

The Noises of American Literature, 1890–1985



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The Noises of American Literature,
1890–1985

Toward a History of Literary Acoustics



Philipp Schweighauser

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Parts of this book have already appeared in other places, and I am grateful for permission to reprint. The introduction draws on my discussion of Henry Adams and Michel Serres in "The Desire for Unity and Its Failure: Re-Reading Henry Adams through Michel Serres" (in *Mapping Michel Serres*, edited by Niran Abbas [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005]). Parts of what is now chapter 1 have been published in two companion essays: "The Soundscapes of American Realist Fiction" (*Philologie im Netz* 19 [2002]): 55–78. <http://www.fu-berlin.de/phn/phn19/p19t3.htm> and "You must make less noise in here, Mister Schouler': Acoustic Profiling in American Realism" (*Studies in American Fiction* 30, no. 1 [2002]: 85–102). Parts of the "White Noise" section in chapter 3 have appeared as "'Sound all around': Sonic Mysticism and Acoustic Ecology in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*" (*Profils Américains* 16 [2003]: 107–21).

Introduction

On returning to New York in 1905, after almost forty years of absence, Henry Adams describes the visual and acoustic panorama he encounters in the following terms:

The outline of the city became frantic in its effort to explain something that defied meaning. Power seemed to have outgrown its servitude and to have asserted its freedom. The cylinder had exploded, and thrown great masses of stone and steam against the sky. The city had the air and movement of hysteria, and the citizens were crying, in every accent of anger and alarm, that the new forces must at any cost be brought under control. [. . .] Everyone saw it, and every municipal election shrieked chaos. A traveller in the highways of history looked out of the club window on the turmoil of Fifth Avenue, and felt himself in Rome, under Diocletian, witnessing the anarchy, conscious of the compulsion, eager for the solution, but unable to conceive whence the next impulse was to come or how it was to act. The two-thousand-years failure of Christianity roared upward from Broadway, and no Constantine the Great was in sight. (*The Education* 471–72)

Adams's *The Education of Henry Adams* (1907/18) documents an intellectual's heroic if failed effort to bring the forces of modernization under notetic control, to tame the noises of modernity through an act of intellectual imagination. Adams's dynamic theory of history, expounded at length in the second half of *The Education* and in his "Letter to American Teachers of History," imports the second law of thermodynamics into historiography to account for what he perceives as a world-historical process of entropic degradation, an irreversible descent into disorder and chaos. The purpose of Adams's borrowing from the natural sciences is not to deny multiplicity but to master it by bringing it into the framework of a unified and unifying scientific doctrine. It is in the context of this scientific framework that the physical noises of modernity are figuratively aligned with disorder and chaos: "Every day nature violently revolted, causing so-called accidents with enormous destruction of property and life, while plainly laughing at man,

who helplessly groaned and shrieked and shuddered, but never for a single instant could stop. The railways alone approached the carnage of war; automobiles and fire-arms ravaged society, until an earthquake became almost a nervous relaxation" (467). For Adams, a resigned critic of his times, this multiplicity and noise needed to be mastered at all cost: "Law should be Evolution from lower to higher, aggregation of the atom in the mass, concentration of multiplicity in unity, compulsion of anarchy in order; and he would force himself to follow wherever it led, though he should sacrifice five thousand millions more in money, and a million more lives" (224).

In *Genesis*, published originally in French in 1982 and translated into English in 1995, the French historian of science and philosopher Michel Serres urges us to think differently about unity and multiplicity, order and noise:

A noisy philosophy would be the shadow of Leibnizianism. The latter relegates it to little departments. In the seventeenth century, you see, hatred was limited and squabbling was confined. The uproar, the murmur of the sea, the generalized confused battle, nausea, are not avoided, but, once again, are the effect of narrowness or limited perceptions. [. . .] Clearly, we will have to retain the word noise, the sole positive word for describing a state we otherwise can only designate in negative terms, such as disorder. The noisy sea is always there, present, dangerous. To be sure, it's enough to make one shudder with fear. Leibniz lumps everything into the differential, and under the numberless thickness of successive orders of integration. The mechanism is admirable. No one ever went so far in rational mastery, down into the innermost little recesses of the smallest departments. The straight line of reason that must turn its back on this chaos is the ascent into those scalar orders. That way lies before us, it is infinite, the perfect flat projection remains inaccessible. It is divine, it is invisible. (What noise does the classical age repress, to what clamor does it close its ears in order to invent our rationalism?) (20–21)

In disassociating himself from the erection of Leibnizian edifices of reason, Serres at the same time abandons Adams's rationalist project and quest for unity in favor of a philosophy that attempts "to think the multiple as such" (6), accounts for background noise as "the basic element of the software of all our logic" (7) and "the first object of metaphysics" (54), remembers that Aphrodite was "born of the chaotic sea, this nautical chaos, the *noise*"

(25), and for which “the work is a confident chord” while “the masterwork trembles with noise” (18). Serres’ allegiance to multiplicity and noise defines itself both positively, in its celebration of the birth of things out of chaos and noise, and negatively, in its denunciation of the violence that inheres, as Adams already perceived, in the move from the many to the one.

Between these two texts, published near the turn of two different centuries, a fundamental reevaluation of noise has taken place.

It is the purpose of this book to chart this by no means linear history as it manifests itself in and through literary texts from the naturalist to the postmodern period in American literature. Literature, it will be argued, is not solely a privileged site for the representation of the noises of our acoustic world but is itself a discourse that generates noise within the channels of cultural communication. As such, literature from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century negotiates, affirms, critiques, *and* becomes an integral part of the acoustics of modernity/postmodernity. The remainder of this introduction provides a twofold setting for thinking about that acoustics and its relation to literary discourse. It first outlines a number of key moments in the history of ideas on noise outside the literary field and then suggests ways in which that history can be made fruitful for literary and cultural studies.

Near the beginning of such a history, however, we already encounter a text that calls into question any strict distinction between the literary and the nonliterary, a text that sits on the fence between religious treatise and literary work. In *The Epic Of Gilgamesh*, written in the second millennium BC, noise is an offense punishable by the gods:¹

In those days the world teemed, the people multiplied, the world bel-
lowed like a wild bull, and the great god was aroused by the clamour.
Enlil heard the clamour and he said to the gods in council, “The uproar
of mankind is intolerable and sleep is no longer possible by reason of
the babel.” So the gods agreed to exterminate mankind. (108)

In this Sumerian version of the flood, noise already occupies the place it still occupies for most of us today: noise is a nuisance, an unwanted signal. This corresponds both to its earliest recorded sense and its current dictionary definition as “a sound that lacks agreeable musical quality or is noticeably loud, harsh, or discordant” (*Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*).

Since the 1960s, noise pollution has been recognized as an environmental problem, a health hazard, and grounds for legal action. Today, the World

Health Organization (WHO) puts noise on top of the environmental agenda. In the executive summary of its *Guidelines for Community Noise* (1999), the WHO states: “In contrast to many other environmental problems, noise pollution continues to grow and it is accompanied by an increasing number of complaints from people exposed to the noise. The growth in noise pollution is unsustainable because it involves direct, as well as cumulative, adverse health effects. It also adversely affects future generations, and has socio-cultural, esthetic and economic effects” (par. 3).

The quality of our acoustic environment has changed radically since the introduction of the internal combustion engine and electricity in the industrial revolutions.² As Emily Thompson documents in *The Soundscape of Modernity* (2002), acousticians and sound engineers have been responding to the noise problem since the 1920s. Since then, new engines and industrial machines, cars and road surfaces, airplanes and airports with significantly reduced noise emission have been designed, and noise-abatement legislation has further contributed to diminishing environmental noise. However, a steady increase in mobility and a growing demand for heavier cars with broader tires and higher-performance engines—take the fashionable idiocy of driving SUVs in a (sub)urban environment as one indicator—has over-compensated for any noise-reduction measures. Today, road traffic is by far the biggest source of noise (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; Hofmann, “Lärmbekämpfung”).

Still other, more subtle kinds of noise have proliferated since electricity was introduced, especially so since the onset of the information revolution in the early 1970s. In the centers of global economic activity, large sections of the population are exposed to a continual bombardment of low-impact noise emitted by all sorts of electrical appliances (refrigerators, air conditioners, computers, TVs, radios, and so on). While the noise produced by these machines often goes unrecognized, it contributes significantly to the extremely dense texture of our acoustic environment. In its uniformity and lack of variance, it provides the constant background noise, the “white noise,” against which other acoustic phenomena struggle to make themselves heard. Because its energy is distributed over a large section of the audible range, such broad-band noise has the effect of masking potentially more meaningful sounds to the point of impeding human communication: “The result is a kind of aural ‘crowding’—the distance over which one communicates is

severely reduced, and that space starts to include few other people” (Truax 2001, 139–40).

Dissatisfied with current approaches to the noise problem—which rely heavily on noise studies and consultants who treat noise from a signal-processing approach that disregards informational, contextual, and systemic aspects—Barry Truax in *Acoustic Communication* (1984; 2001) opts for a communicational approach that conceptualizes noise as a communicative disturbance: “We have characterized sound as having a mediating effect on, and therefore as creating relationships between, the individual and the environment. Noise seems to be the source of a negative mediation of such relationships, an alienating force that loosens the contact the listener has with the environment, and an irritant that works against effective communication” (Truax 2001, 94).

Writers of fiction long ago recognized this communicational dimension of noise pollution. By the time Dos Passos wrote *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), noise had seeped from the factories into the streets of New York, forcing characters to retreat into silent insides to make themselves heard:

An elevated train shattered the barred sunlight overhead. He could see Ruth’s mouth forming words.

“Look,” he shouted above the diminishing clatter. “Let’s go have brunch at the Campus and then go for a walk on the Palisades.” [. . .]

“Then there’s Mrs Sunderland . . .”

“Oh yes I got a glimpse of her going into the bathroom—an old lady in a wadded dressing gown with a pink boudoir cap on.”

“Jimmy you shock me . . . She keeps losing her false teeth,” began Ruth; an L train drowned out the rest. The restaurant door closing behind them choked off the roar of wheels on trains. (128)

Dos Passos writes at a time when “traditional auditory irritants were increasingly drowned out by the din of modern technology” (E. Thompson 6). His depictions of urban and industrial acoustic environments belong to a tradition of technology critique that can be traced back to writings on technology by Karl Marx, Jacques Ellul, Lewis Mumford, and Martin Heidegger and that surfaces in the literary works of, among others, Henry David Thoreau, Sarah Orne Jewett, Henry Adams, Sinclair Lewis, John Steinbeck, and Don DeLillo (Mitcham and Casey; L. Marx, “The Machine”). It is a tradition that

reaches an early literary apex in Stephen Crane's depiction of the noise of war in *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895). In Crane's grim vision, noise is not only an impediment to human communication; it is a form of sonic violence.

Yet from Truax's communicational perspective, noise is not necessarily that which drowns out human language and threatens our psychological as well as physiological well-being. While he is mainly and deeply concerned about the deterioration of the contemporary acoustic environment, Truax does recognize that noise can be a potentially meaningful element of communication:

as pointed out by Bateson (1972) and others, noise, in the sense of information that is unpatterned and unordered by the brain, is the only source of new information. The foreign language or musical style that once seemed unintelligible becomes meaningful once the cognitive structures that are required to decode and understand it are in place. [. . .] This sense of the word is farthest removed from that associated with sounds that are psychologically irritating or stressful. Whereas such annoyance reactions seem ingrained and unchangeable in us, noise as a source of new information is open-ended and offers the promise of all that we may possibly experience. (2001, 97)

Truax here refers to the systems-theoretic order-from-noise principle, which states that systemic evolution depends on environmental perturbations that trigger processes by which systems transform external noise into internal order and information, thus evolving into higher states of complexity. From a systems perspective, disruptions, errors, and noise are indispensable to the long-term survival of any system and constitute the motor of systemic evolution (Foerster; Maturana and Varela; Luhmann, *Social Systems*).

Systems theory builds on the work of biologists who, in the 1930s, began to claim that the reductive-deductive approach taken by physics could not describe the complexity of life (Kneer and Nassehi 17–22). But the roots of its interest in noise must be sought in another field. It is with Claude E. Shannon's pioneering work in information theory that we may begin to account for the role of noise in communication processes in terms that are not exclusively negative.³ In his seminal paper "The Mathematical Theory of Communication" (1948), Shannon insisted that the amount of information a given message conveys must be calculated in relation to the set of possible messages from which the actual message has been chosen: "To be sure, this

word information in communication theory relates not so much to what you *do* say, as to what you *could* say. That is, information is a measure of one's freedom of choice when one selects a message" (Shannon and Weaver 8–9). The greater the set of possible messages, the greater the freedom of choice a sender has in choosing a specific message. And the greater the freedom of choice on the part of the sender of a message, the greater the uncertainty on the part of the receiver as to what specific message the sender has chosen out of a set of possible messages. Within this framework, it seems intuitively clear that a message about which the receiver was highly *uncertain* prior to its arrival conveys more information than one that the receiver could predict with certainty.⁴ Conversely, a message that is completely predictable is redundant and therefore devoid of information.

Since the introduction of noise into a channel of communication increases uncertainty and makes messages less predictable (by distorting the signal emitted by the sender), it also increases information. In fact, noise is defined in Shannon's framework as the signal that carries the greatest amount of information: noise is the opposite of redundancy. Shannon is, however, quick to point out that one needs to distinguish between useful and useless information. Noise, he points out, exhibits a large amount of useless information:

Uncertainty which arises by virtue of freedom of choice on the part of the sender is desirable uncertainty. Uncertainty which arises because of errors or because of the influence of noise is undesirable uncertainty. It is thus clear where the joker is in saying that the received signal has more information. Some of this information is spurious and undesirable and has been introduced via the noise. To get the useful information in the received signal we must subtract out this spurious portion. (Shannon and Weaver 19)

Noise, it seems, has been successfully exorcised from information theory. As an engineer working for the Bell Telephone Laboratories, Shannon was clearly interested in eliminating noise in order to ensure maximally efficient ways of transmitting (useful) information. Toward the end of his expository introduction, however, his coauthor Weaver opens up a different avenue of thinking about noise.

Throughout his exposition of Shannon's insights, Weaver insists that "*information* must not be confused with meaning" and that "the semantic as-

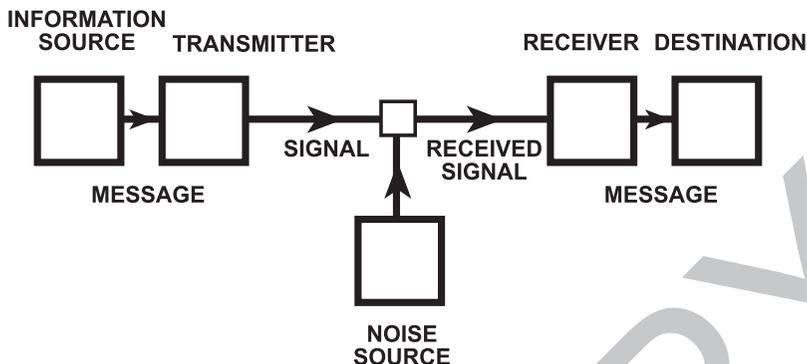


Figure 1. Schematic Diagram of a General Communication System. From *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, by Claude E. Shannon and Warren Weaver. Copyright 1949, 1998 by Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois Press. Used with permission of the University of Illinois Press.

pects of communication are irrelevant to the engineering aspects” (Shannon and Weaver 8). This exclusion of semantic considerations is already apparent in the communication model (figure 1) Shannon proposes at the beginning of his article.⁵

No box is provided for the interpretive activity of the receiver, and it is clear that the purpose of communication in this schema is to transmit messages in such a way that the message received is identical to the message sent.⁶ But when Weaver does turn to semantic problems in his concluding section, he proposes changes to Shannon’s communication model:

One can imagine, as an addition to the diagram, another box labeled “Semantic Receiver” interposed between the engineering receiver (which changes signals to messages) and the destination. This semantic receiver subjects the message to a second decoding, the demand on this one being that it must match the statistical *semantic* characteristics of the message to the statistical semantic capacities of the totality of receivers, or of that subset of receivers which constitute the audience one wishes to affect. (Shannon and Weaver 26)

Weaver’s heightened awareness of the role of the receiver in communication indicates a shift away from a model that considers the sender’s intention as the sole source of meaning and interpretive authority. Moreover, his insis-

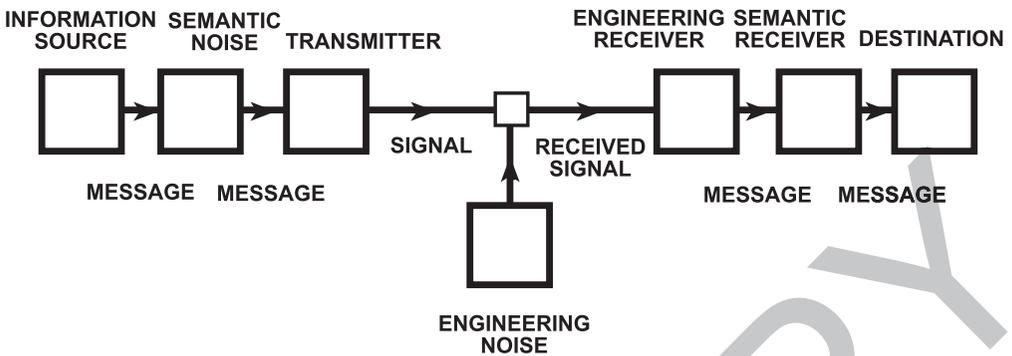


Figure 2. Schematic Diagram of a General Communication System, Modified According to Warren Weaver's Suggestions in Shannon and Weaver (26).

tence that the message's semantic properties must be adjusted, in a "second decoding," to the receiver's capacity for processing meaning already impinges on the original premise that the purpose of the communication process is the transmission of self-identical messages. Weaver's move away from a simplistic model based on intentionality is further accentuated when he contemplates the possibility of adding another box labeled "semantic noise" to Shannon's diagram:

Similarly one can imagine another box in the diagram which, inserted between the information source and the transmitter, would be labeled "semantic noise," the box previously labeled as simply "noise" now being labeled "engineering noise." From this source is imposed into the signal the perturbations or distortions of meaning which are not intended by the source but which inescapably affect the destination. And the problem of semantic decoding must take this semantic noise into account. It is also possible to think of an adjustment of original message so that the sum of message meaning plus semantic noise is equal to the desired total message meaning at the destination. (Shannon and Weaver 26)

Seventeen years after Wimsatt and Beardsley's "The Intentional Fallacy" (1946) but five years before Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author" (1968), Weaver's suggestion that distortions of meaning not intended by the sender might actually contribute to rather than impair the meaning received

at the other end of the communication process represents an engineer's radical break with communication models based on the sender's intention as the final touchstone of communicative success. Weaver's changes to Shannon's model also reintroduce the noise that has been exorcised via Shannon's distinction between useful and useless information (see figure 2).

Of course, Weaver's reflections on meaning and noise propose a model of communication that functions despite the noise rather than because of it. Nevertheless, his suggestion that noise is not only an inevitable component of all forms of communication but may actually be an integral part of the desired message accords noise the status of a potentially beneficial element of communication. Together with Shannon's assertion that noise is the signal with the highest information-content, it forms, either implicitly or explicitly, the basis for all the revalorizations of noise discussed in the remainder of this chapter.⁷ This is as true for literary scholars' conceptualizations of literature as the noise of culture as it is for Michel Serres' as well as systems theorists' valorization of disorder and noise, which are all inconceivable without Shannon and Weaver's prior theoretical reflections on information and noise.

The crucial move from Shannon's information theory to systems theory, from noise to order-from-noise, is one from a simple sender-receiver communications model to a model of communication that seeks to describe processes of information exchange taking place at several hierarchically distinct levels within highly complex systems such as computers, the human body, or society. The order-from-noise principle was introduced by Heinz von Foerster in "On Self-Organizing Systems and Their Environment" (1960). Von Foerster begins his now famous talk with the infamous statement that "There are no such things as self-organizing systems!" (31). What von Foerster means is that even self-organizing systems could not exist without environments that make energy and order available (for living systems, environmental energy exists in the form of food; environmental order in the form of information). But order is not the only thing self-organizing systems find in their environments: "self-organizing systems do not only feed upon order, they will also find noise on the menu" (43). In the discussion following his talk and transcribed in the appendix to the published article, von Foerster clarifies this statement somewhat by linking systems' adaptability to noise to their chances of evolution and survival: "I think it is favorable to have some noise in the system. If a system is going to freeze into a particular state, it is

inadaptable and this final state may be altogether wrong. It will be incapable of adjusting itself to something that is a more appropriate situation" (49). Despite or perhaps because of the brevity of his remarks, von Foerster's introduction of the order-from-noise principle had an enormous impact on a variety of fields, including literary studies.⁸

Today, there are many different formulations of the order-from-noise principle. The version provided by theoretical biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela has been highly influential in its own right. Maturana and Varela have developed a theory of *autopoietic systems*, a term that designates a subgroup of autonomous systems. As the term indicates, autopoietic systems are not only autonomous but also self-creating systems, meaning that the components they consist of are produced in a recursive process by the components themselves.⁹ The only known examples of autopoietic systems are living organisms, and Maturana and Varela in fact postulate that "*autopoiesis is necessary and sufficient to characterize the organization of living systems*" (82).

Autopoietic systems are not determined by environmental input; they attain their "coherence through [their] own operation, and not through the intervention of contingencies from the environment" (Varela 55). As with von Foerster's self-organizing systems, this does not imply that autopoietic systems operate completely independent of processes occurring in their environment. But Maturana and Varela's shift to a description of living systems as autopoietic necessitates a rethinking of system-environment interaction that abandons the more traditional input-output model. As self-organizing and self-creating systems, autopoietic systems interact with systems located in their environment by way of "structural coupling," the process by which "the autopoietic conduct of an organism A becomes a source of deformation for an organism B, and the compensatory behavior of organism B acts, in turn, as a source of deformation of organism A, whose compensatory behavior acts again as a source of deformation of B, and so on recursively until the coupling is interrupted" (Maturana and Varela 120).

In other words, autopoietic systems interact by perturbing one another. They do not perceive changes in their environment as inputs but as sources of noise that trigger processes of reorganization whose specific forms are, however, determined by *the system's own logic of operation*. Autopoietic systems thrive on such destabilizing perturbations, which make them more adaptive

to disturbances (rather than being destroyed by them) and prevent them from ossification. Maturana and Varela join von Foerster and other systems theorists in arguing that the adaptability of systems to disorder and noise is essential not only to their survival but also to their evolutionary development. Noise is thus accorded a productive role in system formation.

While Maturana and Varela (117–18) are undecided on whether their findings are applicable to the study of social structures and processes, other theorists have been less hesitant to move in that direction.¹⁰ In his fascinating study *The Noise of Culture: Literary Texts in a World of Information* (1988), William R. Paulson draws heavily on the theory of autopoietic systems, arguing that, in an informational society, literature is but the noise of the cultural system. Literature is “a residue of a no longer dominant mode of cultural organization” (181) that meets none of the requirements of a social order that to an ever-larger extent relies on the production and consumption of easily processable, machine-readable, clear and unambiguous information (in stockbroking, in databases, on the increasingly commercialized World Wide Web). It will not do to try to reestablish the centrality of literary texts by reverting to humanist defenses of literature, by claiming that they are also objects of knowledge, that they contain eternal truths, moral and cultural values. Rather, we should accept literature’s marginal status in a world of information and begin from a recognition of that position of marginality:

Literature is not and will not ever again be at the center of culture, if indeed it ever was. There is no use in either proclaiming or debunking its central position. Literature is the noise of culture, the rich and indeterminate margin into which messages are sent off, never to return the same, in which signals are received not quite like anything emitted. (Paulson 180)

To designate literature as noise may seem like a strange move for a literary critic concerned about the function and relevance of literature today. But Paulson values literature precisely for its refusal to conform to dominant processes of information exchange. Drawing on the systems-theoretic order-from-noise principle, he conceptualizes literature as the unpredictable noise that is capable of producing new meanings, new concepts, and new information against the backdrop of redundancy continually produced and reproduced by the dominant culture. Literature conforms, in other words,

to Lyotard's logic of paralogy and as such allows for "the invention of new moves in the linguistic and symbolic games that constitute knowledge and society" (Paulson 180).¹¹

For Paulson, the noise of literature is both internal and external. It is internal because literary language deviates from ordinary language use in its ambiguities, its indeterminacies, its aporias, its multiple complex relations between different levels of signification: "Rather than attempting to reduce noise to a minimum, literary communication *assumes* its noise as a constitutive factor of itself" (83). The noise of literature is also external in its interaction with other cultural domains. Literature's difference from other forms of communication ensures that it can never be fully assimilated to the communicative networks already in place. It is this recalcitrance that allows literature to "participat[e] in the process by which new ideas and new constructions of reality are formed" (165).¹²

Though he relies heavily on models from the natural sciences, Paulson does not suggest that literary texts are organisms, and he does not return to New Critical postulates of the "organic unity" of the text.¹³ As he himself points out, his discussion of literary autonomy is both a revalorization and a demystification of romantic doctrines of the autonomous organic text (120–31). For Paulson, autonomy is not an invariant characteristic of literary works; it is a powerful interpretive convention that calls upon readers to *assume* poetic texts are autonomous objects functioning according to their own rules: "part of [a literary text's] culturally defined role is to persuade its reader to treat it as autonomous and experience it accordingly" (135). In Paulson's terms, the literary text is an "*artificially autonomous object*" (135). As such, it places special demands on its readers. In particular, it requires them to interpret all aspects of the poetic text as contributing to its overall signification. In poetic texts, nothing is gratuitous. Hence, whenever readers encounter features that are radically alien to their constructions of meaning so far, they are forced to modify their interpretation by reading what seems random or unintelligible on one level of signification (for example, the literal level) as meaningful on another (for example, the figural level): "the reader is forced to move on to a new level of understanding in order to integrate features which at a simplistic level seemed merely interference in a message" (90). The reader must, in other words, continually transform noise into order and information.

The order-from-noise principle is already inherent in the nature of poetic communication; it is inscribed in the *differentness* of literary language.¹⁴ In the final analysis, though, readers' constant transformations of noise into information are less a response to specific properties of the literary text itself than an entirely appropriate (and eminently useful) activity within an institutional framework that still derives many of its assumptions from romantic and formalist reflections on the unity and autonomy of literary texts.

Quite clearly, this implies a perspective on literary texts that the post-structuralist challenge to New Critical doctrines as well as modernist and postmodernist literary practices have rendered problematic. However, it still offers a good description of the conventions that to a large extent govern the reading practices of most professional and nonprofessional readers alike. More important, Paulson's systems-theoretic approach opens up new avenues of thinking about the social function of literature as it invites us to reconsider questions of literariness, literary autonomy, and innovation that have been all but relegated to the past by poststructuralist theory and postmodern assertions of the impossibility of the new. Paulson achieves this without falling back into the organicist fallacy of either the Romantics or their formalist successors.

Moreover, he gives us a viable model for correlating the formal properties of literary texts with their social function, a model that manages to rethink Adorno's paradox that literary texts are both autonomous and social. Paulson opts neither for an approach that would study literature in isolation from other cultural practices nor for one that would level literature's difference from other discourses. His systemic approach avoids both the excessive determinism of some of the approaches that seek to situate literature primarily in its historical, social, or political contexts and the almost complete dissociation of literature from these contexts characteristic of the "organic unity" doctrine. In this, Paulson's deliberations correspond to our intuitive awareness that there is something special about literary texts—which is both one of the reasons why many of us are in literary studies and a justification for the institutionalized status of what we do—but that the literary discourse is not completely different from or independent of other discursive as well as material practices.¹⁵

Finally, Paulson's conceptualization of literature as an act of communication that is an anticommunication is important not only because it tells us something about literature's ambiguity and unreliability as an instrument

of communication but also because it gives us a model to think about literature's continuing relevance in a world of information. Paulson accomplishes this without any kind of nostalgia for a time when literature was still at the center (or apex) of culture. Instead, he fully acknowledges the marginality of literature in the informational society and bases his investigations on that premise. Paulson's model is a model for our times and will continue to be so, for the process of informatization will not slow down. The decoding of the human genome in 2001 is only one indicator of the speed, cultural relevance, and endurance of this process.

Yet Paulson's systems-theoretic account of the social function of literature also has serious limitations, the most fundamental of which concerns the implications of his theses for the study of what I would call "the politics of representation." From a systems perspective, what is outside a given system and thus in its environment becomes interesting only if it can be integrated into the system's organization via the order-from-noise mechanism. Anything that disturbs a system from the outside is recognizable for the system only if it is absorbed as order or information. Concerned as it is with the preservation of existing systems and the integration of noise as order, systems theory has a conservative bias¹⁶ and remains unable to account for the radically un-integrable alterity and negativity that a thinker like Adorno postulates for art.¹⁷

Even though Paulson explicitly acknowledges his debt to Michel Serres in his preface to *The Noise of Culture*, Serres' own theorizing on noise presents a necessary corrective to the inherent (one is tempted to write "systemic") conservatism of Paulson's approach.¹⁸ Serres joins systems theorists in arguing that "noise gives rise to a new system, an order that is more complex than the simple chain" (*The Parasite* 14). For Serres as for Paulson, the continuation of any system's functioning relies on both the establishment of order and the disruption of that order.¹⁹ Both critics would agree, moreover, with German sociologist and systems theorist Niklas Luhmann that "the meaning process lives off disturbances, is nourished by disorder, lets itself be carried by noise, and needs an 'excluded third' for all technically precise, schematized operations" (*Social Systems* 83). But Serres much more powerfully and insistently moves this third—excluded by Shannon's distinction between useful and useless information and contained by systems theory's order-from-noise principle—to the center of attention.

Serres' *The Parasite* and *Genesis*, first published in French in 1980 and 1982

respectively, present sustained attempts to restore to philosophy and the history of science that which has been lost, overlooked, and excluded by dualist systems of thought.²⁰ His principal ally in this endeavor is the parasite, a wanderer between the worlds of biology, anthropology, and information theory.²¹ Unloved, feared, and chased out, the *parasite*—a word that denotes noise in technical French—becomes for Serres a figure for that which binary thought seeks to suppress and exclude.

For Serres, multiplicity, disorder, and noise are not mere precursors to unity, order, and information; they are originary and constitute the ground of our world and our being:

a system has interesting relations according to what is deemed to be its faults or deprecations. What then about its noises and parasites. Can we rewrite a system, in the way Leibniz understood the term, not in the key of preestablished harmony but in what he called seventh chords? Not with the equilibrium he loved to mention but with the waves and shocks on the line in mind? [. . .] The book of differences, noise, and disorder would only be the book of evil for someone who would prohibit the Author of the universe, through calculation, from a world that is incorruptibly dependable. This, however, is not the case. The difference is part of the thing itself, and perhaps it even produces the thing. Maybe the radical origin of things is really the difference, even though classical rationalism damned it to hell. In the beginning was the noise. (*The Parasite* 13)

Two years after *The Parasite*, Serres published his book of noise—a book he had originally intended to entitle *Noise* but was dissuaded from doing so by its first readers (Assad 279). His *Genesis* begins with “A Short Tall Tale,” a brief narrative in which a shipwrecked narrator constructs a raft out of countless bottles, each with a little message inside, colliding noisily on the Sargasso Sea. The sea, the noise, and the multiple are not only at the beginning of things, they are also at the beginning of Serres’ text: “Before language, before even the word, the noise” (54). *Genesis* presents Serres’ most sustained attempt to listen to the noise.

In a series of meditations that blend the languages of science, philosophy, and poetry, Serres develops a theme that was already present in *The Parasite*. In *Genesis*, we encounter a thinker who has become increasingly concerned about the violence inherent in the pursuit of unity and order:

I am attempting to extricate myself from the hell of dualism. Utterly pure rationality is a myth, it is a sacred place, cleansed, purified through lustral procedures that expel the confused, the profane, the unclean, the victim, accordingly, excluding, in any event, for the greater glory and power of its new priests. [. . .] To think in terms of pairs is to make ready some dangerous weapon, arrows, darts, dovetails, whereby to hold space and kill. To think by negation is not to think. Dualism tries to start a ruckus [*chercher noise*], make *noise*, it relates to death alone. It puts to death and it maintains death. Death to the parasite, someone says, without seeing that a parasite is put to death only by a stronger parasite. Keep the noise down, says he, without perceiving that he has monopolized all the noise, without understanding that he thus becomes the head of all the fury. (*Genesis* 131)

Serres shares Henry Adams's insight that "Chaos was the law of nature, Order was the dream of man" (*The Education* 427), but he is no longer prepared to pay the price to realize the dream of unity and order. In his decision to listen to the noise and explore the fuzzy regions of multiplicity and chaos, Serres does not celebrate irrationality, and his ire is not directed against rational inquiry as such (Assad 291) but against the arrogance of a rationalist discourse whose desire for unity turns violent in its exclusion of everything that does not fit its rigid order. The logic of the parasite, he contends, pervades all systems, and his/her/its exclusion always only heralds the rise to dominance of another parasite. Noise always remains part of the equation.

With Serres, we get a model of thinking about noise that builds on information and systems theory but urges us to consider the costs involved in the transformation of noise into information and order. Any such transformation, Serres contends, threatens to reduce the other to the same; it threatens to deny the otherness of the other and thereby obliterate it.²² Working within a broadly poststructuralist framework, a number of cultural theorists including the German media archaeologist Friedrich Kittler and the French economist and music theorist Jacques Attali have followed Serres' lead, discovering in noise a source not only of new order but also of the disruption and the subversion of systems based on binary logic. Taken together and read alongside Adorno's reflections on the social function of literature, these critics expose a crucial blind spot in Paulson's argumentation that will be explored further in subsequent chapters.

The second, and in my view almost equally serious limitation to Paulson's project concerns his stance on the question of literary representation. In conceiving of the interaction between different systems exclusively in terms of mutual perturbation or structural coupling, Paulson fails to account for the representational nature of literary texts. Critics realized long before the advent of modernism that there is more to literature than the faithful reproduction of "reality."²³ It has become a commonplace that literary texts are to a large degree structured according to internal laws that are independent of and sometimes opposed to the structures (and strictures) of daily existence. Derrida's famous contention that "there is nothing outside of the text" (*Of Grammatology* 58) has for many critics even reversed the traditional relationship between texts and "reality": life as we know it can now be seen as structured like a text rather than vice versa. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that literary texts draw some of their material from a space external to themselves. Moreover, the relationship between the fictional world of the literary text and the external world of objects can at least partly be described in terms of representation—a term that invites us to consider both the objects and the forms of literary discourse. In view of this, Paulson's stern rejection of a representational approach seems premature: "To seek and find knowledge in literature—where the autonomy of language is made manifest—is to accept that the act of knowing resides in language and community, that it is part of an adaptive and self-coherent system and not a representation of reality" (Paulson 172). Maturana and Varela's shift from a representational approach to living organisms to one that focuses on their capacity for autopoiesis does not translate as easily into literary studies as Paulson would have us believe. Literary texts remain in a dynamic interaction with empirical reality that cannot be reduced to processes of mutual perturbation and self-organization. The representational perspective in literary studies is only sterile and un-inventive if we conceive of representation as imitation in the most narrow sense, a stance few if any literary critics would adopt.²⁴

Related to Paulson's rejection of a representational approach is what constitutes the most radical of his book's many arguments. In order to ensure the continuing relevance of literary studies, he argues, critics today should move away "from the dead center of their discipline, from the project of interpreting and describing texts as fully as possible" (182). If literature is no longer seen as being *about* something, we may turn our backs on interpretation and interrogate instead the processes by which knowledge is produced in the in-

teraction and mutual perturbation of a variety of discourses, including the literary discourse but not necessarily centered around it. In Paulson's view, a systemic approach to literature allows us to rethink its social function in a time of retrenchment and is emphatically not "a gadget for producing readings and interpretations" (181). Literary studies, Paulson agrees with Kittler, must become truly interdisciplinary and can no longer be practiced in isolation from the discourses of science and technology. Paulson concedes that such a project might very well mean the end of literary studies as we know it, and he ends his book with the hope that "Out of a new dialogue between literature and science, out of interferences between disciplinary discourses, we may yet be able to arrange a graceful exit from the era of *Literaturwissenschaft*" (185).

While I agree with William Paulson that the task of literary scholars cannot be to study poetic texts in isolation and with the sole purpose of understanding them as completely as possible, I share neither his rejection of representational approaches nor his abandonment of the interpretive project. In fact, the remainder of this book is crucially concerned with establishing passages between Paulson's and other thinkers' conceptualizations of literature as "the noise of culture" and analyses of literary representations of noise. Despite the invention of the phonograph in the 1870s, which effectively ended the monopoly of writing on the storage of sound (Kittler, *Aufschreibesysteme*), literary texts from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century continue to be sites of both the cultural production and the representation of noise, and it is this convergence that a history of literary acoustics addresses.

Let us turn to William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* for an example. In one of the many passages that seem to lend support to Burroughs's claim that he has "no precise memory of writing the notes which have now been published under the title *Naked Lunch*" (7) but ultimately undermine it in their self-reflexive quality, Burroughs discusses both the form and content of his work:

The Word is divided into units which be all in one piece and should be so taken, but the pieces can be had in any order being tied up back and forth, in and out fore and aft like an innaresting sex arrangement. This book spills off the page in all directions, kaleidoscope of vistas, medley of tunes and street noises, farts and riot yipes and the slamming steel shutters of commerce, screams of pain and pathos and screams

plain pathic, copulating cats and outraged squawk of the displaced bull head, prophetic mutterings of brujo in nutmeg trances, snapping necks and screaming mandrakes, sigh of orgasm, heroin silent at dawn in the thirsty cells, Radio Cairo screaming like a berserk tobacco auction, and flutes of Ramadan fanning the sick junky like a gentle lush worker in the grey subway dawn feeling with delicate fingers for the green folding crackle . . . (180)

This passage functions first of all as a commentary on the formal arrangement of *Naked Lunch*. In Burroughs's narrative (if that is the word), the "Word" is stripped of the metaphysical unity it might have once possessed; it is fractured beyond repair—and beyond Burroughs's mockery of religious oratory. This book truly spills off the page in all directions; its cut-up technique, associative ordering of thoughts, and fragmentary syntax provide a source of noise that reflects and complements the novel's events and actions. The novel's formal aspects forestall the reader's easy assimilation of experiences that are out of the ordinary and shocking to most people (somasochism, raw violence, drug abuse). Burroughs's formal innovations therefore not only mimetically reproduce the chaos and breathlessness of his characters' lives; his way of dissecting language and reducing "sense to nonsense" and "government propaganda to noise" (Kittler, *Grammophon* 167; my translation) is itself a form of resistance by negativity in Adorno's sense.²⁵

At the same time, the passage captures the auditory manifestations of some of the novel's main themes. It makes the reader participate in the acoustic turmoil of the city, the cries of pleasure and screams of violence, the blare of the radio and din of the crowd, the full range of noises that define the acoustic world of Burroughs's subculture of junkies and sexual misfits. Moreover, the reference to "Radio Cairo screaming like a berserk tobacco auction" constitutes one of the book's many allusions to radio transmission and thus to a field in which the elimination of noise, of "moment[s] of static, dangling wires, broken connections" (171) has been of primary importance to engineers since the first radio broadcast in 1906. Indeed, in the paragraph following the passage quoted above, Burroughs attributes all of its noises to radio broadcasting and assigns them revelatory force: "This is Revelation and Prophecy of what I can pick up without FM on my 1920 crystal set with antennae of jison" (180). As part of the fictional world Burroughs creates,

these noises have a decidedly literal quality. At the same time, their representation is inextricably intertwined with Burroughs's reflections on the recalcitrant, noisy form of his book. The two forms of noise mutually reinforce each other, building up to the overwhelming brouhaha the reader is sucked into. *Naked Lunch*, then, assumes noise as a part of itself not only in its formal inventiveness and breaches of decorum but also in its representations of physical noise.

Burroughs's decision to associate the subculture he depicts with a panorama of noises points to a related convergence between reflections on the social function of literature and literary representations of noise. *Naked Lunch* is not only a noisy text because it reproduces on the level of textual organization the noises it registers emerging from the margins of society. Literary texts need not be formally experimental to kick up a fuss, to make noise. Burroughs's text provides a platform for the voices of those few whose street talk and junkie slang is merely noise in the ears of the many. In giving a voice to forms of cultural expression that fall outside the perimeter of official culture, Burroughs embarks on a project many writers of fiction have come to embrace as their own.²⁶ In choosing to dwell among the eccentrics, the outcasts, and the losers of history, Burroughs gives expression to voices and sounds that official culture has a tendency to relegate to the dangerous, unstable realms of nonsense and noise. The OED entry for "noise" provides an interesting example in this respect. It is hardly a coincidence that five out of the sixteen examples given for the first sense of "noise" ("Loud outcry, clamour, or shouting; din or disturbance made by one or more persons") record the noises of others: heathens, Bretons, thieves and murderers, women:

1297 R. GLOUC. (Rolls) 8167 Of trompes & of tabors þe sarazins made þere So gret noyse þat cristinemen al destourbed were.

c1330 R. BRUNNE Chron. Wace (Rolls) 11531 At þat word was noise & cry Of þe Bretons þat stoden ney.

1481 CAXTON Godfrey v. 23 Of the noyse that sourded emonge the hethen men discordyng in theyr lawe.

1633 G. HERBERT Temple, Redemption 12. At length I heard a ragged noise and mirth Of theeves and murderers.

1702 ROWE Tamerl. IV. i, Thou hast thy sexes Virtues, Their Affectation, Pride, Ill Nature, Noise.

And when the City of New York systematically began to address its noise problem in 1907, it first banned the use of megaphones by the Coney Island barkers (E. Thompson 123–24). In America, the policing of soundscapes reaches back to colonial times when African-Americans, Native Americans, and the lower orders in general were identified as the most troublesome noisemakers (M. Smith 9–12). The disparagement of the sounds of others as noise has a long tradition that involves processes of exclusion—which can be processes of silencing in the most literal sense—in which immigrants’ accents, female modes of communication, or jazz music are considered undesirable interferences with the sociocultural and communicative networks already in place.²⁷ In some instances, such acoustic boundary-drawings along the lines of race, class, and gender are accompanied by genuine concerns about the debilitating effects of excessive levels of noise. This is the case with Victorian middle-class professionals’ campaigns against the street musicians of mid-nineteenth century London. Their anti-street music movement was informed as much by fears that the sounds produced by organ grinders or brass bands would imperil the mental and physical well-being of their own class as by an often openly expressed xenophobic disdain for the lower-class immigrants who took their music to the streets (Picker, *Victorian* 41–81). Literature participates in such processes, both in affirming and contesting them. As will be argued in greater detail in the following three chapters, naturalist portrayals of immigrant accents, modernist renditions of working-class dissent, or postmodernist representations of alternative systems of communication all constitute interventions in those debates.

Many of the writers discussed in this book challenge and sometimes reverse the hierarchy between voice and noise, sense and nonsense by valorizing the sound-making of others as a productive disturbance of established modes of communication and sense-making. These authors, chief among them the modernists and early postmodernists, are faced with the task of preserving in (and through) their writing something of the otherness of alternative forms of sounding.²⁸ This is a task that is complicated by the fundamental question of how any acoustic phenomenon can be translated into the written format of a literary text. As Bruce R. Smith points out, any translation of the oral into the written threatens to codify and thereby tame the unruly realm of orality. Smith’s examples are moralistic treatises Puritans wrote about the dances and gests of early modern England: “Something heard, felt, *enjoyed*

becomes, in their hands, something seen, known, *mastered*" (166); Kittler documents European musicologists' use of the phonograph to record the unruliness of other peoples' "exotic music" so as to be able to reduce it to "exact notation" (*Literature* 35). The question arises just how the alterity of the sounds and noises of others can be conserved in rather than contained by literary representation.

For many of the authors discussed in the following pages, any answer to this question must be based on the premise that the literary representation of others demands special forms of representation. Thus, we encounter slippages of language into pure sound in Jean Toomer's and Zora Neale Hurston's tributes to the African-American oral tradition, highly fragmented prose in John Dos Passos's portrayal of working-class voices of dissent, and a narrative structure that replicates the noisy alterity of the alternative communications system at the heart of Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*. These authors challenge and disturb dominant modes of communicating about others by means of representational innovations that turn the literary text itself into a source of noise within the networks of culture.

Yet artists' attempts to preserve something of the otherness of other sounds and voices do not guarantee a progressive politics of representation. Futurist and Dadaist spectacles of noise in the first decades of the twentieth century were informed as much by primitivism and militarism as by a desire to disrupt classical harmonies (Kahn 45–67). In many a naturalist text, the differentness of immigrant, working-class, or politically dissenting forms of sound-making is highlighted only to be exposed to ridicule, to be denigrated as noise and excluded from the realm of acceptable sense-making. The interrelations between the literary representation of noise and literature's potential to function as the noise of culture are complex and contingent on the historical context of literary production, distribution, and reception. Our analyses and judgments of the politics of different writers' acoustic imagination will therefore need to proceed on the basis of careful analyses of the different representational strategies of specific works of literature as well as their place within the discourse networks of their times.

As the examples discussed above already show, the relevance of conceptualizations of literature as the noise of culture is not restricted to a specific literary period. But the obvious applicability of an aesthetics of noise to formally difficult texts does suggest that such reflections have a decidedly

modernist bent. From the dual perspective proposed by a history of literary acoustics, this comes as no surprise. Modernist formal experimentation and innovation can be seen as responses to problems of representing the noise of modernity not only in its metaphorical but also in its literal, acoustic sense. Artists confronted with a rapid urban growth that engendered massive demographic changes, the carnage of World War I, and the acceleration of industrial and scientific progress were exposed to a chaos of sense perceptions that demanded new modes of artistic representation. For a growing number of writers, the literary forms of realism and naturalism no longer served to render the cultural atmosphere of a world radically unhinged. Literature, already severely challenged in its claims to verisimilitude by photography, film, and the phonograph, entered a crisis of representation, and modernist experimental forms are a response to that crisis.

While this does not entail that modernist montage, fragmentation, or dissonance simply reproduce the visual and acoustic chaos of life at the beginning of the twentieth century, it registers a historical contingency of modernist form beyond the needs of the system of art to periodically renew itself. The futurist musician Luigi Russolo's groundbreaking compositions best exemplify the new art forms inspired by the soundscape of modernity. Russolo theorized that urban noise was the most authentic musical expression of the twentieth century. Consequently, he built a number of new instruments, so-called noise-intoners (*intonarumori*), that allowed him to bring the noise of the city into the concert hall. As Emily Thompson documents, Russolo's dozen or so public performances in Italy and London in 1913 and 1914 met with anything from enthusiastic endorsement to ridicule and outrage, and his first public performance in Milan erupted into a fistfight between fellow futurists and unappreciative members of the audience. What even some of Russolo's most fervent admirers failed to understand, though, was his emphasis on "the abstract over the imitative quality of his music" (E. Thompson 137).²⁹ Most revolutionary about Russolo's compositions was not that they reproduced the noise of the city but that they elevated noise into a principle of composition.³⁰ Writing against the same acoustic background, modernist authors pursued similar aims, though with the different (and, strictly speaking, silent) tools of their own trade. Both modernist writing and music, then, emerged from a cultural situation whose metaphorical *and* literal noise helped shape artistic forms. A recognition of the modernist lineage of the "literature as noise" paradigm—on which I will elaborate in chapter 2

—therefore allows us to link its origins to a period characterized by a proliferation of noises that was instrumental in making literature jeopardize its communicative function and enabled it to become the noise of culture.

However, even as we situate the emergence of a modernist aesthetics of noise within the historical context of technological modernity, we are forced to recognize that the process of modernization was already well under way when the naturalists published their first books. The end of the Civil War in 1865 was followed by an upsurge in industrial production, particularly in the metal industries (cast iron, steel); by the introduction of more powerful steam engines; and by the concentration of a rapidly growing percentage of the U.S. population in the urban centers of industrial production. Naturalist writers felt compelled to give a sustained fictional account of the new acoustic spaces produced by urbanization and industrialization, and their texts raise interesting questions with regard to the literary representation and representability of noise. As with modernist texts, we may sound out the politics of naturalists' mappings of urban and industrial acoustic spaces and ask ourselves to what extent their texts truly give a platform to or, conversely, seek to contain the noises of modernity and its social conflicts. From the perspective of a history of literary acoustics, answers to this question touch on the complex relationship between the representational forms of literary texts and their historically contingent social functions. This question invites us, in other words, to think about the politics of representation.

Postmodern writing raises a similar range of questions. Yet while many of the sounds introduced by the industrial revolutions continue to sound in the acoustic spaces of postmodernity, the information revolution has inserted new kinds of noise into the postmodern soundscape. The inhabitants of informational cities are exposed to a continuous stream of broad-band noise emitted by electronic apparatuses of all kinds. This "white noise" feeds into an acoustic world in which noise has been all but exorcised from the channels of real-time communication, but in which the very machines that enable this interference-free exchange of information contribute significantly to an extremely dense acoustic environment in which noise is a near-ubiquitous presence. Postmodern writers of fiction register this new quality of the soundscape in their texts and experiment with old representational forms and invent new ones to render the omnipresent and mostly subliminal quality of the noises of postmodernity.

This brief overview of some of the arguments that will be developed in

greater detail in the following pages already attests to the need to account for the historical specificity of writers' representations of and reflections on noise. The following three chapters, which form the core of this book, present an attempt to historicize the question of the social function of literature in a series of analyses that address the convergences between the noises literature represents and the noises it produces in the three successive literary periods of naturalism, modernism, and postmodernism. These chapters are crucially concerned with the politics of literary representation and in their double focus on the literary production and representation of noise seek to contribute to the study of American literature from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century a history of literary acoustics that is embedded in the ongoing project of writing the history of modernity and postmodernity.

The Soundscapes of Naturalism

*We must speak by the card,
Or equivocation will undo us.*

Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Around the turn of the previous century, the scene of writing changed radically. With the invention of the phonograph (in 1877) and film (in 1895), writing lost its monopoly on data storage. As Kittler points out, the new media technologies “store acoustic and optical data with superhuman precision” (*Aufschreibesysteme* 310; my translation) and relegate writing to the status of one medium among others. For Kittler, this transition marks the end of literature in the Romantic sense: “As long as the book had to take care of all serial data flows, [. . .] words trembled with sensuality and memory. All the passion of reading consisted of hallucinating a meaning between letters and lines: the visible or audible world of romantic poetry. [. . .] Electricity itself has brought this to an end. If memories and dreams, the dead and the specters have become technically reproducible, then the hallucinatory power of reading and writing has become obsolete” (*Literature* 40–41). Under the new media regime, Kittler reasons, only two options are left for writers of literature: they could either—as the modernists would—focus their attention on the medium of writing itself and “begin a cult by and for letter fetishists” or become producers of song lyrics and thus turn from “the imaginary voices” of literature “to the real” voices of records (Kittler, *Grammophon* 135–36; my translation).

Kittler’s far-reaching claims need to be qualified, not least because, from a literary-historical perspective, they elide realist and naturalist attempts to reproduce the sights and sounds of the real. At the same time, though, Kittler’s media archaeology invites us to ask a fundamental question concerning all literary representations of noise: How can writing represent noise at all if it must, by force, reduce the unruly noise that lies outside of language to the rules and order of the alphabet? That question is particularly relevant to the

naturalist writers discussed in this chapter, who witnessed the loss of the textual monopoly on the storage of acoustic data at a time when the American soundscape was rapidly becoming saturated with the noises of technological modernity.

In his seminal work on soundscape studies, *The Tuning of the World* (1977), R. Murray Schafer captures the acoustic changes involved in the transition from a predominantly rural and agrarian to an urban industrial society as a shift from a hi-fi to a lo-fi soundscape:¹

A hi-fi system is one possessing a favorable signal-to-noise ratio. The hi-fi soundscape is one in which discrete sounds can be heard clearly because of the low ambient noise level. The country is generating more hi-fi than the city; night more than day; ancient times more than modern. [. . .] In a lo-fi soundscape individual acoustic signals are obscured in an overdense population of sounds. The pellucid sound—a footstep in the snow, a church bell across the valley or an animal scurrying in the bush—is masked by broad-band noise. Perspective is lost. On a downtown street corner of the modern city there is no distance; there is only presence. There is cross-talk on all the channels, and in order for the most ordinary sounds to be heard they have to be increasingly amplified. (43)

Schafer agrees with the vast majority of listeners around the world that the noises introduced by the inventions of the industrial revolutions—in particular by the steam engine, the blast furnace, and later by the internal combustion engine used in cars, motorcycles, and generators—violate our aural sense. His judgment of the soundscape at the time of his writing is correspondingly harsh. This becomes obvious when he comments, for instance, on “the slop and spawn of the megalopolis” that “invite a multiplication of sonic jabberware” (216) or when he points out its “continuous sludge of traffic noise” (230). Such value judgments are hardly surprising, and as we read the works of naturalist authors caught in the midst of the second industrial revolution, we detect a similar dislike of technological noises. Ambrose Bierce’s definition of noise in *The Devil’s Dictionary* (1911) brings out this antipathy best: “Noise, *n.* A stench in the ear. Undomesticated music. The chief product and authenticating sign of civilization” (169). While many an antebellum observer still welcomed and admired “the hum of industry” (M. Smith 119–46), complaints about industrial noise became increasingly

frequent by the turn of the century. Around 1900, it seems, noise calls for domestication.

The fictional texts of the 1890s I am going to discuss in this chapter—Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900); Norris's *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco* (1899); Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893), and *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895)—all address the processes of industrialization and urbanization and register the changes wrought by them. The accelerated growth of industrial production after the Civil War, the expanded possibilities of communication, the rise of corporate capitalism and U.S. imperialism, the increasingly violent social conflicts, and the move of an unprecedented number of people from different regions and countries to the industrial cities of the North radically altered the ways many Americans lived their lives and perceived the world. Many of these changes had an important acoustic dimension. The increasingly powerful steam engines used in factory production, the radical expansion of the railway system (the westbound Central Pacific Railroad and the eastbound Union Pacific met at Promontory Summit in Utah in 1869, connecting the United States coast to coast for the first time), and the sudden copresence of different dialects and languages in the space of the city changed the sonic environment of a great number of Americans. At a historical moment in which sounds of all kinds had become technically reproducible, naturalist writers had to contend with a radically altered soundscape that threatened to exceed their powers of representation.

Dreiser evokes the enormous scope of industrial progress and the noises it brings with it in one of his descriptions of Chicago: "Its population was not so much thriving upon established commerce as upon the industries which prepared for the arrival of others. The sound of the hammer engaged upon the erection of new structures was everywhere heard. Great industries were moving in. The huge railroad corporations which had long before recognised the prospects of the place had seized upon vast tracts of land for transfer and shipping purposes" (*Sister Carrie* 16). By the time Norris wrote *McTeague* (1899), the noises of civilization had restored howling to the western wilderness. An acoustic onslaught of literally monstrous proportions tears apart the "vast silence" (423) of the Californian desert to which *McTeague* flees after he has killed his wife:

Here and there at long distances upon the cañon sides rose the headgear of a mine, surrounded with its few unpainted houses, and topped by its

never-failing feather of black smoke. On near approach one heard the prolonged thunder of the stamp-mill, the crusher, the insatiable monster, gnashing the rocks to powder with its long iron teeth, vomiting them out again in a thin stream of wet gray mud. Its enormous maw, fed day and night with the carboys' loads, gorged itself with gravel, and spat out the gold, grinding the rocks between its jaws, glutted, as it were, with the very entrails of the earth, and growling over its endless meal, like some savage animal, some legendary dragon, some fabulous beast, symbol of inordinate and monstrous gluttony. (380)

In Norris, monstrosity is as much a figure for the violent impact of industrial noise on listeners' ears as for the excessive demands acoustic modernity places on the old technology of writing.

With the advent of electricity in the second industrial revolution, a further, qualitatively different source of noise was added: "The Electric Revolution extended many of the themes of the Industrial Revolution and added some new effects of its own. Owing to the increased transmission speed of electricity, the flat-line effect was extended to give the pitched tone, thus harmonizing the world on center frequencies of 25 and 40, then 50 and 60 cycles per second" (Schafer, *Tuning* 88). Flat-line sounds are characteristic of machines and were already introduced in the first industrial revolution.² The motto of the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition, "Make Culture Hum!," therefore not only points to its obsequiousness (Homberger 152) but also indicates an acoustic transformation well underway. Examples of flat-line sounds are the clatter of the weaving machine, the drone of the generator, the "corundum burr in McTeague's [dental] engine humm[ing] in a prolonged monotone" (*McTeague* 21), or the "nightly whine" (74) of the streetlamps registered in Crane's "The Monster." Due to their repetitiveness and uniformity, such sounds are more redundant and predictable and therefore less informative than other sounds. Now, with the introduction of electricity, the acceleration of sound was added to the acceleration of life.

Authors writing at or near the turn of the century struggle to document the changes affecting their acoustic environment and often link their descriptions with an attentiveness to the processes of technological, scientific, and social change we have come to understand as urbanization and industrialization. Their texts remind us "that denser, urban populations are louder than less dense ones; that more ethnically diverse populations, by virtue of the

different sounds created by different tongues and accents, can sound more discordant than more homogenous populations; that steam power is louder and sounds qualitatively different from muscle power; that industrial-urban societies are characterized by increased decibel levels” (M. Smith 121). However, many, in fact most of the noises naturalist texts register do not originate in a technological source. The screaming of soldiers in *The Red Badge of Courage*, the noise in *Maggie’s* entertainment halls, or the barking of dogs in *McTeague* are all not produced by the machines of the industrial revolutions and seem to have little to do with the process of modernization. Yet both the noises characters make and those they perceive appear within and are partly shaped by an acoustic environment that has been drastically altered by the progress of modernity. If, for instance, we read that Carrie still has “the roll of cushioned carriages [. . .] in her ears” (*Sister Carrie* 166) when returning from a tour of the more prosperous neighborhoods, we should be aware that the very possibility of this aural experience cannot be taken for granted and is not available to all inhabitants of an urban industrial soundscape, fictional or not. Likewise, when Jimmie Johnson yells at pedestrians from the height of his “large rattling truck” (*Maggie* 14), he does so above the din of the city streets. In many cases, the representation of noise in naturalist texts gives us a clue as to the nature of a text’s comment on the acoustic as well as the social condition of American modernity.

Rather than reducing literary naturalism to a reflection or even a result of certain historical processes, I want to analyze the ways in which literary discourse and its acoustic worlds interact with, comment on, and become part of these processes. This entails a rejection of Kittler’s technological determinism as well as of his overly reductive view of literature as a mere storage medium. At the same time, it acknowledges the validity of his insistence that literature must be studied within the context of the discourse network(s) of its time. In doing this, I will be particularly interested in the different degrees to which the noises naturalist texts register are contained. While literature always tames noise since, “In order to store the sound sequences of speech, literature has to arrest them in the system of twenty-six letters and thereby exclude noise sequences from the beginning” (Kittler, *Literature* 34–35), some literary texts contain the noises they represent more forcefully and, in some cases, more violently than others. Strategies of containment can often be deduced from the ways in which authors negotiate between different social worlds and the characters inhabiting these worlds. Both characters and

narrators may comment on viewpoints and voices different from their own and thus provide a reader guidance that does the work of containment for diverging viewpoints. In other cases, as in Crane, the noises of industrialization, war, social discontent, or the problems involved in the representation of noise itself may thwart all attempts at containment and infiltrate the formal organization of narratives in ways that anticipate a modernist aesthetics of noise.³ In any case, the complex relationships between the literary representation of noise on the one hand and the cultural production of noise by literature on the other deserve careful scrutiny if we seek to avoid simplistic generalizations about the politics of specific literary works.

Before we immerse ourselves further in questions concerning the politics of naturalist representation, one more observation is in order. The perception of noise is a highly subjective phenomenon; one man's music is another man's noise. This is already implied in the commonplace definition of noise as "unwanted sound" (Truax 1984, 86). Different people perceive the same noise differently. The way we experience noise is not only contingent on its frequency of oscillation (experienced by the listener as pitch) and intensity (experienced by the listener as volume) but also on the information it contains about its source (we may tolerate the noises produced by some but not by others),⁴ on the constitution of our hearing apparatus, on our momentary emotional and corporeal disposition, on the degree of our previous exposure to environmental noise, and on a number of other factors affecting our physiological and psychological makeup.⁵

Soundscapes of the Soul

Naturalist authors are well aware of the psychological dimension of aural perception and use literary characters' perceptions of noise to give us indications as to their states of mind. In one passage of Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, for instance, even the violently loud noises of war appear as nothing but music to an elated Henry believing his regiment to be close to victory: "In his ears, he heard the ring of victory. He knew the frenzy of a rapid successful charge. The music of the trampling feet, the sharp voices, the clanking arms of the column near him made him soar on the red wings of war. For a few moments he was sublime" (124). In *McTeague*, Frank Norris likewise uses his title character's perception of noise as a key to what goes on in his mind. One of the ways in which Norris indicates McTeague's continuing unrest is by portraying his alertness to the noises of the city. Even as McTeague's

immense anger at Marcus Schouler seems gone the minute he receives his longed-for giant gold molar, his unusual attentiveness to the nocturnal soundscape of the city suggests that his anger continues to brood not very far below the surface:

But he was restless during the night. Every now and then he was awakened by noises to which he had long since become accustomed. Now it was the cackling of the geese in the deserted market across the street; now it was the stoppage of the cable, the sudden silence coming almost like a shock; and now it was the infuriated barking of the dogs in the back yard—Alec, the Irish setter, and the collie that belonged to the branch post-office raging at each other through the fence, snarling their endless hatred unto each other's faces. (150)

Intermingled with the other noises of the night, the barking dogs function not solely as projections of McTeague's agitated mind and bestial nature; the mere fact of their perception by McTeague at this stage in the narrative indicates unfinished business and prepares the reader for the eruption of violence when McTeague breaks Marcus's arm with "a sharp snap" that sounds "almost like the report of a pistol" (235) three chapters later (in chapter 11, where the "two dogs," who "hate each other just like humans" [216], make another appearance).

Norris's repeated descriptions of the barking dogs are admittedly not the most subtle prefigurations of the deadly hatred building up not only between him and Marcus but also between him and Trina. Dreiser's portrayal of his characters' changing perceptions of noise in *Sister Carrie* provides a subtler guide to their inner lives. As Hurstwood becomes increasingly estranged from his wife, the very sound of her voice rings dissonantly in his ears: "When in the flush of such feelings [about Carrie] he heard his wife's voice, when the insistent demands of matrimony recalled him from dreams to a stale practice, how it grated" (140). But when he waits for Carrie in a "pretty little park," music is in the air: "In the thickness of the shiny green leaves of the trees hopped and twittered the busy sparrows. [. . .] He heard the carts go lumbering by upon the neighboring streets, but they were far off and only buzzed upon his ear. The hum of the surrounding city was faint; the clang of an occasional bell was as music. He looked and dreamed a new dream of pleasure which concerned his present fixed conditions not at all" (146–47). When, in a parallel scene in the park, Carrie refuses to meet him

because she has found out that he is married, when he fears his infidelity will be disclosed to his business associates, and when his wife has begun to make monetary demands, Hurstwood no longer perceives the music of the city but only the discordant sounds of “Trucks and vans [. . .] rattling in a noisy line” (236). Carrie herself goes through similar changes in her perception of the acoustic environment. Upon her arrival in Chicago, “the sound of the little bells upon the horse cars” is still “as pleasing as it was strange and novel” (12). But when she is plagued by the “urgent voice” (91) of her conscience, the mysterious noises of the wind exert their powerful influence on her imagination, and she becomes “fearful of the whistling wind” (90).⁶ Later, when the manager of the Casino promises her a place in the chorus line and the prospect of a theater career draws nearer, Carrie again experiences urban noise as a charming sound: “Already the hard rumble of the city through the open window seemed pleasant” (388).

The barking dogs in Norris, the noise of war in Crane, and the singing birds in Dreiser all function as acoustic analogues of the “landscapes of the soul” evoked by earlier authors and discussed by critics since the eighteenth century.⁷ And indeed, psychologization is one of the ways in which naturalist writers strive to make sense of and contain the senseless noise of their historical moment. Yet there are two important differences. First, the critical use of the term *landscape of the soul* has come to acquire strongly religious connotations. This is evident, for instance, in Ernest Fontana’s discussion of references to Dante in Walter Pater’s work: “The allusions to Dante’s great poem [*Divina Commedia*] continued to provide Pater with the outlines of a spiritual topography, inspiring his own attempts to imagine, in a belated age of ‘second thoughts,’ the inner landscape of the soul” (31). This is also borne out by more popular uses of the term; one need only enter *landscape of the soul* on a good World Wide Web search engine to find out.

Second, naturalist texts betray a greater awareness than earlier writing of the degree to which the subjectivity of characters’ perceptions is conditioned by social facts. This social dimension, in which I am particularly interested, is almost entirely absent from the uses to which *landscape of the soul* has been put in critical discussions. If we take a second look at the examples discussed above, we find that noises begin to grind in Hurstwood’s ears at a moment when he not only feels estranged from his wife and abandoned by Carrie but when his future prosperity begins to be seriously endangered as he is reminded to his dismay that there is a crucially important monetary di-

mension to his relationship with Mrs. Hurstwood, who has all their property in her name. Moreover, his wife could easily end Hurstwood's career by informing his employers of her husband's infidelity. In Montreal, Hurstwood is deeply worried about the consequences of his theft and subsequent flight from Chicago, but he still speculates he might be restored to his post upon returning the money, and he is still able to afford a room in a hotel he knows from earlier visits. For a short time, his ears are again attuned to the music in the air and the song of the birds—which is, incidentally, the sound listeners all over the world have consistently identified as the most pleasant sound of their acoustic environment (Schafer, *Tuning* 29).⁸ But along with Hurstwood's optimism, his receptiveness to pleasing sounds quickly vanishes as he is forced to move to a smaller flat (in *Sister Carrie*, the indicator of social decline par excellence) and is shortly after dealt a decisive blow when he has to shut down the saloon, his only source of income. To Hurstwood's mind, the air is no longer filled with birdsong, but with the noises of a thunderstorm. As his downfall is contrasted with Carrie's rise to fame, so are the two characters' perceptions of noise. Hurstwood's loss of his job is paralleled by Carrie's employment by the theater. Separated from Hurstwood by then, the news of her engagement in the chorus is music to her ears and immediately changes her perception of the city noise, whose "clang and clatter" (209) Hurstwood missed when, in Montreal, he was still in a position comfortable enough to do so. As Dreiser puts it in a different context, for Carrie "things were now going socially with a hum" (152).

Dreiser emphasizes the relationship between Carrie's auditory perceptions and her unrelenting social aspirations throughout the novel. In an earlier passage, Carrie is moved by the sound of music:

The constant drag to something better was not to be denied. By those things which address the heart was she steadily recalled. [. . .] Now Carrie was affected by music. Her nervous composition responded to certain strains, much as certain strings of a harp vibrate when a corresponding key of a piano is struck. She was not delicately moulded in sentiment, and yet there was enough in her of what is commonly known as feeling to cause her to answer with vague ruminations to certain wistful chords. (102–3)

As Dreiser makes clear, it is less the beauty of music that moves Carrie to tears (as we learn a little later) than her immediate association of piano mu-

sic with a life better than her own. The scene occurs after Drouet has shown Carrie around the houses of the rich, thereby further kindling her desire for material wealth. Dreiser's qualification of Carrie's response to the music as arising from "*what is commonly known as feeling*" (my emphasis) indicates that her response is somehow tainted by this desire. The next two sentences make this clear: "[The chords] awoke longings for those things which she did not have. They caused her to cling closer to things she possessed" (103). To put this in Pierre Bourdieu's (*Language; Outline*) terms, Carrie does not merely recognize the value of piano music as cultural capital but entirely reduces artistry to its economic dimension: "For Carrie, the melody and the light created a halo about nice clothes, showy manners, sparkling rings. It lent an ineffable claim to the world of material display" (105).⁹

In Dreiser's political economy of sound, it is music that keeps the noise of the factory and the street at bay. While Dreiser critiques Carrie's participation in that economy, his own text cannot fully extricate itself from it. Dreiser's soundscapes of the soul do not inject noise into the discourse network of 1900. Instead, they serve to tame the noise of modernity by integrating it into a literary-psychological framework of sense-making whose roots lie in the eighteenth century. Dreiser's acoustic imagination very clearly belongs to a different century than that of the futurist writers and musicians who began to glorify noise and elevate it to a compositional principle only ten years after *Sister Carrie* was published.

Social Soundscapes

Upon entering the underclass hell of Crane's *Maggie*, the reader encounters a radically different acoustic panorama than the one laid out in *Sister Carrie*. Naturalist fiction is keenly aware of the fact that not everyone was equally affected by the noises of modernity, and Crane is particularly alert to the differences. As we move back in time from Dreiser to Crane, piano music gives way to a brutalistic proletarian soundscape. *Maggie* already begins with an uproar. As little Jimmie throws stones at the Devil's Row children and defies an ally's warning words with "a valiant roar," the infuriated crowd ejects "Howls of renewed wrath" and "curse[s] in shrill chorus." The clamor continues with the little boys "swearing in barbaric treble" (3) until a stone hits Jimmie's mouth, which causes his "roaring curses" to change to "a blasphemous chatter" (4). As Jimmie is silenced, the crowd rejoices: "In the yells of the whirling mob of Devil's Row children there were notes of joy like songs

of triumphant savagery" (4). The crowd falls upon defeated Jimmie, who is now reduced to "the shrieking and tearful child from Rum Alley" (4). As readers enter the world of Crane's *Maggie*, they enter an oppressively dense web of screaming, cursing, groaning, and wailing. Jimmie is finally dragged home by his father, where a mad, drunken mother screams at and abuses the rest of the family. Home grants reprieve from neither the violence nor the noise. As Jimmie flees from his mother's rage to an elderly neighbor, they can still hear its force—through the thin walls of the tenement building and intermingled with the other noises of the night—weighing down on Maggie and the infant Tommie:

Jimmie and the old woman listened long in the hall. Above the muffled roar of conversation, the dismal wailings of babies at night, the thumping of feet in unseen corridors and rooms, mingled with the sound of varied hoarse shoutings in the street and the rattling of wheels over cobbles, they heard the screams of the child and the roars of the mother die away to a feeble moaning and a subdued muttering. (10)

Much of the oppressiveness of Maggie's mother's weeping and yelling derives from its constant presence. In Schafer's terms, Mary Johnson's fierce noises no longer possess the quality of discrete, isolated sound signals; they have become keynote sounds of Maggie's existence.¹⁰ *Maggie* documents how violently discordant sounds become pathogenic once they acquire the permanence of keynote sounds. Maggie never escapes the noise; there is no silent sanctuary, no hiding place from it in the Bowery of Crane's New York. When she is not exposed to her mother's senseless rage, her constant "raving" (26), "cursing trebles" (29), and "maddened whirl of oaths" (33), she works at the shirt factory, where another "whirl of noises and odors" (26) awaits her. The "turmoil and tumble of down-town streets" (14) and the "rattling avenues" (53) of the Bowery present the same dissonance to Maggie's ears. She remains trapped in the acoustic hell of one of the poorest and noisiest parts of an American metropolis that finds itself at the forefront of industrialization. Rather than containing that noise, as Dreiser does, Crane lets it sound throughout his narrative.

Maggie exemplifies that divisions along the lines of social class not only distinguish one author's acoustic world from another's but also separate the acoustic worlds of individual texts into different soundscapes. In this respect, Crane's acoustic sensorium is more finely tuned than that of early

soundscape studies. Since Schafer draws much of his information about past soundscapes from literary sources, his reticence about interrogating the links between social class and exposure to noise is especially surprising. This absence becomes particularly conspicuous when he quotes a passage from Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854), a novel that to all intents and purposes cries out for a reading along the line of social class:

Stephen bent over his loom, quiet, watchful, and steady. A special contrast, as every man was in the forest of looms where Stephen worked, to the crashing, smashing, tearing pieces of mechanism at which he laboured. (*Hard Times* 69; qtd. in Schafer, *Tuning* 75)

Yet Schafer only notes the text's awareness of the obnoxiousness of machine noises. His valuable and often ear-opening account of some of the atrocities of the modern urban acoustic environment would have benefited from a greater awareness of social divisions within the urban soundscape.¹¹

Bruce Smith attempts to fill this gap in his more recent study, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England* (1999). Intent on investigating the "political geography of sound" of Elizabethan England, Smith provides a welter of examples for acoustic divisions with clear sociopolitical implications. Contrasting the account given by Robert Langham, an aural witness, with the official account given in *The Princely Pleasures at the Court at Kenilworth* (1576) of the Queen's presence at court in July 1575, Smith discusses the striking differences between the perceived acoustic qualities of the royal amusements inside Kenilworth Castle and the noises of dancing, singing, and drinking produced by the inhabitants of Warwickshire outside the castle's walls in celebration of the Queen:

The contrast is eloquent. Within the [queen's] hall, there was delectable dancing indeed. Without, an unruly throng. Within the hall, there was music; without, sounds that were heard, so Langham implies, as noise. Through what it includes and what it excludes, *The Princely Pleasures at the Court at Kenilworth* inscribes a political geography of sound. (34)

Naturalist writers recognize similar divisions. The naturalist city is not a unified whole but a space in which different kinds and intensities of noise are produced and heard in different places. Thus, the naturalist city and its soundscapes become, in Amy Kaplan's words, "a spatial metonymy for the elusive process of social change" (44). For instance, when Maggie, aban-

done by Pete and denied by her family, resorts to prostitution toward the end of the narrative, she knows she will not find her customers among the affluent and hurries by their theaters. Some of the theaters are just closing, releasing a noisy crowd into the streets:

Upon a wet evening, several months after the last chapter, two interminable rows of cars, pulled by slipping horses, jangled along a prominent side-street. A dozen cabs, with coat-enshrouded drivers, clattered to and fro. Electric lights, whirring softly, shed a blurred radiance. [...] People having been comparatively silent for two hours burst into a roar of conversation, their hearts still kindling from the glowings of the stage. (54)

In a move that is reminiscent of Langham's description referred to above, Crane divides fictional space into a silent inside and a noisy outside, and it is clear that Maggie has never gained and never will gain access to the inside.¹² The very contrast outlined here has been absent from Maggie's own noisy world all along. Now, walking the streets as a "girl of the painted cohorts of the city" (54), her auditory sensorium registers a mere glimpse of the inside: "A concert hall gave to the street faint sounds of swift machinelike music, as if a group of phantom musicians were hastening" (55). As Maggie hastens by the cheerful crowd and turns "into darker blocks than those where the crowd travelled" (55), she enters a soundscape devoid of the more pleasant sounds she has just heard. Maggie and the reader are back in the drunken, noisy atmosphere of destitution: "A drunken man, reeling in her pathway, began to roar at her. 'I ain' ga no money, dammit,' he shouted, in a dismal voice" (55). In this environment, the subdued sounds of the theaters again give way to the loud noises of the saloons that are patronized by Maggie's potential customers: "In front of one of these places, whence came the sound of a violin vigorously scraped, the patter of feet on boards and the ring of loud laughter, there stood a man with blotched features" (55-56).

While *Maggie* ultimately focuses more on the noises of domestic violence than on those arising from the city streets or factory machines, it draws a compelling panorama of the industrial urban ghetto as the ultimate lo-fi soundscape, an acoustic environment that not only alienates and isolates people from one another but also forces them to raise their voice so as to be heard above the clatter of the streets and the factory drone.¹³ Crane's narrator continues to expose the ludicrousness of not only Maggie's boundless

admiration for the obtuse Pete but also her “dim thoughts” about “far away lands where, as God says, the little hills sing together in the morning” (19).

The places she actually does escape to together with Pete, the entertainment halls, are among the loudest spaces in Crane’s acoustic world. Maggie’s initial acoustic impressions on their first visit to one of these halls are pleasant enough. Maggie registers nothing but “a low rumble of conversation and a subdued clinking of glasses” (22) and correspondingly feels transported into a world of “high-class customs” (23). Her blatant misapprehension of the situation is not perturbed when “half tipsy men near the stage joined in the [female singer’s] rollicking refrain and glasses were pounded rhythmically upon the tables” (23). The boisterous entertainment is a welcome diversion that helps her forget for a moment the misery of her existence: “She drew deep breaths of pleasure. No thoughts of the atmosphere of the collar and cuff factory came to her” (25). While Maggie’s simplicity and gratefulness for everything Pete has to offer largely prevent her from perceiving either the continuities in the acoustic environment of the halls and that of the factory or the decrepitude of the spectacle Pete exposes her to, Crane’s dissonant narrator makes sure the reader notices it. In some passages, Crane’s attempts to indicate the narrator’s ironic distance to Maggie’s perceptions are overdone: “[Pete] could appear to strut even while sitting still and he showed that he was a lion of lordly characteristics by the air with which he spat” (40). Crane is subtler in other passages. In his description of a melodrama performance, the narrator conveys both his sympathy for the audience’s empathic response to characters who share its plight and a sense of the inappropriateness of that response, whose vocal partisanship jeopardizes the unfolding of even the most simple plot as it drowns out the villains’ speeches:

The loud gallery was overwhelmingly with the unfortunate and the oppressed. They encouraged the struggling hero with cries, and jeered the villain, hooting and calling attention to his whiskers. [. . .] In the hero’s erratic march from poverty in the first act, to wealth and triumph in the final one, in which he forgives all the enemies that he has left, he was assisted by the gallery, which applauded his generous and noble sentiments and confounded the speeches of his opponents by making irrelevant but very sharp remarks. (27–28)

As the narrative progresses, Pete takes Maggie to increasingly louder and cheaper places. Crane conveys much of the rawness of the spectacle catered

to the poor by the noises of the audience. At a later performance, we again encounter the crowd of “men seated at the tables near the front applaud[ing] loudly, pounding the polished wood with their beer glasses” (39). But now their clamor rises to a “deafening rumble of glasses and clapping of hands” (39) as the female ballad singer disposes of another layer of clothing. Just as Hurstwood’s downfall is documented by his move to ever-shabbier apartments, so is Maggie’s by the progression of ever-dingier halls. To Crane’s discerning ears, not much has changed since the first industrial revolution in the second half of the eighteenth century, when “Workers lived in squalid quarters near the factories, cut off from the countryside, with almost no recreational facilities except the public houses; and these, if we accept the evidence of numerous earwitnesses, became centers of much greater noise and rowdiness during the eighteenth century than before” (Schafer, *Tuning* 72).¹⁴ At the end of the line, we find Pete and Maggie in the midst of a cacophony of poor music, drunken laughter, and shouted oaths:¹⁵

In a hilarious hall there were twenty-eight tables and twenty-eight women and a crowd of smoking men. Valiant noise was made on stage at the end of the hall by an orchestra composed of men who looked as if they had just happened in. Soiled waiters ran to and fro, swooping down like hawks on the unwary in the throng; clattering along the aisles with trays covered with glasses [...]. The usual smoke cloud was present, but so dense that heads and arms seemed entangled in it. The rumble of conversation was replaced by a roar. Plenteous oaths heaved through the air. The room rang with the shrill voices of women bubbling o'er with drink-laughter. The chief element in the music was speed. The musicians played in intent fury. A woman was singing and smiling upon the stage, but no one took notice of her. The rate at which the piano, cornet and violins were going, seemed to impart wildness to the half-drunken crowd. Beer glasses were emptied at a gulp and conversation became a rapid chatter. (44)

It is with these deafening noises in the background that Pete finally abandons Maggie for another girl and leaves her to the miserable existence of a “fallen woman,” despised by all and rejected by her own family. If literature is, as Kittler insists, one of the “technologies and institutions that allow a given culture to transmit, store and process relevant data” (*Aufschreibesysteme* 519; my translation), Crane’s text stores precisely the data that threatens to exceed

the powers of literary representation in the age of the phonograph. In this, *Maggie* heralds the emergence of a new aesthetics of noise, an aesthetics that Crane would, however, fully implement only in *The Red Badge of Courage*.

In *Maggie*, the noise of the streets and the factory and the endless fracas of the Johnson household are carried directly over into the dreary halls. Entertainment may provide temporary relief for Maggie's troubled mind but grants no reprieve to her ears. Hardly any silent sanctuaries exist in Crane's fictional universe. And if they do, toward the end of the text, Maggie is not granted access. It might be argued that, in the world of entertainment, noise is an essential component and sometimes even one of the chief sources of attraction. We can already see something of this in *Maggie*, where Crane's representation of the clamor produced by both the performers and the audience not only serves to indicate the shabbiness of the spectacle on offer but also helps explain some of its allure. As George explains his reason for going to the pub in Donald Howarth's *A Lily in Little India* (1966): "It's not beer I go for. [...] I go for the noise" (39).¹⁶ However, a comparison of the fictional worlds of entertainment in *Maggie* and *Sister Carrie* will serve to reinforce the idea that different types of entertainment with different acoustics are associated with different social classes.

In Dreiser, Carrie's plans to attend the performance of a melodrama shortly after her arrival in Chicago meet with Sven Hanson's stern censure because they do not accord with the austerity of his working-class outlook on life. For the Hansons, theater is a frivolity indulged in by the rich. Their disapproval initiates a narrative dynamic in which Carrie's fascination with the world of entertainment is firmly inscribed by her social aspirations. Accordingly, we find Carrie and Drouet at an opera performance whose "color and grace [catches] her eye" (77) soon after Carrie has left the narrowness of the Hanson household for Drouet's apartment and money. While the halls of Crane's *Maggie* are part of the economy of want that Maggie is caught in, the world of entertainment in *Sister Carrie* is, like the piano music that moves her to tears, associated with the economy of prosperity and success Carrie strives to enter. Had *Maggie* not been written before *Sister Carrie*, Maggie's descent into progressively poorer halls could be read as a parodic inversion of Carrie's rise to fame on the stage.

Drouet tragically misrecognizes this nexus between entertainment and social mobility when he provides Carrie with her first part in a play organized by the Black Elk Lodge. Anxious to please his social superiors, Drouet's

promise to come up with an actress for the play fuels Carrie's ambitions and accelerates her estrangement from him rather than advancing his own career: "The independence of success now made its first faint showing" (193). Appropriately, several of the scenes that document their growing alienation occur within the context of theatrical performances. The irony involved in Drouet's judgment of a cuckolded character in a play he attends together with Carrie and Hurstwood is not lost on the latter two, whose affair has been going on for some time. Says Drouet, "Served him right [...] a man ought to be more attentive than that to his wife if he wants to keep her" (139). In a later scene, Drouet's lack of support for Carrie's first performance compares badly with Hurstwood's enthusiasm: "She felt his indifference keenly and longed to see Hurstwood. It was as if he were now the only friend she had on earth" (171). To Carrie, Hurstwood's worth is measurable in several ways, and as she gains access to the world of theater, she not only gains access to Hurstwood's heart but also accumulates some of the cultural capital she needs to become more truly worthy of Hurstwood's social sphere, of the "merchants and well-positioned individuals" (173) that make up the play's audience. Theater, in short, becomes associated with the possibility of a more prosperous lifestyle. This pattern repeats itself later in the narrative when Carrie leaves a rapidly deteriorating Hurstwood behind to pursue her (highly successful) theater career. In New York, the stage becomes for Carrie what she always wanted it to be: "a door through which she might enter that gilded state which she ha[s] so much craved" (377). The theater's "atmosphere of carriages, flowers, refinement" (177) has been exerting its mighty spell on Carrie ever since the night of her first performance, where it was reflected in and reinforced by an acoustic ambience that is far removed from the drunken roar of Crane's halls: "It was thus that the little theatre resounded to a babble of successful voices, the creak of fine clothes, the commonplace of good nature" (180). The performance begins with a "soft curtain-raising strain" (180-81) that quickly reduces the spectators' talk to "a whisper" (181). Along with the other members of the audience, Drouet "[holds] out silently" (182) when the play starts off disastrously. In stark contrast to the rising crescendo of noises in Crane's halls, the play's acoustics become even more subdued as the melodrama unfolds and the actors' performances improve. Carrie's "quality of voice and manner" now begin to resemble "a pathetic strain of music" (189) until they are in "harmony with the plaintive melody [...] issuing from the orchestra" (192). In Dreiser's acoustic world, music functions as

what Jacques Attali calls representation, that is, an “attempt to make people believe in a consensual representation of the world” that “stamp[s] upon the spectator the faith that there is a harmony in order” (46).

As many critics of the novel have noted, there is a constant tension in *Sister Carrie* between the sentimental language Carrie’s longings are framed in and the realistic portrayal of social conditions in the narration of Hurstwood’s downfall. Amy Kaplan (140–60) neither agrees with commentators like Donald Pizer (*Novels*) or Daryl Dance—who tend to regard the novel’s sentimental streak as an infelicitous or parodically undermined aberration from a more serious realist project—nor does she join a more recent critic like Walter Benn Michaels, who stresses the novel’s sentimentalism and maintains that “Realism in *Sister Carrie* is the literature only of exhausted desire and economic failure” (46). Instead, Kaplan argues that “the critical opposition associating sentimentalism with consumption and desire, and realism with work and deprivation, is already generated by the narrative strategies of *Sister Carrie*, as a way of managing the contradictions of a burgeoning consumer society” (143). Kaplan notes how the novel’s sentimentalism is firmly inscribed by consumerist ideology and embarks on an investigation of the text’s “sentimental language of consumption” (146). We have already encountered this language when Carrie weeps as the piano music reminds her of the things she does not possess, when the old-fashioned term *worthy* Carrie uses for Hurstwood acquires financial connotations, or when the melancholic melodies of melodrama imbue the theatrical spectacle with an atmosphere of prosperity. Carrie’s relationships with both Drouet and Hurstwood become vehicles for the (illusory) satisfaction of her sentimental desires for consumption. When Kaplan mentions that Drouet “recasts the melodramatic role of seducer in the appropriate form of the traveling salesman” (145), we may add that Carrie lets herself be bought by Drouet’s money in order to escape the drab Hanson household only to be sold again by him as he asks her to perform for the Elk Lodge. By this time, long before the text makes this clear, Carrie herself has become an investment: “She was capital” (447). For Carrie, the economy of consumerist desire runs smoothly, without causing much unnecessary disturbance. As if to emphasize that fact, the text even registers the noiselessness of Drouet’s money: “There were some loose bills in his vest pocket—greenbacks. They were soft and noiseless and he got his fingers about them and crumpled them up in his hand” (61).

Kaplan goes on to note that the desire for social change *Sister Carrie* registers almost exhausts itself in the desire to acquire more goods:

Although desire in *Sister Carrie* propels constant motion, it also becomes a substitute for actively changing either the social order or the individuals within it. This form of desire contributes to the paradoxical sense of stasis in the text at the times of greatest motion; Carrie is constantly on the move up the social scale—from one city, one man, one job to the next—yet she always seems to end up in the same place, as the final scene suggests: rocking, and dreaming, and longing for more. In *Sister Carrie*, the desire for social change is channeled into the desire for novelty, the desire to construct a social reality in which change most often yields to more of the same. (149)¹⁷

To my mind, Kaplan's discernment of a "paradoxical sense of stasis" at the center of a novel whose title character keeps yearning for more captures the prevalent mood of the novel better than Walter Benn Michaels's claim that *Sister Carrie* endorses a capitalist economy of excess and insatiable desire that associates the satisfaction of desire and the possibility of equilibrium with "incipient failure, decay, and finally death" (42).¹⁸ The crucial difference between Kaplan and Michaels is that the former identifies stasis as the paradoxical consequence of Carrie's desire to change by improving her social status, whereas the latter tends to regard desire in capitalism and social stasis as diametrically opposed principles. As a result, Kaplan's reading manages to retain a much stronger sense of the contradictions within *Sister Carrie*'s capitalist economy.

In Michaels's reading, the ideal of equilibrium is based on a precapitalist "economy of scarcity, in which power, happiness and moral virtue are all seen to depend finally on minimizing desire" (35). This ideal, ambivalently represented in the novel by Ames, is mercilessly swept away by capitalism's logic of desire and excess. Hurstwood's downfall and death are precipitated by his failure to adapt quickly enough to the new logic: "Dreiser associates Hurstwood's decline, conventionally enough, with what he calls a 'lack of power' [222], but this lack of power is not a function of Hurstwood's inability to get what he wants, it is a function of his inability to want badly enough" (Michaels 43). Hurstwood's advice to Carrie to "Stick to what you have" (222) belongs to the world of bygone days.

Michaels's equation of equilibrium and death unwittingly points to a reading in line with scientific models available at the time of Dreiser's writing. In nineteenth-century thermodynamics, equilibrium is the condition a closed system finds itself in when all its energy has been converted into heat. Equilibrium is the state of maximum entropy at which the system has come to a total standstill. In *The Education of Henry Adams*, Dreiser's older contemporary Henry Adams, drawing on Hermann von Helmholtz's idea of the "heat death" (Freese 99–105), envisioned the universe as a closed system that is subject to this rapid and total dissipation of energy. Yet in Henry Adams's grim vision of the end of the world, the state of equilibrium represented by the heat death is not an alternative to the unrelenting pressing forward of industry and capital. It is its very own end point. A "thermodynamic" reading of *Sister Carrie* would therefore stress that the sense of stasis both Kaplan and Michaels detect in *Sister Carrie* works toward exposing the threat of stasis within capitalism rather than pointing toward an outdated mode of precapitalist existence. Michaels himself acknowledges this fear at the heart of capitalism when he mentions "the early-nineteenth-century economists' fear of a 'stationary state' and the early-twentieth-century Marxist critique of imperialism, what Lenin was to call in 1916 'the highest stage of capitalism' (by which he meant the last stage)" (49–50). Yet Michaels believes this fear is largely exorcised in *Sister Carrie*. Contrary to Michaels and more in line with Kaplan, I would argue that Dreiser's association of equilibrium with death testifies to the prevalence of the threat of terminal stasis rather than assigning it, along with Hurstwood, to the dustbins of history.

Once we focus on equilibrium as a potential end point of the progress of capitalism, the question arises, what keeps the system from running down to a final stasis? The answer systems theory would provide is, of course, noise (in the sense of a perturbation of systemic and communicational processes). And indeed, the sense of social stasis at the heart of the novel is disturbed when a desperate Hurstwood decides to become a strikebreaker and thereby gets involved in the struggle over social conditions. The noises of social discontent erupt as the strikers yell insults at Hurstwood while the policemen who protect him reply in kind. The level of noise increases as the situation aggravates:

Now the stones were off as Hurstwood took his place again amid a continued chorus of epithets. Both officers got up beside him, and the

conductor rang the bell, when bang! bang! through window and door came rocks and stones. One narrowly grazed Hurstwood's head. Another shattered the window behind him. (424)

Hurstwood eventually gets dragged off the car, beaten, and shot at. As a result, Hurstwood decides to abandon his short-lived stint as a scab. It is with respect to the incidents surrounding the strike that my own reading departs most decidedly from both Michaels's and Kaplan's. Kaplan reasons that because the strike fails to have an effect on the principal characters' thoughts and actions (Hurstwood continues his fall into oblivion while Carrie's rise to fame proceeds uninterrupted), it is contained. Contrary to Kaplan, I would argue that it is precisely Carrie's obliviousness to the events and Hurstwood's total lack of understanding that allow social conflict to surface as the disturbance of the principal characters' value systems (if not of the characters themselves) it really represents. Hurstwood's ignorance exceeds that of the policeman, whose reflections on the role of the police in the strike reveal that "Of its true social significance, he never once dreamed. His was not the mind for that" (413).¹⁹ As the text makes clear, the policemen at least have some prior experience with strikes: "They had been in strikes before" (413). When Hurstwood returns from his involvement in the strike, wounded and exhausted, he washes, sits down in the rocking chair, and reads the news about the strike without wasting another thought about his role in it. In my reading, Hurstwood's incomprehension works against and not in favor of narrative containment. With his sentimental rhetoric deeply compromised by the novel's association of sentimental language with consumerist desire, not even the narrator's one moralizing comment about the strikers ("It was the hissing and jeering mob of Christ's time" [427]) can contain the noisiness of the strike.

In *Sister Carrie*, there is no authoritative narrative voice or character to tell readers how to interpret the strike. It is in the very absence of narrative reintegration that the contradictions of capitalist consumer culture emerge with raw, unmediated force. In the strike scene, *Sister Carrie* stages a breakdown of realist-naturalist literary form in the face of the conflicts and noises of modernity it seeks to contain. In this scene, then, *Sister Carrie* anticipates or at least gestures toward a modernist aesthetics of noise. My reading therefore differs not only from Kaplan's and Michaels's but also from a reading along the order-from-noise principle as postulated by systems theory. The

lack of mediation that characterizes Dreiser's portrayal of the strike's noise prevents its reabsorption into the ideological system of consumer capitalism. Social conflict is, in other words, not the noise that rejuvenates the system and keeps it from running down. Like the threat of stasis, the threat of social disturbance acts as a reminder of unresolved tensions at the heart of both the capitalist system and literary strategies of representation that strive to make that threat manageable.

Acoustic Violence

Nevertheless, it remains true that, in *Sister Carrie*, violent social conflict is confined to one episode. In *Maggie*, it enters the domestic sphere and remains at the very center of the narrative. This is reflected in and reinforced by a fictional soundscape that is largely devoid of the more harmonious sounds of Dreiser's world of entertainment. In *Maggie* and several other naturalist texts, the sheer magnitude of noise has a detrimental effect on characters' minds and bodies as noise becomes part of the violence of their daily lives. These texts explore in much greater detail than Dreiser's the social and acoustic dissonances of a rapidly changing world. Some of the more violent noises represented in them have their source in industrial machines; others emerge from and make themselves heard against the background of the chaos and the din of the industrial age. Both Crane and Norris attribute a menacing, oppressive force to noise. In Norris's *McTeague*, for instance, both the monstrous thunder of the stamp-mill and the constant noises of the collie and the setter barking at each other "in a frenzy of hate" (*McTeague* 124) assume a decidedly ferocious quality.

Violent noises of a different kind enter the relationship between McTeague and Trina as his drunken shouting drowns out and stops her sobbing: "stop that noise. Stop it, do you hear me? Stop it.' He threw up his open hand threateningly. 'Stop!' he exclaimed" (300). Trina's vocal expression of grief is silenced as McTeague's ferocious bass conquers all available acoustic space. We may take this quite literally since, as Schafer points out, "The definition of space by acoustic means is much more ancient than the establishment of property lines and fences" (*Tuning* 33). The parish is a good example of such an acoustic space, defined by the range within which the church bells can be heard.²⁰ In industrial America, the noises of machines testify to their

cultural centrality as they increase in number and intensity, conquering the acoustic space of modernity.²¹ These noises are reproduced in McTeague's acts of violence. As he beats Trina senseless, we are reminded of the noise of the stamp-mill: "In the schoolroom outside, behind the coal scuttle, the cat listened to the sounds of stamping and struggling and the muffled noise of blows, wildly terrified, his eyes bulging like brass knobs" (375). Trina finally dies "with a rapid series of hiccoughs that soun[d] like a piece of clockwork running down," sounds the cat reproduces after Trina's death: "At times he would draw back and make a strange little clacking noise down in his throat" (378). McTeague, about whom it is said that "One might as well stop a locomotive. [. . .] The man is made of iron" (146), is the human equivalent and product of the industrial age.

The more commonly identified subtext of McTeague's ferociousness is of course genetic determinism. The novel abounds in references to dark hereditary traits beyond McTeague's control. The following passage is a case in point:

Below the fine fabric of all that was good in him ran the foul stream of hereditary evil, like a sewer. The vices and sins of his father and of his father's father, to the third and fourth and five hundredth generation, tainted him. The evil of an entire race flowed in his veins. Why should it be? He did not desire it. Was he to blame? (32)

But the discourses of industrialization and determinism are not as far apart as one might initially think. June Howard (1985) makes a compelling argument for their intimate relatedness. In their suggestion that the brute does not lurk far below the surface of the man, naturalist narratives evoke not only the specter of biological determinism and with it the fear of regressing to an earlier evolutionary stage but also the threat of a descent into the lower reaches of the social hierarchy:

We may call the "persistent fancy," the obsessive fear that haunts naturalism, by the scandalous name of *proletarianization*. It is an anxiety traditionally associated with although certainly not limited to the petty bourgeoisie who, possessing small capitals or professional skills, passionately defend their narrow footholds of economic security. [. . .] the privileges of autonomy, awareness, control that characters and

narrators struggle so desperately to establish and maintain are deeply marked as class privileges, and loss of those privileges is figured as the destruction of intellect, humanity, even civilization itself. (Howard 95–96)

The ideology of hereditary determinism recodes rather than replaces the contradictions of industrial capitalism. Howard goes on to note that the social decline of Hurstwood in *Sister Carrie* and Maggie in Crane's text follows a similar pattern, though more along the lines of what we might call social rather than hereditary determinism. Howard adds that "The narrative of proletarianization, demonstrating that one can tumble down as well as climb up the social ladder, implicitly proposes a frightening question to the reader: is anyone safe?" (101). At the same time, she insists that this threat is contained by the characters' fall "beyond the reach of empathy" (101). In the end, Howard argues, the brute is cast out by both the narrative and its readers, its noise muted.

While Howard certainly makes a strong point with regard to the figure of McTeague, I would argue that Maggie and Hurstwood present very different cases. In Crane and Dreiser, the conflation of the discourses of determinism and social decline not only forces the largely middle-class readership to contemplate the existence of social antagonisms but also exposes their minds to the threat of social deterioration²² in ways that narrow the protective distance between readers and lower-class characters. I do not agree with Howard's argument that the fatality of events that befall naturalist characters on the downward slope removes readers' empathy for them. The opposite seems true: precisely the haphazard nature of their decline appears to make us empathize with characters that have lost control over their own destinies. Moreover, it is my contention that few readers will withdraw their sympathies from Maggie or Hurstwood because they have fallen so low. Again, the reverse seems closer to the truth. Maggie's, Hurstwood's, and even Trina's fates continue to enlist our sympathies at the same time as they remind us of the contradictions within industrial capitalism and its consumerist variety. If *Sister Carrie* is the romance of money, Hurstwood's downfall threatens to subvert that romance while Trina's sexually charged avarice in *McTeague* registers its perversion.

As for Norris's Trina, the brutality and noise of domestic violence is for the greater part of her life also at the center of Maggie's existence. Witness Jimmie's perception of it as he is forced to return to his family's apartment

after his own father has stolen the pail of beer that would have bought him sanctuary in a neighbor's flat:

There was a crash against the door and something broke into clattering fragments. Jimmie partially suppressed a howl and darted down the stairway. Below he paused and listened. He heard howls and curses, groans and shrieks, confusingly in chorus as if a battle were raging. With all was the crash of splintering furniture. The eyes of the urchin glared in fear that one of them would discover him. (11)

Such noises are not merely expressions of hatred and rage, but they are themselves part of the violence Jimmie, Maggie, and Tommie have to endure. When a grown-up Jimmie and his companion challenge Pete to a brawl over Maggie's honor, the fight does not begin when Pete launches the first blow but when the allied two begin to "laug[h] in his face," when Jimmie "snarl[s] like a wild animal," and when they answer Pete "with copious sneers" (36–37). The boundaries between provocation, intimidation, and violence get blurred as the combatants' noises anticipate, contribute to, and become part of the violence of the fight: "The breaths of the fighters came wheezingly from their lips and the three chests were straining and heaving. Pete at intervals gave vent to low, labored hisses, that sounded like a desire to kill. Jimmie's ally gibbered at times like a wounded maniac" (38).

As *McTeague* and *Maggie* repeatedly emphasize, noise may be of such intensity that it becomes a form of auditory torment. In naturalist literature, this is nowhere more evident than in the Civil War of Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, where the explosions, shooting, screaming, and shouting directly and profoundly affect the actions and the psyches of those exposed to the noise. In the acoustic world of Crane's war novel, noise is an integral part of warfare.²³ As Schafer indicates when he points out "the peculiar bending of the Latin word *bellum* (war) into the Low German and Old English *bell(e)* (meaning 'to make a loud noise')" (*Tuning* 50), noise and war are already etymologically related.²⁴ In Crane, war is a form of sonic destruction. Crane carefully orchestrates his panorama of noises. The actual noise of war is preceded by important acoustic events. As Henry Fleming remembers in a flashback, it was noises that prompted him to join the army:

The newspapers, the gossip of the village, his own picturings, had aroused him to an uncheckable degree. [. . .] One night, as he lay in bed, the winds had carried to him the clangoring of the church bell as

some enthusiast jerked the rope frantically to tell the twisted news of a great battle. This voice of the people rejoicing in the night had made him shiver in a prolonged ecstasy of excitement. Later, he had gone down to his mother's room and had spoken thus: "Ma, I'm going to enlist." (47)

His youthful imagination already excited by "the gossip of the village," the sound of "the church bell"—anthropomorphized as the "voice of the people"—becomes Henry's call to arms. This pattern of rumor followed by noise is repeated throughout the novel as soldiers' imaginations are kindled by the uncertainty of the immediate future.

Writing on another Henry and another civil war, Shakespeare personified Rumor at the beginning of *2 Henry IV*: "Open your ears; for which of you will stop / The vent of hearing when loud Rumour speaks?" (Induction 1–2). Crane's first two sentences read as follows: "The cold passed reluctantly from the earth, and the retiring fogs revealed an army stretched out on the hills, resting. As the landscape changed from brown to green, the army awakened, and began to tremble with eagerness at the noise of rumors" (43). Both texts register the auditory dimension of rumor, which comes as no surprise given that one of the earliest recorded senses of "noise" was "Common talk, rumour, report; also, evil report, slander, scandal" (OED). In Crane, the noise of rumors never subsides; there is a constant "rustling and muttering among the men" (82); they are continually "whispering speculations and recounting the old rumors" (58). Occasionally, rumors rise to a crescendo as soldiers debate their truth content, "clamor[ing] at each other, numbers making futile bids for the popular attention" (44). The ambient noise level remains high even before Henry's regiment is engaged in combat. Filtered through Henry's consciousness, the novel registers a welter of acoustic details ranging from the "creakings and grumblings as some surly guns were dragged away" (59) to the sound of "the snoring tall soldier" (65) and "the insect voices of the night" (66).

When Henry imagines the onset of the battle, he does so in acoustic terms: "he began to believe that at any moment the ominous distance might be aflame, and the rolling crashes of an engagement come to his ears" (59). Henry continually expects "to hear from the advance the rattle of fire" (60) and, plagued by the prospect of running from the battle, he is quite literally all ears: "He felt that every nerve in his body would be an ear to hear the voic-

es, while other men would remain stolid and deaf" (65). As the long-awaited clash with the Confederate troops finally materializes, industrial metaphors intrude into Crane's text as the acoustic world is torn apart: "The skirmish fire increased to a long clattering sound. With it was mingled far-away cheering. A battery spoke. [. . .] They were pursued by the sound of musketry fire [. . .]. The din became a crescendo, like the roar of an oncoming train. A brigade ahead of them and on the right went into action with a rending roar. It was as if it had exploded" (75). Crane's orchestration of the noises of war is reminiscent of Walt Whitman's *Drum-Taps*, whose opening poems ("First O Songs for a Prelude," "Eighteen Sixty-One," and "Beat! Beat! Drums!") welcome the approaching sounds of war with an enthusiasm that still informs Henry Fleming's acoustic imagination at the beginning of *The Red Badge of Courage*. In the later poems of Whitman's collection, especially in "The Artilleryman's Vision," the musicality of war gives way to the acoustic chaos and terror that also moves to the center of Crane's text as the narrative progresses.²⁵ Both authors' literary soundscapes testify to and reinforce a growing disillusionment with the realities of war.

As Crane's narrator comments on the transition from calm to clamor in a later passage, "It was as if worlds were being rended" (103). One of the worlds that is rended in Crane's Civil War is, of course, that of the United States, a country whose ideological divisions were reflected in and reinforced by acoustic differences even before the war. Commenting on the "sectional soundscapes" of antebellum America, Mark M. Smith writes:

A rapidly modernizing North listened to the South and heard the shrieks of slavery, the awful silence of oppression, and the unmistakable tones of moral, economic, and political premodernity. Masters listened to the North and heard, with increasing volume so it seemed, the disquieting throb of a northern mob made reckless by industrialism, urbanism, wage labor, and passionate democracy. (14)

In the acoustic hell of the Civil War, these sectional soundscapes clash. Crane repeatedly evokes the enormity of the acoustic impact of that clash, its "ear-shaking thunder" (104). Much of the chaos readers experience when they tap into Henry's consciousness draws its strength from Crane's orchestration of acoustic details. On the four pages of the "loudest" chapter, chapter 4, no fewer than sixteen different sources of noise can be counted. They range from "the passionate song of the bullets and the banshee shrieks of shells"

(79) to “Wild yells [coming] from behind the walls of smoke” (79) and “the commander of the brigade [...] galloping about bawling” (80). In a later passage, Crane describes the eruption of the battle’s noises as drowning out all other sounds. Noise fills the universe as the carnage begins anew:

Of a sudden the guns on the slope roared out a message of warning. A spluttering sound had begun in the woods. It swelled with amazing speed to a profound clamor that involved the earth in noises. The splitting crashes swept along the lines until an interminable roar was developed. To those in the midst of it it became a din fitted to the universe. It was the whirring and thumping of gigantic machinery, complications among the smaller stars. The youth’s ears were filled up. They were incapable of hearing more. (197)

In Crane’s *Civil War*, the sensory overload that literary critics and historians perceive as a defining characteristic of industrial modernity is amplified beyond measure. Here and elsewhere the battle noise is depicted as interfering drastically with Henry’s processes of perception, as making him “incapable of hearing more.” Corresponding to its definition in information theory as a disturbance of the signal, the noise interrupts processes of communication, incapacitating not only Henry’s aural sense as it continues to violate “his misused ears” (184) but also undoing the very possibility of speech:

Always the noise of skirmishers came from the woods on the front and left, and the din on the right had grown to frightful proportions. The guns were roaring without an instant’s pause for breath. It seems that the cannon had come from all parts and were engaged in a stupendous wrangle. It became impossible to make a sentence heard. The youth wished to launch a joke—a quotation from newspapers. He desired to say, “All quiet on the Rappahannock,” but the guns refused to permit even a comment on their uproar. He never successfully completed the sentence. (156)

The *Civil War* declines to be commented upon, and Henry’s tongue more than once lies “dead in the tomb of his mouth” (117). Henry’s attempt to order his experiences by relating them to a cultural item of the civilization that is torn apart in front of his senses fails miserably. There is a twofold irony involved in Henry’s attempt. First, there is the ironical twist Henry himself recognizes in the incongruity between the news about the war and its actual

experience, which revolves around an incongruity between two senses of the word *quiet*. Had he been permitted to speak this irony, it would have been not only the basis of his joke but also a way of coping with war by distancing himself from it. Readers (rather than Henry) will detect a second layer of irony in the fact that the quietness mentioned in the newspaper may be read as referring not to the absence of fighting but to Henry's inability to finish his sentence. What remains unheard is not the noise of war but Henry's silenced speech.²⁶

The passage quoted above is of further interest because it gives us an insight into why the noises of war acquire such "frightful proportions." In Crane, noise is not merely a side effect of the war machinery let loose but one of its essential components. "There chance[s] to be no interference" (196) as war itself becomes the interference. In fact, the narrator in one passage explicitly defines the battlefield as "the place of noises" (96). While much of their menacing quality derives from their great intensity, their omnipresence and unlocatability significantly contribute to the noises' devastating impact, not least because soldiers' survival in the Civil War often depended on their ability to read acoustic signs correctly (M. Smith 205–8). In Crane's war, "noises [. . .] become a part of life" (207); they are everywhere and in no particular place. When, toward the end of the novel, Henry is finally able to locate some of the sources of the noise, this provides at least a certain degree of comfort: "It was a relief to perceive at last from whence came some of these noises which had been roared into his ears" (195).²⁷ Before that, however, a plethora of discordant sounds is melted into an incredibly dense soundscape of officers "roaring directions and encouragements" (86), wounded soldiers "cursing, groaning and wailing" (168), fleeing soldiers asking "a thousand wild questions" (131), "the ripping sound of musketry and the breaking crash of artillery" (98), "the grumble of jolted cannon" (132–33), the "hollow rumble of drums" (146), and "the dull popping of the skirmishers and pickets, firing in the fog" (155). The roar of military dispute exceeds all bounds and cannot be contained. It is further intensified by the shouting and yelling of attacking soldiers: "'Here they come! Here they come!' Gun locks clicked. Across the smoke-infested fields came a brown swarm of running men who were giving shrill yells. They came on, stooping and swinging their rifles at all angles" (83).

Throughout the history of warfare, war cries have been used as part of military strategy. Greek generals were already aware of the effectiveness of

martial noises: “One should send the army into battle shouting, and sometimes on the run, because their appearance and shouts and the clash of arms confound the hearts of the enemy” (Onasander, qtd. in Schafer, *Tuning* 50). In the Civil War, the rebel yell became an acoustic signature of Southern troops that was feared by Northern combatants and remembered in the South long after the war had ended (M. Smith 204–5). But the war cries of attacking troops in *The Red Badge of Courage*, their “rasping yell[s]” (184), are not only designed to terrify the enemy. They combine with the noise of rumors and the general noise of battle to confer on the troops the identity of a unified whole, the identity of a crowd intent on killing.²⁸

As Schafer reminds us, the acoustic experiences detailed in *The Red Badge of Courage* are not unique to the historical moment of the American Civil War. The violent impact of war noises has throughout recorded history been a conscious part of military tactics:

Man has always tried to destroy his enemies with terrible noises. We shall encounter deliberate attempts to reproduce the apocalyptic noise throughout the history of warfare, from the clashing of shields and the beating of drums in ancient times right up to the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atom bombs of the Second World War. (*Tuning* 28)

To complement Schafer’s account, we might point out two of the more striking instances of sonic destruction in the history of modern warfare. Scientists working for the German *Wehrmacht* during the Second World War “prototyped a revolutionary sonic ‘cannon,’ which fired a shock wave strong enough to bring down a plane. Today, the U.S. Department of Defense is testing acoustic rifles that can stun and even kill soldiers” (Boulware par. 29).²⁹ But the noises of war need not acquire such enormous proportions to affect the lives of soldiers. The phenomenon of shell shock, which prompted Freud to develop his theory of the death drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, is well known. Loud detonations may constitute the element of surprise that is responsible for the experience of fright causing various war neuroses (Freud 12–14).

Crane repeatedly attributes vocal qualities to the sounds of war to emphasize their intense impact on Henry’s consciousness: “As he, leading, went across a little field, he found himself in a region of shells. They hurtled over his head with long wild screams. As he listened he imagined them to have rows of cruel teeth that grinned at him” (94). To Henry’s overcharged ears

and mind, the roar of battle gains truly monstrous proportions, and his experience of the totality of war noises testifies to their destructive force: “The noises of the battle were like stones; he believed himself liable to be crushed” (94). Rare are the moments when he finds himself detached enough from the war clamor to attribute it to the speech of a divine observer: “The noise was as the voice of an eloquent being, describing” (104).³⁰ More often, though, the noise of the battlefield resembles the screams of a “red animal,” a “blood-swollen god” (130), Mars unleashed.

The most notable feature of Crane’s martial acoustics remains his frequent attribution of human characteristics to the noises of war. Anthropomorphization is one of the ways in which human beings try to tame the frightening otherness of the nonhuman world. But Crane’s literary use of the technique serves the purpose of reinforcing the menacing quality of the martial noises. As human speech is rendered impossible by the clamor of war, it is superseded by the voices of the war machinery, by “the courageous words of the artillery and the spiteful sentences of the musketry” (105), by “The voices of the cannon [. . .] mingled in a long and interminable row” (168) and the “stentorian speeches of the artillery” (207). As the war machine grows more eloquent, human speech degenerates into “barbaric cr[ies] of rage and pain” (198), “growling and swearing” (159), “grotesque exclamations” (198), grunting, bawling, bellowing, gabbling and howling. Filled with rage, fear, and hatred for the enemy, the soldiers’ voices are reduced to infantile babbling and animal noises:

Many of the men were making low-toned noises with their mouths, and these subdued cheers, snarls, imprecations, prayers, made a wild, barbaric song that went as an undercurrent of sound, strange and chantlike with the resounding chords of the war march. The man at the youth’s elbow was babbling. In it there was something soft and tender like the monologue of a babe. (85–86)

In naturalist fashion, Henry himself is transformed into the equivalent of a fierce dog as one of his comrades attempts to quench his war ardor: “The youth cried out savagely at this statement. He crouched behind a little tree, with his eyes burning hatefully and his teeth set in a curlike snarl. [. . .] There could be seen spasmodic gulplings at his throat” (163). With the voice of its protagonist reduced to an angry growl that seems to force even the narrator into a protective distance (“There could be seen”), the noise of Crane’s

war becomes literally “unspeakable” (196). Crane’s portrayal of the soldiers’ loss of language alongside its resurgence in the angry voices of the tools of destruction provides a compelling account of dehumanization in warfare. Henry’s desire to learn more about himself, to “accumulate information of himself” (52), is thwarted as he is stripped of his human identity while the noise of war drowns out all meaningful information.

Donald Pease provides an alternative interpretation of Henry’s displays of rage that complements my own. In Pease’s reading, Henry’s rage is also connected with his loss of identity, but it ensues less from the reduction of the human to the bestial than from the failure of Henry’s acts of narrative self-fashioning. Pease begins his argument by noting the striking absence of the questions of slavery and Southern secession from Crane’s text. In his search for the narratives that take the place of the stable frame of historical reference the text lacks, Pease identifies two conflicting visions in the novel. On the one hand, there are narrative strategies informed by fictional war narratives—all of them descendants of the “Homeric” (46) battles Henry measures his own experiences against—that seek to confer meaning on the war as well as on Henry’s acts of self-fashioning. On the other hand, there is a forceful voice that speaks only of chance events, incidents, and the chaotic fragments of experience. This voice subverts all attempts at sense-making through narrative representation. Consequently, “Henry Fleming must feel alienated in turn both by those incidents that portend their inaccessibility to significance but also by the very narratives intended to impose significance upon them” (Pease 162). Out of this dilemma arises a pressing need for Henry “to take possession of the war in personal terms. Involved in incidents unable to be retrieved in human terms, Henry must invent a history for himself that would at least guarantee the continuity of his identity” (162). Yet this crucial endeavor is beset with difficulties.

Henry’s first attempt at self-fashioning involves a fantasy of self-aggrandizement that, perversely, relies on Henry’s conviction that his fear of the battle testifies to a superior insight on his part, an insight that sets him apart from and above the other soldiers: “The generals were stupid. The enemy would presently swallow the whole command. [. . .] The generals were idiots to send them marching into a regular pen. There was but one pair of eyes in the corps” (71). This first attempt flounders when many soldiers run from the second fight, thus making plain to Henry that fear is too general a feeling among the soldiers of his regiment to help constitute his own identity as

apart from that of the others. Fear gives way to shame as Henry deserts his regiment. In his second attempt at self-fashioning, Henry tries to counteract his feelings of shame by rationalizing his running away as the way of Nature. He is delighted and relieved to see a squirrel escaping “with chattering fear” as he throws a pinecone at it: “There was the law, he said. Nature had given him a sign. The squirrel, immediately upon recognizing danger, had taken to his legs without ado” (100). But this second attempt at self-fashioning is thwarted by Nature itself, which remains indifferent to Henry’s existence and refuses to conform to his representations of it. The final blow to Henry’s narrative constructions of identity occurs when he witnesses the tall soldier’s horrible death. No reassuring narratives can contain this climactic event, and it withdraws all legitimacy from Henry’s prior attempts to account for his role in the war. All that he is left with is rage: “The youth turned, with sudden, livid rage, toward the battlefield. He shook his fist” (116). As Pease argues convincingly, this rage, which finds an outlet in Henry’s excessive brutality in the next battle, is a rage born from a loss of self, from the final breakdown of all strategies of self-fashioning: “Henry formerly identified himself with all the representations gleaned from his battle narratives, once he loses those representations Henry fights with all the reckless abandon of one who has already been lost in battle. [. . .] [Henry] replaces identity with the force of its abandonment” (Pease 173). As he does so, Henry turns into a “war devil” (166) with nothing left to do but “pull his trigger with a fierce grunt” (165).

The emergence of Henry’s rage alongside the failure of his constructions of identity is manifested most clearly in the breakdown of the distinction between the human and the nonhuman world discussed above. In this breakdown, we see that Crane’s protomodernist emphasis on the subjectivity of experience has the effect not only of subverting scientific objectivity but also of collapsing the very distinction between the objective world of things and their subjective perception.³¹ With an awareness of how these categories can become blurred, “Crane was prepared to see the world as flux rather than order. Or, more precisely, flux containing elements of order, everyday order within a larger context that exceeds known rules” (Levenson 161). Rather than trying to order the chaos of war by way of narrative, Crane has it subvert more traditionally realist strategies of representation. More forcefully than Dreiser, Crane refuses to contain the noise. Instead, he has it seep into the formal organization of his text and subvert all of Henry’s attempts at fash-

ioning stable representations of the self. Literature as noise, then, is Crane's answer to the combined challenge of a martial soundscape that tests the limits of literary representability and the increasingly general availability of a technological medium, the phonograph, whose storage capacity for almost any kind of sound far exceeds that of the written text. In Crane's noisy text, there is no ordering principle that would contain the chaos, no psychological framework (such as Dreiser's soundscapes of the soul) that would tame the noise. Such sense-making structures are almost entirely absent from a fictional universe that remains perfectly indifferent to human affairs: "Nature had gone tranquilly on with her golden process in the midst of so much devilment" (89). This is why Leo Bersani's comments on realist literary form at least partly apply to Dreiser but not to Crane: "The realistic novel gives us an image of social fragmentation contained within the order of significant form—and it thereby suggests that the chaotic fragments are somehow socially viable and morally redeemable" (60).

The literary forms Crane chooses in his representations of noise are, then, an integral part of his politics of representation. This holds true not only of *The Red Badge of Courage* but, to a lesser extent, also of *Maggie*. Their subtle explorations of two of the defining soundscapes of modernity, war and the city, and their effect on individuals inhabiting these social spaces make Crane's *Maggie* and *The Red Badge of Courage* into more of a unity than is commonly perceived. I do not agree with Schafer's grim assessment that the noises of war and "the ferocious acoustical environment produced by modern civilian life deriv[e] from the same eschatological urge" (*Tuning* 28) or even that, "as the machines whirl in the hearts of our cities day and night, the significant battleground of the modern world has become the neighborhood Blitzkrieg" (185). But we do not have to look far to perceive relationships between the urban industrial soundscape and the violent fracas of war. In *The Red Badge of Courage*, Crane himself uses industrial metaphors to describe the noise of war. We have already encountered his comparison of the rising clamor of battle with "the roar of an oncoming train" (75) and, later, with "the whirring and thumping of gigantic machinery" (197). Another invention of the first of the industrial revolutions is evoked at the beginning of chapter 11, where "the furnace roar of the battle [. . .] growing louder" (122) intrudes on Henry's consciousness. His exhaustion is likewise cast in the vocabulary of the factory: "He was grimy and dripping like a laborer in

a foundry” (88). Crane’s text registers links between industry and war two decades before war became fully mechanized and sixty-eight years before the term *military-industrial complex* was coined.³² Crane died before the age of thirty. But the years that lie between the end of the Civil War and the publication of *The Red Badge of Courage* provided him with enough evidence to make those connections.

The postbellum world Crane was born into experienced a rapid increase in industrial production that would turn the United States into the world’s largest economic power and chief imperialist actor by the turn of the century (P. Jenkins 163–74). These changes occurred on such a large scale and with such rapidity that, looking back, Henry Adams remembers how he encountered America as a wholly different nation upon returning from England in 1868: “His world was dead” (*The Education* 229).³³ The Civil War, that “revolutionary media network of telegraph cables and parallel railway tracks” (Kittler, *Grammophon* 275; my translation), in important ways prepared the ground for the accelerated industrial expansion that was to follow it. As Philip Jenkins (144–45) points out, its devastation of Southern plantations meant that the United States could now protect its industry by erecting high tariff barriers (which would have imperiled the exportation of the Southern cotton production while it was still thriving). Moreover, wartime production and military contracting allowed businessmen to accumulate large amounts of capital that could be invested in civilian industrial production after the war. Finally, there now existed a national market for commodities produced in ever-larger quantities. Crane’s industrial metaphors in *The Red Badge of Courage* point to this convergence between warfare and industrial production and link Henry’s acoustic experiences on the battlefield to Maggie’s in the industrialized city of New York. Crane’s representation of the martial soundscape therefore constitutes naturalism’s grimmest assessment of the acoustic world of modernity, whose violent impact on the lower strata of society was already documented in his own *Maggie*.

Audiographs

Apart from the Civil War, industrial growth in the second half of the nineteenth century was driven by another historical process that would change the face of urban America forever. U.S. industrialization was both enabled

by and produced a mass immigration that drastically altered the ethnic composition of cities, particularly in the East:

American industrial expansion was made possible by the ready availability of cheap labor in the form of the huge numbers of migrants entering the country from the 1860s onwards. From the 1880s the scale of migration constituted the largest population movement in recorded history. Between 1881 and 1920 there were over 23 million immigrants: 1907 was the peak year, with 1.2 million newcomers [. . .]. This migration had a radical effect on the ethnic composition of the United States. Before 1880 the vast majority of immigrants came from the British Isles or Northern Europe, chiefly Germany; but after that point the emphasis shifted decisively to the peoples of southern and eastern Europe, including Italians, Poles, Hungarians and all the nationalities of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. In 1870 New York City had 80 000 Jews; by 1915 there were 1.5 million. By 1930 perhaps six million Americans were of Italian stock. (P. Jenkins 174–75)

The new immigrant voices were recorded and often critically examined by realist, naturalist, as well as later writers. A common representational strategy was to emphasize the obscurity of foreign-sounding speech. William Dean Howells participates in this when, in *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, he has Basil March comment on “the jargon” of the Neapolitans’ “unintelligible dialect” (158), and so does Henry Adams in *The Education* when he evokes the olfactory and linguistic profile of “a furtive Yacoob or Ysaac still reeking of the Ghetto, snarling a weird Yiddish to the officers of the customs” (229). Immigrant voices, Howells and Adams seem to imply, are often nothing but unintelligible noise.

In Norris’s *McTeague*, Mr. Sieppe’s ridiculously exaggerated German accent and garbled syntax combine with his militaristic posturing to produce the caricature of a German-American who functions as the novel’s primary laughingstock:

“Owgooste!” he shouted to the little boy with the black greyhound, “you will der hound und der basket number three carry. Der tervins,” he added, calling to the two smallest boys, who were dressed exactly alike, “will releef one unudder mit der camp-stuhl and basket number four.

Dat is comprehend, hay? When we make der start, you childern will in der advance march. Dat is your orders.” (65–66)

More interesting still is the case of Marcus Schouler, Mr. Sieppe’s nephew. While Marcus is not afflicted with his uncle’s linguistic shortcomings, his speech is repeatedly designated as noise. The reader meets Marcus as he accompanies McTeague to a saloon in the novel’s first chapter:

Marcus had picked up a few half-truths of political economy—it was impossible to say where—and as soon as they had settled themselves to their beer in Frenna’s back room he took up the theme of the labor question. He discussed it at the top of his voice, vociferating, shaking his fists, exciting himself with his own noise. (13)

Here and elsewhere, Norris furnishes Marcus Schouler with a linguistic profile that compromises the German-American socialist’s diatribes against social inequalities. The saloon owner Frenna’s admonition to Schouler could serve as a motto for my discussion of the constrained roles played by immigrants and, in Schouler’s case, political dissenters, in McTeague’s novel: “You must make less noise in here, Mister Schouler” (140).

With the Polish-American Jew Zerkow, yet another immigrant becomes the object of acoustic profiling. The passages on Zerkow, a man whose “dominant passion” is “inordinate, insatiable greed” (43), are so clearly anti-Semitic that one begins to wonder whether Marcus Schouler’s attack on Chinese cigar-makers (“Ah, the rat-eaters! Ah, the white-livered curs” [121]) was actually intended to reflect negatively on him. Norris’s anti-Semitism culminates in his depiction of Zerkow’s murder of Maria. The harness maker Heise’s description of Maria’s body contains an unequivocal reference to *shechitah*, the kosher way of slaughtering animals by slitting their throat with a very sharp knife: “He’s done for her sure this trip. Cut her throat. *Lord*, how she has *bled*! Did you ever see so much—that’s murder—that’s cold-blooded murder” (318). Prior to this climactic event, Zerkow’s depravity is reflected in and reinforced by the quality of his voice:

“Who is it? Who is it?” cried the rag-picker from within, in his hoarse voice, that was half whisper, starting nervously, and sweeping a handful of silver into his drawer. (125)

“Now, then, Maria,” said Zerkow, his cracked, strained voice just rising above a whisper, hitching his chair closer to the table, “now, then, my girl, let’s have it all over again. Tell us about the gold plate—the service. Begin with, “There were over a hundred pieces and every one of them gold.” (239)

“You fool!” he wheezed, trying to raise his broken voice to a shout. “You fool! Don’t you dare try an’ cheat *me*, or I’ll *do* for you. You know about the gold plate, and you know where it is.” Suddenly he pitched his voice at the prolonged rasping shout with which he made his street cry. He rose to his feet, his long, prehensile fingers curled into fists. He was menacing, terrible in his rage. (242)

In his portrayal of Zerkow, Norris uses a strategy well known from fairy tales. The moral depravity of fairy-tale villains is always reflected in their external appearance. To put it bluntly, witches are not only wicked but also have a croaking voice, a warty nose, and other kinds of physical deformity such as a hunchback. In their conflation of external appearance and internal essence, fairy tales participate in the economy of mythical thought, for which, according to Ernst Cassirer, “the attribute is not one defining aspect of the thing; rather, it expresses and contains within it the whole of the thing” (65).³⁴ Norris’s depiction of Zerkow repeats that pattern: “He was a dry, shrivelled old man of sixty odd. He had the thin, eager, cat-like lips of the covetous; eyes that had grown keen as those of a lynx from long searching amidst muck and debris; and claw-like, prehensile fingers” (42–43). On the one hand, Zerkow’s grating voice merely adds to his hideous appearance and serves to reinforce his wickedness. But once we recognize the similarities in the rendition of Mr. Siette’s, Zerkow’s, and Schouler’s speech and keep in mind that they are all immigrants, we discover an additional mechanism at work.

These literary figures take their place in a long history of discursive struggles that involves the disparagement of the aurality of others as noise. For instance, while it did address legitimate concerns about noise pollution, the anti-street music movement of mid-nineteenth century London was also informed by fiercely racist sentiments among middle-class professionals that made themselves heard most clearly in the denunciation of organ musicians as “blackguard Savoyards and herds of German swine” (qtd. in Picker, *Vic-*

torian 52). Such acoustic profiling along the lines of class and race can be traced back to times well before the nineteenth century. The Irish tongue of their colonial subjects was to many English observers of the early modern era but “one step removed from noise” (B. Smith 306). A sixteenth-century commentator even went as far as arguing that “the Irish language was forged out of the debris of Babel” (306). A faint echo of such attitudes can still be heard in the strike scene of Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie*, during which an “old Irish-woman” (424) yells at the police officers for beating her son while one of the screaming strikers is singled out as “a young Irishman” (427). The narrator’s description of the ensuing “babel of voices” (427) owes as much to the uproar of the riotous strike as to the presence of immigrant Irish voices. A similar rhetoric was used by European colonizers of Native American soil, who evoked the corruptness of Indian languages to justify the displacement and eventual destruction of native lives:³⁵

Prompted by the biblical account of the Tower of Babel, Europeans were predisposed to hear in Native American languages evidence of confusion, dispersal, and degeneration. Robert Johnson, arguing the case for further colonization in his pamphlet *The New Life of Virginea* (1612), cites the barbarity of the Algonkian language as evidence of its speakers’ depravity—and of their aptness for being pulled up and discarded like so many weeds. (B. Smith 322)

While the portrayals of Mr. Sieppe, Schouler, and Zerkow do not proceed along identical lines, their exclusion from the fictional community at the center of *McTeague* at least partly repeats the patterns identified by Picker and Smith. Through the use of literary form, Norris enacts a symbolic form of violence as his immigrant characters’ speech as well as that of the ethnic communities they represent are identified as noise.

In the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, symbolic violence designates an exercise of the power to represent the legitimate social world, of the power to impose one’s vision of the world, one’s meanings, on others. In Bourdieu’s scheme, educational institutions are among the main perpetrators of symbolic violence. Their “pedagogic actions” inculcate the values and systems of meaning of the dominant class, thereby reproducing in covert form the existing relations of power (Bourdieu and Passeron; Bourdieu, *Distinction*). In a series of essays originally published in the late 1970s and early 1980s and collected in English translation in *Language and Symbolic*

Power, Bourdieu applies his findings to the study of language.³⁶ In line with his stated intention “to extend economic calculation to all the goods, material and symbolic, without distinction, that present themselves as *rare* and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation” (*Outline* 178), Bourdieu frames his argument in economic terms:

Linguistic exchange [...] is also an economic exchange which is established within a particular symbolic relation of power between a producer, endowed with a certain linguistic capital, and a consumer (or a market), and which is capable of producing a certain material or symbolic profit. In other words, utterances are not only (save in exceptional circumstances) signs to be understood and deciphered; they are also signs of wealth, intended to be evaluated and appreciated, and signs of authority, intended to be believed and obeyed. (*Language* 66)

Language in Bourdieu becomes linguistic capital. As such, it participates in the larger economies of cultural capital (various forms of legitimate knowledge) and symbolic capital (prestige, honor, social recognition) and thus takes its place among other kinds of capital, including social capital (valued social relations) and economic capital.³⁷

According to Bourdieu, what counts in the linguistic marketplace is less the content than the style of one’s speech.³⁸ Dreiser’s Hurstwood is keenly aware of this when, hobnobbing with the socially superior, he engages in the most meaningless conversations: “Then began one of those pointless social conversations so common in American resorts where the would-be *gilded* attempt to rub off gilt, from those who have it in abundance” (265–66). As Hurstwood knows, such linguistic exchanges are only “pointless” with regard to their propositional meaning. At the level of social interaction, they constitute important investments of social and symbolic capital that in the long run may well yield a profit that is measurable in strictly monetary terms. As Dreiser points out, much of the linguistic knowledge required to secure symbolic profits on such occasions is formulaic in nature: “‘Did you ever hear the story of,’ and ‘That reminds me,’ were the most repeated phrases” (266). This becomes especially clear if we compare Hurstwood to a character who clearly lacks this pragmatic knowledge. Determined to procure tickets for a spectacle he intends to attend with Trina and his prospective parents-in-law, Norris’s McTeague musters all his courage, approaches the

ticket booth, and “deliver[s] himself of the formula he had been reciting for the last dozen hours”:

“I want four seats for Monday night in the fourth row from the front, and on the right-hand side.”

“Right hand as you face the house or as you face the stage?” McTeague was dumbfounded.

“I want to be on the right-hand side,” he insisted, stolidly; adding, “in order to be away from the drums.”

“Well, the drums are on the right of the orchestra as you face the stage,” shouted the other impatiently; “you want to the left, then, as you face the house.”

“I want to be on the right-hand side,” persisted the dentist.

Without a word the seller threw out four tickets with a magnificent, supercilious gesture.

“There’s four seats on the right-hand side, then, and you’re right up against the drums.”

“But I don’t want to be near the drums,” protested McTeague, beginning to perspire. (94)

The exchange, during which McTeague becomes increasingly nervous and the seller begins to laugh at him, continues for another page. Due to his inexperience and inability to produce linguistic expressions appropriate to the situation, McTeague loses face. In Bourdieu’s terms, McTeague incurs heavy symbolic losses while the seller secures symbolic profits as he demonstrates his superior knowledge at McTeague’s expense. McTeague instinctively recognizes the (symbolic) violence that is being done to him and threatens to retaliate with the physical violence he knows all too well: “you—you can’t make small of me. I’ll thump you in the head, you little—you little—little—little pup” (95).

As is already indicated by these short analyses of two very different situations, a reading informed by Bourdieu’s theories allows for a more subtle investigation into fictionalized social interactions than the deterministic interpretations repeatedly offered by naturalist texts themselves. Central to Bourdieu’s project is his desire to transcend the classical opposition between objectivism and subjectivism in the social sciences.³⁹ Human actors are obviously neither mere products of society nor agents free to do whatever they

desire, and Bourdieu's concept of the "habitus" allows him to steer a middle course between the two extremes:

The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g. the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition) produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively "regulated" and "regular" without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor. (*Outline* 72)

In Bourdieu's "genetic structuralism" (*Outline* 162), *habitus* is both the product of socialization within social institutions such as the family, school, or a peer-group (a "structured structure") and a mental structure that serves as the basis for the generation of individual practices (thoughts, actions, representations, expressions, perceptions, appreciations, and so on) and thus a "structuring structure." The *habitus* does not strictly determine the practices of social actors. Rather, it "*disposes* actors to do certain things, it provides a *basis* for the generation of practices" (R. Jenkins 78). Nevertheless, the generative force of the *habitus* is strong enough to ensure that the practices of social actors who underwent a similar process of inculcation tend to exhibit a high degree of similarity. Members of a given class therefore share a class *habitus* that manifests itself in similarities between the most diverse practices, ranging from similar aesthetic preferences, occupational choices, and consumption patterns to similar ways of eating, dressing, walking, and talking, all the practices, in other words, that make up a given lifestyle.⁴⁰ In the fictional world of Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, it is its manifestations of a class *habitus* more distinguished than their own that make Rector's—where "one could encounter politicians, brokers, actors, some rich young 'rounders' of the town, all eating and drinking amid a buzz of popular, commonplace conversation" (42)—such a desirable place to both Drouet and Hurstwood.

In Bourdieu's model, linguistic expressions are generated on the basis of the dispositions of the linguistic *habitus*. These dispositions "imply a certain propensity to speak and to say determinate things (the expressive intent)

and a certain capacity to speak, which involves both the linguistic capacity to generate an infinite number of grammatically correct discourses, and the social capacity to use this competence adequately in a determinate situation” (Bourdieu, *Language* 37). The fact that the “social capacity” Bourdieu refers to is distributed unequally allows speakers with a favorable linguistic habitus to secure symbolic profits on the linguistic market, for example, by being able to address an audience in a formal or official setting (*Language* 69–71). McTeague, for instance, is shown to lack this capacity when he is forced to give a speech on the occasion of his engagement to Trina: “I don’ know what to say—I—I—I ain’t never made a speech before; I—I ain’t never made a speech before. But I’m glad Trina’s won the prize—” (120). The logic of symbolic loss and profit permeates all human practices, but only some actors—those with the appropriate habitus—are likely to realize a profit of distinction on the market of symbolic goods. A social actor’s habitus, acquired during a long process of socialization, is therefore a form of “internalized capital” (Bourdieu, *Distinction* 114). “Internalization” can be taken literally not only because the habitus is a form of internalized social structure but also because it manifests itself in what Bourdieu calls *bodily* (or corporeal, or body) *hexis*: “Body *hexis* speaks directly to the motor function, in the form of a pattern of postures that is both individual and systematic, because linked to a whole system of techniques involving the body and tools, and charged with a host of social meanings and values” (*Outline* 87). For Bourdieu, symbolic relations of power are manifested in the minutiae of corporeal behavior, in “a way of talking, a tilt of the head, facial expressions, ways of sitting and of using implements, always associated with a tone of voice, a style of speech, and (how could it be otherwise?) a certain subjective experience” (87).⁴¹ Bodily *hexis* thus both signals and creates distinction, it is “political mythology realized, *em-bodied*, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable manner of standing, speaking, and thereby of *feeling* and *thinking*” (93–94).⁴²

Refracted through Bourdieu’s twin concepts of habitus and *hexis*, language becomes but one form of corporeal expressiveness to which meanings and values are attached in social interaction. This makes immediate sense if we return for a moment to the portrayal of immigrant speech in Norris. Only one of the characters’ speech, Mr. Sieppe’s, is identified as foreign in strictly linguistic terms. In the case of Schouler and Zerkow, it is prosodic and paralinguistic features, an excessive loudness and a hoarse whispering quality respectively, that mark their linguistic productions as deviant. The

distinctive earmarks of Zerkow's speech are located somewhere on a continuum between the phonemes of language on one end of the spectrum and other, nonverbal sounds produced by the human voice (wheezing, sobbing, clearing one's throat) on the other. In all three cases, the effect remains the same: Norris furnishes his immigrant characters with a bodily hexis whose vocal manifestations are endowed with very little symbolic capital and thereby relegates not only them but also the political views and ethnicities they represent to the margins of his fictional world. Rather than contributing to a critique of symbolic violence, Norris's text enacts that violence in its processes of exclusion.⁴³

In naturalist fiction, this pattern is confined neither to immigrant characters nor to the sounds of the human voice. Like human beings, fictional characters are not merely passive receivers of acoustic phenomena but actively participate in the making of the soundscapes they live in. In *Maggie's* entertainment halls, for instance, the boisterous crowd is responsible for half the spectacle. Characters in novels snore, sigh, snarl, and scream; they grunt, gabble, gossip, and grumble; they clamor, cry, cough, and curse. At a more basic level, human bodies, fictional or not, continually produce noises whether they walk, stand still, sleep, get up, or sit down. If you try to shut your ears the way you shut your eyes, you will still hear yourself breathing. If you hold your breath, you will still hear the blood circulating in your veins. As John Cage learned when he visited the anechoic chamber at Harvard, only death truly silences human bodies.⁴⁴

If observed, the noises people make will be subject to the value judgments of observers. Democratic presidential candidate Al Gore learned this lesson the hard way when he was widely and publicly accused of bad manners for sighing audibly to indicate his disapproval of several statements made by his Republican opponent and later victor George W. Bush during the televised pre-election debates in 2000. Naturalist authors were very much aware of such mechanisms and constructed acoustic profiles for their characters to indicate various character traits that serve both to position characters on the social scale and to direct readers' judgments of them.

These indicators are often singular and subtle in nature. For instance, once Dreiser has Carrie confess her love to Hurstwood and perceive him as "a drag in the direction of honor" (131), Drouet's lack of refinement is thrown into sharp relief against Hurstwood's elegance: "[Drouet] plunged his face in a basin of water and puffed and blew as he rubbed his neck and ears with

his hands, the while Carrie gazed upon him with mingled thoughts of recollection and present judgment” (135). Readers will understand immediately that delicate Carrie does not approve of what she sees and hears, and they will not be surprised when they learn on the following page that Carrie feels “For the first time [. . .] as if she must move away from him” (136). At this point in the narrative, Drouet no longer possesses either the economic or the symbolic capital Carrie is looking for. The episode has two related narrative functions: it prepares the reader for Carrie’s growing estrangement from Drouet and at the same time foreshadows Drouet’s eventual disappearance from the narrative’s main concerns. It therefore drives a wedge not only between Drouet and Carrie but also between Drouet and the reader, whose emotional involvement with this character is gradually displaced on to other characters.

While acoustic profiling is confined to isolated episodes in Dreiser, Norris’s *McTeague* is a different case altogether. At the center of events throughout the narrative, McTeague is furnished by Norris with a consistent acoustic profile, or *audiograph*. I define an audiograph as a characterization technique that endows fictional bodies with a set of distinctive acoustic properties designed to position characters with regard to the ensemble of social facts and practices that constitute the fictional world they inhabit. These acoustic properties may range from characters’ accents, dialects, or intonation patterns to the sounds produced by their laughter, snoring, or the acoustic impact of their footsteps. The positioning accomplished via audiographs may involve value judgments on the part of other characters, narrators, and implied authors as well as implied and empirical readers. Following Bourdieu, I trace the often striking unity of both acoustic practices and the value judgments that are attached to them to the generative schemes of the habitus.⁴⁵ While audiographs may be used as part of the narrative technique of telling (for instance, when a narrator censures a character’s snoring), their principal mode of operation is clearly that of showing.

Besides its sheer massiveness and strength, one of the more remarkable characteristics of McTeague’s body is the amount of noise it produces. When he walks, the air vibrates with the sound of the “heavy, elephantine tread of [his] huge feet” (185) or the noise of “his great feet dragging and grinding on the floor” (374). When he forces his breath through his nose, he emits “a fearful snorting noise” (136). McTeague does not laugh the way other characters do; he “bellow[s] with laughter” (136) or “explode[s] in a roar of laughter”

(99). While Trina chuckles “demurely, her lips closed tight, her little chin thrust out, her small pale nose, with its adorable little freckles, wrinkling,” McTeague “roar[s] with all the force of his lungs, his enormous mouth distended, striking sledge-hammer blows upon his knees with his clenched fist” (75). Even his singing in the morning is “a bellowing roar, enough to make the window sashes rattle” (62). When he is angry or excited, McTeague’s “enormous jaws shut together with a sharp click” (59), and “his teeth” begin to “gr[i]nd themselves together with a little rasping sound” (31). When he is furious, his voice breaks forth into a deafening scream. Witness his initial reaction to Marcus biting him during a wrestling match:

Then followed a terrible scene. The brute that in McTeague lay so close to the surface leaped instantly to life, monstrous, not to be resisted. He sprang to his feet with a shrill and meaningless clamor, totally unlike the ordinary bass of his speaking tones. It was the hideous yelling of a hurt beast, the squealing of a wounded elephant. He framed no words; in the rush of high-pitched sound that issued from his wide-open mouth there was nothing articulate. [. . .] His only idea was to batter the life out of the man before him, to crush and annihilate him upon the instant. (234)

The animal in him, itself described as “shouting and clamoring” (30) not far below the surface, is released in an outburst of violence. Two representational strategies intersect here as the slippage from voice to noise (“meaningless clamor,” “nothing articulate”)—which we have already encountered in the portrayals of Sieppe, Schouler, and Zerkow—combines with the reduction of the human voice to the animal squeal, positioning McTeague beyond the limits of human intelligibility and cognition. McTeague’s audiograph, which includes linguistic deficiencies in a more narrow sense (stammering when excited, limited range of vocabulary, lower-class sociolect), thus contributes significantly to the process of “casting out the outcast,” which June Howard (70–103) has identified as a central concern of naturalist narratives.

In various ways, then, the portrayals of figures as different as McTeague, Schouler, Mr. Sieppe, or Zerkow exemplify the ways in which naturalist authors mark out certain characters as inferior, deviant, or distant on the basis of their violation of what Mark M. Smith calls “aural etiquette” (97). While the processes of inclusion and exclusion enacted by naturalist texts may be based primarily on a character’s belonging to a given gender, class, or race—

the latter is borne out by the fact that McTeague is the only character of purely Anglo-Saxon stock in this group—secondary characteristics such as style of dress, intensity of bodily movements, or acoustic profile in important ways form part of the techniques employed in literary texts to represent the legitimate social world. These details of characterization cannot be reduced to an expression or realization of underlying or primary factors of race, class, or gender, and Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, hexis, and symbolic violence provide us with tools to discuss the relationships between what may, after all, only appear to be primary and secondary social markers.

This leads to a larger issue in critical debates about realist fiction.⁴⁶ Nineteenth-century authors often seem obsessed with insignificant details, such as decorations of houses, dresses characters wear, flowers in a garden. In "The Reality Effect," Roland Barthes has made the argument that it is primarily this abundance of details with no apparent narrative function that creates verisimilitude in realist texts. In realist fiction, we find minute descriptions of clothes, houses, and furniture that have no other function than to make the narrative more realistic. Roman Jakobson provides an illustrative anecdote for what Barthes would later call *l'effet de réel*: "A pupil is asked to solve a problem: 'A bird flew out of its cage; how soon will it reach the forest if it flies at such and such a speed per minute, and the distance between the cage and the forest is such and such?' 'What color is the cage?' asks the child. This child is a typical realist" ("On Realism in Art" 25). The technique described by Jakobson and Barthes is used by all writers discussed in this chapter and is probably put to greatest effect in Carrie's unrelenting fascination with the world of commodities. This observation alone should guard us against drawing too rigid a distinction between realist authors and a writer like Dreiser, whom Donald Pizer identifies as "the author whose work and career most fulfill the received notion of American naturalism" ("American" 57).

Contra Jakobson and Barthes, however, I wish to maintain that many of these details are functional in that they are used by authors to indicate the social status and various personality traits of fictional characters. For instance, the three-paragraph description of the three rooms Drouet rents for Sister Carrie and himself serves to document the improvement of her social status. As Carrie leaves behind the glum poverty of her sister's working-class household, she also leaves behind its "thin rag carpet" (13) for the "good Brussels carpet" of an apartment that is located in an area "occupied by a middle class who were both respectable and moderately well-to-do" (88). Descriptions

of habitats acquire an increasingly important function in Dreiser's novel as Carrie's rise to success is reflected in her choice of a luxurious suite in a hotel that sports an "elegantly carpeted and decorated hall, [a] marbled lobby, and showy waiting room" (453), while Hurstwood, down on his luck, is forced to move to a "cheaper room—thirty-five cents a day" (459) before he finally gasses himself in the room of a hostel described as "a dingy affair, wooden, dusty, hard" (499). Acoustic profiles and audiographs participate in this economy as they signal characters' distinction and thus position them with regard to the production, circulation and exchange of various kinds of capital. As such, they are an integral part of naturalism's political economy of sound and contribute significantly to the processes of containment, exclusion, and symbolic violence enacted within many a naturalist text.

The Noises of Modernist Form

Motor-cars came shooting out of deep, narrow streets into the shallowness of bright squares. Pedestrian darkness formed into cloudy strings. Where stronger lines of speed transected their loosely woven haste, they clotted up, then trickled on faster and, after few ripples, resumed their regular pulse. Hundreds of sounds were intertwined into a coil of wiry noise, with single points projecting, sharp edges running along it and submerging again, and clear notes splintering off—flying and scattering. Even though the peculiar nature of this noise could not be defined, anyone returning after years of absence would have known, with his eyes shut, that he was in that ancient capital and imperial city, Vienna.

Robert Musil, *The Man without Qualities*

In its interrogation of the links between the alterity of literary discourse and its social function, Paulson's *The Noise of Culture* does not exist in a theoretical vacuum. His conceptualization of literature as the disruptive, innovative noise within the communicative networks of culture is part of a long line of thought on the nature and function of the literary. While the relevance of that tradition in literary theory and criticism is, as I argue in the previous chapter, by no means limited to the discussion of modernist literature and art, many of its pivotal contributions originated in studies of that period. Its highly self-reflexive treatment of questions of representation, its "intolerable wrestle with words and meanings," and "Obsessive attempts to say 'the unsayable'" (McFarlane 72) make modernist writing a specially privileged site for exploring the relationship between the social function of literature on the one hand and the specificity of literary writing, its poeticity, on the other. The Russian formalists were important contributors to such debates.¹ Yet while Paulson acknowledges his indebtedness to these thinkers as well as their Belgian counterparts in Groupe μ , he tends to downplay both their interest in questions relating to the social function of literature and their close ties with the modernist movement in art—and thus the historical specificity of their as well as his own claims. Once we recognize that the "literature as noise" paradigm is rooted in a critical tradition that combines a sustained interest in poeticity with a more specific focus on modernist writing, we

are able to historicize that paradigm and make it useful for a discussion of modernist literature.

For instance, while Shklovsky's concept of defamiliarization formulates an insight into the nature of literary writing whose relevance extends beyond the modernist period, it is equally clear that it applies particularly well to literary texts characterized by a high degree of formal innovation. It is no coincidence that the development of Russian formalist thought in the first three decades of the twentieth century ran parallel to the literary movement of modernism.² Not only formalism's focus on the linguistic material of the poetic utterance links it to modernist concerns but also its recourse to organicist metaphors, its thinking about literary autonomy, its interest in poetic "strangeness" or deviation.³ Yet the Russian formalists did not focus exclusively on the formal properties of literary texts; they opened their investigations to their social function.

To say that the Russian formalists insisted on the autotelia of literary texts—that is, that literary language is an end in itself and serves no external purpose—tells only half the story. As Tzvetan Todorov (138–39) points out, Shklovsky's early "Art as Technique" (1917) already moves away from that position. For Shklovsky, defamiliarization is not solely a property effective within the literary system, allowing for the system's constant rejuvenation. By changing our ways of perception, literary discourse also exerts a heterotelic function; it assumes extraliterary significance; it intervenes in the world:

art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar," to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. (Shklovsky 20)⁴

If we consider Shklovsky's deliberations on the purpose of art in conjunction with his repeated assertion that "The language of poetry is [. . .] difficult, roughened, impeded language" (27), we get a notion of literature that is a far cry from the exclusive focus on literariness and formal properties of texts that Russian formalists are often associated with. Shklovsky's concept of defamiliarization has close affinities to Paulson's conceptualization of literary discourse as the noise of culture. Both accounts affirm that literary language

resists easy assimilation to forms of discourse characterized by greater automatization and redundancy. For both theorists, literature's internal noise assumes an extratextual function by breaking with habitual modes of perception; for both of them, literature triggers processes of innovation and thwarts desires for ready consumption.

While Shklovsky is ultimately more concerned with the phenomenology of reading than the politics of reading and writing (modernist) literature, later critics writing about modernist literature addressed the social function and politics of modernist writing in more explicit terms. Many critics have linked modernism's formal ruptures to a rupture of a different order: modernism was and is seen not only as a reaction against established poetic conventions but also as a reaction against and a rejection of the existing social order. For those critics, modernism is a cultural perturbation within and against modernity. Erich Auerbach anticipates many commentators on modernist literature, including Lionel Trilling and the conservative critic Daniel Bell ("Beyond Modernism"), when he writes in *Mimesis* that modernism is "not only a mirror of the decline of our world" (551) but also an acerbic attack on it: "There is hatred of culture and civilization, brought out by means of the subtlest stylistic devices which culture and civilization have developed, and often a radical and fanatical urge to destroy" (551). Yet even with a critic as subtle as Auerbach, the question remains: In what respects do modernism's "subtlest stylistic devices" bring out its "hatred of culture and civilization"? If modernist literature is the noise of cultural modernity, reminding it of its shortcomings and failures, how is that social function related to the specific forms of writing that we have come to associate with literary modernism?

It is here that Adorno's reflections in *Aesthetic Theory* (1970) will lead us beyond a simplistic view of modernist art as society's antagonist. For Adorno, any clear-cut distinction between art on the one hand and society on the other is rendered absurd by the simple fact that art itself is a social phenomenon. Art is a product of labor and as such not exempt from processes of material social production. Art is also social because it draws most of its subject matter from the reservoir of empirical reality. But this does not exhaust the possibilities. Art is also social in a third sense:

Art [...] is social not only because of its mode of production, in which the dialectic of the forces and relations of production is concentrated,

nor simply because of the social derivation of its thematic material. Much more importantly, art becomes social by its opposition to society, and it occupies this position only as autonomous art. By crystallizing in itself as something unique to itself, rather than complying with existing social norms and qualifying as “socially useful,” it criticizes society by merely existing, for which puritans of all stripes condemn it. (Adorno, *Aesthetic* 225–26)

Paradoxically, art is primarily social in its autonomy: “Asociality becomes the social legitimation of art” (234). Precisely because art stands at a remove from society and does not conform to the strictures of practical life is it able to participate in a critique of empirical reality. The critical function of art is not confined to the restricted case of art that directly points out and criticizes the shortcomings and wrongdoings of social structures and actors. On the contrary, committed art unwittingly affirms empirical reality by conforming to its discursive needs.⁵

Authentic art as Adorno conceives it follows the maxim that “only what does not fit into this world is true” (59). The position it adopts toward society is one of negativity. This negativity is of several interrelated orders. First of all, authentic art mimetically reproduces the bleakness of a society that is dominated by a logic of instrumental rationality and total exchange: “The darkening of the world makes the irrationality of art rational: radically darkened art. What the enemies of modern art, with a better instinct than its anxious apologists, call its negativity is the epitome of what established culture has repressed and that toward which art is drawn” (*Aesthetic* 19).⁶

But the darkness Adorno perceives in modernist art not only characterizes its thematic content. More important, it also characterizes its formal organization. For Adorno, modernism’s interest in problems of form has a critical function: “The historicophilosophical significance of the emancipation of form is that it refuses to mollify alienation in the image, exclusively thereby incorporating the alienated; that it defines the alienated as such” (145). What Adorno means by this becomes clearer in his discussion of the abstractness of much modernist art, where he claims that “Art is modern art through mimesis of the hardened and alienated; only thereby and not by the refusal of a mute reality, does art become eloquent” (21). Modernist negativity is therefore not simply a form of protest but contains the reified *structures* of empirical reality.

It would, however, not do justice to the complexity of Adorno's argument to claim that modernist form simply reproduces the alienated character of modernity and thereby critiques it. Anyone who has ever experienced the difficulty and recalcitrance of modernist art intuitively grasps that it does not simply reproduce the structures of empirical reality. Modernism is not simply an oppositional form of realism. Modernist art stands at a greater remove from society than traditional concepts of mimesis imply, and it is primarily formal aspects that create this distance:

Its contribution to society is not communication with it but rather something extremely mediated: It is resistance in which, by virtue of inner-aesthetic development, social development is reproduced without being imitated. At the risk of self-alienation, radical modernity preserves art's immanence by admitting society only in an obscured form, as in the dreams with which artworks have always been compared. Nothing social in art is immediately social, not even when this is its aim. (Adorno, *Aesthetic* 226)

Again, we encounter the paradox that art is primarily social in its autonomy. Adorno takes this argument to its most radical conclusion when he claims that the sheer incomprehensibility of an artwork like Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* constitutes an act of resistance: "The hermetic work brings more criticism to bear on the existing than do those that, in the interest of intelligible social criticism, devote themselves to conciliatory forms and silently acknowledge the flourishing culture industry" (145). In Adorno's bleak view, radical art is the last refuge for opposition in a world dominated by an all-pervasive logic of exchange and instrumental rationality. As such, it must insist on its difference from other spheres by formal means. Negativity in this sense is not just negative mimesis; it is an act of refusal, and artworks must adopt a stance of total refusal: "in order to resist the all-powerful system of communication they must rid themselves of any communicative means that would perhaps make them accessible to the public" (243).

While Adorno does not use the word *noise*, his preferred model of literary communication assigns modernist literary works precisely the function of interference, static, noise. What distinguishes his approach from Paulson's, however, is his insistence that communicative disturbance is an end in itself rather than merely an intermediate step toward the creation of new order and information. In the last instance, Adorno's radicalism poses the ques-

tion of whether art is still possible within a totally administrated and commodified world. The inner-aesthetic answer to this question is anti-art, art negating itself: “Art, for its part, seeks refuge in its own negation, hoping to survive through its own death” (338). This is the ultimate consequence of Adorno’s conviction that any transformation of an artwork’s difficulty and recalcitrance into communicable information would nullify the artwork’s oppositional stance. In literature as in other works of art, noise must remain noise, even at the cost of art’s negation of itself.⁷ In Roland Barthes’ words, “what the reader reads” when reading literature is a “countercommunication. [...] literatures are in fact arts of ‘noise’” (*S/Z* 145).

As will become apparent in the remainder of this chapter, my reading of modernist texts follows Adorno’s and Barthes’ line of argument more closely than it does Paulson’s. If modernist literature is the noise of cultural modernity, it is that not because its difference triggers processes of innovation within a self-organizing social system but because its irreducible negativity and noise enable it to occupy a position of critical distance from the processes of social, cultural, and economic production that sustain the system. Literary modernism constitutes, in Astradur Eysteinnsson’s words, “an interruption of prevalent social discourse” (202) rather than a source of cultural rejuvenation and is for that reason an at least “potentially subversive semi-otic force” (228). Stressing the potentially oppositional force of modernism’s formal dislocations and disruptions, I argue that the negativity, difficulty, and recalcitrance of modernist writing produces a noise that cannot be fully recuperated by the reader, refuses instant assimilation to the communicative networks already in place, and offers at least a certain degree of resistance to processes of appropriation by the forces of commodification.⁸

My twofold interest in conceptualizations of literature as noise and literary representations of noise continues to be at the center of my reflections as I explore the literary acoustics of modernism. With regard to the latter, it is hardly surprising that many of the noises represented in modernist texts were already present in the texts of their naturalist precursors. The acoustic legacy that the House of Morgan and other industrialists and financiers (the Rockefellers, the Carnegies, the Mellons, the du Ponts, the Fords, the Vanderbilts) bequeathed to America and the world continues to be heard throughout the martial and industrial soundscapes of modernism. In Dos Passos’s *1919* (1932), for instance, the continually expanding American railroad system, large parts of which are owned by the Morgan family, intro-

duces “the roar of the air and the swift pound of the wheels on the rails” (99), the noise of trains “whistl[ing] and rumbl[ing] into the platform” (265), and “the rattle of the express train” (278) to ever-new acoustic territories. The shipping industry—whose role Dos Passos emphasizes by devoting one of the fictional narratives to the sailor Joe Williams—likewise continues to make a strong impact on the U.S. soundscape, be it through “the siren of the fireboat *New York* let[ting] out a shriek” (189), “the great blind shapes of steamboat sirens” (99), “the rattle of [the *Callao*’s] winches” (121), or the sound of “rusty freighters with their screws so far out of the water you could hear ’em thrashing a couple of hours after they were hull down and out of sight” (183). Finally, while many new tools of destruction have been introduced between Crane’s Civil War and Dos Passos’s First World War, we can still hear “shrapnel twanging its harps out of tiny powderpuff clouds” (1919 79), “Guns [...] barking in every direction” (106), and “the roar of exploding lyddite” (114).⁹

In addition to these more readily observable convergences, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literary texts also display a similar range of concerns in their representations of noise. For instance, Gino’s rhetorical question about the effectiveness of naval guns in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) formulates an insight about the destructiveness of the noises of war we have already gained from our reading of *The Red Badge of Courage*: “I don’t suppose they are so effective [. . .]. But they scare me. They all sound as though they came directly for you. There is the boom then instantly the shriek and burst. What’s the use of not being wounded if they scare you to death?” (163). Likewise, a modernist like Dos Passos recognizes just as clearly as Crane the differentiation of the urban soundscape into socially defined segments that are exposed to different noise levels. When the financial situation of Ben Compton’s family improves, their acoustic environment changes along with it: “When Pop was well enough to work again he rented half a two-family house in Flatbush where at least they’d be away from the noise of the elevated” (1919 340). Finally, the bodily hexis of modernist characters, including the noises they make, can be read just as much as indicators of their social status as the hexis of their naturalist precursors. The following paragraph from *Manhattan Transfer* is reminiscent of Crane’s depictions of Maggie’s entertainment halls and immediately recognizable as a description of lower-class citizens, even when taken completely out of context: “Heads tossed back on thick necks let out volleys of laughter, glasses were banged on the round

ringmarked table, thighs resounded with slaps, elbows were poked into ribs” (61).

But as we move from naturalist to modernist texts, we also notice changes, both in terms of the quality and quantity of the noises that are represented and authors’ representational techniques. The “urban inhabitants of early-twentieth-century America perceived that they lived in an era unprecedentedly loud” (E. Thompson 6), and some of the more tangible changes in the soundscape of modernity can be traced back to technological advances that were made in the late nineteenth century but only made themselves heard on a large scale at the beginning of the twentieth century. In his contribution to Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane’s still very useful collection *Modernism 1890–1930* (1976), Alan Bullock names some of these advances:

Overlapping with this great industrial expansion was a technological revolution which, in the 1890s and 1900s, produced a series of key developments that remain the foundation of the technology of the twentieth—as distinct from that of the nineteenth—century. These were:

the internal combustion engine, the diesel engine and the steam turbine;
 electricity, oil and petroleum as the new sources of power;
 the automobile, the motor bus—the first London motor buses appeared in 1905—the tractor and the aeroplane;
 the telephone, the typewriter and the tape machine, the foundation of modern office organization;
 the production by the chemical industry of synthetic materials—dyes, man-made fibres and plastics. (59)¹⁰

Add to this the invention of new sound technologies such as “radio, sound film, microphony, amplification, and phonography” (Kahn 10) and the gradual displacement of the interactive technology of the phonograph by the one-way technology of the gramophone (Picker, *Victorian* 112, 142–45), and you get an aural world that inspires and demands new ways of hearing.

The social spaces most heavily affected by the new sounds of modernity were the industrial city and the battlefield. Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms* registers the acoustic changes brought about by the deployment of warplanes, though often from a distance: “The rain had stopped during the forenoon and three times we had heard planes coming, seen them pass over-

head, watched them go far to the left and heard them bombing on the main highroad" (182). The staccato of machine guns is a martial noise that is still missing from *The Red Badge of Courage* but makes a distinctive impact on the soundscapes of Dos Passos's *1919* ("The world's no fun anymore / only machinegunfire and arson" [11]) and *A Farewell to Arms* ("I listened to the firing to the north toward Udine. I could hear machine-gun firing" [194]). Electronic sirens warning civilians about enemy attacks were not invented until after Crane's novel was published; in *1919*, they are among the most frequently represented noises of war (another indication that Dos Passos's novel comments on World War I "from a distance"), be it in the fictional narratives:

She came out on a boulevard at last where there were men and women strolling, voices and an occasional automobile. Suddenly the nightmare scream of a siren started up in the distance, then another and another. (105)

They were eating in a little restaurant in Montmartre. The cash lady and the waiter made them all go down into the cellar when the sirens started wailing for the second time. (75)

or in the impressionistic *Camera Eyes*: "the barrelvaulted room all smells fever and whitewash carbolic sick wops outside the airraid siren's got a nightmare" (135).

In the modernist city, other technological advances leave their acoustic traces. Automobiles make themselves heard in Hemingway's *Milan* ("Down below on the street a motor car honked" [139]) just as they do in Dos Passos's *New York* ("Behind them automobiles slithered with a constant hissing scuttle in two streams along the roadway" [152]). A whole new *mélange* of noises rises from the city streets and engulfs the modern metropolis.

By 1926, the acoustician Edward Elway Free was using the newly developed audiometer to quantify the noises that assailed New Yorkers' ears. Free identified horse-drawn traffic, chain-driven trucks, automobiles, and elevated trains as the main sources of noise (E. Thompson 148–49). Writing in 1925, a journalist for the *Saturday Review of Literature* described the new urban soundscape thus:

The air belongs to the steady burr of the motor, to the regular clank clank of the elevated, and to the chitter of the steel drill. Underneath

is the rhythmic roll over clattering ties of the subway; above, the drone of the airplane. The recurrent explosions of the internal combustion engine, and the rhythmic jar of bodies in rapid motion determine the tempo of the sound world in which we have to live. (qtd. in E. Thompson 117)

Writing in the same year and in language more reminiscent of this chapter's epigraph, Dos Passos captures the noise of the city in metaphorical terms: "Black spiraling roar outside was melting through the walls making the cuddled shadows throb" (*Manhattan Transfer* 50).

The typewriter was already invented in the late 1860s, but the constant clattering of typists at work in large office buildings was a phenomenon that emerged in the early twentieth century. In *Manhattan Transfer*, Dos Passos has Ellen Thatcher describe that appliance's contribution to the ambient noise level of the office environment: "Ellen leaned back in the taxi and closed her eyes for a second. Not even the bath and the halfhour's nap had washed out the fagging memory of the office, the smell of it, the chirruping of typewriters, the endlessly repeated phrases, faces, typewritten sheets" (333). In an early poem, Hemingway compares its staccato sound to that of the newly developed machine gun—an entirely appropriate comparison since, as Kittler reminds us, the first of those "discourse machinegun[s]" (*Literature* 44) was produced by the arms manufacturer Remington, whose business had suffered losses since the end of the Civil War:

The mills of the gods grind slowly,
 But this mill
 Chatters in mechanical staccato,
 Ugly short infantry of the mind (qtd. in Limon 99)

As Hemingway refines his own "hard" style, writing becomes warfare. Hemingway's evocation of the typewriter also points to a more fundamental difference between naturalist and modernist texts. The typewriter not only dissected into separate letters what was a steady flow in handwriting but was also instrumental in making writing visible as a technology, thus inviting the kind of self-reflexivity characteristic of Hemingway's poem and modernist writing in general. "The typewriter [. . .] changed the nature of writing" (Kittler, "Technologies" 735), and modernist language experiments testify to the change. Formal disruptions and fragmentations in particular add an ad-

ditional layer of signification that overlays the representational concerns that texts like Dos Passos's *1919* or Jean Toomer's *Cane* share with texts from the 1890s. This additional layer accounts for much of the distinctively modernist feel of *Cane* and *1919*.

My specific interest with regard to modernism's formal ruptures lies in the varying degrees to which they manage to preserve something of the inefability and intractability of the noises they represent. To give two examples discussed in greater detail below: in the light of Toomer's ingenious mixing of African-American oral traditions and Anglo-American literary strategies, the fragmented form of *Cane* may be read as a reminder of unresolved racial tensions within a segregated America; Matthew O'Connor's rambling, discontinuous speeches in Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*, though drawing heavily on psychoanalytic discourse, do not provide any consoling narrative for the alienated subjects of modernity. As with naturalist fiction, my main focus is on the ways in which stylistic strategies, ranging from dissonant narrators and onomatopoeia to imagist techniques and the dissolution of unified points of view, are involved in processes of containment and inclusion/exclusion in modernist representations of noise. As in my discussion of the earlier texts, the noises I am particularly interested in are those of the social, cultural, racial, and political conflicts of modernity, ranging from the deafening roar of aerial bombs in World War I to the soundscapes of urban conflict in the metropolis, and from the incomprehensible ramblings and cries of alienated characters on the brink of mental breakdown to the challenges to (post-)slavery racism by the sounds of African-American spirituals and spirituality.

In choosing to focus in this chapter on literary texts as different as Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923), John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* (1925) and *1919* (1932), Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* (1936), and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), I do not lay claim to providing a study of a representative sample of modernist fiction. I do, however, wish to make the point that the representational strategies I identify as an aesthetics of noise occur across a fairly broad spectrum of modernist writing. The concept of modernism that emerges from these readings stresses shared communicational and representational concerns across widely divergent literary forms.

For instance, the realistic surface, relatively simple temporal structure, and rural setting of Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* seem to have little in common with the impressionist imagery, fragmented narrative, and

distinctly urban feel of Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer*. Yet once we perceive that both Hurston's introduction of African-American orality into a literary format and Dos Passos's disintegration of narrative continuity are part of an aesthetics that valorizes the disruption of established patterns of cultural communication, commonalities between their projects emerge that overlay obvious differences in terms of narrative and syntactic structure, geographical and cultural setting, and political outlook. Written in the presence of noise, these texts refuse to assimilate their project to contemporary acousticians' attempts to regulate and tame the noise; their literary acoustics do not yield to what Emily Thompson has identified as the quintessentially modern "desire for clear, controlled, signal-like sound" (3).

The question of a shared modernist project assumes special significance with regard to African-American modernism, the Harlem Renaissance in particular, whose formal and thematic distance from the canonized works of Anglo-Saxon modernism has prompted many a critic to decry the former's lack of innovatory force and experimental daring and effectively to deny these texts the label "modernism" along with the (academic) prestige attached to that label. For these and related reasons, I will begin my discussion of literary texts with a reassessment of the place in literary history of two pivotal contributions to African-American literature: Toomer's *Cane* and Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Rather than arguing that these texts are "like" or "as good as" those written by Toomer and Hurston's Anglo-Saxon contemporaries, I explore the points of convergence between two distinctive traditions of modernist writing.

Antiphonal Play

In his monograph on African-American modernism, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, Houston A. Baker Jr. identifies two central strategies of African-American writing in the first decades of the twentieth century. The first, "mastery of form," refers to the various ways in which standard Anglo-American literary and cultural forms, ranging from the sonnet to stereotypical images of blacks invoked in minstrel shows, were adapted for strategic and sometimes ironic purposes. Baker's principal examples for the mastery of form are Booker T. Washington's and Charles Waddell Chesnut's transformative appropriations of the language and representations of minstrelsy: "Like Billy Kersands stretching the minstrel face to a successful black excess, or Bert Williams and George Walker converting nonsense sounds and awk-

wardly demeaning minstrel steps into pure kinesthetics and masterful black artistry, so Washington takes up types and tones of nonsense to earn a national reputation and its corollary benefits for the African American masses” (Baker 33). Baker argues that the mastery of form is a masquerade that was necessary to reach the kind of widespread support Washington gained. The second strategy, “deformation of mastery,” describes an African-American expressiveness that challenges standard forms in a more aggressive manner, introducing and advertising cultural elements alien to the Anglo-Saxon tradition. In its celebration of traditions with decidedly African roots, it challenges and attacks hegemonic cultural forms: “The deformation of mastery refuses a master’s *nonsense*. It returns—often transmuting ‘standard’ syllables—to the common sense of the tribe. Its relationship to masks is radically different from that of the mastery of form. The spirit house occupying the deformer is not minstrelsy, but the sound and space of an African ancestral past” (56). Baker cites W.E.B. Du Bois’s incorporation of the black folk tradition, in particular the musical sounds of spirituals, as his prime example of the deformation of mastery.

What strikes me as problematic in Baker’s approach is less his reduction of African-American modernism to just two fundamental strategies. In fact, I believe that unless such reductions revert to binary reductionism—by which I mean that they either try to explain *everything* by means of the binary scheme or fail to recognize the points of intersection between and necessary intertwinement of the terms—they are often of great heuristic value and provide useful points of departure for critical inquiry. What I do take issue with is Baker’s complete dissociation of the Harlem Renaissance from Anglo-Saxon modernism. While I fully agree with him that “judgments on Afro-American ‘modernity’ and the ‘Harlem Renaissance’ that begin with notions of British, Anglo-American, and Irish ‘modernism’ as ‘successful’ objects, projects, and processes to be emulated by Afro-Americans are misguided” (xv–xvi), this does not necessarily entail either that “Africans and Afro-Americans—through conscious and unconscious designs of various Western ‘modernisms’—have little in common with Joycean or Eliotic projects” (xvi) or that we need to dismiss the work of Anglo-Saxon modernists—as Baker does in his first two chapters—as “often decidedly puerile and undeniably transient” (13) in order to talk about the Harlem Renaissance in terms of success rather than failure. I find Baker’s isolationism particularly problematic because the second strategy he identifies in African-American modernism,

the deformation of mastery, resonates with central concerns of that other modernist tradition: defamiliarization, formal innovation, “making it new.”

Jean Toomer’s *Cane*, published in 1923 and thus not only in the first years of the Harlem Renaissance but also, as Werner Sollors notes, “before Ernest Hemingway’s and William Faulkner’s first important books were to appear” (18), provides a perfect example of multiple intersections between black and white modernisms. As Sollors points out, *Cane* is, like Anglo-Saxon modernist texts, in “Its very form an attempt at finding a literary equivalent for the dislocations that modernity had wrought by moving people from soil to pavements, making them ashamed of their traditional folk culture or changing it into commercial entertainment, and radically altering the epic pace of sun and seasons, of sowing and reaping, into the accelerated and syncopated rhythm of trains and cars, the staccato of quickly shifting images and thoughts” (20). While the ethnic specificity of some of the sociocultural changes Sollors describes is obvious (African-Americans became “ashamed of their traditional folk culture” because it was and remains linked to the memory of slavery), Toomer’s decision to present us with a mixture of poetry, drama, and prose that eschews narrative continuity and challenges the boundaries between the different genres; his potent blend of rural and urban, pre-industrial and technological imagery; his use of imagist techniques (for example, in the poem “Nullo”); and his strategic employment of repetition (in “Rhobert” in its most Steinian manifestation) bear close affinities to the practice of Anglo-Saxon modernist innovators like John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, Ezra Pound, or Gertrude Stein (in that order), and to their artistic reactions to the progress of modernity. However, this does not entail, as Sollors claims, that either Toomer or his white contemporaries were striving for an expression of unity and wholeness as a sort of countermeasure to the sense of fragmentation and alienation experienced by many at the beginning of the twentieth century:

Toomer sees his own mission [. . .] as providing a ground for spiritual unity. His quest for union, for wholeness, for the circle is achieved precisely by thematizing the divisions that the book’s author felt were so destructive and virulent in the modern world: race, sex, class, region. Toomer saw himself as a visionary who would try to redirect readers toward a wholeness—however elusive it might be—that they had lost in their differentiations by category. (28)

The circle Sollors refers to is the sequence of curves that preface the three parts that make up *Cane*: (,) and (). While he concedes that these signify the “interrelatedness of fragmentation and quest for wholeness” (21), Sollors’s reading privileges the latter at the expense of the former. This becomes particularly obvious when he links the (alleged) modernist search for unity to Toomer’s own vision of the emergence of a new American race that is “neither white nor black nor red nor brown” but “one whole and undivided human race” (qtd. in Sollors 29). In Sollors’s reading, organic unity doctrine and melting-pot ideology are close allies. Too close for comfort. Against Sollors’s as well as Toomer’s own assertion in a letter to Waldo Frank that “*Cane*’s design is a circle” (qtd. in Hutchinson 50), I wish to maintain that Toomer’s mixing of black folk tradition with a mastery of literary devices generally associated with Anglo-Saxon modernism produces tensions that are not resolved back into the fullness of the circle.¹¹ Hence, my own reading emphasizes that the two curves that preface the third part of *Cane* are precisely two curves, not a circle: ().

On a thematic level, Sollors’s argument for “interracialism” (35) as a driving force in Toomer’s writing seems to me too conciliatory for a book that has the following description of a lynching in it:

She was in the family-way, Mame Lamkins was. They killed her in th street, an some white man seain th risin in her stomach as she lay there sopy in her blood like any cow, took an ripped her belly open, an th kid fell out. It was living; but a nigger baby aint supposed t live. So he jabbed his knife in it an stuck it t a tree. An then they all went away.
(90)

Reading *Cane*, we are continually reminded that the year of its publication coincides with the strongest historical presence of the Ku Klux Klan: “At its height, around 1923–24, there were between four and eight million Klan members, including a strong female contingent” (P. Jenkins 211). It is entirely in keeping with this that Toomer’s gruesome description is based on actual “NAACP documentation on lynching in the South” (Karrer 138).

But Toomer’s awareness of remaining tensions between the races extends beyond the thematic level to the text’s formal organization. It is here that elements drawn from African-American oral culture contribute to and intersect with modernist literary strategies to produce a highly fragmented text whose discontinuities and formal tensions gesture toward racial chasms

rather than their resolution into a new unity. So while Toomer does bring African-American and Anglo-Saxon modes of representation into a dialogue that exhibits shared stylistic and representational concerns, he does not suggest that there exists a corresponding “interracialism” on the level of social interaction between blacks and whites in the South. What the modernism of Toomer’s *Cane* has in common with Anglo-Saxon modernisms is not a search for wholeness and unity but an insistence on fragmentation and unresolved tensions on the textual level *and* within the field of social practices. Sollors’s own remarks on the harsh sounds of *Cane* may serve as a starting point for our own investigation:

Although the precise meaning of an instance on a given page may be hard to define, the very fact that words are repeated throughout the book gives the reader a sense of acoustic and visual familiarity, a phenomenon reminiscent of *Three Lives*. For example, *Cane* is a book of repeated “thuds,” harsh knocking sounds that syncopate the reading from “Becky” [6; the sound of the chimney falling into Becky’s cabin] to the end of “Kabnis” [115; the sound of Halsey at work]. In “Blood Burning Moon” the thud is the sound of Bob’s body falling and of the mob’s action [33–34], giving a menacingly violent undercurrent of meaning to such later thuds as those in the gymnasium in “Bona and Paul” [70; the sounds of drilling exercises]. (25)

Such acoustic repetitions reverberate throughout *Cane*, be it the “pines” that “whisper to Jesus” in “Becky” (5, 6, 7); the “Cane leaves swaying, rusty with talk, / Scratching choruses above the guinea’s squawk” in “Carma” (10, 11); the cackling chicken, barking dogs, and crowing roosters in “Blood-Burning Moon” (28, 30, 33); a black woman’s “lullaby beneath the mate-eyes of a southern planter” in “Bona and Paul” (71, 76); the “zooming Cadillacs, / Whizzing, whizzing down the street-car tracks” in “Seventh Street” (39); or, more subtly and figuratively, the “Songs” of a jazz club that “soak the walls” until “The walls sing and press inward” in “Theater” (50, 51, 53). Alternating between the rural sounds and songs of the South and those of urban Harlem, between rustling cane leaves and whizzing streetcars, between a plantation worker’s lullaby and a pianist’s jazz tunes, these repetitions provide a dense acoustic panorama of African-American life in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Foremost among the sounds that structure *Cane* are the songs of black

folk culture, the spirituals, lullabies, and work songs whose roots lie in African sound-making, but whose more recent context is that of slavery on American soil and its own soundscape of “the silence of enslavement” and “the clanking of cruelty” (M. Smith 157). Toomer’s inclusion of spirituals like “Deep River” (41, 81), “My Lord, what a morning” (91), or “Swing low, sweet chariot” (65) as well as many unnamed tunes therefore simultaneously celebrates African-American song and serves as a reminder of both the injustices of slavery and the deep racial divisions that continue to structure the lives and perceptions of Americans on both sides of the color-line. The painful memory of slavery attached to them is evoked in one of Toomer’s brilliant metaphors: “The women sang lustily. Their songs were cotton-wads to stop their ears” (29). When W.E.B. Du Bois wrote *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), the spirituals’ association with and historical emergence in slavery was, besides their appropriation by minstrelsy, one of the main reasons why many African-Americans sought to distance themselves from a rich black folk tradition (Sundquist 467–90). Twenty years later, Toomer could evoke the sounds of African-American spirituality with pride without losing sight of the songs’ uncanny association with racial inequality and injustice of the past as well as the present.¹² The final stanzas of his “Song of the Son” bring out this ambivalence best:

O Negro slaves, dark purple ripened plums,
Squeezed, and bursting in the pine-wood air,
Passing, before they stripped the old tree bare
One plum was saved for me, one seed becomes

An everlasting song, a singing tree,
Caroling softly souls of slavery,
What they were, and what they are to me,
Caroling softly souls of slavery. (12)

Like Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk*—whose title is evoked in Toomer’s repeated line “Caroling softly souls of slavery”—Toomer refuses to read the spirituals as signs of shame but reclaims their aesthetic worth along with their indictive force. As Barbara Foley points out, Toomer’s variation on “Deep River” drives home the latter point with particular vigor: the original “Deep River / my home is over Jordan / Deep river / I want to cross over into campground” turns into Toomer’s “White man’s land. / Niggers, sing. /

Burn, bear black children / Till poor rivers bring / Rest, and sweet glory / In Camp Ground” (81). Toomer’s modernist deformation of the spiritual’s words spells out even more clearly the original’s indictment of a southern culture of death that resounded with the noise of “screams, lashes, and clanking chains” (M. Smith 2). No wonder the song, like “Night winds in Georgia,” sets off in Kabnis the feeling of a “weird chill” (81).

Yet the weirdness or strangeness of these songs does not reside exclusively in their evocation of a violent past but also in their continual slippages into the realm of pure sound. In *Cane*, an unnamed female singer’s voice can be heard “rising and falling in a plaintive moan” and gradually “swell[ing] to shouting” (88); Fern “spatter[s] inarticulately in plaintive, convulsive sounds, mingled with calls to Christ Jesus” and then “s[i]ng[s] brokenly” (17) before she collapses into the narrator’s arms; King Barlo announces that Jesus is “awhisperin strange words deep down, O way down deep, deep in [his] ears,” and the audience joins him by humming “Fragments of melodies” (20–21). Shouts, hollers, moans, hums, and cries mix with onomatopoeic words until words lose their meanings and language becomes indistinguishable from noise, as in “Cotton Song”:

Nassur; nassur,
Hump.
Eoho, eoho, roll away
We ain’t awine t wait until Judgment Day! (10)

While these noises originate in the realm of black music and song—be it in the spirituals of the South or the jazz tunes of the North (“Ji-ji-bo, JI-JI-BO!” [58])—they do not remain confined to it but seep into the structure of Toomer’s text. The “thuds” Sollors notices in “Bona and Paul” are soon joined by the “Whir. Whir” (71) of Bona’s dizzying head as she runs into Paul and, somewhat later in the same story, by the “Hi diddle, hi diddle” (76) of the jazz pianist in the Crimson Garden club. “Eohos” reverberate throughout *Cane* (9, 10, 55, 69) and mingle in the acoustic space of Toomer’s text with the “Hi! Yip!” and “Gedap” (10) of Carma’s mule wagon, the thunderous “Boom. Boom. BOOM!” (115) of Halsey’s workshop, the “mutter, laughs, flutter, whishadwash” (61) of a theater audience before the performance begins, the “chug-chug of a gas engine” (10), or Kabnis’s vocal expression of disgust: “Ugh” (84). Together, the repetition of these noises punctures the flow of the text, making it “rhythmical and syncopated” (70), like the thuds

of the men's footfalls at the beginning of "Bona and Paul." These noises give the text a decidedly oral quality and thereby serve to remind readers of the vicissitudes of translating into a literary format what first emerged in the context of oral tradition. They restore the materiality of sound to African-American vocalization and serve as traces of what remains inassimilable and desirably "strange" in the translation of speech, music, and song into the medium of the literary text. The literary form of *Cane*, then, simultaneously documents an attempt to represent in literature that which ultimately remains unrepresentable in writing (as opposed to the phonograph) and an act of linguistic resistance that testifies to both Toomer's proximity to Anglo-American modernism and his literary independence. Moreover, the sounding excess of *Cane's* noises fissures the economy of restraint apparent in the text's imagist moments. So while we need to be aware that their syncopated rhythms contribute to and participate in modernist strategies of repetition and communicative disruption that have their analogues in Anglo-American literature of the period, our recognition of the cultural specificity of African-American sounding should guard us against conflating the aesthetic projects of two related yet distinctive traditions in American literary modernism.¹³ These noises mark an alterity whose origins must be sought in the context of slavery and beyond, in the African roots of African-American song and spirituality.

In another important contribution to African-American literary modernism, Zora Neale Hurston, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), approaches the question of the translatability of oral culture into literature from a somewhat different angle. Henry Louis Gates Jr. brings out the differences best when he credits Hurston with inventing what he calls the "speakerly text," that is, "a text whose rhetorical strategy is designed to represent an oral literary tradition, designed to emulate the phonetic, grammatical, and lexical patterns of actual speech and produce the illusion of oral narration," and when he argues that "Whereas Toomer's *Cane* draws upon the black oral voice essentially as a different voice from the narrator's, as a repository of socially distinct, contrapuntal meaning and beliefs, a speakerly text would seem to be oriented primarily toward imitating one of the numerous forms of oral narration to be found in classical Afro-American vernacular literature" ("Hurston" 165). This not only brings out the two authors' distinctive uses of the oral tradition but also accounts for generic differences between Toomer's more lyrical and Hurston's more narrative, "chatty," writing style.

However, my own reading of Hurston's novel differs from Gates's in that it lays a stronger emphasis on remaining tensions in Hurston's writing between culturally different linguistic registers than Gates's notion of the speakerly text would seem to allow for in its conflation of the oral and the literary, the spoken and the written.

Eric Sundquist's seminal *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* provides a theoretical framework for such a reading, which avoids both Baker's separatism and Sollors's desire for unity.¹⁴ Following Sundquist, my reading proposes a small contribution to the study of an interracially shared tradition in American literature that does not elide the differences that bear the marks of a history of slavery, peonage, and racism underlying that tradition. More specifically, while my reading of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is heavily indebted to Sundquist's reading of another text written by an African-American, W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, it also insists on a commonality of concerns that links Hurston's modernism to that of Dos Passos, Barnes, or Hemingway. Moreover, by insisting on the multiplicity and complexity of the interrelations between oral and literary traditions, it also seeks to avoid what Baker rightly chastises in many accounts of the Harlem Renaissance as failure: the reduction of one culture to the terms and norms of the other (Baker 9–14). Rather than asking whether African-American modernism is as experimental, innovative, and iconoclastic as Anglo-American modernism (whether Hurston is as Poundian as Pound), I will examine their different strategies for reaching similar (representational, aesthetic) goals. As in Toomer, the question of the representability of the unrepresentable returns in Hurston in the guise of the translatability of the untranslatable, of the permutation of the oral into the literary, or, in other words, of the benefits and costs of transforming noise into information.

At the heart of Sundquist's reading of *The Souls of Black Folk* is an interrogation of the relations existing between the individual chapters' arguments and the two epigraphs preceding each chapter, one of them a musical bar that reproduces part of an African-American spiritual, the other a more standard belletristic epigraph drawn from the Western tradition of "high" literature. Sundquist makes much of the fact that the spirituals are reproduced only in musical notation, without titles or lyrics. Only in Du Bois's final chapter, entitled "The Sorrow Songs," are most of the musical epigraphs identified. The limited visibility of the spirituals in Du Bois's text not only points to

their absence from standard literary histories but also suggests that their improvisatory nature and incorporation of noises (hollers, shouts, moaning) cannot be captured accurately by standard forms of musical notation. An exploration of the multiple relations between the musical epigraphs, the belletristic epigraphs, and the arguments of Du Bois's essays raises additional issues relating to the politics of cross-cultural representation.

Sundquist draws on Franz Boas's article "On Alternating Sounds" (1889) to discuss these issues. In this influential essay, Boas charged fellow anthropologists with "sound-blindness" (47) with regard to so-called alternating sounds. Boas argues that alternating sounds—apparently random phonetic variations in speech attributed by anthropologists to more "primitive" languages (for example, Inuktitut, Kwakiutl, Haida)—are a chimera produced by anthropologists whose culture-specific patterns of perception prevented them from recognizing the phonetic subtleties of another culture's language. For instance, an observer may, as Boas himself did on various occasions, transcribe a sound that is unknown in his own language and whose phonetic and acoustic qualities are somewhere between /m/ and /v/ as /m/ on one occasion and as /v/ on another. Reviewing this and other examples, Boas concludes that "there is no such phenomenon as synthetic or alternating sounds. [. . .] alternating sounds are in reality alternating apperceptions of one and the same sound" (52). In Sundquist's reading of *The Souls of Black Folk*, the epigraphs function as alternating sounds in two respects:

Writing at a historical moment of bleak social and political prospects for African Americans, Du Bois marked the gulf between black and white America in many ways, not least in the blunt dialectical challenge of his epigraphs. At the interpretive level the paired epigraphs most often act as a joint dialectical commentary on the individual chapters; in this respect they might (to cite Boas again) be styled "alternating sounds" in the simple sense that they provide a double gloss on Du Bois's various essays in sociological and cultural analysis. [. . .] The musical epigraphs are [also] "alternating sounds" in the other sense that I have outlined already in the example of Chesnutt—an example of a cultural "language" (in this case black) that cannot be properly interpreted, or even "heard" at all, since it fails to correspond to the customary mapping of sounds and signs that make up the languages of the dominant (in this case white) culture. (468–70)

Du Bois's double strategy of reproducing only the musical bars of the spirituals—which in itself is already a gesture against ready appropriation—and bringing them into a relationship with both the belletristic epigraphs and his own scholarly arguments raises a host of questions surrounding issues of translatability and representability: To what degree is any textual representation of spirituals a misrepresentation? What is lost in the translation of African expression and experience into not only an African-American context but also into the recognizably Western formats of musical notation and academic prose? How, if at all, is the mixture of speech and music that characterizes much African-American expressivity to be rendered in print? Has not the phonograph—invented only eight years after Thomas Wentworth Higginson published his groundbreaking *Army Life in a Black Regiment* (1869)—rendered any such endeavor obsolete?¹⁵ Du Bois was well aware that all of these questions had pertinence not only to a critique of white distortions of black culture (in minstrelsy, the plantation novel, ethnographic writings and recordings, or concert performances of spirituals for a predominantly white audience) but also to his own position as a spokesperson for African-Americans (it is here that representation acquires its most literally political connotations). As Sundquist points out, the same complex of questions is activated when Du Bois reproduces “Do bana coba,” the song first sung in his family, in the final chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois identifies it as “primitive African music” (157), but its words are in no known African language:

The antiphonal relationship between word and music that structures the unfolding argument of *The Souls of Black Folk*, to expand an earlier point, is an elaboration of the concept of vocalization—the alliance of speech and music at the base of the African American artistic tradition. “Do bana coba” literalizes that vocalization as an unknown language beyond words, a cry out of the territory of sound that is transgeographical and Pan-African in the most elemental sense. It offers an ancestral equivalent for the cries and shouts, the laboring hollers, typically long, wavering single- or double-line calls, that were the basis for the black work song and consequently for some forms of the spiritual. And it locates in ancestral cultural gifts never to be fully recovered the sign of difference that was designated a “problem” by white commentators. (Sundquist 529–30)

To talk about vocalization in terms of noise is emphatically not to fall prey to the primitivism of many Anglo-Saxon and European modernists but to evoke two distinct yet related senses of the word. First, it refers to the naming practices of those “white commentators” who conceive of African-American expressivity, particularly in its vocal and musical dimensions, as nothing but senseless, unintelligible noise. Noise in this sense describes an aggressive form of misapprehension that is linked to an imposition of one’s own norms and patterns of perception onto those of others—a process we have already seen at work in naturalist literature. Second, it refers to a culture’s mode of self-description that stresses its difference from another, often dominant, culture. Noise in this sense validates precisely those moments of cultural expressivity that fall outside the parameters of a given norm, elements that, like noise in the channels of communication, grate and disturb the discourses they are introduced into so as to bring about the unpredictably new. It describes, in other words, the elements of negativity and communicative resistance in what Baker calls the deformation of mastery. As such, it may be (but need not be) a reaction against uses of the word *noise* in the first sense and engage in what Salman Rushdie has described as a reappropriation of dominant language uses (402). To give an example from the realm of popular culture: When black hip hop artists Public Enemy released their second album, *It Takes A Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*, in 1988, they titled the song in which they endorse Black Muslim leader Louis Farrakhan “Bring the Noise” (“Farrakhan’s a prophet and I think you ought to listen to / what he can say to you, what you ought to do”). Whatever one may think of Farrakhan’s politics, this is clearly more than an act of reclamation; it is a celebration of the different, inassimilable voice of dissent, a voice, moreover, whose prophecies are communicated via a medium—music—that has itself been described as “a herald of times to come” (Attali 4).

The antiphonal play Eric Sundquist discerns in W.E.B. Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk* returns in a different guise in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. In Hurston, it is the interplay of orality and literacy that performs a function similar to Du Bois’s ingenious combination of music and text. Hurston’s decision to embed her narrative within a frame story (in which Janie tells her life story to Pheoby Watson) already brings oral and literary traditions into a dialogue. On the one hand, the frame story is a time-honored narrative device whose employment in world literature reaches from *The Arabian Nights*, with its close affinity to oral storytelling,

to its metafictional and highly “literary” transformation in John Barth’s *Chimera* and beyond. On the other hand, the device of the frame story in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* serves to accentuate the oral dimension of Hurston’s narrative as a story that is told by someone to someone.

Hurston deploys all the resources of the craft of fiction to negotiate between different degrees of orality and literacy. The novel begins with an omniscient (and extradiegetic) narrative voice that introduces the diegetic narrator (Janie) and the narratee (Pheoby) of Janie the character’s life story: “So at the beginning of this was a woman and she had come back from burying the dead” (9).¹⁶ The narrator is soon joined by the porch-sitters, whose judgmental comments, rendered in direct speech, provide more information on Janie. As we move from the narrative frame to Janie’s first-person account of her life at the beginning of the second chapter, we are introduced to the direct speech of Janie’s vernacular: “Ah know exactly what Ah got to tell yuh, but it’s hard to know where to start at. Ah ain’t never seen mah papa. And Ah didn’t know ’im if Ah did” (20). Hurston remains in this mode for several pages and seems almost reluctant to abandon the method of representing words in writing that is closest to speech. Only gradually do first-person narrative and direct speech give way to third-person narrative and a mixture between direct discourse and other, more mediated forms of representing words and thoughts (free indirect discourse, indirect discourse, narratized discourse): “She [Janie] thought awhile and decided that her conscious life had commenced at Nanny’s gate. On a late afternoon Nanny had called her to come inside the house because she had spied Janie letting Johnny Taylor kiss her over the gatepost” (23). But as if to counterbalance this more “literary” style, Hurston moves storytelling and a variety of signifyin(g) rituals to the center of her narrative as soon as Jody and Janie move to Eatonville. These include the “mule talk” (85) surrounding Matt Bonner’s skinny, mean mule; the “eternal arguments” (99) between Sam Watson and Lige Moss; the “acting-out courtship” (105) of Charlie Jones; and the ensuing verbal sparring between Jim and Dave. As Gates observes, the narrator’s voice recedes into the background in these scenes, giving full rein to Hurston’s celebration of oral performativity (“Hurston” 184).

To be sure, from a narratological point of view, these rituals of speech are embedded in a complex narrative structure. In fact, some of them involve meta-metanarratives, that is, they include narratives that are embedded in

Janie's narrative, which is itself embedded in the extradiegetic narrator's narrative:

- [empirical author (Hurston)]
 - [implied author]
 - [extradiegetic narrator (omniscient)]
 - [diegetic narrator (Janie)]
 - [metadiegetic narrator ("mule-talkers")]
 - meta-metadiegetic narrative ("mule talk")*
 - [metadiegetic narratee (village audience)]
 - [diegetic narratee (Pheoby)]
 - [extradiegetic narratee]
 - [implied reader]
 - [empirical reader]¹⁷

This structure is further complicated by the fact that, although Janie clearly is the (diegetic) narrator of her own life story, that story is for the most part told in the third person. As Hurston introduces elements of the black folk tradition into a highly intricate literary form—whose frame structure has distinctive roots in the oral tradition—the boundaries between the oral and the literary become blurred and Baker's two strategies, the mastery of form and the deformation of mastery, inseparably intertwined.

Their Eyes Were Watching God is, like *The Souls of Black Folk* and *Cane*, what Baker calls a "singing book" (68), a form of cultural performance that manages to retain the sounds of African-American expressivity in its translation of the oral into the literary. Throughout the novel, Hurston follows Charles W. Chesnutt's advice to render the black vernacular "with such a degree of phonetic correctness as to suggest *the sound*" (qtd. in Baker 42; my emphasis). This endeavor extends beyond phonetic accuracy to include prosodic as well as paralinguistic features of African-American sounding. Hurston's writing thus participates in "the establishment of a mode of *sounding* reality that is identifiably and self-consciously black and empowering" (Baker 71). When Janie's grandmother, after an argument with Janie, "half s[i]ng[s], half sob[s] a running chant-prayer over the head of the weeping girl" (29–30), when the crowd accompanying the mule's carcass on its way to the grave is joyfully "shouting [. . .] advice and orders and useless comments" (95), when Janie's sorrow over Jody's impending death manifests itself in a

“deep sob” that sounds like “beating a bass drum in a hen house” and then rises “high like pulling in a trombone” (132), when Janie hears “someone humming like they were feeling for pitch” and then finds Tea Cake “mimicking the tuning of a guitar” (152), Hurston evokes the distinctive sounds of African-American vocalization, which find their most compelling expression in the novel’s final paragraph. Janie’s memories of Tea Cake reverberate beyond the end of the novel as they fuse with the sounds of grief and those of African-American sounding:

The day of the gun, and the bloody body, and the courthouse came and commenced to sing a sobbing sigh out of every corner in the room; out of each and every chair and thing. Commenced to sing, commenced to sob and sigh, singing and sobbing. Then Tea Cake came prancing around her where she was and the song of the sigh flew out of the window and lit in the top of the pine trees. Tea Cake, with the sun for a shawl. Of course he wasn’t dead. He could never be dead until she herself had finished feeling and thinking. (286)

Janie’s second husband, Joe Starks (Jody), is presented as an unsympathetic figure not only in his jealousy, possessiveness, and sexism but, crucially, also in his aversion to black merrymaking and noise-making. Soon after he is pronounced mayor of the all-black town of Eatonville, Jody distances himself from its inhabitants’ vocal expressions of joy: “Ah wish mah people would git mo’ business in ’em and not spend so much time on foolishness. [. . .] it’s awful tuh see so many people don’t want nothin’ but uh full belly and uh place tuh lay down and sleep afterwards. It makes me sad sometimes and then agin it makes me mad. They say things sometimes that tickles me nearly tuh death, but Ah won’t laugh jus’ tuh dis-incourage ’em” (99). What Jody, who “talks tuh unlettered folks wid books in his jaws” (79), fails to recognize is that the noises of laughter and ritualized communicative interaction have an important community-building function in the town of Eatonville; that they participate, as Tom Conley puts it in a different context, in “the vital function of ‘noise’” understood as “a circulation of energies in which a social order is given to function” (89).

When Charlie announces to three pretty girls walking down the street, “Ah’m crazy about you. [. . .] Ah’ll do anything in the world except work for you and give you mah money,” he does it “to the entertainment of everybody” (105). The audience of Charlie’s mock courtship knows its score, too: “The

girls and everybody help laugh” (105). The verb “help” here indicates that the audience is aware of the importance of its participatory role. When Charlie’s attention shifts to beautiful Daisy Blunt, he involves three more men in the verbal game: “Now Daisy, *you* know Jim, Dave and Lum is ’bout tuh kill one ’nother ’bout you” (106). Two of them, Jim and Dave, take up the challenge after a “big burst of laughter at Daisy’s discomfiture”: “The boys had to act out their rivalry too. Only this time, everybody knew they meant some of it. But all the same the porch enjoyed the play and helped out whenever extras were needed” (107). What started out as the verbal initiative of a single young man soon involves everybody in a shared, communal experience. Jody alone does not like what he sees and hears: “There was one of those big blow-out laughs and Janie was wallowing in it. Then Jody ruined it all for her” (108) by sending her back inside the store. Janie eventually takes revenge by “playin’ de dozens” (123) on Jody, signifyin(g) upon his impotence. But only once she is in the Everglades with Tea Cake can she fully return to the joyful community of noisemakers: “All night now the jooks clanged and clamored. Pianos living three lifetimes in one. Blues made and used right on the spot. Dancing, fighting, singing, crying, laughing, winning and losing love every hour” (196–97). Her memories of Eatonville are tainted by her forced absence from that community: “The men held big arguments here like they used to do on the store porch. Only here, she could listen and laugh and even talk some herself if she wanted to. She got so she could tell big stories herself from listening to the rest” (200). If Jody was at least partially successful in curbing Janie’s participation in her acoustic community, her newfound embracement of the role of storyteller—which, crucially, is also the role she occupies within the framing narrative—represents her liberation from these constraints, not unlike the way in which Hurston’s introduction of black vernacular into her writing represents *her* liberation from some of the constraints of the novelistic form.¹⁸ Jody’s estrangement from the Eatonville community (if not his death) is therefore an instance of poetic justice not only in the light of the values and practices of Janie and the townspeople but also when measured against Hurston’s own writing practice.

Jody’s disdain for the lively oral culture of Eatonville and his inability to grasp its community-building function gradually turn him into a stranger in the very town he is supposed to govern. Its inhabitants soon realize that the only sound Joe Starks tolerates is that of his own voice. As Sim Jones complains to Sam Watson (in words that register the acoustic dimensions

of Jody's grasp for power): "Sam, you know dat all he do is big-belly round and tell other folks what tuh do. He loves obedience out of everybody under de sound of his voice" (78). Jody's aloofness with regard to the townspeople and their noises is shown in an even less favorable light to the reader after his death, when Mrs. Turner, whose hatred for people with skin of a darker hue than her own threatens to poison the atmosphere in the Everglades, repeats Joe Starks's judgment: "Who wants to be mixed up wid uh rusty black man, and uh black woman goin' down de street in all dem loud colors, and whoopin' and hollerin' and laughin' over nothin'? [. . .] Ah don't go in no nigger store tuh buy nothin' neither. Colored folks don't know nothin' 'bout no business. Deliver me!" (210–11). For her, too, it "was distressing to emerge from her inner temple and find these black desecrators howling with laughter before the door" (216).

Hurston has often been accused of painting too bright a picture of African-American life in the first half of the twentieth century. More seriously, Richard Wright charged her with "*voluntarily* continu[ing] in her novel the tradition which was *forced* upon the Negro in the theater, that is, the minstrel technique that makes the 'white folks' laugh" (25).¹⁹ Her celebration of laughter as a central moment in African-American expressivity seems to lend further support to such claims. However, my own reading of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* follows critics like Sundquist or Baker, who discover subversive potential in the literary or critical combination of cultural elements drawn from both sides of the color line. Hurston's decision to portray a relatively balanced rural black community rather than the viciousness of racism and urban destitution may appeal to white readers, but she always remains careful to negotiate between a more accommodating mastery of form (which does make use of "positive" stereotyping and works within the framework of a predominantly Western literary genre) and a more aggressive advertising of black folk tradition in the deformation of mastery (which unsettles the novelistic form by infusing elements foreign to the history of the novel within the Anglo-Saxon tradition). Paradoxically, it is in the culturally more specific deformation of mastery that Hurston's aesthetic and political project converges most clearly with the aesthetics of communicative resistance practiced by her white contemporaries.

In *Mosaic Modernism* (2000), David Kadlec discerns a similar strategy in Hurston with regard to attempts to define African-American identity. Again, it is her experimental blend of oral and literary modes that chal-

lenges received ideas and forms. Kadlec explicitly links this strategy to the practice of modernist writing and narratological innovation in ways that supplement my own deliberations on narrative structure in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Kadlec makes the argument that Hurston's revalorization of black folk tradition—far from pandering to a white audience—enables her to transcend the binarism of contemporary discourses on African-American identity, in which it seemed that one had to choose between racial determinism (blackness as biologically given) or cultural determinism (blackness as socially constructed): “In the face of the failure of race and culture alike, Hurston believed that Negro identity lay in the discursive performance of materials upon which no firm claims to possession could be laid. It was this belief that enabled her to significantly extend the modern novel's narrative showings” (215). In particular her mixing of black vernacular and literary language—which is also a mixing of predominantly black linguistic registers and predominantly white ones—subverts the determinisms of race/nature and culture/nurture.

Kadlec's main focus is on Hurston's employment of free indirect discourse, which, in its conflation of the voice of narrator and character, exemplifies this mixing and effects this subversion.²⁰ A case in point is the passage where Janie expresses sorrow over Jody's agony on the deathbed:

So Janie began to think of Death. [. . .] What need has Death for a cover, and what winds can blow against him? He stands in his high house that overlooks the world. Stands watchful and motionless all day with his sword drawn back, waiting for the messenger to bid him come. [. . .] She was liable to find a feather from [Death's] wings lying in her yard any day now. She was sad and afraid too. Poor Jody! He ought not to have to wrassle in there by himself. (*Their Eyes* 129; qtd. in Kadlec 216)

As Kadlec points out, “wrassle” marks the transition from highly stylized biblical imagery and language to black vernacular idiom as the narrative and the figural voice fuse in the passage's two final sentences. Hurston's introduction of free indirect discourse into African-American literature marks a modernist literary innovation with political reverberations: “As suggested by the big-picture talkers who approach culture with caution in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston recognized that performative oral practices could serve to cut through the hegemony of universals like nature and nurture, and

she eventually channeled this awareness into a new type of modern literary narrative” (Kadlec 209). We may add to this that the remaining strangeness of the word *wrastle* serves to remind readers of an insight for which the reader, Zora Neale Hurston, as well as Jean Toomer are indebted to Hurston’s teacher Franz Boas: that no cultural language can be fully understood, interpreted, or codified in terms of another, and that the residual difference may be harnessed to bring about the new, be it in anthropological investigation or modernist literary innovation.

As we move from the rural world of Hurston’s Eatonville to the urban, industrialized spaces of Dos Passos’s *1919*, we cannot fail to notice the massive differences between two texts published only five years apart. The first and most readily apparent difference concerns the ethnic composition of their respective sets of characters. In Hurston, all characters are black. In Dos Passos, all title characters of the fictional narratives—and thus all major characters—are native-born whites. Blacks join immigrants as the foil against which some of the whites’ racist practices and attitudes (Joe Williams’s constant use of racial epithets; Daughter’s diatribes against immigrants; a construction boss’s talk of “kike[s]” and “wops” [343]) are revealed.²¹ A second important difference between the two texts lies in their different imaginations of community. While the characters of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* form a tightly knit, organic community against whose values and norms a character like Jody may be judged, no such social cohesion or shared outlook exists within either *1919* or the geographically more limited *Manhattan Transfer*. Dos Passos’s urban characters are alienated, isolated subjects of a technological modernity that has largely bypassed the inhabitants of Hurston’s rural southern town.

From a literary-historical perspective, though, the most fundamental differences between *1919* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* lie in their formal organizations. The montage technique of Dos Passos’s Newsreels, the impressionistic, associative ordering of sense impressions in his *Camera Eyes*, and the indeterminate shifts between prose and poetry in his biographical sketches of public figures rupture the narrative flow to such an extent that Hurston’s more linear mode of storytelling may seem antiquated in comparison. Moreover, the four-part structure of *1919* (Newsreels, *Camera Eyes*, biographical sketches of public figures, fictional narratives) introduces gaps into the fictional narratives and opens up multiple possibilities of connec-

tion between the four parts and their segments that necessitate the reader's participation in the construction of meaning to a greater degree than Hurston's textual structures.²² Finally, Dos Passos's text displays far more of the linguistic self-reflexivity that we have come to associate with a certain type of modernist writing in the presence of the typewriter. Unlike Hurston, Dos Passos dissects words, combines them into new units, breaks up sentence structures, and juxtaposes widely divergent genres, linguistic styles, and registers.

To draw up this list of differences, inconclusive as it is, is to ask the question of whether we are not dealing with two entirely separate traditions of modernist writing. But once we reconceptualize Dos Passos's formal innovations in communicational terms, the distance between his project and Hurston's becomes smaller. Such a reading stresses that Dos Passos's strategic interruptions of the narrative flow in three of the novel's four discourses represent a challenge to and disturbance of conventional forms of literary communication (between text and reader, between text and wider cultural configurations) that have their counterpart in Hurston's infusion of oral modes of narration into a literary text. In this reading, Dos Passos's multiple morphological, syntactic, and genre-related dislocations inject noise into dominant (literary, cultural, political) discourses within modernity, unsettling those discourses with strategies that range from the mastery of form (in Dos Passos's more parodic and satirical moments, particularly in "The Body of an American") to the deformation of mastery (in his inclusion of working-class perspectives and voices of dissent). Most important, a communicational approach allows us to understand Dos Passos's staging of conflicting viewpoints and ideologies as the source of an interference that functions analogous to Hurston's antiphonal play and has a similar innovative aesthetic as well as political potential. To talk about conflicts between different ways of representing and interpreting the world in terms of communicational interference is no mere figure of thought. As we take a closer look at the literary representation of such conflicts, particularly in Dos Passos, we learn that their manifestations in social space include a crucially important acoustic dimension. In Dos Passos, the source of this noise lies less in ethnic and cultural differences and tensions—even though these are addressed via the immigrant and nonwhite characters—than in the more narrowly political debates about U.S. participation in the First World War.

Conquests of Acoustic Space

As the German political scientist Manfred Henningsen pointed out in 1980: “the experiential and symbolic insignificance of the Great War in contemporary America contrasts with the outbursts of passion, the demagoguery and propaganda the war once managed to provoke. This atmosphere of agitation and excitement was so complete that it seeped from politics and news journalism into literature, academic publishing, universities and churches” (368; my translation).²³ While America’s entry into World War I was supported by a majority of Americans by 1917, a significant and vocal minority remained fiercely opposed to U.S. military intervention in Europe: “Radicals and socialists opposed entry into a struggle between rival capitalist cliques; liberals and pacifists hated the destruction caused by war, especially over a matter that had no obvious bearing on American life; many ethnic groups denounced any attempt to align the United States with countries they hated for reasons of their past or present misdeeds. German and Irish voting blocs were both committed to preventing any assistance to the British Empire” (P. Jenkins 201).²⁴ Yet any opposition to the war effort was greeted with fierce repression:

there was extreme hostility to the slightest expression of doubt or criticism about the course of war. [. . .] Radicals and pacifists began a lively propaganda campaign against the war and the draft, but in June 1917 the federal government passed a draconian Espionage Act that severely limited any such criticism. This was enforced ruthlessly: by the post office, which refused to carry seditious literature in the mail; by local and state police, who raided socialist and IWW offices; and by private groups, who denounced any suspicious or “un-American” behavior, by which was commonly meant the slightest association with unorthodox or foreign ideas. (P. Jenkins 204)

Dos Passos’s *1919*, the second book in his *U.S.A.* trilogy—whose title refers to the Versailles Peace Treaty conference—constitutes literary modernism’s pivotal retrospective contribution to those struggles and debates. Dos Passos captures the prevalent political atmosphere when he has the Red Cross official Major Moorehouse—a character who for Lisa Nanne “epitomizes the betrayal of the original promises of America and the distortion of the ‘old words’ of the nation’s founding by the massive forces of industry

and government” (181)—explain his views on those opposing the war: “The trouble now was that people didn’t know enough about what a valuable effort the Red Cross workers were making and were too prone to listen to the criticisms of proGermans working under the mask of pacifism and knockers and slackers always ready to carp and criticize” (1919 174). In the heated debates of the time, few differentiations were being made; being a pacifist was for many the equivalent of being “a proGerman or a Bolshevik or some god-dam thing” (187). On the other side of the fray, calls for “the dictatorship of the proletariat” (12) and “la revolution mondiale” (304) were made with increasing intensity. The tensions increased during the war and were followed by some of the most violent race and labor conflicts in the nation’s history. The state responded with massive repression. Dos Passos puts it bluntly: “To be a red in the summer of 1919 was worse than being a hun or a pacifist in the summer of 1917” (367).²⁵

Dos Passos’s novel is less a book about World War I than about the competing discourses surrounding U.S. involvement in it. Accordingly, compared to Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage*, little martial noise is represented in *1919*. True, Dos Passos’s acoustic portraits of World War I reflect the technological changes that brought about noise in heretofore unimagined proportions. His description of an aerial bombing shares Crane’s anthropomorphizing imagination:

Some Austrian planes that had been droning overhead suddenly cut off their motors and dumped a load of bombs right in front of them. The antiaircraft guns had been barking for some time and shrapnel sparkling in the moonhazy sky overhead but they’d been too drunk to notice. One bomb fell geflump into the Brenta and the others filled the space in front of the window with red leaping glare and shook the villa with three roaring snorts. Plaster fell from the ceiling. They could hear the tiles skittering down off the roof overhead. (157)

More often, though, “The guns soun[d] quiet and distant” (148), and characters are both mentally and spatially far removed from the scene of battle: “Eveline sat up on a sort of table. She was so excited looking at the people and listening to the distant snort of the bombs that she hardly noticed that colonel [*sic*] was squeezing her knee a little more than was necessary” (106).²⁶ The noises *1919* does register are more those of the social and political conflicts that coincided with or stemmed from America’s military intervention in Eu-

rope. More often than not, these conflicts are fought out in civilian rather than military space. Dos Passos provides their ugliness in all its graphic and acoustic detail. During the general strike in Paris, demonstrators attack their opponents by “throwing stones and bits of cast iron at the fancydressed republican guards hissing whistling poking at the horses with umbrellas” (319). When the police force cracks down on an IWW meeting in Everett, we hear “the crack of saps on men’s skulls” (349). The socialist Ben Compton passes out under “Blows with clubs and riflebutts” that are “splitting his ears” (350). In a later passage, soldiers returning from the war celebrate Armistice Day by cutting off union activist Wesley Everest’s “penis and testicles [. . .] with a razor.” Everest is reduced to “a great scream of pain” before the mob “hang[s] him from the bridge in the glare of the headlights” (369).²⁷

The clashes between antiwar protesters, strikers, and the Wobblies on one side of the fence and military officials, the police, and an angry mob on the other fill the acoustic space of Dos Passos’s text. The noisy urban mobs and crowds—still identified in Norris and Dreiser almost exclusively with leftist agitators—now make themselves heard on both sides of the battle line. In Dos Passos, the urban crowd is no longer necessarily a threat to the social and political order; more often it speaks in its defense. When Joe Williams is arrested under suspicion of being a German spy, an anonymous crowd is there to pass judgment on him: “Look at the filthy ‘un,’ one man said. A woman hissed, there were a couple of boos and a catcall” (24). The scenario is repeated on a larger scale when Joe and other men suspected of dodging the draft are walked along Broadway by the police: “They were quite a bunch being marched down Broadway; smart guys in the crowd of clerks and counterjumpers along the sidewalks yelled ‘Slackers’ at them and the girls hissed and booed” (122). This is the same kind of crowd that welcomes President Wilson with “handclapping and patriotic cheers” when he returns from the Versailles Peace Treaty conference, while the other crowd, “the working stiffs” and the Wobblies, “let him pass in silence” (198).

That the fights fought over the interpretation of the war are also fights for dominance over acoustic space (which can, as the previous example shows, take the form of silence) becomes clearest in the songs and marches of the opposing factions. While Italian bands are “practicing *The Star-Spangled Banner*” (295) in anticipation of U.S. president Wilson’s visit to Rome, crowds in Paris are “singing the *International*” (319) at the First of May demonstrations. As the

GOLDEN VOICE OF CARUSO SWELLS IN
VICTORY SONG TO CROWDS ON STREETS (228)

strikers confronting strikebreakers and the police in New York have different concerns and different songs: “Some of the strikers were singing *Solidarity Forever*, others were yelling Scabs, Scabs and making funny long jeering hoots” (219). While a newspaper announces that “Bands will play while a vast throng marches happily to the rhythm of wartime anthems and airs” (82), a cacophony of shouts, songs, and noises erupts on the streets of Paris: “at the Gare de l’Est they’re singing the *International* entire the gendarmerie nationale is making its way slowly down Magenta into stones whistles bits of iron the *International* Mort aux Vaches” (319). The “throaty roar of the Russian Marseillaise” (140), the “tremendous roar of the Marian *Internationale*” (142) can be heard throughout 1919, marking the presence of oppositional forms of sounding and the need of crowds to reassure themselves of their continued existence as a crowd by making noise.²⁸

One important insight that emerges from analyzing Dos Passos’s staging of acoustic conflicts is that noise is an astonishingly effective method of asserting one specific individual’s or group’s dominance not only over acoustic space but, more specifically, over the lives of other individuals or groups. In 1919, the noises that powerful social actors make continually compete with and threaten to drown out the voices of the dispossessed. Michel Serres is correct in saying that “one must make more noise than the others in order for one’s shout of *no more noise* to be heard and for the others to obey. One must demonstrate more fury to strike fear into fury. Neither noise nor fury ever ceases, even under the dominion of those who claim to eliminate them. The latter have simply monopolized the *noise*” (*Genesis* 74). But Serres’s philosophical account must be supplemented by the soundscape studies of scholars like R. Murray Schafer or Bruce R. Smith, who document the actual conquest of physical space by physical noise in various centuries, ranging from Smith’s enquiries into “how successful” Queen Elizabeth I was “in dominating the auditory field” (250) in early modern England to Hitler’s assertion that the NSDAP “should not have conquered Germany without [...] the loudspeaker” (qtd. in Schafer, *Tuning* 91).

Noise blurs the distinction between material and discursive effects as it conquers material, physical space and at the same time becomes part of an attempt to assert one social actor’s meanings, interpretations, and ideologies

against the vocal opposition of another.²⁹ A good example of such a blurring is the use of the factory whistle, which is revealed in *1919* as a blunt but effective tool of social control. When Ben Compton and his fellow construction workers go on strike, their superiors employ this simple device in an attempt to impose their own conditions: “Any man who wasn’t on his job next time the whistle blew was fired and would have to get a move on and remember that the State of Pennsylvania had vagrancy laws.” And the strategy works: “When the whistle blew again everybody went back to work except Ben and Nick” (343). Like church bells or a teacher’s clapping of hands, the factory whistle belongs to the “little world of signals” (166) Michel Foucault has analyzed as crucial to the ordering of time, presence, and work as well as the disciplining of bodies in religious communities, the army, schools, factories, hospitals, and prisons.³⁰

The most powerful assertions of personal, political, and ideological agendas in the acoustic world of *1919* occur, however, at the level of the songs sung by the competing factions. Their importance in *1919* is underlined by Dos Passos’s dedication of a biographical sketch to Joe Hill, a songwriter of the early unionist movement. Contrary to political speeches or manifestos, the ideological force of songs does not derive from any intellectual intervention in the political debates surrounding the war. They are powerful precisely because they circulate below and beyond the level of reasoned argument.³¹ Particularly the songs supportive of the official war rhetoric are shown to rely less on the powers of reasoned debate or even persuasion than on those of suggestion:

Keep the home fires burning
Till the boys come home [...]
While our hearts are yearning [...]
Though the boys are far away
They long for home
There’s a silver lining
Through the dark clouds shining [...]
Turn the bright inside out
Till the boys come home (272–73)

Of course, we may quite readily ascribe a more or less specific ideological agenda to the national anthem, to “Keep the Home Fires Burning,” or other patriotic war songs like “Onward Christian Soldiers” (140), “Over There”

(317), or “America I Love You” (375),³² but their political impact is grounded in their (mis)recognition by those who sing them as an articulation of common sense rather than ideology. After all, what parents would not want their children to return from the war? Another way of saying this is that the ideological content of these songs *is* the often unspoken presuppositions and assumptions that are affirmed, more often unconsciously than consciously, whenever the songs are sung.³³ In the case of “Keep the Home Fires Burning,” it is the promise of postwar domestic bliss that obscures the underlying assumption that the state actually *has* the right to send “the boys” to war in the first place. The more acoustic space this song conquers—that is, the more individuals and groups reinforce its presence in collective memory through repetition—the more successfully it manages to displace protests against this assumption with a discursive construction of a community united by fearful hope.³⁴

In the Newsreels of *1919*, with which he meant to capture “the clamor, the sound of daily life” (qtd. in Nanney 193), Dos Passos challenges in various ways the commonsensical assumptions and hidden ideological content carried by these songs.³⁵ For instance, he inverts a dominant strategy of representation by identifying the official (rather than the oppositional) discourse with so much noise: “when they return home what will our war veterans think of the American who babbles about some vague new order, while dabbling in the sand of shoal water” (1). In other passages, he uses parody to dispute the patriotic songs’ conquest of acoustic space. A case in point is Sardinaglia’s parodic deflation of military marches in his self-composed “march of the medical colonels”: “Tenente Sardinaglia was under arrest in his quarters up there for two days making up a little march on his mandolin that he called the march of the medical colonels. Serrati told them about it giggling behind his hand while they were waiting for the other officers to come to mess” (158). But Dos Passos’s most effective strategy of opposition to the patriotic war songs emerges when he sets them next to more obviously ideologically charged songs like the *Internationale*. Brought into a dialogue with these openly political songs, the songs that repeat and reinforce the official war rhetoric lose their innocence, and their unspoken assumptions are revealed as the ideological messages they are. When, for instance, Dos Passos has Irving Berlin’s popular “Don’t Bite the Hand That’s Feeding You” compete with the *Internationale* in the acoustic space of his novel, the war song’s nationalism and xenophobic sentiments are thrown into sharp(er) re-

lief against the socialist anthem's bid for international solidarity and its claim to speak on behalf of the whole human race (an aspect that is reinforced by the anthem's multilingual rendition):

*If you don't like your Uncle Sammy
If you don't like the red white and blue [...]*
*If you don't like the stars in Old Glory
Then go back to your land across the sea
To the land from which you came
Whatever be its name [...]*
*If you don't like the red white and blue
Then don't act like the cur in the story
Don't bite the hand that's feeding you. (82–83)*

*'Tis the final conflict
Let each stand in his place
The international party
Shall be the human race (322)*

*C'est la lutte finale
Groupons-nous et demain
L'internationale
Sera le genre humain (321)*

Alternatively, a song like “I Love My Country Indeed I Do” challenges the tacit understanding of Berlin's song that objectors to the war are either slackers or un-American:

*I love my country indeed I do
But this war is making me blue
I like fightin' fightin's my name
But fightin' is the least about this fightin' game (231)*

Within the fictional soundscape of Dos Passos's novel, the labor song “We Meet Today in Freedom's Cause” is a particularly interesting case of oppositional sounding. This song is sung to the tune of Philip Paul Bliss's “Hold the Fort,” a song “based on the events of a Civil War battle in October 1864 near Atlanta, GA” (Tubb par. 2). Though its lyrics refer to the causes of trade unionists and have nothing in common with the words for “Hold the

Fort,” Unionist soldiers in the Civil War could equally well have sung them. In its evocation of the historical context and music of the Civil War, “We Meet Today in Freedom’s Cause” reclaims the rhetoric of the just battle that the patriotic war songs sought to arrogate to themselves. In reclaiming the heritage of the Civil War as well as a discourse of freedom, the labor song challenges the symbolic claims of songs like the national anthem, “America I Love You,” or the patriotic hymn and former national anthem “My Country ’Tis of Thee”:

*America I love you
You’re like a sweetheart of mine [...]
From ocean to ocean
For you my devotion
Is touching each boundary line [...]
Just like a little baby
Climbing its mother’s knee [...]
America I love you [...]
And there’s a hundred million others like me (374–75)*

*My country ’tis of thee
Sweet land of libertee
Of thee I sing (365)*

*Hold the fort for we are coming
Union men be strong;
Side by side we battle onward,
Victory will come. [...]
We meet today in Freedom’s cause
And raise our voices high
We’ll join our hands in union strong
To battle or to die—[...]
Hold the fort we are coming
Union men be strong (362–63)*

Dos Passos’s evocation of discourses surrounding the Civil War points to a crucial difference between his and Stephen Crane’s fictional treatment of war. The two authors started from fundamentally different premises: While the Civil War was fought over a cause—the abolition of slavery—widely

recognized as just, no such straightforward justification for the loss of human lives could be adduced for U.S. military involvement in World War I. Moreover, the pacifist movement that opposed U.S. entry into World War I simply did not exist in the historical context of the Civil War. Precisely because of the widespread perception of the Civil War as a just war, Crane was forced to offer his war critique by indirect means. Crane could hardly attack the official rhetoric without finding himself aligned with the most reactionary voices. Instead, he chose to completely elide official justifications for the war, making an absence the scandal of his text. Dos Passos, on the other hand, directly tackles the state rhetoric with an array of literary strategies that include, for instance, his rendition of an alternative soldier song that explodes the myth of a nation unified by the war effort. In his variation on “I’ll Tell You Where They Are,” a popular song among soldiers in the trenches of World War I (Rickheit), the patriotic “we” of the “Uncle Sam” song (“And then by God we’ll all go to Chermanee”) gives way to the divided “you” and “they” of battlefield reality:

*Oh old Uncle Sam
 He’s got the infantree
 He’s got the cavalree
 He’s got artilleree
 And then by God we’ll all go to Chermanee
 God Help Kaiser Bill! (78)*

*If you want to find the generals
 I know where they are
 If you want to find the generals
 I know where they are [. . .]
 I saw them
 I saw them
 Down in the
 Deep dugout (334–35)*

In other passages, Dos Passos transposes the conflict between competing forms of ideological sounding into a character’s consciousness. Paxton Hibben, the brilliant thinker from a wealthy family who turned to socialism, mentally affirms the voices of the downtrodden and excluded against the sounds of the war propaganda: “got to Chicago in time to hear them singing

Onward Christian Soldiers at the convention in the Colosseum; in the close-packed voices and the cheers, he heard the trample of the Russian Marseillaise, the sullen silence of Mexican peons, Colombian Indians waiting for a deliverer, in the reverberance of the hymn he heard the measured cadences of the Declaration of Independence” (140–41).

In still other passages, conflicts are fought out more in the field of intellectual debate. The following variation on the *Internationale* is one of the more opaque examples:

Arise ye pris'ners of starvation
Arise ye wretched of the earth
For justice thunders condemnation
A qui la Faunte se le Beurre est Cher? (321)

The final line is recognizably French, but in the form Dos Passos renders it, it is gibberish that *should* read “A qui la faute si le beurre est cher?” (Whose fault is it when butter is expensive?). In its normalized form, it alludes to Frédéric Bastiat’s “Protectionism, or the Three Aldermen” (1848), a short pamphlet in dramatic form against economic protectionism. Bastiat, a nineteenth-century free-trade advocate, satirist, and popularizer of economics, reduces to absurdity the arguments of protectionists by having his dramatic character Paul, one of the title’s three aldermen, suggest to his colleagues that the production of butter be moved to Paris. When John asks how butter produced in urban Paris could possibly compete with butter from rural Normandy, Paul replies: “From tomorrow on, I shall demand *protection*; I shall persuade the commune to keep butter from Normandy and Brittany from entering Paris. Then the people will either have to get along without it or buy mine, and at my price, too” (Bastiat 232). In Bastiat’s play, the three aldermen succeed in convincing the town council to prohibit the importation of wood, butter, and meat so as to be able to establish production of these goods in the midst of Paris—with the result that wood, butter, and meat become so expensive that Parisians have to spend all their earnings on these three products. Twenty years later, Paris is an economically devastated woodland overrun by cows and pigs. The answer the play’s only sane character and “hero,” the appropriately named Jacques Bonhomme, gives to the question “A qui la faute si le beurre est cher?” is: the economic absurdity of protectionism. As Bonhomme puts it: “If butter is dear, it is not because you are paying high wages to the workers; it is not even because you are making

big profits; it is solely because Paris is ill-situated for that industry, because you insisted that people produce in the city what they should be producing in the country, and in the country what used to be produced in the city” (240).

By defamiliarizing the words of the question and reducing them to noise, Dos Passos not only pokes fun at the style and content of Bastiat’s economic treatises—after all, as some of the passages quoted above show, Dos Passos is himself a master of the *reductio ad absurdum*—but also suggests that we might have to look for new answers to the question. The text of the *Internationale* (into which the Bastiat quote is inserted) provides such an answer: if the price of butter is high, it is not the fault of economic protectionism but, as the French version of the socialist anthem has it, of “les corbeaux, les vautours,” the ravens and vultures of the capitalist class. Likewise, the solution to the problem is not to be sought, as Bastiat suggests, in the “spacious atmosphere of free trade” (238) but in the abolition of private property, the creation, that is, of a political order in which “La terre n’appartient qu’aux hommes.”

In Dos Passos’s novel, oppositional songs produce noise on several inter-related levels. In the most literal sense, the confluence of hundreds of voices singing the *Internationale* at the top of their lungs during a demonstration produces a considerable amount of physical noise that reverberates through the city streets. Yet even if we refuse to designate these songs as noise and insist on their musical qualities, they contribute to the production of noise as they clash with official forms of sounding. They are perceived as a communicational interference with patriotic war songs and national anthems both by those who sing them and those who hear them, no matter what side of the fray the senders and addressees are on. This interference is a noise or a dissonance that is political and acoustic at the same time. It is an equivocation as Roland Barthes defines it in *S/Z*, an interference between two mutually incompatible understandings or interpretations of the wor(l)d (145). Finally, Dos Passos’s reproduction of songs within the written medium of the literary text produces yet a further dissonance between an oral medium that is less codified and codifiable (note the significant differences in vocabulary between different renditions of the *Internationale*, particularly but not only in various translations) than the written medium it interacts with. Literature, Dos Passos knows, cannot store sounds with the precision of the

phonograph, but it can bring them into a productive tension with the old technology of writing. Dos Passos's treatment of songs in his novel is in this respect similar to Toomer's and Hurston's integration of African-American sounding in their texts, although the attribution of literary and oral media is less clear-cut in Dos Passos's antiphonal play and occurs along the lines of class rather than race.

Many of the passages discussed so far participate in the modernist aesthetics of fragmentation that characterizes the four-part structure of *1919* as a whole. As is indicated by the large number of elision markers ([. . .]) in my song quotes, parts of these songs are scattered throughout the Newsreels. In using the montage technique, Dos Passos achieves interesting combinations of widely divergent ideological signals, resulting in ironic juxtapositions like the following:

MACHINEGUNS MOW DOWN MOBS
IN KNOXVILLE

America I love you (375)

His use of hyperbole ("LENINE SHOT BY TROTSKY IN DRUNKEN BRAWL" [272]) and understatement ("BOLSHEVIKS ABOLISH POST-AGE STAMPS" [272]) to subvert the newspapers' screaming headlines and their discursive contribution to and proliferation of the Red Scare ("I.W.W. IN PLOT TO KILL WILSON" [267]; "HOW TO DEAL WITH BOLSHEVISTS? SHOOT THEM! POLES' WAY!" [232]) is not specifically modernist, but it imitates and parodies the fragmented form and brashness of the newspaper front page. The same can, of course, be said about the literary montages of the Newsreels as a whole. Other strategies of fragmentation include the syntactic dislocations that inform the impressions of the general strike in Paris (quoted above), the constant switching between different languages, and this morphological assault on the words of "Onward Christian Soldiers":

On ward Christian so old gers
March ing as to war (114)

Dos Passos saw the political potential in modernist formal innovation when he called the movement "an explosion [. . .] that had an influence in its

sphere comparable with that of the October revolution in social organization and politics” (qtd. in Nanney 10). This relationship between aesthetics and politics deserves a closer look.

The formal ruptures of *1919* not only reproduce the social and discursive tensions within the empirical reality the novel is a part of and comments on, and their function is by no means confined to a subversive fragmentation of dominant ways of making sense. Neither are they solely mimesis of the negative, as Brian Lee argues with regard to the Newsreels: “what they induce in the reader—and are surely meant to induce—is nausea, defined by Sartre as the subject’s inability to digest its experience by reflecting on it. Their randomness, indeterminate, neutral presentation reflects a world which is in itself impenetrable, unalterable, and devoid of essential meaning” (212–13). Dos Passos’s disintegration of linear narrative is also a performance of negativity in Adorno’s sense. Its fragmentary form withholds the gratifications of a linear plot structure and narrative resolution. It admits social reality into its fictional realm only in a highly distorted form, thereby rendering its tensions and conflicts inaccessible to the *readerly* desire for instant comprehensibility. It forestalls easy appropriation and assimilation of both its own structures of meaning and those of the social reality whose structures it reproduces. It withdraws into its own aesthetic sphere while remaining deeply social, closing itself off so as to function all the more effectively as a form of social commentary. Dos Passos’s *1919* is literature as noise that conforms to Adorno’s dictum that “Real denunciation is probably only a capacity of form” (*Aesthetic* 230) and exemplifies his claim that “Art’s asociality is the determinate negation of a determinate society” (226).

This does not imply that *U.S.A.* refuses to engage with the historical “reality” of the United States. As Hartwig Isernhagen’s discussion of *U.S.A.* in *Ästhetische Innovation und Kulturkritik: Das Frühwerk von John Dos Passos 1916–1938* (1983) makes clear, negativity, cultural critique, and historiographical reflection are closely linked in Dos Passos’s aesthetics. *U.S.A.*’s formal ruptures can be read as much as an interrogation of the representability of history as a critical comment on the fragmented nature of its object of representation (the U.S.A.). The trilogy’s four discourses offer competing models of writing history—history as substance in the Newsreels and Camera Eyes versus history as linear process in the biographical sketches and fictional narratives; history as something that is “made” by public actors in a series of decisions in the biographical sketches versus history as something one

undergoes as a result of changes in one's personal circumstances in the fictional narratives; and so on—that, “taken together, [...] emerge as negations and refusals of conventional historiography” (Isernhagen, *Ästhetische Innovation* 171; my translation). Dos Passos's formal innovations thus challenge not only realist modes of writing but also modes of representing history that share with literary realism a preference for narrative continuity and linearity. This combined challenge of aesthetic and historiographical critique raises questions about the legitimacy of different representations of the world. Yet Dos Passos's cultural critique does not exhaust itself in exposing the uses and abuses of language, and it is not only concerned with social actors' varying claims to “own” the legitimate or correct interpretation of social reality but, crucially, also documents the very loss of authentic language:

The systematic relationship between the four discourses lies in the fact that they all emerge as reduced forms of holistic historiography that, even when taken individually, already signal their deficiency by evoking conventions of fiction-writing without conforming to them. The most general unity of the oeuvre is given, then, at the very abstract level of implicit reflection on its own use of language and the very possibility of language. Particularly this second aspect can be linked—via the notion of negativity—with the works' thematic language critique and, by extension, their cultural critique. (Isernhagen, *Ästhetische Innovation* 200–201; my translation)

While Adorno finds the critical potential of modernist art in its recalcitrant form, Isernhagen's reading of *U.S.A.* allows us to specify the trilogy's critical potential as historiographical, representational, and cultural in scope and to locate it at the intersections between the trilogy's four discourses. What Roland Barthes' deliberations in *S/Z* add to these observations is a communicational perspective that allows us to recognize that the negativity of modernist literature frequently arises out of an interference between incompatible understandings or ways of making sense. My own reading of *1919* identifies the origin of such interferences as much *between* as *within* and *across* the text's four discourses, in the noisy clashes between different social actors' attempts to stake their claims in the available acoustic space. Unlike his naturalist precursors (with the exception of Crane), Dos Passos is not content with depicting the noisy social conflicts in the city but lets the noise of social discontent seep into the formal organization of his text. It is in

this respect that *1919* is an “art of noise” in Barthes’ sense: what Dos Passos’s reader feeds on is “A defect in communication, [a] deficient message; what the whole structuration erects for him and offers him as the most precious nourishment is a *countercommunication*” (*S/Z* 145). It is this (structural, formal) noise that distinguishes Dos Passos’s representation of social conflict and its (physical) noises most perceptibly from many a naturalist’s anxious strategies of containment. By breaking up the smooth flow of the narrative, he lets this noise sound within and beyond the confines of the literary text without reconciling the interferences by the imposition of conciliatory literary form.

In *1919*, this noise is not confined to the Newsreels, where headlines, fragments of news stories, short fictional accounts, and political songs collide in a cacophony of voices, but it extends to the associative ordering of memory traces in the Camera Eyes, to the montage technique in the biographical sketches as well as to the struggles over acoustic territory fought out in the fictional narratives.³⁶ As I have argued above, Dos Passos’s representations of the physical, audible noise of strikes, state violence, and demonstrations form an integral part of his modernist aesthetics, but the textual noises of *1919* also encompass the interspersed passages from Marx’s *Capital* and Marx and Engels’s *Manifesto of the Communist Party* in the Ben Compton chapter (339, 345, 348, 351, 357) and the repetitions of words, phrases, and sentences throughout the novel. His most brilliant and most extended employment of modernist strategies of fragmentation, though, occurs in the final (quasi-)biographical sketch.

My analysis of “The Body of an American” remains concerned with the politics of literary representation but takes us beyond our investigation of Dos Passos’s fictional soundscapes. In this brief sketch, his critique clearly goes further than “a reaction to a cultural situation perceived in unspecified ways as in need of innovation” (Isernhagen *Ästhetische Innovation* 213; my translation) but challenges more specifically and aggressively a dominant discourse’s representational claims. Dos Passos uses complex literary strategies to subvert the official rhetoric surrounding the figure of the Unknown Soldier. Starting in the first paragraph, the language of the official discourse is defamiliarized by running words together, thus forcing readers to linger on a discourse whose emptiness is exposed as we pay closer attention to its wording:

Whereas the Congress of the United States by a concurrent resolution adopted on the 4th day of March last authorized the Secretary of War to cause to be brought to the United States the body of an American who was a member of the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe who lost his life during the World War and whose identity has not been established for burial in the Memorial Amphitheatre of the National Cemetery at Arlington-Virginia. (375)

The official construction of a unified representative dead soldier is dismantled as Dos Passos insists on the multiplicity of heterogeneous, irreducible identities the Unknown Soldier is made to stand in for:

John Doe was born
and raised in Brooklyn, in Memphis, near the lakefront in Cleveland,
Ohio, in the stench of the stockyards in Chi, on Beacon Hill, in an old
brick house in Alexandria Virginia, on Telegraph Hill, in a half-timbered
Tudor cottage in Portland the city of roses (376)

His portrayal of the mutilated, fragmented body of the supposedly representative soldier further serves to undermine that body's claim to representativeness. As the individual dead soldier's identity is dismantled, so is that of his quasi-mythical enlargement: "how can you tell a guy's a hundred percent when all you've got's a gunnysack full of bones, bronze buttons stamped with the screaming eagle and a pair of roll puttees?" (375). By pointing out the exclusionary logic that went into the selection of the stand-in, Dos Passos further subverts the logic of the official substitute: "Make sure he ain't a dinge, boys, make sure he ain't a guinea or a kike" (375). The deconstruction of the official discourse proceeds as Dos Passos juxtaposes it with another discourse that insists on the less than glorious details of the soldier's army life. Again, Dos Passos defamiliarizes the official rhetoric, this time by listing the phrases of military speech in fragmentary form and divorced from their original context: "Atten'SHUN suck in your gut you c——r wipe that smile off your face eyes right wattjy think dis is a choirch-social. ForwarD'ARCH" (377). Dos Passos's strategy takes a different turn as he insists on the materiality of bodily suffering in his depiction of the soldier's dying. He here reverses his former approach, restoring the soldier's corporeal identity rather than dismantling its fictive construction:

The blood ran into the ground, the brains oozed out of the cracked skull and were licked up by the trenchrats, the belly swelled and raised a generation of bluebottle flies,
 and the incorruptible skeleton,
 and the scraps of dried viscera and skin bundled in khaki. (379)

By the time Dos Passos has President Harding evoke the name of God in ironic incongruity during the burial of the *unknown* and *unnamed* soldier (“*Our Father which art in heaven hallowed be thy name*” [377]), the wartime rhetoric has been fractured beyond repair.

The most specific critique in *1919*, however, is leveled not against the state’s abuse of language but against the collusion of the war effort with private as well as public business interests. Much more explicitly than Crane, Dos Passos critically reviews the “extraordinary industrial growth of our nation since the Civil War” (*1919* 273) and identifies the same processes at work during and immediately after World War I, a war described by Ben Compton as “a crazy unnecessary war that nobody can benefit from except bankers and munition makers” (356). While Stephen Crane’s exposure of the military-industrial complex was still largely implicit, confined to his use of industrial metaphors in representing the noises of the Civil War, Dos Passos much more openly indicts the entanglement between war and industry. Hemingway’s depiction of World War I in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) is in this respect closer to Crane than to Dos Passos. Hemingway’s use of industrial metaphors and anthropomorphizing imagery is reminiscent of *The Red Badge of Courage*: “Through the other noise I heard a cough, then came the chuh-chuh-chuh-chuh—then there was a flash, as when a blast-furnace door is swung open, and a roar that started white and went red and on and on in a rushing wind” (50).

Dos Passos’s critique is at the same time more straightforward and more reflective, ranging over all discourses except the Camera Eyes—where a similar degree of explicit critical reflection would have been hardly compatible with the stream-of-consciousness technique. Several of the headlines in the Newsreels point out the close ties between war and business interests in no uncertain terms:

BONDS BUY BULLETS BUY BONDS (77)

FERTILIZER INDUSTRY STIMULATED BY WAR (144)

NO DROP IN PRICES TO FOLLOW PEACE SAY BUSINESS
MEN (276)

Sometimes, Dos Passos's critique of war profiteering is voiced by characters in the fictional narratives who are clearly enraged by that state of affairs. Jerry Burnham, the American war correspondent who at one point saves Eveline Hutchins from a French colonel's rude advances, provides a case in point: "But the war won't ever be over . . . too damn profitable, do you get me? Back home they're coining money, the British are coining money; even the French, look at Bordeaux and Toulouse and Marseilles coining money and the god-dam politicians, all of 'em got bank accounts in Amsterdam and Barcelona, the sons of bitches" (172). In other passages, the war profiteers themselves reveal the close ties between civilian and wartime industrial production even as they attempt to deny them. When J. Ward Moorehouse, the former Red Cross major who turns the skills he acquired during wartime to profit as an "adviser on public relations and publicity to big corporations like Standard Oil" (313), asserts before the press that international capitalism is the only true guarantor of peace, the reader does not have to resort to complex interpretive strategies to expose the major's assertion as the self-serving lie it is: "a working agreement had been reached between certain American oil producers and perhaps the Royal Dutch-Shell, oh, no, of course not to set prices but as proof of a new era of international cooperation that was dawning in which great aggregations of capital would work together for peace and democracy, against reactionaries and militarists on the one hand and against the bloody forces of bolshevism on the other" (372).

Ironically, the venue at which the inextricable intertwining between military strategy and the interests of big business becomes most apparent is the Versailles Peace Treaty conference. Mr. Rasmussen, another "Standard Oil man" (301), puts it most bluntly: "I have positive information that [the British] can't hold Baku without heavy reinforcements and there's no one

they can get them from except from us' [...] He kept talking about Baku and Mohommarah and Mosul, how the Anglo-Persian and the Royal Dutch were getting ahead of the U.S. in the Near East. [...] 'We stand to lose our primacy in world oil production'" (241–42).³⁷ But Dos Passos's critique does not rest at an indictment of big business's illegitimate interferences in the peace talks. In his highly polemical biographical sketch of President Woodrow Wilson, entitled "Meester Veelson," Dos Passos exposes the political agenda of the Peace Conference itself as a series of ruthless business deals:

Three old men shuffling the pack,
dealing out the cards: [...]

machine gun fire and arson
starvation, lice, cholera, typhus;
oil was trumps. (197)

Just how damning Dos Passos's judgment of Wilson's war politics is becomes apparent when he repeats the same lines in another biographical sketch on the "House of Morgan," thus identifying Wilson as a war profiteer of Morgan's stature:

(Wars and panics on the stock exchange,
machinegunfire and arson,
bankruptcies, warloans,
starvation, lice, cholera and typhus:
good growing weather for the House of Morgan.) (271)

In *1919*, the Morgan family represents the immoral epitome of the entanglement between war and business. Retracing the history of that famous house, Dos Passos exposes its rise to fame as grounded in the profits it drew from other people's disasters. In this light, the Morgans' war loans during World War I appear as nothing but a logical extension of their involvement in the Civil War. After J. Pierpont Morgan's demise in 1913, the Morgan dynasty—identified by historian Philip Jenkins as "yet another war profiteer from the 1860s" (173)—continues its participation in the business of war under the leadership of his son, J. P. Morgan: "By 1917 the Allies had borrowed one billion, ninehundred million dollars through the House of Morgan: we went overseas for democracy and the flag; and by the end of the Peace Conference the phrase *J.P. Morgan suggests* had compulsion over a power of seventyfour billion dollars" (1919 271).

The Noise of the City Machine

As in Crane, Dos Passos's thematization and critique of the military-industrial complex constitutes one of the main links between his war narrative and his city novel. As far as individual characters are concerned, George Baldwin, the opportunistic lawyer of *Manhattan Transfer*, is equally cognizant of the intimate relationship between warfare and business interests as Major Moorehouse of *1919*. While Ellen Thatcher still struggles to fathom the significance of the events in Sarajevo, Baldwin is already calculating the war's possible effect on the stock market:

Sarajevo, the word stuck in her throat when she tried to say it [. . .]
"It's terrible to think of, terrible," George Baldwin was groaning. "The Street'll go plumb to hell . . . They'll close the Stock Exchange, only thing to do." (*Manhattan Transfer* 199)

But Dos Passos's understanding of the links between industrialization, finance, and war reaches deeper than his indictment of war profiteering. In *Manhattan Transfer* as well as *1919*, the increasing mechanization of industrial societies itself is portrayed as a threat to human lives. In this light, the unnamed Red Cross official's use of industrial metaphors as he shouts down the mildly pacifist opinions of Richard Ellsworth Savage perhaps unwittingly betrays an insight on Dos Passos's part (if not necessarily the official's) into the potentially violent force of the machine:

Young man, [. . .] your opinions, while showing a senseless and cowardly turn of mind, don't matter. The American people is out to get the kaiser. We are bending every nerve and every energy towards that end; anybody who gets in the way of the great machine the energy and devotion of a hundred million patriots is building towards the stainless purpose of saving civilization from the Huns will be mashed like a fly. I'm surprised that a collegebred man like you hasn't more sense. Don't monkey with the buzzsaw. (*1919* 163)

The motif of the violent machine informs *Manhattan Transfer* as much as it does Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* and Norris's *McTeague*.³⁸ In Dos Passos's New York, citizens are almost routinely knocked down by automobiles. When Bud Korpenning, one of the downtrodden characters who will end his life by suicide, arrives at the scene of a dispute between a car driver and enraged pedestrians, he asks one of the onlookers:

“Wassa matter?”

“Hell I dunno . . . One o them automoebile riots I guess. Aint you read the paper? I don’t blame em do you? What right have those golblamed automoebiles got racin round the city knocking down wimmen an children?”

“Gosh do they do that?”

“Sure they do.” (34)

Gus McNeil, the milkman, is almost killed by a train:

“Hay dere for crissake . . .” a man is yelling at Gus from the curb. “Look out for de cars!”

A yelling mouth gaping under a visored cap, a green flag waving. “God-amighty I’m on the tracks.” He yanks the horse’s head round. A crash rips the wagon behind him. Cars, the gelding, a green flag, red houses whirl and crumble into blackness. (53)

Trains in particular are represented as dangerous machines that emit violently loud noises. The elevated “shoots” (51) or “thunder[s] overhead” (51), sending “Jagged oblongs of harsh sound” (148) breaking over New Yorkers’ heads. Its noises are perceived as **nothing less than** “annihilating clatter” (21). Returning from an X-ray treatment and being warned by a friend about the dangers of contracting cancer as a result, Ruth Prynne envisions the people in the subway she rides on her way home as a “trainload of jiggling corpses, nodding and swaying as the express roared shrilly towards Ninetysixth Street” (266). As in the previous examples, the acoustic impressions add to her perception of the train as a vehicle of destruction and death.

As Heinz Ickstadt (70) and other critics have noted, Dos Passos portrays the city itself as a relentless machine. For Dos Passos’s characters, the big city is no longer the space of dreams and infinite possibilities it still represented for Dreiser’s *Carrie*,³⁹ but a brute mechanical force. Already the novel’s very first epigraph likens immigrants arriving in New York to apples crushed by a machine amid a welter of noises:

Three gulls wheel above the broken boxes, orangerinds, spoiled cabbage heads that heave between the splintered plank walls, the green waves spume under the round bow as the ferry, skidding on the tide, crashes, gulps the broken water, slides, settles slowly into the slip. Handwinches whirl with jingle of chains. Gates fold upwards, feet step out across the

crack, men and women press through the manuresmelling wooden tunnel of the ferryhouse, crushed and jostling like apples fed down a chute into a press. (15)

As for the unnamed Japanese governor who visited the city for the first time in 1920, many an immigrant's "first impression of New York" must have been "its noise" (qtd. in E. Thompson 115).

In *Manhattan Transfer*, New York becomes a totalized machine whose impersonal force poses a very tangible threat to those who, unlike Jimmy Herf, choose to remain in it. Its deleterious effect on Dos Passos's characters reaches well beyond the hazards of traffic-related or industrial accidents and noise pollution. The final chapter demonstrates most conclusively the dehumanization of its victims, who become nothing but mechanical appendages to the city machine. The words, actions, and thoughts of Ellen Thatcher and George Baldwin during their final encounter testify to their almost completely reified existence. Checking her makeup in the ladies' room before dinner, Ellen keeps "winding up a hypothetical dollself" (334) that rigidifies into a "photograph of herself in her own place, forever frozen into a single gesture," a "porcelain figure" (335), as she takes her seat at the dinner table. George's final confession describes a state they both know all too well: "God if you knew how empty life had been for so many years. I've been like a tin mechanical toy, all hollow inside" (336). Volker Klotz captures the machine-like nature of both the city and its inhabitants most succinctly when he states that Dos Passos's New York "is a motorized construct that either assigns human beings functionality as parts or ejects them if they do not function" (320; my translation).⁴⁰

In *Manhattan Transfer*, the modernist topos of alienation is inseparable from the mechanization of the industrial city and its population. Robert C. Rosen sees the alienation of its characters reproduced in the novel's fragmented form:

Dos Passos's method of portraying characters—including, to some extent, Jimmy and Ellen—make much the same point as the novel's overall structure. What Blanche Gelfant calls the "impressionistic method of creating character," a "strict selection of isolated moments for dramatization," reveals disordered, alienated lives. Because Dos Passos shows us only disjointed fragments of a character's life, motives are often obscure or attenuated, feelings seem momentary and trivial. We rarely see

thought preceding action; characters tend to respond to immediate stimuli. The dehumanizing nature of the city is revealed through the hollowness of its victims. (43)

To Rosen's observation—which recalls Adorno's contention that experimental modernist form “refuses to mollify alienation in the image” (*Aesthetic* 145)—we may add that the novel's formal organization itself has affinities with the configuration of a mechanical device. Its metallic precision, its interlocking systems of otherwise isolated parts, its repetitive structure (for instance, the novel's first epigraph, quoted above, is reproduced in the “Rollercoaster” chapter [229]), its carefully constructed tripartite organization (titles, epigraphs, texts), and the rate at which scenes interchange betray the creative impulses of a literary engineer. Michael Gold's largely negative review, published in the *New Masses* in 1926, captures this aspect better than many of the novel's advocates: “This novel flies and hurries so, like an express train, it has such a stiff schedule to maintain, it swoops and maneuvers like a stunt aeroplane, that maybe slow and peasant-minded people cannot follow easily. The method is too new and experimental. But read the book twice and the method conveys its own emotion—the zoom of the aeroplane flight over a city” (73). *Manhattan Transfer* is a good example of Richard Poirier's observation about the affinity between technology and modernist writing: “All literature is to some degree aware of itself as a technology. But literary modernism thrusts this awareness upon us and to an unprecedented degree asks us to experience the enormous difficulties of mastering a technology” (113). By 1925, modernist literature had fully absorbed the impact of the phonograph and film—two technologies that emerged around the turn of the century and challenged the “immemorial monopoly of textual data processing” with the result that “the technical status of books themselves” (Kittler, “A Discourse” 157) was revealed as writing became visible as one medium among others. In its assimilation of the technological principle, Dos Passos's novel anticipates and goes beyond Hart Crane's 1930 call for poetry to

absorb the machine, i.e., *acclimatize* it as naturally and casually as trees, cattle, galleons, castles and all other human associations of the past [. . .]. For, contrary to general prejudice, the wonderment experienced in watching nose dives is of less immediate creative promise to poetry than the familiar gesture of a motorist in the modest act of shifting gears. I mean to say that mere romantic speculation in the power and

beauty of machinery keeps it at a continual remove; it can not act creatively in our lives until, like the unconscious nervous responses of our bodies, its connotations emanate from within—forming as spontaneous a terminology of poetic reference as the bucolic world of pasture, plow, and barn. (64)

In *Manhattan Transfer*, the machine does not solely provide “a terminology of poetic reference” but also a blueprint for artistic creation. Once we recognize the presence of a machine aesthetic in *Manhattan Transfer*, Dos Passos’s judgment of the industrial metropolis emerges as far more ambivalent than my foregoing discussion suggests.⁴¹ True, Dos Passos does not celebrate the noises of industrial progress in the vein of Luigi Russolo, the futurist theorist and musician who laid out his concept for a fusion of classical music with environmental noise in *The Art of Noises* (1913)—and *Manhattan Transfer* certainly shares none of Russolo’s protofascist glorification of flags, whips, and warfare.⁴²

In antiquity, life was nothing but silence. Noise was really not born before the 19th century, with the advent of machinery. Today noise reigns supreme over human sensibility. [. . .] In the pounding atmosphere of great cities as well as in the formerly silent countryside, machines create today such a large number of varied noises that pure sound, with its littleness and its monotony, now fails to arouse any emotion. [. . .] Let’s walk together through a great modern capital, with the ear more attentive than the eye, and we will vary the pleasures of our sensibilities by distinguishing among the gurglings of water, air and gas inside metallic pipes, the rumbling and rattlings of engines breathing with obvious animal spirits, the rising and falling of pistons, the stridency of mechanical saws, the loud jumping of trolleys on their rails, the snapping of whips, the whipping of flags. We will have fun imagining our orchestration of department stores’ sliding doors, the hubbub of the crowds, the different roars of railroad stations, iron foundries, textile mills, printing houses, power plants and subways. And we must not forget the very new noises of Modern Warfare. (Russolo 3–8; qtd. in Schafer, *Tuning* 110–11)

But to say that “*Manhattan Transfer* expresses radical disaffection with the city” (Lehan 238) does not tell the whole story either, for it neglects Dos

Passos's appreciation of the energy, vitality, and beauty of the city machine expressed, for instance, in this lyrical evocation of the sights, smells, and sounds of New York:

Across the zinc water the tall walls, the birchlike cluster of downtown buildings shimmered up the rosy morning like a sound of horns through a chocolatebrown haze. As the boat drew near the buildings densened to a granite mountain split with knifecut canyons. The ferry passed close to a tubby steamer that rode at anchor listing towards Stan so that he could see all the decks. An Ellis Island tug was alongside. A stale smell came from the decks packed with upturned faces like a load of melons. Three gulls wheeled complaining. A gull soared in a spiral, white wings caught the sun, the gull skimmed motionless in whitegold light. The rim of the sun had risen above the plumcolored band of clouds behind East New York. A million windows flashed with light. A rasp and a humming came from the city. (229)

This New York is not solely a “City of Destruction” (327) and a “crazy epileptic town” (178) that reduces its inhabitants to machines; it is at the same time an intensely beautiful, if flawed, monument to modernity. After all, this is the city whose noises had moved the French immigrant Edgard Varèse to compose his *Amériques* (1921), a magnificent, noise-infested musical tribute to New York at the beginning of the Roaring Twenties (Kahn 86–87). In *Manhattan Transfer*, the architect Phil Sandbourne's plans to improve the cityscape also express Dos Passos's belief in the redeemability of New York. Fittingly, Sandbourne's vocabulary is that of modernist innovation:

Do you remember years ago old man Specker used to talk about vitreous and superenameled tile? Well I've been workin on his formula out at Hollis . . . A friend of mine there has a two thousand degree oven he bakes pottery in. I think it can be put on a commercial basis . . . Man it would revolutionize the whole industry. Combined with concrete it would enormously increase the flexibility of the materials at the architects' disposal. We could make tile any color, size or finish . . . Imagine this city when all the buildings instead of bein dirty gray were ornamented with vivid colors. Imagine bands of scarlet round the entablatures of skyscrapers. Colored tile would revolutionize the whole life of the city . . . Instead of fallin back on the orders or on gothic or

romanesque decorations we could evolve new designs, new colors, new forms. (234)

While Dos Passos would seek to distance himself from Sandbourne's commercial impulses, he and his character share a belief in the integrability of artistic creation and technological expertise.⁴³ To discover with Dos Passos something of the aesthetic potential of the industrial city and its machines, we need to be careful not to conflate the (implied) author's perspective with Jimmy Herf's grim assessment.⁴⁴ Only then can we appreciate the fundamentally ambivalent nature of Dos Passos's comment on technological modernity; only then do we see that a determination to aestheticize the ugly exists side by side with his sharp awareness of and compassion for the victims of industrial progress.

Darkness

Not unlike Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* and *1919*, Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* (1936) gives a voice to the outcasts and dissenters who remain outside the parameters of official culture. But while Dos Passos's unionists, pacifists, underprivileged, and beggars mainly come to life in their confrontations with representatives of official culture (patriots, bankers, industrialists, politicians), Barnes's lesbians, transvestites, Jews, and circus performers inhabit physical and mental worlds that are largely their own (Robin's nightworld and bestial nature, O'Connor's monologues and filthy room, Felix's obsession with history, the circus scene).⁴⁵ Rather than portraying her characters within a framework of social conflict, pitting the voices and songs of one group against those of another (as Dos Passos does in *1919*) or the destitution of a Bud Korpenning against the decadent frivolities of a colonel's party (staged by Dos Passos in adjoining passages of *Manhattan Transfer*), Barnes delves deep into the strange, idiosyncratic worlds of her outsiders. Accordingly, the noises of her fiction are of a different kind: they do not, as in Dos Passos, emerge from an interference between antagonistic ways of interpreting the world but from a struggle to represent her subject matter and the differentness of her characters' speech, thoughts, and actions.

Barnes chooses to dwell among those who are neither seen nor heard. As is also indicated by the title of her novel as well as its constant references to darkness and the night, she is as much interested in questions of visibility as in questions of audibility. In fact, *Nightwood* can be read as an

extended artistic exploration of the limits of representability.⁴⁶ My reading of *Nightwood* will therefore have to move beyond the field of acoustics into more general issues of representation and include questions of visibility and visualization. This will allow me to situate the foregoing discussion of modernist literature in a broader framework. The end of this section returns to more specifically acoustic issues.

Barnes's probing of the limits of representation informs four different yet related levels of her text. First, her foregrounding of the "negative" side of some of the fundamental antitheses that structure Judeo-Christian thinking (heterosexuality and homosexuality, cleanliness and dirt, innocence and guilt, sobriety and intoxication, day and night, life and death, chastity and sexuality) thematizes that which to many only forms the unspoken or (for reasons of conventional morality) unspeakable background against which the thinking and speaking of the "positive" becomes possible. Second, characters like Robin Vote, Matthew O'Connor, and Guido Volkbein fall outside the representational conventions of official culture, whose clinical terms (the invert, the homosexual, the mentally ill) name one aspect of their difference but fail to capture the intensity and richness of their existence.⁴⁷ Barnes registers the unrepresentability of her cast of outcasts in conventional terms in the fragmented, associative, and darkly figurative language of her novel. Third, while *Nightwood* was certainly not the first work of fiction to explore lesbian relationships,⁴⁸ it is, as Carolyn Allen argues convincingly, formative of a specific, post-Steinian tradition of female writing that explores the dynamics of lesbian love and sexuality from a "theoretical" angle, that is, through "representations of women's erotics" that "contribute to personal and political knowledges in particular sociohistorical formations" (3).⁴⁹ As such a pioneering text, *Nightwood* manages to say that which has not been said before, that which is, in other words, only just becoming representable. Finally, there is a profound sense of loss and emptiness at the center of Barnes's narrative. Her characters' desires revolve around lost objects (Robin for Nora, Robin and aristocracy for Felix) or, in O'Connor's case, around a painful existential void. O'Connor's torrential monologues, Nora's acts of remembrance, and Felix's impersonations of aristocracy are all desperate attempts to fill the emptiness. But only O'Connor recognizes the futility of these attempts. His pain reaches deeper because only he is aware of the more fundamental nature of human misery: "No man needs curing of his individual sickness; his universal malady is what he should look to" (32). He

knows that even if Nora's or Felix's representations managed to make present the lost object rather than its irrecoverable absence, they would be faced with a deeper abyss of meaninglessness that lurks beneath the more immediate tragedy of personal loss.⁵⁰ O'Connor's verbosity may have therapeutic uses, but his recognition of the universal nature of human misery, expressed in his conviction that "the world is [...] about nothing" (124), points to a different reading of his monologues as a struggle to represent that nothingness.

Once we recognize that O'Connor's struggle with (rather than for) words is part of Barnes's larger project of probing the limits and impasses of representation, his figure moves toward the center of critical attention. O'Connor is no artist figure in the strict sense, but his verbal brilliance, self-reflexivity, and iconoclastic negativity make it possible to read a number of his pronouncements as critical reflections on modernist writing. Charles Baxter's "A Self-Consuming Light: *Nightwood* and the Crisis of Modernism" (1974) argues most forcefully for a reading along those lines. Baxter's reading of *Nightwood* as an extended reflection on the difficulties and impasses of modernist writing raises important issues with regard to modernism's interest in problems of representation and form. For Baxter, O'Connor's seemingly inexhaustible eloquence, displayed in his rambling monologues, exemplifies the plight of the modernist artist whose verbal brilliance cannot hide the emptiness that lurks behind the words. Like self-referential and self-contained modernist works of art, his monologues retreat from reality and turn back upon themselves. Like the modernist artist, he shuts himself off from the possibility of a genuine dialogue with his audience, retreating further from the world of experience, hiding in his filthy room, and increasing his own pain and isolation:

By means of the now-familiar Jamesian purification of technique, the ontological status of the Image, and the artist's detachment from his work, the Modernist writer—especially the novelist—effectively cuts off the channels that lead from the creation to a universe of discourse. The novelist's art shields the work and gives it an independent life. But such Being exists in a closed universe where the novel can talk only to itself, usually about its own isolation. Technical lavishness then increases in direct proportion to the narcissism of the work. Matthew O'Connor, consequently, speaks not only for the artist of Modernism (and *in* the language appropriate to it) but also for the work in which

he appears. *Nightwood* explains its condition through him; he is like a medium at a prolonged séance. And what the novel says, as chapter follows chapter, is that it is being suffocated by its own remoteness. [. . .] Its autotelia closes it off from reciprocal information; language looks into a mirror and sees only itself. Indeed, O'Connor's last extended lament in the novel concerns such a depletion, his habit of emptying himself of and with words that have lost their magical properties and exist, like the autoerotic, in a self-contained and self-referential state. Such speech is consequently by and large exhibitionistic. (Baxter 1176, 1181)

There is much to disagree with in Baxter's article, including his persistent use of sexual metaphors to describe modernist writing (autoeroticism, exhibitionism); his tendency to equate same-sex love with narcissism; his dismissal of Robin Vote as "a false double in a novel packed with counterfeits" (1179); his persistent but never unequivocal insinuation that *Nightwood* is a poetic failure. But if we are prepared to lay our initial embarrassment and outrage aside, we will find that Baxter's ideologically dubious and psychologically absurd analogies obscure what is otherwise a valid point of departure for critics of this dark and difficult modernist text.

Baxter's reading accords with the fundamentally dark atmosphere of Barnes's text, a text that is preoccupied with the "universal malady" (32) of humankind, with the "gap in 'world pain' through which the singular falls continually and forever" (51), with characters "who are full to the gorge with misery" (83), a text that has O'Connor, the self-pronounced "god of darkness" (126), and Robin Vote, "a figure of doom" (41), at its center and her son, Guido, "an addict to death" (107), on its periphery. Moreover, it manages to establish a link between the novel's dark tone and the numerous passages that suggest an affinity between O'Connor and professional storytellers of the past and present, some of them noted by Baxter. The doctor's full name, "Dr. Matthew-Mighty-grain-of-salt-Dante-O'Connor" (80) links him to the Italian poet of the late Middle Ages, his rapt discourse on the night to the German Romantic Novalis and his "Hymnen an die Nacht." O'Connor is at least as much an Irish storyteller who "tell[s] the story of the world to the world" (161) as a "medical student" (14), and his warning not to "ma[k]e the literal error" (89) as well as his claim to be "the greatest liar this side of the moon, telling my stories to people like [Nora]" (135) seem to predispose him

toward the former rather than the latter. O'Connor's highly metaphoric use of language explodes the discourse of the psychoanalyst, aligning him with Donne, whom he quotes, instead (97). Like Donne's, O'Connor's words speak of hard intellectual wit and a keen interest in the themes of religion and death; O'Connor's extended metaphorical discourse on the acorn and the tree (83–84) has something of the complex quality of the metaphysical conceit. Moreover, O'Connor becomes a storyteller in an almost metafictional sense when he appropriates the narrator's and eventually the author's voice.⁵¹ As Baxter points out, "There are in fact certain passages (like the initial awakening of Robin Vote) that sound as though they were written by Matthew O'Connor" (1186). Finally, when O'Connor asks, "must I, perchance, like careful writers, guard myself against the conclusions of my readers?" (94), and says to Nora a little later, "I have a narrative, but you will be put to it to find it" (97), the doctor sounds like Djuna Barnes admonishing her readers.

But when Baxter links O'Connor's association with authorial figures (on different intra- and extratextual levels) exclusively with the doctor's persistent sense of failure and concludes that, in the figure of Matthew O'Connor, *Nightwood* documents the failure of modernist writing, he fails to notice the more auspicious models of writing and authorship suggested by O'Connor's monologues. His struggle with words undeniably drags him down into a sea of meaninglessness, but along the way it also produces spectacularly strange and radiantly beautiful prose that augurs well for the modernist artist. In other words, if O'Connor is, as Baxter asserts, correct in saying that he has "given [his] destiny away by garrulity" (91), he, the transvestite and unlicensed practitioner, also asserts the value of his stories, because "Only the scorned and the ridiculous make good stories" (159).

What Baxter dismisses as the narcissism and autoeroticism of modernist writing is, then, an integral and necessary part of Barnes's negative aesthetics. In order to represent that which has been forgotten and obliterated by dominant discourses, the text needs to dissociate itself from those discourses. Any pandering to the discursive needs of a cultural formation that rejects her characters as deviant and seeks to contain forms of negative knowledge would either risk reducing her set of characters, as I have argued in the previous chapter with regard to naturalism and as T. S. Eliot fears in his introduction to the novel, to "a horrid sideshow of freaks" (*Nightwood* xvi), or threaten to eradicate the difference of Barnes's figures and themes in the

normalizing forms of scientific or realist prose. O'Connor's valorization of Guido's physical and mental difference seeks to avert both of these dangers in a characteristically self-reflexive moment: "With Guido, you are in the presence of the 'maladjusted.' Wait! I am not using that word in the derogatory sense at all; in fact my great virtue is that I never use the derogatory in the usual sense" (116–17). Agreeing with her character on this account, Barnes sets the poetic strangeness and self-referentiality of her text against the dialectical forces of abjection and normalization. *Nightwood* is indeed, as Baxter argues, an almost hermetic text, but Barnes's refusal to grant readers easy access to her text works in the text's favor rather than against it. Modernist literature that aspires to function as a cultural perturbation of modernity needs to sever some of its communicative ties with the prevalent discourses of its historical moment; it needs to prolong the process of perception and foreclose ready assimilation to the communicative and interpretive networks that are already in place. In Barnes's alternative brand of modernism, this more widely shared modernist project of communicative refusal merges with her more specific interest in the representability of the negative (the outcast, the night, loss, nothingness). Paradoxically, then, it is the autotelia Baxter vilifies with such fervor that allows *Nightwood* to function as a critical discursive intervention.

In this reading, the darkness of Barnes's text does not reinforce a sense of poetic failure. Instead, it manages to preserve something of the differentness of that which polite society seeks to repress but cannot quite grasp with its means of representation; it refuses to expose it to the full glare of daylight.⁵² The energy *Nightwood* draws from its preoccupation with doom, death, and decay⁵³—an aspect that, significantly, almost completely eludes Baxter's grasp—derives to a large extent from the possibility of a liberating slippage from conventional representability. Yet at the same time as it conjures up a representational space outside domination, the text's darkness pinpoints the very principle of repression.⁵⁴

Once we recognize that Barnes's multiple departures from a realist aesthetics, her associative ordering of thoughts, dissolution of stable (gender) identities,⁵⁵ linguistic self-reflexivity and metaphorical acrobatics⁵⁶ are necessitated by her focus on negative forms of knowledge (of the night, of emptiness, of the outcasts of modernity) and that the combination of formal innovation and thematic darkness serves as a strategy of resistance to processes of assimilation and co-optation—if not to the fascist then to dominant (racial,

sexological, moral) discourses within modernity—several of O'Connor's pronouncements emerge as reflections on Barnes's modernist aesthetics of noise. In this reading, then, what we may discover in O'Connor's speeches is not, as Baxter has it, a poet's admission of failure but a series of reflections on the formal and thematic negativity of Barnes's brand of modernism.

In various ways, O'Connor evokes tenets of Barnes's modernist program. At the level of narrative progression, O'Connor's rambling and discontinuous yet sharp-witted monologues not only form part of Barnes's formal innovations but also present a *mise en abyme* of the novel's formal concerns, not unlike the doorkeeper parable is a *mise en abyme* of Kafka's hermeneutic riddles in *The Trial* (1925). Like some of Barnes's stories that trail off into nothingness (as Guido's does) or end indeterminately (as the story of Robin and Nora's relationship and the book as a whole do), O'Connor's observations and stories remain inconclusive and fail to offer either his listeners or Barnes's readers the consolation of narrative resolution and fullness of meaning. O'Connor's lengthy discourse on the night is a particularly good example here. As Nora's sporadic interruptions of the doctor's talk and his refusal to give straightforward answers to her questions reveal, the two are talking at cross-purposes:

"But, what am I to do?" she said.

"Be as the Frenchman who puts a sou in the poorbox at night that he may have a penny to spend in the morning—he can trace himself back by his sediment, vegetable and animal, and so find himself in the odour of wine in its two travels, in and out, packed down beneath an air that has not changed its position during its strategy." (84–85)

"You beat the liver out of a goose to get a *pâté*; you pound the muscles of a man's *cardia* to get a philosopher."

"Is that what I am to learn?" she asked bitterly.

The doctor looked at her. "For the lover, it is the night into which his beloved goes," he said, "that destroys his heart; he wakes her suddenly, only to look the hyena in the face that is her smile, as she leaves that company." (87)

"Matthew," Nora said, "what will become of her? That's what I want to know."

“To our friends,” he answered, “we die every day, but to ourselves we die only at the end. We do not know death, or how often it has essayed our most vital spirit. While we are in the parlour it is visiting in the pantry.” (96)

Nora wants pragmatic advice but is given only enigmatic parables, metaphors, and similes. Yet *Nightwood's* readers are not offered a position of superiority, understanding what Nora does not. The precise point of O'Connor's explanations—assuming for a moment that they have a point and are explanations—remains as elusive to them as they do to her. Nora's helplessness before his river of words is to a large extent the readers' before Barnes's convoluted narrative. True, Barnes throughout *Nightwood* evokes conventional structures of signification (auctorial narration, morals, religion, psychoanalysis), but she does so without offering them as a remedy for the struggle with meaning that both her characters and readers experience in the world of her book. In *Nightwood*, these discourses are empty formulae that hold out but always frustrate the promise of sense-making: “The forms exist, but they are no longer in the service of any realizable content. The doctor is a moralist without morals, a narrator without a coherent story, who tells his story, as he says, ‘for nothing’ [165]” (Ecker 152; my translation). But to charge both O'Connor and Barnes, as Baxter does, with a failure to communicate effectively is to miss the point. O'Connor is no healer and Barnes no priestess of words. O'Connor explicitly rejects that role (“Do you think, for Christ's sweet sake [. . .] that I am so happy that you should cry down my neck?” [154]), and Barnes refuses to deliver the exegesis along with the sermon. The artist's and her character's communicative refusals signal their rejection of those roles, indicating that—in the face of the ineffable and “the absence of given, guaranteed, intersubjectively constructible meaning” (Isernhagen, “Enthüllen” 362–63; my translation)—traditional interpretive and linguistic patterns need to be replaced by the modernist's struggle with words.

When O'Connor reproaches Nora for “dress[ing]” in her relationship with Robin “the unknowable in the garments of the known” (136), his criticism points to a second, related convergence between the doctor's statements and Barnes's aesthetics. O'Connor's censure aims both at Nora's desperate efforts to bring Robin from the “filthiness” of her nocturnal existence to the safety of their home and at her attempts to understand Robin by talking about her in the languages of domesticity and romance—as she does in

the following passage: “Oh Matthew. I don’t know how to go. I don’t know which way to turn! Tell her, if you ever see her, that it is always with her in my arms—forever it will be that way until we die” (150). Robin is the first to let Nora know how constraining her constructions are and how debasing her concern for her (Robin’s) propriety is. When Nora tries “to take someone’s hands off her,” Robin in her anger observes correctly that Nora’s moral categories rather than her own actions introduce filthiness into her life: “You are a devil! You make everything dirty! [. . .] You make me feel dirty and tired and old” (143). O’Connor, whose room is perceived to be in “incredible [. . .] disorder” and “appallingly degraded [. . .], like the rooms in brothels” (78–79) by none other than Nora, understands Robin’s indignation: “The French have made a detour of filthiness—Oh, the good dirt! Whereas you are of a clean race, of a too eagerly washing people, and this leaves no road for you” (84). Moreover, he mocks Nora’s more subtle attempts to control Robin retrospectively by describing their relationship in terms of romantic love: “there you were sitting up high and fine, with a rose-bush up your arse” (151). O’Connor’s concern not to reduce the unknowable to the known, the nocturnal wilderness to the moral category of “filthiness,” the passionate yet conflictual relationship to the codes of domesticity or romantic love, is the modernist artist’s principal credo. It lies at the heart of Pound’s instruction to “make it new,” underlies Adorno’s disdain for committed art, and forms a crucial aspect of Barnes’s aesthetics.

The modernist artist’s interest in that which official culture seeks to repress or co-opt but can never fully grasp dictates representational strategies that refuse to make the deviant palatable and introduce noise into the officially sanctioned channels of communication instead. To dress the unknowable in the linguistic garments of the known, to drag it out into the full visibility of the light of day, would be almost equivalent to acquiescing in domination. O’Connor’s irrecoverably “strange” monologue on the night is therefore part of Barnes’s larger project of communicative resistance to assimilation, which also enlists the voices of other characters as well as the narrator’s. When, in the “Go Down, Matthew” chapter, Nora regains her voice before the onslaught of the doctor’s talk and explains that “A man is another person—a woman is yourself, caught as you turn in panic; on her mouth you kiss your own” (143); when the otherwise prosaic Felix remembers that “There was in [Robin’s] movement a slight drag, as if the past were a web about her” (119); when the narrator explains that Guido, “if born to anything, [is] born

to holy decay" (107), that Robin is "an infected carrier of the past" (37), or that the good of "the *détraqués*, the paupers [. . .] is incommunicable" (52), their figurative diction reveals something about the dynamics of lesbian love, about Robin's relation to history, about Guido's physical and mental difference, about the plight and joys of the urban poor without any claim of having made them fully visible or truly knowable. In such passages, Barnes's departures from what one might call instrumental communication emerge as challenges to epistemological control. It is in this rejection of the full mastery of meaning that Barnes joins the writers of the *avant-garde* as Julia Kristeva conceives them:

For at least a century, the literary *avant-garde* (from Mallarmé and Lautréamont to Joyce and Artaud) has been introducing ruptures, blank spaces, and holes into language. [. . .] in a culture where the speaking subjects are conceived of as masters of their speech, they have what is called a "phallic" position. The fragmentation of language in a text calls into question the very posture of this mastery. The writing that we have been discussing confronts this phallic position either to traverse it or to deny it. ("Oscillation" 165)

O'Connor's relation to this phallic position is ambivalent. On the one hand, we continually see him judging others and lecturing to them from a self-appointed position of superior knowledge. Moreover, he constantly takes the floor, arrogates it to himself in ways that recall feminist linguists' critiques of male languages of domination.⁵⁷ On the other hand, O'Connor's frank admission of impotence in the "Tiny O'Toole" (96) passage and his repeated assertion that he is "the Lily of Killarney" (96), the "last woman left in this world" (100), deftly undermine any claims to a phallic position. More important, O'Connor rejects the mastery of meaning that Kristeva associates with that position. His refusal to communicate his knowledge of the night in anything but enigmatic metaphors and associative detours—a refusal that may more properly be called an inability—betrays his metafictional awareness of Barnes's struggle with the limits of representing those themes and figures that continue to frustrate the desire for epistemological mastery. In this reading, then, the night comes to stand in for all that which exists in the shadows of representability (lesbianism, male homosexuality, death, mental disorder).

O'Connor's valorization of Guido's differentness points to a third overlap

between the doctor's and Barnes's narrative projects. When he points out to Guido's father, Felix, that "a world like his may be more apt than yours and mine—he is not made secure by habit—in that there is always hope" (120), O'Connor embraces the destabilizing potential of alternative ways of perceiving the world. Djuna Barnes shares her character's appreciation and puts it to work both on the thematic and the formal level of her text. Guido's perceptual break with the habitual recurs on a larger scale throughout *Nightwood*. It informs O'Connor's as well as Barnes's disruptions of narrative continuity; their innovations in metaphorical language; their self-reflexive departures from realist verisimilitude as well as their redrawing and blurring of normative gender categories; their violations of decorum (blasphemy, depiction of aberrant sexuality, transgression of gender normativity, erasure of the human/beast boundary);⁵⁸ their emptying out of conventional structures of signification; and their focus on the "night side" of culturally validated dichotomies. If Barnes's formal innovations are, as I have argued, at least partly motivated by the author's desire to preserve something of the differentness of her characters and subject matter, then it is the combined effect of formal and thematic deviations from the conventional and normative that "fractures," as Karen Kaivola puts it in her reading of the novel, "our expectations of how language represents the world" (67) and challenges our habitualized mechanisms of perception. Barnes's aesthetics thus adds an important qualification to Shklovsky's contention that the purpose of art is to defamiliarize language so as to break through patterns of perception automatized by repetition and habit. While Shklovsky locates the habit-shattering potential of literature almost exclusively on the level of linguistic form, Barnes's challenge to automatized perception derives its force from an intertwining of formal and thematic concerns.

What Barnes's aesthetic program—mirrored and most fully realized in the figure of O'Connor and his speeches—shares with Shklovsky's pronouncements on literariness as well as the more historically specific claims of Adorno and Barthes is the valorization of poetic strategies that—in the form of negativity, "thickened" textures, or equivocation—delay, inhibit, and disturb processes of communication between authors and readers. Barnes's introduction of noise, static, interference into the literary channels of communication serves not only to prolong the process of perception as an aesthetic end in itself but also constitutes an act of resistance against the assimilation of the other, the normalization of the deviant, the reduction of the unknown

to the known. While Robin's return at the novel's end, "crawling after [Nora's dog]—barking in a fit of laughter, obscene and touching" (170), is the literalization of Barnes's aesthetics of irrecoverable noise, O'Connor's pronouncements, delivered "at the top of his voice" (15), function as metaphorical elaborations on that aesthetic. Appropriately, O'Connor uses a metaphoric of discordant sound when he describes himself as "an instrument [. . .] that has lost its G string" (159) and, somewhat later in the novel, as "The mocking bird" who "howls through the pillars of Paradise" (163). When he compares the wedding of joy and terror in suicide to "a formless sea where a swan [. . .] sinks crying" (137), his condensation of beauty, death, formlessness, and noise into a single image could as well serve as a metaphorical description of the style and thematic concerns of the book he appears in. Similarly, when he refers to the mind as a "priceless galaxy of misinformation" (150), or reminisces, as in the passage quoted below, about the noises of Parisian and Viennese nights, O'Connor joins Barnes in his discovery of an incalculable aesthetic and epistemological potential in states of disorder, misinformation, and noise.

The criers telling the price of wine to such effect that the dawn saw good clerks full of piss and vinegar, and blood-letting in side streets where some wild princess in a night-shift of velvet howled under a leech; not to mention the palaces of Nymphenburg echoing back to Vienna with the night trip of late kings letting water into plush cans and line woodwork! (81–82)

Of all the authors under consideration in this chapter, then, Djuna Barnes through the figure of O'Connor develops the most self-reflexive contribution to a modernist aesthetics of noise. Her change of focus from noise as a product of the interference between antagonistic political agendas, cultural heritages, or ways of reading the world to noise as a product of the artist's probing of that which exists outside or beyond conventional systems of visibility and representation foregrounds modernism's central concern with questions of representability—a concern that also underpins Toomer's and Hurston's literary transformations of African-American vocalization and Dos Passos's historiographical and cultural critique—and thus takes us to the heart of what distinguishes modernist from most naturalist forms of writing.

Noise Everywhere

The Postmodern Situation

Noise masked as music had pursued her since early childhood. During her years at the Academy of Fine Arts, students had been required to spend whole summer vacations at a youth camp. They lived in common quarters and worked together on a steelworks construction site. Music roared out of loudspeakers on the site from five in the morning to nine at night. She felt like crying, but the music was cheerful, and there was nowhere to hide, not in the latrine or under the bedclothes: everything was in range of the speakers. The music was like a pack of hounds that had been sicked on her.

At the time, she had thought that only in the Communist world could such musical barbarism reign supreme. Abroad, she discovered that the transformation of music into noise was a planetary process by which mankind was entering the historical phase of total ugliness. The total ugliness to come had made itself felt as omnipresent acoustical ugliness: cars, motorcycles, electric guitars, drills, loudspeakers, sirens. The omnipresence of visual ugliness would soon follow.

Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

Paradoxically, Fredric Jameson's seminal *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) both presents what is still the most sustained analysis of the politics of postmodern art and fails to provide an adequate intellectual framework for assessing that politics. The main problem with Jameson's account lies in its conflation of the economic and the cultural sphere, a conflation that is already apparent in the title of his book:

the expression *late capitalism* carries the other, cultural half of my title within it as well; not only is it something like a literal translation of the other expression, *postmodernism*, its temporal index seems already to direct attention to changes in the quotidian and on the cultural level as such. To say that my two terms, the *cultural* and the *economic*, thereby collapse back into one another and say the same thing, in an eclipse of the distinction between base and superstructure that has itself often struck people as significantly characteristic of postmodernism in the

first place, is also to suggest that the base, in the third stage of capitalism, generates its superstructures with a new kind of dynamic. (xxi)

Against Jameson, I would argue that if we, as critics, are truly interested—as Jameson himself certainly is—in assessing the politics of postmodern art, we need to renounce his conflation of the economic and the cultural because if we do not, the question of whether postmodern art can be oppositional is preempted, the answer always already given. For if the cultural artifact and what lies outside it were subject to one and the same logic (that of late capitalism), there would be nothing the cultural artifact could be oppositional to. This is not to deny that Jameson’s analyses of specific cultural artifacts are subtle and important contributions to the study of postmodern culture but to point out that his conclusions as to these artworks’ oppositional potential are all to some extent predictable. With Linda Hutcheon, I would maintain that “to assume an equation of the culture and its ground, rather than allowing for at least the possibility of a relation of contestation and subversion, is to forget the lesson of postmodernism’s complex relation to modernism: its retention of modernism’s initial oppositional impulses, both ideological and aesthetic, and its equally strong rejection of its founding notion of formalist autonomy” (*Politics* 26).

Hutcheon’s *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) and *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989) present formidable challenges to Jameson’s complaint that postmodernism has abandoned politics along with a genuine sense of history. Contra Jameson’s assertion that “In the postmodern [. . .] the past itself has disappeared (along with the well-known ‘sense of the past’ or historicity and collective memory)” (*Postmodernism* 309),¹ Hutcheon argues that postmodernism is infused with a profound if problematized sense of history. Postmodern novels like Doctorow’s *Ragtime*, Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose*, or Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* are anything but ahistorical. Instead, they interrogate the possibilities of representing the past in and for the present. Having abandoned the notion that either literature or historiography can open a Rankean window on the past “as it really was,” these fictions self-reflexively explore the kinds of stories about the past that both literature and historiography can tell. As “historiographic metafiction,” they both acknowledge the need for such stories (since they are the only means we have of gaining access to the past) and challenge the validity of their construc-

tions of the real. Hutcheon believes that this doubleness of historiographic metafiction also characterizes its politics of representation:

postmodernism is a fundamentally contradictory enterprise: its art forms (and its theory) at once use and abuse, install and then destabilize convention in parodic ways, self-consciously pointing both to their own inherent paradoxes and provisionality and, of course, to their critical or ironic re-reading of the art of the past. In implicitly contesting in this way such concepts as aesthetic originality and textual closure, postmodernist art offers a new model for mapping the borderland between art and the world, a model that works from a position within and yet not totally within either, a model that is profoundly implicated in, yet still capable of criticizing, that which it seeks to describe. (*Poetics* 23)

For Hutcheon, postmodernism is a form of “complicitous critique” (*Politics* 2), a critique that accepts its own implication in that which it criticizes as it abandons the idea of artistic autonomy; it is a critique that nevertheless continues to challenge and subvert dominant ways of reading the past as well as the present.²

Yet Hutcheon’s reminder that postmodernism inherits much of its oppositional impetus from early modernism points to two phases in the history of postmodernism.³ Both Hutcheon and Jameson note that the 1960s were a crucially important moment for the development of the postmodern.⁴ But both critics too quickly turn their attention away from 1960s postmodernism, though for different reasons. While Jameson’s stress on postmodernism’s implication in late capitalist structures aligns itself with a general (though by no means unequivocal) sympathy for the modernist project to the effect that early, anti-high modernist and oppositional postmodernism is relegated to the margins of his discussion,⁵ Hutcheon in her desire to validate a 1980s postmodernism that is both historical and self-reflexive charges 1960s postmodernism with “ahistorical presentism” and an “idealist or essentialist belief in the value of the ‘natural’ and ‘authentic’” (*Poetics* 203). Thus, neither Hutcheon’s postmodernism of complicitous critique nor Jameson’s fully complicitous postmodernism of late capitalism provides an adequate descriptive model for an earlier postmodernism of the 1960s and early 1970s.

To account for the representational politics of the literary texts discussed in this chapter—Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972), and Don DeLillo’s *White Noise* (1985)—we need to distinguish between an earlier phase of postmodernism (including *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Mumbo Jumbo*) and a later phase (including *White Noise*). Andreas Huyssen provides us with such a model in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*. On the American scene, Huyssen distinguishes between the early postmodernism of the 1960s (Cage, Warhol, the Beats, the Beatles, Barthelme), which attempted to revitalize the historical avant-garde and its adversarial stance against a codified form of high modernism, and a two-pronged postmodernism of the 1970s and early 1980s, one part of which was “largely affirmative” of the status quo while the other was alternative in its attempts to redefine “resistance, critique, and negation [. . .] in non-modernist and non-avantgardist terms” (188).

In its historical specificity, this captures more adequately than either Jameson’s or Hutcheon’s accounts the shifting nature and different political positionings of several postmodernisms. In his identification of the historical avant-garde as an important model for 1960s postmodernism, Huyssen also specifies more clearly than Hutcheon the relationship between early modernism and early postmodernism as well as that between early and late postmodernism. Moreover, it avoids Jameson’s, however qualified, assertion of a “radical break or *coupure*” (*Postmodernism* 1) between modernism and postmodernism, an assertion that is based on a too-monolithic conception of the two periods.⁶ Finally, Huyssen’s account also retrospectively enables us to perceive more clearly which tradition (or, rather, antitradition) of modernist writing the texts discussed in the previous chapter belong to.

Huyssen (191–95) identifies four defining features of 1960s postmodernism, all of which it inherits from the avant-garde movements at the beginning of the twentieth century: a strong sense of new frontiers, discontinuity, and generational conflict; an attack on the institution of art; technological optimism; and an attempt to validate popular culture as against high-cultural artistic production. Both Pynchon’s and Reed’s fictions exemplify all of these traits: Pynchon’s in its ubiquitous allusions to the counterculture of the 1960s; its implicit suggestion that professional readers—that is, literary critics—are “like Puritans are about the Bible. So hung up with words, words” (53); its fascination with networks and circuits; and its multiple pop music references; and Reed’s in its staging of conflicts between the more

traditional voodoo practice of Papa LaBas and the new, syncretic practices of Black Herman; its evocation of a sense of new beginning in the Harlem Renaissance; its challenges to a white culture perceived as bookish; its technological enhancement of voodoo in Battraville's "Radio Loa" (151); and its celebration of jazz and ragtime. In more than one sense, *The Crying of Lot 49* as well as *Mumbo Jumbo* are examples of a belated American reception of the European avant-garde as described by Peter Bürger in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde*: "The intention of the historical avant-garde movements was defined as the destruction of art as an institution set off from the praxis of life" (83).

Reading Bürger, we encounter a fifth feature of the historical avant-garde that Pynchon's and Reed's texts share, a feature that actually links them closely to the texts by Toomer, Hurston, Dos Passos, and Barnes discussed in the previous chapter, texts that do not belong to an avant-garde tradition in any strict sense. While insisting that the avant-garde's principal function was to reveal art as an institution and attack it as such, Bürger agrees with Adorno that, at the level of formal description, "The avant-gardiste work is defined as nonorganic. Whereas in the organic work of art, the structural principle governs the parts and joins them in a unified whole, in the avant-gardiste work, the parts have a significantly larger autonomy vis-à-vis the whole. They become less important as constituent elements of a totality of meaning and simultaneously more important as relatively autonomous signs" (83–84). In Pynchon, it is the refusal of plot closure; the plurality of possible readings of the fictional world offered by the novel and its characters; the eclecticism of scientific, literary, historical and political references; and the bewildering complexity and ambivalence of the Tristero system that add up to a fragmented, nonorganic text. In Reed, nonorganicity arises, not unlike in Toomer and Hurston, from a productive tension between orality and literacy, from parodic uses *and* abuses of racial essentialisms and ethnic dichotomies, and from the unruliness of the Jes Grew epidemic itself. Reed explicitly challenges ideas about the reliability, closure, and univocality of texts when he has both Moses's and the Knights Templar's appropriations of the Book of Thoth misfire.

The link established here between Reed on the one hand and Toomer and Hurston on the other suggests that these early postmodern texts may have more in common with the modernist texts discussed in the previous chapter than Huysen's strict separation between an adversarial avant-garde

and a later, fully institutionalized modernism allows for. And indeed, *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Mumbo Jumbo* resonate with the modernist concerns of Dos Passos's aesthetics of fragmentation as well as his historical imagination, Barnes's thematic and formal negativity, and Toomer's and Hurston's deformations of mastery and antiphonal play. With regard to modernism, this implies that any rigid distinction between an early, avantgardist and oppositional modernism and a later, dominant and institutionalized modernism is rendered problematic. What is called for, then, is a history of adversarial modernisms that encompasses both the historical avant-garde and texts that emerge outside or after the closing of the avant-garde but retain much of its oppositional ethos and its closely related nonorganic aesthetics.⁷ With regard to postmodernism, it means that we need to remain suspicious of rigid boundary-drawings between modernism and postmodernism, whichever side of the demarcation line the critic validates. The following discussion will therefore begin with an analysis of some of the formal and thematic continuities between Reed and Pynchon and the adversarial modernists of the preceding chapter. For the other postmodernist text analyzed here (*White Noise*), the situation is different. I will return to DeLillo in the final section of this chapter.

Communicative W.A.S.T.E.

More explicitly than any other work of fiction discussed in this book, Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* thematizes the subversive and innovative potential of noise. To delineate the status and function of noise in Pynchon's fictional system, a brief digression into the field of thermodynamics is necessary. Much has been written on Pynchon's use of two different concepts of entropy in his narrative.⁸ For our purposes, it will be sufficient to give a short introduction to entropy in the thermodynamic sense and its implications for one possible reading of *The Crying of Lot 49* and then discuss the links the novel establishes between thermodynamic entropy and the concept of entropy as it is used in information theory.

The second law of thermodynamics states that "*The entropy of an isolated assembly must increase or in the limit remain constant*" (Roy 145). An alternative way of putting this is to say that the entropy of a closed system left to its own devices invariably increases until it reaches a maximum at equilibrium.⁹ In this state, the molecules in the closed system are assembled in a homogeneous and unstructured, disordered mass. In accordance with the first law

of thermodynamics, no energy has been lost, but the energy is no longer available to do work since “The usefulness of thermal energy derives from order—specifically from the orderly division of hot and cold into distinct regions. Without such temperature variation there would be no relatively cold regions for the heat to pass to, and it is only during such passage that heat can be harnessed” (Engel 51). At equilibrium, the system comes to a standstill, and heat can no longer be transformed into work. This process is an irreversible process, for once the system has reached equilibrium, it will remain in this state.

Maxwell’s Demon is a thought experiment that reverses what is an irreversible process according to the second law. The Demon is a kind of doorkeeper who sorts faster-moving (hotter) molecules and slower-moving (colder) molecules into different regions within the closed system, thus maintaining a continuous heat differential. The Demon would, in other words, refute the second law of thermodynamics by reverting the process of entropic increase. Maxwell argued that the Demon’s sorting activity could not be regarded as expenditure of work and that his thought experiment therefore holds out the promise of a perpetual motion machine.¹⁰

Clerk Maxwell’s challenge to the second law of thermodynamics was not left unanswered. In an article published in 1951, Leon Brillouin took issue with Maxwell’s far-reaching claims. In particular, Brillouin demonstrated that the process of perception that necessarily precedes the Demon’s distinction between faster and slower molecules introduces more entropy into the system than the Demon’s sorting activity could possibly decrease: “Any experiment by which information is obtained about a physical system produces, on the average, an increase of entropy in the system or in its surroundings. [...] An observation is always accompanied by an increase in entropy, and thus involves an irreversible process” (*Science* 184). Hence, one of the crucial insights arising from the controversy about Maxwell’s Demon is that there is a price to pay for the acquisition of information, the price being an increase in entropy.

As Anne Mangel points out in what remains one of the best treatments of Pynchon’s references to thermodynamic entropy, “In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Pynchon uses Maxwell’s notion of the Demon as a metaphor for Oedipa’s experiences” (196).¹¹ At the beginning of the novel, Oedipa lives in a world of Tupperware parties, supermarket Muzak, and domestic conformity, characterized by “a fat deckful of days which seemed (wouldn’t she be the first

to admit it?) more or less identical" (*Lot 49* 6). As a form of sounding that "heralds [. . .] the establishment of a society of repetition in which nothing will happen anymore" (Attali 6), Muzak is the supreme expression of Oedipa's world. This world of undifferentiated sameness and cultural inertia corresponds to a thermodynamic state of maximum entropy at which the system has reached its final destination and come to a standstill. It is a state characterized by both disorder *and* uniformity; it is a chaos of sameness. As Peter Abernethy points out in his discussion of entropy in *The Crying of Lot 49*, in the context of thermodynamics, "disorder and chaos [. . .] do not mean a random jumble of things but rather uniformity, a lack of distinctions, a sameness, a lack of individuality, a tendency toward complete conformity. It is a 'steady-state' in which 'matter and energy' are evenly distributed" (20).

Pierce Inverarity's advice to Oedipa to "keep it bouncing" (123) assigns her the role of the Demon who must sort out the system's parts in order to perpetuate its motion (Freese 532–33). Oedipa's quest for the Tristero parallels the Demon's sorting activity in its attempt to reverse the process of entropic decay. This is already hinted at in the novel's first paragraph, where Oedipa's obligation toward Pierce Inverarity's estate is described as "the job of sorting it all out" (5). The nature of Oedipa's quest, however, not only matches the Demon's sorting activity but is also an illustration of the ultimate failure of Maxwell's thought experiment as described by Brillouin. For the more Oedipa tries to sort the information she receives into a meaningful whole, the more the clues proliferate and the less order Oedipa is able to impose on Pierce Inverarity's tangled web of business interests and the intricacies of the Tristero system. Revelations "come crowding in exponentially" (56), and the sheer influx of information leaves Oedipa increasingly confused, forever unable to "bring the estate into pulsing, stelliferous Meaning" (56) and still awaiting "the crying of lot 49" (127) as the novel ends. In short, analogous to the Demon's dilemma, Oedipa's process of perception has created more entropy than her sorting managed to diminish (Mangel 194–200).¹² The loss of differentiation that accompanies the net increase in entropy is acknowledged by Oedipa toward the end of the novel when she asks despairingly, "how had it ever happened here, with the chances once so good for diversity?" (125) and is further emphasized by the circular structure of the novel, which reinforces the impression that, at the end of the novel, Oedipa is back to where she started.¹³

However, in the fictional world of *The Crying of Lot 49*, or at least in the

imagination of some of its characters, the movement toward entropic degradation is countered by repeated injections of informational entropy into the system. While the thermodynamic world of von Helmholtz and Henry Adams knew entropy only as dissipation of energy, the informational world of Shannon and Pynchon has learned to distinguish between two types of entropy with contrary connotations. In Pynchon's novel, an encounter between informational and thermodynamic entropy is played out:

Metaphorically, one compensates for the other. In both, entropy is a measurement of disorganization; but disorganization in information theory increases the potential information which a message may convey, while in thermodynamics entropy is a measure of the disorganization of the molecules within closed systems and possesses no positive connotation. (Schaub, "Gentle" 51)

In line with Shannon's observation that noise is the maximally entropic *and* information-richest signal, Pynchon has a motley crew of noisemakers disturb the boredom and inertia of Southern Californian suburbia. There are, of course, the Paranoids, the rock band that serenades Oedipa and Metzger. Emerging from the chaos of an aerosol can "hissing malignantly" as it is swiftly propelled through their bathroom against the acoustic background of "a slow, deep crescendo of naval bombardment, machine-gun and small-arms fire, screams and chopped-off prayers of dying infantry" (23–24) emerging from the TV set, the two lovers are greeted by the Paranoids' "shuddering deluge of thick guitar sounds" (25), which ends abruptly when the band blows a fuse. As Schaub remarks, the spray can is "an image of entropy—a region of fast molecules within the can exhausting itself within the confines of the bathroom" ("Gentle" 55). In the confines of a motel room, then, Pynchon stages an encounter between thermodynamic and informational entropy, an encounter that is also played out in the Nefastis Machine and structures the novel as a whole. In this context, it is significant that the Paranoids serenade Oedipa's marital infidelity with Metzger, the coexecutor of Inverarity's estate and her first personal link to the strange, conspiratorial world of W.A.S.T.E. and the Tristero. Their noise is prophetic in Jacques Attali's sense: it heralds the organization of things to come. The noises heard at the Echo Motel will continue to reverberate throughout *The Crying of Lot 49*.

W.A.S.T.E., the underground mail delivery system connected to the Tristero network, turns out to be the most prominent source of noise. As a net-

work of the marginalized and underprivileged, the Tristero has been read as a subversive force that manages to disrupt the patterns of cultural conformity that structure Oedipa's life in Kinneret-Among-The-Pines at the beginning of the novel.¹⁴ In informational terms, W.A.S.T.E. has been interpreted as a source of revitalizing input to a communication system that has run down, continually reproducing itself through a perpetual exchange of empty messages, through an "Endless, convoluted incest" (*Lot 49* 8).¹⁵ In this reading, W.A.S.T.E. is the noise that disturbs processes of communication, makes them less predictable, and introduces informational entropy to interrupt the repetition of the same.

By choosing to name itself W.A.S.T.E., the alternative postal system also acts as a reminder of processes of exclusion and manages to set in motion what Salman Rushdie has called "the process of reclaiming language from one's opponent" (402). Rushdie here refers to the strategy of marginalized groups to wear with pride the epithets that are being hurled at them by their enemies.¹⁶ It is a strategy designed to de-stigmatize formerly stigmatized words, to render them unavailable as words of abuse. Thus, homosexuals came to call themselves "queer," some disabled persons "cripples," and some African-Americans involved in the gangsta rap scene began to refer to themselves as "niggaz." This strategy is also very much a phenomenon of youth culture. In Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, examples include the protopunk name of "Sick Dick and the Volkswagens" (14) and "KCUF" (9), the radio station where Oedipa's husband, Mucho, works.¹⁷ In this context, the name *W.A.S.T.E.* is also a strategic and political choice designed to re-inscribe with positive connotations a term genteel society uses disparagingly. It is a gesture of defiance, and the "message" that the name *W.A.S.T.E.* sends runs along the following lines: "We are the waste you dispose of, and we produce the noises you do not want to hear, and we do so because we refuse to be part of a society which despises us and which we despise." For genteel society, the communicative practices of W.A.S.T.E. might indeed be nothing but noise, but at least for those communicating through W.A.S.T.E. and maybe for society as a whole, this noise may be the unexpected and highly informative input that changes the way we perceive the world, and that might revivify a cultural and communicative situation characterized by monotony, redundancy, and repetition.

Shannon and Weaver's reevaluation of noise, then, allows us to account for the signifying practices of the disinherited in *The Crying of Lot 49* in

terms that correspond more closely to their self-fashioning. In this reading, the noise produced by W.A.S.T.E. is that which injects new life into the stultifying atmosphere of Oedipa's life as a middle-class housewife at the beginning of *The Crying of Lot 49*. Even if her quest takes Oedipa to the point of paranoia and madness, and even if she fails to accomplish her task of "sorting it all out," it has certainly enriched her life beyond the scope of Tupperware parties and suburban domesticity.

In imagining noise as a potentially desirable signal, Pynchon makes use of a modernist aesthetics of communicative disruption and negativity. Indeed, the function of W.A.S.T.E. itself within culture is analogous to that attributed to modernist art in Astradur Eysteinnsson's recourse to Adorno: "In the face of [. . .] human debasement, art's basic mode of resistance is in a sense that of opting out of the system's communicative network in order to attack it head on from the 'outside'" (Eysteinnsson 41). At the same time, though, the topicality of Pynchon's novel firmly locates it in the 1960s and thus near the beginning of a postmodern world. *The Crying of Lot 49* is full of references to 1960s youth culture and its means of communication, ranging from the Echo Motel's manager, Miles, a "drop-out" with "a Beatle haircut and a lapless, cuffless, one-button mohair suit" (16), to bands such as Miles's own Paranoids or Sick Dick and the Volkswagens, to KCUF, to Oedipa's impressions upon visiting Berkeley: "She came downslope from Wheeler Hall, through Sather Gate into a plaza teeming with corduroy, denim, bare legs, blonde hair, hornrims, bicycle spokes in the sun, bookbags, swaying card tables, long paper petitions dangling to earth, posters for undecipherable FSMs, YAFs, VDCs, suds in the fountain, students in nose-to-nose dialogue" (71). Paul Maltby makes the strongest case for a link between the Tristero and 1960s counterculture when he discusses W.A.S.T.E. as an alternative communications network similar to the newly emerging underground media of the same era.¹⁸

The possibility of an alternative cultural order supplanting America's late-capitalist system is a question which haunts *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966). This cultural order is represented by the "Tristero System" which is, or is imagined to be, an underground communications network used by those alienated from the official culture. The latter are thought of by Oedipa Maas, the novel's mediating consciousness, as a community of internal exiles—marginals, drifters, deviants, visionar-

ies—who may be “truly communicating” [117–18] in terms of an order of meaning which is *radically discontinuous* from the hegemonic one. [...] While the term *Tristero* denotes groups which cannot simply be identified with the New Left or countercultural radicals, one can see how, for a politically conscious author of the mid-1960s, the alternative communications network might also serve as a symbol of mass alienation from the official culture, as an expression of a profound rift within a community. (136, 138)

Together with Huysen’s concept of an avantgardist postmodernism, Maltby’s remarks enable us to understand Pynchon’s interest in 1960s counterculture as deeply intertwined with a validation of communicative disruption that challenges what Bernhard Siegert has called the “empire of semiological Puritanism” (5; my translation), a task Pynchon inherits from modernist aesthetic and theoretical practice. In this reading, then, *The Crying of Lot 49* exemplifies early postmodernism’s reworking of modernist strategies. This convergence of concerns is also visible in the novel’s formal arrangement, in its absence of closure, its fragmented plot structure, and its complex system of intertextual references, all of which are reminiscent of Dos Passos’s and Barnes’s nonorganic aesthetics.

This reading of *The Crying of Lot 49* relies, however, on the assumption that the Tristero and W.A.S.T.E. are indeed agents of subversion and cultural renewal. A number of critics have questioned this assumption by pointing out the Tristero’s close association with Pierce Inverarity’s estate and indeed the possibility that it might be nothing but an elaborate joke on the part of the deceased “California real estate mogul” (5).¹⁹ Moreover, the fact that W.A.S.T.E. reads “WE AWAIT SILENT TRISTERO’S EMPIRE” (116) and that the muted post horn is on one occasion also associated with the alphabetism²⁰ D.E.A.T.H. (“DON’T EVER ANTAGONIZE THE HORN” [84]) can be taken to suggest that there is a decidedly sinister quality to this network, and that it might in fact strive for nothing but the replacement of an oppressive system by a totalitarian and potentially violent one. After all, the “Alameda County Death Cult,” which every month “choose[s] some victim from among the innocent, the virtuous, the socially integrated and well-adjusted, using him sexually, then sacrificing him” (84) is one of the groups using the muted post horn as its sign.

Finally, it has also been argued that the messages the W.A.S.T.E. system

circulates are largely devoid of information and therefore do not manage to provide any new input to a cultural and communicative system that has run down (Tanner 64–65; J. Chambers 110–11). The fact that the secret letters sent via Yoyodyne’s internal mail system are full of banalities (35); Oedipa’s intuition that the letter sent by Mucho and featuring the small inaccuracy (“POTSMASER”) characteristic of all mail delivered by W.A.S.T.E. “would be newsless inside” (30); or the refusal to communicate that lies at the bottom of the Inamorati Anonymous, an organization that also uses the muted post horn as its sign (76–80), all seem to point in this direction. In this reading, W.A.S.T.E. is noise, too, but not in the sense of an unexpected signal full of potential information. The messages sent through W.A.S.T.E. are noise because they are useless and undesirable communicative “waste.”

Throughout her quest, Oedipa is confronted with the irreducible ambivalence of W.A.S.T.E. and the Tristero, an ambivalence that is already inherent in Shannon and Weaver’s original definition of noise as the most informative but useless signal.²¹ Toward the end of the novel, Oedipa attempts to sort the different possibilities into an orderly scheme:

Either you have stumbled indeed [. . .] on to a network by which X number of Americans are truly communicating whilst reserving their lies, recitations of routine, arid betrayals of spiritual poverty, for the official government delivery system; maybe even onto a real alternative of surprise to life, that harrows the head of everybody American you know, and you too, sweetie. Or you are hallucinating it. Or a plot has been mounted against you, so expensive and elaborate, involving items like the forging of stamps and ancient books, constant surveillance of your movements, planting of post horn images all over San Francisco, bribing of librarians, hiring of professional actors, all financed out of the estate in a way too secret or too involved for your non-legal mind to know about even though you are co-executor, so labyrinthine that it must have meaning beyond just a practical joke. Or you are fantasizing some such plot, in which case you are a nut, Oedipa, out of your skull. Those, now that she was looking at them, she saw to be the alternatives. Those symmetrical four. (117–18)

Oedipa’s search for clarity is, however, doomed to failure. In the fictional world of *The Crying of Lot 49*, none of these four alternatives is privileged as

the most plausible one, and neither Oedipa nor the reader is in a position to decide which one provides the correct reading of the world.

The greatest challenge Pynchon's novel poses to the reader is not to decide which of these interpretations is correct but to accept the impossibility of such a decision. With the breakdown of any certainty about the role of W.A.S.T.E. in the narrative, we are left, with Oedipa, in the space between. This space is a space between different worlds, between a world in which Tristero is a catalyst of cultural rejuvenation, W.A.S.T.E. an alternative channel of communication for the disadvantaged, and Nefastis a subversive, and a world in which Tristero is a totalitarian system, W.A.S.T.E. a purveyor of empty messages, and Nefastis a pervert and a madman whose Nefastis Machine—which promises to verify Maxwell's claims—will never work. And even this does not exhaust the possibilities; an almost endless number of maps may be drawn, none of which can claim to represent the totality of Pynchon's fictional world. As readers of *The Crying of Lot 49*, then, we remain, like Oedipa, caught in the truly postmodern predicament of what Brian McHale calls "the ontological flickering of fictional worlds" (99).²² Thus, binary distinctions dissolve, and we are left in a state of undecidability.

It is my contention that Pynchon's main achievement in *The Crying of Lot 49* lies in this contestation of the logic of symmetrical alternatives. Pynchon subverts Oedipa's as well as our own either/or habits of thinking and plunges us headfirst into the realm of "excluded middles" (125). As Maltby observes, the irreducibly ambivalent Tristero epitomizes Pynchon's challenge to dualist thought:

According to the principle of the excluded middle, anything must be included either under a given term or its negative: a proposition may be either true or false; it may signify either *x* or not-*x*. Therefore, a third value which postulates a class of undecidable proposition, propositions that are *both* true *and* false, that signify *both* *x* and not-*x*, cannot be admitted. [. . .] the Tristero system is anticipated (or, if unreal, imagined) as the negation of this polarizing logic; its communications, when activated, speaking in the terms of the excluded middle, an order of meaning that privileges indeterminacy and "ambiguity," "diversity" and "paradox." (Maltby 142–44)

This contestation of dualisms is, Maltby continues, not confined to the Tristero but elevated by Pynchon to a structural principle. Maltby identifies a

range of literary strategies that rupture binary logic and narrative closure with a view toward including the excluded third: an inversion of the detective story in which uncertainty and the plurality of explanations increase and resolution is deferred indefinitely; a use of proper nouns with a variety of often contradictory meanings and connotations (Pierce Inverarity, Tristero, Oedipa Maas); a cast of decidedly ambivalent characters (Pierce Inverarity, John Nefastis, the anarchist Jesús Arrabal);²³ and the contradictory signifier “waste,” which hints at both those who are refused by society (its refuse) and those who actively refuse it (and await silent Tristero’s empire):

The result, one might say, is a Tristero novel. [. . .] Pynchon’s objective is to fashion a discourse which maximizes the effects of ambiguity, indeterminacy, and paradox *with a view to occupying the domain of the excluded middle*. It is a strategy designed to fracture the positivist logic which orders meaning into uniform, standardized patterns (binary oppositions, prefabricated alternatives), a logic, that is, which represses diversity of meaning. (Maltby 138, 146)

Maltby joins other critics in linking Pynchon’s aesthetics with the poststructuralist rejection of textual closure, its affirmation of the freeplay of signifiers, its deconstruction of dichotomies, and its insistence on the differential nature of language.²⁴ And indeed, what distinguishes *The Crying of Lot 49* from the modernist texts discussed in the preceding chapter is the radical undecidability of its signs. More obviously and explicitly than *Manhattan Transfer*, *Nightwood*, or *Cane*, Pynchon’s novel lacks an external reference point, an irrefutable claim against which divergent readings of its fictional world (by Oedipa as well as the novel’s readers) could be evaluated. Pynchon’s text registers a rupture in Western metaphysics, the moment Jacques Derrida would in the same year describe as “that in which language invaded the universal problematic; that in which, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse—provided we can agree on this word—that is to say, when everything became a system where the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences” (“Structure” 225).²⁵ In the absence of a center, Pynchon’s fictional world dissolves into a plurality of possible worlds, none of which can claim ontological primacy. More radically than most modernist texts, *The Crying of Lot 49* thus forecloses any form of totalizing reading. It is in this respect that

Pynchon's text moves most decisively away from a modernist aesthetic, with which it otherwise shares a plurality of concerns and strategies.

Pynchon's fiction does not exhaust itself in the sheer play postmodernism is often (and wrongly) associated with. In the links he establishes between a philosophical challenge to binary thought and his representations of the ex-centrics of society, Pynchon's inclusion of the excluded third acquires an ethical and political dimension. In this, he anticipates Michel Serres' deliberations in *The Parasite*. In Pynchon as in Serres, noise becomes a figure not only for the third term that is excluded in information theory (by virtue of Shannon's declaration that noise is useless information) and all other forms of binary thinking but also for those marginalized by dominant ways of making sense: the drifters, the disenfranchised, the poor.

Pynchon's text registers the violence inherent in this logic of exclusion: desperadoes dressed up as Indians and carrying a ring with the muted post horn symbol fight with and are killed by the riders of the Pony Express; Zapf's bookstore mysteriously burns down; Driblette the artist walks into the Pacific and drowns; the wretched old sailor will die without leaving a trace.²⁶ In his reflections on information and noise, Serres urges us to think about that violence:

This couple [noise-message] and their relation are set apart by an observer seated within the system. In a way he overvalues the message and undervalues the noise if he belongs to the functioning of the system. He represses the parasites in order to send or receive communications better and to make them circulate in a distinct and workable fashion. This repression is also religious excommunication, political imprisonment, the isolation of the sick, garbage collection, public health, the pasteurization of milk, and so forth, as much as it is repression in the psychoanalytical sense. But it also has to do with a history, the history of science in particular: whoever belongs to the system perceives noises less and represses them more, the more he is a functioning part of the system. He never stops being in the good, the just, the true, the natural, the normal. All dogmatism lives on this division, be it blind or decided. (*The Parasite* 68)

Serres here formulates an insight he shares with Pynchon. It is an insight into the inextricable intertwinement of the logic of the excluded middle with a discourse of violence, an insight that impels both writers to seek a way out

of binary thought. Serres puts it thus: "Hell is the separation of paradise and Hell, the Devil is the bifurcation between God and the Devil, evil is the crossroads of good and evil, and error is the dualism that only opposes twins" (*The Parasite* 20).

Singing Books

In Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*, we can discover a double coding that is similar to Pynchon's simultaneous looking-back to an adversarial modernist aesthetics of negativity and noise and his looking-forward to a deconstructive aesthetics of the dissolution of systems of meaning based on binary logic. In its insistence on the artist's need to speak and write outside dominant sense-making structures, Reed's own "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto" (1970) invites a modernist reading of his texts. His manifesto is a call to black artists to liberate their own artistic practice from the strictures of the Judeo-Christian aesthetic tradition. Neo-HooDoo encompasses Haitian voodoo, Ancient Egyptian mythology, music (funk, blues, ragtime, jazz), dance ("the Philly Dog, the Hully Gully, the Funky Chicken, the Popcorn, the Boogaloo" [20]), and black literature (Cecil Brown, David Henderson, N. H. Pritchard, and Ishmael Reed himself, among others). It is an intentionally eclectic mix of African and African-American forms of expression; a mix without clearly defined boundaries but unified in the distance of its elements from hegemonic cultural forms: "Whereas at the center of Christianity lies the graveyard the organ-drone and the cross, the center of Neo-HooDoo is the drum the anhk and the Dance. So Fine, Barefootin, Heard it Through The Grapevine, are all Neo-HooDoos" (Reed, "Neo-HooDoo" 22). Like the modernists, Reed calls for the innovation of new cultural forms in opposition to a tradition perceived as stifling and dead: "Charlie 'Yardbird (Thoth)' Parker is an example of the Neo-HooDoo artist as an innovator and improviser" (21). In Reed's version, however, the Anglo-Saxon modernists themselves come under fire: "The reason that HooDoo isn't given the credit it deserves in influencing American culture is because the students of that culture both 'overground' and 'underground' are uptight closet Jeho-vah revisionists. They would assert the American and East Indian and Chinese thing before they would the Black thing. Their spiritual leaders Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot hated Africa and 'Darkies'" (20). The modernist heritage Reed draws on is that of Jean Toomer and "our theoretician Zora Neale Hurston" (21). It is a tradition

that is highly aware of the challenges involved in integrating the nonverbal into the format of the literary text. Reed accepts this challenge, declaring that “Neo-HooDoo is a Dance and Music closing in on its words” (25). Finally, like Pynchon, Reed turns to modernist literary strategies in an attempt to capture something of the adversarial spirit of 1960s counterculture. His “Neo-HooDoo Manifesto” is sprinkled with references to Vietnam, Woodstock, and sexual liberation; his *Mumbo Jumbo* is set mostly in the 1920s, but its oppositional impetus owes at least as much to 1960s counterculture as it does to the Harlem Renaissance.²⁷ As with the early postmodernism of *The Crying of Lot 49*, a modernist reading of *Mumbo Jumbo* has its limits. In what follows, I will pursue that reading as far as it can take us and then discuss the fissures in it.

In his reworking of the genealogies of black and Western cultures, their shared histories of exploitation, appropriation and misrecognition, Reed draws rigid distinctions between the vital, creative force of the Jes Grew epidemic and the life-denying, sterile, and destructive ways of the Atonist Path.²⁸ *Mumbo Jumbo* fully explores the divisive poetics of its author’s manifesto.²⁹ Like Hurston and Toomer, Reed makes much of the corporeal dimension of black culture, expressed in music, song, laughter, and dance. With his tongue firmly in his cheek, Reed even resorts to ethnic stereotyping in places, for instance when Taurus, the “weak Bull” (212) of Western culture, is contrasted with the “Loa Agovi Minorie,” who “boasts when mounting a woman that his phallus is so hard that the brilliance of his organ’s bulb resembles that of a mirror” (213). In Reed’s evocation of the 1920s, whites “eat rays and for snack [. . .] munch on sound” (62), while black artists and spiritual leaders dance, shout, sing, and move about. Like “Neo-HooDoos,” Jes Grew Converts “would rather ‘shake that thing’ than be stiff and erect” (Reed, “Neo-HooDoo” 20). The boundaries between performance and liturgy, artistry and spirituality are blurred as the epidemic rises “to shrieks of Hit me! Hit me!” (153), making its way through America. Jes Grew’s foundational text, the Book of Thoth, already contains this admixture of elements. As a transcription of Osiris’s dance steps, songs, and litanies, it is a text of noise, dancing, and singing. It is “the real Book of Thoth—the original sound” (178). In defiance of the Atonist Set’s order to “cut out that racket” (163), it channels the noise without containing it. The Book of Thoth is literature as noise in the most literal sense. Even more than Toomer’s *Cane* or Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, it is a “singing book” as Baker (68) defines it, a text that

succeeds in conserving the oral qualities of African-American vocalization.³⁰ As such, it manages to preserve the subversive seed of “the time of Osiris” when “every man was an artist and every artist a priest; it wasn’t until later that Art became attached to the State to do with it what it pleased” (164).

As Papa LaBas explains in his lengthy monologue at the Villa Lewaro, Jes Grew is part of an ongoing cultural and spiritual movement that has its roots in the Osirian songs and dances recorded in the Book of Thoth. What Moses condemns as “heathen sounds” reemerges in Jes Grew as “timbre[d] anthems dark, boogie, jazz, down-home music, funk, gutbucket” (187). Appropriately, the unruliness of the tradition resurfaces most perceptibly in the corporeal and auditory dimensions of Jes Grew’s manifestations. Jes Grew is “wiggling wobbling rambling and shambling ringing and chaining” (139). In its full bloom, it is a joyful cacophony of music, voices, songs, and laughter that shakes up the towns and cities of the United States: “New Orleans is a mess. [. . .] It sleeps after the night of howling, speaking-in-tongues, dancing to drums; watching strange lights streak across the sky” (17). LaBas counters the Guianese art critic’s charge that “In times of social turbulence men like [him] always abandon reason and fall back upon Mumbo Jumbo” (195) by proudly accepting the designation and setting Jes Grew’s noise and mumbo jumbo against the deathly structures of the Wallflower Order and mindless instrumental rationality of the Atonist Path: “Why is it Death you like? Because then no 1 will keep you up all night with that racket dancing and singing. The next morning you can get up and build, drill, progress putting up skyscrapers . . . and . . . and . . . working and stuff. You know? Keeping busy” (62–63). In *Mumbo Jumbo*, noise connotes strength, joy, and vitality; the noises of Jes Grew—whose name already spells spontaneity—are the antithesis of Atonist sterility. Reed stages an acoustic antagonism that pits the noises of blacks against the white sounds of progress and utilitarianism. In doing this, Reed challenges a desire for acoustic domination by technology no one has expressed better than Hezekiah Niles, a journalist and observer of westward expansion in the early nineteenth century: “The busy hum of ten thousand wheels fills our seaports, and the sound of the spindle and loom succeeds the yell of the savage or the screech of the night owl in the late wilderness of the interior” (qtd. in M. Smith 108).

As in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the noise of laughter occupies a special position. LaBas even goes so far as to identify it as a religio-cultural phenomenon distinguishing blacks from whites:

For LaBas, anyone who couldn't titter a bit was not Afro but most likely a Christian connoting blood, death, and impaled emaciated Jew in excruciation. Nowhere is there an account or portrait of Christ laughing. Like the Marxists who secularized his doctrine, he is always stern, serious and as gloomy as a prison guard. Never does I see him laughing until tears appear in his eyes like the roly-poly squint-eyed Buddha guffawing with arms upraised, or certain African loas, Orishas. (97)

In his sweeping indictment of what he perceives as a joyless white tradition weighed down by its own austerity, LaBas, not unlike Hurston, elevates laughter to one of the defining features of a vivacious black culture.

Throughout *Mumbo Jumbo*, noise disrupts the Atonist Order's destructive patterns of reason and conformity and subverts its desire for domination. In the case of "West African peoples who were known to repel an invader by 'playing whistles and beating on drums'" (167), noise challenges opposing forces in the most direct manner. As the Wallflower Order "launche[s] the war against Haiti in hopes of allaying Jes Grew symptoms by attacking their miasmatic source" (64) and domestic struggles for power become more closely linked to international ones, we also find that noise functions as a communicative device that helps to organize the Haitian resistance against U.S. imperialism. As Benoit Batraverse explains to Black Herman and Papa LaBas: "Soon the conch horns and the drums informed the people all over the country that we had returned to our ancient religion just as our ancestors the Egyptians the Nubians the Ethiopians did in times of trouble. The Marines became nervous. They didn't expect this" (135). When Herman inquires why he has not heard about these events, Batraverse's answer suggests that blacks have restricted access to white-controlled means of communication: "There was no phone campaign among the rich telephone owners. No receptions in swanky Park Ave. parlors. No ads in newspapers or massive demonstrations" (136). But the Atonist Order unsuccessfully tries to keep in check "Jes Grew's Communicability" (18), whose "Grapevine Telegraph" (20) might not be as sophisticated as the "white telephone" (63)—whose signal-to-noise ratio was a matter of intense concern to engineers of the 1920s (E. Thompson 146–47), and that is in *Mumbo Jumbo* used almost exclusively by the Atonists—but equally effective. The battle raging between Jes Grew and the Atonists is as much a battle over the means of communication as it is a battle over cultural legitimacy and authority. Communications technology

becomes a powerful tool in the hands of Jes Grew's struggle over cultural authority as its noise erupts onto the airwaves, leaving one of radio's inventors wringing his hands in desperation: "What have you done to my child? You have sent him out on the streets in rags of ragtime to collect money from all and sundry" (94). Jes Grew counters the white appropriation of African texts, views, and cultural artifacts with its own appropriation of the channels of communication that have been invented and largely controlled by whites. Its actions leave Hinckle Von Vampton, Grand Master of the Knights Templar, agonizing: "*Jes Grew was on the Rise. If it captured New York its total control on the Radio would be complete*" (139). In its struggle to subvert and infiltrate the official channels of communication, Jes Grew's activities acquire something of the force of Pynchon's underground W.A.S.T.E. system.³¹

What is transmitted over the airwaves and acquires such frightful proportions in the eyes or, rather, ears of Von Vampton is music, which, besides dance, is the most prominent manifestation of "Jes Grew, the Something or Other that led Charlie Parker to scale the Everests of the Chord. Riff fly dip soar and gave his Alto Godspeed. Jes Grew that touched John Coltrane's Tenor; that tinged the voice of Otis Redding" (211). The new vibes of jazz and ragtime seem innocuous enough and Von Vampton's concerns exaggerated at best. But far from exposing the ludicrousness of white fears, Reed has his black characters' actions confirm their validity beyond the imagination of whites. Something of the true scale of black opposition is revealed as Benoit Battraville elaborates on the possibilities of combining radio, music, and voodoo practice:³²

Now, as 1 of your theoreticians has already said, no 1 knows how a new loa is formed. But we know that when 1 comes about it must be fed, similar to the way you feed your Ragtime and Jazz by supporting the artists and making it easier for those who are possessed by those forms. Buying records and patronizing those places which are not in the hands of Atonists. You know that if you don't do this, Ragtime and Jazz will turn upon you or unfed will perish. Similarly we have a Radio Loa who just came about during the war. It loves to hear the static concerning its victims' crimes before it "eats" them. (151)

Battraville here explains why he wants the story of those whom Von Vampton attempted to recruit to infiltrate Jes Grew (the potential Talking Androids) recorded on a Dictaphone. Battraville is not merely talking down to an au-

dience unfamiliar with African religion. The links he establishes between music and voodoo are more than analogies; they suggest that the power and reach of voodoo and other forms of black spirituality, including music, can be enhanced by new technologies of communication.

To be sure, Reed's portrayal of Battraville and his plans have a parodic quality. But, as I will elaborate further below, parody in many cases means serious business. In this case, Battraville's recourse to recording technology turns the tables on a long history of sound technology in the service of Western imperialism, a history that is itself not devoid of (self-) parodic moments. Witness, for instance, a late nineteenth-century observer's concerns that two unnamed travelers' project to record "specimens of Central African languages" may turn out to be motivated by ulterior motives. The article that voices these concerns is entitled "The Phonograph in Africa" and appeared in the *New York Times* on January 19, 1885:

It is possible that the two travelers are wicked and ambitious men, who [...] have conceived the idea of introducing a new religion into Central Africa and of ruling the entire country in the character of high priests. Nothing could be easier than to carry such a scheme into effect. The travelers could describe the phonograph as a new and improved portable god, and call upon the native Kings to obey it. A god capable of speaking, and even of carrying on a conversation, in the presence of swarms of hearers would be something entirely new in Central Africa, where the local gods are constructed out of solid billets of wood, and are hopelessly dumb. There is not a Central African living who would dare to refuse to obey the phonograph god, and the two travelers, as its only authorized priests, could bring the greater part of the continent into subjection for as long a time as they could keep their portable god in good repair and working order. (4; qtd. in Picker, *Victorian* 138)

Battraville's plans both ridicule and appropriate such "techno-colonial dream[s]" (Pietz 270).³³ The result is an electronic, African-American remix of the Gospel according to John that is hilariously funny and deadly serious at the same time.

In Reed's fictional world, the forgotten tradition of voodoo powerfully resurfaces in jazz music and is electrified by modern communications technology. In Reed's Harlem Renaissance, the Jazz Age, the Machine Age, and the Roaring Twenties are one, and jazz seems to confirm the fears of its most

viciously racist critics, who saw in it a paradoxical combination of primitivism and technological modernity gone wrong, disparaging it “not only for returning civilized people to the jungles of barbarism but also for expressing the mechanistic sterility of modern urban life” (L. Levine 12).

In Battraville’s words, African-Americans have managed to “isolat[e] the unknown factor which gives the loas their rise. Ragtime. Jazz. Blues” (152), while Haitians have come up with a “Radio Loa” that both feeds on noise (“the static concerning its victims’ crimes”) and spreads the noise. African-American music becomes more radically defiant as it enters an international alliance with Haitian voodoo in response to the U.S. exportation of its racial conflicts abroad.³⁴ Music becomes a unifying agent in forging a “Pan-Africanism,” which, as a South African trumpeter realizes, essentially consists of “artists relating across continents their craft, drumbeats from aeons, sounds that are still with us” (83). Reed insists on the uncontrollable, dangerous nature of music throughout, for instance when he compares a black musician’s guitar playing to the way “a tiny evil venomous snake would sound if it could sing” (121). Music is also portrayed as dangerously subversive because of its apparent uselessness. In Reed’s fictional world, music is opposed to the Atonist logic of instrumental rationality and aligned instead with what Jacques Attali calls composition, “the conquest of the right to make noise, in other words, to create one’s own code and work, without advertising its goal in advance” (132). What is true today already applied in the mythological time of Set, the disciplined administrator, and Osiris, the joyful creator: “The people would plant during the day and at night would celebrate dancing singing shaking sistrums carrying on so that Set couldn’t get sleep and was tired when he went out on the field and drilled marched and gave commands to others” (*Mumbo Jumbo* 162–63). In Battraville and his allies’ work, the revolutionary force of music is elevated to new heights as they mix it with the powerful practices of voodoo and spread it electronically. In *Mumbo Jumbo*, music indeed seems to “herald[d] the emergence of a formidable subversion, one leading to a radically new organization never yet theorized” (Attali 6). Music in Reed is the very opposite of the Muzak that pollutes the acoustic worlds of Pynchon’s and DeLillo’s narratives. In Reed, music is composition, not repetition.

In its hodgepodge of corporeal, spiritual, and musical elements, Jes Grew remains, like Reed’s Neo-HooDoo, a multifaceted and multifarious phenomenon that eludes the dominant order’s grasp and control. While Jes Grew

ultimately derives its energy from a textual source—which becomes particularly evident when it begins to vanish after the Book of Thoth has been destroyed—it continually explodes all textual boundaries. Its own textuality is of a decidedly unruly, noisy nature. As the quotation from James Weldon Johnson's preface to *The Book of American Negro Poetry* illustrates, and like the spirituals in Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, Jes Grew cannot be codified and resists appropriation by any particular group of people: "The words were unprintable, but the tune was irresistible, and belonged to nobody" (11). In its unrepresentability, Jes Grew implements Reed's Neo-Hoodoo aesthetic, which is, as Jeffrey Melnick points out, "necessarily undefined: it places a premium on improvisation and individual expression, and opposes attempts to codify art or separate it from its roots in folk expression" (300). In fact, the nonorganic form of Reed's narrative as a whole exemplifies the kind of textuality Jes Grew aspires to in its "warped syntax composition and grammar" (215). Its title, *Mumbo Jumbo*, refers not only to the noisy manifestations of Jes Grew and to Papa LaBas's Mumbo Jumbo Cathedral and its reappropriation and revalorization of the racist's designation of black customs and language but also to the formal organization of Reed's novel itself, which presents the reader with a highly fragmentary, nonlinear, and idiosyncratic mixture of voodoo knowledge and Egyptian as well as Western mythology; text and image; detective plot and mock scholarship (footnotes, bibliography, quotations). If *The Crying of Lot 49* is a "Tristero novel," *Mumbo Jumbo* is a novel that "jes grew."

Henry Louis Gates's list of the variety of media, genres, forms, and styles that make up *Mumbo Jumbo* serves to highlight Reed's extended use of the modernist techniques of fragmentation and collage:

A prologue, an epilogue and an appended "Partial Bibliography" frame the text proper [. . .]. Reed's text also includes dictionary definitions, epigraphs, epigrams, anagrams, photo-duplicated type from other texts, newspaper clips and headlines, signs (such as those that hang on doors), invitations to parties, telegrams, "Situation Reports" (which come "from the 8-tubed Radio"), yin-yang symbols, quotations from other texts, poems, cartoons, drawings of mythic beasts, handbills, photographs, a book-jacket copy, charts and graphs, playing cards, a representation of a Greek vase, and a four-page handwritten letter, among even other items. ("Blackness" 301)

Considering the acoustic unruliness of Jes Grew and the noisiness of *Mumbo Jumbo's* textual structures, it is entirely appropriate that Abdul Sufi Hamid, the Muslim fundamentalist who last owned the Book of Thoth, intended to hide this central text within Reed's text—itsself a book of song and dance—beneath the center of the noisy Cotton Club, and that Papa LaBas is prompted to seek it there when T Malice evokes the club's acoustic atmosphere:

There's a terrific comedy team called the Warp and Woof formerly of the Diastole and Systole who imitate 3rd-rate literary critics with a passion. They are hilarious. Then there's the Dancing Bales; that tap dance group taps so that the floorboards begin to creak.

Excited LaBas looks at T Malice. Say that again.

The Dancing Bales they dance so . . .

Come on let's go. (149)

T Malice's description reminds Papa LaBas of the epigram he found lying next to Abdul's dead body: "Stringy lumpy; Bales dancing / Beneath this center / Lies the Bird" (98). But when they finally locate the box that should contain the book, they find it empty. As LaBas and T Malice learn from a letter Abdul wrote shortly before he died—reproduced in *Mumbo Jumbo* as the handwritten letter Gates mentions—he burned the book out of moral indignation.³⁵ Had Abdul not destroyed the book, the logic of the narrative suggests, LaBas would have been able to unify Jes Grew with its text so that its noises could still be heard today. And maybe they are, or, rather, were, in the unruly 1960s that are such a strong presence in this novel about the 1920s. At least this is suggested by the hopeful note on which the book ends, a note that emphasizes the novel's concern with history: "Time is a pendulum. Not a river. More akin to what goes around comes around" (218). In my reading, the connections Reed establishes between the social and cultural context of the 1920s and that of the 1960s at the same time point to a literary-historical connection, to Reed's postmodern reworking of modernist literary strategies.

Yet despite *Mumbo Jumbo's* fierce attacks on Atonist rigidity and lifelessness, despite its celebration of Jes Grew's boundary-breaking energy and vitality, Reed cleverly avoids the stereotyping inherent in a strict binary distinction between a bookish, knowledge-based Western civilization and an oral, emotionally and bodily expressive black culture. One of *Mumbo Jumbo's* more radical suggestions is that much of the knowledge circulated

in Western, Judeo-Christian culture and its secret societies has its roots in a “Black sacred Book” (194), the Book of Thoth. In Reed’s fictional vision, both cultures share one of their central texts. The white appropriation of this text, however, fails miserably. When Moses forced the Egyptian populace to attend his performance of Osirian song and music and started to sing the words of the Book of Thoth, “The ears of the people began to bleed” (183). Likewise, when the Knights Templar begin to derive “strange ceremonies” from the Book, “their fortunes revers[e]” (188). In both cases, a naïve trust in the power and reliability of the text precipitates disaster. Conversely, at Moses’s concert, the Osirians, who do not “know the Work that Moses knew,” effortlessly fill the air with “beautiful sounds” (185). Apparently the Book itself thwarts the Templars’ ambitions by deciding that “it was not going to be their whore any more” (188).

Looking back in a lecture, Papa LaBas emphasizes the importance of textual foundation for the Jes Grew movement: “Jes Grew needed its words to tell its carriers what it was up to. Jes Grew was an influence which sought its text. [. . .] If it could not find its Text then it would be mistaken for entertainment” (211). When we begin to think that, in its elusiveness, Jes Grew moves beyond textuality altogether, LaBas is there to remind us of the structural intricacies and complexities it retains: “Bongo drumming requires very intricate technique. A rhythmic vocabulary larger than French English or Spanish” (217). Yet Jes Grew is from the beginning an impure phenomenon that exemplifies Reed’s Neo-HooDoo aesthetics (“Neo-HooDoo borrows from Haiti Africa and South America. Neo HooDoo comes in all styles and moods” [“Neo-HooDoo” 22]) and subsumes a range of heterogeneous practices including jazz music, the literature of the Harlem Renaissance, Haitian voodoo practices, Egyptian mythology, raids on art museums, and the emergence of new dance forms.³⁶ Its fundamental impurity is reflected in the forms of its expression: “Jes Grew was the manic in the artist who would rather do glossolalia than be ‘neat clean or lucid’” (211). Even though given its name by Papa LaBas’s enemies, “Mumbo Jumbo Cathedral” is a fitting designation for this spiritual center of Jes Grew. While Jes Grew needs its text, it thrives without instrumentalizing and codifying it. The performance of religious, artistic, and spiritual actors is more important than observance of the exact letter of the text.

In the confrontations between Jes Grew and its white antagonists, Reed stages two crucial concerns of his own aesthetic practice:

Reed's project has two distinct, though related parts. He wishes to loosen the stranglehold of the Judeo-Christian tradition on the cultural patterns of black people everywhere (not simply Afro-Americans). Further, he wishes to reestablish the virtue of fiction as performance on the part of the artist, wresting it from the domination of the West, which to his mind has emphasized contemplation and tranquility over performance and activity. (Mason 97–98)

Black Herman, Papa LaBas's fellow houngan, teaches the second lesson to Papa LaBas when he explains how and why he succeeded in making a loa depart from Earline's body: "What it boils down to, LaBas, is intent. If your heart's there, man, that's 1/2 the thing about The Work. Even the European Occultists say that. Doing The Work is not like taking inventory. Improvise some. Open up, PaPa. Stretch on out with It" (130). Earlier on, LaBas already introduced yoga techniques into his Mumbo Jumbo Cathedral when Berbelang accused him of being anachronistic. A preference of performance over purity is also implied in Papa LaBas's early judgment of Abdul—whose idiosyncratic mixture of pragmatism and strict Muslim beliefs clashes with LaBas's voodoo practice—as "just an irritated lyricist who can't seem to get his music sung" (52).

The white appropriation of the Book of Thoth misfires because it fails to recognize or implement this performative dimension. To recall a distinction introduced by Derrida in *Of Grammatology*, the Knights Templar fail because they treat Thoth's text as a closed structure, a Book that needs exegesis, rather than an indeterminate, open text. Moses recognizes the need for performance ("I must play this Book!" [178]) but is hopelessly inept at it. The image of him "gyrating his hips and singing the words of the Book of Thoth" (183) must strike readers as humorously incongruous, and his violent suppression of the audience's enthusiastic response to the Osirians' alternative musical performance conforms to the Atonist Order's creed: "Lord, if I can't dance, No one shall" (65). Moses's performance lacks the corporeal and musical qualities of African religion and culture, qualities that Reed parodically inflates in an effort to counter ethnic essentialism but at the same time portrays as crucial aspects of black experience.

It is precisely in its simultaneous affirmation and negation of essentialist conceptions of blackness that *Mumbo Jumbo* belongs to postmodernism. Parody is Reed's major device to achieve this doubleness. What we find in

Reed is not pastiche, that “blank parody” Jameson dislikes for its lack of a satirical (and therefore a critical) sting, but a postmodern parody that does what parody always did, namely insist “on the force *and* the emptiness of a prior object” (Bradbury, “Parody” 221; my emphasis).³⁷ What distinguishes Reed’s postmodern parody from its modernist precursors (Dos Passos’s dismantling of the official war rhetoric in *1919*, Barnes’s parody of psychoanalytic discourse in *Nightwood*), though, is its more strongly pronounced doubleness, a doubleness that leaves readers unable to decide whether the text in any given parodic passage prioritizes an affirmative or a negative stance toward the object it imitates and distorts. Reed’s parodies not only always affirm and negate at the same time (all parody does that), but they also seem to do both *in equal measure*. Crucially, this doubleness also informs the novel’s historical imagination, in particular its ambivalent stance on the artistic legacy of the Harlem Renaissance. Parody enables Reed to achieve what Pynchon achieves through his novel’s entropic imagination: it allows him to challenge an either/or logic and include the excluded middle. Schmitz captures something of this challenge to dualist thinking when he writes that “For Reed the problem is to get outside the ‘Euro-Am meaning world’ (Baraka’s term) without getting caught as an artist in a contraposed system” (70). In Reed as in Pynchon, readers are not asked to make a decision but to accept undecidability as one of the text’s defining features. Thus, when Papa LaBas praises the virility of the Loa Agovi Minorie, when he decries the whites’ absolute lack of a sense of humor, when Moses is portrayed as a miserable dancer, or when Benoit Battraville speaks about the Radio Loa “eating” its victims, Reed both ridicules essentialist notions of ethnicity *and* puts them to strategic use in an attack on a white culture perceived as lacking the energy, spontaneity, vitality, and emotional expressiveness of black culture.³⁸

Once we grasp this fundamental undecidability of Reed’s text, his extensive use of elements from Haitian voodoo and American hoodoo becomes open to more divergent readings than his manifesto’s unequivocal affirmation of hoodoo practices suggests. Here, the reader is caught between at least three divergent readings, none of which excludes the others. The first would maintain that voodoo and hoodoo are indeed first-class passengers on the “Now Locomotive swinging up the Tracks of the American Soul” (25) that Reed celebrates in his “Neo-HooDoo Manifesto.” The second would point out that the references to zombies and voodoo dolls suggest that Reed parodies white misconceptions about voodoo, which come to haunt them in the

figures of Papa LaBas, Black Herman, Benoit Battraville, and their modern-day loas. The third, finally, would insist that Reed's parodic imagination targets essentialist black self-conceptions. None of these readings is inherently more plausible than the others, and the richness of Reed's narrative seems to me to demand a willingness on the part of the reader to accept the impossibility of a definitive reading.³⁹ My own reading of Reed's novel thus largely agrees with Gates's contention that "Reed's most subtle achievement in *Mumbo Jumbo* stands as a profound critique and elaboration upon the convention of closure, and its metaphysical implications, in the black novel. In its stead, Reed posits the notion of aesthetic *play*: the play of the tradition, the play on the tradition, the sheer play of indeterminacy itself" ("Blackness" 304-5).⁴⁰ Reed's parodic play is also what lends his imaginative return to the Harlem Renaissance a strongly self-reflexive dimension and a problematized sense of the past and its traditions.

Reading Gates (rather than Reed), one cannot, however, shake the feeling that Theodore O. Mason has a point when he decides to read Reed's strategy of indeterminacy against Gates as a sign of "a fundamental political impotence" (106).⁴¹ What both critics fail to see, it seems to me, is that Reed does not celebrate indeterminacy and play for their own sake. *Mumbo Jumbo's* critical impulses do not exhaust themselves in an assertion of the freeplay of the signifier. Its undecidability is the effect of a double-voiced parody whose simultaneous affirmation and negation of ethnic essentialisms and African-American aesthetic traditions serves two different critical purposes. Reed's parodic critique performs the difficult, contradictory task of both validating a counterhegemonic black discourse that relies on essentialist notions of blackness and challenging racist forms of essentializing.⁴² The parodic imagination of *Mumbo Jumbo* thus exemplifies Linda Hutcheon's contention that "Parody is a perfect postmodernist form in some senses, for it paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies" ("Beginning" 251).⁴³

White Noise

A somewhat different form of doubleness is also at the heart of Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985), a novel that embraces the postmodern sensibility apparent in Reed's work much more fully. The kind of doubleness that structures DeLillo's work becomes most apparent in its reception by critics of differing political persuasions. Bruce Bawer, reviewing *White Noise* for the

neoconservative journal *New Criterion*, finds fault with much of the novel's design. Bawer bemoans an implausible plot, an obsession with language devoid of meaning, and is put off by unrealistic dialogues that "defea[t] any hope of verisimilitude" (39) and provide sententious, shallow philosophizing rather than conveying characters' feelings. Bawer, moreover, charges DeLillo with a primitivism and nihilism that ends up exulting violence as a way of escaping the numbing consumerism of American society and is epitomized in Jack Gladney's fascination with Hitler and Murray Jay Siskind's conviction that "violence is a form of rebirth" (290). At the heart of Bawer's critique, however, we discover a somewhat different complaint. Bawer is convinced that all of DeLillo's novels are "born out of a preoccupation with a single theme: namely, that contemporary American society is the worst enemy that the cause of human individuality and self-realization has ever had" (34). For Bawer, DeLillo is another tedious, misguided liberal who keeps barking up the wrong tree: "While those of us who live in the real America carry on with our richly varied, emotionally tumultuous lives, DeLillo (as *White Noise* amply demonstrates) continues, in effect, to write the same lifeless novel over and over again. [. . .] If anyone is guilty of turning modern America into xerox copies, it is Don DeLillo" (42).⁴⁴

Considering the ideologically motivated ire of Bawer's dismissal of DeLillo, it may prove surprising to encounter an equally aggressive volley leveled at the same author from the other end of the political spectrum. In one of the few hostile reviews of DeLillo's novels from the left, John Kucich argues that the author himself remains trapped within his protagonist's white male middle-class perspective. For Kucich, both Jack Gladney and Don DeLillo are spokespersons for the middle-class intellectual who has absorbed the lessons of postmodern politics, which, in the absence of a grounding of politics in anything outside of language and discourse, paradoxically falls back on locating as the only sites of effective social criticism positions of marginality and oppression that are unavailable to the white middle-class male:

That DeLillo should be so devoted to [. . .] social criticism, but so unwilling or unable to take the next step toward any kind of political assertion; that he should be so bad even at articulating the alienation of his white male characters in usefully oppositional ways; that he should be so willing to trail off into admitting lamely that "most of us don't know how to feel," as Jack Gladney concludes in *White Noise*—this set

of problems typifies the general estrangement between postmodern politics and the white male writer. (334)

Both Bawer and Kucich seem to misunderstand a crucial point about the politics of DeLillo's writing. *White Noise* neither constitutes the angry attack on contemporary America Bawer is offended by nor does it epitomize the apolitical indeterminacy Kucich diagnoses as the malaise of postmodern fiction. Linda Hutcheon's description of postmodernism as a form of "complicitous critique" provides a more accurate model for discussing the politics of *White Noise*. It also helps to explain both Bawer's and Kucich's dissatisfaction with the novel: while Bawer denounces its expressions of dissent, Kucich inveighs against the complicitous nature of DeLillo's perspective on contemporary America.

Hutcheon's writing on postmodernism presents a formidable challenge to Kucich's assertion that "One of the primary differences between postmodernism and modernism [. . .] is postmodernism's refusal to separate its own discourse from that of the general culture on the grounds that there is some kind of stable truth-status in artistic or critical language" (331). Against critics like Kucich and Jameson, Hutcheon reminds us to distinguish between postmodernism (as a cultural and aesthetic phenomenon) and postmodernity (as a specific socioeconomic formation). While postmodernism is certainly too aware of its own entanglement in the culture industry to claim for itself a position of straightforward antagonism toward postmodernity the way self-consciously oppositional forms of modernism did toward modernity, postmodernism equally certainly is not simply the cultural manifestation of a late stage in the development of capitalism. DeLillo is not Disneyland:

postmodernism here is not so much what Jameson sees as a systemic form of capitalism as the name given to cultural practices which acknowledge their inevitable implication in capitalism, without relinquishing the power or will to intervene critically in it. (Hutcheon, *Politics* 26)

The complicitous nature of DeLillo's critique is readily apparent in the novel's paranoid vision, a vision it shares with Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*. When, at the evacuation center, a worried Jack consults a SIMUVAC employee about his exposure to Nyodene D, the latter's response produces a paranoid reaction on Jack's part:

“I tapped into your history. I’m getting bracketed numbers with pulsing stars.”

“What does that mean?”

“You’d rather not know.”

He made a silencing gesture as if something of particular morbid interest was appearing on the screen. I wondered what he meant when he said he’d tapped into my history. Where was it located exactly? Some state or federal agency, some insurance company or credit firm or medical clearinghouse? What history was he referring to? I’d told him some basic things. Height, weight, childhood diseases. What else did he know? Did he know about my wives, my involvement with Hitler, my dreams and fears? (140)

While Jack’s apprehension that the SIMUVAC man might know his “dreams and fears” displays something of the delusional quality of clinical paranoia, his unease about the fact that a complete stranger has prioritized access to his computer history—bluntly identified by the SIMUVAC man as “Your genetics, your personals, your medicals, your psychologicals, your police-and-hospitals” (141)—raises entirely legitimate concerns about problems of surveillance, data protection, and privacy in informational societies.⁴⁵ As readers of *White Noise*, we can never fully be sure to what extent DeLillo invites us to dismiss his characters’ paranoid responses as delusional or asks us to recognize in them a vehicle for his critique of technology.⁴⁶ If paranoia forms—as I suggest it does—an integral part of DeLillo’s critical project, that project is also compromised by it.⁴⁷

Rather than unsettling the reader’s certainties about what is real and what is not—as Oedipa’s paranoid responses do—paranoia in *White Noise* has the effect of simultaneously validating and undermining the novel’s critique. This pattern is not restricted to DeLillo’s critique of technology but extends to the novel’s environmental theme. Some of the characters’ environmental fears are clearly exaggerated. Jack’s adolescent son Heinrich’s claim that “all the deformed babies are coming from [. . .] Radio and TV” (175) is a case in point. In other cases we cannot be so sure. For instance, Jack’s suspicion that Heinrich’s prematurely receding hairline may have been caused by his having been raised, “unwittingly, in the vicinity of a chemical dump site, in the path of air currents that carry industrial wastes capable of producing scalp degeneration, glorious sunsets” (22) is at least partly confirmed by the

airborne toxic event and the emergence of ever more magnificent “postmodern sunset[s]” (227) in its aftermath. Jack and Babette’s speculations about the causes of these sunsets likewise hover between the fantastic delusions of tabloid culture and a rational attempt at explanation by two environmentally conscious citizens. Babette’s reference to different schools of thought refers to an earlier rumor about technicians “being lowered in slings from army helicopters in order to plant microorganisms in the core of the toxic cloud” that “would literally consume the billowing cloud, eat it up, break it down, decompose it” (160):

“This isn’t one of the scarier ones.”

“It scares me. Boy, look at it.”

“Did you see last Tuesday? A powerful and stunning sunset. I rate this one average. Maybe they’re beginning to wind down.”

“I hope not,” she said. “I’d miss them.”

“Could be the toxic residue in the atmosphere is diminishing.”

“There’s a school of thought that says it’s not residue from the cloud that causes the sunsets. It’s residue from the microorganisms that ate the cloud.”

We stood there watching a surge of floric light, like a heart pumping in a documentary on color TV. (227)

Jack and Babette’s obvious fascination with the spectacularly beautiful sunsets implicates them in the very ecological critique staged via their deliberations. Still, like Jack’s earlier reaction to perceiving the toxic cloud in its entirety (“The enormous dark mass moved like some death ship in a Norse legend, escorted across the night by armored creatures with spiral wings. [. . .] Our fear was accompanied by a sense of awe that bordered on the religious” [127]), Jack and Babette’s observations remind us that awe involves fear as well as wonder and, delusional or not, together with other representations of paranoid thought serves to alert DeLillo’s readers to vitally important ecological issues of global reach, exposing “the dark underside of consumer consciousness” (191) Jack tentatively locates in the rubbish bags of his American family.⁴⁸ Because of its delusional excesses, paranoia is an inherently flawed sort of critique that does not, however, fail to pinpoint real structural problems of contemporary societies.⁴⁹

Thus, DeLillo’s characters’ conflicting and sometimes contradictory responses to technological as well as environmental hazards lend the author’s

critique a highly self-conscious quality. It is this self-conscious quality that renders DeLillo's work apolitical in the eyes of a critic like Kucich. But Kucich's championing of "politically-engaged fiction" (328) sets the wrong standards for evaluating the politics of DeLillo's writing. In fact, I would argue with Adorno that it sets the wrong standards for any kind of writing (but in particular for the modernist writing for which Kucich expresses a preference). Yet to judge DeLillo's writing against Adorno's call for a literature of negativity, a model that still applies, at least partly, to the novels of Reed and Pynchon, would be equally misguided. A text like *White Noise* displays little of the formal difficulty of the modernist texts discussed in the preceding chapter. Its ingenious blending of serious philosophical and theoretical reflections (on radical skepticism, on the critique of technology, on hyperreality); traditional storytelling techniques (the murder plot, the adventure story, the campus novel, the detective story); and a decidedly realist bent are important aspects of what makes *White Noise* a postmodern text. To some extent, then, DeLillo has abandoned the modernist project of a cultural critique that is based on the literary text's formal and linguistic dissociation from social reality. DeLillo's writing belongs to the later postmodernism whose form of cultural critique Andreas Huyssen has described as nonmodernist and nonavantgardist.

In fact, much of DeLillo's portrayal of the postmodern soundscape follows a realist trajectory. In a sense, *White Noise* returns us to the concerns of chapter 1. DeLillo is as careful as Dreiser or Crane in depicting the details of the acoustic environment his characters inhabit. But DeLillo—with one significant exception, which will be discussed below—does not use his representations of acoustic worlds for the kind of sociopolitical boundary-drawing enacted by many a naturalist writer. In fact, *White Noise* introduces its readers to a world so saturated with sounds and noises from a multiplicity of sources that the very divisions that structure the naturalists' acoustic imagination appear to have all but vanished. Consequently, DeLillo is less interested in social divisions within his fictional soundscapes than in the sheer proliferation of noises, which has assumed such proportions that it has become, he suggests, part of the environmental problem his characters are faced with. DeLillo's realistic depiction of the postmodern soundscape becomes a vehicle for his complicitously critical perspective on ecological issues of the late twentieth century.

Concerns about noise pollution were highly topical when *White Noise* ap-

peared in 1984. Only three years before, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) had published a report entitled *Noise in America: The Extent of the Noise Problem* (1981). That study was an attempt to assess the extent of noise pollution and its effects on the U.S. population at the beginning of the 1980s. It listed road traffic, air traffic, construction work, railroads, and industrial activities as the major sources of noise. The authors found that road traffic was the leading source of community noise and estimated that it alone exposed 96.8 million Americans to daily average sound levels above the safe level of 55 dB. From the numbers given in the EPA report, we can estimate that the combined impact of all major noise sources exposed over half the American population to daily average noise levels above that safety level (Suter 11). Moreover, at the time more than 9 million workers were daily exposed to occupational noise exceeding 85 dB, a sound level that can induce hearing loss, impedes communication, and adversely affects job performance and workplace safety. In 1982, the Reagan administration shut down the Office of Noise Abatement and Control (ONAC) and thus put an end to the activities of that office within the EPA that was responsible for the 1981 report.

Ten years later, Alice Suter, an audiologist at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, reviewed the changes that had occurred in the American soundscape since the shutdown of the ONAC. Her findings were presented to the Administrative Conference of the United States in November 1991. In the concluding chapter of her report, Suter states that “Noise has a significant impact on the quality of American life. There is no evidence that the impact has diminished in the years since ONAC was abolished. Rather, it appears that the impact is at least as great, and probably greater, than it was ten years ago, due to population growth, especially in urban areas, and the proliferation of certain noise sources” (36). Among the adverse health effects of noise, Suter lists hearing loss, interference with communication, sleep disturbance, annoyance, anxiety, stress, reduced performance of cognitive tasks, and a variety of extra-auditory health effects including elevations in blood pressure and raised cholesterol and glucose levels (14–35).

Don DeLillo’s *White Noise* was published within the decade demarcated by the EPA’s and Suter’s reports. The findings of these reports provide an incentive to read the novel’s title literally (as far as this is possible with a term that is itself already metaphorical). To be sure, the acoustic atmosphere we encounter as we enter DeLillo’s Blacksmith is a far cry from the sonic

hell of Crane's Bowery in *Maggie* or the uproar of Dos Passos's Manhattan. When Jack Gladney, the novel's first-person narrator and protagonist, "experience[s] aural torment" (241), it is because he imagines the sound of his wife Babette and Mr. Gray's lovemaking. Jack's first description of the acoustic environment he and his family inhabit in fact stresses that they "live at the end of a quiet street," with the expressway "well below" (4) them. The acoustic division Jack establishes between their quiet street and the noisy expressway anticipates his later attempts to draw a clear line between the family of a man who is "not just a college professor" but "the head of a department" and "people who live in mobile homes out in the scrubby parts of the country, where the fish hatcheries are" (117).⁵⁰ Jack's representation of an acoustic phenomenon thus contributes to his anxious construction of a sense of social distinction that he believes will protect him and his family from harm.⁵¹

Jack Gladney is as keen as Sister Carrie to discover the line that separates his world from that of the lower social orders, and the acoustic distinctions he makes become part of that project. But Jack's attempts are much more heavily ironized by DeLillo's repeated suggestion that the very boundaries Jack seeks to identify have almost completely disappeared within the omnipresent and permanent hum of the postmodern soundscape. While Carrie still finds refuge in the silence of her hotel suite, the acoustic space the Gladneys inhabit is anything but quiet. Ironically, their longing for quietude is undermined within the very space they have built for themselves. Their domestic sonic environment is fed by the uninterrupted buzz of the gas meter, the thermostat, the radiator, the washing machine, the clothes dryer, the refrigerator; it is fed by the anonymous voices emerging from the radio and a television set that is always on. Occasionally, a ringing telephone makes itself heard above the background noise, or a smoke alarm—which is duly ignored.⁵²

The streets of Blacksmith are relatively quiet; traffic and industrial noise are mostly heard from a distance. But when the Gladney family enters one of the local supermarkets or department stores, their ears are again assailed by an extremely dense sonic wall composed of Muzak, consumer messages, coffee grinders, chiming bells, humming maintenance systems, and escalators. The remarkable difference between a silent outdoors and noisy interiors is finally eroded when disaster strikes. As the airborne toxic event approaches Blacksmith, the combined noise of amplified emergency messages, helicopters, automobile horns, and, towering above it all, air-raid, police, fire, and

ambulance sirens fills private and public spaces alike and abolishes the distinction between acoustic interiors and exteriors.

This brief survey of some of the noises that saturate the acoustic world of *White Noise* should prompt us to recognize what critics interested in the novel's ecological theme often fail to notice, namely that *White Noise* is in important ways also a novel about *acoustic* ecology. In its literal sense, the title refers to the omnipresence of broad-band noises as keynote sounds of the postmodern soundscape. As Barry Truax, a coworker on the World Soundscape Project whose first edition of *Acoustic Communication* (1984) appeared one year before DeLillo's novel, explains, the constant hum of traffic and technical appliances such as air conditioners or computers approaches the acoustic qualities of white noise:

Traffic and air-conditioning are [...] examples of "broad-band" sounds, that is, sounds whose spectrum or energy content is continuously distributed over a fairly large range of frequencies. When that range is the whole audible spectrum and the distribution is uniform, the sound is called "white noise," by analogy to white light which contains all visible frequencies. (1984, 20)

If critics identify white noise with the junk information continually emitted by radio and TV (Saltzman 808), we may add that the sound of white noise already exhibits the qualities identified with junk information. Truax makes the connection between the acoustic quality of sound and its information content as he comments on the contemporary "proliferation of low information, highly redundant, and basically uninteresting sounds which do not encourage sensitive listening" (1984, 13). The type of sound Truax describes is a continual presence in the supermarket as well as the Gladneys' home. Jack gives a fairly accurate description of it when he enters Willie Mink's motel room, where his adversary is watching TV with the sound turned off: "I heard a noise, faint, monotonous, white" (306).

Electronic devices produce sounds of great uniformity and little variance. Barry Truax follows Murray Schafer in designating these sounds as flat-line sounds.⁵³ Truax distinguishes between the electrical hum—a low-pitched sound caused by the oscillation of alternating current (AC) if the electrical circuit is not properly grounded—and the electrical drone, a sound caused by the rapid, uniform vibration of various machines including vacuum cleaners and electric lawnmowers. The broad-band noise of today's cities is not

only less informative and more redundant than other sounds but also masks other, potentially more significant acoustic events. As a result, sounds blur into one another, the soundscape loses acoustic definition, and human beings encounter difficulties in communicating across distances (Truax 1984, 123–26). In short, the electrified soundscape interferes with the human production and reception of sound. In making this analysis his own, DeLillo taps into realist modes of representation that are largely absent from Reed's or Pynchon's work.

While the most immediate cause of Willie Mink's loss of communicative abilities toward the end of the novel is an excessive dosage of Dylar, his desolate state at the same time represents the extreme case of human communication that is not only impeded by the ambient noise but has become almost indistinguishable from it. But DeLillo has more subtle ways of inviting his readers to pass a negative judgment on the postmodern soundscape. Many of the noises of *White Noise* possess an ominous quality. When Jack perceives that "The gas meter made a particular noise" (222) or that "That chirping noise was just the radiator (94), he reminds us that the machinery we have come to accept as an indispensable part of our everyday lives may malfunction or completely break down. A more vague but at the same time much stronger sense of premonition is evoked when Jack listens to the garbage compactor's "ram strok[ing] downward with a dreadful wrenching sound, full of eerie feeling" (33) or when its "motorized surge" makes him "retreat two paces" (101). Several of the noises that possess this ominous quality are described as a presence just beyond the range of conscious perception. This is true of the Gladneys' refrigerator, which produces an "eerie static, insistent but near subliminal," which makes Jack "think of wintering souls, some form of dormant life approaching the threshold of perception" (258). It also applies to the buzz of the supermarket, which is characterized as a "sublittoral drone" (168) in one passage and "a dull and unlocatable roar, as of some form of swarming life just outside the range of human apprehension" (36) in another. Jack's comparison of the noises to forms of life lurking just beneath the surface is again evoked when the beast finally emerges and makes itself heard. Startled by the acoustic onslaught of the air-raid sirens, Jack muses that "They made a noise like some territorial squawk out of the Mesozoic. A parrot carnivore with a DC-9 wingspan. What a raucousness of brute aggression filled the house, making it seem as if the walls would fly apart. So close

to us, so surely upon us. Amazing to think this sonic monster lay hidden nearby for years” (118).

It is no coincidence that the full emergence of noise from out of the ambient roar occurs with a signal that announces the text’s ecological disaster. The novel’s acoustic and ecological dynamics follow the same trajectory: both forms of pollution are of far-reaching proportions but remain barely perceptible, lying dormant below the surface until a major event—the ear-splitting blast of the sirens, the airborne toxic event—forcefully imposes them on DeLillo’s characters’ consciousness. Much as the contamination of the grade school or the “smell of acrid matter” (240) that arises from the burning insane asylum reminds the citizens of Blacksmith of an environmental pollution that remains imperceptible for most of the time, the noise of the sirens is merely the supreme expression of an acoustic pollution that is omnipresent—“Panasonic” (241)—but largely inaccessible to conscious perception.⁵⁴ The white noise of *White Noise* both is an integral part of the town’s environmental problem and heralds its more threatening manifestations. DeLillo’s fictional world testifies to Jacques Attali’s assertion that “change is inscribed in noise faster than it transforms society” (5). It is therefore utterly appropriate that Jack Gladney becomes “aware of the dense environmental texture” (168) as he finds himself in the midst of the noises of the supermarket, where he learns about Dimitrios Cotsakis’s death.

The consumer messages that contribute to the supermarket’s dense acoustic texture also fill the acoustic space of the Gladneys’ home. DeLillo’s representation of the disembodied voices that seem to originate from either the radio or the television set indicates perhaps most clearly that his judgment on the postmodern soundscape is a negative one. Like the noises emitted by clothes dryers, radiators, gas meters, or thermostats, these disembodied voices are often reproduced by themselves, as one-line paragraphs:

Dacron, Orlon, Lycra Spandex. (52)
Dristan Ultra, Dristan Ultra. (167)
Leaded, unleaded, super unleaded. (199)
Tegrin, Denorex, Selsun Blue. (289)

Blue jeans tumbled in the dryer. (18)
That chirping sound was just the radiator. (94)

The gas meter made a particular noise. (222)

The thermostat began to buzz. (302)

The fact that the advertising messages are, like the noises of appliances, reproduced as single paragraphs, as acoustic inserts, suggests that their information content is equally low. These noises, DeLillo intimates, become a form of noise pollution. It is, of course, possible for readers to establish meaningful connections between the disembodied TV voices and the surrounding text, for instance when the message “MasterCard, Visa, American Express” (100) interrupts Jack and Babette’s discussion about who wants to die first, suggesting a connection between consumerism and death that also lies behind Jack’s frantic efforts to dispose of the many useless commodities that have accumulated in the Gladneys’ house over the years. But the very difficulty we often encounter in establishing these links suggests much rather that the content of these messages is less important than the fact of their near-random but persistent recurrence throughout DeLillo’s text. As the narrative progresses, they become so many that they begin to merge with the ambient noise, becoming barely distinguishable from it. The ubiquitous TV messages, whose information content lies only minimally above that of the noise produced by traffic or household appliances, signal the always-present possibility of a slippage of language into noise within the postmodern soundscape.

The noises of consumerism, epitomized by the Muzak of the department stores—a form of sounding Attali poignantly characterizes as a “monologue of standard, stereotyped music” that “accompanies and hems in a daily life in which in reality no one has the right to speak any more” (8)—are everywhere and have entered, DeLillo suggests, our heads and impaired our language and our thinking. In fact, DeLillo’s postmodern subjects have internalized the language of advertising to such a degree that their own utterances come to resemble advertising slogans. In their rapid exchanges of sound bytes, the Gladney family’s conversations at times reproduce the two-part and tripartite form of consumer messages:

“I’m trying to remember three kinds of rock,” I said. “Igneous, sedimentary and something else.”

“What about your logarithms? What about the causes of economic discontent leading up to the Great Crash? Here’s one. Who won the Lincoln-Douglas debates? Careful. It’s not as obvious as it seems.”

“Anthracite and bituminous,” I said. “Isosceles and scalene.”

The mysterious words came back to me in a rush of confused school-room images.

“Here’s one. Angles, Saxons, Jutes.” (176)

It is at such moments that Jack’s suspicion that “The family is the cradle of the world’s misinformation” (81) receives its strongest confirmation. What Bruce Bawer would dismiss as unrealistic dialogue is part of DeLillo’s critique of the noises that saturate the acoustic space of postmodernity. Later in the novel, the anonymous “woman passing on the street,” uttering the words “A decongestant, an antihistamine, a cough suppressant, a pain reliever” (262) represents an advanced stage of the same process: both the form and the content of advertising messages have come to infiltrate her thoughts and speech. Willie Mink’s reproduction of TV talk represents the psychotic extreme of the same process. Threatened by a jealous husband pointing a gun at him, Mink can merely reply: “Containing iron, niacin and riboflavin” (310). And later, on the same page, “Some of these playful dolphins have been equipped with radio transmitters. Their far-flung wanderings may tell us things” (310). Of course, this is a comic scene, but its humorous quality should not distract us from recognizing that Mink’s desolate state is merely an advanced form of the linguistic deprivation DeLillo’s characters are threatened by. DeLillo’s observations on the information society are, like Mink’s dolphins, playful, and he does suggest that its “incessant bombardment of information” (66) may, again like Mink’s dolphins, “tell us things,” but DeLillo’s observations never lose their critical edge.

The German philosopher Gernot Böhme proposes a somewhat different perspective on the postmodern soundscape than that suggested by acoustic ecologists. Well aware that the contemporary acoustic environment is, as he puts it, “colonized” (18) by Muzak and a plethora of other machine-made sounds, Böhme argues that the postmodern soundscape also encourages a new type of listening:

one must admit that the acoustic consciousness of the average individual has experienced a noticeable development. This is not only to suggest that musical desires and the musical demands contained in them have been heightened substantially—it also means that listening as such has developed into an important dimension of life and into a broad zone of satisfaction for the general public. Of course one must

state that the noise of the modern world and the occupation of public space by music has led to the habit of not-listening (*Weghören*). At the same time, listening has grown from an instrumental experience—I hear something—to a mode through which one participates in the world. (16–17)

The omnipresence of sounds from multiple sources makes it almost impossible to locate the origin of sounds and creates for the hearer an experience of immersion in an extremely dense acoustic space. This new quality of aural experience highlights that hearing is always also a corporeal experience, an experience that involves our bodies as a whole. Böhme describes the new kind of listening demanded and encouraged by the white noise of postmodernity as follows: “when we are listening [. . .] we are outside ourselves. And this being which is outside itself does not encounter voices, tones, sounds, out there, but is itself formed, moulded, crenated, cut, lifted, pushed, expanded and constricted by voices, tones, sounds” (18).

This is the kind of aural experience, immersion in sound, a number of experimental musicians have attempted to create since the mid-twentieth century. Some of these artists, LaMonte Young and Allan Kaprow among them, used the sounds of water to achieve the desired effect (Kahn 228–32, 271–76). In *White Noise*, DeLillo uses aquatic metaphors to represent the new aurality. When Jack realizes that the supermarket is “awash in noise” (36), when he perceives its “oceanic layers of sound” (288), or comments on the “night’s combined sounds” that “c[o]me washing in with a freshness and renewed immediacy” (118), he experiences the acoustic space he inhabits as a body of water in which his own body is immersed. Yet Jack’s strongest aural experience of this kind does not occur when he finds himself engulfed in the noises of American consumerism, but when he listens to his son Wilder’s crying:

As the crying continued, a curious shift developed in my thinking. I found that I did not necessarily wish him to stop. It might not be so terrible, I thought, to have to sit and listen to this a while longer. We looked at each other. Behind that dopey countenance, a complex intelligence operated. I held him with one hand, using the other to count his fingers inside the mittens, aloud, in German. The inconsolable crying went on. I let it wash over me, like rain in sheets. I entered it, in a sense. I let it fall and tumble across my face and chest. I began to think

he had disappeared inside this wailing noise and if I could join him in his lost and suspended place we might together perform some reckless wonder of intelligibility. I let it break across my body. It might not be so terrible, I thought, to have to sit here for four more hours, with the motor running and the heater on, listening to this uniform lament. It might be good, it might be strangely soothing. I entered it, fell into it, letting it enfold and cover me. He cried with his eyes open, his eyes closed, his hands in his pockets, his mittens on and off. I sat there nodding sagely. (78)

It is in this scene where the boundary between the hearing subject and the sounds it hears is most fully dissolved. As in the supermarket passage, DeLillo uses metaphorical language to depict Jack's immersion in a sea of sound. But Jack's aural experience in this passage possesses a more intimate and near-mystical quality that distinguishes it from otherwise similar experiences at the supermarket. Murray Jay Siskind equally locates a potential for mystical experience in the American family when he speaks about its "otherworldly babble" (101). DeLillo seems to suggest that it is in the presence of human sound-making rather than the temples of consumerism where a "reckless wonder of intelligibility" may still be performed.

Yet to argue that the novel's acoustic imagination is split in two between a familial acoustic space within which the sounds and noises produced by human beings hold a promise of enhanced sense-making and a debased, even pernicious machine-made soundscape colonized by Muzak, traffic noise, and air-raid sirens would be overly simplistic. DeLillo's text in fact betrays a, perhaps perverse, fascination with the noises of postmodernity. If the disembodied TV voices become almost indistinguishable from the ambient noise, the reverse slippage of noise into language can already be observed in the novel's first representation of an acoustic phenomenon. Jack's comparison of the roar of traffic "wash[ing] past" at night to "dead souls babbling at the edge of a dream" (4) points to an incomplete slippage of noise into language that must remain incomplete precisely because the object of representation possesses mystical qualities that, in the final analysis, remain beyond the limits of human understanding and representation.

Jack thus attributes the same otherworldly quality to traffic noise that Murray attributes to the babble of the American family. This aestheticization and mystification of the sonic mundane is repeated in almost identical fash-

ion when the refrigerator's "strange crackling sound" conjures up images of hibernating souls in Jack's mind (258). In fact, the ominous quality of many of the novel's noises also hints at the existence of a world beyond the empirical world the Gladneys inhabit. While the air-raid sirens' ferocious squawk transports Jack's imagination back to primordial times, the subliminal bestial presence he senses among the supermarket's ambient roar suggests the existence of a sphere beyond our means of conscious perception. A similar sense of mystery is evoked when Heinrich muses that "there are sounds even dogs can't hear. [. . .] High, high, high-pitched. Coming from somewhere" (23), when some of Blacksmith's inhabitants expect that a "voice or noise would crack across the sky" and lift them "out of death" (234) or when Jack hears "a great echoing din, as of the extinction of a species of beast" in a hardware store's "deep interior" (82). These noises herald not only ecological disaster but also the incomplete coming into presence of a transcendental world. The novel's dense texture of sounds and noises regularly produces moments of mystical, quasi-religious experience. Even before Murray compares the supermarket to a Tibetan house of the dead do Jack's aural experiences imbue its white noise—a sound that, as Kittler reminds us, "no script can store" (*Grammophon* 72; my translation)—with a sense of the otherworld. In this context, it is no coincidence that Wilder's miraculous survival as he rides his tricycle across the expressway occurs amidst the "serial whoosh of dashing hatchbacks and vans" (322), amidst cars "wailing past, horns blowing," and "sound waves mixing in the air" (323).

It is, however, at the evacuation center where the noises of consumerism come into full mystical presence for Jack, who hears his daughter mutter the words *Toyota Celica* in her sleep:

A long moment passed before I realized this was the name of an automobile. The truth only amazed me more. The utterance was beautiful and mysterious, gold-shot with looming wonder. It was like the name of an ancient power in the sky, tablet-carved in cuneiform. It made me feel that something hovered. But how could these near-nonsense words, murmured in a child's restless sleep, make me sense a meaning, a presence? She was only repeating some TV voice. Toyota Corolla, Toyota Celica, Toyota Cressida. Supranational names, computer-generated, more or less universally pronounceable. Part of every child's brain noise, the substatic regions too deep to probe. Whatever its source, the

utterance struck me with the impact of a moment of splendid transcendence. (155)

As in Jack's description of night-time traffic, it is a murmur—a semiarticulate linguistic utterance—that gives Jack access to a tacit knowledge of a world just beyond the reach of our conventional means of perception and representation.

In his systems-theoretic reading of *White Noise*, Tom LeClair (207–36) has recourse to the order-from-noise principle to explain the emergence of mystery and meaning out of the apparently debased products of consumer culture and the debris of the postmodern soundscape:

While expressing polarities, the sound motif, like the novel as a whole, comes to signify a wide-ranging awareness of systemic mystery, a new knowing and non-knowing. In evolution, Anthony Wilder [*sic*] reminds us, noise is an intrusion “converted into an essential part of the system so as to maintain the relationship between system and environment;” the “efficient system” will “seek to maintain stability by ACCEPTING noise, by incorporating it as information, and moving to a new level of organization (evolving).” [. . .] In *White Noise* DeLillo collects the familiar sounds of American culture and universal fear; he then both turns them up, exaggerating their foolishness for ironic effect, and turns them down, finding in the lower frequencies a whisper of possibility, of uncertainty beyond our present range of knowledge. DeLillo's is the noise of disaster and the noise of possibility. Which shall we hear, which shall we make—in the loop? (231–32)

LeClair makes an important point here whose validity extends beyond the novel's more obviously mystical moments.⁵⁵ Throughout *White Noise*, DeLillo encourages us to search for moments of enhanced experience in the perception of the mundane.⁵⁶ Already the novel's first chapter—a richly satirical account of students returning to campus accompanied by their affluent parents, about whom “something [. . .] suggest[s] massive insurance coverage” (3)—in the final sentence takes a sudden, unexpected turn to the pathos of everyday life: “On telephone poles all over town there are home-made signs concerning lost dogs and cats, sometimes in the handwriting of a child” (4).

For LeClair, the novel's pervasive sense of wonder and mystery is the linchpin of DeLillo's cultural critique. DeLillo's fiction, LeClair argues, warns us against seeking refuge in closed systems that threaten to turn in upon themselves—Jack's obsession with Hitler, Babbette's belief in technological fixes, Jack's yearning for a familial safety that would insulate him from the outside world. Against this narrow conception of the world and our place in it, DeLillo privileges a systemic perspective that accepts the openness, complexity, and flexibility of the multiple systems we inhabit and interact with. Only such a perspective would allow us to regain a sense of awe and wonder at and respect for the world we live in. In *White Noise*, LeClair continues, Murray Jay Siskind is—despite his at times pernicious influence on Jack—the main representative of this systemic perspective, and the Gladneys would do well to listen to and learn from him. It is, after all, Murray who embraces most fully the openness, uncertainty, and mysteriousness of a complex world of multiple interlocking systems and communications, and it is he who discovers “veils of mystery and layers of cultural material [. . .] all the code words and ceremonial phrases” (37–38) in the supermarket, “sacred formulas” (51) in television, and “God's own goodness” (285) in technology. The note of awe and wonderment on which the novel ends may be read as signaling DeLillo's (and maybe Jack's) final endorsement of Murray's systemic perspective:

Murray Jay Siskind is the tutor in mystery. DeLillo hedges Siskind's influence in several ways—by making him hyperbolic and occasionally wrong in his statements, by giving him an immoral influence—but I believe DeLillo means the reader to take seriously Siskind's analysis of essentially religious experience in secular forms. [. . .] While satirizing how contemporary man uses and is used by his objects, his things, DeLillo also shows how a new perception of what is now natural—systems among systems, communications, inherent uncertainty, mysteriousness—can accommodate man to his condition as knower and even squeeze a modicum of hope from the junk into which a reductionist way of knowing has historically converted natural complexity. This is the looping accomplishment of *White Noise*. Morris Berman, in his study of science since the Renaissance asserts that the effect of systems thinking is a “reenchantment of the world,” a sense of participation in systemic seriousness. Understated and uncertain, the ending of *White*

Noise implies this possibility, this futurity—if not for Jack Gladney, then for the reader who knows more than he. (LeClair 228–30)

LeClair's systemic approach provides an adequate model for describing the novel's recurrent slippages of noise into language and consumerist junk into a source of awe and wonder. But to locate DeLillo's critical import in the sense of mystery he evokes, to claim that "For DeLillo, the counterpoint to both power and consumption is 'mystery,' the singly most important value-word in his fiction, nonfiction, and interviews" (15), is problematic and, I believe, misleading.

The main sources of mystery in *White Noise* are, after all, the supermarket and the television set, those avatars of consumer culture. LeClair himself acknowledges this when he writes that DeLillo "extract[s] from his initially satirical materials a sense of wonderment and mystery, finding in the seeming rubbish of popular culture a kind of knowledge that would provide a more livable set of systemic expectations about life and death" (214). If the main purpose of DeLillo's complicitous critique were to sharpen, as LeClair suggests, readers' awareness of systemic complexity by making them realize the potential for awe and wonderment hidden in the products and messages of American consumerism, we would be justified in seeing in DeLillo's work, as Kucich suggests we should, much complicity and very little (if any) critique. The main problem with LeClair's approach is that he inherits from the early systems thinker Gregory Bateson a preference for open, homeostatic systems and a holistic approach that Bateson developed, particularly in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1972), with a concern for the survival of the ecosystem in mind and applies it to the much smaller system of American consumer capitalism, which, as DeLillo's novel amply demonstrates, represents a vital threat to the ecosystem's possibility of survival rather than a source of mystery whose proper recognition would enable us to enter into a more encompassing and harmonious relationship with the world we inhabit. In this context, it is telling that the passages LeClair (229) chooses to illustrate Jack's newfound insights into systemic complexity and uncertainty do not testify to Jack's reconsideration of his own relation to technology or the environment. Instead, it demonstrates to his ability to produce Murray-type analyses of Babette's "spirit" (104) as she appears on the TV screen and "the language of waves and radiation" (326) he listens to at the supermarket as

the novel ends. *White Noise* does indeed have a looping structure, but the loop does not refer to a recognition of “the inherent reciprocity of circular causality that makes certainty impossible” (LeClair 226); it leads from the station wagons filled with Jack’s students’ consumer goods at the beginning of the novel to the stacked shelves of the supermarket at its end.

DeLillo’s evocation of the mysteries of American consumerism and its noises, then, is part of what makes his critique complicit rather than its starting point. But DeLillo does not fully join in LeClair’s mystification of consumer culture and regularly undercuts Murray’s as well as Jack’s attempts to do the same. Not even the Toyota Celica passage allows for a reading of Jack’s epiphany as an unequivocal affirmation of the otherworldly richness of consumerist noise. Such a reading would both overlook the passage’s ironic qualities—which are reinforced in other parts of the novel, where the list-like form of advertising slogans is filled with much more serious content (“Random Access Memory, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, Mutually Assured Destruction” [303]) or parodied in its incongruity (“CABLE HEALTH, CABLE WEATHER, CABLE NEWS, CABLE NATURE” [231])—and its reminder that what has become part of Denise’s “brain noise” are “near-nonsense words” whose presence may well enhance Jack’s consciousness but cloud his daughter’s.

DeLillo’s suggestion, repeated throughout his narrative, that the noises of the postmodern soundscape—fed as they are by “random noise, that irrevocable background to technical media” (Kittler, *Grammophon* 301; my translation)—interfere with human communication to the point of reducing it to noise, that they occlude our processes of cognition and perception, and have in fact become part of the environmental pollution he depicts, represents the critical counterpart to Murray’s celebratory mysticism. DeLillo’s aesthetics here departs most clearly from Reed’s as well as Pynchon’s in its use of realist strategies of representation in the service of a postmodern cultural critique. Yet DeLillo does not simply validate the critical perspective while dismissing the mystical one as corrupt. The novel’s acoustic imagination is part of a complicitously critical project, which also encompasses its environmental imagination. *White Noise* betrays a keen awareness that both its author and its characters are deeply implicated in the very conditions and processes they subject to critical scrutiny without, however, becoming fully absorbed by them or relinquishing all critical distance. Hutcheon describes this double-

ness of the postmodern politics of representation in terms that are directly applicable to *White Noise*:

Postmodernism manifests itself in many fields of cultural endeavor—architecture, literature, photography, film, painting, video, dance, music, and elsewhere. In general terms it takes the form of self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement. It is rather like saying something while at the same time putting inverted commas around what is being said. The effect is to highlight, or “highlight,” and to subvert, or “subvert,” and the mode is therefore a “knowing” and an ironic—or even “ironic”—one. Postmodernism’s distinctive character lies in this kind of wholesale “nudging” commitment to doubleness, or duplicity. In many ways it is an even-handed process because postmodernism ultimately manages to install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert the conventions and presuppositions it appears to challenge. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to say that the postmodern’s initial concern is to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as “natural” (they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism) are in fact “cultural”; made by us, not given to us. Even nature, postmodernism might point out, doesn’t grow on trees. (*Politics* 1–2)

Hutcheon’s choice of the de-naturalizing of nature itself as an example for the de-naturalizing impulses of postmodernism makes her more general argument about the politics of postmodernism read like a comment on the ecological concerns of DeLillo’s novel. In *White Noise*, a plethora of phenomena, ranging from the TV station “CABLE NATURE” (231) to the postmodern sunsets to Murray’s assertion that “It’s natural to deny our nature” (297) attest to the collapse of the distinction between nature and culture into simulations of nature and natural simulacra. Though blurring the very distinctions that ground its critical impact, DeLillo’s de-naturalizing of nature serves to pinpoint the deleterious extent of human intervention in the natural world and thus forms an important aspect of his ecological critique, which, however, remains every bit as complicitous as his critique of technology.

The novel's environmental theme continually reminds us of the ecological costs of American consumerism, of the insecticides that end up in the products of the supermarket's fruit bins, where "Everything seem[s] to be in season, sprayed, burnished, bright" (36), of "the radiation that surrounds us every day. Your radio, your TV, your microwave oven, your power lines just outside the door, your radar speed-trap on the highway" (174). In the context of the novel's ecological concerns, white noise emerges as a metaphor for an extensive environmental pollution that nevertheless remains below the threshold of most American citizens' conscious perception. The airborne toxic event serves to puncture that veil, but DeLillo's ecological critique is not borne out by his characters' actions in any consistent fashion. The Gladneys themselves are avid consumers who indulge in fast-food binges in their car, "fully dressed, in hats and heavy coats, without speaking, ripping into chicken parts with [their] hands and teeth" (231–32) or, driven by an intense "desire to buy," seek satisfaction in "shopp[ing] with reckless abandon" (83–84).⁵⁷

In the absence of either a figural, narrative, or authorial voice that can extricate itself from the novel's environmental critique, that critique must remain compromised. In its oscillation between sonic mysticism and acoustic ecology, the novel's representation of the postmodern soundscape replicates the complicitously critical dynamics of an ecological critique in whose context it acquires its significance. It cannot be stressed enough that the complicitous nature of DeLillo's ecological and technological critiques in *White Noise* does not invalidate the novel's power to intervene critically in the discourses that shape our understanding of postmodernity. DeLillo's description of Iron City as "a large town sunk in confusion, a center of abandonment and broken glass" (85) that "expresses a ghostly longing for something that was far beyond retrieval" (88) may well be read as suggesting that the industrial age the city's name alludes to has given way to a new, postindustrial order. But DeLillo does not join the chorus of approval of the postindustrial society, which the author of that term inspired. If Daniel Bell can write in *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (1974) that, in the postindustrial society, "individual utility and profit maximization" will "become subordinated to broader conceptions of social welfare and community interest" (481), we need DeLillo's fictional stocktaking ten years later to challenge and unsettle the convenient fictions of more compla-

cent social commentators. *White Noise* can and, I think, should be read as exemplifying the doubleness of a late postmodernism that has come to recognize the unavailability of a position fully outside the dominant discourses and socioeconomic structures of our age without abandoning the work of cultural critique.

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Conclusion

Back in 1987 and 1988, the Swiss daily *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* ran a national advertising campaign with the slogan “Lesen macht keinen Lärm” (Reading makes no noise).¹ Indeed, one is prepared to admit that the process of reading does not produce noise in any straightforward sense. With the shift from an oral to a predominantly literate culture in the West and beyond, and with the individualization of the reading process, reading became a silent activity in many regions of the world.² But what about the texts we read? To claim that literature can, in the work of certain writers, become the noise of culture suggests that literary texts at times do make noise. From the double perspective of a history of literary acoustics, noise both designates the communicational and systemic force of literature and one of its objects of representation. Yet even as we insist on the necessity of opening up William Paulson’s line of inquiry to include a study of literary representations, we are led to ask whether noise can be an object of representation at all. As Katherine N. Hayles points out, “as soon as noise moves into the realm of language, it is always already not noise but language” (*Chaos* 29). Noise is that against which language defines itself; it is the other that must be suppressed for language to come into being. It is therefore, strictly speaking, impossible to speak or write noise.

Any inquiry into the representation of noise, then, is faced with the difficult question of the representability of the unrepresentable. In their introduction to *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory* (1989), Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser argue that the languages in which we conduct our dialogues with the unsayable must be inherently unstable, conforming to the constant, dynamic transformations, creations, and undoings of play; they must make the absent present while continually unmasking the impossibility of that endeavor: “only through play can difference as oscillation be manifested, because only play brings out the absent otherness that lies on the reverse side of all positions drawn into interaction” (xiii). To speak the unspeakable, to write the unwritable without effacing it, we need a language that enlists but ultimately frustrates our desire for presence and communicative transparency. In its ambiguities, its indirectness, figurality, and fictionality, literary discourse seems to be a privileged site for such an endeavor. Budick and Iser acknowledge this when

they describe “the ways in which languages of the unsayable spotlight what has been excluded by that which is sayable and said” as “an all-too-easily forgotten part of our *literary* experience” (xi; my emphasis).

At the same time, Budick and Iser’s reflections pinpoint two fundamental dangers informing all our encounters, both literary and nonliterary, with the ineffable. Not to speak the unspeakable threatens to exclude it from the realm of human cognition and imagination. All language use is subject to this logic of exclusion: whenever we say something, we exclude something else that could have been said in its place. This danger, then, is contingent on the contingency of human communication.³ Conversely, to speak the unspeakable threatens to obliterate the otherness of that which, by its very nature, eludes the grasp of the networks of communication that are already in place.⁴ Exclusion and inclusion, then, form the two poles of a double bind in which literary representations of noise are also caught.

One of the ways in which authors have sought to confront (if not overcome) that double bind is by inventing *special* language uses that performatively retain something of the otherness of their elusive objects of representation. Budick and Iser describe this literary performance as a form of negativity that “constantly lures absence into presence. While continually subverting that presence, negativity, in fact, changes it into a carrier of absence of which we would not otherwise know anything” (xiv). Many of the authors discussed in the preceding pages recognize the need for an aesthetics of negativity in this sense. In their attempts to lure absence into presence without effacing it, they employ a variety of literary strategies.

In his depiction of the unspeakable horrors of war, Stephen Crane, for instance, achieves what the English writer Robert Graves considers an impossibility. When asked in an interview whether he wanted to tell his friends at home about his experiences in the First World War, Graves replied: “You couldn’t: you can’t communicate noise” (qtd. in Fussell 170). In *The Red Badge of Courage*, Crane seeks to communicate precisely the noise of war, both in its literal and its figural sense. Crane’s text represents that noise without neutralizing its destructive force and inaccessibility to sense-making through an act of narrative integration. Crane’s choice to expose his readers to chaotic fragments of subjective experience rather than a coherent plot structure constitutes a refusal to turn the indescribable noise and violence of war into a readily appropriate object of knowledge.

Forty-one years later, Djuna Barnes is faced with similar questions of rep-

resentation and representability in an entirely different context. Her portraits of society's outcasts in *Nightwood* withdraw into linguistic obscurity to prevent their reduction to the easily available clichés we have for speaking about others. In her darkly figurative style, Barnes stages the ethnic, sexual, religious, and cultural otherness of her characters and their social practices. *Nightwood's* fragmented structure, its figural complexity, and its pervasive imagery of darkness, death, and decay preserve something of that which resists verbalization in objects of representation that exist in the twilight of representability. In *Nightwood*, Barnes practices an aesthetics of interruption and negativity that injects noise into our channels of cultural communication. The transformation of Robin Vote's voice into a dog's bark provides an appropriately noisy ending to a novel that is crucially concerned with the limits of communicability and the politics of giving others a voice.

Another thirty years later, Thomas Pynchon imagines into being a communications system that transmits the voices that go unheard in the official channels of communication. In one reading at least, W.A.S.T.E. is an informational network that connects the disenfranchised and underprivileged and allows them to communicate in terms that are pushed to the margins and excluded by dominant ways of speaking and making sense. W.A.S.T.E. seems to offer a possibility for communication beyond the reach of official culture and beyond its in-built tendency to reduce the otherness of its outside to its own terms. Instead, through the primitive medium of its garbage cans, W.A.S.T.E. relays the communicative waste a burgeoning informational society cannot and will not hear. In the complexity of its formal organization and the multiple indeterminacies and ambiguities of its plot, Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* enacts the same gesture of communicative resistance, a noisy form of resistance that holds the promise of counteracting the degeneration of culture into a sea of sameness and redundancy.

What these three writers share with many of the other writers discussed in this book is a keen awareness of the ethical and political dimensions of representation. More specifically, they have come to realize that any attempt to represent the unrepresentable is in danger of obliterating its object of representation. Their representations of physical noise testify to this awareness. Any transformation of noise into order and information, these writers suggest, is a potentially violent gesture because it threatens to reduce the incommunicable other to the language and conceptual structures of the self. In accepting noise as one of the constitutive factors of their literary practice,

writers as different in their aesthetic and political sensibilities as Stephen Crane, Djuna Barnes, John Dos Passos, Jean Toomer, Zora Neale Hurston, Thomas Pynchon, and Ishmael Reed seek to retain something of the alterity and ineffability of the noises they represent. In this, they distance themselves from epistemological projects whose sole purpose is to make the unknown known. Instead, they align themselves with an aesthetics of negativity that probes the fuzzy realm of that which ultimately eludes our cognitive and representational grasp. Such an aesthetics of negativity aligns itself with Adorno's aesthetic theory in its refusal to offer up its objects of representation to the reader's ready consumption.⁵ This sense of refusal might, finally, be at the heart of all literary experience.

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Notes

Introduction

1. The story of the flood as narrated in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is based on the older version of the same story in *Atrahasis*, where the flood is preceded by a plague and two droughts, all of which are the gods' responses to overpopulation and its attendant noise (Lambert and Millard 1; Forsyth 151).

2. I follow Manuel Castells (34–40) and the majority of historians in distinguishing between the first industrial revolution, which began in the second half of the eighteenth century and had the steam engine as its prime mover, and the second industrial revolution, which took off a century later and was mainly driven by the introduction of electricity.

3. My account of Shannon draws on Katherine N. Hayles's excellent discussion of Barthes and Shannon (Hayles, "Information").

4. As Weaver sums up: "Information is, we must steadily remember, a measure of one's freedom of choice in selecting a message. The greater this freedom of choice, and hence the greater the information, the greater is the uncertainty that the message actually selected is some particular one. Thus greater freedom of choice, greater uncertainty, greater information go hand in hand" (Shannon and Weaver 18–19).

5. In human oral communication, the information source would correspond to the brain of the speaker; the transmitter to the physical speech apparatus (vocal chords, oral cavity, tongue, and so on), which transforms the message into a coded signal that is sent over the communication channel; the receiver to the ear of the hearer; the destination to the brain of the hearer. See Shannon and Weaver (7–8) for a fuller explanation of the diagram. It will be noticed that what has been referred to as sender and receiver so far is in this model divided into two distinct elements of the communication process, namely information source and transmitter at the one end of the process and receiver and destination at the other.

6. This impression is confirmed when Weaver characterizes the "semantic problems" of communication as "concerned with the identity, or satisfactorily close approximation, in the interpretation of meaning by the receiver, as compared with the intended meaning of the sender" (Shannon and Weaver 4).

7. There are, of course, problems with Shannon and Weaver's model of communication. Even if we put aside for a moment Jacques Derrida's contention that "as writing [*écriture*], communication, if we retain that word, is not the means of transference of meaning, the exchange of intentions and meanings [*vouloir-dire*], discourse and the 'communication of consciousness'" ("Signature" 20) and retain a more conventional model of communication such as Weaver's enhanced model (fig. 2), we are still faced with at least three problematic aspects. First, despite a number of modifications to a

simple sender-message-receiver model, Shannon and Weaver's model of communication remains a one-way model that can only account for communication between two entities. A broader understanding of communication as it informs, for instance, the notion of discourse is well beyond its scope. Second, Weaver's clear-cut differentiation between "semantic noise" and "engineering noise" cannot be upheld because it presupposes a strict separation of the level of the signifier (affected by the engineering noise) and the signified (affected by the semantic noise). The poststructuralist assertion of the primacy of the signifier and the endless deferral of the signified has rendered such a distinction problematic. Third, because Shannon and Weaver's concept of noise is based on the assumption that noise corresponds to all those "things [that] are added to the signal which were not intended by the information source" (Shannon and Weaver 7), their model does not account for noise added on purpose. In the analysis of literature, especially certain types of modernist and postmodern literature, it will be desirable to broaden Shannon and Weaver's concept of noise to include textual distortions and fragmentations that we, as readers, tend to see as intended by a writer who uses them consciously and for artistic effect (which does not amount to suggesting that the meaning of a literary text can be equated with the author's intention). The other thinkers on information and noise discussed in this chapter address some of these limitations.

8. Henri Atlan's "Du bruit comme principe d'auto-organisation" (1972) and Prigogine and Stengers's *Order Out of Chaos* (1979) are two texts that build upon von Foerster's order-from-noise principle—the former in the study of the evolution of living organisms and the latter in its use of an "order through fluctuations" model—and have themselves become influential in the fields of theoretical biology and theoretical physics, respectively.

9. Maturana and Varela define an "autopoietic machine" as follows: "An autopoietic machine is a machine organized (defined as a unity) as a network of processes of production (transformation and destruction) of components that produces the components which: (i) through their interactions and transformations continually regenerate and realize the network of processes (relations) that produced them; and (ii) constitute it (the machine) as a concrete unity in the space in which they (the components) exist by specifying the topological domain of its realization as such a network" (78–79).

10. The most prominent example is the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann, who in his groundbreaking *Social Systems* (1984) defines social systems (for example, the religious system, the economic system, the legal system, the system of art) as autopoietic systems that are ordered according to meaning and continually produce communications out of communications in a recursively closed process. Like Maturana and Varela, he maintains that different autopoietic systems have different ways of interpreting the world and therefore cannot absorb each other's complexity in any straightforward fashion. For Luhmann, too, their complexities act as sources of perturbation or noise: "the complexity each system makes available is an incomprehensible complexity—that is, disorder—for the receiving system. [. . .] All reproduction and structure formation thus presupposes a combination of order and disorder: a system's own structures and an incomprehensible foreign complexity, a regulated and a free complexity. The con-

struction of social systems [...] follows the ‘order from noise’ principle (von Foerster)” (*Social Systems* 214). In Luhmann’s model, disorder and noise are as indispensable to the survival and development of social systems as they are to the survival and development of biological systems: “Without ‘noise,’ no system” (116).

Concerned as it is with processes of communication and the production of meaning in social space, Luhmann’s sociology of autopoietic systems is clearly relevant to literary and cultural studies. This is true a fortiori of his more recent *Art as a Social System*, in which he defines art as a form of communication that is primarily concerned with matters of perception and thus manages to bring into a productive tension social systems (based on communications) and psychic systems (based on consciousnesses). For the most sustained systems-theoretic account of the functioning of the *literary system*, though, the reader is referred to Paulson, discussed at length below.

11. Lyotard defines paralogy as “a move (the importance of which is often not recognized until later) played in the pragmatics of knowledge” (61). With regard to the progress of science, he describes the functioning of paralogy as follows: “Science does not expand by means of the positivism of efficiency. The opposite is true: working on a proof means searching for and ‘inventing’ counterexamples, in other words, the unintelligible; supporting an argument means looking for a ‘paradox’ and legitimating it with new rules in the games of reasoning” (54). Lyotard receives support from physics Nobel laureate Ilya Prigogine and philosopher Isabelle Stengers in their joint book, *Order Out of Chaos*: “It is obvious that the management of human society as well as the action of selective pressures tends to optimize some aspects of behaviors or modes of connection, but to consider optimization as the key to understanding how populations and individuals survive is to risk confusing causes with effects. Optimization models thus ignore both the possibility of radical transformations—that is, transformations that change the definition of a problem and thus the kind of solution sought—and the inertial constraints that may eventually force a system into a disastrous way of functioning” (207).

12. Paulson is aware that, from a systems-theoretic perspective at least, systems of all kinds act as sources of noise for other systems (Maturana and Varela 81; Reese-Schäfer 46). But he insists that literature occupies a special position. Due to its strangeness, its poeticity, its internal noise, literature is a priori more disruptive, more noisy than other systems.

13. In fact, Maturana and Varela’s differentiation between systems that are autopoietic (and therefore living organisms) and systems that are “merely” autonomous allows for ways of thinking about literary autonomy that do not equate literary texts with living organisms and nevertheless show that literature shares some of their structural properties.

14. Paulson puts it thus: “The principle of constructing a pattern out of what interrupts patterns is inherent in artistic communication, because this kind of communication arises by deviating from the regularities of nonartistic communication, and this deviation must be the source of whatever advantage or specificity artistic communication possesses. In the language of the Groupe μ (and of Jean Cohen), the poetic func-

tion implies departures from norms and then the production of new kinds of relations and meaning from these departures” (87).

15. Paulson would concur with German media theorist Friedrich Kittler’s insistence that literature must be studied as part of a larger discourse network. He would, however—as I do, too—take issue with Kittler’s assertion that literature is first and foremost a storage medium of the same order as the phonograph or film (Kittler, *Grammophon; Aufschreibesysteme*). Kittler’s contributions to the study of literature are discussed further below.

16. Not surprisingly, systems theory has often been charged with political conservatism (Lyotard; Kneer and Nassehi 186–92).

17. For Adorno, artistic deviation must precisely *not* be integrable if it is to retain any oppositional force: “In art what once took care of itself became a specific undertaking, and as a result integration increasingly binds the centrifugal counterforces. [. . .] The more successful the integration, the more it becomes an empty spinning of gears; teleologically it tends toward infantile tinkering” (*Aesthetic* 29). In Adorno’s grim vision, the transformation of noise into order and information becomes an aggressive gesture of co-optation. What Paulson regards as a prerequisite for any successful process of innovation is for Adorno the neutralization of art’s critical impulses, effected primarily via the culture industry, whose “unmistakable symptom is the passion to touch everything, to allow no work to be what it is, to dress it up, to narrow its distance from the viewer” (*Aesthetic* 17). See chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of Adorno’s aesthetic theory.

18. Paulson writes, “I owe a special intellectual debt to Michel Serres, whose writings were instrumental in convincing me that this was a book I should attempt to write” (x).

19. As Serres puts it in his characteristically figural style: “Noise destroys and horrifies. But order and flat repetition are in the vicinity of death. Noise nourishes a new order. Organization, life, and intelligent thought live between order and noise, between disorder and perfect harmony. If there were only order, if we only heard perfect harmonies, our stupidity would soon fall down toward a dreamless sleep; if we were always surrounded by the shivaree, we would lose our breath and our consistency, we would spread out among all the dancing atoms of the universe. We are; we live; we think on the fringe, in the probable fed by the unexpected, in the legal nourished with information. There are two ways to die, two ways to sleep, two ways to be stupid—a head-first dive into chaos or stabilized installation in order and chitin.” (*The Parasite* 127)

20. Ross Chambers’s review of Serres’ *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy* captures the principal concerns as well as the feel of Serres’ writing best: “Serres’ recognition that the game is not the rules does not boil down, then, as it does (say) in Bourdieu, to rehabilitating practice in the face of theory. It asks a deeper question concerning the practice of theory itself, and enquires which theoretical practice, with its necessary entailments, one is to opt for, as between one which reifies the rules and promotes order and one which, aware of all that is sacrificed and destroyed in the production of order,

refuses so momentous a sacrifice. The latter option, within our tradition, is by far the more difficult of the two: it involves the production of order but without a concomitant sacrifice of disorder, or if one will, the maintenance within order of the disorder which is its very condition of existence. But this is the option for which Michel Serres stands, the game he chooses to play and invites us to join, that of the inclusion of the excluded” (189–90).

21. Serres puts it thus: “I must put three things together: habits or customs, animals, noises. At first glance, they are unrelated. Yet I am not putting them together haphazardly. I am forced to do so by my tongue: Latin, Greek, Roman. In this somewhat fuzzy spot, a parasite is an abusive guest, an unavoidable animal, a break in the message” (*The Parasite* 8). As Lawrence R. Schehr explains in his “Translator’s Introduction” to *The Parasite*, the title of Serres’ book has three different meanings:

The parasite is a microbe, an insidious infection that takes without giving and weakens without killing. The parasite is also a guest, who exchanges his talk, praise, and flattery for food. The parasite is noise as well, the static and interference in a channel. These seemingly dissimilar activities are, according to Michel Serres, not merely coincidentally expressed by the same word (in French). Rather, they are intrinsically related and, in fact, they have the same basic function in a system. Whether it produces a fever or just hot air, the parasite is a thermal exciter. And as such, it is both the atom of a relation and the production of a change in this relation. (Serres, *The Parasite* x)

22. Gerald L. Bruns identifies this threat with admirable clarity: “As Emmanuel Levinas says in *Totality and Infinity* (1961), knowledge is not a relation to the other but the destruction of it; it is ‘the reduction of the other to the same.’ It is a refusal of otherness. The other, however, is for its part just what refuses to be contained within the conceptual structures that we build up in order to make sense of things. This is what the otherness of the other means” (1058). For a concise discussion of the problematics of the same and the other in contemporary philosophy and ethics, see Rasch.

23. For early examples, take Horace’s literary pragmatics of instruction and delight (*prodesse et delectare*) or, later, the Romantic view of poetry as an expression of the artist’s feelings.

24. Moreover, the input-output perspective, with which Paulson constantly associates representational approaches, in no way describes the practices of those who are interested in the mimetic aspects of literary texts, and their implicit association with what Lyotard calls the logic of performativity is tendentious to say the least.

25. Insisting on the subversive potential of self-reflective fiction, Raymond Federman attributes a similar weight to the formal aspects of *Naked Lunch* and other early self-reflexive novels: “the new fiction (created on the margin of the literary establishment) sought to show the form rather than the content of American reality. It tried to render concrete and even visual in its language, in its syntax, in its typography and topology, the disorder, the chaos, the violence, the incongruity, but also the energy and vitality, of American reality” (1146).

26. Witness, for instance, Günter Grass's characterization of the activity of authors in his acceptance speech for the 1999 Nobel Prize for Literature:

But worst of all they refuse to make common cause with the victors of history: they take pleasure milling about the fringes of the historical process with the losers, who have plenty to say but no platform to say it on. By giving them a voice, they call the victory into question, by associating with them, they join ranks with them. (par. 21)

As different as they are in their habitus, politics, and literary practice, both Grass and Burroughs have learned from Walter Benjamin's characterization of official historiography as "the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate" and decided to dissociate themselves from that project, accepting as the writer's task "to brush history against the grain" (Benjamin 256–57).

27. We may note here that the popular exclusion of certain artworks from the realm of art—I am thinking of hostile reactions to John Cage's compositions or Jackson Pollock's paintings—has proceeded along similar lines.

28. This task touches on the difficult question of the translatability of cultures. As Wolfgang Iser points out, this is a task that becomes increasingly significant in a world of global information exchange: "In a rapidly shrinking world, many different cultures have come into close contact with one another, calling for a mutual understanding not only in terms of the culture to which one belongs, but also in terms of the specificity pertaining to the culture encountered" ("On Translatability" 5).

29. Overcoming the imitative or referential function of sound in music continued to be a main prerogative of experimental twentieth-century music from the *musique concrète* of Pierre Schaeffer to the sonic violence of Japanese noise artist Merzbow. See also Kahn (101–22). Edgar Varèse put it succinctly when he said, "I need an entirely new medium of expression: a *sound-producing* machine (not a *sound-reproducing* one)" (qtd. in Kahn 387 n. 35).

30. Moreover, with Jacques Attali, who attributes prophetic force to music, we may at least "toy with the idea" that "it is no coincidence that Russolo wrote his *Arte Dei Rumori* ("The Art of Noise") in 1913; that noise entered music and industry painting just before the outbursts and wars of the twentieth century, before the rise of social noise" (9).

Chapter 1. The Soundscapes of Naturalism

1. Schafer's book is now most readily available as an identical reprint with a different title: *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (1994).

2. Schafer explains the origin and characteristics of flat-line sounds thus: "The Industrial Revolution introduced another effect into the soundscape: the flat line. When sounds are projected visually on a graphic level recorder, they may be analyzed in terms of what is called their envelope or signature. The principal characteristics of a sound envelope are the attack, the body, the transients (or internal changes) and the decay. When the body of the sound is prolonged and unchanging, it is reproduced by the graphic level recorder as an extended horizontal line. [. . .] The flat continuous line in

sound is an artificial construction. Like the flat line in space, it is rarely found in nature. (The continuous stridulation of certain insects like cicadas is an exception.) Just as the Industrial Revolution's sewing machine gave us back the long line in clothes, so the factories, which operated night and day nonstop, created the long line in sound." (*Tuning* 78)

3. See, for instance, Trachtenberg (142), who suggests that Crane's city sketches share important stylistic features with impressionist paintings. Margot Norris's recollection of being confronted in her reading of *The Red Badge of Courage* with a series of disconnected impressionist images rather than a continuous narrative makes a similar point with regard to Crane's depiction of war (personal communication). Levenson argues both ways when he reminds us that Crane himself was "content with the name of realist" (154) and at the same time makes a case for both Crane and Norris as precursors of modernism in their investigations into human psycho(patho)logy.

4. See also Hofmann, who points out that "noise carries information about its source and producer. The effect of noise on humans is therefore by no means only a question of intensity, but often dependent on the information content of the sound, which is evaluated in multiple ways and hardly measurable" ("Schall" 13; my translation). It should be noted here that Hofmann's concept of "information content" differs from Shannon's.

5. These differences may be culture-specific. Surveys in the 1960s, for instance, have shown that Jamaicans, who were exposed to few technological noises when the surveys were being conducted, were less prone than either Europeans or Americans to complain about traffic noises and more prone to complain about the noises of certain animals (Schafer, *Tuning* 147–48).

6. See also Schafer, who devotes a section of *The Tuning of the World* to "The Deviousness of the Wind" (171–73) and the frightful proportions its noises have acquired in human ears throughout the ages.

7. I am indebted to John Rowe for making me aware of this critical tradition. As Melville makes clear in "Hawthorne and His Mosses" (1850), "landscapes of the soul" may refer to both an internal landscape (the soul as a territory to be explored) and an external one (the landscape as a reflection of the workings of the soul). The first sense is evoked when Melville praises "the enchanting landscape in the soul of this Hawthorne" (338), the second when he marvels at the "orchard of the Old Manse," which "seems the visible type of the fine mind that has described it":

Those twisted, and contorted old trees, "that stretch out their crooked branches, and take such hold of the imagination, that we remember them as humorists and odd-fellows." And then, as surrounded by these grotesque forms, and hushed in the noon-day repose of this Hawthorne's spell, how aptly might the still fall of his ruddy thoughts into your soul be symbolized by "the thump of a great apple, in the stillest afternoon, falling without a breath of wind, from the mere necessity of perfect ripeness"! For no less ripe than ruddy are the apples of the thoughts and fancies in this sweet Man of Mosses. (339)

Although Melville is here referring to the author's soul, we may easily adapt the model to discuss the relationships naturalist writers establish between characters' inner lives and external objects and events.

8. Hence also the appropriateness of the last sound we hear in Norris's *McTeague*. With all principal characters dead or dying, the novel closes with "the half-dead canary chittering feebly in its little gilt prison" (442).

9. See the "Audiographs" section in this chapter for more on Bourdieu.

10. Schafer defines keynote sounds as sounds "which are heard by a particular society continuously or frequently enough to form a background against which other sounds are perceived" (*Tuning* 272). As such, they "help to outline the character of men living among them" (9).

11. One of the reasons for Schafer's neglect of class issues might lie in his humanist outlook, which surfaces most perceptibly in his pronounced distaste for a technocratic world he perceives as dehumanizing. His massive utopian project of redesigning the world soundscape does take into account cultural differences as it traces changes in the acoustic environment all over the planet. Yet its underlying vision of humanity as working toward shared goals in a rational, benign manner—most forcefully expressed in his conviction that educational authorities will sooner or later perceive the value of introducing so-called ear-cleaning exercises in schools—does not allow for much reflection on the fact that those who hold the power to make decisions that will alter the quality of the soundscape (high-ranking municipal and federal officials, airport authorities, CEOs of corporations in the industrial sector) might be the ones who are least likely to be affected by those changes because they can afford to live in areas far removed from airports, highway intersections, or centers of industrial production. Barry Truax, one of Schafer's coworkers on the original World Soundscape Project and himself a prominent figure in soundscape studies, seems more aware of the social divisions of acoustic worlds when he criticizes the criteria used to establish permissible levels of noise in noise-abatement legislation: "the criteria are such that even when their recommended levels are adhered to, they guarantee only *minimal* protection and acceptability for a *certain percentage* of the exposed population. Such criteria simply reflect what the majority can adapt to, and as such they serve to maintain a precariously balanced status quo" (1984, 82). However, Truax only sporadically considers issues of class and does not develop them into a sustained argument. This is also true of the second edition of his book (Truax 2001).

12. Note also that the desire to "go inside" was reinforced at the time of Crane's writing by the introduction of plate-glass shop windows and their display of commodities. Blanche H. Gelfant (180–81) analyzes this structuring of desire in Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*.

13. Truax describes some of the possible psychological consequences of a lo-fi soundscape: "The lo-fi environment [. . .] seems to encourage feelings of being cut off or separated from the environment. The person's attention is directed inwards, and interaction with others is discouraged by the effort to 'break through' that is required. Feelings of alienation and isolation can be the result" (Truax 1984, 20).

14. Compare Crane's and Schafer's descriptions also to those of a southern visitor to the "drinking and dance-houses" of antebellum New York: "There lies a drunken female, screaming and yelling" while men are "cursing and swearing in the most blasphemous manner—a sort of medley which is indescribable" (qtd. in M. Smith 4).

15. We may hear in this passage an echo of one of the senses of noise that had already become obsolete before Crane's lifetime: "A company or band of musicians" (OED).

16. Thanks are due to Laurenz Bolliger, who provided me with this quote.

17. As Kaplan's comments on the ending of the novel reveal, she is using the older edition of *Sister Carrie*, edited by Donald Pizer, rather than the new Pennsylvania edition, which I am using. In the new version, the final scene has Hurstwood gassing himself rather than Carrie thinking her sentimental thoughts in her rocking chair. Kaplan explains her preference for the older edition: "I have chosen to use the edition which was published by Dreiser in 1900 and has been read by readers since then, because I believe that the revisions either made by or authorized by Dreiser are as much a part of Dreiser's final product as is his 'original' draft. As this argument suggests, I think that the deletions show that more is at stake in the 'new edition' than accuracy, but [*sic*] it reflects a longstanding critical desire to recuperate the great American realist, without his embarrassing sentimentality" (181 n. 5). While the greater sentimentality of the older edition certainly strengthens Kaplan's argument, the passages I am discussing appear in both editions, and their differences therefore do not make a difference to my own argument.

18. It should be noted here that, in the introduction to *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism*, Michaels qualifies his assertion that "Carrie's economy of desire involves an unequivocal endorsement of [. . .] the unrestrained capitalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (45). In short, Michaels argues that one cannot really be "for" or "against" capitalism because there is no outside-of-capitalism that would allow for such a position: "It thus seems wrong to think of the culture you live in as the object of your affections: you don't like it or dislike it, you exist in it, and the things you like and dislike exist in it too" (18). Michaels's argument raises interesting epistemological questions but seems to me to demand a radical revision of critical practice only if one has previously assumed that a work of fiction may represent a wholesale rejection or endorsement of a given culture (or even of a given ideological, economic, or political system). This is obviously a view few if any critics would adopt. As my own readings suggest, it is less a question of whether an author or a reader likes a given culture or not than a question of how tensions existing in a given culture are (re)negotiated in the fictional worlds of literary texts produced within that culture.

19. Kaplan (154) wrongly attributes these thoughts to Hurstwood. Her observations concerning Hurstwood's lack of comprehension remain valid nevertheless.

20. Schafer's reminder that Hitler insisted on the crucial importance of the loud-speaker in his 1930s campaign for Germany's political leadership (*Tuning* 91) further attests to the importance of acoustic space and points to the potentially violent nature of its conquest. Barry Truax summarizes the links between power, space, and sound: "The control of spatial communication [. . .] is essential to centralized power and domi-

nation. Therefore, acoustic power, amplified through the loudspeaker, or in the form of any loud sound, is linked to the domination of space” (1984, 13).

21. Schafer uses the term *Sacred Noise* to discuss noises that escape legislative regulation due to their association with powerful social actors or institutions. His discussion touches on the relationship between noise and power:

We have already noted how loud noises evoked fear and respect back to earliest times, and how they seemed to be the expression of divine power. We have also observed how this power was transferred from natural sounds (thunder, volcano, storm) to those of the church bell and pipe organ. I called this Sacred Noise to distinguish it from the other sort of noise (with a small letter), implying nuisance and requiring noise abatement legislation. This was always primarily the rowdy human voice. During the Industrial Revolution, Sacred Noise sprang across to the profane world. Now the industrialists held power and they were granted dispensation to make noise by means of the steam engine and blast furnace, just as previously the monks had been free to make Noise on the church bell or J. S. Bach to open out his preludes on the full organ. The association of Noise and power has never really been broken in the human imagination. It descends from God, to the priest, to the industrialist, and more recently to the broadcaster and the aviator. The important thing to realize is this: to have the Sacred Noise is not merely to make the biggest noise; rather it is a matter of having the authority to make it without censure. Wherever Noise is granted immunity from human intervention, there will be found a seat of power. The noisy clank of Watt’s original engine was maintained as a sign of power and efficiency, against his own desire to eliminate it, thus enabling the railroads to establish themselves more emphatically as the “conquerors.” (*Tuning* 76)

22. This is precisely the specter raised for the lower middle-classes in Marx and Engels’s *Manifesto of the Communist Party*: “The lower strata of the middle-class—the small tradespeople, shopkeepers, and retired tradesmen generally, the handicraftsmen and peasants—all these sink gradually into the proletariat, partly because their diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which Modern Industry is carried on, and is swamped in the competition with the large capitalists, partly because their specialized skill is rendered worthless by new methods of production” (17–18). To account for McTeague’s decline, we would have to add professionalization to Marx and Engels’s scheme.

23. This is the place to regret the absence of a discussion of film in this book. A movie like *Apocalypse Now* (1979) stresses the acoustic dimension of warfare throughout. Think of the opening sequence, where fan fades to helicopter blades or the use of Wagner during the napalm bombing.

24. This acoustic sense is retained in modern German “*bellen*” (to bark) and modern English “to bellow.” Schafer in this context also reminds us of the Nazis converting the bronze of church bells into arms in 1940 (*Tuning* 176).

25. See Picker (“Red War” 1–10) for a fascinating discussion of the musical and acoustic qualities of Whitman’s Civil War poems.

26. Many twenty-first-century readers will also register the similarity between the newspaper's wording and the title of Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929) and, even though Crane could obviously not have been aware of this, will see the first two layers of irony reinforced by what to us may seem like a reference to Remarque's bitterly ironic title. (The original German title, *Im Westen Nichts Neues*, largely lacks the acoustic qualities of the English title but shares its ironic bent).

27. Bruce Smith explains that sounds that “lack locality” (31) are disconcerting primarily because they are hard to make sense of.

28. As Elias Canetti points out, the noises produced by any crowd bent on destruction have the additional function of reinforcing the crowd's identity, particularly in its desire to grow beyond its present size:

It is true that the noise of destruction adds to its satisfaction; the banging of windows and the crashing of glass are the robust sounds of fresh life, the cries of something new-born. It is easy to evoke them and that increases their popularity. Everything shouts together; the din is the applause of objects. There seems to be a special need for this kind of noise at the beginning of events, when the crowd is still small and little or nothing has happened. The noise is a promise of the reinforcements the crowd hopes for, and a happy omen for deeds to come. (19)

We have already encountered such noises on a smaller scale at the beginning of *Maggie*, where Jimmie engages in battle with the clamoring mob of the Devil's Row children. The intimate relationship between a crowd's identity and the noises it produces is not confined to violent packs or crowds. In Crane's “The Monster,” the crowd gathered around the Trescotts' burning house is excited by its own noise to the point where silent deliberation is regarded with suspicion:

The lads hated and feared a fire, of course. They did not particularly want to have anybody's house burn, but still it was fine to see the gathering of the companies, and amid a great noise to watch their heroes perform all manner of prodigies. [. . .] They did not care much for John Shipley, the chief of the department. [. . .] This quiet man, who even when life was in danger seldom raised his voice, was not much to their fancy. Now old Sykes Huntington, when he was chief, used to bellow continually like a bull and gesticulate in a sort of delirium. He was much finer as a spectacle than this Shipley. (82)

According to Canetti, fire itself shares many of the characteristics of the crowd. Its destructive potential, its contagiousness, its propensity to emerge spontaneously and grow insatiably, and its appearance as an undifferentiated mass make fire a crowd symbol. As the citizens of Whilomville gather to watch the spectacle of the burning house, the crowd rejoices in the reproduction of its own image while its noises merge with the noises of the fire “roaring like a winter wind among the pines” (76). Crane anticipates Canetti in yet another way. As John Rowe points out, Crane analyzes how the noises of “rumor, gossip and fantasy contribute to the crowd psychology of scapegoating” (*Literary Culture* 154) as the townspeople exaggerate the monstrosity of Henry Johnson, the black servant whose face is disfigured in the attempt to save Jimmie Trescott. Again,

the noises of the crowd serve to reinforce the crowd's identity, this time by abjecting the racial other.

29. The U.S. Air Force lists twelve different nonlethal weapons based on acoustics. These include acoustic bullets (“High power, very low frequency waves emitted from one to two meter antenna dishes. Results in blunt object trauma from waves generated in front of the target. Effects range from discomfort to death” [Bunker par. 30]); the HPS-1 Sound System (“A 350 watt sound system with an audible voice range of 2½ miles. Used by the military in Indo-China and then supplied to law enforcement. First used by police forces at San Francisco State College and at Berkeley in the 1960s” [par. 35]); and infrasound (“Very low-frequency sound which can travel long distances and easily penetrate most buildings and vehicles. Transmission of long wavelength sound creates biophysical effects; nausea, loss of bowels, disorientation, vomiting, potential internal organ damage or death may occur. Superior to ultrasound because it is ‘in band’ meaning that its does not lose its properties when it changes mediums such as from air to tissue. By 1972 an infrasound generator had been built in France which generated waves at 7 hertz. When activated it made the people in range sick for hours” [par. 36]).

30. Schafer's notion of “Sacred Noise” springs to mind here. See note 21 in this chapter.

31. *Sister Carrie* registers a parallel collapse and inversion within the cityscape when a speechless Carrie is addressed by the seductive voices of commodities: “‘My dear,’ said the lace collar she secured from Partridge’s, ‘I fit you beautifully; don’t give me up.’ ‘Ah, such little feet,’ said the leather of the soft new shoes; ‘how effectively I cover them. What a pity they should ever want my aid’” (98).

32. Carroll W. Pursell traces the origin of the term *military-industrial complex* back to “President D. Eisenhower’s farewell address to the nation in 1961” (1).

33. Adams recognizes and reflects on the new, global role America plays by the beginning of the twentieth century in a chapter aptly entitled “Vis Nova (1903–1904)” (437–47).

34. For a sustained discussion of mythical thought in literature, see Horn.

35. Smith also draws on the work of Vivian Salmon to delineate “the multiple ways in which Native American languages were read in terms of Irish and Irish in terms of Native American languages” (B. Smith 325).

36. The linguistic process of standardization—by which one particular dialect or sociolect is established as the standard language—provides Bourdieu with a good example of how a cultural arbitrary is instituted as a norm that is misrecognized as legitimate both by those who are able to reproduce that norm and those who are not (Bourdieu, *Language* 43–65). Once the standard language has become widely accepted as the legitimate norm, the misrecognition of its legitimacy endows the speaker capable of producing it with prestige, authority, and a sense of distinction.

37. An important theoretical as well as practical feature of these different forms of capital is their mutual convertibility. Economic capital, for instance, can be invested to acquire cultural capital in the form of educational qualifications, which not only

increase one's symbolic capital (prestige) but can also be reconverted into economic capital as they are cashed in on the job market. For a discussion of different kinds of capital and their mutual convertibility, see Bourdieu (*Outline* 179, 183; *Language* 72), Richard Jenkins (84–91), John B. Thompson (14–15), and Ritzer (542–43). Note also that symbolic violence does not have to be based on the unequal distribution of symbolic capital but may involve other forms of capital, cultural or social, as well.

38. Bourdieu's assertion that some ways of speaking are valued more highly than others in the linguistic marketplace hardly breaks new ground, and his distancing from "linguists," who, according to Bourdieu, "merely incorporate into their theory a pre-constructed object, ignoring its *social laws of construction*" (*Language* 44) is an ill-founded attempt to increase his own symbolic profit. In "The Pronouns of Power and Solidarity," Roger Brown and Albert Gilman already in 1960 focused their attention on relations of power embedded in linguistic structures as seemingly insignificant as pronoun choice (French *tu* vs. *vous*, German *Du* vs. *Sie*). Dell Hymes's "Sociolinguistics and the Ethnography of Speaking" (1971) constitutes a sustained critical assessment of and departure from Chomskyan linguistics that antedates Bourdieu's critique of structural linguistics by several years. For the purposes of my own investigations into naturalist soundscapes, the interest of Bourdieu's thoughts on language and symbolic power lies elsewhere.

39. George Ritzer explains that the objectivist position is identified by Bourdieu with "Durkheim and his study of social facts [...] and the structuralism of Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, and the structural Marxists," while the subjectivist position includes "Sartre's existentialism, [...] Schultz's phenomenology, Blumer's symbolic interactionism, and Garfinkel's ethnomethodology" (536). For a discussion of Bourdieu's attempts to overcome the subjectivism-objectivism dichotomy as well as his tendency to privilege the objectivist perspective nevertheless, see Richard Jenkins (66, 90–91); Harker, Mahar, and Wilkes (15); and John B. Thompson (11). Particularly Jenkins remains doubtful whether Bourdieu's work escapes objectivist determinism.

40. Bourdieu puts it thus: "The objective homogenizing of a group or class habitus which results from the homogeneity of the conditions of existence is what enables practices to be objectively harmonized without any intentional calculation or conscious reference to a norm and mutually adjusted *in the absence of any direct interaction* or, *a fortiori*, explicit co-ordination" (Bourdieu, *Outline* 80). It is important to note here that Bourdieu's concept of class differs from that of Marxist theorists in significant ways: "Bourdieu does not define classes in terms of the ownership or non-ownership of means of production [...]. For Bourdieu, classes are sets of agents who occupy similar positions in the social space, and hence possess similar kinds and similar quantities of capital, similar life-chances, similar dispositions, etc." (J. Thompson 30).

41. Bourdieu explicitly treats speech as a form of corporeal behavior: "It is no coincidence that bourgeois distinction invests the same intention in its relation to language as it invests in its relation to the body. The sense of acceptability which orients linguistic practices is inscribed in the most deep-rooted of bodily dispositions: it is the whole body which responds by its posture, but also by its inner reactions or, more specifically,

the articulatory ones, to the tension of the market. Language is a body technique, and specifically linguistic, especially phonetic, competence is a dimension of bodily hexis in which one's whole relation to the social world, and one's whole socially informed relation to the world are expressed. There is every reason to think that, through the mediations of what Pierre Guiraud calls "articulatory style," the bodily hexis characteristic of a social class determines the system of phonological features which characterizes a class pronunciation. The most frequent articulatory position is an element in an *overall way of using the mouth* (in talking but also in eating, drinking, laughing, etc.) and therefore a component of the bodily hexis, which implies a *systematic informing* of the whole phonological aspect of speech. This "articulatory style," a life-style "made flesh," like the whole bodily hexis, welds phonological features—which are often studied in isolation, each one (the phoneme "i," for example) being compared with its equivalent in other class pronunciations—into an indivisible totality which must be treated as such." (*Language* 86)

42. Bruce Smith, who formulates his insights independently of Bourdieu's work, locates the origin of this social mechanism in the early modern period: "In the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries [. . .] bodily control became an ever more visible index of social hierarchy. Etiquette books like Della Casa's *Galateo* are quite explicit on the subject. Along with spitting, snorting, and breaking wind, open laughter became a sign of inferior social status. [. . .] laughter is a matter not only of physiology but of politics" (164).

43. For a more detailed account of linguistic relations of power, see Volker Hinzenkamp's excellent *Interaktionale Soziolinguistik und interkulturelle Kommunikation: Gesprächsmanagement zwischen Deutschen und Türken* (1989), which applies Bourdieu's findings to the study of intercultural communication.

44. Cage describes his experience as follows: "It was after I got to Boston that I went into the anechoic chamber at Harvard University. Anybody who knows me knows this story. I am constantly telling it. Anyway, in that silent room, I heard two sounds, one high and one low. Afterward I asked the engineer in charge why, if the room was so silent, I had heard two sounds. He said, 'Describe them.' I did. He said, 'The high one was your nervous system in operation. The low one was your blood in circulation'" (qtd. in Kahn 190).

45. Bourdieu explains that: "Systematicity is found in the opus operatum because it is in the modus operandi. It is found in all the properties—and property—with which individuals and groups surround themselves, houses, furniture, paintings, books, cars, spirits, cigarettes, perfumes, clothes, and in the practices in which they manifest their distinction, sports, games, entertainments, only because it is in the synthetic unity of the habitus, the unifying, generative principle of all practices. Taste, the propensity and capacity to appropriate (materially or symbolically) a given class of classified, classifying objects or practices, is the generative formula of life-style, a unitary set of distinctive preferences which express the same expressive intention in the specific logic of each of the symbolic sub-spaces, furniture, clothing, language or body hexis." (*Distinction* 173)

46. I consider naturalist fiction a subcategory of realist fiction. This is not to deny that there are significant differences between the aesthetics and politics of, say, a Norris and a Howells, but it suggests that we should discuss those differences against a background of shared formal and thematic concerns that distinguishes most literary works written between the Civil War and the end of the nineteenth century quite radically from modernist preoccupations. Moreover, the achievement of a writer like Crane is brought into sharper focus if we recognize the roots he shares with Howellsian realism along with the differences that have prompted many critics to see an anticipation of modernist concerns and techniques in his writings. Distinguishing sharply between realist writing on the one hand and naturalist writing on the other not only overlooks a shared institutional history but also runs the risk of preempting a discussion of both continuities and discontinuities in literary history.

Chapter 2. The Noises of Modernist Form

1. I am indebted to Hartwig Isernhagen for making me aware of the richness of Russian formalist thought.

2. As Victor Erlich points out with regard to one of Russian formalism's main practitioners: "Jakobson's definition of 'literariness' called attention to what is a crucial element of *any* poetic structure. But it was especially pertinent to a literary situation, where the poet's professed aim was manipulation of the medium rather than representation of reality" (276). Note also that eminent formalist critics like Shklovsky, Jakobson, and Tynjanov were active supporters of the Russian futurist movement in literature.

3. One should be careful not to overstress the Russian formalists' insistence on the autonomy of art, not solely because Marxist-Leninist attacks on formalism's idealist stance—which prepared the ground for the forceful suppression of Russian formalism under Stalin—committed the same error. The following passage from Leon Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution*, first published in 1924, is a case in point: "The assertion of complete independence of the aesthetic 'factor' from the influence of social conditions, as is made by Shklovsky, is an instance of specific hyperbole whose roots, by the way, lie in social conditions too; it is the megalomania of aesthetics turning our hard reality on its head. Apart from this peculiarity, the constructions of the Formalists have the same kind of defective methodology that every other kind of idealism has" (181–82). The formalist position is distorted when it is equated with an insistence on the complete autonomy of art. For instance, in a joint essay published in 1928, Roman Jakobson and Jurij Tynjanov conceive of literature as a system that interacts with other systems. The final of their eight theses states:

A disclosure of the immanent laws of the history of literature (language) allows us to determine the character of each specific change in literary (linguistic) systems. However, these laws do not allow us to explain the tempo of evolution or the chosen path of evolution when several, theoretically possible, evolutionary

paths are given. This is owing to the fact that the immanent laws of literary (linguistic) evolution form an indeterminate equation; although they admit only a limited number of possible solutions, they do not necessarily specify a unique solution. The question of a specific choice of path, or at least of the dominant, can be solved only by means of the correlation between the literary series and other historical events. This correlation (a system of systems) has its own structural laws, which must be submitted to investigation. (80–81)

There are at least two possible readings of this passage. The first would interpret it as an attempt to expand the scope of literary studies by subsuming as much extratextual material as is necessary to retain literary studies as an autonomous discipline that studies the immanent laws of its object(s). This reading would explain Jakobson and Tynjanov's extremely broad application of a systemic perspective to include within a single system not only literature and literary history but also the correlations between literary history and other historical "series." My own reading proceeds along similar lines but emphasizes that, while retaining formalism's scientific impulse, Jakobson and Tynjanov here clearly concede that literature is not a fully closed system but interacts with other systems. It would be wrong to see their explorations into the relationships between literature and extraliterary discourses as a late aberration from formalist principles. Even though their views on the interrelationship between literature and extraliterary facts represented a further move away from too-narrow concepts of the autonomy of literature, an early formalist like Shklovsky was, as we will see below, far less reticent in discussing the social significance and function of literature.

4. Shklovsky's wording is strikingly similar to that of Percy Bysshe Shelley's reflections on art and perception in his "A Defence of Poetry." Though wavering between an ontological and a phenomenological conception of objects (note the "at least"), Shelley already sensed in 1821 that objects do not exist independently of an observer when he wrote: "All things exist as they are perceived; at least in relation to the percipient" (56). What art does to our perception and, consequently, also to the objects of perception, Shelley explains in a way that anticipates Shklovsky's observations by a century: "Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar. [. . .] It creates anew the universe, after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration" (33, 56). By changing our perception of objects, Shelley knew, art does not remain enclosed within an autonomous sphere, but enters into a dialogue with the world out there.

5. As Martin Jay points out in his discussion of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, it is the social uselessness and inaccessibility of modernist art—as opposed to committed art—that enables it to assume a critical distance in the first place: "If there is a positive moment in aesthetic truth, it is evident only in those works that strive for the utmost autonomy from the present society, defying immediate accessibility and popular impact. [. . .] For only in the utter uselessness of such works, which stubbornly resist all attempts to instrumentalize them, is the present domination of instrumental reason defied" (159).

6. As Diana Coole notes, a mimetic dimension is also crucial to Adorno's style of

writing. Rather than classifying its objects from a supposedly objectifying distance, philosophical language should strive to replicate the form of its objects. Hence the oft-noted performativity of Adorno's style (Coole 176–77, 182–84).

7. At least since Adorno, the idea that formal difficulty and stylistic experimentation constitute positive features of modernist texts has informed the work of modernism's advocates to such a degree that Richard Poirier is able to state that "Modernism can be thought of as a period when, more than in any other, readers were induced to think of literary texts as necessarily and rewardingly complicated" (106). It should be noted, however, that Poirier's contribution differs significantly from those of Adorno and others in that it is interested in the difficulty of form per se rather than the relationships between literary form and social function: "modernism is to be located not in ideas about cultural institutions or about the structures of life in or outside literary texts. It is to be found, rather, in two related and historically verifiable developments: first, in the promotion, by a particular faction of writers, of the virtues and necessities of difficulty and, second, in the complicity of a faction of readers who assent to the proposition that the act of reading should entail difficulties analogous to those registered in the act of writing" (Poirier 105).

8. For a similar line of argument, see also Terry Eagleton, who blends the languages of Marxism and Russian formalism when he states that "Modernism is among other things a strategy whereby the work of art resists commodification, holds out by the skin of its teeth against those social forces which would degrade it to an exchangeable object. [. . .] To fend off such reduction to commodity status, the modernist work [. . .] thickens its textures and deranges its forms to forestall instant consumability, and draws its own language protectively around it to become a mysteriously autotelic object" (140).

9. During World War I, Du Pont sold explosives in quantities above a hundred thousand tons per year to America's European allies. Du Pont was the main supplier of explosives, and its profits were enormous: "According to the American statistics, Du-Pont supplied 40% of the total ammunition used by the Allies during the war. At the works the number employed rose from 5,000 to 100,000, while the output of powder rose from 2,500,000 lbs in 1914 to 400,000,000 lbs in 1918. [. . .] Total profits were 266 million dollars" (Lewinsohn 154).

10. Bullock's account is somewhat imprecise because many of the technological developments he lists were made before the 1890s. The typewriter was, for instance, invented in the late 1860s, and plastics were already available in the mid-1800s. Nevertheless, his suggestion that the *impact* of these inventions on large segments of the public began to be felt in the twentieth century remains valid.

11. Geneviève Fabre and Michel Feith's introduction to the collection of essays that features Sollors's article is in many respects closer to my own take on *Cane*:

Cane partakes of the "double-voicedness" of African American literature, which finds its origin and inspiration in Western formal writing as well as in vernacular forms of expression. This ties in with the depiction of the African American "double-consciousness" that W.E.B. Du Bois made in his landmark work *The*

Souls of Black Folks [sic] (1903). Thus, the split in the work parallels that of the writer himself as an heir to more than one culture, several literary traditions, and many “races.” The specificity of *Cane* in the context of the Harlem Renaissance lies in the widening of the split, which evolves into a state of formal fragmentation. The body of the work is “torn asunder” under the pressure of “unreconciled strivings.” Toomer’s book stages a radical breakup of the unifying principle of form. (5–6)

12. George Hutchinson (42) notes Toomer’s familiarity with Du Bois’s writings as well as with the debates between Du Bois and Washington.

13. I am particularly troubled by critics like George Hutchinson, who go to great lengths in their attempts to “rescue” *Cane* from the African-American literary tradition:

although it is entirely fitting to read *Cane* in the context of African American literary tradition—and as one of the most important texts of the Harlem Renaissance—it is important to recognize that Toomer’s relation to that tradition is ambivalent at best and that *Cane* also needs to be read in relation to other traditions and movements. Indeed, it is precisely the ambiguity—and mobility—of Toomer’s “identity” in a society obsessed with clarity on this score that motivated the restless searching through which *Cane* came about, through which Toomer left it behind, and without it there could be no book like it. (54)

14. I am indebted to John Rowe for referring me to Sundquist’s work.

15. See Picker on Colonel Higginson’s desire to “quite literally captur[e] the spirituals” sung by his African-American soldiers “in words” (“Red War” 13) and his attempts “to impose the settled qualities of print on transformative specimens of orality” (14).

16. In Gérard Genette’s terminology, “any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed. [...] The narrating instance of a first narrative is [...] extradiegetic by definition, as the narrating instance of a (metadiegetic) narrative is diegetic by definition” (*Narrative Discourse* 228–29). Janie as narrator of her own life story thus belongs to a different (diegetic) level of narration than the (younger) Janie, who is a fictional character on the metadiegetic level.

17. I am indebted for this type of model to Rosemarie Zeller’s lectures on narratology as well as Gérard Genette’s *Narrative Discourse*. Genette would dispute the existence of the level of implied author/reader.

18. See also Carla Kaplan’s reading of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which focuses on Hurston’s thematization of the promises and failures of conversation, storytelling, and the (erotic) desire to be listened to when one speaks. Kaplan uses the term *erotics of talk* to describe a “signature feature of much so-called minority writing” that “takes the specific shape of heightened desire for an ideal listener, a listener whose existence is passionately desired but doubted at every possible turn. An erotics of talk, in other words, is a figuration for both personal desire and social critique, projecting ‘normative possibilities unrealized but felt in a particular social reality,’ as Iris Marion Young puts it” (70).

19. Otis Ferguson, another early reviewer of Hurston's novel, makes the same point with regard to her rendition of the black vernacular: "To let the really important words stand as in Webster and then consistently misspell no more than an aspiration in any tongue, is to set up a mood of Eddie Cantor in blackface. The reader's eye is caught by distortions of the inconsequential, until a sentence in the supposedly vernacular reads with about this emphasis: 'DAT WUZ UH mighty fine thing FUH you TUH do'" (276). Ferguson's judgment applies to narrative James Weldon Johnson's influential prescription against using dialect in poetry (Gates, "Hurston" 161).

20. As Kadlec (214) duly notes, Henry Louis Gates Jr. was the first critic to credit Hurston with "introducing free indirect discourse into Afro-American narration" (Gates, "Hurston" 175). Kadlec's reading differs from Gates's in that it does not locate her achievement in using free indirect discourse in "resolv[ing] the tension between standard English and Black vernacular" (Gates, "Hurston" 200) but in staging it. In this respect, my own reading is closer to Kadlec's than to Gates's.

21. Dos Passos's employment of racial epithets is not without its problems. In the case of Daughter and the construction boss, the racist remarks are clearly intended to elicit the reader's indignation. Joe Williams's ethnic slurs can largely be explained as a result of the naturalist desire to render working-class speech raw and unfiltered. However, Joe's language use seeps into the narrator's idiom ("the stench of niggerwoman sweat" [21]) to such an extent that we may begin to ask ourselves to what degree Dos Passos's modernist transformation of the naturalist project replaces the (working-class) brute with the racially other as the figure to be cast out.

22. Following a hint in one of Dos Passos's outlines for *The Big Money*, Hartwig Isernhagen in *Ästhetische Innovation und Kulturkritik* distinguishes between "lives, headlines, camera eyes [and] newsreels" (161), arguing that "lives" is more neutral than "fiction" (or my "fictional narrative") because it does not suggest that what I call "fictional narratives" are somehow at the center of the trilogy and that "headline" captures better than "portrait" (or my "biographical sketch") the public status of the figures portrayed. Granted, but I find "headliners" too suggestive of the headlines in the Newsreels and "lives" too neutral because it could equally well apply to the biographical sketches or the fictional narratives.

23. The American historian Philip Jenkins concurs with Henningsen's assessment: "The impact of the war on American domestic life was out of all proportion to its military involvement" (203).

24. Henningsen notes that 337,649 U.S. deserters were registered during World War I. This is a significant number, especially if compared with the approximately 570,000 deserters during the highly unpopular Vietnam War (369).

25. With regard to Dos Passos's own positioning toward these conflicts and debates, it is significant to know that he supported the communist candidate William Z. Foster in the presidential elections that were held the year 1919 was published. Though never a member of the Communist Party, Dos Passos sympathized with its causes and published in the *New Masses* at the time he was writing 1919. His disillusionment with Communist Party politics and eventual embracement of deeply conservative political

views began somewhat later, even though Michael Gold's didactic tone in his 1926 review of *Manhattan Transfer* in the *New Masses*—a journal that was cofounded by Gold—already indicates the rift: “Dos Passos must read history, psychology and economics and plunge himself into the labor movement. He must ally himself definitely with the radical army, for in this struggle is the only true escape from middle-class bewilderment today. That is what I feel” (74). The definitive split was fueled primarily by the communist disruption of a Socialist Party meeting in 1934, the unfavorable reviews for *The Big Money* by leftist critics in 1936, and, most important, the execution of his friend José Robles by communists during the Spanish Civil War. Granville Hicks puts it thus: “Dos Passos in 1932 was closer to communism than he had ever been—and as close as he was going to get” (23).

26. As a driver for the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Service, the Red Cross ambulance corps, and the U.S. Medical Corps, Dos Passos had seen, as he records in one of the journal entries collected in *The Fourteenth Chronicle*, “the grey crooked fingers of the dead, the dark look of dirty mangled bodies,” and heard “their groans & joltings in the ambulance, the vast tomtom of their guns” (qtd. in Nanney 6). While both Dos Passos and Hemingway had more war experience than Crane when he wrote *The Red Badge of Courage*, the fact that both Dos Passos and Hemingway had worked for ambulance services rather than joining combative forces not only reflects their reluctance to participate in the killing but at least partly explains the curious sense of detachment from actual fighting we experience when reading both *A Farewell to Arms* and *1919*.

27. This passage is based on the so-called Centralia massacre, which was provoked by American Legion veterans attacking the IWW hall of Centralia on Armistice Day with the intent of driving the Wobblies out of town. The unionists were expecting the attack and defended themselves, killing four legionnaires in the ensuing confrontation. Wesley Everest, the only unionist victim, was abducted from prison, castrated, and hanged. Centralia's local museum devotes a space of about 1 by 3 yards to document the massacre. The exhibition is placed so inconspicuously that I had trouble finding it at all when I visited the museum in August 2001.

28. See also my discussion of Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* in the previous chapter.

29. Consider also, for instance, the use of loudspeaker propaganda announcements from low-flying planes during World War II and, more recently, in Vietnam, Iraq, Bosnia, and Afghanistan (and Iraq again).

30. I am indebted to Peter Burleigh for drawing my attention to the relevant passage in *Discipline and Punish*. See also Mark M. Smith (112–17) on the regulatory power of bells in and out of prisons.

31. My following observations draw on Alan Sinfield's discussion of common sense as a highly potent form of ideology that derives its explanatory power from acts of repetition. Sinfield uses the term *story*, but the references to the Althusserian understanding of ideology are clear and explicit in other passages of Sinfield's text:

stories are lived. They are not just outside ourselves, something we hear or read about. They make sense for us—of us—because we have been and are in them.

They are already proceeding when we arrive in the world, and we come to consciousness in their terms. As the world shapes itself around and through us, certain interpretations of experience strike us as plausible because they fit what we have experienced already. They become common sense, they “go without saying.” Colin Sumner explains this as a “circle of social reality”: “understanding produces its own social reality at the same time as social reality produces its own understanding.” (24–25)

32. Jill Bondurant’s Web site, “Music of the Great War” (<http://www.melodylane.net/wwi.htm>), features the music and lyrics of some of the better-known patriotic World War I songs, including “America I Love You,” “Keep the Home Fires Burning,” and “Over There,” all of which are reproduced in parts in Dos Passos’s *1919*.

33. This level of analysis, which acknowledges the supreme ideological force of consensual, commonsense understandings (rather than knowledge), is, it seems to me, what is most flagrantly missing from Habermas’s theory of communicative reason, which proceeds on the idealized model of individual subjects communicating with the goal of reaching mutual understanding and does not sufficiently recognize the potential oppressiveness of structures of meaning that exist both above and beneath the level of intersubjective dialogue (Habermas 294–97).

34. Fear works; the current “war on terrorism” provides ample evidence.

35. With regard to the Newsreels, Charles Marz anticipates some of my own arguments in “Dos Passos’s Newsreels: The Noise of History” (1979). But in focusing almost exclusively on the headlines, Marz fails to see the literal implications of his own title and does not proceed to integrate his reading into a discussion of modernist aesthetics.

36. I do not agree with Lisa Nanney’s assessment that “The segments of *U.S.A.* [...] point the reader back to a center, where is located an individual and an artist in the fullness of history” (199). Nanney locates this center in the Camera Eyes and their introduction of an artistic subjective consciousness (197–98). On the contrary, I would argue, their impressionistic quality and stream-of-consciousness technique (which Nanney does acknowledge) significantly contribute to the irreparable fragmentation of Dos Passos’s fictional world. More generally, critics who hierarchize Dos Passos’s four discourses (with the fictional narratives and sometimes, as in Nanney’s case, the Camera Eyes at the center) tend to evade the question of their interrelation and for that reason fall short of the mark. (Isernhagen, *Ästhetische Innovation* 166).

37. The world’s oil fields have, of course, lost none of their geopolitical importance. As I am preparing these pages in March 2003, American forces are attacking Mosul, one of the first targets in the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

38. The motif of the violent machine can be traced back to literature before naturalism. Leo Marx mentions Hawthorne’s sketch of “a malignant steam machine which attacked and killed its human attendants” (“The Machine” 115).

39. In a passage on *Sister Carrie* in his essay on images of the metropolis in modern American literature, Ickstadt offers a cogent analysis of the dialectical relationship between loss of self and experience of personal freedom and opportunity: “When Carrie

arrives in Chicago, all alone and with four dollars in her pocket, when, intimidated, she roams the downtown streets looking for a job, she experiences [...] her own feeling of disorientation and forlornness as the city's secret: herself as nothing in the midst of highrise luxury facades, the stony representatives of impenetrable societal forces. Precisely then, however, does she perceive Chicago as a kaleidoscope of sheer possibility, a fairyland [...] out of *Arabian Nights*" (63; my translation).

40. See also Becker (46) and Lehan (241) for similar assessments.

41. Isernhagen (*Ästhetische Innovation* 137) likewise affirms *Manhattan Transfer's* ambivalence toward the city. He attributes critics' oversight of the positive aspects of city life depicted in Dos Passos's novel to the enormous influence of Leo Marx's pastoral theses and their unequivocal valorization of the garden over the machine (246 n. 4).

42. The ninth thesis of Marinetti's 1909 futurist manifesto is adamantly clear about the movement's glorification of war (as well as its misogynist slant): "We will glorify war—the world's only hygiene—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for woman" (qtd. in M. Norris 48–49). With regard to Russolo, Douglas Kahn tells us that "Although Russolo would eventually become antifascist, during the second decade of this century he was never antiwar" (66). In *1919*, Dos Passos places an ironic comment on the futurist glorification of strength in the mouth of Sardinaglia, the author of "the march of the medical colonels," who mockingly proclaims himself a *futurista*: "A futurist must be disgusted at nothing except weakness and stupidity. [...] A futurist must be strong and disgusted with nothing," he said, still trilling on the mandolin, 'that's why I admire the Germans and American millionaires.' They all laughed" (159–60).

43. The fact that the sleazy lawyer George Baldwin declines to invest in Sandbourne's project (234–35) adds to rather than detracts from the architect's integrity.

44. See also Ickstadt: "Herf's total repudiation of the city cannot be Dos Passos's perspective—how else could he have erected such a great monument to it?" (70; my translation).

45. With Tony Hunter and Warner Jones, both *Manhattan Transfer* and *1919* have a male homosexual character, but one would be hard-pressed to discover much sympathy for them in Dos Passos's novels. His fictional treatment of gays reveals the limits of his compassion. Particularly with regard to *Manhattan Transfer*, I concur with Wendy Steiner's assessment that the book "is full of disgust with sexuality, homosexuality, unwanted pregnancies, and venereal disease" (858).

46. One should use the notion of "the unrepresentable" with care. Unless one wants to reserve the term *representation* exclusively for situations in which there exists (the possibility of) a perfect congruence between the territory and the map, there are few objects that are truly unrepresentable. God and death may come closest to being unrepresentable because few if any have seen the territory and come back to draw the map. In most cases, however, including the abject as well as the horrors of the Holocaust or Hiroshima, one should speak of different degrees of difficulty or of (political, ideological, psychological) resistance to representation. Having said that, I still find that

notions of “the unrepresentable” and “the ineffable” and discussions surrounding these notions can be made useful for a reading of *Nightwood*, and I will continue to use the terms, with appropriate qualifications. My conclusion returns to the question of the representability of noise.

47. See also Jean Gallagher, who argues that Barnes in *Nightwood* challenges and redefines the medical terms *homosexual* and *invert*. With regard to the latter, Gallagher suggests that Barnes expands the concept to cover the visual field: “My suggestion is that in its representation of the ‘inverted’ characters of Robin Vote and Dr. O’Connor, *Nightwood* also attempts to model an ‘inverted’ observer who is, as the etymology of the word suggests, ‘turned in’ to the novel’s visual field rather than occupying a privileged, transcendent, voyeuristic position outside of it, suggesting how, in Kaja Silverman’s words, the eye might be ‘shown to look not from a site exterior to the field of vision, but from one fully inside’” (280–81).

48. See, for instance, Elizabeth A. Meese’s discussion of *Nightwood* and its mixed reception by critics familiar with Radclyffe Hall’s earlier and far less experimental *The Well of Loneliness* (1928).

49. Allen (21–37) reads *Nightwood* as a challenge to Freud’s tendency to equate homosexuality with narcissism. Rereading passages in the novel that seem to conform to this theory (for example, Nora’s repeated assertion that “She is myself” [127]), Allen discovers in *Nightwood* alternative models for lesbian relationships that rupture discourses of narcissism and sameness, particularly that of the mother-child dyad invoked repeatedly by both Nora and O’Connor. Allen summarizes her argument thus: “In using Barnes’s narrative to intervene in Freud’s texts, I am prompted not only by their similar historical moments and the culturally problematic nature of psychoanalytic discourse for women in general and lesbians in particular, but also by the form of *Nightwood*’s narrative. Nora’s retrospective account of her love for Robin both revises the identificatory model that is delineated in Freud’s narratives of male homosexuality and narcissism, and writes the maternal position that is largely absent in his work” (34).

50. Robin’s return to Nora at the end of the novel does not contradict this observation. What returns to Nora is not the object of her representations but a Robin so changed that the continuation of their relationship (and indeed the possibility of human interaction with Robin) becomes doubtful.

51. Baxter is appropriately cautious when he writes that “*Nightwood* is not expressly metafictional. But to a certain extent Matthew O’Connor is” (1186).

52. Victoria L. Smith argues in a similar vein with regard to *Nightwood*’s language of loss: “*Nightwood* is a paradigmatic melancholic text. [. . .] The performance of loss in the excesses of Barnes’s text—its torrential and Byzantine language coupled with its relative unconcern with plot—offers a strategy for recuperating what has been unspeakable, including the woman, and especially the lesbian, subject” (196). However, I would argue that Barnes’s strategy is both one of recuperation and concealment.

53. Anette Bretschneider’s dissertation, *Decadent Djuna* (1997), traces decadent themes and motifs throughout Barnes’s oeuvre.

54. Jane Marcus's reading of *Nightwood* as a text that warns of and speaks out against the rising fascist powers captures this double nature of Barnes's text most clearly:

Using Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, I argue that *Nightwood*, in its original title of "Bow Down" and its continual reference to submission and bowing or lowering of the self, is a study in *abjection*, and that by its concentration on the figure of The One Who Is Slapped, the downtrodden victim, it figures by absence the authoritarian dominators of Europe in the 1930s, the sexual and political fascists. While Kristeva studies abjection as a pathology, I maintain that Barnes' portraits of the abject constitute a political case, a kind of feminist-anarchist call for freedom from fascism. Looking at Nikka's tattoo as a defiance of the Levitical taboo against writing on the body, I see the body of the Other—the black, lesbian, transvestite, or Jew—presented as a text in the novel, a book of communal resistances of underworld outsiders to domination. Its weapon is laughter, a form of folk grotesque derived from Rabelais and surviving in circus. (221)

But while Marcus locates the potential for subversion in Barnes's Rabelaisian humor, my reading situates both the mechanisms of repression and their subversion in the darkness and negativity of her text. For a different perspective, see Kaivola, who stresses the potentially dangerous and politically dubious nature of such a double movement: "With *Nightwood*, Barnes works to find a language capable of breaking through to the other side of culture, to its destruction. Despite the contradictions and collusions in the text, to a great extent she succeeds. But what *Nightwood* simultaneously demonstrates is that it is virtually impossible to use language to represent an alternative that is utopian without partaking in existing, sometimes oppressive cultural configurations" (100).

55. Characters in Barnes's novel are unstable, fragmented, and subject to a sense of continuum and flux. They exemplify a modernist strategy of characterization already outlined by the Swedish dramatist August Strindberg in 1888: "My characters are conglomerations of past and present stages of civilization, bits from books and newspapers, scraps of humanity, rags and tatters of fine clothing, patched together as is the human soul" (qtd. in McFarlane 81).

56. Gisela Ecker points out that *Nightwood* refuses to tell a coherent story and supplants narrative with a veritable flood of images that are no longer decipherable: "Taken together, these images do not—as is otherwise the case with complex metaphors—contribute to acts of signification with a common ground, but distance themselves further and further away from the object they designate; their separate parts hasten away without converging into their point of origin" (153; my translation). For Alan Singer, who, similar to Ecker, discovers in *Nightwood* an "asymmetrical relation between tenor and vehicle" (49) and a rapid dissociation of figural associations from any motivating context, this distancing and displacement presents a radical challenge to the unity of novelistic plot.

57. For an early study that has become something of a classic in the field, see Don Zimmermann and Candace West's study of male interruption patterns in "Sex Roles, Interruptions, and Silences in Conversation" (1975).

58. Bonnie Kime Scott traces a sustained interest in beasts and the blurring of the human-animal boundary throughout Barnes's oeuvre.

Chapter 3. Noise Everywhere: The Postmodern Situation

1. The weakening of historicity, itself but one manifestation of a more general postmodern depthlessness, is for Jameson one of the defining features of postmodernism. He characterizes the postmodern age as “an age that has forgotten how to think historically” (*Postmodernism* ix) in the very first sentence of his book.

2. This impossibility of “pure” critique is also affirmed by “postmodern” theory. It is, for instance, centrally present in Jacques Derrida's assertion that even critiques of metaphysics (such as his own) cannot escape the language and concepts of metaphysics: “*There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to attack metaphysics. We have no language—no syntax and no lexicon—which is alien to this history; we cannot utter a single destructive proposition which has not already slipped into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest*” (“Structure” 226).

3. Hutcheon's general attitude to modernism is hostile. In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, she repeats standard objections to the movement when she writes about “modernism's dogmatic reductionism, its inability to deal with ambiguity and irony, and its denial of the validity of the past” (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 30). Contrary to Hutcheon, I believe that her account of postmodernism as “complicitous critique” is perfectly compatible with a more sanguine view of modernism. I develop this argument in the following pages.

4. Jameson captures the relationship between early postmodernism and the modernism that preceded it accurately when he describes 1960s postmodernism as a reaction against an institutionalized high modernism:

Not only are Picasso and Joyce no longer ugly; they now strike us, on the whole, as rather “realistic,” and this is the result of a canonization and academic institutionalization of the modern movement generally that can be traced to the late 1950s. This is surely one of the most plausible explanations for the emergence of postmodernism itself, since the younger generation of the 1960s will now confront the formerly oppositional modern movement as a set of dead classics, which “weigh like a nightmare on the brains of the living,” as Marx said in a different context. (*Postmodernism* 4)

Hutcheon refers to the same process of institutionalization and domestication when she argues that, in searching for valid models of oppositional artistic practice, postmodernism had to reach back to “modernism's *initial* oppositional impulses” (my emphasis).

5. Note how Jameson in an interview with Anders Stephanson moves from describing postmodernism as a reaction against a specific form of modernism, institutionalized high modernism, to arguing that it constitutes a rejection of “modernist values” *tout court*: “Historically, it *did* begin as a reaction against the institutionalization of modernism in universities, museums, and concert halls, and against the canonization

of a certain kind of architecture. This entrenchment is felt to be oppressive by the generation that comes of age, roughly speaking, in the 1960s; and, not surprisingly, it then systematically tries to make a breathing space for itself by repudiating modernist values. In the literary context, values thus repudiated include complexity and ambiguity of language, irony, the concrete universal, and the construction of elaborate symbolic systems” (Jameson, “Regarding Postmodernism” 3–4).

6. Jameson discusses the question of break or continuity in his introduction to *Postmodernism* (xii–xiv).

7. Whether nonorganic form represents, as Bürger (90–91) argues, an artistic attempt to reintegrate art and life or dissociates, as Adorno has it, the former from the latter in order to critique contemporary conditions of living all the more effectively from a putative outside, remains open to debate. Perhaps the two explanations do not necessarily exclude each other; it may be only in the postmodern era where Adorno’s paradox that “Asociality becomes the social legitimation of art” (*Aesthetic* 234) assumes its full significance. As for a history of adversarial modernism, such a history has yet to be written, but Astradur Eysteinnsson’s *The Concept of Modernism* (1990) would, in its insistence on the adversarial potential of modernist form, serve as a good starting point.

8. The reader is referred to Freese for the most comprehensive treatment of the uses of the second law of thermodynamics in postwar American fiction. His fifth chapter provides a detailed reading of *The Crying of Lot 49*. See also Mangel, Schaub (*Pynchon*), and Slade for other convincing readings of the function of entropy in Pynchon’s novel. My following account of Maxwell’s Demon and the second law relies most heavily on Mangel; Freese; and Bimalendu N. Roy’s *Fundamentals of Classical and Statistical Thermodynamics* (2002).

9. A closed system is defined as a system in which “exchange of energy may occur but no transfer of matter occurs between the system and its surroundings” (Roy 10). One of the standard physics textbooks available at the time of Pynchon’s writing of *The Crying of Lot 49* explains the second law of thermodynamics as follows: “every system left to itself changes, rapidly or slowly, in such a way as to approach a definite final state of rest. This state of rest (defined in a statistical way) we also called the state of equilibrium. Now, since it is a universal postulate of all natural science that a system, under given circumstances, will behave in one and only one way, it is a corollary that no system, except through the influence of external agencies, will change in the opposite direction, i.e., away from the state of equilibrium” (Lewis and Randall 76).

10. See Paulson for a discussion of Maxwell’s Demon as “a theorization of nineteenth-century fantasies—perpetual motion, energy without expenditure, the production of a generalized reservoir” (41–42).

11. At this point, Pynchon’s background as an engineering physics major at Cornell and his work as a technical writer for Boeing Aircraft in Seattle should be mentioned (O’Donnell 3–4).

12. The second half of Mangel’s article goes on to discuss the links between informational and thermodynamic entropy in *The Crying of Lot 49*. Unfortunately, while her

explanation of entropy in the thermodynamic sense as well as her application of the concept to a reading of Pynchon's novel are to the point and convincing (194–200), the latter part of her article suffers from a failure to clearly distinguish between the two notions of entropy. See also Dean A. Ward (25–26) and Freese (523–26) for similar criticisms of Mangel.

13. Stefano Tani, who reads *The Crying of Lot 49* as a postmodern detective novel, likewise stresses the circular structure of the novel: "Oedipa the [. . .] post-modern detective quits sizing up clues and accepts mystery as her story 'ends' as it started, with five words which are also the title. [. . .] Circularity emphasizes the fact that suspense remains" (24).

14. See, for instance, Schaub (*Pynchon*); Seed; Maltby; and O'Donnell.

15. Tony Tanner (63–65), for instance, suggests a reading of the Tristero as an agent of opposition and communicative renewal but at the same time points out the highly ambivalent nature of a network that seems to include the Peter Penguid Society, which only "reveal[s] a pointless secrecy concealing meaningless, 'newsless' repetitions" (65).

16. In a defense of *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie explains why he used the name *Mahound* for the prophet Mohammed. Well aware that "Mahound" is "a medieval European demonization of 'Muhammad,'" Rushdie argues that "Central to the purposes of *The Satanic Verses* is the process of reclaiming language from one's opponent. [. . .] 'Trotsky' was Trotsky's jailer's name. By taking it for his own, he symbolically conquered his captor and set himself free. Something of the same spirit lay behind my use of the name 'Mahound'" (402).

17. In the late 1990s, KCUF returned in the fully commercialized guise of "fcuk," the logo used by the UK-based fashion retailer French Connection UK since 1998. I am indebted to Timothy Grundy for pointing this out to me.

18. For similar readings of W.A.S.T.E., see Seed (148–56) and O'Donnell (1).

19. For discussions of Inverarity's role, see Abernethy (22) and Henkle (104). The ambivalent nature of W.A.S.T.E. and the Tristero becomes clearly apparent once we take a closer look at Inverarity's involvement with them. As one of the major shareholders of the Yoyodyne firm, Inverarity is directly responsible for the suffocating working environment that Koteks, one of Yoyodyne's engineers, talks about. It is entrepreneurs like him who have created environments like San Narciso, which is "less an identifiable city than a group of concepts" (14) and where "address numbers were in the 70 and then 80,000s. [. . .] It seemed unnatural" (15). Oedipa's epiphanic realization toward the end of the novel that "San Narciso had no boundaries" and that Pierce Inverarity's "legacy was America" documents the extent to which his "need to possess, to alter the land, to bring new skylines, personal antagonisms, growth rates into being" (123) have penetrated or, indeed, pierced the country. In such passages, Inverarity becomes a capitalist "founding father" (16) not only of San Narciso but of America as a whole.

The tower Oedipa is entrapped in is not only the solipsistic tower of her mind or the roles (housewife, lover, executrix) that are thrust upon her but also the confines of an all-pervasive and therefore closed capitalist system that demands conformity, stifles creativity, and prevents genuine forms of human communication. Maltby makes the

link between capitalist practices and solipsistic states of mind explicit: “The America of *Lot 49* is an America under the dominion of capital, a social order which is understood to isolate individuals and create self-centered forms of subjectivity which militate against genuine communication and, by extension, against authentic community. The society of *Lot 49* is populated by self-enclosed egos. Images of enclosure abound in the novel; there are repeated references to towers, furrows and cul-de-sacs” (140). This is further emphasized in the novel by the frequent allusions to the Narcissus myth (“San Narciso,” “Echo Motel”). It therefore comes as no surprise that, for the anarchist Jesús Arrabal, Inverarity is “too exactly and without flaw the thing we fight” (83). W.A.S.T.E. is one possible reaction against an America Inverarity has helped to build.

Yet, as Oedipa gradually realizes, “Every access route to the Tristero could be traced also to the Inverarity estate” (117). Paradoxically, Inverarity might even be the originator of the alternative communications system W.A.S.T.E. Up to the very end of the novel, it remains unclear whether Inverarity’s close association with the Tristero exposes the Tristero’s subversiveness as a mere pretense or hoax or whether the association actually manages to redeem Inverarity’s existence and actions. As with so many other characters, situations, and events in *The Crying of Lot 49*, we remain together with Oedipa in the realm of excluded middles.

20. If, as Stanley Koteks explains, Oedipa makes a mistake when she pronounces W.A.S.T.E. “like a word” (*Lot 49* 60) because every letter must be pronounced individually, W.A.S.T.E. is an alphabetism and Koteks is wrong in referring to it as “an acronym” (60), which is defined as “A word formed from the initial letters of other words” (OED). The same applies to D.E.A.T.H. Such blunders on the part of characters associated with the Tristero raise further doubts about the network’s credibility and effectiveness.

21. Shannon and Weaver’s insights can therefore be made fruitful for a reading of *The Crying of Lot 49* not only because Pynchon’s novel is crucially concerned with processes of communication (Oedipa’s initial comparison of San Narciso to the circuit of a transistor radio [14–15] provides the appropriate setting) and because it stages a confrontation between informational and thermodynamic entropy but also because the ambivalent nature of the Tristero and the W.A.S.T.E. system mirrors the ambivalences inherent in Shannon and Weaver’s definition of noise.

22. For McHale, *The Crying of Lot 49* is a modernist text because, in its adherence to the detective story format, it remains interested in the epistemological questions he considers to be at the center of the modernist enterprise (147). Contrary to McHale, I would argue that Pynchon stages a modernist heroine’s frustrated quest for knowledge and truth in a radically indeterminate postmodern world. *The Crying of Lot 49* thus beautifully exemplifies McHale’s own claim that the move from modernism to postmodernism involves a “shift of dominance from epistemology to ontology” (8).

23. For a discussion of proper names in *The Crying of Lot 49*, see also Tanner (57–60).

24. For other critical attempts to establish links between Pynchon’s fiction and poststructuralist theory, see, for instance, Mephram (145, 150), Madsen, and Sherard.

25. Derrida's famous talk "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," from the published version of which this quote is taken, was first given at Johns Hopkins in 1966.

26. Kerry Grant (20 n. 17.17) has also pointed out that, by associating the state-run postal offices with the fierce-looking Uncle Sam posters, Pynchon comments on the oppressive nature of the monopoly W.A.S.T.E. is fighting against.

27. Reed suggests as much in a self-interview that was first published in June 1974: "I wanted to write about a time like the present or to use the past to prophesy about the future—a process our ancestors called necromancy. I chose the twenties because they are very similar to what's happening right now. This is a valid method and has been used by writers from time immemorial. Nobody ever accused James Joyce of making up things. Using a past event of one's country or culture to comment on the present" ("Ishmael Reed" 156–57).

28. In Reed's fictional world, the Jes Grew epidemic subsumes the upsurge of African-American creativity in the 1920s and its return in the 1960s while the Atonist Path comes to stand for a Judeo-Christian tradition perceived as stale and oppressive. As Reginald Martin explains, the word *Atonism* originates "in the worship of the one, true sun-god, Aton of ancient Egypt" (*New Black* 84). Martin goes on to comment that "Atonism" at the same time evokes "atone" and thus a (white) guilt culture from which the adherents of Jes Grew as well as Reed seek to dissociate themselves.

29. See also Neil Schmitz's remark on Reed's manifesto, which at the same time provides a good description of what goes on in *Mumbo Jumbo*: "In the 'Neo-Hoo-Doo Manifesto,' which first appeared in the *Los Angeles Free Press* (September 18–24, 1970), Reed devises a myth that divides history into a war between two churches, two communities of consciousness: the 'Cop Religion' of Christianity and the transformed Osirian rite, Voodoo" (75).

30. See the "Antiphonal Play" section in chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of Baker's notion of the "singing book." Similar to Baker, Henry Louis Gates Jr. reads *Mumbo Jumbo* as a "speakerly text" ("Blackness" 296) akin to Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Schmitz is less optimistic about Reed's success in integrating the oral and the written: "In a sense, the problem with *Mumbo Jumbo* is that it is not mumbo jumbo at all" (81). To me, Schmitz's otherwise brilliant article suffers from a tendency to separate the literary discourse from all other discourses in too strict a fashion. This comes to the fore, for instance, when he writes that, "simply put, the language of music is not the language of literature" (81). To be fair to Schmitz, it must be said that Reed's categorical statements and his claims of having invented a radically new aesthetic, most prominently in the "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto," invite such critiques.

31. Neil Schmitz also notes that Reed "write[s] in the parodic manner of Thomas Pynchon and Donald Barthelme" (70). I will return to the question of parody in Reed below.

32. Some of the most vitriolic early attacks on jazz music associated it with voodoo in order to emphasize its savagism. This excerpt from a 1920 issue of the *Revue Musicale* testifies as much to the writer's racist hatred of black music as to his fear of its social

repercussions: “Jazz is cynically the orchestra of brutes with nonopposable thumbs and still prehensile toes, in the forest of voodoo. It is entirely excess, and for that reason more than monotone: the monkey is left to his own devices, without morals, without discipline, thrown back to all the grooves of instinct, showing his meat still more obscene. These slaves must be subjugated, or there will be no more master” (qtd. in Attali 104).

33. I am indebted to John M. Picker’s *Victorian Soundscapes* for drawing my attention to both the *New York Times* article and William Pietz’s discussion of it in “The Phonograph in Africa: International Phonocentrism from Stanley to Sarnoff.”

34. See Rowe’s *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism* for a sustained discussion of the multiple intersections between U.S. imperialism in the more narrow sense and domestic forms of imperialism centered around race, class, and gender. Rowe’s study focuses on literary culture’s (often deeply problematic) interventions in those configurations and processes.

35. Reginald Martin suggests that the burning of the book by a black man also “takes another stab at the new black aesthetic critics, such as Gayle, Houston Baker, and Amiri Baraka, who had the chance to codify Afro-American tradition, but who, in Reed’s eyes, failed because their perceptions were too narrow and because their standards were at least partly set by training in white universities, which caused them to ignore important parts of Afro-American tradition” (*New Black* 92). Reed and the new black aesthetic critics have denounced each other publicly and aggressively in essays, articles, interviews, and books. Reed more specifically criticizes what he perceives as those critics’ socialist bent, their rigid standards of evaluation, as well as Baraka’s black nationalist rhetoric. Martin (*New Black* 25–62) provides a good overview of the debates.

36. *Mumbo Jumbo*’s eclectic mix also illustrates “the effacement [. . .] of the older (essentially high-modernist) frontier between high culture and so-called mass or commercial culture” (*Postmodernism* 2) that Jameson considers to be one of the defining features of postmodernism. While Jameson tends to regard this erasure of boundaries as another symptom of the further encroachment of the logic of late capitalism upon the cultural sphere, Andreas Huyssen reminds us that the dissolution of a strict distinction between high and low may serve a specific purpose for minority artists: “it is precisely the recent self-assertion of minority cultures and their emergence into public consciousness which has undermined the modernist belief that high and low culture have to be categorically kept apart; such rigorous segregation simply does not make much sense within a given minority culture which has always existed outside in the shadow of the dominant high culture” (194).

37. Parody is often regarded as a ludic form, a comic and distorted imitation of literary and stylistic conventions. As such, parody is said to foreground linguistic playfulness at the expense of more serious concerns. Accordingly, the *Bloomsbury Guide to English Literature* (1989) situates parody in opposition to serious literary works in its definition of the term as “A literary form which constitutes a comic imitation of a serious work, or of a serious literary form” (783). Likewise, Gérard Genette in *Palimpsestes*

discusses parody as a ludic genre and distinguishes it from both satiric and serious [*sérieux*] reworkings of earlier texts. But parody is never a total negation of a previous text and always retains some of the model's thematic and formal concerns. Parody both affirms and negates what it imitates.

In distinguishing parody from pastiche, Jameson equally acknowledges the relative “seriousness” of parody: “Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody’s ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. Pastiche is thus blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs” (*Postmodernism* 17).

38. For a discussion of oppressed subjects’ need to both contest essentialisms and occasionally use them strategically, see Elizabeth Gross’s interview with Gayatri Spivak in *Thesis Eleven* (Spivak).

39. Similar ambivalences also attach themselves to the historical Black Herman, who was practicing as a magician in the 1920s and became “the most famous black magician in American history” (Early 235). As such, he is both something of a black culture hero and a fraud.

40. As Gates argues, the main protagonist’s name already signifies indeterminacy: “As I have shown, the name ‘LaBas’ is derived from Èsù-Elégbára. The Yoruba call Èsù the god of indeterminacy (*àriyémuyè*) and of uncertainty” (“Blackness” 312).

41. Mason’s critique of Gates has its own problems, the most obvious being his uncritical endorsement of Lukács’s (by now seriously dated) pronouncements on the historical novel. Linda Hutcheon’s *The Politics of Postmodernism* and *A Poetics of Postmodernism* make a convincing case for the inapplicability of traditional notions of the historical novel to postmodern “historiographic metafiction.” See also the beginning of this chapter.

42. One could, I think, construct the argument that Gates loses sight of the critical potential of parody because he aligns it all too quickly with a notion of play. Note, for instance, his threefold repetition of “play” in the following passage: “It is indeterminacy, the sheer plurality of meaning, the very play of the signifier itself, which *Mumbo Jumbo* celebrates. *Mumbo Jumbo* addresses the *play* of the black literary tradition and, as a parody, is a *play* upon that same tradition” (“Blackness” 313). Moreover, I would argue that essentialist notions of blackness are not only the object of Reed’s critique in *Mumbo Jumbo* but, paradoxically, also one of its devices. Gates’s analysis of Reed’s critique therefore falls short of the mark:

Both Ellison and Reed, then, critique the received idea of blackness as a negative essence, as a natural, transcendent signified; but implicit in such a critique is an equally thorough critique of blackness as *presence*, which is merely another transcendent signified. Such a critique, therefore, is a critique of the structure of the sign itself and constitutes a profound critique. The Black Arts Movement’s grand gesture was to make of the trope of blackness a trope of presence. That

movement willed it to be, however, a transcendent presence. Ellison's text for today, the "Blackness of Blackness," [...] analyzes this gesture, just as surely as does Reed's Text of Blackness, the "sacred Book of Thoth." In literature, blackness is *produced* in the text only through a complex process of signification. There can be no transcendent blackness, for it cannot and does not exist beyond manifestations of it in specific figures. Put simply, Jes Grew cannot conjure its texts; *texts*, in the broadest sense of this term (Parker's music, Ellison's fictions, Romare Bearden's collages, etc.), conjure Jes Grew. ("Blackness" 315–16)

43. Hutcheon's affirmation of the critical function of parody is a common thread running through her two books on postmodernism. In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, she writes:

We have seen that what both its supporters and its detractors seem to want to call "postmodernism" in art today—be it in video, dance, literature, painting, music, architecture, or any other form—seems to be art marked paradoxically by both history and an internalized, self-reflexive investigation of the nature, the limits, and the possibilities of the discourse of art. On the surface, postmodernism's main interest might seem to be in the processes of its own production and reception, as well as in its own parodic relation to the art of the past. But I want to argue that it is precisely parody—that seemingly introverted formalism—that paradoxically brings about a direct confrontation with the problem of the relation of the aesthetic to a world of significance external to itself, to a discursive world of socially defined meaning systems (past and present)—in other words, to the political and the historical. (22)

While I fully agree with her thoughts on parody, I find that her reading of Reed's parodic imagination repeats Gates's mistake of overlooking the ways in which essentialism, too, becomes a strategic and critical tool in Reed's hands. This, I would suggest, is what one discovers when one takes a closer look at Reed's assertion of racial difference, a trait of his fiction that does not escape Hutcheon:

Ishmael Reed's consistently parodic fiction clearly asserts not just a critical and specifically American "difference" but also a racial one. And, on a formal level, his parodic mixing of levels and kinds of discourse challenges any notion of the different as either coherent and monolithic or original. It draws on both the black and white literary and historical narrative traditions, rewriting Hurston, Wright, and Ellison as easily as Plato or Eliot [...] while also drawing on the multiple possibilities opened up by the folk tradition. Reed is always serious, beneath his funny parodic play. It is this basic seriousness that critics have frequently been blind to when they accuse postmodernism of being ironic—and therefore trivial. The assumption seems to be that authenticity of experience and expression are somehow incompatible with double-voicing and/or humor. (*Poetics* 134)

In the light of Reed's deeply essentialist pronouncements in his "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto," a reading of *Mumbo Jumbo* that emphasizes only Reed's challenges to essentialist thinking seems untenable to me.

44. For an inspired rebuttal of Bawer and like-minded conservative critics of DeLillo, see Crowther.

45. In fact, Charles J. Sykes's description of the continuing expansion of the surveillance society in *The End of Privacy* (1999) makes Jack's worries seem rather harmless. Sykes (25–30) provides a list of the data items that a single individual sitting at his computer can find out about another individual within a few hours and at little expense. These include the other's occupation, her car brand, the name and age of her spouse and children, the value of her house, the taxes she pays, the demographics of her neighborhood, her stock, bond and mutual-fund records, her Social Security number (available for \$30), her credit-card number (\$450), her bank balance (\$200), telephone records (\$80–\$200), credit report (\$75), and medical history (\$400). And this does not include invasions of privacy on a far larger scale by companies like Microsoft or government agencies such as the CIA or NSA (which are also discussed by Sykes). It is only the information one citizen can, with the readily available help of Internet sleuths and information brokers, gather about another citizen with a minimal amount of effort and money.

46. For an excellent Heideggerian reading of the novel's technology critique, see Michael Valdez Moses's "Lust Removed from Nature" (1991). Moses suggests that DeLillo's critique focuses less on the deleterious effects of technological machinery on the human mind and body than on the harmful dominance in postmodern culture of a technological mindset. Modern technology not only challenges nature so as to transform it into a standing-reserve (*Bestand*). Ironically, once humankind has brought large parts of nature under its control through the challenging revealing of technology, technology turns back upon human beings, challenging them to challenge nature. In the process, human beings themselves become reified as a standing-reserve. Heidegger regards this process, by which human beings are caught up in a technological framework as they seek to impose it on nature, as the essence of modern technology and calls it "enframing."

For Heidegger as for Moses, the chief danger of enframing is that it imposes an inauthentic existence on us, an inability to "experience the call of a more primal truth" (Heidegger 28). In Heidegger's existentialist philosophy, this "more primal truth" is the fact of human finitude. Technology, then, alienates us from the experience of our own mortality. And this is precisely the analysis of technology offered by DeLillo in *White Noise*. Murray's assertion that "technology [...] creates an appetite for immortality" (68) is borne out by the mass media, whose endless representations of disasters in remote areas create the impression that death is something that happens to others and lead Jack to pronounce in the face of a massive toxic spill in his immediate neighborhood that "That's for people who live in mobile homes out in the scrubby parts of the country, where the fish hatcheries are" (117); it is borne out by modern medical technology, whose computerized representations of disease and dying "mak[e] you feel like a stranger in your own dying" (74); and it is borne out most obviously by Dylar, that "interesting piece of technology" (187) that promises to eliminate the fear of death. Moses concludes that "white noise serves," among other things, "as DeLillo's meta-

phor for the way in which technology covers over an existential perception of finitude” (81).

47. See also the collection of essays *Paranoia within Reason* (1999), edited by George E. Marcus, for a variety of accounts of paranoia that are also nonpathologizing. In his introduction, Marcus describes paranoia as a cultural symptom rather than a psychological pathology. Marcus traces the prevalence of paranoia as a mode of explanation in contemporary America to two different historical sources: the legacy of “decades of paranoid [Cold-War] policies of statecraft and governing habits of thought” that “define a present reality for actors in some places and situations that is far from extremist, or distortingly fundamentalist, but is quite reasonable and commonsensical” (2–3), and the corrosion of sense-making metanarratives and the ensuing postmodern form of a crisis of representation, which creates “an impulse to figure out systems, now of global scale, with strategic facts missing that might otherwise permit confident choices among competing conceptions” (4). In the late twentieth century, Marcus concludes, paranoia can no longer simply be dismissed as a deluded aberration from rational principles but should be acknowledged and studied “as a ‘reasonable’ component of rational and commonsensical thought and experience in certain contexts” (2).

48. See Kerridge (190–92) for a Kristevan reading of this passage as staging the return of the repressed and abjected.

49. Paranoia in this sense is a form of cultural critique that follows Noam Chomsky’s insight that institutional analysis is dismissed as conspiracy theory primarily by those who consider our institutions to be fundamentally and inherently just (Melley 16).

50. Jack’s division of acoustic space along the line of social class is also a social reality. As Henrik Karlsson points out: “More and more, the acoustic environment is becoming a question of power, and of money with which to buy silence. More and more it is becoming a matter of luxury consumption, perverted forms of which also afflict the poor. In the big cities of Central Europe, the areas located nearest to railway lines and motorways are inhabited by the poorest—immigrants and dropouts—because the noise there makes flats less attractive and, consequently, cheaper” (11).

51. This connection between social distinction and a sense of security is crucial to Jack’s professorial self-fashioning. This emerges most clearly in Jack’s mental reply to the SIMUVAC employee’s ominous suggestion that Jack’s exposure to Nyodene D. constitutes a serious health hazard: “I wanted my academic gown and dark glasses” (142).

52. Steven Connor makes an interesting comment on sirens that is pertinent to my discussion of *White Noise*:

Strange that the word we use for a sound that cannot and must not be ignored derives from a myth of a sound that must be resisted. Strange, but also appropriate, since ours is a world that is full of ignored unignorability. We are all tied to the mast of indifference and disregard. The care taken to make sirens unignorable is matched by the slowly and carefully learned capacity of the city-dweller to filter them out. Alarms strive to nullify this auditory anaesthesia. But there is

always a cost. Perhaps what is most stressful about a world full of alarms is the generalisation of a readiness to act which does not find adequate discharge in action. (pars. 30–31)

Connor here touches on the problem of listener desensitization in lo-fi soundscapes that is also discussed in chapter 1 of this book.

53. For a discussion of the physical properties of flat-line sounds, see the beginning of chapter 1 and note 2 of that chapter.

54. “Panasonic” was one of DeLillo’s working titles for the novel (LeClair 230). He decided to drop it because of copyright infringement issues.

55. See also DeLillo’s more recent *The Body Artist* (2001), in which a seemingly insignificant noise announces the mysterious man who will bring change and motion into the body artist’s life (18, 40).

56. This is also Arnold Weinstein’s argument, whose description of the feel of DeLillo’s writing closely resembles LeClair’s: “DeLillo is the metaphysician of the kitchen and the breakfast room, the poet of fast food. [...] There is something literally wonderful about this kind of writing, a kind of conceptual generosity that restores our doings to light and language, brings awe back to the world” (299).

57. See Ferrard for an analysis of consumption in *White Noise* as the main source of the Gladney family’s unity.

Conclusion

1. The *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* is a high-quality Swiss daily that is read beyond the borders of Switzerland. It is neoliberal in economics and national politics, progressive in culture, and an excellent source of news on foreign affairs (not only but also because its evaluations of U.S. foreign policy present a healthy alternative to the hawks’ view of, say, *Foreign Affairs*).

2. See Ong for a wide-ranging study of the shift from orality to literacy.

3. This view of communication also informs Shannon’s notion of information as selection. Budick and Iser put it thus: “The modern coinage *negativity*, or some equivalent means of eschewing indicative terminology, becomes inevitable when we consider the implications, omissions, or cancellations that are necessarily part of any writing or speaking. These lacunae indicate that practically all formulations (written or spoken) contain a tacit dimension, so that each manifest text has a kind of latent double. Thus, unlike negation, which must be distinguished from negativity, this inherent doubling in language defies verbalization. It forms the unwritten and unwritable—unsaid and unsayable—base of the utterance” (xii).

4. Diana Coole notes that all thinking about negativity is informed by an irreducible paradox, for “as soon as we think it, it ‘is.’” She calls this “the aporia of negativity” (46).

5. Note that Budick and Iser are at pains to distinguish their notion of negativity from Adorno’s (xiii). For reasons touched upon in various parts of this book, I believe that they share more than either side would (have) be(en) prepared to admit.

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