the annual fair had been held*...On all sides are ghosts, not of the dead, but of living people. Here, *during the day just passed*, have come the people pouring in from the town and the country around. Farmers with

their wives and children and all the people from the hundreds of little frame houses have gathered within these board walls. (*Winesburg* 134; emphasis mine)

If we are to accept Yingling's claim that this passage is "awash in nostalgia," then, we have to specify that we are talking about nostalgia for the previous hour or two. The momentous phrase, "the life has all gone away," refers to the disparity between the raucous day when the fair was in full swing and the quiet night, when George and Helen wander the empty fairgrounds together. Yingling simply excises these temporal indicators, because they do not fit his predetermined belief that *Winesburg* is an elegy of lost community. Granted, the elegiac feeling produced by this particular passing of collective life might be emblematic of a more widespread sense of loss, but even this less literal reading is predicated on the notion that "something" was really lost in the first place. It is this presumption that we must question.

It is instructive, therefore, to back up yet again and observe the description of those previous hours when the fair was in full swing and, as the text reads, "overflowing with life." Here it is not the "town as a single social unit" that we see, but many "crowds." Some variant of the word (crowds, crowd, crowded, crowding) appears no less than ten times in six pages, most often in the plural noun form. This is not a portrait of "harmony and collectivity," but a chaotic description of a multitude of haphazardly assembled consumerist crowds. Feeling "utterly lonely and dejected," George drifts aimlessly "amid the jam of people" (*Winesburg* 130), ultimately becoming so irritated by the "broken sounds...the murmur of voices and the loud blare of the horns of the band," that he feels a terrible urge to "run away by himself and think" (133).

As is apparent from the above, furthermore, this is not simply the objective, third person narration of some transcendent eyeball, as Yingling makes it out to be. The chapter follows George closely and the mood of the narration is completely bound up with the momentous change he is experiencing. It is George's "moment of sophistication," "a time in the life of every boy when he for the first time takes the backward view of life" (130). This moment marks the point when a young man "crosses the line into manhood" (130), and begins to experience both "[a]mbitions and regrets" (131). For this reason, just about everything is imbued with nostalgia for young Willard, even, we should say, the previous hours of the same day.

The seemingly idyllic rural scene of the county fair takes on all of the impersonal frenzy of the urban vignette, so that George's ramble through the fairgrounds resembles the perambulations of the *flâneur*. "Sophistication" should be read, in fact, as Anderson's arch reimagining of the *flâneur* scenes from his earlier work, *Marching Men*.

Pushing his way through the crowds on Main Street, young George Willard concealed himself in the stairway leading to Doctor Reefy's office and looked at the people. With feverish eyes he watched the faces drifting past under the store lights. Thoughts kept coming into his head and he did not want to think. (130)

Importing the familiar effect of chiaroscuro found in nineteenth-century urban travel sketches, such as George Foster's *New York by Gas-Light*, Anderson places young Willard into a "metropolitan" territory whose texture is much the same as the Chicago of *Marching Men*. Even the same phrases reappear from the earlier novel, including the "procession" of "figures." This phrase now forms a chain from the urban scenes of

*Marching Men*, through “The Book of the Grotesque,” with its own dream-like “procession” of grotesques, to this penultimate chapter, suggesting that it is a similar crowd which figuratively parades through the two texts.

But whereas with the character of McGregor, Anderson raised the immunity of the *flâneur* to heroic, superman proportions, young Willard is distressed by the paradox that it is precisely in the midst of the throbbing crowd that he feels so disconnected and alone. Elbowing his way through the crowds at the fair Willard desperately longs for the “touch” of “some other human” (131). As “the sense of crowding, moving life close[s] in about him,” he wants only to “run away and think” (133). It is only when he is walking the empty fairgrounds with Helen, an hour or so later, that the previous scene is imbued, retroactively, with the sense of “overflowing” life:

In the darkness under the roof of the grand-stand, George Willard sat beside Helen White and felt very keenly his own insignificance in the scheme of existence. Now that he had come out of the town where the presence of people stirring about, busy with a multitude of affairs, had been so irritating the irritation was all gone...He began to think of the people in the town where he had always lived with something like reverence. (135)

This time, by contrasting two moments, Anderson reinforces the same ironic point that he has already made with his use of multiple perspectives. Amid the people, George is irritated and lonely. But, when they are gone, he looks back on them with “reverence” and, we should say, nostalgia (135). Of course, Anderson has already told us to look for this irony at the start of the chapter, when he writes that the moment of “sophistication” is

one in which the young man “for the first time takes a backward view of life” (130).

Whatever the case, this is not the nostalgia of the text, but a pointed critique of Willard’s own nostalgia, which retroactively transforms what was, in fact, an alienating, “metropolitan” crowd into a fuzzy picture of small-town community.

Anderson has, in this manner, launched a double-edge critique against two distinct but related fantasies of community. The cohesive community will not be found either “over there” or “back then.” Wherever we go in an attempt to find it, among other people who supposedly have it, or in the pre-industrial past, it refuses to appear as such. On both the spatial and temporal dimensions what we see is not simply the absolute absence of common experience, but the commonness of this very absence.

Despite being talked about ad nauseam, the collective as such never appeared in *Marching Men*, either. But, as we saw, in that novel, it seems to have been the result of Anderson’s failure to present a collective substance that he, like the grotesques of *Winesburg*, believed must exist somewhere. In *Winesburg*, by contrast, the previous failure of technique is converted into an ontological feature of community itself, so that the latter is defined by its very absence. This yields Bataille’s paradoxical formula: “any possible community belongs to what I call...absence of community” (*Absence* 81).

Two absences then, which do not come together to indict the possibility of community, but which must be followed through in order to lay the groundwork for a possible community to come.

On the synchronic level,

Bloom is alone only *in appearance*, for he is not alone in his aloneness, since all humans have that solitude *in common*. He lives like a foreigner in his own country, non-existent and marginal to everything, but all Blooms inhabit the land of Exile *together*. All Blooms belong indistinctly to the same world, which is the world's oblivion. Thus the Common is estranged, but only *in appearance*, for it is still estranged as a Common: the estrangement of the Common only refers to the fact that what is common to men appears to them as something particular, proprietary, private.

(*Theory* 103-4)

And, in the temporal dimension:

The loss of experience and the loss of community are one and the same thing, seen from different angles. This is the lesson of the metropolises, clearly. Yet one must bear in mind, against the nostalgia that a certain romanticism enjoys cultivating even in its adversaries, that before our era there were never any communities. And these are not two contradictory affirmations. Prior to Bloom, prior to “the absolute separation,” prior to the total abandonment that is ours, prior, then, to the utter destruction of every substantial ethos, all “community” could only be a heap of falsehoods—the falsehood of belonging to a class, a nation, a milieu—and a source of limitation; without which, moreover, the community would not have been annihilated. Only a radical alienation of the Common was able to hypostatize the originary Common in such a way that solitude, finitude, and exposure, that is, the only actual connection between men, also

appears as the only possible connection between them...Hence it falls to us to experience real community for the first time, a community that rests on our assumption of separation, exposure, and finitude. (54-5)

It is this positive dimension of *Winesburg*, that Barry D. Bort speaks about in his neglected essay, from 1970, "*Winesburg, Ohio: The Escape from Isolation.*" Indeed, what distinguishes *Winesburg* from so much other fiction "dating from the beginning of the nineteenth century," Bort concludes, is that it is not a "chronicle of self discovery," but rather "has as its goal the revelation of that rare ideal, the human community" (4). Critics, Bort writes, have addressed at length the desperate need of the grotesques to communicate, "but what has not been understood about Anderson's work is that this continual frustration serves as the context out of which arise a few luminous moments of understanding" (3).

But what is the essence of this communication? Lindsay is right to be skeptical of the theme of communication in *Winesburg*. Communication has typically been criticized, in a poststructuralist perspective, as the coherent message sent from one autonomous subject to another. Bort points out, however, that these moments of understanding and of communion are "usually silent, or if they do involve talk, the words themselves take on a meaning deeper than any implied by the utterances" (Bort 4).

Bort will go on to cite what is perhaps the most famous moment, the climactic moment of the text, when George Willard and Helen White sit together in the grandstand and look down upon the now empty fairgrounds, after "the crowded day had run itself out into the long night of the late fall":

In that high place in the darkness the two oddly sensitive human atoms held each other tightly and waited. In the mind of each was the same thought. “I have come to this lonely place and here is this other,” was the substance of the thing felt (*Winesburg* 135)

In a few halting sentences, Anderson ties together a startling number of the themes and issues that we have been wrestling with throughout. Here we see the critique of the language of the “public realm,” so crucial to the thematic complex of *Marching Men*, resurrected and, I would argue, resolved. In contrast to the “empty words” of devastated language, George and Helen’s communication is wordless and silent. The “substance of the thing” communicated is linked—but in no sense identical—to that frustratingly ambiguous “something” that came to pervade the final sections of *Marching Men*. There, the “something” reared its head in those moments when Anderson’s language failed to present his imaginary mass movement in its embodied fullness. Here, however, the “substance of the thing” is neither “substance” nor “thing.”

For some reason they could not have explained they had both got from their silent evening together the thing needed. Man or boy, woman or girl, they had for a moment taken hold of the thing that makes the mature life of men and women in the modern world possible (*Winesburg* 136).

Referring to this famous passage, Updike writes that, in *Winesburg*, “The vagueness of ‘the thing’ is chronic, and only the stumbling, shrugging, willful style that Anderson made of Stein’s serene run-on tropes affords him half a purchase on his unutterable subject, the ‘thing,’ troubling the heart of his characters” (191). Updike’s condescension might be misplaced, however, for there is a necessary connection between

the “thing” and Anderson’s “stumbling, shuffling” style. As Bataille writes, “There subsists in us a silent, elusive, ungraspable part” that remains “neglected” by “words” and “discourse” (Bataille, *Inner* 14). It thus “falls to poetry, but also to literature, to approach this elusive unknown through an interruption of discursive language” (Mitchell and Winfree 14). Whereas, in *Marching Men*, it was the main character, McGregor, who “stuttered” (*Marching* 25) and spoke in “short broken sentences” (183) here it has become a feature of the narrative voice itself, which “approaches in effect the inadequate use of a foreign language” (Trilling 299). But, Bataille continues, even this rupturing of discourse brought on by poetic language does not mean that the “impenetrable ungraspable” is thereby “objectified or possessed” (Mitchell and Winfree 15).

For this reason, Updike’s charge of “vagueness” goes too far. Much like the charge of nostalgia, it seems to assume that there is some *thing* to present. In truth, the silent communication between George and Helen—“I have come to this lonely place and here is this other”—is not the exchange of a content, but a mutual residing in the incommunicable. If there is a substance to what is communicated here it is only the recognition of what Tiquun call our originary “separation, exposure, and finitude” (*Theory* 55). That these two, George and Helen, are together in a lonely place indicates that it is the very private nature of our experience that is, as Mitchell and Winfree put it in the introduction to *Bataille’s Obsessions*, “shared from the outset” (Mitchell and Winfree 14).

Helen and George share the essence of the Bloom, which is Nothing. But this nothing no longer retains the negative cast of a mere lack. It is the positive character of

this nothing, furthermore, which tips the Bloom over from the terrain of individual difference into singularity:

The condition of men and of their common world as *exiles* in the unrepresentable [...] manifests the absolute singularity of each social atom...and its pure difference as a pure nothingness. Assuredly, Bloom is *positively nothing* [...] The interpretations diverge only as to the meaning of this ‘nothing’” (*Theory* 35).

It is rather “the nothing of sovereignty, the void of pure potentiality” (123).

Whereas Lindsay uses “commonness” pejoratively to give the lie to the grotesques’ empty expressions of “singularity,” Tiqqun understand this commonness as the only saving grace of the Bloom. Using “individual” and “singularity” interchangeably, Lindsay fails to see that, like the Bloom, the grotesque is the result of the “decomposition of the individual, or rather, of the *fiction* of the individual” and thus a potential “singularity” (44).

A singular being does not emerge or rise up against the background of a chaotic, undifferentiated identity of beings, or against the background of their unitary assumption...A singular being *appears*, as finitude itself...with the contact of the skin (or the heart) of another singular being...Community means, consequently, that there is no singular being without another singular being” (27-8).

When we think of the “place” of this communication that is not “communion,” we come to Anderson’s grand revisioning of the immunitary optic he had been deploying and interrogating since *Marching Men*. For this “lonely place” is not surprisingly for us also a

“high place” (*Winesburg* 135). The scene immediately refers us back to young Beut McGregor’s early immunity training with his father, on the hill overlooking Coal Creek. But, in this high place, we also find traces of the narrator of Hawthorne’s “Sights from a Steeple,” of the speaker of Whitman’s “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” of Curtis Jadwin gazing down on the tumult of the Pit, and of Child’s persona, looking down from Brooklyn Heights on the “dense crowding of human existence” in the city below (Child 39, 64). In this climactic moment of the text, Anderson brings us again to the primal scene of writing on the crowd, the panoramic vantage of Brand’s *flâneur* .

But something is decidedly different in this iteration. Here, by contrast, the “I” has been doubled. Even though there are two, the “place” is still lonely, because first it is the customary high place of the immunitary optic, and second because the two remain separate, and “no communication can abolish [their] fundamental difference” (Bataille, *Erotism* 12). They are alone together, forming a lonely crowd of two, but a crowd infinitely more real, if no more “substantial,” than the phantasmic crowd passing below. Infinitely more real, I say, because not predicated on either horrific or utopian—depending on one’s perspective—notions of fusion. “[A]nd here is this other” signifies that what is experienced in the high place is not a “fusional communion” (*Inoperative* 37), in Nancy’s words, but a simultaneous, mutual recognition of “absolute separation” (Tiqun, *Theory* 54) and “finitude.” Here, in the high place, the two are no longer “above” the many below, but are, rather, exposed in the total absence of the latter. The “they” of *Winesburg* has finally assumed its objectively spectral character. Without the ultimately comforting belief in a “they” (even if it be a repressive “they”), without a “coherent collective” to negate, to define oneself against, or to pine for and lament,

George and Helen become what they are: two singularities marked by separation, exposure and finitude.

In this careful reimagining of the immunitary Ur-scene of crowd psychology, Anderson holds out the promise that such a mutual recognition of singularity (in which each thinks “I have come to this [...] place and here is this other”) is possible for all of the grotesques of *Winesburg*, possible on a mass scale. Whereas Norris had tried to undo the immunitary regime through a simple absorption of the individual in the sublime substance of the many, Anderson, having learned from the mistakes of *Marching Men*, tries to arrive at community by working through immunity, through separation and finitude. Community will no longer be thought in terms of a fusional One, a substance, or a “thing.” Nor is it a masculine vitalism, or force. Nevertheless, Anderson avoids the tragic position of mere atomism that many critics find in this text. The communal texture of *Winesburg* that emerges at the text’s end is not simply the ironic one that Lindsay notes, for the necessity of deconstructing the fiction of individuality serves the greater purpose here of pointing toward the potential of the singularity, which is exposed only in the company of another singularity.

It is precisely at this moment, nevertheless, that we should consider Nancy’s trepid critique of Bataille’s first and final thought on community as a community of lovers. In Nancy’s reading of Bataille, the community of lovers has the virtue of presenting the limit of community and the disadvantage of still referring to the “private” space of the individual (*Inoperative* 36). To what extent is Anderson’s “community of two,” as Bort terms it, open to the same critique? (4) Nancy writes that “in general” the community of two lovers sustains a “distance from society” in Bataille’s work, as if the

true community formed by lovers could be placed either within or outside of “society” as a whole. The exploits of the lovers in *The Story of the Eye*, for instance, appear to flout the rules of conventional sexual morality—and this in turn seems to account for their ecstatic force. In this sense, Nancy argues that at moments Bataille imagines the lovers achieving something like a “fusional communion,” an ecstatic union, in which the limits of discontinuous being are temporarily overcome (37).

In the climactic scene between George and Helen on the hill, virtually all of the elements of Nancy’s reading of Bataille are at play, though they are significantly rearranged:

When they had come to the crest of Waterworks Hill they stopped by a tree and George again put his hands on the girls’ shoulders. She embraced him eagerly and then again they drew quickly back from that impulse. They stopped kissing and stood a little apart. Mutual respect grew big in them. They were both embarrassed and to relieve their embarrassment dropped into the animalism of youth. They laughed and began to pull and haul at each other. (*Winesburg* 135-6)

The “fusional communion” of the kiss is interrupted. In fact, the two recoil from this immanence, preferring instead the relative distance of the touch and play. If love can form the “extreme though not external limit of community” as it often seems to do in Bataille, it must, Nancy writes, “expose [...] singular beings to one another” (*Inoperative* 38). Such a revealing of singularity and finitude, Nancy argues, does not come about through speech, the gaze, or the kiss, but through touch alone (39). “Lovers touch each other, unlike fellow citizens,” Nancy writes. “This banal and fairly ridiculous truth means

that touching—immanence not attained but close, as though promised (no longer speech, nor gaze)—is the limit” (38-9).

George and Helen thus move from kissing, which is something like the comic exaggeration of a communication without speech (Nancy, *Inoperative* 31), to pulling and tugging at each other in the manner of “little animals” (*Winesburg* 136), a move occasioned by their mutual respect and recognition. In this moment of youthful animalism the two lovers appear to miraculously recover their aptitude for gesture. The innocence of play returns as an answer to all of the broken sentences, empty words, stooped gaits, and grotesque twitches that plagued the population of Winesburg.

The limit of Anderson’s vision here is the limit of Nancy’s. As in *Marching Men*, we find the same allergy to political contents, to signifiers, to language even. Surely, the mystic, vitalist substance of wheat and *Marching Men* has been transmuted into a properly atheist “compearance” of singularities, but it remains unclear what implications the community of two lovers has for larger scale collectives. Is it too practical-minded to wonder how, for instance, a lover’s touch could have helped the ranchers of *The Octopus* in their bloody battle against the railroad monopoly? In Anderson’s phenomenology of the Bloom and its dawning awareness of the other as such, the appearance of a truly collective being is still deferred. *Winesburg, Ohio* begins with a clear-headed recognition of the problem regarding the devastation of language and the gesture by Biopower and manages to avoid the tempting myths of communal fusion. Yet it is merely an adumbration, for the community, here, is still only coming.

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