Marshall Plan Metropolises: The Transatlantic City in Postwar American Fiction

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores Cold War U.S. fiction’s complex engagement with a nascent culture of state-based foreign aid inaugurated by the Marshall Plan. Marshall Plan funds exceeded all previous U.S. overseas aid combined, establishing a precedent for subsequent Cold War foreign assistance projects like Truman’s Point Four program. The authors treated in my project—Joseph Heller, William Faulkner, James Baldwin, and Paule Marshall—reformulate the unique affective and social technology of Cold War compassion associated with Marshall Plan aid to postwar Europe. In their texts, the Marshall Plan subtly configures imaginings of distant, needy others on the part of an affluent America but also reveals the tolls of conditional giving—the exactions made by foreign aid that arrives with twinned humanitarian and geopolitical, expressly anticommunist aims.

However, the Marshall Plan, by framing a unique relationship between U.S. money and destroyed European cities in these texts, also acts as a fulcrum upon which American authors imagine U.S. urban decline through the war-torn cityscapes of Western Europe. *Marshall Plan Metropolises* thus also revises scholarly accounts of Cold War
U.S. culture by arguing that the literature of America’s postwar “urban crisis” can only be fully understood when read against European wartime urban annihilation. By intertwining programs of U.S. governmental support for urban restructuring on both sides of the Atlantic, the dissertation reimagines both money-saturated scenes of compassion in U.S. Cold War fiction and literary depictions of “urban renewal” of the time.

Chapter one argues that Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22* conceives of “reconstruction” across both time and space, linking the shattered infrastructure and political community of World War II Rome to the fraying seams of U.S. Cold War urbanity. Chapter two asserts that William Faulkner’s post-WWII corpus locates at the heart of Cold War political-discursive formations a complex relationship between geography, architecture, and sound, disclosing strategies for imagining political collectivities in spaces of ruin. Chapter three musters an unconventional reading of James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room* as a text that meditates upon the singular affective, ethical, and geopolitical complexities of American tourism during the high Cold War. Finally, chapter four explores how Paule Marshall’s *Brown Girl, Brownstones* elaborates a triangulated spatial sphere encompassing America, war-wracked Europe, and “third world” Barbados, staging a distinctly Cold War mode of *bildungsroman* that critiques U.S. rhetorics of “freedom” and “modernization.”
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Introduction: Marshall Plan Metropolises

In her seminal work of U.S. urban planning *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs casts domestic municipal policy in revealingly transnational terms. Referencing blighted East Harlem’s longstanding poverty, she notes that “eventually, much as the generosity of a rich nation might well extend massive aid to a deprived and backward country, into this district poured massive ‘foreign’ aid, according to decisions by absentee experts from the remote continent inhabited by housers and planners” (307). Published in 1961, Jacobs’s remarks infuse U.S. planning discourse with a narrative of urban experience developed in the Cold War by some of her country’s major novelists—a narrative that, this dissertation asserts, is both unthinkable in U.S. culture before 1945 and now pervasive in contemporary imaginings of U.S. city life. This narrative is not simply that of viewing certain urban sites as distinct countries (a notion captured a year after Jacobs in James Baldwin’s 1962 novel *Another Country*) but rather of envisioning U.S. urban redevelopment through the lens of extensive post-WWII programs of U.S. foreign aid like the Marshall Plan. *Marshall Plan Metropolises: The Transatlantic City in Postwar American Fiction* charts transnational circuits of U.S. urbanity as imagined by four authors—Baldwin, Joseph Heller, William Faulkner, and Paule Marshall—who variously install processes of domestic urban renewal within the logics of “modernization” and “development” that undergirded U.S. foreign aid of their time. Where Jacobs likens the “cataclysmic money” of urban renewal programs to foreign aid for ruined spaces whose “barbarism” recalls a warzone, these authors refashion a familiar city trope—the destroyed inner city as proto-battleground—to the
particular historical circumstances of their time (303, 33). In so doing, they redevelop American urban fiction for an age of renewed geopolitical engagement by their country following the isolationism of the interwar years. In the texts of what I call “Marshall Plan fiction,” tools of U.S. Cold War foreign aid frame a unique relationship between American money and destroyed European cities, catalyzing a spatial imagination that refracts U.S. urban decline through the war-torn cityscapes of Western Europe awaiting U.S.-backed reconstruction.

The textual worlds of Marshall Plan fiction yoke together domestic and international processes of reconstruction in registering the effects and affects of government-funded spatial upheaval. Domestically, America’s postwar urban fabric was reshaped by governmental programs like the 1949 Housing Act (which funded slum clearance and created the Federal Housing Administration) and the 1956 Federal-Aid Highway Act (which created the interstate highway system, thereby enabling suburbanization). These and other legislative measures addressed (and in some cases exacerbated) a growing sense of “crisis” in U.S. urbanism. As Robert Beauregard attests, “after World War II, the large industrial cities of the United States entered a period of profound collapse. Factories closed and manufacturing jobs disappeared. Local tax revenues plummeted and governments faced bankruptcy. Slums and blight engulfed retail districts and neighborhoods alike” (vii). Beauregard’s terms emphasize the twinned

1 That Jacobs’s image of urban renewal funds as foreign aid references the Marshall Plan in particular in Death and Life is bolstered by her evident fascination with it in later work. For instance, in Cities and the Wealth of Nations (1984), she explores how aid programs to “backward” countries (echoing Death and Life) in the postwar period were frequently modeled, often foolishly so, on the Marshall Plan: “The Marshall Plan was seized upon as a demonstration that aid could metamorphose stagnant economies into developing, self-generating economies. Promising exactly that, national and international aid and development agencies proliferated amazingly, often enough describing their purposes in a catchy way as Marshall Plans for the Third World, Little Marshall Plans, or programs to Do What the Marshall Plan Did” (8).
collapse of economies (closed factories) and physical infrastructure (blighted buildings) whose European counterparts U.S. foreign aid sought to remedy. The writerly act of comparing decaying U.S. urban space to a war zone, even if only through indirection, thus assumes in the high Cold War unprecedentedly layered weight, suturing together across the Atlantic spaces of ruin based upon their fictively allied modes of reconstruction.

My gathered authors, in imaginatively “reconstructing” urban life through the prism of literary prose, craft cities that have so far escaped attention in our major studies of American urban literature. While recent works like Carlo Rotella’s *October Cities* and Thomas Heise’s *Urban Underworlds* have masterfully explicated the poetics of renewal within the genre, they have done so primarily within the frames of *domestic* social, political, and economic life. Resituating the American city within a *transnational* frame unearths for us a new set of stories about its literature. While scholarship that reads literary representations of urban life in transnational terms usually does so by reference to global flows of capital and labour tied to neoliberal globalization, *Marshall Plan Metropolises* considers urban space as it is made transnational by infusions of government-directed aid rather than by free-market capital. That is to say, while we are perhaps by now familiar with city images that emphasize their nodal status amid transnational networks of mobile capital, less familiar (yet equally compelling) is the transnational urbanism expressed in Marshall Plan fiction: an urbanism that sees the city as traversed not only by the money of free-market capital but also by government funds in service of discrete policy aims. This distinction matters, since public imaginings of urban change turn in part upon the source of money (and motives) that propels it.
Although private and state capital clearly operate in tandem in many facets of urban upheaval, our affective relationship to changes in physical urban infrastructure (Rotella’s “city of facts”) as they take form in urban cultural representations (the “city of feeling”) shifts with our sense of whether urban change occurs for private profit, public betterment, or some blend of the two. If the Marshall Plan (and cognate Cold War foreign aid programs) arguably advanced U.S. state initiatives that were congruent with those of free-market capitalism, the texts treated in Marshall Plan Metropolises nevertheless render literary cities whose transnational valences lie in capital flows routed through the ostensibly public interests of government funding, threading through their representations of transatlantic urban “reconstruction” more expansive questions of how “American” identity is configured and deployed in “underdeveloped” spaces. Reading city space in postwar U.S. fiction through transatlantic geopolitics reveals new affective engagements with cities reshaped beneath the imprimatur of the “American interest.”

But if this dissertation urges us to consider Cold War American literature’s fascination with the politics and aesthetics of foreign aid projects like the Marshall Plan, what cultural valences did and does the Marshall Plan carry? To elucidate how postwar U.S. fiction fashions a spatial imaginary shaped by programs of international development is to evoke the Marshall Plan’s tangled, conflicting resonances for Americans both then and now. For instance, politicians and historians commonly invoke the Marshall Plan as a model for guiding countries away from state economic intervention and towards systems of globalized free-market capitalism; yet the Plan itself arose from and championed a notion of state planning now widely disparaged in U.S. political discourse. Likewise, while it was a “a major foreign policy departure for the
U.S.,” its aid totaling “more than all previous U.S. overseas aid combined,” its ultimate role in Europe’s economic recovery has nevertheless since been downplayed by many economic historians (Judt 2). Furthermore, the Marshall Plan has been touted as The Most Noble Adventure (to cite Greg Behrman’s 2007 book) but also exposed (by scholars like Sallie Pisani and Frances Stonor Saunders) as a funding tool for covert CIA operations and U.S. propaganda dissemination. But perhaps the most salient story of the Marshall Plan in cultural criticism involves casting it as an instrument for “Americanization” and the concomitant spread of free-market capitalism in Western Europe. In this vein, Victoria de Grazia describes it as a “bearer of new ways of thinking about producing affluence” such as Fordist modes of production (338); Richard Pells notes that Marshall Planners “sought not just the resurrection of capitalism in Western Europe, but the adoption of economic practices that were quintessentially American” (54); and David Alworth notes that only during the Marshall Plan era did France witness the arrival of “American-style supermarkets” (301). These economic outcomes themselves carried complex political and social connotations for U.S. citizens as they learned to view their cultural production as that of a country newly dubbed a global “superpower.”

Yet all these narratives, in expressing the Marshall Plan’s decidedly conflicting resonances in our cultural imagination, illuminate an animating tension of Marshall Plan fiction. This tension involves how we understand the impetus of U.S. aid, as well as its underlying affects: to what extent can aid be given selflessly, altruistically, out of purely humanitarian concerns? On the other hand, what ethical concerns redound upon the aid-giver who helps the needy recipient only under certain conditions? Do emotional
consequences attend the event of aid-giving for both donor and recipient if such aid is conditional? And if so, if aid is given only with the expectation of change on the recipient’s part, is such aid necessarily (if only tacitly) violent? While these questions arise most directly in chapter three, on James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*, they underpin the dissertation as a whole, positioning the “Marshall Plan” within Marshall Plan fiction not as an explicitly mentioned narrative object—indeed, none of my selected novels directly addresses it—but rather as an absent presence that crystallizes an orientation shared by these novels towards U.S. foreign affairs, urbanism, and national identity.

American identity in these novels is continually reconstituted through encounters with cultural others—those beyond normative “American” identity, whether within or outside U.S. borders—whose “development” is guided through governmental aid spurred by a complex admixture of generosity and calculation. Transfers of money—and, concomitantly, culture and values—to spaces of reconstruction condense impulses of selfless giving and instrumentality epitomized most prominently in this period by the Marshall Plan itself. What I call Marshall Plan fiction thus renders the precarious balance of altruism and conditionality underlying aid to “underdeveloped” spaces in Europe and inner-city America in order to register transformations of “American” identity as that identity inflects the Cold War’s unprecedentedly widespread programs of spatial reconstruction.

As only literature can, my selected works elaborate the fraught, complex affective relations entailed by such encounters between aid-giver and aid-recipient. These relations as they emerge in the novels are best described as moments of “compassion.” By “compassion,” a term colloquially used to describe impulses of sympathy felt towards
a needy other, I deliberately evoke the term’s theorization by Lauren Berlant, who lucidly untangles its surprisingly messy politics. For Berlant, compassion, rather than being an authentic emotion, is “a social and aesthetic technology of belonging” that involves both a spectator and sufferer in conventions of sympathy that call on the (always privileged) spectator to ameliorate the suffering they witness (5). In this way compassion emerges as an always hierarchical “emotion in operation” that depends upon a distance both spatial and material between gazer and object across which feelings travel (4). All four of my authors literally render such distances between subjects in order to gauge the feelings that flow across them, whether it is Heller’s Yossarian gazing upon a bloodied Roman corpse, Faulkner’s unnamed narrator imagining Cecelia Farmer across a vast temporal expanse, Baldwin’s David wincingly observing Giovanni’s downfall, or Marshall’s Selina imagining her father Deighton’s death before a coin-like sun.

What charges the feelings that traverse these distances with unusual geopolitical weight is an aspect often occluded from our everyday notions of compassion: what Berlant describes as its lack, a lack produced by our withholding of it. Describing compassion’s lack as “an aversion to a moral claim on the spectator to engage, when all the spectator wants to do is to turn away quickly and harshly,” Berlant argues that our sense of compassion, rooted in an ability to measure the pain we see before us, entails also a sense of stinginess, a lack of care, a capacity to care only under certain conditions (10). As my selected novels produce and negotiate a network of distances—between privileged and needy characters; between differentially “developed” geographical spaces across national and urban boundaries; between a novelistic diegetic world and the world of the reader—they stage encounters each of which holds the possibility of either
compassion or compassion’s refusal. In this way each deploys the techniques of fiction to foster and then defamiliarize the affects associated with large-scale schemes of “aid” between the U.S. government and needy spaces and peoples within and beyond the nation-state. In so doing, moreover, each self-consciously positions itself within a particular social sphere in which dominant imaginings of ruination and aid are structured through other media like journalism, television, radio, and film. After all, as Berlant notes, Americans, both now and in the early Cold War, most often encounter the pain of others through mass media (4). Marshall Plan fiction likewise reflects on the capacity of mass media to structure widespread “national” affects and thereby generate publics based on shared sentiment.

The novels studied in Marshall Plan Metropolises, ever self-reflexively attentive to their own public-forming powers, query the psychic structures underpinning Marshall Plan aid as such aid was unveiled to the public in General George C. Marshall’s famous 1947 Harvard convocation address. Before turning to the novels themselves, then, it is crucial to explore this speech, which mobilizes and renders historically significant the complex affective states engaged by Heller, Faulkner, Baldwin, and Paule Marshall. Taken together, the novels I present as Marshall Plan fiction disentangle the braided impulses of altruism and instrumentality underpinning the sales plan presented in this speech for the foremost project of U.S. Cold War foreign aid. Yet they also illuminate unexplored dimensions of the compassion taken in this speech to structure public feelings towards needy others. The Marshall Plan emerges in its inaugurating speech as an outgrowth of proper public feelings—for the people to reject it, General Marshall opines, is to succumb to “a passion or a prejudice or an emotion of the moment” (qtd. in Agnew
and Entrikin xvi). However, this boundary between proper, socially acceptable (humanitarian) feelings and recklessly momentary emotions reveals itself as deceptively porous.

As becomes apparent in the speech’s opening lines, momentary passions arise from a callous indifference that everywhere stalks our more compassionate impulses. Immediately after introducing the “serious” 1947 “world situation,” Marshall invokes the social and spatial distance central to compassion in describing the U.S. public’s potential psychological barriers to aid-giving:

the problem [of European rebuilding] is one of such enormous complexity that the very mass of facts presented to the public by press and radio make it exceedingly difficult for the man in the street to reach a clear appraisement of the situation. Furthermore, the people of this country are distant from the troubled areas of the earth and it is hard for them to comprehend the plight and consequent reactions of the long-suffering peoples, and the effect of those reactions on their governments in connection with our efforts to promote peace in the world. (xiii; my emphasis)

Here Marshall presents two cognate but, ultimately, subtly distinct bases upon which the American public, the “man in the street,” should choose to give or to withhold aid. One such base involves “appraisement,” the detached valuation of European pain and need as communicated by a “mass of facts” nearly sublime in its “enormous complexity.” Appraisement entails applying one’s rational faculties to the enormous complexity of the “world situation” circa 1947, and, by abstractly measuring out reported pain against available resources, settling upon either humanitarian giving or calculated withholding. Yet in Marshall’s very next sentence we encounter a strikingly different basis for the very
same humanitarian choice: not the rational calculation of appraisement but the emotive compulsion of comprehension. Were the distance reduced between U.S. citizens and residents of “the troubled areas of the earth,” Marshall implies, Americans would “comprehend”—in a moment of illumination, not ratiocination—Europeans’ “plight,” as well as the aid that their plight necessitates.

Where appraisement involves an observer assigning value to the object of perception, comprehension involves that observer’s recognition of the object’s innate worth. And this recognition of innate worth in the needy suffer generates for U.S. spectators the moment of compassion. General Marshall warns of Americans allowing their judgments to be clouded by “emotion[s] of the moment,” but his very speech recruits comprehension—an instantaneous, synchronic burst of understanding—over appraisement—a lengthier, diachronic process of measurement—in framing the case for Marshall Plan aid. Embroiled in a scene that demands momentous compassion, American listeners of Marshall’s speech are enjoined to discard their callous methods of appraisement and instead follow the dictates of compassion in relieving “long-suffering peoples” of their “plight.” General Marshall thus rhetorically fashions compassion into an affect whose social propriety can be gauged only through its manifestations in worldly action; by stirring his auditors to comprehend foreign suffering rather than appraise it, his speech prohibits them from using compassion as a social out-clause, an excuse to feel properly while calculatedly withholding aid.

It is curious, then, that Marshall’s speech treats cultural *representations* of European suffering dismissively, given how important the visual spectacle of suffering is in stoking “comprehension” in Americans of their need to give compassionately. In his
closing paragraph Marshall, after reminding his listeners that “we are remote from the scene of these troubles,” opines that:

It is virtually impossible at this distance merely by reading, or listening, or even seeing photographs or motion pictures, to grasp at all the real significance of the situation. And yet the whole world of the future hangs on a proper judgment. It hangs, I think, to a large extent on the realization of the American people, of just what are the various dominant factors. What are the reactions of the [European] people? What are the justifications of those reactions? What are the sufferings? What is needed? What can best be done? What must be done? (xvi)

In geopolitical terms, the Marshall Plan revolved around processes of representation and reading: to beleaguered and impoverished Europeans, it signified steadfast U.S. support against Soviet lures and thereby sought to convince ordinary European citizens of the virtues of sticking with liberal-democratic capitalism over communism. Furthermore, within the Cold War itself—a confrontation often waged through restrained but meaningful gestures—the Plan communicated to Stalin a U.S. resolve to contest Soviet expansion that prefigured America’s heightened military presence on the Continent in coming years. Yet Marshall here suggests the need to renovate American “reading” practices as such practices concern programs of foreign aid: mediated spectacles of suffering—whether in print, radio, photographic, or cinematic form—fail to the convey what Marshall calls the world situation’s “real significance.” What is this “real” that escapes signification in the mass-media spectacles that Berlant suggests constitute for most people our primary encounters with abject suffering, with scenes that demand compassion?
The Marshall Plan’s “real” is a version of the “appraisalment” that General Marshall forbids his listeners from conducting—the “appraisalment” of *realpolitik*. Marshall’s speech slyly blends its presentations of altruistic and instrumental rationales for Marshall Plan aid in order to enact an uneasy, unspoken slippage between the two in the minds of listeners. Mediated spectacles of suffering are inadequate to Marshall’s presentation of the “world situation” because, as Berlant reminds us, the compassion these spectacles generate can as often be callously ignored as it can be generously acted upon. Because of this, the “reading” practice Marshall advocates involves cloaking in the garb of altruistic compassion a gallery of instrumental aims. While Marshall earlier references the “consequences to the economy of the United States” of European instability, what remains unspoken throughout is the looming Soviet presence that the Marshall Plan, an iconic tool of U.S. “containment” policy, was designed to check (xv). As the Marshall Plan operated in the years following this speech, such instrumentality arrived in forms such as projects to Americanize European business practices, as well as the propaganda branches identified by Pisani and Saunders. The instrumental appraisalment of European postwar wreckage generates conditions imposed upon aid recipients, producing tangible benefits for the aid giver, America. Appraisalment, the reading mode banished from America’s public imaginary by General Marshall, nevertheless quietly reappears alongside comprehension in the Marshall Plan’s execution, tingeing its project of altruistic giving with transactional elements.

This friction between altruism and instrumentality kindles the curious succession of questions that ends Marshall’s speech: “What are the sufferings? What is needed? What can best be done? What must be done?” (xvi) Here impulses to undertake the
“best [that can] be done” to alleviate “sufferings” constitute compassion. Yet in light of compassion’s unreliability, in light of our habit of coldly turning away from distant suffering, Marshall installs the imperative—no longer the note of generous compassion but now of self-interested compulsion—in his final question, “What must be done?” This “must” undoubtedly registers the geopolitical stakes of European squalor—what Marshall describes earlier in the speech as the “reactions of the long-suffering peoples, and the effects of those reactions on their governments” (xiii). It emerges, then, that Marshall is somewhat disingenuous when, in his speech’s eighth paragraph (of eleven), he claims, “Our policy is directed not against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos” (xv). Against this claim, rooted in “comprehension,” we can detect the “appraisal” of statecraft.

All the same, it can hardly be denied that the Marshall Plan’s cash outlay—even within the contexts of the conditions attached to that money, even given the geopolitical calculus behind it—did palpably help to restore economies, cities, and lives in a time of great need. This is the dilemma of ethics and aesthetics fostered by the Marshall Plan: its overlaying of the contingent and particular maneuvers of geopolitics with universalizing, transhistorical narratives of generosity, narratives rooted in seemingly “natural” human affect. Is conditionality ever ethical in the giving of aid? If so, what are its acceptable limits? What balance, if any, of “appraisal” and “comprehension” provides justice to the needy Other of aid? Is purely altruistic, unconditional, non-instrumental giving even possible? These quandaries and many more are papered over by the “reading” practices

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2 My presentation of the Marshall Plan’s geopolitical instrumentality could be undercut by the fact that Marshall Plan aid was offered, indiscriminately, to nations of the Soviet bloc. However, historians concur that America’s offer of aid to the Soviets was primarily for public relations purposes, and that Stalin’s eventual (and famous) refusal of Marshall Plan aid was wholly anticipated by the Truman administration.
Marshall proposes for U.S. aid giving; it is the work of my chosen authors to refract such questions through the singular prism of fiction, generating new practices of “reading” suffering others in “troubled areas of the earth” both within and beyond U.S. soil.

Marshall Plan fiction illuminates the tolls instrumentality imposes upon recipients of putatively altruistic money for “development” or “renewal,” whether in U.S. cities or European ones. My selected texts are not, however, simply oppositional, unequivocally criticizing U.S. foreign aid. William Faulkner, for example, worked as an ambassador for the U.S. State Department in the 1950s, and his Cold War novels Requiem for a Nun and A Fable, treated in chapter two, reflect his antagonism to the Soviet regime. Rather, by reimagining U.S. urban decline through the widely publicized images of post-WWII European urban destruction, these authors reveal congruencies between domestic and international “reconstruction” programs that enable new ways of “reading” foreign aid. General Marshall, in his Harvard speech, suggests that U.S. citizens cannot comprehend the stakes of Marshall Plan aid because of their distance from “the troubled areas of the earth” (xiii). Even literary and visual representations of “long-suffering peoples” cannot foster the “proper judgment” of a “world situation” that requires U.S. reconstruction aid; as argued above, this is because representations of suffering engender compassion, a dismissible emotion, whereas Marshall’s “world situation” demands an instrumentality that can only unfold in the guise of altruism. Marshall thus rhetorically refashions compassion into an emotion whose ethical value lies entirely beyond a subject’s interiority, in its worldly manifestation as action; in this way, the Marshall Plan’s vaunted generosity remains unquestionable only so long as its procedures of appraisement remain submerged, out of sight. My chosen texts collectively reorient U.S. citizens, reminding
them that “troubled areas of the earth” exist closer to home, in their crisis-beset metropolises. In so doing, they foreshorten the distance between the American “man in the street” and governmental aid programs intended to reconstruct broken cities and alleviate suffering. By reorienting Americans so as to call attention to the problems of “urban renewal” at home (problems generated and perpetuated by highly instrumental government initiatives like slum clearance), Marshall Plan fiction invites its readers to attend more acutely to the woes of instrumentality in more distant locales, the instrumentality that silently accompanies the altruistic declarations of U.S. planners.

Admittedly, writing about U.S. fiction’s relationship to the Marshall Plan, a signal instrument of early Cold War “containment” policy, runs the risk of marking my readings as yet more iterations of a by now familiar interpretive pattern drawn from Alan Nadel’s landmark 1995 study Containment Culture. However, what the fictions of Joseph Heller, William Faulkner, James Baldwin, and Paule Marshall elaborate is an imagining of geopolitical space and affect that draws together Nadel’s “containment” culture with the wave of post--“containment” scholarship that has enlivened U.S. Cold War cultural studies over the last decade. Nadel, building on the work of Elaine Tyler May and others, famously maps America’s foreign policy of global Soviet “containment” onto domestic relations, finding containment policy’s domestic analogues in a variety of broad cultural

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3 This overfamiliarity is not due to any flaw in Nadel’s masterful analyses but rather reflects the sway his vision held over the field of Cold War studies for so long. As Steven Belletto and Daniel Grausam point out, “for many critics, Cold War culture is containment culture, and vice versa, which leads to a narrative of the Cold War as a principal context only for the culture of the long 1950s” (5). My own readings, which all fall within the long 1950s, would seem to lie squarely in Belletto and Grausam’s crosshairs, but as I show later in this introduction, these readings generate a model for reading cultural expressions of Cold War foreign aid well beyond the 50s. The most acerbic critic of the ubiquity of “containment culture” readings of U.S. Cold War fiction is Andrew Hoberek, who notes that, “at its worst, [Nadel’s model] has become a routinized reading generator: take a 50s text that hasn’t been discussed yet, explain how it reflects an ambivalent liberalism hostile to political extremes (or designates some group as subversive, or denigrates the radical legacy of the 30s), and publish” (146).
narratives that collectively worked to marginalize and “contain” potentially subversive populations based upon race, sexuality, or political affiliation. However, as Steven Belletto and Daniel Grausam have recently noted in a virtuosic survey of the field, a new phase of Cold War scholarship emerged in the early 2000s that perceived American culture’s relationship to the Cold War through a more “global frame;” this new, broadened frame encompassed a world divided between more forces than simply Soviets and Americans, such as the Third World, whose geography figures prominently in my fourth chapter (6). In this movement’s vanguard, Christina Klein in Cold War Orientalism posits her “global imaginary of integration” against Nadel’s imaginary of containment. Against Nadel’s vision of a globe polarized between U.S. and Soviet power, Klein’s reading of U.S. representations of Cold War Asia emphasizes how middlebrow intellectuals and artists “imagined the world in terms of open doors that superseded barriers and created pathways between nations,” generating sentimental fictions of alliance and attachment between non-communist states in the region (41). In Klein’s model, such fictions reside not only in cultural objects but even programs of foreign aid and practices of tourism reminiscent of those I study below.

This dissertation relocates the stage of cultural encounter from Klein’s Asia to Western Europe, invoking a markedly different set of political and cultural coordinates in which to read U.S. artistic production. Moreover, by tracing the resonances Western Europe’s destroyed cities held with decaying American metropolises for U.S. authors, Marshall Plan Metropolises also envisions the emotional, affective facets of foreign aid in ways distinct from Klein’s influential model. To be sure, my critical category of Marshall Plan fiction demonstrates how impulses of integration—precisely the Marshall
Plan’s tools for disseminating U.S. culture in Europe—intertwine themselves with those of containment even on the Cold War’s signal “containment” battleground of Western Europe. It thereby affirms Klein’s point that “far from being opposed to each other, the containment of the Soviet Union and the integration of the capitalist ‘free world’ are best understood as two sides of the same coin” (25). Yet where Klein posits sentimentalism as instrumental in educating Americans about U.S. foreign policy in Asia, the authors of Marshall Plan fiction formulate a more complex emotional terrain for understanding foreign aid and policy. Substituting “compassion” for Klein’s sentimentalism captures more fully the fraught affects involved in giving aid only conditionally, with strings attached. For example, Berlant pointedly notes that compassion can provide an emotional out-clause for withholding aid to the needy sufferer: our ability to feel correctly excuses our lack of material help. All of the novels studied in *Marshall Plan Metropolises* register a struggle to balance proper feeling on the part of moneyed Americans with the tolls conditionality imposes upon aid recipients. Compassion also relies upon social (and often spatial) distances amenable to the sort of imaginative remapping we see in Marshall Plan fiction, where such distances are reconstituted and superimposed upon urban zones in Europe and America that fictively speak to one another, mutually illuminating one another’s troubled modes of “reconstruction.” *Marshall Plan Metropolises* thus presents a new model for understanding the aesthetics of reconstruction, modernization, and development—a model suggestive for work involving spheres of post-1945 U.S. foreign policy beyond the European theatre treated below. These aid policies—such as the Truman-inaugurated Point Four program—have been described both as “wholly without precedent in human history” and as “likely to
remain the biggest single act of national generosity on record” (Johnson 821). This dissertation offers a model for future work on cultural representations of U.S. “reconstruction” aid as that aid appeared in other parts of the world.

By delineating U.S. authors’ fictional layering of European upon American urban space (and vice versa), Marshall Plan Metropolises tells a unique story within what Susan Kay Gillman has called “U.S. empire studies” (196). Defining the “U.S. empire” of U.S. empire studies has always been daunting, given this empire’s indeterminate starting point (1848? 1898?), territorial boundaries, and modes of expansion and governance. In this study, I use the emergence of widespread U.S. foreign aid emblematized by the Marshall Plan as an occasion to read Marshall Plan fiction’s decidedly transnational spatial imagination against a decidedly state-based policy instrument. In this way my readings participate in American studies’ transnational turn of the last twenty years while nevertheless acknowledging the role of specific governmental policies in diffusing U.S. culture, capital, and values globally. Yet it is in my study’s mobilization of space that its broadest intervention in U.S. empire studies becomes visible. As Gillman argues, while recent work in transnational American studies has elevated categories of space over those of time, attending to “borderlands, borders, and contact zones,” much of the rhetorical “remapping” performed by this work remains just that—rhetorical (203). In this way, such remapping becomes “less a material than a figurative term, evacuating actual geographical coordinates in favor of figuring a revised literary and cultural landscape” (Gillman 203). The remapping undertaken by Marshall Plan Metropolises is more than merely rhetorical, situating the urban aesthetics of my chosen authors within a wider archive of urban planning
initiatives, tourist practices, and governmental policies. By scrutinizing the figure of the city in U.S. fiction as that figure is remade and trans-nationalized by governmental initiatives, the readings offered below trace shifts in the narratives American citizens lived out in relation to their built environments. These chapters delineate what Patricia Yaeger calls “a poetics of geography,” reading Marshall Plan fiction for “an awareness of the irreducible strangeness of space and a narrative capable of addressing its encryption [by political forces]” (5-6).

This archive places the aesthetic constructions of Marshall Plan fiction in dialogue with palpably material modes of renewal both at home and abroad. In broad strokes my analysis resonates with Amy Kaplan’s assertion in *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* that the cultural, political, and social apparatuses of U.S. empire “unsettle[s] the ever-shifting boundaries between the domestic and the foreign” (1). Yet if Kaplan’s reading of imperial “anarchy” evokes the breakdown of monolithic forms of spatial organization between “national” and “global,” my own reading dwells at greater length on the affects of the layered spatialities such processes generate. Moreover, these affects pertain, I argue, to a specific phase and mode of empire, that of the post-1945 escalation of U.S. aid for international reconstruction and development. The study whose interpretive moves most mirror my own is another that follows Kaplan’s lead, Harilaos Stecopoulos’ *Reconstructing the World*. Stecopoulos reads the U.S. South as an “alternate geography” whose attempted and failed Reconstruction placed it within the public imagination in “complex relation to the imperial geography promulgated by the nation’s power elite” (4). By shifting Stecopoulos’ zone of internal colony from the U.S. South to blighted American inner cities, *Marshall Plan*
*Metropolises* mobilizes a host of experiences and affects specific to urban life through which to understand the particular imaginative interventions made by Marshall Plan fiction in debates over domestic urban restructuring and Cold War foreign policy. These experiences are, not surprisingly, distinct from those of the largely rural geographies mapped by Stecopoulos. Such uniquely urban experiences, such as the Benjaminian shock of crowd experience, are theorized across my four chapters, particularly the first. Encountering common urban experiences within the transatlantic metropolises my authors provide, we see them anew, as the textual city and its resonant affects are imbued with tensions specific to Cold War U.S. culture regarding the constitution and global diffusion of “American” identity.

As implied in my use of terms like “textual affects” and “aesthetics of reconstruction” in the preceding paragraphs, “Marshall Plan Metropolises” sketches a historically particular backdrop for cultural production while nevertheless ascribing to literature itself a unique representational role. If my invocation of U.S. “urban crisis” seems short on archival documentation, this is because my concern lies more with how Marshall Plan fiction not only registers but also queries and reformulates broad cultural narratives of the time. These narratives bore directly on the material relations Americans of the long 1950s had with their country’s urban spaces, as well as upon the imaginative (and, directly or indirectly, material) relations they had with foreign geographies. My study is thus invested in what Derek Attridge calls literature’s role as “a peculiar nexus within the culture that is perceived as resisting or exceeding all pre-existing general determinations” (63). By emphasizing the role of literary form in singularly recasting the words and ideas of U.S. Cold War public discourse, “Marshall Plan Metropolises”
contributes to what Marjorie Levinson has called the “new formalism,” a movement that reasserts the importance of aesthetic form in understanding the complex, distinct interventions artworks make in their cultural milieus (558). Literary language as conceived in the chapters below possesses a unique power to complicate and refract broader rhetorical fields beyond the bounds of the text. My reading method is thus what Richard Strier might call an “indexical” formalism, in which the text is scrutinized for the multiform ways in which it registers yet reconfigures extra-textual discourses (qtd. in Levinson 565). Most saliently, for instance, the novels of Marshall Plan fiction meditate on the affective quandaries occasioned by oscillating rhetorics of distance and proximity in intra- and international projects of U.S.-funded “reconstruction.” These literary geographies accrue a felt weight distinct from the abstraction of governmental planning.4

Such spatial concerns emerge most directly in my opening chapter, which serves in part as an introduction to the precepts of literary and spatial theory that inform all four chapters. This chapter, “‘Rome was in Ruins:’ Transatlantic Urbanism in Joseph Heller’s Catch-22,” argues that Heller’s famous dark comedy conceives of “reconstruction” across both time and space, linking the shattered infrastructure and political community of World War II Rome to the fraying seams of American Cold War urbanity. Within Rome’s contact zone Catch-22 stages the intersection of devastated European metropolitan life with American forces of war and commerce. Citing on the levels of narrative form and diegetic world the dynamics of detachment that characterize stories of humanitarianism (as theorized by Joseph Slaughter), the chapter argues that our perception of Europe becomes steadily more proximal in this novel, culminating in

4 Fraught with temporal and epistemological uncertainty, the spatial ruins represented in Marshall Plan fiction exhibit an air of mystery and potential enchantment that John McClure, in Late Imperial Romance, identifies as a bulwark against the rationalizing tendencies of imperial administration.
Yossarian’s fearsome nighttime walk through bombed-out Rome. In displaying a zero-degree of brutalism that subtends the economic disparities and spatial segregations of American cities, the destroyed Rome of this scene reveals present fissures in America’s body politic but also—insofar as any ruin invokes an imaginative “reconstruction” on the part of its viewer, an act that imagines both past spatial forms and potential future reconstructions—suggests possible avenues for rehabilitating American urban space, for healing the fissures. Yet *Catch-22* portrays asymmetries of international geopolitical power and wealth that impede a fellow-feeling across nations rooted in bodily finitude. This is to say, then, that a “community” rooted in finitude can emerge in America as an alternative to *Catch-22*’s nefarious technocratic military-commercial complex, just as it can emerge in ruined Rome, but that these respective communities remain, in the novel’s narration of intercultural interactions, irreconcilable to one another.

Chapter two, “Babbling Cacophony: Unmaking and Making in Cold War Faulkner,” calls for closer scholarly attention to Faulknerian geography in its historical specificity by demonstrating the effects of post-WWII urban crisis on Faulkner’s Cold War writing. To this end, the article reads Faulkner’s *Requiem for a Nun* (1951) and *A Fable* (1954) as not only responses to industrialization and militarization in the South, but as sustained novelistic reflections on modes of urban renewal in both the United States and a Europe under reconstruction through the Marshall Plan. By unearthing the bivalent history of US urbanism’s sounds and spaces, these novels interrogate US mass culture at a crucial moment in its foreign expansion, during a period when many Europeans feared an “Americanization” of their cities and cultures concomitant with US-funded postwar rebuilding. The texts’ fictive geographies represent a Faulknerian spatial imagination
unthinkable in isolation from the urban panics—both domestic and international—of the early Cold War, allowing us to rethink Faulkner’s strategies for imagining political community in this time. The novels locate at the heart of Cold War political-discursive formations a complex relationship between geography, architecture, and sound. In these novels, the architecture of built space, as well as the sounds these built spaces mediate, discloses rhetorical strategies for imagining political collectivities amid urban crisis and reconstruction in both America and Europe.

Chapter three, “States of Repair: Marshall Plan Tourism in James Baldwin’s Giovanni’s Room,” musters an unconventional reading of Baldwin’s 1956 novel as a text of Cold War (and specifically Marshall Plan) tourism that fantasizes the tolls of merely conditional monetary aid on the part of a moneyed American to a needy postwar European. This chapter takes seriously the distinction between “exile” and “tourist” in arguing that Giovanni’s Room meditates upon the unique affective, ethical, and geopolitical complexities of American tourism during the early Cold War. As in other chapters of this project, we can discern in Baldwin’s novel ligatures between the decaying spaces of America’s crisis-beset postwar cities and the war-wracked metropolises of Europe. However, what Giovanni’s Room provides that is unique for our understanding of the affective quandaries entailed by projects of Cold War urban renewal on both sides of the Atlantic is a sustained, searching rumination on a particular figure, the tourist, who travels between the distinct ruins of Europe and America. In Giovanni’s Room, the Cold War American tourist is an ambassador of spatial, temporal, and sexual modalities associated with mass-market capitalism; yet the novel also labors to show how the affluent American tourist’s encounters with foreign territory elicit an irresistible yet
unattainable mode of compassion tied to projects of American humanitarianism in the high Cold War. The logic of Marshall Plan tourism—a form of foreign humanitarian aid that simultaneously sustains and refigures its recipients—catalyzes crises both ethical and affective in Giovanni’s Room as David negotiates competing impulses to give and to withhold economic aid from an impoverished European, the novel interrogating the very possibility of affective relations like empathy with and compassion for needy others on the part of the moneyed tourist.

Finally, the dissertation considers the Marshall Plan within a truly global context in its fourth chapter, “You Can Go Your Own Way: Third-World Bildung in Paule Marshall’s Brown Girl, Brownstones.” Herein I argue that Marshall’s 1959 novel offers a singularly complex vision of U.S.-funded Cold War “reconstruction” aid by asking why non-European needy areas of the earth are denied a Marshall Plan. Paule Marshall’s novel meditates on relationships between U.S. urban renewal, programs of colonization and Cold War geopolitics from the vantage of New York’s diasporic Barbadian community. In rendering its protagonist’s growth and development within a triangulated spatial sphere encompassing America, war-wrecked Europe, and “third world” Barbados, Brown Girl, Brownstones stages a unique Cold War mode of bildungsroman that critiques U.S. rhetorics of “freedom.” The “development” undertaken by this protagonist, Selina, swerves from normalization to insurrection against an America of mass consumption that is coded in Brown Girl, Brownstones as crypto-totalitarian—a political and economic formation doubly injurious to African Americans because of its inbuilt racial hierarchy. Brown Girl, Brownstones in this way deploys the bildungsroman genre, together with its formal structures and concomitant narrative expectations, all in
order to subvert teleological tales of “development” that undergird U.S. postwar neo-
imperialism. Selina’s eventual refusal to embrace an “adulthood” sanctioned by her 
parents’ diasporic generation and dependent upon a fetishized whiteness allows her to 
chart a new, counterintuitive path of “development” away from that of a proto-totalitarian 
first world.

Taken together, the chapters of Marshall Plan Metropolises attempt to delineate 
what one might fashionably call a poetics of foreign aid. Above all, the texts treated 
below bear the traces of an awareness on the part of U.S. authors of a heightened role for 
their country and its culture in the world, as well as what U.S. political leaders saw as a 
commensurately expanded set of global responsibilities. Such awareness of reshaped 
U.S. relations with inhabitants of, in General Marshall’s words, “the troubled areas of the 
earth” incarnates itself in Marshall Plan fiction through the diverse and often conflicting 
channels that literature offers for affective expression. To begin exploring these 
channels, let’s now join Joseph Heller as he hopscotches between New York slums and 
Roman battlegrounds.
CHAPTER ONE

“Rome was in Ruins:” Catching Community in Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22*

Entering Rome after its capture by Allied forces during WWII, Yossarian, the protagonist of Joseph Heller’s 1961 novel *Catch-22*, senses widespread suffering on the part of “all the poor and stupid and diseased people he had seen in Italy, Egypt and North Africa and knew about in other areas of the world” (405). Yossarian here delineates spectacular suffering along national boundaries, notably omitting his own country, the United States, from the list. However, as Yossarian proceeds through bombed-out Rome, his awareness of suffering fixates itself on the destitute Europeans before him, the “pale, sad, sickly children in Italy” (412). Yossarian’s walk through destroyed European urban space—arguably *Catch-22*’s climax, and a scene analyzed closely in this chapter’s fourth and final section—figuratively sutures bodily suffering to the material urban destruction of WWII. During this city walk, bombed buildings and wounded bodies enmesh themselves in larger questions that *Catch-22* poses regarding how both individuals and nation-states can ameliorate the suffering of needy others. As this chapter argues, the aesthetics and ethics of reconstruction—how do we see and understand the foreign Other whose material and bodily spaces we repair?—generate a historically specific anxiety in Heller’s popular dark comedy. Scholars frequently note that *Catch-22* is more concerned with the cultural and political milieu of the Cold War than with that of its WWII setting. However, a lack of attention to the particular projects and culture of Cold War “reconstruction” emblematized by the Marshall Plan has left unexamined the novel’s preoccupation with the politics of foreign aid. Attending to this preoccupation exposes
the transnational nature of ruination in the novel—a ruination present not only in European urbanity but that of Yossarian’s own country.

However, before turning to *Catch-22* itself, I want to explore briefly an important intertext for the novel that has gone untreated in *Catch-22* criticism: Sigmund Freud’s *Civilization and its Discontents*. Like Heller, Freud uses Rome as a theoretical staging ground for questions about the relationship of embodiment to both spatial ruination and such ruination’s transnational valences, anticipating and treating in more abstract form issues vivified in *Catch-22*’s diegetic world. Freud provides us with a theoretical map of spatial ruin, urban experience, and processes of memory to help orient us within the Cold War geopolitical imaginary of Heller’s text. Freud’s famous tour through Rome in the opening section of *Civilization* positions the reader as archaeologist unburying the ruins, the overwritten spaces, of the Eternal City’s palimpsest. Like Heller’s Yossarian, we are positioned by Freud as urban walkers in a city of ruins. Traversing space and time, we encounter not only contemporary sites like the Coliseum and the Pantheon but also their ghostly antecedents. Each site in Rome thus evokes within us, the tourist “equipped with the most complete historical and topographical knowledge,” recognition of that space’s particular history as well as a broader sense of the perpetual presence of the past (17). However, Freud memorably jettisons his comparison of urban space’s layered past to the past of the psyche. This is because, as Freud notes, while all psychic change arises as a defense against unpleasureable stimuli, urban renovation can occur in a peaceful mode: “Demolitions and replacement of buildings occur in the course of the most peaceful development of a city” (19). As we shall see below, the prism of literary language furnishes a particularly rich range of meanings for such processes of demolition and
replacement as they appear in Yossarian’s world. Catch-22’s plot structure maps for readers a range of contexts brought to bear on Yossarian’s (and our) psychic experience of destroyed European urbanity.

In the economy of Civilization’s larger argument our walk with Freud primarily serves to distinguish a uniquely psychic process of preservation and evolution. Nevertheless, it also maps a relationship between urban space and processes of deconstruction and reconstruction. This relationship sits ambivalently beside more recent formulations of how collective memory and communal identity hinge in part upon the built environment. On the one hand, Freud’s model of urban memory seems to trivialize the actual physical process of urban destruction by overlooking how a city’s built environment accrues personal resonances—born through senses, emotions, experiences—in the minds of its users. These are the resonances that render city space a series of what Henri Lefebvre would call representational spaces, generating an individualized urban geography that helps solidify a sense of place and selfhood. Physical urban destruction seems strangely bereft of dire consequences in Freud’s walk, as the “complete historical and topographical knowledge” possessed by our synecdochic visitor seems adequate to the task of reconstructing past structures in startling fullness (17).

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5 See, for instance, discussions by critical geographers of the concept of urbicide, the deliberate destruction of non-militarized urban space. Two recent and exemplary books on this concept are Martin Coward’s Urbicide: The Politics of Urban Destruction and Robert Bevan’s The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War. For Coward, urbicide assaults the built environment conceived of as the condition of possibility for heterogeneity. Moving beyond the mountain of scholarship on architectural monumentality, Coward’s Urbicide asks what is significant in the destruction of prosaic urban architecture: while symbolism attends the destruction of certain iconic buildings, for what reason are non-military buildings of negligible cultural significance destroyed? Bevan, who centers his discussion much more heavily on monumental spaces than Coward, investigates how processes of heavily politicized urban “reconstruction” can allow fictitious communal histories to be forged as new buildings arise atop the ruins of the old. My own discussion of the relationship between the built environment and notions of community owes much to these two books.
On the other hand, while *Civilization* overlooks the harm done by spatial destruction to collective identity, it proffers a model of spatial “reconstruction” that melds processes of physical building with those of story-telling, of fabulation. Before embarking on our Roman tour, Freud notes that the psyche exhibits its earlier stages in a way that highly-evolved animal species do not. Of these species Freud claims that “the intermediate links have died out and are available to us only through reconstruction. In the realm of the mind, on the other hand, what is primitive is […] commonly preserved alongside of the transformed version” (16; my italics). This reconstruction represents a form of storytelling—an imaginative imposition upon the animal here before me of outmoded forms—which anticipates the very “flight of imagination” that leads Freud to fictively reconstruct Rome’s urban past from the traces of its current cityscape (18). Freud notes the physical impossibility of resurrecting extinct urban forms in his claim that “the same space cannot have two different contents” (19). However, the hypothetical visitor he guides through Rome can nevertheless imaginatively “reconstruct” these annihilated forms overttop of the structures that are their spatial tombstones. Space for this visitor thus becomes multiple, even incongruous. This process of imaginative and fabulistic “reconstruction” not only deepens space but links sites across time and space. It is this particular sense of “reconstruction” (and concomitant deconstruction)—thorized by Freud and elicited in Yossarian’s tactile urban experience—that allows *Catch-22* to trouble the prominent discourses of “reconstruction” of its time.

In many ways, Heller’s novel extends Freud’s meditation on demolition, ruination, and reconstruction to the geopolitical context of the early Cold War; also like Freud, and in ways that scholarship on Heller has overlooked, *Catch-22* conducts these
meditations through the prisms of curiously transnational literary cities like the Rome treated by both authors. Freud’s dismissal of the city as analogue to the psyche in its mode of historical preservation arises from his contention that the “destructive influences” which prompt psychic growth through unpleasureable stimuli appear in urban space not only in times of strife and threat but in peacetime as well: “destructive influences which can be compared to causes of [psychic] illness […] are never lacking in the history of a city, even if […] like London, it has hardly ever suffered from the visitations of an enemy. Demolitions and replacement of buildings occur in the course of the most peaceful development of a city” (19). Eliding the difference between wartime and peacetime modes of urban destruction, this passage invites readers to consider the evolution of Roman urban space in relation to that of London by subsuming such evolution under a broad rubric of urban change, decay, and “reconstruction.” This rubric allows each of these two counterpoised but linked sites—Rome and London—to evoke imaginative associations of its counterpart in the minds of those who walk its streets and perceive the unending change of its cityscape. In Freud, as in the scenes of Catch-22 scrutinized below, urban destruction thus becomes transnational while the perceptual, imaginative act of seeing city space as transnational itself becomes a type of storytelling.

As noted above, the imaginative associations of urban renovation on display in Civilization—renovation that links divergent spaces, renovation transpiring in both wartime and peacetime—preoccupy Heller’s Yossarian as he walks through Roman ruins midway through the twentieth century. By this point, our readerly encounter with the ruins in Catch-22 functions as culmination to the novel’s sustained reflection on how physical urban destruction corrodes a communal identity that invigorates the body politic,
as well as how urban demolition and “reconstruction”—both material and fictive—
involves its practitioners in ethical questions of atonement, compensation, and payback.
As in Freud, *Catch-22* conceives of “reconstruction” across both time and space, linking
the shattered infrastructure and political community of World War II Rome to the fraying
seams of American Cold War urbanity. Within Rome’s contact zone *Catch-22* stages the
intersection of devastated European urban life with U.S. forces of war and commerce.
The novel projects upon this city, both demolished and reconstructed in part through U.S.
capital, anxieties about dehumanizing tendencies of an administrative logic that abstracts
both space and life from its lived actuality, subjecting both to a fearsome law that
threatens their very existence. In this way, the novel’s European spaces open themselves
out to broader considerations not only of urban decay in postwar America, but also to the
relationship between modes of urban “reconstruction” on both sides of the Atlantic.
Finally, as shown most vividly in Yossarian’s own encounter with Roman urbanity, the
novel’s presentation of transnational urban space enables it to reflect on competing
modes of individual and collective psychic life on both continents during a time when
debates over the future of Western Europe’s political and communal identity were
particularly fraught.

In elaborating this argument my chapter follows the spatial imagination of *Catch-22*
itself, proceeding from issues of abstraction (like the “hospital” logic that governs the
U.S. military’s reconstructive imagination) to issues more tactile and immediate (like the
bracing scenes of violence encountered by Yossarian in bombarded Rome). We thus
begin by considering how *Catch-22*’s strategies of figuration subtly immerse readers in a
linguistic universe where acts of destruction become textualized—and, in becoming
textualized, also become de-materialized, abstracted from their physical ruin. The chapter’s second section outlines how the novel’s sequencing of textual spaces guides the reader from the abstract plane of the technocratic imagination to the local experience of urbanites at street level; *Catch-22*, I argue, structures its textual spaces in this way so as to invest issues of reconstruction with a poignant immediacy, persistently documenting the harm done by abstract power to urban users. The third section traces how the particular strategies of “reconstruction” imagined by forces of U.S. business and bureaucracy render money a locus for ethical reflection in the “contact zone” of postwar Europe. Finally, section four scrutinizes Yossarian’s night walk at length, arguing that *Catch-22* uses this climactic scene to call attention to the need for new logics of reconstruction not only in the ruined urban zones of postwar Europe but also in the crisis-beset metropolises of Cold War America. Taken together, these sections illuminate *Catch-22*’s sustained call for new modes of reconstruction more attentive to the alterity of the suffering other.

In the readings that support these claims, we see *Catch-22*’s affective investment in the human body’s bare fragility. Elaine Scarry’s classic analysis of pain’s ultimate inexpressibility, its lack of an exteriorized object, in *The Body in Pain*, thus captures in its subtitle (“The Making and Unmaking of the World”) the fulcrum upon which this chapter turns. While *Catch-22* foregrounds the unmaking of bodies and territories through a gallery of weapons including bombs, words, and commerce, it nevertheless meditates upon the procedures of geopolitical “making.” Scarry herself posits as an example of vast civilizational “making” the postwar processes of European reconstruction at the heart of which lay America’s Marshall Plan: “If the period between 1939 and 1945 is
conventionally identified as one of the darkest in western civilization, then there can also be taken as one of its most luminous the period of years during which Europe was rebuilt” (178). Like Freud in *Civilization and its Discontents*, Scarry characterizes urban reconstruction as akin to fabulation, describing the Marshall Plan as an “imagining” on the part of American and European leaders of a restored Europe (178). Preoccupied as intently with the complexities of Cold War America as with those of WWII Europe, *Catch-22* evokes through its depictions of urban unmaking corresponding questions of how to “make,” how to “reconstruct,” European urbanity and community—questions that engage larger issues of how cultural communities interact, of how political rhetorics are disseminated and received across national borders, as well as of what conditions should attend payment from debtor to creditor. *Catch-22*’s fictive “making” of processes of urban unmaking harbors in its textual unconscious the question of how to revitalize shattered communities in ways that honor and preserve their heterogeneity, locating its reflections about community in the human body. This body becomes also a marker of purity—a stark and illegible materiality that confounds military logic and hierarchy—as well as of human fragility. Such bodily fragility emerges most strikingly in *Catch-22* when set against an overbearing threat of violence that the novel associates with American systems of governance and commerce—systems that emanate, and remain ultimately inextricable from, U.S. urbanity.

*I. (Extra-)Linguistic Casualties*

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6 As mentioned in this dissertation’s introduction, international dissemination of pro-American rhetoric, covertly funded by America’s government, accelerated during the time of *Catch-22*’s composition. Frances Stoner Saunders argues in *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* that “during the height of the Cold War, the US government committed vast resources to a secret programme of cultural propaganda in western Europe” (1). The Marshall Plan, the very program so integral to revitalizing economies, cities, and societies in Western Europe, also proved a useful resource for aiding American Cold War foreign policy interests: “Marshall Plan funds were soon being siphoned to boost the cultural struggle in the West” (26).
To argue that *Catch-22* is a quintessentially postmodern World War II novel (alongside Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*) that thematizes and performs a disjunction of sign from referent⁷ (what has been called “the language of discontinuity”⁸) is, no doubt, to tread on numberless critical toes. What these critics have overlooked, however, is how the novel’s representation of unfixed signification furnishes a mode of textual place-destruction that jives uneasily with the physical urban destruction enacted by the novel’s American soldiers. Among the most pervasive strategies by which *Catch-22* signals the reign of pure, non-referential language in the U.S. military apparatus is by noting the blindness to material reality of many of this language’s speakers. Thus, for example, Clevinger appears to Yossarian as “one of those people hanging around modern museums with both eyes together on one side of a face,” while other characters like the Chaplain and the patient in Yossarian’s ward see things not once, but twice (68). For many of the novel’s characters, poor vision is not troublesome, since these characters trust the capacity of language to signify a world to whose surreal horrors they are blind. However, as the novel’s ironic mode makes clear, such blind faith in referentiality creates unforeseen bodily and infrastructural damage.

Thus the novel’s two symmetrical corpses—Doc Daneeka’s (dead in writing, alive in body) and Mudd’s (alive in writing, dead in body)—constellate themselves within the language of military bookkeeping. While the narrative voice distances us from these events by depicting the palpable deadness of Mudd and the corresponding health of

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⁷ This can be seen, for instance, in the titles of its chapters, which frequently deal only cursorily with their ostensible subject before moving on to another topic entirely.

⁸ See Gary W. Davis’ “*Catch-22* and the Language of Discontinuity” in *Novel* 12.1 for a foundational reading of how *Catch-22* works to expose the gap between “words” and “things.” While I agree with Davis that “symbolic forms and expressions have the privileged status usually accorded to ‘reality’” (69), my argument seeks to reclaim a role for space within *Catch-22*, to see language as not entirely discontinuous, but rather as instantiating new places and boundaries which comprise a material reality which stands behind language.
Daneeka, its language nevertheless furtively immerses readers in the army’s administrative logic: while Doc Daneeka remains alive in body, soon after being pronounced dead his healthy body assumes qualities in the narrative voice more befitting of his linguistic deadness, as he is described as “sepulchral” and “petrifying” (340, 341). It is in just this mode that, later on, the novel’s soldiers exemplify Baudrillard’s postmodern substitution of the map for the terrain as they await a mission to Bologna. In this scene Yossarian renders the mission unnecessary by simply moving the bomb line so that it appears that Allied forces have captured the target. Once more the novel’s language figuratively sutures cartographical and terrestrial realities in ways that insinuate the reader within military administrative logic: the red ribbon of the map’s bomb line, which represents the advance position of Allied troops, lies “tacked across the mainland,” just like the troops themselves, who are “pinned down,” and just like the men of Yossarian’s unit, who are “trapped,” forced to brave the flak by flying to Bologna (118).

Such tropic links between a discontinuous language and its abandoned referents serve as the subtle countercurrent to *Catch-22*’s postmodern treatment of language’s non-referentiality. In this way, they give the novel’s representation of what I shall call “textual spaces” a macabre tone heightened by the novel’s insistence on the potential violence intrinsic to an administrative language divorced from reality. For instance, the annihilation of American cities occurs in the novel’s opening scene, albeit in textual form. Yossarian, forced to censor letters in the sick ward while faking a liver ailment, devises games to dispel the monotony of censorship, blacking out all modifiers in some letters, all adverbs in others, and so on, before turning to the envelopes themselves: “When he had exhausted all the possibilities in the letters, he began attacking the names
and addresses on the envelopes, obliterating whole homes and streets, annihilating entire metropolises with careless flicks of his wrist as though he were God” (8). In his role as censor, Yossarian, excused from bombing European metropolises caught in a state of war, here figuratively destroys U.S. cities. (The letters Yossarian censors would presumably be written by U.S. officers to loved ones back home; when he censors their addresses, the letters would presumably not be sent.) The addresses Yossarian censors serve as linguistic markers of space within the planned, administered city. They thus engender a compartmentalized version of city space—found in texts like maps, voting lists, telephone books, property tax assessments—that overlies the more personalized geographies (Lefebvre’s “representational spaces”) city walkers construct for themselves. This early scene inaugurates the novel’s sustained rumination on the potentially destructive effects of language upon urban spaces and bodies—effects shown most poignantly with regard to characters like Doc Daneeka, who loses his wife and children because of unsent mail. Continually the novel insists on the ethical value of a “real” beyond language whose fragile existence is jeopardized in a world that unduly trusts textual over empirical evidence.

Destruction of textual space, it turns out, occasions severe physical consequences that lie seemingly beyond the linguistic realm. However, *Catch-22* further complicates this nexus of textuality and destruction by mobilizing a process symmetrically opposite to the destruction of textual space: the novel’s very figurative language self-consciously *textualizes* the U.S. air force’s destruction of European physical space in *Catch-22*’s opening stages, insulating readers from its grim actuality. The novel’s first description of bombs dropping naturalizes the destruction at ground level through tropes that liken the
bombing to geological and oceanic processes. The bombs thus produce a “swirling pall of smoke and pulverized debris *geysering* up wildly in huge, rolling *waves* of gray and black” (29; my italics). The novel even tropes the language of carnival and celebration in portraying the destruction of machines of war themselves, as the fatal explosion of Kraft’s plane registers with Yossarian primarily through the “tap dancing” of metal fragments on his own plane’s roof (137). The figurative nature of these descriptions, all rendered from the perspective of American soldiers, obscures the toll in lives and infrastructure at ground level. By these means *Catch-22* alerts readers to the dangers posed by the language and logic of Yossarian’s military system while also slyly plunging readers within this very language by way of more subdued tropes.

*Catch-22*, then, is a novel of both linguistic and spatial “capture,” trapping its characters and (more surreptitiously) its audience in language, laying before readers the fearsome possibility that *il n’y a pas d’hors texte*. Moreover, the novel incorporates structures of “capture” within its plot through a series of spaces that collectively confine and discipline characters. *Catch-22*’s “catch” can be read as, most obviously, a disadvantageous condition of any contract, one often concealed by the contract’s logic or phrasing; in this sense, the “catch” can be imagined as a potentially dreadful, or at least undesirable, consequence of contractual language. However, “catch” can also be understood as the entrapment or enclosure of an object of capture, and it is in linking these two forms of “catching” that Heller’s novel imbues the plight of Yossarian and his

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9 W.G. Sebald’s influential and provocative dictum for ethical war writing in his *On the Natural History of Destruction*—that eyewitness accounts of air war destruction “need to be supplemented by what a synoptic and artificial view reveals”—would then find *Catch-22*’s rendering of the air war incommensurate to the damage Yossarian’s Air Force inflicts on European cities (25-6). My argument seeks to restore ethical value to the act of witnessing by reference to Yossarian’s night journey through Rome.
fellow airmen with its grimmest tones.\(^\text{10}\) Thus, for instance, Yossarian feels “imprisoned in an airplane. In an airplane there was absolutely no place to go except to another part of the airplane” (33). Yossarian’s plane in this description assumes the qualities of Saussurean language, with each part of the plane referring to, defining itself in exclusive relation to, other parts of the plane’s self-contained system. (The flak from below threatens to punch literal aporia in the plane’s Saussurean signifiers.) Once more the plane seems inescapable in a way that recalls the inexorable logic of Catch-22 itself, whose “elliptical precision” submits those who live under it to an unending, and potentially fatal, feedback loop of entrapment within military systems of power (46). The very literary language that blurs textual and material processes of destruction in Catch-22 thus encodes within itself a fearsome legal structure that menaces the fragile human body.

Ironically, one of the exemplary spaces of such “elliptical” incarceration and linguistic capture in Catch-22 is the hospital: “[Yossarian] could start screaming inside a hospital and people would at least come running to try to help; outside the hospital they would throw him in prison if he ever started screaming about all the things he felt everyone ought to start screaming about, or they would put him in a hospital” (173). For Yossarian, free self-expression results in either imprisonment or hospitalization—options that Catch-22 exposes as false alternatives, even if we are introduced to hospital space in the novel’s opening chapter as a refuge from wartime atrocity. Hospital space comes to

\(^{10}\) This notion of spatial and linguistic “capture” evokes Alan Nadel’s impressive reading of postwar cultural strategies of “containment” in Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age. My use of the term “capture” connotes, I believe, the more insidious operations of language in Catch-22, which do far more than just “contain” language’s subjects in the novel. Nadel emphasizes the utter primacy of language to the ontology of characters and things within Heller’s text, arguing that normative language does not correlate to an objective reality but rather shows that objective reality is created by the sharing of language” (168). In contrast, my reading emphasizes the various strategies by which Catch-22 nevertheless imagines a space beyond language and representation in which an ethical community can be located (168).
exemplify the disjunction within technocratic worldviews between representation and reality that *Catch-22* thematizes; however, it also assumes overtones of oppression reminiscent of the penal spaces of Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*. The novel’s most obvious emblem of hospital language’s complete severance from worldly reality, the Soldier in White, abstracts the body’s materiality away into mere language, so that the Soldier’s full-body cast covers everything but a hole over his mouth from which language could potentially emerge (but never does; the Soldier remains voiceless). In this way, we can see hospital logic’s zero degree in the nurses’ care for the Soldier, whose vacant body, buried beneath an unscripted sheet of white cast, registers its existence only through signs, such as body temperature, legible within hospital language. *Catch-22* hereby ironically transforms the very site of embodiment into one of disembodiment.

The Soldier in White represents in many ways the bodily subjection to intertwined textual and physical violence that we see in Roman citizens in *Catch-22*’s climax, during Yossarian’s walk through a destroyed European urban zone. Yet the novel emphasizes the tragic universality of such subjection by stitching its American victims into tropic patterns across the text, even as European citizens consume ever more of the narrative focus. In keeping with *Catch-22*’s penchant for recurrent, repeated images the tone of whose iterations darkens as the novel unfolds, the Soldier in White, rendered in a

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11 The classic analysis of this structure as it operates in Heller’s novel is James L. McDonald’s “I See Everything Twice: The Structure of Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22*,” in *University Review* 34. For another thoughtful and thorough analysis of this structure, see Jon Woodson’s *A Study of Joseph Heller’s Catch-22: Going Around Twice*, which situates this structural reading within a broader argument that emphasizes the novel’s intertextual links to ancient myth cycles (as illustrated by Weston, Frazier, as well as in the Gilgamesh epic), the Bible, and the Kabbalah, connecting many of the novel’s characters to archetypal figures in these spiritual texts. Woodson’s focus on motifs of godhood and spirituality, as well as his perceptive linkage of characters’ belief in the divine to their belief in *Catch-22*, highlights the extent to which those who wield *Catch-22* assume the role of godhead in Heller’s novel, but it fails to probe this point further by, for instance, investigating what becomes sacred and what profane in this new system. To this end, my own reading of *Catch-22* emphasizes much more heavily than Woodson’s the importance of
humorous vein in the opening chapter, returns much later in the novel, but this time in macabre tones. His so-called body “constructed entirely of gauze, plaster and a thermometer,” the Soldier in White dies the exemplary death of *Catch-22*’s hospital space, a space in which materiality is eclipsed by administrative regimes of language and knowledge (167). The Soldier’s death, it seems to Yossarian, occurs not due to a cessation of bodily functions but rather due to Nurse Cramer’s proclamation in language that he has indeed died: “if she [Nurse Cramer] had not read the thermometer and reported what she had found, the soldier in white might still be lying there alive exactly as he had been lying there all along” (167). This scene, rendered largely from Yossarian’s perspective, transmutes what seems to be a bare medical fact (the thermometer reading that signals the Soldier’s death) into a nefarious “decision to terminate” the Soldier’s life by a delegate, Nurse Cramer, of the broader, faceless hospital system (167).

This death epitomizes *Catch-22*’s tacit distinction between phrases like “medical system” and “hospital system:” “medicine” represents in this novel the ideological term that justifies fundamentally administrative decisions made in the carceral space of the “hospital.” Hospital logic—tied to bureaucratic language rather than actual bodily recuperation—pervades *Catch-22*’s military, following this military into European zones of destruction and reconstruction. Such logic, introduced in Pianosa’s hospital in *Catch-22*’s early sections, informs the novel’s imaginings of reconstruction in later ones. In these imaginings, urban reconstruction becomes a sort of “hospital” work involving an administrative survey of ruined spaces that neglects the material needs of such spaces’the mortal, material body that becomes “captured” within both the dictates of *Catch-22* and language itself, using the metaphor of captivity as a way of reading the novel’s many spaces of imprisonment.
actual occupants. Before the novel shifts its gaze beyond the U.S. air force base, *Catch-22* depicts hospital logic as an encroachment of disciplinary space into all areas of Pianosan life. This encroachment occurs, in the logic of both doctors and the novel itself, through the great leveler of death, which renders any body the potential object of hospital scrutiny and knowledge. The novel’s intermittent reminders that all human life is a journey towards death assumes its most instrumentalized expression in the words of a “torpedo-shaped” doctor, his very description linking him with the novel’s bureaucratized military, who tells Yossarian that, “To a scientist, all dying boys are equal,” rendering the scope of hospital space potentially limitless (182).

In a strategy whose contours should by now seem familiar, while *Catch-22* skewers administrative medicine through portrayals of absurdly inept doctors, it nevertheless suggests the unsettling pervasiveness of administrative medicine’s logic and discourse by incorporating them within the narrative voice. This procedure in turn insinuates *Catch-22*’s readers within the very “hospitalized” perspective and space that the novel’s plot renders terrifying. Thus, for instance, the narrative, focalized at this point through Yossarian, portrays the traumatically repeated scene of Snowden’s wounding through a structure that recalls a medical diagnosis, as we first encounter the violence inflicted upon Snowden’s body through the language of a symptom (“I’m cold”) before only later discovering its grisly cause. Furthermore, in a passage that blends the logic of the universalized hospital (“all dying boys are equal”) with *Catch-22*’s thematization of cartography, we adopt the perspective of the bombardier in noting that “boys on every side of the bomb line were laying down their lives,” a passage that levels distinctions of nationality before the overriding truth of the body’s capacity to die (411,
16). Figuratively situated within the language of haunting abstraction that structures *Catch-22*’s diegetic world, the reader is tempted, like the bombardier, to perceive human bodies as mere numberless specks, devoid of particularity.

*II. Homines Sacri of the Streets*

The Soldier in White’s termination transpires in a hospital system blithely and callously blind to any reality beyond that of its own administrative language. This nameless, potentially disembodied character’s death epitomizes *Catch-22*’s suggestion that laws and logics inattentive to human particularity inevitably engender their own spaces of incarceration. However, the novel’s early stages, set almost exclusively on Yossarian’s U.S. military base, introduce us to the brutally abstract “reconstructive” logic of the military hospital only in order to move us beyond this hospital in later stages, gradually revealing hospital logic’s inexorable spread. In rendering the spread of such fearsome logic, *Catch-22*’s plot structure conveys its unique spatialities in modes reminiscent of critical spatial theory of recent decades. Most obviously, characters like the Soldier in White immediately call to mind the *homines sacri* Giorgio Agamben describes in *Homo Sacer*, where Agamben asserts that “the production of bare life is the originary activity of sovereignty” (83). For Agamben, the fearsome power of violence the sovereign wields over bare life occurs within and generates specific “localization[s]” and “territorialization[s]” that become states of nature beyond the commonwealth (111). Yet, like *Catch-22*, Agamben transposes such territorializations onto the plane of linguistic signification:

We have seen that only the sovereign decision on the state of exception opens the space in which it is possible to trace borders between inside and
outside and in which determinate rules can be assigned to determinate territories. In exactly the same way, only language as the pure potentiality to signify, withdrawing itself from every concrete instance of speech, divides the linguistic from the nonlinguistic and allows for the opening of areas of meaningful speech in which certain terms correspond to certain denotations. (21)

Agamben’s formulation of sovereign power as residing in a langue beyond worldly parole anachronistically provides the theoretical terrain on which Catch-22 engages Cold War discourses of “reconstruction” present in both the Marshall Plan and processes of U.S. domestic urban renewal. To what extent does Agamben’s sovereign decision correspond not only to the Soldier in White’s death but also, in its sheer abstraction, to what Jane Jacobs calls “decisions by absentee experts from the remote continent inhabited by housers and planners” that account for urban renewal’s failings (307)? Moreover, is resistance to decisions wrought by remote, administrative planners even possible in Yossarian’s world?

Agamben’s analogy of language to territorialized power relations thus enucleates some of what this chapter has heretofore treated as core themes in Catch-22, such as the fearsomely unaccountable legislative power of unstable language, as well as the precise spatial formations in which these power relations operate, entrapping subjects. Catch-22’s opaque power over Yossarian and his bloodied comrades invites us to read Yossarian’s plight in terms transposed directly from Agamben: Yossarian’s life is bare life, the military an all-powerful sovereign, the legal atmosphere of Pianosa a state of emergency.12 This is, of course, to say nothing of the Roman citizens whose lives

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12 In an interview with The Realist, Heller addresses the extent to which the state of emergency has, in post-WWII America, become the norm: “What distresses me very much is that the ethic which is often dictated by a wartime emergency has a certain justification when the wartime emergency exists, but when this […] ideology is transplanted to peacetime, then you have this kind of lag which leads not only to absurd situations, but to very tragic situations” (qtd. in Davis 73). Heller shares this concern about normalized
transpire in the figural village at the foot of the castle, threatened by American ordnance. (More will be said about their lives below.) Yet while Agamben’s terminology illuminates broad structures of *Catch-22*’s spatiality, the novel’s diegetic world and narrative structure reveal that this terminology does so only partially, with *Catch-22*, illuminated by Agamben, itself exposing a need for nuance in Agambenesque models of sovereignty and bare life. The devices by which *Catch-22* both stages and dissects Agamben’s categories of sovereignty and bare life are most clearly explained in Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life*. In this book, de Certeau critiques Foucault’s (and, anticipatorily, Agamben’s) analyses of power relations by retraining the analytical lens upon everyday practice, the “tactics” of users that remain unaccounted for and indeed illegible within the “strategies” of constituted powers. For de Certeau, concepts like Agamben’s zone of exception and Foucault’s carceral space unduly fixate on the production of systemic power. Instead, de Certeau examines the responses of power’s objects, how ordinary people resist power’s imposition, “manipulating the mechanisms of discipline and conforming to them only in order to evade them” (xiv). In a novel that features an entropic trickster figure, Yossarian, as its protagonist, de Certeau’s attention to the subversive tactics of users seems particularly necessary in understanding *Catch-22*’s deceptively complex representation of power.

De Certeau invites us to ask of Agamben: where is the agency of the bearer (barer?) of bare life? While *homo sacer* has been deemed a legally killable body, states of emergency with Agamben, who in his *State of Exception* describes such states as “legal civil war[s]”: “the voluntary creation of a permanent state of emergency (though perhaps not declared in the technical sense) has become one of the essential practices of contemporary states, including so-called democratic ones” (2).

Agamben has indeed been taken to task for a lack of nuance in his terms and models. See Leland de la Durantaye’s *Giorgio Amagben: A Critical Introduction*, pages 213-4, for a summary of these critiques.
Agamben’s top-heavy model of overbearing sovereignty leaves *homo sacer* utterly powerless, cowering in the shadow of sovereign violence from which there exists no escape or recourse. When de Certeau describes how “technocratically constructed, written, and functionalized space” appears to the sovereign figure of the technocrat, he recalls peering down upon New York’s polyglot urbanity, “looking down like a god,” from atop the World Trade Center (xviii, 92). From these heights the administrative scopic drive synthesizes the teeming mass of incommensurable urban spaces into an object of knowledge. For the technocrat gazing down upon New York, “One’s body is no longer clasped by the streets that turn and return it according to an anonymous law:” de Certeau’s “anonymous law” that clasps urban bodies here anticipates the law with force but without content that shadows the life of Agamben’s *homo sacer* (92). Also, just as Agamben likens the sovereign to a Hobbesian Leviathan, ruling over the commonwealth as an unassimilated fragment of the State of Nature, so de Certeau likens the synthesized city of technocratic discourse to a Hobbesian state, citing Hobbes as its “political model” (94). However, unlike Agamben, de Certeau ascribes to sovereignty’s objects a capacity for subversive resistance.

By revalorizing and affirming the illegible production of bodies clasped within the “anonymous law” of a dehumanizing administrative modernity, de Certeau unearths a subject position occluded from Agamben’s view. In so doing, he also illuminates *Catch-22*’s particular novelistic intervention into both spatial theories like Agamben’s and, more pointedly, Cold War discourses of “reconstruction.” It is precisely a movement from the perspective of the strategic sovereign power to that of the tactical user—the movement, to borrow de Certeau’s model, from atop the World Trade Centre down into New York’s
illegible, bustling streets—that *Catch-22* deploys in its plot and narrative structure. The effect of this movement in *Catch-22* is to both foreground and stage the disjuncture between legible, knowable space (the space of maps and of discontinuous language) and more tactile spaces that harbor a welter of sensuous experiences and memories in subjects whose lives are vulnerable to imminent violence. The novel enacts this movement perhaps most obviously in the spatial shifts of its narrative from Pianosa, an island described by Heller in the novel’s preface as purely fictive, to represented places with known referents such as Rome and New York. If we take Yossarian’s walk through Rome as *Catch-22*’s climax, part of this scene’s power resides in the immediacy of urban ruin we encounter after glimpsing the ruined city in mere fragments. In this scene, to be read closely in this chapter’s final section, the novel reveals the palpable effects of American bombing which have to this point been concealed from view by the narrative’s focalization through Air Force officers. Like Oedipa Maas’ night walk beneath the freeway in Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*, Yossarian’s trek provides what de Certeau would call the novel’s “spatial story” (the narrative’s procession through spaces) with a nightmarish and sustained portrayal of the plight of users beneath administrative violence, Yossarian’s walk an illegible and subversive script in the military’s spatial vocabulary.

Yossarian’s own status as trickster figure allows *Catch-22* to mine for humour the radical disjuncture between administrative spatial strategies and users’ tactics: take, for instance, the hospital, designed as a space for knowing and caring for the soldierly body, but used by Yossarian as a refuge from fighting. Similarly, Yossarian manipulates the

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14 I don’t mean to recycle the overdetermined binaries of de Certeau’s model. I realize that these spaces cannot be separated as starkly as I have separated them here, and that the spatialities of the novel reside along a continuum rather than in two polarized camps.
carceral space of his own airplane in order to escape combat, scrambling the intercom system in order to scuttle the dreaded Bologna mission. Much of the novel’s comedy, and much of what has been described above as a signifying gap in *Catch-22* between representation and actuality, relies too on the interplay of an administrative view of represented space and the representational, sensuous spaces of users. Furthermore, much of the novel’s grimness relies on the juxtaposition of and narrative shuttling between these types of space: the violence of military strategies of spatial representation emerges through the deferred revelation of injuries to both human bodies, such as Snowden’s, and body politics, such as Rome’s.

*Catch-22*, then, oscillates in its representations of sovereignty’s efficacy between an Agambenesque realm of fearsome violence towards bare life and a carnivalesque realm of users’ tactics, the subversive sphere enacted by Yossarian’s misuse of administrative space. What gives *Catch-22* its progressively darker tones as its narrative unfolds is the sense that while users of space like Yossarian may momentarily outwit the house of the technocratic military, may win the occasional hand, the house always wins in the end. By novel’s end, for instance, the vast majority of Yossarian’s friends have died, “caught” finally in a global military complex that turns war into a slaughterhouse of the young of all nations: “All over the world, boys on every side of the bomb line were laying down their lives for what they had been told was their country” (16). While *Catch-22*’s conclusion, which sees Yossarian abscond for Sweden, beyond the tentacles of the military’s technocracy, ostensibly offers hope for a space of bodily life and freedom to which the trickster can escape, the novel’s final few lines render this hope at best tentative, if not utterly unattainable: Yossarian must obey Major Danby’s order to
“Jump!” in order to elude Nately’s bloodthirsty, vengeful whore, whose knife narrowly misses Yossarian as he jumps aside (453). In this scene, Yossarian still relies on the orders of a superior officer to remain alive; he has not yet escaped the system. Catch-22 both juxtaposes represented spaces (the spaces of maps and language) with representational spaces (the spaces of sensuous, lived experience) and sequences its narrative in such a way as to gradually shift focalization from that of a military bombardier (in which ruined European urbanity is seen primarily from above, from Air Force bomb-sights) to that of an urban walker (the AWOL Yossarian who traverses the Eternal City’s rubble). Readers of Catch-22 undoubtedly enjoy a freedom of movement in both time and space as they skip constantly in both dimensions through the novel’s scrambled temporality and spatial story. Nevertheless, the novel’s spatial and temporal structures—funneling readers inwards towards the lived experience of annihilated urbanity while at the same time eschewing a recursive, repetitive time-scheme in its closing stages—render immediate and bracing the sovereign violence wrought upon the bodies of urban subjects, as well as upon the built urban environment whose historicity serves as a foundation for communal identity.

While the novel’s exemplary wounded body is that of Snowden, to the traumatic scene of whose wounding the narration repeatedly returns, wounded bodies litter Catch-22, proliferating on every side of the bomb line. Heller’s novel in this way portrays the urban and the bodily as inextricably intertwined, with the horrors of communal and urban destruction inscribed upon the bodies of soldiers and air raid victims alike. Thus Hungry Joe, Catch-22’s type of the skittish, unhinged soldier, has a “desolate, cratered face, sooty with care like an abandoned mining town,” his visage inscribed with not only the
terrestrial signs of his military bombing work ("cratered"), but also with markers of post-industrial communal decline, the "care" of the face adding pathos to the desolation and desuetude of the ruined town it connotes (52). In Hungry Joe’s face we see interwoven the effects of military destruction (the “cratered” landscape could be the effect of bombing) and those of an economy which has crumbled (the craters could also refer to the remains of mining pits). Just as communities decay, so too does the body; mapped upon Hungry Joe’s face are the traces of a violence that shatters both community and body and that, through the simile that likens the face to a town, shatters both simultaneously. Catch-22’s narration makes clear the culprit for this twinned bodily and urban decay, this decline of community that occurs upon and through the body: Catch-22 itself, the opaque and dehumanizing sovereign law that reduces bodies of both soldiers and civilians caught in its technocratic grip to “bare life.” Language of urban decay pervades descriptions of Hungry Joe’s body, but the darkness of the novel’s comedy arises in part from the gradual revelation that this bodily mode of urban annihilation afflicts all U.S. soldiers: while Hungry Joe appears the comical emblem of a body and psyche devastated by America’s military system, by novel’s end all U.S. soldiers resemble Hungry Joe.

Not only can the body be penetrated and mechanized in Catch-22’s economy of signs, it can also be inscribed with an ineradicable deathliness that haunts the flesh, unceasingly reminding the embodied subject of his or her capacity to be killed by overbearing forces of violence. In this way, the revulsion of Yossarian and his comrades towards the mutilated remains of Kid Sampson bespeaks a fearful awareness of the flesh’s mutability. Sliced in half by the propeller of McWatt’s plane as it passes
overhead, Kid Sampson’s body rains all over the soldiers sunning on the beach, prompting those on whom his remains fall to draw back in horror, “as though [...] trying to shrink away from their own odious skins” (338). Soldiers recoil from Sampson’s remains in just the same way they recoil from their own decaying, putrefying, yet inescapable bodies: the body here becomes a text inscribed with a latent deathliness that the “drops” of Kid Sampson’s remains render terrifyingly visible, conscious (338). The body’s corroding materiality itself becomes a submerged structuring device of everyday consciousness for soldiers like Yossarian, guiding their actions and functioning as an aporia of self-understanding by rendering the material bodily self a mere vehicle to a final destination of unknowable, fearful non-being. The body, then, like a technocratic language severed from material referents, and like disciplinary military spaces, becomes its own space of “capture,” an inescapable tomb fated to decay.

However, while the body’s trappings emerge as mere traps, as intrinsically rotting capsules, *Catch-22* depicts European urban bodies as overwritten by the script of American wartime bombing, linking violence wrought upon bodily “bare life” with that inflicted upon the built urban environment. In this way, *Catch-22*’s motif of destroyed textual spaces (as seen in the addresses Yossarian annihilates through censorship) finds its eerie echo in the novel’s rendering of a new form of writing upon both individual and civic bodies that attends spatial destruction. After sleeping with the Roman prostitute Luciana, Yossarian encounters an “invisible scar” etched in her back:

> She grew tense as fine steel when he traced the mutilated contours with his finger tip from a pit in her shoulder blade almost to the base of her spine. He winced at the many tortured nights she had spent in the hospital, with the ubiquitous, ineradicable odors of ether, fecal matter and disinfectant, of human flesh mortified and decaying amid the white uniforms, the
rubber-soled shoes, and the eerie night lights glowing dimly until dawn in the corridors. She had been wounded in an air raid. (158-9)

In this passage Luciana’s body memorializes wartime urban destruction, her scar functioning as a reminder inscribed upon living flesh of the body’s bare capacity to be killed. The very narration of this passage dehumanizes Luciana by likening her body, newly read and interpreted by Yossarian, to an inert substance, “fine steel,” subtly mechanizing it. Here Luciana’s scar bears multiple resonances, signaling itself as wounded bodily site but also catalyzing Yossarian’s own imaginative “reconstruction” of the destructive night of Luciana’s wounding—a reconstruction that prompts a pained “wince” from Yossarian. Significantly, in the very next chapter Yossarian, having received from Luciana a slip of paper bearing her name and address, rips it up blithely, an attack on the “textual space” of Luciana’s address reminiscent of Yossarian’s earlier obliteration of American streets and cities; it seems that, with regard to “textual spaces,” Yossarian is an equal-opportunity assaulter, annihilating European and American urban sites alike. This later scene of textual destruction, however, metaphorically links the shards of ruined “textual space” to Luciana’s own scarred body, as the following morning Yossarian regrets “tearing her long, lithe, nude, young vibrant limbs into tiny pieces of paper so impudently” (163). Yossarian’s erotic anamnesis here yokes decimated Rome to Luciana’s limbs: to destroy Roman “textual space” is to destroy Luciana’s very body.

In the figure of Luciana, then, the bodily, the urban, and the scriptural reveal their mutual imbrication, positioning Luciana’s scarred body as a European counterpart to that other traumatically charged and wounded body seen by Yossarian, Snowden’s.

Luciana’s body becomes synecdochic in *Catch-22*’s diegetic world of a wider range of suffering that we (and Yossarian) are left to imagine; by scrupulously
documenting her scarred flesh, the novel prompts an empathy for her singular, exemplary suffering that might arise less quickly in relation to abstract statistics like casualty rates or body counts. The novel renders Luciana’s body synecdochic by situating her scripted, wounded corporeality within a continuum of figurative bodily modes that range from the subterranean to the heavenly. This continuum extends *Catch-22’s* reflections on the body’s constitution in space into an entirely new, vertical dimension. Thus, for example, Major Metcalf is “shipped to the Solomon Islands to bury bodies,” and this motif of the buried corpse arises often in the narrative (81). By contrast, the nude body of Yossarian, who despises his military uniform (and removes it whenever possible), strikes the Chaplain as a “true revelation,” something otherworldly, even heavenly (204). Poised precariously between millennial life and subterranean death, the bodies of *Catch-22’s* diegetic world evince their vulnerability to forces of militarism and capitalism seemingly beyond their control. What becomes clear of *Catch-22’s* anxieties regarding U.S. governmentality’s global spread is that the life “caught” in its technocratic grip—the life whose zero degree Yossarian encounters amid the Eternal City’s ruins—assumes both the profane and otherworldly qualities associated with the ambivalence of the “sacred” in Agamben’s figure of *homo sacer*. As we shall see in the sections that follow, the novel weaves this understanding of the human body’s vulnerability into broader reflections on the forms of intercultural contact enabled by both militarism and business. In *Catch-22’s* spatial imagination, bodies bear a universalized vulnerability, but national identity matters nevertheless: the novel insists upon the menace posed by U.S. governmentality and finance to a localized sense of space that underwrites notions of collective identification.
III. Money Troubles

Written during a time of European economic and infrastructural reconstruction which the novel’s depictions of shattered urban spaces invite readers to imagine, *Catch-22* frames its WWII Europe as a “contact zone” replete with the conflicts and struggles that would attend intercultural relations between America and western Europe in the immediate post-WWII period. I borrow the term “contact zone” from Mary Louise Pratt’s *Imperial Eyes*, which defines this zone through a postcolonial lens as “the space of colonial encounters […] in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other […] usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (6). Needless to say, Pratt’s specific cartography of “contact zones” within nineteenth-century European travel writing differs widely from *Catch-22*’s twentieth-century, postmodernist project of satirizing the techniques of an American military, governmental, and commercial apparatus anchored in that country’s urban modernity. However, insofar as *Catch-22* meditates on issues of U.S. urbanism in its representations of a ruined European urbanity open for “reconstruction,” the broad contours of Pratt’s model of “contact zone” writing obtain: just as in Pratt’s samples of imperialist European travel writing, *Catch-22*’s meditations on urbanism demonstrate “the ways in which the periphery determines the metropolis” (Pratt 6). In a postwar era

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15 While I’m aware that what is colloquially referred to as “Americanization” is really an intricate process of cultural creolization on both sides of the Atlantic (see Rob Kroes’ *If You’ve Seen One, You’ve Seen the Mall: Europeans and American Mass Culture* for an influential version of this argument), the “Americanization” dealt with in this chapter is the type of top-down imposition of cultural values upon postwar Europe that Frances Stoner Saunders describes in *Who Paid the Piper?*

16 My argument here uses the terms “metropolis” and “periphery,” traditionally associated with theories of third-world dependency and underdevelopment, in tongue-in-cheek fashion, with a full awareness of the postwar historical fact of Europe’s own metropolitan status in relation to its imperial peripheries. What I wish to highlight through these terms, however, is the relational nature of the “metropole-periphery” model: intermediate points in a global constellation of metropoles and peripheries can be both “peripheral” to a larger metropolis and “metropolitan” to a less economically developed periphery. In this sense, then,
of unprecedented U.S. economic and political strength in relation to Europe, the novel’s staging of European-American intercultural “contact” allows *Catch-22* to formulate a sense of U.S. urban identity in relation to a (ravaged, destroyed) peripheral “other” ticketed for “reconstruction”—a refashioning, a repetition and reiteration with difference—through American aid. Having examined the diverse bodies “caught” within *Catch-22’s* textual spaces, we now gain a clearer sense of the cultural vectors—forces such as commerce and global print and television media—that overwrite and shape European-American encounters within the “contact zones” of ruined European urbanity.

Perhaps *Catch-22’s* most cancerous emblem of American “freedom,” Milo Minderbinder’s free-market international financial syndicate entwines itself with the novel’s military apparatus in violently advancing an American capitalism whose global spread pervades all intercultural encounters within European “contact zones.” Milo’s brand of commodity capitalism reduces all distinctions between objects, with money operating as a great leveler, so that “Milo could see more things than most people, but he could see none of them too distinctly” (65). (Ethical and national distinctions are leveled too: this is why Milo’s syndicate can contract with the enemy to bomb Yossarian’s own base.17) However, Milo’s brand of militarized capitalism belies its own rhetoric of global freedom by operating violently upon the “bare lives” of the military officers who represent instruments of capitalist profit for M & M Enterprises. Not only does Mudd, the dead man in Yossarian’s tent, die after Milo “alert[s] the German anti-aircraft

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17 Milo asserts that in recompense for bombing Yossarian’s base he “could reimburse the government for all the people and the property he had destroyed” (259).
gunners” to an impending American attack, but the Italian thief with a sweet tooth gets swindled in his dealings with Milo because, in Milo’s opinion, “he doesn’t even speak our language and deserves whatever he gets”—a state chillingly reminiscent of the Agamben-esque abandoned body, which, subjected to a law with force but without content, deserves whatever it gets (255, 67). Milo’s own blend of self-righteous rhetoric and underhanded, violent practice lends credence to Yossarian’s claim in Catch-22’s final chapter that all he sees around him are “people cashing in on every decent impulse and every human tragedy,” giving the lie to Milo’s claim that “everybody has a share” in his syndicate (445, 232).

Unnervingly violent, Milo’s brand of ever-expanding capitalism generates a “contact zone” in which democracy—seemingly intrinsic to U.S.-styled Cold War capitalism—begins to resemble the fascism with which many post-WWII Europeans were so recently acquainted. Catch-22 identifies democratic capitalism’s insidiously fascistic tendencies as a failure of representation that attends all systems of political and economic management that neglect human particularity. Thus we see blended in Milo’s globalizing capitalism an emergent personality cult (reminiscent of fascist dictators) with fascism’s characteristic penchant for violence. For instance, Milo’s personality cult appears as he injects U.S.-style capitalism into Palermo’s stumbling economy. Upon entering Palermo he receives a “tumultuous celebration” from a crowd “chanting in hoarse, glassy-eyed adoration,” and is elected mayor shortly afterwards (234). Only pages later, Catch-22 stages a fantasized version of the twinned growth of U.S. commerce and U.S. culture imagined in American Cold War foreign aid initiatives, emphasizing the perilous loss of autonomy that attends insertion into a U.S.-led global
financial system: “Milo was not only the Vice-Shah of Oran […] but also the Caliph of
Baghdad, the Imam of Damascus, and the Sheik of Araby. Milo was [also] the corn god,
the rain god and the rice god in backward regions” (237). While Milo’s syndicate
fosters the international trade between European countries sought by American foreign
policy in the immediate post-WWII period, the unreciprocated and asymmetrical violence
with which it structures “contact zone” encounters renders U.S. commerce’s expansion
perhaps the novel’s signal struggle. After all, as Colonel Cathcart realizes following
Milo’s bombing raid on Pianosa, wartime destruction—even of the U.S. soldiers and
planes who themselves destroy European urban space—constitutes a “commendable and
very lucrative blow on the side of private enterprise” (214).

Milo’s syndicate exemplifies most saliently Catch-22’s indictment of U.S.
capitalism for its callous abstraction—an abstraction that fails to register human
particularity, thwarting impulses like sympathy or empathy that presuppose knowledge of
another’s interiority. The novel continually interposes the profound physical and social
distances between characters upon which the emotion of compassion relies, frequently
staging scenes of compassion’s refusal, moments where the needs of a suffering subject
are cruelly ignored by a source of power, whether an individual entrepreneur like Milo or
a broader bureaucracy like Pianosa’s military hospital. Nevertheless, even in moments of
ostensible compassion, Catch-22 persistently questions the modalities it takes by asking
what kind of compassionate giving is commensurate to human suffering and loss. Is

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18 While Heller’s literary debts to such canonical modernists as Joyce, Eliot, and Kafka are well known, this
particular passage discloses a possible debt to Woolf, whose novel Mrs. Dalloway describes “Conversion,”
the sister of Dr. Bradshaw’s invidious principle of Proportion, in the following terms: “now engaged—in
the heat and sands of India, the mud and swamp of Africa, the purlieus of London, wherever, in short, the
climate or the devil tempts men to fall from the true belief which is her own—[…] even now engaged in
dashing down shrines, smashing idols, and setting up in their place her own stern countenance” (85).
giving money to the sufferer ethically adequate? Money thus becomes in the novel the locus of ethical reflections on the nature of debt, credit, and forms of payback. *Catch-22* ruminates on the possibility of atoning for violence inflicted on both bodies and buildings through cash payments, ultimately exposing the inadequacy of mere lucre in the face of irreparable loss. Because money functions as a potential (though imperfect) substitute or stand-in for wrecked objects, monetary waste troubles the novel’s ethical imagination. In a “contact zone” where the cultural distance between privileged Americans and needy Europeans frequently appears unbridgeable, to squander money is to reduce one’s ability to *feel* appropriately, to sense that one has acted adequately to alleviate another’s suffering. After all, with so much injury, hunger, and need in the ravaged world Yossarian traverses in bombed-out Rome, how can an American government in good conscience bury its money in the ground, like Milo, only never to see it sprout? The motif of waste pervades depictions of *Catch-22*’s bureaucratic military, in which layers upon layers of ambitious careerists undertake inefficient projects solely for personal advancement, all the way to the redundant layers of support that accrue to Mrs. Daneeka following her husband’s death in language but not in body. Scenes like these most obviously satirize bureaucratic waste in the age of the Organization Man, but lingering beneath such satire—and transforming it into dark comedy—is a sense that money might just represent the only means of adequately atoning for harm done to suffering others.

In the logic of *Catch-22*’s military-commercial complex money funds exculpation, so that to squander money is to forfeit the capital by which guilt can be bought off. However, money functions as a site of competing affective impulses in the novel, accruing diverse, sometimes contradictory meanings. For instance, *Catch-22*
couples the specter of monetary waste on the part of Americans with its waste by Europeans, the recipients of aid. Such waste by Europeans insinuates within the imagination of U.S. soldiers and planners a rationale for withholding aid. We see this specter of inefficiency intimated in Yossarian’s claim that the Roman girls to whom he gives Milo’s fruit “sell it all on the black market and use the money to buy flashy costume jewelry and cheap perfume,” converting American benevolence into baubles (63). Similarly, Milo explains that nondescript European “people,” stuck in backwards traditions, continue to purchase overpriced eggs in Malta simply because “they’ve always done it that way” (231). Such instances of putative waste on the part of aid recipients foster a sense of innate rightness intrinsic to reconstructive logics that fail to account for the specific, particular needs of foreign sufferers. In this way, they underwrite the callous inattention to alterity that Catch-22’s “hospital” logic demonstrates.

However, beyond presenting this specter of European inefficiency, Catch-22 even questions whether money can adequately atone for injury at all. Thus Yossarian, after encountering a desperate old woman evicted from Nateley’s whore’s apartment by ruthless military police, tries to alleviate the woman’s loss by leaving money, reflecting that “it was odd how many wrongs leaving money seemed to right,” the hedging of “seemed” signaling the passage’s ironic tone (409). In this instance, the narrative voice suggests, U.S. monetary aid cannot compensate for the woman’s loss of a physical home. By this late stage in the novel, readers have already been exposed to the specious notion that the floating signifier of money can pay back in full—in a sense, can establish a relationship of signification or correspondence with—a destroyed object. The inadequacy of money as a form of “payback” reveals itself most clearly in Milo’s
syndicate—an enterprise which, in a sense, leaves money (in the form of the share which “everyone” purportedly possesses), which supposedly justifies the exploitation of and harm inflicted upon both U.S. soldiers and European civilians. No amount of money, the novel suggests, can buy the dead back to life.

Money, moreover, represents only one mode of capital, financial capital. *Catch-22* further complicates intercultural encounters within Rome’s “contact zone” by registering a European *cultural* capital that, rooted in history, culturally jejune America cannot hope to match. This cultural capital both bespeaks the Continent’s geopolitically diminished postwar stature by evoking a more glorious past and suggests something of value (an enduring cultural heritage) that exceeds and remains undetermined by great power relations. In this regard, the old man at Nately’s whore’s bordello embodies an ineffaceable past that resists “reconstruction.” The old man’s encounter with Nately in chapter twenty-three, for instance, can be read as Cold War foreign policy allegory, with the lascivious old man cast in the role of both tempter and prophet, “sitting in his musty blue armchair like some satanic and hedonistic deity on a throne, a stolen U.S. Army blanket wrapped around his spindly legs to ward off a chill,” his frail body sustained by pilfered American goods (242). Nately, on the other hand, a scion of American bluebloods, in this encounter seems the epitome of a youthful, jaunty American idealism as he boasts that “America is the strongest and most prosperous nation on earth” (242). Amid Rome’s ruins, however, Nately’s nationalistic rhetoric falters as he encounters a historicity—a sense of deep time—unbeknownst to an America only recently risen to global prominence: Nately, and readers, gain the chilling sense that Rome’s ruins hold the key not only to Europe’s past, but also to America’s future, as the old man intones
that “Rome was destroyed, Greece was destroyed, Persia was destroyed, Spain was
destroyed. All great countries are destroyed. Why not yours?” (243) Such deep
history—a commodity America cannot possess or buy—reveals as contingent and
precarious the values that the novel’s U.S. technocracy trumpets as instrumental to its
exceptional status and geopolitical supremacy.

In the old man’s indictment of American bravado, destroyed European urbanity
reveals a latent and inextricable rot—a destiny of decay—at the heart of American
civilization. The old man in this passage embodies a long history punctuated by rises
and falls that exposes the vainglory of superpower imperialism. In the logic of this
encounter, sheer endurance—an echo of Catch-22’s valorization of sheer life in
Yossarian’s will to live at all costs—becomes a virtue that overrides the fleeting glories
of momentary geopolitical power. Catch-22 thus stages Old Europe’s jaded
intransigence towards American prosperity, as well as its potential disloyalty to the
country responsible for its “reconstruction:” the old man sneers to Nately that “your
country will have no more loyal partisan in Italy than me—but only as long as you
remain in Italy” (245). Here the tactics of users, to borrow de Certeau’s terminology,
subvert the technocratic strategies of European reconstruction. However, and above

19 Urban decay features prominently throughout Heller’s career—as Heller himself mentions in a 1981
interview with Rolling Stone, “in all my books […] there’s a passage on the degeneration of cities, the
deterioration of law and order” (“Checking in with Joseph Heller” 229-30). This motif of American urban
rot can be seen throughout Heller’s oeuvre, from Bob Slocum’s comment in Something Happened that
“From sea to shining sea the country is filling with slag, shale, and used-up automobile tires […] Towns die
[…] ‘America the Beautiful’ isn’t,” to Bruce Gold’s walk through dilapidated Coney Island in Good as
Gold, all the way to Closing Time, Heller’s 1994 sequel to Catch-22, in which Yossarian, watching
panhandlers in New York City, reflects that “Nowhere in his lifetime […] not in wartime Rome or Pianosa
or even in blasted Naples or Sicily, had he been a spectator to such atrocious squalor as he saw mounting
up all around him now into an eminent domain of decay” (484, 49). Curiously, Heller scholarship leaves
the theme of urban rot in Heller’s novels almost entirely unmentioned.

20 Also noteworthy is that the old man partially blinds Catch-22’s clearest emblem of an American cultural
spread in Europe that proceeds lawlessly and unboundedly, Major de Coverley. See, for instance, the
opening pages of chapter thirteen, where the old man appears as a caricature of Old Europe, his mouth
and beyond such tactical subversion, the Old Man’s threat invokes American anxieties that unwittingly index a logical knot at the heart of foreign aid projects. If such projects are ostensibly predicated on emotional relations of compassion, as suggested by Marshall Plan publicity, then to what extent is loyalty expected on the part of aid recipient to aid giver? The encounters *Catch-22* stages in Rome’s contact zone expose as surprisingly porous the boundary between aid as altruistic gift and aid as instrumental transaction. As the novel’s spatial story moves inexorably from a Europe abstracted in military and planning discourse to a material, tactile space of contact, such knots come to appear increasingly irresolvable.

**IV. Catching Community**

It is Yossarian’s city walk through Rome in *Catch-22*’s chapter thirty-nine, “The Eternal City,” where the novel’s preoccupations with modes of political community, bodily harm, just compensation, and intercultural contact come together. Yossarian’s journey through shattered European urbanity functions as both a tactile engagement with the city’s representational spaces (over against the detached mediations of the ruined city with which Heller has presented readers up to this point in the novel) and an indictment of American strategies of urbanism. The novel’s focalization of the night journey through Yossarian allows readers to conclude, along with Yossarian, that U.S.-funded “reconstruction” of postwar Europe risks fostering a callous individualism associated in *Catch-22* with American identity. At the same time, though, Rome’s ruins evoke both

“reeking with sour fumes of wine, cheese, and garlic” (133). Significantly, Major de Coverley enters the “shattered city” in “a jeep he had obtained from somewhere,” the ambiguity of the jeep’s source suggestive of de Coverley’s lawless practices, established earlier when readers learn that his duties include “kidnapping Italian laborers” (131). The lawless de Coverley, unidentifiable even to the army’s American technocracy, nevertheless “spearhead[s] every important [American] advance fearlessly and successfully,” operating in the text as a type of American rugged individualism. His blinding by the old man, then, signals the perils of European engagement for this type of individualism.
memories and portents—memories of a deep historicity against which the poise of
Yossarian’s newly hegemonic but culturally young country falters, and portents of
Rome’s possible future following American-influenced “reconstruction,” imaginings of a
city whose physical sites have been rebuilt but whose sense of urban community remains
lost amid a tide of foreign culture.

As Yossarian enters the city he feels the weight of a history of violence, the
“chain of inherited habit that was imperiling them all,” a history perpetuated by the very
urban destruction he himself perpetrates as a U.S. bombardier: Italian collective history
and cultural identity crumble as we learn that “The Colosseum was a dilapidated shell,
and the Arch of Constantine had fallen” (406). Significantly, the old man, embodiment
of European perdurability, marker of its history, has by this point died, the novel’s
narration insinuates, at the hands of military police troped in the language of aerial
bombardment: the soldiers’ “fiery and malicious exhilaration” complements their
“sanctimonious, ruthless sense of right and dedication” in a mixture that recalls the
violence and self-righteousness in Milo’s brand of U.S.-led global capitalism (408; my
italics). It is no coincidence that, later in Yossarian’s walk, it is outside the “Ministry of
Public Affairs” that he witnesses “a drunken lady […] backed up against one of the fluted
Corinthian columns by a drunken young soldier” who ignores the drunken lady’s pleas to
stop, for this climactic chapter of Catch-22 depicts the intertwined destruction of bodies,
laws, and “Public Affairs” in European urban space under the weight of American
interventions (414). In Yossarian’s nighttime walk we see in its most visceral form the
imbrication of body politics and politicized bodies in which Catch-22 locates not only the
evident violence of an American military-commercial complex associated with U.S.
urbanism, but also possible avenues for the rehabilitation of that urbanism.

Yossarian’s nightmarish walk has often been characterized as his descent to a mythic underworld that precedes his moment of revelatory insight at chapter’s end. However, Heller’s Rome nevertheless retains an essential worldliness in a passage crucial to understanding *Catch-22*’s geopolitical unconscious, the stakes it invests in relations between American and European modes of urbanity. Upon witnessing a destitute mother and child shivering in the rain, their homes presumably destroyed, Yossarian likens the inequalities of Roman urban space under a wartime state of emergency to urban life in his own land:

> What a lousy earth! He wondered how many people were destitute that same night even in his own prosperous country, how many homes were shanties, how many husbands were drunk and wives socked, and how many children were bullied, abused or abandoned. How many families hungered for food they could not afford to buy? How many hearts were broken? How many suicides would take place that same night, how many people would go insane? How many cockroaches and landlords would triumph? How many winners were losers, successes failures, rich men poor men? How many wise guys were stupid? How many happy endings were unhappy endings? How many honest men were liars, brave men cowards, loyal men traitors, how many sainted men were corrupt, how many people in positions of trust had sold their souls to blackguards for petty cash, how many had never had souls? How many straight-and-narrow paths were crooked paths? How many best families were worst families and how many good people were bad people? When you added them all up and then subtracted, you might be left with only the children, and perhaps with Albert Einstein and an old violinist or sculptor somewhere. (412-3)

Here ruined Rome mirrors the urbanity of Yossarian’s America, reflecting the class divisions that become so noticeable in a crowded cityscape, but also unveiling a sordid

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21 The original expression of this argument is Minna Doskow’s article “The Night Journey in *Catch-22*.” While Doskow’s argument focuses on Yossarian’s education, by which he learns his “proper course of action,” my reading of Yossarian’s night walk emphasizes that the night walk teaches both us and Yossarian more than Doskow suggests (e.g. the universality of the suffering depicted in this episode is associated within the novel’s narrative patterns with urban space—it’s no coincidence that musings on responsibility, ethics, and payback take place in a city bombed by the American Air Force) (189).
reality that belies public spectacle. Rome’s mirror, for instance, reveals American “wise
guys” as “stupid,” and “sainted men” as “corrupt,” bequeathing to Yossarian (and, by
extension, to Catch-22’s audience) a sense that all class relations—even those “in his
own prosperous country”—rely upon a sheer force whose rawest form instantiates itself
in the law with force but without content that is Catch-22. To be sure, the inequalities
portrayed in this passage are primarily economic (for instance, in descriptions of
“families [who] hungered for food they could not afford to buy” and of “rich men” who
are really “poor men”), largely overlooking inequalities of race and gender (the latter of
which appears only in passing in a description of “wives socked” by drunken husbands).
That Yossarian foregrounds class inequalities in his imaginative linkage of shattered
Rome to urban America implicates the manipulative and violent international capitalism
of Milo Minderbinder in Rome’s—and America’s—urban deterioration.

The length of this catalogue of discrimination, abuse, and deception, as well as the
anaphora by which it becomes one of the novel’s gravest passages, suggests that if we are
to read Yossarian’s walk through “The Eternal City” as Catch-22’s climactic moment of
discovery and revelation, the tenor of this climax cannot be adequately explained without
an awareness of how the novel imaginatively overlays one mode of urbanity upon
another, disclosing through Rome’s urban destruction the grim status of American city
space. In Yossarian’s ruminations on this wounded European city, the fall of buildings
raises the curtain on American urban rot.\textsuperscript{22} The appeal to quantification displayed by the
narrative voice in this catalogue (the repeated “how many”) would appear to replicate an

\textsuperscript{22} In his Voices of Decline: The Postwar Fate of U.S. Cities, Robert A. Beauregard notes that, in the post-
WWII period of Catch-22’s composition, “Urban decline lurked behind every postwar story” of Heller’s
America, and that the “spread of physical decay” in American cities lent credence to a sense in public
consciousness that “the modern city seemed on the verge of total collapse” (4, 151).
administrative logic and language of technocratic planning discourse skewered in *Catch-22*’s earlier sections. However, having presented individual, particular scenes of suffering encountered by Yossarian over the course of his walk, this scene instead weds the language of numerical abstraction to a tactile knowledge of specific human suffering in order to render the wounds of Roman bodies and buildings representative of wider, transnational ills.

In displaying a zero-degree of brutalism that subtends the economic disparities and spatial segregations of American cities, this destroyed Rome reveals present fissures in America’s body politic. However, it also—insofar as any ruin invokes an imaginative “reconstruction” on the part of its viewer, an act that imagines both past spatial forms and potential future reconstructions—suggests possible avenues for rehabilitating American urban space, for healing the fissures. The depredations Yossarian imagines as he gazes upon Rome’s ruins suggest the need for economic, governmental, and spatial orders attuned to human vulnerability—to the finitude of the woundable (and killable and exploitable) human body—in ways that Milo’s brand of capitalism or America’s technocratic and ruthlessly violent military are not. It is precisely this sense of human frailty, of the concomitant necessity for acknowledging human particularity, which Yossarian acquires near novel’s end as he reads the “message” in Snowden’s wounded body: “Man was matter […] Drop him out a window and he’ll fall. Set fire to him and he’ll burn. Bury him and he’ll rot, like other kinds of garbage. The spirit gone, man is garbage” (440). Besides cataloguing various of the novel’s corpses—for instance, Michaela (the maid whom Aarfy drops out a window), the bodies buried (and now rotting) in the South Seas, and the European urbanites killed in the fire of aerial
bombing—Snowden’s “message” expresses a universalism that levels distinctions between bodies on a global scale. All bodies, Snowden’s message suggests, are mere killable matter, no matter which side of the bomb line they occupy.

Yet *Catch-22* tempers this universalism by portraying asymmetries of international geopolitical power and wealth that impede a fellow-feeling across nations rooted in bodily finitude. This is to say, then, that a “community” rooted in finitude can emerge in America as an alternative to *Catch-22*’s nefarious technocratic military-commercial complex, just as it can emerge in ruined Rome, but that these respective communities remain irreconcilable to one another. To understand Rome as an urban mirror for American city life, then, is to read into its cityscape properties of the heterotopic mirror described in Michel Foucault’s essay “Of Other Spaces:”

> From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself where I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there. (24)

Foucault’s heterotopic mirror brings together all the other places it holds in juxtaposition, but nevertheless generates a sense of discrete selfhood—the reconstituted self in the mirror—for the viewing subject. In the space of wounded Rome—a space traversed and shaped by the novel’s destructive military-commercial complex—the European city becomes a mirror that juxtaposes Roman urbanity to U.S. urbanity while nevertheless holding them apart, intimating an insurmountable difference between American soldiers and Roman urbanites rooted in geopolitical and economic relations. The material
distance intrinsic to compassionate giving produces an impassable gulf between bodies that, despite their shared vulnerability, remain intractably tied to national identities.

Yossarian’s final, and culminating, encounter with woundable life in “The Eternal City” chapter illustrates the tension in *Catch-22’s* presentation of intercultural and geopolitical relations between a universalism based in human mortality and an intractable separateness, based in power relations, that continuously differentiates Americans like Yossarian from the European urbanites whose cities they have destroyed and, in the postwar period of *Catch-22’s* composition, are now helping to reconstruct. After Aarfy drops Michaela out a window, Yossarian confronts her defenestrated corpse:

> Her dead body was still lying on the pavement when Yossarian arrived and pushed his way politely through the circle of solemn neighbors with dim lanterns, who glared with venom as they shrank away from him and pointed up bitterly toward the second-floor windows in their private, grim, accusing conversations. Yossarian’s heart pounded with fright and horror at the pitiful, ominous, gory spectacle of the broken corpse. (417)

The fact that the body “still” lies on the pavement upon Yossarian’s arrival allows readers to imagine the scene that immediately precedes his intrusion: an unbroken circle of destitute Roman urbanites brought together before Michaela’s dead body. By coming together before the supreme example of human bodily frailty, these urbanites resemble the sort of “community” envisioned by Jean-Luc Nancy in *The Inoperative Community*, where Nancy argues that “it is through death that the community reveals itself” (14). For Nancy, true community requires its subjects to abandon notions of a transcendent immanence or essence that binds them together; rather, the inoperative community, what Nancy poses in opposition to the immanent communities of fascism, consists of a “resistance to immanence,” a “communication of finitude” between subjects so that community becomes “a gift to be renewed and communicated, […] not a work to be done
or produced” (35). If we see the Roman urbanites that encircle Michaela’s corpse as a tenuous “community” brought together by a public spectacle of bodily finitude, Yossarian’s entrance into the circle shatters this community, dispelling a sense of communication between European urbanites as “private [...] conversations” ensue among them (417). Yossarian, despite being AWOL, nevertheless retains his army uniform, a marker of an immanent or essential aspect of his identity within the ruined city. In the eyes of this fragile Roman community, then, Yossarian’s uniform becomes the synecdochic marker of a broader force of violence that wracks the city, provoking their “glare[s]” (417). Yossarian’s intrusion into the circle of destitute Roman onlookers reveals *Catch-22’s* awareness of irremediable markers of cultural difference—markers given meaning by the geopolitical encounters the novel stages—that attenuate possibilities for a universalism rooted in human mortality. In *Catch-22’s* “Eternal City,” geopolitical violence demarcates the boundaries of human community.

Aarfy’s murder, however, also occasions *Catch-22’s* grimmest reflections on payback, positioning European city space as the locus of the novel’s anxieties over ethical modes of compensation for acts of violence. When asked by Yossarian why he chose to rape and murder Michaela rather than simply hiring a prostitute, Aarfy brags, “I never paid for it in my life” (418). Harkening back to earlier scenes in *Catch-22* that

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23 Nancy’s inoperative community, then, represents the antithesis of the “camp” which Agamben sees as the inescapable political structure of our age. (Ana Luszczynska’s article “The Opposite of the Concentration Camp: Nancy’s Vision of Community” explains this contrast between inoperativity and the fascist camp with astounding clarity.) Juxtaposing Nancy’s conception of community with Agamben’s allows us to see more clearly how *Catch-22* articulates competing models of communal and spatial organization via representations of wounded bodies. Ian James lucidly explicates death’s centrality to this type of community: “Nancy’s community is ‘unworked,’ then, insofar as it is a multiplicity of singular existences who are ‘in common’ only on the basis of a shared mortality which cannot be subsumed into any communal project or collective identity. Their relation to death is not the communication, communion, or fusion of a subject and object. It is the exposure of each singular existence, its being-outside-of-itself, to a death which is revealed in and through the death of others. Community reveals, or rather is, our exposure to the unmasterable limit of death, and thus our being together outside of all identity, or work of subjectivity.” (185)
query the status of cash payments as just compensation (“it was odd how many wrongs leaving money seemed to right”), this scene stages the horrific alternative to paying: rather than pay, Aarfy rapes and murders. This alternative generates Michaela’s “broken corpse,” a silent (Aarfy holds “his hand over her mouth”) and forever silenced European urbanite whose death catalyzes a community inaccessible to Americans like Yossarian (417). Aarfy never pays for “it” in either pecuniary or legal terms: he never pays prostitutes, just as he never pays a legal price for homicide.24 If the geopolitical unconscious of Catch-22 has already suggested both the inadequacy of monetary payback for bodily and urban destruction as well as the ominous expansion of U.S. culture that attends such payback in the form of Cold War programs like the Marshall Plan, it nevertheless suggests, despairingly, the necessity of such payback by rendering its grisly alternative in the form of Michaela’s corpse. Catch-22 queries the efficacy of American Cold War foreign policy by revealing the need for an ethical mode of payback that respects otherness as such.

Catch-22’s movement from strategic spaces to tactical ones—from technocratic spatial representations like maps to the more tactile experience of walking the city—in its broad narrative structure parallels a textual desire to penetrate interiors, to access a revelatory truth that lies beyond artful facades. In this way we can align Yossarian’s stroll through nighttime Rome (his engagement as non-officer with a city bombed by officers like himself) with other quests for truth within the text, such as Yossarian’s desire to learn the meaning behind Orr’s “fantastic story of why the naked girl in Nately’s

24 In Catch-22’s Roman state of emergency, spatial divisions seem to be policed more heavily than anything else: rather than arrest Aarfy for murder, the military police arrests Yossarian for entering Rome without a pass; also, Aarfy’s assertion that Michaela’s dead body has “no right” to be out in the street because it is “after curfew” elevates in his own mind—and perhaps in the minds of the policemen who fail to arrest Aarfy—Michaela’s public transgression over Aarfy’s homicide (418).
whore’s apartment was hitting him over the head with her shoe,” or the fascination of sick ward officers with the Soldier in White, whose body may or may not actually exist beneath his cast (236). Similarly, the group of officers and doctors that treats (and interrogates) Yossarian in chapter forty-one, “Snowden,” desires to “get to the truth” and “get to the inside of things once and for all,” which they attempt (and fail) to do by reading an X ray of his body (431). Throughout *Catch-22*, it seems, truth lies beneath the surface: in some cases, naked bodies like Yossarian’s possess a revelatory message beneath the surface script of military uniforms, while in other cases, naked bodies like Yossarian’s conceal an inner truth undetectable even by X ray.

The text’s most prominent bodily interior, Snowden’s, prompts a process of reading on Yossarian’s part that discloses revelatory truth. Initially, Yossarian cannot distinguish between the signifier of Snowden’s military uniform and the ostensible signified of his bare flesh, as “It was impossible to tell where the shreds of his saturated coveralls ended and the ragged flesh began” (436). However, the inscrutability of Snowden’s textualized skin recedes as Yossarian uncovers yet another unreadable textual layer, the wound in Snowden’s thigh, that once more resists comprehension, proving “too raw and deep to see into clearly” (438). Finally, though, *Catch-22* stages its moment of grim revelation, as Yossarian discovers yet another textual layer, the “gigantic hole” under Snowden’s armpit that, unlike earlier layers, presents lucid truth: “It was easy to read the message in [Snowden’s] entrails” (438, 440). Snowden’s secret—“The spirit gone, man is garbage”—invokes a spiritual realm evacuated of divinity (for instance, if we take Snowden’s message as: man’s body, in the absence of a spiritual element, is mere corporeal matter), a world eerily echoed in Yossarian’s own acts of arbitrary
Godhood, his “annihilating [of] entire metropolises with careless flicks of his wrist as though he were God” (8). In a novel preoccupied with the question of why bad things happen to good people—“What in the world was running through that warped, evil, scatological mind of His when He robbed old people of the power to control their bowel movements? Why in the world did he ever create pain?” Yossarian wonders—Snowden’s secret impugns the arbitrary acts of violence from above that demolish European urbanity as unprincipled acts of brute force that frustrate any attempts at justification, since, in Catch-22’s universe, justice, whether earthly or cosmic, is absent (179). It is this inequitable, asymmetrical violence, Catch-22’s narrative suggests, that reigns in Yossarian’s “own prosperous country,” and that represents this country’s most potent export in Cold War geopolitics.

If, with Tobin Siebers, we consider the Cold War to be “the era of suspicion par excellence,” Catch-22’s own hermeneutics of suspicion—its persistent drive to expose an inner “real” meaning hidden by surfaces—maps retroactively upon the bodies and urban spaces of its WWII diegetic world a mode of reading drawn from the time of the novel’s actual postwar composition. Catch-22 in this way discerns beneath bodies and spaces inscribed with the rhetoric of U.S. Cold War foreign policy a darker shattering of community (5). In Catch-22’s interpretation of the urban, then, we see scrutiny of American Cold War cultural expansion braided with a mode of “reconstruction” across both space and time that is exemplified by the anonymous city walker of Freud’s Civilizations and Its Discontents. Amid Rome’s unhomely, ruined physical infrastructure Catch-22 locates an uncanny (and paranoid and suspicious) sense of home.
CHAPTER TWO

Babbling Cacophony: Unmaking and Making in Cold War Faulkner

Two letters written by William Faulkner during World War II to his stepson, Malcolm A. Franklin, reveal the author’s vexed relationship with the country whose military he sought, unsuccessfully, to enter. The first, written on 5 December 1942 from Warner Brothers Studio in Burbank, California, where Faulkner scraped out a living through screenwriting, describes something rotten in the state of California—a rot created by an economy of frivolous consumption, one that supports “parasites who exist only because of motion picture salaries” (Letters 165). The need for levels of consumption uncurbed by wartime rationing amongst these parasites, Faulkner claims, spells ruin for America’s city of show-business spectacle:

There is something here for an anthropologist’s notebook. This is one of the richest towns in the country. As it exists today, its economy and geography was fixed and invented by the automobile […] [T]he town which the automobile created, is dying. I think that a detached and impersonal spectator could watch here what some superman in a steamheated diving-bell could have watched at the beginning of the ice age, say: a doomed way of life and its seething inhabitants all saying: Why, Jack Frost simply cant do this to us […] We’ve got to be warm. We cant live otherwise. (Letters 166)

Despite his evocation of American urban decline (or perhaps because of it) Faulkner goes on to applaud his stepson’s decision to enter the military, though not without adding the caveat emptor that while the American army needs enthusiastic and regimented soldiers like Malcolm, its administrative structure encourages a stultifying mental uniformity at odds with what Faulkner takes as a quintessentially American ideal: liberty. “To be a good soldier,” he warns Malcolm, “infers not only a capacity for being misled, but a willingness for it: an eagerness even to supply the gaps in the logic of them who persuade
him to relinquish his privacy” (*Letters* 166). Discerning the damage done to personal privacy by ideological conformity in a military that seeks to defend a “doomed way of life,” Faulkner also thematically links the international projection of American military power—what political scientists would call its “hard power”—with the crumbling foundations of a city whose entertainments constitute a vital arm of American “soft power,” an integral part of America’s cultural marketing.

Faulkner’s second letter to Malcolm, written from Burbank nearly seven months later, on 4 July 1943, shifts the writer’s focus on American urban decline from the city created by the automobile to the city which created the automobile: Detroit. In this letter, Faulkner notes that on the same day that a squadron of African-American pilots fought admirably in a battle in northern Africa, “a mob of white men and white policemen killed 20 negroes in Detroit” (*Letters* 175). Startling in its juxtaposition of urban racial violence with valorous armed service by African Americans, Faulkner’s letter registers social tensions which would, in the postwar period, flare into urban riots: “A change will come out of this war,” Faulkner foresees, suggesting that “the people who run this country” will be “forced to make good the shibboleth they glibly talk about freedom, liberty, human rights” (*Letters* 176). In both letters, it seems, urban decline evidences a necessity to tether administrative language—the words of “the people who run this country”—to tangible referents in a social realm fostered by new forms of political praxis: the sorts of freedom, liberty, and human rights which subjects of administration can experience in their everyday lives rather than merely read about in press releases.

This chapter suggests that figures of urban ruin crystallize in their doubleness Faulkner’s fascination with and antipathy to American mass-market consumerism during
the early Cold War. Images of place-destruction in three texts published after Faulkner’s 1950 Nobel Prize—two novels, *Requiem for a Nun* (1951) and *A Fable* (1954), and a magazine essay, “On Privacy” (1955)—reveal Faulkner’s cultural, aesthetic, and geopolitical investments in the blighted modernity of America’s postwar urban crisis. Faulkner rose to the status of literary celebrity in a post-WWII America of unprecedented international clout and domestic affluence, but also one whose foremost metropolises were beset by “crisis.” As Robert A. Beauregard notes in *Voices of Decline: the Postwar Fate of U.S. Cities*, “after World War II, the large industrial cities of the United States entered a period of profound collapse” to such an extent that “the proclaimed decline of large cities framed the lives of those who came of age in the last half of the twentieth century” (vii, viii). While the public discourse of urban crisis emerged primarily in reference to a set of material conditions in gestation in Northern cities long before the Cold War, the military conflicts that exacerbated Northern urban decay kindled similarly sweeping change in the metropolises of Faulkner’s South. In fact, the South faced urban and regional upheaval brought on by the recent wartime economy and its postwar global expansion, and Faulkner’s writing in this period stages the crisis of urban re-making in ways that have yet to be explored by critics.

Tens of billions of dollars in federal spending poured into Southern states between 1941 and 1945, an amount exceeding even New Deal aid during the Great Depression (Larsen 128-9). This money went not only towards the construction of warm-weather military training camps, but also towards proliferating industrial facilities in shipbuilding, munitions, textiles, and chemicals (Larsen 129). Such rapid industrialization, combined

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25 My central argument in this chapter is indebted to John T. Matthews’s claim that “writing for the first time in his career as a world figure, and in years during which global geopolitics were creating an era of apocalypse, Faulkner in the 1950s responds to Cold War preoccupations” (7).
with a progressive mechanization of agriculture that rendered many croppers expendable, produced explosive urban growth in the late 1940s and early 1950s which far outstripped that of Northern metropolises. A corollary of this growth was exacerbated class and racial strife, prompting John Dos Passos to describe Mobile, Alabama as “trampled and battered like a city that’s been taken by storm. Sidewalks are crowded. Gutters are stacked with litter. […] Garbage cans are overflowing” (qtd. in Tindall 703). Echoing discourse of early Cold War urban decline in the North, the urban fabric of Faulkner’s South was experiencing enormous, and publicly underappreciated, change:

Bulldozers were the most visible emblem of the forces remaking the South at mid-century, but they represented much more than material or even economic transformation. The total experience of war mobilization […] made the changes that came to the South between Pearl Harbor and the end of the Korean War transformative rather than evolutionary. War brought ordinary Americans into more intimate contact with the national state than had ever been the case […] As a result, the relationship of regional identity and race relations to national sovereignty was forever altered by the response to […] global war. (Sparrow 167-8)

Global war acts as a fulcrum of geographical change in this account, transforming its regional sites of production even as it traumatically marks its international sites of conflict.

However, Faulkner himself was brought into “more intimate contact with the national state than had ever been the case” for a very different reason following WWII: the recuperation of his authorial reputation after the war forced the famously diffident author to negotiate boundaries of “private” and “public” like never before as the US State Department sought to market him abroad as an icon of American cultural freedom.26

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26 The seminal study of Faulkner’s public stature is Lawrence Schwartz’s *Creating Faulkner’s Reputation*, which attributes Faulkner’s rise from overlooked minor author before WWII to paragon of American literary modernism in the postwar period to a cluster of cultural, commercial, and political forces not dissimilar from those which vaulted Abstract Expressionists to prominence in the postwar art world (a rise
Sent abroad on cultural marketing sorties in what Frances Stonor Saunders calls the “cultural cold war,” Faulkner thus lent his celebrity to a gallery of foreign affairs projects during the period which constituted a campaign for the hearts and minds of Europeans on behalf of an American mode of mass-consumerism about which he harbored grave and well-documented doubts. Indeed, a crucial preoccupation of this period for Faulkner was the global diffusion of American capital through both free-market channels and those occasioned by government projects like the Marshall Plan. In a coupling reminiscent of the military-commercial complex lampooned by Heller in Catch-22, federal money channeled through programs like the Marshall Plan sought to buttress Western Europe against communism by promoting an American mode of consumer capitalism identifiable, in the rhetoric of U.S. Cold War foreign policy, with liberty. Victoria de Grazia’s Irresistible Empire sees the high Cold War as the culmination of a period since the early twentieth century in which America’s consumerist values slowly permeated Western Europe, emerging as a fully-fledged “Market Empire” amid the wreckage of WWII. As Timothy Galow argues, the rapid development of new

recounted in Serge Guilbault’s well-known How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art). The “Faulkner” harnessed by the U.S. State Department in international tours, in this account, exemplified democratic and capitalist America’s dynamism in contrast to the cultural stultification of Soviet collectivism. I argue that Schwartz’s account, despite its perceptive and wide-ranging take on America’s postwar literary landscape, nevertheless reproduces the familiar modernist myth of the author divorced from mass culture. As Helen Oakley notes, Faulkner appears to have had only limited agency in creating his reputation in Creating Faulkner’s Reputation. “On Privacy,” my reading suggests below, reveals a Faulkner concerned with finely calibrating a persona of privacy within the public sphere.

27 For two excellent overviews of Faulkner’s State Department-sponsored promotional tours of Latin America, see Debra Cohn and Helen Oakley. While Faulkner’s trips to this region have attracted recent scholarly attention, he also traveled to Europe and Japan in a similar role during the early Cold War.

28 For instance, Faulkner’s 1957 novel The Town refracts Cold War anxiety over American projects for the capitalist, democratic reconstruction of war-battered Europe through an earlier program of post-WWI reconstruction. Thus Gavin Stevens participates in a “bureau for war rehabilitation in Europe,” getting elected as County Attorney only after returning from “rehabilitating war-torn Europe” (112, 120). The novel situates such reconstruction within broader American diplomatic endeavors: Gowan Stevens’s father “work[s] for the State Department” in “China or India or some far place,” echoing Faulkner’s own work as cultural ambassador for the State Department in the 1950s (3).
media technologies in the early and mid twentieth century allowed the “widespread consumption of relatively homogeneous products and messages” (314), a process which enabled the rise of mass-media celebrities amid the consumerist mass market Victoria de Grazia describes. Faulkner’s well-publicized distaste for apparatuses of celebrity, of course, can be read as a pose characteristic of an avant-garde modernist seeking to distance himself from the dust and heat of the marketplace. In Faulkner’s particular case, however, such cynicism on the part of critics falters before the brute fact of Faulkner’s decades spent writing in obscurity and near-bankruptcy. While Schwartz’s Creating Faulkner’s Reputation presents a Faulkner irrefutably concerned with his fate in the marketplace, it also presents a man hesitant to speak publicly without the promise of a paycheck. In examining two novels and an essay from Faulkner’s post-Nobel period—a period in which Faulkner’s writings turned more frequently and attentively to subjects of immediate public debate—this chapter argues that Faulkner’s novels negotiate on a transatlantic and geopolitical plane issues of privacy and mass commercialism addressed within a national context for the more limited audience of his magazine piece for Harper’s. Turning first to “On Privacy” for its condensation of Faulkner’s hesitations about American mass culture, we will then trace the novelistic iterations of these concerns in his novels, lingering on images of ruins, sounds, and collectivities in Requiem for a Nun, before concluding with a brief treatment of how these concerns evolve with the transatlantic shift in setting of A Fable.

29 See Aaron Jaffe’s Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity for an account of how canonical modernists like Eliot and Joyce, far from disdaining the commercial sphere, sought to position themselves within it by creating literary objects bearing their own unique “imprimatur.” In this way, Jaffe avers, they allowed value to accrue to their texts in the literary sphere through the cultural value of their name—in effect, by turning themselves into “formal artifact[s]” (20).
Published in *Harper’s* in 1955, “On Privacy,” subtitled “(The American Dream: What Happened to It?),” represents both a jeremiad against totalizing institutional forces bent on eliminating individual identity and an historical treatise that positions a particular type of privacy at the core of American life. (Faulkner, having written the essay in response to attempts by magazines to publish unauthorized profiles of the recent Nobel Laureate, felt that his own privacy had been violated.) Motifs familiar from Faulkner’s private letters to his stepson circulate in this public essay so as to portray postwar America as having forgotten its founding ideals amid a tide of commercialism and spectacle. Echoing his private description of public discourse as mere glib talk, Faulkner asserts that the “strong loud voices” of America’s pioneers have receded before “a cacophony of terror and conciliation and compromise babbling only the mouthsounds” (65). Similarly, just as Faulkner linked an erosion of privacy to urban decay in his letters, so he here endows the cacophony of glib talk so corrosive to American social life with physically destructive qualities. The walls which once represented the threshold of the private, claims Faulkner, will soon no longer be able to “stand before that furious blast […] bellowing the words and phrases which we have long since emasculated of any significance or meaning other than as tools, implements, for the further harassment of the private individual human spirit” (73). The examples Faulkner provides of such emasculated language, notably, are precisely the watchwords of what Victoria de Grazia calls America’s expanding postwar “Market Empire:” “‘Security.’ ‘Subversion.’ ‘Anti-Communism.’ ‘Christianity.’ ‘Prosperity.’ ‘The American Way.’ ‘The Flag.’” (73). In this way, Faulkner aligns American urban decay with the very slogans that governed the administration of aid, through projects like the Marshall Plan, so vital to reconstructing
European cities and economies. For all their ostensible altruism, such aid programs come laced (Faulkner suggests) with the ingredients for the same ills that trouble postwar America.

In “On Privacy,” then, Faulkner attempts to craft a public image as an author whose private “self” stands behind the representations of “Faulkner” disseminated by news media and government agencies. Gesturing towards the agencies responsible, at least in part, for elevating his national profile, Faulkner accepts his status as “a commodity: merchandise to be sold, to increase circulation, to make a little money” (66). The split self—one half a reified commodity, an icon of American cultural freedom; the other a private citizen—articulated in Faulkner’s essay echoes, and originates from, the split between multiplicity and singularity which marks theories of the crowd.30 Crowds and ruins loom as imbricated figures of a fearful loss of the “private” self in Faulkner’s essay. When the walls built to protect privacy fall before a “furious blast” of empty talk, the private self withers as it is exposed to a social realm that seeks its wholesale assimilation. For Faulkner, privacy’s erasure renders formerly independent citizens as mere “identityless integer[s] in that identityless anonymous unprivacied mass which seems to be our goal” (71). Yet images of agglomeration in Faulkner’s postwar corpus engage relationships of privacy and publicity on psychological, spatial, social, political, and even sonic levels; the crowd, as well as the cacophonous noise it emits, accrues energies which render it far more than a mere physical collectivity. As we shall see,

30 Lexical issues trouble any attempt to describe agglomerations of people, as Jeffrey Schnapps and Matthew Tiews attest: “Much rides on the distinction of meaning, nuance, or implication between terms like crowd, multitude, mob, mass, people, and collectivity” (xv). For the purposes of distinguishing between the constellated individuals of a Kantian public sphere and the undifferentiated mass of Habermas’s commercialized public sphere in the twentieth century, I will largely hold to the terms “public” and “crowd,” respectively, but may veer from this terminology from time to time for the sake of connotation or nuance.
Faulkner’s Cold War novels *Requiem for a Nun* and *A Fable* locate at the heart of Cold War political-discursive formations a complex relationship between geography, architecture, and sound. In these novels, the architecture of built space, as well as the sounds these built spaces mediate, discloses rhetorical strategies for imagining political collectivities amid urban crisis and reconstruction in both American and Europe.

Faulkner funnels *Requiem’s* and *A Fable’s* anxieties over political form in an age of rampant consumerism—a consumerism based on free-market ideology central to U.S. Cold War foreign aid to Western Europe—through the twinned tropes of buildings and ruins. These geographical tropes are linked to competing modes of imagining human collectivities by a shared investment in spatiality. In this way, collectivities in the novels organize themselves along one of two spatial configurations: one type takes the form of the *crowd*, an unruly, disordered, potentially chaotic (and even revolutionary) collective whose energies can be mastered only through force or demagoguery; against this disordered uniformity of the crowd, we can imagine a second, more structured mode of agglomeration, that of the *public*. This second mode follows from Jürgen Habermas’s *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), in which Habermas describes the qualities, as well as the evolution, of what he calls the “public sphere.” For Habermas, the apogee of the normative public sphere occurred during the Enlightenment

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31 For a treatment of the expansion of American free-market ideology during the twentieth century, see Victoria de Grazia, who describes the Marshall Plan as “central” to “the challenge of American consumer culture to European commercial civilization” in the immediate postwar years (338). For a survey of qualities of a distinctly American tradition of viewing ruins, see Nick Yablon’s *Untimely Ruins: An Archaeology of American Urban Modernity, 1819-1919*, especially pgs. 1-17. Yablon ascribes an “unstable temporal quality” to all ruins, regardless of locale, but identifies American ruins as deeply linked to “artificial cycles of capitalist obsolescence” (284). For a treatment of ruins as modernity’s “dark side,” see Andreas Huyssen (22).

32 For recent scholarly treatments of the figure of the crowd as a heteronomous other to autonomous liberal self, see work by Mary Esteve, William Mazzarella, and the collected essays in *Crowds*, edited by Jeffrey T. Schnapps and Matthew Tiews.
with Immanuel Kant, who asserts that the discussions of autonomous individuals who employ practical reason foster a public sphere “that [can] guarantee the convergence of politics and morality” (Habermas 104). The communication of educated and rational individuals generates, in Habermas’s account, “Kantian notions of universality, cosmopolitanism, and science” (18). While classic theories of the crowd emphasize its fluidity—a fluidity that eats away at the edges of the autonomous liberal subject as the self melds with those around it into an undifferentiated, irrational mob—Habermas’s normative public sphere contains selves that remain autonomous and demarcated one from another: selves that through critical-rational debate do not meld into the fluid oneness of the crowd. In its vision of autonomous, spatially detached individuals discoursing rationally in order both to embody and to produce political morality, this rational critical public sphere constellates citizens by way of a coherence and order reminiscent of built space. Just so, in Faulkner’s *Requiem for a Nun* and *A Fable*, potentially disorderly human agglomerations become structured within the architecture of a political community. And as ruins represent the unraveling or shattering of a previously organized structure, so these novels render the unruly crowd, the Kantian public’s shadow side, as the *ruins* of the tenuous architecture of a classical public sphere.

Moreover, Faulkner’s coupling of crowds with ruins relies for its integrity upon a unique conceptualization of sound. Sounds as depicted in these texts fall within a spectrum, between the poles of sound-as-intelligible-communication and sound-as-cacophonous-noise. The texts link this sonic spectrum with built space by emphasizing how physical walls confine sounds and facilitate auditory clarity. Walls, the texts suggest, keep sounds isolated within a particular space, preventing sonic mixture and
thereby allowing distinct voices to remain intelligible and unclouded by external noises; or, if the walls crumble, the physical partitions between different sounds vanish, leaving only an open space in which sounds form a cacophony, stifling clear communication. In the classical crowd theory of Freud, Le Bon, and Tarde, the crowd exhibits a lack of structure and order that corresponds spatially to the disordered ruins of destroyed buildings, and sonically to a welter of white noise that drowns out distinct, intelligible speech. On the other hand, Habermas’s vision of an idealized public sphere depends upon citizens being able to understand one another’s distinct, rational-critical viewpoints; that is, voices need to be intelligible and clear. The structure and order of this idealized public sphere, then, represent a type of discursive architecture that mirrors that of intact buildings. In this way, by unearthing the bivalent history of American urbanism’s sounds and spaces, *Requiem* interrogates American mass culture at a crucial moment in its foreign expansion, during a period when many Europeans feared an “Americanization” of their cities and cultures concomitant with American-funded postwar rebuilding. Crumbling walls in these texts index not mere spatial destruction but the erosion of the autonomous agency, communal history, and institutions of privacy all inscribed within intelligible language. *Requiem for a Nun*, by excavating the history of built space in the American South, and *A Fable*, by rendering the relationship between military administration and indigent citizens within a war-scarred European city, both use images of architectural ruin to register the anxieties created for postwar U.S. foreign policy when time and space become crowded.

*Jefferson in Ruins* in *Requiem for a Nun*
Faulkner’s *Requiem for a Nun* reifies the urban ruin as a spatial trace of clear frontier voices beyond the crowded hubbub of postwar consumerism in order to problematize narratives of American identity and culture in the early Cold War.33

*Requiem*, arguably Faulkner’s most structurally ambitious work, uses a three-act drama to portray the sentencing to death by hanging of Nancy Mannigoe, an African-American maid, for infanticide (in act one); the late-night, last-minute appeal for clemency by the murdered child’s mother, Temple Drake, before Mississippi’s Governor (in act two); and the encounter between Temple and Nancy as the latter awaits execution in Jefferson’s jail (in act three). Each act is prefaced by an essay that, in bardic tone, outlines the history of that act’s signal building: the courthouse (prologue one), statehouse (prologue two), and jailhouse (prologue three). These prefaces collectively narrate the fearful fall of a mythic frontier South before forces of Northern capitalism, but do so in a way that foregrounds how this fall is registered in the geography, buildings, and sounds of modernity. Written during an era of cultural struggle between capitalist America and communist Russia for the hearts and minds of Western Europeans, *Requiem* excavates Yoknapatawphian geography and records its sounds so as to install Faulkner’s imagined county within postwar geopolitical circuits. The very soil and built structures of *Requiem*’s Yoknapatawpha resonate in the aftermath of global war in ways not only temporal (serving as ligatures to historical forebears) but also spatial (serving as imaginative bridges to urban restructuring in post-WWII Europe).

33 For major studies of geography in Yoknapatawpha (and Faulkner’s own Lafayette County), see Charles S. Aiken, Don H. Doyle, Thomas S. Hines, J. Hillis Miller, Hortense Spillers, and Joel Williamson. Taylor Hagood’s recent *Faulkner’s Imperialism* considers, as does the present paper, Yoknapatawpha’s spaces in a broader, more international context, but does not treat Faulkner’s later work in light of the geographical changes undergone by the South during and shortly following WWII. *Requiem* has received comparatively little attention in studies of Faulknerian space, despite its status as the text that arguably foregrounds geography more insistently than any other in Faulkner’s corpus.
Alternating between theatrical dialogue set in the present (1951) and prose prefaces that recount the geographical and social history of Yoknapatawpha County, 
*Requiem*’s literary form knits together the present, in all its crystallized social and legal tension, with the *longue durée* of a past punctuated by upheavals spatial and social. Exhuming the ghostly voices concretized in Jefferson’s built environment allows 
*Requiem* to develop a mode of what I call “ruinous narrative”—that is, narrative rooted in incompletion, narrative that achieves its very authority and sense of authenticity from a lack of closure, a spectral trace of the fragmentary rooted in the sediments and layers of past times. *Requiem* sees, then, in material urban decay a sign of historicity that allows for subject formation inimical to the universalist watchwords of American Cold War foreign policy. *Requiem*’s rendering of the devastations of urban “reconstruction” does not ultimately prevent it from both presenting in its diegesis and performing in its voice a compensatory movement towards a zone of place-based subjectivity. In this way, the novel finds in ruins the ground for a subjectivity that resists the depredations of a mass-market consumerism (emanating from America’s Northern urban centers) whose values American foreign policy sought to foster abroad.

Aside from the hunting tales of *Go Down, Moses*, the three prefaces of *Requiem* represent most saliently for many critics the binary tensions that underlie Faulkner’s lament for a lost wilderness, tensions catalogued by François Pitavy as “Urban civilization versus nature, progress versus wilderness, motion versus stasis, the flow of time versus eternity” (81). Far from challenging the validity of these terms as such, productive as they are for understanding narratives of decline in *Requiem*’s preface sections, I argue that the particular historical circumstances of militarization in the South
and America’s postwar geopolitical promotion of mass-market consumerism allow us to re-conceive what “progress” and “reconstruction” mean in Faulkner’s vocabulary.\(^34\)

Paralleling cycles of ecological loss and renewal, the “motion” of Faulkner’s urbanity in \textit{Requiem}’s preface sections derives from cycles of decay and reconstruction intrinsic to capitalism itself, the inorganic things that populate capitalism’s “ecosystem” of consumption pregnant with their own obsolescence. \textit{Requiem}, much more vividly than \textit{Go Down, Moses}, links the deterioration of nature with the expansion (and simultaneous decline) of urban space by reference to the inner contradictions of a mass-market capitalism associated with the crumbling urban centers of America’s North. Edward Soja’s description of capitalist spatiality amid perpetual urban restructuring as an “oxymoronic dance of destructive creativity” captures the specifically cyclical nature of motion in the urbanity of \textit{Requiem}’s prefaces (158).\(^35\) Thus while Jefferson’s growth represents “a delirium in which it would confound forever seething with motion and motion with progress,” this motion contains its own self-consuming involutions. Even the frontiersmen who, in act one’s preface, build Jefferson’s courthouse, thus do so “not

\(^{34}\) This latter term, “reconstruction,” would of course have connoted the failure of federal intervention into state or regional affairs for Faulkner. See Harilaos Stecopoulos’s \textit{Reconstructing the World: Southern Fictions and U.S. Imperialisms, 1898-1976}, for an account of how the experience of government-mandated Reconstruction rendered the South a hybrid region within the nation, what Stecopoulos calls “a fun-house mirror reflection of U.S. colonial spaces abroad” (13). Remarkably, as Stephen Weisenburger recounts in a deft reading of \textit{Requiem}, a National Public Radio reporter visiting war-wrecked Baghdad in 2003 discovered a group of Iraqi intellectuals who “shared a keen interest in […] \textit{Requiem for a Nun},” especially for its treatment of “the problems of reconstruction” (739).

\(^{35}\) Soja’s nod to Joseph Schumpeter’s notion of creative destruction recalls the prominence of such cycles of urban renewal in twentieth-century American cities. See, for instance, Max Page’s \textit{The Creative Destruction of Manhattan, 1900-1940}, which views Schumpeter’s idea as encapsulating for urbanites “the fundamental tension between creative possibilities and destructive effects of the modern city […] Celebrated and condemned, encouraged and resisted, this process defines the experience of the city. It also poses in the most jarring manner the dilemmas of modernity” (3). Like Page, I see creative destruction’s oxymoronic logic as commensurate to the complexity of urban experience. Where Page focuses on the “politics of place” in local Manhattan developments, however, my reading of \textit{Requiem} is meant to suggest the stakes of spatial upheaval in a chain of tiered and interwoven identities that collectively affect geopolitical relations far beyond the “local” (10).
to finish it quickly in order to own, possess it sooner, but to be able to obliterate, efface, it the sooner” (4, 29). This impulse to unceasing urban reconstruction ensures that “every few years the county fathers […] would instigate a movement to tear it [the courthouse] down and erect a new modern one” (41). In this way, *Requiem*’s narrative of ironically destructive “progress” evinces a cyclical dynamic of spatial presence and absence that, recalling Walter Benjamin’s famous treatment of Klee’s “Angelus Novus,” sees in the ruin modernization’s inescapable shadow.

The preface sections, however, deploy images of seemingly perpetual war as the governing trope and historical context for mass-market consumerism’s accelerating expansion. From the outset Jefferson’s growth appears as “a furious beating of hollow drums,” the town’s naming of itself redolent of “Napoleon dub[bing] himself emperor,” its early census rolls padded in service of, in military discourse, “defending the expedient” (4). Similarly familiar tropes of military conquest—urbanization as a march into the wilderness, the dispossession of land of defeated peoples, the courthouse’s construction as “like the fixed blast of a rocket”—pepper *Requiem*’s accounts of urban growth and ecological despoliation (192). What distinguishes the *Requiem* prefaces from innumerable other texts that figure expansion (be it geographical, economic, political, or otherwise) through militarism is *Requiem*’s documentation of how militarism intertwines with capitalism to render uncanny the built environment of America’s South. The rise of cotton as a major Southern commodity indexes the intertwined forces thematized in the prefaces. As the town “whirl[s] faster and faster toward the plunging precipice of its destiny” of wartime ruination, this commodity forms another “destiny of which […] the plow and the axe had been merely the tools” (195). The wreckage of war, the
concomitant waste of a “parasitic aristocracy,” and the inefficiency of government all identify Jefferson as one of the disasters produced by cotton’s “white tide” (195, 196).36

Jefferson’s urban texture and its civic imaginary shift beneath waves of war and commercialization that install the town within currents national and global. Requiem’s third preface reiterates how wars both domestic and international reshape the material environment, using the inauguration of a series of war monuments (first to the Civil War, then WWI, and finally WWII) to display civic memory’s accretion in a built form apparently elevated beyond market relations. These monuments, however, become bound up in commercialism, as Northern urbanites, “young men from Brooklyn,” hawk “tiny Confederate battle flags among the thronged Saturday afternoon ramps of football stadia” (212). Even elements of community as seemingly sacrosanct as civic memory, then, fall prey to what the novel portrays as corrosive forces of mass culture. Requiem’s observation that Jefferson undertakes urban reconstruction far earlier than the rest of the Civil War-scarred South renders the town an icon of urban renewal (204). Yet the novel portrays this renewal as inextricable from both war and exploitative market relations: Redmond, the town’s “domesticated carpetbagger,” devotes “no small portion of the fruit of his rapacity to restoring the very building the destruction of which had rung up the curtain for his appearance on the stage” (205). Further ruinous shocks continue to reshape Yoknapatawpha’s built and imaginative spaces, so that the Depression-era W.P.A. “mark[s] the town and the county as war itself had not,” government-administered capital here exerting the spatial effects of military conquest (209). Southern

36 The trope of cotton as tide links this commodity with a crowd psychology instilled by capitalist urbanization. Jeffrey T. Schnapp catalogues the long history of figuring crowds through oceanic imagery in his essay “Mob Porn” in Crowds. Cotton’s tidal whiteness, however, signals in Requiem’s South the racially uneven distribution of the profits it bestows.
geography shifts also as it is traversed by networks of transportation and communication within which Yoknapatawpha finds itself inescapably enmeshed. Mechanization in agriculture, a force that depletes the South of “an entire generation of farmers” just as military service did, exacerbates urban crisis by jettisoning obsolete Southern farmers in “New York and Detroit and Chicago and Los Angeles ghettos:” large American cities teem with the detritus of advanced capitalism (211). This third preface devotes a long passage to documenting rural depopulation and the ghettoization of Northern cities, thus recording how war and urbanization follow parallel tracks: the spread of capital and the spread of war buttress one another in scarring Southern culture, landscape, and urbanity.

*Requiem* registers these postwar transformations of American cities within a larger narrative of the rise of administration, a force emanating from American urban centers. “Administration” in this context polysemically refers to an array of apparatuses and techniques that collectively curtail individual autonomy—the celebrated individualism of the frontier—and that employ what Michel de Certeau describes as strategies (as opposed to the oppositional, subversive tactics of ordinary citizens, the subjects of administration). *Requiem*’s depictions of “men and women pioneers, tough, simple, and durable, seeking money or adventure or freedom or simple escape” partake of romanticized conventions of the American frontier (4). However, while *Requiem* narrates a similarly conventional tale of the loss of frontier autonomy as Jefferson

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37 This romanticized frontier, however, contains a sinfulness that charges it with mystery. Noel Polk’s book-length study of *Requiem*, for instance, sees Jefferson’s jail as a symbol of “original sin, the rapacious and destructive side of man’s nature that makes it necessary to impose limitations on human activity” (25). Polk reads the twinned structures of courthouse (embodiment of humankind’s ideals and aspirations) and jail (embodiment of humankind’s primal frailties) as representative of change and stasis, respectively, since *Requiem* emphasizes how the courthouse undergoes frequent rebuilding while the jail is only occasionally painted over, its walls left unrenovated. My reading of Jefferson urban space complements Polk’s model by historicizing the transience of the courthouse and perdurability of the jail by reference to Faulkner’s contemporary urban crisis.
becomes embedded in networks of commerce and transportation, what distinguishes *Requiem* as a text of particularly transatlantic urbanity is the way in which it locates the erosion of the signal American ideal of liberty within geopolitical currents that, as the Cold War dawned, provoked a felt need within America’s foreign policy establishment for the expansion of American culture overseas, particularly in Europe.

The very loss of privacy which Faulkner would decry in “On Privacy” constitutes one prong of a dual movement in *Requiem* from ostensibly circumscribed public and private domains into the nebulous zone of what Hannah Arendt calls “the social.” As the lives of Jeffersonians fall under the impersonal scrutiny of governmental administration, these lives also increasingly open themselves outwards to a sociality born of militarism and mass-market consumerism. In the preface sections, then, this loss of privacy arrives in lockstep with urban upheaval in the form of growth and suburbanization: “there were new people in the town now, strangers, outlanders, living in new minute glass-walled houses set as neat and orderly and antiseptic as cribs in a nursery ward, in new subdivisions” (215). A visuality spatially affiliated with the suburbs and figured in terms redolent of mass market rationalization (“new,” “neat”) here facilitates the administration of infantilized others (“outlanders” whose houses recall “cribs”) as Jefferson’s built environment itself loses opacity, weightiness, and materiality,

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38 For Arendt, the social arises as public and private spheres blur together. With society’s emergence, alienation, loneliness, and political indifference afflicting citizens as the glare of publicity, allied with intensified administration, pries open formerly private domains, leaving no intimate space for individual differentiation and transforming autonomous political actors into a community of laborers. (See *The Human Condition*, especially pages 38-49.) Arendt’s explication of the social has been much criticized for its ambiguities, as well as for its problematically rigid distinction between public and private spheres, most famously in Hanna Fenichel Pitkin’s *The Attack of the Blob*. It is hardly the aim of this paper to defend Arendt’s notoriously slippery term in its minute, local implications and applications; rather, the term proves useful in its broad strokes (eroded privacy, political apathy, mass conformity, a loss of attachment to place) for understanding Faulkner’s concerns in *Requiem* with prospects for political discourse in Cold War America.
taking on the qualities of a veritable city of glass. Such enhanced exposure of domestic interiors arises in part from an encroaching homogeneity whose origins, in the novel’s logic, are both commercial and administrative: as Catherine Jurca argues, that an age of mass capitalism proffers domestic interiors with a similar range of nearly identical products renders these areas less distinctive and more easily imaginable to outsiders. The creeping rationality of administration, on the other hand, combined with an expanding sociality, leaves less of the world unseen and unknown and thus immune from the regulative impulses of both the legal code and communal morality. The transparent walls of anonymous Jefferson suburbanites allow the private to be publicized and the public energies of consumer capitalism—figured as a media-driven pressure “to buy […] arriving more instantaneous than light, two thousand miles from New York and Los Angeles”—to penetrate the domestic interior (210).

*The Right House on the Right Street*

Against critical discord over how *Requiem*’s prefaces relate to its theatrical sections, I would like to propose that the shifting boundaries of privacy and publicity

39 See *White Diaspora: The Suburb and the Twentieth-Century American Novel*, where Jurca claims that “houses that contain mass-produced and -consumed goods and department-store living rooms or that are built en masse in post-World War II developments are associated with homelessness not because they have been improperly penetrated by an abstraction called the market. Rather, the association comes through the undesirable multiplication of such houses and furnishings, interiors and exteriors, that look exactly alike. The twentieth-century home is under siege, not from any conventional notion of the public or commercial sphere, but as it has been opened up to other private homes” (12).

40 Such morality confronts, for instance, the romanticized vagabonds of Yoknapatawpha’s frontier days, so that the county contains “not even a highwayman any more of the old true sanguinary girth and tradition of Hare and Mason and the mad Harpes,” as these outlaws are “checkmated and stripped not even by man but by Progress, by a pierceless front of middle-class morality” (194). In this way, Jefferson’s jail can be read as the spatial marker of what Joshua Landy and Michael Saler describe as a lament, unique to modernity and voiced by such as Max Weber and Friedrich Nietzsche, for a progressively disenchanted world: Western modernity “now allowed secular law courts to adjudicate matters of morality; it permitted scientists to explain away the miracles of nature; [and] it dismissed as frauds those whom it had formerly persecuted as heretics” (1). While Landy and Saler’s essay collection reveals strategies by which a world increasingly gripped by Foucauldian knowledge/power carves out strategies of secular re-enchantment, it also insists on the coexistence within modernity of “rationality and wonder, secularism and faith” (3). My reading of sounds and voices below emphasizes how the ordered voice of the storyteller can itself brim with the enchantments of bygone ages.
thematized in the prefaces structure not only the spatial imaginaries of the theatrical sections but also the prose-drama relationship in the text as a whole.\(^{41}\) Despite the tone of public historian that infuses the narrative voice of *Requiem*’s prefaces, this voice addresses an audience of one: the private reader.\(^{42}\) *Requiem*’s dramatic sections, on the other hand, imply the more public zone of the theatre, allowing readers to imagine themselves taking in the text’s dialogue amid a community of others.\(^{43}\) However, the corrosion of private-public boundaries (and the rise of Arendtian sociality) occasioned by urban decline subtends, and subtly steers, much of *Requiem*’s dramatic action, permitting us to read *Requiem*’s prefaces as extended meditations on macrocosmic social energies that find microcosmic influence in the lives of individuals like Temple Drake, her husband Gowan Stevens, and the couple’s maid, Nancy Mannigoe. The stage directions for Act One, Scene II, for example, describe the Stevens home as a product of the creatively destructive urban renewal that characterizes urban growth more generally in the prefaces: the living room “has the air of another time—[…] the air of being in an old house, an ante-bellum house descended at last to a spinster survivor who has modernised it” (46). The play’s setting, moreover, invokes an urban space segregated by boundaries of race and class, as Gowan and Temple, affluent whites, “can afford to pay that much

\(^{41}\) As Weisenburger notes, “*Requiem* has long frustrated attempts at a coherent reading of its structure” (745).

\(^{42}\) That the narrative voice speaks to an audience of individuated, private readers becomes most clear in the concluding sections of the third preface, where the voice turns to the second-person, addressing each reader as “you.”

\(^{43}\) See Barbara Izard and Clara Hieronymus’s *Requiem for a Nun: Onstage and Off* for the turbulent history of *Requiem*’s reception in the theatrical world. Published as a novel in 1951, *Requiem*’s dramatic sections debuted as a three-act play in Zurich in 1955 in a version Faulkner avowedly wrote with the Mississippian actress Ruth Ford in mind. In September 1956 an adaptation by Albert Camus debuted in Paris to broad acclaim, but *Requiem* nevertheless did not open on Broadway until 1959, even then closing after only forty-three performances.
rent in order to live on the right street among other young couples who belong to the right church and the country club” (46).

Just as the very joints and boards of the Stevens house evoke historicity in spite of the house’s reconstruction, leaving the past an ineradicable presence in the built environment, so the dramatic action of *Requiem for a Nun* stages a recrudescence of historicity in the form of Temple’s confessions of past marital infidelity. However, her confessions, as well as the very transgressions confessed, derive seemingly inescapably from transgressions of the boundaries that structure Jefferson’s urban space. Nancy Mannigoe, the reformed prostitute hired by Temple out of sheer compassion who ultimately murders Temple’s child, comes not from the right street, as do Temple and Gowan, but rather from a polluted zone of the city—as Gavin Stevens puts it, from “the gutter,” the site where figures of crisis have long been focused in American urban-panic discourse (60). Temple’s belated (and arguably self-serving) compassion in seeking clemency for Nancy flows not only from her own guilt over a less-than-genteel past, but also from her sensitivity to the perils of eroding spatial barriers between classes and races. Temple imagines Nancy’s identity in Jefferson public space as structured by her sordid urban address:

Whore, dope-fiend; hopeless, already damned before she was ever born, whose only reason for living was to get the chance to die a murderess on the gallows.—Who not only entered the home of the socialite Gowan Stevenses out of the gutter, but made her debut into the public life of her native city while lying in the gutter with a white man trying to kick her teeth or at least her voice back down her throat. (105)

The fate (and voicelessness) of Nancy Mannigoe, then, in Temple’s formulation emerges from allowing the urban gutter to infiltrate the “right street” occupied by people like the socialite Stevenses. The tone of rueful and ironic self-denigration that infuses Temple’s
speech gestures towards Temple’s own famous experience in a Memphis whorehouse (recounted in Faulkner’s 1938 novel *Sanctuary*), reminding us once more of certain congruities between Nancy’s and Temple’s pasts, as well as underlining how Temple’s race and familial wealth allow her to reside on the “right street,” despite her past.

*Requiem*’s dramatic sections draw attention to the shifting boundaries between private and public spheres through more than the specter of ruinous urban mixture that frames Nancy’s crime, however; Temple’s very act of confession evinces an indeterminate boundary between private and public produced in part by the rise of prying media and the mass consumer publics they generate and serve. *Requiem*’s confession scenes invest themselves heavily in a notion of private subjectivity detached from the media, a media whose increasingly invasive journalism threatened, in the minds of numerous Cold War cultural critics, to corrode the boundaries between public and private spheres.\(^4^4\) Temple’s confession enacts a fantasy of the complete exposure (a de-privatization) of her past, her testimony to her auditors, spurred on by Gavin’s insistence, functioning as a sort of talking cure. But how does Temple conceive of her auditors? Her confessions occur overnight in the inner chambers of Mississippi’s Governor, the official with the power to save Nancy Mannigoe’s life by granting her a pardon: ostensibly a place (and time) of inviolable privacy. But that apparent privacy is misleading: unbeknownst to Temple, her husband hides nearby, within earshot. Further, Temple imagines the Governor’s office as the public space of a “witness stand”—and,

\(^{4^4}\) See Deborah Nelson’s *Pursuing Privacy in Cold War America*, which links the emergence in popular discourse between 1959-1965 of privacy’s disappearance to shifts in constitutional law and the rise of confessional poetry. While *Requiem for a Nun* obviously predates the period covered by Nelson, it nevertheless indexes material and social conditions (for instance, the heightened surveillance and administration of citizens’ everyday lives) that prompted what Nelson calls “the stunning appearance of privacy as a lost thing at the end of the 1950s and first half of the 1960s” (9).
notably, the Governor agrees, investing his inner chambers with the public, administrative functions that Temple wishes for it (101).

Temple’s confession, despite being uttered in a (futile, belated) bid to save Nancy’s life, both exposes previously private truths of Temple’s life and claims for the speaker an identity that recognizes the twinned private and public faces of her persona. Her lines once more acidly rueful of her notoriety, Temple reminds the Governor that she is better known “not [as] Mrs. Gowan Stevens: Temple Drake. You remember Temple: the all-Mississippi debutante whose finishing school was the Memphis sporting house? […] Not that anyone […] need be reminded of that, provided they could read newspapers eight years ago” (101). Within the apparent privacy of the Governor’s office, Temple’s full disclosure of marital infidelity moves the private “Mrs. Gowan Stevens” towards the public media celebrity of “Temple Drake” by repositioning Temple within urban space. As Gavin Stevens fumes, Temple’s adulterous lover, Pete, is the sort of man so “amoral” that he could “fling [Temple] into the gutter” on a whim (147). Gavin’s phrase moves the matron of the socialite Gowan Stevenses from the right house on the right street to the very precipice of the gutter; or, perhaps more ominously, it merges these two spaces by figuring Mrs. Gowan Stevens, a woman associated in Requiem with domestic interiority, as polluted by the trace of her excessive alter ego, the Temple Drake of the Memphis sporting house and the public gutter. Gavin’s formulation invokes an oft-cited anxiety of Cold War America, that of the penetration of bounded interiors (by way of penetrated domestic privacy), but does so through a register of ruination and urban decline. The very walls of this house lose solidity, become frighteningly permeable, decay in their

45 The play’s emphasis on truth-telling and disclosure recalls several other major dramas of the early Cold War, notably Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman, Tennessee Williams’s Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, and Edward Albee’s Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?
ability to bar entry to a highly public mode of subjectivity—a “Temple Drake” that has been inscribed in public consciousness through newspapers—that infiltrates the domestic interiors of Mrs. Gowan Stevens.

Temple’s letters further corrode distinctions between public and private spheres as well as between competing ideologies of privacy itself. Written to Red, her lover Pete’s deceased brother and Temple’s own former lover in the Memphis “sporting house” of Sanctuary, these letters communicate and instantiate in language a love whose fullness lies in its inviolable privacy: Temple laments the impossibility that “love can be, mean anything, except […] the privacy” as she recalls trysts with Red behind a “door locked at last for just the two of us alone” (132). The walls of the Memphis brothel are permeable—Temple acknowledges she “could have climbed down [a drainpipe] at any time and got away”—but Temple’s script rather than her body is what she directs beyond them, the letters functioning as substitutes for Temple’s physical presence in Memphis city space (128). Gowan’s very marriage to Temple atones for his own misdeeds that led to her kidnapping as recounted in Sanctuary: in this way, the Stevens marriage can be understood as a transaction in which Gowan “buys” back his public honor at an intensely private cost—his inextinguishable shame over having married a former prostitute. Gowan’s marriage derives from a concept of privacy that emanates from the externalized, decidedly public vantage point of social standing: marriage being concomitant with bliss according to conventional mores, Gowan’s performance of love through the public ritual of marriage renders unnecessary any prying into the domestic sphere. By way of this fiction, the home becomes impenetrably private, beyond public scrutiny, but also a site whose health depends on repressing Temple’s sordid past. The recrudescence of this past
in the form of Temple’s letters—letters that materially convey a non-domestic form of sexuality that “was already there in whoever could write” them—threatens to drag the gutter into the home but also alters Gowan’s fictively constructed private happiness by shifting the composition of its actors (159). The script of Temple’s letters enacts her deviation from Gowan’s scripted privacy of domestic bliss.

*Requiem*’s dramatic sections invoke an oft-cited narrative of privacy’s demise, but do so in order to locate a crucial form of privacy in the relationship of forgiveness—a relationship the novel figures as an act of rehabilitation and reconstruction. While Temple ascribes to love a form of privacy, her recollection of the early stages of her marriage to Gowan speculates on the possibility of a mode of privacy even more recalcitrant than love: “Love, but more than love too […] tragedy, suffering, having suffered and caused grief […] And then I began to believe […] that there was something even better, stronger, than tragedy to hold two people together: forgiveness” (134). Forgiveness is precisely that which is denied to *Requiem*’s two signal female sufferers: Temple cannot be forgiven by Gowan, while Nancy Mannigoe cannot, by this juncture, be pardoned by the state. Because of Gowan’s inability to forgive, Temple is left to dread “tomorrow and tomorrow”—a mode of duration precisely delineated, day by day, in contradistinction to the unmeasured “old brave innocent tumultuous eupeptic tomorrowless days” of the frontier existence that *Requiem* nostalgically associates with a privacy lost by the Cold War (243, 91).

Lacking forgiveness from the state, meanwhile, Nancy clings to her doctrine, never exhaustively defined, to “Believe” in a God who offers otherworldly salvation.

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46 At first glance Temple’s very next line appears to disavow forgiveness’ potency in binding two people together. The line, however, is telling in its refusal to fully dismiss Temple’s earlier assertion: “Only that seemed to be wrong” (134; my emphasis).
through suffering (243). Where Temple imagines divine salvation as transactional, exasperatedly asking Nancy why God’s “customers” can only be saved through “the whole world’s […] ruin,” Nancy imagines it as less a relationship between equally autonomous agents (buyer and seller) than as the hierarchical relationship, familiar from Christian scripture, between human and beast (237). For Nancy, God is “like a man that’s got too many mules […] more mules than he can count at one time even, let alone find work for, and all he knows is that they are his, because at least don’t nobody else want to claim them, and […] the pasture fence was still holding them last night” (238). Translating biblical sheep into Yoknapatawphuan mules, Nancy’s image evokes the tension between order (the pasture fence) and inchoate desire (uncountable mules seeking “to run free in mule sin and mule pleasure”) redolent of classical crowd theories like Freud’s and Le Bon’s (238). It evokes this tension, however, in order to foreground how the intimate relationship of forgiveness between God and mule can open a space of privacy within the seemingly impersonal zone of the crowd. Uncertain of the existence of such a forgiving God (“If there is none, I’m sunk”), Temple resigns herself to the tenuous hope of earthly forgiveness from a husband whose perception of marital domestic life remains firmly intertwined with the mule-like, crowd-like domain of the Arendtian social (245). Such grim resignation resounds in Temple’s final line, “Coming,” in answer to Gowan’s call to leave the jail (245). While privacy by way of forgiveness can only reside in the afterlife for spatially marginal citizens of the gutter, Temple, lacking forgiveness, must continually suffer the fragile privacy of the right house on the right street.
Sounding the Ruins

The distinct voices of *Requiem*’s dramatic sections, echoing in their clarity the singular voices of Faulkner’s romanticized frontier, give way with the onset of an increasingly crowded modernity to the braying of mules, the clamorous hubbub of collectivities. While dialogue in the play sections occurs almost exclusively within the bounded (though penetrated) spaces of house, Governor’s office, and jail, the narrative voice of *Requiem*’s prose prefaces emanates from a perspective seemingly omniscient and transhistorical, a perspective that predominantly views exteriors rather than interiors of built structures. As the prefaces move forward in history, this narrative voice assumes a tone increasingly detached from individual lives, taking in the sweep of ever more rapid social and political change in Yoknapatawpha. It is through the acoustics of the novel’s diverse voices that *Requiem* registers the complex of ruined/renewed urban forms and shifting domains of privacy that, in the postwar period, are inextricable from the aesthetics and politics of American aid to shattered Europe. Faulkner’s text teems with sounds that sonically map and enact new forms of political community as these forms affect Yoknapatawpha’s built environment—forms of community that mutate through energies originating in America’s urban North. In this way, while early Yoknapatawphan history contains distinct voices of characters like Compson, Peabody, and Pettigrew, the two later prefaces narrate how autonomous voices dissolve amid a commotion associated with commercialism, the “babbling pressure to buy and buy” that streams into Jefferson through mass media like radio (210).
Requiem’s sounds thus register the decline of normative publicity. Habermas famously locates the deterioration of a liberal democratic public sphere in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as the rise of such media instilled in citizens a new mode of so-called “public” deliberation rooted in consumption: rather than discuss affairs of political and social import, citizens instead express their tastes regarding purchasable commodities. Both Habermas’s account of a transformed (and deteriorated) public and Requiem’s acoustics of modernization partake of a dialectic of autonomy and heteronomy that gauges the viability of liberal democracy by the ability of citizen-subjects to deliberate, as in Kant’s model public, rationally and freely. The acoustics of Cold War Jefferson are cacophonous, characterized by the indecipherable noise of booms and roars: thus the “rocket-roar” of “one America” engenders a “vast hollow sphere of […] air […] murmurous” with chattering, disembodied voices coded in “radar waves from the constellations” (213). In the frontier of Requiem’s first preface, singular voices engage in discussion: even the “thin peremptory voice” of America’s government participates in a dialogue, by way of Pettigrew and the symbolic value of the old lock he carries for the settlement’s makeshift jail, in which citizens exhibit “allegiance without abasement […] as free men” (9, 11). Gradually, as Jefferson becomes caught in the regulatory “net of commerce” that prompts ruinous progress, these voices lose their autonomy: “men’s mouths were full of law and order, all men’s mouths were round with the sound of money” (91, 92). Contemporary Jefferson’s corroded public sphere reveals itself, meanwhile, in the absence of singular voices altogether, the community’s voice audible merely as an unintelligible din against the “patter” and “screams” of an urban-oriented
mass media (210). By way of acoustics, then, Requiem figures the fall of liberal
democracy’s rational, autonomous subject into the fearful heteronomy of the crowd.47

If the sonic disorder occasioned by architectural ruination resembles the crowd’s
inarticulate roar, the discrete, intelligible voices of a normative public evince an order
reminiscent of built space. Michel Serres claims that “[e]mitted by inexhaustible
chatterboxes, the cries of politics—noises of conflicts, carnage, jealousies—keep us from
hearing the world’s song” (259). Serres’s model of attentive listening favors
architectonically precise acoustics, rooted in form, whereby meaning in speech emanates
from syntax and grammar: the artisan of language, he avers, “works with […] two
literally senseless treasures, dictionary and grammar, like an architect or a mason” (260).
Acoustic meaning—in any form, be it speech, music, writing—flows from a
“framework,” from the “pillars, beams, and flying buttresses” of language, leaving the
cacophonous patter and screams of Cold War Jefferson merely a “noise of meaning
without meaning [that] anesthetizes language” (260). It is in this way that Requiem
entwines the built form of the material cityscape with an acoustics of political
community: the pillars and beams of an unbroken building exhibit a form that spatially
enacts the acoustic structure—individuated, calibrated, ordered—of a burgeoning liberal
democratic public sphere of the Kantian model.48

47 William R. Paulson’s The Noise of Culture: Literary Texts in a World of Information identifies literature
as a source of destabilizing noise in modern cultural systems preoccupied with clear, intelligible
information: “Literature is the noise of culture, the rich and indeterminate margin into which messages are
sent off, never to return the same” (180). While the present article focuses on inscriptions of noise within
Faulkner’s novel rather than on Requiem itself as a source of cultural noise, Paulson’s characterization (by
way of analogy) of literature as noise demonstrates how intelligible communication (e.g. the written words
of the literary text, or the spoken words of rational-critical debate) can nevertheless exhibit noisiness.
48 It goes without saying that this ideology of the liberal public sphere, as Nancy Fraser and others have
argued, relies upon exclusions based on class, race, and gender. My own reading of publicity’s
representation in Requiem emphasizes the masculine traits of hardness and order that infuse both the
novel’s normative public sphere and the clear, strong voices of Yoknapatawpha’s bygone frontier. In
The electro-acoustic din of mass media in *Requiem* corrodes normative publicity not only through its unintelligibility, however, but also through its sonic homogeneity. In the decades preceding the Cold War, new electro-acoustic technologies like loudspeakers, radios, and microphones moved from laboratories to the commercial sphere, ushering in a “new criterion” by which to evaluate sounds (Thompson 3). Emily Thompson’s *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933* links calibrated, clear sounds to architectural innovations in early twentieth-century America such as the development of sound-absorbing building materials that enhanced acoustical privacy (2). For Thompson, early twentieth-century Americans learned to conceptualize sounds as signals: sounds with precise, decipherable messages. Electrical noise, in this reimagining of sound, became merely another impediment to clear communication via auditory signals. Even reverberation, once seen as “the acoustic signature of each particular place,” a residual sound created by the dimensions and materiality of each space, was imaginatively demoted to “just another kind of noise, unnecessary and best eliminated” (3). In Thompson’s account of Americans’ growing desire over this period for “clear, controlled, signal-like sound” we can grasp the complexity of *Requiem*’s engagement with Cold War dynamics of urban decay, mass-market capitalism, and communal imaginaries, as well as their attendant acoustics (3). *Requiem* subverts the imaginative investment in signal-like sound that links the advertisers of mass-market commodities to American consumers: in *Requiem*, electro-acoustical sound transmits cacophonous chatter, not clear messages. Thompson argues that the very electro-acoustic technology that valorized signals over noise

*Requiem*’s representational logic, the figure of the crowd by contrast displays an effeminate softness and fluidity.
dissociated sound from the particularities of place: that is, clear, nonreverberant sound disclosed none of the unique features of the space in which it was heard (2-3). By standardizing sounds, the electro-acoustic technology that had become a staple of postwar modernity also weakened the sensorial fingerprint of built spaces themselves. *Requiem* figures this process of acoustic homogenization—the scrambled noise of chatter broadcast ubiquitously across America from major urban centers—as a mode of place-destruction complementary to the creatively destructive urban renewal brought about by commercial construction and military movements. Just as the collapsed walls of urban ruins permit an unimpeded flow of sounds that, taken together, comprise an unintelligible din, so the din of electro-acoustic broadcast technology in *Requiem* corrodes the subjective connections to built space that are integral to fostering imagined communities.

*Requiem* thus inverts the process of increasing auditory clarity that Thompson describes as shaping America’s early twentieth-century acoustic culture, or at least rewrites this narrative of progress as one of decline. The loud, clear voices of *Requiem*’s vanished frontier become the sounds that function as signals insofar as they transmit intelligible messages. *Requiem*’s narrative of decline transmutes this frontier into a Faulknerian state of nature, its inhabitants occupying a pre-political space awaiting capture by the twinned nets of government and the capitalism it sustains.49 Frontier voices, in their autonomy and clarity, assume characteristics of the rational, depersonalized voices of a Faulknerian public.50 Buildings, whose walls impede sound

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49 I do not mean to suggest that *Requiem*’s frontier is entirely devoid of politics, since the imprisonment of the Harpes gang in the first preface glaringly disproves this. Rather, I use the term “pre-political space” to denote Jefferson’s status before its complete immersion in the United States’ particularly constrictive governmentality—and, indeed, before the settlement was even formally founded as the community of “Jefferson.”

50 Charles Taylor, who develops Habermas’s history of the public sphere by locating its roots in the natural law theories of Locke and Grotius, sees the Kantian public sphere as arising from “the idea that political
and engender spatial privacy, are artifactual in this schema, gesturing at a Southern past in which sounds did not mix into mere noise.

However, if clear frontier voices recede before modernity’s tide of unintelligible din, where can Faulkner’s contemporaries look for controlled, ordered acoustics—for sounds whose messages are decipherable, for sounds as signals? A clue lies in Requiem’s recounting of an exemplary historical moment of place-destruction, the South’s ruination in the Civil War; rumours of distant but approaching war reach Jefferson “like far summer thunder” until:

The spring of ’64, the once-vast fixed impalpable increaseless and threatless earth now one omnivorous roar of rock (a roar so vast and so spewing, flinging ahead of itself, like the spray above the maelstrom, the preliminary anesthetic of shock so that the agony of bone and flesh will not even be felt, as to contain and sweep along with it the beginning, the first ephemeral phase, of this story, permitting it to boil for an instant to the surface like a chip or a twig—a match-stick or a bubble, say, too weightless to give resistance for destruction to function against […] (199)

Once more place-destruction in Requiem’s South unfolds through tropes evocative of disorganized crowds: tidal imagery (“spray above the maelstrom”) that echoes the volatile fluidity of crowds; the “anesthetic of shock” central to Benjamin’s description of crowd experience in Baudelaire’s Paris; and the unintelligible noise (“one omnivorous roar”) emitted by the crowd’s many and contending voices. Yet from this fluid cacophony arises a hardened, discrete trace (“like a chip or a twig”): the story.

Storytelling, condensing the welter of historical experience into a transmissible narrative form, here stems from memory and human communication rather than from any physical edifice, endowing it with an impalpability that renders it “too weightless to give power must be supervised and checked by something outside”—just the “outside” that a departed frontier provides, historically and geographically, to the seemingly inescapable web of commerce and government in America’s Cold War South (90).
resistance for destruction to function against.” In a text haunted by the prospect of unceasing historical loss, storytelling’s unique emplacement beyond destruction’s grasp signals its importance to how Requiem imagines reconstructive possibilities for American (and, by way of Cold War cultural marketing, European) political community in Faulkner’s time. Boiling to the surface like a chip or twig, the story arises organically in this passage as a frail skein of words hovering above lived history’s crowded, cacophonous roar, achieving a tactility that lies beyond ruin.

In his 1936 essay “The Storyteller,” Benjamin conceptualizes the story as a primarily oral form of transmitting experience, a form beleaguered in modernity by the rise of print media such as novels and newspapers. A story, in Benjamin’s sense, conveys from narrator to narratee wisdom or counsel of an amplitude that surpasses print media’s rote explanation of facts. Although it is ostensibly a lament for storytelling’s ebb in modernity, Benjamin’s essay also takes on the more ambitious and delicate work of explaining how a desire for storytelling’s lost orality—the orality that binds storyteller and listener through relayed experience—inflects written literature in the modern era.51 Storytelling in modern writing represents a desire for community—a bond between the teller and a “community of listeners”—but also a particular mode of address, one grounded in a voice singular to the life of the teller but simultaneously steeped in earlier versions of the tale, passed on through generations (91). In this way, while storytelling is an art based on sedimentation and accretion, “always the art of repeating stories” and thus crowded with the voices of past tellers, it also bears the traces of a unique life: storytelling “sinks the thing [its events] into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints

51 I am indebted for my reading of Benjamin here to Peter Brooks’s article “The Storyteller.”
of the potter cling to the clay vessel” (91, 91-2). Benjamin’s spatial trope—storytelling as sculpting, as design—aligns its narrative work with architecture, revealing “the relationship of the storyteller to his material, human life [as] […] a craftsman’s relationship,” so that the storyteller “fashion[s] the raw material of experience […] in a solid, useful, and unique way” (108). While recent treatments of sound in literature, building on Michel Serres’s model in The Parasite, have valorized feedback and white noise as resisting the power of hegemonic communication, Requiem for a Nun complicates this model by rendering the wealth of experience conveyed in the storyteller’s clear though heteroglossic voice. Enabled by the walls of built space that partition sounds one from another, the storyteller’s voice is itself a form of architecture that fosters identity and agency in its auditors.

The intimate, direct address of the storyteller intersects most tellingly with built space in the remarkable conclusion to Requiem’s third preface, where Faulkner addresses the reader in second-person voice for the only time in his corpus. After documenting in third-person voice the decay of liberal publicity amid the din of mass culture, Requiem pivots, describing the arrival of “you, a stranger, an outlander say from the East or the North or the Far West, […] perhaps relation or acquaintance or friend of one of the

52 See, for example, Philipp Schweighauser’s The Noises of American Literature, 1890-1985: Toward a History of Literary Acoustics. Schweighauser invokes systems theory, building on the work of Barry Truax, to argue that “noise can be a potentially meaningful element of communication,” since “systemic evolution depends on environmental perturbations that trigger processes by which systems transform external noise into internal order and information” (6). What Requiem demonstrates is not any shortcoming in systems theory as applied in the literary text, however; indeed, in the textured, layered voice of the storyteller, we hear an intelligible voice that nevertheless harbors the noisy discordances of generations of past tellers. Rather, Faulkner’s novel installs intelligible discourse at the core of its vision of a burgeoning, liberal-democratic public. Caught between intelligibility and noise, processes of communication in Requiem fall along a spectrum of autonomy and heteronomy that mirrors that between Kantian publics and unruly crowds. Indeed Serres himself emphasizes that noise is not in and of itself salutary to everyday life, a point Schweighauser neglects in his valorization of noise as “a productive disturbance of established modes of communication” (22). In a passage from The Parasite that Schweighauser himself quotes, Serres avers that, “Organization, life, and intelligent thought live between order and noise, between disorder and perfect harmony” (qtd. in Schweighauser 202).
outland families which had moved into one of the pristine and recent subdivisions” (217). This address positions us, the reader, as a member of an anonymous crowd—part of an “outland invasion”—driving a car along a transportation network that enmeshes Jefferson in the trap of governmentality (217). For us outlanders, Jefferson’s urban fabric matters not for its local particularities but rather for its synecdochic status: we wish to learn why our acquaintance would “elect to live here—not specifically here, of course, not specifically Jefferson, but such as here, such as Jefferson” (217). Shortly, however, our acquaintance drags us into the private kitchen of Jefferson’s oldest structure, the jail, a building unique in that it has never been destroyed or reconstructed, lying apart from the city’s cycle of creative destruction. In the layered, weathered walls of the jail we encounter built space’s irreplaceable historical resonances. In its kitchen we confront an old windowpane upon which Cecelia Farmer, amid the roar of the Civil War (the novel’s iconic moment of urban ruin and reconstruction), inscribed “her frail and workless name, scratched by a diamond ring in her frail and workless hand, and the date” (197). Viewing the “crudely-pressed, almost opaque glass,” Cecelia’s scratches—her chips in the solidity of architectural space—assume the intelligibility of voice: “something has already happened: the faint frail illegible meaningless even inference-less scratching on the ancient poor-quality glass you stare at has moved, under your eyes […] coalesced, seeming actually to have entered into another sense than vision: […] a whisper, […] speaking” (219).

Central to the experience of hearing Cecelia’s voice is emplacement: “not only hearing, listening, and seeing too, but you are even standing on the same spot, the same boards she did that day she wrote her name into the window” (220). Yet its message is
intensified through stories: just as Benjamin emphasizes that stories rely for their power on repetition and accretion, so we search for answers to the questions prompted by Cecelia’s haunting voice in our acquaintance’s inherited wisdom, a knowledge of “the town’s composite heritage of remembering that long back, told, repeated, inherited to him by his father” (220). Connection to place—for Arendt, an essential condition for political engagement in an age of sociality—arises from the stories told not only by people, but by places protected from cycles of creative destruction. *Requiem* reinforces this foregrounding of orality by narrating our intimate contact with Cecelia in the direct voice of the second person.

Cecelia’s voice, moreover, conjures a multitude of past voices that threaten to crowd the present: “the deathless murmur of the sublime and deathless names and the deathless faces, the faces omnivorous and insatiable and forever incontent” (225). To be sure, Cecelia’s voice is “undistanced,” revealing to us that there is “no time: no space: no distance,” raising the specter of a present overtaken by unintelligible, cacophonous voices of the past (225). Her voice, however, is also “clear […] as though out of the delicate antenna-skeins of radio,” the simile here maintaining a crucial gap between the actual patter and screams of mass culture and the acoustical clarity aspired to by radio, but in *Requiem*, achieved by the storyteller’s voice (225; my emphasis). The present, it seems, is populated by the undistanced voices of a history disclosed via architecture, voices which anchor identity for citizens who contain the promise of constituting *Requiem’s* vision of a Kantian liberal public sphere. Significantly, Jefferson’s jail and its encased voice remove us from the overbearing governmentality of the twentieth-century United States, so that only after leaving the building do we travel “back into the United States”
(225). After clear, intelligible voices largely vanish from *Requiem*’s prefaces following Jefferson’s mythic frontier era, such a voice reappears as the final, triumphant statement of the third preface: “*Listen, stranger; this was myself: this was I*” (225).53

Emanating across history through the accretions of unreconstructed built space, Cecelia’s voice forms the grounds for autonomous selfhood and democratic citizenship in the Cold War South at a time when that very region represented for many an internal colony within America’s postwar “market empire.” As we shall see, the tropes used in *Requiem* to meditate upon issues of community formation shift as Faulkner moves across the Atlantic in *A Fable* to another postwar imperial contact zone. Where *Requiem* documents the exactions made upon Southern geography by U.S. programs of reconstruction whose analogues were exported to war-wrecked Europe during the late 1940s and early 1950s, Faulkner’s later novel *A Fable* registers such reconstruction at ground level in Europe while nevertheless cataloguing the echoes of reconstruction in U.S. domestic space. In this way the two novels function as complementary, virtually interlocking spatial stories that internalize Faulkner’s growing awareness of Cold War geopolitics at a time when he served, howsoever ambivalently, as an official ambassador of U.S. values.

*Place Destruction in A Fable*

*A Fable* transposes *Requiem*’s scrutiny of place-destruction from creatively destructive America to war-scarred Europe, negotiating the difficulties of postwar

53 Writing of this moment, arguably the novel’s climax, Theresa M. Towner suggests that “Just as Cecelia’s identity is manifested in writing, investigated intertextually […] and finally imagined and so joined by some independent other, so do we learn to recognize, investigate, imagine, and finally live in Faulkner’s world. His writing […] makes all of us “outlanders” into “inlanders” (6). Towner’s formulation captures not only the potential of writing to engender sympathy across space and time by way of imagination and sensory experience, it also unwittingly registers a tension at the heart of Faulkner’s postwar writings as he became an artistic icon for a nation that, by way of neo-imperialism, sought to figuratively convert “outlanders” into “inlanders,” or at least allies, by spreading its values and culture.
reconstruction, be they architectural or political, by way of the unstable figure of the ruin. Ruins register a passage of time, beckoning backwards to a prior order, but they also render that order epistemologically uncertain through the material disorderliness of the ruin which serves as its marker. *A Fable’s* European setting allows the novel to broaden *Requiem’s* consideration of architectural decay by metonymically linking competing modes of American and European ruination to processes of subject and community formation, casting doubt upon projects of reformation inattentive to historicity. As will be discussed below, these competing modes of place-destruction exhibit logics of erasure (in American ruins) and palimpsestic reinscription (European) that structure the relationships that both individuals and communities construct for themselves through storytelling about their past and their sense of emplacement.

Although ostensibly set in World War I France, *A Fable* allegorically channels anxieties towards foreign policy and urban deterioration germane to Cold War America. That a novel composed during the Marshall Plan years can fixate so frequently on U.S. capital’s penetration of Europe testifies, I argue, to an intense preoccupation with the vagaries of American cultural marketing during the early Cold War era: both its necessity insofar as it served to buttress Europe against (in Faulkner’s opinion) a repugnant adversary; and its insidious threat to place-centric publics sustained by communal histories encoded within built environments. U.S. money and materiel pervade the blasted geographies of *A Fable’s* France, appearing as both savior and stricture to the novel’s characters. The novel narrates the aftermath of a mutiny led by a nameless corporal whose men refuse to scale their trenches in a doomed attack against German lines, detailing the maneuvers between the corporal’s regiment—jailed and sentenced to

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54 For two recent instances of this argument, see articles by Richard Godden and Jan Mieszkowski.
death for their mutiny—and their military overseers, who ultimately execute the regiment. In a parallel plot, a nameless runner attempts a second mutiny, only to find himself and his men shelled by both German and Allied generals, who mutually work to sustain a war profitable to the elite of both sides. *A Fable* imagines its war as producing a European future in which “France and Britain would have vanished as military and even political integers and the war would have become a handful of Americans […] battling with branches from shattered trees and the rafters from ruined houses” (18). If communal imaginaries, as *Requiem* avers, reside in part in built space, France’s own accreted past relies on foreign assistance, as soldiers move through “stone courtyards which for a thousand years the French have been dotting about the […] countryside, apparently for the purpose of housing between battles the troops of the allied nations come to assist in preserving them” (50). This image of ancient stone courtyards, ligatures between twentieth-century France and its thousand-year past, blends humor and geopolitical piquancy in its condescending final clause. Paradoxically, the spatial ruin that attends this war occurs in the name of preservation: the preservation of not only the material history embedded in thousand-year-old stone courtyards, but also of viable markets for U.S. capital.55

*A Fable* builds into its most emblematically foreboding space—the prison that houses the doomed regiment—a tension between destruction and production, ruination and renewal, that inheres in the sort of “total war” waged by the industrialized militaries of each party. For instance, the very compound in which the mutinous regiment,

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55 As Taylor Hagood notes, the “constant motion of the novel” consists of a “movement back and forth from center to periphery” (197). However, by “center,” Hagood means WWI Europe. My reading differs from Hagood’s insightful account by considering the extent to which Europe, both in the novel’s post-WWI setting and at the post-WWII moment of its publication, has itself become peripheral.
sentenced to death by the supreme Allied commander, the Old General, is imprisoned, was once “a factory,” but has now been rebuilt as a wartime depot through “material bought with American money and sawn into numbered sections by American machines in America, and shipped overseas and clapped up by American engineers and artisans, into an eyesore, monument, and portent of a nation’s shocking efficiency and speed” (110). Evoking both the “shock” of urban experience and America’s vaunted economic productivity (“efficiency and speed”) during Faulkner’s high Cold War era, the passage labors to indicate American capitalism’s foundational role in the novel’s signal struggle: the incarceration within an American-built compound of French laborers who are tagged for destruction in reconstructed European urban space. Indeed, even the compound’s electricity is paid for by “the Service of Supply of the American Expeditionary Force” (190). The novel’s stalemated war (reminiscent of the geopolitical stalemate when *A Fable* was published) allows practices of heightened productivity to infiltrate Europe: machine production that acts as a “portent” for changes to come. The dark “portent” of sovereign violence that hangs over the nameless corporal and his mutinous regiment shadows also European cities, however, marking the compound’s synecdochic status: Paris, too, operates under an Agambenesque state of emergency as an “aghast and suspended city dense not only with French civil police but the military ones of the three nations patrolling the streets in armed motorcars” (178).56

France’s citizens come to resemble the Jeffersonians of *Requiem for a Nun*, their land inundated with American goods and curious outlanders like an Iowan soldier, who, tourist-like, carries a map marked with the places he has seen, a map he intends to “frame

56 For an ingenious interpretation of *A Fable*’s French citizens as potential concentration camp victims, see chapter six of Richard Godden’s *William Faulkner: An Economy of Complex Words.*
and hang [...] on the wall” (316). Like *Requiem*, *A Fable* interweaves tropes of crowds, noise, and ruins in fashioning a narrative of communal decay and spurious reconstruction; but it also inverts this narrative of *Requiem’s*, emphasizing not the colonization of a mythic frontier South by Northern capitalism but rather the neo-imperial maneuvers of *Requiem’s* “one America” in a foreign land. The dynamics of spatial decay and reconstruction, then, signify in Faulkner’s postwar corpus the ties between post-WWI (and post-WII) France and the post-Civil-War American South: each represents an enticing site of expansion for Northern capitalism. As demonstrated by the corporal’s detention in rebuilt space as he awaits the inflexible penalty of death for his pacifistic mutiny, acts of reconstruction in *A Fable* connote a lack of forgiveness. Just as *Requiem’s* dramatic sections turn on Gowan’s inability to forgive Temple, so the plot of *A Fable* hinges on the question of whether the mutinous regiment can have their lives spared, can be “forgiven,” by the Old General.

However, where *Requiem* foregrounds the presence of a pastness spatially inscribed and aurally encoded in built space, *A Fable’s* shift in setting from America to Europe recalibrates the position of spatial ruins to individual identity. Jefferson’s ruins and rebuilt structures typify a quintessentially American tradition of spatial ruination in which ruins, located primarily in urban space, are created and rebuilt swiftly, testaments to capitalism’s shocks and efficiencies. As Nick Yablon notes, the durable industrial materials like steel used in constructing American buildings prove more resilient against decay than material such as stone, used in European structures from many centuries past (8). Questioning the transhistorical status of ruins as an aesthetic category, Yablon argues that the classical and Gothic ruins of Europe register for many writers and painters
a temporally longer process of devolution than American ruins, a process that involves the built structure slowly succumbing to natural decay (10). (Far more often than American ruins, European ruins have been depicted in relation to the natural world; Wordsworth’s Tintern Abbey famously exemplifies this tendency.) Rather than any “natural” or “universal” process of decay, differences in American and European cultural understandings of ruination reveal the process’ sheer contingency: where ruination occurs most visibly, through what means it transpires, and upon what materials, all shape its import within a public imaginary.

Unlike Requiem for a Nun, A Fable situates the shocking violence of American ruination within the context of conventionally European modes of decay more deeply rooted in natural processes. The novel thus juxtaposes two distinct modes of ruin: brusque, swift, urban-centered, and commercially-oriented creative destruction of the American variety; and more gradual, nature-oriented decay of the European mode, centered most often beyond the city. The relationship of the present to historicity in each mode of ruin subtends and structures the novel’s presentation of how narrativized communal histories create crowds and publics. The extent to which the past permeates the present, a crucial question elicited by ruin iconography, is an insistent question in both the diegesis and narrative form of A Fable. This question takes its most salient form in the novel’s presentation of material spaces vulnerable to degradation and renewal. Numerous descriptions appear, for instance, of structures like “the old gate in what had once been the city’s ancient […] wall” and stables and houses made of “stone,” the material most vulnerable to a characteristically European mode of gradual decay (4, 5). As in Requiem, spatial regimes in A Fable not only mirror social relations but rather
display those regimes’ prominent place in the textures and experiences of everyday life that help shape individual identities.

More so than *Requiem, A Fable* explores the relationship between geography and modes of imaginative belonging through direct representations of large groups. In a novel preoccupied with the workings of ideology upon masses of people, several scenes depicting urban collectivities intercede in a narrative otherwise centered around dialogue between private (though usually nameless) figures, signaling the public import of private exchange and indeed even the ever-shifting boundaries of the private that vexed Faulkner during this period. The novel’s “crowds” consist, in the first two such scenes, of relatives of the mutinous regiment slated for execution, gathered to plead for clemency of the military’s highest commanders, most notably the Old General, the supreme allied leader. To be sure, Faulkner’s renderings of these crowds cling to well-worn stereotypes: the crowds both flow like a river and issue into the riverbanks of Chaulnesmont’s streets from “hive-dense tenements” in order to vent their “vast conglomerate of all the passions and forces” (3, 104). In many ways, such depictions of the crowd as malleable and subhuman accentuate the novel’s questioning of the limits of subjectival autonomy and agency amid the dawn of new modes of mass suasion: the Old General admits that his ambition is to direct “the confused and anguished mass of the civilian homeless in order to make room for […] victories” (253). Yet, since the mutinous regiment is filled mainly with soldiers drawn from rural areas, the crowds, made up of families from these same areas beyond the city, are aligned with a deep historicity inherent in the natural landscape. A flight sergeant, Conventicle, appears as the emblem of a particular “race” of Europeans whose history lies muddied in soil itself: readers learn that Conventicle
descends from “morose and musical people […] who seemed to be born without dread or concern into knowledge of […] man’s sunless and subterrene origins which had better never have seen light at all” (80). The subterranean sources of Conventicle’s identity—sources harboring ineffable knowledge, “misty and music-ed names no other men could pronounce even,” beyond signification—put him intransigently at odds with the world of *A Fable*’s military bureaucracy, a “rational world where men still [try] to forget their sombre beginnings” (80). Conventicle’s very body bears, in its intransigent historicity, the signs of materiality and vulnerability that bind together members of Chaulnesmont’s crowds.

Conventicle’s status as a marker of ineradicable and indeterminate origins in a culture that seeks epistemological certainty renders his body a nexus for the novel’s concerns with ruination and processes of public formation. As Tim Edensor argues, traditional European ruins provoke epistemological confusion because of their tenacious withholding of determinate history from those who gaze upon them; we are left to project upon such ruins both a long past and an indiscernible future.⁵⁷ Such ruins are, moreover, tied intimately to the soil, since part of their decay involves the reclaiming by nature of structures whose materials derive from it in the first place. Yet Chaulnesmont’s crowds too are aligned with the soil, residing, in the words of two soldiers, in “mud” and “muck” (51). In this way, we can see these human collectivities as the forces whose worldly actions and daily patterns of use over many centuries preceding the shocks of modern capitalism, have gradually worn away and eroded their culture’s built structures, inscribing them with communal history that speaks across generations. That the novel’s

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⁵⁷ Edensor claims that “there is an excess of meaning in the remains [of the ruin]: a plenitude of fragmented stories, elisions, fantasies, inexplicable objects and possible events which present a history that can begin and end anywhere” (141).
central group—the mutinous regiment sentenced to execution and housed in a rapidly reconstructed factory—is defined by their unwillingness to leave their trenches subtly binds them to the subterranean origins of both Conventicle and Chaulnesmont’s crowds: like these two entities, the regiment remains in a sense below-earth, subterranean, in a way disruptive to military-commercial logic.

On many levels the novel documents how acts of restructuring—in spatial, subjectival, economic, and political terms—submerge such subterranean pasts, pasts that are both constituted in and resisted by narrative, by storytelling. Numerous characters either possess indeterminate origins (such as the corporal) or consciously seek to disavow them, such as Gragnon, the general who commands the mutinous regiment and who recommends the sentence of death to the Old General for his regiment’s mutiny. Gragnon exemplifies the desire for erasure that characterizes military-commercial restructuring in *A Fable*: he appears to be the “perfect soldier” in part because he is “pastless” (17). But the problems that bedevil any attempt to submerge individual pasts appear most prominently at the head of the military itself, in the figure of the Old General. To be sure, the Old General appears to the collectivities epitomized by Chaulnesmont’s crowds as a virtual celebrity, a figure whose identity, shaped and disseminated by media, recalls the patters and screams funneling into *Requiem’s* Jefferson from the American North. At the head of France’s military imperium, the Old General is “the property of all” as he “lie[s] weightless across the face of France from Mozambique to Miquelon […] like a barely remembered odor, a fading word, a habit, a legend—an effigy cut by a jigsaw for souvenirs” (221). In this passage, the Old General’s celebrity, articulated through media, strenuously resists the subterranean
origins of selfhood characteristic of the common rabble: a discrete, acquirable property, he is a determinate word, but a fading one, a word struggling to retain its power of signification.

Yet the Old General’s life, we are told, involves repeated attempts at casting off origins and pasts: his flight to an obscure military outpost on the imperial margins rather than more prestigious positions after glittering success as a cadet; and, crucially, his abandonment of a son who returns in *A Fable* as the nameless corporal whose pacifism threatens havoc to his military-commercial complex. The return of this son in the figure of the corporal is a literal return of the repressed, a return of suppressed origins. The recommendation by Gragnon, the pastless soldier, to the Old General that the corporal’s regiment be sentenced to death, reflects the *tabula rasa* logic of military-commercial restructuring: this irruption of the Old General’s personal history in the figure of the corporal and those he commands must be erased by execution. My reading could initially appear to be undermined by the fact that the Old General does not immediately in fact grant Gragnon’s wish, instead offering the corporal a bargain to save his life: the logic of erasure implicit in military-commercial ruination and reconstruction would not appear to be as singular as this chapter suggests. Yet the very bargain offered by the Old General to his son merely reinforces how *A Fable* troubles early Cold War notions of material and cultural reconstruction by reference to ruined and renewed space.

The Old General’s offer, wherein the corporal can save his own life by abandoning his pacifism and embracing the militarism of his father, prompts a discussion between corporal and Old General that serves as *A Fable’s* climax. This dialogue occurs from a vantage point apart from and overlooking Chaulnesmont—a point, significantly,
near the “old Roman citadel,” a site of ruins whose traces of historicity architecturally recall the historicity that the Old General wishes to efface. (289). These ruins, described as a “gesture […] of [human] mortality,” in turn embody the subject of debate between the corporal and his powerful father as the lives of the regiment hang in the balance. By this late point in the novel, the stakes of this discussion, developed over the preceding chapters, are many—the resistance of citizens to ideological manipulation, the ethics of killing, the plight of individual subjects amid vast commercial and political conglomerates set to profit from perpetual war—but the primary axis centers on the nature of forgiveness. The Old General’s mode of forgiveness is entirely strategic, political: the corporal can save his own life by eschewing pacifism and uniting with the overseers of a war unending and profitable to the powerful of both sides. No other mode of forgiveness exists for the Old General apart from the strategic logic of the military-commercial complex he heads. As the father and son view the city from a de Certeauian administrative vantage, the son’s refusal to abandon the indiscriminate mass of people below prompts a rebuttal from the Old General telling in its reconstructive logic as he asks: “Why with their bare hands, since they have enough of them, have they not torn down brick by brick the walls which far fewer hands than theirs sufficed to raise […] and set all of you free who had essayed to die for them?” (292) The Old General here recognizes the crowd as a potential force of revolutionary ruin, one that threatens to overhaul and reconstruct not only the factory rebuilt through American lucre into a prison but also the mechanisms that enact instantaneous, history-erasing, ruin.

What staves off potential revolution, the Old General claims, is a hopefulness installed in collectivities through a degradation of language, the loss of intelligible
language’s role in the rational-critical discourse of a Habermasian public. In this way, *A Fable* envisions processes of communal formation through tropes of sound and architecture reminiscent of *Requiem for a Nun*. The Old General’s vision of the necessities of war overtaking the human body encompasses an apocalyptic catalogue of Cold War anxieties, what Noel Polk calls “the postwar ideological scramble in which the cold war, the mass media, and modern technology combined in ways that drove the wedge between the powerful and the powerless, the individual and the masses […] even more deeply than the war had” (323). Their wars fought entirely by machines, humans, in the Old General’s vision, lose a fixed sense of place, inhabiting mobile houses, “peripatetic,” so that “what he once called home will have vanished from human lexicon” (298).

Many critics, observing echoes of Faulkner’s 1950 Nobel Prize acceptance speech in the Old General’s lengthy monologues, have read this passage as valorizing human voice as a perdurable instrument of community-building. Yet such readings fail to account for the circumstances of the dystopian world imagined by the Old General: this is a denatured world facilitated by the corporal’s capitulation to power, his incorporation within a military-industrial complex that, in exploiting populations, merges autonomous, distinct voices into the hubbub of docile collectivities. In this future, the war machines constructed by ideologically blinded citizens no longer answer to human voice—“years, decades then centuries will have elapsed since [they] last answered his voice”—enacting a failure of communication (298). The machines, moreover, materially embody the link between degraded noise and spatial ruin advanced in this chapter as a crucial nexus for Faulkner’s Cold War imaginings of citizenship and community. Crawling upwards from
underground, from a “cooling burrow,” the cowed humans of the Old General’s imagined future witness a final showdown between the two remaining machines, their wear marked by their “dead antennae” (299). These machines, both outgrowths and enablers of a corroded public sphere, are marked by unintelligible noise, by sounds that fail to refer: moving amid a “clangorous rain of dials and meters and switches,” the machines stand “bellowing at each other polysyllabic and verbless patriotic nonsense” (299). For the Old General, humanity’s endurance is laudable only through the logic of the profit motive, only insofar as what endures in humanity is its misguided capacity for hope. The Old General may appear to be a storyteller figure, but not in the Benjamianian sense. While Benjamin’s storyteller transmits stories layered with traces of a communal past, the Old General crafts stories steeped in instrumentality. These stories engage with communal identity only insofar as this identity can be mobilized towards the profit of the Old General’s own societal elite.

While A Fable links destroyed Europe and the U.S. South through transatlantic transfers of characters and money, the South’s only two extended appearances in the text occur in the form of stories that, in the divergent modes and manners of their telling, expose the central role of the storyteller’s voice in the material construction of place. This is because while one story possesses the accretions of experience of the Benjamianian story, the other does not, serving through its ideological instrumentality to illuminate

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58 Notably, however, the Old General’s description of an inimitable human voice that immediately follows his description of the noisy machines, emphasizes that the primary activity of this “inexhaustible” voice, its “planning to build something higher and faster and louder,” concerns not the intelligibility of noise in these machines but the volume, the loudness: though the machines would be “louder,” they would presumably continue to emit nonsense (299). The Old General’s praise of human voice, then, is not truly celebratory but disingenuous: he praises its “folly,” the vulnerability of eroded publics to nonsensical oratory (299). Faulkner inserts this final rousing tribute to humanity’s endurance as an ironic counterpart to his Nobel Speech, transposing his own speech as cultural icon into the mouth of another celebrity and thereby shifting the speech’s meaning.
precisely what a Benjaminiian story is not. This latter story, told by the Old General to the corporal during their climactic chat overlooking Chaulnesmont, concerns a murderer sentenced to death “in America, at a remote place called by an Indian name I think: Mississippi” (297). The Old General tells us that shortly before his hanging, the prisoner, having long claimed innocence, finally confesses his guilt before a priest in the interests of spiritual salvation. This prisoner, standing on the platform with “the trivial noose already fitted to his neck and in his vision one last segment of the sky beyond which his theology had taught him he would presently be translated,” sees a solitary bird perched atop a slender branch (297). The bird’s song—a form of “verbless nonsense”—recalls to the prisoner the world’s materiality in all its seemingly irrecoverable immediacy, causing him to “cast away heaven, salvation, immortal soul and all […] crying ‘Innocent! Innocent! I didn’t do it!’ even as the trap […] fell from under him” (297). Urging the corporal to “take that bird,” the Old General likens the corporal’s pacifism to the Mississippi prisoner’s theology. However, this analogy in its apparent aptness conceals ruthless self-interest. While the Old General insinuates that the corporal will achieve worldly life by forsaking his pacifistic “theology,” one power trumps theology in his Mississippi story: state violence. The Old General’s celebration of the prisoner’s last-minute choice of life overlooks the fact that, by the time of execution, the prisoner’s choice is a false one: he will die either way. The overwhelming force of state violence renders his decision moot. The corporal’s choice, forced upon him in the unforgiving shadow of state execution, is similarly false: were he to forsake pacifism (as well as forsake the other soldiers of his regiment), the corporal would merely embrace a military-commercial complex whose main product is death. The Old General’s story serves
ideological ends, presenting a veneer of choice to a subject already slated for death as an Agambenesque *homo sacer*.

However, an earlier story of the U.S. South functions as counterweight in *A Fable* to the Old General’s instrumentalized narrative, providing a model of Benjaminian storytelling that both transmits experience to and prompts action in its auditor. This story, typically called “the horse-thief episode,” is narrated by Tooleyman, an African American preacher. Tooleyman tells of an apocryphal three-legged race-horse stolen by an English groom, a child jockey, and himself from an American oil baron in the back-country of the South. Pursued by both police and agents of the oil baron, the three-legged horse moves stealthily and unbelievably quickly from state to state, amassing an unbeaten record at racetracks along with a presumed fortune for the three fugitives. Upon being caught and imprisoned in a Southern jail, the thieves are released through the energies of an American mob. While most critics focus on this episode’s curious relation to the rest of the text, as well as its depiction of the apocryphal horse, the fact that the story’s telling galvanizes its auditor, the runner, to mount a second mutiny in emulation of the corporal’s original mutiny suggests that attention should also be paid to the mode of the story’s telling. Hearing the story, we are told, the runner sees “the immortal pageant-piece of the tender legend which was the crowning glory of man’s own legend,” as well as “the world’s oldest and most shining tale” (129). Although Tooleyman’s story emerges from a specific historical locale (indeed, it is set only five years prior), it nevertheless possesses the layered, sedimentary quality of the Benjaminian story. The story effaces the runner’s own subjectivity, as he finds himself “seeing what the Federal deputy marshal had five years ago while in the middle of it: not a theft, but a passion, an
immolation, an apotheosis” (129). Notably, these final three terms (passion, immolation, apotheosis) aptly describe the runner’s cataclysmic attempt later in the novel to mobilize both Allied and German troops to meet peacefully between their trenches—an attempt that results in the mutinying troops being shelled by the elites of both sides. The runner’s fate echoes the affecting content of the story he is told, subtly aligning the textual story conveyed in *A Fable* with the oral story related by Tooleyman.

Later in Tooleyman’s story, the fuel for both the horse thieves’ thievery and (*A Fable* invites us to presume) the runner’s doomed mutiny appears through free indirect discourse in the voice of the lawyer who defends the thieves. This lawyer is drawn to “the affirmation of a creed, a belief, the declaration of an undying faith, the postulation of an invincible way of life: the loud strong voice of America itself out of the westward roar of the tremendous and battered yet indomitably virgin continent” (141). Once more we see subversions (by both the runner and the horse thieves) of entrenched power as unfolding through a singular voice (the “voice of America”) metonymically linked to a fixed place. This place, moreover, the “virgin continent,” is, like Jefferson’s jail in *Requiem for a Nun*, untouched by projects of spatial destruction and reconstruction: its past lies accreted in material space, just like layers of history lie accreted in the storyteller’s voice. Tooleyman’s voice, the voice of a transatlantic storyteller, catalyzes an attempt, albeit a futile one, against twinned enemies on European soil: one, European powers, embodied in the Old General, who keep their citizens in thrall through ideology; and two, American power both militaristic and financial, embodied in the jail that was once a factory.
The failure of the corporal’s and the runner’s respective rebellions might seem to suggest Faulkner’s pessimism that individual agency could treat the socio-cultural ailments of a degraded public sphere. However, the measure of redemption given each figure (the corporal’s body is mistakenly buried in a national monument, while the runner survives the generals’ shell blasts) gives glimmers of hope: gaps in strategic knowledge furnish the opportunity for renovation, if only autonomous, rational-critical citizens can be brought to discern them. In Cold War Faulkner, we see, the individual voice of the storyteller enables this opportunity, resisting the depredations of an increasingly global U.S. mass culture. Writing of the South’s persistent economic underdevelopment in the decades spanning the failure of Reconstruction and Faulkner’s own Cold War epoch, Harilaos Stecopoulos notes that “to focus on the complex entanglement of U.S. imperialism and U.S. regionalism is to recognize that the strength and flexibility of the modern capitalist state depended partly on its capacity to help produce colonial geographies within and without the putative borders of the nation” (10-11). What the above reading of Cold War Faulkner exposes is the complexity of intertwined geographies beneath even the level of region: tropes of ruination link the abject gutter of Jefferson’s Southern urbanity more closely to the marginalized spaces of “New York […] ghettos” than to the Stevens house, located on the right street in Jefferson itself (Requiem 211). Moreover, Requiem and A Fable braid together geographical imaginaries in Cold War America and Europe, together rendering an ominous Cold War modernity through culturally specific experiences of ruination. But, as Stecopoulos avers, “for Faulkner any turn from the South to the world had the uncanny effect of recalling for him the problems of home” (135). Faulkner’s imaginative cartography of Jefferson aligns the city not only
with dependent spaces in the urban North, but also with the signal battleground between American democracy and Soviet communism in the early Cold War: the ruined spaces of Western Europe that awaited reconstruction. *Requiem for a Nun* and *A Fable* reveal the geopolitical implications of the discourses of geography, place, and space as deployed in the specific historical moment of the early Cold War, but do so in order to trace unlikely ligatures between far-flung locales, as well as to suggest modes of spatial reconstruction attentive to and respectful of otherness. The novels allow us to discern how regional experiences of ruination and reconstruction became Faulkner’s mode of meditating upon the ambitions of the state in his later, less-recognized, post-Nobel writings. Whether lingering over ruined women, ruined families, or ruined buildings, Faulkner’s novels seek to subvert the unforgiving reconstructions associated with postwar governmentality, and to demand that modes of forgiveness both aesthetic and political, both spatial and moral, be imagined.
CHAPTER THREE

States of Repair: Marshall Plan Tourism in James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*

Near the end of James Baldwin’s 1956 novel *Giovanni’s Room*, Giovanni berates his former lover David in language that evokes a type of mobility seemingly unusual in the author’s oeuvre. This language, the language of “tourism,” is incongruous with dominant critical understandings of the novel—and of Baldwin’s body of work as a whole—that see it as preoccupied with experiences of “exile.” Imagining his life as it would have been had he remained in his Italian village, married to his young wife (rather than in a homosexual relationship with David in Paris), Giovanni classifies David as a privileged, callous traveler detached from his community’s emotional, affective life:

> I can see you, many years from now, coming through our village in the ugly, fat, American motor car you will surely have by then and [...] looking at all of us and tasting our wine and shitting on us with those empty smiles Americans wear everywhere and which you wear all the time and driving off [...] and telling all the other Americans you meet that they must come and see our village because it is so picturesque. And you will have no idea of the life there, dripping and bursting and beautiful and terrible, as you have no idea of my life now. (138-9)

Giovanni’s castigation brims with an anti-Americanism that instruments of U.S. power like the Marshall Plan helped stoke in Europeans during the Cold War, but more interesting for the purposes of this chapter are the emotional, visual, and material transactions between American and European that it foregrounds. In Giovanni’s scenario we see an association between failed fellow-feeling and an imperialistic refusal to “give” on the part of moneyed Americans like David to impoverished Europeans like Giovanni: the Americans in this scenario taste the villagers’ wine, consuming their products and landscape while notably neglecting to communicate with them. As we will see, the relations of tourism imagined by Giovanni above become in the early Cold War the basis
for reflections on aid-giving in this novel, revealing to us a text, and an author, whose investment in forms of mobility far exceeds the bounds of exilic displacement.

The habit of viewing both Baldwin’s characters and his lengthy overseas travels through the prism of “exile” is longstanding. Thus Magdalena Zaborowska explores Baldwin’s years in Turkey in her book *James Baldwin’s Turkish Decade: Erotics of Exile*; Joshua Miller reads the author as a “witness dedicated to blurring the distinction between […] citizenship and exile” (338); and Cyraina Johnson-Roullier describes Baldwin’s time in France as “self-imposed exile” (129). Moreover, this same tradition projects Baldwin’s putative exilic identity upon protagonists in his corpus, seeing them as embodiments of the displacement and estrangement that characterize Baldwin’s own biography. Zaborowska, then, in a separate article on *Giovanni’s Room*, sees its post-WWII Paris as “the ultimate twentieth-century space for troubled white American exiles” like David (52). Yet while the racial and sexual discrimination faced by Baldwin as an African-American, homosexual author undoubtedly bred what Edward Said calls exile’s “crippling sorrow of estrangement,” this chapter posits an alternative and complementary trope for reading the mobility of Baldwin’s characters: what becomes newly visible when we perceive them not as exiles but as tourists?

Certainly, the “exile” metaphor that predominantly shapes our understanding of mobility in Baldwin’s novels cannot but be invoked in a merely qualified way: Johnson-Rouiller’s earlier description of Baldwin’s exile notes its self-imposed rather than its forcible status, while Zaborowska’s article on *Giovanni’s Room* oscillates between the terms “exile” and “tourist” as if they were synonyms. In Zaborowska’s interpretation of the novel, David’s sojourn in Paris can be seen simultaneously as a “flight from America
to France” and as the vacation of a “closeted, all-American tourist” (62, 52). This chapter takes seriously the distinction between “exile” and “tourist” in arguing that Giovanni’s Room meditates upon the unique affective, ethical, and geopolitical complexities of American tourism during the early Cold War. As in other chapters of this project, we can discern in Baldwin’s novel ligatures between the decaying spaces of America’s crisis-beset postwar cities and the war-wrecked metropolises of Europe. However, what Giovanni’s Room provides that is unique for our understanding of the affective quandaries entailed by projects of Cold War urban renewal on both sides of the Atlantic is a sustained, searching rumination on a particular figure, the tourist, who travels between the distinct ruins of Europe and America. In Giovanni’s Room, the Cold War American tourist is an ambassador of spatial, temporal, and sexual modalities associated with mass-market capitalism; yet the novel also labors to show how the affluent American tourist’s encounters with foreign territory elicit an irresistible yet unattainable mode of compassion tied to projects of American humanitarianism in the early Cold War.

David’s travels occur in an era that witnessed a transformation of tourism’s class valences and geopolitics. The early Cold War saw the rise of transatlantic jet service alongside an increase in middle-class American prosperity that helped generate a tourism boom in postwar France. However, visits to France by tourists like David also represented in the early Cold War an important prong of American foreign policy that mixed free-market commercialism with national identity. As Christopher Endy has shown, the U.S. government set aside part of the 1948-1952 Marshall Plan aid for an unprecedented travel development program: “operating under the notion that every dollar spent by a tourist was one dollar less the government needed to spend in foreign aid, U.S.
policymakers promoted and even organized Americans’ leisure spending in war-ravaged Europe” (8). Tourism thus represented in this period a unique form of foreign aid, one based not upon technocratic planning but rather upon the free spending choices of American consumers. In this sense, as Endy argues, “what might be called consumer diplomacy represented an attempt to harness private consumer activity for state goals,” while American tourists, though still private citizens, were nevertheless encouraged to think of themselves as “ambassadors” abroad (5). Although these consumer diplomats could bestow American wealth on rebuilding Europe without government oversight, their very act of free-market consumption advanced a key plank of the Marshall Plan. As Victoria De Grazia argues, the Marshall Plan was crucial in dislodging old regimes of economic regulation in Europe, advancing American-style consumer modernity, and converting European citizens into citizen-consumers, what Jean-Luc Godard famously called “the children of Marx and Coca-Cola” (343). However, efforts by French and American bureaucrats to render France hospitable to America’s middle-class as “a part of American consumer culture” nevertheless served to undercut another goal of Marshall Plan tourism, that of “making tourism a vehicle for enhancing Franco-American understanding” (McKenzie 114). Marshall Plan tourism, in order to attract free-market American dollars for girding the country against communism’s appeal, had to “domesticate the exotic,” transforming the country’s spaces and culture into a simulacrum of itself ripe for American consumption.

The logic of Marshall Plan tourism—which, like most forms of foreign humanitarian aid, simultaneously sustained and refigured its recipients—catalyzes crises both ethical and affective in Giovanni’s Room as David negotiates competing impulses to
give and to withhold economic aid from an impoverished European, the novel
interrogating the very possibility of affective relations like empathy with and compassion
for needy others on the part of the moneyed tourist. Such fraught relations with a foreign
other whose essence we seek, ever futilely, to “understand,” can perhaps be read as part
of the experience of tourism as such. As Jonathan Culler argues, “Tourism reveals
difficulties of appreciating otherness except through signifying structures that mark and
reduce it” (167). For Culler, tourism operates through a semiotic system that inspires
tourists to seek signs of a spurious “authenticity” in foreign spaces and cultures, this
search inclining every tourist to consider herself not a philistine “tourist” but instead a
“traveler” in pursuit of culture beyond the dreaded and superficial “tourist traps” that
inhibit one’s understanding of foreign “authenticity.” Striving always for the
“authenticity” that lies “off the beaten path” (in tourist parlance), tourists can only ever
obtain the consolation of reproductions that signify the “authentic” or “originary.” Culler
thus sees the popularity of touristic souvenirs as bespeaking our desire to surround
“ourselves with reproductions [so that] we represent to ourselves […] the possibility of
authentic experiences in other times and in other places” (160). An “authenticity”
intelligible and graspable to the foreign tourist emerges, then, through the semiotic
structure of tourism itself. Giovanni’s Room charts not only the violence engendered by
a Marshall Plan tourism persistently in search of a readymade and intelligible “authentic”
that can only be produced by domesticating foreign spaces and selves, but also the
vacuity of a mode of touristic empathy used to underwrite American Cold War foreign
aid. Projects of Cold War urban renewal in shattered Europe generate as their affective
engine an empathy that, in the fashion of tourism, domesticates an other (for instance,
destroyed Europe) to the imperatives of the self (prosperous America, the donor nation)—an empathy whose emptiness *Giovanni’s Room* exposes but also whose lingering power it documents. The novel thus registers how Marshall Plan tourism recast tourism as a dialectic between taking (via cultural domestication) and giving (via free-market spending) in an age of greatly enlarged U.S. foreign aid.

This chapter argues that *Giovanni’s Room* traces the unwitting ravages of Marshall Plan tourists through David’s encounter with spaces both private and public in a Paris of decay, a postwar metropolis in need of American-funded renewal. The novel portrays in the unintelligible disorderliness of Giovanni’s room—a disorder that can be rectified, made coherent, ordered, and intelligible only through money held in America as earmarked for the marriage of the novel’s protagonist, David—an ambivalence towards investments, both monetary and personal, in spatial renovation as it occurs simultaneously on either side of the Atlantic. In fact, in an age of potentially cataclysmic urban renewal in both America and Europe that threatened to replace the privatized, individuated “attachments” to local, neighborhood space with the impersonal projects of planners, Baldwin’s novel figures queer intimate space as eminently vulnerable to undesirable renewal via capital circulation. The chapter traces this mode of unforgiving mass-market renewal through David’s touristic encounters with foreign spaces and looking-relations with foreign selves. David’s ultimate adherence, by novel’s end, to the dictates of Marshall Plan tourism consigns France’s marginalized spaces and populations to death, an ethical burden that David, despite his best efforts, cannot ever evade. In this way, *Giovanni’s Room* queries the ethics of humanitarian aid-giving in the postwar period by scrutinizing such aid’s always conditional nature. If aid is given only with
strings attached, if it is aid for reform rather than a mere bestowal, if the aid is given only with the expectation of a change in the recipient, then to what extent is it truly “given,” to what extent is it nothing more than a reciprocal exchange, a business deal? In Baldwin’s David emerges the tourist’s ceaseless desire, as well as its ultimate failure, to give selflessly.

Touristic Retrospection

The narrative structure of Giovanni’s Room echoes earlier American novels that depict a young American’s “self-discovery” in Europe, with a now solitary David ruminating from a guest house in Southern France upon the events that have led to what he calls “the night which is leading [him] to the most terrible morning of [his] life” (3). David is no Lambert Strether, though, nor (in his sexual freedom) Chad Newsome; rather, the familiar image of an American “innocent abroad” here resonates with discursive forms particular to Cold War geopolitics. David functions as the “ambassador” of a newly hegemonic post-WWII America, acting out its imperatives for nearly the entire novel, however unsettling he may find them to be. The events recollected by David—his departure for Paris following an adolescent estrangement from his Brooklyn father; his blossoming affection for and homosexual relationship with Italian bartender Giovanni while his heterosexual fiancée, Hella, tours Spain; his eventual abandonment of the impoverished Giovanni upon Hella’s return, prompting Giovanni’s descent into misery and, ultimately, murder; and Hella’s final abandonment of David upon discovering a homosexuality that David can no longer conceal from her—transpire within a frame that foregrounds not only a remorselessly linear temporality associated with American capitalism but also a mode of vision no longer cowed by European grandeur, a mode of
vision newly appropriative, poised in its dominance. The novel’s opening paragraph gives us a young American projecting his image upon European soil as he “stand[s] at the window of this great house in the south of France,” peering through his “reflection in the […] window pane” (3). David introduces us to French land through his own projected reflection, referencing his ancestors’ imperialistic capacities even as he demonstrates his own in the early Cold War. Aligned with Northern European (and American) whiteness, David, whose “blond hair gleams,” informs us that his “ancestors conquered a continent, pushing across death-laden plains, until they came to an ocean which faced away from Europe into a darker past” (3). This introduction thus marks David as the latest iteration in a long line of conquerors of Europe (as well as, perhaps, a barbarian), with David’s reference to “death-laden plains” invoking the particularly death-strewn European terrain of recent history; but it also, by way of his reference to “a darker past,” establishes David’s affiliation with the Marlow of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, a character who also imagines a darker, inscrutable past. Like *Heart of Darkness*, *Giovanni’s Room* thematizes imperialism and self-discovery: just as Marlow unearths unsettling aspects of his own subjectivity by venturing to the unknowable imperial satellite of his own European metropole, so David, in a neo-imperial gesture, undertakes self-reflection by casting himself within the newly dependent space of his own nation’s free-market imperium. The act of “self-discovery” is itself an imperializing gesture, an act of coming to know, mastering, and disciplining the self, akin to the European explorers who fill in their maps’ blank spaces in Conrad’s novella. As we shall see, David’s own project of subjective cartography—of mapping his own self—hinges upon his ability also to know European others, a desire that renders David the prototype of a Marshall Plan tourist.
Like Culler’s tourist, David seeks signs of “authenticity” in other spaces and subjects whose interior truths are rendered intelligible to him through, as David imagines, a vision that peers past mere facades. Echoing Culler’s case that the desire to distinguish oneself from “mere tourists” is germane to the culture of tourism itself, David seeks constantly to differentiate himself from tourist figures who, in his eyes, encounter only surfaces, missing the “authentic.” Thus as autumn strikes Paris following David’s abandonment of Giovanni, he informs us that “[t]he tourists in their thousands disappeared, conjured away by timetables,” touristic temporality here characterized by an orderliness that, as we shall soon see, structures relationships between U.S. and European subjects and cultures (146). His attempts at self-distinction notwithstanding, though, a tourist David remains. The very setting of David’s narration in the frame aligns him with Cold War tourism, as his rented house lies “just outside a small summer resort” (4). In moments of weariness David finds Paris a “strange city” full of “people [he] would never understand,” his simultaneous desire and failure to “understand” foreign subjects signaling his touristic epistemological struggle for the ever-elusive “authentic” (62).

Thus far, however, one could quibble that David’s estrangement from his surroundings could equally well characterize him as an exile as it could a tourist; what marks his specifically touristic nature is that David not only desires to know foreign spaces and subjects, remaining perpetually estranged from these things, but that he also possesses the ability to abandon them at leisure: his mobility, his ability to return home, bars David from the status of exile. In the very same passage as he describes his

59 While David scrupulously distances himself from resort tourists by noting that “the season has not yet begun,” he nevertheless remains a foreign visitor to a resort locale (4). The fact that his house is “rented from photographs” also marks it as a highly temporary abode that, one presumes, must have been advertised in venues aimed at travelers to the region.
estrangement from Paris, David also acknowledges his “longing to go home […] to things and people I knew and understood,” positioning America as a chartable, intelligible, readable space apart from Parisian incomprehensibility (62). Like the quintessential tourist, David sees himself clearly only against the foil of foreign unintelligibility: “I saw myself, sharply, as a wanderer, an adventurer” (62). David’s self-description as an “adventurer” invests his isolation with grandeur: adventures are undertaken from desire, not from the necessity that characterizes exile. The novel’s characters themselves, including David, align such mobility, such lack of attachment to one’s present surroundings, with the flightiness of the tourist. Giovanni, his lecherous patron Jacques, and his equally lecherous employer Guillaume, all deride Americans for their fickleness: “The Americans always fly. They are not serious.” (154) Being “not serious” is a hallmark of the tourist in Giovanni’s Room: disavowing commitments to other people and spaces makes one touristic. Thus, for example, the novel imagines a form of erotic tourism, of love sans commitment to or empathy with the other: Hella, in a letter to David from a vacation resort in Spain, describes “the tourists, mainly English and American dipsomaniacs, paid […] by their families to stay away,” widowers who appear to Hella as “old hags [who] guzzle and make eyes at anything in pants” (93). Immediately after reading this letter, though, David seduces a dead ringer for Hella’s touristic hags: Sue, described by David in sordid terms, comes from a “very rich” American family (recalling the widows who have been paid by their families to stay away) and drinks liquor to a degree that recalls the guzzling hags (95). The scene of their tryst, a rented apartment, also connotes a lack of permanent investment in space. David’s association of Sue with tourism even transforms his revulsion for her into self-revulsion,
as he senses the absence of any affective connection between himself and his lover: to David, making love to Sue is merely “a job of work,” a “performance” that masks his interiority from her just as hers is guarded from him (100). This inability to disclose interiors, this failure to achieve fellow-feeling, David senses in the fashion of a tourist: he rues, and feels ashamed by, his failure to engage with Sue’s “authentic” self. His shame in this scene, then, derives not only from his lack of perdurability, his abandonment of Sue, but in a more fundamental sense from his encounter with a seemingly unavoidable fact: his failure to engage with “authenticity” renders David a tourist.

Scholarly treatments of tourism universally associate it with mass-market capitalism, and while Giovanni’s Room undoubtedly draws on this association as well, it nevertheless frames acts of American tourism through the specific geopolitical imperatives of the early Cold War. In its portrayal of David and Giovanni’s relationship, the novel stages an encounter between a displaced, penniless European (Giovanni comes to Paris from rural Italy) and a new world American flush with cash (wired to Paris by David’s father) and mobility. The terms of this encounter broadly replicate the geopolitical disparity in American and European power that underwrote Marshall Plan prerogatives, as well as the specter of European collapse that necessitated American aid both governmental and touristic. The Paris of Giovanni’s Room is a city that is “falling to pieces, measure by measure,” while its citizens are people “struggling for comfort and, even, dignity” (36, 3). Many grown European men in this novel participate in the crumbling apparatus of European imperialism whose erosion was accelerated by World War II: impoverished boys who flock to Paris from rural areas “end up on the streets, or in jail, or in Indochina,” while their elders have returned to Europe “after a lifetime of
storming and conquering the world, home to [...] wait for death” (26, 65). France’s imperial metropole, Paris, appears in these descriptions as a warren of impoverished youth, while its satellite, Indochina, is patrolled by that metropole’s banished underclass, the imperial project for these youth tantamount to prison. Paris’s stagnation arises in part from economic inefficiency, one of the prime targets of structural change in the eyes of Marshall Planners: in our first extensive view of the city in this novel, David describes to us from a passing taxi a stunted city where the Seine appears “swollen and yellow,” with barges not moving, while city streets represent anything but arteries of bustling commerce, constituted as they are by “choked boulevards and impassable sidestreets” (45, 47). Much Marshall Plan aid was devoted to providing postwar Europe with basic necessities like food and agricultural supplies, yet our introduction to Paris in Giovanni’s Room dramatizes precisely the American fears of wasted European aid that fueled opposition to the Plan among right-wing American constituencies, indexing on a geopolitical level the anxiety towards aid-giving that characterizes relationships in the novel as a whole.60 Bustling Paris in this passage contains plentiful food in “mounds all over,” but large quantities of this food, intended to “feed the roaring multitude,” ultimately go to waste (47). We encounter such waste through David’s eyes as he sees Parisian pavement strewn with “cast-off, rotten leaves, flowers, fruit, and vegetables” (48). David’s Cold War vacation positions him as an affluent observer of a France that is crumbling to pieces amid economic stagnation and inefficiency, a France in need of aid but whose state of postwar chaos—registered in phrases like “roaring multitude”—renders aid projects perilous (47).

60 As an example of such right-wing fears of European waste, Republican congressman John Taber complained of proposed Marshall Plan aid that “if the Europeans would work as hard as Americans they would need no help from us” (qtd. in Bonds 49).
While David’s touristic gaze takes in the sweep of the needy multitude, lingering on national structures of economic distribution, his affective investment in postwar European squalor arises primarily on the level of the personal, in the sphere not of public space (Les Halles, for instance) but of private space in Giovanni’s apartment. Repeatedly perceived by the novel’s European characters as well-heeled, David recollects his encounter with Giovanni’s room in order to meditate upon the affective dilemmas of aid-giving: how to balance one’s own conditions for giving aid with the affective pull of another’s bare neediness, as well as with the perils of withholding aid? David initially finds Giovanni’s rented apartment a refuge from “so small and policed a city” as Paris, which “malevolently presse[s], encroaching day by day, as though it had confused itself with a jungle” (152, 85). Soon, however, David begins to find the smallness and meanness of the room not only “stinking and dirty” but spatially disorienting: “it was not the room’s disorder which was frightening; it was that when one began to search for the key to this disorder, one realized that it was not to be found” (135, 87). Through the unclean, decaying space of Giovanni’s room, the novel fantasizes the complete dependency—not only financial, but emotional and moral—of a European upon an American tourist: “The burden of [Giovanni’s] salvation seemed to be on me,” David claims (114).

While Giovanni devises “great plans for remodeling the room,” to the point where David imagines that Giovanni expects of him to “destroy this room and give to Giovanni a new and better life,” *Giovanni’s Room* evinces a fear and anxiety towards spatial renovation that become linked to David’s own self-understanding (71, 88). David, along with the money he receives by wire from his American father, provides Giovanni with
hope for a future beyond his decrepit room, as well as for a future beyond sordid financial dependency on older men like Jacques and Guillaume. However, David’s abandonment of Giovanni prompts not only the personal ruin of Giovanni, but also the destabilization of the French state: Giovanni’s murder of Guillaume—who, despite his marginalized sexual position, carries “one of the oldest names in France,” a name “entangled with French history, French honor, and French glory […] indeed, a symbol of French manhood”—endangers social order, “threaten[ing], before its reverberations cease, to rock the very foundations of the state” (150, 149). Giovanni’s murder of Guillaume stokes fears of the loss of a prototypically “French” identity, rooted in the state, which the tourist futilely yearns to comprehend. “French” identity at this crucial postwar moment depends for material sustenance upon U.S. touristic money; but this dependence renders it commensurately vulnerable to tourists’ affective fickleness, allowing Giovanni’s Room in this scene to stage a loss of national identity that recalls the fears of Marshall Plan publicity that France would fall prey to communism in the absence of U.S. capital.

Giovanni’s descent into crime occurs partly as a result of David’s process of self-deception and eventual self-discovery in relation to his own sexuality. However, this self-deception on David’s part in relation to his own sexual identity remains inextricable from his identity as an American. This is because it is America’s more restrained sexual climate (at least compared to European cities like Paris), in which an ideal of masculinity channeled by David’s father reigns, that helps precipitate David’s own denial of his homosexuality, as well as his desire for a “normal” heterosexual union with Hella. In this way, Giovanni’s Room depicts an encounter between a moneyed, mobile American and a financially dependent European that is subtended not only by international economic
relations, but also by anxieties generated within the American as he confronts something terrifying within himself—his homosexuality—which he initially seeks to deny (and eventually projects outward upon a foreign Other). Not only does Giovanni, dependent upon David, figuratively wither following the withdrawal of the American’s support, but the withdrawal itself stems from the American’s own ambivalences in entering the relationship: without American money provided by David, and without the renovation and remodeling of Giovanni’s room that such money would purchase, Giovanni—and, as suggested above, the French state itself—spirals towards crime, violence, and death. David’s retrospective narration of Guillaume’s, Giovanni’s, and (by extension) the French state’s demise fixatedly restages the pitfalls of withholding aid on principles of conditionality (in David’s case, the use of American money for heteronormative purposes). Yet his narration also simultaneously registers the unique guilt created in the withholder by Marshall Plan tourism: while David adheres to his home country’s heteronormative imperatives in withholding aid from Giovanni, his position as free-market aid giver nevertheless renders such withholding an autonomous choice. David’s sense of ethical dilemma pervading his narration of Giovanni’s downfall originates in a tension between the dual subject positions predicated by Marshall Plan tourism: the tourist as national ambassador versus the tourist as free-market agent. What this novel questions by way of David’s withholding of aid is the very capacity for free-market choice when the act of choice itself is already geopolitically and sexually freighted.

Reading *Giovanni’s Room* as a Marshall Plan allegory, as we have done in the preceding paragraphs, illuminates not only the geopolitics of David’s affective state in this novel but also a structure of urban experience that, echoing other chapters of this
project, links European and American postwar cities through a shared politics of reconstruction. In *Giovanni’s Room*, sexually marginalized communities are banished to abject city spaces ripe for projects of renewal fueled by finance capital, projects whose mission of rebuilding comes laced with heteronormative conditions. The very marginality of these spaces as they appear in David’s narration renders them “unclean” according to regimes of both public sanitation and conventional morality. While the plot of *Giovanni’s Room* unfolds nearly exclusively on French soil, its geographic imagination invests this territory with transatlantic valences by way of David’s frame narration. In the frame, David recalls his first encounter with queerness, in his “teens” while living in America, in terms that anticipate his later affair with Giovanni (6). Following a day at the beach, David and his friend Joey, moving their heads as they strain to hear one another, kiss “by accident,” and then, discovering their mutual feelings, “act the act of love” (8). (Immediately afterwards, terrified by his self-discovery, David abandons Joey, an act that mirrors his later abandonment of Giovanni.) The trajectory of David’s relationship with Giovanni thus broadly replicates that of his brief relationship with Joey, and the plot structure of *Giovanni’s Room* can be understood as David’s retrospective attempt to interrogate his own selfhood in the face of an abandonment twice committed. However, the novel also geographically codes each relationship in terms derived from America’s postwar urban crisis. David acknowledges that he lives “in a better neighborhood than Joey’s,” rendering his sexual excursion, which occurs in Joey’s house, also an excursion into underprivileged urban space (6). This movement within Brooklyn space from David’s house to Joey’s David frames as a vacation: “I was spending the weekend at his house, which was near Coney Island,” a popular tourist
destination (6). However, David’s act of tourism in “spending the weekend” away from his “better neighborhood” also entails a transgression of the racial boundaries around which so much discourse of urban panic in America circled. David imagines queerness through the lens of race, aligning Joey with blackness: awaking the next morning, David sees Joey’s sweaty body as “brown, […] the most beautiful creation,” but also as “the black opening of a cavern […] in which [he] would lose [his] manhood” (8, 9). In this way, David narrates his initial experience with queerness as a terrifying vacation across zones of American urbanity.

David associates homosexuality with blackness in his relationship with Giovanni as well, and his eventual abandonment of Giovanni can be understood as an aversion to racial difference. However, beyond this reading, what Giovanni’s Room makes clear is how racial divisions that are emblematized and exacerbated by uneven urban development inflect transatlantic political and sexual encounters in the early Cold War. David first senses affection for Joey in a “small […] room” that anticipates Giovanni’s own, while Giovanni’s apartment, like Joey’s house, remains distant from the “better neighborhood[s]” of the city (6). A “cheap” apartment, Giovanni’s room lies “way out at the end of Paris, near the zoo,” its alignment with animality signaling not only the heteronormativity that pervades David’s cognitive map of Paris but also a sense of confinement, of being caged like an animal, that he uses in part to justify his escape from Giovanni (96). Though the apartment lies on the urban periphery, its proximity to the zoo also suggests its status as a tourist destination: as zoo-goers gaze upon animals while distanced from them by a cage, imagining them in their “authentic” habitat, David too, as

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61 For two important histories of Coney Island tourism, see John F. Kasson’s Amusing the Million and Michael Immerso’s Coney Island. Notably, Joseph Heller, the subject of chapter one, locates his own imaginings of U.S. urban decline in Catch-22 in part within the Coney Island neighborhood of his birth.
we shall see below, remains always affectively and visually distanced from the object of his touristic gaze, Giovanni. While David feels that the “circle of [his] arms” becomes a “home” when holding Hella, Giovanni’s room and the sexuality associated with it assume for David a mode of disorientation and placelessness that defies what Michel de Certeau describes as imperialistic projects of cartography achieved through rationalized strategies (120).

While Hella’s room lies on the same street as the Senate, the seat of government, Giovanni’s functions as a queer countersite within France, a detritus-strewn space on the margins that, in Giovanni’s opinion, functions as a receptacle for “all of the garbage” of Paris (87). David disputes this—“This was not the garbage of Paris, which would have been anonymous; this was Giovanni’s regurgitated life”—but his distinction between anonymous, public garbage and the regurgitated, publicized interiority of a specific individual discloses the desire inherent in David’s touristic narration: to peer beyond foreign surfaces, to gain access to the exotic “authentic” (87). Three paragraphs later, after expressing frustration at his persistent status as a “vrai américain” in the eyes of Europeans, David encounters a horde of philistine American tourists, their commitment to mass-market commercialism marked by accessories “all clearly from the same department store” (89). To David, these tourists harbor, unseen within themselves, “the sorrow of the disconnected,” a sorrow that David himself, privy (in his own mind) to regurgitated European interiority, does not share (90). Such an imagining by David of touristic sorrow is disingenuous, though, for it seeks to distinguish David from the tourists he scorns. Sorrow tinges the tone of David’s narrative of his French life, as well

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62 In one of his many denunciations of imperialistic spatial planning practices in The Practice of Everyday Life, de Certeau explains that “the city, like a proper name […] provides a way of conceiving and constructing space on the basis of a finite number of stable, isolatable, and interconnected properties” (94).
as his voice in the present: the novel’s subtle linkage of uneven urban development in Brooklyn and Paris reveals how David’s French experiences are anticipated by those in his home country. Unlike the exile, David is not radically dissociated from his homeland—rather, his retrospective narration frames the dilemmas of his French life as extensions of his American one. In this way, David’s sexual dilemmas are exported from America to France, threatening, through their repercussions, French statehood itself. As a Marshall Plan tourist, David remains doubly estranged from foreign others: one form of estrangement derives from his material affluence, with which he has the capacity to give aid to needy sufferers; nevertheless, America’s culture of heteronormativity, personified in David’s father, occasions a second, sexual, form of estrangement that imposes conditions upon the aid David might otherwise give Giovanni unreservedly.

However, describing the plot structure of Giovanni’s Room as a touristic exportation of sexual self-questioning entails identifying a broader system of repetition that structures the plot. David’s retrospective narration can itself be seen as a “regurgitated life” akin to Giovanni’s: the novel recounts events in David’s life spanning his early childhood to the present moment. Within David’s regurgitation, moments of sexual awakening, self-questioning, and abandonment recur, first in Brooklyn, and then in Paris. Moreover, the setting of David’s frame narrative, a dark French night that at novel’s end brightens into day, emblematizes repetition’s ambivalent temporality: the diurnal cycle itself recalls in its uniformity a Nietzschean eternal return of the same, a

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63 The novel’s transatlantic spatial and moral imagination did not escape attention by Baldwin’s contemporary readers. Literary critic Robert Bone, in his 1958 The Negro Novel in America, complains that Giovanni’s Room “simply transposes the moral topography of Harlem to the streets of Paris” (qtd. in Field 96). My reading suggests that this process of transatlantic shuttling reveals how transposition in this case is never simple. This is because the act of transposing itself involves David’s own shifting conceptions of sexual and national identities, as well as new affective structures developed to accompany these identities.
sameness without difference, yet the movement from night to day also exhibits progress, a forward movement from one day to the next that promises the possibility of difference within repetition, the possibility of progress as time unfolds. The narrative structure of *Giovanni’s Room*, through its frame narrative that invites readers to compare David’s past life with his present narratorial self, emerges through patterns of repetition revealed most clearly by its protagonist’s project of Marshall Plan tourism. While this section has identified the fictive structures within which David emerges as a tourist in *Giovanni’s Room*, situating his tourism within a Cold War geopolitical allegory that binds urban decay across America and Europe, the following section scrutinizes more closely the divergent temporalities associated with urban ruin in this novel. In so doing it asks how a mode of time privileged by American projects of urban reconstruction configures not only how characters in *Giovanni’s Room* experience urban space but also how these same characters conceive of the affective possibility of interpersonal empathy upon which selfless aid-giving, including the free-market aid-giving of tourism, depends.

*A Time Beyond Exchange*

The marginalized and ruined spaces of *Giovanni’s Room* spatially index a specter that shadows Marshall Plan tourism and the mass-market capitalism it both participates in and promotes: the wreckage of the past created by acts of utopian, progressive reconstruction. David’s role as Marshall Plan tourist steeps his identity in a capitalism that envisions time as always progressive, as invested in futurity. What unsettles David as a Marshall Plan tourist, what tests his adherence to American geopolitical imperatives, is his confrontation—through Giovanni and the room he occupies—with a time unmoored from futurity, a time fearfully unaligned with progress. If capitalism is in part
defined by reciprocal exchange between autonomous dealers, what *Giovanni’s Room* poses in both its diegesis and its narrative structure is the possibility of an obverse realm and time beyond exchange that unsettles narratives of temporal progress. Mass capitalism’s failure to fulfill its progressive promises, signaled by the detritus it creates, reveals its impotence in ameliorating the world’s ills; insofar as this capitalism brands itself through American Cold War rhetoric as an instrument of amelioration, its failure also signals an inability on the part of capitalist-aligned governments to enact progress, to repair what is broken. In *Politics Out of History*, Wendy Brown describes the reduced capacity for agency that characterizes citizenship in a postwar era of mass capitalism:

“Our capacity to intervene in the trajectory and the wide range of effects of capital (as the most powerful moving force in modernity), […] appears exhausted. So history surges on, but with no promise that past suffering will be redeemed” (139). The history Brown describes is that of Klee’s Angelus Novus in Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” but its implication for citizenship is that we must rethink chronology in a “present and future of driven, rushing aimlessness” (Brown 139). Political projects thus implicitly align themselves with one of a series of possible chronologies all of which jar for supremacy in our historical imagination: the narratives of progress upon which reconstruction projects like the Marshall Plan depend are haunted by the specters of ruin that attend “modernization,” as twentieth-century history has shown all too well. To what extent can we discern possibilities for progress amid a world where time seems more often circular, where remnants and ruins of the past infringe upon the present and subvert visions of teleological development? As we saw in the preceding section, monetary aid in David’s tale seems always to come with strings attached, and part of this
novel’s struggle is to imagine forms of economic and interpersonal relations beyond the compulsory reciprocity of capitalist exchange.

Reading *Giovanni’s Room* as an allegory of Marshall Plan geopolitical imperatives illuminates modes of time which jostle and commingle with one another in the novel, and whose limit forms can be mapped upon the radical difference between Europe and America posited in the novel by David’s tourism. David narrates his status as tourist as one imbued by an outlook on time that emphasizes possibilities for linear progress through capitalist exchange, but his tourism forces him to confront a temporality radically different, a “ruin time” characterized by a palimpsestic layering of times upon one another. That this clash of temporalities is central to David’s understanding of his relationship with Giovanni is made clear in his recollection of their very first meeting, where he structures their interaction as in part a philosophical debate over the nature of time, a conversational exchange whose lack of resolution anticipates the troubled financial and sexual exchanges to come between them. During their very first encounter in Guillaume’s bar Giovanni and David discuss the differences between forms of urbanity in New York and Paris, with David seeing in New York a dynamic urbanism associated with futurity, novelty, and movement—“very high and new and electric—exciting […] It’s very twentieth-century”—and Paris as “old,” so that you “feel all the time gone by” (33). Giovanni’s interpretation of David’s description, however, distinguishes between European and American understandings of time: for Giovanni, the layered time of Parisian city space stands against an American mode of time that is linked imaginatively with a seemingly artificial and synthetic cleanliness, a belief by Americans that “with enough time […] everything will be settled, solved, put in its place” (33). The rhetoric of
clarity mobilized here by Giovanni—things being “put in [their] place”—gestures outwards to a broader epistemological outlook connected to “progressive” temporality: the possibility that objects of scrutiny will reveal their “true” meaning (and will thus be “solved—and in this way concluded, consigned to the past), an outlook that, as we shall see in the next section, inflects the novel’s looking-relations and narrative structure.

While this first conversation is erotically charged and flirtatious throughout, its denotative content concerns the rupture between European categories of space and time and those brought from America by David in his tourism. David claims that “Paris is old, is many centuries. You feel, in Paris, all the time gone by. That isn’t what you feel in New York” (33). Questioned by Giovanni as to New York’s temporal difference, David admits that its allure lies in its ambiguous futurity, in the mystery of what form the city will take many years from now—as Giovanni puts it, “When we are dead and New York is old,” or, as David puts it, “When everyone is tired, when the world—for Americans—is not so new” (33). This exchange both indexes conventional motives for American Cold War tourism (the novelty of the exotic locale, a place where the world is new) and positions both New York and Paris in a relation to time that emphasizes their capacity to age. Paris, in this reading, even as a crumbling city being rebuilt after the war, archives history in its buildings in a way reminiscent of European understandings of spatial ruins. New York, on the other hand, defined by David as “new and electric” and “very twentieth-century,” is defined by its untimeliness, a quality that Nick Yablon has argued is characteristic of American ruins brought about by the creatively destructive upheaval and money-driven “renewal” schemes of its major cities.64

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64 See in particular pages 1-17 of Yablon’s Untimely Ruins.
Such radically opposed structures of time have galvanized recent work in queer theory that illuminates the possibilities for sexual identity posed by time as a concept in this novel. Lee Edelman, for instance, in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, argues that contemporary political discourse relies on an uncritical belief in “reproductive futurism” whereby the tacit aim of politics is to enhance life for a future-oriented “image of the Child” (2). The logic of contemporary politics, then, remains committed to refining a social order “which it then intends to transmit to the future in the form of its inner Child” (3). Such projects invest themselves in a time conceived of as linear and progressive, a time resonant with David’s understanding of American urbaniy and capitalism in *Giovanni’s Room*. Yet, as Edelman sees it, the abject other of reproductive futurism’s linear temporality, homosexuality, assumes for mainstream political discourse a quality of deathliness: “The queer comes to figure the bar to every realization of futurity, the resistance, internal to the social, to every social structure or form” (4). David himself remains ideologically invested in Edelman’s reproductive futurism as he encounters foreign others and considers Europe’s destitution—on the very night he meets Giovanni, David apprehends an old man who resembles “a receptacle of all the world’s dirt and disease,” and a young boy “who would look like that man one day, if one could read, in the dullness of his eye, anything so real as a future” (54). However, his narration suggests how we might conceive spatially of reproductive futurism in a way that Edelman does not (54). David, raised in an American ruin culture of creative destruction and uneven urban development, confronts in Giovanni’s room a space where time does not proceed linearly but rather engulfs its inhabitants. In their first conversation,

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65 For an exploration of queerness and geography whose treatment of temporality relates closely to Edelman’s see pages 1-21 of Judith Halberstam’s *In a Queer Time and Place*.
Giovanni, distinguishing European time from the “triumphant parade” of American progressivism, likens it to “water for a fish” (34). David later reports of his life in Giovanni’s apartment that “life in that room seemed to be occurring beneath the sea. Time flowed past indifferently above us; hours and days had no meaning” (75). Later, he reaffirms that “Life in that room seemed to be occurring underwater,” welding the circular, fluid temporality of the room’s disordered space to a reconfiguration of his own memory and imagination: the room becomes “every room I had ever been in and every room I find myself in hereafter will remind me of Giovanni’s room” (85). This room in its very indescribability elevates it beyond the flow of progressive temporality: reshaping David’s memory, it supplants the spaces of his past and imprints itself on all spaces he can imagine in a future.

The very category of a future, however, is even undercut in David’s formulation: if Giovanni’s room becomes an icon for spaces both past and future, how is one to distinguish between them? David’s claim levels all differences between spaces past and future, negating the possibility of progress: future spaces will be identical to the past, as they will all resemble this disordered room. David’s retrospective narration places Giovanni’s room beyond progressive time, beyond a past and future. As David struggles to narrate his experiences within the room, the non-reproductive sexuality that divorces its temporality from reproductive futurism also stymies David’s own narrative production: he “scarcely know[s] how to describe that room” (85). In his initial conversation with Giovanni, David acknowledges Paris’s ruinous and disordered temporality, but his experience of the room alters his own sense of European urbanity. This disordered and crumbling physical space, perceived by David to be in need of both
material and literary reconstruction, bequeaths privacy to its inhabitants. This privacy fosters a sexuality aligned temporally with the ruins of built space, a space whose temporality defies the “progressivism” of renewal schemes invested ideologically in reproductive futurism. As Giovanni’s room comes to figure metonymically for Paris in David’s recollection of it, boundaries of privacy and publicity increasingly come to structure his understanding of Parisian sexual culture. Public space beyond Giovanni’s room invites forms of social life amenable to reproductive futurism, as David hears “children playing” in the courtyard outside Giovanni’s window, a window obscured by Giovanni with a “white cleaning polish” that, in a novel that imagines categories of sex through those of race, signals the public face that Giovanni wishes his room to project: a white and clean face associated with heterosexuality, a face acceptable to the children (and their parents) who lie just beyond its windows (86, 85).

This threat to queer privacy and its attendant non-linear temporality crystallizes itself in Hella, who embodies the progressive future of heterosexual marriage and childbirth for David. Her surname, “Lincoln,” marks her ironically as the great Emancipator, the American heteronormative alternative to Giovanni’s fearful and exotic queerness. Against the oceanic, fluid time of Giovanni’s room Hella poses the measured, quantified time of the touristic timetable: small fragments of time may open outwards into a “lifetime” in the ruinous space of Giovanni’s room, but Hella’s letter from Spain announces the precise “day and hour she would arrive in Paris” (119). Writing his father to request the funds held in his name, David emphasizes not only the heteronormative use

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66 If, as Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner assert in their essay “Sex in Public,” boundaries between the “private” and the “public” are in part generated through dynamics of cultural power that delimit what societal inequalities can be openly contested in public discourse, then Giovanni’s whitewashing of his windows in this novel suggests also the hopelessness of publicly resisting a racially-coded heteronormativity.
to which his American cash shall be put in Europe but also the progressive temporality with which it is aligned: after recounting his first time meeting Hella, David announces, “and the rest, as they say, is history,” placing Hella squarely within history, within a linear temporality associated with American modernization (124). Later, impatient with David’s reluctance to embrace fully their relationship, Hella describes their travels in Europe as “marking time,” envisioning their movements through European space as a sort of ordering that echoes the ordering of writing (“marking”) but imposes order not on language but temporality (161).

However, the cognitive act of ordering time in Giovanni’s Room for David and Hella always entails discriminating between the ostensibly different sorts of temporalities available to citizens on either side of the Atlantic. The child-centered future that Hella represents abounds in a hope absent from the destitution that awaits needy Europeans: David muses that “kids like Giovanni are in a difficult position. This isn’t […] the land of opportunity—there’s no provision made for them […] [and] very little money, not enough for them to be able to think of building any kind of future” (134). David’s expression of sympathy registers his recalcitrant affective investment in modes of futurity and child-rearing facilitated by monetary circulation, the very circulation promoted in Europe by America’s Marshall Plan and imagined as occasioning a future in its postwar “land of opportunity.” Moreover, this passage, in rhetorically associating the prospective aid recipient with childhood (Giovanni as a “kid”), reinforces our sense of the multilayered paternalism underwriting David’s aid-giving powers: Giovanni as aid

67 Hella’s phrase “marking time” also aligns her and David’s European sojourn as irreducibly nationalistic in character, since it originates in military language as a reference to marching on the spot. Hella unwittingly figures in this phrase the crisis of temporality encountered by David in Giovanni’s Room, as “marking time” involves mimicking the passage of time in one’s bodily movements without actually progressing anywhere.
recipient becomes a “kid” in David’s eyes; Giovanni as lover, however, is no longer a “kid” but instead a contemporary whose sexuality threatens the heteronormativity, embodied in David’s father, that conditions American aid.

_Giovanni’s Room_ thus presents its narrator as perpetually seeking “authentic” engagement with European others (in the fashion of Culler’s tourist) but as also perpetually unable to rend himself from American Cold War values associated with mass-market capitalism. The novel stages this dilemma of interiority by refracting it through David’s anxieties over the very possibility of escape from structures not only of monetary circulation but, more expansively, of circulation per se. Selfhood in this novel remains inextricably linked to systems of circulation, exchange, and reciprocity—the practices of exchange that make up social and romantic relationships between subjects whose interior lives remain unintelligible to one another. David’s tourism remains inescapably linked to capitalist circulation but also to his desire for “authenticity,” his desire to peer into the interiority of the observed “other,” to comprehend that interiority, and thereby to cast off his status as tourist and adopt that of countryman. Capitalist circulation prohibits such comprehension of the other for David, however, leading him to conceive of a non-touristic self exclusively as one apart from circulation, one who can “give” selflessly to the exotic other without expectation of recompense.

Fantasies of gift-giving thus permeate David’s narration as he strives to imagine an “outside” to both circulation and the boundaries of subjectivity. Jacques Derrida, in _Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money_, exposes the pitfalls of such fantasies, pitfalls that attend any articulation on David’s part of a desire for selfhood beyond his American identity and the Cold War ideological imperatives associated with it during his European
tourism. For Derrida, a logic of exchange permeates all forms of commerce, barring the possibility of unreciprocated giving. Asking whether it is possible to give without immersing oneself in a structure of circulation which configures the gift as a debt demanding repayment from the recipient, Derrida argues that there is ultimately no outside to exchange. The sole form of unreciprocated giving apart from circulation imaginable, Derrida argues, is one that remains impossible: a form of giving wherein the gift itself is not recognized as a gift by either giver or receiver. While for Derrida acts of unreciprocated giving transpire only beyond the purview of consciousness and selfhood, our fantasies of acknowledged giving, of giving that remains perceivable by the self, expose only our continued immersion within cycles of exchange. David’s touristic melancholy stems from his awareness of the “gift” as a category apart from economic circulation, a residue to circulation itself, but also from his failure ever to bestow such an unreciprocated “gift” upon another. His ambivalence in this way echoes that of the Marshall Plan itself, a program popularly conceived by some as a “gift” to ruined Europe (indeed, recipient nations were not expected to repay) and by others as an “exchange” replete with conditions imposed by U.S. Cold War realpolitik.

David understands his failure to “give” selflessly through his relationship with Giovanni, a relationship that, in David’s recounting of it, remains mired in cycles of debt and repayment that prove ruinous to both the space of Giovanni’s room and the love associated with it. From the novel’s outset, in his role as frame narrator, David imagines love as unmoored from both time and reciprocity, considering his affection for Hella an emotion “unrelated to past, present, or anything to come,” yet also an emotion that flourished only “under a foreign sky, with […] no penalties attached,” an emotion for
which, in the freedom of his European tourism, David feels the merest “mechanical
responsibility” (5). *Giovanni’s Room* positions the entry of Giovanni into David’s life as
an awakening on David’s part into a world of reciprocity and the “responsibility” to
another that reciprocity entails—a responsibility felt by David not only for Giovanni but
also for Hella. Such sexual reciprocity emerges in the novel through tropes of bodily
materiality that emphasize its stench but that also suggest the inexorable stench which
attends all economic and sexual circulation—what Giovanni calls “the stink of love”
(137). David begins his recollection of his Paris days by noting his indebtedness to his
Parisian room-keeper, a fiduciary state that assumes curiously olfactory qualities: on the
day he first meets Giovanni, David owes six thousand francs in rent, a sum he describes
as “not […] an awful lot of money, […] but Parisian hotel-keepers have a way of
smelling poverty and then they do what anybody does who is aware of a bad smell; they
throw whatever stinks outside” (22). Given a (temporary) home by the hotel-keeper,
David defaults on his pungent financial obligations, prompting his eviction. The trope of
stench here narratively frames a process by which principles of economic reciprocity
shunt an impoverished subject from private domesticity to public exposure.

Yet imagery of pungent debt and unpaid dues also pervades Giovanni’s final
harangue as David abandons him, revealing the novel’s imaginative investment in love as
reciprocity: Giovanni casts himself as an employee of his putatively affluent American
lover, claiming that he has “worked, to make this room for you,” but David refuses to pay
the wage (137). Giovanni characterizes David as acting as though he has “some precious
metal, gold, silver, rubies, maybe *diamonds* down there between [his] legs”—metal that
he “never give[s] […] to anybody” (141). Giovanni’s figuration of David’s genitals as a
valuable commodity exposes the duality of stench metaphors in this text, as well as the complex relationship of stench to forms of gift-giving. To Giovanni, “the stink of love” refers to the recalcitrant materiality of love—a materiality associated with the body, and from which David recoils, as shown by the imagery of bodily decay that fills his narration (137). To David, though, stench refers not to the (ultimately desirable and fulfilling) materiality of a body in love but rather to the (undesirable) state of being monetarily in debt. In Giovanni’s imagining of love, bodies and selves are possessions that can be given unremittingly, without the brute calculation that attends economic exchange. For David, bodies, selves, and relationships remain unimaginable except through a prism provided by market exchange, a prism that casts these things as commodities to be traded.

Metaphors of exchange pervade David’s descriptions of other romantic relationships in the novel to an extent that evinces David’s own unstated desire to view his own relationship with Giovanni as a simulacrum of giving. *Giovanni’s Room* questions the possibility of a “gift-giving” unalloyed with self-interest or expectation of return in a way that anticipates Derrida’s conception of the gift; but just as Derrida asserts the impossibility of “gift-giving” as a system of worldly, conscious exchange, so *Giovanni’s Room* renders selfless giving a relational virtue by juxtaposing the tacitly reciprocal relations between Giovanni and David with other sexual couplings far more explicitly rooted in market exchange. Guillaume and Jacques thus function as exemplars of Paris’s sexual “meat-market,” the transparently acquisitive, pecuniary quality of their pursuit of young men casting David and Giovanni’s relationship by contrast as one of seemingly pure “giving.” Thus, for instance, upon first seeing Giovanni in the presence of Jacques, David claims that Jacques “could only hope to conquer the boy before us if
the boy was, in effect, for sale” (28). To David, Giovanni’s love for him reveals that Giovanni is not “for sale,” that he lies beyond the realm of fevered exchange that David constructs as Parisian sexual culture. (Giovanni’s later conquest by Jacques following David’s abandonment of him helps engender the melancholy of the novel’s close by restoring salability to Giovanni.) Yet, as we have seen above, structures of reciprocity and exchange never wholly evacuate their relationship: for David, Derrida’s mode of imaginative “giving,” hinging upon a dissolution of subjectivity itself, remains impossible so long as he clings to the imperatives of his father and his fatherland, imperatives that continually mark his difference from those around him, as a tourist. In *Giovanni’s Room*, David continually quests after affective relations with those around him that allow for empathic fellow-feeling, for a mode of feeling that punctures the boundaries of subjectivity; as the next section demonstrates, however, structures of compassion germane to Marshall Plan tourism render engagement with and reconstruction of the needy other unattainable, the very failure of attainment providing its own compensatory, touristic pleasure.

*Touristic Compassion*

We have seen how *Giovanni’s Room* posits an impassable distance between subjects in both its diegetic world (for instance, the failure of David to “give” selflessly to Giovanni) and its narrative structure (David as frame narrator looking back upon past selves whose motives he continues to misunderstand). What this section asserts is that the relationships of spatial distancing that pervade the novel—both between characters and between sectors of the city such as Hella’s hotel and Giovanni’s apartment—generate affective resonances that imbue David’s narration with its tone of rueful, melancholic
retrospection. Specifically, *Giovanni’s Room* discloses through David’s twinned adherence to and disdain of his position as Marshall Plan tourist, the conflicts between sympathy and empathy that vex the emotion of compassion itself when such compassion is directed towards a needy other. If we understand empathy to mean “the power of projecting one’s personality into (and so fully comprehending) the object of contemplation,” then empathy’s gesture renders, through imperialistic projection, the exotic other intelligible to the comprehending eyes of the tourist (OED). Sympathy, by contrast, can be a species of fellow-feeling, but one that involves greater distance—“the quality or state of being thus affected by the suffering or sorrow of another” (OED 3.c). David’s touristic desire for knowledge of the “authentic” when interacting with European postwar impoverishment impels him to seek affective relations beyond the bounded realm of sympathy, but such relations—relations that open the bounded self to another’s alterity—threaten to both dissolve David’s American identity and force his deviation from American Cold War imperatives associated with heteronormative masculinity. The novel’s insistent questioning of our capacity truly to “know” both ourselves and others thus stages the difficulties of Cold War humanitarianism as the emotions of such humanitarianism are funneled through the narrows of national identity.

This tangle of sympathy and empathy within the social relationship of compassion structures spectatorship in *Giovanni’s Room* in ways that suggest the violence of a touristic perception that seeks to “know” the other’s “authentic,” interior self. Recent queer studies work on urban space by scholars like Julie Abraham, Chad Heap, and Scott Herring reveals as a crucial source of identity formation the distinction between legibility (a surface readability) and intelligibility (an exposure of one’s interiority to the
comprehension of another). Reviewing this work, Richard T. Rodriguez suggests that there is political value for queer studies in exploring legible yet unintelligible social positions because such unintelligibility complicates “conventional assumptions regarding gay identity” (175). Rodriguez’s tacit claim here is that the cultural inscription of an “intelligible” subject involves not an unmediated perception of that subject’s interiority but rather a projection upon that subject of “conventional assumptions” regarding their identity category. Intelligibility thus elicits knowledge not of the other in their alterity but rather the “knowledge” relayed by cultural assumptions. David as a tourist in Giovanni’s Room shuttles between ascribing (fallacious) intelligibility to those around him and despairing of falling ever short of the comprehensive knowledge he desires of others’ interiorities. In other words, we could say, David shuttles between relations of empathy (a projection of one’s own interior states upon another so as to produce a false intelligibility) and the more distanced, mediated relation of sympathy (an affective relation that acknowledges the ultimate unknowability of certain interior states of the other). Lauren Berlant discusses compassion in terms that recall such a tension between empathy and sympathy, claiming that while we desire compassion to be “a true expression of human attachment” (a mode of attachment that recalls empathic relations), it is nevertheless “a term denoting privilege” insofar as it is felt by a spectator who remains distanced from the sufferer he or she perceives (7, 4).68 David’s touristic compassion in Giovanni’s Room brims with desire for the “attachment” enabled by another’s intelligibility, yet the inexorable distance between spectator and sufferer that

68 Rodriguez’s distinction between legibility and intelligibility illuminates an unanswered question in Berlant’s otherwise brilliant essay: what epistemological relationship does the compassionate spectator establish with the suffering object of compassion? I would argue that the material outcomes of compassion (e.g. conditional or unconditional giving by spectator to sufferer—or even the callous withholding of aid) hinge in part upon this relationship.
structures compassion as a social relation inhibits a selfless connection with alterity, leaving David perpetually a privileged spectator—leaving him a tourist.

Nevertheless, as discussed earlier in this dissertation’s introduction, compassion as a “social and aesthetic technology of belonging” does not merely encompass relations of aid to those who suffer (Berlant 5). Rather, as an expression of fellow-feeling that places an affective obligation on the spectator to alleviate another’s suffering, compassion also functions as an excuse to withhold aid: if we can observe another’s suffering and “feel right” or “feel appropriately compassionate,” then these feelings can substitute for ameliorative action itself, can “as easily provide an alibi for an ethical or political betrayal as it can initiate a circuit of practical relief” (Berlant 10). While Berlant does not distinguish between the different compensatory emotions recruited in withholding aid in its diverse forms (e.g. monetary aid versus physical aid), her model nevertheless suggests how we might understand David’s fraught affective response to withholding aid from Giovanni as one involving both guilt and pleasure. Compassion functions as a salve for David’s touristic guilt in Giovanni’s Room, alleviating his sense of obligation to a European sufferer by assuring him that his sympathy obviates a need for monetary or physical aid itself. David’s quest for empathic relations with European others merely reaffirms his distance from them—reaffirms his status as Marshall Plan tourist—but the sympathy he feels for these others excuses his intractable adherence to American heteronormativity, an adherence that causes him to withhold aid. Giovanni’s Room thus deploys the figure of a sympathetic narrator in order to show how the social relationship of compassion underwrites humanitarian aid projects awash in conditionality,
aid projects with strings attached, where aid arrives in the service of reform rather than as an unconditional gift.

David as narrator repeatedly expresses sympathy towards the impoverishment of others, yet his voice expresses a longing for empathy that manifests itself in recurrent attempts to “know,” to render intelligible, with reference to both others and his own self. David’s desire to read and know both oneself and others arises at the novel’s outset as he, in the frame section, peers outwards upon French soil at night through a window. He tells us in this opening paragraph that as he watches his “reflection in the darkening gleam of the window pane” his “blond hair gleams,” the repetition of “gleams” within this short section inviting us imaginatively to link qualities of David’s own body with those of a windowpane (3). The novel makes a motif of David staring at his own reflection, and while this recurrent image suggests that Giovanni’s Room can be read as charting David’s own shifting self-understanding over the course of one night as David initially fears the “most terrible morning of [his] life” but instead encounters a morning of “hope,” David’s subtle linkage of his own body to a transparent windowpane registers also an unease with being “read” and “known” by others (3, 169). For instance, as he abandons Giovanni, looking back one last time upon him, David senses not only an ethical obligation to Giovanni (“I wanted to beg him to forgive me”) but also an exposure of his own interiority that he feels as a subjugation, musing that Giovanni seems “to find [his] face more transparent than a shop window” (144). Invoking as an epitome of transparency the shop window, David configures the knowing gaze—a gaze that perceives and makes “intelligible” another’s interiority—as a type of commodity appraisal: the other’s interior comprehended as products in a shop. The gazer in this
configuration thus becomes a flâneur figure, wandering a marketplace and viewing interiors. Yet as the flâneur is inexorably entangled with commodity capitalism, David’s fear of being perceived as a shop window by Giovanni exposes such looking-relations as commercial and even imperialistic, as bound to cycles of exchange that render the observed other an object for the gazer’s acquisition. Labeled simply an “American” by many of the novel’s European characters, David feels himself transparent to and intelligible by gazing practices that project upon him their culture’s “conventional assumptions” regarding his American identity (Rodriguez 175). Questing after knowledge of the “authentic” interiority of exotic European others (in the fashion of Culler’s tourist), David nevertheless cannot efface his own selfhood—a selfhood whose putative intelligibility frighteningly recalls the shop window he sees in other subjects.

Tourism in Giovanni’s Room thus becomes not only a social status but a mode of sight and stance of affect. The novel abounds in opaque surfaces whose interior, “authentic” truths remain impenetrable even under the scrutiny of knowledge-hungry observers; moments of presumed knowledge also pervade David’s narration, though, exposing both his penchant for empathic projection and his undying desire for “intelligible” otherness. Jacques and Guillaume appear as flamboyant stereotypes in David’s recounting in part because of David’s projection upon them of categories of understanding germane to himself: of Jacques, David admits that “the contempt I felt for him involved my own self-contempt” (23).69 In this formulation, Jacques becomes the

69 Against my own argument, Douglas Field contends that Giovanni’s Room dramatizes the liberation of unintelligibility: “by portraying a character whose homosexuality is not visible—a character who is able to pass in both the straight and the gay worlds—Baldwin also questioned the prevailing notion that sexuality could be readily identified by those attempting to scrutinize and categorize sexual differences” (97). While Field’s reading of David’s relative unintelligibility for the most part convinces—leaving aside Hella’s claim that she has “known it [David’s homosexuality] for a long time”—his claim nevertheless fails to account for the highly intelligible sexuality of many of the novel’s other characters (162).
French soil upon which David gazes through a window pane that reflects his own image. Furthermore, David’s recollection of Jacques’s introduction to Giovanni reflects a confidence in his own (self-proclaimed) ability to parse legible social signs so as to disclose their interior meanings: “I knew where the conversation was going,” David claims, asserting also that he “knew that voice” (29; my italics). David figures characters like Jacques, Guillaume, Sue, and the patrons of Guillaume’s bar as readable and wholly intelligible in a way that he himself resists, but such knowledge he also presumes when viewing American tourists: seeing their mass-produced clothing and accessories, David nevertheless asserts that “beneath these faces, these clothes […] was power and sorrow, […] the power of the inventors, the sorrow of the disconnected” (90). In striving rhetorically to disconnect himself from these tourists and thereby to disavow his touristic identity, David peers beyond their legible exteriors, imputing to them an internal sorrow that unwittingly echoes David’s own fears of interpersonal disconnection.

What David fears in *Giovanni’s Room* is that which remains unintelligible, that which remains opaque to his gaze, refuting his efforts at connection and affirming his status as Marshall Plan tourist. Perhaps the novel’s most fearsome presence, then, is the “knife-blade lean, tight-trousered boys” who carry “behind their eyes [something] at once terribly vulnerable and terribly hard” (26). While their homosexuality is intuited by David, these boys nevertheless possess interior motives that remain mysterious and unreadable: “One could never be sure […] whether they were after money or blood or love” (26). That Giovanni by novel’s end falls in with this pack of inscrutable boys merely confirms an aura of mystery that enshrouds both his person and his room throughout David’s narration: while David perceives the squalor of Giovanni’s room as
an exposure of interiority—as “Giovanni’s regurgitated life”—such regurgitation defies comprehension, as David cannot locate “the key to this disorder” (87). The fearsome unintelligibility attendant upon homosexuality for David thus appears to correspond to age: Jacques and Guillaume remain wholly intelligible to David, while younger homosexual characters like Giovanni and the knife-blade boys do not. That which is old, worn, and exhausted (like postwar Europe), whose narrative appears to have been told, assumes knowability to David. On the other hand, that which possesses futurity exudes an unknowability that suggests the peril of ruin. These characters resemble for David the young European boy for whom David cannot discern “anything so real as a future” (54). David foresees a danger that this young boy will come to resemble his older male companion, a man who resembles “a receptacle of all the world’s dirt and disease,” the man’s squalid state recalling both the ruinous disorder of Giovanni’s room and the deathliness ascribed by David to homosexuality (54). Moreover, just as the young boy evinces in David fears of un-American totalitarian forces, possessing “some suggestion […] of the storm trooper,” so David witnesses in Giovanni something fearfully at odds with the cultural dominants of his own country. Unable both to achieve even the false attachment of empathy and to cast off his identity as American tourist, David is left to witness not only the suffering of impoverished others but also to imagine a fearfully un-American future.

David’s position as detached observer of Giovanni’s woes relies upon a distance between spectator and observed object that facilitates sympathy while simultaneously eliding any sense in the observer of an obligation to provide tangible, physical aid. The structure of detached looking-relations, along with its attendant affects, that pervades
David’s relationship with Giovanni replicates itself at other textual levels within *Giovanni’s Room*, however, implicating Baldwin’s novel in relations of compassion on multiple levels. Just as David gazes—helplessly, he feels—upon Giovanni’s suffering, withholding aid while nevertheless reaping the compensatory pleasures of compassion, so David as frame narrator looks back across a temporal distance upon his past self, retrospection here imbuing his tale with a tone of fatalism that obviates any urge to intervene in the twinned paths of David and Giovanni towards their respective ends. In much the same way, we as readers gaze from afar upon both layers of David’s narration, the text soliciting our sympathy for David by disclosing to us access to his interiority. Thus David feels the greatest empathy for Giovanni at moments when he is both affectively and spatially removed from him: he gains “a new sense of Giovanni, his private life and pain, and all that [moves] like a flood in him” only when ordering a drink for the tourist figure Sue as an obvious Anglophone before a Francophone waiter—in other words, when his own status as outsider, as tourist, is most fully revealed to himself (97). Imagining the “burden of [Giovanni’s] salvation” to be on him, David narrates to us their relationship as one in which Giovanni comes to rely on David for cash, and David on Giovanni for self-discovery (114). In other words, David narrates to us a relationship of tourism.

The distance that compassionate looking requires, David creates through his failure to give selflessly—“even when I tried hardest to give myself to [Giovanni] as he gave himself to me, I was holding something back”—but such looking remains the province of the passive tourist (78). Despite routing its story through the voice of David, *Giovanni’s Room* impresses upon us what, in discussing affective estrangement between
partners in any relationship, Hella describes as “something awful about being at the mercy of a stranger” (125). This is precisely Giovanni’s predicament: David narrates and fantasizes the reliance upon him of a European for whom he feels “nothing” (138). Fixated upon the complex dynamics of legibility, intelligibility, and estrangement that characterize interpersonal—and, through tourism, international—exchange, Giovanni’s Room dramatizes (and exposes) the affective illusions necessary to offer aid to a needy, estranged other based not upon sheer mercy but only under specific conditions.

Writing of nineteenth-century American literature, Amanda Claybaugh distinguishes between social programs of charity and social reform in terms that remain pertinent to the markedly different context of aid-giving captured in Giovanni’s Room. For Claybaugh, both programs entail aid-giving to a needy other, but charity “seeks to assuage a suffering that is understood to be inevitable,” while reform seeks to ameliorate the structures that cause a suffering that is taken to be fixable, often by requiring “individuals to transform their own lives” (21, 24). Reform’s imperative to “transform” the recipient of aid hinges upon a presumption that the aid-giver possesses knowledge of how to ameliorate social ills—a presumption that, in an instrumental fashion, coerces the recipient to change in some way, binding aid to conditionality. Such an understanding of reform-based aid as a mode of giving distinct from charity allows us to read Giovanni’s Room as a particular sort of “reform” novel: not, as in Claybaugh’s terms, a novel designed “to be actively working for the social good,” but instead one that interrogates both the potential violence of instrumental and conditional reform, and the affective technologies used to dispel guilt by such givers (and withholders) of conditional aid (7). Reading Giovanni’s Room as an allegory of Marshall Plan tourism reveals how
Baldwin’s novel complicates the value of “choice” that underpins American free-market capitalism while simultaneously demonstrating the never wholly adequate powers of compassion to assuage the tourist’s guilt over choosing to give aid only under certain conditions. After all, David remains haunted by Giovanni’s face and fate even after abandoning him. Seeing Giovanni’s face in a Paris newspaper after his arrest, David imagines the photograph soliciting his personal help: against an “unforgiving world” Giovanni pleads for “mercy,” but David considers himself “the only man in Paris who knew that he had not meant to do it, who could read why he had done it beneath the details printed in the newspapers” (153). Once more fantasizing his possession of knowledge of a Giovanni intelligible only to himself, David neglects his duty to vouch for Giovanni’s life, but David’s own narration nevertheless insinuates an inescapable ethical obligation to the needy other.

The novel’s final scene once more finds David witnessing from afar (through his imagination) Giovanni’s execution: a spectacle of compassionate, touristic looking. David notes that Jacques has sent him a slip of paper containing the day of the execution, but David, in a gesture that suggests his desire for liberation from ethical obligations, “tear[s] it slowly into many pieces” and watches “the wind carry them away” (169). Yet David’s sense of obligation persists: “the wind blows some of [the pieces] back on me,” he notes (169). This final scene exemplifies the affective complexities of international encounters in *Giovanni’s Room*, challenging conventional readings of Baldwin’s characters as merely echoing Baldwin’s own state of “exile.” As a tourist, David remains mobile, free (and financially able) to leave his foreign hosts behind, and while his sense

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70 In this way *Giovanni’s Room* broadly exemplifies Wai-Chee Dimock’s claim in *Residues of Justice* that literature performs “the textualization of justice, the transpositions of its clean abstractions into the messiness of representation” (10).
of compassion underwrites his lack of material giving to Giovanni, this scene stages his subconscious guilt—a guilt associated with instrumental giving, which, the novel reveals, is only ever a form of withholding. Describing the plight of an American in Paris in his 1954 essay “A Question of Identity,” Baldwin notes that the American “does not want to be confused with the Marshall Plan, Hollywood, the Yankee dollar, television, or Senator McCarthy” (94-5). One could accuse this chapter of committing, at worst, one of these confusions, but this would be to overlook how Marshall Plan tourism as a category of affective and spatial experience captures an ambivalence to national identity—a simultaneous repulsion from and clinging to—that attends Baldwin’s depiction of Cold War humanitarian compassion.
CHAPTER FOUR

You Can Go Your Own Way: Third-World Bildung in Marshall’s Brown Girl, Brownstones

The closing paragraphs of Paule Marshall’s 1959 novel Brown Girl, Brownstones proffer a New York City whose post-WWII patterns of renewal, funded by “cataclysmic money” (Jacobs 303) render the cityscape a virtual warzone. The protagonist, Selina Boyce, finds herself surveying:

a vast waste—an area where blocks of brownstones had been blasted to make way for a city project. A solitary wall stood amid the rubble, a stoop still imposed its massive grandeur, a carved oak staircase led only to the night sky. […]

On the far perimeter of the plain, the new city houses were already up and occupied. As Selina stared at those monolithic shapes they seemed to draw near, the lighted windows spangling the sky like a new constellation. She imagined she heard footsteps ringing hollow in the concrete halls, the garbled symphony of radios and televisions, children crying in close rooms: life moving in an oppressive round within those uniformly painted walls.

The project receded and she was again the sole survivor amid the wreckage. And she suddenly turned away, unable to look any longer. For it was like seeing the bodies of all the people she had ever known broken, all the familiar voices that had ever sounded in those high-ceilinged rooms shattered—and the pieces piled into this giant cairn of stone and silence. (268)

Readers of this dissertation should not by this late point be surprised to encounter yet another post-WWII American writer rendering scenes of domestic urban crisis through images of “wreckage” evocative of European wartime urban destruction. Familiar also should be Marshall’s positioning of U.S.-funded urban renewal itself as the agent of cataclysm. The novel’s final images register the bodily and spatial casualties of domestic processes of “reconstruction” whose international analogues unfolded through Cold War geopolitical tools like the Marshall Plan. In this vein, the passage presents through Selina’s focalized spatial imagination her withdrawal from a community sustained in
Arendtian fashion by the tactile walls of her neighborhood, with the broken buildings recalling broken bodies, leaving Selina a “sole survivor amid the wreckage.”

However, Paule Marshall’s parting image of Selina amid urban rubble, seemingly conventional within “Marshall Plan fiction,” invokes geopolitical coordinates unusually tangled, and it is the very complexity of these coordinates that produces Brown Girl, Brownstones’ singular vision of Cold War American-funded “reconstruction.” Like David in Baldwin’s Giovanni’s Room, Selina finds herself vulnerably lonely at novel’s end; unlike David, though, Selina has already hinted (if not confirmed) to the reader as to where she might travel next: Barbados, the childhood home of her parents. The novel’s closing passage foregrounds this question of Selina’s destination by leaving her departure from New York City’s proto-warzone conspicuously absent, seemingly just beyond the novel’s final words. Will Selina turn away from America’s consumers’ republic for a Barbados she envisions in prelapsarian terms, or will she embrace the housing projects that first approach and then recede from her vision? The tacit positioning of this question in this crucial passage underscores the thematic importance in Brown Girl, Brownstones of the act of path-choosing on the part of a young woman figured as a survivor in a bombed-out, “blasted” warzone. Selina’s decision matters, we infer, and the radical contingency of her future emerges spatially in the fragmented urban zone that recalls European postwar cities. Tim Edensor writes that “there is an excess of meaning in the remains [of the ruin]: a plenitude of fragmented stories, elisions, fantasies, inexplicable objects and possible events which present a history that can begin and end anywhere”

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71 In The Human Condition Arendt writes of the importance of built things to a healthy public sphere: “To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time” (52).
Such referential excess allows urban ruins to invoke multiple and fragmented pasts while simultaneously gesturing to indeterminate possible futures, just the sort of futures that Selina remains poised between as we leave her. Moreover, one of these possible futures, that of the American housing projects, appears in geopolitically freighted imagery: the “new city houses” that “draw near” disclose a fearfully heteronomous, crowd-like life within, a life redolent of the totalitarian aesthetics described in chapter two. The “garbled symphony of radios and televisions” suggests a cacophony harmful to the clear acoustics upon which intelligible public discourse depends, while adjectives like “monolithic,” “uniformly painted,” and “oppressive” similarly suggest the specter of de-individualization that panicked America’s cultural imaginings of Cold War mass culture.

But what of Selina’s other possible path, to Barbados? It might fairly be asked what Barbados has to do with the Marshall Plan, as well as what a novel like Brown Girl, Brownstones, whose primary imagined geographies involve ties between America and the Caribbean, has to do with literary imaginings of Cold War U.S. foreign aid to war-wracked Europe. This chapter’s gambit is to suggest that Brown Girl, Brownstones reveals the breadth of Cold War American fiction’s engagement with Marshall Plan aesthetics in its status as a limit-case: the novel contains only intermittent references to Europe, none directly tied to urban ruin or renewal. Nevertheless, it frames in complex terms a pressing question begged by the Marshall Plan: in a world rife with poverty, why did only Europe merit one? Ann Douglas implies just this question in her searching overview of “the American century” when she notes that “Africa and Latin America were pointedly excluded from the benefits of the Marshall Plan, which, like most U.S. cold war
foreign and domestic policy, was a method of showcasing the white West as a model of success while insuring that its success was fed by the more or less invisible exploitation of Third World labor” (77). When Selina’s indomitable mother, Silla Boyce, condemns World War II in thanking providence that neither of her daughters can be sent “to die in another white-man war,” the novel’s invitation to readers to envision geopolitical maneuvers like war and foreign aid as instruments of racially-coded power becomes clear (53).

To be sure, such ire does not seem unfounded in an era when President Truman himself conceded the existence of realpolitik behind foreign aid’s seeming altruism: when asked during the Marshall Plan’s implementation why no equivalent program had been established for Latin America, he replied, “There has always been a Marshall Plan in effect for the Western Hemisphere […] known as the Monroe Doctrine” (qtd. in Hixson 218). Truman’s statement demonstrates the overlapping discourses and instruments of empire—the jostling narratives of U.S. Cold War foreign policy—against which *Brown Girl, Brownstones*’s literary language and form emerge. Depicting as it does the maturation of Selina Boyce in New York City’s Barbadian immigrant community amid her father’s death, her mother’s chillingly relentless pursuit of upward social mobility, and a global context of World War, the novel is conventionally read by critics as a bildungsroman. What these critics have left unaddressed, and what this chapter explores, are the significant geopolitical stakes built into the bildungsroman genre—and in particular how these stakes in Marshall’s novel furnish new forms of

72 As Joyce Pettis’s influential study puts it, “scholars view the novel primarily as a bildungsroman” (14).
narrating international relations in an age of “three worlds.”\textsuperscript{73} Commonly understood as “a genre that stages the development of an individual toward a normative ideal,” the bildungsroman in its fascination with the dynamics of formation rewards comparison with instruments of norm-based state building and control like the Monroe Doctrine and Marshall Plan (Boes 5).\textsuperscript{74} Likened by Truman to the Monroe Doctrine, itself a “formative ideology of U.S. nationalism and empire” (Murphy 4), the Marshall Plan’s program of rebuilding Europe invoked discourses of “progress” and “modernization” redolent of both the Monroe Doctrine and descriptions of the bildungsroman genre itself. Labeled by Mikhail Bakhtin “an image of man growing in national-historical time” (25; italics in original), Fredric Jameson a “national allegory” (65), and Jed Esty a novel that reflects how “nationhood […] gives a finished form to modern societies in the same way that adulthood gives a finished form to the modern subject” (4), the bildungsroman’s emphasis on teleological growth has infused its renderings of individual maturation with political and nationalistic force. While \textit{Brown Girl, Brownstones} has been read as a bildungsroman, and Marshall herself as a novelist fascinated with affairs of state,\textsuperscript{75} these

\textsuperscript{73} Leerom Medovoi’s \textit{Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity}, notes that the “three worlds” model emerged in the Cold War.

\textsuperscript{74} Boes invokes this definition only to problematize it in contending that models of the bildungsroman that emphasize the stasis of normative closure overlook ineluctable transnational, cosmopolitan elements that persistently preempt closure. While this chapter does not aim to engage debates about the genre itself, it does suggest a set of historically specific ideological and geopolitical forces engrained in the genre as seen in diasporic fiction of the early Cold War. Worth noting also is that this chapter uses the term “bildungsroman” in full awareness of arguments on the part of critics like Jeffrey L. Sammons and Marc Redfield that virtually no texts designated as bildungsroman actually contain the sort of bildung constitutive of the genre itself. Again, this chapter brackets these debates regarding the term itself, using the term in its conventional sense in hopes of illuminating the particular relationship between Marshall’s novel and dominant Cold War narratives of foreign relations. I should state my indebtedness here to Boes’s masterful synopsis of bildungsroman criticism, which has informed my own engagement with the genre in this paragraph and elsewhere in the chapter.

\textsuperscript{75} For a discussion of politics in Paule Marshall’s fiction (albeit one that does not address the Cold War) see Martine Watson Brownley’s \textit{Deferrals of Domain: Contemporary Women Novelists and the State}.
strands of criticism have yet to be interwoven in engaging the geopolitical complexities of Marshall’s use of the genre.

Written during an age of global decolonization (and an age of emerging neocolonialism via Cold War clientelism), Marshall’s novel anticipates the “choice” faced by Barbados seven years after the novel’s publication when it emerged as an independent state from British colonial rule. Firmly in the embrace of the Monroe Doctrine, Barbados in practical terms may have had little choice of international affiliation with U.S.-led democracy. However, in the geographic model of “three worlds” (the first world aligned with NATO, the second with the Soviet bloc, and the third constituting non-aligned nations) newly-independent Barbados was, in theory, capable of selecting its own ideological allies. The nascent nation-states of the third world, including those of the Caribbean, became, in Eric Hobsbawm’s words, “the zone in which the two superpowers continued, throughout the Cold War, to compete for support and influence, and hence the major zone of friction between them” (227). It is within this context of decolonization, American neo-imperialism, and an emergent “third world” that Selina’s act of path-choosing amid urban ruins, the culmination of her development, yields the unique geopolitical triangulations that subtend this novel and render it an unlikely interlocutor with Marshall Plan aesthetics. Bakhtin emphasizes the spatial facets of “formation” as it transpires in the bildungsroman: “the image of the emerging man begins to surmount its private nature (within certain limits, of course) and enters into a completely new, spatial sphere of historical existence” (24; emphasis in original). This chapter argues that in rendering Selina’s development within a triangulated spatial sphere encompassing America, war-wracked Europe, and “third world” Barbados, Brown Girl,
Brownstones stages a singular Cold War mode of bildungsroman that critiques U.S. rhetorics of “freedom” that attend the culture of mass consumption the nation sought to export abroad through projects of “reconstruction” and “modernization.” Brown Girl, Brownstones, in this reading, posits the Marshall Plan (and its analogue in the Western Hemisphere, the Monroe Doctrine) as a nefarious program of bildung from which detachment is desirable. The “development” undertaken by Selina in this novel swerves from normalization to insurrection against an America of mass consumption coded in Brown Girl, Brownstones as crypto-totalitarian—a political and economic formation doubly injurious to African Americans because of its inbuilt racial hierarchy. Contrary to critical consensus, this chapter envisions Selina’s mother, Silla, as equally unfit a model for Selina’s maturation as her father, Deighton, ensnared as both are within totalitarian psychological structures that Selina rejects. Selina’s rejection of these structures, in fact, marks her bildung in the novel.

Marshall’s novel thus channels the anti-teleological models of subject formation identified by Jed Esty in canonical modernist bildungsroman into unprecedented challenges to western (or, in Cold War parlance, first-world) discourses of progress. However, rather than staging, like Esty’s selected bildungsroman, an extended adolescence in its protagonist, Brown Girl, Brownstones mobilizes the ideologically-charged Cold War figure of the “rebel” to frame Selina’s “formation” (or perhaps “anti-formation”). Invoking Leerom Medovoi’s reading of the fifties-era American “rebel,” I see this figure in its application to Selina as identifying her “insurrectional citizenship against the threat of ‘conformity’ and corresponding loss of agency posed by a Fordist suburban world” (Medovoi 47). However, one consequence of reading Brown Girl,
Brownstones as both a Marshall Plan fiction and a bildungsroman of rebellion is that Medovoi’s influential mode of imagining Cold War geopolitical space in Rebels—that is, as a globe comprised of “three worlds”—is called into question. The Marshall Plan’s absent presence in Brown Girl, Brownstones exposes how the novel’s Bakhtinian “spatial spheres” create a geographical imaginary that imbricates within one another the two dominant models of geopolitical space in U.S. Cold War literary criticism: Alan Nadel’s “containment” model and Medovoi’s three worlds imaginary.

In Nadel’s “containment” model of imagining Cold War geopolitical space, the U.S. must seek to check and thereby “contain” Soviet expansion at every juncture; communism is thus envisioned as a potentially infectious disease that threatens to spread beyond boundaries. The globe is riven between two contending, dichotomous forces: America and the Soviet Union. Medovoi, pointing out that the 50s witnessed the inauguration of “three worlds” discourse, presents a more nuanced vision of geopolitical space, suggesting that the U.S. first world and Soviet second world play “national characters” in order to seduce to their side the independent, non-aligned, newly decolonized states of the third world (Rebels 11). Seeing the Marshall Plan as a narrative of bildung allows us to reconcile these two contending models. The Marshall Plan was indisputably an instrument of containment, Cold War historians tell us. However, thinking of it as a tool of bildung reveals it to be concerned not so much with checking any spread of communism into first-world territory so much as with guiding the growth of wrecked European states along democratic paths. That is to say, the Marshall Plan conceives of the threat of communism not as a threat from without, a threat to be contained. Instead, the threat comes from within the subject of bildung itself—the threat
of communism manifests itself in an alternative and discouraged route of formation open
to the immature national subject to take.

The muddying of national teleology in Marshall’s diasporic bildungsroman,intertwining the third world and the first, reveals how the discourse of development
functions through “containment” instruments like the Marshall Plan in keeping
vulnerable postwar Europe within the first world and out of the clutches of the second
(50). The Marshall Plan functioned not simply as a tool of “containment” but also as a
tool of formation and growth—a tool of, arguably, bildung—in its “reconstruction” of
shattered Europe, preserving through its technologies of formation the geographical
boundaries of the “first world” itself. In this way, just as Gretchen Murphy traces how
the Monroe Doctrine used “spatial constructs to build a worldview” in demarcating a
“Western Hemisphere” under U.S. “protection,” so the Marshall Plan, imagined by
Truman as the Monroe Doctrine’s first-world analogue, implied its own ideological
cartography in imaging forth a map of postwar Europe (7). In this map, the boundaries
between “freedom” and “repression”—that is, between the first world and the second—
hinged upon programs of U.S.-backed formation galvanized by tactics of containment.
The Marshall Plan, in this geographical imaginary, sought to stabilize these lines on the
map. The triangulated spatial sphere of Paule Marshall’s bildungsroman, then, depicts
the depredations inherent in projects of “formation” in impoverished spaces of the
Western Hemisphere in order to invoke a nefarious instrumentality present in broader,
more global processes of bildung—processes epitomized in America’s popular
imagination most clearly by the Marshall Plan.
I. Pale Forms

Brown Girl, Brownstones’ plot unfolds entirely in New York City, with Barbados conjured into being only through the reminiscences, descriptions, and imaginings of characters who present clashing, contradictory visions of it. We come to see Barbados in turn as a land of white-controlled economic exploitation through slavery, but also, in other moments, as a prelapsarian space of unstinted fecundity and sensuality, blithely unconcerned with economic efficiency yet also increasingly vulnerable to spoliation by forces of war and economic “modernization.” Envisioned by Selina as “a green node in a vast sea,” Barbados is a nodal point of intersecting desires, imaginings, and cash-flows in the novel, its diversity of uses and (re)constructions on the part of the novel’s characters indispensible to the plot itself (124). Brown Girl, Brownstones narrates the growth of Selina in inner-city New York from her childhood in the 1930s to her college years in the 50s. During this time, her profit-driven mother, Silla, works endlessly to purchase the brownstone house rented by the family, while her profligate and unambitious father, Deighton, fills the role of Silla’s counterpart by desiring not upward U.S. social mobility but rather a return to Barbados. When Deighton inherits a small tract of Barbadian land following his sister’s death, Silla schemes to sell it, against Deighton’s wishes and without his knowledge, in order to put a down-payment on their Stuyvesant Heights brownstone. Their dispute over the land dominates much of the novel, concluding only with Silla’s engineered deportation of Deighton to Barbados after Deighton abandons his family for a religious cult led by “Father Peace.” These events transpire against the backdrop of a migration of the Barbadian American community from inner-city Stuyvesant Heights, Brooklyn, to the tonier neighborhood of Crown Heights, an elevation
in social address accomplished only through brute toil and in the face of discriminatory real estate practices and urban renewal schemes. Third-world land ownership and its relation to schemes of U.S. social geography thus serves as one of the plot’s vital fulcrums. This vital presence ensures that one of the novel’s primary objects of meditation involves the ethics of acquiring, relinquishing, or transforming space—in both the third world and the first—as well as the affective consequences of such actions.

In a novel that critiques U.S. “modernization” projects in and through the bildungsroman form, it is telling that Barbadian land appears directly only through its exchange value: the nine hundred dollars garnered by Silla after she forges letters in Deighton’s hand to sell his inheritance. Even more telling, though, is Deighton’s response to Silla’s ruse: noting that the misappropriated money can still only be accessed by himself and not Silla, Deighton spends the nine hundred dollars not on a down-payment for U.S. land but rather on gaudy consumer items. Focalized as the novel is through Selina, what we witness in these transactions is the effective conversion of Barbadian soil into U.S. consumer items that themselves engender in Selina an imagined landscape of war. As Deighton flings gowns, coats, and other items at the family, they resemble “flare[s]” exploding in midair, creating the “wreckage of the day” Selina gathers afterwards (108, 114). In this crucial moment of the plot, then, forces of capital and war traverse an imagined Barbados as it is converted from geographically specific land into a veritable whirlwind of consumer goods. Exchanged in this transaction is a local, specific piece of land for mass-produced goods which, in a Cold War world of expanding U.S. culture, bear the weight of an implied globality: garbed in the items her father buys her, Selina feels “imprisoned” as though she is “a frail Atlas buckling under
the world” (114). What Barbadian soil comes to mean in practical terms for Selina’s parents is less a remembered homeland than American property, be it in the form of a brownstone for Silla or a bevy of products for Deighton. The novel’s imaginative conversion of locally specific space into homogenous, ubiquitous consumer goods echoes fears of the “Americanization” of foreign terrain roused by projects like the Marshall Plan. Figuratively “convertible” into facets of America’s consumers’ republic, third world land becomes caught in the centrifugal energies of a U.S. capitalist imaginary whose globalizing tendencies manifest themselves through international “reconstruction.”

To be sure, as critics have noted, Barbados’ complex rendering as an imagined space in this novel involves traumatic memories of it for both Boyce parents—Silla recalls grinding toil for white landowners, Deighton his humiliation before white townspeople. Yet an unexplored aspect of the dark undercurrent beneath Barbados’ prelapsarian presentation is its susceptibility to aerial bombardment, a susceptibility that suggests its status as a battleground for contending armies. Hearing of the Pearl Harbor attack on the radio, Selina “[h]ope[s] they don’t bomb Barbados,” a sentiment Deighton echoes (54). Later, recalling a particularly raucous wedding in Barbados, Silla’s friend Florrie describes “children screeching like bombs [were] falling” (120). Barbados as a site of potential postwar ruin casts its natural splendor—Suggie remembers “soft-sloping hills, a susurrant sea of sugar cane,” while a “flamboyant tree” dominates Deighton’s vision of his future Barbadian home—beneath the pall of foreign supremacy, be it through British colonialism or U.S. neo-colonialism via the Monroe Doctrine (14, 71).76 However, Brown Girl, Brownstones also installs Barbados as battleground in its very

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76 Suggie’s vision of a lush, sensuous cane field suggests Jean Toomer’s Cane as a distant intertext for Brown Girl, Brownstones. Like Marshall’s novel, Cane thematizes geographical displacement from rural to urban space through language awash in spiritual imagery.
narrative structure: divided into four sections, the novel entitles its longest (and central) section, “The War.” The title’s deliberate polysemy denotes U.S. participation in World War II, Selina’s own internecine bodily turmoil (“the war […] reach[es] out and claim[s] her” in the form of menstruation, which the novel recurrently aligns with WWII), but also the fierce struggle between Silla and Deighton over the fate of Deighton’s inherited Barbadian land. The lone fatality of this latter war is Deighton, whose death at sea (and possible suicide) following deportation is reported to Selina in the final paragraphs of “The War,” on the very day World War II ends. That the succeeding and final section is entitled “Selina” renders Selina’s bildung in the aftermath of her father’s death a sort of post-war reconstruction. The wars that temporally frame the novel’s third section may be global—we encounter gestures to both European and Asian wartime theatres—but the sole “war” related to us directly in Brown Girl, Brownstones erupts in inner-city New York, over territory in the third world, with its sole casualty dying “at a point within sight of the Barbados coast” (159). Selina’s “formation” in the final section of Brown Girl, Brownstones occurs in an environment structurally reminiscent of the novel’s closing scene (with which we began the chapter): Selina exists in a postwar environment of emotional ruin, isolated from her community and even her own family by sustained grief. As in the closing scene, Selina in her eponymous section undertakes the task of post-war recovery through acts of path-choosing, forging alliances with particular lands (Barbados, we suspect, over New York) and people (a variety of “outsider” figures like Clive Springer and Rachel Fine over against the Barbadian Association). The novel thus recursively layers sites of postwar reconstruction one upon another: Stuyvesant Heights, Barbados, Europe, and even Selina’s body and psyche.
The pall cast upon Barbadian land derives not only from armaments, though, but also from U.S. cash that flows to Barbadians in the form of racially-coded tourist money, reminiscent of David’s money in *Giovanni’s Room*, that passes between subjects while simultaneously reinforcing their cultural separation. For instance, Deighton recalls a scene from his youth that furnishes one of the novel’s most significant motifs—diving underwater for coins as a spectacle for white U.S. tourists: “And when a tourist ship come into Carlisle Bay we would swim out to it and rich white people from America would throw money in the water just to see we dive for it” (8). Deighton, figuratively linked with sunlight throughout the novel, here distances himself from sunlight in pursuit of foreign funds. He submerges himself in the darkness of both the ocean and his own skin—the very dark skin whose color he wishes to abjure, according to accusations from Silla and others. In this scene, one of Deighton’s most iconic memories of Barbados, the pursuit of something associated with whiteness (tossed coins) only reaffirms non-whiteness, depriving the submerged subject of an ability to speak. Moreover, the status of this pursuit as spectacular entertainment for touristic onlookers compounds racial difference, in spite of the seemingly non-raced, abstract identity of “consumer” that money places on its holder.

This early image ripples across the succeeding pages, rising as a motif that in crucial moments signifies the Du Boisian double consciousness attendant upon a pursuit of goods and modes of living that remain racially coded. Nowhere is this motif more prominent than in Selina’s imaginative reconstruction of Deighton’s death by water.77

She sees:

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77 In her body’s very reaction to her father’s death, Selina resembles a war victim, reiterating the novel’s alignment of Deighton and Silla’s battle with World War II. For instance, for in the opening paragraph of
Dawn at sea with a tropic mist moiling over the ship in smoky gusts and her father alone at the rail, the salt mist on his sunken face and soaking his shirt until it was like silk on his skin. The dawn hour was all peace, his peace merged with that of the sea, his body sharing the rhythm of the ship’s meditative rise and fall. Gradually the mist thickened until his body seemed to buckle under its weight. But oddly, as his body drooped, his mind soared, roaming free in a vast emptiness. For a long time there was only this nothingness, this pure peace, until a light burst in the void and bizarre shapes spiraled up. It was the sun rising in a brilliant coin behind the pale form of a distant island. When he saw the island, he emitted a low frightened cry, his hand rose to blot it out. For that low mound, resting on the sea like a woman’s breast when she is supine, was Barbados. Time fled as the mist fled and he was a boy again, diving for the coins the tourists tossed into the sea, and he saw the one he wanted most in the bright disk of the sun... (162; emphasis in the original)

Here Barbados merges with the sun-like coin that rises behind it—an image that suggests the source of Deighton’s demise in this novel: his pursuit, and internalization, of a fantasy of normative whiteness at the heart of “American” identity that associates whiteness with affluence. It is noteworthy that while Deighton retains a romanticized attachment to Barbados, in this novel the island becomes little more than a source of cash when placed near him (here it resembles a coin; earlier it generates nine hundred dollars). In this vein, even Deighton’s imagined return to Barbados remains inextricable from this fantasy that racializes both national identity and material wealth. Deighton dreams of returning to Barbados as a landowner—a status regularly linked with whiteness in his recollections of the island—replete with U.S.-earned riches. In many ways, then, the position Deighton yearns for in Barbados resembles that of the colonial landowners whose scorn so scarred him in his youth. Returning to a British colony that lies under the neo-colonial shadow of the Monroe Doctrine, Deighton’s fantasy is to arrive on the island as a third-world Marshall Planner, stocked with U.S. funds directed at the transformation of his land.

the next section, Selina is figured as a nuclear bomb victim: she carries “the weight of winter in her body,” recalling the specter of “nuclear winter” that loomed in America’s public imagination (161).
In Selina’s imagining of her father’s death, this fantasy’s futility illuminates the scene like sunlight—indeed, the hopelessness of Deighton’s Icarus-like quest emerges through the figure of sunlight itself. The sun, layered atop the island in this passage, renders Barbados a “pale form,” a phrase that connotes white control (the pale form here containing and binding a darker, non-pale content). Barbados, this “pale form,” is the coin Deighton wants most, yet his inability to acquire this coin, as well as his fear of such impossible acquisition (hence the “frightened cry” and hand raised “to blot it out”), precipitate his final deathly fall into blackness, apart from coin-like sunlight. Barbados, envisioned from the vantage of New York City as contained within a “pale form” figuratively aligned with U.S. currency, emerges in Brown Girl, Brownstones as a complex site of aid, control, and intervention on the part of racially-coded administrators. Deighton’s dream of occupying an administrator’s seat is thwarted by the very powers of administration that seek to contain him spatially within inner-city America. The international diffusion of U.S. funds through policies like the Marshall Plan and Monroe Doctrine transforms and reforms recipient countries, producing the “pale form” that envelops Deighton’s homeland.

Barbados as an imagined space remains the geographical telos of Selina’s bildung in Brown Girl, Brownstones, but its persistent figuration through tropes of modernization and war suggests troubling alternative paths to the rebellious formation Selina undertakes. By presenting the island as a site of whose future remains radically, illimitably open—but also a site besieged by contending narratives of “modernization”—the novel aligns Selina’s perception of Barbados’ social, economic, and political prospects with her own psychological and moral development. However, this
bildungsroman is not simply a national allegory; rather, it is an *international* allegory that imaginatively sutures together diverse spaces ripe for “development” at the hands of governmental power: inner-city America, third-world Barbados, and postwar Europe. In the novel’s presentation of these spaces, what threatens each is an overbearing violence that emerges through figurative and psychological structures associated with totalitarianism. This totalitarian specter hovers in disparate forms over young Selina in Stuyvesant Heights. As will be shown below, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* codes the Caribbean’s Marshall Plan, the Monroe Doctrine, as crypto-totalitarian in both its material operations and its psychological procedures. Insofar as the novel’s three primary models for Selina’s *bildung*—Silla, Deighton, and the Barbadian-American Association—are each variously implicated in crypto-totalitarianism, Selina’s rejection of them signals Paule Marshall’s adaptation of the bildungsroman’s generic conventions to dominant geopolitical narratives of the early Cold War. Selina’s *bildung* amounts to a rebellion, rendering her a “rebel.” Yet her rebellion occurs against a midcentury U.S. culture that had appropriated the figure of the “rebel” to itself as a national icon to be displayed, as Medovoi claims, before non-aligned nation-states of the third world. Selina’s rebellious *bildung*—a deviant *bildung* apart from normative paths—relocates “freedom” on the geopolitical scene within non-aligned third-world nations, nations that resist the allure of projects of (re)construction laced with conditionality. Selina’s non-alignment with normatively “American” values championed by policy instruments like the Marshall Plan paradoxically renders her, in her rebellious individualism, more characteristically American than Marshall Planners themselves.
**II. The Parent Trap**

Following Silla’s machinations that result in Deighton’s deportation, Selina denounces her mother as “Hitler” (158). The critical consensus regarding Silla’s influence on Selina’s maturation in *Brown Girl, Brownstones* curiously overlooks this scene,\(^7^8\) contending that Selina’s development in the novel actually culminates in a recognition of her affinities with Silla.\(^7^9\) By contrast, this chapter argues that any reading of Marshall’s novel in relation to Cold War geopolitics must take seriously this heated appellation, querying its presence in a novel so preoccupied with routes of personal and national formation. After all, while Selina does at novel’s end identify herself as her mother’s daughter—“Everybody used to call me Deighton’s Selina but they were wrong. Because you see I’m truly your child,” she tells Silla—critics too casually conflate the adult Silla presented in the novel’s diegetic world with the true object of Selina’s affiliation: the youthful Silla that Selina imagines, a Silla who leaves Barbados “alone as a girl of eighteen” and becomes her “own woman” (265).\(^8^0\) That Selina identifies herself with an imagined youthful Silla while simultaneously rejecting the older Silla who stands before her, illuminates the broad trajectory of her potential *bildung* beyond the novel’s conclusion. The Selina we see resembles a youthful Silla, yet while Selina’s eventual adult state remains uncertain, Silla’s is on full display throughout the novel—and,  

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\(^7^8\) One exception is Elizabeth Wheeler, who addresses this scene in suggesting that Silla is able to turn WWII to her own profit in ways that bewilder Selina: “Naturally, the younger generation isn’t sure what to learn from elders so strong, so materialistic, so scarred, and so intent” (182). Her reading thus implies (though it never explicitly addresses) Silla’s status as a failed model of bildung for Selina. Wheeler furthermore situates Selina’s rebellious nature within her broader attachment to her ruined neighborhood, but, unlike this chapter, does not tie the processes of renewal on display in New York City to broader processes of international reconstruction.

\(^7^9\) For a prominent, widely-cited version of this argument, see Eugenia DeLamotte.

\(^8^0\) This distinction I posit here between an older Silla (against whom Selina chafes) and an imagined younger version (with whom she identifies) is bolstered in the very next paragraph of the novel, where Silla “glimpse[s] in Selina the girl she had once been” (265).
frequently for Selina, Silla’s state represents a deformation, a formation that Selina cannot wish for herself. However, Silla is not the only adult figure who comes to represent a failed model of development for Selina. Just as pointedly, though for distinct reasons, Deighton, as well as the members of the Barbadian-American Association, come to embody traits that Selina deems pitiful, repulsive, or abhorrent. What marks these entities as negative models for Selina’s bildung is their tropological affiliation with a specter associated primarily with the Soviet second world but also—in a Cold War U.S. cultural imaginary vexed by the perilous homogenization of mass capitalism—potentially ascendant in the U.S.: totalitarianism.

By reading both characters and organizations within Brown Girl, Brownstones through the lens of “totalitarianism,” this chapter invokes the term in not only its historical specificity within the early Cold War but also its theoretical vagueness. The term’s vagueness inheres in what critics of Hannah Arendt’s The Origins of Totalitarianism have described as her conflation of fascism and communism. Yet these two forces, in their Nazi and Soviet guises, both created polities in which “the state administered its population all the way down to the fine-grained level of private social life” (Medovoi “Race War” 164). While Arendt herself pointedly distinguished totalitarianism as a system of mass administration from the putatively homogenizing social sphere of postwar America, many other cultural commentators did not; it is in this more flexible use of the term within popular discourse that this chapter invokes it.81

81 Scholarship tracing the critique of Cold War U.S. culture as “totalitarian” is extensive, but for one particularly incisive example, see Leerom Medovoi’s “The Race War Within: The Biopolitics of the Long Cold War.” Within this essay, Medovoi notes that Norman Mailer’s famous piece “The White Negro” asserts that black Americans have “been living in the margin between democracy and totalitarianism for two centuries” (qtd. in Medovoi 176), a description that figures Americans of color as akin to decolonizing third world nations in the moment of the early Cold War.
Applying such a loaded term to characters and structures within Marshall’s novel—a novel that has conventionally been read as one of racial and gendered empowerment—might seem obstinately contrarian, but in actuality such a reading situates Brown Girl, Brownstones within a climate of radical politics (on both the Left and Right) occupied by major African American and Caribbean American authors at midcentury. As Alan Wald notes, Paule Marshall “as a teenager came under the influence of both Garveyite nationalism and Communism,” and the presence of these two political forces in Marshall’s first novel suggests a possibly autobiographical facet of Selina’s bildung (198). In many ways conversant with a Cold War climate of “late antifascism”—the intellectual inheritance of radical Leftist politics of the 1930s and 40s—Brown Girl, Brownstones expands the category of totalitarianism so as to indict a U.S. mass consumerist culture predicated on fantasies of national whiteness (Wald xviii). While “the Cold War […] posited a development narrative centered on the decolonizing third world poised to decide between democracy and totalitarianism,” Marshall’s novel questions the category of “democracy” itself in depicting Selina’s rejection of an America steeped in totalitarian figures (Medovoi “Race War” 174).

Within the context of Cold War political-literary radicalism, Selina’s denunciation of her mother as “Hitler” illuminates the grave geopolitical stakes involved in Brown Girl, Brownstones’ rendering of diasporic identity and community—as well as, within the novel’s diegetic world, wider totalitarian tendencies in the system against which Selina rebels. Selina might identify her own personal development with a younger version of her mother that she imagines, but the older Silla we encounter in this novel exhibits traits of a prototypical fascist subject—traits engendered in her, crucially, by a desire for
whiteness that Eugenia C. DeLamotte has termed an “ideology of white supremacy” (17). Vital to this reading of Silla as fascist is the recognition of an existential despair that, for Hannah Arendt, leaves one psychologically ripe for fascist conscription.\(^{82}\) Having internalized the values of a racist culture, Silla becomes a tragic type of fascist subjectivity. In so doing, she (along with Deighton and the Association) affiliates \textit{Brown Girl, Brownstones} with a culture of what Paul Gilroy and Mark Christian Thompson have each termed “black fascism.” Gilroy’s account of this culture locates its origins in the very Garveyite nationalism (a movement whose support crested in the 1930s) that influenced a teenaged Marshall, describing Garveyism as a “nationalist vision supported by the familiar masculine values of conquest and military prowess,” and Garvey’s political aesthetics as sharing a “common political style” with infamous European fascists (73, 70).\(^{83}\) Thompson trains Gilroy’s assessment of political culture on major African American writers of the 1930s and 40s, contending that canonical black authors like George S. Schuyler, Claude McKay, Zora Neale Hurston, and Richard Wright variously “used fascist ideology to construct the bulwark of fascistic conceptions of radicalism and revolution” (1). Thompson frames literary black fascism as “a positive form of black political engagement” whereby African American and African Caribbean writers, enamored of European fascism’s will to power, promoted racial uplift through images of

\(^{82}\) Admittedly, Silla can also be read not as despairing but as tenaciously hopeful and determined in the face of economic hardship and societal racism. In insisting upon an existential and psychological despair as the source of Silla’s totalitarian tendencies in the novel, I am gesturing to readings that trace Silla’s own “seeing [of] herself as a despised Other”—her interpellation as abject by dominant white culture (DeLamotte 17).

\(^{83}\) It is hardly the intention of this chapter to reduce Garveyism in all its political complexity to a mere stand-in for fascism; rather, what my reading posits is \textit{Brown Girl, Brownstones’} intertextual relation to Garveyite aesthetics. As Michelle Ann Stephens argues, while Garvey cast himself as a “black fascist on the stage of world politics,” this self-presentation served broader ends: “Garvey’s cultural politics can […] be seen not simply as an expression of black nationalism or even black fascism but rather as a spectacular traveling portrayal of the race’s right to statehood” (100).
“violent creation” while eschewing its racial ideologies (21, 3). Although *Brown Girl, Brownstones* lies beyond Thompson’s Depression-era frame, it transposes the preoccupation with fascist aesthetics in these writers to a Cold War era of third-world decolonization in which “fascism” had come to be intellectually absorbed within the broader idea of “totalitarianism.”

One of the prime elements of Thompson’s conception of fascist ideology, taken from historian Stanley G. Payne, captures perhaps the most vexing aspect of Silla’s personality: “positive evaluation and use of, or willingness to use, violence” (29). Throughout *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, Silla’s propensity for spectacular violence renders her prototypically fascist. This violence flares most calamitously in Silla’s fearsome encounter with Miss Mary, the aged upstairs owner of the Boyce house who lives in a room on its top floor. Hell-bent on possessing the house, Silla assaults decrepit Miss Mary verbally and physically in ways that recall Nazi strategies of the previous decade. For instance, Silla frames her violent removal of Miss Mary—old and with little productive value—as a purification of the house’s population: “I gon call in the Board of Health to see all this dirt and get you out of the way” (173). Appearing as “the embodiment of all [Miss Mary] had ever feared and the image of her imminent death,” Silla begins destroying artworks and furniture before turning on Miss Mary herself (173). Talon-like, “Silla’s curved fingers [draw] the life from Miss Mary” until the aged

84 Reading Silla’s fascistic tendencies as evocative of the Soviet second world might at first glance seem far-fetched, but the very concept of “totalitarianism,” as Medovoi makes clear, was used in the 1950s to equate Soviet communism with bygone Nazi fascism. While the European fascist states of Hitler and Mussolini had been defeated by the 50s, writers like Arendt used the totalitarian rubric to portray the Soviets as the Nazis’ historical brethren.

85 Another of Payne’s elements of generic fascist ideology, relegated by Thompson to a footnote, resonates with any reading of *Brown Girl, Brownstones* as an antifascist allegory: “Exaltation of youth above other phases of life, emphasizing the conflict of generations, at least in effecting the initial political transformation” (qtd. in Thompson 29, footnote 40).
landlord finally lies “still” (174). While Miss Mary survives Silla’s attack, the novel informs us flatly only paragraphs afterwards that “Miss Mary died a few months later,” implying how crucial Silla’s attack is in her death (174). Silla’s fascistic violence against the white home-owner becomes both an instrument and image of death.86

However, the novel stages Silla’s affiliation with fascist aesthetics most memorably in Selina’s visit to her mother’s wartime workplace—significantly, a factory that produces the very U.S. military armaments that enable place-destruction in European cities. As Selina approaches the armaments factory determined to denounce Silla’s plan for inveigling Deighton out of his land, she traverses a snow-laden “white path that could lead only to the mother” (81). The novel here associates Silla and her economic production with both whiteness and, in the snow’s rendering as “swirling […] golden dust around the street,” whiteness’ concomitant affluence (81). The snowfall occurs within New York City’s ruined underbelly, a “barren waste land gripped by a cold more intense than winter’s,” the coldness and silence of the street prefiguring a Cold War public sphere of the novel’s 1950s composition in which a pall falls over U.S. public discourse in the form of McCarthyism (81). The very geography of Silla’s factory suggests a fearsome power of ruination destructive to open public discourse, but the factory’s nefarious crypto-totalitarian nature emerges clearly as Selina spots a “swastika” in graffiti on a nearby wall (81).

86 Eugenia DeLamotte’s reading of this scene willfully distorts the text in seeking to lionize Silla, claiming that her attack on Miss Mary represents a “war against white hegemony” (15). In reality, Silla assault an immobilized old lady. We can grant that Miss Mary’s is a voice of white privilege that perhaps tries to “colonize” Selina’s psyche, but does this act of “reclaiming her daughter” excuse Silla for an attack that, arguably, results in Mary’s death (15)? Where DeLamotte sees Silla as an exemplar for Selina, I read her as fascist force resisted by Selina.
Totalitarianism’s imprint appears most strikingly within this factory, where Silla contributes to the production of both U.S. economic wealth and a terrifyingly vital force of violence. Entering the workspace, Selina finds herself “drowned in a deluge of noise,” her breath figuratively taken away through the trope of drowning that anticipates her father’s death (83). The cacophonous factory noise, moreover, silences the intelligible voices necessary for a burgeoning liberal-democratic public sphere. Emitting this noise, though, are factory machines whose presentation blends a futurist trumpeting of raw power with a Cold War-era warning against a creeping American totalitarianism produced by U.S. Fordist production. Selina sees:

a controlled, mechanical hysteria, welling up like a seething volcano to the point of eruption, only to veer off at the climax and start again.

And just as the noise of each machine had been welded into a single howl, so did the machines themselves seem forged into one sprawling, colossal machine. This machine-mass, this machine-force was ugly, yet it had grandeur. It was a new creative force, the heart of another, larger form of life that had submerged all others, and the roar was its heartbeat [...].

The workers, white and colored, clustered and scurried around the machine-mass, trying, it seemed, to stave off the destruction it threatened. They had built it but, ironically, it had overreached them, so that now they were only small insignificant shapes against its overwhelming complexity. Their movements mimicked its mechanical gestures. [...] And no one talked. Like the men loading the trailer trucks in the streets, they performed a pantomime role in which only the machines had a voice. (83-4).

Racial identity and even subjectivity itself falter before a machine-force that threatens to produce totalitarian “mass men.” Hannah Arendt’s claim that totalitarian regimes compress autonomous, individuated citizens into a single political subject, eliminating the distance between them, resonates in the machines’ sublime diminution of the surrounding factory workers, the “the small insignificant shapes against its overwhelming complexity.” Marshall’s very use of machine imagery echoes Arendt’s metaphor for totalitarian collective psychology: totalitarianism “substitutes for the boundaries and
channels of communication between individual men a band of iron which holds them so tightly together that it is as though their plurality has disappeared into One Man of gigantic dimensions” (*Origins* 465-6). Moreover, the scene’s overwhelming visuality—a visuality that emerges at the expense of human discourse—accords with Russell A. Berman’s description of fascist aesthetics as “the displacement of verbal by visual representations: the power of the image renders scripture obsolete” (61). The machine-force contained within this swastika-emblazoned manufacturing zone silences individual voices before its visual “grandeur.” Finally, its destructive power unfolds through tropes reminiscent of processes of *bildung* (“new creative force,” “welded,” “forged”), revealing its status as a potentially formative entity for young Selina. Submerged within this proto-fascist machine-force, Silla emulates its power, as her “own formidable force […] match[es] that of the machines” (84). In this way, her destructive labor—immersed in, produced by, and productive of violence—exemplifies Walter Benjamin’s description of “the destructive character,” for whom “destroying […] cheers because everything cleared away means to the destroyer a complete reduction, indeed eradication of his own condition” (301).

Silla’s own interpellation as abject, her “seeing [of] herself as a despised Other,” generates both the psychological despair necessary for totalitarian recruitment and the cheer that Benjamin identifies for the destructive character in violent acts (DeLamotte 17). It is significant, then, that this factory scene—which plunges Silla within a spectacle steeped in totalitarian aesthetics—resurfaces frequently in Selina’s memory, functioning as a dark undercurrent to the remainder of the novel, and hovering as a specter over her maturation. When Selina witnesses her mother’s certainty that she has fraudulently sold
Deighton’s Barbadian land, we learn that “the night at the factory rushed back, vivid, as
though a year had not passed. That night was part of this cold windy day, just as this day
had been contained in that night, and they would both reach with long arms into every
day to come” (93). The novel’s figurative quilting of crypto-totalitarian factory
production with not only the conversion of Barbadian soil into U.S. currency but also
Deighton’s death emerges through Selina’s sensorial experiences in this scene: she feels
“shattered” (evocative of material destruction), but also senses a “chill wave” pass over
her (anticipating Deighton’s drowning that ends “The War”) (93, 92). Whatever
impersonal, inhuman destructive force we see harnessed in this New York City factory,
the novel suggests, instantiates itself in human actions, be they on levels familial or
geopolitical. Thus, when we read that Silla is fought over by forces of “dark and light” in
a “more intense” fashion than others, we sense not only the tension in her racial self-
identification predicated on interpellated self-hatred but also, in an era of such clearly
marked ideological contrasts, a pitched battle over her political subjectivity (63).

The darkness subtending Silla’s willfulness announces itself also through her
voice’s curiously visual, spectacular power over those around her. Most readings of
Brown Girl, Brownstones treat Silla’s voice as an instrument of empowerment. Yet
while such empowering qualities undeniably reside in her voice, what conventional
readings of this voice overlook are its political and ideological undercurrents. As
mentioned above, fascist aesthetics promote visuality over textuality, privileging the
“image in a text […] over the function of the image in a system of writing,” and it is
precisely a replacement of the word by the image that we witness in the novel’s most

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87 In a text that makes a motif out of drowning, it is significant that Silla’s name distantly echoes “Scylla,”
another character with an entrancing but ultimately dangerous voice.
famous discussion of Silla’s voice (Thompson 35). Responding to a suggestion by Iris Hurley, Silla’s friend, that Silla is trying to “kill [her] with words,” Florrie Trotman, another friend, exclaims, “Talk yuh talk, Silla! Be-Jees, in this white-man world you got to take yuh mouth and make a gun” (58). Florrie’s exhortation not only fosters a fantasy of race-based collective political action against a “white-man world,” it routes this politics in and through a shaping force, the monologic voice of a leader whose voice conditions all others. Her phrasing also, though, imaginatively substitutes an organ of language-production, the mouth, with a gun, thereby substituting linguistic words (emitted by a mouth) with imagistic bullets (emitted by a gun). Finally, Florrie’s emphasis on the production of weaponry (“make a gun”) at this early stage in the novel anticipatorily links Silla’s voice with the fearsome destructive armaments production in New York’s ruined, swastika-scarred factory district. Only a few pages later, we see the fascistically-coded power of this voice upon Selina’s body, as Silla’s overheard promise that she will scheme to sell Deighton’s land fraudulently “seeps[s] her blood” from her body amid a “white silence” that recalls a blood-drained corpse (62). Even the very entrancement generated by Silla’s voice distantly recalls the security apparatus of a police state, functioning as “a net flung wide, ensnaring all within its reach” (39). Traces of such violent, even fatal, force within Silla—along with this force’s possible connection to both totalitarianism and European wartime destruction—attend her representation from early in the novel. For instance, readers first encounter WWII through ominous terms: Silla holds “the newspaper a little away from her as though the news of the war in Europe might contaminate her” (42). Arguably, it does.
Silla’s representation in *Brown Girl, Brownstones* abounds in crypto-totalitarian hues, but we only see the full effects of her violence in her treatment of another subject coded as totalitarian: Deighton. To be sure, the novel renders both of Selina’s parents in crypto-totalitarian hues; however, whereas Silla exhibits the mixed tendencies of both a totalitarian leader and a totalitarian subject, Deighton only ever occupies the latter position.\(^{88}\) Arendt writes in *Origins of Totalitarianism* that “What prepares men for totalitarian domination in the non-totalitarian world is the fact that loneliness […] has become an everyday experience” (478).\(^{89}\) Deighton’s despair in this novel stems not only from a racially-rooted self-hatred he shares with Silla, but, uniquely, from his effective expulsion from the Bajan community: “the lonely man […] finds himself surrounded by others with whom he cannot establish contact or to whose hostility he is exposed” (Arendt 476). Disdain and ridicule greet Deighton throughout the Bajan community because of a swagger that belies his stagnant career and lack of savings, marooning Deighton within his own community and producing images—especially during “The War”—of striking loneliness. For instance, at ’Gatha Steed’s daughter’s wedding, a major community event in the novel, Deighton enters the reception hall and “desperate[ly] search[es] for a single welcoming face” but encounters only “disdaining backs” and “cold nods” (128, 129). Reconstructing in dreams an image of her ostracized

\(^{88}\) As stated here, my aim is not to read *Brown Girl, Brownstones* in neatly allegorical terms. Any division between Silla-as-leader and Deighton-as-subject should not be insisted upon too strongly. At many moments, Silla also recalls an Arendtian totalitarian subject. That being said, any reading of totalitarian aesthetics in the two characters must distinguish the presence of crucial leader-like attributes in Silla from their wholesale absence in Deighton.

\(^{89}\) Michael Cobb cites this passage in reading Arendt’s “loneliness” within the context of romantic coupledom. As Cobb argues, while it is tempting to view single people as “lonely,” and falling in love as “the ultimate antidote for the lonely,” the couple form can impose its own modes of loneliness: “The loneliest of us are not necessarily those who are actually alone but rather those of us trying our hardest not to be alone” (“Lonely” 449). Cobb’s analysis of loneliness resonates with my reading of Selina’s anti-totalitarian *bildung*: Selina long desires to exist within the couple form but fails to find lasting companionship there. At novel’s end, Selina, an icon of rebellious freedom, is single once more.
father at the wedding banquet, Selina envisions Deighton’s body as fragmented, likening it to “an abstract painting, for he was always only an immense hand reaching out and imploring eyes” (129). The scorn of the Bajan community in these dreams “hound[s] him out into the mob waiting in the dark to claim him,” an image evocative of totalitarian inscription: Deighton’s lonely self succumbs to the tidal force of the mob, a dark and oceanic crowd that distantly echoes the dark water into which Deighton repeatedly, and fatally, falls. Deighton—who so often in Brown Girl, Brownstones exemplifies Homi Bhabha’s model of colonial mimicry in chasing whiteness’ material metonyms—ironically and tragically falls into a deathly blackness even as he is ejected from his own black community.

While Deighton’s existential loneliness renders him vulnerable to the overtones of a peaceful crypto-totalitarian demagogue like Father Peace, two moments of violence precipitate his final loss of interiority and autonomy. The first, Silla’s fraudulent sale of the Barbadian land, transpires once more through martial imagery that reiterates the novel’s layering of WWII battlegrounds upon the Boyce brownstone. Upon learning of the sale, Deighton repeats Silla’s name in astonishment, “as though struck with amnesia” such that her name is the “all he [can] remember out of the obliterated past” (97). Deighton’s “obliterated past” takes on a productive referential ambiguity here, since what seems obliterated is not only his memory (the “amnesia” that anticipates Deighton’s later evacuation of interiority) but also—and significantly in a novel preoccupied with Barbados’ vulnerability to air war—the land itself. In this latter reading of “obliterated past,” the intrusion of commercial forces into Barbados’ prelapsarian realm severs a tie to Deighton’s past—a past that is obliterated, ruined as if bombed from above. In this way,
Silla’s sale obliterates both the land itself and Deighton’s affective bonds to that land as registered in memory. We thus encounter only paragraphs later a simile likening this defeated Deighton to “Brutus standing in the dead-strewn field” with Silla clutching “an unsheathed knife […] pointed at him” (97). Silla’s “knife” is in fact the bank draft she wields like a weapon, exposing her sale as a tool of violence. Amid Deighton’s “crumbling” dreams, processes of material ruination map themselves upon the psychological process of Deighton’s creation as a totalitarian subject: “It was as though Silla, by selling the land, had unwittingly spared him the terrible onus of wresting a place in life” (98). Just as Arendt’s totalitarian subject “derives his sense of having a place in the world only from his belonging to a movement,” so Deighton resigns himself to the despair of placelessness because of Silla’s destructive ploy (324). “Broken” and “stripped” by machinations in which Silla deprives her husband of an identity by stealing it through acts of forgery, Deighton emerges from this scene primed for the dictatorial leadership of Father Peace (98).

What precipitates Deighton’s final plunge into totalitarian subjecthood, though, is an act of violence by a force reminiscent of the machinic force associated with Silla. The news that Deighton’s arm has been crushed while at work in his mattress factory prompts Selina to reflect on and imagine the scene from afar. The narrative then conjures before us a man already “crushed inside” who is subjected to the “impersonal brutality” of a “giant complex of pistons and power” (133). Selina’s earlier literal sighting of her mother amid the crypto-totalitarian roar of her armaments factory here finds its foil in her imaginative sighting of Deighton amid the “roaring” apparatus of his mattress factory.
Here too the mechanical roar extinguishes any capacity for intelligible public conversation, while Deighton’s “slim figure with an ascetic face” amid the machine-mass echoes Silla’s own body as it is threatened with immersion within her factory’s roar (133). However, where Silla possesses a “formidable force” that in “match[ing] that of the machines” reveals a concealed kinship with them, Deighton appears defenseless against machine-generated violence (84). Both of Selina’s parents, interpellated by U.S. culture as racially abject, embrace the violent, crypto-totalitarian destructive power of Fordist machines in hopes of material wealth always coded as white. Yet while Silla fits herself to this machine force, channeling its energies, Deighton, despite his foolishness and profligacy, becomes an object of Selina’s (and the reader’s) compassion as we witness from afar his bodily and psychological ruin. Deighton’s ruin is the result of machine forces tropologically likened in Brown Girl, Brownstones to forces of development associated with the Monroe Doctrine and Marshall Plan—paths of development from which Selina swerves.

However, Deighton’s immersion within totalitarian subjectivity crescendos only with his entry into Father Peace’s cult. In its portrayal of Father Peace, Brown Girl, Brownstones draws on a religious figure of 1930s Harlem, Father Divine, whose public persona at its Depression-era height of popularity resonated with totalitarian aesthetics. For example, Mark Christian Thompson notes that Father Divine collaborated on a campaign for black employment with Sufi Abdul Hamid, a flamboyant, frequently anti-Semitic orator whose “fascistic agitation” helped kindle Harlem’s 1935 riot (11). Claude McKay, meanwhile, in his 1940 historical treatise Harlem: Negro Metropolis, describes

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*Brown Girl, Brownstones* reiterates Silla’s affiliation with economic systems linked to violence and destruction by situating Deighton in a factory that produces mattresses, associated in this novel with love and sexuality (through the noises made by Suggie’s mattresses that so infuriate Silla).
Father Divine’s Peace Mission Movement as enacting, in totalitarian fashion, “the abnegation of all individuality, collective servitude and strict discipline in every domain of life with one man as supreme dictator” (48). With Father Divine’s Peace Mission Movement echoing clearly in his own name, Brown Girl, Brownstone’s Father Peace embodies his historical model’s dictatorial qualities (along with, we sense, his corruption). As an authoritarian Father figure who demands celibacy of followers who call one another “Brother” and “Sister,” Father Peace recalls the primal father of Freud’s “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego,” a text commonly cited in models of totalitarian leadership. Just as in Freudian groups all members have “succeeded in identifying themselves with one another by means of a similar love for the same object,” so in Brown Girl, Brownstones Father Peace’s movement demands of its members that they renounce their families and marriages (120). At the meeting Selina attends with Deighton, Father Peace exercises the control of a virtual hypnotist over his “transfixed” followers, who Selina imagines as “children being led by the piper into the sea” (142, 143). Selecting Deighton from the rapt crowd to sit with him for this particular gathering, Father Peace beckons him “with a slow hypnotic motion,” rendering Deighton “drawn […] by an invisible thread pulled by [his] finger” (143). When worshipping Father Peace, Deighton’s makes a “gesture that did, indeed, cancel his entire self” (145).

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91 For an impressively extensive overview of Father Divine’s relevance to the Harlem Renaissance’s literary history, see Benjamin Kahan’s “The Other Harlem Renaissance: Father Divine, Celibate Economics, and the Making of Black Sexuality.”

92 Joyce Pettis reads Deighton’s flight to Father Peace in terms that suggest (without explicitly invoking) totalitarian leadership: Deighton finds that “his benumbed fractured self can be submerged and mostly forgotten in the frenzy of the glorifying Father” (43). Pettis is merely one among many critics who curiously neglect to consider models of totalitarian leadership in the Father Peace scenes, which take place shortly after the swastika-emblazoned factory scene and shortly before Selina’s denunciation of Silla as “Hitler.”

93 Incidentally, Father Peace’s denunciation of marriage further cements his connection with the historical Father Divine, who imposed celibacy upon his followers, as Kahan notes.
When we afterwards witness Silla denouncing Deighton for his cowardly turn to the cult, Deighton recognizes that she is “perhaps […] nothing more than his own inner voice,” yet this description merely affirms that Deighton—an exemplar, like Silla, of failed bildung for Selina—is finally voiced only by others (such as Father Peace) in his transformation into a totalitarian subject (150). It is ironic, then, that while a mournful peace follows “The War,” what precipitates the end of the novel’s domestic “war” is Father Peace.

Deighton and Silla both thus signify failed routes of bildung for Selina insofar as they assume, each in their own way, chilling attributes of a totalitarian subject metonymically linked to America’s Cold War geopolitical foes. Yet the Bajan community’s main vehicle of collective politics, the Barbadian-American Association, partakes also of crypto-totalitarian aesthetics. For instance, Beryl Challenor tells Selina that her father, Percy (who sits among the Association’s leadership), claims it will “be the biggest thing since Marcus Garvey” (168). Beryl’s comparison is telling, since Garvey is historically linked not only to Pan-Africanism (a notion which the Association ostensibly rejects, since it wishes only to serve Barbadian Americans rather than all black Americans) but also by Mark Christian Thompson and Paul Gilroy to black fascism, Garvey’s fascist credentials bolstered by his claim in an interview that “Mussolini copied Fascism from me” (qtd. in Thompson 45). The Association’s headquarters is a reconstructed, “formerly condemned factory building,” spatially echoing the destructive, swastika-emblazoned factory district of Silla’s armaments production (188). At Association meetings, the gathered members form a fearfully heteronomous crowd: “Their silence was a deep wide bowl into which the speaker poured his words,” an image
suggesting passive indoctrination (188). Following such pseudo-indoctrination, the crowd’s applause resounds “like gunshots,” again figuratively linking the Association with violence (190). The Association leader most prominent in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, Percy Challenor—his name distantly echoing “Chancellor”—evinces subtle traces of a European dictator: Selina likens Percy to the pseudo-dictator figure Father Peace, since both preside over their followers “like a threatening god” (167, 145).

Finally, the Association’s meetings, conducted beneath a giant U.S. flag, feature both denunciations of communism—redolent of the McCarthyism that 1950s cultural critics labeled proto-totalitarian—and Silla’s frequent invocations of seemingly natural, socially Darwinist laws of history that Arendt sees as crucial to the ideological structure of totalitarian movements. The Association is thus a third seductive, but failed, model of *bildung* for Selina.94 *Brown Girl, Brownstones* in this way deploys the bildungsroman genre, together with its formal structures and concomitant narrative expectations, all in order to subvert teleological tales of “development” that undergird U.S. postwar neo-imperialism. Selina’s eventual refusal to embrace an “adulthood” sanctioned by her parents’ diasporic generation and dependent upon a fetishized whiteness allows her to chart a new, counterintuitive path of “development” away from that of a proto-totalitarian first world aligned in this novel with policies like the Marshall Plan.

94 Kevin Meehan, in an imaginative and incisive interpretation of cultural politics in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, argues that Caribbean cultural identity as represented by the Association is linked to “the successful struggle to survive the assaults of racism and imperialism” (269). While Meehan’s reading of divisions between Caribbean American and African American characters in the novel reveals crucial facets of its cultural politics, his reading of the Association as a vehicle for unalloyed racial uplift overlooks its chillingly proto-totalitarian elements as catalogued here.
III. Bildung, Bandung-Style

From the vantage of her elders, Selina’s formation is in fact a deformation, a swerve from the well-trodden route towards U.S. material affluence into a Caribbean space whose geopolitical affiliation was in the 1950s dangerously uncertain. The motif of totalitarianism tracked in the previous section allows us to read her eschewal of “American” values, along with their accompanying geopolitical logic of modernization, as a rejection of the conformity engendered by U.S. mass culture. Rebellious and independent, Selina departs Stuyvesant Heights’ spatial ruins in a way redolent of the “third path” taken by non-aligned countries following the 1955 Bandung Conference, where Asian and African nations, many newly decolonized, resolved to oppose Cold War neocolonial domination by either the United States or the Soviet Union. While Caribbean nations did not participate in the Bandung Conference, this “third path” of nonalignment, I argue, invigorates a geopolitical fantasy of Barbadian decolonization and non-alignment in Brown Girl, Brownstones, published only a few years before Barbados achieved independence from British rule in 1966. This fantasy triangulates the “underdeveloped” spaces of postwar European cities, American inner cities, and the Barbadian nation in order to expose the crypto-totalitarian facets of instruments of putative “development” like the Marshall Plan, U.S. schemes of domestic urban renewal, and, finally, the Monroe Doctrine.

Selina’s return to Barbados, then, in the soul-nation allegory central to the bildungsroman genre, signifies her non-alignment with either Cold War superpower, yet it also mobilizes and re-signifies a geopolitically-charged figure in American culture, that of the “rebel.” Medovoi positions this figure’s American elaborations during the Cold
War within a broader geopolitical imaginary characterized by America’s “proprietary relationship to the discourse of freedom” (Rebels 12). In this way, the “rebel” becomes America’s own national icon projected to decolonized, non-aligned nations at this time, beckoning them along a course of “freedom” cast in particularly American terms—a course that would deafen them to communist overtures. Just as Medovoi argues that “rebel” figures functioned for marginalized U.S. groups as cultural expressions of “psychopolitical emancipation from the compliant subjectivity associated with the coercive expectations of patriarchal, white supremacist, or heteronormative self-definition,” so Selina’s status as “rebel” allows her to wrench the meaning of “freedom” from its moorings in U.S. State Department discourse (Rebels 47). Ironically, in exhibiting Emersonian self-reliance against a Cold War culture of conformity, Selina embodies typically “American” values more fully than any other character in the novel. What Selina’s rebellion accomplishes that productively exceeds Medovoi’s model of the Cold War “rebel,” however, is to locate its insurrection within a broader geographical imaginary that envisions postwar Europe as a staging ground for programs of “development” and “modernization” that threaten cultural diversity for putatively “underdeveloped” nations like Barbados. The Bakhtinian spatial sphere within which Selina’s bildung occurs is an unusually striated one: more than simply expose U.S. domestic racism as belying trumpeted American values of “freedom” and “equality,” the novel accentuates its critique of Cold War neo-imperialism by imaginatively layering upon one another geographically disparate spaces that are supposedly ripe for reconstruction.
Brown Girl, Brownstones cues Selina’s bodily, psychological, and social growth to signifiers of violence, loneliness, and loss that suggest her vulnerability to totalitarian conscription. Most notably, “The War” intertwines European warfare not only with Silla and Deighton’s battle over Barbadian land, but also with Selina’s own bodily growth: the war only “reach[s] out and claim[s] her” with her body’s “sudden upheaval” whereby she experiences “her dark blood flowing as it flowed in the war, the pain at each shudder of her womb as sharp as the thrust of a bayonet” (54). Her body’s war-like upheavals lie beyond Selina’s control, revealing an aspect of herself over which she exercises only limited autonomy. These martial upheavals resonate figuratively within the menacing destructive power encountered by Selina in Silla’s armaments factory—a power that hovers over other spaces of coercive development. For instance, the city college she attends, a gateway to middle-class living, recalls Silla’s factory as a “towering steel structure” where the elevators make soaring and plunging motions faintly reminiscent of pistons in machines (182). In these elevators, Selina feels “bodies crushing hers,” the crush of bodies evoking not only Deighton’s maiming in his mattress factory but also Arendt’s description of how previously disparate bodies become compressed together in totalitarian crowds (182). Even the mass-culture commodities so appealing to Selina early in the novel betray possibly violent origins: in the secretary’s office of Silla’s crypto-totalitarian factory, “the pinup girls on the calendars [are] streaked with black industrial oil,” signaling that one possible model for Selina’s bildung in Brown Girl, Brownstones—images of normative beauty in U.S. pop culture—are tainted with the oil of war production and thereby coded (coated?) with the sign of U.S. military power (82).
What renders Selina most vulnerable to the siren song of crypto-totalitarian mass culture, however, is a loneliness frequently associated in the novel with deathliness. Severed from her “community” in the novel’s later stages through her rejection of the Barbadian-American Association, Selina experiences loneliness from the plot’s outset through a Boyce family photo that includes not Selina but a brother who died before her own birth. This sense of lingering mortality colors Selina’s loneliness in succeeding pages, as, asked by Beryl why she imagines herself as severed from her family, she diverts the conversation to a time when she saw “a dead girl” (48). Later in the novel, Selina wears black in mourning for her father far longer than either Silla or Ina, remaining psychologically outside the “warm pink circle” of sociality fostered by these two in addition to the Challenors and their friends in the Barbadian-American Association (166). A social apartness instantiated by mourning fuels Selina’s deviant bildung following “The War,” as shown most clearly at Beryl’s party, where, shortly before being jarred back into pained awareness of her father’s absence, Selina reflects in free-indirect discourse that “Beryl’s life was planned, ordered, while hers was as vague and formless as mist” (167). The disorder of Selina’s life takes figurative shape through an image of mist that echoes the “tropic mist moiling over the ship” from which she imagines her father plunging fatally only pages earlier (161; emphasis in the original). Where Percy Challenor places “pink-palmed hands” (coded as white) on Beryl’s head and “transfer[s] his acquisitive spirit to her,” initiating her into a mass capitalism troped in the novel as totalitarian, Deighton bequeaths to his daughter a legacy singular in its lack of material value (167). In a sentimental vein, the novel’s free-indirect discourse
notes that Selina envisions Beryl as unable to tabulate the “worth” of Deighton’s bestowal (169).

Perhaps this is why, reminded cruelly by Beryl of Deighton’s death, Selina feels her “familiar upheaval” of anger and grief as a “cold and powerful wave drowning out her mind, the same one, she imagined, that had borne her father down to the sea’s floor” (168). Gripped by her upheaval, Selina at this early moment in her post-“War” reconstruction, her rebellious bildung, experiences the force of crowd-belonging (the “powerful wave” reminiscent of crowd imagery) that threatens her autonomy by “drowning out her mind.” Confronted with such negative models of formation as Silla, Deighton, and the Association, Selina’s own status as lonely outsider frequently exposes her to the snares of totalitarian belonging. If bildung is a process of teleological formation oriented towards the future, Selina’s agonized cherishment of memories, her consuming awareness of loss, forestalls a “development” that would require her to relinquish an attachment to her wayward father. Such relinquishment in pursuit of “progress” appears to Selina to be as callously violent as Silla’s own proto-totalitarian treatment of the father.

Left fearfully unformed amid her “utter desertion,” Selina nevertheless reconceives Arendtian loneliness as Arendtian solitude, forming herself as a rebel who appropriates for herself the potent U.S. Cold War discourse of freedom (181). Arendt in The Origins of Totalitarianism distinguishes between loneliness and solitude, separating the latter from the former by claiming that, “in solitude […] I am ‘by myself,’ together with myself, and therefore two-in-one, whereas in loneliness I am actually one, deserted by all others” (476). Solitude thus becomes for Arendt a prerequisite for introspection
and thinking, even if it remains always at risk of devolving into the loneliness that precedes totalitarian recruitment. Throughout *Brown Girl, Brownstones* Selina grapples with a detachment from community that risks becoming loneliness. The drama of her *bildung*, I argue, as well as the geopolitical stakes of that drama, turns on her ultimate acceptance of solitude over loneliness—a solitude that validates her third-worldly non-alignment with potential models for formation furnished by her Barbadian-American community. The logic of Selina’s deviant *bildung* renders her immaturity apparent in the novel’s early stages through her attachment to material commodities (like the candies her father buys her) and her perilous susceptibility to the power of Silla’s voice.\footnote{In an astute reading of this voice, Michael Cobb argues that Marshall’s novel pits the sanguine effects of religious rhetoric against a “rhetorical system of relations that would prefer to deny life and efface different voices” (*RB* 76). This chapter transposes Cobb’s scrutiny of life-giving and death-dealing relations from the realm of religious utterance to that of Cold War geopolitics and U.S. urban renewal. It does so by arguing that Marshall’s novel also concerns the categories of life and death once we view these categories through the prism of totalitarian biopolitics. In this reading, Silla’s voice is appropriated by a system of death, while Selina’s and Deighton’s journeys home are a dash for cultural particularity, something beyond the homogenizing tendencies of American administrative apparatuses.} Yet where Silla ruthlessly pursues goals oriented to an American material affluence coded as white, Selina pursues more spiritual, psychological, and existential ends that the novel associates with artistry and free expression. The dichotomy posited in *Brown Girl, Brownstones* between Silla’s materialism and Selina’s lack thereof teeters on cliche; but, as earlier sections of this chapter have sought to demonstrate, this materialism accrues complex geopolitical resonances in the particular moment of the novel’s production, an emergent age of three worlds wherein non-aligned nations deviate from paths of “development” dictated by Soviet and U.S. power.

Selina’s rebellion against crypto-totalitarian materialism funnels itself primarily through her relationship with Clive Springer, who comes closer than any other character in *Brown Girl, Brownstones* to embodying a model for Selina’s *bildung*. That Selina
ultimately rejects Clive as a model for her own formation is significant for any geopolitical reading of the novel, since it allegorically aligns Selina’s indeterminate, formless future with the open futurity of third-world nations whose choices are not constrained by neocolonial masters like the U.S. or the Soviet Union. What matters for both Selina and non-aligned nation-states, this reading suggests, is not the particular direction of development chosen but rather the fact of its being independently chosen in the first place, free of external constraints. Selina’s body, we are told on the first page after “The War,” expresses “an importunate plea for a boy,” rendering Selina’s relationship with Clive a crucial aspect of her post-war bildung (161). The boy who answers her plea, Clive, is conspicuously associated with postwar reconstruction himself, having performed “clean-up detail” in former battlegrounds (202). Although Clive performs this work in the Pacific theatre, his imagining of clean-up work in the European theatre resonates particularly clearly with Selina’s world: Clive believes he would not have minded such “clean-up” work in Europe because “the snow can cover a lot,” concealing dead bodies (202). The snow that Clive envisions covering ruined European battlegrounds covers also not just the proto-totalitarian factory district wherein Silla produces armaments but also a Stuyvesant Heights space critical for Selina’s formation, the dilapidated pavilion where Selina loses her virginity. This snowy space epitomizes for Clive the “dark days of neighborhood decline” but also distantly recalls his wartime duties, as he speculates before entering the pavilion that he “might have to clean out a few winos,” an echo of his soldierly clean-up detail (203). Furthermore, in inviting Selina into the pavilion, Clive promises “not to talk about the war,” ironically calling WWII to our attention once more right before a crucial moment in Selina’s maturation.
This scene, then, situates Selina’s post-“War” *bildung* in a blighted Stuyvesant Heights landscape that recalls postwar Europe.

Although a failed artist, Clive comes closest to embodying a model of *bildung* for Selina insofar as he seeks aesthetic expression that he imagines as inimitably at odds with American mass culture. Figuratively linked to Deighton throughout his appearances in the novel, Clive opts out of a conventionally “American” lifestyle that he derides as materialistic (one of the first things we learn about Clive, for instance, is that he neither has nor wants a job). It is noteworthy, then, that it is while with Clive that Selina voices her fantasy of Deighton’s resurrection and survival in Barbados: “sometimes I think that he outwitted us all and really swam ashore, and is home now living like a lord and glad to be rid of this place and of us” (214). Selina’s vision reaffirms the material value of Deighton’s Barabadian land apart from its exchange-value in U.S. cash while also raising him from the crowd-like ocean in order to place him in a space of autonomous, willed enjoyment (“glad to be rid of this place”). This affiliation of Clive with Deighton through their shared aversion to U.S. mass culture undergirds the pivotal moment in *Brown Girl, Brownstones* when Selina resolves to leave America for Barbados, reprising her father’s trip. Standing with Clive by the sea—Selina’s first encounter in the novel with her father’s resting place—Selina witnesses a “scene swiftly [rising] from the sea” that features Deighton’s “dream of escape dying in his mild eyes” as he learns of Silla’s scheme to sell the land (230). If Deighton’s misery at being entrapped within the “pale

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96 Clive’s presentation as lay-about artist echoes a description given earlier in the novel by Florrie Trotman of her own Bajan son, one of the “New York children [who] don like work” and whose “head […] be up in a radio listening to jazz” (56). Florrie’s description subtly likens her son to unproductive Europeans, inefficient and backwards, who need to be assimilated to an American ethos of Taylorist productivity, while the son’s taste for jazz aligns him with Europeans exposed to the jazz music that was broadcast over outlets like Radio Free Europe to promote U.S. culture.
of societal racism both prompts his death and indicts America’s vaunted promises of equality, then Clive’s own experience of racism while serving in the U.S. army reminds us that the Monroe Doctrine depends for its enforcement upon an internally racist, authoritarian organization whose principles are at risk of being exported abroad through foreign policies like the Marshall Plan (162; emphasis in the original). Selina’s maturation in this novel partakes of qualities in both Deighton and Clive—she emulates Deighton’s desire to return to Barbados while eschewing the loneliness that leads him to Father Peace; she emulates Clive’s professed dedication to self-expression while rejecting his resignation to remain in New York—but the development she exhibits in the novel is ultimately her own. Fittingly, we leave her in this novel amid urban ruins standing on her own, her fierce independence evoking both Silla’s youthful rebelliousness and the non-aligned nature of third-world nations in the Cold War.

*Brown Girl, Brownstones* routes the distinction it draws between Selina and Silla through twinned images of a black female body within “pale forms” tinged with totalitarian potential. To this end, Selina’s attainment of an autonomous voice distinct from the proto-totalitarian aesthetic and discursive structures that surround her arrives with the dance she performs near novel’s end. This spectacle contrasts itself revealingly with the novel’s earlier spectacle—witnessed from afar by Selina—of Silla subsumed within the productive (destructive?) apparatus of the ominous armaments factory. Descriptions of Selina’s dance practices and performance emphasize her autonomy through words like “restraint,” as well as her singular focus on craft: practicing a piece before Clive, Selina “[forgets] him as her mind and body, drawn to the music, [become] coordinated” (236). That Selina’s crowning dance performance in *Brown Girl,*
Brownstones is a birth-to-death cycle references the novel’s own status as bildungsroman, marking this performance as an adumbration of Selina’s broader dynamics of development across the novel. Although Selina’s performance, a visual spectacle devoid of written language, risks being understood as reminiscent of totalitarian aesthetics in its privileging of the imagistic over the linguistic, the novel forestalls such a reading by emphasizing that Selina’s body “speak[s] for her” on stage (242). Selina’s dark body speaks socially in this visual spectacle; while her body inhabits a pale form—the dance cycle derives from Greek drama, leading one of the onlookers to tell Selina that she is “so Greek!”—she does not fear this form but inhabits it while nevertheless remaining apart from the oceanic crowd whose adulation the novel codes racially as “a white shifting welter of faces” (244). The dance performance scene presents readers of Brown Girl, Brownstones with a foil to the novel’s earlier depiction of Silla’s crypto-totalitarian factory: in each scene, we witness a female black body from afar as that body is caught within a cacophony, like the “thunderous sound” to which Selina bows (243). However, while Silla’s bodily performance amid cacophony is for monetary profit and in service to America’s military-industrial complex, Selina’s is non-instrumental and expressive of her own voice insofar as her body’s movements “speak for her” (242). Where Selina participates in the production of an (artistic) life cycle, Silla participates in the production of war. Selina’s reaffirmation of her plan to leave America soon after this performance underscores the fiercely independent form of expressiveness she demonstrates within the pale forms that threaten to suffocate her parents.

In this way, Selina’s bildung involves her re-imagination and appropriation of the typically “American” virtue of “freedom” promoted to non-aligned nations by the U.S. in
the Cold War. Such putatively American freedom, the novel insists, is undercut by instruments of U.S. Cold War foreign policy. Rejecting the prestigious scholarship offered her by the Barbadian-American Association, Selina looks across a “dark sea” of faces (evoking the sea in which Deighton drowns) and senses “the loneliness coiled fast around her freedom” (261, 262). Her freedom is wrested at great cost—the isolation that risks generating pre-totalitarian loneliness—amid a meeting hall decked with U.S. flags, but in this scene Selina resiliently holds her freedom apart from the iconography of U.S. statehood. Shortly afterwards, Silla berates her for defying the Association in entrancing language that forms a “dazzling pyrotechnic display,” but this moment merely furnishes an example of Selina’s growth in Brown Girl, Brownstones: Selina feels herself to be “no longer the child who used to succumb, without will, to that powerful onslaught” (263). Selina preserves her autonomy here, steeling herself against imagistic and violent (“onslaught”) words reminiscent of a totalitarian leader’s. Surveying the ruined American neighborhood that she will soon depart, Selina defines her personal quest as a pursuit of the “center” of life, speculating that what lies at the center is “peace, perhaps, […] and the things that shaped it: love, a clearer vision, a place” (266). Like Deighton, Selina seeks a nebulous “peace;” but unlike Deighton, who perishes in the placelessness of the sea, Selina emphasizes the importance of material place for her “peace” as she abandons a neighborhood subject to urban renewal’s creative destruction in favor of a Barbados whose tactile land she imagines. In this way, Brown Girl, Brownstones distinguishes Selina’s rebellious bildung from U.S. Cold War programs of development, associating her “freedom” with the open futurity of nation-states unconstrained by totalitarian (or proto-totalitarian) power.
Selina’s fiercely independent abandonment of America for Barbados casts in troubling relief the society she leaves behind—a society whose domestic inequalities render it unfit, in the novel’s political unconscious, to foist coercive schemes of “development” upon others. What sparks the self-awareness that both affirms Selina’s choice to leave America and steels her against Silla’s voice is her post-dance conversation with the racist and patronizing Mrs. Benton, during which Selina feels herself “drowning in the deluge of [Mrs. Benton’s] voice” (249). Once more the novel inscribes its motif of drowning, linking this moment—where Selina feels herself classified racially in Mrs. Benton’s gaze—to Deighton’s death: if her experience of racial classification (steeped in the language of class itself) can be extrapolated to all the novel’s black characters, then Deighton’s death can be read as merely a literalization of the discrimination faced by Selina’s Barbadian-American community. It is noteworthy, then, that upon hearing Selina’s decision to abandon American and travel to Barbados, Silla not only sees in Selina “the girl she once had been” but also recalls her younger self traveling from Barbados to America, standing “at the ship’s rail, watching the city rise glittering with promise from the sea” (265, 266). By positioning Silla at the ship’s rail, Brown Girl, Brownstones figuratively binds them, in spite of their “War:” just as Deighton dives into the sea for cash, so what Silla views rising from the sea is a city whose glitter promises wealth. For each character, the pursuit of what lies within (or rises from) this sea proves tragically futile.

Arguably the tragedy that befalls Selina’s parents inheres in a trenchant myth extended to marginalized Americans by mass capitalism itself: that the possession of capital levels racial distinctions; that equality arises in the marketplace as subjects don
the putatively non-raced, abstract identity of “consumer.” Writing of membership in the public sphere of mainstream mass media, Michael Warner claims that “the bourgeois public sphere has been structured from the outset by a logic of abstraction that provides a privilege for unmarked identities: the male, the white, the middle class, the normal” (383). For Warner, entering into the seemingly anonymous identity of public subject entails embracing a category that depends on an anonymity that is a priori raced: “It is at the very moment of recognizing ourselves as the mass subject […] that we also recognize ourselves as minority subjects. As participants in the mass subject, we are the ‘we’ that can describe our particular affiliations of class, gender, sexual orientation, race, or subculture only as ‘they.’” (Warner 387). Following her moment of self-recognition as abjectly raced in her conversation with Mrs. Benton—“She […] reminded me that I was only a nigger after all”—Selina experiences a virtual second “mirror stage” where she catches her reflection in the darkened window of a “vacant store” (254, 251). There Selina makes a “discovery” as she “see[s], clearly for the first time, the image which [Mrs. Benton]—and the ones like the woman—saw when they looked at her” (251). Tellingly, this “mirror stage” occurs for Selina while she looks into a shop window: in this scene, she fully recognizes her blackness through a position of consumer (a looker in the shop window) that promises equality but instead merely confirms the ineluctable taint of her skin’s color.  

This shop-window scene illuminates our readerly understanding of each Boyce parent: we recall Deighton’s ecstasy as spends the cash from the Barbadian land sale on

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97 I agree with Susan Stanford Friedman’s remark upon this scene that, “in contrast to the imago in the Lacanian mirror stage, the false self in the window is not Selina’s creation, but rather the cultural meaning of black womanhood that she has internalized and must destroy” (51). Where my reading departs from Friedman’s is in assessing Silla and the Association not as “a powerful island in a sea of racism” but rather as forces that themselves have internalized the implicitly racist values of white America (51).
consumer items, as he encounters white sales clerks who, expecting him to request a job “cleaning out their toilet,” instead “almost break their neck running to wait ’pon [him]” as he counts his money (106). But the moment also reveals to Selina the source of Silla’s “swift rage”—a rage that Selina speculates “might have killed them:” that in U.S. society Silla everywhere encounters faces that remind her of “her own despised color” (253). Although Silla condemns WWII as a white-man’s war (a condemnation extended by the novel to instruments of post-war reconstruction), the novel’s very section entitled “The War,” meant to allegorize WWII, can in the closing pages of Brown Girl, Brownstones finally be seen as an internecine war between black American subjects who ultimately possess more joint interests that they do antagonisms, oppressed and immiserated as they are by white socio-economic systems. Thus Selina describes Silla through free-indirect discourse as “she who had not chosen death by water,” an acknowledgement by both her and the novel of Silla and Deighton’s shared plight (253). That Selina makes these reflections while gazing upon her own U.S. neighborhood’s “ruined houses” reminds us of the context of spatial reconstruction—both domestic and global—within which Brown Girl, Brownstones couches its critique of rapacious societal hierarchies that characterize both totalitarian states of the second world and the first-world U.S. (253). The violent, racist socio-economic structures of everyday American life for characters like Silla are not ethically superior to the brutal conditions of peon labor that drove her to America from Barbados in the first place, the novel suggests. In this way Marshall’s novel—

98 In making this point I concur with Kathlene McDonald, who writes that “Silla and her fellow Bajans believe in the possibility of a colorblind and classless society that they can have access to through their professional success” (28). McDonald’s article perceptively illustrates the Cold War-era culture of materialist consensus to which Silla and the Barbadian-American Association assimilate themselves, but it overlooks the extent to which, as Medovoi shows, this culture was coded as proto-totalitarian at the time. As this chapter has argued, the critique of Cold War culture as “totalitarian” represents a project of Brown Girl, Brownstones itself.
written in an age of global decolonization and Cold War neo-imperialism—triangulates imagined circuits of postwar reconstruction: American aid’s violent instrumentality, demonstrated in the ruins of both U.S. cities and postwar Europe, reveals the need for non-normative paths of Bildung, paths of rebellious Bildung that recapture the discourse of “freedom” in service of an unchecked futurity.
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