FEAR OF FORMALISM
KANT, TWAIN, AND CULTURAL STUDIES IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

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I begin with what we might call a bipolar disturbance in literary criticism. Caught between the materialism of cultural studies and the formalism of philosophy, literary criticism is construed, on the one hand, as useless—struck dumb by its lack of purpose in the face of real politics and real bodies—and, on the other hand, as singularly efficacious, the only tool through which to reveal the essentially discursive character of all forms of culture, including bodies and politics. While this rhetorical model of criticism is regularly posited as politically bankrupt, as having no purchase on the facticity of the world, the model of materialist cultural criticism is just as regularly unmasked as, at base, rhetorically constructed and thus guilty of concealing its own formalist dimensions.[1] This "disturbance," as I've described it, tends to be acted out as a debilitating dialectic: caught between formalism and materialism, literary criticism is left without any ground to stand on. Yet this peculiar bipolarity within literary criticism is intimately linked to the strange status of literature itself. Language becomes recognizably literary at the moment it assumes a rhetorical or formal dimension rather than serving as the invisible conduit of mimetic representation.[2] Whence, evidently, the allure of formalism for literary criticism: form would seem to be exactly what demarcates the literary from the nonliterary, what defines the exclusive territory of literature. Yet formalism, as has been widely and persuasively argued, tends to turn literature into precisely the kind of artifact that means little in relation to the world and tends to obscure the worldly relations that inform the text and its production. Indeed, in the field of Cultural Studies—a field whose defining gesture is political engagement—"formalist" is a term whose meaning often comes to approximate "apolitical." "Formalist," fashioned as opprobium, speaks chidingly of hermeticism or more acerbically of the insidious erasures enacted by universalism.

In contemporary criticism, formalism has thus come to occupy an important antipodal position which encompasses far more than the New Critical practices of the 1940s and '50s. In emphasizing the formal, intrinsic qualities of the literary work, New

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1. For a materialist cultural criticism, see Jennifer Daryl Slack and Laurie Anne Whitt, who voice the concern that cultural studies risks "sliding" into the "merely semiotic" by overemphasizing formalist concerns: "[A] tendency in contemporary cultural studies has been to abandon the commitment to struggle against oppressive social and political formations and to find and celebrate essentially semiotic 'resistance' in virtually any manifestation of popular culture" [584]. For an excellent critique of the rhetoric of cultural criticism see Alan Liu.

2. See Maurice Blanchot's meditation on the nature of literature, "Literature and the Right to Death." Blanchot also speaks, in this essay, to the strange force and impotence of literature that I am trying to evoke here.

Critics closeted the text away from the world and from the possibility of social action: their agenda has thus been construed as politically quietist and inherently conservative.[3] Yet the term "formalism," used as a charge of conservatism, has been applied more broadly to poststructuralist criticism as well. Paul Lauter, for instance, uses the term "formalist" to describe deconstruction as an avatar of New Criticism: both emphasize textual relations to the exclusion of extratextual considerations. Poststructuralism, Lauter and others have argued, continues an aestheticization of literature which turns literary criticism over to an elitist and ultimately irrelevant "priesthood." "'Formalist,'" writes Lauter, "suggests that the whole enterprise of literary theorizing subsists behind dense academic walls, where de Man speaks only to Heidegger, and Heidegger speaks only to God" [138]. While Lauter bases his analogy between poststructuralism and New Criticism on the charge of hermeticism as well as a lack of historical engagement, the notion of "form" as it appears in poststructuralism is nonetheless significantly different than the "form" that animated New Critical endeavors. Where New Critical "form" concerns specifically literary structures—irony, metaphor, tension, unity—the poststructural referent for these rhetorical terms is often the "form" of language or subjectivity itself. Accordingly, the meaning of "form" (and, indeed, "formalism") undergoes a marked shift from specific rhetorical articulations to larger theoretical claims about language and identity.

This second, broader articulation of form has been critiqued less for hermeticism or quietism than for its implied universalism—that is, for fashioning subjects and discursive forces in uniform shapes without regard for political and historical specificity. Stuart Hall, for example, whilst defining the practice of Cultural Studies, warns against theories of the subject (in this case psychoanalysis) that tend toward universalism: "The manner in which this 'subject' of culture is conceptualized is of a trans-historical and 'universal' character: it addresses the subject-in-general, not an historically-determinate social subject, or socially determinate particular language" [Hall 70]. On this reading, formalist theories of poststructuralism and psychoanalysis posit an ahistorical subject as well as an ahistorical model of language insofar as they give shape to a uniform theory of the subject or of language, even when such a subject is understood to be internally divided.

The charge of formalism, on either definition, thus implies that form is simply not enough, that *mere* formalism is at base empty of the meaning we seek to catch hold of as literary critics and that a concern with form will never effect the work we would like to perform as critics. Nonetheless—and here I reinvoke the profoundly bipolar or duplicitous character of literature and literary language—literature is, by definition and even essentially, formal as well as referential. In what follows, however, I will argue for the productivity of this duplicity rather than its morbidity.[4] Rather than defining literature as essentially aporetic (a deconstructive turn) or, alternatively, resisting formalism altogether (a move characteristic of some versions of cultural studies in the United States), I would suggest that literary criticism should examine form as itself culturally enacted or staged. Following, for instance, the claims of Frederick Jameson, we can understand form as inseparable from history or materiality and thus understand form as eminently political. As Jameson contends, history can be grasped only through form: accordingly, a polarized debate over these terms is nonsensical:

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3. David Shumway argues that the New Critics saw literature as representing "the conservative picture of a world torn between good and evil, a condition beyond social remedy. . . . The New Critics thus picked up the banner of the intellectual right, carried it into the universities, and raised it over their English departments" [230].

4. The most eloquent theorist of the "morbid" relation of form and reference is Paul de Man. De Man's work consistently opposes a paired set of terms—performative/cognitive, rhetorical/referential—to point to the necessary contradiction of the two. While I agree with de Man that a contradiction obtains, I tend to agree less with his melancholic reading of the loss of sense he takes this contradiction to imply.

> *One does not have to argue . . . that history—Althusser's 'absent cause,' Lacan's 'Real'—is* not *a text, for it is fundamentally non-narrative and nonrepresentational; what can be added, however, is the proviso that history is inaccessible to us except in textual form, or in other words, that it can be approached only by way of prior (re)textualization. Thus, to insist on either of the two inseparable yet incommensurable dimensions of the symbolic act without the other . . . is surely to produce sheer ideology, whether it be . . . the ideology of structualism, or . . . that of vulgar materialism.* [Jameson 82]

To the extent that form is inseparable from history, form itself becomes the bearer of political and historical meaning for Jameson, and criticism will accordingly involve a "process whereby generic specification and description can, in a given historical text, be transformed into the detection of a host of distinct generic messages" [Jameson 99].[5] In both of the passages cited here, however, history is assimilated to form: form becomes the conduit of historical meaning for Jameson. While Jameson is persuasive as to the political stakes of form, he nonetheless tends to elide a certain tension between history and form. This tension may be ideological, but as such it serves as a purchase point for analysis. I would argue, then, for a productive contradiction between these terms—a contradiction which exists because form is never *merely* formal. Form is never quite as empty (as aporetic, as universal) as critics on either side of the debate imagine. In viewing form as political, I'm less interested, then, in a taxonomy of form—in mapping specific genres onto specific political formations or contents—than in considering the *fantasmatic* nature of form, the way in which form gestures toward a closure to which it cannot attain. Form never attains to the uniformity that a hermetic notion of form implies, in part because, as Jameson argues above, the very terms of form and history corrupt one another. Form, then, is not the product or the vehicle of history on this model: history is less a complicitous hand within the close-fitting glove of form than the corrosive grinding away at the would-be smoothly productive machinery of formalization.[6] As fantasm, moreover, form, far from being universal, is differentially articulated across subjects and across time. And this is the case even when we understand form in a poststructuralist rather than New Critical fashion. Even when we understand form to refer to the structure of subjectivity, and not simply to a New Critical notion of literary form, we cannot take that form to be evenly and universally distributed through time or across geographies: if the form of the "universal" subject is impossible, its fantasmatic possibility is achieved only through consolidating subjectivity in some bodies and dispersing the failures of formalization across other bodies.

I have, in the preceding set of claims, equated cultural studies in the United States with a resistance to formalism or with a fear of formalism. This equation may seem unwarranted, given that the cultural studies movement in Britain began as an attempt to locate the role of culture in social and political formation and has been quite hospitable to structuralist concerns with form. Yet cultural studies in Britain has a very different history and trajectory than cultural studies in the United States, particularly the cultural studies that has taken root in English departments in the United States. Cultural studies

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5. Form, as the bearer of meaning, thus becomes the "content" of the text rather than the container of content: "It has become possible to grasp such formal processes as sedimented content in their own right, as carrying ideological messages of their own, distinct from the ostensible or manifest content of the works" [Jameson 99].

6. Indeed, it would seem this is what Jameson means by the statement "history is what hurts" [102]. Accordingly, it is somewhat of a caricature of his argument to suggest that history neatly resolves itself into a legible typology of forms. Still, while form may articulate determinate contradictions for Jameson, I want to emphasize that it does not master them. Thus I am interested in retaining or least setting to work the perceived opposition between form and history.

in Britain emerged as part of the New Left's modification of Marxism—a modification which sought to complicate the so-called vulgar Marxist model of base/superstructure in order to account for the generative (rather than merely reflective) role of culture in politics. In the United States, in contrast, cultural studies has been embraced in the wake of deconstruction and new historicism and in the name of a newly politicized relation to culture, as well as, significantly, in the name of the renewed political agency of the critic. These distinct histories point, in turn, to divergent—if not antithetical—definitions of culture implicit in the two fields of study. For Stuart Hall and the Birmingham group, culture escapes a "merely reflective" role and is defined, rather, as "the activity through which men and women make history" [63]. On this formulation, culture stands opposed to a notion of economic determinism—opposed to a notion of the economic as the "real" of culture and politics. Culture, then, tends to be textual in this formulation: culture is an array of "signifying practices," "the study of articulation," or the study of specific practices which "must not be absorbed into the economic" [Hall 65, 69]. In the United States, by contrast, the term "culture" more often refers to what lies outside of the text, that is, to *context* in opposition to text.[7] "Culture" as context, then, may refer precisely to a model of economic determinism (or modified economic determinism) that shapes the textual.

While the study of American literature has been reshaped, of late, by efforts to repudiate the exceptionalist roots of the discipline, the appropriation and transformation of cultural studies has in some respects returned American Studies to its Cold War roots: insofar as the appropriation of cultural studies in the United States resurrects and champions a notion of liberal agency, it assumes a particularly American cast. Where deconstruction described the inability of master discourses to sustain themselves on their own terms, new historicism suggested that the contradictions within given historical discourses were themselves productive of and complicit in dominant power relations rather than necessarily subversive of the same. Thus while both poststructuralism and new historicism tend to deprivilege the liberal subject as agent—as well as the critic as agent—cultural studies restores this privilege.[8] The rhetoric of political commitment is ubiquitous in the writings of British and American cultural studies and is perhaps the unifying marker of the field. Lawrence Grossberg, for instance, describes cultural studies as "driven by its own sense of history and politics." "Cultural studies is committed to contestation," he argues, "and perhaps most importantly, cultural studies is radically contextual" [3]. Yet the transmission of a politically defined practice of cultural studies from Birmingham to the English departments of the United States has produced an accompanying (dare I say) jeremiad: as frequently as the political character of cultural studies is pronounced, an anxiety about its depoliticization in the United States is voiced as well.[9] This lament is structurally well founded: as Joel Pfister argues in his account of the "Americanization" of cultural studies, Stuart Hall's work in cultural studies arises out of socialist politics—

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7. See Joel Pfister's "The Americanization of Cultural Studies": "What concerns me... is that British cultural studies, as it does get acknowledged by a 'new' American Studies, might simply be absorbed or incorporated *as a British contribution to the ongoing project of 'contextualism'" [216]. Pfister cites the tendency of American studies to turn the injunction "always historicize" into "always contextualize."*

8. For discussions of political agency in deconstruction, new historicism, and cultural studies, see H. Aram Veeser and Cary Nelson. Veeser, writes, for instance: "New Historicism transmits to subalterns the fatal inability to act. It locates power and oppression in 'discourses' and 'epistemes,' not in ruling groups of people, institutions, or even ideas. Infected by Nietzsche and Foucault, denying cause-and-effect, disputing narratives of emergence and emancipation, New Historicism contaminates all forms of agency" [4].

9. See Cary Nelson and Joel Pfister for examples of this lament. Pfister begins by citing a litany of such complaints by Stuart Hall, Alan O'Connor, and Lawrence Grossberg.

"a radical effort to explain and act upon the postwar predicament of British socialism and late capitalism"—whereas cultural studies in the United States has found an institutional base within the university and has been assimilated to an idea of liberal pedagogy divorced from more "narrow" political concerns.[10] Yet rather than taking this anxiety about backsliding at face value, I would suggest that it speaks to the very reasons that cultural studies has been welcomed and rapidly institutionalized in the United States: cultural studies in the United States at times concerns less the particulars of *a* political platform such as socialism than a desire to have political agency as such. Such a claim embodies the sense (as seen in Lauter's critique) that literary studies has become irrelevant, emasculated: cultural studies, then, would seem to restore the critic's ability to intervene in the "real" world of politics. However, the claim to political agency frequently is voiced without any specific political agenda attached: it is symptomatic of a concern with political agency rather than a particular politics that the rhetoric of cultural studies in the United States often predicates "opposition" and "contestation" without an object.

In a manifesto advocating cultural studies, Henry Giroux, David Shumway, Paul Smith, and James Sosnoski define cultural studies as an "emancipatory project": "By investigating and teaching the claim that culture is in a real sense unfinished, Cultural Studies can secure its own political effectiveness" [478]. Resisting intellectuals, they argue, can "resist the suffocating knowledge and practices that constitute their social formation" [480]. While they argue for a resistance to existing institutional structures, the specific political stakes of this resistance are nowhere spelled out. As a result, some of the power of this emancipatory language would seem to accrue to the academic as emancipated subject—as one who escapes his or her own "suffocation" within the academy and thus secures his or her own political agency. The corollary to the claim that cultural studies liberates the critic from the enervation of the academy is the assertion of the inadequacy of the realm of textuality: "In the context of Cultural Studies it will not be appropriate simply to generate idiosyncratic interpretations of cultural artifacts. The most important aim of a counter-disciplinary praxis is radical social change" [483]. Interpretation is here opposed to praxis: as such, the insufficiency of the text and textuality in relation to the virile world of political action is asserted. It bears noting that the opposite movement accounts for the genesis of cultural studies in Britain, namely an attempt to understand the political force of culture and textuality rather than the effort to move beyond textuality to the "real" world of politics.

The anxiety generated by the alternate collapsing and separating out of politics and textuality occasioned by cultural studies in its various incarnations cannot be felt more strongly than in literature departments, where a claim for the general inadequacy of textual interpretation necessarily has disciplinary implications. In this respect, a trio of recent essays by Donald Pease attempting to redefine the field of American literary studies is exemplary of the play of tensions at stake around the question of politics and the political agency of the critic in relation to literary criticism. Pease's first effort to redefine the field of American literary studies, "New Americanists: Revisionist Interventions into the Canon," appeared as the introduction to a 1990 special issue of *boundary 2*.[11] In this essay,

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10. Pfister cites Patrick Brantlinger's claim that cultural studies will make the liberal arts more liberal: "The liberal arts—the humanities and social sciences, must be 'liberal'—even 'liberating'—or else degenerate into mere hypocrisy and obfuscation" [Brantlinger 11, qtd. in Pfister 208]. Pfister compares Hall and Brantlinger in the following terms: "Stuart Hall, then, is a dialectical materialist who analyzes culture because it is politically pressing to do so. Brantlinger is mainly a literary culturalist with an intellectual appreciation for interdisciplinary cultural studies that has a materialist base" [Pfister 209].

11. Pease takes the term "New Americanist" from Frederick Crews, who criticizes the work of a new generation of Americanist literary critics in a 1988 essay in the New York Review of Books *(October 27). Pease, in critiquing Crews, adopts Crews's nomenclature for this group.*

Pease works to expose the "field imaginary" of old Americanists as one which resolutely separates the realm of culture from that of politics: Lionel Trilling's "liberal imagination," Pease argues, aimed at restoring the wholeness of a fractured political subject by recourse to the separate and autonomous sphere of culture. New Americanists, in contrast, "insist on literature as an agency within the political world and thereby violate the fundamental presupposition of the liberal imagination. . . . Insofar as the liberal imagination represents the denial of political questions, the academic field it supervises becomes, for the New Americanists, an appropriate battlefield to fight for the return of these questions to the literary imagination" [19]. Pease thus defines the new terrain of Americanist literary critics as the heretofore repressed political dimension of literature.

The issue of *boundary 2* was reprinted as a collection of essays entitled *Revisionary Interventions into the American Canon* and was initially intended, according to Pease's introduction to the collection, "as the inaugural event for an emergent field of new American studies" [vii]. Yet its inaugural status was revoked when, instead of publishing this collection as the first text in the "New Americanists" series of Duke University Press, Pease replaced it with the alternative *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, a collection of essays coedited by Pease and Amy Kaplan. The replacement was occasioned, writes Pease, by his sense that the New Americanist field delineated in *Revisionary Interventions* "threatened to renew preconstituted categories and master narratives of an earlier American studies" [vii]. The discredited master narrative that threatens in this instance might be understood as coextensive with the very word "America"—a word which defines the field of study in the title of one volume but is noticeably absent from the title of the other. Instead of taking the national "American" frame as the predicate of the field, Kaplan argues for "interrogating [the] formation" [15] of national borders in an international context. Yet while the founding gesture of this (alternative) inaugural volume is to displace "America" in the name of anti-imperialism—to transform the object of study from a revised American canon to the cultures of US imperialism—the absence of "America" from the field of American studies proves difficult to sustain. Pease's third essay redefining the field of American studies appears as the introduction to a third collection of essays, *National Identities and Post-Americanist Narratives*: here Pease resuscitates the term "America," albeit in the negated form of "post-Americanist" narratives.[12] The introduction to this volume thus makes it evident that the work of founding—of rewriting the field of American literary studies—is a restless labor when predicated on a distrust of master narratives.

In this third essay, Pease explicitly repudiates a field-defining metanarrative of "America" in favor of articulating a unifying critical practice among those working in the "new" (or perhaps "post-") Americanist field. Instead of a redefined and broadened canon (as in the first volume), or a redefined America (as in the second volume—an imperialist United States rather than an exceptional America), Pease locates the disciplinary coherence of the field in the methodology of the New Americanist critic. While the metanarrative of America and the common ground of the canon that sustains this narrative disappear, they are replaced by "an account of [New Americanists'] emergence from and continued interconnection with different emancipatory social movements" [3].[13] The New Americanist, Pease argues, abandons an allegiance to disciplinarity in favor of political engagement: "Primary identification with the sociopolitical strategies of social

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12. This collection is a reprint of a special edition of boundary 2 *edited by Pease,* New Americanists 2: National Identities and Postnational Narratives, boundary 2 *19.1 (1992).*

13. It is worth noting that Pease, like Giroux et al., deploys a vocabulary of "emancipation" that is embedded in the nationalist narrative that he is ostensibly criticizing: on the next page, Pease explicitly criticizes the terms of a traditional nationalist (American) narrative which "proposed a scene of emancipation, wherein a captive people liberated themselves from a tyrannical power" [4].

movements, rather than the academic discipline which they practice, leads to a very different description of what it means to be constituted as a New Americanist than the one I advanced in the first volume" [8]. Pease stresses that the New Americanist is defined by "multiple interpellations"—interpellations that fracture the force of the metanarrative of America that previously underwrote the unity of the field. Yet the "multiple" interpellations of the critics Pease speaks of seem less multiple than binary: a division between academic disciplinarity and social movements is repeatedly invoked. And the hierarchical arrangement of the terms of this binary is quite apparent: the "primary identification" of the New Americanist critic lies with "emancipatory" social movements.

Pease does gesture toward a set of formal, textual consequences implied in the methodology of the New Americanist: the national narrative is replaced with "postnational narrative surfaces." Yet these surfaces are available only to the critic who has escaped identification with the national narrative—the disciplinary narrative of American studies and the American canon—through identification with social movements. Pease thus repeatedly invokes the divided body of the critic, a critic who we might envision, on the one hand, reading Hawthorne in a graduate seminar and, on the other hand, attending political meetings of an unspecified sort. Yet this is a division that places politics outside of the academy and away from the text: "narratives" are dangerous in Pease's vocabulary; "movements" are liberatory. While Pease is clearly trying to articulate a model that conjoins the two, an anxiety about the danger of a suffocating academic interpellation seems to be rectified by vigorous exercise in the real world of politics. By escaping the academy, the critic achieves a new potency—indeed, the critic seems to reclaim a form of agency that academic interpellation had destroyed. The extent to which an autonomous liberal subject is reconstituted through escaping the academy is nowhere more clear than in Pease's description of one of the essays in the collection which celebrates Frank Lentricchia as the hero of a new literary criticism. Pease writes (here ventriloquizing the author of the article, John O'Hara):

> *Because Lentricchia never identifies with any of the disciplinary practices—New Historicism, neopragmatism, New Criticism, neoformalism, professionalism—developing within the field of Literary Studies, he can discern the historicity of these developments as the basis for the discovery of his own imaginative agency. In "becoming himself," instead of these academic personae, Lentricchia explains resistively the social imaginaries into which he otherwise would have been absorbed.* [13]

This description is clearly less an account of multiple interpellation than of an unfettering from interpellation altogether—a model of the formation of the heroic critic as autonomous liberal subject.

In his series of introductions redefining the study of American literature, Pease jettisons not only the term "America" but also, in some sense, the term "literature" (canon, narrative). The perverse construction of a field under the sign of negation—we might now call this "the field formerly known as American literature"—provocatively, and I think usefully, destabilizes the central terms of the field. However, replacing these terms with an account of political engagement outside of the field ironically reinscribes the division between literature and politics which Pease's first essay set out to eradicate. While Pease nowhere uses the term "cultural studies" to define the New Americanist, I take the trajectory of his field-defining essays as exemplary of the effect of the claims of cultural studies on the study of American literature.[14] The unreflective invocation of liberal agency

14. Though Pease does not use the term in these essays, Duke University does market Pease's books as "cultural studies" texts. This marketing move speaks to the allure of cultural studies in the current academic climate.

in the form of "heroic" criticism results from an anxiety over political efficacy, yet this notion of critical agency ignores the *textual* structures which inform and enable the ideology of "autonomous" subjectivity. Indeed, as Jeffrey Louis Decker argues, the limits of the interdisciplinary practice of American Studies may be embodied less in an American narrative than in an American heroic subject.[15] Yet such a subject must necessarily obscure his (I use the male pronoun advisedly) imbrication within and dependence upon specific processes of cultural formation and systems of exchange (both monetary and linguistic), which render individual identities anything but autonomous. The investigation of the structuring effects of such formal systems is necessarily antithetical to the notion of the self-inventing, autonomous liberal subject. At its worst, then, the fear of formalism in the American academy—a fear of critical impotence—has left American Studies bereft of the very analytic tools it requires to understand cultural formation and its own "intervention" in culture.

While Pease tends to champion the liberal agency of the literary critic, Stuart Hall's description of two methodological strains within cultural studies—structuralism and culturalism—points up the troubled status of the liberal subject within cultural studies. The two methodological strains described by Hall part ways over precisely the question of agency: does culture determine the subject, or does the subject determine culture? Is culture an escape from the brute determinism of economic models, or does culture itself shape and determine the subject as irrevocably as the economic base did? "Many of the lines of divergence between the two paradigms flow from this point," writes Hall: on the one hand, structuralism within cultural studies suggests a "conception of 'men' as bearers of the structures that speak and place them"; on the other hand, culturalism describes individuals as "active agents in the making of their own history" [Hall 66]. The consequences of understanding the structuralist view as dominant include the erasure of the possibility of "active politics"; yet the consequence of the culturalist view seems to be a "naive humanism" which implies the possibility of a sheerly "voluntarist and populist political practice" [Hall 66]. Hall's analysis thus places the issue of the political agency

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15. Decker's terminology differs somewhat from that used here, though his concerns are similar. He argues that a humanist outlook—"characterized by its adherence to Western notions of 'man' as an autonomous, coherent 'individual' with a wholly private consciousness" [284–85]—has marked and limited American studies from its inception. In this respect, Gayatri Spivak's comments concerning the differing trajectories of humanism in the French and United States academies is illuminating:

> The critique of humanism in France was related to the perceived failure of the European ethical subject after the War. The second wave in the midsixties, coming in the wake of the Algerian revolution, sharpened this . . . because . . . [theorists] felt that their practice was not merely a disinterested pursuit of knowledge, but productive in the making of human beings. . . . At the end of the Second World War, the self-representation of the United States, on the other hand, was that of a savior, both militarily and, as the architect of the Marshall Plan, in the economic and therefore sociocultural sphere. . . . In fact, given the nature of United States society, the phrase "failure of the ethical subject felt by humanist intellectuals" has almost no meaning. . . . [T]he majority of United States teachers in the humanities saw and see the relevant French intellectuals as merely being *anti*humanists who believe that there is no human subject and no truth. *[274–75]*

The swiftness with which deconstruction was issued a death certificate in the United States following the revelation of Paul de Man's wartime writings (the de Man-izing of deconstruction in the US) similarly indicates the relief with which the antihumanist elements of deconstruction were identified with fascism. Jean-Luc Nancy's argument that de Man's ideological "accident" belongs to "our history"—that is, to a Western history of the subject and of essences and origins—is one that seems virtually unthinkable in a climate of heroic (and, by extension, demonic) criticism.

of the liberal subject in question, rather than arrogating this agency to the critic from the outset.

To address historically, rather than simply assume, the autonomy and agency of the liberal subject points us toward the work of a notorious formalist, namely Immanuel Kant. Not only is Kant a principal player in the articulation of the modern, liberal subject (albeit not in the United States, where this role more often falls to John Locke), but he also describes the creation of this eminently political subject in relation to cultural (aesthetic) forms. While I invoke Kant at this point, to do so is evidently heterodox with respect to the field of cultural studies: Kant is perhaps the central figure in an aesthetic tradition that emphasizes formalization and universalism together with the explicit repudiation of materiality—a tradition with which cultural studies is constitutively at odds.[16] Yet Kant is also the central theorist of liberal agency in relation to ethics and aesthetics—as such, Kant addresses precisely the relation of liberal agency to aesthetic formation that is at stake (although, as I have argued, often unreflectively so) in cultural studies. Indeed, Hall's polarization of cultural studies between a humanist, culturalist notion of agency and a structuralist view of determinism might be seen to oddly restage the terms of Kant's antinomy of reason. In Kant's First Critique he asks how we can be both determined by the laws of nature and free at the same time. For both Kant and Hall, the answer to the tension between agency and determinism lies in the field of culture. Moreover, Kant's Third Critique clearly elaborates the relation between a narrowly aesthetic notion of form—form in a work of art, or New Critical form—and the larger "form" of subjectivity, the form at issue in poststructuralism.

In what follows, I offer a brief reading of Kant in order to suggest that his analysis of the formalizing effects of the aesthetic gives us a model for the way in which we might understand the relation of politics to literary form. It is extremely significant that, during the period of revolutionary upheaval surrounding the creation of new nation states in eighteenth-century Europe, Kant turns to aesthetics (*not* revolution) in order to imagine the formation of the liberal citizenry who will constitute the new state. The aesthetic thus bears tremendous political weight in his philosophy: aesthetic form becomes crucial in creating new political identities and regimes. Thus while Kant's model of subject formation may be problematic in terms of its universalizing aims, his model nonetheless speaks directly to the link between aesthetic form and political formation. In rereading Kant's model, I mean to argue for the continued relevance of addressing these formal relations, albeit in terms that are not entirely faithful to Kant's own politics.

Kant's First Critique resolves the antinomy of reason with the transcendental deduction—the claim that we exist under two aspects, as determined in the phenomenal world and as free in the noumenal world. Yet Kant's transcendental deduction—as much as it resolves the problem of the antinomy of reason—leaves us with a profoundly divided subject. Indeed, all three of the critiques are devoted to overcoming the divisive effects of the Kantian solution to the antinomy of reason. In the Third Critique, which concerns me here, Kant turns to aesthetic judgment as a means of bridging the sensuous and supersensuous—as a means of proving that freedom does indeed exist in the world, and that liberal agency and hence morality are sustainable.[17] Yet insofar as Kant is able to

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16. Eric Lott writes, "Cultural studies has had a distinctly difficult time with the concept of aesthetic value. It has done little more than assault, critique, explode, and dismantle it—often for the best of reasons" [545]. Lott, in the article that follows this comment, argues in favor of recognizing aesthetic value. Nonetheless, Ross Posnock comments that Lott's very effort to resuscitate aesthetic value within the frame of cultural studies speaks to "cultural studies' lavish sense of triumph amid the wreckage of the aesthetic" [273].

17. In The Critique of Judgment, *Kant explains the nature of the disjunction between the sensible and the supersensible as follows:*

reconcile the contradiction that informs the liberal subject—to cast a bridge between man's agency (his supersensible aspect) and his conformity to natural law (his sensible aspect)—he does so in the form of a tenuous narrative. Kant discovers man's "free conformity to law" in the experience of aesthetic judgment: in both the judgment of the beautiful and of the sublime, man loses a cognitive sense of the world in order to discover, inadvertently, the law of reason within himself, namely his own supersensible substrate. Kant thus suggests that the freedom that defines the liberal subject is ascertained through producing a disjunction between cognition and reason. Aesthetic judgment of the beautiful entails a *liberation* from cognition of the material world in the "free-play" of the mental powers;[18] the second form of aesthetic judgment described by Kant—judgment of the sublime—involves the outright *failure* of man's cognitive abilities. In both cases, aesthetic judgment requires the temporary *loss* of the subject's cognitive abilities, whether this loss be figured as a liberation or a failure. Recovering the supersensible ground of the subject thus requires *losing* the sensible ground of the subject: self-recovery is grounded in self-loss. In order to ground the liberal subject's claim to freedom, Kant thus conjoins the sensible and supersensible, but he conjoins them in a relation of disjunction. Ultimately, the conjoining of the sensible and the supersensible occurs only metonymically, that is, only insofar as Kant places them next to one another in *temporal* succession.

In a description of the sublime, Kant indicates the extent to which the "narrative" movement of aesthetic judgment, from (loss of) the sensible to the supersensible is repetitive rather than cumulative:

> The realm of the concept of nature under the one legislation [Understanding], and that of the concept of freedom under the other [Reason], are completely cut off from all reciprocal influence that they might severally (each according to its own principles) exert upon the other, by the broad gulf that divides the supersensible from Phenomena. The concept of freedom determines nothing in respect of the theoretical cognition of nature; and the concept of nature likewise nothing in respect of the practical laws of freedom. To that extent, then, it is not possible to throw a bridge from the one realm to the other. *[36–37]*

Despite this broad gulf, Kant is also clear as to the exigency of bridging it: in order for man to be *moral, that is, to act in accordance with the highest end of Reason—namely, freedom—he must be able to realize freedom in the sensible world. If the concept of freedom as the final end is to "take effect in the world," Kant tells us, "this presupposes the condition of the possibility of that end in nature (i.e. in the nature of the Subject as a being of the sensible world, namely, as man)"* [Critique of Judgment *38]. Because man is a creature of the sensible world, the supersensible end of man must necessarily take place in the sensible world.*

18. While Kant labors to show that aesthetic judgment can account for the manifestation of freedom in the sensible world, he ultimately argues that aesthetic judgment alone serves this purpose precisely because it does not *provide a cognition of freedom; rather, aesthetic judgment allows a process of pure subjectivity to take place in which what counts is not any quality of the beautiful object—any positive embodiment of subjectivity in the object—but the free play of the understanding and the imagination in the* absence *of a completed cognition: "The judgment is called aesthetic for the very reason that its determining ground cannot be a concept, but is rather the feeling (of the internal sense) of the concert in the play of the mental powers as a thing only capable of being felt"* [Critique of Judgment *71]. The free play of the mental powers, however, does not lead to chaos but rather to understanding. Ultimately Kant describes aesthetic judgment as "a conformity to law without a law, and a subjective harmonizing of the imagination and the understanding without an objective one"* [Critique of Judgment *86]. The aesthetic judgment is, Kant argues, both subjective and universal: it produces an experience which is universal for all subjects because it evokes* subjectivity *itself, albeit only in its very generality. Through the free play of thought, man ends up with an understanding which concerns himself more than any object at hand.*

> *The mind feels itself* set in motion *in the representation of the sublime in nature. ... This movement, especially in its inception, may be compared with a vibration [*mit einer Erschütterung*], i.e. with a rapidly alternating repulsion and attraction [*mit einem schnellwechselnden Abstoßen und Anziehen*] produced by one and the same Object. The point of excess [*Das Überschwengliche*] for the imagination (towards which it is driven in the apprehension of the intuition) is like an abyss in which it fears to lose itself; yet again for the rational idea of the supersensible it is not excessive, but conformable to law [*gesetzmäßig*] and directed to drawing out such an effort on the part of the imagination: and so in turn as much a source of attraction as it was repellent to mere sensibility.* [*Critique of Judgment* 107]

In this passage, Kant identifies the movement between the sensible and the supersensible as a "vibration"—a rapid alternation between two irreconcilable positions. The abyss which separates these two positions is a source of repulsion and attraction insofar as it is the source of both self-loss and of gain. Kant is careful, however, not to privilege the terms of the gain over the loss: the attraction to the abyss does not overcome the repulsion but merely alternates with or stands in insistent opposition to it.

The aesthetic or narrative resolution of the subject's self-division is thus ultimately procedural: freedom can be recreated, presumably, in another encounter with the beautiful or the sublime, but not embodied positively.[19] This is typically meant to indicate that freedom cannot be represented; a beautiful object does not represent or embody freedom so much as it enables the judgment of the beautiful. But we could also take this to mean that the subject does not embody freedom, either. Rather, the subject remains dependent upon the object for the staging of a self-division which is itself the experience of freedom. Thus, rather than seeing this disjunction between the supersensible dimension of the moral subject and the sensible subject as one that "weakens" or destroys the subject, I would argue that Kant's description of aesthetic judgment indicates that subjectivity is constituted by this very gap between the two realms. The subject is thus *produced* by tracing and retracing the contours of the abyss between the noumenal and the phenomenal in the narrative of aesthetic judgment. While Kant's narrative of aesthetic judgment stages the subject's autonomy, it does so not in order to overcome the gap between matter and form, but in order to trace this gap. Kant's deduction indicates that freedom is grounded not in the emptying out of materiality and the achievement of pure formality but in the procedural conjunction of materiality and formality. Kant thus grounds liberal agency in a profoundly divided subject.

In this reading of Kant, I thus take issue with two established sets of critical claims. First, I am arguing that the Kantian narrative—despite Kant's aspirations—does not produce an abstract, formally coherent subject whose relation to history and materiality

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19. Indeed, the difference between Kant and Schiller can be sketched in these terms: Kant offers a negative presentation of freedom, whereas Schiller provides a positive presentation of freedom. Schiller thus appears to "rescue" the sensuous or the material from Kant's transcendental idealism. In his revision of Kant, Schiller maintains that the aesthetic can indeed serve as a bridge between Sense and Reason (the sensible and the supersensible). Moreover, Schiller's aesthetic mediates between Sense and Reason by means of conjunction, *not disjunction. Schiller ascribes the manifestation of freedom to the beautiful* object, *not to the subjective response to the object. In this sense, then, the material need not be discarded; rather, the material permits the representation of the supersensible itself. What follows from Schiller's argument is the notion of an aesthetic* Bildung *or education and, less directly, the claims of a Matthew Arnold for the educational or civilizing value of a circumscribed set of aesthetic objects. While Arnold's claims are read back into Kant by many, these claims are more strongly grounded in Schiller than in Kant.*

is subsumed in the reassuring operations of the formalizing aesthetic.[20] Rather, I emphasize the failed coherence of the subject—that is, the extent to which the subject must constantly restage its own division to enact formalization. Insofar as my emphasis on division within the subject can be assimilated to the familiar "divided subject" of psychoanalysis and poststructuralism, I am also arguing with a second set of claims which, as described earlier, see the divided subject as itself a universalizing, abstract construct. The decentered subject, on this view, is a sheerly formal structure—a structure empty of historical content and specificity. Yet this is the case only if we seen Kant's narrative of subject formation as teleological—as producing formally coherent subjects. My emphasis on the centrality of the temporal displacement in this narrative (and the necessity of continually reinvoking this temporal displacement) is meant to indicate that the process of formalization ruptures the fantasmatic closure of form because form itself must be generated and articulated in what Kant calls "pathological" (particular, material) terms. That is, the formalizing process will not be able to overcome its material and historical grounds but must continually return to them, and thus inscribe them as disruptions within formalization. Form, then, remains fantasmatic, unachieved save as the telos of a process that necessarily does not arrive at its endpoint.

Kant's narrative of formalization indicates that the liberal subject is never completely consolidated, completely formed, and is always in need of fiction (narrative) to enact consolidation. One such fiction of consolidation is, I would submit, that of authorship itself. Indeed, a growing body of criticism traces a link between authorship and the terrain of the liberal subject; moreover, authorship (or the concept of authorship) may be understood to *create* rather than merely reflect the status of the liberal subject as an autonomous agent.[21] In short, authorship (a familiar mode of "self-invention") may be seen as a privileged model of autonomous subjectivity: the author is one who masters the process of formalization and constitutes his own agency and unity in that action. Benjamin Franklin is exemplary in this respect: he both stages his life as a text over which he has authorial command and uses textuality—his position as an author and as a printer—to accrue wealth and prestige to his name. This model of Benjamin Franklinesque self-fashioning is problematic on Kantian terms, however, because the process of formalization remains indebted to a disjunctive relation to materiality. The position of authorial self-mastery is subject not only to a deconstructive critique (to the claim that language functions by way of dissemination which undermines linguistic mastery, that is, to a "formalist" critique based on the iterative nature of language) but also to a critique that identifies the specific material relations in which authorship remains embedded. In the brief reading that follows, I'd like to suggest the pathological (differential, historical, material) ways in which formalization is enacted. My textual example is one provided by the obsessive theorist of twoness, Mark Twain. As Marc Shell writes, "To mark the one in twain is the game in Twain" [7; see also Dreiser; Gillman]. My reading will suggest that the problems of authorial unity and the divisive impasses of liberalism are formally inscribed in Twain's fictions—that is, both the production of these impasses and Twain's efforts to deal with them assume important formal dimensions in his text.

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20. See especially Terry Eagleton for the argument that the process of aesthetic formalization amounts to a form of bourgeois hegemony.

21. See, for instance, Habermas. For the most explicit version of this argument in an American context, see Armstrong and Tennenhouse, who argue that the conundrum of the English Revolution (was it caused by the rise of individualism or did it cause the rise of individualism?) can in part be addressed by understanding individualism as the product of a new public sphere, namely the realm of publication (particularly in the colonies). This realm creates the possibility of a new subject—the author—who is a quintessentially liberal subject. Their argument is indebted to Foucault's description of the author [see "What Is an Author?"] and to Benedict Anderson's analysis of the public sphere created by the realm of publication [see Imagined Communities*]. See also Warner.*

The specific material relations in which Twain wrote indicate the acute paradox of understanding authorship as unfettered liberal agency. Susan Gillman describes the turn-of-the-century setting of Twain's authorship in the following terms:

> *Increases in population and literacy, combined with advances in technology and transport, were the enabling conditions for a massive increase in book and journal output following the Civil War. The rapidly expanding business of producing and marketing literary products created what was in some ways a boom for writers. . . . [Yet] the net result was an implied paradox: as the man of letters' name grew more and more widely known and his books were more and more popularly consumed, he became less and less in control of his book/product, his audience/consumer, and his own image. . . . The writer's authorial freedom, then, is fatally compromised by the success of his own writings.* [23–24]

Authorship, following Gillman's reading, *should* serve as a figure for the citizen who enters the public sphere—a public sphere that, if we accept Habermas's idealized vision, is enabled by commercial print and sustains rational debate and liberal republicanism.[22] Yet rather than serving as Twain's vehicle for becoming a self-possessed autonomous subject, authorship and entry into the public sphere have the reverse effect of dispossessing him of his freedom and identity. Unlike Benjamin Franklin, who parlayed a printing career into exemplary liberal autonomy and authorship, Twain's investments in a publishing house and the technology of printing (the Paige typesetter) led him to financial bankruptcy. Both writing and publishing, then, serve as much to unmake Twain—to compromise his freedom and financial autonomy—as to enable him.

The model of author as liberal subject presumes that the author is able to use language as an inert tool which ultimately functions in a mimetic fashion, that he is thus able to shape his self-representation and to enact and achieve self-mastery in this process. But in Gillman's description of Twain, which points to the displacements of capitalism operating in the sphere of publication, when representation becomes a commodity it circulates in ways that fail to return Twain's investment to "himself." Here, the formal qualities of authorship—a mastery of language and the translation of the self into an enabling kind of textuality—are at odds with the material conditions of the text's production, circulation, and reception. Twain's introduction to *Those Extraordinary Twins* points to a second set of problems with the model of authorship as formal mastery: the language with which Twain works, he complains, is far from inert; rather, it has a life of its own which robs him of mastery.

According to Twain, *Those Extraordinary Twins* is not only about a doubled subject but is itself a double text. When he began writing the story of a set of Italian Siamese twins who visit the sleepy Missouri town of Dawson's Landing in 1830, Twain explains, a different set of characters began asserting themselves and eventually forced him to accommodate them in a separate novel, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. The story of the Siamese twins began to "change . . . itself from a farce to a tragedy" in an "embarrassing" fashion, writes Twain, until he discovered that he had written "two stories tangled together" which "obstructed and interrupted each other at every turn and created no end of confusion and annoyance." "I could not offer the book for publication," he concludes, "for I was afraid it would unseat the reader's reason." In an attempt to solve the problem, Twain "pulled one of the stories out by the roots and left the other one," thereby performing "a kind of

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22. Habermas argues that the creation of the public sphere during the Enlightenment enables the transformation of the feudal subject ("subjectum") into the liberal, self-governing ("reasoning") subject [26].

literary Cesarean operation" [119]. Twain is beset by embarrassment as an author who cannot master his material: he then tries to reestablish that mastery by performing an operation that would divide one body from another, that would eradicate the problem of two identities in one body or two stories within one text. In extricating the tragedy of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Twain assumes the position of master surgeon rather than embarrassed and inept author. Yet despite this resolution, doublings proliferate vertiginously in the double texts of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* and *Those Extraordinary Twins*. As such, each tale seems to stage a version of the very problem of authorship Twain confronts: the difficulty of achieving formal coherence in a world where matter is far from inert.

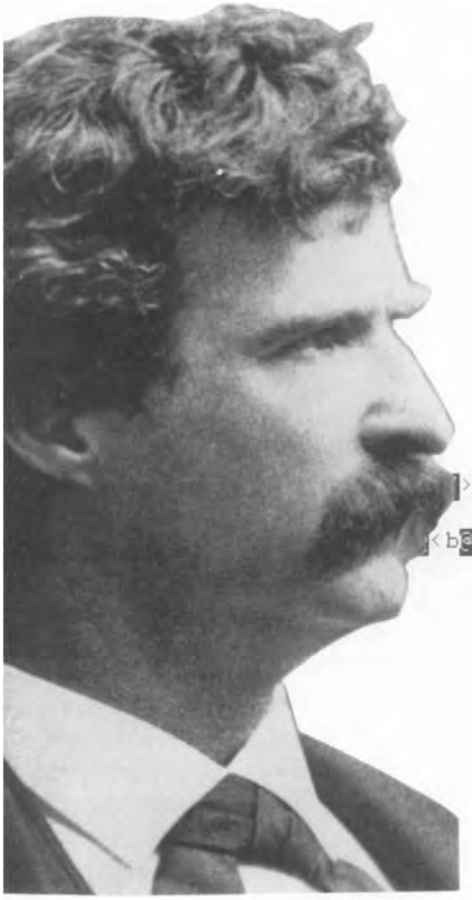
The "suppressed farce" of the Siamese twins, the tale Twain introduces as an example of his failed mastery as an author, works to elaborate rather than resolve the problems that beset an individual who cannot properly claim autonomy and self-possession. In the opening pages of the text, Rowena and Aunt Patsy anticipate the arrival of Counts Angelo and Luigi, who will board at their Missouri home. "Insane with joy" [123], and as yet unaware of the "conglomerate" nature of the twins, Rowena and Aunt Patsy savor the foreignness of their expected visitors—their European roots, their exotic names, their high breeding. In its opening scene, then, the tale reverses the plot of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* and brings European royalty to the inner reaches of America. Yet when the twins arrive, they prove more foreign than expected—rather than simply charming, they are "a stupefying apparition." The foreign nature of the twins seemingly lies less in their royal birth than in their extraordinary connectedness, yet their misshapen body serves as a bizarre literalization of the distinction between a hierarchical European system (where identity is based on contiguity to others in the feudal chain) and American individualism (where identity is construed as atomistic).[23]

The difficulties of the indissolubly attached and incompletely individualized twins are initially described as problems of consumption: while Angelo is abstemious, Luigi enjoys whiskey; while Angelo prefers tea, Luigi likes coffee; while Luigi smokes, Angelo prefers fresh air. Yet the problem of the deformed subject has more profound effects than that of disturbing consumer identity. The first of these effects is the disruption of language: when Aunt Patsy Cooper refers to the twins as "he," Rowena responds, "*They*, ma—you ought to say *they*—it's nearer right" [161]. Rowena's correction, which is only "nearer" right than Aunt Patsy's reference, suggests the impossibility of squaring this double self with the organizing syntax of individualism.[24] The second effect of the double status of the twins arises with respect to the law. Accused of assault, the twins are placed on trial. While it is established in court that they did commit assault, Pudd'nhead Wilson (the eastern lawyer who will rise to titular status in the text Twain delivers from the misshapen body of the *Twins*) is able to convince a jury not to convict either of them. Wilson insists upon the epistemological uncertainty that obtains concerning the agent behind the action: because it cannot be proved which one of the twins enacted the assault (a kick), neither can be convicted.

The epistemological questions raised at the trial indicate that verifiable evidence can be located only in the relation between an individual subject and inert matter. Cross-

23. The extent to which such an atomistic model of identity is unthinkable to Angelo is suggested in his description of the "strange and unsocial and uncanny construction of other men" [137]: "To be separate, and as other men are! How awkward it would seem; how unendurable. What would he do with his hands, his arms? How would his legs feel? How odd, and strange, and grotesque every action, attitude, movement, and gesture would be. To sleep by himself, eat by himself, walk by himself—how lonely, how unspeakably lonely! No, no any fate but that. In every way and from every point, the idea was revolting" [136].

24. Twain reiterates this problem by having the narrator repeat the pronomial confusion: the narrator refers to the twins as "He—or preferably they—" [161] and later as "it—or them" [167], suggesting a slide not only between singular and plural conceptions of self, but the extent to which this slide compromises the status of the twins as a conceivable subject, rendering them(?) an "it."



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examined concerning her assertion that the Twins regularly switch control of their legs on a weekly basis, Aunt Betsy is asked, "Madam, do you know—do you know absolutely *know*, independently of anything these gentlemen have told you—that the power over their legs passes from the one to the other regularly every week? . . . How do you *know*? That is the question" [152]. Aunt Betsy replies to the lawyer, "Don't you talk to me like that, Sim Robinson—I won't have it. How do I know, indeed! How do *you* know what you know? Because somebody told you. You didn't invent it out of your own head, did you? Why, these Twins are the truthfulest people in the world; and I don't think it becomes you to sit up there and throw slurs at them when they haven't been doing anything to you. And they are orphans besides" [152]. The debate over the status of knowledge thus shifts between two models: a model that argues that knowledge can occur "independently" or atomistically between an individual and an objective world, and Aunt Betsy's model, which defines knowledge as intersubjective, as constituted only within an array of social relations (that of older woman to younger man, that of orphans to other members of society). While Aunt Betsy's knowledge is dismissed as nonknowledge, as "hear-say," the court can nonetheless not produce knowledge of the twins' guilt or innocence on the basis of an atomistic model of the subject. The Judge, though forced to release the twins, elaborates (to the jury) the disastrous legal and social effects of their inability to single out a culpable subject: "You have set adrift, unadmonished, in this community, two men endowed with an awful and mysterious gift, a hidden and grisly power for evil—a power by which each in his turn may commit crime after crime of the most heinous character, and no man able to tell which is the guilty or which the innocent party in any case of them all. Look to your homes—look to your property—look to your lives—for you have need!" [154]. The "miscarriage" of justice thus indicates the extent to which the law relies upon the assumption of autonomous individualism in order to establish guilt and innocence.

Not only do the twins cause a disruption of the legal system, they finally disrupt the system of representative government as well when they run against one another for public office. Throwing themselves into the activities of democracy, Luigi and Angelo compete aggressively with one another for a seat on the board of aldermen. When Luigi is ultimately elected, he is not allowed to serve: were he to sit with the board, Angelo would necessarily accompany him, and Angelo cannot be privy to the deliberations of the group. As a result of this dilemma, the government grinds to a halt. Finally, the citizens agree to lynch Luigi in order to restore order. The lynching of Luigi is pointedly aporetic: we must presume that if Luigi is lynched, Angelo will die as well, yet the text makes no mention of that consequence. Rather, the text closes, as it opened, with an authorial remark concerning the "extravagant" and failed nature of the tale. Twain reiterates the claim that *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is the text that survived his surgical endeavors: as such, the final note to the text gestures to *Pudd'nhead Wilson* for the closure that is clearly lacking in *Those Extraordinary Twins*.

If we understand the novel as a form historically linked to securing the premises of a modern liberal subjectivity, as has been repeatedly argued, then *Those Extraordinary Twins* indeed fails extravagantly in this endeavor. As a genre, the novel might be said to operate in two directions: it at once posits a politically significant homology among subjects (a shared freedom to pursue desires in a shared, objective world) and a series of finely calibrated differentiations among subjects which are coded as private (defined by an array of personal desires, an interior world specific to each subject).[25] The private world

25. *D. A. Miller argues that the point of the novel is "to confirm the novel-reader in his identity as 'liberal subject' a term . . . which allude[s] not just to the subject whose private life, mental or domestic, is felt to provide constant inarguable evidence of his constitutive 'freedom,' but also to, broadly speaking, the political regime that sets store by this subject" [x]. Catherine Gallagher describes the homology established among subjects in the novel in terms of the fictionality of the*

of the novelistic subject, as Nancy Armstrong argues, sustains the possibility of a new political order: "In place of the intricate status system that had long dominated British thinking, [novelists] began to represent an individual's value in terms of his, but more often in terms of her, essential qualities of mind. . . . [The novel] presume[d] to say that neither birth nor the accoutrements of title and status accurately represented the individual; only the more subtle nuances of behavior indicated what one was really worth" [4]. We might imagine, then, that the novel is a form precisely designed to transform Italian counts into Missouri aldermen. Yet rather than forming a politically coherent subject through the elaboration and discipline of private desires, Twain presents a "conglomerate" subject with no ability to control the minutiae of private life: the twins cannot individuate themselves by controlling what they eat, when they sleep, what they read, or how they worship. Yet Twain's farce presents the twins' story less as an allegory of the failures of an older social order than of the incipient violence and incoherence of the new atomistic order. Far from differentiating subjects on the basis of interior desire exercised on an inert, objective world, Twain blurs both the subjective and objective poles of this distinction. The "miscarriage of justice" that results indicates less the failure of the twins to achieve formalization than the violence inherent in a political world that insists on such a uniform subject. The aporia of the text lies in its inability to motivate the procedures of formalization that the novel traditionally enacts. For example, the representative government in Dawson's Landing cannot function without insisting upon the formal homology of its subjects, and as a result the citizenry must excise the misshapen figure of the twins. Yet this excision cannot be motivated by an epistemology which sees formalization as the operation of the subject on an *inert* world; rather, this excision takes place on the animated body of the twins and thus assumes murderous dimensions. That Twain cannot motivate or justify his authorship of this text points to the sense in which the twins stand as a figure of Twain himself, the deformed, "jack leg" author. "Twain" is thus "a twin": like the twins, he struggles less with an inert world shaped to his desires than with a world that talks back to him, that returns his image to him in a debased and misshapen form. The lynching of "a twin" at the close of *Those Extraordinary Twins* might thus be taken as the figure of an authorial and signatorial suicide for Twain, a figure indicating the impossibility of authorship as a model of liberal autonomy.[26]

Pudd'nhead Wilson, the text offered as deferred closure to the problem of twinning, systematically reverses the failures of *Twins*. Rather than insisting on epistemological uncertainty, the miscarriage of justice, and the coercive and violent nature of liberal political identity, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* proposes the concise interlocking of justice, epistemology, and liberal identity. The novel begins as Roxy, the slave mother who is white by appearance, laments the fact that she lives in danger of having her infant son sold down the river: to avoid this fate, she switches her (socially black, phenotypically white) child with the master's child. As a result, Roxy's son embodies the racially doubled self—although he occupies the position of a white master, Roxy and we as readers know that he is "really" black. As "Tom" grows into a thoroughly unpleasant and immoral adult, he takes to stealing the property of the townspeople to pay off his gambling debts. He thus literalizes the threat to property that the judge warns of in *Those Extraordinary Twins*. Ultimately, Tom kills his surrogate father, Judge York Driscoll, thus extending his threat to the legal and patriarchal foundations of the community. Yet the threat to property, life, and law which the judge cannot control in the figure of the Siamese twins is eradicated in the courtroom scene with which *Pudd'nhead Wilson* concludes. In that scene, Wilson reveals Tom's true identity, and Tom is sold down the river to pay his owner's debts. The

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form: "Because [fictional identities] were conjectural, suppositional identities belonging to no one, they could be universally appropriated. A story about nobody was nobody's story and hence could be entered, occupied, identified with by anybody" [168].

26. I thank Cesare Casarino for the specific terms of this formulation.

conundrums of the Twins are thus resolved by resorting to a racialization of difference: rather than occurring within one body, difference occurs between two bodies that are socially coded as black and white.

While *Pudd'nhead Wilson* has received a great deal of critical attention recently for its treatment of race, the racial issues it treats have not been considered in relation to form. Indeed, while the story of black and white "twins" of mixed race as well as mixed identity would seem to dominate the text, this story is also displaced, as the title indicates, by the story of the production of Wilson as an autonomous subject—a subject who will stand before us "white and free" [112] at the end of the text. Placing *Pudd'nhead Wilson* next to its failed double, *Those Extraordinary Twins,* underscores the prominence of this second narrative—a narrative concerning Wilson's rise from ignominy to prominence. This second narrative of subject formation reveals not just the problems of race that beset the nation in the era of Jim Crow, but the extent to which racialization is itself embedded in the formation of a coherent liberal subject.

Read as Wilson's story rather than that of Tom and his "twin" Chambers, the text begins with Wilson's arrival in Dawson's Landing and a confusing formal distinction between cats and dogs. In the opening paragraphs of the novel, Twain limns the objects which constitute the shared world of the novel: the generically whitewashed houses, blooming gardens, and windowsill flowerpots of Dawson's Landing. At the end of this description, a peculiar cat appears:

> *When there was room on the ledge outside of the pots and boxes for a cat, the cat was there—in sunny weather—stretched at full length, asleep and blissful, with her furry belly to the sun and a paw curved over her nose. Then that home was complete, and its contentment and peace were made manifest to the world by this symbol, whose testimony is infallible. A home without a cat—and a well fed, well petted, and properly revered cat—may be a perfect home, perhaps, but how can it prove title?* [3]

At the end of a lengthy, mimetic description of the town of Dawson's Landing, Twain introduces a cat, but this cat is not merely a cat: rather, the cat is the symbol of a "complete" home. Twain is not, then, as Freud would say, calling "*un chat un chat*" in this passage: rather, Twain is calling a cat a symbol. Twain thus highlights a system of reference in which things are not simply themselves; rather, they stand for other things and stand in symbolic relation to other things. This order of representation, then, is not what Roland Barthes would call the code of the "real" in fiction—the code in which the insignificant detail signifies (insofar as it has "no meaning") precisely the objective quality of the world within the text. Rather than the world of the "real," then, Twain imagines a world marked by meaning—a world closer to the form of allegory than to the form of the novel.

Yet in contrast to the signifying cat that we meet on the first page, Twain introduces a dog on the third page of the novel, which, though full of sound and fury, seems not to signify. The dog interrupts a conversation between a number of townspeople and Wilson (soon to be "Pudd'nhead"), who has just arrived in town. When the "invisible" dog interrupts the conversation, Wilson states, "I wish I owned half of that dog." When a townsman asks him why, he responds, "Because, I would kill my half" [5]. The townspeople, who, Twain tells us, are impervious to irony, believe Wilson is serious rather than joking and label him an idiot—"Pudd'nhead." The text thus begins with what appears to be a misnomer—Wilson is incorrectly identified as an idiot because the people of Dawson's Landing cannot make sense of his language.

As readers, however, we are surely asked to laugh at the townspeople who cannot laugh at Wilson's joke. Wilson's joke, *we* should understand, points up the status of the dog as both property and unified agency or life and the contradiction between the two. If

you can own something, you can sell half of it, you can quantify it, but the life of a dog is indivisible, unquantifiable. Wilson's "joke" operates somewhat similarly to remarks about having 2.5 children. Yet Wilson's joke is a bit unfunny, perhaps because it seems radically unmotivated. Indeed, according to Shelley Fisher Fishkin, Twain may have borrowed the joke from P. T. Barnum. In his autobiography, Barnum reports that H. Bailey was once cheated of the proceeds for exhibiting an elephant in which he owned half interest and subsequently announced, "I am fully determined to shoot my half" [qtd. in Fishkin 26]. Bailey's joke is funnier, it seems, because the elephant has a use-value and the shooting of the elephant directly impinges upon its money-earning capacity. Since we are accustomed to thinking of money as quantifiable and divisible, the slippage between these terms and the elephant seems more plausible, more humorous. Wilson, however, has effectively told only half the joke by omitting any term which would motivate the characterization of the dog in quantifiable and thus divisible terms.

By killing half the joke, Wilson makes evident his own unspoken assumption that a homology exists between a dog and a pile of money. Wilson's dog, unlike the revered cat, has no significance other than in its existence as matter: proof of its material nature lies in its divisible quality, its ability to stand in for radically different objects such as money. The townspeople miss this assumption and thus miss the joke. Wilson's joke, then, serves to turn the dog into inert matter: rather than a barking nuisance (matter which talks back), Wilson turns the dog into something that he, as master surgeon, can divide and conquer. On one level, however, Wilson is surely ironizing such an attitude toward objects and lives. Indeed, as Fishkin argues, Wilson's comment can be taken as an attack on the reification that seemingly underwrites the slave labor system of Dawson's Landing: "Wilson's absurd comment that he would 'kill his half' of the dog makes him a marked man, a marked fool, in his community. But aren't his fellow citizens engaged in just such a proposition? As they systematically degrade and destroy that 'half' of the people in their land whose skin is the 'wrong' color, don't they destroy their own community as well?" [12]. Twain will, moreover, make explicit the link between the apportioning of the dog and the apportioning of people in his ironic description of Roxy's racial status: "To all intents and purposes Roxy was as white as anybody, but the one-sixteenth of her which was black out-voted the other fifteen parts and made her a negro. She was a slave, and salable as such. Her child was thirty-one parts white, and he, too, was a slave and by a fiction of law and custom a negro" [9]. Wilson, on this reading, is particularly skilled at exposing what others cannot see—at bringing to light the invisible and highly questionable assumptions about the ways in which capitalism turns people into divisible things.

On another level, however, Wilson can be seen as introducing the very knowledge or episteme that he ironizes here. In narrative terms, Wilson's arrival in Dawson's Landing at the opening of the text stands in sharp contrast to the arrival of Luigi and Angelo at the beginning of *Those Extraordinary Twins*. Rather than bringing a mode of hierarchical identity to a world of individualism, Wilson brings an atomistic mode of identity and the code of the "real" to a town which is defined by its allegiance to an outmoded feudal structure (the local gentry are loyal to the codes and social order of the "FFV," the "First Families of Virginia") and an anachronistic symbolic code of representation. More importantly, it is ultimately not clear that Wilson's irony functions as a critique of the system of slavery. Indeed, the triumph of Wilson as the purveyor of evidence and identity at the trial that closes the novel *enables* the sale of Tom down the river. What appeared unspeakably cruel and unconscionable at the opening of the novel—that Roxy's son should be sold down the river—appears in the form of justice, as engineered by Wilson, at the close of the novel. Further, it is through the mimetic code of representation (that of dogs rather than cats) that Wilson accomplishes this closure.[27]

27. Jameson argues that the "process" of the novel creates a kind of subjectivity through "the production of a new kind of objectivity" [152]. The task of the novel is, he argues, to produce "that

Thus in the final pages of the novel, Wilson, who has taken a series of fingerprints of the residents of the town for years, realizes from seeing his fingerprints that Tom is an impostor as well as the murderer of his surrogate father. Tom tries to cheer up Wilson, who seems to be losing his court case, by reassuring him, "you'll hang somebody yet." Wilson, in response, mutters, "It is no lie to say I am sorry I have to begin with you, miserable dog though you are!" [103]. Reluctantly, then, Wilson will kill the half-dog he jestingly sought to execute at the start of the novel. By exposing Tom as one-thirty-second black, Wilson will transform him into property which can be disposed of by able liberal subjects such as Wilson.[28]

Wilson's use of technology to establish the truth of Tom's identity is thus consonant with the episteme of liberalism found wanting in *Those Extraordinary Twins*. The inert, physical evidence of the fingerprint maps onto the singularity of every subject: as Wilson tells the court, "Every human being carries with him from his cradle to his grave certain physical marks which do not change their character, and by which he can always be identified—and that without a shade of doubt or question" [108]. As proof of Wilson's claim, the spectators in the court look at their own hands, examine their own fingertips, and are astounded at the fact that their own hands carry the "evidence" of their singularity. The metaphorical "hand" as agent is thus literalized as the singular "hand" covered with patterned whorls of skin. Yet the evidence Wilson presents, in a series of enlarged charts and diagrams (so familiar to us now from our daily media schooling in forensics), nonetheless effects a sleight of hand, for it is unclear precisely what the fingerprints of Tom prove. After presenting his evidence—or rather, an entire theory of evidence, a new mode of reading the identity of subjects in the inert and unique marks left by their fingers—Wilson commands Tom to make his mark: "Valet de Chambre, negro and slave—falsely called Thomas à Beckett Driscoll—make upon the window the fingerprints that will hang you!" The fingerprints thus prove a chain of associations: negro, slave, murderer. The chain of meaning that inheres in this series of substitutions bespeaks the logic of the symbol (the cat) over that of mimesis (the dog). While fingerprinting will "prove" that Tom is not really Tom, and thus reveal that he is "really" black, this objective reality has no meaning save within an existing, racialized social order. The identity of Tom is thus lodged in a series of social equations between blackness, slavery, and criminality. Nonetheless, Wilson's sleight of hand establishes blackness as an objective identity: thus the identity of blackness, initially described by Twain as a "fiction of law and custom," now is functionally accorded the status of fact.

While Wilson claims, at the trial, that he will liberate the white child who has been treated as a slave all of his life—that this man will "stand before [the audience] white and free!" [142]—Wilson ultimately produces only himself as white and free. Freed from the moniker of "Pudd'nhead," Wilson's words cease to "unseat reason." At the close of the trial, rather, "all of his sentences were golden . . . all were marvelous" [143]. (We might

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very 'referent' . . . of which this new narrative discourse will then claim to be the 'realistic' reflection" [152]. See also Roberto Unger's claim that the "liberal doctrine" requires an epistemology of objectivity: the liberal doctrine must assert that "there is only one world of facts and only one form of understanding, fundamentally alike in everyone" [40].

28. Roxy's comment upon switching the infants—"Dog my cats if it ain't all I kin do to tell t'other fum which, let alone his pappy" [14]—might also be read in terms of a shift in epistemology: knowledge is no longer lodged in e..trinsic and hierarchical qualities, but located in objective qualities. What will distinguish Tom's and Chambers's "real" identities from this point forward will not be name, position, or clothing but our "knowledge" of their racial difference—a knowledge secured finally by Wilson's objective fingerprinting evidence. Rather than functioning as a code of difference, race thus acquires the status of biological fact. See Eva Saks for a discussion of the need for establishing a biological discourse of racial difference after the demise of slavery. For a catalogue of references to cats and dogs in the text, see Elliot and Fisher 306–09.

presume, as well, that now that Wilson has learned to separate black from white and person from property through the formal, objective means of fingerprinting, he has also weaned himself of the duplicitous, ironic speech that got him in trouble at the outset of the novel.) The production of Tom's blackness enables the production of Wilson's (white) authorial agency and representativity. By separating out the contradictions of person and property such that Tom becomes property and Wilson becomes a person, the unsettling divided status of the liberal subject is resolved. We should note, here, the significant displacement of the freedom produced at the end of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. Chambers, the white child who has been raised as a slave, does, indeed, have his patronymic restored. Yet while "rich and free" he is nonetheless in a "most embarrassing situation": "He could neither read nor write, and his speech was the basest dialect of the Negro quarter. His gait, his attitudes, his gestures, his bearing, his laugh—all were vulgar and uncouth; his manners were the manners of a slave. . . . The poor fellow would not endure the terrors of the white man's parlour, and felt at home and at peace nowhere but in the kitchen" [144]. While the unmasking that occurs in the trial would seem to reverse the initial reversal—that is, to restore Tom to his position as slave and property and Chambers to his position of white personhood, this is not what occurs. Chambers's authorial agency is permanently compromised (he can't read or write) by his upbringing as a slave; rather, it is Wilson who gains authorial agency by the act of turning Tom into property.

I would suggest, as well, that Twain gains authorial agency in the same moment. By racializing the formal impasses of liberal subjectivity, he establishes himself as the master of his text. He also rewrites the farce of the twins as a Franklinesque story of success. Wilson, who is initially misrecognized as an idiot, is able to prove his inner worth and assume a position of social authority (through his own inventive ingenuity) by the close of the story. Yet clearly this narrative requires that the fiction of racial identity be taken as foundational fact. Thus the story which is so good at exposing the fiction of racial essentialism tends to reinforce the notion of an individual, essential self in the person of Pudd'nhead Wilson. By contrast, Roxy, who at the beginning of the novel functions as Wilson's twin—both are intelligent outsiders in the town, central characters in the novel—has by the end been demoted to a barely human wreck. The formal qualities of identity that support the ultimate triumph of Wilson (the notions of evidence that inhere in systems of racial classification and technologies of identification such as fingerprinting) and the public recognition of his "true" nature as clever and insightful, also work to repeatedly dispossess Roxy of any publicly recognizable identity. Roxy loses her status as a mother (she repeatedly states that all she asks of Tom is to be called "mother"), she loses the money she earns working on a steamship, she loses her status as free when Tom sells her down the river, and she ultimately loses her desire to live when Tom is sold down the river. Despite repeated attempts to trade on her own intelligence, she is never able to parlay this intelligence into cultural capital, into cultural identity.

Twain wrote *Pudd'nhead Wilson* in 1892, the year when the most lynchings occurred in the United States. While *Those Extraordinary Twins* ends with the aporetic lynching of the doubled self, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* enacts what amounts to a lynching as well, but in racialized terms that are no longer aporetic but strikingly historical. The formal problems of liberalism, staged twice here, indicate the way in which liberalism entails processes of formalization which are perhaps universal, but whose terms are anything but universalizing. Rather, subjects are placed differentially in relation to form: the contradiction of liberal subjectivity is played out by Twain in 1892 in racialized terms which equate whiteness with agency and blackness with property. The complicity between Wilson's rise and Roxy's demise suggests that the impasses of the liberal subject are, as I've stated, differentially distributed. Roxy and Wilson stand in pointedly different relations to the form of the liberal subject, and the doubling form of Twain's narrative plays out this formal dilemma for us. The ease with which racial coding becomes the alibi

for liberal agency in this tale correlates with the historical moment in which Twain wrote the text—a time period in which Reconstruction ended and the racial codings of Jim Crow legislation instituted an official renewal or re-endorsement of the ideology of racism that sustained race slavery. Moreover, liberalism formalizes and encodes a shift in epistemes from an overtly oppressive and hierarchized system of slavery to the naturalized system of marks which locate the failures of subjectivity in the inert matter of the world (biology, evidence) rather than in the overt operations of power.

In this reading of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, I mean to have indicated that the political stakes of literature are not always or simply contextual. Indeed, it is precisely the resource of literary studies to be able to address the formal qualities of texts in relation to historical and material contexts. The familiar opposition of political agency and "mere" formalism obscures the political distribution and enactment of formal notions of subjectivity, agency, and authorship. Indeed, I would further suggest that the aesthetic may be most political in its formal dimensions, that is, in the forms that it deploys which aim toward the production of coherent political subjects. The proto-mystery narrative and novelistic realism of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* tend to endorse an essentialist vision of race and identity: true identity (in the case of both Tom and Wilson) is revealed at the end of the novel. In this sense, the form of the text (in a New Critical sense) maps onto the form of subjectivity (in a poststructuralist sense). When Pudd'nhead Wilson becomes his own man, "white and free," at the end of this text, we should, I would argue, be disturbed by the seemingly coherent form of this liberal subject: we should similarly wonder at the critic who, like Pease's Lentricchia, works at "becoming himself" through the activity of heroic criticism.

If we understand this formalizing process, described to us by Kant, as disjunctive and repetitive rather than as a teleological and universalizing Schillerian *Bildung*, then Kant's model helps to account for something like cultural formation—for the force of culture in political distributions of power and identity. While Kant has typically been read as offering an account of the aesthetic education which produces universal, abstract subjects, it is possible to use Kant's account of the political force of culture to consider a less than universal production of subjects—to consider, that is, the production of subjects in relation to specific historical moments and specific cultural forms. Kant's own attempts to produce a coherent, universal liberal subject point precisely to the political stakes of form and aesthetics. In this terrain—a markedly literary terrain, if you will—politics is at stake. The New Americanist criticism has tended to suggest the opposite: that is, politics have been located in the context rather than the text, or alternatively, in the heroic agency of the literary critic. Kant, however, points us toward a notion of the relation between politics and literary form. My reading of Kant—in emphasizing the temporal dislocations within the process of abstraction—points more specifically to the way in which the model of formalization is potentially useful for talking about specific historical and political subjects rather than an abstractly formal model of the subject. Twain's text, in turn, indicates the culturally specific terms in which narratives of subject formation are imagined and articulated. The economies of meaning in Twain's text locate individuals quite differently with respect to power, identity, and agency: subjects are thus differentially produced through formalizing narratives. Ultimately, then, I'm suggesting in this series of readings that literary criticism need not, in a self-sacrificing gesture, locate "real" meaning in a politics external to the text, nor, in a questionable heroics, locate political force in the liberatory agency of the critic. Rather, literary form itself can speak to us of the specific operations of the creation and distribution of political power.

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