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WHITMAN'S INSCRIPTIONS:
THE LOGIC OF MANUSCRIPT AND CIVIC SPACE
IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA

by
Blake Bronson-Bartlett

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Doctor of
Philosophy degree in English
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

August 2014

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Ed Folsom

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Graduate College
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH.D. THESIS

This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

Blake Bronson-Bartlett

has been approved by the Examining Committee
for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy
degree in English at the August 2014 graduation.

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Garrett Stewart

To Jan, Gil, and Deana,
for their patience

All are written to me...

Walt Whitman
“Song of Myself,” Section 20

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Friends and family who endured my ramblings, fellow graduate students no less patient, librarians who paged requests, overworked academics who answered emails, undergraduates at the University of Iowa who tested trial ideas in the classroom, and many more anonymous witnesses to the growth of this project, have all the gratitude I can supply. Here's to an infinite conversation.

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ABSTRACT

“Whitman’s Inscriptions” examines the link between civic space and material practice in the writings of Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, and Louisa May Alcott. Combining media studies, bibliography, and urban history, my dissertation argues that these four authors used manuscript as a medium of civic engagement in their published works. In each chapter, my comparative analyses of manuscript practices and published texts examine the historical layers of storage, formatting, and circulation conventions that assumed new forms in literary writing under the specific technological conditions of the industrial-urban era. Walt Whitman is the central figure of my project, as my dissertation title suggests, because his writings record the “noise” of the mid-nineteenth-century’s industrial-urban conditions.

In Chapters Two, Four, and Six, I demonstrate how the noise registered by Whitman’s published works discloses the storage, formatting, and circulation functions of writing in practice and thus guides materialist interpretations of his writings. Comparative analyses of Whitman’s manuscripts and published works with those of his contemporaries highlight, I argue, the practical characteristics of their writings. Following the bibliographic theories of Donald Reiman and Jerome McGann, I retrospectively periodize the published works of the authors in my canon through “thick” descriptions of their texts, tracing back Emerson’s published essays and lectures to the manuscript practices of Renaissance humanists (Chapter One), Thoreau’s nature writing to Enlightenment era archival practices (Chapter Three), and Alcott’s fiction to modern diaries (Chapter Five). The periodization of each authors’ writing practices allows me to describe the link between writings systems and the historic civic spaces from which they emerged, and in which they continue to determine a general practice. The periodization of writing systems in Emerson, Thoreau, and Alcott leads, in turn, to the description of

Whitman’s own writing system as a system to come, a recording of emergent conditions at the onset of the industrial-urban era.

“Whitman’s Inscriptions” is, generically speaking, new historicist in its self-reflective tendencies. All six chapters are organized into parts that frame my comparative analyses with an engagement with secondary literature on new historicist scholarship in nineteenth-century American literature. Part One (Chapters One and Two) engages with Jay Grossman’s Althusserian critique of the “American Renaissance” through his historical materialist analyses of Emerson’s and Whitman’s binding and formatting practices; Part Two (Chapters Three and Four) engages with Lawrence Buell’s “environmental criticism” (previously known as “ecocriticism”), largely founded on the impact of “network theory” on his Thoreau scholarship as well as his later readings of Whitman; Part Three (Chapters Five and Six) engages with Judith Butler’s theory of “gender performativity” as well as her more recent work on a “politics of the street” and employs them in a critique of Sara Luria’s urban historical concept of the “poetry of internal improvements,” which is partially based on her readings of Whitman’s Civil War poetry. In each case, my own work builds on the theoretical precepts that lead contemporary scholars to the materialist analysis of texts in their nineteenth-century contexts while articulating the discursive and technical preconditions that determine their scholarship. The critically self-conscious strain in my scholarship is not strictly new historicist but also derives from bibliography and media studies, which have facilitated the peculiar concerns of the scholar of American literary history who works in an epoch increasingly defined by digital media.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| LIST OF FIGURES | ix |
| GENERAL INTRODUCTION “WHITMAN’S INSCRIPTIONS”: BEHIND THE SCENES | 1 |
| PART 1 THE COMMONPLACE SYSTEM..... | 18 |
| INTRODUCTION TO PART 1 “EMERSON/WHITMAN”: FORMULATING A SYSTEM OF LETTERS AND BOOKS | 19 |
| CHAPTER 1 THE POSTAL UNCONSCIOUS/THE DEMOCRATIC IMAGINARY: EMERSON’S “POETIC INTERCOURSE” | 31 |
| The Postal Unconscious: Letters, Vertical and Horizontal..... | 31 |
| Emerson’s “poetic intercourse”: The Letter as Lecture..... | 39 |
| Whitman’s Print Erotics and The Logic of Manuscript..... | 56 |
| CHAPTER 2 WHITMAN’S “BLACK LINES”: UNBINDING THE COMMONPLACE SYSTEM | 67 |
| The Commonplace System: A Network of Letter-Book Circuits | 70 |
| Binding Emerson’s <i>Journal</i> : The Format of “Nature” | 78 |
| Tentative Bindings: The Handmade-in-the-Readymade | 89 |
| Manuscript Noise: The Voices of Others and Writing-in-Transit | 106 |
| PART 2 NATURAL HISTORIES..... | 123 |
| INTRODUCTION TO PART 2 WRITING-IN / “OUT-OF-DOORS”: TRACING NETWORKS WITH WHITMAN AND THOREAU | 124 |
| CHAPTER 3 THOREAU’S “TRANSCENDENTAL METRICS”: THE ARCHEOLOGY OF NATURE WRITING | 139 |
| The Nature Diary: Romanticism after the Grid | 142 |
| Thoreau’s Archeology: Decomposing Natural History | 155 |
| Tending to the Cut: Thoreau’s “Transcendental Metrics” | 176 |
| CHAPTER 4 WHITMAN’S “BROOKLYN FERRY,” BEFORE AND AFTER: THE SUBJECT OF WRITING-IN-TRANSIT | 193 |
| The Scene of Writing in the City: Bibliography’s Imaginary | 194 |
| Among Ruins: Localizing the Past in Cosmopolitan Language | 199 |
| The Coming City: Infrastructure, Mathematics, Poetics | 220 |
| PART 3 REAL WAR..... | 242 |
| INTRODUCTION TO PART 3 THE “REAL WAR”: WHITMAN’S AND ALCOTT’S DOCUMENTARY POETICS..... | 243 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| CHAPTER 5 TWO DRAMAS OF PAPERWORK: WHITMAN AND ALCOTT IN “THE REAL WAR” | 255 |
| Prelude: The Skeleton and the Fairy | 256 |
| Dramas of Paperwork: Tracing Bureaucracy during the Civil War | 266 |
| Conservation: Technical and Political | 273 |
| CHAPTER 6 THE NEW SCENE: ALCOTT AND WHITMAN IN THE “HOSPITALESQUE” | 290 |
| Strange Hands: Poetic Intercourse 2 | 290 |
| The “Hospitalesque”: The Body, Delivered | 299 |
| Writing-in-Transit: A Possible Bound Thing | 313 |
| CONCLUSION | 331 |
| WORKS CITED | 335 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | |
|--|-----|
| Figure I.1: Page from “Return my book” notebook. Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of <i>The Walt Whitman Archive</i> . | 1 |
| Figure 2.1: Comparison of bindings of “Wide World 1” and “College Theme Book,” respectively. Courtesy of Houghton Library, Harvard University. | 82 |
| Figure 2.2: Page stubs from “Talbot Wilson” notebook. Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of <i>The Walt Whitman Archive</i> . | 95 |
| Figure 2.3: Pages from “Talbot Wilson” notebook. Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of <i>The Walt Whitman Archive</i> . | 95 |
| Figure 2.4: Page stubs from the fourth (left) and fifth (right) pamphlets of the “Talbot Wilson” notebook. Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of <i>The Walt Whitman Archive</i> . | 99 |
| Figure 2.5: Page from “Talbot Wilson” notebook. Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of <i>The Walt Whitman Archive</i> . | 102 |
| Figure 2.6 Page from “Talbot Wilson” notebook. Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of <i>The Walt Whitman Archive</i> . | 103 |
| Figure 2.7: Page 183 of the “Dick Hunt” notebook. Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of <i>The Walt Whitman Archive</i> . | 107 |
| Figure 2.8: Comparison of stanzas/lines from “To Think of Time” from the 1855 and 1856 edition, respectively. Images courtesy of <i>The Walt Whitman Archive</i> . | 120 |
| Figure 3.1: “Letter XX,” from Gilbert White’s <i>Natural History of Selbourne</i> (62-63). | 145 |
| Figure 3.2: “Letter XXVII,” from Gilbert White’s <i>Natural History of Selbourne</i> (86-87). | 145 |
| Figure 3.3: “General Phenomena for June,” 1852-1861. Table. From “Tabulations of General Phenomena” Courtesy of the Pierpont Morgan Library. | 149 |
| Figure 3.4: “Pond Kalendar.” From the Journal, Volume 15, March 7-August 18, 1853. Courtesy of the Pierpont Morgan Library. | 150 |
| Figure 3.5: “Notes” for “General Phenomena for June,” 1852-1861 and detail (June 21, 26, and 28, 1854). From “Tabulations of General Phenomena” Courtesy of the Pierpont Morgan Library. | 152 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Figure 3.6: Entry for Monday, June 26, 1854 and detail. From Journal, Volume 17, February 13-September 2, 1854. Courtesy of the Pierpont Morgan Library..... | 153 |
| Figure 3.7: Title page of “Gleanings.” From the <i>Journal</i> , Volume 1. Courtesy of the Pierpont Morgan Library..... | 160 |
| Figure 3.8: Entry for October 22, 1837, on first page of “Gleanings.” From the <i>Journal</i> , Volume 1. Courtesy of the Pierpont Morgan Library | 162 |
| Figure 3.9: Entry for June 14, 1840. From the Journal, Volume 2. Courtesy of the Pierpont Morgan Library..... | 163 |
| Figure 3.10: Entry for May 3-4, 1838, “Journey to Maine.” From the Journal, Volume 1. Courtesy of the Pierpont Morgan Library..... | 164 |
| Figure 3.11: Accounts. From the “Economy” chapter of <i>Walden</i> (56-57). | 180 |
| Figure 3.12: Map of Walden Pond, based on Thoreau’s 1846 survey, and originally published in the first edition of <i>Walden</i> (1854). Courtesy of The Concord Free Public Library Special Collections (www.concordlibrary.org). | 184 |
| Figure 3.13: Entry for January 6, 1856 and detail. From the Journal, Volume 20, January 4-April 23, 1856. Courtesy of the Pierpont Morgan Library. | 191 |
| Figure 4.1: Sheet twenty-nine from the “Words” notebook. Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. | 200 |
| Figure 4.2: Sheet twenty-five of the “Words” notebook, showing scraps (pulled back) pasted over tipped-in scraps. Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. | 200 |
| Figure 4.3: Page one of notebook “15.” Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of <i>The Walt Whitman Archive</i> | 215 |
| Figure 4.4: Page eighty nine (Grier’s count) of “George Walker.” Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of <i>The Walt Whitman Archive</i> | 224 |
| Figure 4.5: Page fifty eight (Grier’s count) in “George Walker.” Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of <i>The Walt Whitman Archive</i> | 225 |
| Figure 4.6: Page eighty-eight (Grier’s count) in “George Walker.” Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of <i>The Walt Whitman Archive</i> | 227 |
| Figure 4.7: Page twenty-one (Grier’s count) in “George Walker.” Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of <i>The Walt Whitman Archive</i> | 229 |
| Figure 4.8: Page ten (Grier’s count) in “George Walker.” Courtesy of the Charles Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of <i>The Walt Whitman Archive</i> | 236 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Figure 4.9: Page seventeen (Grier's count) of "George Walker." Courtesy of the Charles Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of <i>The Walt Whitman Archive</i> | 238 |
| Figure 5.1: Page from Louisa May Alcott's "Notes and Memoranda." <i>JLMA</i> | 274 |
| Figure 5.2: Two-page spread from "Hospital Notebook." Courtesy of The Clifton Waller Barrett Library, University of Virginia..... | 278 |
| Figure 5.3: Page from Louisa May Alcott's <i>Journal</i> . <i>JLMA</i> | 281 |
| Figure 5.4: Pages from "Scene in the Woods" notebook, images A-D. Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Images courtesy of <i>The Walt Whitman Archive</i> | 284 |
| Figure 5.5: Three pages from "Scene in the Woods" notebook, images A-C. Courtesy of <i>The Walt Whitman Archive</i> | 288 |
| Figure 6.1: Plan for West Philadelphia Hospital from Hammond's <i>Treatise</i> | 303 |
| Figure 6.2: Plan for Mower General Hospital from Hammond's <i>Treatise</i> | 303 |
| Figure 6.3: Two-page spread of the "Account." Details A and B on following page. Courtesy of The Trent Collection, Duke University..... | 317 |
| Figure 6.4: Cover of the "Holograph Account." Courtesy of The Trent Collection, Duke University..... | 320 |
| Figure 6.5: First page of the "Holograph Account." Courtesy of The Trent Collection, Duke University | 320 |
| Figure 6.6: Page from the "Holograph Account." Courtesy of The Trent Collection, Duke University..... | 321 |
| Figure 6.7: Diagram showing the architecture of the "Holograph Account." | 322 |
| Figure 6.8: Page from the "Holograph Account." Courtesy of The Trent Collection, Duke University..... | 324 |
| Figure 6.9: Two-page spread from "Holograph Account" and detail. Courtesy of The Trent Collection, Duke University. | 325 |
| Figure 6.10: Two-page spread from "Holograph Account" and detail. Courtesy of The Trent Collection, Duke University. | 326 |
| Figure 6.11: Two-page spread from "Holograph Account" and detail. Courtesy of The Trent Collection, Duke University. | 327 |
| Figure 6.12: The T-head pin binding the "Holograph Account." Courtesy of The Trent Collection, Duke University..... | 329 |
| Figure C.1: "Capture the city in motion" advertisement on CTA subway car. | 331 |

GENERAL INTRODUCTION
 “WHITMAN’S INSCRIPTIONS”:
 BEHIND THE SCENES

This project began with some rudimentary observations about a page from one of Walt Whitman’s notebooks¹ (Figure I.1). Dating from late 1862, the page reflects the poet’s minor obsession with the nineteenth-century form of horse-drawn mass transit known as the “omnibus,” a ubiquitous presence on the streets of antebellum New York City as well as Philadelphia, Boston, Paris, and London.

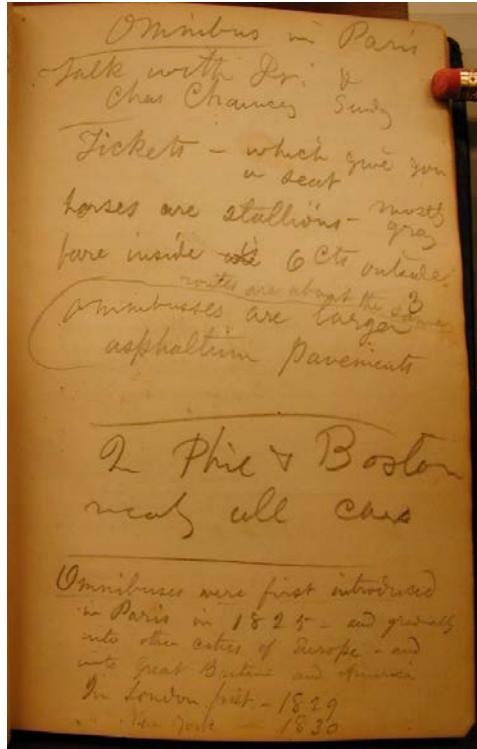


Figure I.1: Page from “Return my book” notebook. Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of *The Walt Whitman Archive*.

¹ See NUPM 2:478-524.

The “Omnibus in Paris” was the subject of a “Talk with Dr. and Chas Chauncey Sunday” for at least two reasons. Whitman spent most of his life before the Civil War in New York City, where he became especially renowned for his fraternal bonds with omnibus drivers. He also harbored a peculiar affection for French political and cultural life, tracing back to his childhood encounter, reported in his memoir *Specimen Days* (1881), with Le Marquis de Lafayette, the French hero of the American Revolution.² The “Omnibus in Paris” combined Parisian street life with the poet’s own, but the combination did not require the universalizing intuitions of a lyric subject. In Whitman’s milieu, such ideals were manifest in “the Bourgeois International Style,” as David Scobey has it, “a neobaroque urbanism of broad avenues, palatial architecture, grand public squares, scenic pleasure grounds, and massive infrastructures,” which began “inform[ing] the spatial imagination of urban elites in the United States as well as elsewhere” after 1840 (166).

Whitman’s “Omnibus in Paris” notes, spanning a total of four recto pages, are typically seen as inchoate notes toward a newspaper or magazine article, which has yet to, or may never, surface. Several of the poet’s early journalistic writings do in fact consist of such conventional portraits of nineteenth-century urban life, its trials and attractions (see Chapters Two and Four). The notes therefore appear to provide yet another example of an unrealized idea by a poet whose investment in creating a record of his moment combined his profession as a newspaper man with his calling to fulfill America’s “poetical nature” by becoming its “greatest poet” (*LG* 1:iii, iv). As they stand, however, the notes have as much in common with his poetry as they do with his journalism, though the differences between the generic forms are clear: the poetry carries over the discontinuities recorded by the manuscript. The 1860 poem “Salut au Monde!,” for instance, opens: “O TAKE my hand, Walt Whitman! / Such gliding wonders! Such sights and sounds! / Such joined unended links, each hooked to the next!” (*LG* 3:243). This muse—who guides the poet through a global network of “joined unended links”—presided over the cosmopolitan

² The incident is reported by way of John Burroughs in a footnote in *Specimen Days*, where “General Lafayette” is said to have pressed the five year old Whitman “a moment to his breast” before “giving him a kiss” and laying the cornerstone for Brooklyn’s children’s public library (*PW* 1:13).

situation of cities like mid-nineteenth-century Paris and New York, whose aesthetic unity lay in the “Bourgeois International Style.” So when the muse asks the poet “What do you see, Walt Whitman?” (*LG* 3:245), he describes a situation in which the cosmopolitan perspective allows him to traverse hemispheres, city by city, line by line:

I see the cities of the earth, and make myself at random a part of them,
 I am a real Parisian,
 I am a habitan of Vienna, St. Petersburg, Berlin, Constantinople,
 I am of Adelaide, Sidney, Melbourne,
 I am of London, Manchester, Bristol, Edinburgh, Limerick. (*LG* 3:252)

The multitude of such passages throughout Whitman’s poetry might lead to the consideration of manuscript instances such as the “Omnibus in Paris” as not necessarily destined for journalistic prose or even poetic effusions. What if they were inscribed *in* a practice, rather, one that founded everything he wrote and published, but whose traces showed up best in his tradition-breaking-and-making free verse? Information, both aesthetic and historic, reveals itself not in what the notes contain or what their imagined intention might be. At the very least, a palpable difference can be detected between the inscription of “Omnibus in Paris” at the top of the notebook page and “In Phil & Boston nearly all cars” in the middle of it. That is, something changed between the former and the latter—something whose “joined unended links” are in fact unjoined by linebreaks and the geographic displacement they embody in “Salut au Monde!,” despite the common foundation provided, line by line, by the “I.”

It is impossible to say where or why Whitman scribbled his notes on the “Omnibus in Paris,” and yet the poet’s material traces present something besides a historic scene of writing and its causes. As in “Salut au Monde!,” Whitman’s manuscript notes bear the imprint of a radically localized attempt to make a record in the midst of one of the first great surges forward in the globalizing process. The thematic tension between the local and the global in Whitman’s writings does not account for this process or allow the description of the link between the published works and the situation that shaped them. For this research project, then, I have focused on the late Romantic period in the northeastern U.S., where distance from Old World cultural traditions, the nature of participatory democratic citizenship, and a rapidly growing

network of information exchange routes and industrial presses generated a peculiar relationship between writing, civic space, and the body. What is found in some of the most influential and experimental texts of the American Renaissance is a relationship between manuscript practices and industrial era literature in which the continuity of manuscript traces are fragmented by an emergent technological situation and printed books embody this phenomenon, interacting with the environmental conditions of nineteenth-century American cities in the northeastern States in a way that escapes the technologically conditioned perspective of the twenty-first century. The chapters to follow will describe this situation by way of a comparative reading of Whitman and three of his contemporaries—Emerson, Thoreau, and Louisa May Alcott. These authors have been selected for the way their writings expose a materialist logic, rooted in civic life, that links literacy and circulation. Their works attend to the ways manuscript and printed texts are linked by a logic at work in the techniques individuals acquire and the technologies that reproduce and circulate them. “Whitman’s Inscriptions” therefore advances the overarching thesis that what sets the writings of canonical American Romantics like Whitman, Emerson, Thoreau, and Alcott apart from other nineteenth-century American authors is that the practices associated with manuscript are not represented but rather are manifest in their published works. What defines the poetic and philosophical writings that began to inscribe a distinctive literary tradition in the North American States lies in the way the authors of that tradition employed their manuscripts as media of civic engagement in an emergent technological situation.

The early twenty-first century might reconsider the early American imperative that art have a social function as a phase in the layered history of the inscription and distribution of literacy, here broadly conceived as a matter of technical aptitude in the arts of sending and receiving information. A media history of the American cultural tradition would (I believe) disjoin practical art from the networks that turn it into a national program by allowing the description of the relationship between techniques and the technologies that condition techniques in practice. While it is true that the first half of the nineteenth century was considered America’s “Golden Age of Oratory,” published diaries established the generic precedent for the form and

style of American literary writing from at least 1700 forward (Kagle 4). American Transcendentalism most likely would never have emerged without the precedent established by the socially useful art of the Lyceum lecture (*NELC* 138). And yet the association between the Lyceum and literary style can only be a “speculative” one, states Lawrence Buell. We weren’t there, we never will be. The textual record of antebellum oratory reveals that podium rhetoric appears to have “ensure[d] the continuance of classicism into the Romantic era” (*NELC* 153). So even though Emerson’s declamatory style, so often traced back to the American lecture hall, carries its share of conservatism, his published lectures and essays are constituted by a generative tension between podium rhetoric and the compositional pretexts of Montaigne’s “Essays”: Renaissance letter writing and epistles (Chapters One and Two). The “Master’s” brand of “self-reliance” would therefore be followed to the letter by his disciples, Whitman (Chapter Two and Four) and Thoreau (Chapter Three). After Emerson, American literary writing would be indebted to American oratory by way of negation: the character of Whitman’s and Thoreau’s writings would be conspicuously scripted and formatted, and this character would be transmitted for practical purposes.

That American art had to have a social function was not limited to the discourse channeled through modern institutions like the Lyceum; rather, the demand for art with a social function extended to the dissemination of writing in practice throughout the more unruly field of industrial media. Manuscript had a very different utilitarian value and impact on the media cultures of the mid-nineteenth-century States, especially as it first began to be overshadowed by the proliferation of industrialized print and its interurban networks of railways, steamships, postal roads, and telegraphs. As the genealogical relation between Emerson’s compositional practices and Montaigne’s “Essays” demonstrates, manuscript was simply a medium for writing whose role in the dissemination of literacy, after having passed through the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, had only begun to be irreparably deformed by the technological situation of the mid-nineteenth-century northeast. By 1830 manuscript entered into a complex field of relations no longer accessible to twenty-first-century readers, one they may not know exactly how to read,

but one that can be retrospectively evaluated under contemporary medial conditions. Even though the scenes of writing that took place then and there can only be imagined, the traces of practice—as well as its disruptions, its palpable differences along ostensibly continuous lines of manuscript—can be described in the situation conditioning the publication of techniques of literacy and the material conditions for their circulation. The relation between technique and technology shows up most prominently in the record established by Whitman’s manuscripts and published works, and this record highlights, by way of comparison, such relations in the manuscripts and published works of his contemporaries.

The perspective that manuscript was used as a medium of civic engagement in the published works of nineteenth-century authors raises questions about the history of access through public channels, not without disrupting the utility of standard, especially “clean” textual editions. The mere description of manuscripts and published works have led to what often feel like trenchant arguments with the fine print of standard textual sources, like the New York University Press edition of the *Notebooks and Unpublished Manuscripts*, as when I state: Whitman’s notes on the “Omnibus in Paris” were surely made in different locations and at different times, or, at the very least, in palpably different states of mind. But of course they were. They were written, after all. And yet all four pages of the “Omnibus in Paris” notes are presented in print as a continuous diary entry, because “they were apparently written in one session after the talk with the two Chaunceys” (*NUPM* 2: 491n22). That the editor of the *NUPM*, Edward F. Grier, assumes that the “Dr.,” in this case, is Charles’s father—and not one of the various doctors inscribed in the poet’s notebook—can be attributed to a more general assumption about how writing signifies, particularly by way of the symbolic charge ascribed to manuscript. The distinction between the “Omnibus in Paris” and “In Phil & Boston” on the single notebook page in question is evident enough. As evident is the fact that Whitman skipped a recto after the first page of notes on the “Omnibus in Paris” and provides a new heading, “Omnibuses Paris,” in a still more varied hand (491). But the scene of writing, composed of “joined unended links,” shapes the reader’s perspective in advance, just Whitman’s poetry is assumed to deliver this

scene and demand nothing else. It so often escapes readers when looking at manuscript letters, diaries, loose scraps, not to mention their printed instantiations, whether as text editions or books of poetry, and their movement throughout “the cities of the earth,” that writing takes place in time—that it measures time—and that it only flows along, threading hours into days, in a situation that allows it to do so.

As Donald Reiman has pointed out, manuscript serves as a gauge for palpable shifts in the history of writing when seen from the retrospective view that writing, whether by hand or machine, is subject to conditioning by the technological situation in which it is disseminated:

Two hundred years from now, historians or theorists of texts may well decide that the age of modern manuscripts continued to the end of the twentieth century, but we already know that a new era has begun to emerge in which both casual messages and many more permanent records are being prepared primarily for electronic transmission, storage, and retrieval and only secondarily for impression on paper or kindred substances. Though we cannot be sure how posterity will judge present events and trends, the era of modern manuscripts covers at least five centuries, from about 1475 to 1975, with the beginning and ending dates marking the approximate time that technological changes alerted the forward-looking intellectuals of the transitional eras to the new modes of transmitting and recording visual data that would ultimately alter the shape of their intellectual world. (1-2)

Reiman’s retrospective account follows Marshall McLuhan’s insights into the discontinuous layers of history that are revealed when new media are introduced into a historical situation. Defining his famous aphorism, he writes: “‘The medium is the message’ means, in terms of the electronic age, that a totally new environment has been created. The ‘content’ of this new environment is the old mechanized environment of the industrial age.... Each new technology creates an environment that is itself regarded as corrupt and degrading. Yet the new one turns its predecessors into an art form.” (vii-viii). Manuscript is not a thing of the past anymore than Whitman’s “joined unended links.” What traverses them both, as well as what altered the conventions of writing that made Whitman a form-breaking poet, only begins to reveal itself as the epoch of “electronic transmission, storage, and retrieval” emerges.

That the technological frameworks of research, theory, and practice, more generally conceived, retrospectively reveal their possibilities and limitations in the general introduction to

the *NUPM* as well. Grier states that text cannot easily accommodate the poet's "habit of writing almost at haphazard on the page." Whitman shared this habit with Ralph Waldo Emerson (whose editors he apparently disagrees with), thereby justifying his decision to produce a clean edition:

Examination of recent editions of Emerson and Whitman has convinced me that the values of attempting to reproduce this randomness typographically are outweighed by the facts that even a typographical arrangement cannot convey the subtle variations that give such a page of manuscript its effect on the reader, that the page is fatiguing to the eye and mind, and that such a practice uses a great deal of space.... I should add, moreover, that to my mind the ideal edition of any manuscript would be a fully annotated photographic reproduction. (*NUPM* 1:xviii)

For Grier, manuscript, like photography, is iconic; it is a moment of life, captured in time; text is a reasonable compromise, given that it triggers recourse to the image repertoires and internalized sound archives of traditional interpretation. Digital media, on the other hand, presents a situation in which image and text are subject to the mutability of scripts: HTML and XSMIL are constantly written and rewritten behind the scenes. Invisible data-collection and -processing platforms, such as so-called social media, wear stage-designed interfaces dictating the way digital hardware is used. The multiple layers conditioning a theatics of participation in the virtual spaces of digital mediation are traversed by scripts, invisible under the conditions of practice and yet accessible to the willful practitioner. This layered situation has a layered history to match, tracing back through Grier and the American Renaissance, all the way to the Renaissance in Europe.

I do not mean to deny implicitly that seeing a photographic image of manuscript has its advantages when the materials themselves cannot be accessed. Rather, the assumption that manuscript is a medium that can only be technologically reproduced by photographic impressions belies the fact that manuscript, photography, and print are all historically contingent media traversed by a manipulation of scripts and codes. The early industrial-urban era constituted a new media context that configured the relationship between all three, a relationship, moreover, that shaped the techniques and practices individuals employed to generate a record of their everyday lives. A century before the emergence of universal data-processing machines, Americans were awash in an array of inscribed and printed papers, loose and bound, cut-up,

pasted, and stitched together. The nineteenth century forged its own symbolic value systems to organize the mess of industrial media, establishing meaningful links between the instability of social, material transformation and secular, economic, sentimental union in the nationalist imaginary. But a history of techniques and technologies conjoined in the production of symbolic value systems, a history now calling out from the archives of universities and historical societies across the U.S., reveals that imaginary union was a work-in-progress for a culture of scribblers and scrapbookers.

Nineteenth-century literary writing returns readers to the nineteenth-century's imaginary today not because (or not only because) it served absolute goals, inherited as the very nature of post-industrial humanity: the desire for imaginary stability and continuity under conditions destabilized by technical, technological change. Literary writing in any historical situation preserves some trace, however minor, of the history of scripts and codes that imaginaries and the publics that elect them are designed to elide. Where the intuitive design of digital interfaces engage with users, printed texts offer a variety of generic formats that cue intuitive responses. Scripts and codes underlie formats, whether newspaper, book, or letter, and, once acquired through the techniques of literacy, they become the inscribed support system of a given era's and a given nation's imaginary. In the digital era as in the era of industrial print, literacy and its dissemination operate on the basis of scripts and codes that establish the foundation for the interdependence of technique and technology and can, therefore, be described. I refer to this technical, technological level underlying the surfaces of media, the surfaces by means of which civic engagement takes place, as the *logic of manuscript*.

Manuscript is used here to emphasize the historical role of the hand in the technical acquisition of literacy when it began to contend with the new media context of industrial print, and just before the advent of the typewriter. Manuscript is also used to underscore the role of manuscript in the imaginary of readers by the nineteenth century, when literature previously fashioned as remediated diaries and epistolary archives were formed into a new order by the modern novel, which subsumed material practice under the omniscience of narrative voice.

Because literature, generally speaking, is a broad and variegated field of study, what I refer to as the *literary* in literary writing has the potential to preserve the traces of the logic of manuscript, leaving open fissures in the surfaces of mediation, fissures providing glimpses of scripts and codes that call for critically trenchant readings and writings. Without the literary, the logic underwriting the surfaces of mediation is subsumed by the desire for imaginary unity, leaving aside the multiplicity of elements and the order that facilitates mediation and motivates the desire for union in the first place. Twenty-first century new media contexts are still teaching scholars to read the logic that the mid-nineteenth century would have, I believe, taken for granted and that the century to follow would gradually forget. The logic of manuscript at work in new media contexts turns the reader toward a retrospective glance on history without projecting inherited scenes onto it, so that the possibility for the emergence of a relation between practice and the situation conditioning it can appear.

The opening possibility for establishing new relations with the history of practice is both an opportunity and critical situation in the era of digital scholarship. *The Walt Whitman Archive* is one of only a handful of standard-bearing digital resources providing around-the-clock electronic access to literary historians and readers in general. Soon enough, the same will be true for the manuscripts of Whitman's contemporaries, whose archived papers bear their own distinctive traits demanding research projects on literary writing that begin by inquiring about the history of material practices. In anticipation of such projects, "Whitman's Inscriptions" is about the complex relations between technique, technology, and the historical situations conditioned by them. Because textual editions of the writings of Whitman and his contemporaries either push descriptions of the discontinuities that can be found throughout the poet's notebooks into footnotes or endnotes, if not eliding them altogether, the distribution of manuscript through digital media, I believe, demands a suitably dispersed account of the impact of manuscript in practice on their textual condition.

The archival methodology of my dissertation has been influenced by recent scholarship on the manuscripts of nineteenth-century authors, such as *Rescripting Walt Whitman* (2008) by

Ed Folsom and Kenneth Price, which reveals the unexplored physical dimensions of the poet's notebooks and manuscripts in relation to his printed texts. Clearly influenced by Folsom and Price, Matt Miller's *Collage of Myself* (2010) is one of the first monographs on a nineteenth-century American author to articulate a writer's practice of poetic composition—in this case, Whitman's cut-and-paste method—within the framework of historical and contemporary material and medial cultures. But these accounts focus on Whitman's creative processes and (consequently) examine his manuscripts and published works in isolation, while the poet's manuscript record has led me to consider contextual, material factors that shaped his writings and that remain unread. My interest in these factors has largely been motivated by materialist research in American cultural history that examines the practices and institutional sites (schools, libraries, Lyceums) that trained citizens of mid-nineteenth-century American cities to forge a collective imaginary under their emergent civic conditions. Cultural histories that address the antebellum American urban context as a site of practice for new publics and their way of life, such as Karen Haltunnen's *Confidence Men and Painted Women* (1982), have had a formative impact on my research. More recently (and more importantly perhaps), Thomas Augst's *The Clerk's Tale* (2003) traces a genealogy of the humanities in the U.S. to its roots in what he calls "literary leisure," a discursive formation produced through the democratization of literacy in public education, the industrialization of media, the marketing strategies of publishing companies, mercantile libraries, and the lyceum movement.

Retrospective accounts of material practice in nineteenth-century America, recovering the forgotten scribblers, archivists, and readers of the industrial-urban era, are becoming increasingly common, some examples being Ellen Gruber Garvey's book on scrapbooking, *Writing with Scissors* (2012), and Molly McCarthy's study of daily planners, *The Accidental Diarist* (2013). The growing frequency of these works gives the literary historian a timely reminder of the world of practice recorded in the array of scripted documents, in manuscript and print, bound and unbound, stored in institutional archives and now being increasingly distributed through digital media. Digital resources are enabling cultural historians not only to bring their attention to the

material records left by the inhabitants of historical epochs but to acknowledge the odd dissymmetry between the historical artifact and its delivery by interface, machine, hypertext, and binary code.

In its attentiveness to what contemporary conditions reveal about the past, the methodological and theoretical framework of “Whitman’s Inscriptions” draws from the overlap of archival research on nineteenth-century material practices and media studies, as the recent publications cited above all have to a greater or lesser extent. The framework for my project is built at the intersection of bibliography and media history: a site of overlapping theoretical and methodological investments established by the work of David Reiman (mentioned above) as well as Jerome McGann. McGann defines the “textual condition” as the “structures of textual variability” that “demonstrate the operation of these variables at the most material (and apparently least ‘signifying’ or significant) levels of the text: in the case of scripted texts, the physical form of books and manuscripts (paper, ink, typefaces, layouts)” (TC 12). McGann not only proposes a theory and practice of bibliography and textual editing but a materialist approach to the practice of reading, a “materialist hermeneutics,” which resists the classical and romantic hermeneutic practices of interpreting the imaginary, transcendental meaning of signs. Realizing that his emphasis on the materiality of textual media might align him with “communication studies,” McGann defines the analysis of “textual conditions” against it, as if it were a traditional form of hermeneutics:

Were we interested here in communication theory, rather than in textuality, such redundancies [i.e.: the rhetorical excesses of poetics] would be studied as ‘noise,’ and their value for the theory would be a negative one. But the redundancy, excess, and thickness of the textual condition are positive features in the perspective I am taking. They draw our attention to that quality of self-embodiment that is so central to the nature of texts. (TC 14)

The “redundancy, excess, and thickness” of the textual condition does not privilege communication anymore than it privileges signification. Both rely on paradigmatic form/content distinctions and the *proper channeling* of content which determines the social function of form. The “nature of texts,” their “quality of self-embodiment,” lies in the “noise” of the textual

medium, not the imaginary harmony of delivery and the reception of content. The geometric symmetry of an open book and its homogeneous page design does not resolve the foundational dissonance of textuality; rather, “scripted texts” in their physical form, whether books or manuscripts, are entities composed of layers of media, techniques, operations, and protocols. “Textual variability” and “the operation of these variables” amount not to channeling but a logic of manuscript, comprised of the storage, format, and transmission functions that “noise” returns to the channels of communication.

McGann’s attentiveness to the “noise” of the “textual condition” places him in the tradition of media theorists like McLuhan. The affinity emerges explicitly in McGann’s 2006 book *The Scholar’s Art*:

The physical object—the specific manuscript, the particular edition or printed object we read (like this very object you are reading now)—is coded and scored with human activity. An awareness of this is the premise for interpreting material culture, and the awareness is particularly imperative for literary interpretation, where the linguistic ‘message’ regularly invisibilizes the codependent and equally meaningful ‘medium’ that codes all messages. (SA 136)

Only when McLuhan’s “medium” is McGann’s “text” can text have a “condition” that does not signify but that bears the record of the layers of operations that inscribe, code, and score it, before and after it has been formatted and transmitted as a manuscript or printed object.³ It therefore follows that bibliography-as-media-theory assists the materialist interpretation of “scripted” texts in the ostensibly virtual domain of codes, hypertexts, and archives. Because “all text is marked text,” states McGann, the attempt “simply to store and make accessible digitized simulations of things we have preserved in museums and libraries...requires a fundamental rethinking, and reimagining, of the ontologies that are embedded in those archival things” (155).

³ McGann proposes an aesthetic theory of textuality based on systems theory, which overlaps with discursive strains of media theory after McLuhan, but this leads to abstractions that are not of interest to the project at hand. According to McGann’s aesthetic theory, books are machines “for processing a variety of symbolic forms organized in looping autopoeitic structures,” which “stand in a relation of codependency” with “allopoeitic,” or transparent, self-evident functions (SA 156, 164). The opposition between the “autopoeitic” and “allopoeitic” “measures the allopoeitic functions being executed in the codes of a supervening autopoeitic system” (165).

The concern here stems from more than just a critical resistance to inherited interpretive techniques; the point, for me at least, is not to prove that hermeneutics, meaning, and imaginary communities are wrong or bad; the point is to carry forward the idea, increasingly held by scholars of material culture, that techniques and technologies are conjoined in the formation of any historical situation, that their conjunction determines a relation expressed in literary texts, and that the insistence on eliding the discontinuously layered history of this technical, technological relation has consequences for perspectives on the past as well as the present. To perpetuate the imaginary idea of a tradition of interpretation is tantamount to the belief that nothing changes and that nothing can change. Literature becomes instrumental in the reinforcement of this belief.

That is why I have proposed another name (the literary) for the phenomena studied by scholars of material culture and a complementary logic (of manuscript) unfolding the storage, formatting, and transmission functions constitutive of the elements of hermeneutically conditioned meaning. Because digital media inherits the imaginary conditions of immaterial transmission prescribed by the hermeneutic tradition, the contemporary technological situation demands heightened awareness of the hardware co-extensive with the institutional frameworks conditioning the storage, formatting, and transmission of information. The harmony of imaginary communities, their scenes of writing, and continuous traditions collapse the spaces of text, institution, street, and field into the generic figure of the universal subject equipped with the technique for understanding the similarity of all things. The understanding that museums and archives play a role in digital as well as civic spaces does not depend on rhetorical play any more than Whitman's "Omnibus in Paris" does. Institutions and infrastructures are the material conditions in which that play takes place, as they all store, format, and transmit. In sum, they produce civic space.

The scripts and codes latent in the materials of any textual condition have always been, and still are, channeled by institutional ensembles and traditional techniques in various types of civic space. The analogical link between text and space is a cultivated one; it conditions reality,

but has nothing to do with the real. The relation between text and space consists of a constellation of elementary material practices that cultural historians can locate, pursue, configure, and describe. As Friedrich Kittler states in the notorious opening of *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (1986/1999), “Media determine our situation, which—in spite or because of it—deserves a description” (xxxix). A description of the historical layers of media history constituting our ostensibly virtual and decentralized media epoch is exactly what is in order. If materialist hermeneutics provides a theory and practice facilitating the rethinking of archival “things” by way of the “noise” of the techniques and materials constituting them, it also does not typically manage to describe the historic situation that shapes textual conditions—even if it presumes to do so. Kittler’s descriptive approach to media history opens the combination of bibliography and media studies in “Whitman’s Inscriptions” to the analysis of literary writing in civic space. The indebtedness of early computer architecture and the language of early informatics (buses, ports, modules) to modern cities, states Kittler, provides “reason enough to bring together the workings of the city with concepts from general information science” (“CM” 722). If “Media record, transmit and process information,” or inscribe, send, and format it, then “cities are a medium.”

The account of the city in history, retrospectively described from the digital epoch, builds on the world of McLuhan while demolishing the human-centered assumptions driving it. In his description of the emergent electronic media situation propelling his own work, McLuhan states: “By putting our physical bodies inside our extended nervous systems, by means of electronic media, we set up a dynamic by which all previous technologies that are mere extensions of hands and feet and teeth and bodily heat-controls—all such extension of our bodies, including cities—will be translated into information systems” (57). Departing from McLuhan’s externalized neural networks, Kittler subjects the human body naturalizing the extensions Man to materialist analysis, presenting “past media and the historical function of what we refer to as ‘man,’ as the play between commands, addresses, and data” (“CM” 722). In place of the “man” that he

subtracts from McLuhan's scene of networking, Kittler locates a circuit of commands, addresses, and data, or the medial functions of formatting, transmission, and storage.

Railways and telegraphs, as well as museums and libraries, were technologies of inscription that would set the stage for the reception of gramophones, films, and typewriters under old imaginary assumptions. Where new media in the last third of the nineteenth century would result in the technological specialization of senses and the technical manipulation of sensory data in real time, what contemporary media history doesn't account for is what digital archives are bringing to the materialist scholar's attention: manuscript and the noise that it records. The palpable irregularities recorded in Whitman's notes on the "Omnibus in Paris" document the technological situation of mid-nineteenth-century New York City in a way that cannot be represented in print but that can be described in and between the poet's manuscripts and published works. Such description becomes possible once the noise of manuscript appears alongside its typographic remediation in the virtual space of the digital archive, a space that is scripted and coded beneath the user-friendly interface. The digital condition of such archival materials relies on logical inscriptions—in this case, XSMIL—that allow manuscript and print to circulate as imaginary representations that call for user participation. This digital condition also allows users to consider the way the textual condition of nineteenth-century American literature shares the structural relation between the techniques that disappear beneath the surface of aesthetic representation and the infrastructural technology that disappears along with it.

If Whitman is the "first great urban poet" (Reynolds 107), and if his aesthetic innovations have taught readers to interpret his contemporaries in a similarly proto-modernist light, then my description of his page of notes on the "Omnibus in Paris" affirms what is already well known, albeit differently. The scene of writing that hinders the perception what remains unread—the logic of manuscript and its degree of errancy in the manuscripts and published works gathered for this dissertation—extends to preconceptions of the industrial-urban milieu in which Whitman and his contemporaries composed their works. History is read and written using the same hermeneutic techniques that are used to interpret literature; the nebulous projections conditioned

by those techniques are then attributed to literature so that historical research can construct imaginary scenes with truth value; but every act of scholarship, whether making claims about truth on historical or imaginary grounds, has the opportunity to describe the ground it stands on and to excavate its tectonic layers.

There is no hermeneutics, no scene of writing, and no history without the different situations established by the conjunction of technologies and techniques, or *civic spaces* and *writing systems*: the two facets of imaginary harmony that the logic of manuscript presents to the reader. For the research project at hand, *writing systems* guide the analysis of *civic space*; *civic space* is described analytically as a system of writing practices that amount to something like a nineteenth-century American city. The goal of “Whitman’s Inscriptions” remains what it was at the outset: to forge a methodology for the adequate description of the physical state of a manuscript like Whitman’s notes on the “Omnibus in Paris,” as well as to follow the traces of that physical state into the field of material practice that the poet shared with his contemporaries. Bearing in mind the conjunction of civic space and writing systems, I will proceed on grounds that repeatedly open to reveal, if not history and not literature, then the literary. By proceeding in this way, I will trace the coordinates not of an imaginary scene but of a space of practice relying on various media and techniques, from civic space to the individual writing hand. This mode of analysis will help me to grasp the shifting ground of the antebellum decades to which nineteenth-century publics would adapt in practice, as they strove for harmony with their material conditions and as the literary prepared a record of the noise emitted by the juncture of writing and space.

PART 1

THE COMMONPLACE SYSTEM

INTRODUCTION TO PART 1
 “EMERSON/WHITMAN”:
 FORMULATING A SYSTEM OF LETTERS AND BOOKS

For more than half a century, Ralph Waldo Emerson’s July 21, 1855, letter to Walt Whitman has served as the constituting document of the American literary tradition. And yet as Jay Grossman pointed out in *Reconstituting the American Renaissance* (2003), the letter “is rarely read at all” (92-3): that is, the relatively brief, four-paragraph letter is rarely, if ever, subjected to analysis in the context Whitman created for it. In the appendix of the second edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1856), titled “Leaves-Droppings,” Emerson’s presumably private letter appears adjacent to the poet’s thirteen-page “open” response. “Here are thirty-two Poems, which I send you, dear friend and Master,” begins the print-only exclusive, “not having found how I could satisfy myself with sending any usual acknowledgement of your letter” (*LG* 2:346). The acknowledgement was more than unusual: it had a backstory consisting of multiple phases of storage, formatting, and transmission function, carried out by both Emerson and Whitman. One version of the story begins with Whitman sending a copy of the 1855 *Leaves* to his Master, who then responded, politely, with a brief manuscript letter of encouragement. No doubt perceiving the opportunity for self-promotion in the missive, Whitman showed incredible restraint by waiting to publish it in the New York *Tribune* on October 10, 1855. Once remediated in newsprint, the letter was subject to all manner of recycling and circulation: it was clipped and pasted on the inside front covers of unsold copies of the 1855 edition that Whitman sent to critics, before it appeared in the 1856 appendix, and even had its first line, “I greet you at the beginning of great career,” goldstamped on the book’s spine. The response was, indeed, “unusual,” elaborate, and even “poetic” in the “practical” sense of the word, reaching back to the word’s Greek roots.

The 1856 *Leaves of Grass* not only draws attention to the fact that it is a “made” thing but also lends this quality to everything it touches: Emerson’s letter as well as the adjacent texts it binds together. The consequences of the text’s material condition reach beyond the interiors of

the book object, however. What touches and what is touched between the covers of the second edition reveals itself in more than the diversity of generic variations of epistolary writing and the corresponding private or public destinations that they signify. The made character of the text exposes the possibility that the distinctions between types of letters and books, as well as their sources and destinations, are all a matter of proper formatting. The collapse of proper formatting reveals that the natural order governing the sending and receiving of writing at different levels of civil society is held together by a relatively delicate system of links, a binding condition, depending on stably coded formats that are, in fact, always prone to manipulation. Thus neither the “open letter,” a well-established print convention in Early American political culture, nor the ostensibly private epistle were the causes of an effect: both were widely read. The contrast between Whitman’s public response and Emerson’s ostensibly private “greeting,” the effect of this contrast on the total structure of the 1856 *Leaves*, and the relation between this effect and the historical situation that scholars of the American Renaissance perceive through it—these are “rarely read.”

These systemic tremors in the bibliographic and historical framing of Whitman’s first two editions are what remain to be read, but they are also what escape historical and rhetorical readings. The reason for this is that the openness of formatting disclosed by the second edition throws into question what and how a text is read. If the texts bound into book format cannot be interpreted, and if they cannot be linked to some contextual point of reference, then what can be done? If the open letter had paid respects to the author’s patron, or if Emerson’s letter had granted approval to an author not at liberty to represent him or herself, then either text, or both, would have appeared at the beginning of the book, as the Master’s letter did when it was pasted on the inside front cover of the 1855 edition. Even then, it could not escape its association with the other hastily added promotional supplements validating the first *Leaves of Grass*. The material text of 1856 presents an author committing an act of publication surpassing attempts at self-validation and exceeding self-promotion. But what lies beyond these subjective and objective conditions of interpretation?

As Grossman reminds us, the juxtaposition of the two letters in the 1856 *Leaves* raises questions about the way scholars not only receive and transmit literary texts but also ignore format—the technical formulae coding the proper reception of generic forms and their binding conditions that fulfill (or betray) readers’ expectations—as they pull book objects from circulation and study them:

The first thing to note about Whitman’s long printed reply to Emerson in the 1856 volume is the fact that the ‘letter,’ despite its appearance in the ‘Correspondence’ subsection of the appendix called ‘Leaves-Droppings,’ is not, as Kenneth Price notes, really a letter at all.... [T]he reply marks another of the generic mixtures on which the 1856 edition is built, here redefining not poetry, but the presumed privacy and exclusivity of the letter in terms that collapse its differences from the publicity and anonymity of the print sphere. Which is to say that there is more than a little pamphleteering going on in Whitman’s 1856 reply to Emerson—to borrow that term from the circulation traditions of the eighteenth-century ratification debates. (103-4)

Though the claim has apparently been made before, the fact that Whitman’s reply is not “really a letter” but a “generic mixture” remains surprising in Grossman’s account because his claim potentially leads to the falsification of the letter, whether open or closed, as a generically coded format. If the “open letter” is not a letter, if Emerson’s letter may or may not be a letter, if they are more like the poems, which are more like “generic mixtures,” then what is being presented by the book? And doesn’t the dissolution into sameness demand a return to the difference between the two letters that led to this line of questioning about writing and the conditions under which writings circulate? If there are no genres, no cartographic locations for receiving and transmitting properly formatted writings, then there is no interpretation.

The jostling of the letter in Whitman’s material text therefore has consequences for the general framework in which literary scholars conduct their research, constituting the overarching interventional argument of Grossman’s book: the continuous narrative of American literary history prescribed by canon-making texts—Francis Otto Matthiessen’s *American Renaissance*

(1941) being chief among them—and maintained by later generations of scholars⁴ obscures the political foundation of “contested differences within a genealogical chain that traces back (at least) to the moment of American constitution” (84). Grossman’s genealogy opens a broader field of inquiry than he can cover in a single work, if not a vertiginous drop into the archives of Western culture. Whispered under the breath of his prose, a parenthetical “(at least)” leaves the field open while holding him back from the receding horizon of historical materialist inquiry. As the parenthetical whisper slips free, the tentative historical ground that Grossman finds in the “circulation traditions of the eighteenth-century ratification debates,” the limit preventing his genealogy from leading him too far afield, trembles. This trembling of historical ground is the consequence, (I believe), not so much of submitting the letters and the book to genealogical analysis but of allowing this analysis to open the question of the “subject.”

The question of the subject leads to further consequences, further trembling of historical ground. For the most part, the subject leads to the deconstruction of authorship in Grossman’s analysis. Emerson and Whitman transform from “Representative Men” to “representative subjects” (102); the mythological passing of laurels from Master to disciple is formulated as “Emerson/Whitman,” a fractured identification between the subjects in question. Atypical of scholarship on Emerson and Whitman, Grossman’s recasting of both authors as representative subjects largely results from his adaptation of Louis Althusser’s essay “Ideology, and the Ideological State Apparatus” (1970). As Grossman states, the links in the genealogical chain that he traces back to the republic’s constitutive moment in the late eighteenth century consist of “the marks of Althusserian interpellative processes,” marks allowing Grossman to identify the constitutionally mandated and institutionally channeled techniques structuring Whitman’s material text with the network in which that text circulated.

⁴ See Grossman 75-77, where he also cites Harold Bloom and David Reynolds as examples of scholars who have perpetuated mythological narrative continuity of the American literary tradition, beginning with the passing of laurels from Emerson to Whitman and/or Thoreau.

Some of the most interesting work in Grossman's book happens during abbreviated archival ventures, in which he tracks the "marks of interpellative processes" into the field of mid-nineteenth-century material practices. Examining four of Emerson's hand-bound journals from the mid-1820s, which originally belonged to his late father, William Emerson, a former pastor of the First Church of Boston and descendent of a long line of ministers—Grossman articulates Emerson's inheritance of New England reformist tradition by describing the way he (or someone else) gutted his father's journals and bound his own pamphlets into the remaining covers, which still bear his father's as well as his brothers' inscriptions. To distinguish Emerson's practices from Whitman, Grossman refers to a description, given by the poet's latter-day amanuensis, Horace Traubel, of manuscript lecture notes written on recycled paper covers used to bind the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Grossman makes the result of his comparative analysis clear: "there is no better material/textual fact to rid ourselves of the recurring critical notion that there occurred some singular, miraculous shift in Whitman's life around 1855, or 1842, than to consider...[Whitman] writing lecture notes on the discarded and unbound printed sheets of his 'literary' debut, and unsure as to what is the best medium for his 'goods'" (105). For such critical points of indecision, Grossman's "(at least)"—as well as his book's early chapters on eighteenth-century circulation traditions—comes to the rescue.

Just when Grossman begins to trace the network of practices constituting Emerson and Whitman, he recovers political causality in the post-revolutionary tradition of contestation and pamphleteering. Thus the statement from Whitman's thirteen-page open letter, "I much enjoy making poems," is not only materially enacted in the network of references structuring the 1856 edition but can also be fitted to Whitman's constitutive political background. The "madeness" of the book is a recognizably Jacksonian expression of "poetry as a trade, a form of embodied labor explicitly tied to larger economies of publishing, newspapers, and the book market more generally." This expression of Jacksonian politics and middle-class identity, moreover, contrasts with Emerson's inherited Federalism and moderate elitism, determining the "Master's" conception of "poetry as epiphanic, as a transcription of celestial music" (110). The return of a

constitutive political history to the scholar's analysis of material practice in material texts therefore replaces the deteriorating canonizing narratives of the early twentieth century with a new stable link between tradition and literary history. The canon returns, the same but different, just as Grossman, in a stunning performance of self-referential new historicist critique, resists and reproduces the precedent established by his own "Master," the father of the American Renaissance, F.O. Matthiessen.

It is clear why Grossman would introduce the ratification debates as the limit, "(at least)," of his genealogy and establish this limit as the domestic (American) ground for his analysis of "representative subjects" as well as his formulation of "Emerson/Whitman," not to mention "Matthiessen/Grossman." As Etienne Balibar states, when Althusser made the object of historical materialist analysis the "interpellated subject," he placed himself at risk of losing his grounding in political economy. This is because Althusser's topographical analysis dissolved the subject—much as Marx dissolved the commodity—into its conditions of production, resulting in an analysis without a foreseeable limit, because, at its limits, there was nothing to return to. That is, at the limit of the analysis of the subject under its conditions of production, there is no subject—no Althusser—just the expansion and acceleration of the Apparatus. The historical materialist must impose a limit, then, which consists, for Althusser, of the capitalist mode of production and his self-implication within the recursive operations of the "Apparatus" from which he had previously achieved some measure of distance. As Althusser states in his essay, "it is essential to realize that both he who is writing these lines and the reader who reads them are themselves subjects, and therefore ideological subjects" (172). Closes down the question of technology....

Where "there is more than a little pamphleteering going on," there is also more than a material text with a historical point of reference: the second edition is "a network designed to convert readers to the project of the *Leaves*" (104). Pamphlet-like, it circulates "not merely Whitman's theory but his practice—the encodings in his writings of the relationship between reader and writer" (143). Grossman deciphers the marks of interpellative processes constituting

“Emerson/Whitman” in a technical language as suitable to his alignment with Althusser as it is symptomatic. That is, in the process of radicalizing Emerson’s and Whitman’s texts in the original divide between federalists and factionalists, Grossman resorts to the language of informatics. “Emerson/Whitman” can therefore be situated in a genealogy linking “French Theory,” since the mid-twentieth century, to new media.⁵ To note this association may simply be to repeat a “commonplace in current North American literary theory” (Kittler *GFT* xix). And yet it is an association that Grossman brings to the attention of the literary historian at work in the networks of digital scholarship. Whitman’s “network” of reader conversion and his “encodings” of reader-writer correspondences cannot be disentangled from the digital Apparatus that currently distributes high-resolution color facsimiles of the 1855 and 1856 *Leaves of Grass* and submits the heterogeneous texts it binds together to the mandates of the “Textual Encoding Initiative.” By way of Grossman’s genealogy, the intriguing possibility arises that the tracing back of the Apparatus at work in the reordering of formats in the 1856 edition can illumine the fundamental preconditions for the contemporary digital situation in the layers of history preceding the ratification debates and the constitutive “/” it inscribed in the representative subjects in question.

That is why I want to follow out some of the consequences of Althusserian genealogy in Grossman’s book, particularly his critique of the subject by way of his analysis of the marks of interpellative processes in Emerson’s and Whitman’s writing materials. In following out these consequences, I intend to begin establishing the theoretical framework for the next two chapters, which will be developed further in Parts Two and Three. This will require me to identify the utterance of his “(at least)” in the subject of interpellative processes, a subject which Althusser adapts from the work of his contemporary, Jacques Lacan. The Lacanian subject complicates the tentative historical ground advanced by Grossman and assists in attending to the voice of desire,

⁵ In their introduction to *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz summarize the history: “What hypertext and hypermedia are to poststructuralism, cybernetics was to structuralism and semiotics” (Kittler 1999, xix).

the “(at least),” rupturing the surface of his text. I do not intend to advance Grossman’s discoveries by moving away from the project of writing literary history and delving into the projects of psychoanalysis. On the contrary, contemporary media history, whose indebtedness to Lacan is well known, has paved the way for historical materialist research that passes through the figure of the subject and into the networks of material culture, while also evading an obligatory return to the writing subject hemmed in by the inescapable conditions of capitalist ideology, its mode of production, and its inevitable reproduction in all the subject says and does.⁶

While Althusserian analysis would cast technology as an instrument of ideological forces, the unconscious, for Lacan, establishes the preconditions for ideology and what it has its subjects do and say. As Lacanian psychoanalyst Bruce Fink explains, “we are spoken by a language that functions, in certain respects, like a machine, computer, or recording/assembling device with a life of its own; insofar as our needs and pleasures are organized and channeled into socially acceptable forms by our parents’ demands (the Other as demand); and insofar as our desire comes into being as the Other’s desire” (xi). Desire presents itself to the subject as an object that can never be possessed because it is always double. That is, the subject is always lodged between the demand (already made) and its realization (never complete), and it only achieves the imaginary fulfillment of the Other’s desire (social acceptance) once it is scripted and coded by the symbolic order—the order of the signifier, patriarchy and the Law. And yet, as the Lacanian subject is never satisfied by its symbolization or the fulfillment of its desire in the imaginary conditioned by that order—how could it be?—it is split; it marks a space of resistance (“/”) between symbolic-imaginary synthesis. Even though synthesis tends to win the subject’s adherence to the symbolic order, it is always bothered by something to a greater or lesser extent,

⁶ See Zizek 43 for a Lacanian critique of Althusser’s “ISA”: “the weak point of his theory is that he or his school never succeeded in thinking out the link between Ideological State Apparatuses and ideological interpellation.... Althusser speaks only of the process of ideological interpellation through which the symbolic machine of ideology is ‘internalized’ into the ideological experience of Meaning and Truth...[but] there is always a residue, a leftover, a stain of traumatic irrationality and senselessness sticking to it, and...*this leftover, far from hindering the full submission of the subject to the ideological command, is the very condition of it.*”

something that runs the psychological gamut from mild neurosis to madness: the operations of the unconscious that manifest in the “real”: “It is the real which is encountered at the points where language and the grids we use to symbolize the world break down,” states Fink. “It is the *letter* which insists whenever we try to use the signifier to account for everything and to say it all” (xiii). New trajectories for subjectivity can be traced in the remembering of desire by way of the real opening along the lines of the “letter,” or the “signifying chain”: “The unconscious *cannot* forget, composed of ‘letters’ working, as they do, in an autonomous, automatic way; it preserves in the present what has affected it in the past, eternally holding onto each and every element, remaining forever marked by all of them” (20). Remembering assembles the subject’s ineffable, raucous pleasure, even when the Law of the signifier scripts and codes the subject with a proper format for proper channeling.

Media history traces the errant lines of such remembering. For the media historian, the unconscious is not “like a machine, computer, or recording/assembling device” but has been one depending on the technological situation conditioning distinctive historical epochs. Media history is not as interested in the always receding horizon of an ideologically constructed situation, then, as it is in the varied configurations of technologies and techniques that only change with the introduction of new media and that subsequently fade into the unconscious of each successive, distinctive epoch of history. If the unconscious is structured something like a language for Lacan, for the media historian language is materially instantiated in the technologies that condition the organization and circulation of materials within a given historical situation. As media history has discovered, this situation has tended toward the scripting and coding of bodies into the fiction of subjects in space, a fiction of formatting that, (I believe), Grossman’s analysis of “Emerson/Whitman” has begun to deconstruct and that I want to pursue in the chapters to follow.

Revisiting the question of letters and subjects from the perspective of media history, Bernhard Siegert’s *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System* (1999) has informed the historical approach taken up in the chapters to follow. Siegert nimbly traverses the layered

history of postal system from the Achamenidian Empire of the sixth century BCE, through the end of the Middle Ages in Europe when the Taxis Post first began to charge postage rates, and into the modern era of telecommunications networks. The articulation of postal history amounts to a layered, panoramic reconstruction of the conditioning of modern subjectivity by way of communications technologies and techniques. Once people were given the right to pay for the privilege of sending letters in the late seventeenth century—a privilege which had been reserved for emperors and kings since the sixth century BCE—“the absolutist state invented the uniformly ruled space, the territory. Within this space, the people were subjects, pure and simple, and therefore vassals of the monarch” (8). Once the previously closed circuits for sending and receiving were opened, the postal system facilitated the expansion of State power across a continuous spatial surface instead of a discontinuous network of provinces and walled cities broken up by the wilderness. The State-mandated postal system and public education, allowing subjects to format their writings for circulation, conditioned the imaginary effect of continuity through space and time, from one subject to another. Imaginary union furnished the symbolically scripted and coded subjects and their letters with meaning, as the “postal unconscious” receded into the unintelligible noise of the real.

Departing from Grossman’s materialist interpretation of the 1856 *Leaves of Grass*, I want to demonstrate that Whitman’s book enacts its specific conditions of circulation, conditions not limited to the circulation of texts but a general crisis in formatting that was a consequence of the “new spatiality” of railroads and telegraphs in the northeastern States after 1800 (Schivelbusch 10). This departure will simultaneously help me follow the traces of what I believe to be the subtlest accomplishment of Grossman’s historical materialism, which implicates the institutional, political conditions of possibility for his work, after Matthiessen and after Althusser. His analyses tacitly acknowledge that the established frameworks conditioning historically localized acts of reading and writing—in the years leading up to the publication of his book in 2003—were entering a period of technological reconfiguration. Only now, what was unimaginable to the scholar of the American Renaissance, is that not just institutions and traditions but software

(writing systems) and the virtual spaces it constitutes (civic spaces) are making their mark on scholarship.

In the chapters to follow, the “/” structuring the work to be done will be traced back through the nineteenth century, in order to open an inquiry into the historical layers of practice linking writing systems to civic space. The proposed analysis will require a two-faceted approach drawing from the history of the postal system (Chapter One) and the history of commonplace books that accompanied the emergence of State-mandated postal systems (Chapter Two). In Chapter One, I will examine the way Emerson’s inheritance of the New England reformist tradition gave him access to the early national postal system, when it wasn’t yet an entirely open-access network, and place him at variance with Whitman’s own. A comparative analysis of Emerson’s and Whitman’s formatting of letters and books will allow for the consideration of the link both authors’ practices attempted to establish and preserve between the writing systems that inscribed them as subjects and the civic spaces in which their published works circulated. This comparative analysis will require the elaboration of two systems that inscribe, format, and distribute inscriptions and that naturalize inscriptions, from subject to subject, letter to letter, book to book. The history of Emerson’s writing system, which contrasts with the new space of circulation presented in the network of “generic mixtures” tentatively bound together in Whitman’s material text discloses, as Grossman has demonstrated, a very different writing system for a different type of civic space.

This analysis will not only afford for an expanded perspective of the history of literature, culture, and politics, but a history of writing that discloses its place in the history of spaces formed by the inscription of the “/” and its elision through the proper channeling of civic discourse. Between writing and space, the elements of material practice—the logic of manuscript—that condition individuals to write and circulate as subjects depend on a tautologically constructed situation which elides the “/” the difference between writing systems and civic space. But the “/” is there to be traced; it can be tracked through the techniques and operations disclosed by a description of the situation in which writing systems take place. This

notion can be tested by way of a return to the emblematic role of the correspondence bound into the appendix of the 1856 *Leaves of Grass*. By examining the conventions of epistolary writing, as they were practiced by Emerson and Whitman, the role of epistolary form in the 1856 edition will be reassessed, so that the dialectical structure of letters and books—a structure that reestablished itself at the levels of media history leading up to the American Renaissance, as it did in the writings of the representative subjects in question—can be traced.

CHAPTER 1

THE POSTAL UNCONSCIOUS/THE DEMOCRATIC IMAGINARY:

EMERSON'S "POETIC INTERCOURSE"

Taking up the general thesis of this dissertation, Chapter One will begin to elaborate a definition of *the literary* as a practice that registers the noise of inscription: the constitutive noise of scripting and coding, carried out by writing systems and civic space, and harmonized by the subject. This chapter will demonstrate that the works of Emerson and Whitman represent distinctive types of subjects, their publics, and social spaces that condition them, while registering the material practices, specifically the storage, formatting, and transmission practices, by means of which they become conditioned in their historical situation. An analysis of their manuscripts and published works will therefore demonstrate the literary character of their writings by revealing the way they diverged from the conditions of practice specific to their historical situation. That is, the elements of practice disclosed in their works amount to systems of practice that bear the marks of the literary because they resonate with the conditions of practice circulated by conduct manuals and self-help guides, some of the most popular texts during the antebellum decades, and yet appear to be rooted elsewhere. The marks of literary practice in Emerson's and Whitman's manuscripts and published works will lead to foreign territory in the historical layers of writing systems and civic space that came before, and were anticipated by, the popular practices in circulation during the American Renaissance: the postal unconscious and the democratic imaginary.

The Postal Unconscious: Letters, Vertical and Horizontal

The most popular conduct manual in antebellum America was *A Young Man's Guide* (1834), written by the New England education reformer William A. Alcott, not to be mistaken for his second cousin, Transcendentalist Bronson Alcott. The purpose of such manuals was self-edification for social advancement, and personal writing was chief among the means of refining character. As these manuals largely served rural youths arriving in the relatively new industrial

cities of the northeast, personal writing allowed the urbanizing citizen to inscribe himself for circulation in his unfamiliar milieu, and, according to W.A. Alcott, nothing facilitated the acquisition of scripts and codes as well as “common letter writing.” Epistolary practice would not only exercise the youths’ literacy, newly acquired and likely as undeveloped as the public education system that installed his ciphering skills; it would not only rehearse the cultivated moral character that he would have to perform among his betters; it would also improve his wobbly compositional and social skills naturally, because the ability to write only grew under the right conditions. Alcott tells his readers: “It is related in Ramsay’s Life of Washington that many individuals, who, before the war of the American Revolution, could scarcely write their names, became, in the progress of that war, able to compose letters which were not only intelligible and correct, but which would have done credit to a profound grammarian” (202). Literacy happens naturally but only if the context that generates it is conducive to learning. In this case, the military encampment establishes the historical groundwork for the unlettered, “thrown into a situation where they were obliged to write much and often, and in such a manner as to be clearly understood. Perhaps the misinterpretation of a single doubtful word or sentence might have been the ruin of an army, or even of the cause” (202). If there is noise in the lines of the subject’s inscriptions, neither he nor what he writes will get where they want to go, and, as Alcott relates, the republic is at stake. Grammatical rules and the direct instruction of composition can only disappear when taken for granted as a natural condition of sending and receiving. This natural condition formats the subject and his writings for the proper channels of circulation, securing the future of American democracy.

W.A. Alcott’s reference to the educational effects of revolutionary-era encampments established the groundwork for a similar argument about letter writing in the antebellum decades. The “most successful” aid to composition in Alcott’s view was “common *letter writing* from friend to friend...with the mutual understanding and desire that each should criticise freely on the other’s composition.” With such an understanding in place, “More than one individual...became a good writer from this practice, with little, if any aid from grammatical

rules; and without any direct instruction at all” (202). Assuming that at least one of the two friends has some measure of technical skill as a letter writer, rules and instruction—or texts, teachers and their institutional frameworks—could be removed from the process of disseminating literacy through the practice of writing. The removal of a dispersed process of technical programming fosters the democratic imaginary projected by the conduct manual. In the antebellum decades, self-reliant subjects formed a union through conduct and character building, not a mere exchange of scripted and coded letters, typically delayed in transit, and motivated by urban migration. The fact that Alcott’s *Guide* was marketed to young men pouring into urban hubs in the early thirties—but also decades later—returns the urban situation for which he wrote left out of his revolutionary anecdote and implied elsewhere in his text.

The space of the industrial city is the missing link between the early American military encampment and the autonomy of spontaneously lettered citizens; it is the noise of the literary elided in the writing practices of young men entering antebellum cities. The horizontal social structure consisting of home, community, and church in Early American provincial towns would (perhaps) never disappear, but they would become a thing of the past by the 1830s. Industrializing urban centers did not destroy the vertical social order of provincial towns but displaced and contained it. The provincial town did not facilitate the growth of a properly democratic republic, which demanded the horizontal distribution of the right to self-representation. Home, community, and church were all “traditional, vertical institutions,” states Karen Haltunnen, “in which the lines of force radiated downward, from the father, the selectmen, and the minister, and the prevailing pattern of social relationships was authority and deference” (21). This downward force had resisted onset centripetal forces for at least a century in the republic’s States and territories. During the Great Awakening, when a horizontal expansion of access to the divine compromised orthodox Calvinist ministers’ privileged access to the Word of God, or when “print discourse” disseminated the proto-democratic right to self-representation

and prepared the colonies for independence,⁷ the “vertical institutions” of incorporated, provincial towns persisted in spite of the expanding, accelerating horizontal movement that tested their rigorously maintained trinity of institutions and well-circumscribed communal boundaries.

Between 1830 and 1860, New York City, the fulcrum of the nation’s accelerating rate of circulation, was not the cause of an emerging horizontal society but its most auspiciously positioned vector in a network of vectors. The mercantilist elite that once ruled early American cities in the northeastern States had been gradually displaced in the decades following 1800 by the speculators and industrialists. Carried along by collective, rapid accumulation of labor and surplus-value, both nourished and desired by W.A. Alcott’s young men, the maturing industrialist networked metropolitan hubs. These *interurban networks* collapsed the home-community-church triad into the generalized, horizontal circulation of bodies and information, facilitated by infrastructural and institutional ensembles so multiple, so thoroughly dispersed that the new world appeared constituted by invisible forces. And ever since industrialization had exploded the vertical institutions of Early American civic life, the public had not been the same. It could not be, for it lacked practices suited to the material conditions that only it could reinforce through practice. The prescribed codes of conduct once operative in the provincial town before 1800—the scripts and codes prescribing proper conduct in and for a public body, as well as its reception by other citizens—no longer functioned in harmony with the new spaces of the 1830s. Contrary to the “traditional, vertical institutions” of the early American provincial town, the urban mobilization and reorganization of the populace made it increasingly impossible to know everyone with whom one exchanged money and words, or to what, if any, symbolic values those instruments of exchange were connected.

A palpable side-effect of the horizontal restructuring of the nation was a “crisis in social relations,” writes Haltunnen, which “called for the establishment of a new code of conduct,

⁷ See Ruttenberg and Warner *LR*, respectively.

within which men could meet without suspicion, without fear of betrayal by confidence men” (51). The collapse of the old vertical architecture of patriarchal authority gave way to an alienating new horizontal infrastructure of social mobility and self-interest, a dissonant pairing that added the risk of forged public personalities to the homelessness of urban migration. As Whitman himself had, young men were leaving home to seek their fortunes at an earlier age and were vulnerable to the competition, self-interest, intemperance, and desperation thriving in the antebellum metropolis. Temperance and abolitionist reform societies offered fresh bodies the social cohesion necessary to the formation of identity in the horizontal world. The widespread desire to participate in moral reform societies, writes Stuart Blumin, “expressed a wish to learn how to behave according to rules of middle-class respectability, a point that may apply as well to less reform-minded associations, such as debating societies, militia companies, fraternal lodges, and others dedicated at least in part to the organization of sociability among members of and aspirants to an emerging middle-class” (334). Reform societies were politically, spiritually defined fields of practice for the “new code of conduct” largely disseminated through manuals like W.A. Alcott’s.

Like the city itself, reform-minded middle-class associations were a vector through which the rising generation of individual citizens would pass as they internalized the “new code,” embodied it in social practice, and realized the new ideal of circulation for which conduct manuals had been disseminated in print. Urban space, reform societies, and the individual citizen were concentric layers in the nested structure of the emerging horizontal social order, at the very foundation of which was the inscription of code, a code individually represented, collectively reinforced by a public body, and socially adapted to cities and the networks linking them. Once urban subjects were properly channeled through these networks, this expanding networked structure would provide a limitless surface for the production of society as a relatively homogeneous ensemble of publics with no proper ground, only proper channels for the circulation of internalized practices, sutured together, subject to subject, letter to letter, into the union of the democratic imaginary. The young man who flowed into the antebellum city was

destined to be liberated from vertical authoritarianism, as he developed organically into a representation of a secular code of public behavior rooted in liberal circulation. He would therefore achieve, in one sense, the ideal of the revolutionary democratic society that gave him the right to speak for himself as he entered circulation, though at the cost of forgetting the civic space and inscribed code for which his right to speak provided a unified representation of an ostensibly divided, progressively contentious political culture. If read as a linear sequence of Articles and Amendments, the Constitution follows a similar logic. The establishment of “Post Offices and post Roads” is wedged between the punishment of counterfeiters and the promotion of “the Progress of Science and useful Arts” in Article 1, Section 8, mandating the right of Congress to tax its citizens. The first amendment right to worship, speak, publish, assemble, and protest was the fruit of the ratification debates. The articulation of the economic and infrastructural frameworks linking the individual citizen to the future of the republic is always already prior to the right to self-representation. The disappearance of the background is constitutional, mandating the free circulation of discourse as the unconscious operates on the subject.

So when William Merrill Decker states that the American postal system was constitutionally mandated so that citizens could talk back to their government from a distance, he assumes that the construction of a postal circulation system and the right to self-representation were mutually constitutive facets of the democratic ideal. If he is correct here, then he would also be correct in stating: “there was never a time in American history when people without material advantages did not also write letters” (60). But this view of postal history collapses background and foreground, or infrastructure and the democratic circulation of its public body. David Henkin states that between 1790 and 1845 “everyone understood that personal letters were luxury items.” Thus:

most Americans tended to use the mail, if at all, for shorter distances or special occasions when the high price of sending a letter would mark the significance of the gesture.... From its creation, the U.S. Post Office was committed principally to facilitating the wide circulation of political news,

allowing an informed citizenry to live far from the metropolitan centers of government while remaining active in affairs." (PA 20-21)

The shift from the postal circulation of political news to the general practice of sending and receiving letters would take place in conjunction with the enmeshed social reforms and spatial transformation of the antebellum decades. Before letter writing could become a popular practice, public education would first need to train subjects to use the republic's postal network, just as they had to be trained to inhabit industrial cities.

Literacy and the postal system, codes and the city, disappeared in the natural identification between letters and subjects. Interurban networks were therefore postal networks before anyone knew it, as they both circulated the writings of subjects, as well as subjects, and traversed the distinction between the vertical town and the horizontal city, a break caused by a leap forward in technological history and sutured by epistolary practice. Under conditions of displacement and alienation rooted in America's postal unconscious, the horizontal expansion of the democratic imaginary, facilitating the horizontal circulation of subjects and letters, established a virtual space of intercourse by way of writing practices and infrastructural development. Epistolary exchanges had supplemented divine bodies for centuries. But during the American Renaissance the effect of presence delivered by manuscript letters depended on constitutional pretexts as well, an extension of the tax-paying citizen's right to autonomous self-representation. Between 1830 and 1860, the revolutionary subject achieved the democratic ideal by internalizing the new code of conduct that would insure understanding amid industrial tumult and by eliding the emergent material conditions of interurban circulation that would have made autonomy appear to be a fragile, if not tentative, condition of civic life.

The reform necessary to achieving the democratic ideal furnished a growing class of lettered citizens with access to the postal network at the very moment when centripetal forces mobilized them. When Congress decided to charge for posting letters by weight instead of distance (up to 3 hundred miles) in 1845, and then set a fixed rate of five cents for a half ounce for up to 3 thousand miles in 1851, they met the demand of subject looking to circulate their

manuscript subjectivities for the edification of character as for the republic.⁸ At this secondary level, the postal service facilitated the production of an imaginary topography that would serve as the ideal destination of public education and the material practice of composing, addressing, and sending manuscripts. The subject that internalized the new code and inscribed it for his own sake entered the virtual space-time of departures and arrivals that delivered subjects to one another. Henkin calls this virtual space-time “the new postal cartography,” which “conjured an ill-defined, vaporous outside world through which or within which individual people could be located and accessed” (39). That he refers to Emerson’s correspondence with Thomas Carlyle as well as Whitman’s “Song of Myself” to illustrate this point emphasizes the formative role played by the postal system in establishing the infrastructural and discursive conditions of possibility for American Transcendentalism. A generation of urban youths mobilized by interurban networks routed themselves through scripts and codes given unity by epistolary practice, properly channeling the noise of America’s postal unconscious into a democratic imaginary. The consequence of this ecstatic becoming would be the mystification of infrastructural space’s impact on the writing body and, in turn, of practice itself.

Under ideal democratic conditions, lettered citizens would not only have to be united by a space for practice regulated by the federal government but would also have to believe that they were not being regulated. They would have to believe that they were capable of internalizing writing. It had to belong to them. If the right to self-representation was going to mean anything, its meaning would be dependent on the effectively established link between the public and the proper channels of its imaginary, not its postal infrastructure, not its interurban networks, the process of training that formatted subjects for circulation. Stated another way, the newly lettered citizens of the antebellum decades had to forget that formative layers of history, made a thing of the past but maintained by the industrial-urban conditions, were still at work in the democratic

⁸ “Advocates of cheap postage cited mobility as a basis for their sanguine predictions of a nation of letter-writers.... Mobility and postal reform were thus mutually reinforcing historical developments” (Henkin 28-29).

imaginary. These layers of history, surviving in the remnants of the vertical architecture of civic life and carrying forward its own history of practice, shaped civic leaders: lawyers, congressmen, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Public figures, descending from a tradition of civic leadership, as Emerson did, were trained not only to write letters well but to store them, refine them, integrate them into their public work. As Decker claims, “many of [Emerson’s] fundamental ideas receive early articulation in the overtly dialogic letters from which the journal repository is thereafter established” (114). But if his earlier claim about America’s open-access postal network was an overstatement, here he understates the impact of epistolary practice and the personal archiving practice that traditionally corresponded with it, on Emerson’s lectures, essays, and the system of practice that can now be traced back through them.

Emerson turned himself into a celebrity of the lecture circuit by modeling his orations on “the new postal cartography” that emerged over the course of the antebellum decades. Generally speaking, a well-composed letter had to transcend the material conditions of its inscription, formatting, and circulation, practices bound together and vaporized by circulation in the postal imaginary. The transcendentally well-composed letter would have to disclose a way to represent the complex backdrop of American democracy in progress as it throttled forward into modernity while simultaneously allowing that backdrop to recede into the ideal flows of proper channels, or the unilateral and circular line of the Transcendentalist’s public speech. Emerson’s lectures delivered his auditors from the practical and logistical nuisance, on which they all depended, which they all desired, and from which they could not flee fast enough.

Emerson’s “poetic intercourse”: The Letter as Lecture

Emerson’s ability to deliver his audiences from the postal unconscious began with the relatively unique position he occupied between his home and Harvard University. The Emerson home was a component of the traditional, vertical triad (home, community, and church) in early national Concord. His father’s career as a Unitarian minister at the First Church of Boston as well as the influence of his brothers and Aunt Mary Moody Emerson motivated his attempts to live up to the

tradition attached to his name. Given that his father had died of stomach cancer years earlier, leaving the Emerson family relying on the Unitarian church and their community for support, Harvard President John Kirkland, a friend of Emerson's father, made it financially possible for fifteen-year-old Emerson to attend Harvard. That was in 1816, when the school's philosophy, which had been slowly changing for over a decade, finally shifted into a new phase. In 1805, the appointment of Henry Ware, Sr., as Professor of Divinity, signaled Harvard's definitive turn, after years of reformation, to Unitarianism, free of the Trinitarian and Calvinistic doctrines of original sin and predestination still active at other American universities (Sacks 22). As American Unitarians were largely influenced by British empiricism, specifically the Lockean notion of the *tabula rasa*, the combination of empiricism and gospel would guide the public lectures of Unitarian Harvard alumnae like William Henry Channing, whose lecture "Self-Culture" established one of the foundational pretexts of American self-improvement and, as Channing was one of Emerson's early influences, its mystic outgrowth in Transcendentalism.

As Harvard became a Unitarian institution during the early decades of the nineteenth century, it also positioned itself in the vanguard of transnational intellectual trends. In addition to appointing Ware, Kirkland also made arrangements for three of Harvard's finest students—George Ticknor, Edward Everett, and George Bancroft—to pursue their advanced degrees at the University of Göttingen—where Emerson's older brother, William, had earned his MA in Divinity—so that they could bring the pedagogical fruits of German institutional reform to their *alma mater*. As Kenneth Sacks notes, Ticknor, Everett, and Bancroft "returned to Harvard with an appreciation of critical thinking, refined pedagogy, and German Romanticism, somewhat inadvertently providing much of the spark for the Transcendentalist movement" (33). The same German institutional practices that assisted Harvard's Unitarian reformation also introduced the New England literati to German Romanticism and Idealism, as well as the free writing, the rhetoric of lecturing, and hermeneutic practices, which impacted Emerson's formation as a young scholar and civic leader. Like the Unitarians' divergence from Calvinist determinism, the projected freedom of Emerson's "genius" from all institutions was indicative of the generalized

disintegration of traditional institutions and the demand for new codes and new practices adapted to the material conditions of the era.

As if responding to the shift at Harvard, Emerson transcended the limits of the university curriculum by borrowing books liberally from the Boston Library, to which the Emerson family had a lifetime membership: a tribute to the memory of his late father. The cultivation of Emerson's free writing and reading relied on this linking together of institutions by the motivated young scholar, and postal routes are the implicit backdrop in the record of his labors. One month after graduation, young Emerson served as a relay between the stacks and his older brother William, Jr., who was sojourning in Alexandria, Egypt, at the time. In the June 20 entry of an 1819 journal-letter, Emerson wrote: "I have just come to Boston & found your letters to me & the rest & have to say in answer to the Library Businesses that I will renew what you desire at once, but cannot send 'Cours' &c from the other by Mr McKulloch" (*LRWE* 1:86). Young Emerson would travel back and forth between the scholarly resources in Boston and Cambridge to circulate texts and manuscript letters for his brother again on July 3: "I am going to Cambridge again & shall obtain this La Harpe of which you talk so familiarly & send him by the packet You know when all college books must be returned;—is it not before August? I send you 1 Volume of Montolieu's Works, which I just obtained by returning Fontaine. The book I endeavoured to get you was one of Mad. De Genlis' was not in" (88). Young Emerson not only expanded his reading lists but acquired experiential training in accessing scholarly resources, retrieving rare texts from multiple repositories, distributing them (along with his own epistolary manuscripts), and ensuring their timely return.

Emerson continued to play this role almost ten years later, after he had entered Harvard Divinity School. In a December 4, 1828, letter to William, he portrayed himself as a relay for the scholarly and familial needs of William as well as his younger brother, Edward: "I received & transmitted the letters containing cards which you sent. Had you not better send me half a dozen cards, without direction, to exercise my worldly wisdom in distribution? I am a great professor of that art, within these past few months, that I have meddled with Edward's matters" (*LRWE*

1:252). Three years later, he would still be meddling in Edward's matters, as he stated in an August 15, 1831, letter to his younger brother: "I read with great pleasure two or three letters which Charles [Emerson] bro't home from N.Y. from you last night dated (one of them) 18 July.... I carried your letter to R C D to Mrs Derby & talked with her. I enclose to you Barlows letter which pleased mother & me very much & which I answered forthwith favorably" (329). Because his services as a relay for texts and manuscripts positioned him between institutional resources that promoted education and its continuation, Emerson internalized the sending and receiving of the postal unconscious, not its democratic imaginary—the operations of universities and libraries, not their effects.

Young Emerson was therefore the type of letter writer that W.A. Alcott would dream of in the early 1830s. Writing to Charles Chauncey and Edward Bliss Emerson in a December 30, 1826, letter from Charleston, Emerson exercised his debating skills on obscure topics: "As to what you say respecting universal genius I am not satisfied that your latest opinion was the truest. There have been unquestionably men whose genius was equally excellent in grand & minute performances" (*LRWE* 1:182). And then the medium arose, in a more technically oriented and disciplinary tone: "This letter I see is open to great exceptions, but I shd. be ashamed to withhold it after having written so far, so let it lie as quietly on the shelf as may be. By the way, it is strange you shd. be so incorrect a writer, when so scholarly,—‘landlegs’ for sea legs—‘day of a port’ for in, &c. besides unfinished sentences. It raised the gall of Holofernes in me tho' I cd. Almost cry for joy at the letter" (182). The attempt to edify the recipient of the letter with technical training is a type of fraternal horseplay: Emerson points out the most obvious and careless errors in the recipient's last missive, only to flatter his scholarly character and cry for more. The young scholar was no mere subject of an Apparatus of institutions; he did not reproduce and forget them. Rather, he was the subject of a closed system of institutions, to which he had access because of his peculiar position as a would-be civic leader in the New England tradition at a moment of transition: a moment when it was adapting to the horizontal, industrial-urban form of civic space. Emerson therefore internalized the organizational format that linked

together writings and subjects for an elite corps, while simultaneously being formed by the protocols of accelerating, expanding horizontal circulation. From his formative period to his early adulthood, Emerson would relay manuscripts and texts in a network rather than merely receiving inscriptions like a *tabula rasa*: a subject in a world of objects. But his peculiar station as a relay was between two worlds: the vertical world of scripture, where the word of God radiated downward from the pulpit, and the horizontal world of media, where authority was redistributed through the channeling of public expression.

The “Golden Age of Oratory” in the antebellum States was split by the inherited right to speak and democratic right to public expression. In one sense, the split was cartographic: it lay between the Early American elite of New England and the emergent modernity of New York City. As Lawrence Buell states, “Both the quantity and the quality of oratorical performance were especially notable in New England, owing partly to the Congregational tradition, which set a high value upon an educated ministry and upon the sermon as the centerpiece of the worship service, and partly to the quasi-democratic structure of the local government, which encouraged public expression—at least by the elite” (*NELC* 138). For Emerson, public expression by the elite relied on the proper channeling of writings. In Emerson’s epistolary network of manuscript and text exchange, writing was typically cast as the practice that facilitated all others; it was anterior to the circulation of manuscripts and texts; it did not issue from conditions of circulation, accelerating and expanding its centripetal force. Writing was more of a system internalized by uniquely positioned subjects, a closed system that grew from them by nature, or not. The rest takes place in the republican theatre of self-representation. “[W]hen a man writes,” Emerson explained to his brother Charles in an 1827 letter,

he divests himself of his manners & all physical imperfections & it is the pure intellect that speaks. There can be no deception here. You get the measure of his soul. Instead of the old verse, “Speak that I may know thee,” I write “Speak, that I may suspect thee; write, that I may *know* thee.” (*LRWE* 1:191)

The young Emerson may have been defending his preference for script over speech because he felt Charles’s eloquence to be superior to his own, as he suggests in an 1831 letter to his brother

William: “Charles was born with a tongue you & I with a pen” (333). By the time he had left the Unitarian church, and had begun his career as a lecturer, his faith in writing—or manuscript at least—shifted. Around February 1840, he reprimanded himself for the delivery of an early lecture in his *Journal*: “A cold mechanical preparation for a delivery as decorous,—fine things, pretty things, wise things,—but no arrows, no axes, no nectar, no growling, no transpiercing, no loving, no enchantment” (*JMN* 8:339). Mere theatre, mere self-representation, Emerson’s performances in the lecture halls of the northeast’s interurban networks lacked the authenticity of inscriptions circulated in the closed circuits of his family and fellow Harvard alumnae: the contact between letters and subjects that gave coherence to the vertical architecture of their world. Oratory that reveals nothing but its mechanical preparation failed in 1840 for the same reason that speech had been an inferior medium in 1827: “manners” and “physical imperfections” lacked the communication of the “pure intellect” transmitted by inscriptions between brothers who share the same scripts and codes.

By 1840, neither speech nor writing are privileged media but points of departure for the pure intellect organized and transmitted by some other means, not yet identified. The personal letter appears to provide the clearest precedent for the third medium beyond speech and script. The “cold mechanical preparation” with which Emerson critiqued himself in his *Journal* reflects the anxiety of receiving nothing but a letter, mechanically prepared, or delivering nothing but a script to his auditors. As the bearer of presence, the letter was the act of writing plus its imaginative speech effects, and it therefore equaled something completely unidentifiable, completely other. If Emerson could present his audiences with the material barrier that all correspondents had to cope with while delivering the presence that the most cherished letters promised, then he could effectively link himself to the collective experience of deliverance rather than the mechanical preparation of address for a growing culture of letter writers. Emerson had a successful career as a public intellectual on the antebellum lecture circuit because he delivered public speeches as if they were the effects of letters. Occupying a peculiar position between the

vertical and horizontal worlds of the American Renaissance, the mature Emerson was able to traverse the “/” between the postal unconscious and the democratic imaginary.

Emerson’s lectures and essays only trace the invisible divide between postal infrastructure and its effects because of his liberal adaptation of a format that bound together transmission and storage functions, just as the democratic imaginary bound postal routes and subjects. Emerson could only rightfully be called “Master” by Whitman or any other poet of the American Renaissance because he developed a style that reproduced the “Golden Age of Oratory’s” ideal space of public expression: the lecture hall. This technical accomplishment can only be marked in retrospect, however. And such marks surface most forcefully when the traces of manuscript practice that Emerson reserved for his closed circuits of exchange are read in his printed and orated works. The risk of such a reading lies in the acknowledgement of a gap in the reader’s comprehension of the role of manuscript in relation to the roles of public print and speech in antebellum American culture. This gap is conditioned by the increasingly manuscript-less medial context for reading nineteenth-century literature in the twenty-first century. Emerson’s printed lectures and essays are invested with a practical process of composition that ultimately covers its tracks; the logic of manuscript scripting and coding his printed and orated works is presented and then withdrawn. Here, manuscript is not a trope or theme but an element in a situation constituted by practice, a situation that discloses technical know-how and embodied activities that cut through the imaginary. Reading the medial marks traversing Emerson’s works—his manuscripts and published works, including his lectures—will provide for an altered perspective of the way systems of practice and civic space—in a state of transition and consequent dissonance during the American Renaissance—left its marks on his texts as his texts marked up the subjects to which they were addressed.

In his August 16, 1841, letter to Margaret Fuller, Emerson blamed the transit system for his recent lapse in correspondence: “I should gladly have written to you on my journey if I had alighted anywhere on an inkstand and a quiet half hour; but these are not the gifts of stage roads & small ocean-steamboats; so with many friendly thoughts cast southward to Newport by way of

ventilation & perfume to our dull carting & boating, I finished my transits in silence" (*LRWE* 5:440-441). The opening of Emerson's letter designates the spaces in which not only writing but communication in general can take place. Transit routes do not provide the gift of writing, and, as if by consequence, they are also denied the gift of his speech. Under such conditions, telepathic missives are sent "by way of ventilation and perfume," to await their delayed materialization once Emerson has arrived at his final destination.

But here at home last night I found one letter, & this morning, by mail, another, of good remembrance, to be thankful for; and so I greet you well,—you and Caroline [Sturgis].... I dream I dream that we shall yet meet—all of us and more than we three—on a far higher ground than ever hitherto. Strange that there is almost no attempt to realize a fine & poetic intercourse but that always there should be such vast allowance made for friction until the best of society gets to be a mere diminution of the friction. I think if you should read the letters & diaries of people you would infer a better conversation than we ever find. (441)

In Emerson's letter, "intercourse," without "allowance made for friction," is the absolute destination in a system of corresponding destinations. The troubles of "stage roads & small ocean-steamboats" are resolved "by way of ventilation & perfume"; the transit system that did not provide "an inkstand and a quiet half hour" is placed in opposition to the home, which not only gives Emerson the materials, time, and space to write his letter, but also the gift of letters to be read and responded to. Under these ideal conditions, the letter and the diary might as well be the same, for they are bound within the closed circuits of senders and receivers, which exclude the transit networks that link them, just as those networks supposedly negate the necessary conditions for written and, consequently, spoken communication. The "letters & diaries of people" are therefore the media of "poetic intercourse," an ideal system of correspondences that masters the transits of life "in silence." And at the same time, the stable, private conditions necessary for penning an address or a diary entry become the only conditions under which anything can be said.

As a close ally and short-term editor of *The Dial*, Fuller was familiar with the object of this rhetorical maneuver, a maneuver that effectively produced the ideal conditions for the reception of the writer's words and that Emerson frequently used in not only his letters but also,

just that year, his first series of *Essays*. Emerson had been called away from his writing desk—and the letter to Fuller delayed—so that he could deliver “The Method of Nature” at Waterville College, Maine, five days earlier, on August 11. Like the letter, the lecture grounds itself in nineteenth-century modernity: “I love the music of the water-wheel; I value the railways; I feel the pride which the sight of a ship inspires; I look on trade and every mechanical craft as education also.” With this foundation in place, Emerson can send his audience in surprising new directions: “But let me discriminate what is precious herein. There is in each of these works an act of invention, an intellectual step, or short series of steps taken; that act or step is the spiritual act; all the rest is mere repetition of the same a thousand times” (*CWRWE* 1:120-1). In “The Method of Nature,” the return from the invented machine to the primordial act of inventing calls the passive receiver to action and admonishes him not to settle for anything less but this “intellectual step, or short series of steps”: whether singular or plural, an alternative movement consolidated by “the spiritual act.” Diverging from the activities increasingly regulated by networks of manufacture and transit, the spiritual act refers to a leap of faith far different from the trust a traveler had to have in the safety of railways.

In the conclusion of his address, the Master proves this point by demonstrating that an eternity of “steps” can be summed up in the singular “body you see before you”:

Do what you know, and perception is converted into character, as islands and continents were built by invisible infusories, or as these forest leaves absorb light, electricity, and volatile gases, and the gnarled oak to live a thousand years is the arrest and fixation of the most volatile and ethereal currents. The doctrine of this Supreme Presence is a cry of joy and exultation. Who shall dare think he has come late into nature, or has missed anything excellent in the past, who seeth the admirable stars of possibility, and the yet untouched continent of hope glittering with all its mountains in the vast West? I praise with wonder this great reality which seems to drown all things in the deluge of its light.... I cannot tell if these wonderful qualities which house to-day in this mortal frame, shall ever re-assemble in equal activity in a similar frame, or whether they have before had a natural history like that of this body you see before you; but this one thing I know, that these qualities did not now begin to exist, cannot be sick with my sickness nor buried in any grave; but that they circulate through the Universe: before the world was, they were. (136-7).

Character forms as naturally, and is as divinely ordained by nature, as the earth itself but only if, like the earth, “you,” the auditor, do what you already know, naturally. Also natural is the formation of auspicious constellations, those “admirable stars” that beckon you westward, where, as you know, new opportunities are opening, new characters forming. Such relatively local displacement is no displacement at all, considering that the “qualities” of “this body you see before you...circulate through the Universe”; you are preceded by the “doctrine of this Supreme Presence,” issued and represented by this body before you. Through an “intellectual step, or short series of steps,” transmuting the “waterwheel” and “railways,” through the “invisible infusories” of geological formation, into the delivery of this “Presence,” the orator abolishes the material preconditions of his speech: not only the manuscript from which he reads but also the transit routes that delivered him and his lecture to his audience, now a collective unit bound by the forces of “Reason.” Emerson achieves this feat by replacing industry, transit, and education with the “Universe” that has delivered him to you—and delivered you, in turn—amounting to an ideal union of technique and system in the time-space of the here and now. The mystic consolidation of the eternal stars in the speaking body relies on the elision of the constellated access routes just beyond the walls of Waterville College, just as the transformation of manuscript into Emerson himself relies on the synthetic power of the voice conveyed by the properly executed letter.

When Emerson refers to his career as a preacher-turned-lecturer in the surprising turn of his 1841 letter to Fuller, then, his recipients know that they are in the presence of the Master:

Yet I must preach a little & say that nothing excellent can ever come of our partial & irregular merits: the delicacy & luster of our Corinthian capitals, the carving, inlaying, & painting of our tablets must rest on the hidden but perfect, foundations of the just & laborious life. I suppose what is finest in life comes neither out of poverty or riches but out of heights of character which make themselves so conspicuous that they will not suffer us to attribute anything to condition, scarcely to know what the condition was. (*LRWE* 5:441)

It is no coincidence that Emerson describes “our tablets” as ornately carved “Corinthian capitals” just after his manuscript begins to “preach” about the “hidden but perfect, foundations”

of the “just & laborious life.” The “character” that serves as the bond of sympathy between the author of the letter and his select addressees hangs in the balance. There is no external “condition,” neither steam-boat nor stage, that can be blamed for Emerson’s lapse in correspondence. Only the letter itself, making all manner of excuses, could have delayed Emerson’s appearance before his select audience. Nothing written in the manuscript letter can be valued: it is mere architecture, mere imitation of classical inscription that delights the eye with “Corinthian” artifice. Emerson presents his self-possessed character by resisting his script, but he can only do so after becoming the author of his own limitations: the one who controls the only technical circuits of exchange immediately grasped by his addressees. Literally, an over-saturation of rhetorical mastery inscribes technique on the surface of Emerson’s writings, so that technique can be superseded by the discovery of its overwhelmingly self-evident spiritual effect. And this effect is configured in the technical groundwork of his writings, leading, as if inevitably, to the latency of this effect in what has come before it and in the effect itself, all in one place: whether the letter read in Fuller’s parlor⁹ or the script read in the lecture hall. The letter and the lecture, technically speaking, are therefore delivered in a similar fashion: they both foreground technique and supersede it with the effect of a revealed presence latent in that technique, and, in both cases, technique overlaps with infrastructural technology.

The effects of Emerson’s letter depend on more than just the bonds of collegiality shared by the New England coterie. Down to its “dots” and “points of light,” each articulate letter of the missive asserts its exceptional status by defining itself against the distribution of literacy. While the valences of the word “character” traverse theological and political controversies in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America, in antebellum writing manuals, notes Tamara Plakins Thornton, “character” naturalized the technical rigor behind the body’s formation of a proper social identity in script (52). By virtue of the natural unity of identity and handwriting,

⁹ The communal reading practices of the Transcendentalist circle have been discussed elsewhere, so I will leave it to be taken for granted as an established practice, though I will provide my construction of historical pretexts and practices from Emerson’s early life that informed his conception of “small-scale” circulation in Chapter Four. See Sacks, 7; Rosenwald, 76-77; Myerson 1973; and Carlson.

then, Emerson cannot be determined by a “higher will,” neither by god nor the “transits” of life. Rather, like all humans, he is what “dots its way along by interrupted points of light”—or, as he states in “The Method of Nature,” the “series of steps,” each of which is a “spiritual act.” And he can therefore be embodied, spoken, and understood among his select addressees because they can read in the letter what cannot be heard in everyday speech: that the speaker is as inconsistent as the dots and points of light on the page of manuscript and that his self-possession, in this self-evident fact, makes him Master of all he has inscribed.

If print media had shaped American culture to the extent that it either permitted, before 1800, the liberal exercise of anonymous self-representation, or later reflected, by the antebellum decades, the crisis of representation demanding a “bureaucratic hermeneutics,” then in Emerson’s “poetic intercourse” infrastructure served as the medium blocking direct access to the timeless, spaceless “Supreme Presence” of the “Universe” and the natural order of “steps” and “spiritual acts” that it determined. Technologies of production and distribution, such as the “waterwheel” and the “railway,” established the conditions under which the democratic citizen could become the embodied realization of a cosmic movement toward western horizons. But like the natural order leading from knowledge to action, both point of departure and destination—infrastructure and the west—had to lie before us, in the sense that it both preceded us and was in front of us: the “Universe,” absolutely, waiting to be embodied as “character,” naturally. In Emerson’s lecture as in his letter, the distribution of “character” relied on the addressee’s assumption of innate qualities. These qualities would only be realized, however, if addressees entered circulation as subjects of an emergent world and forgot the “steps” facilitating knowledge and circulation. The most natural history is the universal one that comes before and after us, while enacting itself in the present as the “body you see before you.” The letter and the lecture, collapsed into each other as a form of performance art, consolidated not just the audience enclosed within the space of the parlor or lecture hall but also history. The logic at work in Emerson’s writings acknowledges and effaces the emergence of modern conditions of circulation and distribution. This logic returns those modern conditions, as if they had never existed, to the

format of traditional, vertical space-time, the space-time that modern infrastructure and democratically distributed technique were disrupting.

Infrastructure was therefore not so much a rhetorical trope in the American Renaissance as it was a constitutive element of emergent modernity, which impacted reception by shaping the conventions that delivered the content of writing. Infrastructure was the obstacle—symbolic and imaginary—that formatted the spiritual origin and destiny of Emerson's addressees. Emerson's letter to Fuller offers a particularly illuminating perspective of the anxiety over the impact of infrastructure on the production and reception of literacy in general, from manuscript letters to published works. The difference does not lie in the written object alone but in the steps of writing, formatting, and circulating the letter and the speaking body under the infrastructural conditions of the antebellum decades. Successful delivery affirmed the fact that characters linked properly and moved without delay, a necessary displacement of a technical and technological foreground to the background. The format of the letter, like the format of the lecture, allowed for the conditioning of a space where writing could, as a matter of fact, control circulation. No epistolary fiction, Emerson's writings trace the natural method by which the delivery of civic discourse is properly channeled. Both depending on an apparatus of horizontal circulation—call it a postal system, Lyceum circuit, institutional ensemble, or transit network—the letter and the lecture reproduced a vertical channeling of discourse depending on and concluding with effects of achieved simultaneity and spatial unity, in spite or because of the pull of horizontal expansion.

Whether it was Emerson's intention or not, the spaces of the letter and the lecture, private or public, insured the proper reception of civic discourse as an inscribed entity, self-possessed in transit, already in correspondence with those to which it was addressed, and thus exchanging its technical and technological self-evidence for the self-evidence of what lies before us, suddenly a spiritual thing. And yet, somehow, this profound achievement could not be translated into print media. Emerson's *Essays* did not fare well in the vital literary marketplace of the antebellum decades. As Thomas Augst states, it was the very illegibility of Emerson's lectures that brought him success as a public speaker: "Where the silent reading of Emerson might become hermetic

and difficult, requiring our individual skills for textual exegesis, hearing him became a pleasure of a distinctly communal nature for which one required no special preparation—the collective experience of *we* and *us* afforded by a mass medium of *intellectual entertainment*" (138). In a January 1, 1841, entry of his *Journal*, Emerson appears to have hoped that his first volume of *Essays* would have the same effect as his lectures: "I see no reason why we may not write with as much grandeur of spirit as we can serve or suffer. Let the page be filled with the character not with the skill of the writer" (JMN 7:411). He had every reason to believe that his personal character would transcend his technical skills in the *Essays*, as his masterful letter to Fuller demonstrates. His 1855 letter to Whitman, on the other hand, reveals that his forgetting of the material basis of writing and its circulation, of discourse and its proper channeling, had its consequences. Emerson's anxiety over this eventuality was already legible in his 1841 Journal entry, where he could only hope that his character would not be read in the double-sense: as the author's technique side-by-side with its collective effect.

Emerson's published texts would await future generations who learned to read Emerson by reading him in the context organized for him by Whitman in the 1856 edition. Both Fuller's parlor and the lecture hall assembled select audiences for Emerson's personal presence at different scales. The applause can still be heard. But contemporary reviews of "The Method of Nature" were not positive. Given that the analysis of Emerson's letters and lectures has emphasized material practice and material conditions, the emphasis here can extend to the claim that the primary reason for the lack of positive reviews is a consequence of the fact that the critics appear to have read the printed text of the lecture. The review appearing in the *Knickerbocker*, December 18, 1841, began: "We are bound to thank the author, Mr. Ralph Waldo Emerson, for a copy of his Oration delivered before the Adelphi Society of Waterville college, (Maine,) in August last. It is the production of one who thinks much, often deeply, but who writes muddily; and this latter quality, we are sorry to be compelled to add is the evident result of the German-English system of Thomas Carlyle, which whoso handleth, not being expert therewith, useth an edged tool, and will assuredly be wounded thereby" (Myerson 109). Perhaps

today's critics have been conditioned to appreciate the marks left by inscription. In Emerson's case, writing cuts, but only when it surfaces as technique in writing that attempts to suture and clean itself with a spiritual act. To say that Emerson thinks much, even deeply, and wounds with his "edged tool" is the accurate assessment of his work's technical achievements.

To articulate Emerson's infrastructural character, the critic would have to enter the spaces configured by his inscriptions and have the technical know-how for grasping them. Today's readers know the lecture hall as artifact and manuscript as essence; Whitman had a profound feeling for both in the 1840s. The poet offers a viable alternative for critics of Emerson's lectures: the choice to say little to nothing at all about the lecture itself and to focus on its more legible context, as he did in his March 7, 1842, review of "Mr. Emerson's Lecture," "Nature and the Powers of the Poet," for the *New York Aurora*. This brief review has often been cited as evidence of Whitman's awestruck first encounter with his forebear, mainly because its final sentence reads: "Suffice it to say, the lecture was one of the richest and most beautiful compositions, both for its matter and style, we have ever heard anywhere, at any time." We might assume that the sentence is not to be taken literally, given Whitman's cartoonish depictions of the audience, particularly Horace Greeley, who, "whenever any thing particularly good was said, which seemed to be once in about five minutes...flounce[d] about like a fish out of water, or like a tickled girl" (*WWJ* 1:44). Whether or not Whitman was truly impressed by Emerson's lecture, his review explicitly portrays the comedy of celebrity worship and regurgitates received opinion dripping with satire. In the lecture hall, writing did not cut because, where instruments were lacking, only fingers remained.

The budding poet's satirical account prefigures his mimicry of Emerson in the open letter of the 1856 *Leaves of Grass*: "The time is at hand when inherent literature will be a main part of These States, as general and real as steam-power, iron, corn, beef, fish. First-rate American persons are to be supplied. Our perennial material for fresh thoughts, histories, poems, music, orations, religions, recitations, amusements, will then not be disregarded, any more than our perennial fields, mines, rivers, seas" (*LG* 2:350). The American bard's proclamation of the

nation's coming literature of industry and resources virtually transcribes the form of Emerson's sentiments in the essay adapted from "Nature and the Powers of the Poet,"¹⁰ the essay titled "The Poet": "Our logrolling, our stumps and their politics, our fisheries, our Negroes, and Indians, our boats, and our repudiations, the wrath of rogues, and the pusillanimity of honest men, the northern trade, the southern planting, the western clearing, Oregon, and Texas, are yet unsung. Yet America is a poem in our eyes" (*CWRWE* 3:22). A comparison of the two passages throws into relief Emerson's notable use of plural possessives and a familiar system of oppositions. Emerson's vision of the nation is split between "our" logrolling and stump speeches and "their politics"; the "Negroes" that are "ours" and the Indians that are not "us"; the "repudiations" that can be "ours" and the "wrath" and "pusillanimity" that cannot.

Whitman's concept of national literature in 1856 transcribed Emerson's movement between oppositions and his absolute supersession of those oppositions. It also defined itself against that movement by disclosing what the Master's revealing of the inevitable before us leaves unsaid, or what it cannot say to preserve its vertical posture in the midst of accelerating horizontal expansion. The bard's concept posits a network of industry and agriculture that proceed step by step without achieving a spiritual act, configuring instead a national collective schema across the surface of his inscriptions. Instead of reproducing a system of oppositions, Whitman's concept becomes a systemic opposition to Emerson's, not excluding other politics, people, or states of mind, but identifying what is "ours" through the "perennial material" common in technology, resources, and culture. His use of the plural possessive pronoun equates an array of practices with the territorial diversity of the nation by way of the sign of collective identity, while avoiding the signification of a racially or provincially designated "us." The network structure of this collective identity, in other words, consists of inscriptions, of a system of practice, that are not elided by way of a performance of rhetorical mastery in the end but continually traces these inscriptions across the surface of writing. This system of practice is not

¹⁰ See *ELRWE* 3:347-365.

given as a simultaneous totality, out of time and out of space. Rather, the network that Whitman traced into existence presents its links as open and tentative: a national infrastructure in the process of being constructed. The network structuring the 1856 *Leaves of Grass*, its letters and other generic mixtures, is emblematic of the poet's tracing of the Emersonian cultural phenomenon in its ideal context and the consequences of this tracing: a retroactive disclosure of practice that reveals the technical and technological foreground in Emerson's spiritualization of what lies before us.

That is not to say that Whitman negated Emerson's idealism or that he actively resisted it; rather, Whitman sought what lay before him, following Emerson's direction, and, in doing so, he discovered the steps leading to the act, the writing system and civic space for which Emerson attempted to direct his addressees toward harmony. Lacking Emerson's technical training, Whitman would have to trace back his own history of practice to compliment what he had gathered from a rudimentary public education and the literary proficiency he had cobbled together as a typesetter, newspaper man, and self-reliant young man of antebellum New York City. In the context Whitman created for Emerson—a context that cannot be avoided today—the poet exposes the marks of the Master's material practices, where technique and technology overlap and Emerson truly gains control of writing systems as civic space by giving them imaginary unity. By way of these marks, Emerson's writings present a compositional process but then propose an ideal conclusion from which there is no looking back. Reversal of the progressive movement of Emerson's rhetoric opens the Master's ideal ends to composition, releasing the noise coexisting with public speech and the delay of letters—the steps that amount to "Emerson/Whitman." The open and tentative forms of binding together writing systems and civic spaces in the antebellum decades establishes a modern context for Emerson that he could never have established for himself, not because he was unaware of or uninterested in the technological situation emerging in the antebellum northeast but because his mastery of discourse was closely tied to a social structure ill-suited to his emergent conditions. Emerson's writing system, based on the proper channeling of letters and public expression from top of a

vertical edifice downward, would be broken and its flows redirected by the emergent writing system modeled on a form of civic space that had not yet fully emerged: the civic space in which Whitman refined the instruments of his poetics.

Whitman's Print Erotics and The Logic of Manuscript

In his June 20, 1857, letter to Sarah Tyndale, Whitman excused his irregular letter writing by referring his addressee to his published works: “I think profoundly of my friends—though I cannot write to them by post office. I write to them more to my satisfaction, through my poems” (WC 1:42). He wasn’t joking: the paucity of Whitman’s extant correspondence antedating 1860 suggests that the poet actually did not feel obligated to use the republic’s postal system, or the rhetorical operations that securely bound senders and receivers in the epistolary circuits of the democratic imaginary. In Whitman’s writing system, script was not a delivery system for effects that superseded its technical and technological means of transmission; rather, it was a delivery system for the means of transmission. In the case of his letter to Tyndale, the means of transmission brought Whitman another opportunity to promote the next edition *Leaves of Grass*. Still three years away, the third (1860) edition would contain “no other matter but poems—(no letters to or from Emerson—no notices, or anything of that sort.).... The difference is in the new character given to the mass, by the additions” (44). Where the double-meaning of character oscillated between material inscription and the transcendental delivery of a little preaching in Emerson’s 1841 letter to Margaret Fuller, in Whitman’s 1857 letter to Tyndale character can only refer to an awaiting type-case full of pica and the steps toward the composition of a newly bound text. Whitman’s letter turns the spiritual act that completes Emerson’s poetic intercourse into the transient situation that it works to suppress. The American bard not only spends an entire paragraph detailing his plans for his third edition and expressing his hope that his publishers will “give up the plates” used to print the book. He also renders future contact with his addressee improbable, explaining: “I hang back more and more from making visits” (WC 1:44). In place of frictionless intercourse, Whitman’s letter counteracts the rhetoric of presence demanded by

epistolary conventions and delivers in its place the prospect of book making and the redistribution of an old text, new and improved. More an act of recycling, one familiar to compositors, than resistance or self-determination, Whitman's letter discloses the technologically reproducible pretexts that circulate and distribute the writings of senders and receivers.¹¹

The coincidence of print-media prospects and lacking correspondence among Whitman's papers before 1860 can be traced back to the poet's formative years as a journalist and editor for urban newspapers. Whitman's three-month employment with the New Orleans *Crescent* in 1848 has left a particularly conspicuous absence in his record of correspondence—only two brief addenda inscribed on his younger brother's letters home are extant.¹² The Tyndale letter suggests, however, that Whitman considered his first publications in the *Crescent*, a series titled “Excerpts from a Traveller's Note Book,” a report for his intimates as well as those he refers to in his letter to Tyndale as his “friends” at large in the networks of the republic (*UCPPWW* 1:181–190). As stated above, the early American postal system was primarily a network for news media and business correspondence. For the economizing journalist, then, public print may have served as the medium through which to earn from rather than spend on personal exchanges. The mass-mediated “Note Book” suggests that for Whitman the production of private papers was enmeshed in the prospect of circulation in the networks external to bound formats. That is,

¹¹ We might consider how Emerson' and Whitman's respective class identities impinged upon their epistolary practices. Yet after the Postal Act of 1851, a letter weighing one half-ounce could be posted, with a prepaid postage stamp, for three cents, and posting letters became especially popular in Whitman's New York City, which sent more than six times the national average of mailed letters in 1856. See Henkin 2006, 22; 31.

¹² The two extant letters are actually brief notes, added at the end of journal-letters written by the budding poet's younger brother, Thomas Jefferson (“Jeff”), who accompanied Whitman and worked as an office-boy for the *Crescent*. One of Whitman's addenda, addressed to his “mother,” primarily consists of instructions for managing the Whitman household's finances back in Brooklyn.¹² Though it expresses sentiments that fulfill epistolary conventions—“I began to feel very uneasy, not hearing from you so long”—in the next sentence, the poet shifts to an economic register, as if no transition were needed, writing: “My prospects in the money line are bright” (Whitman 1961, 33). See also the even briefer note at the end of Jeff's letter, dated April 23, 1848 (36). The economy of Whitman's addendum, concerned as it is with the family's fiscal solvency, was likely determined by the cost of moving to a new city, if not the anticipation of a first paycheck.

networks and notebooks had a curious relation in Whitman's journalism from the 1840s. The same was true for unbound formats. After returning from his brief career in New Orleans, the *New York Sunday Dispatch* ran ten installments of Whitman's "Letters from a Travelling Bachelor," from October 1849 to January 1850, which described urban walks and railroad jaunts in and around New York City; and, between October and November 1850, Whitman placed three articles titled "Letters from New York" in D.C.'s *National Era*. A comparison of the 1848 "Note Book" and the "Letters" of 1849 and 1850 reveal that the generic distinctions indicated by the series' titles had little impact on the subject of letter or diary in print distribution. The absolute destination of "letters & diaries" in Emerson's poetic intercourse, then, were practically mirrored in the personal letters and notebooks rendered as mere formats for senders and receivers in the medial context established by industrial print.

Both "Note Book" and "Letter" in technologically reproducible form shared an impersonal mode of address directed to a general audience, a mode that Whitman had cultivated since 1842 as the editor of New York's *Aurora*.¹³ This claim resonates with Michael Warner's description of the universalizing and anonymous character of the print medium, or its "printedness," in early America after 1700. As Warner demonstrates, print was "differentiated from personal modes of sociability" and thus relied on the culturally inscribed distinction between manuscript and print (*LR* 39). Warner emphasizes this point in making the distinction between the format of the open and personal letter. The political pamphlet in open letter form, widely deployed in the political culture of the eighteenth-century colonies, "is not a personal letter, and *must* not be"; rather, "Writing's unrestricted dissemination appears here [in the open letter] as the ground of politics because in its very contrast with personal presence it allows a difference between public discourse and private correspondence" (40). The constitutive opposition between public, political discourse and private, personal discourse is medially

¹³ See O'Neill, who argues that the antebellum republic was a "dialogic public space" in which Whitman experimented with the form of the personal address to the general public as editor of the *Aurora* in 1842.

inscribed, for Warner, by the essential distinction between print media and manuscript at a moment in media history when storage, formatting, and transmission entered a new phase. The initial stirrings of popular print in England and the colonies in 1700, as Warner notes, introduced the conditions of possibility for pre-revolutionary political culture based on what he calls “print discourse.” Warner’s book charts a tragic course for early American political culture, however, as it follows out the consequences of the ratification debates and its proliferation of pamphlets in the emergence of American literature. Gothic ambiguity and lachrymose sentimentality of American literary culture after 1800 accompanied a “bureaucratic hermeneutics,” mediating the relation between democratic subjects with their constitutive pretexts, as if by necessity. Early national hermeneutics essentially split the print medium. Before 1800 print mediated the individual citizen’s relation to American political culture; after 1800 it provided the surface for a “nationalist imaginary.”

Whitman’s mass-mediated “Note Book” and “Letters” were not the political pamphlets of eighteenth-century circulation traditions. But Warner’s take on early American print demonstrates why this is so. Where the political phenomenon of eighteenth-century print discourse took place when print production was only just becoming possible in early America, the industrial press and interurban circulation networks of the antebellum decades made newspapers a medium for Whitman’s type of “everyman.” Under such conditions, what W.A. Alcott called “common letter writing” was always already dependent the circulation of texts that disseminated the emergent “code of conduct.” The print medium and its circulation was a conspicuously visible foundation for the redistributed practice of writing according to the codes established by a nationalist imaginary. And as Emerson’s poetic intercourse demonstrates, the representation of practice through the proper postal channels of manuscript and spatial contexts of received presence were inscribed with the inevitable purpose of restoring what is before us and was only momentarily lost in the emergent technological situation of the American Renaissance.

Warner guides a consideration of the way Whitman distinguished himself from within the conditioning of an imaginary for the mark constituting the democratic subject. In the more recent essay titled “Whitman Drunk” (2002), Warner draws from his earlier scholarship to claim that the 1855 poem ultimately titled “Song of Occupations” exploits the anonymity of print discourse’s “definitional impossibility of intimacy” as an anonymous, universal medium in a political culture (*PC* 285). Referring back to the poet’s temperance fiction from the 1840s—specifically the episodic narrative *Franklin Evans* (1842)—to emphasize the politics of Whitman’s print-based political aesthetics, Warner discovers an “erotics or even ethics of contemplative self-abandonment, presenting challenges for the pragmatics of selfing.” From the early journalism to the 1855 poems, Whitman’s writings posit a democratic subject constituted by the potential slippage between mediation and embodied self-representation under antebellum material conditions, a slippage necessary to “the idea of sexuality as an expressive capacity of the individual” (287). Whitman’s poem therefore externalizes the democratic subject’s internalized division: the constitutive split (the “/”) between the technological reproducibility of media and the erotic charge of direct address that is always mediated, and always before us. What this reading makes apparent is the poem’s emphatic expression of the possibility of a mediation and distribution of the mark constituting desire and instantiated in the subject as a politically constituted entity with a right to self-representation.

And yet Warner reproduces some all-too-familiar, albeit generative, contradictions that critics have identified as the driving force behind Whitman’s poetic writings after 1855 (or perhaps earlier), not excluding invocations of the sensual body that rupture his otherwise technically and technologically self-aware, self-referential experimental texts. I am not objecting to Warner’s reading of “Song of Occupations” (or *Franklin Evans*, for that matter); rather, I want to identify his early view of American print and republican political culture with his later perception of the tension driving the political nature of the democratic subject and the possibility of distributing this tension in a medium previously fallen into an imaginary state eliding this tension. This heightened tension may have only been possible once the republic’s nationalist

imaginary had saturated the symbolic order established by the ratification debates. Only then, perhaps, could the nationalist imaginary elide the materiality of self-representation through print media as well as, consequently, the discursive practice of interventional participation that it facilitated in pre-revolutionary political culture. Only then could such a medium be so thoroughly evacuated of its culturally inscribed divisions between the body and its means of political participation that a new identity, an awakening into the possibility of formerly repressed embodied identities and practices under new conditions of circulation, crack its fascinating surface. Only then could the spiritual act before every literate subject, ambiguously expressed, disclose itself as the mark of a practice channeled by an accelerating, expanding technological situation that composed these marks into something like a nation.

Henkin leads the way out of the dialectic between “contemplative self-abandonment” and the “pragmatics of selfing” that Warner opens in his reading of “Song of Occupations” by articulating the postal unconscious expressed in Whitman’s “Song of Myself. With Henkin’s assistance, I want to unfold the *logic of manuscript* at work in one section of the poem: specifically, the section (among all of the poems in all six editions of *Leaves of Grass*) which makes an explicit reference to manuscript letters, rather than “letters” in terms of “modern letters,” pica, or, in more thematic terms, the rhetoric of address, which could, in some instances, be historically interpreted as a relative of the rhetorical conventions of epistolary writing. As mentioned above, Henkin quotes Emerson’s correspondence with Carlyle to make a point, in passing, about the imaginary unity given to the technical, technological character of antebellum America’s postal unconscious by cultural phenomena like Transcendentalism. He then cites the following lines from “Song of Myself” in its final version (1881): “I find letters from God dropt in the street, and every one is sign’d by God’s name, / And I leave them where they are, for I know that wheresoe’er I go, / Others will punctually come for ever and ever” (*LG* 6:76). In the first published version of the poem, appearing in the 1855 *Leaves*, the three lines quoted by Henkin appear as the last two of the following five lines:

Why should I wish to see God better than this day?
 I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and each moment
 then,
 In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face in the
 glass;
 I find letters from God dropped in the street, and every one is signed by
 God's name,
 And I leave them where they are, for I know that others will punctually
 come forever and ever. (*LG* 1:54)

Henkin refers to these lines as signs of “ill-defined, vaporous outside world through which or within which individual people could be located and accessed” in the “new postal cartography” of the antebellum decades, where “postal users may well have conceived of letters as messages tossed upon the seas, washing up miraculously at their intended destination” (39). Because God may have dropped these loose leaves in Whitman’s streets, Henkin identifies the religious strain in Whitman’s lines: writing and posting are acts of faith that link the subject with the divinity of an unidentifiable outside (40). As Emerson’s poetic intercourse demonstrates, spiritual acts descend from the vertical architecture of early American communities; the delivery of a little preaching, under the right conditions, maintained this architecture as the horizontality of industrial-urban infrastructures established a network for them. Here lies the technical, technological distinction marking the “/” in “Emerson/Whitman,” the distinction that binds and unbinds them. That Henkin doesn’t distinguish the two authors on the basis of the infrastructural situation is not a problem. He doesn’t write literary criticism; he was only citing cultural reference points to flesh out postal history. What I want to do, then, is to identify the way the five lines of the 1855 “Song of Myself” distinguishes “letters from God dropped in the street” from frictionless “poetic intercourse” and even a frictive erotics of print media by unfolding a logic of manuscript in print.

In the five lines, the logic of manuscript discloses the design of proper channels that deliver the spiritual act, vertically, in a horizontally mobile situation. A sequential formulation reveals itself in Whitman’s lines, tracing a dissonance between vertical/horizontal mobility and the logic of manuscript/print, and marking the trajectory, line by line, of a civic space in which a subject has been formed by a system of practice. The sequence begins with a rhetorical question:

why should the subject of the poem wish to see God better than this, the present day? Why, indeed, should he see what he begins to articulate in the “twenty-four” hours of the day, or in the moment by moment temporal rhythm in which the subject sees God? The identification of the “faces of men and women” as well as the subject’s “own face in the glass” replace the units in the standard temporal metrics of the passage from the beginning to the end of a single day: the measure of God’s perceivability. The subject does not see God in the faces of others or of his own face but in the calculable traces that they leave behind as they move past the subject and the subject sees himself. These traces are legible, retrospectively, because they are, in fact, letters from and signed by God and “dropped in the street.” That the subject leaves them because others will punctually come suggests that they remain not only available to all of the “faces” that would find them and the signature of God on them, but that, in the streets, they remain in liberal circulation with those faces in which God is seen.

The sequence articulated over the course of the five lines clearly articulates a logic moving from totalities to multiplicities, beginning with the analogous totalities of the mystic entity of God and the empirically experienced totality of the passage of twenty-four hours. The sequence proceeds by formalizing the total day into “each hour” and “each moment”; it then supplements these increasingly abstract metrical units with the subjective identification of faces, strange and familiar; and lastly it collapses metrical units and subjective identifications into the scriptural trace, both divinely and technically authored, circulating through urban space. Line by line, the poem presents a sequence of dialectical movements, in miniature, that achieve supersession in a spiritual act split by manuscript: a scripture split by script and disclosing the space for which it has been coded for circulation. There is no need to explore the somewhat obvious pun on “faces” (for “typefaces”) to grasp the contrast between totality and multiplicity in God and letters, the day and hours/moments, the faces and mirrors, the divine signatures and the street.

The logic of manuscript in the 1855 “Song of Myself” discloses a movement that multiplies the print medium into media crossed through with the distributive force of print

technology and the infrastructures that circulate it. This logic is counter-intuitive, no doubt, given that manuscript is typically conceived as being emblematic of continuity, at least in cursive. And yet this conception is belied by the fact that the nationalist imaginary after 1800 trained the public, before they knew it, to read print and manuscript as subjects perpetually linked through the postal unconscious and the vertical spaces it established in a horizontally mobilized topography. As it pertains specifically to the postal system, the logic of manuscript in the five lines of “Song of Myself” leads back to Grossman’s description of the 1856 *Leaves of Grass* as “a network designed to convert readers to the project of the *Leaves*” through its scattered references to the Emerson letter. Included among the reviews of the 1855 edition in “Leaves-Droppings” is a review “From the Examiner. (London, England.),” the first paragraph of which reads:

We have too long overlooked in this country the great poet who has recently arisen in America...to whom Mr. Emerson writes that he finds in his book “incomparable things, said incomparably well.” The book he pronounces “the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed;” at which, indeed, says Mr. Emerson in the printed letter sent to us—“I rubbed my eyes a little, to see if this sunbeam were no illusion.” (*LG* 2:378)

Critical discourse, no matter what subject position it is intended to serve, ultimately becomes enmeshed in the context created by the poet, a context whose work of literary writing lies in format, not its preparation for proper channels. Inscription, folding, addressing, sealing, sending, printing, and circulating in the republic’s interurban networks is presented in the format of the 1856 edition, in contrast with the 1855, as a literary practice in excess of reading, heard through the single sensory-reception channel of the brain. From one edition to the next, the reader’s ear is frayed by noise of proper channels splitting open, the “/” constituting senders and receivers, their postal unconscious erupting into the imaginary as a system of practice that posits no spiritual act before us. In the reference to the divine referent of epistolary scripture in “Song of Myself,” the logic of manuscript disrupts the print medium to articulate a multiplicity in a synthetic fashion, to make print a medium that bears the imprint of manuscript.

The network of references to Emerson's manuscript letter structuring the 1856 edition of *Leaves of Grass* discloses a similar logic that unbinds the single, bound unit of the book. Whitman received Emerson's letter, but not its effects; his subjectivity was not properly channeled. And that's why he could submit the letter to a process articulating a sequential formulation of the midcentury imaginary across the single, medial surface inscribing it: print in circulation, with its roots in eighteenth-century circulation traditions. But the making of the context for this articulation of the antebellum republic's imaginary preconditions penetrates down to its Greek roots in poetics. A technological situation that makes possible the political representation of formerly invisible bodies may also make visible the steps toward representation lost along the way. By attending to the material culture of a historical situation, readers participate in interpretive projects that trace and read these steps; materialist interpretations remember the layers of practice from which texts emerge.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to see how such interpretations can proceed by privileging the print medium in a historical situation that was saturated with it, certainly transformed by it, but just as certainly formed by other media, other practices, and other histories. My reading of Emerson's poetic intercourse has already suggested as much. Though his works are inscribed in a dialectic of practice and supersession common to texts in wide circulation in the antebellum decades, the technical mastery displayed by his writings self-consciously link technique with technologically constituted spatial conditions. Retrospectively, at least, Emerson's dialectic allows readers to grasp materially their conditioned position as subjects between technique and technology, between practice and space, unless the instrumentality of his writings slips from their fingers. That is why Emerson was Whitman's Master: the poet could not escape the technicality of inscriptions that marked his situation into existence as a political, cultural space, as a format for storage and reception. As in his letter to Tyndale, the condition for sending and receiving letters, or even notebooks, is not transcended in a spiritual act but by a dispersed network of machines, markets, and open formats. A textual condition, unbound, the situation Emerson entered by 1840 and from which Whitman emerged was not determined by print media

and its circulation but the relations between steps in the process of printing, binding, and distributing writing. Now what about the textual condition in which those letters were bound? Now that the technical, technological overlap of letters and subjects, of writing systems and civic spaces, of the postal unconscious and the nationalist imaginary, in Emerson's and Whitman's manuscripts and published works have been explored, will they form an ideal union in the format of the letter in the book?

chapter 2

WHITMAN'S "BLACK LINES":

UNBINDING THE COMMONPLACE SYSTEM

In his contribution to *The Man of Business: Considered in his Various Relations*, an 1857 anthology of conduct manuals, Presbyterian minister James Waddel Alexander noticed that the multiple factors accelerating urban migration amounted to a gravitational force:

Of the countless throng of city clerks, some are living under the parental roof, but the great majority have come from the country. An increasing centripetal force bears the youth of rural districts towards the great emporium [of New York City]. While this infusion of fresh blood into the old veins is useful in many ways to the receiving party, it involves losses and exposures on the part of those who come. Each of them has left a beloved circle, which, alas! he has not yet learned to prize, and has entered into a comparatively homeless state. (8)

Cast in the language of economic speculation, Alexander's warning about the "losses and exposures" experienced by "those who come" to the "great emporium" suggests that capital gains involve necessary risk still unknown to "the youth of rural districts." And yet the "fresh blood" the newcomer provides for the new city's "old veins" taps into the primitivism soon to be ascribed to the vampiric capitalists of the post-bellum, incorporated States. What the prospect of economic gain through loss adds to the symbolism of bloodletting in Alexander's text is an appeal to self-interest within a Christian moral framework that implies the historical inevitability of that symbolism's necessity and supersession: human sacrifice, once and for all, will realize a greater spiritual good. The collapse of economic circulation into the ecstasy of spiritual communion blurs the distinction between capitalism and religion as well as ancient and modern forms of ritual sacrifice. Despite some initial discomfort, the youth's "comparatively homeless state," his "loss and exposure," were not fated as long as he inscribed himself into his new situation. The "rural districts" from which he had been liberated would die to make him a gift for the "old veins" of the new gods, and he would be suitably resurrected in their corporate body.

Alexander's text reveals his economic and religious stakes in New York City's future. As pastor of the largest Presbyterian congregation in midcentury Manhattan, (and the nation), with

familial connections in New York's largest insurance company, his portrayal of urban migration reflects a highly condensed theological conception of the transition from an agrarian to an industrial-urban nation, a transition involving necessary sacrifice for the realization of the greater good. That is why, after Alexander depicts the young émigré as "fresh blood," he insists that a young man must not remain tethered to the home by dutifully sending and receiving letters: "Away with home-sickness and querulous imbecility! Tear up those whining epistles which you have written home" (19). Centripetal forces knit together morality and economy to give the young man a persevering character, not a nostalgic yearning for the traditional town. The sentimental conventions of epistolary practice were a legacy burden that bound the newly mobilized young men of interurban networks to the past: to their homes and the adolescent "disposition" to change, or to resist the centripetal force drawing them through the horizontal infrastructure of industrializing republic to build them a new vertical edifice.

Epistolary practice being a legacy burden, another practice was imperative in the world of centripetal forces. Alexander therefore suggested that the young man "write rather on your private memorandum, PERSEVERANCE. Quash every disposition to make changes, except where they tend to moral benefit, or knowledge of business" (19). This proposal must have seemed highly unnatural to the subject of poetic intercourse. If the future lay in the urban demand for "PERSEVERANCE," then, it would have to be reinforced by the act of inscription in the young man's "private memorandum," a portable type of all-purpose blank book for scheduling appointments, keeping track of finances, and entering occasional thoughts. W.A. Alcott laid the foundation for this practice, though in 1831 the keeping of a neat and legible "memorandum book," among other personal books, in which to record daily appointments and balance fiscal accounts, had been the second best way, after letter writing, for the subject to acquire the antebellum code of conduct.. For Alcott, the "memorandum book" was not only a storage medium for the new code of conduct but also a medium through which the private subject lived internally and transmitted himself imaginatively to an ideal future. The inscriptions made in a private memorandum cultivated self-reliant character under transient conditions and

was a young man's personal, social and spiritual obligation: "a matter of duty; not only to his fellow men, but to God," because it would provide a record of his character for the future. Alcott offers a personal anecdote to make his point: "A gentleman of my acquaintance assures me that he always leaves his books, accounts, &c, in so complete a state, on going to bed, that if he should die during the night, every thing could be perfectly understood" (103). It should be noted that when Alexander admonished his young man to inscribe his "PERSEVERENCE" in an ostensibly private book, he advised an act of resistance against the ostensibly private home of the youth's vertically-structured past, so that the subject could free himself for a state of transience. Alcott's and Alexander's advice refers back to a pattern that has already begun to emerge from my analyses of Emerson's and Whitman's manuscripts and published works: a vacillation of the subject faced with the ambiguity between scripture and script.

After 1800, what Warner calls a bureaucratic hermeneutics may have constituted this ambiguity and channeled it through texts like Alexander's and Alcott's. The collapse of spiritual acts and private inscriptions in memorandum books, as well as the assumed contiguity of public circulation and the technical refinement of "books, accounts, &c," opens a history of spirit and practice, bound and unbound that may alter perspectives on the way subjects prepared themselves for the inevitable lying before them. The circulation of manuscript books was nothing new in 1831 or 1857; the public reading of diaries and accounts can be traced back, (at least), to the posthumous airing of late seventeenth-century protestant diaries. And the triad of functions that allowed letters to be properly channeled between senders and receivers had depended for centuries on traditional scholarly book-keeping systems. The democratization of the postal system followed a track paralleling the democratization of what I will be referring to as "the commonplace system," a writing system that inscribed the historical format for the proper channeling of civic discourse.

The commonplace system, I will argue, was a component of Emerson's training as a young scholar; it significantly informed his writing practices; and it left its marks, marks that must be traced back to the sixteenth-century humanist moment, (at least), on his lectures and

essays. Whitman, on the other hand, acquired the commonplace system through practice, moment by moment, over the course of his life. The history of writing systems that I will propose in this chapter will therefore serve as the sequel to, while also providing the backdrop for, the brief history of epistolary practice given in the previous chapter. This history will demonstrate that letters traditionally depended on a system of books, which selectively stored and circulated civic discourse by way of official correspondence that informed public speech. This system was redistributed to provide the condition of possibility for the subject's right to self-representation in the "common place" of democratic civic space: the conditions under which the democratic subject cut himself loose from the vertical home to inscribe himself, horizontally, in the fluid text of the republic's interurban networks. The analyses of Emerson's and Whitman's use of book objects will not establish a link between text and context but will attempt to demonstrate the way that both "representative subjects" diverged from the conditions established by the commonplace system, as they worked (respectively) to escape or to enter that system. Their endeavors led them to disrupt the proper channels of civic discourse and to create a space for civic discourse by attending to the noise of their technical, technological situation, and by tracing the inarticulate mark of the literary dividing the natural union of writing systems and civic space.

The Commonplace System: A Network of Letter-Book Circuits

In composing "The Method of Nature," Emerson lifted a passage from his Journal, which record a stage-coach meditation between Concord and Boston early in 1841: "I frequently find the best part of my ride in the Concord coach from my house to Winthrop Place to be in Prince street, Charter street, Ann street, & the like places at the North End of Boston. The dishabille of both men & women, their unrestrained attitudes & manners make pictures greatly more interesting than the clean shaved & silk robed processions in Washington & Tremont streets." The "picturesque" scene inspires Emerson to "feel the painter in me.... But the painter is only in me; it does not come to the fingers' ends. But whilst I see a true painting, I feel how it was made; I

feel that genius organizes, or it is lost. It is as impossible for the aspirant to paint a right picture, as for grass to bear apples. But when the genius comes, it makes fingers, it is pliancy & the power of translating the circumstance in the street into oils & colors" (*JMN* 7:440). The last two sentences, the only ones transposed into the "The Method of Nature,"¹⁴ are far distant from the lecture's opening nods to railroads and water wheels, and there is no trace of the stage-coach ride that inspired them. The unnatural yearnings of the "aspirant" and the intervention of genius in the making of artists' fingers were lifted from the context Emerson created for them: the space of his *Journal*. The sentences would be delivered in the space that he created them for once they were properly channeled through his lecture.

Poetic intercourse in action, Emerson's 1841 lecture does what it says as long as the auditors don't see that "genius organizes": it makes, moves, and empowers the body, until "the body you see before you" becomes "Supreme Presence." Not visible, but palpable nonetheless, this organizational practice of channeling discourse and leaving composition to the study was appreciatively acknowledged by adherents like James Russell Lowell, who, in welcoming the publication of the Master's universally reviled *The Conduct of Life* in 1861, could state that "It is a singular fact, that Mr. Emerson is the most steadily attractive lecturer in America," and yet ask his reader: "Search for his eloquence in his books and you will perchance miss it, but meanwhile you will find that it has kindled all your thoughts" (ETR 295, 296). Emerson's lectures could operate on the postal unconscious of the antebellum subject because the material practices shaped by that unconscious had descended from the format of the commonplace book.

First named in the sixteenth-century educational manuals of Erasmus, the commonplace book had been a scholarly practice used for the storage and formatting of useful quotations under

¹⁴ The printed text of the lecture reads: "You admire pictures, but it is as impossible for you to paint a right picture, as for grass to bear apples. But when the genius comes it makes fingers: it is pliancy, and the power of transferring the affair in the street into oils and colors" (*CWRWE* 1:128). See also *JMN* 7:441n468. The editors also note the inclusion of the following: "Each soul is a soul or an individual in virtue of its having or I may say being a power to translate the universe into some particular language of its own; if not into a picture, a statue, or a dance, why then, into a trade, or an art, or a science, or a mode of living, or a conversation, or a character, or an influence."

topoi, or “place” headings. Between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, it was simply a “notebook,” into which excerpts from canonical texts could be transcribed, as Ann Moss points out, and then deployed in official correspondence and public debate (56). The commonplace book not only named a format that had been employed by scholars for centuries but also marks a transitional break in its history. Before reformed scholars like Erasmus distributed the commonplace-keeping technique, the only persons in need of such a technique had no need to give it a name. The commonness of commonplace keeping by the sixteenth century resulted from the distribution of printed manuals, like Erasmus’s, for amateurs who lacked proper training. As Anthony Grafton puts it, “In the early modern period, one literary technology—itself ancient—embodied the ideal of the beehive: the notebook, in all its gloriously illegible forms. This was, of course, a classical revival.... [Humanists] discovered that some of the ancients most like themselves...had turned the notebook itself into a literary genre” (35-36). When sixteenth-century humanists redistributed the “notebook,” a term for a diversity of manuscript books in a closed system of scholarly practice, as a commonplace book, they initiated a long-term process that parceled writing systems into literary genres linked arbitrarily to manuscript drafts.

The commonplace system devised by Calvinist educator Johannes Henricus Alstedius, for example, recommended that the commonplace book be complimented by another type of blank book, “in which we note in a disorderly fashion things we hear, see, and read, as we do so successively year by year, month by month, day by day, whence they get their name ‘ephemerides’ or ‘diaria’” (Quoted in Moss 232). The mere “notebook,” before it was renamed the commonplace book, did, in fact, consist of a multiplicity of books; there were even various names that referred to its contents. The only center to this system was the closed circuit of practice and circulation that held it all together. Once the circuits opened and began replicating themselves the commonplace book named the center of a generic system of practice: a writing system that inscribed subjects in a cognate civic space. The split in the history of writing, induced by print technology and named by the commonplace book, had an impact on unbound manuscripts as well. Manuals instructing individuals on the outside of Medieval scholars’ closed

circuits in the art of commonplace keeping were accompanied by manuals on the art of letter writing. The individual equipped with technique had no need for the commonplace book if he did not send and receive inscriptions.

Before print technology, there was manuscript practice; after print, manuscript horizons lay before it. The redistribution of practice increased the quantity of technically equipped individuals while shaping the quality of their writings, not only because writing could take “place” at a multiplicity of horizontally dispersed sites but also because letters would have to establish proper channels in this decentralized topography of practice. The Medieval guide to epistolary writing, the *ars dictaminis*, presented letter writing as an art for official correspondence, providing model phrases for the performance of deference, diplomacy and dissemblance. The letter-writing guides of sixteenth-century humanists, renamed the *ars conscribendi epistolis*, began “moving away from serving the simple function of providing model sentences or form letters appropriate for one’s addressee” (Burton 91). The new manuals of style, written (*conscribendi*) instead of commanded (*dictaminis*), did not completely displace or invert the protocols of their predecessors. In both cases, the letter was “oration written,” a format designed to deliver its author’s commands without the fetters of the technique or the technology that produced it.

The delivery of authority was a virtue of letter writing in practice transcending the split between Medieval constraints on composition and print-humanism that liberated composition from constraints while passing it along through open channels. But Renaissance humanists had modified authority to accommodate their faith in the transformative power, antedating the mechanical guidelines of the *ars dictaminis*, of the rhetorical arts. Promoting a use of older, “purer” Latin, as well as a heightened attentiveness to rhetoric, based largely on the correspondence of Cicero, humanists introduced “a new flexibility and independence for discourse” (98). Recovering the scripts and codes of the Roman *civitas*, humanist educators advanced a style of writing modeled on the origins of epistolary rhetoric and, consequently, made style a mark of authentic “originality.” The modern roots of technical, technological

supersession lay in the early modern strategy of inaugurating a new historical epoch by borrowing the forgotten scripts of history, reviving them with emergent media, and inscribing the notion that history begins today.

Ironically enough, the *ars conscribendi epistolis* issued a practical refutation of the mere copyists of canon and convention guided by the *ars dictaminis*. And yet the former was originally, if not entirely, dependent on the technological dissemination of reproducible technique. By the mid-sixteenth century, printed aids for commonplace keeping were popular and widely available in Europe, while printed commonplace books themselves offered a wealth of reading material to be transposed, without consulting primary texts (Grafton, 42; Moss, 238). To write with style, then, was to solve the intrinsic problem of the humanists' opening of the closed circuits of practice: style transformed the proliferating copies of copies into originals. No longer written within the strictly limited circuits of institutional power, letters had to have a personal voice that spoke with their own authority, if the horizontal distribution of rhetorical arts were going to transform society. Only the author of the letter could occupy this position, where, formerly, that position was a circuit composed of letters and books: the technical authoritarianism of the *ars dictaminis* left no space for letter writers. The early modern letter writer could only occupy this position because it was established by the commonplace book, an open format in what would soon become a network of franchised letter writers. The commonplace book provided the tentative ground for the rise of the author of modern letters. It shaped the individual's position in a writing system that was both the individual's own, being proper to him, and subject to generic categorization in a network of practice. The “/” blocking the smooth transition from property to collective identity could be resolved by pursuing the virtues of stylistic originality and access to the means of such originality. The letter conceived as original “oration written” and the book as the open-access format of reception and distribution comprised the two facets of the Renaissance Humanist conception of the liberal citizen, equipped with practice previously reserved for the future elite.

The distribution of the commonplace system would not only shape the writing systems configured by individuals after 1600 but would also configure, by means of these individuals, a network of subjects that circulated through proper channels. Just as Renaissance Humanists had resisted the mere copyist of the *ars dictaminis*, the early modern subject emerged from the economic, religious, and political upheavals of the seventeenth century with the need for a different type of practice in a different type of civic space.¹⁵ From ancient Rome to the baroque city, the commonplace system fit the urban seat of power, vertically planned within the walls of the *civitas* and horizontally primitive in the postal networks without. But that was changing, as the Taxis Post of the early modern period began to enfranchise letter writers and postal routes to spur their desire to send and receive manuscripts and printed texts, just when the walls of the *civitas* began to crumble for the first time in history. The decentralization of urban space which began, as Lewis Mumford states, with the planning of baroque cities in the sixteenth century (368) coincided with the dissemination of the commonplace system, the *ars epistolis conscribendi*, and the development of postal infrastructure. Such creative destruction did not preserve the technical, technological situation that it created but persevered in creating the binding condition of a network of writing subjects while disposing of its pretexts. As if the commonplace system had only supplied the tentative binding for the formation of this binding condition of networked subjects, the “commonplace” named the writing system that it disseminated as if to destroy it.

By the mid-seventeenth century, commonplace book no longer fit the situation it had conditioned. The scripts and codes of commonplace organization complimented by stylization for channeled distribution established the precedent for the generic practice of writing as prayer:

¹⁵ During the Renaissance, states Giulio Argan, “The relationship between city planning and stage design, which was to become so important in the baroque period, can already be sensed. The concept of the city as the stage for human actions was related to the new social structure” following Protestant revolutions, the rise of mercantile capitalism, and the race to imperialist conquest in Europe and England (21).

the internalized, portable discourse between God and the protestant subject equipped to send and receive letters. Letters named manuscripts were sent to other subjects and diary entries named manuscripts were sent to God. The “/” between the two vertically constructed levels of social order was a precondition of participation in manuscript practices by 1700 because writing subjects were inscribed in a commonplace system that was decomposing into the unintelligible noise of the postal unconscious. Letters and diaries channeled this noise after 1700 into representations of civic harmony, such as God or spiritual acts. Thus the unconscious formatting program that brought writing systems into harmony with civic space would be replaced with a supplementary unconscious: the proper conduct modeled on personal accounting that underlay the style of protestant diaries.

Given that popular diary writing emerged following the religious, political and economic revolutions of the seventeenth century, it is no secret in the first known diary-writing manual, John Beadle’s *A journal, or diary of a thankfull Christian* (1656), was founded on the era’s “increased knowledge of book-keeping methodology and accounting theory” (xlv).¹⁶ When Beadle published his manual for an expanding community of reformed, literate citizens in 1656, its only precursors were the academic text books that standardized commonplace keeping methods and recommended supplementary forms of writing. As a minister, Beadle was a registered clerk as well as a minister because he was in charge of calculating the contents deposited in collection plates and distributing them to the poor. In a similar fashion, the value of accounting methods would be horizontally distributed for the management of properly channeled subjectivity. Double-entry book keeping gave the early modern protestant ethic a practical basis, a mathematical-spiritual prescript that linked the subject to civic space and, somewhere along the way, grouped writing systems with Nature. As Germaine Fry Murray has explained, the application of “accounting principles to personal diary writing was the creation of a sustained

¹⁶ Aura Kouffman has also stated that diary writing manuals printed between 1656 and 1714 employed a “language of credit and debit” (Kouffman 70). For a list of these manuals, see Botonaki.

and conscious connection between the Puritan's private and public existence" (liv). Manuscript diaries had long been circulated among not only intimates but also printed and publically read after a diarist's death in traditional, vertically structured societies (Kouffman 73). Only by 1700, rudimentary mathematics entered an ambiguous relationship with the inscriptions made in private manuscript books, as if they were, in the most basic sense, any different from the letters they posted. Both were designed to maintain the subject's moral economy and the civic harmony of a networked public.

This practice of accumulating private discourse between the subject and God helped transform the inscription, formatting, and sending of civic discourse in the commonplace system—a unified system for the channeling of discourse—into a dispersed system of autonomous inscribing and formatting circuits, whose sending function was deferred in anticipation of judgment. Accumulation for the sake of value was a divine virtue enacted in the protestant diary, which subsumed the economic formatting of devotional inscriptions under the personal style introduced to the commonplace system by Renaissance humanists. The popularity of diary writing suited the horizontal movement that established the American colonies and thus coincided with the commonplace book's decline by 1700. The commonplace book, argues Ann Moss, "was by Locke's time a rather lowly form of life, adapted to fairly simple tasks, and confined to backwaters of intellectual activity" (279). Locke's commonplace system (1706) posited a new method of indexing and documenting textual resources employed in scholarly pursuits, but the fact that it also emphasized the importance of personal commentary in addition to transcribed sources was an indication that the era of the diary would displace the commonplace book.

In the era of diary writing after 1700, the fact that the subject's manuscript books would be read, or at least examined, provided incentive to write and to do so properly. Writing in the technical and moral sense collapsed into something like a public, something like civic harmony, in anticipation, if not fear, of judgment. While the ritualized posthumous reading of personal papers may have antedated the early modern period, it was the horizontal expansion of diary

writing for the public emerging from the previous century of economic, religious, and political revolution—all of which was consolidated in the internally channeled discourse, the privately inscribed prayers of the protestant subject—that established the groundwork for democratic personality in the early American colonies. By the nineteenth century, an array of written forms designed to record “everyday” personal accounts would furnish the self-interested public born into industrial-urban conditions the elements for the “new code of conduct.” Meanwhile, the commonplace book would be reborn as the “scrapbook” and “album.”¹⁷ The centripetal forces that formed and were facilitated by the industrial cities of the northeastern U.S. hastened the deterioration of the commonplace system. Nevertheless, it provided the increasingly invisible foundation of storage, formatting, and transmission functions still operative in the modern world of accelerating, expanding circulation, which would give birth to a strange new version of the commonplace book, like Emerson’s *Journal*, while also demanding a totally different system, a system not entirely determined by the commonplace dialectic of letters and books.

Binding Emerson’s *Journal*: The Format of “Nature”

The layers of media history outlined above are captured in Emerson’s *Journal*, given the unique position that he occupied in history and in the spaces of early national New England, as discussed in the previous chapter. This fact is implicit in the consistent inability of scholars to identify Emerson’s book-keeping practices with a specific generic category from the history of writing. Even Bronson Alcott, after perusing Emerson’s manuscript *Journal* on April 29, 1839, noted the peculiar formatting of the Master’s inscriptions. “I looked over E’s commonplace books,” he wrote. “These are full of elegant sketches of life and nature. They are the materials from which the lectures are compiled. He does not record the history of his facts, but idealizes whatsoever he observes and writes his thought in this general form” (*JBA* 126). Like other members of Emerson’s circle, Alcott consistently dated his diary entries and methodically

¹⁷ For genealogical histories linking scrapbooks to commonplace books, see Gernes 109; Tucker and Ott 3-10; and Havens 10, 93.

followed his account of each day with reflection, like protestant diarists, who were “distinguished by their disposition to record process rather than result” (Rosenwald 91). Alcott’s description of Emerson’s *Journal* suggests that Emerson rejected the normative economy of account and reflection, tracing back to Beadle’s mid-seventeenth-century diary-writing manual. The Master’s inscriptions are history-less: reflections on reflections. It is for this reason that Lawrence Rosenwald has described Emerson’s journal-writing practice as a hybrid of the commonplace book and the puritan diary (36). The hybrid form of Emerson’s *Journal* reveals itself to be the commonplace system surviving under conditions more amenable to diary writing. The *Journal* therefore opens the two components of a historical transition from the dissemination of the commonplace system to the network of subjects and formats with generic labels, such as letter and diary, in the early modern era.

But this transition only opens along the formative line of the “/” constituting it when the layers of history in which Emerson’s *Journal* is inscribed are traced, for Rosenwald is not wrong: the *Journal* is a hybrid, or at least it seeks to achieve this state of generic mixture. That is the nature of the circuits networked in the commonplace system: they are separated from and desire their originally bound condition. As stated in Chapter One, however, the lines of practice linking together Emerson’s manuscripts and published works in the material conditions from which they emerged reveal a dialectical structure composed of a technical, technological basis that it has been programmed to supersede but that, in spite or because of that basis after 1800, the structure preserves while superseding itself. Now that I have traced back the commonplace system’s dialectic of letters and books to the dissemination of writing systems and the formation of an early modern networked subject—now that I have looked down through the layers of media history at the networking of a writing system that began to shape modern civic spaces and its dialectical relation to the practices fitting subjects to those spaces—I can return to the materials, as Bronson Alcott noted, that shaped the composition of Emerson’s essays and lectures.

The historical link between letter writing and book keeping instantiated in Emerson’s *Journal* provided the basis for the dialectical union of poetic intercourse. As scholars had for

centuries, Emerson regularly transcribed or physically bound letters into his *Journal*. Letters from his most enduring mentor, his Aunt Mary Moody Emerson, composed a substantial part of his early as well as his continuing education after graduating from Harvard University. In an entry dated “Tuesday Eve.—Feb. 20, 1822,” reflective commentary on the book’s inscribed contents was not made by the devoted writer himself but by a letter from Aunt Mary Moody: “I shall close my book with some remarks upon a few of its pages from the kindness of one who was persuaded to read them” (*JMN* 1:89). A later volume of Emerson’s *Journal*, known as “Blotting Book Y” (1829-1830), contains several letters from his aunt, which are tipped-in with wax.¹⁸ Such compositional acts reveal that Emerson’s early journal volumes were at least partially composed of letters by way of transcription and binding. It can therefore be stated that Emerson built his character as a writer by transcribing and binding letters into his manuscript books. Letters and books furnished him with the distinctive formats that were always already unified, before he knew it, in a system of practice. Only the horizontal dissemination of this practice made the dialectical structure in which letters and books were inscribed appear to be constituted by a spiritual act. The commonplace system therefore conditioned Emerson’s lectures and essays, as it established a binding condition for the subjects redistributed in it.

The system did not establish this condition by enabling authors to deliver the spiritual act channeled through letters (as well as diaries) but by conditioning the relation between the materials of practice (paper, thread, board, pencil, pen, ink, and so on) and the information they contain: storage, formatting, and transmission functions. Evidence for this claim lies in one bibliographic detail from Emerson’s “College Theme Book” (first inscribed ca. 1819) and “Wide World 1” (first inscribed ca. 1820), his earliest extant manuscript books: they were composed of the same paper that Emerson used to write letters to his family.¹⁹ The paper that Emerson used

¹⁸ Letters are tipped-in at the left margin of page five; a partial leaf is tipped-in with wax on page twelve in the right bottom margin; and a leaf is pasted on in the lower right margin of page twenty-seven

¹⁹ Houghton Library, Harvard University.

for his March 14, 1818, letter to his younger brother Edward, when compared with the paper from which the “College Theme Book” and “Wide World 1” were composed, reveal that they originated from the same stack of paper. All three share the same beige tint, smoothness, and, perhaps most tellingly, “laid and chain” lines, or the ribbed lines betraying a pre-industrial papermaking process. Even though Emerson used other types of paper for his correspondence during the same period, the letter and the two manuscript books demonstrate that Emerson’s writing system demanded the preparation of surfaces before inscriptions could be made. In place of the spiritual act, ungraspable and infinite, what lies before us is the logic of a formatting process—a process of folding and binding—that initiates a space for letter and diary formats. The latter trace the formatted spaces of writing, which are themselves shaped by a writing system that, one century before Emerson, began receding into the postal unconscious. Emerson’s manuscripts and published works preserved the traces of the receding layers shaping his writings and the relations between the materials of practice that carried out and covered up their functions through his spiritual acts.

The logic of the commonplace system may help to articulate why the young Emerson maintained two adjacent spaces for his inscriptions, one bound and the other unbound. Among the differences between Emerson’s two manuscript books is the fact that the “College Theme Book,” theoretically of less value to Emerson for being a mere “Theme Book,” used for undergraduate course work, was bound in leather, while “Wide World 1,” considered the first volume of Emerson’s *Journal*, was composed of stacked folds of paper, hand-sewn and lacking any cover (Figure 2.1). The intention behind the two bindings, if there is one, is elusive, given that the leather binding of the “Theme Book” would help preserve its contents, while “Wide World 1” would remain vulnerable to damage, its binding threads and fragile pages having been left exposed. If both books were originally fashioned from folded and stacked sheets of paper, then a decision must have been made at one point to give the “Theme Book” a stable binding and



Figure 2.1: Comparison of bindings of “Wide World 1” and “College Theme Book,” respectively. Courtesy of Houghton Library, Harvard University.

to leave uncovered “Wide World 1,” the first in a series of handmade installments with the same name. This fact is especially intriguing considering that Emerson used the less stably bound “Wide World” pamphlets as the space for the transcription of entries valuable enough to be carried over from his ostensibly less valuable “Theme Book.” While working at his brother William’s primary school—his first job after earning his BA from Harvard—Emerson noted in the remaining pages of the “Theme Book,” on March 2, 1822: “Have written this over in its proper place—Wide World, No. 4, page 12” (*JMN* 1:201).²⁰ By maintaining these adjacent spaces for inscription and transcription, the young Emerson began developing a multi-book commonplace system. Other book-keeping methodologies involved the act of inscribing and transcribing. As suggested by W.A. Alcott’s conduct manual, the antebellum subject’s memorandum books were best kept tidy in preparation for judgment by God and man, a process of refinement that involved copying old books, inevitably full of mistakes and excess, into newer, ideally more expensive books, so that a “fair copy” could be made. And yet the process of storing and restoring through inscription and transcription has its roots in the history of the commonplace system. The fact that the traces of the commonplace system, though in a state of decay, surfaced in Emerson’s earliest extant manuscript books supports this reading.

References made in Emerson’s “Wide World 1” prove that he had at least begun to study Locke’s system for keeping commonplace books (1685/1697).²¹ Not only does a Lockean alphabetical index of commonplaces, left incomplete, appear in “Wide World 1,” the handmade notebook also opens with the following “Dedication”: “These pages are intended at this their commencement to contain a record of new thoughts (when they occur); for a receptacle of all the

²⁰ For this reason, the editors of the first volume of Emerson’s *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks* classify the “College Theme-Book” as a secondary “Miscellaneous Book,” not one of the “Journals.” In pointing this out, I do not want to suggest that I am opposed to this editorial strategy; rather, I find their classification system to be useful for scholarship on Emerson’s journals and notebooks, even if the distinctions they make sometimes appear to make arguable distinctions.

²¹ See Rosenwald 30-43, for the way Emerson’s “Wide World” series adapts Lockean commonplacing and diverges from it. This observation serves as the basis for his description of the *Journal* as a hybrid of the commonplace book and the protestant diary.

old ideas that partial but peculiar peepings at antiquity can furnish or furbish; for tablet to save the wear & tear of weak Memory & in short for all the various purposes & utility real or imaginary which are usually comprehended under that comprehensive title Common Place book." In its "peculiar peepings at antiquity" and the assumed flexibility of the book's "real or imaginary" uses, the "Dedication" plays with the prescribed tradition of practice by adding irrational elements to the otherwise rational and "comprehensive" "Common Place book" format. The "Dedication's" invocation of commonplace keeping compliments the magic powers of the adolescent, pen-wielding, paper-folding mystic: "O ye witches assist me! Enliven or horrify some midnight lucubration or dream (whichever may be found most convenient) to supply this reservoir when other resources fail" (*JMN* 1:4). At its inception, Emerson's *Journal* combined the practicality of a democratized scholarly practice with the unknown mysteries that motivated the piety and punitive measures of Emerson's New England forebears.

The tradition carried forward by the New England patriarchal elite could, therefore, be seen as having been partially responsible for the hybrid format in Emerson's *Journal*, but a more substantive tradition lies in the material practices of folding and binding. Grossman's reading of the journal volume whose recycled binding originally held one of William Emerson, Sr.'s, manuscript books has planted that idea for readers in advance. The history of practice disclosed by the commonplace system reinforces that reading from below, as the practice of folding and binding manuscript books can be traced back through Emerson's eighteenth-century spiritual precedents. The fabrication of pamphlets for personal writing was common before the emergence of industrial book production after 1830. Early American ministers typically composed their manuscript sermons out of sheets of paper folded, stacked, and sewn back-to-front. Given that Emerson descended from a long line of ministers, he would have been familiar with the practice of making blank books out of folded and bound paper from an early age. Emerson's own sermons from his years as a Unitarian minister were composed this way, as were the sermons,

notebooks, and “Miscellanies” of Jonathan Edwards.²² While it is understandable that Edwards would fabricate his own notebooks in the early-eighteenth century, when blank books were made for a smaller market, were harder to come by, and more expensive, once Emerson entered Harvard in 1816 blank books were becoming more readily available. When considered in its material and practical relation with letters, then, Emerson’s *Journal* began as a hybrid within the remains of the commonplace system of practice: the binding and circulating of discourse through which civic leaders had constituted themselves for centuries. The hybrid evolved, however, by surfacing as a decomposed commonplace book in the material state of Emerson’s later journal volumes.

On December 11, 1833—not long before publishing his first book, *Nature* (1836)—Emerson purchased and began using Journal “A.” As the editors of the *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks* state, it was with “A” that Emerson “began to letter [his journal volumes] in alphabetical order, to buy rather than to make them, to chose books of relatively uniform size for his records, and to increase his somewhat sporadic indexing into a major activity” (*JMN* 4:249). In other words, Emerson’s first “mature” journal volumes were more like commonplace books than they had been previously. And yet the volumes would also contain less impersonal material culled from the library stacks as the earlier volumes did, because his system of practice would perpetuate itself through the groundless circulation of poetic intercourse, not dutifully cited references or the storage, formatting, and transmission functions coding his use of paper, binding, and networks. The often-cited “Dedication” on the opening page of “A” hailed a

²² The editors of Jonathan Edwards’s “Miscellanies” note that Edwards’s blank books “originally consisted of separately folded sheets, written one at a time and later sewed together,” and refer to “other manuscript notebooks made of separately folded double leaves” (Edwards 1994, 69). Edwards also used “foolscap” for his letters as well as his journals, as Emerson did. The editors of the “Miscellanies” note: “‘Foolscap’ was the standard writing paper and was used by Edwards for his permanent notebooks, sent letters, and all his sermons until the 1740s” (61). The editors of Emerson’s *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks* provide bibliographic accounts of Emerson’s earliest journals—the series titled “Wide World”—and they note Emerson’s use of foolscap. As indicated by the title of their edition, the editors of the *JMN* divide Emerson’s manuscript books into the official “Journals” and “Miscellaneous Notebooks.” For that reason, I have capitalized the word “journal” and placed it in quotes when first mentioning them.

new era for his writing practice: “This Book is my Savings Bank. I grow richer because I have somewhere to deposit my earnings; and fractions are worth more to me because corresponding fractions are waiting here that shall be made integers by their addition” (250-251). By 1833, the improvement of Emerson’s material as well as his metaphysical wealth motivated his preference for store-bought, readymade blank books. Circulation traversed economic and poetic exchanges, providing a groundless precedent for the spiritual act that lies before us, though the roots of that groundlessness can be traced back to the dissemination of the commonplace system.

Emerson’s system of practice evolved from adjacent spaces of writing, handmade and readymade, to a central binding condition for the channeling of discourse at the same time that he emerged as a popular mystic. After 1830, his arguments against institutional dependence and bookishness for the rising generation of American Romantics entering interurban networks stemmed from the pulpit rhetoric that he left behind him as well as the writing system expressing itself from the depths of media history. In his 1837 Phi Beta Kappa address, “The American Scholar,” Emerson called on contemporary poets to be contemporary prophets, and to realize this unity with the age of the apostles, as if in practice. And yet he also states: “Meek young men grow up in libraries, believing it their duty to accept the views, which Cicero, which Locke, which Bacon, have given, forgetful that Cicero, Locke, and Bacon were only young men in libraries, when they wrote these books.... The book, the college, the school of art, the institution of any kind, stop with some utterance of genius” (*CWRWE* 1:56-57). Because genius, independent of the system that facilitates its very “utterance,” is the only source of creation, time is “wasted in other men’s transcripts of their readings” (57). The “institution of any kind” provides the stasis for the movement of sovereign power. Thus in 1837, Emerson’s would-be exemplary “scholar” was more of an exceptional figure, who “had to free himself from all institutions” (Sacks 29), as well as books. Institutions and their books prevent the young scholar from transcending his apprenticeship with the likes of Bacon, Locke, and those other men who risk mere transcription, as all scholars do. The greater forces that would (ideally) force the

scholar to utter arresting words of genius made the subject Master, not a surface for the same old inscriptions.

The essay titled “Nature” depicts the other half of Emerson’s resistance to institutions, books, and transcription. But in this case, the young scholar is a young romantic who makes inspired inscriptions in his diary. “Each young and ardent person writes a diary, in which, when the hours of prayer and penitence arrive, he inscribes his soul. The pages thus written are, to him, burning and fragrant: he reads them on his knees by midnight and by the morning star; he wets them with his tears: they are sacred; too good for the world, and hardly yet to be shown to the dearest friend” (*CWRWE* 3:109). Emerson’s conception of diary writing in “Nature” excludes the practical rigor of the commonplace format but reflects the closed circuits of poetic intercourse in which he shared his manuscript volumes with intimates. The diary, on the other hand, was what the subject shared with the network in himself, so that he could prepare himself for the network lying before him.

Emerson’s reference to the desire to circulate private entries calls up the tradition of manuscript books prepared for judgment by God and man. Emerson’s romantic diarist is therefore caught between the closed circuits of manuscript exchange among New England’s elite and the ordinary subject’s private inscriptions, whose circulation would be deferred: “After some time has elapsed, he begins to wish to admit his friend to this hallowed experience, and with hesitation, yet with firmness, exposes the pages to his eye. Will they not burn his eyes? The friend coldly turns them over, and passes from the writing to conversation, with easy transition, which strikes the other party with astonishment and vexation” (*CWRWE* 3:109). Emerson satirizes the vanity of the proud diarist as well as the false assumption that writing reveals what discourse does not. Following the mere transcriptions of the subject’s internal discourse with mere discourse between two friends, the diarist need not bother circulating what he writes or says. No subject could possibly traverse the mark dividing subject from subject, each one being constituted—only the universe itself traverses that mark. Writing and conversation are not only mutually constitutive everyday practices; rather, they are both superseded by the freely

circulating civic leader, whose genius exceeds institutions, books, and discourse. The Master transcends any technical, technological situation because he has been equipped to condition this situation with a binding that elides materials, the information encoding their relations, and the processes that prepare them for proper channels delivering the spiritual act: the birth of a scripted and coded subject in a nationalist imaginary.

Emerson's conditioning of the addressee of his writings is not a rhetorical matter as much as it is, once again, a matter encoded in the writing materials he used and the relations between them. When the *Journal* shifted toward readymade writing materials and a format more commonplace than not, it followed a shift in the production and distribution of readymade writing materials in the northeastern States after 1830. Whitman's binding-in of Emerson's letter in 1855 and 1856 does not escape this phenomenon. Just as interurban networks began to rapidly mobilize and expand the American public's horizons, the marketing of internal spaces of writing in blank books allowed the subject, lettered and numbered by public schools, to protect himself from the shock of early modernity by entering a period of gestation inscribed in readymade bindings. When Emerson stifled his addressee's desire to share diary entries or even talk about private manuscripts, he was essentially advocating for a type of "PERSEVERENCE."²³ Emerson's mystic and unilateral style of rhetoric can therefore be traced back to his simultaneous adherence to the commonplace system and his adaptation of the remains of this system to an era more amenable to the diary, or, following James Waddel Alexander's advice, to the memorandum book. Technically speaking, as the commonplace book receded into the unconscious of the lecture and essay, the diary surfaced in an admonishment to keep bound manuscripts properly channeled. Technologically speaking, as the infrastructures of production and distribution were preceded and superseded by the spiritual act before us, the speaking

²³ See Benjamin 313-355. See also in the same volume the unpublished manuscript "Central Park," (incidentally, the same manuscript in which Benjamin makes his only mention of Whitman): "Shock as a poetic principle in Baudelaire: the urban scene traced out by the fantasque escrime of 'Tableaux parisiens' is no longer a homeland. It is a spectacle, a foreign place" (174).

presence of the Master delivered the subject into a state where his newly democratized grasp of practice would not prevent him from staying focused on the most important task at hand: leaving history to the experts.

Tentative Bindings: The Handmade-in-the-Readymade

Whitman didn't leave history to the experts, did not accept the Master's spiritual act, and was not shy about exposing his manuscripts in public or encoding a logic of manuscript in his published works. And yet, understanding the popular conditioning of practice, for which Emerson was a representative subject, it is not surprising that, despite the long history of open letters and "Note Books," the anonymous reviewer in the April 1856 issue of *The Critic* found the lists of employments appearing in the 1855 version of "Song of Occupations" to be a sign of impertinence. The logic of manuscript encoded in the poem's syntax, diction, typography, and lineated form was the sign of an amateur who had lacked the training to deliver spiritual acts of poetry. The reviewer quotes a long section of the text to prove his claim:

The veneer and gluepot . . . the confectioner's ornaments . . . the decanter
and glasses . . . the shears and flatiron;
The awl and kneestrap . . . the pint measure and quart measure . . . the
counter and stool . . . the writing pen of quill or metal;
Billiards and tenpins . . . the ladders and hanging ropes of the
gymnasium, and the manly exercises;
The designs for wallpapers or oilcloths or carpets . . . the fancies for
goods for women . . . the bookbinder's stamps;
Leatherdressing, coachmaking, boilermaking, ropetwisting, distilling,
signpainting, limeburning, coopering, cottonpicking,
The walkingbeam of the steam-engine . . . the throttle and governors, and
the up and down rods,
Stavemachines and plainingmachines . . . the cart of the carman . . . the
omnibus . . . the ponderous dray;
The snowplough and two engines pushing it . . . the ride in the express
train of only one car . . . the swift go through a howling storm;
The bearhunt or coonhunt . . . the bonfire of shavings in the open lot in
the city . . . the crowd of children watching;
The blows of the fighting-man . . . the upper cut and one-two-three;
The shopwindows . . . the coffins in the sexton's wareroom . . . the fruit
on the fruitstand . . . the beef on the butcher's stall,
The bread and cakes in the bakery . . . the white and red pork in the pork-
store;
The milliner's ribbons . . . the dressmaker's patterns . . . the tea-table . . . the
home-made sweetmeats;
The column of wants in the one-cent paper . . . the news by telegraph . . .

the amusements and operas and shows;
 The cotton and woolen and linen you wear the money you make and
 spend;
 Your room and bedroom your piano-forte the stove and
 cookpans,
 The house you live in the rent the other tenants the deposit
 in the savings-bank the trade at the grocery,
 The pay on Saturday night...the going home, and the purchases. (*LG* 1:63)

“Can it be possible,” asked the baffled critic, “that its author intended this as a portion of a poem? Is it not more reasonable to suppose that Walt Whitman has been learning to write, and that the compositor has got hold of his copy book?” (Price 45). Lacking the requisite formal conventions and mode of address found in poetry, notebook, or letter, the type of writing circulated in Whitman’s book is assumed to be the mistake of a printer who could not tell the difference between the most vulgar materials of self-culture and the highest aims of “Literature.” Consequently, the critic’s conceited jab at Whitman (not to mention his printer) betrays a sense of anxiety about the fact that *Leaves of Grass* has appeared in book form at all.

Such anxious responses to aspiring authors indirectly attacked writing machines, or the press and technically-trained subjects. If not for *The Critic*, the conflation of a manuscript “copy book” and Whitman’s 1855 edition is a provocation that may have gone unnoticed, a provocation concerning *who* is allowed to write and *what* subject matter enters the halcyon enclosures of nineteenth-century American verse. Whitman’s writings, in general, and the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, in particular, are required reading today because of the friction and dissonance between writing and the conditions constructed for its reception—because of the traces of the literary registered by the review in *The Critic*. Nowhere do the practices and urban-industrial conditions of writing appear to be so thoroughly enmeshed in nineteenth-century American culture as in the first edition of *Leaves*. For this reason, *The Critic* identifies a fundamentally important characteristic of “Song of Occupations,” a poem emblematic of the most radical aesthetic gestures of 1855. The text refers not only to itself as a printed object, but to its production as a bound object conditioned by a logic of manuscript that it should have been conditioned to elide: “The veneer and gluepot,” “the writing pen of quill or metal,” and “the bookbinder’s stamps.” These references do not amount to the representation of a subject or an objective world so much

as the presentation of the steps of composition, steps that happen to correspond to the elements of personal writing and book-making and that, consequently, are neither constitutively public nor private. These references do not add up to a bookish trope by way of free-associative metonymy; rather, they disperse and interlink the materials and activities that contribute to a still unforeseen result by tracing the expanding, horizontal space in which the book is constituted as an object. The logic of manuscript in Whitman's poem does not call for a political cartography locating it within the Apparatus constituting it or for a close reading unpacking its cultural-historical semiotics. It calls for an enframing derived from the history of practice and space that has already been traced back through Emerson's manuscripts and published works.

Just as Whitman's 1841 review of Emerson's lecture received the Master's delivery in reverse, the 1855 "Song of Occupations" throws the spiritual act of reception back on its steps. A horizon may not be opened here—not yet—but a new way into an increasingly ungraspable environmental situation displays itself, line by line. These lines deconstruct the book object into its material elements, which are then dispersed throughout the networks that lie beyond them: the "express train," "shopwindows," and "money you make and spend." Over the course of the excerpt, quoted in the *Critic* review, the text describes the book and the lines stored in it as a pure medium, a vector of sorts, already exposed to the networks of circulation that should lie outside the secure confines of its covers. The book as object is given an material-ontological state as a format for storing information, always already linked with the spaces outside of it that, in fact, flow through it. Proper channels of discourse, sent and received, are opened to conditions of production and circulation cross that link the medial functions disclosed by the book—its storage, formatting, and transmission functions—with its technical, technological situation. Reversing the movement toward a centralization of inscriptions found in Emerson's *Journal*, Whitman's manuscripts and published works present a departure from the representative subject's position of centrality and originality on the grounds established by the commonplace system. Confirming widely held assumptions about the American bard, this observation opens a perspective of Whitman's poetic texts that passes through the historical layers structuring the

relation between writing systems and civic space, thereby making all the difference to our grasp of the poetics at work in his texts.

Referring to itself as a multiplicity in the process of being materially constituted while imaginatively interpreted, “Song of Occupations” exposes the imaginary to itself as a bound object whose construction produces a spatial effect collapsing the internal space of inscription with the external space of circulation. Where Emerson’s writing system resurrected a dialectic of letters and books, summed up by an ideal synthesis of “poetic intercourse,” Whitman presented language as a medium dependent on the material production and circulation of texts—vehicles for the desired effects of all writing in manuscript and print—in a horizontal, infrastructural civic space binding culture and politics. “City and country . . . fireplace and candle . . . gaslight and heater and aqueduct; / The message of the governor, mayor, or chief of police . . . the dishes of breakfast or dinner or supper; / The bunkroom, the fire-engine, the string-team, and the car or truck behind.” The linked dispersion of places, subjects, actions, and the routes overlap with the localized image of handwriting: “The paper I write on or you write on . . . and every word we write . . . and every cross and twirl of the pen . . . and the curious way we write what we think . . . yet very faintly” (*LG* 1:62). Just as the book object shares its sequence of constitutive medial functions with the world outside of it, the writing subject is formed by its use of instruments. The “paper” is given as the surface anterior to the “I” that writes, as it is for other “I’s”; the “word,” also anterior, is the shared medium with which “we write”; the dance of the “pen” seems independent of a human agent; “the curious way” of this writing anticipates, with telling syntax, that “we write what we think.” Over the course of the line, the “I” discovers itself on paper, in the letter, marked with the pen. What “we think” only occurs after “I write” and then “we write,” in a practice that is both singular and plural, impersonal and personal, printed and scripted. If Whitman’s first edition is a “copy book,” printed by accident by a printer as spiritless as his machine, then this chance operation has transformed references to manuscript in print into the articulation of a system practice that technically scripts and codes the subject.

By placing what appear to be raw material inscriptions, in addition to cultivated rhetoric, into circulation as poetic writing, Whitman's 1855 poetry articulates the possibility of a writing system that does not amount to the delivery of a self-possessed author's ideal presence, a presence that can only emerge under the binding conditions of reading and the reproduction of a closed system of assumptions, without friction. It is in this way that Whitman's printed texts reproduce the adjacency and multiplicity of spaces for writing that Emerson progressively consolidated. This reproduction of a system of adjacency and multiplicity—the indication of a movement that perpetually doubles the book alongside and outside of itself—bears the trace of the friction and noise of the literary, from which I now want to extrapolate the term “the handmade-in-the-readymade,” the preconditions of which lie not only in the “printedness” of Whitman's medially self-conscious experimental texts but in the peculiar references to manuscript practice, remediated and distributed to harmonize the writing machine internalized by the antebellum subject with the writing machine of interurban networks in which he was inscribed.

The articulation of relations between Whitman's manuscripts and published works requires consideration of the way the medial functions self-consciously presented in his books abolish the proper channeling of letters and subjects by exposing those functions for description. Considering format as a function with the effect space, which binds internal spaces for inscription and codifies the generic distinctions between letters and diary entries, will grant access to a thinking of the way a conditioned relation between writing systems and civic spaces is unbound by Whitman's poetics. What I want to demonstrate is that his practical understanding of the relation between objects and the spaces conditioning reveals his grasp of relations between an array of materials, before they are inscribed in a system of objects and the conditions of their use. An analysis of format in the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* will then lead back to the context the poet created for Emerson's ostensibly private letter in the 1856 edition.

That Whitman's earliest notes toward the first edition were made in portable ledgers demonstrates that, like many young men flooding urban centers during the antebellum decades,

he recorded his everyday transits on surfaces ruled for accounts but materially inscribed with a mixture of written forms. Some of Whitman's most famous manuscript draft poems antedating 1855 were made in the portable ledger known as "Talbot Wilson," or "the earliest and most important notebook of Walt Whitman," as shown on the inscribed label on the cover of the notebook. The notebook contains two entries in a loose account book form, as well as the traces of more rigorously dated economic transactions on the "stubs" of pages that were removed from the beginning, middle, and end of the notebook. The remaining stubs at the beginning of the "earliest" notebook reveal that Whitman kept his accounts as directed by the notebook's ledger-ruled pages, with dates entered in the left-hand column and dollar values entered in the right-hand column (Figure 2.2).

The two intact account-book entries (Figure 2.3) remaining in the notebook would provide an even better idea of the poet's accounting methods, if they were not so different from the entries made on the removed pages. One of the remaining entries, dated April 19, 1847, reminds Whitman that "the mason commenced work on the base- / ment rooms," most likely for one of the houses the poet was building in Brooklyn in the late 1840s (Figure 2.3).²⁴ The entry appears inconspicuous: the date of services-rendered falls in the vicinity of the left-hand column allotted by the ledger-rules; the transaction is described in the wide center column; and what would be the figures of debt and expenditure are replaced by the summary "paid mason in full," written within the general area of the right-hand column.²⁵ A similar entry appears further along

²⁴ The 1847 entries have led some scholars to argue that the first manuscript versions of Whitman's free-verse lines, which appear in the ledger seventeen pages after the entry, were drafted in the late 1840s, while other scholars have made convincing arguments to the contrary. Both camps acknowledge the difficulty of dating the "earliest" notebook on the basis of extant evidence and ultimately agree that, in the last analysis, the notebook was in use between 1847 and 1854—a transitional period for Whitman. It should be noted that a possibly related shift took place in his book-keeping practices, given that the remains of accounts on the stubs at the beginning of the ledger abruptly end, over thirty pages are skipped, and the more careless April 1847 entry is made. On the controversy over the dating of the early notebooks, see *NUPM* 1:53-55; See Higgins; Miller 2-9.

²⁵ Grier cites an article by Charles Feinberg, noting a May 1 receipt for a payment of \$56 to a mason (*NUPM* 1:58n49).



Figure 2.2: Page stubs from “Talbot Wilson” notebook. Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of *The Walt Whitman Archive*.

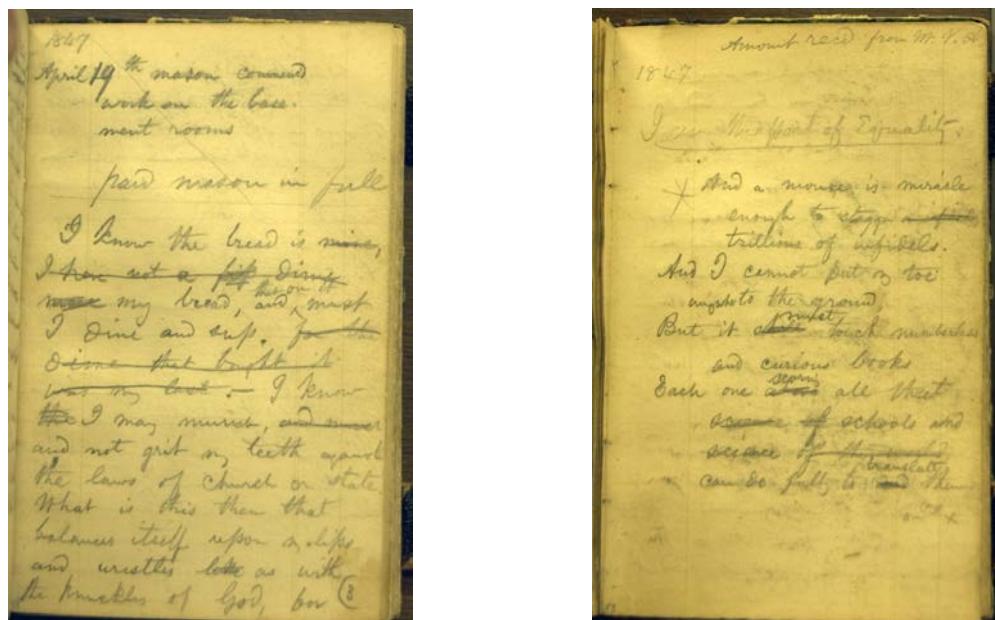


Figure 2.3: Pages from “Talbot Wilson” notebook. Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of *The Walt Whitman Archive*.

in the ledger, though in a looser style than the entry preceding it: “Amount rec’d from Mr. V.A. / 1847” (Figure 2.3). This entry appears in the upper-margin of the ledger-page, floating above free-verse lines destined for “Song of Myself,” which appear to have been written over the traces of erased pencil inscriptions. Whitman’s early notebooks are materially inscribed according to a practice based, as the Protestant diary was, on principles of economic exchange. But the poet’s “earliest” notebook traces a differential history of written forms disclosed by the account book entries remaining in them; an analysis of his inscriptions in relation to the structure of the book object suggests that the poet used his portable ledgers as an open-format storage medium.

The April 1847 entry in the “earliest” notebook records a balanced and self-sufficient exchange: a closed account. Though seemingly entered at random, the prose notes on the lower half of the same page respond to the closed account: “I know the bread is ~~missing I have not a~~
~~[illeg]~~ dime more my bread, and [that on it] must I dine and sup. ~~for the dime that bought it was~~
~~my last.—I know the~~ I may munch, ~~and never~~ and not grit my teeth against the laws of church or state. What is this then that balances itself upon my lips and wrestles like as with the knuckles of God.”²⁶ The coincidental adjacency of the account and the prose lines on the same notebook page generate, despite their chance encounter, a relationship so intriguing that it verges on presenting an intentional pairing of accounting/diary formats. In place of an account entry with date and numerical figure, Whitman’s prosaic account documents a concluded transaction. In place of a personal history or reflection, his empathic meditation on the suffering of the poor employs the semantics of formatting encoded in the ledger page to inscribe account-book keeper as the other who lies outside closed accounts.

In the space adjacent to the closed account dated 1847, Whitman traces the disequilibrium that drives the free-market economy: the deficit that always moves the laborer to work, or to desperation for sheer lack of it. The two formats that appear on the page bearing the 1847 entry stage an encounter, then, between personal and general economy, or between the

²⁶ Unless otherwise indicated, transcriptions are my own.

account's documentation of labor exchanged for universal equivalents and the subjective ruminations of the other excluded from exchange. What the two formats share is their impersonality: the account and the voice of the other. Appropriate to a space for writing economic calculations, in his portable ledger Whitman traced the voice external to his subject, while configuring on the single ledger page a practice that is nonetheless his own. This practice depends upon the possibility for the manuscript book to serve as an impersonal storage medium whose material elements bear the scripts and codes of multiple, open formats, regardless of the ledger rules and binding that channels those formats into proper accounting or diary entries. This medium does not provide the internal space in which the subject becomes present to himself, so that he can circulate and be present to other subjects. If this medium destines him for communal identification, Whitman's inscriptions arrest and retroactively open the channeling of scripts and codes into the single-format option of antebellum civic subjects: PERSEVERENCE, or sacrifice for the new gods of interurban networks. The open-format palpable in Whitman's "earliest" notebook does not constitute a space for receiving inscriptions, a space generically distinct from the epistolary emissions of the postal unconscious. Rather, the portable ledger discloses a multiplicity of spaces derived from the format embedded in the paper, binding, implements, and conditions under which they become linked together in the material act of writing.

The bound, material format of the "earliest" notebook, rather than the division between manuscript and print, hand and machine, accounting and prose, will guide my analysis of Whitman's manuscripts and published works. The placement of the two 1847 entries in Whitman's "earliest" notebook allows for the identification of the poet's use of the portable ledger as a single object composed of and always potentially deconstructed into its multiple parts. The 1847 entries are assumed to have been made at random, because the April entry was made around the middle of the notebook, and the second entry, lacking a month, was entered

several pages after it.²⁷ But if each entry is considered in relation to the construction of the readymade ledger on the whole, both entries appear to have been written at the beginning of one of the five twenty-four-page pamphlets bound together into the single bound object of the ledger.²⁸ If pages are counted, including stubs and excluding fly-leaves, and begin doing so from the side of the book bearing the “earliest” notebook label on its cover, the April 1847 entry appears on the first leaf of the third pamphlet, or the forty-ninth page.²⁹ When pages are counted forward from that entry, the fourth pamphlet begins where, as revealed by the remaining stubs, several pages of accounts have been removed. With these pages removed, the second 1847 entry appears at the top of the first leaf of the fourth pamphlet of the five composing the single bound object.

What this reveals about the “earliest” notebook is that Whitman made seemingly random entries at the beginning of the multiple pamphlets composing the bound object, not at random in the single space its bound condition provided. Not only were the 1847 entries made at what would have been the beginning of pamphlets, but the traces of account entries on the stubs remaining at the beginning, middle, and end of the notebook suggest that the pamphlets within the ledger were used even earlier as multiple surfaces, for the refinement of accounts. The opening pages of the ledger were inscribed with monthly and daily transactions, as indicated by the “Ap,” “M,” and “J” and the “M’s” and “W’s” on the remaining recto stubs. The rapid succession of “F’s,” “M’s,” “A’s,” and “Ju’s” on the recto stubs at the beginning of the fourth

²⁷ See Grier’s introduction to the notebook for one example: “When he paid the mason and received the money from Mr. V.A. he entered these currently important facts on random blank pages and later wrote around them” (*NUPM* 1:55).

²⁸ Although the “earliest notebook” is not available for examination, I have inspected a portable ledger of the same size from the 1850s in the special collections at the University of Iowa and confirmed that a ledger like Whitman’s would have been composed of twenty-four page pamphlets.

²⁹ See Higgins 53-77. Higgins gives this page as page fifty-one, which is the number it is given in the facsimile provided by the Library of Congress’s “American Memory website (www.memory.loc.gov). This pagination includes the front fly-leaf, which is not part of the individual pamphlets from which the notebook is composed. I do not believe that this clarification alters Higgins’s argument; rather, I correct the pagination in defense of my own calculations.



Figure 2.4: Page stubs from the fourth (left) and fifth (right) pamphlets of the “Talbot Wilson” notebook. Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of *The Walt Whitman Archive*.

pamphlet suggest a distillation of previous accounts (Figure 2.4). Because the letters remaining on recto stubs of the fifth and last pamphlet are upside-down (Figure 2.4), it follows that the ledger was inscribed from the back at some point. The pages removed from the back of the ledger were, therefore, also removed from what were the front leaves of the fifth pamphlet. The traces of ledger entries in the notebooks indicate that the first, third, fourth, and fifth pamphlets were treated as multiples bound together as a single object: the portable ledger. The readymade binding of Whitman’s portable ledger was only tentatively bound. What Emerson consolidated in the readymade bindings of his mature *Journal*, Whitman redistributed from within the binding condition that he might have otherwise received as an original instantiation of a spiritual act.

To acknowledge that Whitman used his blank books either as tentatively bound readymade objects, or as readymade pamphlets destined to be bound in covers, leads to a new understanding of the way the poet used his writing materials. The analysis given here therefore applies to his other early notebooks from the early-mid 1850s: specifically, four of the six extant early notebooks that scholars have dated prior to 1855, which are unbound ledger-ruled pamphlets. Three of them, “Poem Incarnating the Mind,” “You Know How the One Brain” and “I Know a Rich Capitalist,” are twenty-four-page pamphlets, like the pamphlets in the “earliest” notebook and they are approximately the same dimensions. The fourth, “Regular Old Followers,” is twenty pages long, but its current state, dismantled and in a conservational binding, suggests that it was in a deteriorated condition and may have lost its outermost folded sheet: the first and last leaves, which amounts to four pages. With the loss of the outermost sheet of “Regular Old Followers” accounted for, all three “notebooks” can be considered twenty-four-page pamphlets that may have once been part of a single portable ledger of the same make and design of the “earliest” notebook.

These four notebooks reveal that Whitman used the readymade, bound object as a thing in a physical state of always potential unbinding. Where Emerson’s journal volumes reveal a shift toward the use of more stable objects—leather-bound journals that internalized handmade booklets—Whitman’s early notebooks bear the marks of a practice that unbinds bound objects and that consequently reveals the elements of a logic underlying systems of practice: a logic of manuscript underlying writing systems and civic space. The specific name for the network of relations between materials that facilitated Whitman’s practical reversal of Emerson’s modern instantiation of the commonplace system will therefore be the “handmade-in-the-readymade.” This name refers to a network of relations reminiscent of the network of references and generic mixtures Grossman identified in the material structure of the 1856 *Leaves of Grass*. For the purposes of the research project at hand, I want the handmade-in-the-readymade to identify the networked preconditions of a practice that opens the possibility of new formats, new subjects, and new spaces, based on the scripts and codes latent in materials. As in Emerson’s writing

system, the conception of materials in the analysis of writing systems cannot remain limited to the materials bound together as books or unbound and channeled as letters, subjects, and civic discourse. It cannot be assumed that these materials bear an analogical relation with the situation conditioning them. Rather, the friction of writing systems and civic space must be felt in the multiple layers of media history disclosed by my analysis of Emerson's manuscripts and published works. Standing shoulder to shoulder with Whitman, and looking back over his departure from Emerson's Transcendentalism, the dissonant, decentralized materiality of practice and civic construction harmonized by the commonplace system and maintained by its derivations in the personal style of letters and diary entries, as well as the dialectic of accounting and diary writing, must be considered in the analysis of the literary. The handmade-in-the-readymade in Whitman's manuscripts and published works reveals that the tentative binding evinced in the physical state of the poet's early notebooks does not limit the analysis of his system of practice to his writings alone but to the conditioning of that practice by the civic space of 1850s New York City.

One page of "Poem Incarnating the Mind" records a list of musings or observations that might be found in a journalist's or a poet's notebook (Figure 2.5):

If the light of a half day dawn were arrested, and held so for a thousand years

How

And ~~write~~ chalked on a ~~great~~ board, Be of good cheer, we will not desert you, and held it up ~~as they to against the~~ and did it;

The thin swift passing clouds like lace, blowing overhead during a storm are called the flying send

If Let us suppose ~~for~~ ~~for~~ that all the most relational people of the world had gone no further than children of twelve years old—or, as this seems forced, suppose the utmost advance yet made was the advance of the Camanches and kindred peoples of[.]

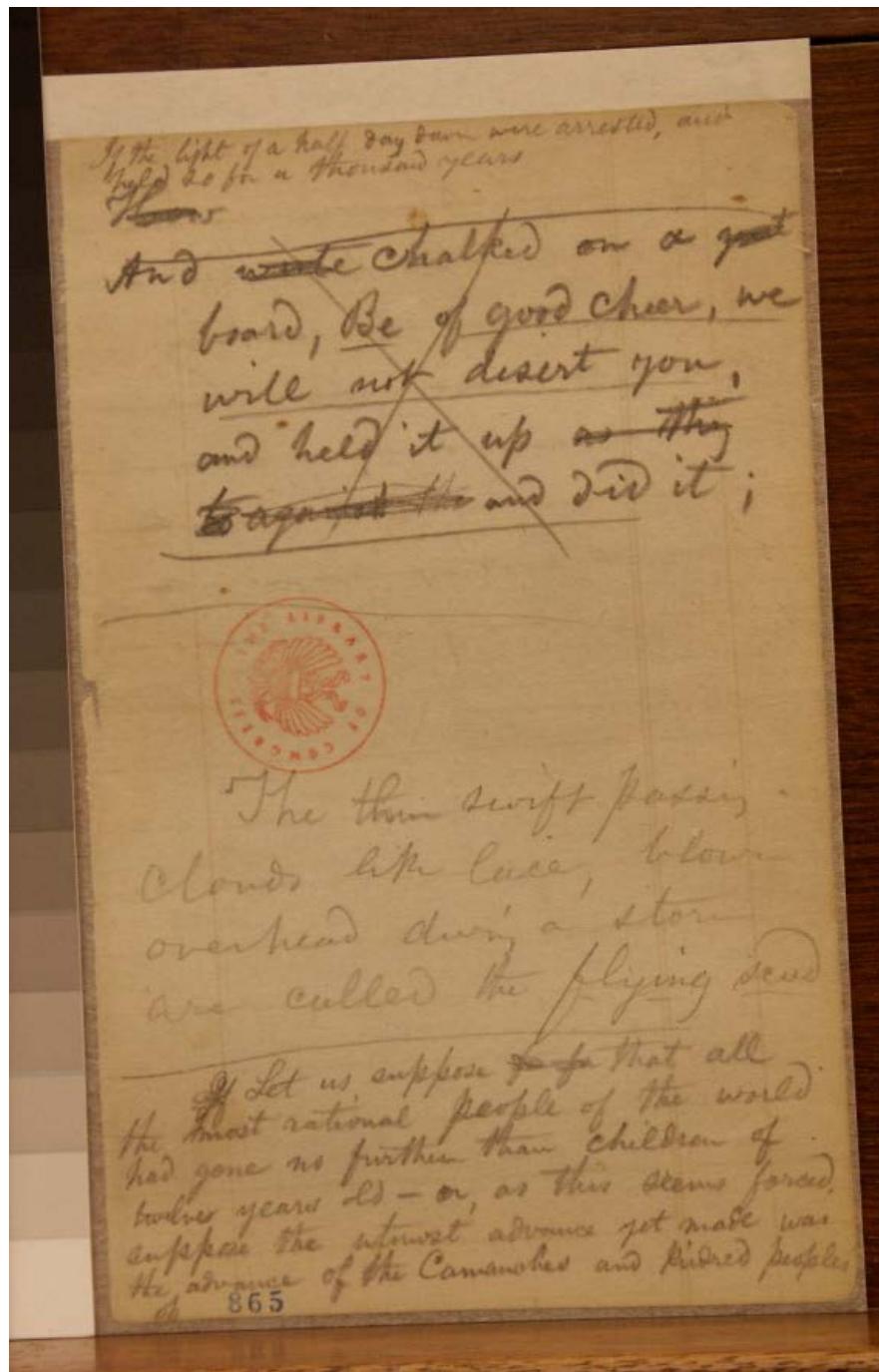


Figure 2.5: Page from “Talbot Wilson” notebook. Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of *The Walt Whitman Archive*.

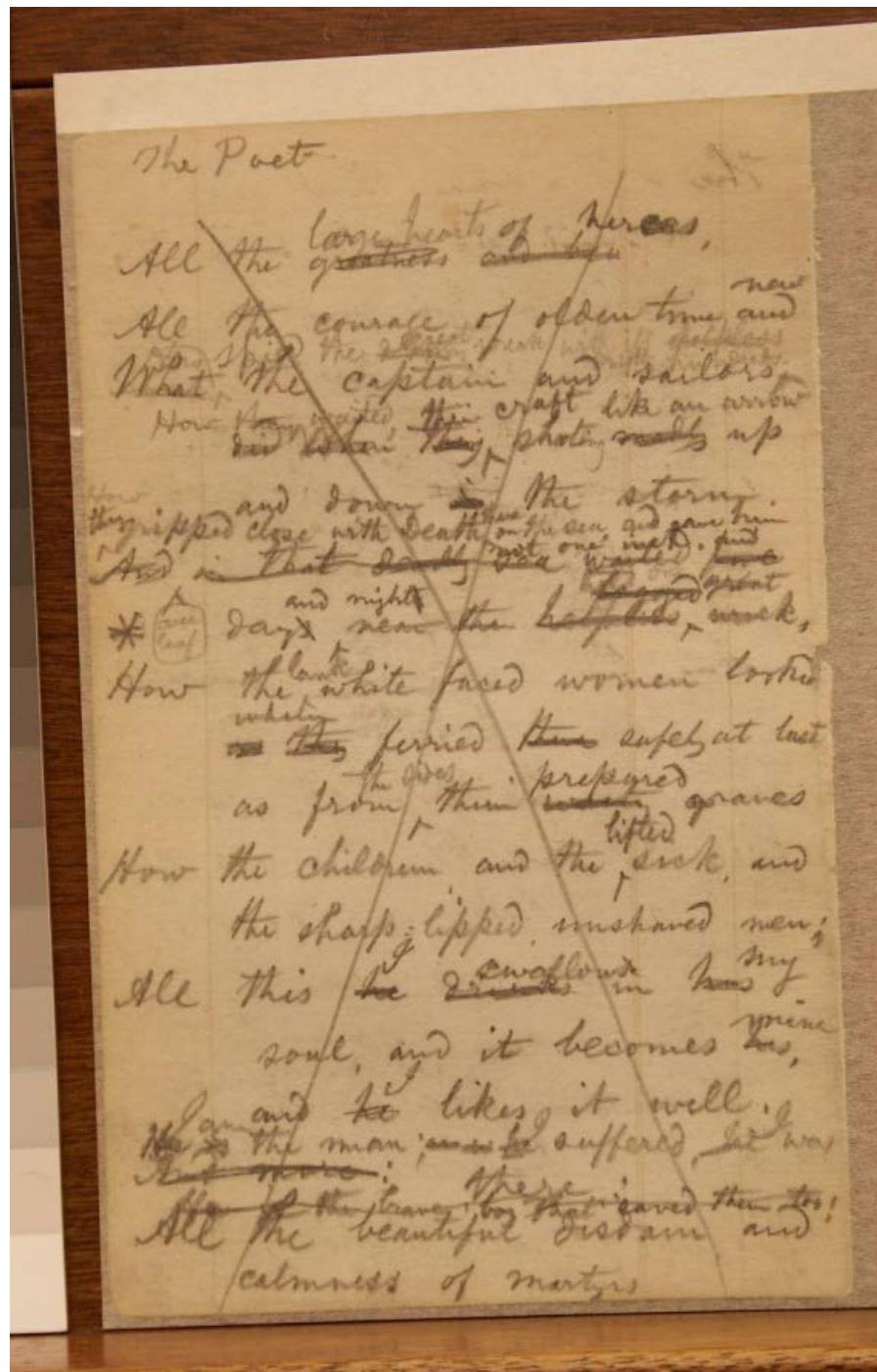


Figure 2.6 Page from “Talbot Wilson” notebook. Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of *The Walt Whitman Archive*.

Four entries have been made, at different times, under different circumstances, with different pencils, as indicated by the varying shades of lead in each fragment. The density of the material traces as well as the relative size and control of the handwriting displays the multiplicity of conditions inscribed in the single situation documented on the ledger-ruled notebook page. Sandwiched between the speculative note about the “arrest” of time at the top of the page and about the utopian pre-adolescence of Native American society at the bottom,³⁰ the two middle entries on the page refer to the wreck of a steam ship, the San Francisco, the appearance of which has led scholars to date Whitman’s use of the notebook to 1854. Manuscript lines on the next page of “PIM,” provide what seems like an eyewitness account in free-verse of the rescue of the “[lank] white faced women” and “children” from the wreck (Figure 2.6). These lines end with Whitman’s “I” claiming: “All this ~~he drinks~~ [I swallows] in ~~his~~ [my] soul, and it becomes ~~his~~ [mine]. / ~~He is~~ [I am] the man, ~~an w he~~-[I]-suffered, ~~he~~ [I] was there.” The poetry in manuscript continues on the following page with a list of tortured and executed scapegoats, such as “The old woman,” or “witch,” “that was chained and burnt,” “The great queens that walked serenely to the block,” and “The [hunted] slave,” with whom the “I” explicitly identifies by proclaiming “~~He is~~ [I am] the hunted slave.”

Inscriptions from all three pages of “PIM” appear in the 1855 version of “Song of Myself.”

How the skipper saw the crowded and rudderless wreck of the steamship,
 and death chasing it up and down the storm,
 How he knuckled tight and gave not back an inch, and was faithful of days
 and faithful of nights,
 And chalked in large letters on a board, Be of good cheer, We will not
 desert you;
 How he saved the drifting company at last,
 How the lank loose-gowned women looked when boated from the side of
 their prepared graves,
 How the silent old-faced infants, and the lifted sick, and the sharp-lipped
 unshaved men;

³⁰ These two inscriptions may have been made on the same occasion, given the similarity of the pencil trace, the handwriting, and the fact that the entry at the top of the page is squeezed into the upper margin.

All this I swallow and it tastes good I like it well, and it becomes
mine,
I am the man I suffered I was there.

The disdain and calmness of martyrs,
The mother condemned for a witch and burnt with dry wood, and her
children gazing on;
The hounded slave that flags in the race and leans by the fence, blowing
and covered with sweat,
The twinges that sting like needles his legs and neck,
The murderous buckshot and the bullets,
All these I feel or am.

I am the hounded slave I wince at the bite of the dogs. (*LG* 1:39)

In print, the lines preserve much of the language and construction from all three pages of the notebook. The stanza describing the wreck of the San Francisco draws from the list of fragments (“Be of good cheer, we will not desert you”), which is inserted into the poetry drafted on the page following it, as indicated in the manuscript by an asterisk (Figure 2.6). This insertion produces the single break in the incantatory “How’s,” the anaphora being originally continuous in manuscript and broken by the insertion of the journalistic fragment. The transcription of an event, one ostensibly witnessed in civic space, inserts itself into a continuous entry ostensibly destined for print as a poem in a book of poems. While Whitman-the-journalist helped to shape the lyric poet’s form-breaking experimental verse, the poetic text as it appears in print is neither “poetic” nor “journalistic,” neither “literature” nor “copy-book.” Any single channel that might clarify the page is distorted by the articulation of a multiplicity of spaces and generically defined formats. The text gestures toward the unbinding of its format as a written inscription, technically scripted and technologically reproduced, as well as its conditional unbinding of spatial formats, technically a multiplicity constructed as an object and technologically a city in a transitional state. These gestures mark the sequence of materially instantiated functions that would be channeled by the analogical relation between book and city. They disclose, instead, the logic of manuscript in the open-format poem, the book in which it is stored, and the civic space conditioning its objective status.

Once Whitman’s lyric “I” proclaims itself the consumer of newsworthy events, swallowing all and making it his, the vertical accumulation of “How’s” is replaced by the

horizontal expansion of calculable marks: the notorious strings of “....’s” breaking up the lines of the 1855 poems. Newsworthy events provide the universal conditions of possibility for the emergence of the discoursing “I” in civic space. And yet the coincidence of print discourse and the consuming, regurgitating “I” coincide with the structural movement of anaphora and a sequence of diacritical marks. The next stanza breaks from the generic mixture of lyricized newsprint by imposing a fragment that operates as a commonplace topic-heading: “The disdain and calmness of martyrs.” The new stanza, like the new page in manuscript, records different material from the preceding stanza in a double sense: a noticeable shift in the density of lead indicates a shift in the conditions of writing. This shift affects the poem’s localized perspective, sending back through a selective history of persecution leading up to Whitman’s historical moment. The space between the two stanzas and the indication of a new subject heading suggest that the withered bodies of the San Francisco’s women and children passengers are *not* equal with the bodies of women persecuted as witches and the suffering bodies of slaves. Rather, a space in the text is opened, which exposes the possibility for difference between the lyricized news report and the references to martyrs past and present. This space of difference delivers not a spiritual act or a representation of historical discontinuity bound together by experimental writing but a sequence of inscribed formats, referencing the *topoi* of commonplace keeping, journalistic writing, religious history, and poetic tradition.

Manuscript Noise: The Voices of Others and Writing-in-Transit

Wherever he found himself throughout his life, whenever the opportunity presented itself, Whitman appears to have taken advantage to play his version of the game of “twenty questions.” Though he reportedly played the game with his elementary school students back in the late 1830s, traces of the game sometimes referred to as “Animal, Vegetable, Mineral” do not show up in his earliest extant manuscript books. But the “Dick Hunt” notebook, whose use is dated around 1857, contains several manuscript lists generated by the poet’s favorite guessing game, such as the following:

animal & vegetable
in this room
not used by drivers
worn above the waist
not the neck
complete in
int' a

Poem expressing the
sentiment of the joy of
old age - of an old
person (?) or in the
poems of
Joyce

(O my old ~~manhood~~, my
My children and my grandchildren
My white hair and
A beard! My largeness
calmness and peace ~~majest~~ ^{majest}
Many years)

Figure 2.7: Page 183 of the "Dick Hunt" notebook. Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of *The Walt Whitman Archive*.

animal + vegetable
 in this room
 not used by drivers
 worn above the waist
 not the neck
 complete in
 it's a (Figure 2.7)

Of particular interest is the fact that Whitman played the game with omnibus drivers, firemen, carpenters, storekeepers, and whoever else may have been around, while jaunting about the streets of antebellum New York City. Given the number of pages missing from Whitman's early as well as his post-1856 notebooks, it can be assumed that he played the game in earlier notebooks, and that he did so more frequently and with other persons.³¹ For the moment, I will agree with C. Carroll Hollis, who stated in 1958 that the "Dick Hunt" notebook contains the earliest manuscript evidence of the game (75). I will also rely on the date and the numerous traces of "Animal, Vegetable, Mineral" in the notebook as I extend my analysis of Whitman's writing system in the 1855 and 1856 editions of *Leaves of Grass* to the industrial-urban space beyond the binding conditions of the book of poetry. The poet's manuscript and printed books are structured by a relation of dual presence that has been unfolding a logic of manuscript in my analysis, that has been named the handmade-in-the-readymade, and that was conditioned by the emergent technical, technological situation of the antebellum city itself.

In his brief examination of the lists in the notebook, Hollis notes that they are not always written in Whitman's hand and that this fact "would indicate an informality about the notebook that is surprising," because the poet had inscribed trial lines on the same page (75). This informality refers to the fact that Whitman opened his notebook—his "private memorandum"—for others to inscribe. It also provides a material trace of the transient social milieus in which

³¹ See *Faint Clews & Indirections* 17, for an example of a loose manuscript bearing traces of the game.

Whitman and his companions inscribed the notebook. At one point, Hollis attempts to place Whitman's inscriptions "in a store, perhaps with a clerk or proprietor." Later, he notes that the coincidence of the game and trial lines for the poem ultimately titled "Song of Joys," also made in pencil and with the similar handwriting, "indicate these lines were made at the same time or shortly after the word-game." And yet, Hollis adds, "It is hard to believe Whitman worked out such lines in a gathering room for drivers while his friends remained nearby" (76). Given the variety of "informal" circumstances in which the poet drafted lines, the working out of these lines in such a context, or in the multiplicity of such contexts for socialization through manuscript practice, actually is believable. How tentative binding and everything that is "hard to believe" about the location of a subject, representative or not, are themselves informal, or fundamentally unformed, in a historically imagined scene should also be considered. As my analysis of Whitman's manuscripts and published works have begun to reveal, there is no given format, neither subject nor civic space, that can be taken for granted once poetics traces the open formats of bound objects and the binding conditions in which they circulate. The informality of manuscript opens possibilities for reading Whitman's experimental texts, as well as their relation to the history of the American city, differently. This informality might be taken seriously as the only basis for reading manuscript books like Whitman's, which, as I aim to demonstrate in Parts Two and Three of this dissertation, make an art out of disclosing the scripts and codes of subjects and objects in civic space.

While Hollis finds it "hard to believe" that Whitman drafted his lines among his working-class friends in a shop or some other relatively public space, it is actually just hard to prove that he did so. Still more realistically, it is impossible to know where and with whom Whitman inscribed the lines. What is interesting, however, is that this impossibility is typically not an issue in the manuscript books of Whitman's other contemporaries, including Emerson. That is, it can be safely assumed that Emerson composed his *Journal*, as well as the lectures and essays he composed from its entries, in his study—responding affirmatively to the call of "Whim," as he

states in “Self-Reliance.”³² When Emerson wrote while out and about, the traces of his outings were relegated to manuscript books his editors have categorized as “miscellaneous notebooks.” And the editors were not wrong to do so: they acted in accord with the vertical, hierarchical structure of his writing system, in which all transient scribbling in the horizontal multiplicity of notebooks aspired and ascended to the central node in his system: the *Journal*. The center of Whitman’s writing system, on the other hand, was the printed book, which was no center at all: first, because it was technologically reproducible and distributable, and second, because it was, in the case of the first two editions of *Leaves of Grass*, a tentatively bound, open-format text composed of the multiplicity structuring it. These material characteristics of Whitman’s poetics in 1855 and 1856, (I believe), determine the scholar’s and the non-academic reader’s desire to establish a “scene of writing” in which to place the poet, in order to inscribe him as a writing subject (or author) and to condition historically the situation in which he wrote.

My exploration of the layers of media history underlying the American Renaissance over the course of the previous and current chapter would lead the reader to believe that this desire is channeled, which moves me to make the following statement, implicit in my analysis of Emerson’s and Whitman’s writing systems up to this point. That is, readings of Whitman have always been conditioned by Emerson’s writing system: the system programming vertically constituted subjects in a horizontally decentralized technical, technological situation, whose layered media history, linking writing and civic space, has never stopped decomposing and receding into the postal unconscious since the infrastructures and personal practices of modernity were set in place in the nineteenth century. These are the stakes in tracing back the “/” constituting “Emerson/Whitman,” Grossman’s formulation of “representative subjects,” which I have rendered as a formula for a system of letters and books: the commonplace system. Beyond their largely class-determined identities as authors, rooted in the economically determined

³² “I shun father and mother and wife and brother, when my genius calls me. I would write on the lintels of the door-post, Whim. I hope it is somewhat better than whim at last, but we cannot spend the day in explanation” (CWRWE 2:30).

politics of federalism and factionalism, federal banks and free-market enterprise, Emerson and Whitman were enmeshed in the historical opening of closed circuits disseminated by the commonplace system that reestablished and multiplied closed circuits in a more dispersed network of subjects.

To read the “/” in “Emerson/Whitman” is to read the mark that organizes genres, subjects, and their proper formats and spaces. This mark of organization draws attention to the noise of the storage, formatting, and transmission functions scripting and coding self-reliant, private subjects and structuring the networked relations between them. It cuts through the layers of media history that spill out, horizontally, from the opening of proper channels traced by Whitman’s manuscripts and published works. These tracings are disclosed in and between the first and second editions of *Leaves of Grass*; both material texts embody the techniques and technologies conditioning the subject’s status as an object for the reception of scripts and codes among other similarly constituted objects in a networked situation. In both editions and between them, the proper channels binding subject to subject record the friction of horizontal circulation and the noise of that infrastructural situation under construction. Whitman’s first two editions therefore disclose the civic spaces conditioning their physical state as texts. The material texts do not bear the historical signified traditionally deciphered in his lines; rather, they expose the relation between that signified and the open format of free verse, a relation exposing, in turn, the frictive contact between codified formats, (private/open letter), techniques (“copy-book”/“poem”), and the media conventionally associated with them (manuscript/print). The rapid transition from the 1855 to the 1856 edition only intensifies the previously invisible, impalpable, and inaudible phenomenon manifested in what has been traced as a peculiar situation among materials, a situation consistent with the transient situation of the mid-nineteenth-century American city, a situation traced by the exposed relation between writing systems and civic space: the literary.

Hollis’s brief observations about Whitman’s “word game” are emblematic of the nature of writing subjects and the modern letters that they consumed and reproduced in the northeastern

States by 1855. He constructs a scene of Whitman writing among his working-class friends, a scene consistent with the poet of democracy's place in America's nationalist imaginary. But Hollis is split because his reading takes place before the constitutive “/” surfaced in the scholarly writing of literary history, even though the material reality of that very fact stared back at him from somewhere within the nebulous imaginary reflection conditioning his reception and transmission of Literature. Whitman models a subject that is not a recipient of spiritual acts, duly received and transcribed in a private memorandum. Rather, the poet is a documentarian of the steps toward that act because the proper channels of Emerson's writing system could not successfully condition the networked situation in which Whitman and other subjects circulated in the 1850s. The most receptive among them would certainly internalize the spiritual act delivered by horizontally circulating civic leaders like Emerson. But Whitman, even if he was an aberration in his own century, prepared a record of the friction and noise constituting the subject and its imaginary in the world to come. This record is evinced in the physical state of the first two editions, as described above. In reading the medial functions made legible by the structure of relations embodied in and between the first two editions, we have already begun articulating the logic of manuscript unfolded by that structure. Like his earlier notebooks, Whitman's “Dick Hunt” notebook records the situation shaping his inscriptions (Figure 2.7).

Hollis feels the probability of the game and the trial lines leaving their traces in the same context because both forms of Whitman's inscriptions are on the same page and have been made in pencil. But at least three different times and places of inscription are in evidence on the notebook page. The list pertaining to “Animal, Vegetable, Mineral” appears to have been inscribed with a duller pencil tip than the tip that inscribed the idea for “Poem of Joys” below it, except for the “P” at the beginning of the entry, as evinced in the palpable contrast between the two densities of lead. The chronological order of the inscriptions are not a concern in this case. Such an order would not only be as hard to believe as Hollis's proposed scene of writing—it would likely be impossible to prove. Because the pencil tip appears to have dulled as Whitman wrote—those of us who still use pencils can relate—the medium loses density; the lead trace

diffuses. The same can be said for the trial line below it, beginning “O my old,” three words which were certainly made by Whitman, but look almost nothing like his handwriting. The lines were inscribed by Whitman, but they must have been made under duress, or while walking, or perhaps even on the omnibus, as the irregular hand inscribing “whi te,” “ h^air,” and the wiggling exclamation point beneath them indicate.

In addition to the loose, irregular hand, the transformation of the lead trace bears valuable information because the varying density of the trace from one entry to another marks their discontinuity. The fact that the thinness and density of the lead trace is renewed at three points on the page reveals that Whitman entered the inscriptions on three different occasions. Even if those occasions followed each other sequentially and all of them occurred in the same location, the pencil was sharpened or exchanged for another pencil. And even if the locations remained the same, something in that location changed enough to have an impact on the medium and the poet’s writing hand. The situations in which Whitman inscribed the “word game” and his trial lines conditioned his desire for the restoration of a fine point. Because Whitman’s inscriptions were conditioned by his transient situation, it is impossible to know where and in what order he inscribed his manuscript books. Only by perceiving the impossibility of such an imaginary conditioning of literary writing and its relation to specific historical situations can the “/” constituting Whitman’s break from Emerson and from the commonplace system at the level of practice be traced. What readers see and cannot sense is the palpable encounter between the transient situation of New York City in the 1850s and the writing materials on hand for a subject like Whitman. The trace of this encounter breaks open the properly channeled union between subjects by recording the movement of civic spaces, far from stabilized at the infrastructural level, that move the hand as well as the material variability of the technically equipped subject, whose perseverance is subject to the irregularities of the real, illegible body. The handmade-in-the-readymade, describing the practical elements latent in bound objects, pertains to this physical state of writing, in which a body, one not locatable as a subject positioned in historically narrated space-time, generates a record of its transformation into a subject by the harmonizing forces of

writing systems and civic space. Extending from the open-format concept of the handmade-in-the-readymade, the descriptive term for the record made by this unlocatable body in Whitman's transient situation is "writing-in-transit."

I want to conclude this chapter by bringing together the handmade-in-the-readymade and writing-in-transit as two descriptive terms for the materialist analysis of Whitman's 1855 and 1856 editions. This analysis will attend to the constitutive difference between Emerson and Whitman, the constitutive "/" that binds and unbinds them, as Grossman has demonstrated, and that pierces through the layers of media history. What must be made clear at this point is that their practices are not infrastructural in a figurative sense, as if infrastructure named the internal structures of the subject, or as if it named the essential role of literature in the subject's everyday life. I want to emphasize, rather, the way that the irregularities of Whitman's writing-in-transit and the vertical architecture of Emerson's variation of the commonplace system were concretely impacted by infrastructural development in the antebellum northeast. I am therefore going to trace back the manuscript traces from Whitman's "Dick Hunt" notebook to the 1855 poem ultimately titled "To Think of Time" and then follow it through to its reappearance in the 1856 *Leaves of Grass*. Indicating the relations between Whitman's manuscript practices, the two printings of the poem, and the publication of Emerson's letter, I will pursue a reading of the infrastructural character that Whitman's manuscripts and published works disclose as the basis for his system of practice. Like the context the poet created for Emerson's letter, I will demonstrate how Whitman's system simultaneously conditions the retroactive disclosure of the infrastructural character that Emerson's system shares with Whitman's but elides, naturally.

In all six versions of "To Think of Time" published between 1855 and 1882, the recurring trope of the poem, the mysterious image of "black lines," remains virtually unchanged. Merging transit infrastructure and written lines in a single image, the "black lines" present the reader with an image of transit at a standstill; they evoke the absolute stasis of death, paradoxically, as a delocalized, global movement, thereby collapsing circulation and nature, mysticism and politics. In the 1855 edition, the lines read: "Slowmoving and black lines creep

over the whole earth . . . they never cease . . . they are the burial lines, / He that was President was buried, and he that is now President shall surely be buried" (*LG* 1:66). With the focus on the indirect reference to transit in the lines, it bears mentioning that the lines were written shortly after American cities were networked by telegraph and railroad. New York City, Buffalo, Philadelphia, Boston, and Pittsburgh were linked by telegraph in 1847; the New York Central and Erie Railroads were finished in 1851; the Pennsylvania and the Baltimore and Ohio railroads were completed in 1853. The postal system originally circulated more news than manuscript letters, although postal reform would reverse these conditions. During the first half of the nineteenth century, transit systems and traffic flows accelerated and evolved in tandem with intercity communications technology; cities remained the site of power, even after their walls came down and closed circuits of practice had been distributed, because they drew their power from interurban networks. As Raymond Williams has stated, "The communications system is not only the information network but also the transport network," and "The city, obviously, has always been associated with the concentration of traffic" (296). Antebellum New York City was the fulcrum of the nation's centripetal forces.

These forces would increasingly reveal themselves to be centrifugal. Whitman's "black lines" present the systolic-diastolic movement of industrial-urban circulation, the centrifugal forces that would follow the centripetal. The "burial lines" are lines of progress, lines of death in a paradoxical state of vital movement. Beyond all nineteenth-century conceptions of geography or religion, the "black lines" are not human, organic, or divine, but the opposite: dead, foreign, limitless, unstoppable, and radically other. The radical otherness of these lines schematized a radically local situation in the antebellum city, the impact of which I have already begun to explore in the traces of writing-in-transit. Mass transit on the streets of New York in the 1850s was in a state of transition from slow and cumbersome horse-drawn stage-coaches to fast and efficient horse-drawn rail-cars. This state of infrastructural transition established a peculiar type of urban space composed of two historically specific and adjacent circulation networks. The

unwieldy vehicle commonly known as the stage-coach, or “omnibus,”³³ was omnipresent below fourteenth-street in antebellum Manhattan, as well as lucrative for omnibus franchises after 1830. The vehicle’s omnipresence and profitability were threatened, however, by the inevitable advance of smoother, faster iron rails. Entrenched in the political and economic machinery of the city, omnibus companies managed to prevent the laying of iron rails on the streets of downtown Manhattan and Brooklyn until 1852, when horse-drawn rail-car companies were given license to run lines on avenues adjacent to central thoroughfares, including Broadway. The rail lines did more than just introduce competition to the omnibus companies’ local transit monopoly. Iron rail-car lines also laid the foundation for steam engines—forbidden, at the time, in densely populated urban areas of New York City—that serviced the eastern seaboard. The fact that the rail-less stage-coach and the rail-car co-existed—ran adjacent to each other—on the streets of New York in the same decade that Whitman published the first two editions of *Leaves of Grass* fills in the historically specific technological situation in which his book was written, published, and circulated. If the book is considered as a transient space of tentative binding, a storage medium exposed to the forces shaping its material condition as a text, then the transit infrastructures for which many of Whitman’s friends and acquaintances labored and on which he spent much of his time should be considered a materially constitutive element of the unbound character of the first two editions.

“To Think of Time” presents the shift from one mode of transit to another in the scene of the stage driver’s funeral, which directly follows the provocative image of “black lines.” As the setting for the funeral is established, distances collapse into a sequence of urban scenes: “Cold dash of waves at the ferrywharf, / Posh and ice in the river . . . half-frozen mud in the streets.” The interment proceeds by way of a recounting the funeral as if it had already happened—“The

³³ The Latin term “omnibus,” meaning “for all,” was not in common usage in antebellum New York. In an article published in the August 23, 1856 *Life Illustrated*, Whitman wrote: “The experienced will often save the extortion and abuse of hackmen by using ‘stages,’ as the city people always call an omnibus” (NYD 138). In his reminiscence about Whitman, the poet’s friend, Dr. St. John D.B. Roosa, concurred: “The real New Yorker never said omnibus” (NUPM 2:525).

coffin is lowered and settled . . . the whip is laid in the coffin.” Then the poem switches into the present-tense before the driver’s eulogy begins: “He is decently put away . . . is there anything more?” Following the ambiguous and spatially delocalized image of the “black lines,” the poem introduces a scene of ritual interment—a symbolic passing away of the stage-coach in the metonymic figure of the driver—as well as a space for a form of public discourse: the eulogy of the driver, an informal form. After the delocalized image of “black lines,” read concretely as expanding transportation and communication lines, the funeral recounted in the past tense and the eulogy introduced in the present temporalize the lines. But the temporalities of the poetic lines, in spite or because of the “black lines,” are irregular. And the irregularity not only persists as the local act of civic discourse is carried out; it also becomes more irregular. Once the eulogy begins, it reinstates the past-tense:

He was a goodfellow,
Freemouthed, quicktempered, not badlooking, able to take his own part,
Witty, sensitive to a slight, ready with life or death for a friend,
Fond of women, . . . played some . . . eat hearty and drank hearty,
Had known what it was to be flush . . . grew lowspirited toward the last . . .
sickened . . . was helped by a contribution,
Died aged forty-one years . . . and that was his funeral. (*LG* 1:66)

The eulogy that speaks for the past introduces the temporality of storytelling in the past-tense, as well as a distinctive set of vernacular rhythms, to the poem. This temporality breaks, however, opening the possibility of a second voice, differing in tone from the lines leading up to the scene of the stage driver’s funeral.

The present-tense returns to the eulogy by way of this second voice, which articulates a different vocabulary and set of rhythms. This time, public speech emerges in a paroxysm of altered perspectives and free associations. “Thumb extended or finger uplifted, / Apron, cape, gloves, strap . . . wetweather clothes . . . whip carefully chosen . . . boss, spotter, starter, and hostler” (*LG* 1:66). Abandoning the eulogy’s original temporality, the voice transmits the perspective of the driver: the view of the thumbs and fingers that hailed the driver to the curbside. The absent body of the dead, the one who was spoken for, materializes in the driver’s uniform and equipment, constituting a sensual existence registered in the migratory and multi-

tonal consonance and alliteration of “apron, cape, gloves, strap” and “boss, spotter, starter, and hostler.” The séance continues in the last three lines of the eulogy, until the original mode of the poem resumes.

Somebody loafing on you, or you loafing on somebody . . . headway . . .
 man before and man behind,
 Good day’s work or bad day’s work . . . pet stock or mean stock . . . first
 out or last out . . . turning in at night,
 To think that these are so much and so nigh to other drivers . . . and he there
 takes no interest in them. (67)

Three voices, two voices, or one: the possibility of other voices and other times traces points in the evolution of a voice, of a subject, living and dead, inscribed and dictated, in the delocalized ambiguity of the “black lines.” Equipment, diacritical marks, and open-format writing trace the multiples that would otherwise channel temporal linearity or the unilateral delivery of spiritual acts. The play of ambiguity motivated by the “black lines” turns the funeral scene into a network of inscribed and spoken acts; the “black lines” flatten their vertical architecture into a horizontal schematic of overlapping layers of technology and technique. “To Think of Time” presents civic discourse as a product of writing-in-transit ruptured by the postal unconscious.

This rupturing is not elided by a recuperative spiritual act so much as it serves to concretize the unconscious and thus to inscribe the technological situation structuring the subject’s unconscious in the technical space of writing and civic discourse. When the “black lines” reappear later in the poem, their ambiguity—their earlier mystification of the conditions and practice that they disclosed in the internally ruptured eulogy—refers more directly to the growing network of transnational and international iron rails: “Slowmoving and black lines go ceaselessly over the earth, / Northerner goes carried and southerner goes carried . . . and they on the Atlantic side and they on the Pacific, and they between, and all through the Mississippi country . . . and all over the earth” (*LG* 1:68). Because the poem asks its reader to “think of time”—of the future, the past, and the wonders of the present moment in history—it makes sense that the “black lines” are made to refer to the infrastructure that was effectively deciding the

future of the nation, creating its place in history, and yet erasing the history that the nation had both imported from Europe and England and encountered on the American continent

The question raised by “To Think of Time,” then, is not so much the question of why the nation or the world shifted from one mode of transit to another, or even the question of what is lost in the process, but how that movement and how a record of supersession is written, preserved, or stored. The 1855 version of “To Think of Time” presents the elements of this record as it transformed into “Burial Poem,” the last poem in the 1856 edition. The reformatting of the 1855 edition as the 1856 edition informs the materialist reading of the “black lines” for at least three reasons. First, the dimensions of the second edition are closer to the dimensions of Whitman’s portable ledgers, a portable format in direct opposition to the awkwardly large 1855 edition; second, the 1856 edition’s smaller dimensions reshaped the lines of the poem, while creating the opportunity to remove the diacritical marks in the 1855 edition (Figure 2.8). In the comparison provided below, the two stanzas, between which the break from narration to ecstatic writing-in-transit takes place, are palpably different from one edition to the next. Most obviously, the second edition subdues the drift and dotted sequences within lines, making the lines more homogeneous than in the first edition. But the regulation of the lines also heightens the tension internal to the stanzas, mainly because in 1856 the stanzas are individual lines as well as stanzas; they are isolated versions of inscribed civic speech that, when internally disarticulated, stand in contrast to each other as speech acts.

Lastly, the 1856 edition contained not only several new poems and an appendix but also a new organization of textual materials. As mentioned above, “Burial Poem” is the last poem of the 1856 edition. It appears, then, just before the appendix, beginning with Emerson’s letter and followed by Whitman’s open response and the reviews of the first edition. The positioning of the poem in relation to the private and open letters bound into the appendix might lead to a consideration of the relation between Whitman’s “black lines,” his disarticulation of writing and speech from within print, and the generic formats of letters and books. With their external sizes

He was a goodfellow,
 Freemouthed, quicktempered, not badlooking, able to take his own part,
 Witty, sensitive to a slight, ready with life or death for a friend,
 Fond of women, . . . played some . . . eat hearty and drank hearty,
 Had known what it was to be flush . . . grew lowspirited toward the last . . . sickened
 . . . was helped by a contribution,
 Died aged forty-one years . . . and that was his funeral.

Thumb extended or finger uplifted,
 Apron, cape, gloves, strap . . . wetweather clothes . . . whip carefully chosen . . .
 boss, spotter, starter, and hostler,

He was a good fellow, free-mouthed, quick-tempered, not bad-looking, able to take his own part, witty, sensitive to a slight, ready with life or death for a friend, fond of women, played some, ate hearty, drank hearty, had known what it was to be flush, grew lowspirited toward the last, sickened, was helped by a contribution, died aged forty-one years—
 and that was his funeral.

Thumb extended, finger uplifted, apron, cape, gloves, strap, wet-weather clothes, whip carefully chosen, boss, spotter, starter, hostler, somebody loafing on you, you loafing on somebody, head-way, man before and man behind, good day's work, bad day's work, pet stock, mean stock, first out, last out, turning in at night,

Figure 2.8: Comparison of stanzas/lines from “To Think of Time” from the 1855 and 1856 edition, respectively. Images courtesy of *The Walt Whitman Archive*.

and internal poetic forms both radically transformed, the first and the second editions are not just unique texts but traces of a shift and a break in the relation between writing systems and civic space. They initiated not so much a publication project as a formatting process resulting in the presentation of a network of open formats: a presentation that does not call for an analogical comparison and establishment of a link between the interior of the book object and its conditions but the situation in which the two, though linked by a formatting process, co-exist in radically different and thus open formats. The handmade-in-the-readymade, in this case, does not describe the artisanal or “made” character of the technologically reproduced editions in question; rather, it describes the differential character between the two editions in the fixed, readymade context that would make them single bound objects. Like the readymade portable ledger, an ostensibly fixed storage medium for the private inscription of the industrial-urban subject’s “PERSEVERENCE,” each of the first two editions of *Leaves of Grass*, given the rapid turnover from one to the next, induces a vacillation in the identity of the singular text that only stops when the one bound object is allowed to be two. The process of formatting, of binding and unbinding, of releasing the dissonance between properly channeled letters and other formats, bears the traces of irregularity and transience described by writing-in-transit. Where the frictive points of contact between fixed formats disclose the network structuring the 1856 *Leaves*, the published instantiation of Whitman’s industrial-urban situation is shaped by the irregular hand found in the “Dick Hunt” notebook and earlier notebooks.

The first two editions are therefore traversed by a logic of manuscript allowing the reader to formalize a writing system that emerged with industrial-urban civic space. Whitman’s emergent writing system in the 1850s created a context for Emerson’s entire system of practice when the poet bound the Master’s published letter into the 1855 and 1856 texts. The technical, technological situation that Emerson’s manuscripts and published works foregrounded and superseded, acknowledged and left behind, are resurrected and made immanent in Whitman’s writing system. The logic of manuscript flattens the vertical architecture of Emerson’s dialectic; it discloses the handmade-in-the-readymade; it writes in transit; and as it traces the line

articulating the medial functions binding writing systems and civic space, it returns the postal unconscious and the decomposing commonplace system to the trembling surfaces of constitutive historical processes before they reflectively become an imaginary topography of subjects. From within the virtual surfaces of civic space, the logic of manuscript surges up, retrospectively, as the mark of technique and technology, once media become a singular noun. This is what Whitman's manuscripts and published works reveal about what was and is before us: an anterior, manifold, multi-layered conditioning, whether public or private, co-appears in media, whose singular-plural referent unfolds storage, format, and transmission functions. The body inscribed in practice returns as manuscript in media, and, in doing so, the unlocatable body short-circuits the circular logic of the imaginary; it discloses the operations of the symbolic order; it rumbles with the noise of unbound materiality. Just as Emerson's poetic intercourse united manuscript and infrastructure by giving them wholeness as channeled civic discourse, manuscript returns *in* the reading of Emerson's and Whitman's published works not alongside it.

Over the past century, Whitman has been portrayed as a proto-modern urban poet, a poet of the American people, who writes in public. Suspicious of these portrayals, I deconstruct pursue the traces of writing-in-transit in the format of the handmade-in-the-readymade throughout the poet's post-1855 notebooks as well as the 1856 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Not leaving behind Emerson's modern variation of the commonplace system to which Whitman was at least partially indebted in the mid-1850s, the chapters to follow will build on what has emerged from its decomposition. Chapters Three and Four will continue exploring media history with "Emerson/Whitman" by comparing Emerson's two wildest disciples: Whitman and Henry David Thoreau. Whitman's practice of writing-in-transit will be illuminated by the far better documented scene of writing-in-nature attributed to his contemporary, one of the founding fathers of American nature writing.

PART 2
NATURAL HISTORIES

INTRODUCTION TO PART 2
WRITING-IN / “OUT-OF-DOORS”:
TRACING NETWORKS WITH WHITMAN AND THOREAU

After visiting Walt Whitman’s Brooklyn home with Henry David Thoreau and Sarah Tyndale on November 10, 1856, Bronson Alcott described Emerson’s wildest disciples to his diary as “two beasts, each wondering what the other would do, whether to snap or run.” Apparently, each felt the other was attempting to mark his territory:

Whether Thoreau was meditating the possibility of Walt’s stealing away his ‘out-of-doors’ for some sinister ends, poetic or pecuniary, I could not well divine, nor was very curious to know; or whether Walt suspected or not that he had here, for once, and the first time, found his match and more at smelling out ‘all Nature,’ a sagacity potent, penetrating and peerless as his own, if indeed not more piercing and profound, finer and more formidable. I cannot say. (*JBA* 291)

While Thoreau guarded his “out-of-doors” from Whitman’s “poetic or pecuniary” interest, the “finer and more formidable” “sagacity” that Alcott bestowed on his fellow New Englander suggests, by way of comparison, that Whitman was the only true beast in the room. Thoreau seems to have concurred with Alcott’s assessment when he complained in the December 7 entry of his journal-letter to H.G.O. Blake that in some of the “simply sensual” poems of *Leaves of Grass* “It is as if the beasts spoke” (*CHDT* 444). This objection, however, is belied by his confession that “Walt Whitman...is the most interesting fact to me,” so much so that he would even claim the Brooklyn poet “has spoken more truth than any American or modern that I know” (445). The difference between mute and speaking beasts, then, was that the latter, though “simply sensual,” also spoke “more truth,” for reasons that Thoreau did not, perhaps could not, fully articulate.

The unintelligibility of animal speech, causing tremors in the surfaces of Thoreau’s reception of Whitman, indicates the primal difference between the two disciples. In the 1856 version of “Song of Myself,” (as in 1855), the poet claims that he “could turn and live with animals,” finding that “they show their relations to me, and I accept them, / They bring me

tokens of myself, they evince them plainly in their possession” (*LG* 2:53, 54). He does “not know where [the animals] got those tokens”; he “may have passed that way untold times ago and negligently dropt them,” “Myself moving forward then and now and forever” (54). The fleet-footed human spirit transcends the animal, and the animal finds the spirit simply retracing its path. Thus sensual tokens once forgotten are now, once again, the return to the very grounds of communication. Thoreau’s sympathies appear to lie most with “the fluttering alder and poplar leaves.” But when he states in the same paragraph of the “Solitude” chapter in *Walden* that the “wildest animals do not repose” and “are Nature’s watchmen,—links which connect the days of animated life,” he casts them as timely reminder’s of humankind’s natural world-making activities (*WO* 425). Leaving aside Alcott’s jocund assumptions about the beasts’ instinct to fight or flee, the encounter between Whitman and Thoreau becomes most interesting as it is considered a practical exchange of simply sensual materials that spoke more truth than any man. Literally, they exchanged books, “tokens” of the practices they had placed in circulation.³⁴ There was nothing poetic about such intercourse, as Alcott helpfully observed: they did not recognize each other on their common grounds of the decomposing commonplace system, perhaps because it has vanished in the air of antebellum lecture halls, or was a ruin ill-suited to the situation emerging all around them.

Whitman and Thoreau could not decipher how the other worked, or how the other had traced his Transcendentalist flights through industrial-urban networks back to the project of developing a new technique for their technological situation. Different as their projects may have been, it is in developing and circulating a practice suited to that situation that their primitive differences become common in a primary way. Hindsight being what it is, the opportunity emerges to see that the truth for both authors lay in the functions of storage, formatting, and transmission. Both authors unfolded this truth from their shared Nature: the groundwork

³⁴ Thoreau received his copy of the second edition of *Leaves* from the poet himself; Whitman received a copy of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*.

provided for them by their shared Master, Emerson. Yet neither Whitman nor Thoreau could identify their common efforts to unfold the logic of manuscript from their common ground in Emerson's *Nature* because their distinctive systems of practice, though they both overlapped with Emerson's commonplace system, were shaped by different technical backgrounds and relations to technology. Alcott's and Thoreau's assessments of Whitman are emblematic of the discontinuity in the otherwise natural connection between Whitman and Thoreau in the American literary canon. Though they were perhaps Emerson's most renowned disciples by the twentieth century, Thoreau's relationship with Emerson was more personal, more intense, and at least as vexed (in history as well as in the secondary literature) as Whitman's, printed letter and all. Whitman and Thoreau occupy two sides of an Emersonian divide, from which they opened two diverging paths. That is not to say that their differences should be traced back to their shared Transcendentalist mentor. On the contrary, the techniques that set them on different paths and that established different records of their technological situation can be disclosed by way of the description of their manuscripts and published works. Whitman followed and (thus) defined himself against Emerson by reversing the Master's spiritual act of delivery and redistributing civic discourse as an open format immanent in given conditions (the handmade-in-the-readymade) and faithful to the transformation of those conditions (writing-in-transit). In the chapters to follow, Whitman's system of practice will be further elaborated by way of comparison with the system devised by Thoreau, as both authors developed systems in Emerson's wake but only on the basis of their technical training as antebellum subjects and their relative positions in an emergent technological situation of interurban networks.

What Whitman and Thoreau shared was the cultivation of a system of practice that allowed them to record the "out-of-doors" *in* their manuscripts and published works. The written record specific to each author discloses the storage and formatting functions of not only Emerson's *Nature* but also the natural world produced by the techniques and technologies emerging in the antebellum decades. This reading of Whitman and Thoreau has precedents in now classic scholarship on American literary history, such as Leo Marx's historical critique of

the “pastoral-ideal” in nineteenth-century American literature, *The Machine in the Garden* (1964). As Marx states, the pastoral-ideal is “a variation on the contrast between two worlds, one identified with rural peace and simplicity, the other with urban power and sophistication, which has been used by writers working in the pastoral mode since the time of Virgil” (19). With the emergence of industrial transportation and cities in the antebellum decades, the pastoral-ideal in American literature evidenced “another way of accounting for the symbolic power of the motif,” “bring[ing] the political and psychic dissonance associated with the onset of industrialization into a single pattern of meaning” (30). Without rejecting Marx’s analysis of the motif of arcadia interrupted, or the readings of the nature/culture conflict embedded in (perhaps) all texts, the project at hand is at variance with Marx’s book for two reasons that may already be clear from the concerns motivating Chapters One and Two. These reasons are: first, the “single pattern of meaning” established by the “symbolic power” of the trope representing the nature/society split and, second, the assumption that symbolic power lies in its ability to reflect that split in a similarly split subject.

As discussed in the introduction to Part One, in the framework being developed by the research project at hand, the singularity of the symbolic enforces the reception of meaning, the delivery of a spiritual act. Symbolic enforcement and its effects as well as the errant “letters” tracing a contingent process forced by the irrationality of the real were not destined *for* the union lying before us but *in* the raucous multiplicity of material inscriptions and the overlapping systems of practice revealed by the layers of media history. The comparative analysis of Emerson’s and Whitman’s manuscripts and published works has set reading on a new track, then, by retroactively disclosing the tracing of dissonance between writing systems and civic space: not a retracing of a traditional symbol of historical trauma but of the literary given exemplary expression in Whitman’s early notebooks and the open-formatting enacted by the first two editions of *Leaves of Grass*.

What remains to be analyzed without Marx’s symbolic power and symbolic pattern of meaning are techniques consisting of marks, bindings, and distributions (or storage, format, and

transmission functions), which disclose the binding conventions of practice and which thereby constitute a complex, layered record of the transformation of practices in the emergent civic space of the mid-nineteenth-century northeast. Just as Marx reads Whitman and Thoreau for the ways that they reproduce the motif of the machine in the garden, they will be read in the chapters to follow as literary writers who derived their respective systems of practice from the situation in which they inscribed, bound, and circulated their writings: conditions that were, no doubt, impacted by the onset of industrialized transportation and communication. With this in mind, it will become apparent that the distinction between Emerson and Whitman at the level of practice extends into the analysis of Whitman's and Thoreau's manuscripts and published works, as both writers, in their own way, and on the basis of their own technical backgrounds, returned the early modern effects of the commonplace system to its decomposing remains, where both discovered the elements of a system of practice suited to their transient situation.

Instead of rearticulating the symbolic power of their texts, then, the materialist analysis of the techniques and technologies constituting that symbolic power will lead back through Whitman's and Thoreau's writings to the institutional conditioning of the antebellum imaginary. In the chapters to follow, I will mark the intersecting lines of practical and infrastructural networks channeled through midcentury institutions and posit a supplement to the "machine in the garden" that refers to the popular discursive context those institutions established: "Natural History." While I acknowledge that Natural History primarily referred to a specific grouping of natural sciences in nineteenth-century America—geology and botany, primarily—I will assume in the chapters to follow that the phrase did not exclude references to philology, theology, mathematics, the visual arts, and architecture. Natural History will therefore name overlapping technical and technological networks that generated an eclectic and transitional form of civic space traversing the nature/civilization divide and also constituted by the institutional conditioning of material practice.

My conception of Natural History partially draws from the research of urban historian and planner M. Christine Boyer, who has demonstrated that nineteenth-century museum

displays, which were based on eighteenth-century ideals of representation, extended to the production of modern civic space.³⁵ Though the antebellum cities of the northeastern States fostered a museum culture specific to its democratic foundations as well as its post-1800 nationalist imaginary, American museums in the first half of the nineteenth century linked the public to the imaginary through the symbolic medium of institutional space. Whitman's and Thoreau's manuscripts and published works, as we will see, register the fragility of this link and trace the errant line of the literary in the tense formation of oppositions held together in the dispersed and multiple situation of Natural History. As William Cronon argues in his book *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (1991), "We cannot understand the urban history of Chicago apart from the natural history of the vast North American region to which it became connected: Nature's Metropolis and the Great West are in fact different labels for a single region and the relationships that defined it" (19). Cronon's use of "natural history," though I have sympathies with it, will be considered one of two possible perspectives shaped by the layers of media history preceding a contemporary grasp of the networked situation it refers to. As the name for a similarly networked situation that, as Boyer allows me to see, also conditioned a uniform nineteenth-century imaginary, Natural History will refer to the situation conditioning the view that Literature consists of a mutually constitutive binary (there is always a "garden" and always a "machine") as well as the view that history, urban or literary, potentially reveals the layered, enmeshed networks of scripts and codes channeled by absolute dialectical structures.

³⁵ As Boyer states, nineteenth-century museums "aimed at a universal history...a perfect and purified collection rendered accessible to and receptive by the viewer" (141). These displays extended to the production of modern civic space, claims Boyer, as planners "anointed monuments with historic value, reaching out with the power of the state or the museum to isolate and protect them from further destruction and annul the degradations of time" (144). By assigning the value of authenticity and originality to public spaces and monuments at a time when the value of both terms were in decline, the state and the museum transformed public space into a medium not so much for the conservation of history or the promotion of scientific knowledge as a site for the reproduction of "universal history" and its symbolic power.

It may go without saying that Thoreau traced these scripts and codes, primarily because a consideration of his manuscript practices have been integral to contemporary criticism of his published works, at least since Sharon Cameron's *Writing Nature* (1985). For Cameron, the *Journal* is a work unto itself that is distinct from his published works, such as *Walden*:

[In *Walden*, Thoreau] must present his reverence for nature in a way that makes it accessible to others within the circumscriptions of literary conventions: by beginnings and endings and representative symbols.... In the concessions by which *Walden* is yarded—by which it makes nature available to an audience—*Walden* presents not nature but the seductive rapprochement of the natural and the social to which, put in the harshest terms, nature is sacrificed. (24)

In his *Journal*, however, Thoreau expressed the “desire to speak somewhere *without* bounds” states Cameron, quoting a manuscript entry. And “Perhaps more than one would like, the *Journal* satisfies that desire” (24). Here, again, is the problem of animal drives and excess, neither of which are properly channeled, and yet both of which pursue uncompromised truth. The next generation of Thoreau scholars attempted to resolve such problems. Following Cameron, Laura Dassow Walls's *Seeing New Worlds: Henry David Thoreau and Nineteenth-century Natural Science* (1995) describes Thoreau's practice of writing in the “out-of-doors” as a practice of transcription. By developing a shorthand technique that allowed him to take notes on his nature walks, Thoreau “symbolically brings away what he can from the field to his study,” so that “extracting passages from his *Journal* pages was like bringing away flowers from their native fields” (138-9). Technique and transcriptive process not altered Thoreau's subjective perceptions as he reduced the practical basis of his subjectivity to the scripts and codes of a writing system. These practices could then be circulated in a published book like *Walden*, Walls claims, as “he worked hard to compose various subsets of what he was amassing into socially available forms, not just to see new worlds himself, but to present those worlds, and the means for seeing them, to others” (140). Cameron's distinction between Thoreau's *Journal* and *Walden* remains in this account. The difference is, however, that the scripts and codes of writing in practice—what Walls names, using mathematical terms, “various subsets”—traverse manuscript

and print media, thus allowing for the consideration of the parallel practices of data storage and formatting remediated in published transmissions.

Most interesting about Walls's perspective is the fact that she touts Thoreau's efforts to make his "way of seeing" the world "socially available," celebrating him as he gave up on publishing after the commercial failure of *Walden* to begin working steadily as a county surveyor in Concord and to commit himself to the *Journal* as a work of literary art in its own right. What allows Walls to escalate her praise over the course of her book, as Thoreau committed himself to his *Journal* and published less, are: first, the residue of a *modern* belief in the heroism of the uncompromising artist, (which she appears to share with Cameron), and, second, the strictly *nonmodern*, post-Cartesian mode of *network analysis*. These two contradictory facets of her book have a way of collapsing into a redemptive portrayal of Thoreau and Literature itself. Thus *Walden* is an "alternative network, one authorized by individual, empirical, relational experience rather than by experience as socially determined, the consensus of the many mystified as the One and disseminated as Tradition" (Walls 164). And after *Walden*, in his (even) less compromising late period, Thoreau configured a "counternetwork," departing from all of the networks on which he relied, whether institutional, commercial, or infrastructural. Leaving the closed circuits of these networks to the ordinary world, Thoreau configured his own, which gives the manuscript and printed record he left behind the advantage of influencing "the cultural network in ways that outflanked American institutional science" (178) while also resisting commodification in the literary marketplace. The "counternetwork," in opposition to ordinary networks, makes this freedom from compromised practice possible by delivering "the solution of relational knowing," a solution positing a "nonmodern science in which the subject and object are not split into separate and independent entities but caught mutually in a web of relationship" (206, 209).

Consistent with her counternetworking of Thoreau's manuscripts and published works, Walls's book tended in the general direction of non-linear, interdisciplinary interpretations of American literary history in the mid-90s, participating in the upward surge of what Lawrence Buell has called "second-wave" environmental criticism.

Published the same year as Walls's *Seeing New Worlds*, Buell's *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1995), by title alone, casts Thoreau in a privileged role among nineteenth-century literary writers, (though the book covers a broad range of under-read authors as well). The book also devotes a significant number of pages to shaping critical perspectives of authors, texts, and the "web of relations" in which they are enmeshed. Thoreau's writings prefigure the very discursive transition represented by Buell's and Walls's books—the transition "from homocentrism to biocentrism," or from the human-centered perception of the world to its centerless re-conception as a nonhuman environment (138). For Buell, the environmental imagination entails a blend of ecology, ontology, and self-aware interpretation:

Altogether, it seems that place-consciousness of the nonhuman environment as a network enfolding human inhabitants, ought to be considered a utopian project that realizes itself, in its more instructive forms, not as a *fait accompli* but as an incompleteness undertaken in awareness that place is something we are always in the process of finding, and always perforce creating in some degree as we find it. (260)

Though merely a simile in the passage above, the network provides an analytic model grounded in evolutionary contingency, without cause or end, immeasurable and discontinuous, neither subjective nor objective. Both a rhetorical medium and an existential form of the hypothetically knowable world, the network here combines poetics and science in their most basic senses as the desire to discover the world as a means of knowing the world. For literary studies, then, the network distinguishes scientific method from its scientific ends, or its "*fait accompli*," as well as the infinite potential of figurative language from its own endgame in the subjectivism of literary interpretation based on rhetorical deconstruction alone. Stated another way, network analysis allows methodologies once organized along disciplinary divides to overlap, and it simultaneously brings the analyst into self-awareness about the historically determined conditioning of such discursive organization. It discloses previously unperceived relations and opens the possibility for new ones while reminding the reader that steps are forever being retraced, leading to the rediscovery of what so-called modernity forgot.

Whether by way of “counternetwork” or “biocentric” worldview, Thoreau has undergone a transformation from a writer of the “out-of-doors” into a nineteenth-century prefiguration of networks with no insides or outsides, no subjects or objects, no society or nature, or any of the dualistic oppositions traditionally traced back to figures like Descartes, Hobbes, or the constitutive “/” that marks revolutionary breaks in history, as it does the institutionally inscribed art/science division. In Buell’s *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005), a retrospective account of the critical discourse he helped found, Bruno Latour is cited as one of the most brilliant and influential questioners of such traditions. Buell sums up Latour’s contribution to environmental criticism as follows: “Several second-wave ecocritics have commended Latour as a wholesome antidote to simplistic endorsement either of science’s authority over against the claims and frames of literary and cultural theory or of ‘theory’s’ purported demolition of science as nothing more than discursive or cultural construction” (21). Latour’s demolition of the great divide discloses a decentralized, endless field of practice, where the minute, material, and radically local has an operative function in any analytic practice.

In *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993), Latour deconstructs the grand narrative hinging on the emergence of modernity. The timeline of political, economic, and technological revolutions constructed before and after the modern era, argues Latour, constrains any inquiry, permitting “scarcely anything more than small extensions of practices, slight accelerations in the circulation of knowledge, a tiny extension of societies, minuscule increases in the number of actors, small modifications of old beliefs” (48). Latour’s interpretation of history plays a significant role in the network analysis that he has developed for over two decades: ANT (Actor-Network-Theory). Explaining ANT in a 2009 lecture, he stated that networks permit analytical frameworks “to suck in the *res extensa*, [the external, objective world theorized by René Descartes,] to bring it back to specific places, trades, instruments, and media, and to let it circulate again but without losing a moment of what in the industry is called its traceability” (“S&N” 142). Where classical, static conceptions of objective space, and the explanatory methodologies applied to the analysis of relations within it, “interrupt the movement of

associations,” the tracing of new associations through network analysis “render[s] the social world as flat as possible in order to ensure that the establishment of any new link is clearly visible” (*RS* 8, 14). Only by flattening space-time to perceive the layers of overlapping networks shaping discourse and practice, only by tracing the movement of associations fixed by modernist, humanist narratives of history and civilization can the analyst avoid reconstructing prescribed conditions, such as the limiting perspectives constitutive of the so-called “modern.”

As demonstrated throughout Latour’s work, however, network analysis does not exactly fit historical or cultural research projects. Rather, it promotes new trajectories for research in science, technology, and sociology by theorizing the network analyst’s critical tasks: essentially, the opening of breaches in scientific methodology and their technological situations of practice. ANT has assisted historical projects, such as Cronon’s urban history of Chicago and the work of archaeologist Carl Knappet. The break from old beliefs and the tracing of new links should apply to the writing of literary history as well, though Latour doesn’t provide specific examples of how this application might be carried out, or even be possible. Alexandra Soccardes’s scholarship on Emily Dickinson’s manuscripts has begun to apply ANT successfully to research on manuscript practices, mainly through the archaeological filter provided by Knappet. Until very recently, though, scholarship on nineteenth-century authors that began to integrate elements of network analysis two decades ago have, for the most part, discovered a new way to articulate old beliefs. For better or for worse, Thoreau was the figurehead of such projects. A different literary subject, several years later, might have had the potential to alter the course of environmental criticism on the American Renaissance.

In Buell’s *Writing for an Endangered World* (2001), his reading of Whitman’s ode to mass transit, “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” addresses the co-appearance of technique and technology, of practice and infrastructure, distinguishing the poet’s writings from Emerson’s: “Transit does not occur in an isolated space or as an isolated incident.... [I]t should not be thought of merely as a movement from embarkation point X to destination point Y. It should be thought of as a part of the entire commercial and spatial order, and as happening ongoingly and

not just in this or that moment” (100). “Transit,” here, names the combination of visible and invisible as well as local and global channels romanticized as Nature or spiritualized as God in other sources. Mass transit is a meta-system that reveals the elements of the scene of writing outside as a scene of writing in an infrastructural situation. As if the city could be the “out-of-doors” in the first place, the scene of writing in the city is made a dubious truth about the infrastructural situation in which writing-in-transit takes place always and everywhere.

Whitman’s urban lyric does not represent a scene of writing on Brooklyn ferry anymore than it does a private soliloquy manifesting itself in the reader’s head and hands.³⁶ The poem presents the tracing of a movement whose links are as unperceivable to the hermeneutically conditioned imaginary as they would be to a worldview organized by subjects and objects, nature and society.

Another way to articulate the representation of lyric scenes made dubious by writing-in-transit would be to state that imposed dubiousness flattens the scene of writing, disclosing a poetics that retraces its steps, once again, which leads to a confrontation with the noise of storage, formatting, and transmission. When the trace of the “/” returns in network analysis, the beasts speak, reducing the symbolic order to the assembly process of “letters”: a process with an order still unknown. In words that can’t be understood, but whose letters appear to touch each other, the animals leave tokens revealing that interpretation, conventionally speaking, is designed to help subjects forget. For the time being, we, the subjects, are all structured this way. And Buell, in spite of himself, is no exception, when he states that Whitman’s “choice and handling of subject in ‘Brooklyn Ferry’ were wholly in keeping with this commitment: to seize hold of a mundane ritual of city life, a familiar and pivotal aspect of metropolitan infrastructure, and to imagine a paradigmatic moment embodying transfiguration of city life within the routine of ordinary experience” (WEW 102). At the very point that Whitman’s poem becomes most

³⁶ See Jonathan Culler’s “Why Lyric?” for a critique of the definite scene of lyric scenes of vocalization.

interesting, most challenging, and most apt for network analysis, Buell drops out of the historically constructed infrastructural network that he began to articulate. Giving in to what could only be the tragic desire for a spiritual act, his analysis seeks recourse for the ecstatic contingencies of transit in the seized or imagined “moment” that “embod[ies] transfiguration of city life within the routine of ordinary experience.” Soon after he began retracing the movement of writing on the animal’s path, Buell consolidates those material traces in the poet’s (or any other subject’s) imagined transfiguration of the city into a symbolic union, the suturing together of a “single pattern of meaning.” Something like a game of bait and switch, network analysis as environmental criticism amounts to another “machine in the garden,” Leo Marx’s symbolic order of arcadia interrupted.

Buell’s reading of “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” reproduces Emerson in transit, where Whitman is. It is as if he assumes that the technical, technological situation structuring the distinction between the two representative subjects is a matter of position and (thus) perspective in networked space. Nevertheless, Buell’s reading of “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” assists the research project at hand by framing that scene as a constructed and, consequently, falsifiable truth. I will therefore proceed with the assumption that the transfiguration of the ordinary as the spiritual act has yet to be fully handed over to network analysis. The intervention I want to make regarding Whitman’s writing system does not reject Buell’s reading but builds on it by reversing the direction of the dialectical structure mobilizing it. This intervention will therefore maintain the direction of the interpretations from preceding chapters along with this research project’s affinities with retrospective, descriptive approach of media history. That is, the stunning achievement of “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” is that neither Whitman nor the reader but the city itself suddenly recognizes itself in the traces of the body—its seizing of moments, its imaginary departures—as “the routine of ordinary experience.” It recognizes itself in the traces of irregularity—the handmade-in-the-readymade and writing-in-transit—explored in Whitman’s early notebooks in Chapter Two. The poet’s scene of writing in the city is not an imaginary recourse or redemption but a tracing of the fragile links between science, infrastructure, and

society. Amounting to the mark of a split (“/”) in the formation of a potential subject under properly channeled conditions, these traces, and not the spiritual act mediating an absolute relation of transcendentally networked subjects, appear in the methodical retroaction of the spiritual act into the elements of practice. The storage, format, and transmission functions that are elided by the channeled link between the Emersonian subject and the networked city inscribed in the act of reading are schematically rendered, line by line, in Whitman’s ode to mass transit. A reading of Whitman’s urban lyric, then, will disclose the city’s uncanny confrontation with itself as a writing system and a civic space.

This reading will depend on a comparative analysis of Whitman’s manuscripts and published works with Thoreau’s, for, as Buell’s environmental criticism from 1995 to 2001 demonstrates, both authors co-existed in a networked situation, to be discovered as we find it. Our efforts will be guided by recent scholarship that does not necessarily fit into the history and discourse of environmental criticism but that attends to the traces missing in its reconceptualization of American literature: material practices and their conditioning by technological situations. In Chapter Three, Patrick Chura’s *Thoreau the Surveyor* (2011) attends to the techniques and instruments that Thoreau used to make notes for his *Journal* and to measure property lines, thus abolishing the limits of his *Journal*’s bound format. In Whitman’s case the closest equivalent to such a research project lies in Folsom’s and Miller’s scholarship, as mentioned in the general “Introduction.” More often, attempts to trace back Whitman’s scene of writing to the poet’s manuscripts, as we will see in Chapter Four, ultimately serve close-reading practices that instrumentalize archival materials, along with their readymade institutional enframing, for the authenticity they lend to interpretation. In the case of Whitman’s and Thoreau’s writings, American literary history is positioned at the opening of a field disclosed by the analysis of environmental conditions, though the nature of that environment and the means of accessing it have been shaped by the silent bearers of scripts and codes forgotten at the outset.

If it can do nothing else for literary studies, network analysis has the potential to backlight the joints and seams that frame objects of inquiry and generate scenes of writing,

offered up to interpretation, within institutionally and technically circumscribed limits. Archival scholarship paired with innovative methodological hybridizations, particularly those that facilitate the tracing of the silent marks that organize and direct readings, before readers know it, are beginning to model this mode of analysis. But as this field of access to the materials of literary history and their circulation continues to open, the noise of circulation must be amplified, the disruptive mark of organization, the “/,” returned to the scene of writing, and the attempt made to perceive the infrastructural situation of writing that facilitates readers’ transits in a networked situation. The systems of practice inscribed and circulated by Whitman and Thoreau will reveal the instrumental layers of techniques and technologies facilitating the public body’s experience of itself as a spatially, politically divided entity, one granted symbolic order by an inherited tradition channeled into a modern imaginary. This modern imaginary was conditioned by the internally divided cultural category that I will be calling Natural History and that I will be flattening into civic space, so that the traces of writing systems can emerge to form new conceptions of Whitman, Thoreau, and practical figures of subjectivity.

CHAPTER 3

THOREAU'S "TRANSCENDENTAL METRICS":

THE ARCHEOLOGY OF NATURE WRITING

The general public of interurban networks only began to accept Thoreau's writings after his death in 1862. One of the reasons for this delay can be traced to the fact that the nature diary, though it had become a widespread practice in England and America during the 1840s and 1850s, would not become a natural supplement to diary writing until the final third of the nineteenth century. That is why William Ellery Channing took the time to describe his late contemporary's writing practices in his 1873 biography and collection of memorial verses *Thoreau, the Poet-Naturalist*. The domestic originator of American nature writing became a mythological persona once he was linked to the nature diary's growing network of practitioners. It might have been difficult for nature diarists in the 1870s to identify with the system of storage and formatting reported by Channing, who begins with the description of Thoreau's "note-book" as

a cover for some folded papers, on which he took his out-of-door notes; and this was never omitted, rain or shine. It was his invariable companion, and he acquired great skill in conveying by a few lines or strokes a long story, which in his written Journal might occupy pages. Abroad, he used the pencil, writing but a few moments at a time, during the walk; but into the note-book must go all measurements with the foot-rule which he always carried, or the surveyor's tape that he often had with him. (65)

Channing captures Thoreau in the phase that Walls located in the *Journal* for September–November 1850, when it "changes character, becoming not just a record of things seen, but more important, a tool for seeing" (122). What Walls identifies, as Channing only began to do in his anecdote, is the technical character of Thoreau's *Journal* by 1850: the poet-naturalist's "great skill" of making "a few lines or strokes" that would "occupy pages" of prose; the moment-to-moment writing while walking; and the writing-as-measuring with "foot-rule" or "surveyor's tape."

Channing makes abundantly clear that readers should marvel at the unique system of practice linking his friend's "note-book" to the *Journal* for which its "lines or strokes" were destined. He quotes a November 9, 1851, entry from the *Journal*, where Thoreau expresses frustration at Channing's inability to write, or see things, the way he does: "In our walks, Channing takes out his note-book sometimes, and tries to write as I do, but all in vain. He soon puts it up again, or contents himself with scrawling some sketch of the landscape. Observing me still scribbling, he will say that he confines himself to the ideal,—purely ideal remarks,—he leaves the facts to me" (Channing 66). Channing's excerpt allows for the insight that, in practice, Thoreau's writing system traversed the natural division between the freedom he discovered in the diligent "scribbling" of "facts" and the "confines" of occasional attempts at "ideal remarks." The poet-naturalist drew a line between himself and his contemporaries for that very reason. The traces of writing in the "out-of-doors" were not completely lost in the "long story" that entered the binding condition of the *Journal*. What remains of those traces in the layers of formatting constituting Thoreau's writing system is what gives the *Journal* in manuscript, print, or as a published work like *Walden*, the unique identity ascribed to the author. Channing's report from the field reminds the reader that what distinguished Thoreau from his contemporaries took place at the level of practice and, therefore, can be unfolded as a logic of manuscript traversing his manuscripts and published works.

That is not to say that Thoreau wasn't interested in finding common ground with others. Rather, he didn't believe that common ground had been found yet, not by his fellow American Romantics or the scientific community to which they linked him. In one sense, Thoreau's desire to uncover that as-of-yet-undisclosed common ground between himself and others was characteristic of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century's spirit of exploration and discovery, a spirit dictated by the generic context for popular science known as Natural History in the antebellum decades. From Thoreau's perspective, however, popular science was like Channing's "purely ideal remarks," more of a nuisance blocking the pathways of scientific inquiry. Still there is no denying the fact that, as Thoreau himself was well aware, the poet-naturalist was as

dependent on the proper institutional channels of Natural History as he was on American Transcendentalism's. But that is exactly what the system of practice, to be traced across the surfaces of his manuscripts and published works in the chapter to follow, have to teach us. That is, writing, once reduced to its elementary functions, is something like a science of scientific methods and philosophical speculations disclosing the fragile links that institutions construct between them in shaping imaginaries and the civic spaces containing them. As Thoreau guides my flattening of Natural History into antebellum civic space, I will not aim to rediscover a meta-system, symbolic pattern, or counternetwork, but to encounter the ruins from which the poet-naturalist composed his system in the archaeological layers of media history.

Thoreau was a nature diarist in the most purely practical sense, for the nature diary was founded on the widespread desire to discover the invisible forces of nature and to make them visible by methodically inscribing them in manuscript books.³⁷ At the same time, the popular form of nature diary writing in the antebellum decades represented what Thoreau, in reducing the practice to its purest traces, would define himself against, as he brought the inscribed nature of his world to the surface of his writing system and circulated it in his published works. In so reducing the nature diary to the elementary functions of storage, formatting, and transmission, the poet-naturalist would transform the popular form of the nature diary into the very opposite of itself: a practice of nature writing with a “foot-rule” and a “surveyor’s tape.” The retroactive development of his system of practice into the elementary functions of all media will disclose the elementary technological pretext facilitating the link between writing systems and civic space, one returning to the dissemination of the commonplace system and the planning of baroque cities: the grid.

³⁷ See also Bellanca: “Like the ‘catalog,’ the noting of the never-seen’ thing goes beyond its original, practical purpose of acquiring new knowledge to express, or imply, an affective response” (60).

The Nature Diary: Romanticism after the Grid

As noted in Chapter One, popular diary writing in seventeenth-century Europe and England integrated “book-keeping methodology and accounting theory” (Beadle xlv). Early Modern individuality therefore developed on the basis of a formal model supplied by accounting schematics: its columns, its itemized entries, and its methodical condensation of weekly, monthly, and annual sums. Like the Protestant diary, the nature diary was based on a formal model: the “calendar.” The difference between the two variants of diurnal writing lies in their prescribed formatting. The logic of accounting, though it linked the individual’s private inscriptions to the public world of economic circulation, only allowed the value of diary entries to grow relative to their privation, until the diarist’s death if necessary, when they would be evaluated by god and man. Inscriptions made in the nature diary, on the other hand, being formally determined by the calendar, did not belong to future judgment but to the possibility of building knowledge in the present for the future.³⁸ Nature diarists prepared inscriptions for immediate rather than deferred circulation because they ultimately served the real demands of scientific networks.

The two constitutive facets of the nature diary—the calendar and its narration in diary entries—are on full display in the book that popularized the practice and defined nature writing as a literary sub-genre, *The Natural History of Selborne* (1789) by Gilbert White.³⁹ White’s earliest inscriptions as an amateur naturalist, Mary Ellen Bellanca states, were made in his “Garden Kalendar” (1751-1767), “a set of loosely stitched quarto sheets,” and his similarly handmade “Flora Selborniensis” (1766), both of which contained lists of phenomena ordered on a grid. The *Natural History*, published over twenty years later, would be adapted from entries

³⁸ See also Bellanca: ““The nature journal arose from the convergence of the older practice of diary keeping as a form of individual life-writing with the newer field notebook as a tool of factual knowledge-seeking” (12).

³⁹ Thoreau himself owned a copy, as did Charles Darwin. See Bellanca 2007, 44-47. Thoreau did not read White until 1853 (Thoreau 2000, 372).

made in his “Naturalist’s Journals,” commercially-printed calendars first given to White in 1768 by his friend and correspondent Daines Barrington, a professional naturalist and the inventor of the “Journals.” The history of the *Natural History of Selbourne* therefore contains a minor history of the commercialization and dissemination of popular science. Yet Barrington’s grid would neither be a commercial success nor make White’s *Natural History* the bestseller it became in England and America. Rather, its epistolary form and illustrations did. The book featured the occasional chart and etching, all in the interest of science and dynamic display. A proper combination of fact-oriented objectivity and idealist subjectivity, White’s published diaries provided the practical template for a post-Enlightenment “subject,” whose interiority was not structured according to a static economy of public and private, but was circulated in the networks of biodiversity, migration patterns, and seasonal cycles.

The epistolary form of White’s *Natural History* was not employed for commercial purposes alone. Naturalists relied on postal networks to build their archives. After the publication of White’s book, any citizen who could find the time to become an amateur naturalist and post letters could also find himself linked-in to a readymade network of scientific collaboration. The bulk of the *Natural History*’s letters, addressed to Thomas Pennant, express White’s eagerness to communicate findings and enrich his correspondent’s store of knowledge. The letters tend to deliver information in an anecdotal fashion, but in doing so, adopt the specialists nomenclature, as in “Letter XX”: “The next bird that I procured...was a male red-back butcher bird, (*Lanius Collurio*). My neighbor who shot it says that it might easily have escaped his notice, had not the outcries and chattering of the white-throats and other small birds drawn his attention to the bush where it was: its craw was filled with legs and wings of beetles” (63; Figure 3.1). The etching of the butcher bird that accompanies the letter in the *Natural History* offers the reader a glimpse of his cabinet of specimens, where the bird, minus the “legs and wings of beetles,” appears as it might have in its natural habitat.

White’s butcher bird consists of the same nineteenth-century techniques of representation used in monographs of American Natural History, such as John J. Audubon’s *Birds of America*

(1838). These images set new international standards for the representation of subjects, states Marjorie Welsh, by transporting observers “to the branches...or on the water to observe birds literally on their own territory” (50). The image of the animal subject of Natural History in America attracted observers not only for its likeness to the subject of the natural world, but for its likeness to the observing subject. The animal portraiture that mobilized the public’s sympathy for wildlife must have relied on an invisible precondition, because humanized beasts motivated editors of mid-century periodicals to cultivate essays on Natural History that humanized animals (144).

As if the text’s visual and verbal rhetoric could be mistaken for aesthetic caprice, the *Natural History* does not always seamlessly weave science and art together. Other letters expose their reliance on the austere structure of the calendar. In “Letter XXVII,” addressed to Daines Barrington, White provides two paragraphs of introduction to a thirty-item list of birds that sing until midsummer, followed by a grouping of the listed birds according to “Linnaean genera,” birds that sing as they fly, and birds that breed early in Selbourne (87-89; Figure 3.2). While White’s “Naturalist Journals” were printed as an appendix in late nineteenth-century editions of the *Natural History* (295-308),⁴⁰ the sample of the calendar format provided in the letter to Barrington, in contrast with the anecdotal format and cabinet specimens in the letters addressed to Pennant, reveals how the first popular nature diary was addressed to at least two different types of readers within a network of participation. In both cases, White’s text utilizes a binary structure of presentation. The distinction between the two structures is clear enough, however: the letters to Barrington provide a relatively dry narration of the data formatted by the calendar, while the letters to Pennant provide affective responses to the thrill of discovery. To some extent, then, the *Natural History* makes a persuasive case against the use of calendars with narration and for the use of affect with imagery.

⁴⁰ They appear in appendix as the *Naturalist’s Calendar*.

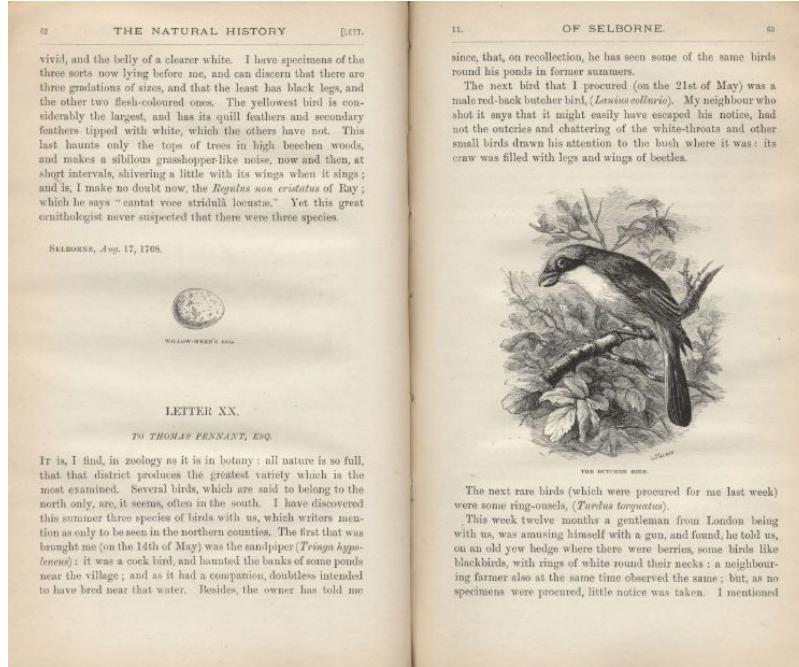


Figure 3.1: “Letter XX,” from Gilbert White’s *Natural History of Selbourne* (62-63).

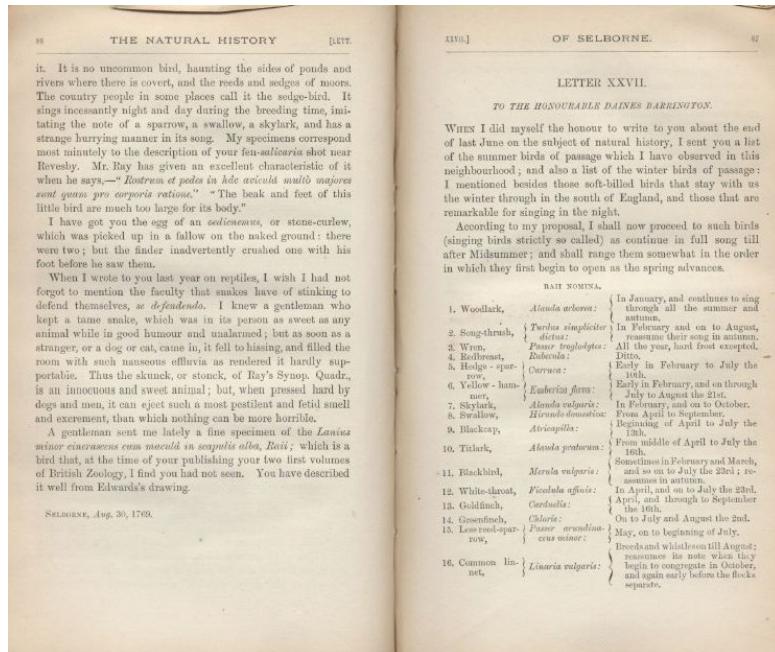


Figure 3.2: “Letter XXVII,” from Gilbert White’s *Natural History of Selbourne* (86-87).

As the practice of the nature diary expanded, it eventually became entangled in economies of private and public. Mary Ellen Bellanca states: “White’s private manuscripts had become a successful mass-market product, and readers were encouraged to keep their own, presumably private diaries in like fashion—diaries that might, then, in turn, enter the public realm as contributions to a magazine or annual” (106). Motives for keeping a nature diary could no longer be purely scientific once it had become a popular practice with economic exchange-value. By the mid-nineteenth-century, the nature diary in practice collapsed into nature writing as genre, just as scientific networks of exchange collapsed into commercial publication networks. Consequently, nature writing increasingly resembled the internal world of pious, personal reflection typical of the Protestant diary. As Bellanca states, in its popular phase the nature diary “goes beyond its original, practical purpose of acquiring new knowledge to express, or imply, an affective response” (60). The nature diarist of the mid-to-late nineteenth century gradually transformed the “out-of-doors” into the new spiritual basis for the accumulation and storage of personal value.

The result of this transformation was the “romantic subject,” for whom the calendar disappeared in favor of affect, and for whom scientific networks collapsed into commercial networks. The nature diary therefore became an instrument for seeing nature as the network from which all others emerged, and into which they could be collapsed again. Enveloped in nature’s Network, the romantic subject could instrumentalize science to prove that what was empirically true at the most radically local level was also true for the expansive world outside. So in contrast to White, whose *Natural History* confined itself to the precincts of Selbourne, Susan Fenimore Cooper’s account of the global diversity of poplars in *Rural Hours* (1850), known as the first published nature diary by an American author, establishes an organic conduit linking the balsam poplars of North America to their varietals in Southern Europe and Asia.⁴¹ If, as Marjorie Welsh

⁴¹ The 1887 edition of *Rural Hours* was used for this chapter, as provided by the digital library of the University of Pennsylvania. <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/cooper/hours/hours.html>.

has stated, Cooper borrowed various observations of this kind from the contemporary botanist Asa Gray (166), then *Rural Hours* is an early example of a published nature diary, after White's *Natural History*, which pares away the representation of epistolary networks, calendars, and even images, to present a localized writing subject organically networked with the globe. The romantic subject of the mid-nineteenth century is a globally networked subject.

Channing's depiction of Thoreau at work in the "out-of-doors" now appears to reveal the difference between two possible outcomes of the binary structures of presentation—two polarized "tool[s] for seeing"—placed in circulation by White's *Natural History*. The pictured specimen and the naturalist's affective response established the precedent for the romantic subject of the nature diary, for whom image and text, nature and human, local and global, were united by bonds of sympathy. No exception to this rule, Channing confines himself to "ideal remarks" and sketches of the landscape, thus appearing frustratingly out-of-touch to Thoreau, who, on the other hand, adopts the model that appears not to have been promoted by White's text. The amateur naturalist who subjected himself to calendars and dry interpretations of data would be exiled from the romantic subject's "out-of-doors," outside of the outside. Thoreau's model for nature writing would be the model which had not made it into nature's global Network. This model was based on the calendar, a grid-plan, which was submerged beneath the network-form of romantic subjectivity.

Now, what I aim to demonstrate for the rest of this section, and then trace throughout Thoreau's manuscripts and published works in the sections to follow, is how Thoreau's writing practices naturally evolved into a system that sought to excavate the grid-plan submerged beneath the expansive, rapid growth of the networked subject. The project of excavating the grid from beneath his writing began at the same time that his Journal transformed into a "tool for seeing." The editors of the Princeton edition the Journal state: "In summer 1851, he began compiling floral calendars and seasonal lists." A list of dated observations tipped into his Journal, titled "General Phenomena for July," they date "sometime after July 22." The editors identify "similar, more specific lists of flowering plants and returning birds...in subsequent

volumes beginning in Spring 1852, his first systematic ‘year of observation’” (*HDTJ* 3:494).

Thoreau continued to compile lists of “General Phenomena” in the years leading up to the publication of *Walden* (1854), and would ultimately contribute to his “Tables of General Phenomena”: a series of large grids of phenomena, which were listed at the head of each row on the grid’s vertical axis, and entered in the annually designated columns for the years 1852 through 1860.

The creation of the Tables can be dated and Thoreau’s method of filling them in deciphered by comparing a representative example—in this case, the “Table of General Phenomena for June” (Figure 3.3)—with the “Pond Kalendar” (Figure 3.4), which was inscribed on the front-end papers of the Journal for 1853. In the “Kalendar,” 1853 and 1854 are the only years containing a complete record of freeze and thaw dates. The Princeton editors estimate that the “Kalendar” was inscribed around March 1853. I will agree with this estimate, because it is likely that Thoreau prepared the “Kalendar” to receive data he had prepared for the purpose of tabulating it in 1853; that he maintained this practice in 1854; that he mined his Journals for data antedating the “Kalendar”; and that his commitment to filling it diminished as he began more ambitious projects (*HDTJ* 6:373). Following this logic, I will assume that the “Table of General Phenomena for June” was created sometime in 1860, because 1860 and 1852 through 1854 are the most complete. If Thoreau began preparing data for the “Tables” around the same time that he conceived them, then it would make sense for him to have had data from that year (1860) ready for entry and that he would have entered it. The years 1852-54 have been filled-in because, after making his contemporaneous entries in 1860, Thoreau then began the process of mining his Journals for data, formatting the data for entry into the “Table,” and then entering it in chronological order.⁴²

⁴² My dating is consistent with the Princeton editors’ estimated date for the “Tables” (Thoreau 2002, 399-400).

| | General Phenomena June | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|------------|----|-----------|----|----|----|----|----|-------------|
| | 52 | 53 | 54 | 55 | 56 | 57 | 58 | 59 | 60 | 11/20 |
| Planogotous sp. | | | | | | | | | | |
| Spiders | | | | | | | | | | |
| Wind in River | | | | 6 mondays | 6 | | | | | |
| Wind over Glaciers | | | | | | 5" | | | | |
| Habenaria vulgaris | | | | | | | | | | |
| Pollen on hand | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1st loc. sun & plants | | | | | | | | | | |
| Autumn in forests | | | | | | | | | | |
| Wind blowing begins | | | | | | | | | | |
| Freshness of green eggs | | | | | | | | | | |
| Swarm (?) | | | | | | | | | | |
| Helleborus niger yellow | | | | | | | | | | |
| Sun (or moon) 20° 1/2 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Overcast | | | | | | | | | | |
| Sunlight days | 18' | 22' | | | | | | | | |
| | 52 | 53 | 54 | 55 | 56 | 57 | 58 | 59 | 60 | 11/20 |
| Fragrance in air | 10 mondays | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 3 weeks 1/2 |
| Scents of Rose | | | | | | | | | | |
| Wilt of Arbor Vitae | | | | | | | | | | |
| Pearson's Red Currant | | | | | | | " | | | |
| Summer Currant | | | | | | | " | | | |
| Wind sop good | | | | | | | | | | |
| Fresh weather | 16 | 17 mondays | | | | | | | | |

Figure 3.3: "General Phenomena for June," 1852-1861. Table. From "Tabulations of General Phenomena" Courtesy of the Pierpont Morgan Library.

Pond Kalendar

| | Walden | Thru' | Fair Haven |
|------|----------------------|--|--|
| | Freeze Thaws | Freeze Thaws | Freeze Thaws |
| 1845 | Dec 22 | Ap. 1 | |
| '46 | " 16 | Mar. 25 | |
| '47 | | Ap. 8 | |
| '48 | | | |
| '49 | Dec 31(?) | Betw. Dec 23 & 28 th | Before Dec. 9 |
| '50 | " 27 th | Dec. 16 | or weaker snow before Dec. 8 |
| '51 | | Mar. 28 | |
| '52 | Jan. 5 | Ap. 18 Dec 21(?) | Nov. 23 |
| '53 | Dec 31 st | Mar. 23 Dec. 5 | Mar. 21 Dec. 4 Mar. 22 |
| '54 | Dec 18 | Ap. 7 th (?) before Dec. 11 | Mar. 31 before Dec. 8 Ap. 5 th n ^o 6 |
| '55 | Dec 30 th | Mar. 31 | Mar. 29 Nov. 2 Ap. 5 th |
| '56 | Dec 19 | Ap. 18 | |
| '57 | Dec. 28 | Mar. 29 | |
| '58 | Dec. 25 | Mar. 28 | Mar. 28 |
| '59 | Dec. 25 | Mar. 29 | Dec. 9 th Mar. 23 |
| '60 | Dec. 16 (sic) | May 15 | Mar. 15 |
| '61 | Dec. 29 | | |
| '62 | | | |

Figure 3.4: "Pond Kalendar." From the Journal, Volume 15, March 7-August 18, 1853. Courtesy of the Pierpont Morgan Library.

My dating of the “Table” is confirmed by some observations about the “Notes” for the “General Phenomena for June” (Figure 3.5), which also reveal Thoreau’s practice of mining his Journals and editing them for the “Table.” On the verso sheet of the two sheets of correspondence paper used to compile the “Notes” for June, the entry for June 26, 1854, reads: “peculiar dark shade of June /clear air bluish light in grass (c. [?])?” (Figure 3.5, detail). These phenomena had been previously recorded in Volume 17 of the Journal, in the entry dated “Monday, June 26,” as the following sentence: “I am struck as I look toward the Dennis shore from the bathing place—with the peculiar agreeable dark shade of June a clear air—and bluish light on the grass & silvery light reflected from fresh green leaves” (*HDTJ* 8:216; Figure 3.6). What is immediately apparent is that, in preparing his Journal inscription for the “Table,” he cast off his “I.” The process of transcribing the Journal entry as “Notes” in preparation for the “Table of General Phenomena” abolishes the “poet” in Channing’s “poet-naturalist” formulation. The tabular grid of phenomena allows for little else. If Channing’s anecdote may serve as documentary evidence of Thoreau’s writing practices, then it can be assumed that the Journal inscription’s lyric prose was not originally entered in the Journal, but was an expanded version of “the few lines or strokes” that Channing witnessed him making in the “out-of-doors.” As the Princeton editors state:

beginning in 1850 Thoreau adopted the practice of composing his Journal by expanding brief notations or field notes made on his regular walks, only fragments of which have survived. But ‘Field Notes’ was also the title Thoreau gave to a notebook he used for recording his surveys, and by March 1853 his surveying activities had increased to the point where these working excursions had also become the occasions for notes to be expanded in the Journal. (*HDTJ* 6:366)

When Channing observed the poet-naturalist in his field of practice, Thoreau was really working toward a synthesis of the “poet” and “naturalist” in the calculating marks of the “surveyor.” And while it could be argued that this practical shift was economically determined, surveying appears to have offered Thoreau more of a practical advantage, a new “tool for seeing.” During the first half of the 1850s at least, the marks and figures of the “Field Notes” may have been easy enough

| General Phenomena for June | |
|--|---|
| June 1st - 54. - | Approaching a gale with very strong winds and cold dry - this was extremely warm - no clouds & part (last night) - thin blue bottoms Clouds with an interval & the 2nd day |
| 2. Windy - like strong winds blowing from the S. 3. E. wind - the cold then came | |
| 4. East or North - very dry Now the weather becomes fair & hot dry. | |
| 7. Hail storm. 9. 10. 11. Fair & warm with some rain & the air becomes more & more moisty. | |
| 12. Rain - the form of flurries. | |
| 13. Thunder storm coming - rain | |
| 15. Thunder storm - thunder clouds moving - and at 6 PM it was a very strong thunder. | |
| 16. Sun rises at 5 AM in a day of mist & atmosphere. Waves & rain rather violent - getting worse & so at 10 AM very dry - For a night or two the atmosphere was very dry with white clouds | |
| 17. Clouds (dark or cloudy) - hailing at first & then rain. | |
| 17. Fog in morning & wind. | |
| 18. Weather rather cool - the 18th | |
| 19. A dark thunder storm - thunderous - then晴朗 (clear) & clouds & clouds. | |
| 21. Windy - rain through it | |
| 26. Fairly dark sky 7 June Clear air & thin light atmosphere (c. thick). 28 - a Thunder storm - rain | |
| General Phenomena - with notes made for June | |
| June 7-51. A gentle southwest wind - a fishing trip to Rockaway, started 3 PM late | |
| 5. 28. & took possible were to find "Mother's" 30. Haying commenced - of morning hours - | |
| 52. - | |
| 52. - | Wind & rain & partly cloudy in bottoms 53. 54. - 3 weeks & a half back here 55. - 56. - 57. - 58. - 59. - 60. - 61. - 62. - 63. - 64. - 65. - 66. - 67. - 68. - 69. - 70. - 71. - 72. - 73. - 74. - 75. - 76. - 77. - 78. - 79. - 80. - 81. - 82. - 83. - 84. - 85. - 86. - 87. - 88. - 89. - 90. - 91. - 92. - 93. - 94. - 95. - 96. - 97. - 98. - 99. - 100. - 101. - 102. - 103. - 104. - 105. - 106. - 107. - 108. - 109. - 110. - 111. - 112. - 113. - 114. - 115. - 116. - 117. - 118. - 119. - 120. - 121. - 122. - 123. - 124. - 125. - 126. - 127. - 128. - 129. - 130. - 131. - 132. - 133. - 134. - 135. - 136. - 137. - 138. - 139. - 140. - 141. - 142. - 143. - 144. - 145. - 146. - 147. - 148. - 149. - 150. - 151. - 152. - 153. - 154. - 155. - 156. - 157. - 158. - 159. - 160. - 161. - 162. - 163. - 164. - 165. - 166. - 167. - 168. - 169. - 170. - 171. - 172. - 173. - 174. - 175. - 176. - 177. - 178. - 179. - 180. - 181. - 182. - 183. - 184. - 185. - 186. - 187. - 188. - 189. - 190. - 191. - 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The trees continuing to become larger etc
 1) Eskew - xskew - xskew shadowed
 1) sp. Garlic fern xx 18 inches high down
 the cañon first a "carving house" - then
 many long firs at water level
 aspen - very few - on the ^{dark} ~~dark~~
 south branch. *Aralia cordata* ^{more or less} ~~white~~
 1) A raspberry on roundly RR ripe xxxx
 1) Through fence the song of the bird
 is probably growing fainter. *Sialia*
 1) *Clethrum* xxx RR above red house under
 the one observed some time ago was a downy
 1) *Clethrum* with lanceolate leaves. *Trifolium*
 roseum x

Monday June 26

Pm up into Park. *Ulmus laevis* - rose
 1) *C. sepiaria* yellowish black. small fruit
 with polygonal ^{outline} xxx - a much like black
 1) the flower. small form of *anemone* red in
 but with weather - of several days.
 I am struck in I look toward the ^{evening}
 here from the bathing place - with the per-
 haps agreeable dark shade of June
 adown air - and bluish light on the ground
 & bright, light effects from fresh green
 leaves. Sprig annuum up common in
 3 days. The largest of the same between

1) *Polygonum convolvulus* xx Wool grass tops
 1) *Rubus rotundifolia* in soft wood bushes
 1) A black snake in Abel Brooks' barn - on a
 dry side of it has ^{insulated} ~~heat~~ on a stump - rapidly when
 his tail which struck upon the leaves. 5 feet
 no inch long. uniform coat black above, with
 greenish costly reflections, bluish or slate ^{below} beneath
 white beneath head - about 7 (8) abdominal
 plates. Tail more than 1 foot long & slender -
 When the head has head exerted great power
 with its body - could hardly hold it.
 1) Early blue berries have begun ^{xxv} on the Brown
 Frontland Fen Banks. This the 3 summer
 since the wood were cut. & the first for many

Figure 3.6: Entry for Monday, June 26, 1854 and detail. From Journal, Volume 17, February 13-September 2, 1854. Courtesy of the Pierpont Morgan Library.

to convert into exchange-value, thus affording Thoreau a degree of pecuniary independence. But these marks might be considered as constitutive, in Thoreau's hands, of a practice that allowed him to see what the network of the romantic subject could not.

The lines beginning the June 26 entry, just preceding the personalized description quoted above, suggest that there was little time or space for subjects and predicates when Thoreau released himself into field-writing:

Pm up river to Purp. utricularia-shore
 C. sericea yesterday at least— Small front-rank
 polygonum XXX—a smut-like blast in the flower
 a—Small form of arrowhead in Hub aster meadow-ap several days.
(HDTJ 8:216; Figure 3.6)

The record of flora—in this case, purple bladderwort, dogwood, and knotweed—using the nomenclature of a trained botanist, or expert amateur, bears no “I,” as the more affective observations (“I am struck as I look...”) of the air and light that follow it do. And yet there are traces of the writing subject’s presence in the act of spotting bladderwort “up river” and then dogwood “yesterday at least.” If the “lines or strokes” made in the field were the marks proper to the surveyor’s field of practice, then romantic subjectivity fleshed out these marks to compose the poet-naturalist’s inscriptions by 1854. But the “lines or strokes” fleshed-out in the Journal would be stripped down again for the “Table of General Phenomena,” as Thoreau “started reviewing his [Journal] volumes, compiling lists of botanical and phenomenological phenomena...and placing list marks (two parallel lines, usually in ink) in the [left] margin beside descriptions of phenomena he was charting” (*HDTJ* 6:373; See Figure 3.6). The “two parallel lines” re-inscribe the surveying techniques of the “Field Notes” in the Journal, transforming lyric inscriptions into a network of subjectivity mediating between the field and the grid-plan of the “Table.”⁴³

⁴³ I restrict myself to the “two parallel lines” Thoreau marked in the margins of his Journal. The notation system he devised was, in fact, more robust and “systematic.” The Princeton editors state: “The first of these practices involved using a single, double, or triple ‘X’ to designate the dates on which he observed plants blooming, relative to seasonal norms. The second involved cross-referencing phenological observations in order to pinpoint phases in the initial appearance of migratory birds, the leafing-out and flowering of trees and shrubs, and other phenomena” (*HDTJ* 6:373-374). See also

Over the course of this chapter, I will demonstrate that Thoreau's writing practices evolved into the grid, because of his commitment to liberate his writings from subjective determinations. In the section to follow, an analysis of Thoreau's early manuscript books and published works will reveal that his aesthetics and his budding naturalist poetics first emerged with a destructive streak, sharing an image repertoire of ruination and death that coincides with his tendency to trace into visibility the otherwise invisible forms that shaped his inscriptions. I will demonstrate that Thoreau's tendency to write-out these structures in his manuscript books precedes his integration of nature diary-writing and practices culled from the fields of natural science and surveying. And I will further demonstrate that, as Thoreau's practice evolved, it progressed by way of exposing and externalizing all prescripts, including his scholarly training and the cultural space of Natural History in America. Thoreau's aversion to the unnatural character of his training and industrial-urban modernity conditioned his writing-out of prescriptions. Yet we will also see that this writing-out prepared Thoreau to "mobilize" his natural subjectivity in *Walden*, a text that anticipates the ecstatic formatting project of the Table: his final destination.

Thoreau's Archeology: Decomposing Natural History

In his analysis of the manuscript draft of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849), Linck C. Johnson describes Thoreau's first book as a "complex weave" of early essays and manuscripts, some antedating the text's biographical point of origin in the 1839 excursion that the author took with his brother John.⁴⁴ Thoreau did not begin working on *A Week* until 1842, a year after his brother died from Tetanus, and for the next seven years he would compose his first

annotation 160.2, which reveals that the single X stands for "in very good season" and the double X in "rather early" bloom (336).

⁴⁴ Johnson compares Thoreau's 1839 jaunt with John Thoreau to his 1848 jaunt with William Ellery Channing the year prior to the book's publication (36). He also suggests that if *A Week* can be considered pastoral, nostalgic, or withdrawn in character, it is because Thoreau was coping with his brother's death, thus turning his book into a memorial of sorts (40).

book by culling entries from his manuscript books, assembling them with his published writings, and then editing and re-editing the assemblage into a single work. It is no surprise, then, that one of the digressions, so characteristic of *A Week*, originally appeared in the January 1844 issue of the *Dial* as “Homer. Ossian. Chaucer: Extracts from a Lecture in Poetry, Read before the Concord Lyceum, November 29, 1843.” The digression excerpted from Thoreau’s printed lecture presents an allegorical image of an inscription coming to light in a field of ruins. The inscription shares its beauty with the field of ruins strewn around it, because the beauty of the allegory is that the author of both is time. Appearing in the “Friday” chapter of *A Week*,⁴⁵ the image is described as follows:

In these old books the stucco has long since crumbled away, and we read what was sculptured in the granite. They are rude and massive in their proportions, rather than smooth and delicate in their finish. The workers in stone polish only their chimney ornaments, but their pyramids are roughly done. There is a soberness in a rough aspect, as of unhewn granite, which addresses a depth in us, but a polished surface hits only the ball of the eye. The true finish is the work of time, and the use to which a thing is put. The elements are still polishing the pyramids. Art may varnish and gild, but it can do no more. A work of genius is rough-hewn from the first, because it anticipates the lapse of time, and has an ingrained polish, which still appears when fragments are broken off, an essential quality of its substance. Its beauty is at the same time its strength, and it breaks with a lustre. (WCMR 305-306)

The genius of Thoreau’s image lies in the way it depicts his own method of composition—his weaving together of fragments—in reverse. Beauty withstands the test of time, but not because its purity is preserved; rather, beauty is inscribed by time in the edifice of literary art, which reveals beauty over time in the traces of decomposition. The work of genius, “rough-hewn from the start,” is therefore not a composition but a decomposition.

As a decomposition, the work of genius exposes the frayed edges and suturing marks that reveal the composition of the work and its eternal decay. Only time can make such lustrous inscriptions. They are not as commonplace as the juxtaposition of verse and prose, as such

⁴⁵ The change that was made to *The Dial* text was the addition of a comma in the sentence: “The true finish is the work of time[,] and the use to which a thing is put.”

generic breaks can be traced to the author.⁴⁶ The transposition of the excerpt from Thoreau's published lecture, on the other hand, awaits the reader, undeterred by decay, who feels for traces of beauty as they fall into the ruins of history. Once those traces are palpable, the work of genius no longer appears as an assemblage—it is an excavation, or an “archeology,” which brings to light the inscription made by time on all enduring works. The aesthetic emblem of *A Week*, the inscription that “breaks with a lustre,” holds a mirror to the archeological technique that Thoreau employed as he composed his first book.

Archeology by way of decomposition circulates a new variation of scholarly practice that can be traced back to the subject-less practice of storing, formatting, and organizing modeled by “classical” commonplace books. Since Thoreau’s printed lecture was woven into his published book—a book composed of several other previously published lectures and essays, as well as unpublished manuscript notes—the “complex weave” of *A Week* is a type of crafted facsimile. The notion that *A Week* is a singular, enduring work of beauty may be proven by the way it fits the commonplace writing system to the rising genre of published manuscript books: nature diaries as well as travel diaries, which were really a variant of nature writing. *A Week* establishes a precedent for the circulation of a book that links contemporary manuscript practices to the writing systems that they leave buried in the past.

Though the published commonplace books of unknown individuals would become more common in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, in the 1840s their circulation was still relatively exceptional, largely because they were only produced by those who were trained for, and who thus engaged in, civic discourse. The compositional process that Emerson employed in

⁴⁶ Meredith McGill has demonstrated that the intersection of elements that give the book its conspicuously formal character can be traced back to the compositional techniques of the commonplace book. The commonplace book shared by Emerson and Thoreau as they planned a collaborative edition of ancient and modern poetry not only bears the traces of the generative yet vexed relationship between Master and pupil, but more plainly reveals the shared scholastic practices that facilitated their relationship and shape the fragmentary character of *A Week*. The narrative sections that record the writer’s on-the-spot accounts serve their final purpose by throwing into relief the insertions of cited and original poems, as well as the digressions on civic and cultural matters, ancient and modern (McGill np).

preparing his lectures and essays can be traced back to the commonplace writing system, although this process was strategically elided in the works he circulated. More like Whitman in this way, Thoreau's published works did not perform a cultivated elision of the process of writing—or, more trenchantly put, the institutionally prescribed training that shaped his writings. On the contrary, Thoreau wanted to expose the technical prescripts that determined what he wrote, because only then would his writings decompose with beauty. Thus, his first book restores the orated and published texts of the American scholar to the writing system which organized, stored, and circulated civic discourse, and it fits this system to the emergent field of nature diary-writing which, by midcentury, had largely the technical prescripts that determined it.

Thoreau's fitting together of the commonplace book and the nature diary constitutes a dual structure that reveals one of his attempts at purging himself of the scholarly training that shaped him. As a Harvard graduate, Thoreau, like Emerson before him, had attended William Henry Channing's lectures on antiquity and classical literature, benefited from training in mathematics and the natural sciences, and also received similar compositional training.⁴⁷ Though Harvard was facing imminent change when Thoreau began his undergraduate career in the early 1830s, rote learning was firmly inscribed in the foundation of the young scholar's training and thus determined the qualitative difference between compositional exercises and the process that uncovered genius. Emerson and Thoreau both resisted their scholarly training. Where Emerson's mature Journals lack "the history of his facts," however, Thoreau's early Journals are more rigorously formatted and consistently dated, making his inscriptions both more like a commonplace book and more like a diary than Emerson's Journals. Where Emerson's Journal is a "hybrid" essentially governed by the commonplace system, Thoreau's Journal begins by co-inscribing two different systems—the commonplace and the diary—and thus maximizing the tension between objective formatting and subjective narration.

⁴⁷ See Richardson.

Fittingly, then, Emerson makes an appearance in the first entry of Thoreau's earliest extant journal volume, dated October 22, 1837, as an anonymous figure whose suggestion to begin a Journal is duly noted: “‘What are you doing now?’ he asked, ‘Do you keep a Journal?’ So I make my first entry to-day” (*HDTJ* 1:5). No mere diary entry, the inaugural scene that opens the Journal is carefully staged to portray the journal-writer as the recipient of an occupation from an impersonal source, though only because he has immediately understood the gravity of the mere suggestion. This inaugural scene has been staged with care—a fact that reveals itself when it is viewed not so much as an inaugural entry or scene but as an opening gesture following a sequence of opening gestures. This sequence of opening gestures begins prior to the first entry, on the title page, where “Gleanings, Or What Time Has not Reaped Of My Journal” has been inscribed and embellished with an ornamental flourish (Figure 3.7). The sequence continues with three epigraphs—by Herbert, Burton, and Marvell—each given its own page.⁴⁸ The opening pages of “Gleanings” therefore locate Thoreau’s early journals in the theatrical tradition of commonplace books that were carefully staged for those who could recognize the training that informed an author’s technique.

If Emerson was Thoreau’s ideal reader, as suggested by the anonymous reference to him in the first dated inscription, the technique displayed in “Gleanings” would have to meet the challenge Emerson set for correspondents in his closed circuits: to adhere to and to resist classical prescriptions in order to preserve them dialectically under industrial-urban conditions. As the Master’s apprentice, Thoreau appears to meet this challenge by inscribing dates before fragmentary entries and thus producing a stark contrast between the temporal structure of the diary and the spatial order of the commonplace book. Where Emerson’s Journal is a sporadically dated, indiscriminate weave of once discrete writing practices—a hybrid governed by the

⁴⁸ The Princeton University Press edition of the journals provides a holograph of the title page (*HDTJ* 1:3) followed by the three epigraphs on the same page (4). I am not in disagreement with the editors’ choice to present the opening pages of “Gleanings” this way. I only emphasize the spaces on and between pages in the journal because it is relevant to my analysis of Thoreau’s writing practices and because my observations may supplement the excellent work of the journal’s current editors.

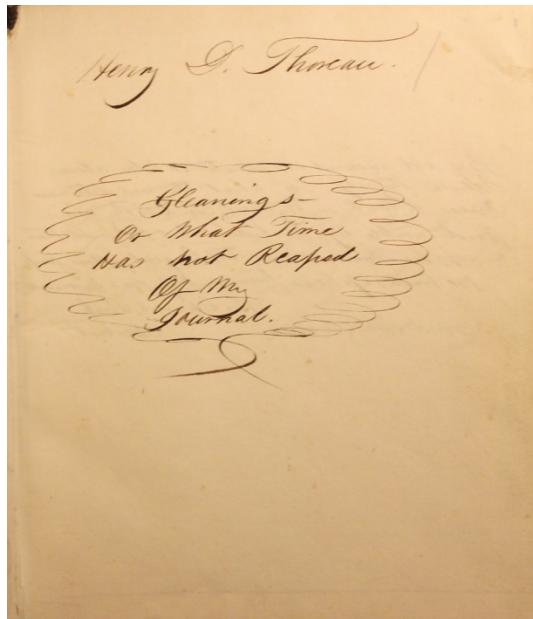


Figure 3.7: Title page of “Gleanings.” From the *Journal*, Volume 1. Courtesy of the Pierpont Morgan Library.

commonplace system—Thoreau’s “Gleanings” traces the seams and sutures of the hybrid weave. It can be read as a response to Emerson’s writing system, but it must also be considered non-Emersonian for the way it juxtaposes diary-writing and commonplace-keeping, thereby preserving not the classical writing system as well as the break between it and the diary that superseded it.

“Gleanings” therefore bears the marks of Thoreau’s early resistance to prescribed techniques that would have otherwise shaped his inscriptions. The resistance is palpable in his earliest extant Journal because the simultaneous formatting of his inscriptions as commonplace and diary entries maximizes the tension between the two writing systems shaping his entries. From this maximized tension, the traces of decomposition—the practice of writing-out prescribed formatting techniques—begin to reveal themselves. These traces can be seen as clearly as the tension can be felt in his manuscript pages because, as he composed, Thoreau marked the structural guidelines determining commonplace and diary entries alike. It likely

comes as no surprise at this point that Thoreau's early Journals are transcriptions.⁴⁹ What should be emphasized, then, is that Thoreau's practice of transferring notes from the field into his mature Journals began not in the naturalist's field of practice, but in the scholar's field, where he learned to maximize the tension between discontinuous writing systems. As the current editors of the Journals state, a few extant "scattered leaves" and "partial indexes" are all that remain of the two manuscript books that Thoreau transcribed into his three earliest extant Journals. If the extant Journals were "fair copies" of their predecessors, then they would be like any scholar's commonplace book, because, like most young scholars trained for civic leadership, Thoreau's early Journals contain only "What Time Has not Reaped." And yet most young scholars—not even Emerson—memorialized the inevitability of loss in the process of composition with such care. For Thoreau, scholarly formatting for the channels of civic discourse did not give new life to the past, but offered diminishing returns as time moves forward. The Journal's ideal readers had to learn that the personal entries on display in "Gleanings" would mean less, in time, than the lines between them.

Below the first dated entry of "Gleanings" appears a speculative fragment under the heading "Solitude" (Figure 3.8). The remaining space on the final line of the fragment is marked by three dashes, as if tracing the ruled composition lines on the page of the manuscript book.

⁴⁹ "Gleanings" was only the first of just over three blank books consisting of transcribed versions of two earlier volumes. In an 1855 list of the most important dates of his life, Thoreau referred to these volumes as the "Red Journal," or a "Journal of 546 ps," and a "Journal of 396 ps." The editors of volume one state: "Neither of these two volumes is extant, although a few scattered leaves from the first volume and Thoreau's partial indexes to both volumes survive." The editors also leave Thoreau's motives for transcribing the nine hundred and forty-two pages of apprentice work written between October 1837 and January 31, 1841 an open question. "Thoreau headed the first of his transcript volumes 'Gleanings—Or What Time Has Not Reaped Of My Journal,' leaving some ambiguity about why he undertook the transcriptions: it may be that the leaves of the original volumes had literally been 'reaped'—that is, cut out for inclusion in drafts of literary works; or it may be that his motive was chiefly editorial, and he chose to preserve only as much of his early work as seemed to him worthy or representative of his aspirations" (*HDTJ* 1:596-597). See also Howarth 26. "Realizing that his two original Journal volumes were now too ragged for convenient use (he had torn out too many pages), Thoreau decided to copy the surviving entries into five new blank books." This quote is included here to document variations in authoritative scholarship on Thoreau's Journals.

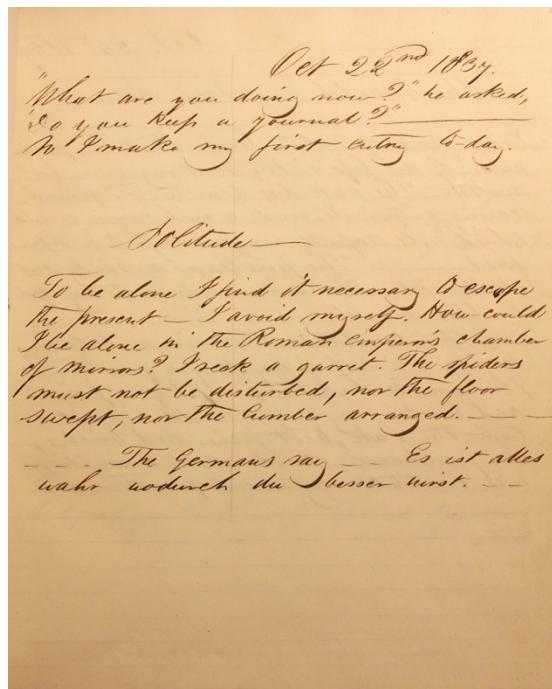


Figure 3.8: Entry for October 22, 1837, on first page of “Gleanings.” From the *Journal*, Volume 1. Courtesy of the Pierpont Morgan Library.

Following the fragment is what appears to be another related fragment, introduced by three dashes that trace the ruled lines of the page again: “— — — The Germans say — Es ist alles wahr du besser wirst. — — ” (Figure 3.8). The broken lines bear none of the penmanship displayed elsewhere, as in the second extant journal volume, where the entry for June 14, 1840, is composed entirely of quotations separated by doubled lines and concluded with a flourish (Figure 3.9). While the latter represents the theatrical mode of inscription found on the title pages of “Gleanings,” the broken lines between entries on the manuscript book’s first page mark the format of commonplace-keeping—a format anterior to, and which should disappear behind, all conventions of ornamentation and display.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ The reader will notice that quotations from Thoreau’s Journals are my own, unless otherwise indicated. The Princeton edition does not replicate the broken lines, except occasionally as two dashes, as noted in the “Textual Introduction” of *HDTJ* 1:636-637.

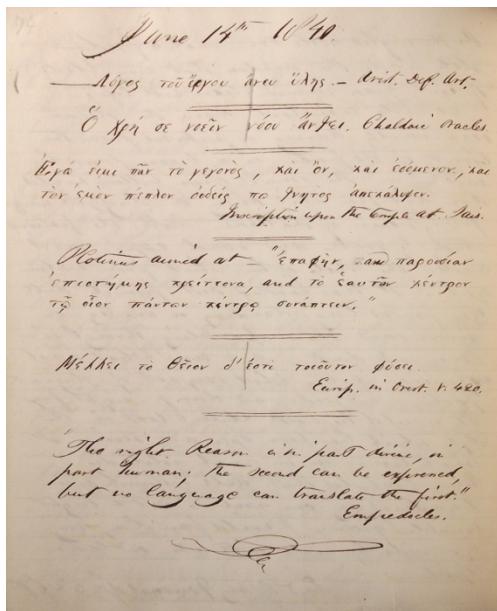


Figure 3.9: Entry for June 14, 1840. From the Journal, Volume 2. Courtesy of the Pierpont Morgan Library.

While the motive and purpose behind Thoreau's broken lines may ultimately remain a mystery, there is reason to believe that, in tracing the frayed edges and sutures of scholarly composition, these lines not only made the inscriptions that would have otherwise disappeared behind writing visible, but also captured the invisibility of the movement of time, as early nature diarists attempted to do with their calendars. Because Thoreau's early journal volumes appear to antedate his interest in phenology, broken lines marking the records of his travels through New England anticipate the more rigorous formatting Thoreau gleaned from Natural History. The first page of the "Journey to Maine" entry, dated "May 3^d-4th" (Figure 3.10). Thoreau's documentation of his 1838 trip to Portland, Maine, appears to be an assemblage of sutured fragments that would otherwise present itself as an excursion narrative. Though the reader of the journal knows that "Gleanings" is a transcription, the broken lines between the writer's meditation on what "sustains" New England and his "new inducement to be the Lord of Creation" after "looking out on all sides into space" link fragmentary reflections while indicating

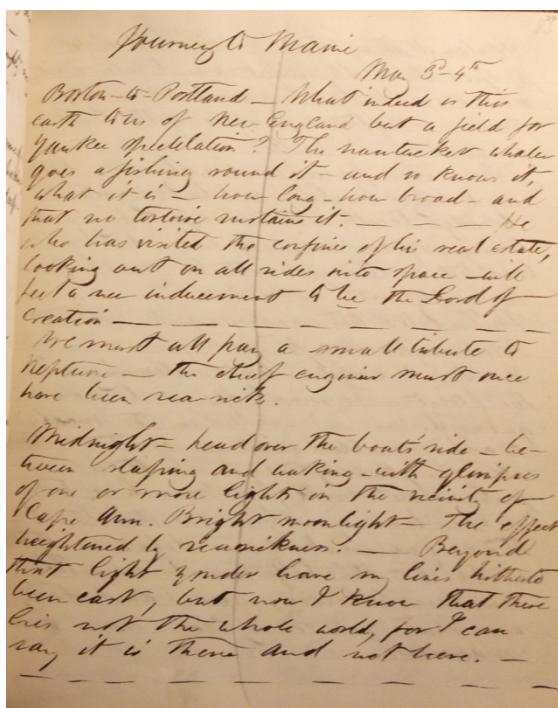


Figure 3.10: Entry for May 3-4, 1838, “Journey to Maine.” From the Journal, Volume 1.
Courtesy of the Pierpont Morgan Library.

their spatial and temporal differences.⁵¹ The same can be said for the long broken line that punctuates the latter reflection, before Thoreau, on a more personal note, claims that “We must all pay tribute to Neptune—the chief engineer must once have been sea-sick.” The unmarked space that follows the mythically framed report of seasickness before further details are provided after the heading “Midnight” gives the broken lines a specific and conspicuous structuring role in the young scholar’s account of his excursion. What is indicated by unmarked space and temporal notation is also marked by broken lines that mark the suturing of fragmentary entries and thus the writing-out involved in the composition of writing outside and in movement.

⁵¹ The reader will notice that quotations from Thoreau’s journal are my own, unless otherwise indicated. While subtle differences, such as the Princeton edition’s use of italics instead of underlining in the case of “be,” from “inducement to be,” may not seem to be significant in the grand scheme of things, it should be noticed that the Princeton edition does not replicate the broken lines, except occasionally as two dashes, as noted in the “Textual Introduction” (*HDTJ* 1:636-637).

From scholars to clerks, all users of manuscript books transcribed their daily entries from one book to another, where they refined their records as they copied them into always more stable bindings. Because this process of transcription and refinement prepared manuscript to be judged by god and man, it involved the elision of frayed and torn edges as well as the prescribed formal models that shaped those inscriptions. Thoreau's dividing lines resist the progressive refinement of composition by writing-out the technique that was designed to disappear in the preparation of a "fair copy." Because the composition of "fair copies" occlude what Thoreau's lines expose, these initial traces of decomposition may be attributed to what I have named Thoreau's archeological technique. Exposing prescribed techniques, bringing to light the formatting of inscriptions, and presenting composition in a state of decomposition, Thoreau's the early traces of decomposition anticipate the archeological image of lustrous breaks. Even if the excerpt from "Homer. Ossian. Chaucer" does not graphically reveal the frayed edges and sutures of its transposition into *A Week*, these edges and sutures reveal themselves in time. The genealogy of practice tracing back to Thoreau's earliest Journals reveal the way his writings amplified the tension between the divergent formats shaping them, the way he marked that tension with lines of decomposition, and perhaps even the way he experimented with mobilizing this practice in the archeological image from *A Week*.

In the preceding paragraphs, I may have seemed to imply that Thoreau was compelled to mark the lines of decomposition in his Journal, as if he were neurotically obsessed with form over signification, or egomaniacally committed to purging himself of influences and being an original. I aim to dispose of such implications in the analysis to follow by situating Thoreau's archeological technique in the antebellum culture of popular science and (as I stated in the introduction) in the civic space constituted by the field of Natural History in the northeastern States. By cutting through the dissemination of scientific culture to the urban institutions that facilitated it, I will demonstrate that Thoreau's archeological technique traces the decomposition of the commonplace writing system by documenting the constitutive role of Natural History in antebellum civic space.

First, I am going to establish the role of institutions of Natural History in antebellum cities of the northeastern States, so that I can trace back their historical relation to the dissemination of the commonplace system and the emergence of Natural History museums in England just after 1700. Just as the commonplace book began to deteriorate, scholars founded archival institutions, such as the Ashmolean Museum, whose main purposes were to store, organize and display artifacts culled from England's expanding colonial enterprise as well as the fragmentary manuscript records of scholarly practice. In one sense, then, Early Modern archival institutions were enlarged "cabinets of curiosities," or what Bacon called the "model of universal nature made private," because they gave order to an increasingly expansive world. And in another sense, they were repositories for the scraps and abandoned drafts of fully realized written work of scholarship which could be about the invisible formation of the world at the atomic level but which could not be what they were about. The eighteenth-century scholar's practice of conserving the elementary materials of composition was also advised by the founder of modern science, who believed the best ideas were always in the loose notes and scraps left out of fair copies and their circulation (Yale 3).

What I am suggesting is that, because the earliest museums of Natural History provided a new destination for specimens culled from the wide world as well as the fragmented traces of scholarly practice, such institutions established a link between the declining commonplace book system and civic space in the eighteenth century. The museum, as both a "cabinet of curiosities" and an archive for loose manuscripts, took over for the commonplace book, which had effectively served the same function. And it is also plain to see that, in following Bacon's advice, early museums were motivated by the desire to include in formal representation what had previously been left out of it, or to make visible what had previously been invisible, both in the institutions constituting civic space and in the channeling of civic discourse. The precepts of modern science therefore established a new representative, inclusive space for writing which would be disseminated as the popular practice of nature diary-writing by the end of the eighteenth century.

Since the museum emerged as the commonplace writing system began to crumble, it seems natural that Emerson, as the Master of this system, introduced Thoreau to the field of Natural History. In an April 10, 1842, letter to Margaret Fuller, Emerson informed his friend that he had put Thoreau “on the good track” of reviewing four “Scientific Surveys” of Massachusetts, given to him by the Secretary of State. The Boston Society of Natural History, of which Emerson was a member, had demanded that the surveys be produced to keep up with other States in the antebellum northeast—New York City being the leader in scientific projects at the state level. Perhaps Emerson believed a reading of the institutionally sanctioned accounts of the Massachusetts wilderness would discipline his slightly wild protégé as it put him “on the good track.” Yet the reverse could also be true, since Emerson mentions in his letter that he explained to Thoreau “the felicity of the subject for him as it admits of the narrative of all his woodcraft boatcraft & fishcraft” (*LRWE* 1:47). Even if Thoreau was more of a “crafty” outdoorsman than a naturalist in the eyes of the Boston Society of Natural History, the Master must have known that his disciple would return from the “good track” with a review that was both disciplined and resistant to discipline, as demonstrated in Thoreau’s early Journals.⁵²

As might have been expected, Thoreau’s first published encounter with American Natural History, which appeared in the July 1842 issue of the *Dial* as “Natural History of Massachusetts,” uses the books under review to issue a corrective to the dry surveys. In an uncharacteristically brief paragraph, the reviewer notes in a sardonic tone: “It appears from the Report that there are about forty quadrupeds belonging to the State, and among these one is glad to hear of a few bears” (*Ex* 13). Such allusions to the “Reports,” however, are preceded and followed by lengthy personal observations that the “Reports” leave out: “Frequently, in the morning or evening, a long ripple is seen in the still water, where a musk-rat is crossing the

⁵² Howarth has suggested that Emerson and Thoreau began to part ways as early as 1842 for various reasons. Thoreau had been living at Emerson’s home since Spring 1842; John Thoreau died in January 1842; and Waldo Emerson died the same month (27). According to Howarth, Thoreau’s journal also began to change around this period, as noted in the beginning of this chapter.

stream, with only its nose above the surface” (14). Because it is for the most part a personal essay that is nothing like a review, “Natural History” relies less on Thoreau’s assigned reading and more on his personal archive of writings.⁵³ The same could be said for another early natural historical essay, “A Winter Walk,” which was published the following year, and which reveals a striking shift in his perspective on nature writing that can be traced back to the conception of Natural History as type of civic space in the 1840s.

A representative example of Thoreau’s striking use of metaphor “A Winter Walk” embeds the classical system of knowledge in the natural order of the New England wilderness: “In winter nature is a cabinet of curiosities, full of dried specimens, in their natural order and position” (*Ex* 68). The rhetorical naturalization of human technique evinced in Thoreau’s metaphor is, in one way, all Emerson. As Emerson states in “The Poet”: “Readers of poetry see the factory-village, and the railway, and fancy that the poetry of the landscape is broken up by these...but the poet sees them fall within the great Order not less than the bee-hive, or the spider’s geometrical web” (*CWRWE* 3:11).⁵⁴ And yet the “Order” that supersedes the railway as well as the spider’s web in Emerson’s “rational” system remains divided in Thoreau’s metaphor. Despite the link established between the naturalist’s “cabinet” and the “natural order,” the rhetorical force of Thoreau’s metaphor does not traverse the opposition it attempts to suture; the trope does not advance toward a higher “Order” or system but leaves its structure, the “cabinet,” exposed.

The cabinet-metaphor left hanging open in “A Winter Walk” bears a relation to the physical state of the Journal in which it had been previously inscribed, or transcribed. Journal volume eight is estimated to have been at least 464 pages long in its original state, though only

⁵³ As Joseph Moldenhauer points out, Thoreau composed the essay from his transcribed journals and his contemporaneous manuscript books with passages dating as early as November 28, 1837 (*Ex* 391).

⁵⁴ It is worth noting that Thoreau may have been the inspiration for Emerson’s poet in this case. See *CWRWE* 3:175n11.31.

nine of its leaves are extant.⁵⁵ Among the remaining leaves is the entry dated “Thursday Ap 27th,” where the cabinet-metaphor appears: “In the winter nature is a cabinet of curiosities She is full of dried specimens in their natural order and positions” (*HDTJ* 1:455). Five days after writing these lines, Thoreau moved to Staten Island to tutor William Emerson’s two children. The Master had arranged for Thoreau’s employment in his brother’s home, so that Thoreau could position himself in New York City’s burgeoning literary marketplaces, Manhattan being a short ferry ride from Staten Island. Because he sent “A Winter Walk” to Emerson on June 8, the drafting of the essay clearly straddled the beginning of an urban sojourn, which would only last until late November 1843, but began as an open-ended excursion.

Entries in Journal volume eight appear to inform, retrospectively, Thoreau’s cabinet-metaphor and others that he may have added after arriving in his new home adjacent to the metropolis. An undated entry falling between April 27th and May 19th bear inscriptions that make suggestive allusions to urban life: “Scholars have for the most part a diseased way of looking at the world—For by the world frequently they mean a few uneasy men or women in New York or London who take up very little room in the universe” (*HDTJ* 1:456). The sentiment is consistent with the young scholar who marked the lines shaping his Journal entries, because his remarks are clearly preoccupied with exposing the tension between institutional and personal practices, or the formatting of the commonplace book and the diary. What this entry discloses is the fact that the scholarly worldview is identified with industrialized cities, and that this spatial perspective is both diseased and safely quarantined in major urban nodes of the northeast. The cure for this illness can be found at the end of the entry, where more notes for “A Winter Walk” appear: “In winter summer is in the heart of man.... All the greenness of vegetation is there. A healthy man is the complement” (457). Once again, suture marks are in evidence as the ecosystem enters the “healthy man,” uninfected by the scholar’s industrial-urban worldview, though he bears the marks of that illness. The sutures in this man reveal why organic metaphors in Thoreau’s essay

⁵⁵ See *HDTJ* 1:626, for the Princeton editors’ description of the extant leaves.

must remain divided and open. Only then can nature and history switch places, thereby allowing the nature writer to externalize the institutional format shaping his encounter with the environment and, in recognizing the violence of this imposition, to become the world outside. The reversal of insides and outside in “A Winter Walk” roughly constructs a system of transitions from winter to spring, cabinet to greenness, and scholar to nature writer.

The early traces of this system show up in Journal entries contemporaneous with the editing of “A Winter Walk,” which wasn’t published in *The Dial* until October. The twenty-four remaining leaves of Journal volume nine bear entries from Thoreau’s last months in New York and attest to his growing alienation with urban life. In an entry from September 1843, dated “Sunday 24th,” he writes: “Who can see these cities and say that there is any life in them. I walked through New York yesterday—and met no real and living person.” And what made New York a city of the dead were its institutions of Natural History: “I hate museums, there is nothing so weighs upon the spirits. They are catacombs of Nature. They are preserved death” (*HDTJ* 1:465). The “preserved death” of museums must not be confused with the time-inscribed edifice appearing in *A Week*, though the beauty traced over it appears on ruin-strewn grounds. Indeed, sections of the lecture-turned-essay “Homer. Ossian. Chaucer” were drafted in Journal volumes eight and nine, and, though the edifice appeared in manuscript in his earlier Journal volumes, it may still be considered a “counterimage,” if not a “countercity,” to the “preserved-death” of the museum-city.⁵⁶ The problem with museums is that they are constructed to arrest and represent decomposition, while, for Thoreau, decomposition releases the beautiful traces of time’s inscription in constructions as they “[break] with a lustre.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶ For the edifice in manuscript, see *HDTJ* 1:324. The Princeton editors note that Journal volumes eight and nine contain drafted sections of “Homer. Ossian. Chaucer” (610-611).

⁵⁷ Worth mentioning here are the various references to decay in volume eight. Particularly relevant to the argument at hand is a November 5th entry: “It is remarkable how language, as well as all things else, records only life and progress never death and decay. We are obliged often to contradict ourselves to express these as the tree requires the vital enery to push off its dead leaves” (*HDTJ* 1:483).

Thoreau therefore discovers the source of the city of the dead in the museum, as he confuses the specimens on display with the patrons viewing them: “I know not whether I muse most at the bodies stuffed with cotton and sawdust—or those stuffed with bowels and fleshy fibre” (*HDTJ* 1:465). It is at least conceivable that Thoreau went to museums in Manhattan, most likely Barnum’s American Museum, during his months in New York. In fact, it is difficult to imagine him avoiding an attraction so popular in 1843.⁵⁸ Barnum’s was a far cry, however, from its eighteenth-century predecessors in England as well as Early America. In the antebellum decades, states Andrea Dennet, American Natural History museums “emerged as a novel form of recreation that could divert a heterogeneous audience while supporting the new industrial morality of hard work, temperance, and perseverance” (Dennet 5). The antebellum museum collapsed the institutional conservation of unique specimens into the industrial-urban formation of the American public. Where the wilderness might extract the “cabinet of curiosities” from the nature writer, the museum-city installed the cabinet to produce the citizen of Natural History. From Thoreau’s perspective, the urban public in 1843 was therefore infected with the diseased worldview of the scholar, whose illness was at least as old as the decline of the commonplace writing system. Institutions like the American Museum were repurposed variations of its eighteenth-century predecessors. They instrumentalized the conserved remains of the scholar’s declining system of practice to format the heterogeneous and rapidly changing public of antebellum decades for circulation, as if to preserve them in the suspended animation of networked society. Circulation may have been expanding and accelerating, but, in Thoreau’s eyes, the ostensibly dynamic, progressive space constituted by industrial-urban networks was the dead space of Natural History.

Beyond the September 1843 entry, Thoreau raises the stakes of his polemic as he begins to view the museum-city from an archeological perspective. This style of writing, which becomes his “tool for seeing,” allows him to penetrate the cultural miasma produced by the

⁵⁸ See Adams 76-89.

transformation of the scholar's worldview into the civic space of American Natural History. Challenging the naturalist's "right to imitate heaven with his wires" in museum displays, the archeologist points out that they are actually latter day "tombs and catacombs" better left in "Italy and Egypt." In the New World, he rails, "Embalming is a sin against heaven and earth," once heaven "has recalled the soul—and set free the servile elements." The public is therefore "degraded" by the museum's spectacle of death, as he admits, once again, to mistaking a "veritable living man, in the attitude of repose musing like myself as the place requires, for a stuffed specimen" (*HDTJ* 1:472). The Concord wilderness and heaven should counteract the mortifying effect of the museum-city, now archeologically exposed as a cheaply staged reconstruction of the Old World. If metaphors in "A Winter Walk" are sutured in a "rough-hewn" fashion, then nature's influx turns the wound of institutional order into an opportunity for self-liberation. And yet if a natural habitat would be requisite for that solution, then why does Thoreau ask late in his essay: "What would human life be without forests, those natural cities?" (*Ex* 60). Like winter, that "cabinet of curiosities," the "natural city" cannot enact metaphorical unity, because the trope embodies the tension between two opposed types of space. The very logic of the metaphor forces nature to refer to the city as its point of reference, because the natural city can only follow the forest, leaving the question mark a sign of the anxiety of urban influence. As the phrase "natural city" appears in other texts by other writers, its vexed character might be considered to be dependent on the context Thoreau creates for it in his early essay, just as the healthy man, liberated of institutional determinants, can become the subjective environment in which it is conceived and from which it is issued.

The nature writer of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* attempts to achieve environmental harmony by externalizing his own internalized "cabinet of curiosities." But instead he presents an archeological scene of writing, which can be traced back to his Journal volumes from New York City. In the scene, Thoreau sights "Two blue herons" at twilight during the return trip to Concord. Flexing the muscles he developed in his early natural historical

essays, he employs Linnaean nomenclature and renames the herons “*ardea herodias*.” What follows is a condensed staging of the history of Thoreau’s inscriptions, as the herons,

with their long and slender limbs relieved against the sky, were seen travelling high over our heads—their lofty and silent flight, as they were wending their way at evening, surely not to alight in any other marsh on the earth’s surface but, perchance, on the other side of our atmosphere, a symbol for the ages to study, whether impressed upon the sky, or sculptured amid the hieroglyphs of Egypt. Bound to some northern meadow, they held on their stately, stationary flight, like the storks in the picture, and disappeared at length behind the clouds. (WO 316-317)

The nature writer does not receive input from his field in this passage so much as the history in nature reveals itself as the true author of the scene. The representation of the field is therefore deferred by the presentation of writing, though not, as in Emerson’s case, by the material conditions of circulation that in the last analysis fall into “Order.” In Thoreau’s *A Week*, the field exposes the way historical inscriptions have already written the scene, bringing to light archeological layers of the scholar’s worldview.

Scholarly inscriptions enter the scene with the renaming of the “two herons” as “*ardea herodias*.” The common name for this variety of ibis would blend naturally with the bucolic picture if its institutional *nomen* had not cracked the observer’s lens, disrupting the flow of the scene with a foreign sign and its requisite italics. While Thoreau’s readers would be familiar with the format of the common name paired with its Latin name, *A Week* is not a “survey,” nor a conventional excursion narrative, nor a gallery of stuffed subjects whose placards bear their common and Latin names. The double-naming of the herons therefore begins to frame the poet-naturalist’s observation for institutional display, and Thoreau proceeds by deftly tracing the historical prescriptions of the visual culture of museums in what appears to be an adaptation of Emerson’s own archeological aphorism, “Language is fossil poetry” that “is made up of images, or tropes.” As a poet with access to these images, Thoreau recognizes the herons to be a “symbol for the ages to study,” not a phenomenon by any common name. And because this uncommon symbol is “for the ages to study,” its power is released as it “breaks with a lustre,” “whether impressed upon the sky” or “sculptured amid the hieroglyphs of Egypt.” Between the epochs of

printed impressions and sculptured edifices, the initial doubling of the herons by their Latin names has exposed a presentation of the history of writing, without which symbols could not be studied.

And yet, neither Egyptian hieroglyphs nor printed impressions refer to the “fossil poetry” that language is—or if they do, those fossils have first been framed and labeled for a museum exhibit. In contrast with Emerson’s natural historical aphorism, Thoreau’s method of presentation anticipates the determining influence of museum culture, rather than being determined by it. Thus, the observation of the herons does not excavate language’s “fossil poetry” anymore than the “cabinet of curiosities” in Thoreau’s “natural cities” establish the natural order of the Walden Woods. The consolidating function of trope does not disappear from Thoreau’s presentation of the natural world but marks the historically saturated structure by means of which nature has been represented, all the way back to the catacombs better left in Italy and Egypt. These Old World empires are code for foreign influence as well as the dead world of New York and London. The scene is brought to a close, then, as its natural historical frame is completed by the paradoxical representation of “stationary flight, like the storks in the picture,” which confirms that the observation was already determined by institutional displays but has at least been written-out among the ruins of time’s genuine process of inscription.

So by the time Thoreau installs his reference to the visual culture of Natural History, the herons are long gone, and have even become interchangeable with the stork, another bird of the genera the Egyptians credited with the invention of writing. There is little distinction, then, between image and writing once the entire scene in which Thoreau observes the herons has been reduced to a history of inscriptions from glyphic edifices, through printed horizons, to contemporary museum displays, all of which are “impressed,” “sculptured,” and “pictured.” Consequently, Thoreau’s nature has not yielded “fossil poetry” in the images and tropes only the “Poet” can access. Rather, an archeological excavation has taken place, and in the process, the poet-naturalist has recovered the fact that the images and tropes excavated while writing outside are the ruins of the scholarly worldview from which industrial cities like New York are built.

And yet in spite of the crumbled stucco littering Thoreau's field, the enduring inscriptions composing the scene still enact the force of the figure, who has not only been purified, but has also woven the ruins into a suitable point of departure for the practice to come: the figure standing among the ruins of the text.

It is in this way that "writing outside" in Thoreau's first book is a "writing-out" of the History in the Nature of Natural History. Thoreau presents the scene of writing in nature as a scene in which the museum-city constructs the nature writer's perspective. The environment constructed by Natural History could have been a reproduction of the museum's "preserved death," staged by one of its embalmed subjects. Instead, Thoreau decomposes the scene of writing in nature by writing-out, or tracing and excavating the format determining the civic space of Natural History and its subjects. Bearing the practical marks of decomposition, the scene is split open and its sutures loosened, to present an "archeological scene" of writing in the "out-of-doors": a scene anticipating the decline of the natural historical perspective and thus disclosing time's enduring inscriptions in Thoreau's traces, as the nature writer's view falls to ruin. In the section to follow, I am going to extend this reading of *A Week* by assuming that lays the groundwork for the mobilization of writing practice in Thoreau's second book, *Walden*.

This practice, though essentially modeled on the popular practice of the nature diary, will highlight the tension between nature writing and the environment. In doing so, the practice mobilized by *Walden* will also widen the split metaphors and internally divided scenes of writing outside in *A Week*, as it opposes the network-form of Natural History and its networked subjects to the form that Thoreau, given his practical tendencies, was destined for: the grid. Elaboration and refinement of some of the fundamental claims and objections made in the introduction of this chapter is, therefore, necessary. Instead of writing about the organic networks that enveloped him and that he internalized as a writing subject of Natural History, Thoreau wrote-out the formatted prescripts on which networks grew and expanded. Instead of doubling those networks, Thoreau decomposed the links they established between writing and the environment. Consequently, in what would have been the nature diarist's scene of writing outside, Thoreau's

archeology uncovered the historical layers of the museum-city, to get to the bottom of Natural History, to extract the antebellum public's internalized formatting, and thus to achieve a new perspective of civic space.

Tending to the Cut: Thoreau's "Transcendental Metrics"

Internal improvements are mainly invisible in *A Week on the Concord or Merrimack Rivers*. That is, they are rendered invisible by the piling-up of archeological strata in the poet-naturalist's scene of writing outside. In *Walden*, however, infrastructures are prominently featured and also frequently targeted in Thoreau's anti-industrialist polemics. "Internal improvements" are "external and superficial," Thoreau argues, "ruined by luxury and heedless expense, by want of calculation and a worthy aim." The expanding, accelerating nation "lives too fast," he warns, before mocking the public's collective agreement to submit to the "work" of building a nation of industrialized circulation: "If we do not get out sleepers, and forge rails, and devote days and nights to the work, but go tinkering upon our *lives* to improve *them*, who will build railroads?" (*WO* 87). His sarcastic query recalls his 1843 observation about the mortifying effect of New York City's museums on the antebellum public. By 1854, he clearly perceived their destiny in the making, no longer restricted to the nebulous cultural miasma of the museum-city once concretized in the nation's expanding, accelerating urban networks. Thoreau upped the ante of social critique in his second book, menacing the public with a vision of collective labor, not restricted to its exploited laboring class, but deregulated for universal servitude; not enforced by god, city, or man, but by pervasive infrastructural conditions. The circulation facilitated by industrial-urban networks may have multiplied socio-economic strata, widened income gaps, and produced a new spectrum of material conditions both to fear and aspire to; but even then, suggests Thoreau, the drama of modernity was largely symbolic, when in actuality the single, common problem was that citizens were compelled to "devote days and nights to the work."

Anti-infrastructure sentiments were more or less common in the antebellum decades. Infrastructure had been a consistent point of contention in the debate over Federal versus State,

and public versus private, funding of public works since ratification. The combination of Federalist authoritarianism and self-reliant factionalism among New England literary writers may have amplified the already vexed issue of national infrastructure, which was rapidly growing by 1850. Texts like Hawthorne's "The Celestial Railroad" (1843) are emblematic of widespread anxieties about industrial transit at midcentury, as well as the local reservations among northeastern provincials about network access. As Hawthorne was linked into Emerson's closed circuits and one of Thoreau's regular interlocutors, the two authors might be imagined exchanging paranoid visions of the railroad's violent impact and infernal consequences. And yet the projected anxieties of Hawthorne's tale also parody the hysterical reactionary and his apocalyptic delusions. Thus, fantasies of shared anxieties about the railroad just as easily give way to mutually reinforced, self-critical awareness of the provincialism and hypocrisy behind such anxieties. Thoreau's dependence on railroads to access libraries in Boston and to take his cherished excursions is no secret. It almost seems that the very notion of an uncomplicated attitude toward industrial transit in Thoreau's case in particular is intentionally falsifiable. Perhaps Henrik Gustafson's description of Thoreau's relationship with the railroad as a "struggle" may adequately sum up the paradox (63). Apt as "struggle" may be to name the tensions I have been reading in Thoreau's manuscripts and published works leading up to *Walden*, however, in the case his second book this "struggle" does not appear to take place between Thoreau and the railroad; rather, as Walls has stated, it appears to take place between the network and the "alternative network," or "counternetwork," that his second book "mobilizes."

To say that it is not the struggle between Thoreau and the railroad but the struggle between two versions of the same form is a matter of perspective, but not a subjective one. For Thoreau, the implementation of any form has consequences which lie in the perspective it produces, and it is for this reason that he worked over the course of his writing life to write-out prescripts, to decompose his Journals, to carry out an archeology of writing "out-of-doors"—in sum, to get to the bottom of Natural History. With the archeological scene exposed by the poet-

naturalist, the grid that Thoreau had only just begun to see in opposition to the networks of the antebellum era by 1854 began to emerge into his system of practice. Elaborating on earlier observations about the grid, I will claim in this section that the “struggle” between mainstream institutional-commercial networks and Thoreau’s counternetwork should be articulated as an opposition between the network and the grid. As it fully revealed itself toward the end of his life, the grid begin to emerge in *Walden* and then to constitute his writing system. As witness to this emergence, I will demonstrate that what might be considered an opposition between the network and the counternetwork is an effect of the “transcendental metrics” that Thoreau employed in the construction of *Walden*. And once this metrics is brought to light, it will become clear that network forms are a medium whose destiny is the grid.

In arguing for this perspective, I will assume that in Thoreau’s text the railroad is invested with a connotative charge, meaning that it binds together multiple elements of the material and cultural milieu of the northeastern States in the early 1850s. The railroad may refer to internal improvements in general, as when the phrase is employed at the beginning of *Walden*’s anti-railroad polemic. It may also refer to industrialization, urbanization, natural science, engineering, politics, economics, and still more rapidly evolving factors at midcentury. Before engaging with the post-1850 Thoreau, then, I want to highlight three networks that are consolidated by, and that can also be extracted from, the actual yet figurative function of the railroad in *Walden*. First, Thoreau was involved in scientific networks of information exchange. After Emerson put him in touch with Louis Agassiz in 1847,⁵⁹ Agassiz’s assistant, Spencer Fullerton Baird, trained Thoreau to collect field specimens and to format them for Agassiz.⁶⁰ It was then that Thoreau’s Journal became an instrument for accumulating and “mobilizing” specimens from the field, claims Walls, though he would not remain in Agassiz’s network. The

⁵⁹ See Walls 113; 138

⁶⁰ Baird also invited Thoreau to join the American Association for the Advancement of Science. The editors of the Princeton Journal states that he declined, “citing what he believed to be its lack of professional interest in the ‘higher law’ that guided his own studies” (*HDTJ* 6:370)

poet-naturalist appropriated the network for his literary project: his “alternative network, one authorized by individual, empirical, relational experience rather than by experience as socially determined” (Walls 160). For the “alternative network” to extract itself from its ties to institutionalized naturalists like Agassiz, it also had to be positioned against the Federal networks that were conditioning the future of Natural History in America.

The truth of this claim lies in the fact of the Pacific Railroad Surveys (1853-1855), whose findings were documented in the series of illustrated “Reports” issued over the next five years (1855-1860). While surveying was the ostensible priority of the excursion, 58% of the thirteen-volume Reports consist of information gathered by the naturalists, who were hand-selected by the recently founded Smithsonian Institute to gather undocumented specimens while the Army Corps of Engineers gauged the route most suitable for the transcontinental railroad. While Natural History had been associated with the republic’s westward expansion since the Early National period,⁶¹ by 1853 it became integral to the Federal planning of the nation’s future. Where Natural History refers to the site of the diseased urban culture of popular science in the 1840s, in the world of *Walden* the railroad signals the expansion of that site.

Consequently, the railroad in *Walden* signals an urban network of museum-cities. The most prevalent writing practice among new arrivals in the antebellum city was personal accounting. Thus, in the “Economy” and “The Bean-Field” chapters, the juxtaposition of accounts and their narrative explanations appears to refer to the urban citizen’s everyday calculation practices (Figure 3.11). Leonard Neufeldt has convincingly argued for this reading, demonstrating that the accounts displayed in Thoreau’s second book directly respond to the accounting principles disseminated by urban conduct manuals. Neufeldt reminds us that these manuals provided the young men who migrated to antebellum cities “stability in the unstable modern world” of industrialization and urbanization (114).⁶² Stability could be achieved through

⁶¹ See Goetzmann 181-198.

⁶² As Neufeldt states, given that Thoreau owned several of these manuals, including Alcott’s *Young Men’s Guide*, he likely read them as he prepared his public works. Neufeldt singles out the

of food for eight months, namely, from July 4th to March 1st, the time when these estimates were made, though I lived there more than two years,—not counting potatoes, a little green corn, and some peas, which I had raised, nor considering the value of what was on hand at the last date,—was

| | | |
|----------------|-----------------------|--|
| Rice | \$1 73 ^{1/2} | |
| Molasses | 1 73 | Cheapest form of the saccharine. |
| Rye meal | 1 04 ^{3/4} | |
| Indian Meal | 0 99 ^{3/4} | Cheaper than rye. |
| Pork | 0 22 | |
| Flour | 0 88 | { Costs more than Indian meal, both money and trouble. |
| Sugar | 0 80 | |
| Lard | 0 65 | |
| Apples | 0 25 | |
| Dried apple | 0 22 | |
| Sweet potatoes | 0 10 | |
| One pumpkin | 0 6 | |
| One watermelon | 0 2 | |
| Salt | 0 3 | |

All experiments which failed

Yes, I did eat \$8.74, all told; but I should not thus unblushingly publish my guilt, if I did not know that most of my readers were equally guilty with myself, and that their deeds would look no better in print. The next year I sometimes caught a mess of fish for my dinner, and once I went so far as to slaughter a woodchuck which ravaged my bean-field,—effect his transmigration, as a Tartar would say,—and devour him, partly for experiment's sake; but though it afforded me a momentary enjoyment, notwithstanding a musky flavor, I saw that the longest use would not make that a good practice, however it might seem to have your woodchucks ready dressed by the village butcher.

Clothing and some incidental expenses within the same dates, though little can be inferred from this item, amounted to

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Oil and some household utensils | \$8 40 ^{3/4} |
| | 2 00 |

So that all the pecuniary outgoes, excepting for washing and mending, which for the most part were done out of the house, and their bills have not yet been received,—and these are all and more than all the ways by which money necessarily goes out in this part of the world,—were

| | |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| House | \$28 12 ^{1/2} |
| Farm one year | 14 72 ^{1/2} |
| Food eight months | 8 74 ^{1/2} |
| Clothing, etc., eight months | 8 40 ^{3/4} |
| Oil, etc., eight months | 2 00 |
| In all | \$61 99 ^{3/4} |

I address myself now to those of my readers who have a living to get. And to meet this I have for farm produce sold

| | |
|---------------------|----------|
| Earned by day-labor | \$23 44 |
| | 13 34 |
| In all | \$36 78. |

which subtracted from the sum of the outgoes leaves a balance of \$25.21^{3/4} on the one side,—this being very nearly the means with which I started, and the measure of expenses to be incurred,—and on the other, beside the

Figure 3.11: Accounts. From the “Economy” chapter of *Walden* (56-57).

accounting practice by way of the practical synthesis of “Christian perfection” and capitalist self-interest, thus perpetually fueling circulation with the collective desire for favorable judgment from beyond.

In opposition to deregulated circulation, the accounting schematics presented and explicated in *Walden* present Thoreau’s “living experiment,” initiated with a modest budget and intended to perpetuate itself outside normative economies altogether, as a venture woven from

manuals of Fordyce, West, Hawes, Franklin, and Foster as particularly influential models of the genre (103).

success as well as failures, or modest fiscal gains as well as high experiential dividends (Neufeldt 177). *Walden* does not present a refined account to be judged by god and man; it does not accumulate symbolic value conflating Christian morality with fiscal solvency. Rather, it presents an alternative account which documents the vicissitudes and cyclic economy of nature, which has no interest in Christian perfection or fiscal solvency, and which leaves the nature writer with “very nearly the means with which I started, and the measure of expenses to be incurred” (WO 57). The odd effect of Thoreau’s candid narration of mathematical formalization stems from the fact that his activity in the field appears to present nothing, certainly nothing worth circulating in print. And yet accounts which lack meaning—whether spiritual, economic, or both—present a surplus truth which disperses meaning to present material practice for its own sake. Yielding no symbolic value, the dual presentation of calculation and narrative in *Walden* is a gesture which establishes its potential meaning by way of its intertextual referent, but which only means anything by breaking its ties to its referent, leaving the accounts and their explanation a presentation of practice in circulation for its own sake. The calculation-narrative duality of Thoreau’s open accounts abolishes the established link between calculation and narration that prescribed the practice and perspective of the subject of Natural History.

Accounts in *Walden* do not reveal a one-to-one correspondence between conduct manuals and itself, however, because it is already a type of nature diary, a book inscribed by the subject of Natural History. For White’s *Natural History of Selbourne*, as well as the state surveys Thoreau satirized in “A Natural History of Massachusetts” and the Pacific Railroad Survey Reports, format-narrative and image-narrative pairings were normative conventions. The consequences of the unconventional accounts in *Walden* are both elaborate and eloquently reductive. The accounts link to a network of intertexts. They are actually *between* the two textual precedents that I have referred to here. And from within the network mediating this relation, they split the network and leave format and narrative facing each other. Because the accounts in *Walden* represent a fiscal account without fiscal value, and a naturalist’s mode of display with a decidedly economic purport, the text fails to fulfill the goals of either precedent, their meaning is

neutralized, and nothing but a formal opposition remains. The reduction in *Walden* of textual precedents that would disseminate economic and scientific practices for the romantic subjects of the nineteenth century therefore extracts the network internalized by the subject of Natural History and displays the split nature of that subject. If neither exchange-value nor organic unity is the absolute goal of the subject, then the absolute goal of networks cannot be achieved, and all that remain are absences where there must be nodes and conduits.

These absences, where there once were romantic subjects, are not nothing. Rather, they are, as a matter of fact, units of measure, instantiated by the material text of *Walden* and governed by what I have named Thoreau's "transcendental metrics." This metrics leads back to the "surveyor" of the "out-of-doors," who consolidated the "poet" and the "naturalist," not by weaving the two personae together and synthesizing them as a hybrid, but by reducing them to the "few lines or strokes" that Channing observed his companion making in his natural habitat, that Thoreau would flesh out as a "poet-naturalist" in the lyric observations of his Journal, and that he would decompose into "General Phenomena" formatted for his "Tables." Thus, transcendental metrics will refer to the system that organizes and formats the act of mark-making, narrating, and formatting examined (above) in Thoreau's post-1850 Journals, "Notes," and "Tables." I will be considering this metrics to be a world-making system that decomposes the convolutions of the network and its subjects, and that, in place of doubling their form, reduces the network-form to its elementary particles and discovers the structurally opposite form of the grid in the process. Returning to the "lines or strokes" that disentangled Thoreau from the network of nature diary-writing from beneath, I will demonstrate how transcendental metrics first impinged on the organization and formatting of *Walden*, and how it constituted a practice embodied and mobilized by the text.

What makes transcendental metrics legible in Thoreau's text is the map of Walden Pond, which he drafted in 1846, and which typically faces the chapter titled "The Ponds" in copies of

the first edition.⁶³ Because the map appears approximately two-thirds of the way through the book, from the front to back cover, and because it is actually not a map of the “Ponds,” but only Walden Pond—and, even then, consists of fictional elements—I will claim that the map opens an interval from within the text: an interval between the map’s cartographic formatting and the writing about the “Ponds” in Thoreau’s prose narrative. Given that there is a similar pairing of format and narrative in the “Economy” and “Bean-Field” chapters of the book, and given that the map is based on the book’s eponymous pond, I will also claim that the map-format spans the whole material text and localizes smaller format-narrative pairings within that span. The correspondence between the span and its units will constitute the elements of the transcendental metrics that stands in formal opposition to the networks of Natural History in America.

As Patrick Chura has demonstrated, the map in *Walden* imitated the conventions of various texts about the outside world, from exploration narratives to books of Natural History. But much like the accounts in the “Economy” and “Bean-Field” chapters, Thoreau’s map repurposes these conventions and thus reduces the map in the text to a map-narrative presentation. The map of Walden Pond is, first of all, presented upside-down (Chura 35; Figure 3.12). Any assumption that the map is an index of the real world is therefore thrown into relief while the truth-value of mapping in general is thrown into question. As Chura states, “The Walden map is not a socially empty commodity, for the home of at least one acknowledged resident is included, but it is empty in a proprietary and institutional sense, a space where there are suddenly no property lines and discernible personal or civic claims” (38). The fictive shaping

⁶³ The map is a paratext of *Walden* that readers may or may not be familiar with. It appeared in some, though not all, copies of the first edition. And the same variation can be found in contemporary reprints, which sometimes include a reproduction of the map, either in the opening pages or as an appendix. My reading will be informed by the publication history of the map in the first edition, as given by Philip van Doren Stern, who tells us that it “was not put into every copy [of the first edition]. The Ticknor and Fields cost books show that an additional 500 maps had to be printed in September 1856, probably because some of the first lot of 2,000 had been damaged or lost. Books bound up before this second lot of maps came through evidently had the map left out. There is no doubt about the position that Thoreau wanted it to have, for he wrote in the page proofs: ‘Let the map of the pond face page 307’” (AW 38).

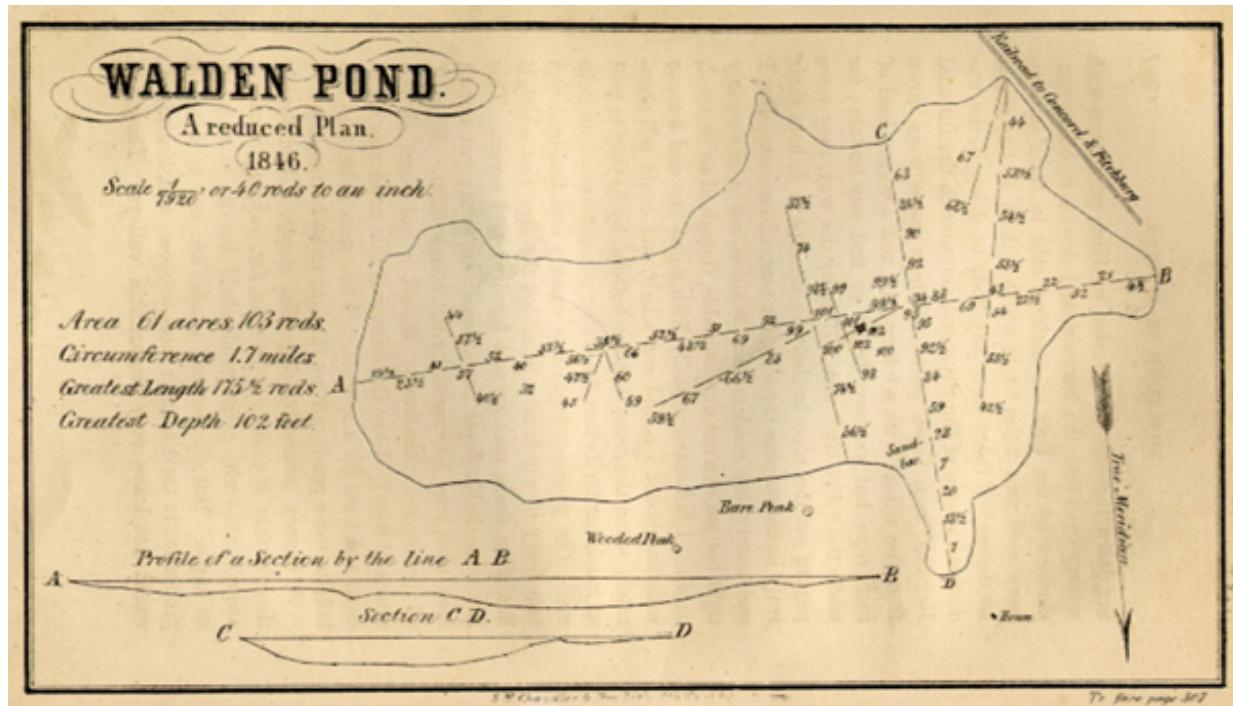


Figure 3.12: Map of Walden Pond, based on Thoreau's 1846 survey, and originally published in the first edition of *Walden* (1854). Courtesy of The Concord Free Public Library Special Collections (www.concordlibrary.org).

process of map-making is displayed, but the network of lines constituting the civic organization of space are left out. What is left in the map is the minimal data referring to the location of the subject who drafted it (represented by the one acknowledged home) and its outlines: the limits of its territory, its metrics, and its (inverted) compass.

Just as Thoreau's accounts lacked the symbolic value that would have made them socially valuable, the map lacks the meaning it should accrue in its scientifically formatted representation of the world and the textual narration it supports with its innate truth-value. Because Thoreau's inverted map signifies the falsifiable narration it should bolster, it also decomposes the line of signification linking them. Inverting the truth-value of spatial schematics, the map is disconnected from its referent, and it only links to the narrative it complements, which, as a map with no referent, it cannot compliment, because it is not a prose narrative. The formatting of space is all that the map can represent and the prose text it is bound into follows

suit. In opposition to each other, map and prose constitute two different compositions of marks, decomposed and thus presenting a dual structure. Where dualism might imply the production of meaning in other contexts, in the context of *Walden* the presentation of format and narrative opens an interval between the map and the book. This interval divides the space of the text from within, severing the link between writing and environment that the map, the text, or the synthesis of the two might have otherwise established. In place of the signification of space through writing, the world enfolding the subject, or the alternative network that would suture this interval, *Walden* intensifies the interdependent duality of formatting and narration, so that duality persists in a tense formulation, which disperses meaning and presents a world composed of elements of practice.

For Chura, as for Walls, the interval opened by the text's dualistic textual gestures serves as the material signifier of its various organic signifieds: Walden Pond or all of Nature, depending on the reader's metrics. I am going to maintain, however, that there is no signified for the interval Thoreau leaves open between formatting and narrative, because this interval provides the unit of measure for practice at the local level of the nature writer and at the environmental level, which determines his practice at the local level. That is, the gap between map and prose narrative is the determining environmental condition for the nature writer of *Walden*, and it therefore supplies the transcendental metrics for his measurement of format-narrative intervals at the local level. The modeling of this transcendental metrics, enacted in scenes of writing outside in *Walden*, constitute the possibility for the mobilization of a practice that is disentangled from antebellum networks. This practice fictionalizes its own external system for measuring the world, (in the absence of any predetermined order of signification between reality and its representation), and thus permits the fabrication of a form of identity that can only be measured in absences (or local format-narrative intervals) on the basis of transcendental absences (or environmental format-narrative intervals).

It is no surprise, then, that one of the representative scenes in which this practice is enacted takes place in the "cut": the railroad cut, in which the tracks running by the pond were

laid. In the scene of writing in the cut, the railroad appears to be in and yet adjacent to the opening made by the cut. In “Spring,” the last chapter of *Walden*, the railroad is depicted as an instrument that awakens the earth to its auto-archeological function. Thoreau writes: “Few phenomena gave me more delight than to observe the forms which thawing sand and clay assume in flowing down the sides of a deep cut on the railroad through which I passed on my way to the village.” Emerging from overlapping streams of melting snow, this sight, which he calls a “hybrid product”

is a truly grotesque vegetation, whose forms and color we see imitated in bronze, a sort of architectural foliage more ancient and typical than acanthus, chicory, ivy, vine, or any vegetable leaves; destined perhaps, under some circumstances, to become a puzzle to future geologists. The whole cut impressed me as if it were a cave with its stalactites laid open to the light. (286-287)

In this scene of contact between nature and transit infrastructure, Thoreau does not uncover the dead structures shaping his access to the pure field so much as he bears witness to the uncovering of another future opened by the railroad’s “deep cut”: “a puzzle to future geologists.” The primordial “forms and color we see imitated in bronze” relegate the mimetic arts to the past and its enduring inscriptions among ruins. Architects as well as botanists, on the other hand, will discover new structures to shape their practices in the “grotesque vegetation” exposed by the earth’s auto-archeology. Those who build edifices and study plants while embracing decomposition, prophesies Thoreau, may be the citizens best-equipped to draw the metrics for a new world from the now meaningless interval alongside the railroad. The alternative for this new world does not lie in the railroad itself, and thus not in its network-form, but in the mess created by it, and extending alongside it.

The elements exposed by thawing sand and clay along the gradient of the cut is just a preview for the main of the scene of writing staged in the cut, as Thoreau traces back the scholarly prescripts of what he sees to the semblance of “a cave with its stalactites laid open to the light” (287). The allusion to Plato’s allegorical cave is not only too great to pass over without remark, but also too relevant to the elaborate presentation of the body the liberated by its

perception of the invisible world made visible. The spontaneous occurrence of what Thoreau calls “sand foliage” along the railroad cut makes him feel as if he “were nearer to the vitals of the globe, for this sandy overflow is something such a foliaceous mass as the vitals of the animal body.” Thoreau’s animal sympathies for the “globe” then build on the allusion to Plato’s cave, now excavated and enlightened, with an analogical framework. But instead of reading the “Order” of analogies inscribed along a great chain of being, as Neo-Platonists like Emerson might have, Thoreau’s animal body empirically experiences sympathy with the earth because they are both structured by an inside and an outside. And yet that very assumption is belied by the fact that the cave’s inside is also its outside, naturally, after the railroad has cut into the earth, thus dividing it from itself and disseminating the freely circulating elements destined for the network.

In Thoreau’s analysis, the inside is not an invisible force which outwardly expresses itself in the “text of nature” and its legible signs, as mimetic programs from Aristotle to the Renaissance had it. Rather, the outside produced its insides at an accelerated rate, as if the outward expression of inner truths were a natural fact in a world of networks. So Thoreau proceeds in a more free-associative fashion to point out the “anticipation of the vegetable leaf” in the moving sands which disclose the aspiration of elementary particles as they move toward probable forms. As matter in motion illuminates the transient system of relations between constitutive elements and their construction, Thoreau reduces dualistic structure to an atomic precondition: “No wonder that the earth expresses itself outwardly in leaves, it so labors with the idea inwardly. The atoms have already learned this law, and are pregnant by it.” Internal labor externally expressed is the structure of sympathy between man and Nature: the binding condition of humanity’s invisible atomic multiplicity.

Matter in movement is therefore stabilized by the diverse layers in the perceiving subject’s mental framework, while that framework is empirically proven.⁶⁴ The conduit

⁶⁴ Atran argues that science advanced beyond “common sense,” or “manifestly perceptible fact” because of analogy: “formative analogies become prime constituents in scientific abstraction and

foreclosed in *A Week* is opened by the structure of inside and outside that allows Thoreau to ascribe human attributes to the non-human world in *Walden*, as when atoms have “learned” or are made “pregnant by” the law of inward labor and outward expression. When an “overhanging leaf” perceives its “prototype” in the “sand foliage” beneath it, he externalizes his own structural relation to the earth by attributing it to a leaf, which then liberates him for the labor of marking the “globe” with the traces of his scholarly training.

Internally, whether in the globe or animal body, [the “overhanging leaf”] is a moist thick *lobe*, a word especially applicable to the liver and lungs and the leaves of fat ([greek], *labor*, *lapsus*, to flow or slip downward, a lapsing; [greek], *globus*, lobe, globe; also lap, flap, and many other words); *externally*, a dry thin leaf, even as the *f* and *v* are a pressed and dried *b*. The radicals of *lobe* are *lb*, the soft mass of the *b* (single-lobed, or *B*, double-lobed), with the liquified *l* behind it pressing forward. In *globe*, *glb*, the guttural *g* adds to the meaning the capacity of the throat. (287-288)

The quotations in Greek, Latin, and English displayed on pages presented in a more traditional scholarly format in Thoreau’s early *Journal* are brought to bear on his atomic analysis of the “leaf’s” relationship to the “globe” that expresses it. But it is not just the relationship of the earth’s expression to itself that is on display in his virtuoso performance; rather, it is the presentation of this relationship as a relationship that takes place externally in the cut, where binding conditions are a natural, if also invisible fact. Interestingly enough, articulation is more physiological than oral in Thoreau’s analysis because this articulation is marked at the atomic level by the silent letters of dead languages that he mastered as a Harvard undergraduate. After Thoreau had written-out the field of practice shaping his nature writing by 1849, he watched the elementary particles of his training decompose from “minimal signifieds”⁶⁵ into “minimal signifiers.” Never again to be organically sutured by phonemes, (no doubt lost in the aether), the lexical remains of Old World discourse were, from the perspective offered by the railroad cut,

lawmaking. They are used to show that familiar things. Belong to more extensive classes of objects and processes, which depend for their occurrence on more pervasive relational or structural properties” (12). Howarth believes Thoreau had this insight, when he claims that for Thoreau “science is metaphor” (196).

⁶⁵ This phrase is borrowed from Kittler DN 369.

excluded consonants which shaped the voice by measuring the openings of the mouth. It is possible that Thoreau's view of linguistic particles in the cut reacts against the organicist comparative philology of Wilhelm von Humboldt (brother of Alexandre) and Maximilian Schele de Vere, both of whom could be considered romantic natural historians of language.⁶⁶ Yet only by reducing language to its radically minute inscriptions could all polarities be reduced to the measurement of the interval between two conjoined elements. Only then could the excess nature spilling out of network circulation reveal that the great chain of being was not wound up inside the network of romantic subjects of Natural History—Emerson's “Order”—but in the unlinking of links, which opened between seemingly complimentary formats, and whose lack of grounded meaning or value reduces distinct formats to mere differentials in a unit of measurement.

If what is brought to light by the cut is in any way illuminating, to network the uncovered elements, in practice, would restore what had been disclosed to the shape that disclosed it, thereby perpetuating an endless circuit of exposure and concealment by the same means—always already constructed by networks, always already reconstructed in the form of networks, which are rediscovered as they are found. Thoreau's scene of writing in the cut, on the other hand, anticipates the choice between two formats of perception—one which calculates freely circulating elements, and one which perceives them as always already constructed by the network-form. But he has always already rejected both, and this fact is instantiated in the material text of *Walden*, because “Spring” follows the opening of gaps which measure the interval between calculation and prose at the level of personal accounting and spatial mapping. The text has already established local and environmental units of measure for the nature writer's perceptions and the world being perceived, which, like the units on any measuring stick, ruler, or tape, depend on the absence of a mediating term or form in the space they delimit.

Thoreau therefore liberated himself from formal predetermination by adopting calculating marks and by reducing them to elementary units, which could potentially rebuild the

⁶⁶ See Warren 12-21.

world from the atomic level up through language and perception to the higher purpose of the blossoming trees. At the elementary level, the unit of measure appears to be constituted neither by an inside nor an outside, but a constitutive differential that delimits the vacant opening of a subject and a world. From the perspective granted by this transcendental metrics, the necessity of practice lies in the gaps, margins, and blanks that it opens as if by accident, and that it pursues with purpose. A structural link is therefore established between the empty space between opposed formats and the description of the “deep cut”—between the material text and its signified—where it cannot be established between account-narrative or map-prose dualities. That structural link conveys the immeasurable distance between (textual) form and (meaningful) narration that allows *Walden* to decompose signification, to suspend the economic, civic purports of calculating marks, and to convert what remained into a world-making practice. In the measurement of little absences, on a transcendental scale of absence, there can be no motive or destiny to determine Thoreau’s tracing of the structure of the perceived world, except perhaps the inscription of time. What had been the lustrous break before 1850 has therefore become the “hybrid product” in the cut opened in the earth by “internal improvements,” from which the format of “the cabinet of curiosities” has disappeared. And this “hybrid product” will be ordered by time’s inscription as it gradually emerges as the “Table of General Phenomena.”

Thoreau’s writing practices inclined toward the temporal schematic of the “Table” as he persisted in dividing his surveying practice, which in most cases appeared to lack context and purpose, from the infrastructural formatting of space in the 1850s. In 1856, this inclination appeared to enact graphically the return of lines of decomposition from the early Journal, now utilized to cut into continuous prose entries. In one instance, dated January 6, 1856, (Figure 3.13) Thoreau measures the snow banks along the north side of the railroad cut, which he first compares to “the coarse edge of a shell” (*HDTJ* VIII:92).⁶⁷ He then records its appearance as

⁶⁷ When this chapter was written, the textual edition of Thoreau’s Journal 20 had not been published by Princeton University Press. So I have consulted the 1906 Houghton Mifflin edition of the Journal (Volume VIII). As indicated in the List of Abbreviations, the Houghton Mifflin edition is distinguished by the use of Roman numerals in place of Arabic numerals to denote the volume referred to.

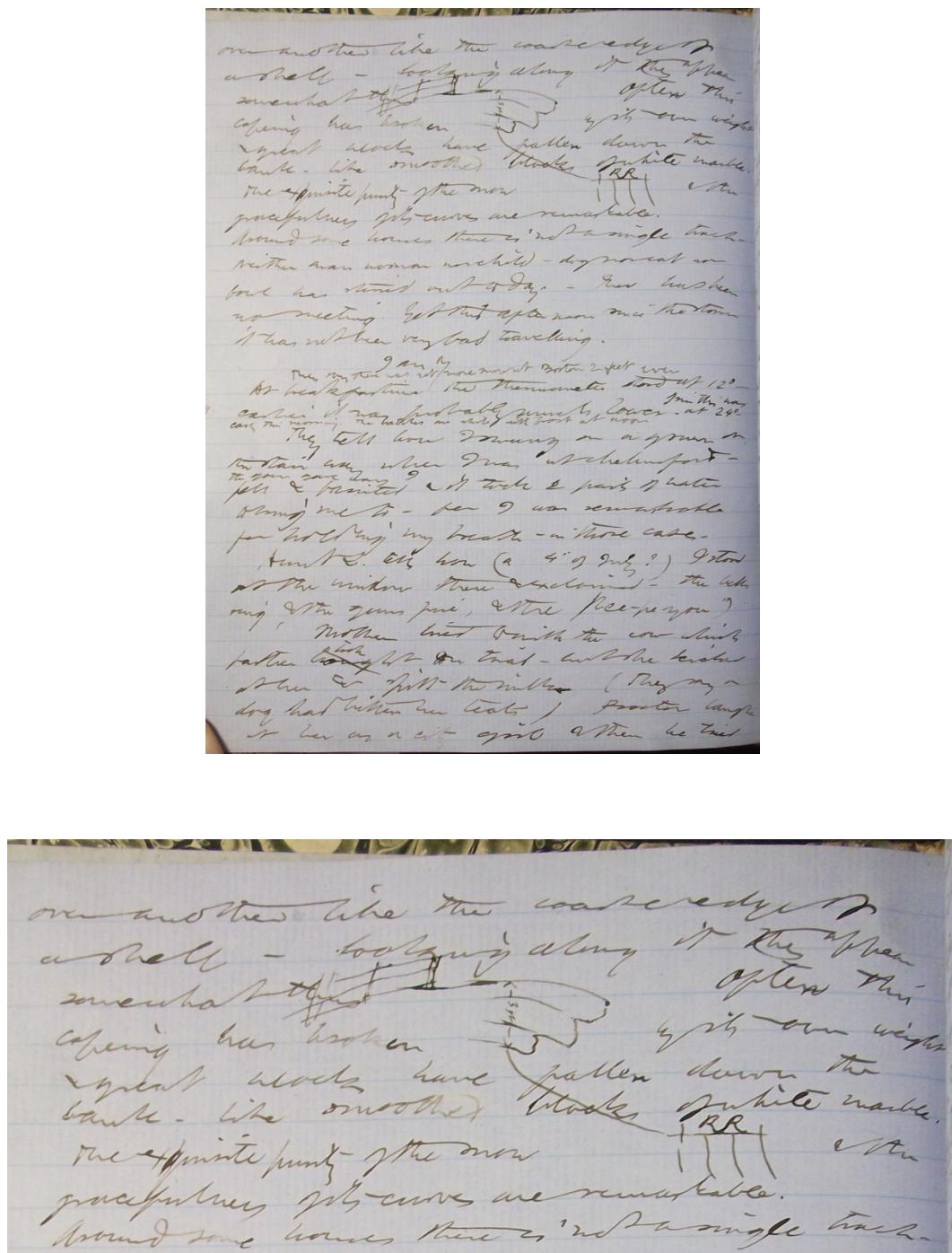


Figure 3.13: Entry for January 6, 1856 and detail. From the Journal, Volume 20, January 4-April 23, 1856. Courtesy of the Pierpont Morgan Library.

“somewhat thus,” before entering a schematic drawing that cuts into his prose, dividing the page, but completing his sentence (Figure 3.13, detail). The snowdrift overhanging the railroad cut has been illustrated with its layered structure and measured depth, but this information is only important for the way it contrasts with the poet-naturalist’s lyric prose. Ultimately, Thoreau’s schematic illustration is more effective for its dramatization of the technique that completes his description of the natural world by disrupting it, as the image swoops down into the lines of prose below, which elaborate and bring closure to the illustration with the return of narrative format: “often this coping has broken by its own weight and great blocks have fallen down the bank—like smoothed blocks of white marble. The exquisite purity of the snow & the gracefulness of its curves are remarkable.”

A passage that appears to “break with a lustre” would reveal nothing about the enduring inscription of time, if it were not for the measurement of layers in the drift and the general program of calculation for which they were destined. As Thoreau moved the transcendently measured bodies into the rationalized temporal world of the “Table,” he finally dissolved the determining dual structure that delimited absences and that allowed him to measure the world outside of antebellum networks. In the previously empty center of Thoreau’s writing system, then, there lies a field of empty centers, each one opening to receive a sensation plotted accordingly along a horizontal axis of years. This multiplicity of transcendently organized spaces was ultimately the “more truth,” the excess reality, which Thoreau relentless pursued over the course of his writing life. It was perhaps this lifestyle, if not also his training, which motivated Bronson Alcott to assume that Thoreau was a beast in the field of Natural History whose intellect was superior to the “great brain” of Whitman, that other beast. Yet the superior intellect that Alcott ascribed to Thoreau may not have endured his contemporary’s descent into the depths of Natural History and his discovery of the grid-plan at the bottom of it all. Rather, the “more truth” that Thoreau read in Whitman’s 1856 *Leaves of Grass* may have signaled his acknowledgement of the common ground they shared as writers of the world outside.

CHAPTER 4

WHITMAN'S "BROOKLYN FERRY," BEFORE AND AFTER:

THE SUBJECT OF WRITING-IN-TRANSIT

Just as the mythic persona of the “poet-naturalist” provided readers with a subject of the unconventional nature writer, the “poet-driver” posited a new type of subject, who supplemented the turbulence between *Leaves of Grass* and antebellum civic space (see Chapter One). As a poet not only *of* but *in* the city, Whitman turned himself into a true beast in the field of Natural History. Instead of being scandalized by the stuffed specimens of the museum-city, Whitman found organic life in the rhythms of the city. Perhaps that is why Alcott, in the same diary entry where he identified Thoreau and Whitman as “two beasts,” also noted that Whitman bragged about how he “rode sometimes a-top the omnibus up and down Broadway from morning till night beside the driver, and dined afterwards with the whipsters” (*JBA* 289). Thoreau, too, reported to H.G.O. Blake that Whitman “loved to ride up and down Broadway all day on an omnibus, sitting beside the driver, listening to the roar of the carts, and sometimes gesticulating and declaiming Homer at the top of his voice” (*CHDT* 441). For resurrecting the Bard in the thoroughfares of the modern republic, Whitman would always be more of a beast than a man-of-reason.

And yet the New Englanders respected the American Bard in their way. Alcott never maligned Whitman in his diary. He had also visited him before, and would visit after, Thoreau fled to Massachusetts. And Thoreau heard not only beasts but “more truth” in Whitman’s 1856 poetry than he did in the speech of other men. What hasn’t been accounted for is the fact that Thoreau heard this excess truth in two poems in particular: “poem of Walt Whitman an American” (“Song of Myself”) and “Sun-Down Poem,” later re-titled “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” (*CHDC* 444). That Thoreau heard “more truth” in the oscillation between urban and pastoral milieus in “Song of Myself” makes perfect sense. But that he heard this truth in Whitman’s ode to mass transit opens a new line of inquiry into the coexistence of animal speech and excess truth

for the archeologist of determining forms, because his reading suggests that truth could indeed emerge from *inside* the city. As stated at the beginning of the previous chapter, then, the difference between the two writers' conceptions of the outside lies in the position from which they marked the boundaries of that space, and thus drafted their plans for the coming city.

The difference between these two plans, I will argue, is not territorial but technological and "infrastructural." In the 1850s, the United States was renegotiating its boundaries, and this renegotiation was felt in the nation's urban hubs. Thoreau and Whitman do not represent two types of citizens who chose to flee or to reside in the antebellum city; rather, they are representative of the general displacement of subjects, who were pushed out into the American frontier and pulled into the nation's expanding cities. Along with this geographic repositioning by infrastructural technology came differences in technique. Whitman does not seem to have been so intent on the use of specialized tools and their corresponding marks—the "surveyor's tape" and its accompanying "lines and strokes." For Whitman, technique was latent in the structure of materials, such as portable ledgers; he derived his technique from objects on hand. Where Thoreau turned surveying techniques into a transcendental metrics, for Whitman technique exploited the constructed environment of the city: the medium of his writing system.

The Scene of Writing in the City: Bibliography's Imaginary

Because the examination of the link between civic space and writing practice will rely on comparisons of Whitman's published works and manuscripts, the long history of scholarly writing on Whitman's notebooks must be included in this analysis. This long history shares at least one assumption with the current project's extended argument. Scholars of the nineteenth-century American literature—specifically those involved in producing text editions of authors' manuscripts—have consistently found Whitman's notebooks to bear traces of the historical situation in which they were used, thus making the poet's notebooks indexes of his material conditions. Evidence of these conditions will appear in the pages to follow. Before taking that direction, however, I must underscore the difference between the research project at hand and the

long history of scholarship on Whitman's notebooks. In doing so, my goal will not be to pride myself on seeing what others have not so much as it will be to see from a new angle what others have already seen and repeatedly see: the scene of writing. The scene of writing adheres to Whitman's published works and manuscripts perhaps more than other mid-nineteenth-century American authors, even Thoreau. This adhesion results from an understanding of Whitman's works that, I believe, most readers will find undeniable: the proximity of his writings to the concerns of civic life and the city itself.

With this natural fact, it follows that a "scene of writing in the city" is almost always readily constructed for Whitman's readers. And though they may seek the origins of his poetry, readers of the notebooks will find themselves no exception. The second published version of the notebook containing trial lines from "Sun-Down Poem," later known as "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," serves as a case in point. In the introduction to his text edition of the notebook, *Walt Whitman: An 1855-56 Notebook* (1959),⁶⁸ Harold Blodgett writes: "As we read these pages we realize that this notebook is much more than a literary artifact. It is the moving evidence of a poet living his days both in life and yet apart from it, involved and free, possessed of the artist's power to receive and to act, to enjoy and to record" (viii). The correct reading of Blodgett's statement—if a reading is even called for in this case—is that the "moving evidence" of this scene of writing first requires a scene of reading from which the poet's movements can be observed.

The poet's notebook is therefore animated by the reader's experience of history, which is affectively "moving" and effectively animated. Blodgett confirms the double-valence of his pun with a cinematic preview of what will be seen in Whitman's "1855-56 notebook":

Any page will show this to be true,—for example, page ninety, not at all brilliant but illustrative. The poet may be walking down the street. Suddenly an idea for a poem strikes him. Out of his pocket comes an already much-used little red book of ruled paper. He writes: 'Full poem—

⁶⁸ This text was published in a limited edition of 500, signed by the owner of the notebook, Charles Feinberg. I used number 207/500 for this chapter.

Theme—that which involves gladness, joy,—*all out*.’ Some time later the notebook is pulled out again to jot the name of Edward H. Dixon, editor of *Scalpel*, 42 Fifth Avenue. Walt is enormously interested in medical journals if only to pore over the nomenclature of anatomy. Again, he is reminded of an aspect of his country’s tremendously varied industry. Down go two words in a further entry.—‘oilworks’ and ‘candle making.’ The first of these will go into the next revision of the 1855 poem ultimately to be titled ‘A Song for Occupations,’ added to reinforce a line about other ‘works,’—iron, whitelead, and so on. The second will be held in reserve. America’s activities are the poet’s storehouse. All will go down. (xiii-ix)

By the end of the paragraph, Blodgett has transformed the moving image of Whitman, inspired by urban life and scribbling as he walked the streets, into the affecting image of a poet triumphantly harnessing the chaos of modern life with his pen. The double-meaning of “moving,” in this case, is founded upon the reader’s understanding that literature is a privileged medium that transmits sentiment and sympathy, thereby transcending mere consumption, because affective responses to literary texts open worlds. Whitman’s poetry offers no historical fantasia; rather, his poetry describes the present world in all of its impossibility.

In each case, Whitman is a poet who is not only moving but is “moved” in public, and thus can write in public. The poet’s medium is empathy, and with it he transforms the city into a mobilizing condition that unites subjects across space and time. The identity that Blodgett has forged with the help of “moving evidence” invites the reader to become as intimate with the actual poet as the poetic texts themselves ask readers to be. And the closer we, as readers, come to the source of the poetic medium through which we access such affective modes across space and time, the more privileged our access to the subjectivity of the author—until, of course, Blodgett’s subjectivity and our subjectivity become Whitman’s subjectivity. Because Blodgett uses his expertise to fill the gaps between the notebook entries, we readers have to be convinced that he knows what he is doing. At the end of his cinematic projection of literary history, then, he is at liberty to quote Whitman’s notebook without using quotation marks: “All will go down.”

Wielding professional authority, privileged access to the notebook, and the universal medium with which all texts are read, Blodgett introduction to Whitman’s notebook epitomizes the reading and writing practices that have been traced back to at least 1700. Blodgett has only

refined, then, what Whitman himself, by all appearances, forged at a pivotal moment in the history of modern subjectivity. Whitman's conception of subjectivity places that subject in the space of the antebellum city, amidst emergent conditions of industrial-urban circulation. Toward the end of his life, as he prepared his authorial mythology for posterity, the poet played a significant role in cultivating the once and future image of his genesis as an artist for the world-to-come.

A case in point is Richard Maurice Bucke's eclectic biography of the poet, simply titled *Walt Whitman* (1883), which Whitman himself was largely responsible for writing. The text depicts the poet in his early years, "spend[ing] the day in solitude with Nature, walking, thinking, observing the sea and sky, bathing, reading, or perhaps reciting aloud Homer and Shakespeare as he strode along the beach" (21). In this scene, readers will identify the familiar pastoral Whitman, born on the farmlands of Early National Long Island and receiving the poetic tradition as if from the forces of nature itself. The text follows the pastoral scene, however, with what appears to be a counterexample to the first, revealing that the budding poets'

special enjoyment in New York was riding up and down Broadway on an omnibus, sitting in front, watching the crowds and vehicles, and the limitless life of the swarming streets. Or crossing the East River, half the day or half the night in the pilot-houses of Brooklyn ferry-boats, watching the multitudes coming and going, observing the sights on the waters, feeling the quiver of the boat, the strong beat of the paddles, and the rush through the yielding water. (21-22)

In Bucke's biographical text, the shoreline and the city are the two sites determining Whitman's scene of writing. In Whitman's fragmentary memoir *Specimen Days* (1881), he writes that the shores of the south bay of "Paumanok," the "aboriginal name" for Long Island, "are woven all through L. of G." (CPW 13). But he follows this by stating that Rabelais, Cervantes, Homer, and Shakespeare "would have gloated upon" his omnibus driver friends, with whom he would ride, "listening to some yarn...perhaps I declaiming some stormy passge from Julius Ceasar or Richard.... [T]he influence of those Broadway omnibus jaunts and drivers and declamations and escapades undoubtedly enter'd into the gestation of 'Leaves of Grass'" (19). Like Thoreau's "few lines or strokes," his "foot rule" and "surveyor's tape," Whitman's oscillation between

pastoral and urban sites of poetic inspiration drive a wedge into the imaginary conception of the Romantic author and Nature, the subject and the outside world in which it is harmoniously nested.

As Whitman's scene of writing was planned for posterity, it was planned to be at variance with itself. That is, he made the scene of writing a multiplicity of scenes, as if anticipating the subjective binding of the pastoral and the civic, nature and the machine. More generally, the cultivated variance of scenes, their inconsistent ratios of poetic tradition to mere nostalgia, introduces the notion that, whichever readers may choose for subjective reasons, the scenes themselves are falsifiable myths, not fictions to be fitted to the truth. It might be agreed, then, that the shoreline and the city serve as the two primal scenes dividing any historical scene grafted onto the poetry of *Leaves of Grass*, and that, from division, poetics appears. That is not to say that Whitman's poetry was divided between the city and the country, or the modern and the pastoral; rather, I want to demonstrate that Whitman's poetry posits images, scenes, and ideals, but also situates them in a context where any singularity can be verified. His poetry places in circulation a poetics by positing falsifiable truths, and these falsifiable truths are always associated with assumptions about and perceptions of the scenes we inhabit, the world outside of us.

Whitman's "Sun-Down Poem" anticipates the sheer externality of civic space and the role of a poetics to presenting this space outside of the delimitations of objective practices that assume a subject of knowledge and historical achievement. "Sun-Down Poem" is a presentation of poetics in this space that formalizes manuscript practice, so that this practice can be disseminated in print. That is, the poem addresses the way this space comes into existence in the city, circulates in the city, and thus occludes the material conditions from which it came. To read the poem or the notebook in which it began with the preconceived notion of a scene of writing is to resist the way the poem enacts the making of that very scene, or, even better, the making without the scene. Whatever Whitman intended to give his readers in "Sun-Down Poem," he ultimately presented the city as a field of practice in his ode to mass transit, which can be traced

back to the notebook in which he drafted it, though perhaps not to the streets and ferries he knew and loved. Though it may seem as if I am attempting to take away what we readers might know about Whitman, I want to insist that my argument assumes that it will have the opposite result. I want to insist that what readers can know concretely about Whitman's published works and manuscripts, with regards to the historical context of their production and circulation, lies in the traces of practice alone, and that one of the most important consequences of Whitman's interventions as a poet in the history of literary writing is that his works convert the scene of writing and the city at its base into sheer practice.

Among Ruins: Localizing the Past in Cosmopolitan Language

The 294-page notebook known as "Words" is both an archive and the parody of an archive. It is in fact a printed book that the poet repurposed by cutting out almost all of its pages and then pasting scraps of paper to the remaining page stubs. The "Words" notebook can therefore be considered a "filing system," to borrow C. Carol Hollis's phrase (437), consisting of tipped-in scraps that follow no discernible logic or sequence from the front to back cover. The varying color and size of the tipped-in scraps (Figure 4.1), as well as the scraps pasted onto scraps (Figure 4.2), all of which are harvested from diverse sources, do reveal, however, the conspicuous presentation of the "handmade-in-the-readymade": the always potential unbinding of bound inscriptions informing Whitman's poetics. In this notebook lies the model for a way of reading that escapes the scene of writing, because the writing in it is unquestionably as significant as the torn edges of its tipped-in fragments and the residue of paste that stain them. These traces of the notebook's fabrication emphatically express the tentativeness of their bound condition, which slowly moves, day-by-day, toward their originally unbound state. The "Words" notebook is the index of a poetic practice that menaces the scene of writing, because its highly tentative binding doesn't preserve its integral structure so much as the ongoing movement of its composition.

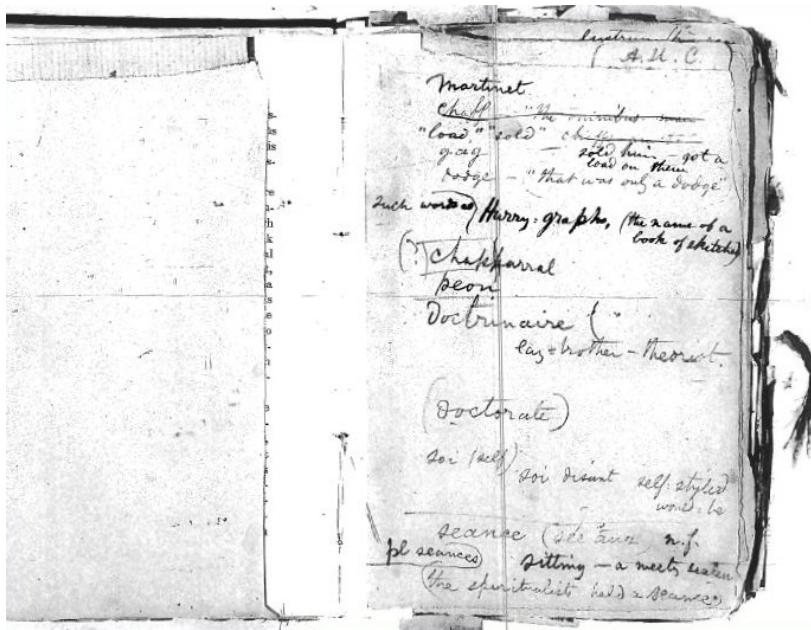


Figure 4.1: Sheet twenty-nine from the “Words” notebook. Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress.

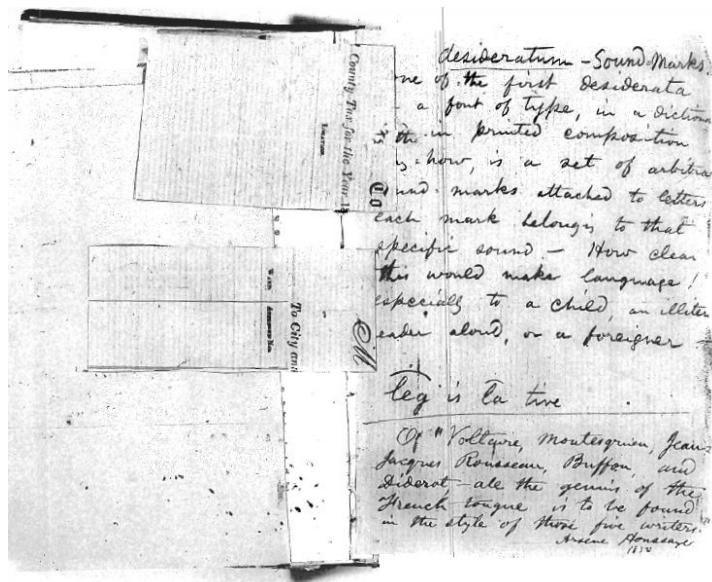


Figure 4.2: Sheet twenty-five of the “Words” notebook, showing scraps (pulled back) pasted over tipped-in scraps. Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress.

The city of the dead that Thoreau rejected in 1843 was the cosmopolitan field for Whitman in 1856. There, he documented the circulation of languages in the antebellum city. The “Words” notebook is emblematic of these changes. It is a documentary form of the fragmentation and always tentative binding process of storage and formatting that would have been as evident in the all-too-temporary social homogeneity of Barnum’s American Museum in the 1840s as in the socially fragmenting civic space of New York City in the 1850s. The “Words” notebook is therefore a type of field notebook, documenting the frayed edges and sutures of antebellum New York as it underwent a process of composition. In advancing this notebook as a model for reading the practice circulated by Whitman’s poetic texts, I will highlight the link that the notebook discloses between Whitman’s use of writing materials and the civic space that he inhabited during the 1850s.

The “Words” notebook is Whitman’s version of the “Field Notes” that are largely missing from the paper trail Thoreau left behind him. In a number of ways, Whitman’s notebook is the inverse of the “Field Notes,” not only because it is extant, but also because its field lies in the cosmopolitan space of antebellum New York City: the natural historical space of the museum-city. As Elizabeth Blackmar states, the urban world of the antebellum decades fostered “a new way of looking at the city’s landscape,” which “in effect commuted land’s use value into exchange value” (161). Under the emerging conditions of antebellum New York’s economic spatial order, the “new way of looking” was facilitated by local and transnational conditions shared by citizens in other industrializing cities of the mid-nineteenth century. What David Scobey has called the “bourgeois international style” of urban planning that spanned the northeastern U.S. through England and Western Europe constituted a cosmopolitan network of common experience, rooted in the uniform production of space (Scobey 166-167). The democratic museum-city was not just a formatting apparatus for mortified New Yorkers, but a global conditioning system with a self-regulating infrastructure, constellating New York, London, and Paris according to a stylistic mandate.

Scholars have had good reason to link the persona of Whitman's urban sketches to the "flâneur," the nineteenth-century figure of the male, urban spectator, both withdrawn from but also curious about the world of his industrial-urban settings—both "in and out of the game," as the "I" of "Song of Myself" was in 1855. The flâneur is most famously associated with the writings of Whitman's French contemporary, Charles Baudelaire. But as Dana Brand has convincingly demonstrated, the flâneur in nineteenth-century France was a modern incarnation of a figure that can be traced back to the urban typologies of the early seventeenth-century "Theophrastian character book" and the urban sketches in Addison and Steele's *The Spectator* in the early eighteenth century.⁶⁹ While Early Modern naturalists established the first museums of Natural History, the English flâneur emerged in "print discourse" just after 1700 as an agent of the scholar's field of practice—a naturalist of the metropolis—whose narratives transformed urban space into an open museum structured by an educated gaze. Given the genealogical relationship between the spaces of museums and the scholar's field of practice, it appears more natural for Thoreau to have the distanced yet interested perspective of the flâneur when observing the patrons of New York's institutions of Natural History.

As the editor of the daily *New York Aurora*, Whitman approached the spectacle that the American Museum made of the antebellum public by turning it inside out. In one of his urban sketches, titled "An Hour in a Balcony," published March 23, 1842, the budding poet, "feeling in an observative mood...went up the stairs of the American Museum, entered the first room, took a chair, placed it in a roomy niche made by the setting in of one of the front windows," and took advantage of the panoramic view of the city outside, rather than the microcosmic world on display in the museum's galleries. "Out before us," he writes, "was the busiest spectacle this busy city can present. One mighty rush of men, business, carts, carriages, and clang." This spectacle does not earn the writer's admiration for its theatrical display of objects in urban space,

⁶⁹ See Brand, chapter two; especially, 24-25 and 33. Brand's book is an extended refutation of the assumption that the flâneur was geographically restricted to Second Empire Paris.

but for the movement it facilitates. “How true it is, what travelers say about our population always being in a hurry,” writes Whitman. “With what restless and feverish steps they move along!” (WWJ 1:66).

In place of Thoreau’s indecision about whether to “muse most” at the stuffed specimens or stuffy citizens of American Natural History, Whitman’s urban sketch turns the spectacle that immobilizes its subjects into a device that opens the citizen’s eyes to the wonders of details in everyday life. Les Harrison has pointed out “the notable lack of references to Barnum’s museum in Whitman’s journalism,” which possibly indicates “that even Whitman the radical democrat of the 1840s and 1850s was never completely comfortable with the cultural practices associated with the American Museum” (171). Both Whitman and Thoreau appear to have acknowledged in the early 1840s that the illusion of a classless society produced by the democratic space of the American Museum introduced more problems than it solved. While Thoreau hated museums, the still-budding urban poet began to develop a writing practice that departed from the democratic spectacle disseminated by public institutions.

These very conditions alienated Thoreau, driving him into the forests, those natural cities, in Concord, where he measured his environment as a space of infinite, localized change. For Whitman, on the other hand, the world was simply immeasurable, as his “out-of-doors” locally signified its cosmopolitan nature. The cosmopolitan world of accelerating, expanding transportation and communication was dead and dying. And yet these emergent conditions were not to be fled or negated but affirmed in Whitman’s writings, for these conditions do not appear to have been wrought by humankind but the constructive force that is only partially named by death. Infrastructure and composition serve as more comprehensive names for the movement that Whitman’s texts identify with death, a movement that leaves its traces in the peculiar material traits of the “Words” notebook, for infrastructure and composition not only refer to that which is put together but also that which breaks and falls apart. Infrastructure and composition also illuminate the coincidence of space and of the record of experience made in it, the distance between civic space and writing being measured by the literary at given moments in history.

When civic space and writing systems harmonize, civic discourse is efficiently channeled. The limitations of what can be said, thought, and accomplished are as clearly established as the walls of an ancient city, which may as well have been spoken into existence. If the movement toward modernity follows multiple pivots, the pivot in the research project at hand turns from the site of the *polis*, harmonically conceived, to the dissonance of the democratic *civitas*, where the self-reliant citizen serves as the emblem of achievement and union but also, in backlighting the first two, the revolutionary overcoming of obstacles. The “Words” notebook serves as an emblem embodying, in a non-contradictory manner, the contradictory nature of the modern city. In addition to the way it bears the traces of its material construction and appears constructed to fall apart, the “Words” notebook supplements its physical form by bearing the traces of the cosmopolitan situation in which it was composed, which was a situation, if not *the* situation, allowing Whitman to break into the discourse channels dominated by figures like Master Emerson.

The materials bound together in the “Words” notebook clearly indicate the motivation to enter these channels.⁷⁰ The eighty-third sheet reads:

Name for lectures
 Lessons En Passant
 Lessons – No. 2 – No. 7, &c&c
 (as “Walt Whitman’s Lessons”) (*DN* 3:685).

The trial names for these “lessons” suggest that the “Words” notebook consisted of materials for Whitman’s projected series of lectures on language, and that he envisioned a cosmopolitan audience attending them. On sheet two hundred twenty-five, several pages of trial names for the lecture series end with a telling cross-section of his era’s popular philosophy and its cosmopolitan culture:

American Lessons In—Transitu

⁷⁰ There is evidence throughout “Words” that Whitman was using the “filing system” to collect materials for a lecture series on the English language, which, fittingly, only ever contributed to his works in print.

In—Transitu

Transcendental Lessons

Original Lessons

First “

Parturition “

Lessons Accouché

[drawing of hand pointing to the above.] (*DN* 3:712)

What were “Lessons En Passant,” an adverb adapted from French, meaning “in passing” or “by the way,” are here “In-transitu,” an adverb adapted from Latin, meaning “In passing, or on the way out.” Whitman would have found both in his copy of Noah Webster’s 1844 *American Dictionary of the English Language*, which serves as a source text for inscriptions on several scraps of the “Words” notebook, as well as a target for his critique of American lexicography.⁷¹ In considering possible titles for his lectures on language, Whitman considers American English to be a linguistic system equipped with the scholarly authority of dead languages and the worldliness of Europe’s power language. For the citizen who wanted to enter the city’s discourse channels, where “Transcendental Lessons” reigned supreme, all he needed was time, a dictionary and some writing materials.

The title “Lessons Accouché,” however, is a wildcard on the list of trial titles, because, first, it is grammatically incorrect—the French modifier takes an “s” when the noun is plural—and, second, it is not in Webster’s lexicon. The words “accouplement” and “accoucheur,” meaning, respectively, “the act of giving birth” and “a male assisting a birth,” can be found in the 1844 *Dictionary*, however, and both words are derived from the same verb as the past participle “accouché”: “accoucher,” or “to give birth.” Given that the latter does not appear in the lexical source text, it might be assumed that Whitman used another source for his erroneous “frenchism,” but it is just as likely—if not more so—that he took the liberty of coining the

⁷¹ For Whitman’s critique of Webster’s 1844 *Dictionary*, see *DN* 3:716-18. References to Webster’s are from Hallen.

expression himself, with a little help from the environmental conditions in which he was immersed. Unlike Latin, French was in the air in antebellum New York City; it was a language system that Whitman might have picked up “en passant,” or even “in-transitu,” on New York’s cosmopolitan streets, where the “preserved death” of the museum-city wasn’t the only condition shaping the masses, as foreign languages circulated through the city, overlapping, converging and “giving birth” to new words and new languages.

The scene of the antebellum city was, in one sense, fragmented and animated by its cosmopolitan community. If the “Words” notebook is both a study and a critique of antebellum lexicography, it is because Whitman’s research extended to the languages encountering and recreating themselves in the transnational and transient environment of New York street-life. Whitman’s course of study accepts the necessity of textual editions like Webster’s *Dictionary* while taking for granted that it is necessarily limited by stabilizing guides to the natural life of language, which is already circumscribed by the urban space allotted for its encounter with its multiple, national strains. In language, in its movement and intercourse, then, lay the resolution to the static presentation of nature in the museum-city—unless, of course, the lexicon and the lecture hall were allowed to bury American English alive.

The “Words” notebook therefore provides evidence of Whitman’s determination to enter the discourse channels that disseminated philological and lexicographic theories and practices, from texts as well as podiums. But the same body of evidence demonstrates why the poet’s inchoate lecture series was never fixed in a stable binding and never profited from the ideal space of the lecture hall. Beyond the binding of dictionaries, and outside the Lyceum, the theory and practice of language remained in the streets, where words abolished the taxidermy-effect of discourse channels and accounted for the emergent system that would outgrow the universalizing institutional framework of Natural History. That is why two linguistic systems—the common English of the urban working class and cosmopolitan signs—overlap on various sheets of the “Words” notebook, as they do on sheet twenty-nine: “~~ehaff ‘The omnibus man chaffs another.’~~ / ‘load’ ‘sold’—sold him—got a load on them / gag / dodge—(‘that was only a dodge’)” (DN 3:

672-673, Figure 4.1). Though it is crossed out, the “omnibus man” who “chaffs another,” along with “load,” “sold,” “gag” and “dodge,” reveal that Whitman was documenting language systems not yet documented in the scholar’s field of practice. On the same page, the English “peon,” or “péon” in French, referring in both languages to a member of the laboring or peasant class, resonates with the working class omnibus drivers at the top of the page. Other French words and phrases, such as “soi (self) / soi-disant self-styled would-be,” when considered in relation to the slang at the top of the page, build on the linguistic constitution of working class identity at the top of the sheet with the cosmopolitan multi-valence of French.

While the inscriptions on this other sheets present the way street-talk and cosmopolitan diction intersected in 1850s New York, they could not do so if readers restricted themselves to the image of Whitman’s scene of writing in the city. Rather, what must be examined is the way the poet’s inscriptions document the oscillation between textual sources and public resources, thereby measuring the field of practice he discovered in the street of antebellum New York. More than any other language system available to Whitman in the 1850s, French words were vectors, both symbolically fractured by political revolution and indicative of the possibilities opened by a cosmopolitan network of exchange. In the 1850s, French had become a democratized instrument of self-improvement, as foreign language dictionaries and self-instruction books proliferated in the literary marketplace of antebellum cities like New York in response to the rapidly expanding middle class’ need for a language with which to articulate their cosmopolitan world.⁷² While the majority of the population would still have been priced-out of

⁷² A few of the titles published prior to the 1855 *Leaves* were F.C. Meadows’s *A New French and English Pronouncing Dictionary* (1835; 1855), Charles Fleming and J. Tibbins’s *A New and Complete French/English and English/French Dictionary* (1846; 1855), Norman Pinney’s *Practical French Teacher* (1849) and *Progressive French Reader* (1850), Alexander Spiers and Gabriel Surenné’s *French and English Pronouncing Dictionary* (1852), Alexander Collot’s *New and Improved Standard French/English and English/French Dictionary* (1852), and Jean Roemer’s *Dictionary of English Idioms with their French Translation* (1853). Additionally, Appleton & Co. offered ten books in *The Literary Union* of January 1850. They are: Alexander Collot’s *Dramatic French Reader* (\$1), Alain de Fivas’s *Elementary French Reader* (50 cents), DeFivas’s *Classic French Reader for Advanced Students* (\$1), Heinrich G. Ollendorff’s *Elementary French Grammar* (50 cents), Ollendorff’s *New Method of Learning French* (\$1), *Key to Ollendorf’s New Method* (75 cents), F. Rowan’s *Modern French Reader* (75 cents), Gabriel Surenné’s *French Pronouncing Dictionary* (\$1.50), Victor Value’s edition of Ollendorff’s *New*

second language acquisition, the fact that there were sixteen different French phrase books, grammar books, and “readers” available on the commercial market by 1850 reveals the public demand for such edifying texts of self-instruction.

In 1856, Whitman published an article on the history of language, featuring a user-friendly list of French words. Whatever his commercial motives may have been for publishing the article, it is at least indicates that French was a foreign language system circulating at a notably high level in the cosmopolitan locus of antebellum New York. Titled “America’s Mightiest Inheritance” and published in the April 12, 1856, issue of *Life Illustrated*, the journal of the phrenological firm Fowler and Wells, also the publishers of the 1856 *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman’s article ends with an “Appendant for Working-People, Young Men and Women, and for Boys and Girls.” After a concluding note on pronunciation, the “Appendant” provides the reader with “A few Foreign Words, mostly French, put down Suggestively.” “Allons” appears on the list (*NYD* 62). French words appeared in Whitman’s poetry in greater numbers over the course of the 1850s because the language was part of the cosmopolitan system of the world articulated by his poems. Unlike Greek and Latin, which would have been less immediately useful to the rising urban middle class, French words were living signs—linguistic vectors potentially enhancing the individual citizen’s mobility in the emergent world of cosmopolitan circulation. And yet, while the proliferation of self-help books that naturalized French for domestic use likely provided Whitman and other middle-class citizens access to French words, the other source for Whitman’s French was just as likely to have come from the city streets.

The cultural exchange-value of French for New York’s middle-class could only have been complicated by the meetings and demonstrations of the “French red republicans” in the 1850s.⁷³ These gatherings, notes Mark Lause, were well-known to New Yorkers who, like

and Easy System of Learning French (in press), and a *New and Complete French and English Dictionary* (in press) (*The Literary Union* January 1850, 63). In the same advertisement four such books are advertised for German, three for Italian, and six for Spanish language acquisition.

⁷³ See Lause 68. As Lause points out, Americans in Whitman’s bohemian circle in the late 1850s, such as Henry Clapp and Clapp’s friend, the Fourierist Ira B. Davis, “regularly paraded through

Whitman, spent much of their time in the public spaces of lower Manhattan. In the March 10, 1855, issue of the *New York Times*, just months before the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* was published, a “New-York City” column expressed the banality of seeing red republicans in Manhattan: “In extemporized residences on the lines of railways in course of construction, we have seen Ireland. In lager-bier saloons we have looked on Germany. France is not strange to us who have attended Red Republican festivals” (8). French was not the only foreign language thriving among the multiple immigrant cultures of antebellum New York City, nor was the French immigrant population the city’s largest. Nevertheless, French was mobilized in antebellum New York, rising in popularity but falling in value, eruptive as well as cohesive. The tension at work in the francophone language system had reached a new phase in midcentury New York, as French became an instrument of democratic self-improvement for the petit-bourgeoisie, while being simultaneously paraded through the city’s streets on banners reading “Liberté! Fraternité! Egalité!”: a sign of crushed revolution living on in the face of adversity, in an emergent space allotted for it to circulate.

The intersection of street-talk and French words on sheet twenty-nine of the “Words” notebook measures the indeterminate space of circulation between Whitman’s course of study through textual sources and also through his documentation of the shifting status of language in the antebellum city’s public spaces. If the scholar’s diseased perspective shaped the dead museum-cities of New York and London, as Thoreau observed in his Journal, then Whitman pieced this perspective together and ended up with something else entirely: the multiple trajectories, the divergences, and the encounter of language with itself, albeit in different tongues. The “Words” notebook therefore constitutes a record of the scholar’s diseased perspective being held together by the excess, the “more truth,” that emerges in spite of the museum-city’s stabilizing framework. That is, whether the urban scene of writing or the binding

lower Broadway honoring the revolutionary experience abroad as ‘Universal Democratic Republicans’” See also 22-27, 68-79.

of language in lexicons is being referred to, the scene and its language are tentatively bound in Whitman's "Words" notebook. The movement of composition brings both the scene of writing in the city and the language that circulates in the city—not to mention the revolutionary flipside of its bourgeois majority—into relation with themselves. This inevitable doubling is the result of the practice of writing-in-transit.

To say that the "Words" notebook is Whitman's version of the "Field Notes" is to say that it brings the naturalist's field of practice into relation with itself, or with the urban institutional ensembles that facilitate it, and that it doesn't account for. If the way that Thoreau and Whitman shared in common their status as writers of the outside, as beasts in the naturalist's field of practice, is taken into consideration, then the Bard's documentation of the life-world of language on New York's cosmopolitan streets comes as close to nature diary-writing as it does to on-the-spot journalistic writing. Traces of Whitman's curiosity about the naturalist's field of practice from the 1850s appear to have been motivated by his attempts to acquire the scholarly training he had never received, as with his language studies. They might even have been carried out simultaneously, not only to satisfy a common desire to acquire the scholarly training he lacked, but to bring the generic form of self-edification to the character of his published works.

In the notebook given the number "4" and gathered with fifteen notebooks that William White has named, "Other Notebooks, &c. on Words," begins with a description of the "wood drake," the first item on a list of four birds taken from naturalist J.P. Giraud's *The Birds of Long Island* (1844). The list of four birds provides information on their coloring, migration habits, measurements, and songs, in a more or less inconsistent fashion that also reduces Giraud's pages of description for each specimen to a few lines (*DN* 3:770-771). Consultation with Giraud's text also reveals that Whitman avoided Linnaean nomenclature—the "wood drake" also being given as *Anas sponsa* by Giraud—thus restricting the poet's list to the natural or common names of his assorted specimens (312). Where Thoreau began developing a poetics of nature writing by linking the body and the earth through the letters of dead languages, Whitman was learning to

“incarnate” the nation’s “geography and natural life” (*LG* 1:iv) by taking notes on books of Natural History.

William White states that the poet’s transcribed ornithological descriptions correspond to lines referring to the “wood-drake” and “wood-duck” in the 1855 version of “Song of Myself,” thus suggesting that a manuscript in the objective form of a list of birds adapted from a book of Natural History could also be a poetry manuscript (*NUPM* 1:770-771, n3476).⁷⁴ Yet a reading of natural historical inscriptions in notebook “4” cannot be limited to its account of wildlife specimens alone, for the notes following the list of birds reveal Whitman’s expansive view of the naturalist’s field, such as notes on language, poetic theory, and Greek theatre. What these traces reveal is not an attempt to become a naturalist or scholar, but the opportunism of a dilettante in a field saturated with overflowing discourse channels. As he developed his modern democratic poetics, the American Bard pursued a course of study that followed the movement of knowledge in circulation during the 1850s.

With this in mind, consider that most of the poems added to the 1856 edition of *Leaves of Grass* are poems that are about nature, or that are set in a non-urban environment. The poems, however, are not about nature so much as they are about the “preserved death” of Natural History and the reanimation of its mortifying effect through practice. In the 1856 “nature poems,” Whitman’s conception of nature is rooted in his conception of the act of writing, which, when informed by scientific discourse, is the process of positioning and re-positioning identity in a transient world-system that appears to rely on the circulation of language. “Poem of Sayers of the Words of the Earth” makes an explicit comparison between nature, language, and the formation of civic bodies.⁷⁵ The poem defines the elements of poetic composition negatively, while presenting them as being integral to a process of production: “The workmanship of souls is

⁷⁴ See Miller 28, for a claim that the list of birds serves as a possible formal precedent for Whitman’s breakthrough free-verse line.

⁷⁵ This poem received its final title, “A Song of the Rolling Earth,” in 1881.

by the inaudible words of the earth / The great masters, the sayers, know the earth's words, and use them more than the audible words" (16-17). Unlike Emerson's "Poet," a heroic figure with privileged access to the "fossil poetry" buried in the earth's strata, "the inaudible words of the earth" perform the labor of "The workmanship of souls," while the "sayers" only know them.

This distinction is all the more striking given that "Poem of Sayers" evades another Emersonian maneuver by eliminating the possibility of an analogical correspondence between the work of the earth's words and the communicative function of writing, when the poem claims: "The truths of the earth" are "untransmissible by print" (26). Because the poem presents itself as a failed oral phenomenon three lines later, it can only negate itself and throw its own value into question: "I speak not, yet if you hear me not, of what avail am I to you?" (29). That the earth's "truths" cannot be transmitted by print would suggest that the "sayers" are the transmitters of the earth's truths. The negation of the transmissibility of truth by way of print, however, leads the text to question its value in the face of its inaudibility, short-circuiting assumptions about the auditory origins and destiny of words. The fiction of hearing through the print medium, whether read in silence or aloud, is therefore negated in "Poem of Sayers," but this negation is the affirmative articulation of the "truths of the earth," letter by letter.

This contradiction can only be generative in the printed poem, where the work of words ironically negates the print medium by admitting, "I speak not," while also affirming its inaudible truth as it responds to its own limitations: "To bear—to better—lacking these, of what avail am I?" (30). In questioning the limitations of the medium that would transmit its truths, "Poem of Sayers" negates the possibility of its transmission of the "truths of the earth," only to affirm print's ability to do the silent work that words do when the reader stops imagining that it already has a voice and begins listening instead. Only then are the earth's "truths" articulated by the display of text—a display of the practice of writing. Only then are truths displayed in the process of affirmative negation, not memorializing what is left out, but writing-in the labor that it cumulatively marks.

The study of language systems returns here by way of the naturalist's field of practice. Following my reading of "Poem of Sayers," I want to underscore the function of linguistic mediation as a formal presentation of what can be spoken and what cannot be spoken at the same time. As in chapters one and two, it is not what language signifies so much as what shapes it, what it marks, and what it indicates in the structure of presentation that is of interest, for the practice I seek to articulate in Whitman's published works and manuscripts lies in the result of an activity that is still taking place. What is spoken and what is unspoken are in the process of being composed—of being bound together and falling out-of-place—as modeled by the material state of the "Words" notebook. But Whitman's study of language is not restricted to the "Words" notebook, but extends to other manuscripts reflecting the same course of study, and traversing the spaces of the naturalist's and the philologist's fields.

In the gathering of loose sheets numbered "15," also known as "Words for an Intended Dictionary,"⁷⁶ Whitman assembled French words, American idioms, scientific terminology, and fragmented notes on the history of the English language (Figure 4.3). No self-evident system unifies the assemblage apart from the vestiges of columns, which occasionally organize inscriptions to the right and left of the manuscript page. The logic behind this inconsistent organizational strategy is not in evidence, however. Many of the materials for the "Intended Dictionary" appear to have been culled from Spiers and Surette's *Dictionary*, Maximilian Schele De Vere's *Outlines of Comparative Philology* (1853), and Webster's 1844 *Dictionary*. Given the absence of alphabetical order, or any other prescribed order, the linguistic source texts do not appear to have shaped the assemblages in notebook "15." The poet does not appear to have pursued a course of study that can be called linguistic in nature because his notes exceed lexical source texts, just as they exceed books of Natural History. And yet, in following the

⁷⁶ In DN 3, William White titles the five leaves (recto/verso) of which this MS is comprised "notebook 15." The MS is in the Charles E. Feinberg collection of Walt Whitman papers at the Library of Congress. The microfilm of the Feinberg, in consultation with White's transcription, has been used for this chapter.

traces of Whitman's research project, what takes shape in notebook "15" is a conceptual system of source texts and their accompanying precepts: a discourse network of history, language, and natural science, which might be consolidated under the commonplace of Natural History, but which appears to be formulated in the ostensibly disordered traces of practice that Whitman has left behind him. While no clear precedent for the logic determining the traces of Whitman's course of study is in evidence, what is in evidence is a field of relations deriving its order from the excess of a previous order and the emergence of another system of composition.

Halfway down the first page of the manuscript a note on the history of the English language, likely adapted from de Vere's *Outlines*, states that the "Norman followed [the Danes, Scots, and Norwegians]" and added the "scion of French" to the English language during the Norman invasions of England in the twelfth century. Below this note is written: "Commerce imports words as well as wares from all parts of the earth." And beneath this constellation of linguistic history and global economy appear idiomatic phrases copied from a French dictionary: "accouche! accouchez!" and "acheve! achievez!," meaning "speak up!" or "out with it!" in English. The fact that the imperatives have been copied from a dictionary or phrase-book is confirmed by the poet's transcription of the second-person singular/familiar tense ("accouche!") with the plural/formal tense ("accouchez!") of the verb "accoucher." In fact, the imperatives do appear in that very way and with the same definition ("out with it!") in Spiers and Surette's *Pronouncing Dictionary*. They also appear that way, though without the lexical definition, in "Poem of Sayers": "Accouche! Accouchez!," commands the text. "Will you rot your own fruit in yourself there? / Will you squat and stifle there?" (31-33). As the only line of French in the poem, the break in the linguistic register adds an eruptive force to the poet's otherwise standard exclamatory imperatives.

Given its phrase-book appearance of the line, it also explicitly refers to the material composition of the poem by means of the decomposition of its source texts. The correspondence between the earth's inaudible truths and the truths "untransmissible in print" is materially instantiated, then, by the direct transposition of a line from a French phrase-book, which puns,

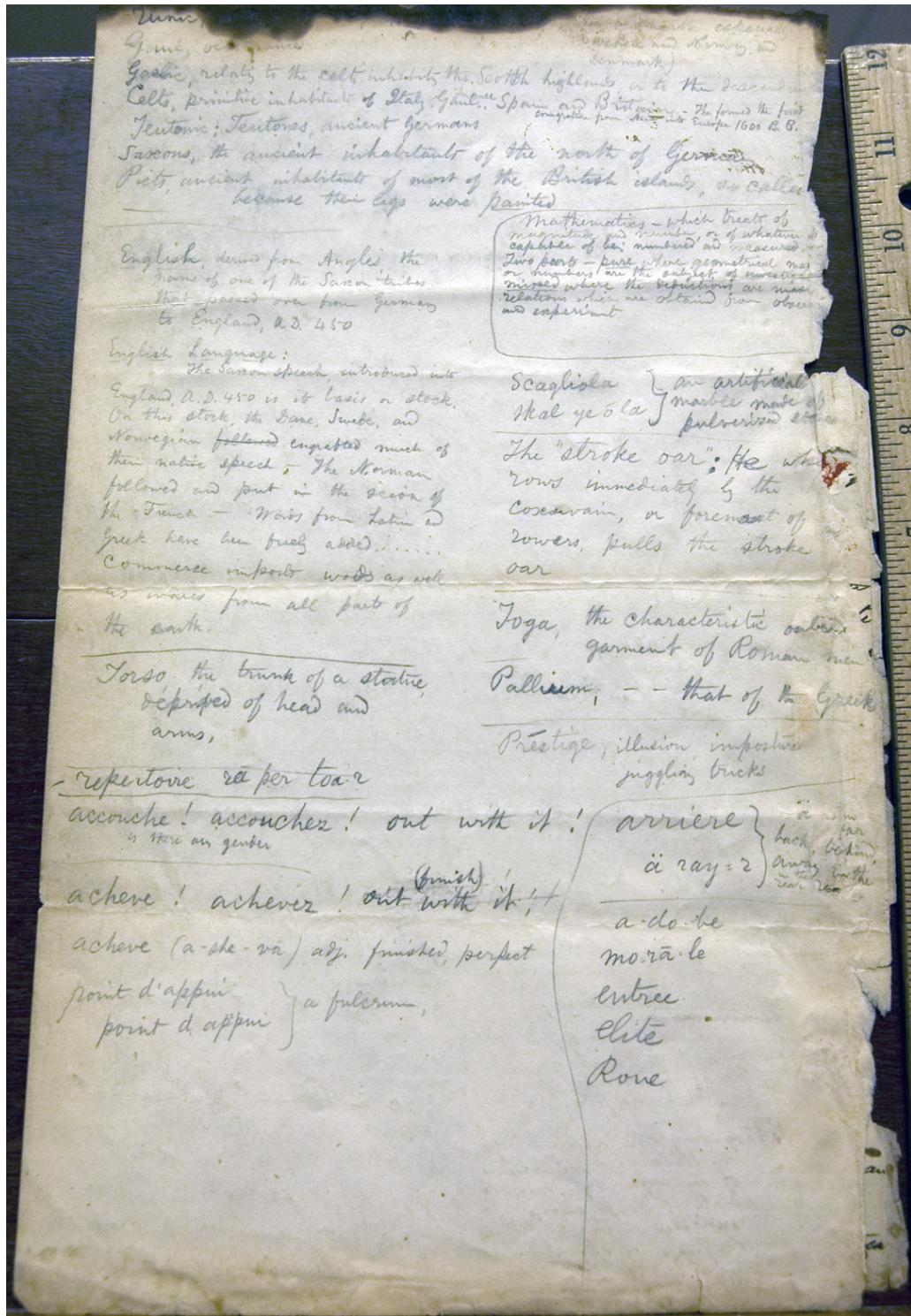


Figure 4.3: Page one of notebook "15." Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of *The Walt Whitman Archive*.

not linguistically, but materially, as it demands externalization (“out with it!”) of linguistic “fruit.” Poetic diction is not the fruit of the mouth, however, but the labor of culling, or “gleaning,” the fruits of the antebellum era’s flood of textual sources. The disruptive appearance of “Accouche! accouchez!” presents the decomposition of source texts as the laboring movement that amounts to poetic composition. The reader is informed earlier in “Poem of Sayers” that poetic composition by decomposition is an embodied process, for “In the best poems re-appears the body, man’s or woman’s, well-shaped, natural, gay.” So the elements, “Air, soil, water, fire, these are words, / I myself am a word with them—my qualities interpenetrate with theirs—my name is nothing to them” (11-13). When the poem erupts, “Accouche! accouchez!,” identity and environment have been reduced not to linguistic elements, but to language acquisition in the embodied, material practice of composition.

The French imperatives in “Poem of Sayers” bear the material traces of an embodied training process that does not produce the “sayer” of the earth’s truths, but their “singer”: a body whose physical training and physical impact on listeners is not restricted to the transmissible content of audible words. The “I” therefore utters a seemingly paradoxical line that is in fact consistent with training and the material decomposition of source texts: “I swear I begin to see little or nothing in audible words! / I swear I think all merges toward the presentation of the unspoken meanings of the earth! / Toward him who sings the songs of the body, and of the truths of the earth, / Toward him who makes the dictionaries of the words that print cannot touch” (101-104). When read in light of the text’s materialist display of self-instruction, the singer is emblematic of the trained “body” of the text that articulates the earth’s truths as it shapes its “presentation” line by line: a structure of improvement, “to bear” and “to better.” Print cannot touch this presentation because the presentation lies in the direct transposition of “Accouche! accouchez!” Presentation lies in the frayed edges of the materials presented in the “copy book” character of the poem, which follows the logic of the amateur, who, without formal training, constructs the scholar’s field of practice as a field of animated by the relations emerging in excess of the museum-city.

Once the practical structure of “Poem of Sayers” is displayed, the methodical reduction of the earth and the individual to the work of words stops short at presenting the structure of self-improvement from amounting to a new representation of the external world of nature or of the internal world of the Protestant subject by expanding the work of words to the project of civic construction: “When the materials are all prepared, the architects shall appear, / I swear to you the architects shall appear without fail! I announce them and lead them!” (129-130). Because the poem has in effect presented the preparation of materials in its structure of self-improvement, the “I” that has edified itself for one hundred and thirty lines can finally announce and lead those who will design the new civic body. But the very fact that this self-edified “I” announces and leads the “architects” suggests that the presentation of its own construction in the poem serves as the foundation for the emergent nation.

The work of civic construction announced at the end of “Poem of Sayers” not only follows the logic of construction through self-improvement, but also bears the traces of the field of relations from notebook “15” and the “Words” notebook. Where “Accouche! accouchez!” links the manuscript and printed poem, the intersection of history, language, and economy in the manuscript is gradually configured in the work of words, the training of the singer, and the coming-to-order of the civic body. And yet these three elements do not constitute a determining cultural-economic precondition for Whitman’s poetics, for what these three thematic elements have in common is their reducibility to construction as a calculable multiplicity: the sum with a value untransmissible by the symbolic functions of tradition, signs, and money. In “Poem of Sayers,” history, language, and economy transmit the labor of improvement that links the individual with the environment by reducing them to labor without content and yet attributing meaning to their remains by presenting them undergoing the process of edification in their state of “preserved death.” Edification is their only point, as the only sum derived from this process is the process itself: the field of relations that takes place in the labor of words. The coming civilization of industrial-urban modernity will be built, line by line, by a nation of citizens who,

being untrained, train themselves and in doing so prepare the way for unprecedented designs, civic projects, and civic bodies.

In the open field of antebellum textual culture the work of words has prepared the materials for embodying the work that the textual field has opened to them: for the re-articulation of the scholar's field of practice through the constructive process of public improvement. This process is neither environmentally determined nor individually motivated, but is the calculable effect of an overwhelming quantity of knowledge as it loses its traditional shape. In Whitman's nature poems of 1856, then, decomposition is presented as the scientific basis for production and the embodied practice of self-improvement line by line. It displays the world as a space in transition and as a transient space built by disruptive transpositions, not continuous tradition; by material texts, not linguistic atoms pregnant with inner knowledge and thus attracted to others like them; by the perversity of addition for its own sake, not the accumulation of value. This tripartite configuration of the emerging world of scientific decomposition in practice and its implementation on the civic level is amplified in "Poem of the Road,"⁷⁷ another poem added to the 1856 *Leaves*.

Although it appears before "Poem of Sayers" in the order given to the texts in the 1856 edition, "Poem of the Road" applies the affirmative direction of composition in "Poem of Sayers" to nineteenth-century public improvements. Consistent with Whitman's conception of nature in "Poem of Sayers," tradition and value are subtracted from history and economy by the "copy book" presentation of language:

To take the best of the farmer's farm and the rich man's elegant villa, and
 the chaste blessings of the well-married couple, and the fruits of
 orchards and flowers of gardens!
 To take to your use out of the compact cities as you pass through!
 To carry buildings and streets with you afterward wherever you go!
 To gather the minds of men out of their brains as you encounter them! to
 gather the love out of their hearts!
 To take your own lovers on the road with you, for all that you leave them
 behind you!

⁷⁷ The poem would receive its final title, "Song of the Open Road," in 1867.

To know the universe itself as a road—as many roads—as roads for traveling souls! (181-185)

Without an “I” to ground them in time, the infinitive phrases that open spaces, social relations, and possible trajectories are fragments without a system or network to link them together. Like a grammar exercise requiring the student to conjugate the phrases by adding a subject to them, the lines present the reader with a civic body fragmented by its cosmic expansion along circulation routes that require citizens “To know the universe itself as a road—as many roads.”

As the poem differentiates spaces, bodies, and conduits, then, it calls for a subject willing to adapt to the conditions of cosmic expansion, while also opening the possibility for this subject on the “many roads” “for traveling souls” at the infinitive opening of every line. For that very reason, however, this subject belongs to the “universe” that tallies roads as much as it does to every particular line leading up to it: each line, including the “universe” itself being latent with the composition, in time, that only the addition of the subject can implement. The cosmic infrastructure that mobilizes the “traveling souls” of “Poem of the Road” therefore develops from the “workmanship” of the earth’s words, dissolving privileged identity and a hierarchy of spaces, to leave the “I” constituted by the cosmic infinitude of the field of relations itself.⁷⁸ Although expansive as Emerson’s “Order,” Whitman’s road is not an all-encompassing spiritual body, but a vector that orders entities in a field of relations as it anticipates bodies, subjects, and civic structures.

On Whitman’s cosmic road, then, French words erupt with material force, as they do in “Poem of Sayers.” Unlike the eruptive phrase-book transposition of “Accouche! accouchez!,” however, the first-person plural imperative, “Allons!,” or “let’s go!,” in “Poem of the Road” has

⁷⁸ In the 1855 Preface of *Leaves of Grass*, the word “kosmos” is used interchangeably to refer to the macrocosmic ensemble of planets, to groups of people, and to individuals. For example, in the 1855 Preface, Whitman writes: “The American bards...shall be kosmos” (*LG* 1:vii). He also writes: “the attributes of the poets of the kosmos concentrate in the real body and soul” (ix). And then he also writes: “the gangs of kosmos and prophets en masse shall take their place” (xi). The interchangeable use of “kosmos” suggests that the poet’s conception of the “kosmos” was not limited to a relation between “microcosms” and “macrocosms,” though there is evidence of part-to-whole and whole-in-part correspondences throughout his writings.

the character of a rallying cry or revolutionary street sign. Repeated thirteen times over the course of the second half of the poem, “Allons!” directs “traveling souls” to join the collective and cosmopolitan movement over the roads that link up spaces, bodies, and even more expanding routes between them. The historical resonances of the imperative are clearly intoned as well as complex and overlapping. The revolutionary sound of the French rallying cry cannot be disconnected from its historical relation to the bloody “terreur” and France’s ongoing political turmoil, but neither can it be disconnected from its role, however constructed, as a sign of social mobility in the antebellum city, as the “phrase-book” character of “Accouche! accouchez!” suggests.

The Coming City: Infrastructure, Mathematics, Poetics

Though the “Words” notebook mainly addresses linguistic matters, its contents reflect the eclectic nature of Whitman’s course of study in Natural History. Due to its eclectic character, the notebook is an artifact whose inscriptions and material state are tentatively bound and thus falling apart, though the notebook is not a work of decomposition in the sense that I have given to the word in chapter two. Rather, as I have attempted to demonstrate the notebook is sheer composition, or as conspicuously built as it is fragile. More this compositional character extends from its binding to its graphite. All that Thoreau wrote-out—marked in manuscript, excavated and refined in proceeding toward his transcendental metrics—Whitman wrote-in. Whitman’s inscriptions are not shaped by the repressed and conserved edges of scholarly practice, so they will not be returned either. The American Bard’s edges are frayed, and fraying, at the site of encounter between the true and the false, Order and the emergent order that will redeem the excess truth stirred up by circulation.

The “Words” notebook therefore embodies, in a single bound object, a possible composition of a unified field of practice that it does not bring to light so much as it brings together the multiplicity from which it is composed, as if for the first time. Where Natural History represented the pervasion of a homogenizing and mortifying field of practice for

Thoreau, and thus a determining force to be written-out and reduced to its elementary particles, for Whitman Natural History materialized the invisible constitution of civic space and the public body shaped by it. For Thoreau, the city was a museum, and the museum consolidated the antebellum public as Nature, stuffed and on display. For Whitman, architecture and infrastructure were configured for the production and circulation of the perspective constituting the museum-city, and this perspective, in turn, had to be cultivated in practice. Only by practicing self-representation for display in the museum-city could the living be the dead, fixed in the eternity of the here and the now, from the past for the present.

While Thoreau conducted surveys for the planning of new streets, new infrastructures, in growing Concord, Whitman wrote-in-transit, monitoring the city's movements and planning a practice, a poetics, fitted to the conditions configured by the infrastructure of the emergent order. This poetics can be calculated formulaically in a properly schematized field of practice. In the 1850s, poetics had a formula, in order to be placed in circulation as a practice in Whitman's published works. Just as the frayed edges and sutures of practice can be marked and quantified in Thoreau's Journal, in Whitman's 1856 poetry the movement of death linking infrastructure to infrastructure will be counted and re-counted, in grasping the elements that the poem composes into the self-representative scene of writing in the city. A single inscription in the "Words" notebook reveals the way the formulation of practice is integral to the poetics of Whitman's course of study in that scene and the text of "Sun-Down Poem":

Words of figures—or rather the figures themselves
—for
Figures are words
every number ~~an~~ or calculation in numbers is a poem. (*DN* 3:682)

The last line of the brief meditation on this scrap, assigned the number sixty-nine by William White, is not only of interest to poets, but to everyone who uses numbers to count and to calculate sums. If Whitman's inscription is taken at its word, then it reveals that the American Bard, for at least one fragmentary moment, believed that mathematics is poetry, because words and figures, though spurring the imagination, are still calculable in the wake of such effects.

The inscription has expansive consequences, for it implies that numbers and the most banal use of them, such as the application of linear numerical order to any sequence of disordered or un-numbered elements, might be poetry. The same would have to be true, then, for the enumeration of scraps tipped-into the “Words” notebook. Now, the scraps are numbered by necessity, because this numbering constructs a logical framework that allows “Words” to be an object of study, instead of a composition of scraps pasted into a recycled binding. When White provides the heading, “[69:green sheet:]” (*DN* 3:682) for the scrap inscribed with “Words of figures,” he doesn’t just inform the reader of the numerical order in which the fragment appears in the notebook, as well as its color in the spectrum of the poet’s “filing system.” Rather, he applies that order, and, in doing so, he gives the “Words” notebook a plan and a direction, both of which are preserved by his calculation of the notebook’s pages. And yet the book into which the scrap has been pasted quite literally has no pages. Whitman removed those pages and their order, so that he could tip-in scraps in an order that cannot be deciphered with any certitude.

By adapting universal laws to the historical moment in which he prepared his text edition, William White became a poet. To be clear, however, I want to emphasize that the poetic character of his act depends not only on Whitman’s inscription but on the peculiar material state of the “Words” notebook. The enumeration of loose papers gathered in a file folder, for instance, only counts what may be added to or subtracted from that gathering in time. Perhaps not every calculation is poetry, then, but calculation under certain conditions—conditions which defy the permanence and universality of numerical order, or which falsify that order in time as that which is calculated changes, falls apart, and thus continues to compose itself. To count the scraps whose tenuous hold on their recycled binding has replaced the ostensible permanence of their numbered predecessors juxtaposes the potentially infinite order of enumeration with the object that embodies its tentatively composed finitude.

If one of the most identifiable effects of Whitman’s poetry lies in its ability to convince the reader that finitude has been transcended and the infinite gained in the act of reading, then isn’t the material finiteness of the “Words” notebook and the mathematical infinity of the

numbers assigned to its “sheets” the realization of the same play of finitude and infinity in a different genre, the text edition of a handwritten, handmade artifact? Or better, hasn’t this genre realized Whitman’s play of finitude and infinity as a poetics, as composition in practice, because it involves an object whose very form is its composition, and whose composition is then formulated mathematically for circulation, this formula itself being necessary to the circulation of practice? My own affirmative response to these questions will proceed by way of demonstration, as I conclude this chapter by extending my observations about the “Words” notebook and the count that it invites—indeed, demands—to a reading of “Sun-Down Poem” and the notebook in which it was originally drafted.

What the “Words” notebook stubbornly presents to any conservational desire for universal and eternal effects is the finitude that drives it, because the notebook’s constitutive fragility reveals numerical order to be necessary for conservational and communal purposes, and yet absolutely conditioned by the situation delimited by any calculation. In a surprising encounter between scholarship and poetics, the inscription that states “every number or calculation in numbers is a poem” posits a universal law for both scholar and poet: to designate an unnumbered fragment the sixty-ninth in a sequence that has displaced the linear order preceding it, and that may slough off any order applied to it over the course of time, adds up to a poetics, which formalizes the tension between finitude-infinitude and circulates it. This law does not secure for all eternity the numerical order applied to a given array of elements; rather, it guarantees calculation infinitely by means of the finitude of composition. Infinity, under conditions that remain historically circumscribed, is a falsifiable sum, and yet it fits itself to the finite object that it calculates. Transcendence therefore presents a calculable multiplicity—of tipped-in scraps, in this case—and yet transcendence does not transcend the composition that it sums up. This conception of poetry and poetics will guide my reading of Whitman’s ode to mass transit, allowing me to articulate the practical formula distributed by the poem, and rendering Whitman’s poem as both historically circumscribed and infinitely deployable.

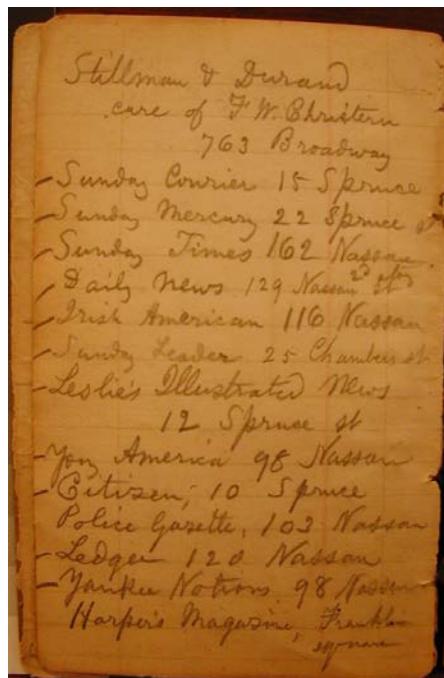


Figure 4.4: Page eighty nine (Grier's count) of "George Walker." Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of *The Walt Whitman Archive*.

Whitman's poetics was informed at its foundations by the formatting and basic arithmetic in the traces of account-book entries from the "earliest" notebook, "[T]albot Wilson." Instead of returning to the manuscript books examined in chapter one, I want to consider notebooks attributed to the period following the publication of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, such as "Words" and also the portable ledger containing drafts of "Sun-Down Poem": "George Walker." Among the eclectic variety of inscriptions made in "George Walker," my work begins with a list of addresses that, like the fragments tipped-into the "Words" notebook, implies the presence of a system innate to its structure while demanding the implementation of another order. The first full page of the list provides valuable biographical evidence of Whitman's ongoing participation in the newspaper and periodical industry of antebellum New York (Figure 4.4). Given that the entry for "Stillman & Durand" at the top of the list is followed by "care of FW. Christern," Whitman appears to have compiled a mailing list, either from a directory or from memory.

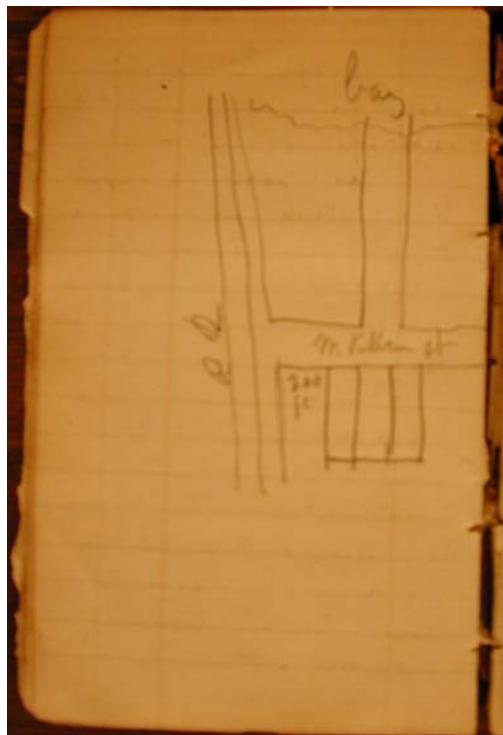


Figure 4.5: Page fifty eight (Grier's count) in "George Walker." Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of *The Walt Whitman Archive*.

Additionally, the first full page of the list appears to have been composed all at once, with one exception: the addition of "2d story" in a cramped hand and with a sharper lead point above the address of the "Daily News." This addition distinguishes the "Daily News" from the other addresses on the list, because the addition is not a correction from a textual source, but a direction for practical assistance. The addition of "2d story" therefore suggests that the mailing list may also have been used as an errand list. For this reason the structure of the list of addresses assumes an adaptable character lacking in other entries of a schematic nature in "George Walker," such as the map appearing elsewhere in the notebook (Figure 4.5). Like any map, the map in "George Walker" represents the approximate topographic layout of a given spatial order, with added specifications, such as the "200 sq ft" written into one of the map's open lots. The list of address, on the other hand, accumulates items from that spatial order and then, using those items, builds a structure with an order of its own. Where the map represents a space in which

elements are to be measured, identified, and added when necessary, the list of addresses reconstructs that field in a sequence with no discernible order beyond the specific and momentary needs of the list-maker. What distinguishes the list of addresses from the map is also what makes it structurally analogous to the line of poetry drafted above the list as it continues onto a second page. This line was destined for one of the nature poems of 1856, “Sun-Down Poem,” which was permanently re-titled “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” in 1860: “[I have seen at night] Where the fires [from the foundry chimneys] burn high and glaringly [into the night] and cast strong contrasts of darkness and wild red and yellow light over the tops of the houses, and down into the clefts, ~~of~~ the streets” (Figure 4.6).⁷⁹ The fact that the continued list appears at the bottom half of the next page suggests that the draft lines were already inscribed on the upper half of the page when the list was of addresses was compiled. It is therefore evident that the poetic line and the list were inscribed separately and in different situations.⁸⁰

And yet the line and the list are composed of elements drawn from the same source and are sequences with an order innate to their structure. While it may be true that the space of the notebook page forces the line of poetry and the list of addresses into a coincidental relation with each other, this happy accident creates the opportunity for the chronological texture of Whitman’s inscriptions to reveal itself on the notebook page. An examination of the page reveals that the line destined for “Sun-Down Poem” was initially a sequence of elements gathered from urban space: “Fires,” “darkness,” “red and yellow light,” “tops of the houses,” “clefts,” and

⁷⁹ Because Edward Grier’s transcription uses footnotes to indicate that words have been inserted and deleted, I have offered my own transcriptions from the holograph. Brackets indicate insertions. A strikethrough indicates a deletion.

⁸⁰ According to Edward Grier’s transcription of the notebook, which attempts to recreate the original temporal sequence in which the inscriptions were entered, the line was written between the first page of the list and its continuation on the bottom half of the next page. Though Grier’s sequence could accurately reflect the chronological order of the notebook entries, the character of the inscriptions—the handwriting and quality of the lead—on the notebook pages themselves suggest that the lines of poetry found on the top half of the second page of the list—and also on the top half of the third page on which the list continues—were more than likely inscribed before the list, thus forcing the list continued from the first page it occupies in full to the bottom halves of the two succeeding pages. See *NUPM* 1:240.

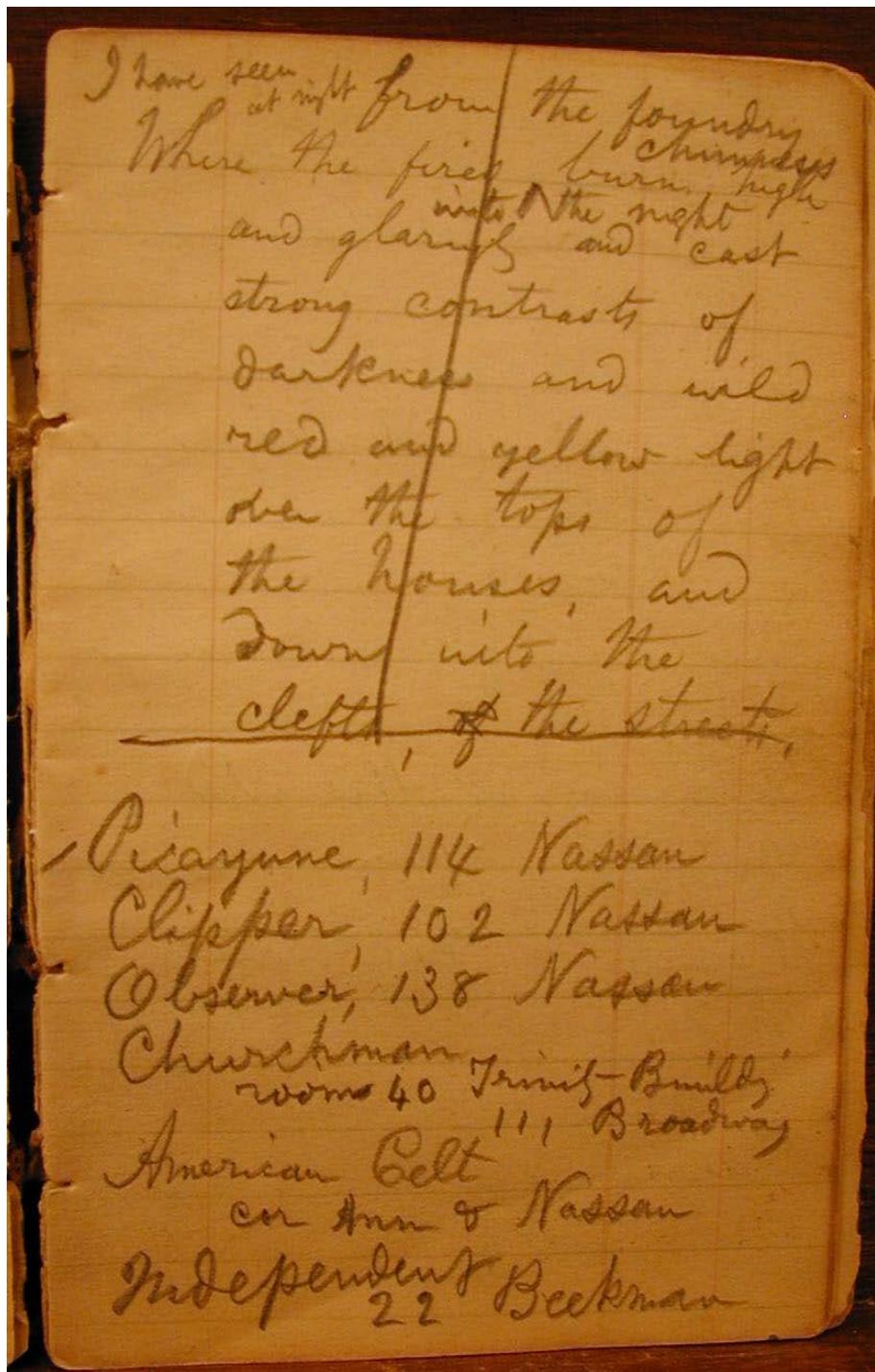


Figure 4.6: Page eighty-eight (Grier's count) in "George Walker." Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of *The Walt Whitman Archive*.

“streets” (Figure 4.6). The “I” of “I have seen at night” was squeezed into the only space that remained at the beginning of the line after the sequence of elements had been entered and even after its point of observation, the “foundry chimneys,” had been added to the top margin above the initial sequence.⁸¹

As a sequence of elements with an “I” placed before it, but only after the inscription of the elements, the poetic line reveals itself in manuscript as a structure with an order all its own. And yet the sequential order accepts the “I,” as if it anticipated the moment when the “I” would add itself, in a singular yet banal stroke of lead, to harness its otherwise open-ended field of relations into the subjective source of perception. What this deferred “I” suggests is that the sequence of elements initially traced from the spatial order of the city composes a sequential structure that is open to, but not dependent upon, the composition of that sequence into an order departing from the “I”: the mark of identity called for by the sequence that made it possible. The fact that the prescriptive form of calculation anticipates subjective and objective categories of experience and existence is confirmed by what appears to be Whitman’s reversible use of the “I” and the materials it harnesses together as he drafted his poem in manuscript. For other draft lines of “Sun-Down Poem” in “George Walker,” the “I” is inscribed before, though without objects to ground its subjective perceptions: “I too have - - - have— have— / I too have- - - felt the curious questions come upon me” (Figure 4.7).⁸² Broken lines supplement elements of perception that will never be inscribed after the inscription of the “I,” as if the “I” were a vertical mark producing sequences of horizontal non-signifying marks where perceived elements would be, were the “I” the origin of the existential world. Consequently, the notion that the “I” is an

⁸¹ This fact raises another problem with Grier’s transcription. If he ordered the pages of “George Walker” according to his intuitions of the chronological sequence of their inscription, then why didn’t he provide some typographical indication of the chronology of additions, which are more self-evident? His footnotes place such evidence outside of his presentation of the text. See *NUPM* 1:240.

⁸² See *NUPM* 1:230 for Grier’s transcription, which differs typographically from my own. Grier also provides helpful references to Whitman’s uses of blank spaces in other notebooks, such as “Dick Hunt,” also in *NUPM* 1:230n62.

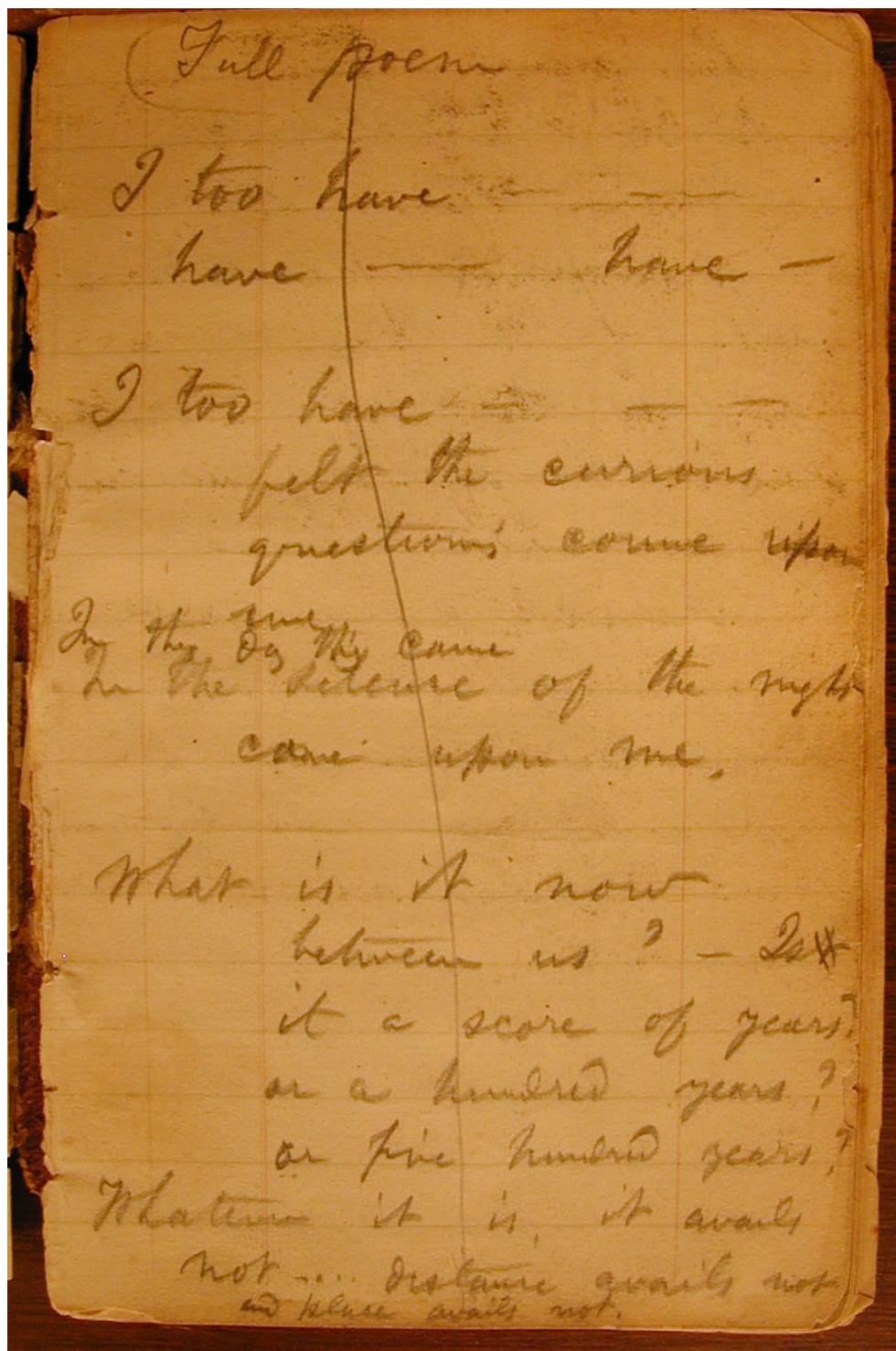


Figure 4.7: Page twenty-one (Grier's count) in "George Walker." Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of *The Walt Whitman Archive*.

originating figure of democratic self-representation in Whitman's poetics is no more accurate than the notion that the objective world of materials is the origin of Whitman's democratic poetry. By harnessing objects of the material world together in perception, the "I" neutralizes the democratic availability of materiality, while poetry simultaneously calls for the figure that will harness those materials and insure their permanence, however limited.

To privilege one or the other side of experience encloses Whitman's poetics in a dynamic that oscillates between subjectivity and objectivity, resulting in a spatial concept of the poetry, or a scene in which the poem makes the historical world appear to readers. This dynamic leads back to the classical cinematic topography of the scene of writing in the city; it applies a reproducible structure to the poem—one that readers can sympathize with. The classical dialectic of movement and rest can be fitted to Whitman's poetics, but somehow that dialectic still does not quite fit. The chronological texture of the "I" placed before (spatially) and after (temporally) the sequence of elements from which the trial line of "Sun-Down Poem" was initially composed illuminates a different structure of "Sun-Down Poem" in the 1856 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. It illuminates the practical formula that anticipates the coordinates of subjects and objects in the topography of civic space, thus suggesting that the architecture and infrastructure are themselves practices rewritten in practice. If dialectic is at work in Whitman's poetics, then it is this one: infrastructure and writing compose civic space simultaneously. Stasis is only the distinction between two planes of movement, and poetics measure the distinction between them by calculating their distance and dissonance, and by positing falsifiable sums.

With this practical formula illuminated, "Sun-Down Poem" clearly calls up a practice with no scene but the one which has been projected onto it, and it therefore demands a calculation with an order of its own. As the poem discloses the chronological texture of modern subjectivity in the space of Whitman's New York in the mid-1850s, it also presents the common practice of making lists as a practice that is structurally analogous to the sequencing of perceptions in a field of relations. Thus, the practice of adding, sequencing, and positing sums abolishes Natural History for the channels of circulation, now reduced to sheer movement,

regardless of the distinction between nature and industrial-urban transit. If the poem coincides with the practice of writing outside and its institutional prescripts, it may be no accident. But if so, it also diverges from the subjective pretexts of nature diaries and the objective pretexts of Natural History by falsifying their readymade romantic subjects as readymade sums. The handmade-in-the-readymade redistributes these sums as a calculable multiplicity, deploying the infinite order by means of the finitude of practice within the limits of the antebellum city's industrial-urban situation.

“Sun-Down Poem” is often described as an urban lyric or a modern Romantic ode because of its opening apostrophes to the “Flood-tide of the river” and the “sun half an hour high” (1-2). As soon as tropes begin to set the stage for a pastoral representation of the city, however, the vertical polarities of the sun above and the tide below collapse and expand along the horizontal plane of “The simple, compact, well-joined scheme” of urban topography, animated by mass transit (6). Moving from the verticality of Romantic address to the spatial order of urban locations in the horizontal “scheme,” the hallmarks of the ode undergo a tragic fall, as rhetorical figures become figures to be calculated in this “scheme.” Yet tragedy in the antebellum city is submitted to an unusual perspective granted by the writer-in-transit.

From the decay of poetic representations of nature, elementary mathematics lights the scene of “Sun-Down Poem.” The “I” does not ask to be nature’s lyre but is disclosed to itself as a figure to be calculated among others: “myself disintegrated, every one disintegrated, yet part of the scheme” (6). One of the more famous images in the poem sums up the initial redistribution of tropes as calculable marks: “The glories strung like beads on my smallest sights and hearings—on the walk in the street and the passage over the river” (8).⁸³ A horizontally organized image that collapses elements of perception into the scheme of urban circulation, the poem’s “glories

⁸³ Compare Whitman’s trope to a similar trope in Emerson’s “Experience”: “There are always sunsets, and there is always genius; but only a few hours so serene that we can relish nature or criticism. The more or less depends on structure or temperament. Temperament is the iron wire on which the beads are strung” (474).

strung like beads” returns poetic imagery to the scene of the poem without returning to the same vertical spatial order.

Trope is and is not itself, in this case, because it binds together the radiant unity of the image and the multiplicity summed up by that unity as representation. If dialectical movement is at work in the poem, what moves it, presents it, and why? These questions are hidden from the scene of writing on the ferry, for the image that accumulates “glories” “on my sights and hearings” does not allow the “I” to identify itself as an agent walking or passing over the river. Whether the trope resembles an abacus or a string of prayer beads, its consolidating power does not yield a stable unit. Rather, it posits the mutable structure of a calculable multiplicity. As if in response to this internally deconstructed trope, the “I” begins to identify its mathematical structure, as it gradually loses what is “mine” in “my sights and hearings” and beholds the “scheme” holding it together. Where the open road and its circulation of figures have been calculated, those figures can be counted up as lyric poetry. In disclosing this “scheme” and illuminating its coordinates, in spite of the incursion of imagistic unity, the poem supplements the unity lacking in its ambiguously mathematical-spiritual trope with the distribution of multiples and their tentative sums.

In “Sun-Down Poem,” calculation is an infinite practice, which operates autonomously in the “scheme” that precedes and follows the subject, but so is the intervention of the image that posits a sum, which presents itself as an end to calculation. Elements, scheme, subject, and sum are component parts supplying the rudiments of a writing practice for transient conditions stabilized by democratic institutions of Natural History. In place of its given cultural conditions, the poem yields two possible results: the departure from the image for infinite calculation, or the departure from calculation for recourse to finite representation, over and over again. Resolving these two possible courses of action, the “I,” once mathematically disintegrated, does not begin endlessly calculating itself but enacts an order of its own. This order composes itself, anticipating numerical ordering after the fact, on the basis of the “scheme.” The “I” may appear to give the citizen boundless agency to depart from the “Crowds of men and women” on the ferry and see

ahead to “you that shall cross from shore to shore years hence” (3, 5). But this departure binds the “you” to the material practice of writing—just as William White’s enumerated sheets are bound to the “Words” notebook. Calculation binds “you” to writing, because writing composes itself in the finite moment of history, in spite of the numerical order that it needs—again, as in William White’s text edition of “Words”—so that history can circulate as practice instead of a scene.

“Sun-Down Poem” therefore puts practice into circulation in defiance of the image of the scene of writing, because the text presents the very binding of infinite calculation to finite composition. To read “Sun-Down Poem” for its presentation of calculable multiplicities may make all the difference in assessing the poem as an urban lyric, as a product of its historical moment, and as a work of poetry that circulates a poetics: a practice, rather than a representation of a subject and its scene. The conception of the subject and its scene not only underlies representative interpretations but also determines opposed readings of the poem. On one side of this opposition lies the hysterical deconstruction exemplified by Tom Cohen, who calls “Sun-Down Poem” “the foremost work in any canon on the metatextual relation of (future) reading to the temporal event of *inscription*” (33). Celebrating the poem’s rhetorical mastery, Cohen argues that the rhetorical failure staged at the beginning of the poem betrays the poem’s self-conscious attempt to disarm, lure, and ultimately “inscribe” the reader in the eternal present, where “neither time or place—distance avails not” (20), leaving the reader effectively dead, or forever frozen in passive acceptance of received ideas. Cohen perceives the trans-historical readership of Whitman’s poem as menaced by the museum-city’s “preserved death.”

As Cohen points out, at several points in Whitman’s text the “I” makes striking claims about what it feels or sees, so that it can prove, for instance, that crossing the East River on the ferry was the same for the poet in the past as it is for the reader in the present. While making these claims, continues Cohen, the poem begins “inscribing” the reader by displacing the lyric subject of the poem, and replacing it with the now subjugated reader. In the subjugated reader’s place, the lyric identity of the text can live on in the present, having vampirically drained the

reader of life, or the possibility of an actively engaged, critical reading. The poetic violence revealed by Cohen's reading does illuminate the conspicuous formal traits and characteristic effects of "Sun-Down Poem." As if displaying specimens from nature, captured in an animate moment and represented in a durable and universal framework, the "I" lists what it saw in the past from the ferry:

I too many and many a time crossed the river, the sun half an hour high,
 I watched the December sea-gulls, I saw them high in the air floating with
 motionless wings oscillating their bodies,
 I saw how the glistening yellow lit up parts of their bodies, and left the rest
 in strong shadow,
 I saw the slow-wheeling circles and the gradual edging toward the south.
 (28-32).

Having repeated itself at the beginning of the past four lines, the "I" suddenly drops away, turning the poem into a list of subject-less predicates in the past-tense:

I too saw the reflection of the summer-sky in the water.
 Had my eyes dazzled by the shimmering track of beams,
 Looked at the fine centrifugal spokes of light round the shape of my head
 in the sun-lit water. (33-35)

From Cohen's perspective, the depersonalization of the "I" slowly drains the reader of ego, drawing the reader into the embrace of universality and infinity: a timeless, spaceless, and deathless void. The reader then approaches the void—Cohen's uncritical, historical oblivion—as verbs drop away from the urban litany, transforming the poem into a list of objects.

In response to Cohen's defensive reading, Keith Wilhite argues that the poem does not "inscribe" the reader, but "attempt[s] to occupy the future scene of reading at the scene of writing" and thus "transfor[m] the latter into an in-between space or, more specifically, a threshold" (939). The abstract, subjective "origin" of the poem is given to the reader by the poet, claims Wilhite, so that the reader can make the poem his own, affirmatively, rather than challenging the reader's ability to deconstruct the poem, negatively. What Wilhite's and Cohen's readings have in common is the notion of a continuity of practice—whether "readerly" or "writerly," positive or negative—that the poem presents as an effect of calculation.

In “Sun-Down Poem,” the subject is neither inscribed in the timeless past nor handed a form of universal subjectivity, constituted by a trans-historical practice of reading and writing. On the contrary, the subject of the poem is a “scheme” animated by a list of “figures” that remain to be counted. This reading is not a matter of perspective. Subjectivity and its scene have reached their limits through calculation: “The sailors at work in the rigging or out astride the spars, / The round masts, the swinging motion of the hulls, the slender serpentine pennants, / The large and small steamers in motion, the pilots in their pilot houses,” as well as “The scallop-edged waves in the twilight” (40-45). And to insure that perspective is completely atomized, objects become prepositional vectors: “On the river the shadowy group, the big steam-tug closely flanked on each side by the barges—the hay-boat, the belated lighter, / On the neighboring shore the fires from the foundry chimneys burning high and glaringly into the night, / Casting their flicker of black, contrasted with wild red and yellow light, over the tops of houses, and down into the clefts of streets” (47-49). Originally a single line in the “George Walker” notebook, the last two lines of the list return the sequence of elements—“fires,” “red and yellow light,” tops of houses,” clefts of streets”—to a sequence without perspective. The “I have seen” added to the manuscript draft version of line forty-nine harnessed together the sequence of elements in time and with a subject, but when this addition was subtracted, the line could multiply and thus “bear” and “better” itself. Portions of “Sun-Down Poem” that began in the “George Walker” notebook followed the same pattern before they were printed in the 1856 *Leaves of Grass*, suggesting that the poem was first conceived as a formal presentation of calculations and sums. One of the largest sections of trial lines in the notebook begins with a description of the still untitled poem as “the scenes on the river Pœ as I cross the Fulton ferry” (Figure 4.8).

If inscribed at the poem’s inception, the draft idea for the “poem or passage” privileges a multiplicity of “scenes,” which are neither seen by the “I” nor seen from the ferry by the “I,” but are “on the river...as I cross.” This clarification is important to the lines that follow the inscription, for the trial lines of the “poem or passage” itself do not begin with the “I” or even

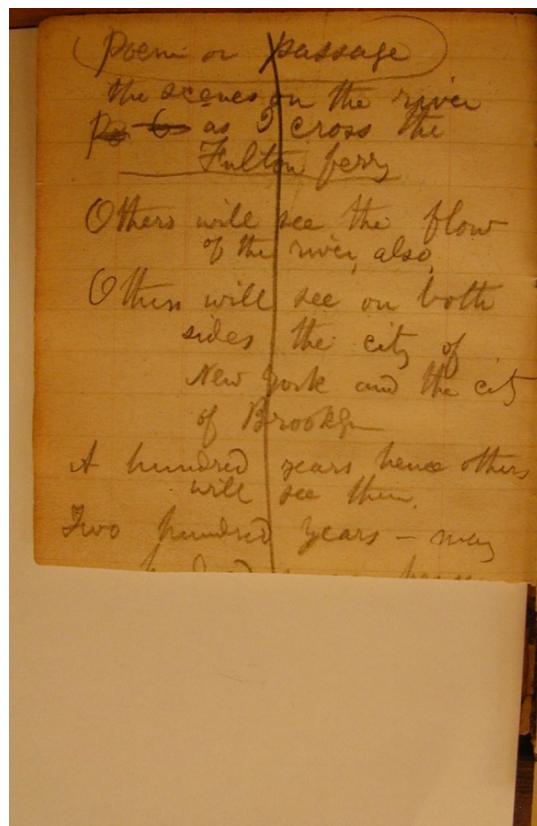


Figure 4.8: Page ten (Grier's count) in "George Walker." Courtesy of the Charles Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of *The Walt Whitman Archive*.

temporally located scenes, but the possibility of “scenes” being seen by “others” in the future: “Others will see the flow of the river, also, / Others will see on both sides the city of New York and the city of Brooklyn / A hundred years hence others will see them.” Following these prospective claims are one-and-a-half pages of trial lines that each begin with the “I have seen,” who has taken the ferry in the past.

I too ~~have crossed~~ many and many a time have crossed the ferry
 I have watched the sea-gulls flapping their wings—I ~~have~~
 I have seen [them] floating with motionless wings high in the air at sunset,
 just oscillating their bodies.
 I have seen the [glistening] ~~bright~~ yellow light parts of their bodies and
 leave the rest in strong shadow
 I have seen them [high] ~~thus~~ [up] ~~afa~~ ~~afar~~ off slowly wheeling in circles
 edging slowly to the south.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ For Grier's transcription, see NUPM 1:229.

Assuming that this section of the poem in manuscript was inscribed in the order suggested by the sequence of pages in the portable ledger, it would follow that the trial lines claiming “I have seen,” has only seen anything after the scenes in the future-tense were inscribed. Only by prospectively inscribing the scenes perceived by others can the “I” emerge as a singular identity with those same perceptions in the past.

The reduction of the “I” to a calculable multiplicity of scenes appears in manuscript in “George Walker” following the trial lines stating what “I have seen,” as in the printed poem: “The ~~dancing~~ [edged] waves, the ~~bat~~ scooped cups, and the dancing motion, / The yellow masts, the pilots in their pilot-houses, the sailors at work in the rigging,” and so on (Figure 4.9). As in the printed poem, the lines beginning “I have seen” give way to a sequence from which the “I” has been subtracted, and in which the elements have no past or future. Mathematical figures for calculation, glories to be strung on “my sights and hearings,” the sequence of elements with an order of their own loses the “I” because the elements cannot be “mine” if they were already going to be the same for “Others.” The poem therefore displays the pattern of writing in a mode that resists the romantic subject of Natural History by presenting the “I” as a mark that is not “present” and does not merge with nature, or even account for a natural world. Rather, the “I” is added as it retrospectively applies a linear, progressive order to the elements that anticipate it.

Although this retrospective order appears to ensure the durability of the universal and eternal order of prospective counting that precedes it, the retrospective “I” ends up being the excess figure of counting that adds the historical finitude innate to the dissolute scheme and the inevitability of prospective counting. For the remainder of the poem, then, the “I” effectively produces new sums of its itinerary as it develops new modes of accounting for its decomposed environment: “These and all else were to me the same as they are to you, / I project myself a moment to tell you—also I return” (50-51). When the “I” returns to the present, it indicates its role in the general structure of the poem by summing up the process constituting it for the past fifty lines: the future (“you”) becomes present once the retrospective subject has been placed before it. By line fifty-one the “I” is not a rhetorical figure of the writer in “Sun-Down Poem,”

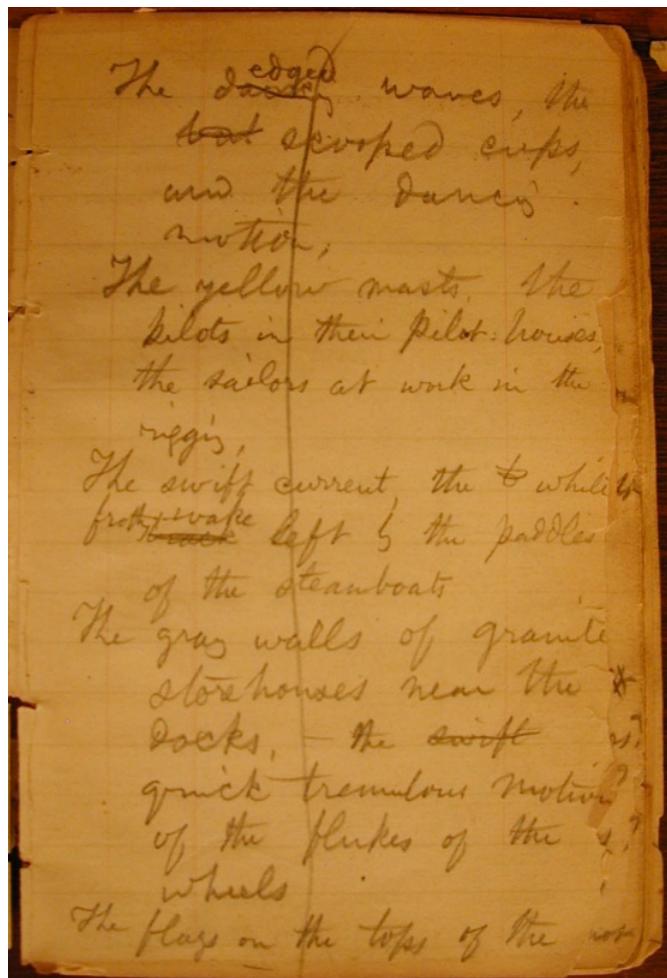


Figure 4.9: Page seventeen (Grier's count) of "George Walker." Courtesy of the Charles Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Image courtesy of *The Walt Whitman Archive*.

then, so much as it is an instrument of calculation, marking its conditions of possibility in writing-in-transit. Calculation liberates fixed spatial orders by tracing the chronological texture of their constructed scenes as overlapping fields of practice. The "I" therefore appears to manipulate time and space, but the sum given by the "I" at line fifty-one ("I project myself a moment...I return") also marks its instrumental function as a mark. The "I" projects itself

infinitely through calculation and returns to its historical finitude as an “I” within the transient order of antebellum New York City.

The “I” therefore resumes its memorial work without projecting itself, as it sums up the elements culled from its historically specific urban milieu: “I loved well those cities, / I loved well the stately and rapid river / The men and women I saw were all near to me” (52-53). And these more generic retrospections spur the question and answer, so reviled by Cohen’s readerly anxiety, at the center of the poem: “What is it, then, between us? What is the count of the scores or hundreds of years between us? / Whatever it is, it avails not—distance avails not, and place avails not” (57-58). As in “Poem of Sayers,” the rhetorical question challenges the reader’s training as a literate subject, disrupting access to the anticipated effects of poetic language and form. In “Sun-Down Poem,” however, it is not the aural phenomenon of silent reading that is suspended, but the abolition of time and space affected by the rhetoric of Transcendentalism and the microcosmic body of the orator.

The “count of the scores of hundreds of years between us,” (whatever that count may be), that “[avail] not,” (as neither distance nor time do), lacks the force to separate the poet from the reader. It is also useless in explaining, by way of quantification or measurement alone, whatever it is that lies “between.” The poem, however, hasn’t improved on the lack of force and explanation. Rather, the poem has presented the “between” line by line, for what lies between reader and poet is on display between the “I” placed before its dissolution in the first five lines and the “I” that retrospectively sums up the prospective scenes multiplied by the disclosure of the scheme. This reading requires nothing more than an acceptance of the idea that the “I” of the poem is different every time that it appears, and that it consequently refers to a different sum of elements before and after multiplying identities are schematized.

Following the rhetorical question and answer, the second half of the poem advances by adding memorial lines that sum up previous fragmentation while acknowledging their own excess in the “too” of “I too lived, / I too walked the streets of Manhattan Island” (59-60). Lines ostensibly heard through print, such as “Closer yet I approach you” (87), or lines like “I

considered long and seriously of you before you were born” (89), situate the poet outside space and time to no “avail.” Such lines continue to plainly describe the “more truth” of what the poem sets as its goal, because the “I,” placed before its dissolution into the scheme and now returning after the presentation of its calculable multiplicity, is the finite mark of that interrupts calculation and brings it to order. The transient scheme in which the “I” is marked exposes aesthetic synthesis as a formulaic effect of the “I” that is placed before and after multiplicity—a multiplicity made calculable by prescribed beginnings and ends. When presented as a calculable multiplicity, the “I” appears at both ends of an optic device composed by an urban field. The “I” is not a subject anymore than the “you” is the subject reading the poem: both are instruments in the writing system that traces, not experience, but the arbitrary and transient order of the American city in the 1850s. The notion that readers are condemned to that city is, perhaps, a matter of perspective.

“Sun-Down Poem,” on the other hand, presents readers with a disintegration perspective and the option of practice: an option with calculable options. The “I” does not attempt to live on eternally in the lyric present at the end of the poem, but makes a new tally of previously inscribed elements: “Now I am curious what sight can ever be more stately and admirable to me than my mast-hemm’d Manhatta, my river and sun-set, and my scallop-edged waves of flood-tide, the sea-gulls oscillating their bodies, the hay-boat in the twilight, and the belated lighter” (98). While the “I” creates new sums from old lists, it reduces itself to the possibility latent in writing as a process of accounting—as the creation of a structure with an arbitrary order of its own. The poem therefore ends by losing its ‘I’ again and redistributing the scenes of the city in an extensive sequence of apostrophes. This sequence does not revert to but adapts, rather, the Romantic verticality of the poem’s opening addresses to the sun and flood tide. It weaves vertical addresses into an expansively multiplying horizontal scheme articulated in-transit. And though we’ve previously read the vertical and horizontal in a state of collapse into the scheme, the poem’s concluding weave differentiates itself from the poem’s beginning—which makes all the difference.

Instead of a new sum provided by the “I,” the poem replaces it with the plural “we”: a new finite mark that consolidates the calculable multiplicity of the “I.” The singular “you,” as it “furnish[es]” its “parts toward eternity” and “toward the soul” (142-143), is still the instrument of prospective scenes in an ongoing process of addition, subtraction, and multiplication. The dialogue between “we” and “you” reproduces the dynamic between the “I” and the “you,” but we readers cannot call it the same dialogue. The terms in the field of relations are fixed, but variable. The plural pronoun introduces a new element that accounts for the sums proposed by the “I,” but it hasn’t sublated the “you” into the sum it represents. The representative sum of “we” is a multiple that emerges from calculation and representation. It bears the trace of the calculable multiplicity that it sums up as a new element of the scheme. At the end of “Sun-Down Poem,” “we” is a falsifiable sum, because it bears the trace of its infinitely calculable parts in a finite composition.

What “Sun-Down Poem” presents to the reader in practice denies any firm hold on the space of the transit vehicle or the city streets. And yet I want to maintain that it is a presentation of civic space. More, it is a presentation of civic space in-transit, or undergoing a transitional phase, which no practical precedent could be fitted to. “Sun-Down Poem” resolves the problem of existential instability in moments of historical transition by placing in circulation a schematization of space as a composition of elements that can be calculated but that have no absolute sum, image, or subject. No scene, no totalizing dialectic, and no personal narrative can embody civic space in-transit, except for writing-in-transit. It is the presentation of such a writing practice that lights up the common ground on which the industrial-urban public could not take the “preserved death” of a commercialized post-Enlightenment order of universal knowledge and infinite progress for granted. To write-in-transit was not to be swept up in the accelerating, expanding current of change after 1850, but to trace the movement of shifting ground, its trembling (at least), in a split and polarized field. This practice would be the only one capable of recording the dissonance of material conditions with the onset of Civil War.

PART 3
REAL WAR

INTRODUCTION TO PART 3
THE “REAL WAR”:
WHITMAN’S AND ALCOTT’S DOCUMENTARY POETICS

In 1863, when Whitman originally pitched his book-concept for *Memoranda During the War* (1876) to James Redpath, who had just published Louisa May Alcott’s surprise bestseller *Hospital Sketches* (1863), the poet described it as “a book of the time, worthy the time—something considerably beyond mere hospital sketches.” The readymade link Whitman established for posterity with this less-than-subtle reference to Alcott’s Civil War writings has informed scholarship on both authors. Yet this link, rather surprisingly, has not generated much comparative analysis of the two authors’ works. Perhaps the similarities and differences between them as well as their war-era texts are too self-evident to merit scholarly treatment. The nation was at war with itself; Alcott and Whitman both worked with soldiers in Washington’s military hospitals; and both of them documented their time serving at the borders of the battlefield in distinctive versions of what might be considered “documentary” texts of the American Civil War. What else is there to say about the matter?

Much of the scholarship linking *Hospital Sketches* and *Memoranda During the War* compares the texts along gender lines. As Daneen Wardrop has pointed out, the Civil War gave nursing narratives an “erotic” character. What would traditionally be repressed, only to emerge through slips of the signifier, were made manifest in the sick and dying bodies not yet contained by the situation that attempted to contain their suffering. The hospital therefore displaces gendered, moralistic conventions of sympathy with embodied practices of affection and caring, regardless of prescribed gender norms (29-30). Reading Whitman’s hospital memoir among its intertexts, Waldrop demonstrates that gender and its translation into the roles men and women played in hospitals were complicated in ways that aren’t usually taken into account. As Judith Butler states, “within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be” (25). She states this

proposition best for the research project at hand in the following passage from *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990):

Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender. (33)

Though Wardrop's reading of Whitman among the nursing narratives that proliferated during and after the Civil War doesn't overly reference Butler's book—perhaps because Butler's conception of gender performativity has become something like a natural fact in early twenty-first-century critical discourse—the passage from *Gender Trouble* returns the question of “compulsory frames” and the “forces that police the social appearance of gender” to a historical consideration of the space of military hospitals during the Civil War.

This return is necessary, (I believe), for at least two reasons: first, because the Civil War hospital, often perceived as an opportunity for liberation from gender identity's “compulsory frames” among literary historians, was, in fact, a compulsory frame. It is true that Civil War hospitals created the opportunity for young women, like Louisa May Alcott, to leave her home, to achieve perspective on her domesticated life, and to gain independence from the vertical, patriarchal structure of the home. As Martin Murray has stated, “Although most Civil War nurses were male (typically convalescent soldiers), the tremendous need combined with the spirited insistence on the part of women to assist the Union cause resulted in large numbers of women nurses as well.” The second reason to re-introduce a perspective of the hospital as a compulsory frame for the scripts and codes of gender performativity lies in Murray's observation about Whitman's role in the context he describes: the poet was not a nurse; he was actually just “a very attentive visitor” (66). Where the roles men and women played in Civil War hospitals were jostled by their transposition to military hospitals, suggesting (in retrospect, at least,) that gender is “performative,” Whitman's role as “a very attentive visitor” jostles the whole concept of roles in general. That is, the transience of his role—the difficulty of naming it, describing it, scripting

and coding it—calls for an analysis of the techniques and technologies by means of which bodies in Civil War hospitals were framed and policed, as these institutional spaces attempted not only to heal the wounded but to reproduce the same, but different, gendered forms of social subjects.

Butler's "political genealogy of gender" will be understood in the chapters to follow as a project that directs the analysis of writing systems and civic space toward the formation not only of new gender roles, or subject positions, but the architectural, infrastructural frames for those roles: the material-ontological structure of subjectivity disclosed by Whitman's transient role as a "very attentive visitor." Engagement with Butler's "political genealogy of gender" should remind us of the historical materialist genealogy of "Emerson/Whitman" that served as the point of departure in Part One, where Grossman's positioning of "representative subjects" in the Apparatus of the post-revolutionary republic was traced back to the receding layers of the postal unconscious and the commonplace system that left its marks in their manuscripts and published works. Butler's conception of gender performativity will guide us through the ostensibly feminist and/or queer literary history that locates the malleable fiction of the gendered subject in Civil War hospitals and will lead to her more recent work on public bodies and the "politics of the street." Her more recent work will disclose the frames and forces scripting and coding all of the bodies in the transient institutional spaces recorded in Whitman's and Alcott's Civil War writings.

In her more recent work, Butler discusses the material conditions of practice that have concerned the preceding chapters of this research project: "As much as we must insist on there being material conditions for public assembly and public speech, we have also to ask how it is that assembly and speech reconfigure the materiality of public space, and produce, or reproduce, the public character of that material environment" ("BA" np). In one sense, Butler suggests that we are not exclusively conditioned by the constructed situation in which material practice takes place; rather, we are always in a reciprocal, co-constitutive relation with that situation as we participate in it and engage with it. The other sense embedded in her statement stems from the fact that we ask not only "how" assembly and speech reconfigure the environments in which we

participate and engage, but also whether we “produce, or reproduce” the situation conditioned for and by material practices. Assembly and speech are not self-justifying categories of participation and civic engagement; rather, they are acts advancing from a “material history” whose layers return the transformation of space and practice to every historical situation presenting its tenuously erected scene as an absolute return of the same but different:

the bodies on the street redeploy the space of appearance in order to contest and negate the existing forms of political legitimacy – and just as they sometimes fill or take over public space, the material history of those structures also work on them, and become part of their very action, remaking a history in the midst of its most concrete and sedimented artifices. These are subjugated and empowered actors who seek to wrest legitimacy from an existing state apparatus that depends upon the public space of appearance for its theatrical self-constitution. In wresting that power, a new space is created, a new “between” of bodies, as it were, that lays claim to existing space through the action of a new alliance, and those bodies are seized and animated by those existing spaces in the very acts by which they reclaim and resignify their meanings. (np)

Departing from a “political genealogy of gender,” Butler’s politics of “bodies on the street” leads to the technical, technological foundations that format spaces of engagement and the subjects acting within them. Bodies co-appearing in public space are instrumental to the politics of a spatializing process (a reclaiming and resignifying of the meaning of space) or instrumentalized by the “existing state apparatus” (“existing spaces” and the meaning conditioned by them). The politics of a spatializing process articulates the writing system to come, for the civic space to come, as formulated through the comparative analyses of the manuscripts and published works of Whitman and his contemporaries.

Butler’s “concrete and sedimented artifices” are what I have been describing as the “technical, technological situation” and its “proper channels.” She addresses the link between writing and space established by proper channels and the fissuring of this link, which opens the possibility of reinforcing it by reproducing the meaning it conditions or of producing meaning through an act of civic engagement that traces the fissure. At least two directions opened in the “‘between’ of bodies” lead to at least two systems of practice: the binding condition of the same but different or the tentative binding of a conditional multiplicity already in the situation. What

Butler calls the “theatrical self-constitution” of a possible subject has been for us the handmade-in-the readymade and writing-in-transit: descriptive terms for the opening of proper channels in civic space by the noise of the body and its material traces. As it has been for us, the political action Butler describes takes place in media: “The street scenes become politically potent only when and if we have a visual and audible version of the scene communicated in live time, so that the media does not merely report the scene, but is part of the scene and the action; indeed, the media *is* the scene or the space in its extended and replicable visual and audible dimensions” (“BA” np). The technical, technological situation that opens, as Butler suggests, by way of the documentary acts made possible by media collapses, in her reference to “the media,” the media consolidated by the digital medium employed to document political actions and the news media that selectively channels it. To maintain a historical perspective on all-in-one digital media is to insist on media in the singular-plural sense.

“The media” is therefore singular-plural not only in the sense that storage, formatting, and transmission functions can be unfolded from each medium differently, but also in the sense that media is produced (on the ground or street) and channeled in the formation of subjects and publics. This second level of polyvalence has roots in the layers of America’s postal unconscious: the circulation of news media by postal routes came before the networking of senders and receivers. The fact that the contemporary digital situation is being conditioned by the medium that consolidates all others as digital media should make the insistence on media as a sequence of storage, format, and transmission functions, according to which writing systems and civic space operate and run the program of writing subjects, all the more important to the reception of Butler’s politics of the street and her reference to “the media’s” practical valences. Engagement with Butler creates a two-fold opportunity: first, to extend her work to the concerns of a media historical approach to mid-nineteenth-century American literature, and second, to advance the underdeveloped feminist strain of critical discourse informing media history. As Geoffrey Winthrop-Young states, Kittler’s *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* “appeared in the dark days before Judith Butler’s books shook up German academia” (128). Though their works are

engaged with the same continental tradition of system breakers and builders (prominently featuring the likes of Nietzsche, Lacan, Foucault, and Derrida), Kittler had no theory of gender performativity, and Butler has no use for Kittler's anti-humanism. To trace the literary in mid-nineteenth-century American literature through the layers of media history is to assume that the two have something that the other might find useful.

Focusing on Alcott's *Hospital Sketches* and Whitman's *Memoranda During the War*, I will demonstrate that the Civil War established infrastructural conditions that reshaped Alcott's and Whitman's manuscript practices and irreversibly changed their published works. In the previous two chapters, I analyzed the way the manuscripts and published works of Thoreau and Whitman documented the shaping of industrial-urban time in the "new spatiality" of the 1850s. In the chapters to follow, I will return to the spatial preoccupations of Chapters One and Two, where I demonstrated that Emerson's and Whitman's manuscript practices were adapted to different models of civic space and thus constituted different strategies of civic engagement. The infrastructural conditions that emerged during the American Civil War will be considered a restorative spatial order designed to channel the new temporality of the industrial-urban era into a network of accelerating, expanding circulation.

While keeping Butler's conceptions of gender performativity and her politics of the street in view, I will be guided back to the period of the American Civil War in the chapters to follow by the work of historian Sarah Luria. Of particular interest to the research project at hand is her book *Capital Speculations: Writing and Building Washington, D.C.* (2005), which develops a methodological combination of urban history and poetics that leads her to discover the "poetry of internal improvement" in Whitman's Civil War poetry. The combination appears to be readymade as Luria identifies the success of "internal improvements," such as the Erie Canal and the transatlantic telegraph cable, with "the marriage of rhetoric and technology that characterized the times":

The 'turnpike era,' as that period has been dubbed, was also America's 'golden age of oratory,' which turned the Union into a religion.... The concurrence of these technological and oratorical developments

demonstrates a dialectical relationship whereby an impassioned rhetoric paved the way for controversial projects such as the transcontinental railroad to be approved, and the new railroads in turn gave proof that the glorious Union such nationalistic rhetoric envisioned could actually come true. (42)

The dialectic of technology and oratory mobilizing the cultural-political acceleration of infrastructural development by 1861 establishes the discursive basis for the “poetry of internal improvement.” This poetry, states Luria, “provided a fantastic, as well as essential, means of expression for the survival of the ‘extended republic,’ and it reminds us of the extraordinary attempts, however vexed, at that imagined community’s literal fulfillment” (67). The “poetry of internal improvement” is therefore destined to become a traditional, trans-historical coping strategy more than a material reality: a “fantastic, as well as essential, means of expression for the survival of the ‘extended republic.’” Luria’s “poetry” is linked to “speculation,” whose symbolic force collapses politics, literature, architecture, and urban planning, and, in doing so, discloses Literature as a channel that fits subjects to their civic spaces in times of crisis.

Luria should be allied with the research project at hand, but the methodological interventions and goals of our projects are radically divergent. The roots of this divergence lie (I believe) in our perspectives on cultural history and our use of terminology. As Luria states in her introduction, “writers depend upon architectural expressions of their visions so that their words can exceed the margins of their text and be experienced as a new physical reality. Together these spaces describe a dialectical relationship between the political imagination and physical space” (xxii). Essentially based on the classical Marxist model of the vertical structure linking superstructure and base, Luria’s dialectic of the imaginary and its material conditions reproduces vertical structural relations without reproducing a Marxist analysis of the conditions of production, their reproduction, and the horizontal distribution of vertical structural relations. The consequences are somewhat grave: poetry ultimately channels the restoration of vertical order as an instrument of the nationalist imaginary in Luria’s book. Under the sign of “speculation,” Luria gathers together multiple referents to spiritualize the material, to materialize the spiritual, and posit the concept of a collective body poetically defined within its institutional frameworks.

“Speculation” is therefore a figurative conversion of a technologically constructed situation on the basis of economically determined symbolic patterns. As a guiding term for the “poetry of internal improvements,” “speculation” reproduces the mystifying ambiguity that historical materialists and semioticians have identified with the culture of industrial capitalism for almost a century.

And yet Luria’s book is all the more interesting for the fact that it is an early twenty-first-century work of cultural history that effectively reproduces the very infrastructural and imaginary conditions established during the American Civil War. What Luria has left to be done is the tracing of the dissonance of the literary in the harmonized formulation of the “poetry of internal improvements.” Butler’s description of documentation as a political action in contemporary media culture has already begun to lead the way in tracing back the noise of writing systems and civic space as they operate on the “‘between’ of bodies” to the critical situation of the 1860s. In the documentary texts of Whitman and Alcott, the emergence of a spatial order and the formation of the subject of that order are recorded in varying strategies of *conservation*—not only of their historical moment but of the paperwork involved in documentation. The palpable internal break, the “/,” brought to the surface of nationalist imaginaries and its subjects by the Civil War assisted the dismantling of the prescripts of embodied social roles, formed along the lines of gender and ethnicity, even in “liberal” domestic contexts like the Alcott household. The scripting and formatting process of gender, which I will identify as “conservation” and as the “conservative” mode of documentary poetics, operated in tandem with the rapid planning and construction of national infrastructure. What the technological situation laid bare at this time of crisis simultaneously opened an opportunity for the reorganization of gender roles in democratic civic life. This reorganization would be configured at the technical level of practice in Whitman’s and Alcott’s manuscripts and published works. And yet the situation of the war-era republic, once exposed to the possibility of transformation in a time of crisis, hastily established familiar norms by horizontally planning a vertically erected patriarchy. Reproduction would be enforced by the same but different vertical

structures menaced by the horizontal expansion and acceleration of interurban networks during the antebellum decades. The civic space planned for these networks during and after the war, however, would stabilize the link between space and meaning, would efface the traces of the body writing in transit, and preserve a hierarchical relation between space and the imaginary, later known as “poetry of internal improvements.”

In Chapters Five and Six, “on the spot” narratives by nurses as well as soldiers proliferated during and after the war because they catered to the public’s desire to “be there,” though not necessarily on the battlefield. As Wardrop states, Whitman’s *Memoranda During the War* cannot be extracted from the popular genre of the Civil War nursing narrative and its style “of notes composed on the spot and put together so as to retain the immediacy of the experience” (27). “On the spot” writings had constituted a popular sub-genre of non-fiction for at least a century before the Civil War, but the crisis of war between the Union and the Confederacy caused this genre to become a widely popular mode that served as a new literary form granting anyone who had “been there” the ability to take up pen or pencil, find their way into print, and have their fifteen minutes of fame. Simultaneous with, if not prior to, the blurring of gender lines in war-era documentary writing is the blurring of lines between writers and readers, the singular author and the plural public, for whom the experience of war was mediated via quasi-fictional and non-fictional war literature.

The documentary therefore names an alternative to the on-the-spot generic category that Whitman’s and Alcott’s Civil War writings fall under. The witness narrating a documentary text proved that the war did not exist in the fray so much as it did in the preparation for skirmishes, the lulls between fights, and in military hospitals of major cities like Washington, D.C. That is, readers desired the experience of being adjacent to the crisis, where they could feel the anticipation and suffering that took place before and after a skirmish, but never the presence of the fighting itself. In this way, the erotic character of Civil War documentary texts exposes the reading public’s desire for involvement in the crisis of battle and the satisfaction of being involved at the same time. Underscoring the limits of what can be recorded and transmitted by

writing, while simultaneously making the singularity of witnessing its own aesthetic value, the erotic charge of Civil War writings lies in the way documentary texts refer to a shift in readers' expectations about what writing can deliver, how inscriptions are made, and who can make them during and after the crisis of the Civil War.

The impersonality of the culture of writing during the war established the foundation for the new variety of "on the spot" writing that would emerge with the Civil War. Alcott's *Hospital Sketches* establishes clear ground rules for this new variation of documentary writing by drawing on the writing practices she acquired during her brief experience as a nurse in Civil War Washington. But her text also combines these practices with practices she had maintained since her childhood, when her education programmed her to write as a female subject, and yet also—given her father-educator's beliefs about gender equality—created the possibility for her to circulate a type of documentary writing that altered its "on the spot" precedents. The context provided for *Hospital Sketches* in Chapter Five will present Alcott's text as a turning point in her career as a proto-feminist American author, whose ability to circulate writings depended on her adherence to the conservation of traditional patriarchal social structure in which gender assignments would become culturally ambiguous while infrastructurally reinforced according to traditional scripts and codes. For laying bare the urban, bureaucratic, and infrastructural situation in which this reorganization took place during the war and was hastily concealed by the rise in American culture of narrative art, *Hospital Sketches* will be read as a documentary text that is tragically divided: both innovative for its documentary character but also conservative for its restoration of familiar gender roles. What I want to do, then, is propose an erotic framework for reading Alcott that does not reproduce historical analyses of representations of gender and the way gender exposes itself as a fiction of the symbolic order in any rhetorical construction, but that traces the body along the division between bureaucratic disorder and its hastily constructed infrastructural channeling, paperwork and proper channels, writing systems and civic spaces.

Alcott's framework will reveal itself most clearly in *Hospital Sketches*, but the tracing of its articulated joints, folds, and other formatting conventions will rely on, first, a brief survey of

Alcott's technical training as a romantic free-thinker and civically-engaged writer in the tradition established by the Alcott family, itself an extension of the tradition borne by the New England elite. Second, I will examine the consequences of entering circulation as a representative subject in the post-war nation's imaginary. *Hospital Sketches* traces out the two sides of a formational break in the identity of the Union after the Civil War. Alcott's documentary text brings to the surface the constitutive rupture that would be sutured by narrative art in the last third of the nineteenth century. But this rupture cannot be traced unless the scripting and coding of her identity through her technical training as an author are considered. In relation to her training, the impact of the emergent civic spaces with which her training moved her to engage through the circulation of published works must also be considered. In *Hospital Sketches*, what is most compelling about Alcott's first commercial success is its staging of a drama of paperwork, a drama that evolved into a more specific generic category, one prescribing a public attitude toward recovery from the crisis of war. Alcott's text documents the crisis of the Civil War by transferring epistolary rhetoric into a bureaucratic process of bodily formatting for circulation in the emergent format of post-war civic space. Because this staging of poetic intercourse in periodical and book formats of *Sketches* preceded Alcott's ascent as a popular American novelist after the war, I will consider the way that her success as an author was shaped by the emergent self-evidence of bureaucratically and technologically ordered publics in America. What will be at stake in this reading is not the retracing of subject positions, or the marketplaces trading in the discursive formation of such positions, but the situation ordering such formats and their circulation. What will be at stake is what is lost and irre recuperable: the fall into the normative resistance of domestic American Realism.

Published over a decade after *Hospital Sketches*, *Memoranda During the War* retroactively reveals that writing on the spot in the Civil War produced a genre of documentary narratives *about* the Civil War. Even though it wasn't published until the war had been over for several years, Whitman's documentary text proposes an alternative to documentary narratives: a "documentary poetics" suited to the emergent spatial conditions of the Union during and after the

Civil War. Technological advances in communication and transportation infrastructures having begun during the previous two decades, by 1865 they had reached a new phase in their evolution and, consequently, brought about a historical shift leading to the modernization and incorporation of the Gilded Age. A documentary poetics, when viewed through the contrast between Alcott's and Whitman's texts, both records and provides the means for articulating the new infrastructural space of the post-bellum Union as a spatializing process.

Whitman's *Memoranda* is preoccupied with memorializing the paperwork that informs the published text. The advantage of reading Whitman's *Memoranda* alongside Alcott's *Sketches* is that the two texts throw into relief two different attitudes toward the process of documentation on the spot and the possibility or even stakes of remediating this process in print. A comparison of the two texts that traces manuscript practice back through print will reveal that the internal division structuring the erotic character of *Sketches* and *Memoranda* is medial before it is gendered. Without attempting to demonstrate that Whitman's *Memoranda* responded in any way to Alcott's *Sketches*—although there is evidence to support such a claim—I will demonstrate in Chapter Six that Whitman's documentary text maintains Alcott's contribution to the practice of writing “on the spot” and radicalizes these contributions by foregrounding the role of storage and formatting, or disclosing the mutability of media encoded in the raw materials of practice, a mutability that entered circulation in his published writings.

CHAPTER 5

TWO DRAMAS OF PAPERWORK:

WHITMAN AND ALCOTT IN “THE REAL WAR”

Like digital media networks, the proper channels of mid-nineteenth-century civic discourse had obscured the scripts and codes of material practice by way of the very participation and adaptation that it facilitated. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine anyone besides its Master programmers grasping it. Then there were upstarts like Whitman and Louisa May Alcott, who, as if from nowhere, established what appeared to be a whole new system of practice, one not so much indebted to the deep layers of history as the new world of modernity. So how did they establish new systems in this new world? How did they adapt tradition in entirely new ways that broke from the history of writing and practice that a figure like Emerson bore with him through the centuries? In this chapter, I will demonstrate that Whitman and Alcott inaugurated a new era of writing in mid-nineteenth-century America, an era opened by the crisis of war. Their vocation as literary writers led them to erect scenes that stop short of being scenes of writing. Whitman’s and Alcott’s published works at midcentury merely set a scene, establishing a platform for the staging of a drama representing the crisis of war. This setting, this staging of a work-in-progress articulated the technological situation of Civil War Washington in the non-representational character of their texts, a character acting out the era’s drama of paperwork.

In the very different ways represented by Whitman’s and Alcott’s texts, this drama inevitably turned into a tragedy of circulation for both authors under the conditions established by the imaginary Union, a “speculative” phenomenon emerging from the war. It is tragic when literary writing falls into the normative channels of the ordinary, compulsory frames of role, gender, and civic engagement. And yet the literary traces, by way of a logic of manuscript, the writing that is in transit through those channels. The split driving tragedy in two directions, Whitman’s and Alcott’s, will inform the polyvalent sense of “conservation”: a term that bears the literary charge of documentary practice and the subjugated condition of bound, closed formats.

Prelude: The Skeleton and the Fairy

In the opening pages of *Memoranda*, Whitman describes the notebooks in which he wrote his “on the spot” account of the Civil War, among the sick, dying, and dead.

From the first I kept little note-books for impromptu jottings in pencil to refresh my memory of names and circumstances, and what was specially wanted, &c. In these I brief'd cases, persons, sights, occurrences in camp, by the bedside, and not seldom by the corpses of the dead. Of the present Volume most of its pages are verbatim renderings from such penciling on the spot. Some were scratch'd down from narratives I heard and itemized while watching, or waiting, or tending somebody amid those scenes. I have perhaps forty such little note-books left, forming a special history of those years, for myself alone, full of associations never to be possibly said or sung. I wish I could convey to the reader the associations that attach to these soil'd and creas'd little livraisons, each composed of a sheet or two of paper, folded small to carry in the pocket, and fasten'd with a pin. I leave them just as I threw them by during the War, blotch'd here and there with more than one blood-stain, hurriedly written, sometimes at the Clinique, not seldom amid the excitement of uncertainty, or defeat, or of action, or getting ready for it, or a march. (3)

If the poetry of *Leaves of Grass* had been implicitly fashioned as an auto-didact’s “copy book,” then, from the outset, Whitman’s *Memoranda* was an explicit remediation of these “little note-books” or “livraisons.” But with practical foregrounding comes and emphasis on the inaccessibility of manuscript materials to the reader of the printed text. Here, Whitman plays a type of media provocateur, vexing the reader’s anticipation of direct access by promising only indirect access to the desired object of reading: the real object referred to by printed language. His lengthy description of the direct impressions recorded in the “livraisons,” “scratch’d down” “on the spot,” not to mention the wealth of notebooks (“perhaps forty”), which he has left “just as [he] threw them by during the War, blotch’d here and there with more than one blood-stain,” is so enticing to the reader’s desire for the thing being described as to be almost comical.

Whitman’s text may be appealing to the reader’s desire for the virtual and imaginative, in place of the real, in the decade following the war. If that is the goal of his prelude, however, the way he foregrounds the materiality of his “livraisons” and then follows up his description of them with their effects on him as the author of *Memoranda* increasingly makes his text out to be a printed facsimile of manuscript materials. That is to say, *Memoranda* is conceptually structured

according to a distinction between manuscript materials serving as indices of real experience and the imaginary retrospection stimulated by them. The force of the materials on the imagination is profound, no doubt, as Whitman claims: “Even these days at the lapse of many years, I can never turn their tiny leaves, or even take one in my had, without the actual army sights and hot emotions of the time rushing like a river in full tide through me.” But this embodied experience is not one that readers of his text have access to, as they don’t have the “tiny leaves” at hand to conjure the somatic rush of the remembered war.

The prelude becomes as comical as it is convincing when the “livraisons” are portrayed as artifacts with magical properties: “They summon up, even in this silent and vacant room as I write, not only the sinewy regiments and brigades, marching or in camp, but the countless phantoms of those who fell and were hastily buried by wholesale in the battle-pits, or whose dust and bones have been since removed to the National Cemeteries of the land, especially through Virginia and Tennessee” (3). As in other documentary narratives, *Memoranda* synthesizes manuscript practice and imaginary retrospection. Unlike such narratives, however, the synthesis in Whitman’s text is fractured by the presentation of materials inaccessible to the reader. The imaginary visions of the past that may be real for the writer, intoxicated by his own archival materials, break from the possibility of sharing these effects. Remediation does not reproduce the proper channels of imaginary effects. Rather, it adds a layer of practice; in Whitman’s documentary text, the gesture toward remediation highlights the practice of circulation in the media studies triad.

Here it is, but it is not: the tragedy of circulation in Whitman’s case emerges from that very transience that he had been tracing, in practice, since at least the early 1850s. The anguish of a scene of writing that disintegrated and slipped away under the transient conditions of the antebellum city hurt in the most provocative manner once the war was underway. So many texts from the period allude to themselves as documents written in battle, on the march, from the sidelines, in letter, diary and memorandum format, but few solicit the reader’s desire for access to the paperwork generated by the war as elaborately as Whitman’s introduction to *Memoranda*,

few texts deliberately lead the reader to believe that the text circulates authentic documentation of the war—that such circulation is possible—while simultaneously withdrawing such documentation from circulation. *Memoranda* foregrounds its constitutive break, its “/,” with the circulation of authentic documentary accounts. No doubt, the surfacing of the text’s “/” can be interpreted as a marketing strategy by this most entrepreneurial of poets. Such interpretations do not give Whitman much credit, however, given that *Memoranda* was not only self-published but a commercial failure in its own time and even, it could be said, in our own. If it is read, it is usually studied; and even scholars mainly refer to the version of *Memoranda* written into the autobiographical text *Specimen Days* (1882), where it lacks some of the original’s peculiar material traits, pertaining mainly to typography and format. The poet’s odd decision to include a section of “Notes” at the end of *Memoranda*, which consist of enumerated outtakes referring back to different points in the already dubious linear history posited by the text’s (sometimes) dated fragment headings.

In 1863, when Whitman originally pitched his book-concept for *Memoranda* to James Redpath, publisher of Alcott’s *Hospital Sketches*, the poet had conceived of it as “a book of the time, worthy the time—something considerably beyond mere hospital sketches.” He had also already imagined the book’s physique, its “handy size & form” with “first rate paper,” “elegantly bound” to make “presents &c for the holidays” (*NUPM* 2:171-172).⁸⁵ But James Redpath had already decided on a plan to print large quantities of “dime editions” and to market them to soldiers. As Ted Genoways has stated, “All of Whitman’s demands...ran exactly counter to Redpath’s new business plan,” and the publication of Whitman’s *Memoranda* would be deferred for over a decade. First, Whitman would publish his collection of Civil War poetry in a slim edition that fulfilled many of the physical qualities envisioned for the *Memoranda*.

Drum-Taps, Whitman’s collection of Civil War poems, would be shaped by Whitman’s vision in collaboration with the material conditions of its publication. As Genoways notes, one of

⁸⁵ See also Genoways 2005 np.

the conspicuous material characteristics of *Drum-Taps* is the economy of its page layout,⁸⁶ which partially results from the cost of paper by 1865 (102). For this reason among others, Genoways claims that “even if the shape eventually taken by *Drum-Taps* is not an *expression* of the war, … it is the ultimate, poignant *reflection* of the war, embodying in its very arrangements the wounds and scars of April 1865” (116). *Drum-Taps* therefore provides a “reflection” of the nation’s tentative acceptance of limitation—in Whitman’s personal case, the high cost of paper—in 1865, and, as Genoways implies, the material text serves as a documentary record of the material conditions under which it was produced. Even though *Memoranda* cannot serve as an index of the same material conditions under which *Drum-Taps* was published, the manuscript practices foregrounding Whitman’s documentary text link it to the historical moment of the Civil War, when writing and writing materials emerged as essential equipment for the survival of soldiers and civilians alike.⁸⁷ The “wounds and scars of April 1865” reflected in the bibliographic features of *Drum-Taps* coincided with an expansion of manuscript practice as well as the circulation of writing spanning the war and lasting at least until the end of Reconstruction.

Without denying the strength of economically determined interpretations of the material text, a consideration of the fractured presentation of materials and the fracturing of anticipated intersubjectivity is historically grounded in the American tradition of art with a social purpose. Whitman’s memoir of the war, in its first textual condition as a printed publication in book format, is to coax the reader into writing. If my reference to the material text is a little thick, then here is why: the description of the material text as well as the erotic spur to write are the

⁸⁶ “In short, briefer poems appear to have been moved from the middle of the book toward the front wherever space was available, allowing Whitman to maximize the number of lines on each page” (102).

⁸⁷ For a more elaborate argument distinguishing *Drum-Taps* from *Memoranda*, see Feldman. “In *Memoranda During the War*, Whitman took pains not to naturalize or aestheticize the war as he did in *Drum-Taps...and Sequel to Drum-Taps*” (19). Feldman argues that Whitman put the wounded soldier, the convulsiveness of war, on display to heal the nation, but that there was no redemption offered by this display. The war was to be received as “trauma” and not “recuperable or redeemable” (22).

elements of an intersubjective experience that has not been taken up, perhaps not even in its own time. *Memoranda* is largely composed of often fragmentary newspaper articles that the poet had begun publishing shortly after his arrival in D.C. in late 1862. Given that Whitman collected, revised, rearranged (in a not-always-linear fashion) his clippings for his documentary account, his memoir not only reflects the fractured body, the fragmented psyche, or whatever other analogue might occur, but models a variation of the everyday practice of personal archiving from the whirlwind of new media in circulation around 1860. To the mid-nineteenth-century personal archive of clippings and jottings, the livraison adds the traditional practice of hand-making books, improvised to record impressions of the war on the spot, when readymade bindings did not suit the urgency of the situation. The livraison is emblematic of the way critical situations shape media, enabling the reader to take part in the storage, formatting and circulation of the handmade as well as the readymade.

Writing does not stand for manuscript or the remediation of hand-written language in Whitman's system of practice. Plunging to the bottom of the disintegrating system in which he was immersed in the antebellum decades, Whitman's poetics was always at work with the organizing principle, the “/” that extrapolated a logic of manuscript in a print-saturated media culture. As the Civil War progressed, the handmade-in-the-readymade, spanning a field of localized manipulations of media, would increasingly surface in the popular practice of scrapbooking. But scrapbooking would not ascend to the status of a general practice until after the war, and *Memoranda* is not so much a scrapbook as it can be identified as material text enmeshed within the media culture that gave rise to the popularity of scrapbooking; *Memoranda* is a text that presents writing as storing, formatting, and circulating if not also recycling. The elements of practice on display in the poet's memoir only backlight the logic of manuscript and the logic of the handmade-in-the-readymade presented by the three editions of *Leaves of Grass* preceding it.

Instead of intoxicating the reader with the magic of virtual experience by way of print media, Whitman's *Memoranda* serves over and above all of the questionable facts it provides as

a documentary record to encourage readers to become active recorders of their historical moments. The promise of imaginary experience may lure readers to take up the documentary poetics proposed by the text, but imaginary experience is not promised by the text itself, which enacts the manuscript practice of documentary poetics disrupting the total effect of documentary narrative. Whitman's unpublished thoughts on handling records of the war and attempting to conjure such effects from them reveals that not only his own manuscripts and published works informed the conspicuous made-ness of *Memoranda* but that his handling of the manuscripts of others did as well. The manuscript known as "Monday Night, December 26" describes the experience of receiving the trunk belonging to his brother George, who was thought dead because confined in a Confederate prison. Among the trunk's contents, Whitman finds his brother's diary, which the poet describes as follows:

It is merely a skeleton of dates, voyages, places compared in or marched through, battles fought, &c. But I can realize clearly that by calling upon even a tithe of the myriads of living & actual facts, which go along with, & fill up this dry list of times & places, it would outvie all the romances in the world, & most of the famous histories & biographies to boot. It does not need calling in play the imagination to see that in such a record as this, lies folded a perfect poem of the war, comprehending all its phases, its passions, the fierce tug of the secessionists the interminable fibre of the national union, all the special hues & characteristic forms & pictures of the actual battles, with colors flying, rifles snapping cannon thundering, grape whirling, armies struggling ships at sea or bombarding shore batteries, skirmishes in woods, great pitched battles, & all the profound scenes of individual death, courage, endurance & superb hardihood, & splendid muscular wrestle of a newer larger race of human giants, with all furious passions aroused on one side, & the sternness of the unalterable determination on the other. (NUPM 2:745-746)

In a style that should be familiar to us by now, Whitman conjures George by extrapolating a logical sequence that serves as the formal basis on which George can report his experiences on the battlefield. The sequence overlaps with George's experience because the record that he made of it is "merely a skeleton": the reduction of imaginary scenes of writing to the formal structure of experience.

This formal structure is not transcendental but is a different skeleton each time, meaning that "by calling upon even a tithe of the myriads of living & actual facts" someone else can "fill

up this dry list of times & places.” Whitman does not appear to be positing a remembrance of his brother according to the logic of a transcendental subjectivity as the basis of shared experiences through time and space. Rather, the poet appears to refer to the work of schematization that is unique to any record shaped by its conditions, especially in crisis, even when it attempts to flesh out an absent body. The “perfect poem of the war” to flesh out George’s manuscript record, then, offers a schematic instead of a scene, “the special hues & characteristic forms & pictures of the actual battles,” a logic of “all the profound scenes of individual death.” Each experience standing for every other by way of a progressively differentiating schematization of experience, jostled by crisis, rather than a movement toward a stabilized identity or sameness, can only be stored and circulated when the tentative binding of scripts and their formats are presented, in the scene, as writing.

The “perfect poem of the war” lies in the situation presented by *Drum-Taps* and *Memoranda During the War*, a presentation made possible by their descriptive and eclectic approach to the media culture of that situation. In presenting this situation, both texts articulate the infrastructural conditions that break down and surge forward to accommodate the critical conditions of the Civil War. Toward the end of his prelude to *Memoranda*, Whitman writes: “the marrow of the tragedy concentrated in those Hospitals—(it seemed sometimes as if the whole interest of the land, North and South, was one vast central Hospital, and all the rest of the affair but flanges)—those form the Untold and Unwritten History of the War—infinitely greater (like Life’s) than the few scraps and distortions that are ever told or written” (5-6). In a similar statement, Alcott also finds this to be the case, when she states: “in these war times the hum drum life of Yankeedom has vanished, and the most prosaic feel some thrill of that excitement which stirs the nation’s heart, and makes its capital a camp of hospitals” (83). Where the military hospitals furnish both authors with the infrastructural framework in which to write, they also manage to produce divergent conceptions of the writing public: one mobilized by what has not been written, and the other by what has.

By way of this articulation Whitman's Civil War writings will reveal the infrastructural conditions that they share with Alcott's *Hospital Sketches*. On the basis of the distinctive presentation of these conditions, it can be stated that Whitman's and Alcott's texts not only circulated differently under those conditions—that is, they achieve different rates of success in their own time—but that they also positioned themselves in relation to their infrastructural conditions differently. The logic of this chapter's argument will be that it is not an author's relation to his or her publics that determine the circulation of their texts, but the relation between writing techniques and infrastructure.

The scripts and codes of writing that shaped Alcott's technical training as a young American author were as different from Whitman's as those of Emerson and Thoreau. The fact that Alcott was home-schooled would not be so extraordinary, except that her father, previously the founder of a Pestalozzian school, was her educator. Even though such schools attempted to involve children in the direction of their educations, in Bronson Alcott's school, at least, diary-writing was a required activity as it had been in formal education for centuries. In Louisa May Alcott's case, however, the diary appears to have been a medium for maternal as well as paternal guidance. Her mother would inscribe lessons in her daughter's early diaries: "DEAR LOUY-- Your handwriting improves very fast.... Remember, dear girl, that a diary should be an epitome of your life. May it be a record of pure thought and good actions, then you will indeed be the precious child of your loving mother" (JLMA 47). In Alcott's diary for 1845, they correspond to each other through the medium of the book, as if they had literalized Emerson's "poetic intercourse" (55). As Katherine Anthony states, "Her journal had always been a sort of correspondence with her mother, who read the pages after she had gone to bed at night and left little notes in reply" (Quoted JLMA 64n1). Her father inscribed himself in her diaries by reading them: "In looking over our journals, Father says, 'Anna's is about other people, Louisa's about herself.' That is true, for I don't talk about myself, yet I must always think of the willful, moody girl I try to manage, and in my journal write of her to see how she gets on. Anna is so good she need not take care of herself, and can enjoy other people" (61). The early stirrings of Alcott's

fabrication of herself as a fictional persona, as well as the pretexts for her understanding of relations as “written,” are both visible in her early diaries.

Though she hadn’t been completely satisfied with the family’s lifestyle at Fruitlands, it was an enchanted locus for her imagination. On Thursday the 14th, 1843, she writes: “I ran in the wind and played be a horse, and had a lovely time in the woods with Anna and Lizzie. We were fairies, and made gowns and paper wings” (45). In January 1845, she writes: “All the trees were covered with ice, and it shone like diamonds on fairy palaces” (54). She is moved to write poetry about winter. Her earliest fiction, published in the collection titled *Flower Fables* (1855), tells variations on the quest narrative, usually involving a female character leaving the safety of home and community and venturing out into the world to do charitable missionary work. In “The Frost King” the Queen of pastoral fairy land allows “the weakest and lowest of our subjects” to fulfill her calling to give joy to the land of the Frost King (*FTFS* 6). Violet will not bring joy or the “Power of Love” to the kingdom of ice, a barren place, but to restore “the fair forms that are gone” (8). Violet’s reformist mission involves the cultivation of a vaguely Fourierist system of labor and exchange. After breaking the frosty bonds that hold “ugly brown spiders” in bondage, she tells her new friends “in gentle words...how in Fairy Land their kindred spun all the elfin cloth, and in return the Fairies gave them food, and then how happily they lived among the cool green leaves, spinning garments for their neighbors” (9). In return for their services, she promises better food than “helpless insects,” peace, and, of course, the intrinsically rewarding act of making things. The Frost King proves himself to be strictly utilitarian, rejecting the beautiful robe for which Violet oversees the production and even killing the flowers she conjures from the ice (10). Through hard work and persistence, Violet wins the day, the Frost King doffs a crown of flowers, and Elves dance in his new gardens. The template is reversed in “Eva’s Visit to Fairy-Land,” where the human girl Eva learns that all fairies have the right to an education that appeals to their interests and talents and that they use their education to enter the world, disguised as mortals, to do charity work in “the cottages amid the hills,” “the sea-side,” and “the noisy city” (22, 23). Fourierist principles are on display in the fairy society of “Lily-Bell and

Thistledown": "Our laws are few and simple. You must each day gather your share of honey, see that you cell is sweet and fresh, as you yourself must be; rise with the sun, and with him to sleep.... Now will you stay with us, and learn what even mortals seek to know, that labor brings true happiness?" (34).

After the Alcott's moved to Boston in 1850, she writes: "Since coming to the city I don't seem to have thought much, for the bustle and dirt and change send all lovely images and restful feelings away. Among my hills and woods I had fine free times alone, and though my thoughts were silly, I daresay, they helped to keep me happy and good. I see now what Nature did for me, and my 'romantic tastes,' as people called that love of solitude and out-of-door life, taught me much" (61). The city defines the psychological framework that would become her ironic sensibility because it has split her childhood in a tragically broken utopian community. By April 1855, she inscribes a distinction between the practical and the literary: "Being behindhand, as usual, I'll make note of the main events up to date, for I don't waste ink in poetry and pages of rubbish now. I've begun to *live*, and have no time for sentimental musing" (73). It is only with the prospect of a summer in Walpole that she can write "I long for the hills, and can write my fairy tales there." Indeed, after arriving in Walpole, N.H., she can return to the source of her imagination: "Shall write here, I know" (74). She finishes her fairy book in September, and it is illustrated by sister May (75). The book won't sell, but she continues to publish tales, to teach, and sew.

According to Richard Brodhead, *Hospital Sketches* marks a transition in Alcott's literary career, from the low-brow author of "thrilling tales" for "story-papers" to the high-brow—or, more accurately, middle-brow—author of *Little Women*. Given that authors are products of their market conditions for Brodhead, I want to demonstrate in this section that *Hospital Sketches* anticipates Alcott's transformation into a celebrity author of fiction after the Civil War by depicting Alcott, via her thinly-veiled fictional persona Tribulation Periwinkle, as a figure who converts paperwork into letters that accumulate symbolic value. In Brodhead's historical framework, this symbolic value would be primarily economic, for he understands authorship to

be conditioned by the forces of the literary marketplace. While I have no argument against Brodhead's framework, I want to focus on the way *Sketches* anticipates the transition he reads in Alcott's post-war texts by thematizing the link her quasi-fictional documentary narrative establishes between the transitional civic space of the war and the act of writing. My argument will essentially be that the narrative begins by expressing frustrations with paperwork required to enter circulation in the urban networks of the war-era Union. The frustrations are resolved once paperwork is converted by way of the fictional persona into a narrative with symbolic power, granted to it by its service the Union. It will be assumed that this level of power for a literary text insures its commercial success as much as, if not more than, its perpetuation of conventions and stereotypes reinforced through social practice.

Dramas of Paperwork: Tracing Bureaucracy during the Civil War

Where the city maintained a ubiquitous presence in the poetry of the first three editions of *Leaves of Grass*, celebrated and denigrated in turn, Whitman's relationship to the city in *Drum-Taps* shifted to a tone of complete affirmation, as if the Union and the war itself were urban entities. In "First O Songs for a Prelude," following a list of mechanics, lawyers, judges, drivers, and salesmen "falling in and arming," the once heterogeneous occupations of 1855 are portrayed as a homogeneous order. The single occupation of the city is military: "Outdoors arming, indoors arming, the flash of the musket-barrels, / The white tents cluster in camps, the arm'd sentries around, the sunrise cannon and again at sunset, / Arm'd regiments arrive every day, pass through the city, and embark from the wharves" (*DT* 6). When the poem addresses "you lady of ships, you Mannahatta," at its close, it reflects on itself in the past, as if reflecting on the photographic image of her former self: "Often in peace and wealth you were pensive or covertly frown'd amid all your children, / But now you smile with joy exulting old Mannahatta" (7). The urban goddess is unveiled by the war, smiling at the prospect of bodies mobilized at accelerating rates.

The urban goddess Mannahatta is now the vector channeling bodies: the necessary fuel for the engines of war. In a retrospective mode in the "Notes" section at the end of *Memoranda*

During the War, Whitman recalls the period opening the war as follows: “Then the great New York papers at once appear’d, (commencing that very evening, and following it up the next morning, and incessantly through many days afterwards,) with leaders that rang out over the land, with the loudest, most reverberating ring of clearest, wildest bugles, full of encouragement, hope, inspiration, unfaltering defiance” (62). Print is depicted as the instrument that disseminates the rallying cry of the city with the speed of sound. As if the Union were a single city, print draws bodies into the arms of the goddess who simultaneously reveals herself to be a conversion machine, transforming the fragmented nation into a single conduit for the instantaneous dissemination of information.

The city and the individual citizen, the arouser and the aroused, consequently operate as a unit, and the poet is no exception to this rule. When the city springs to action in “City of Ships,” the poet admits: “Good or bad I never question you—I love all—I do not condemn any thing, /... / In peace I chanted peace, but now the drum of war is mine, / War, red war is my song through your streets, O city!” (DT 41). Even more than “First O Songs,” “City of Ships” reveals its acknowledgement of a break with a former identity; its lack of nostalgia about that former identity; and its enthusiasm for the “red war” at hand, as if the cry for military action had been liberated from the propriety of the lately self-contained streets. Where the collapse between privacy and publicity, body and printed text, previously appeared to be an ironic equation, internally split, the collapse of individual citizen and city in a time of crisis is presented as a revelatory insight freeing both city and individual from their previous confines. This liberation will only result from a conflation of bodies and print into media for accelerated mobilization.

The Civil War transformed transportation infrastructure in the North as well as the South. In the industrialized North, circulation networks were essentially limited transport systems, serving the needs of central nodes in a limited geographical region and competing within a growing national circulation network of coordinated interdependence. George Rogers Taylors has demonstrated that the shift toward a more unified transportation infrastructure after the war resulted from military demand “for through movement of troops and supplies.... The exigencies

of war highlighted the advantages which could be had from a standardized and inter-connected railroad system" (6). The Civil War brought technological and political force to the realization of the infrastructure revolution initiated in the 1850s. As James MacPherson notes, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad contributed a major strategic advantage to the Union, because it was the most direct transit link between Washington and the Midwest (299). After regaining it at Harper's Ferry in June 1861, George McClellan assigned at least 5,000 of his men, one-fourth of his army, to guard it and keep the route to Washington open (300).

The limits of the Union's transit infrastructure during the first years of the war are reflected in *Hospital Sketches*. When Alcott's thinly-veiled fictional persona, Tribulation Periwinkle, travels south from Boston by rail, she has to take an overnight steamboat from New York to Jersey City, where she boards a new train for Washington (62-65). The inconvenience is true to life, and would have won the sympathies of many of her readers, for there was no through-service between New York City and Washington, D.C., before 1863. In ways anticipated by poets and philosophers during the antebellum decades, the acceleration and expansion of circulation networks would become an empirical reality granting agency and opportunity to citizens who would naturally elect a networked society. The natural election of the "new spatiality" of expanding, accelerating transportation during and after the war will be referred to here as a "narrative framework." Alcott's *Hospital Sketches* is an exemplary case of the erotic character of that framework.

While en route to Civil War Washington in the first chapter of *Hospital Sketches*, Tribulation Periwinkle portrays Boston street life as a trap for reform-minded women scribblers. After failing to obtain necessary papers from a certain "Mc K" in the State House, she sets out through the city streets, complaining that "the ignorance of the neighborhood was really pitiable. Nobody knew anything, and after tumbling over bundles of leather, bumping against big boxes, being nearly annihilated by descending bales, and sworn at by aggravated truckmen, I finally elicited the advice to look for Mc K in Haymarket Square" (58). People, boxes, and descending bales unite in the persecution of young women who leave their homes. Periwinkle's

environmental and bureaucratic persecution ends once she encounters her brother-in-law, Darby Coobiddy, Esq, who becomes the first of many spontaneously generated guides: family members, or members of the family of humankind, who lend their male agency to women on the move (59).

“Mr. K,” it turns out, requires papers from “Dr H,” and once she ends up at Dr. H’s office, who holds the papers required by the once elusive “Mc K,” she is relieved to find “somebody who could do what I wanted, without sending me from Dan to Beersheba, for a dozen other bodies to do something else first” (60). What makes governmental administration and the streets of Boston difficult to navigate is more or less the same: the problem lies in the disorder of bodies and materials. The exception to the madness of urban and political disorder is the Dr’s office, where order grants Periwinkle the retrospective insight that the problem never really lay with her. She can map the chaos of everyday urban life with Scripture, but the Good Book does not get her where she needs to go.

The Dr.’s papers, on the other hand, give Tribulation Periwinkle her first taste of belonging to the bureaucratic machine, the first high of making sense out of chaos with paperwork, and she expresses her flight with an awkward analogy: “Peace descended, like oil, upon the ruffled waters of my being, as I sat listening to the busy scratch of his pen; and, when he turned about, giving me not only the order, but a paper of directions wherewith to smooth away all difficulties between Boston and Washington, I felt as did poor Christian when the Evangelist gave him the scroll, on the safe side of the Slough of Despond” (60-61). The problem—stylistic this time—does not lie with Periwinkle, once again, for her naiveté as a narrator is conditioned by her inexperience with the ecstasy of being written by anonymous hands: a new pleasure that becomes normative by the time our heroine reaches D.C. Once she finds herself at the Dr’s office, Periwinkle can collapse her map into the one given to her by the Dr: the map that will guide her through the convolutions of Boston’s disorderly bureaucratic machine. At first, Boston appeared to be a man’s world. At the Dr.’s office, however, the circulation of paperwork begins to be what is most important.

The Dr.'s role in the documentary narrative, though relatively minor, foreshadows the major transformation of civic space by hospital architecture during and after the Civil War, the indication of which is the purport of Alcott's *Sketches* on the whole. The Dr.'s kindness as well as the collapse of Periwinkle's map into his urban map gesture forward to the dissolution of the traditionally gendered body in D.C.'s military hospitals. The brief scene also plants the idea that the common ground remaining between bodies without such gender prescriptions lies in paperwork and its circulation. Yet *Hospital Sketches* merely glimpses this state of affairs in 1863. And for this reason, after obtaining her papers from the Dr., she becomes protective of her paperwork and resents its return to the marks of gender. Finally back at "Mc K's," where the "Dr's" inscribed papers must be validated by the State, Periwinkle observes with dismay that "it pleased this reprehensible Boy to make various marks and blots on my documents, toss them to a venerable creature of sixteen, who delivered them to me with such paternal directions, that it only needed a pat on the head and an encouraging—'Now run home to your Ma, little girl, and mind the crossings, my dear,' to make the illusion quite perfect" (61). Where "Dr. H" granted young Tribulation Periwinkle her first taste of bureaucratic ecstasy, the pubescent male functionaries in the State House make a mess of her initially gratifying documents. Paperwork, like the law, is not beyond good and evil—it is good *and* evil, female and male. Difference lies in the way marks are made and the agency such marks grant.

As the reader already knows, Periwinkle's quest for paperwork in Boston has all been for the purpose of gaining open access to the interurban transit system. The Dr. provided the map for our heroine's navigation of Civil War Boston, but the steamboat office will allow her to accumulate the papers that place her in circulation. At the steamboat office, she encounters "A fat, easy gentleman [who] gave me several bits of paper, with coupons attached, with a warning not to separate them, which instantly inspired me with a yearning to pluck them apart, and see what came of it" (61). Her desires are not proper to women who hold papers, for only the male functionaries in the transit system have the right to strip and mark her growing archive. To maintain, or overemphasize, the gender analogy would make the second chapter of the *Sketches*

rather shaocking, as she narrates her travels south in diary form: “In the cars, at Jersey City. Much fuss with tickets, which one man scribbles over, another snips, and a third ‘makes note on’” (65). Without negating the possibility of an erotic reading here, an examination of the way paperwork has functioned in the narrative is more credible. The men who fuss, scribble, snip, and make note on Periwinkle’s virgin paperwork is not so much a thinly veiled analogy for sexuality emerging from beneath everyday social repressions, but is the very index of identity in an urban society, which is either possessed, or not—which is either in circulation, or lost in the bureaucratic system.

By focusing on paperwork and its circulation as indices of the individual citizen and her entrance into the urban condition during the Civil War, the reader can attend to the eclectic formatting of *Hospital Sketches*. Alcott’s documentary narrative captures her experiences as a nurse in Georgetown’s Union Hotel Hospital by alternating between straightforward narrative prose and manuscript forms, such as the diary and the letter. Contemporary readers of Alcott’s *Sketches* in their serialized version in the Boston *Commonwealth* as well as in their published version in book form were aware of the fact that her fictionalized memoir had been adapted from letters she wrote to her family. If Periwinkle’s account of her voyage from Boston to D.C. is any indication, then it can be assumed that her archive contained a travel diary as well, or that the formatting of the *Sketches* as various print and manuscript forms is part of Alcott’s fictionalization of her archive of writings.

Given that her journals are fair copies of daily diaries, it is right to wonder about the following inscriptions in September 1859: “Great State Encampment here. Town full of soldiers, with military fuss and feathers. I like a camp, and long for a war, to see how it all seems. I can’t fight, but I can nurse” (95). She wasn’t alone in feeling eager for a war. She had to retreat to nature to write her fairy tales, the labor of writing required that she stay at home while drafting Moods. “All sorts of fun was going on, but I didn’t care if the world returned to chaos if I and my inkstand only ‘lit’ in the same place” (103). This is the place she returns to when she decides to revise her notes and letters from Civil War Washington, D.C., for publication. First, she would

“set forth in the December twilight, with May and Julian Hawthorne as escort, feeling as if I was the son of the house going to war” (110). In its own time, then, *Hospital Sketches* was framed as an archive of personal writings, remediated and generically converted for circulation among a broad reading audience. It may go without saying that the text is framed this way for today’s readers. What I would like to emphasize is that this framing is the primary fiction of Alcott’s documentary narrative and that the narrative art enacted in the text depends on the distinction between its manuscript origins and its printed incarnation as a thinly veiled, fictionalized memoir. Alcott’s ironically (non-)fictional persona, her Dickensian comic tone, and the eclectic quality of forms used in the formatting of her text are all of a piece. They are all part of the same strategy of fictionalization for circulation. The role of paper and paperwork provides the basis for this fiction and its circulation, or for the identity and agency of Tribulation Periwinkle as she enters the urban network on her way to D.C. Yet readers are advised that there is an original archive, Alcott’s archive, meaning that the documentary narrative is not so much a tragic-comic story of a young woman’s entry into the political-commercial world under changing social conditions, but more of a parody of public access to the privileged materials of authorial agency.

On the way to D.C., the Dr.’s map and Periwinkle’s map collapse into each other—urban agency collapsing into Biblical guidelines. This scene, along with the drama of paperwork that follows, offered a glimpse of the essential role papers play in founding our heroine’s identity and agency in the urban network, and thus the insight that *Sketches* is the fiction of paperwork itself. These observations are affirmed when Periwinkle arrives at “Hurly-burly House”—the fictional name for the Union Hotel Hospital in Civil War Washington—and the distinction between paperwork and personhood disappears. “Marching boldly up the steps, I found that no form was necessary, for the men fell back, the guard touched their caps, a boy opened the door, and, as it closed behind me, I felt that I was fairly started” (68). The administrative form that validated our heroine’s passage to the capital city can now be read in her body’s presence at the hospital’s threshold.

Conservation: Technical and Political

The structure of before and after that can be interpreted in manuscript practice was not so much symptomatic of the Civil War as it was a matter of what published authors preserved of their practices when circulating their writings in print. Because Alcott's *Sketches* presents manuscript practice as a fiction, it could be assumed that she did not preserve her practices for circulation. What is striking, however, is that Alcott did not transcribe her notebooks into the stable bindings of "Diaries" and "Journals"—as her father and his coterie did. Rather, she methodically condensed the inscriptions she made in her manuscript books until almost nothing remained. The most recent editors of her journals relied on texts of her early diaries for which no manuscripts are extant. The manuscript books that are extant are highly condensed "Notes and Memoranda," or fair copies transcribed into a journal, with the exception of her late diaries. Otherwise, she destroyed her manuscript books and letters.⁸⁸

Nevertheless, Alcott's "Notes and Memoranda" provide enticing bites of information that are at times useful to the archival scholar. In her "Notes and Memoranda" for 1861, she notes in her the telegraphic fashion typical of her archive: "A month at the White Mts with L[ouisa] W[illis]. & write letters home that amuse the town" (*JLMA* 106; Figure 5.1). It can be taken for granted that the inscriptions were not made in 1861, but that they had been selected after she had reviewed her daily diary, which also may have been destroyed after selections were transcribed into her "journal." Given the process of refinement that preceded the condensed "Notes," it is

⁸⁸ The editors provide the following useful summary: "At various times in her career, most noticeably after her mother's death, in 1877, and the family's move from Concord to Boston in 1885, Alcott went through her papers and destroyed letters and journals to ensure privacy after her death. Although she simply destroyed her letters, the disposition of her journals is more complicated. All available evidence indicates that Alcott kept a daily journal or diary. At a later date, she summarized and greatly condensed the year's events, both in a journal volume and in her "Notes and Memoranda" volume. The daily diaries were then—or at a later date—destroyed. Only the daily diaries from 1885 to 1888 have survived, and the ones for 1885 and 1886 may be compared with the journals for those years to see how determined Alcott was to boil down the events of her daily life into neat, compact monthly units" (*JLMA* xiii).

| 1861. | My Earnings. |
|---|--|
| Gather has good tasks in it & reforms our schools. I am & John happy as twin doves. Our writing & grafting as usual. Whether beginning to feel easy & quiet, or busy at the system doing well John Brown's girls board with us. April 17 th the war was declared with the South. A month at the White Mts with S.W. to write letters home that amuse the town. | A Pair Of Eyes. 40 Whisper In The Dark. 50 Mr. L. 20 110 |
| | |
| 1862. | |
| I keep a kinder Gar- ten for six months in Boston. Visit - at the fields & among friends. Have nothing to give up tailoring. I will die. Dec 11 th to Wash- ington as an Army nurse. Stay six weeks & fall ill. Am brought home nearly dead & have a fever which I enjoy very much, at least the wavy part- | School. 50 Knitting. 10 Pauline's Pictures 100 King Of Clubs. 30 170 |
| | |
| 1863. | |
| Get well & fall to work. March 29 th saw boy was run, Frederick Blatt Balt., Oh to blanket's Island found in a dead. The first colored regiment went to the war. In the Fall I went to Minness to lady goulding. Capital sketches home and I find she done a good thing # & becoming it. | On Picket Duty. 80 Hospital Sketches. 200 Mountain Pictures. 30 My Contraband. 50 + Shontad's Plate. 10 330 |

Figure 5.1: Page from Louisa May Alcott's "Notes and Memoranda." JLMA.

possible that “the letters home that amuse the town” were not manuscript letters, but were the “White Mountains” letters, an epistolary fiction based on Alcott’s actual excursion and serialized in the *Commonwealth*, July through August 1863. The publication of the “White Mountains” letters directly resulted from the success of *Hospital Sketches* in the May through June 1863 issues of the *Commonwealth*. In the July 1863 entry in one of her extant manuscript journals,⁸⁹ she writes: “Sanborn asked for more contributions, & I gave him some of my old Mountain letters vamped up. They were not good, & though they sold the paper I was heartily ashamed of them, & stopped in the middle, resolving never again to try to be funny lest I should be rowdy & nothing more” (119). In case it had not been previously noticed, the self-disparaging tone of “write letters home that amuse the town” in her 1861 “Notes,” which were inscribed perhaps decades later, can now be heard.

Alcott’s writing practices using her “Notes and Memoranda,” the typescripts of her destroyed manuscript books, and her extant manuscript journals, once pieced together, establish a writing process that not only refined and condensed inscriptions made *before*, but also integrated events in the record of a year (1861) that took place *after* that year (1863). This observation presents an extreme version of the self-editing practices that Emerson and Thoreau employed in their Journal-writing systems. Where Emerson preserved many, if not all, of the manuscript books and letters he transcribed into his Journal, and where Thoreau saved many of his scraps of “Nature Notes” and notebooks, Louisa May Alcott diligently destroyed the majority of her paperwork and left behind a tantalizing series of traces recording her life in fiction writing.

The last installment in the serialized version of *Sketches*—chapter six in the book version—Alcott’s “Postscript” responds to *Commonwealth* readers so moved by Alcott’s documentary narrative that they wrote to the Boston newspaper as if to Nurse Periwinkle herself. Her open letter response states takes the opportunity to present herself, once again, as the quasi-

⁸⁹ For an example of the holograph manuscript from this journal, though it is not the manuscript of the page quoted here, see Figure 12.

fictional Nurse Periwinkle, who maintained what could only have been a quasi-fictional correspondence with her convalescing brothers and sons: “Since the appearance of these hasty Sketches, I have heard from several of my comrades at the Hospital; and their approval assures me that I have not let sympathy and fancy run away with me, as that lively team is apt to do when harnessed to a pen” (118). The correspondence Periwinkle maintains with soldiers in this last fiction of manuscript, now in epistolary form as the undeliverable manuscript originals were rumored to have been, would present a split between manuscript and printed circulation if she did not insist that “sympathy and fancy” had not derailed her intentions to document the military hospital. Her claim only pushes the tragedy of manuscript to its true nadir, as Alcott’s fanciful “pen” serves as a virtual index to the practical implement readers had been moved to take up as they reached across the borders of her documentary narrative.

Like the formatting of Alcott’s *Sketches*, the formatting of Whitman’s *Memoranda* is eclectic, because it presents the reader with multiple manuscript practices remediated in print. In Alcott’s case, these practices—the diary and the letter—are identifiable as generic conventions that do not necessarily indicate the remediation of “on the spot” accounts. In *Memoranda*, the diary and the letter are presented as minor forms among a multiplicity of minor forms of writing practice, thus approximating the shape of manuscript made on the move. This multiplicity includes the admixture of soldiers’ writings with Whitman’s reeled off memoranda, as suggested by an excerpt from the soldier John Glover’s diary: “He kept a little diary, like so many of the soldiers. On the day of his death, he writes the following in it: *To-day, the doctor says I must die—all is over with me—ah, so young to die.* On another blank lead he pencill’d to his brother, *Dear brother Thomas, I have been brave, but wicked—pray for me*” (32). What would be undeliverable in Alcott’s narrative is here preserved and distributed, as the tragedy of manuscript is inverted to achieve the triumph of manuscript circulated as print.

The difference between the circulation of manuscript in print in *Memoranda* and, for instance, the “Excerpts” from a soldier’s diary in the *Commonwealth* lies in the fact that the author, likely dead, did not intend to distribute his writing and that Whitman, the purported

author of his text, transcribed it and wove it into his documentary text. In fact, Whitman's documentary text is a forcefully transcriptive work, a characteristic illuminated by, and not restricted to, the poet's transcriptions of soldiers' diaries. While it may be assumed that the diaristic and epistolary forms presented in Alcott's *Sketches* are also transcriptions, the fiction of manuscript at work in her text requires a suspension of disbelief, as any fiction does. An examination of her writing practices in the most recent edition of her journals reveals that she was not in the habit of transcribing, but destroying her manuscript and condensing long stretches of time with the ambiguity characteristic of fiction writing. *Memoranda*, on the other hand, though a close analysis of the text reveals its infidelity to chronological order and the truth-value of text, truthfully represents the structure of the military conditions under which it was inscribed for the public. The presentation of manuscript practice in Whitman's text is so committed to formal eclectic quality that, despite its fabricated temporal order, forms of writing in *Memoranda* can be fitted to the space of military hospitals.

Documentary poetics fits itself to civic space by weaving together transcriptions, not fictionalizations, of conventional writing (John Glover's diary) and forms suited to "on the spot" recordings of space. *Memoranda* does not present readers with the spatial order of hospitals so much as it presents space as if it were structured by physical needs. Whitman's text suggests that such needs cannot be represented by the descriptive imagery and narrative voice in texts like Alcott's *Sketches*, but only by the comparably neutral and conspicuously formalized structure of the list. The list and the remediation of manuscript work together in an explicit fashion in the fragment titled "Items Wanted—(From my Note Books.)"

Some of the half-erased and not over-legible when made, memoranda of things wanted, by one patient or another, will convey quite a fair idea.
 D.S.G. bed 52, wants a good book; has a sore, weak throat; would like some horehound candy. Is from New Jersey, 28th regiment.....C.H.L., 145th Pennsylvania, lies in bed 6, with jaundice and erysipelas; also wounded. Stomach easily nauseated. Bring him some oranges, also a little tart jelly. Hearty, full-blooded young fellow. (He got better in a few days, and is now home on a furlough.) (37)

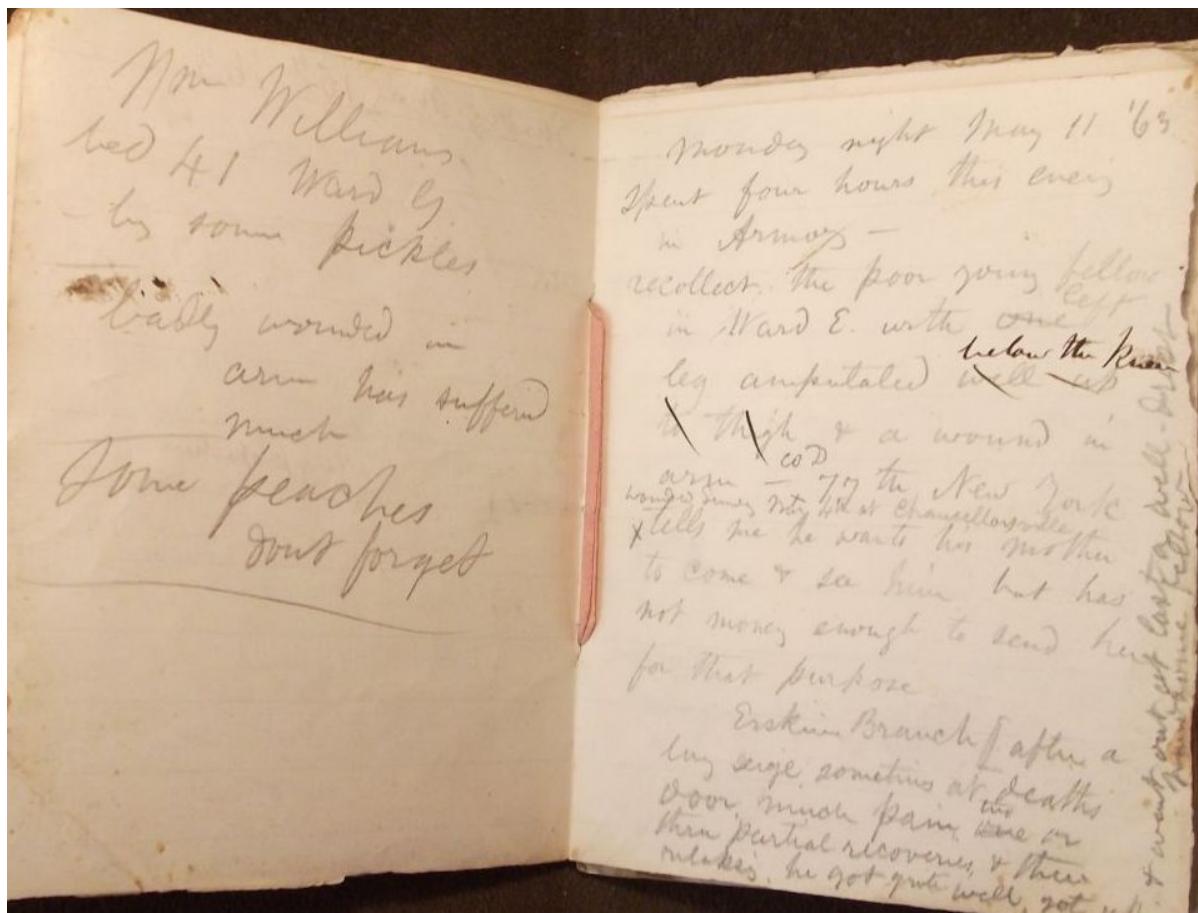


Figure 5.2: Two-page spread from “Hospital Notebook.” Courtesy of The Clifton Waller Barrett Library, University of Virginia.

As the holograph manuscript of such a list in one of Whitman’s extant “livraisons” demonstrates (Figure 5.2), the poet does not provide a direct transcription of his handwritten lists in the text of *Memoranda* so much as he provides a facsimile of his “half-erased” manuscript as if its partial effacement and fragmentary character were calculating, on body at a time, the space of the military hospital.

The space of writing in *Memoranda* therefore distinguishes itself from the space of Alcott’s *Sketches* by privileging the count of bodies instead of the radiant order of the hospital-home. As in the 1855 poems, non-signifying marks backlight the structural presentation of writing practice fitted to civic space. Documentary poetics is rendered typographic rendered

typographically in *Memoranda* in italics, calculable ellipses, and dashes. As with italics and ellipses, dashes assist in the formalization of the space of the hospital, by tracing it as a structure of the convalescing body. Whitman uses dashes this way in presenting his encounter with “Marcus Small, CO. K, Seventh Maine”: “I write a letter for him home to East Livermore, Maine—I let him talk to me a little, but not much, advise him to keep very quiet—do most of the talking myself—stay quite a while with him, as he holds on to my hand—talk to him in a cheering, but slow, low, and measured manner” (17). The technique of documentary writing is evinced in the dashes binding together fragmented inscriptions that also unbind and disrupt the flow of narrative prose. Unbinding and disruption in the above passage are not jarring or disturbing, as might be expected; rather, the marks that unbind and disrupt narrative flows mark the binding structure of consolation and convalescence by means of companionship. The formalization of space through the presentation of manuscript practice allows writing to be fitted to civic space. In *Memoranda*, the writing of space during the war cares for the needs of bodies in crisis, one body at a time.

In the same section of *Memoranda*, Whitman proposes a name for his practice of tracing space one body at a time: “(In my visits to the Hospitals I found it was in the simple matter of Personal Presence, and emanating ordinary cheer and magnetism, that I succeeded and help’d more than by medical nursing, or delicacies, or gifts of money, or anything else” (18). This relational practice of consolation provides the documentary poet access to privileged information: story material directly from the battlefield. True to the practice formalized throughout *Memoranda*, the documentary text presents soldiers’ stories as transcriptions conserved for circulation. Whitman also underscores the presence of soldiers and his presence witnessing their stories, thereby articulating a structure of experience during the Civil War: a space of writing ordered by relations. This relational space is described in the section titled “Soldiers and Talks”: “One, for instance, will have been all through the Peninsula under McClellan—narrates to me the fights, the marches, the strange, quick changes of that eventful campaign, and gives glimpses of many things untold in any official reports or books or journals.

These, indeed, are the things that are genuine and precious. The man was there” (24). Whitman and Alcott may agree, perhaps, that “the real war will never get in the books.” But the presentation of the “real war” is not what is at stake in either case. What I aim to demonstrate for the rest of this chapter, then, is that what is at stake is simply the practice of writing. I therefore want to expand on both texts’ stake in the practice of writing by analyzing Whitman’s Civil War notebooks. My analysis will be largely restricted to Whitman’s notebooks, in part, because all that remains of Alcott’s Civil War notebooks—her extant 1863 manuscript journal—is a transcription from the daily diary that she destroyed. The editors of her journals have let this fact be known, but she also states the fact herself. The condensed March entry for her 1863 diary, once she begins to “get about a little,” following her illness, refers to the absence of her original manuscript book: “Sat up till nine one night & took no lunch at three A.M. Two facts which I find carefully recorded in my pocket diary in my own shaky hand-writing” (*JLMA117*). In a sample page from Alcott’s 1863 Journal (Figure 5.3), transcription not only allows the author to produce a narrative of her real life, but also to efface the indices of that reality in her “shaky hand-writing,” as once again the fiction of manuscript turns narrated events into an act of the imagination.

That is not to say that Alcott’s text less of a stake in the dissemination of the practice of writing than Whitman’s does. Rather, my claim is that Alcott’s writing practices impinged on the fiction of manuscript that her published *Sketches* disseminate. More, transcription is not emblematic of Alcott’s practice on the whole, but is only a component of the system of condensation and erasure that shaped her published work. Indeed, the transcription of manuscript, from one writing surface to another, is in evidence throughout Whitman’s Civil War notebooks, where the act has inverse consequences. Telling insertions of on the spot accounts transposed from scraps of paper appear in the notebook Grier titles “Hospital Book 12,” where the poet wrote: “I find this in my notes—I suppose from ‘chinning’ with some soldier in hospital” and then copies out an “incident” from the previous September (727). In fact, many of

a dreadful time of it.

1863

Next morning felt better & at four went home, just remember seeing Day's shocked face at the Depot, mother's bewildered one at home, & getting to bed in the former belief that the house was no longer & no one wanted to see me.

As I never shall forget the strange fancies that haunted me I shall amuse myself with recording some of them. The most vivid & enduring was a conviction that I had mooned a stout, handsome Spaniard, dressed in black with very soft hands & a voice that was continually saying, "Die still, my dear." This was mother, I was told, but with all the comfort I often found in her presence there was blended an awful fear of the Spanish spouse who was always coming after me, appearing out of doors, in at windows, or threatening me dreadfully all night long. I appealed to the Pope & nearly got up & made a touching plea in something meant for Latin they tell me. And I went to heaven & found it a twilight place with people darting thro' the air in a queer way. All very busy & dismal & ordinary. Hindu, Gt. I. Slavery & other people were there but I thought it dark & "low" & wished I hadn't come. I took at Baltimore knock ing down the door to get me; being hung for a while turned, stoned & otherwise maltreated were some of my fancies. Also being tempted to join Dr. M. & his wife in worshipping the Devil. Also tending millions of rich men who never died or got well.

Figure 5.3: Page from Louisa May Alcott's *Journal*. JLMA.

the most important manuscripts for Whitman's Civil War journalism, originally published in newspapers during the war, and later collected and modified in *Memoranda*, do not appear in the "livraisons" at all, but inscribed on loose scraps.

The four scraps of paper that Whitman used to draft the manuscript titled "My Visits and Distributions" are written on the reverse of a letter of introduction that he had drafted for someone else to write to "Col Taylor—Commissary Genl" (*NUPM* 2:582). In this manuscript he discusses his charity work, mentions patrons of his work, and describes himself, all of which may be attributed to his plan to promote his mission to care for soldiers in D.C.'s military hospitals.⁹⁰ The manuscript known as "I Go Around" was used in one of the earliest published portions of *Memoranda*, the first to appear in the *New York Times*, February 16, 1863, "The Great Army of the Sick" (588). The manuscript consists of two scraps of paper, inscribed in pen, thus defying the notion that Whitman's journalistic fragments were entirely written in "livraisons," on the go, and thus in pencil. Yet it seems clear that "I Go Around" was inscribed "on the spot"—that is, at the soldier's bedside—where he had ink and paper ready, while writing a letter for a convalescing soldier too sick to write for himself.

The act of transcription does not reflect the attempt to refine and condense inscriptions only to destroy the paper trail a documentarian might leave behind. For Whitman, this trail and its preservation are constitutive of the act of writing and its dissemination. Repetition became a remarkable characteristic of Whitman's poetry and the publication project of *Leaves of Grass* by 1855. In his documentary prose and publishing practices during and after the war, *addition*, even at the cost of redundancy, becomes the signature of the poetic documentarian and can be traced back to the notebook inscriptions he made while tracing the space of D.C.'s military hospitals. In

⁹⁰ "I regularly carry a haversack with me on my visits,—and my coat has the biggest kind of pockets. Among things generally marking my progress through a Ward, I may mention that I distribute paper, envelopes, stamps—oranges and apples, preserves and jellies—pickles—candies, (especially horehound)—tobacco, in small plugs—blackberry syrup, brandy, large quantities of reading matter—over and over again—a few pocket diaries and Almanacks for 1863—a stock of old magazines and of the morning or evening papers of the day—and always of course my own personal talk, soothing, cheering up, and friendly comforting, to each case according to its kind" (584).

the notebooks as in *Memoranda During the War*, addition describes the conservational structure of documentary poetics and even links this poetics to the structure of space in Civil War military hospitals.

I am going to limit my analysis to one exemplary case of addition in the notebook given the title “Scene in the Woods.” When Grier prepared his transcription of the notebook for the *Collected Writings*, it was missing and only four photostated pages remained (*NUPM* 2:651). Grier’s text was therefore limited to the “scene in the woods on the Peninsula—told me by Milton Roberts, Ward G (Maine),”⁹¹ recorded by Whitman, perhaps at Roberts’s bedside. For several reasons, however, the scene of Whitman inscribing these pages “on the spot” by the soldier’s bedside is complicated by the manuscript. All four manuscript pages bear the traces of hurried and uneven handwriting (Figure 5.4). But the irregularity of the handwriting is itself irregular. It becomes increasingly unstable at the bottom of the first page, as might be expected of a tiring or excited hand. On the second page, the hand could even be described as slightly frenzied. But then the manuscript returns to a relatively stable form on the third page, before the “scene in the woods” ends on the fourth page. Whitman appears to be writing in haste under conditions inhospitable to a regular writing hand—that much is incontestable. Whether or not that means he was writing at the bedside of Milton Roberts is another matter.

To begin with, the editorial traces Whitman made to the notes, beginning on the frenzied second page, must be considered part of the “on the spot” manuscript record it establishes. While the poet may have edited his manuscript “on the spot,” perhaps at the bedside of Roberts, the fact that he made his edits in pencil (Figure 5.4B and C) and, on the fourth page only, in pen (Figure 5.4D) suggests that Whitman revised the “scene” on at least two different occasions. These occasions may have arisen in the hospital, because he appears to have made notes in his “livraisons” as well as on loose scraps, in pencil as well as in pen, depending on the

⁹¹ Transcriptions are based on facsimiles available on *The Walt Whitman Archive* website.

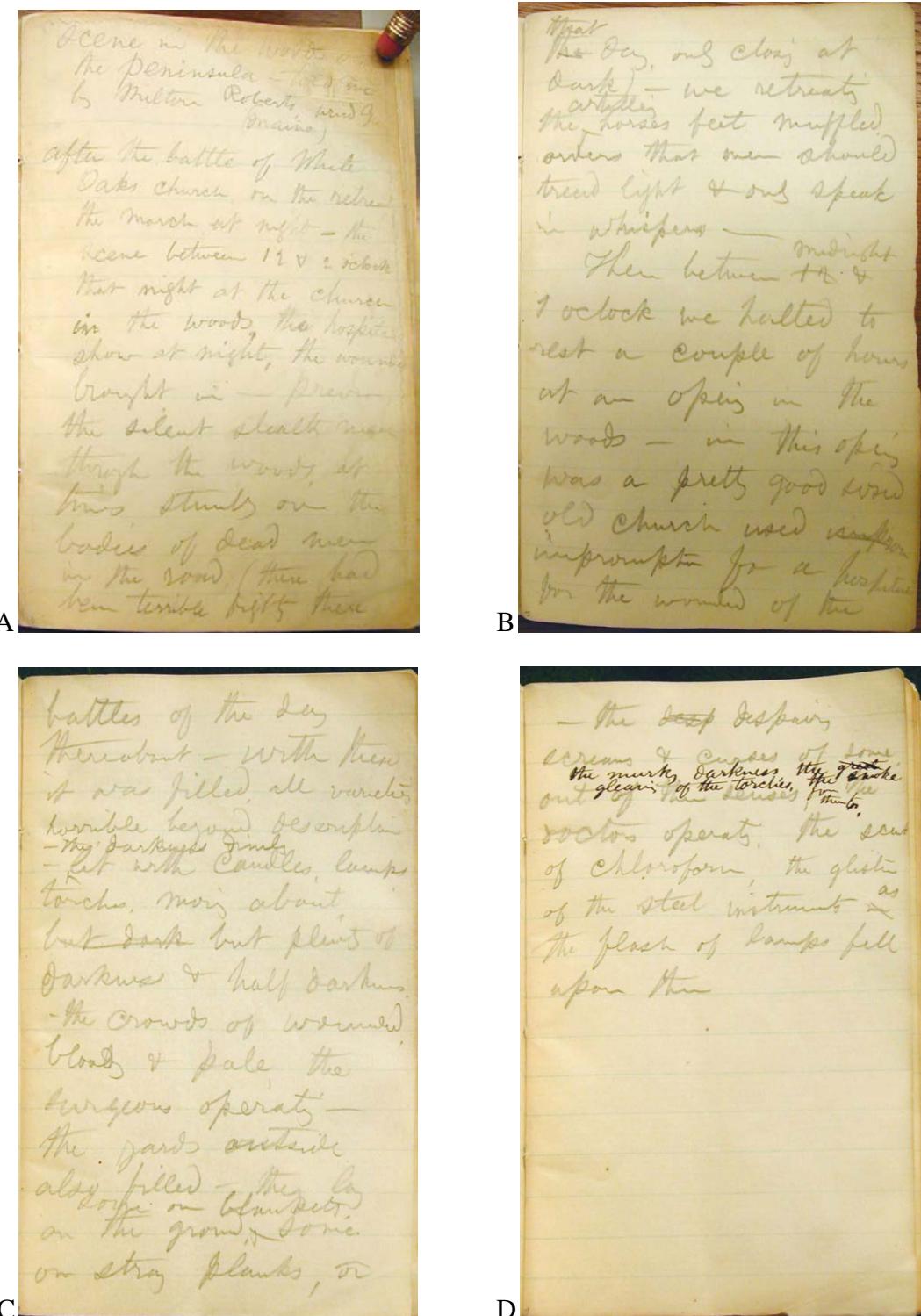


Figure 5.4: Pages from “Scene in the Woods” notebook, images A-D. Courtesy of the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. Images courtesy of *The Walt Whitman Archive*.

materials available in a given situation. Even if he had been writing a letter for Roberts in pen, after having written down the “scene in the woods” in pencil, the editorial change Whitman made in pen would have had to have taken place during an interruption in the writing of the letter or after the letter was written. With all consideration taken to preserve the on the spot bedside scene in which Whitman may have inscribed the “scene in the woods,” what remains is a discontinuous scene, or really no scene at all.

What I want to demonstrate is that the impossibility of determining a scene, at the soldier’s bedside or anywhere else, does not foreclose the possibility of analyzing Whitman’s “livraisons” as documents that capture the military hospitals of Civil War Washington. On the contrary, the record of a process marked between writing systems and civic space in the livraisons traces the visitations of the documentary poet, traces that open the possibility for the articulation of the structure recorded not “on the spot,” or in place, so much as “on the move,” dispersed among bodies contained by the critical situation of war. What I want to emphasize here is that the physical index ostensibly provided by an instance like the inscription of “scene in the woods,” found throughout Whitman’s Civil War notebooks, as well as the documentary character of his published work, is not an index of a scene of writing in space. Rather, it is an index of the one scene that conserves the multiplicity of scenes composing it.

Editorial marks are not the only conservational traces of the multiple scenes that can be counted in the apparently singular inscription of Roberts’s “scene in the woods.” The links between Whitman’s hospital notebooks allow for the schematic articulation of Whitman’s visitations among the many hospitals built in and around Civil War Washington. As Grier helpfully notes, Milton Roberts also appears in “Hospital Note book” (*NUPM* 2:651n2), on a list of soldiers, their locations, afflictions, loved ones, and desires. The inscription of Roberts is relatively spare: “Ward G—bed 12 Milton S. Roberts Co B. 5th Maine V amp of left leg / mother Mrs. Betsey A Roberts South Waterboro York co Maine” (571). Like the other soldiers listed

throughout “Hospital Note book,” Roberts is an addition to the generic structure of a list. And yet he is no mere abstraction in an abstract structure: the reader knows where he is from, how he has suffered, how he will probably die, and who his mother is. The form of the list forces the necessity of the information allowed by the abstract character of the list to the surface of the manuscript; it fuses the practice of addition with the force of the suffering body’s needs.

Whitman employed lists in his manuscripts and published works before the war, but he fitted the abstract form of the list to the material conditions of Civil War Washington as he carried out his hospital work. In antebellum New York as in Civil War Washington, the list allows writing to span specific spaces, times, and the media used to record them. “Hospital Note book” provides an exemplary case of Whitman’s use of the list to capture a spatial and temporal span in Civil War Washington because, as he notes, it was inscribed between two hospitals: Campbell and Armory Square Hospital (*NUPM* 2:569). Although military hospitals were scattered throughout Civil War Washington, Campbell and Armory Square were approximately two miles apart, the former being located just outside metropolitan Washington and the latter being in the middle of the city and just a brief walk from the Capital. The central location of Armory Square would have made it easy to access the Boundary-7th St. railcar line to the northern periphery of the city, or would have provided an occasion for a healthy walk.⁹² Whatever his means of transit, Whitman’s “Hospital Note book” spans the urban space between the two hospitals and forces the specific needs of suffering bodies within that span of space to the surface of the abstract form of the list.

The abstract form of the list therefore establishes a link between manuscript practice and the urban space of Civil War Washington, a city of hospitals, while allowing the progressive addition of radically localized bodies to structure the space in which they were structured. In the “Scene in the Woods” notebook, the editorial marks that Whitman made in his transcription of

⁹² These observations would not have been possible without the assistance of the Civil War Washington website and its map feature (www.civilwardc.org)

Milton Roberts's account also traces not only of multiple scenes of writing, but of "writing in transit." A comparison of "Scene in the Woods" and "Hospital Note book" suggests that the former was used in Armory Square. The wards at Campbell noted in "Hospital Note book" are all assigned numbers while those at Armory Square are lettered. All wards noted in "Scene in the Woods" are all lettered. And given the lack of content recorded in the notebook, it is conceivable that the notebook was inscribed all at once, or at least during the same visit.

Yet other inscriptions made in "Scene in the Woods"—inscriptions which were not among the photostated facsimiles available to Grier when he prepared his transcription—indicate that Whitman most likely employed the notebook over the course of multiple visits. Evidence of this observation lies in the dating of names, in list form, scattered throughout the notebook. On the twelfth page, Whitman wrote: "ward A. Aug 28-9-'63 Bethuel Smith cavalry, wounded in foot.----father [illegible] [Christopher] Smith? Glen's Falls, Warren co. N.Y" (Figure 5.5A) Whitman not only visited Smith over a span of two days, from August 28th to the 29th, but also rewrote Smith's name, without effacing the previous inscription, on the fifteenth page: "Bethuel Smith co F. 2nd US Cav father Christopher Smith Glen's Falls Warren co NY" (Figure 5.5B). Between page twelve and fifteen, the progression of Smith's convalescence is traced in the inscription of a fair copy, but only because it leaves a paper trail behind it. Smith appears to have recovered in the third appearance of his name in the notebook, likely written in Smith's hand—certainly not Whitman's (Figure 5.5C).

Whitman's "livraisons" are the record of not only multiple scenes in what appear to be ostensibly singular scenes of writing, but also Whitman's transits—his coming-and-going—between military hospitals, such as Campbell and Armory Square. It is in this way that Whitman's manuscript practice, as evinced in his extant "livraisons," are uniquely conservational, because what appears to be prioritized in them are the general conditions of the hospital and the city of hospitals in which his visitations took place. The general urban space of

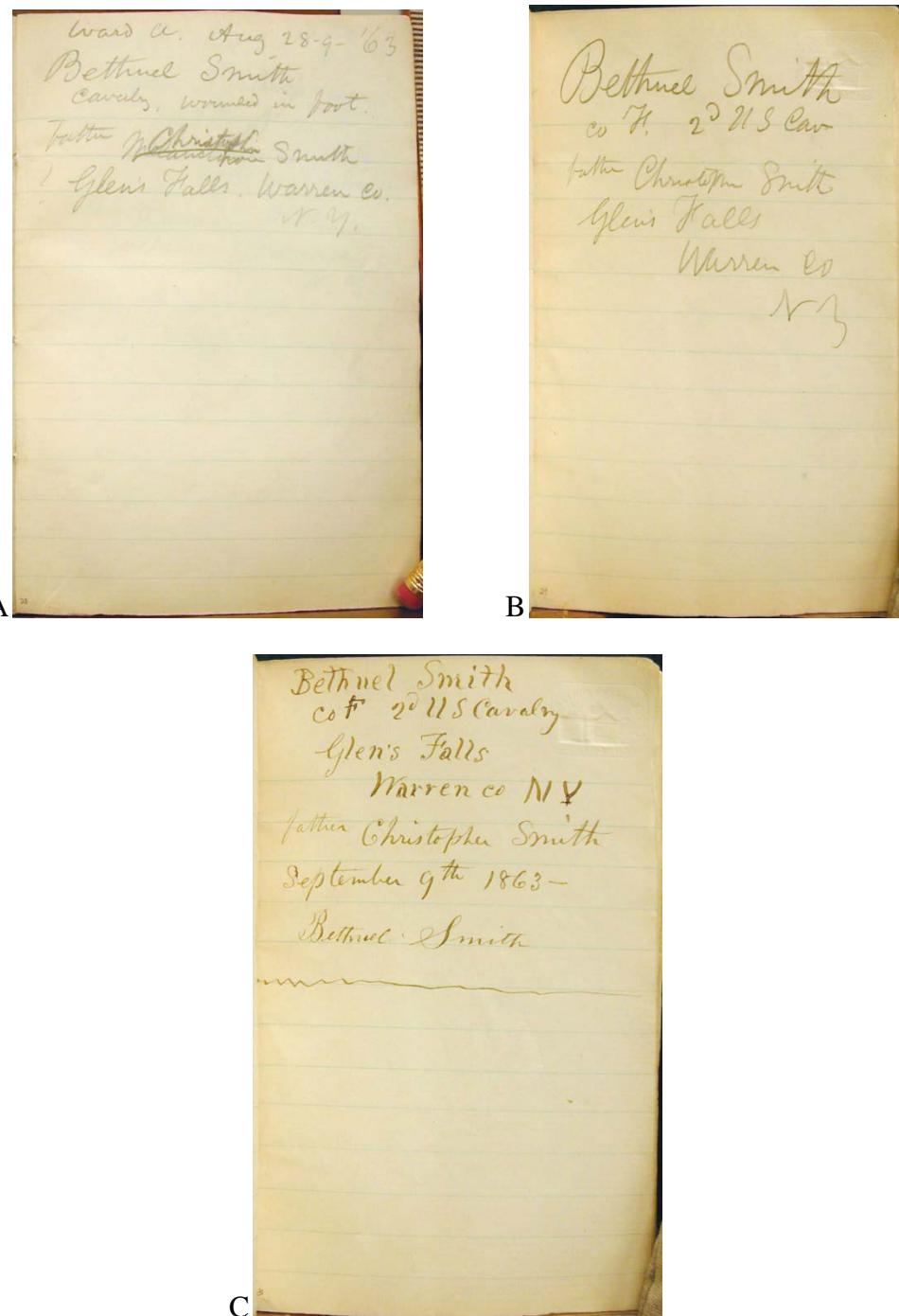


Figure 5.5: Three pages from “Scene in the Woods” notebook, images A-C. Courtesy of *The Walt Whitman Archive*.

Civil War Washington informed the structure and inscription of “livraisons,” even when the accounts recorded in them appear to be limited to single moments or hospital spaces. It would then follow that *Memoranda During the War*, as a printed dissemination of the collected “livraisons,” traces the general urban structure of Civil War Washington, as it traces the multiple spaces of the city’s military hospitals.

The abstract form of the list and the links between “livraisons” are effectively remediated in book form as *Memoranda During the War*. Given that “Hospital Note Book”—a “livraison” consisting almost entirely of lists of soldiers—contains manuscript drafts of fragments that appear in *Memoranda*, such as “Items from My Note Book” and “Some Specimen Cases,”⁹³ the form of the list appears not only as an effective record of the suffering body’s needs, but also a practice that can be effectively distributed as manuscript practice via the print medium. The abstract form of the list is therefore as *distributable* as it is formally *distributed*. That is, the list allows writing to span specific spaces, times, and the media used to record them, while forcing the radically local condition of embodiment to the surface of mediation. “Hospital Note book” provides an exemplary case of the list’s ability to capture radically local embodiment in an abstract form, because it could be remediated without losing its practical character.

By counting moments and adding to them over indefinite lengths of time, Whitman’s manuscript practices resulted in a presentation of the military hospital in *Memoranda During the War* as an always varying calculable multiplicity within a tentatively bound space. Before providing a demonstration with further analyses of Whitman’s manuscript practices and published works, however, I will have to elaborate on the relation between the space of military hospitals and Civil War Washington in Whitman’s and Alcott’s documentary texts. It will be necessary to identify how the link between the military hospital and urban space was analogous to the link between the writing systems of both authors and their conceptions of civic space during and after the war.

⁹³ These observations are helpfully point out by Grier. See *NUPM* 2:570n12, n16.

CHAPTER 6
 THE NEW SCENE:
 ALCOTT AND WHITMAN IN THE “HOSPITALESQUE”

In this chapter, I will focus on the institutional architecture that stabilized the circulation networks configured in the antebellum decades: military hospitals. Whitman’s and Alcott’s writing systems and the dissemination of those systems in published works would be conditioned by a technological situation that I will be referring to in the pages to follow as the “hospitalesque”: a microcosmic template for a macrocosmic regime of interurban networks.

Strange Hands: Poetic Intercourse 2

As a fictional body, Periwinkle becomes the sum of bureaucratic paperwork that brought her to D.C. She converts paperwork into her fictional body as a nurse and converts it into the material of ambiguously fictional narratives. In the space provided by the makeshift hotel-hospital, Periwinkle is the supplement of paperwork, and personal letters become the supplement for physical presence. What the conditions of the Civil War add to the tradition of corporeal supplementation through epistolary writing is the accelerated rate at which bodies were being destroyed as well as the accelerated rate at which the writing of destroyed bodies could be circulated. After her arrival at Hurly-burly House, Nurse Periwinkle’s fiction of paperwork presents letter-writing as an incorporeal, rather than a corporeal—an impersonal, rather than a personal—manuscript practice. This presentation of manuscript practice succeeds not by providing access to the presence of correspondents, but by delivering an index of the war itself.

Letter-writing became impersonal during the Civil War because radically personal letters had to be written by strange hands. As a letter-writer, Nurse Periwinkle is not the author of her fictional archive of paperwork, but an amanuensis as well as an editor. As an impersonal medium for the personal letters of wounded and dying soldiers, she is lifted out of the bureaucratic machine that brought her to Hurly-burly House, so that she can be taken up by what appears to be the tradition of war-era literature.

The letters dictated to me, and revised by me, that afternoon, would have made an excellent chapter for some future history of the war, like that which Thackeray's 'Ensign Spooney' wrote his mother just before Waterloo, they were 'full of affection, pluck, and bad spelling;' nearly all giving lively accounts of the battle, and ending with a somewhat sudden plunge from patriotism to provender, desiring 'Marm,' 'Mary Ann,' or 'Aunt Peters,' to send along some pies, pickles, sweet stuff, and apples, 'to yourn in haste,' Joe, Sam, or Ned, as the case might be. (79)

As Nurse Periwinkle displays her credentials, she also presents herself as a nurse who cares enough to revise the voices of her wards while taking dictation. The fiction of the documentary narrative is figured in this presentation once again. The soldiers who dictate are reformed for their manuscript letters, and the manuscript letters remain outside of Alcott's published text. The multiplicity of soldiers' names and their correspondents are gathered, bracketed in quotation marks, and thus kept outside the framework she has been constructing in *Sketches*: a framework that modestly refers to itself as dictation, but actually composes itself into a fiction of manuscript.

Nurse Periwinkle is a reader and writer whose skills give her a transcendent position outside of, or adjacent to, the crisis of bodies at war. If the reader has been following Periwinkle's paper trail, then it should be plain to see that, as a persona in a fictional archive of paperwork, Alcott's text offers its readers a very intimate experience of this transcendent position. Perhaps the amanuensis and editor of soldiers' letters must occupy this position by necessity, given that injured bodies rely on those removed from the fray to write (and read) their letters. What escapes Periwinkle's transcendence of the bodies who need her strange hand to write for them is their access to her fictional archive of paperwork. In Alcott's text, Periwinkle and her narrative would provide convalescing soldiers the identity and agency she herself gained on the way to D.C. But one of the purposes of the documentary narrative, as I have begun to demonstrate, is to displace the bureaucratic paper trail on which her fiction is based. Periwinkle initially accomplishes this feat by embodying the papers that grant her identity and agency in the Union's urban networks. She then proceeds by converting her bureaucratic paper trail into the impersonal letter-writing that she writes about, but does not find its way into the *Sketches*.

Manuscript practice and the bodies of soldiers are therefore presented in *Hospital Sketches* as the fiction of manuscript that converts the war into the experience of the national crisis from an adjacent position. By tidying the documentary narrative's paper trail and editing the dictating bodies of convalescing soldiers, Periwinkle increasingly refines the conditions under which her fiction could be produced and circulated. *Sketches* is emblematic of authorial self-possession under critical conditions; it enacts an array of strategies for coping with such conditions and provides the sum of these strategies in the author's and reader's mutual remove from this crisis through the fiction of practice.

The letters of soldiers, traveling the access routes that gave the Union army its strategic advantages over the South, provided a "new kind of access to the Civil War" (Henkin, 138). David Henkin states that letters from soldiers, or those who wrote for them, provided valuable information to correspondents who otherwise depended on limited accounts, or perhaps mere fictions, from war-era newspapers. The public's dependence on letters from intimates on the front lines "[suggest] a relationship to writing, receiving, and expecting letters that was heightened, but not fundamentally transformed, by the extraordinary circumstances of mobilization and war" (141-142). It is difficult to consider how letter-writing could be "fundamentally transformed" after centuries of slowly accelerating circulation. And yet the practices of writing, sending and receiving which were "heightened" by "mobilization and war," if not "fundamentally transformed" by them, may have reached a critical turning point by the Civil War.

As an amanuensis and editor of soldiers' letters, Periwinkle transformed the soldiers of the hospital-hotel into her ailing brothers and sons in a hospital-home. Yet the care Nurse Periwinkle takes as a letter-writing nurse is not an expression of her gendered social position, but an effect of the space of the hospital itself. Just as she internalized the mess of paperwork to become a nurse, she orders the bodies of soldiers by collapsing the hospital into the home. What this collapse produces, as with her writing of soldiers' letters, is not care itself, but the effect of care produced by order. The organization of bodies to produce the effect of care is, again, not

indicative of her gender so much as it is conditioned by the hospital where she is given a transcendent position that grants her the ability to transform the hospital-hotel into a hospital-home.

More flattering than the most gracefully turned compliment, more grateful than the most admiring glance, was the sight of those rows of faces, all strange to me a little while ago, now lighting up, with smiles of welcome, as I came among them, enjoying that moment heartily, with a womanly pride in their regard, a motherly affection for them all. (80)

The adolescent male could have never been so radiant without their being organized in rows and incapable of marking and tearing her papers.

For this order to be maintained, the medical-framework in which Periwinkle carries out her work is associated with the familiarity of gender prescriptions. But such prescriptions seem to be most important to the text when the fictional character of the documentary narrative needs to reinforce its transcendent position in relation to the conditions of its writing. The character of “John the Blacksmith” therefore serves as the fictional double for Periwinkle’s own fictional gender identity, and the chaste romance between them reinforces Periwinkle’s transcendent remove from the military hospital while gathering the multiplicity of soldiers under a sanitized version of her male likeness. Nurse Periwinkle admiringly writes: “though I had seen many suffer, some swore, some groaned, most endured silently, but none wept” (88). John can enter Alcott’s narrative framework because he fits the English literary schema from which she composes it: from the embodied practices promoted in Richardson rather than Thackeray.

The discovery of a familial bond, albeit a generic one, is what she lacks as writer and editor of the correspondence for her other sons. In John’s case, she “was the poor substitute for mother, wife, or sister, and in his eyes no stranger, but a friend who hitherto had seemed neglectful” (88). What makes John singular is the generic familial bond that she shares with him and that is confirmed by the spectrum of reference points, from mother to friend, which make them an ideal pair. A variety of the brother-in-law who guided hapless Periwinkle through the civic web of war era Boston, John serves as the guarantor of our heroine’s ability to forge connections between her less remarkable sons and their correspondents. As the archetypal

mother of convalescents in “Hurly-Burly House,” she has the scriptural skills to read their signs and canonize them if warranted.

The singular, representative male who bears the signs of spiritual transcendence accessible to all men, if only by virtue of their potential to signify in the language of the archetypal mother, validates the scriptural service Nurse Periwinkle provides as a letter-writer and as the narrating consciousness of *Hospital Sketches*. Because the text was known to be, but was not actually composed of, Alcott’s posted letters, John becomes the Absolute figuration for the drama of paperwork on which the entire documentary narrative was founded: the archive that is fictionalized in order to lie outside of the text. In John, *Sketches* presents the delivery of the undeliverable.

This notion is revealed in the plotting of John’s death scene, which begins as Nurse Periwinkle remembers her emotional attachment to John in a flashback. The announcement of John’s imminent death calls her away from her less remarkable sons in the generic order of Hurly-burly House and calls up her memory of becoming attached to him, over and above her maternal affection for other soldiers. “Sundering” her from her recollections, which constitute the entirety of John’s story in the *Sketches*, and also signaling her arrival at his bedside, is the letter she writes for him.

So I wrote the letter which he dictated, finding it better than any I had sent; for, though here and there a little ungrammatical or inelegant, each sentence came to me briefly worded, but most expressive; full of excellent counsel to the boy, tenderly bequeathing ‘mother and Lizzie’ to his care, and bidding him good bye in words the sadder for their simplicity. He added a few lines, with steady hand, and, as I sealed it, said, with a patient sort of sigh, ‘I hope the answer will come in time for me to see it;’ then, turning away his face, laid the flowers against his lips, as if to hide some quiver of emotion at the thought of such a sudden sundering of all the dear home ties. (91)

The “sundering of all dear home ties” takes place at three levels: between John and his home, between John and Nurse Periwinkle, and between Periwinkle’s memory and her encounter with John’s death. This tripartite sundering serves as evidence of the efficiency of Nurse Periwinkle’s epistolary framework. Writing and revising, Nurse Periwinkle misses nothing, and consequently

her narrative framework rises above the hospital-hotel to create a trinity of exception: the hospital-home, the exemplary man of pathos, and her own status as the editor of men's bodies.

Periwinkle proves herself as an apt manager of the latter once John is dead and the response to the letter dictated to her, tragically delayed by the confusion of accelerated postal routes, finally arrives:

As we stood looking at him, the ward master handed me a letter, saying it had been forgotten the night before. It was John's letter, come just an hour too late to gladden the eyes that had longed and looked for it so eagerly: yet he had it; for, after I had cut some brown locks for his mother, and taken off the ring to send her, telling how well the talisman had done its work, I kissed this good son for her sake, and laid the letter in his hand.
(93)

In this scene, Periwinkle is, above all, a diligent archivist, whose skills as an amanuensis and editor—as an organizer of bodies—delivers a fiction *about* the undeliverable. The figure of the undeliverable in *Hospital Sketches* is the respectfully unread manuscript letter, delayed in transit and buried with its ideal reader.

The paper trail behind *Hospital Sketches* reveals the way Nurse Periwinkle's narrative transforms documentary text into a fiction of documents by converting bureaucratic paperwork into edited letters. The radiant order of bodies in the hospital-home is enacted in Alcott's text through a refinement of writing practice, from the disordered and marked archive received from State bureaucracy to the refined circulation of letters that ultimately deliver what cannot be read. *Sketches* is not only a drama of paperwork, but also a sort of tragedy of manuscript resulting from the conditions of the Civil War, when letters eagerly awaited and eagerly sent may have never arrived, or arrived written in strange hands. As Henkin states, "war correspondence showed a fascinated impatience with the speed at which letters traveled and a gnawing anxiety that letters were miscarrying or disappearing" (142). Alcott's text captures the essence of this epistolary anxiety without referring directly to postal networks or the broader infrastructural conditions of the war. The narrative presents Nurse Periwinkle as a converter of paperwork into edited letters and the hospital-home as the context in which that conversion can take place.

Under Nurse Periwinkle's watch, the most valuable letters are withdrawn from circulation altogether, and the conception of the urban networks integral to the war effort and the mobilization of bodies is elided altogether by the space of the hospital. Alcott therefore offers her readers a fiction that dramatizes the tragic circumstances under which manuscript could no longer be received as a supplement of the body, as it traditionally had, but was a fiction about the undeliverable circumstances of war, a drama redeeming the unread in death. The paper trail and circulation routes through which papers circulate are left behind and outside of the space of Alcott's documentary narrative. The delivery of the unread in Alcott's fictional scene represent a radical form of privacy in death.

Sketches may be considered a response to Civil War documentary texts that were presented to readers as printed versions of manuscript evidence. "Extracts from the Journal of an Officer in the 54th Regt., Mass. Vols." appeared in the same issue of the *Commonwealth* as Alcott's epistolary "Postscript" to *Hospital Sketches*, as well as the announcement of the concluded serial's publication as a book (June 26, 1863). The authenticity of the extracts lies in the banality of its contents, as the officer does not record the dramatic events of the battlefield, but his regiment's incessant movements by steamboats and rails. Epistolary anxiety was, perhaps, military anxiety: both eagerly awaited access to the crisis of war, while living with the fear that the object of desire would never arrive at its intended destination. The "Extracts," which continue in the following number of the *Commonwealth*, where they are accompanied by "Letters" from "The Kansas Colored Regiment," suggest that documentary accounts were not only in demand among the general reading public, but that the distinction between letters and journals, fictional "sketches" and autobiography, were divided by their concepts of access to paperwork.

Nevertheless, both the *Sketches* and contemporary documentary texts attempt to prove that, however much the war may accelerate or disrupt the delivery of eagerly anticipated personal reports from the front, something will survive. In both cases, war-era documentary texts reacted to a desire for manuscript which might have only ever been satisfied by its simulation in

print. What distinguishes Alcott's narrative is that it casts the fictional persona of the caring amanuensis and editor of soldier's letters in the role of a converter of real bodies for circulation as supplements, thereby reflecting the battlefield testimony of anonymous soldiers, transcribed and edited for circulation as remediated manuscript evidence in newsprint. Thus, *Hospital Sketches* teaches readers that writing about the war turns manuscript into a printed fiction, as the author knew well that the expressions of ordered soldiers are always already mediated by the hands of others. Still, Periwinkle's drama of paperwork began with the accumulation of papers that would allow the Civil War nurse to narrate the tragedy of manuscript. To follow the paper trail behind the *Sketches* is to return to the city streets and the fiction of the hospital-home that Alcott proposes as the new fiction of social space by the end of her documentary narrative. It is on the streets and in the vision of the post-bellum future that Alcott's and Whitman's documentary texts share the concerns of literary writing during and after the war.

In the early diaristic fragments of *Memoranda During the War*, before the poet actually arrives at the military hospitals in Civil War Washington, Whitman begins caring for soldiers by writing letters for them. In a makeshift hospital-mansion in Falmouth, VA, December 21, 1862, he admits that he "had nothing to give at that visit, but wrote a few letters to folks home, mothers, &c." (6). He would become famous his distribution of gifts to convalescing soldiers. Throughout *Memoranda*, these gifts consist of, among other delights, stationery. A fragment dated Thursday, Jan. 21, notes: "In Ward F supplied the men throughout with writing paper and stamp'd envelope each." Emphasizing the demand for stationery as well as his role in furnishing it, he expands on his distribution practice: "Distributed in the Wards a quantity of note-paper, and forty or fifty stamp'd envelopes, of which I had recruited my stock, and the men were much in need" (8). In the undated entry titled "Letter Writing," he notes the coincidence of his note-taking and letter-writing practices: "When eligible, I encourage the men to write, and myself, when call'd upon, write all sorts of letters for them, (including love letters, very tender ones.) Almost as I reel off this memoranda, I write for a new patient to his wife" (9). The simultaneous reeling off of memoranda and his letter-writing for soldiers is made literal in the text pages later,

when he prints his letter to the mother of the late Frank H. Irwin, “Co. E, 93rd Pennsylvania”: “No doubt you and Frank’s friends have heard the sad fact of his death in Hospital here....I will write you a few lines—as a casual friend that sat by his death bed” (50). If the distinction between letter-writing for those who cannot and the reeling off of manuscript notes are blurred, it is so because Whitman’s documentary text presents writing for others and writing by others as necessary measures in conserving relations under conditions of war.

In Whitman’s *Memoranda*, manuscript is not a drama wrested from the infinite circulation of war-era urban networks, so much as it is a layer of practice in a burgeoning media culture. The figure of media in Alcott’s *Sketches* was Nurse Periwinkle, the converter of bureaucratic paperwork into edited letters, in *Memoranda* that figure is the memoirist who redistributes practice as paper, script, print, and its bindings. What is made clear in the earliest fragments of the *Memoranda*, then, is the text’s stark contrast with Alcott’s *Sketches*. Whitman thought his book would be “beyond mere hospital sketches,” in order to distinguish it from Alcott’s text and its imitators. Whitman’s text does not present itself as a fiction of paperwork, but as a variety of paperwork; the memoirist does not embody bureaucratic papers and convert them into edited letters, but distributes stationery; and most strikingly, perhaps, the memoirist does not only write for soldiers, but encourages them to write for themselves, if possible, even though he appears to be capable of reeling off memoranda while writing letters for others.

Memoranda distributes the paper trail that other documentary texts place behind and outside their narratives. In distinguishing itself from its predecessors in the war documentary genre, then, Whitman’s documentary text becomes a work of documentary poetics, placing manuscript practice suited to the conditions of war into circulation. The reader is still placed in an adjacent position: not on the battlefield, but in the capital city’s military hospitals; not occupying the perspective of a soldier, but in a growing relation with a multiplicity of soldiers; not as a fiction affirming the undeliverable, but as an archive, in effect, affirming the simultaneity of fiction and non-fiction, of the soldier and the writer taking dictation, of the deliverable and the undeliverable, in every account. *Memoranda* does not transcend the

limitations of Alcott's position of adjacency to the battlefield or what she writes about it, but by presenting the memoirist's adjacent position in the form of a manuscript practice, Whitman's documentary poetics captures the experiential structure of being *in* the general situation of war *after* its heroic battles and *before* its traumatized bodies can be tallied and therefore fictionalized for circulation.

The split presentation of manuscript "livraisons" and retrospective imagination in the opening pages of *Memoranda* develops into a structure of before and after, writing letters and reeling off memoranda, which registers the impact of the crisis the memoirist and everyone else is simultaneously in. By writing-in this situation, Whitman's *Memoranda* can be identified and distinguished from the transitional space depicted in Alcott's *Sketches*. Both writers sought to capture the military hospital that they worked in during the Civil War. The hospital-home constitutes a fiction of an emergent order, a space withdrawn from circulation. Whitman's documentary text increasingly exposes its paperwork in book form by reducing the presentation of manuscript practice to the material conditions not only of war, but of expanding, accelerating circulation.

The "Hospitalessque": The Body, Delivered

According to Dell Upton, one of the most important advances in nineteenth-century hospital architecture prioritized the circulation of air, providing for increased ventilation in wards and around individual beds. Reformed architecture not required the addition of windows, vents, and chimneys but also a revised floor plan. Long, narrow wards allowed more space between beds. High windows and "ventilation chimneys" that pulled air through the wards, where infection was thought to breed in the stagnant air, would bring nature's salubrious influence to the sick and dying (156). Attributed to Florence Nightingale, ventilation-forward hospital architecture emerged from the unprecedented medical demands of the Crimean War. The Union imported the new designs for the same reason. Whitman's and Alcott's accounts of military hospitals in Civil War Washington capture the emergence of a new sanitary architectural template in the States by

presenting the coexistence of makeshift and planned medical spaces in the same critical urban milieu. While both authors' texts suggest that a new sanitary architecture would improve conditions for convalescing or dying soldiers, they also suggest that sanitary architecture could benefit society on the whole.

Writing in 1863, Alcott portrays "Hurdy-burly House" as a domestic, institutional space laughably ill-equipped for the demands of industrial-urban war. Hurly-burly House is a domestic institution in transition, and Periwinkle, like Alcott, eagerly anticipates the efficiency of the coming spatial order. On one of her leisurely jaunts through Civil War Washington, Nurse Periwinkle visits Armory Square Hospital, the more famous hospital she had originally hoped to be deployed to at the outset of her short nursing career. There, she finds the promise of an order superseding her own Hurly-burly House. The wards are "long, clean, warm, and airy" in contrast with her domain's "cold, dirty, inconvenient, up stairs and down stairs" (97). "Here," she continues,

order, method, common sense and liberality reigned and ruled, in a style that did one's heart good to see; at the Hurly-burly Hotel, disorder, discomfort, bad management, and no visible head, reduced things to a condition which I despair of describing. The circumlocution fashion prevailed, forms and fusses tormented our souls, and unnecessary strictness in one place was counterbalanced by unpardonable laxity in another. (97-98)

In her comic descriptions of Hurly-burly House, Periwinkle often laments the disorganization of the staff and the limitations of the space. It was originally a hotel, after all, but that only proves that even a generic system of practice, like the narrative order of Alcott's Sketches, already superseded the crumbling order of civic spaces and the infrastructural emergence it began to reveal. Could it be that Alcott's documentary narrative actually succeeds because it presents the transitional space of the hospital-home in the already superseded past? The fractured façade of allegorical representation in Alcott's text is the necessary step toward the reign of "order, method, common sense and liberality." Nurse Periwinkle is the heroine of the *Sketches* for the order she brings, both as a character and a writer, to its scene. The awkward fit between body and space is the stuff of parody; the dissonance cannot be heard. Noise promises to disappear

altogether under the conditions of planned medical spaces, where Periwinkle finds the harmony that she has been looking for. In Armory Square, she enters the spatial equivalent of the fiction of manuscript, a sanitary institution that appears to restore the natural order interrupted by the crisis of war, thereby burying the past.

To say that the writing body's harmony in this spatial order was infrastructurally conditioned requires no speculation. Published the same year as *Hospital Sketches*, the *Treatise on Hygiene* (1863), by newly appointed Surgeon General William Hammond, outlined plans for hospital reform—among other matters—which were implemented by the federal government as soon as 1863, but which also became in the years after the Civil War a “model for a nationwide military hospital program” (Rutkow 156). The new model would allow all distinctions to collapse: doctors would design institutional interiors and the pioneers of the free-market would clear the way for them. Health, economy, and culture would be part of the same political planning of the post-war citizen. In his *Treatise*, Hammond explicitly states that his designs for Civil War hospitals would apply to “structures intended for certain particular purposes, such as theaters, manufactories, and public buildings of various kinds,” all of “which properly belong to the domain of public hygiene” (305). In Hammond’s *Treatise*, more capacious and sanitary military hospitals are really prospective figures for the dispersed institutions of the post-bellum Union, infrastructurally harmonized, inside and outside, above and below, for the body’s sake.

The meaning of hygiene and the strategy of creating a hygienic environment was more complex than the mere account of increasing quantities of bodies and the architectural channeling of salubrious qualities. Hospital reform during the Civil War bore a history structured by a “/,” a break that attempted to supersede itself in the modern style. The architectural movement might also be considered a return of the commonplace system. Hammond acknowledges that the Renaissance architectural style “stands confessedly at the head of all the forms of modern secular architecture in the chief capitals of the world” (345). The Vitruvian concepts of symmetry and proportion were the rule applied to individual buildings and their unity in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century urban spaces. “Starting with the idea of a unitary

space of geometrical structure in which all values were in proportion to each other,” states Giulio Argan,

it was impossible not to see the need for a proportional relationship between the buildings situated in that space. Since the geometrical structure of space is *perspective*, a proportional composition is also a perspective composition. The novelty in the Renaissance concept of space lay in the fact that perspective was no longer considered as the law of our vision but as the constructive rule of space itself; consequently, it was important as a principle of distribution of buildings in the design of the city. (21)

The Renaissance style established the template for the “pavilion plan” to be used in hospital architecture beginning in the seventeenth-century. The industrial museum cities of the antebellum decades were a caesura in a long-term work-in-progress that could only hit the streets once the crisis of bodies induced by the Civil War demanded its return, albeit in an architectural and infrastructural format.

The first hospital designed by Hammond, the West Philadelphia Hospital (Figure 6.1), followed the pavilion plan established by Renaissance style. It accommodated 3,124 beds, but despite its impressive capacity the Surgeon General found it almost too big: “The discipline has always been excellent, and the patients have been well cared for. The difficulties to contend with in the management of so vast an institution as this can scarcely be conceived by those who have not personally visited it and studied the system by which it is governed” (371). The system of governance at West Philadelphia Hospital included an in-house printing press and library. Discipline and care were more efficiently managed in Mower Hospital (Figure 6.2). Though a temporary hospital, it was superior in architecture and infrastructure. Mower Hospital was also adjacent to Chestnut Hill and Philadelphia Railroad, so as to receive soldiers directly from the battlefield (372). Each pavilion had its own mess-room, wash-room and wardmaster’s-room; each patient had his/her own 60 X 950 cubic feet area; and “water-closets are well arranged, the excreta being carried off at once by a full stream of water” (373). Mower also had its own internal railroad to transport bodies and commodities throughout its vast interior: “To each ward at the end joining the corridor a messroom is attached, sufficiently large for the use of those

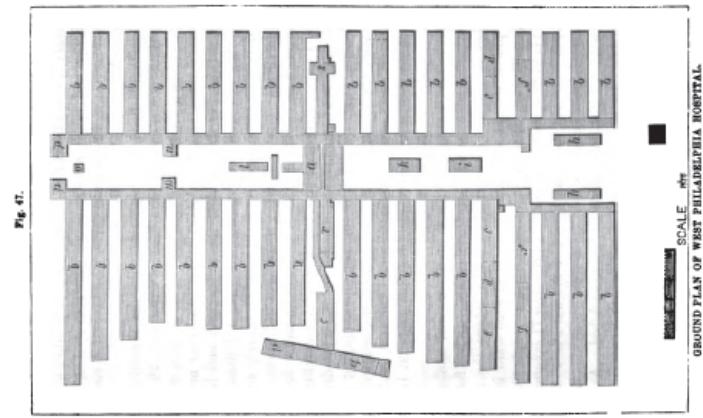


Figure 6.1: Plan for West Philadelphia Hospital from Hammond's *Treatise*.

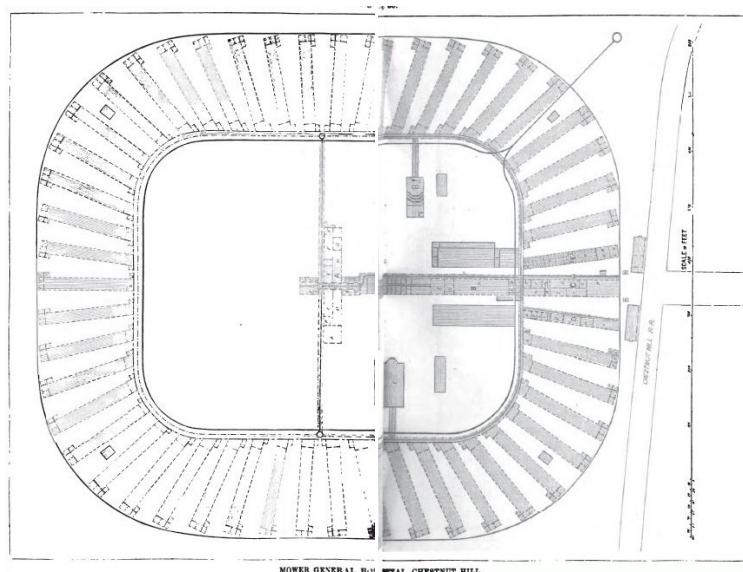


Figure 6.2: Plan for Mower General Hospital from Hammond's *Treatise*.

patients able to leave their beds. The food is brought to these rooms in hot-water cars running on a railway laid in the corridor throughout its entire length. By this means the meals are served hot from the kitchen, with which the railway is immediately connected. This railway also serves for the transportation of patients to their wards, and for carrying fuel, furniture, etc.” (373).

Temporary hospitals like Mower were experimental trials for a widespread hospital program.

Where West Philadelphia Hospital had been built on the “lateral pavilion plan,” Mower Hospital followed the “radial pavilion plan.” The radial pavilion plan was superior to the lateral plan, argued Hammond, because it provided “the most complete isolation of the pavilions consistent with efficient administration” (381). The organization of convalescent bodies according to type and gravity of illness for the purpose of serving their needs established the conceptual foundation for the hospital program to emerge from the Civil War. Provisions had already been made for improved ventilation, for the introduction of nature into hospital architecture. Now the provisioning of bodies with individual spaces and services provided for their needs on the basis of physical type could become a true realization of system of practice in the political reality of the Union.

Whitman’s and Alcott’s Civil War texts capture the movement of medical space into the political space of D.C.’s urban milieu. Lisa Long calls the hospital program to emerge under Hammond’s United States Sanitary Commission a program based on “sanitary science.” Sanitary science, states Long, inscribed itself on the body, negating the emotional life of individuals by constructing codified social members: “it is clear that the USSC believes its scientific mission ‘inscribed’ itself, to use their term, on all it touched. The USSC writes history on and with sanitized bodies....Sanitary science’s presumed triumph over the human body is the foundational myth upon which victory, defeat, and subsequent reunification are founded” (95). Social equivalence by means of ideological regimentation would pave the way for a healed and functional body after the rupture of the war (despite the rupture of race, or even gender). The hospitals inscribed bodies at the radically local level within a microcosmic institutional format that was networked within a more general and emergent spatial order that would assume the

same form and be facilitated by the already accelerating, expanding interurban networks of the previous three decades. The single hospital for African-American soldiers was located outside of D.C.'s city limits.

By 1863 the Union had acknowledged drawbacks it had not anticipated at the outset of the Civil War, but the advance of internal improvements in D.C. set the stage for victory. Emerging with the American Renaissance in architecture and civic planning during the war, the theatricality of baroque urban space combined with the Enlightenment-era museum city to bear forward the proto-modern city of the late-nineteenth century. In L'Enfant's Washington as in Haussman's Paris, perspective was not only shaped at the local level, according to the grid plan on which the conventions of perspective were based in the Renaissance, but topologically, as if the localized subject absorbed the general, radial plan of the city on the street level. The consumption of maps and lithographs of aerial plans in the 1850s did not form the psychic infrastructure of the modern subject but harmonized with the circulation permitted by radial plans at the street level, where all major traffic channels lead to and from the center of governance.

Just as Alcott's drama of paperwork would be consolidated by the social role allotted to her in the hospital-hotel, just as that drama would present the reader with the fiction of manuscript amid the tragedy of circulation, the hospital program on the horizon, incubating at institutional sites like Armory Square, foreshadowed a corrective to the tumult of civic space left over from the growing pains of the antebellum decades. During a walk through Civil War Washington, Alcott describes the city as a military festival: "Pennsylvania Avenue, with its bustle, lights, music, and military, made me feel as if I'd crossed the water and landed somewhere in Carnival time" (68). This passage leads Mary Cappello to invoke the "carnivalesque" in Alcott's *Hospital Sketches*. Coined by Mikhail Bakhtin, and revived by many since, the carnivalesque refers to the always prior communal forms and rituals repressed by modern societies. In the carnivalesque, there are no political divisions, whether private/public, rich/poor, female/male. Cappello identifies the traces of the carnivalesque in Alcott's

representation of Civil War Washington as a festive spectacle, which discloses her “alienated desire” and consequent will to “social protest,” which turns “the body politic inside out.”

Like Daneen Wardrop’s reading of Whitman’s *Memoranda*, Cappello’s reading of Alcott’s *Sketches* is concerned with ambiguous representations of gender and the political stakes of erotic reading. In departing from Wardrop’s and Cappello’s arguments, I want to insist on an erotic reading that has similar stakes but that stops short of gender politics and the vexed historical collaborations between white feminists and people of African descent in America, as they both struggled for civil rights. My departure is more of a perspectival shift on the grounds established by Wardrop and Cappello in reading Whitman and Alcott, as I follow the trajectory of Judith Butler’s analysis from gender performativity and its infrastructural, medial context. The articulation of the body’s documentary impulse as bodies, physically localized and nationally expanded, break down and are reconstructed is what is at stake in my analysis. I want to assess the technological situation in which bodies are channeled and organized into types, especially when they are ostensibly enfranchised by the constitutive mandates of an emergent democratic scene, designed to foster a republican culture of free and equal citizens. My analysis enters the dialogue about gender, race and the body in Whitman’s and Alcott’s war-era texts, I believe, by way of the link that literary writing disrupts and establishes between civic space and its public. My conception of the literary is, perhaps, what distinguishes my perspective from a perspective like Cappello’s. It can either be assumed that a prior social existence, repressed by the current order of things, ruptures civic space in times of crisis, thereby allowing the “carnivalesque” to be traced on the surface of everyday life. Or it can be assumed that what is prior to any political condition is a social process of organization that takes place on the level of spatial design and its reinforcement by way of practices localized in the body.

In Whitman’s and Alcott’s post-1861 writing systems, the literary measures the noise between the two facets of a harmonized Union of programmed dissent and recuperation as paperwork, its organization and distribution. My analysis is not positing a prior condition of corporeal identity institutionally defined but a historical writing of the simultaneity of more than

one material condition according to which social types are inscribed and allotted roles affirmed in practice. Social process, designed and enacted in practice, fits the coordinates of civic space to writing systems, facilitating the tracing of transient configurations, one body at a time, and thereby generating something like a public. Paperwork in *Hospital Sketches* and in *Memoranda* is presentable and distributable in its given situation; the presentation of that situation in the documentary style of the literary in a time of crisis necessarily traces out different trajectories, different consequences of practice, differences that become gendered, become ethnic: are performative medial instantiations of a *documentary poetics* under differing infrastructural conditions. What is emerging, then, is not another “carnivalesque” but the channeled tumult, the controlled noise, of the republic: the spatial order, always recurring, that I will refer to as the “hospitalesque.”

The hospitalesque entails more than just a free circulation of air; Nurse Periwinkle can only provide her documentary portrait of Civil War Washington once she stops moving: “Being forbidden to meddle with fleshly arms and legs, I solaced myself by mending cotton ones, and, as I sat sewing at my window, watched the moving panorama that passed below; amusing myself with taking notes of the most striking figures in it.” The “panorama” described by Alcott is representative of the “/” that surfaces at the critical moment when the hospitalesque emerged: the “Long trains of army wagons” and their “perpetual rumble”; the ambulances that “rattled to and fro.” The social dynamics prescribed by the hospitalesque are predictable enough: “barouches, with invalid officers, rolled round the corner, and carriage loads of pretty children, with black coachmen, footmen, and maids.” Promenading women “dressed in the worst possible taste, and walked like ducks,” while “men did the picturesque, and did it so well that Washington looked like a mammoth masquerade.” Just like the popular amusement and its industrialized optical effects, everyone and everything in Alcott’s panorama is animated in a generic representation of the world outside, the natural world: “dozens of such figures were constantly prancing by, with private prickings of spurs, for the benefit of the perambulating flower-bed” (102). This scene of urban spectatorship gives the reader very much to look at, but leaves very little to the

imagination. And yet Alcott's panorama succeeds as entertainment because it confirms what readers already know. Nearly everything pictured in the scene is familiar. Its historical specificity lies in its depiction of the density of industrial-urban circulation, the introduction of war-torn bodies, and the restoration of old embodied roles in the everyday scene, brought to order by what we readers can trust will become a national hospital program.

Whitman's *Memoranda* also features panoramic descriptions of Civil War Washington. As elsewhere, the poet's scenes appear to respond to Alcott's text. Watching the cavalry camp in the field outside his bedroom, he writes on July 10: "I sit long in my third story window and look at the scene—a hundred little things going on—or peculiar objects connected with the camp that could be described, any one of them justly, without much minute drawing and coloring in words" (21). In *Memoranda*, as in "Sun-Down Poem," Whitman presents the reader with scenes that could be easy enough to describe but are left undescribed, rendered in generic terms. Just as Alcott paints and animates a picture of Civil War Washington, Whitman opens blanks where scenes should be. Where the fiction of manuscript negates its paper trail, Whitman affirms it, not only by presenting a text that presents itself as paperwork, but by writing-in the "hundred little things going on" and gesturing toward the possibility of their inscription. Whitman's documentary poetics conserves the trace of what would be represented in text, in order to stop short of representation in general and to offer in its place the presentation of a logic anticipating inscriptions, format, and circulation. Though Whitman sits and looks out at the world from his window, as Alcott does, he presents a moving scene from everyday life without the scene, as Alcott does not. Contrasting with the narrative strategies employed in *Sketches*, Whitman's *Memoranda* is written without a scene. This statement articulates differently what I stated above concerning the manuscript practice integral to Whitman's hospital visitations, which brings bodies to the surface of his writing, one body at a time. In his manuscript "livraisons" as in *Memoranda*, Whitman's writing articulates a structure of representation, a process without a product, a summing up without a sum, which is, consequently, distributable as a practice.

I want to emphasize that the multiple elements of this structure can only be presented and distributed because they are not a product or a sum of those elements. My emphasis on this formal observation about Whitman's documentary poetics returns me to Luria's reading of *Memoranda*—which is actually a reading of *Memoranda* as it appears in Whitman's autobiography *Specimen Days* (1881)—alongside the poet's elegies for Lincoln, originally published in *Sequel to Drum-Taps* (1865-66). Building her concept of the “poetry of internal improvements,” Luria describes Whitman’s documentary text as a type of writing that works in tandem with the infrastructural conditions emerging from the Civil War. “Whitman’s journalistic images let us see the value of internal improvements as a way of organizing, and giving a shape of progress to, the national sprawl, and to the violence that results from the incursion of the nation’s contests into the personal lives of the citizens who must fight its wars” (62). The new spatial order established with military hospitals provides the architectural model for Luria’s materialist idealism, because this order allows soldiers to be properly cared for. Military hospitals therefore resolve the “capital city’s inherent tension between circulation space and interior space. There scientific knowledge and invention combine to create the right setting for the men” (63). Luria describes the consequences of the emerging spatial condition that I have named the hospitalessque. Infrastructure only obtains this ideal state—already projected by William Hammond in his *Treatise*—with the help of the “poetry of internal improvements.” Where Whitman’s “journalistic images” allow the reader to value infrastructure for its potential to realize a transcendent ideal, then, poetry provides the ideal that infrastructure realizes.

As it does with Whitman’s “journalistic” documentary prose, “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d” serves as an exemplary case of poetry that works in tandem with emergent infrastructural conditions. Luria supports her notion of the “poetry of internal improvement” by providing a close-reading of the following section of Whitman’s elegy:

Coffin that passes through lanes and streets,
Through day and night, with the great cloud darkening the land,
With the pomp of the inloop’d flags, with the cities draped in black,
With the show of the States themselves, as of crape-veil’d women,
standing,

With processions long and winding, and the flambeaus of the night,
 With the countless torches lit—with the silent sea of faces, and the
 unbarred heads,
 With the waiting depot, the arriving coffin, and the somber faces,
 With dirges through the night, with the thousand voices rising strong and
 solemn;
 The dim-lit churches and the shuddering organs—Where amid these you
 journey,
 With the tolling, tolling bells' perpetual clang;
 Here! coffin that slowly passes.
 I give you my sprig of lilac. (*SDT* 4-5)

Because these lines refer to Lincoln's funeral train, Luria decides that "Technology and humans merge in this poem." As the political figurehead of the Union, Lincoln's body ties the nation together, even in death, as the railroad carrying his body does, and will. The public is incorporated by the collapse of the dead president's body and the railroad, for as Luria observes, "the black crepe forms a train, as on a dress of mourning, that follows the tracks." Anaphora amounts to a techno-nationalist sum, then, as individual movement is subsumed under the collective agency symbolized by the presidency and mobilized by the railroad. The poem's "I" realizes this sum, when its arrival, "Here!," at the coffin, does not present the "I's" movement toward coffin, but makes the "I" automatically present at the coffin. The consequence of Luria's reading is that "The poem simply asserts a fantastic infrastructure in which home, nation, death, and poetry all flow together" (67). What is most surprising about Luria's reading of Whitman's elegy is that it is not intended to condemn the poet as the nationalist ideologue some of his most reactionary critics perceive him to be. That is not to say that Luria's reading is wrong. On the contrary, her reading appears to be right. But what is right about it only holds if the poem is read as the completion of an austere materialism which could only blossom within a nationalist imaginary. To maintain this dialectical framework is to maintain a concept of the formation of sums—of unified poems, unifying infrastructures, united publics—all of which can be neatly collapsed into the system that orders them in accordance with their role in perpetuating the survival of that system. That is, after all, how ideology works: the apparatus that channels the localized, embodied practices designed to insure its survival on a wider scale mystifies the relation it creates between bodies and the collective.

And yet “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d” appears to offer a perfect representation of ideology in order to present the operations of the apparatus at a local level. And this is what makes it a *less than ideal* complement for the real infrastructures that would unite the States under a widespread hospital program. This alternative system in Whitman’s elegy can be identified in the poem’s symbolic triad—the bird, the star, and the lilac—if the reader can, for a moment, allow the triad to remain a structure of multiple elements, rather than a trinity whose unity is prescribed by Christian mythology. At points throughout the poem, the elements of the triad tally sums, as the lilac does in the section read by Luria. In those lines, anaphora establishes a homogeneous foundation for the symbolic totality of cities, States, mourning garb (and the public wearing it), railroad lines, and individuality, figuratively mediated by the “I,” who becomes the singular bearer of an organic totality: the “sprig of lilac.” If the poem is about the fusion of technology and humans, as Luria claims it is, then technology refers to the symbol as well as the railroad in this case. The imaginary order induced by the power of the symbol and the parallel spatial order still being produced by railroads in collusion with political institutions is, in fact, elegantly staged in Luria’s extracted section of the elegy.

Whitman’s long industrial-urban lyrics tally sums and redistribute them. In doing so, he not only reproduces sums, but introduces new sums as new elements in each tally: retracing, in movement, the differing coordinates binding civic space and writing systems, rather than subjects and infrastructures or the lyric hybrids that result. Each sum becomes a new element in the next calculation of elements, and which consequently proceeds with new terms based on new elements in the calculation that provides the indeterminate metrics of the literary. This practice of calculation in the uniform schematic established by the industrial-urban order that Whitman found himself immersed in during the 1850s documented the conditions of circulation that would have otherwise escaped the cultural record of that specific moment. In “Sun-Down Poem” as in “When Lilacs Last,” writing-in-transit presents an alternative structure disclosing its own order of infrastructural possibility—the disclosure resulting from the tallying and the redistribution of sums.

The “sprig of lilac,” then, after being deployed as a symbol of collective mourning, is a mere strategy to “cover [death] over,” and a mere fragment among many that “Copious, I break” (*SDT* 5) for the incalculable deaths produced by war. So the elegy proceeds by trial and error, as the star is brought into the triad of symbols, only to find that it is a projection of the “I’s” melancholy: “As I watch’d where you pass’d and was lost in the netherward black of the night, / As my soul, in its trouble, dissatisfied, sank, as where you, sad orb, / Concluded, dropt in the night, and was gone” (6). More successful is the “gray-brown bird,” who, one hundred lines after the funeral train, sings “To the tally of my soul, / Loud and strong” (10). And yet the song that tallies the soul revives the traumatic memories of war and the social fragmentation persisting in its wake:

And I saw, as in noiseless dreams, hundreds of battle-flags;
 [...]
 And at last but a few shreds of the flags left on the staffs (and all in
 silence),
 And the staffs all splinter’d and broken.

I saw battle-corpses, myriads of them,
 And the white skeletons of young men—I saw them;
 I saw the debris and debris of all dead soldiers
 [...]
 The living remain’d and suffer’d—the mother suffer’d,
 And the wife and the child, and the musing comrade suffer’d,
 And the armies that remain’d suffer’d. (11)

It is the bird-song that tallies the soul and revives the vision of “splintering” and “breaking.” The vision would rest in the past, except for the ongoing suffering of those who survived the war, whether on or off the battlefield—the remaining armies, the mother, wife, and child. The trauma of the war structures the codependent survival of military and domestic institutions, elsewhere ordered by the national infrastructures of a hospital plan for the convalescent Union. The indeterminate metrics of the literary erode the spatial order between the living and the dead, the city and the battlefield. The literary traces the coordinates—the scripts and codes—that organize the two spaces sacralized by the narration of history to emerge from the crisis. It opens the spatial order that prescribes a metrics for space and the perception of that space through the practice of self-representation—and, consequently, the analogical perception of the self as the

holistically conceived organism that social order must become to survive. The museum city of the antebellum decades did not die; rather, it had paved the way for and was incorporated by the hospitalesque: a new sum of coordinates binding space and practice, which, in Whitman's elegy, is also a new element in an ongoing tally of sums and traced coordinates.

The poem therefore concludes with the presentation of a multiple triadic structure, more than a readymade trinity. It posits an alternative symbolic structure of multiples, "Lilac and star and bird," which cohere, "twined with the chant of my soul" (12), within a system of practice that traces new orders of relations, new coordinates disclosed by the shifting grounds on which space and writing are forced together, to space out the elements of readymade units, only ever tentatively bound. If the poem is infrastructural, then it may be so because it is a system which posits an order of its own—an order consisting of a tentatively bound multiple. The poem therefore presents a structure not of transcendent order, but of perpetual suffering that must be accounted for, one body at a time. No spatial or symbolic order posited by the conditions emerging from the Civil War can truly provide recourse. In retrospect, Whitman's *Memoranda* achieves a new articulation of the persistent trauma of war ten years after the publication of *Drum-Taps* and *Sequel*.

Writing-in-Transit: A Possible Bound Thing

Because of the material character of the "livraisons," bibliographic descriptions of them in the NYU edition of *Collected Writings* are consistently intriguing. Regarding the fabrication of the handmade "Hospital Note book," Grier ventures the following reconstruction:

[Whitman] apparently folded and cut the notebook and began entries at what now appears to be the back in late January 1863, two weeks after he settled in Washington. He made entries on the rectos up to {23}, and put it aside. In June, he apparently took it up again and pasted on the yellow paper cover, concealing his name, address and the names of hospitals on the original white blue ruled cover ({1}). He then turned it upside down and over and inscribed a title and his name on the new yellow front cover. (NUPM 2:569)

Measuring roughly 4 X 3 inches and fabricated from correspondence paper, the material structure of the "Hospital Note book" is one example of the many that embody the story of its

creation. As the poet carried out his hospital work, distributing stationery, writing letters, and reeling off memoranda, he fabricated storage media from the materials offered up by his situation. The livraison was a storage medium that did not only reflect its situation but became a part of it as Whitman gave his writing practice over to its demands. Somewhere between the published *Memoranda* and the (now) archived livraison lies the circulation of a documentary practice that emerges with the infrastructural conditions and institutional programs designed to recuperate the loss inflicted by times of crisis. In Whitman's war-era manuscripts and published works, a logic of manuscript articulates a code that operates in the program resulting in the narrative effect of the hospitalessque. This code leads back from such effects—writing-in-transit yields what was placed *before* material practices *after* practice has begun.

As a vehicle for Whitman's emergent writing system, the livraison is consistent with the storage media preceding it: the portable ledger and the improvised “filing system.” With the livraison, however, the “handmade-in-the-readymade,” the conception of the book as a tentatively bound object, reaches a critical state. In ways that the poet's readymade ledgers could not, the livraison bears a peculiar history of storage, formatting, and circulation that is non-linear and yet aims at narrative, that is extemporaneous and yet deliberately temporalized. The livraison bears the temporal and spatial structure of a practice that emerges with the crisis of Civil War and yet records the noise of its recuperative hospital program's implementation. Whitman's “Hospital Note book” bears inscriptions that share the formal character of documentary fragments in *Memoranda*, which account for suffering soldiers, one body at a time, under the hospital program established during the war.

In this section, I want to extend this analysis to the construction of another “livraison,” one used to document the political space outside Civil War Washington's military hospitals. An analysis of the notebook, titled “Wednesday 4th March” in the *Collected Writings*, and also known as “Holograph Account of the Adjournment of the 37th Congress 4 March 1863” in the catalogue of the Trent Collection at Duke University—will demonstrate that Whitman's manuscript practice in Civil War Washington was shaped by the structure of the city and its

multiple scenes, rather than the city as a scene of writing or any singular scenes within it. This analysis will maintain the idea that Whitman's manuscript practice documents a calculating spatial structure that shaped his published works and became distributable as a practice of tracing the production of space as a calculation of sums. The case of the "Holograph Account" poses a challenge as well as a next phase to my reading of practice in "Sun-Down Poem," for it reveals the localized practice not of counting and recounting but of making spatial structures through the manipulation of media. The task of counting now falls to the archivist who will have to count the multiple elements structuring the scene of Whitman's writing during the adjournment of the 37th Congress, March 4, 1863.

An analysis of this particular notebook will be significant to the argument of this chapter—indeed, the methodological intervention of this dissertation—for at least two reasons. First, as Grier notes, the "Holograph Account" was "Evidently written on the spot for one of [Whitman's] letters to NY or Brooklyn papers" (*NUPM* 2 576). This observation is evinced in the material state of the notebook, due to its handmade fabrication and its portable size, roughly 6 X 3.5 inches. Further evidence that the notebook was used for "on the spot" journalistic writing is provided by the handwriting, which, at the end of the twenty-seventh page of the notebook, "becomes progressively more irregular" (577n28). Grier makes no absolute claims about the context in which the notebook was inscribed, though he suggests that the "Account" was "evidently" part of Whitman's practice of writing about Civil War Washington by *writing-in* the historical scenes taking place there. The second reason this notebook is significant to the project at hand is that it bears not only "on the spot" manuscript traces, but also traces of its extemporaneous construction. Grier describes the notebook as being "made of eight sheets of white laid paper torn, folded and fastened at [the] fold with a pin." The eight sheets were made from four loose-leaf sheets of paper. Grier notes the "Blue rules" on the rectos of the leaves of the notebook, as well as the "Embossed shield with a flourish or scroll below and above, all surmounted by a star at upper left of original sheets"—the same loose-leaf paper Whitman used for soldiers' correspondence and to fabricate his "livraisons." As the poet himself states in his

description of the “soil’d and creas’d little livraisons,” they were “each composed of a sheet or two of paper, folded small to carry in the pocket, and fasten’d with a pin” (*MDW* 3). It should not escape notice that Whitman’s description of the notebooks’ fabrication leaves open the order in which he folded and bound the papers. The question is: were the notebooks folded, carried, and pinned? Or were they folded, pinned, and carried?

While these questions may appear to make too much of a shift in syntax, order and organization have preoccupied this research project from the outset, particularly regarding writing in practice and its relationship to the emergence of civic space. With this in mind, it should be of great interest that the “Holograph Account” is composed from sheets of paper that were pinned more than once and in different places. The last two leaves of the notebook (Figure 6.3), including the back cover, were once pinned together in the upper corner nearest to the center fold of the notebook (Figure 6.3, details A and B). The inscriptions on the second to last page (verso) and the inside back cover (recto)—the two leaves with the pin marks in question—are the only inscriptions in the notebook that have nothing to do with the “Account.” The recto describes the “President’s room,” and at the top of the otherwise blank verso is inscribed, in what Grier claims is another hand: “Campbell Hospital—Frank Hinkle Surgeon Ward No 6” (*NUPM* 2 578n42; Figure 6.3 [recto]). It is possible that Whitman did not want to waste blank space in the notebook and that he used the last remaining pages for inscriptions made at another time and in another place from the inscriptions occupying most of the notebook.

Why were the pages pinned together, then? It is possible that Whitman pinned loose-leaf papers together to keep them organized in the haversack he carried during his transits through Civil War Washington. This possibility would answer the question, except for the fact that the “Holograph Account” is composed of eight sheets of paper, derived from four sheets of letter-writing paper. If Whitman collated his loose-leaves by pinning them together in one corner, then there would be two other pin holes in two other corners of the notebook’s pages. But there are

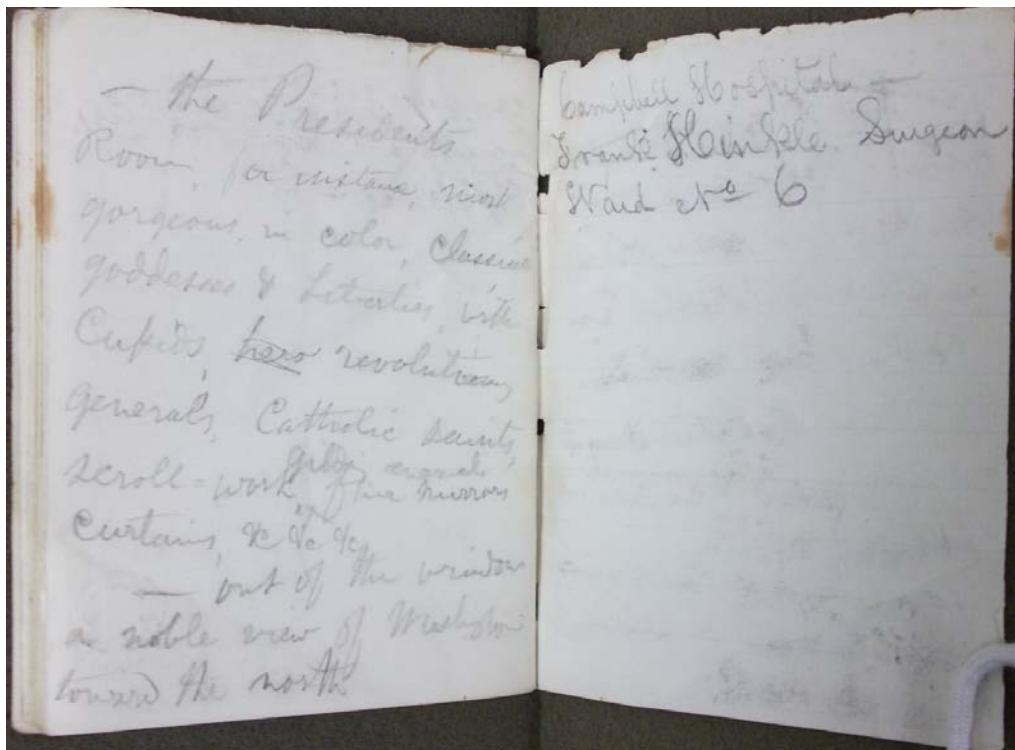
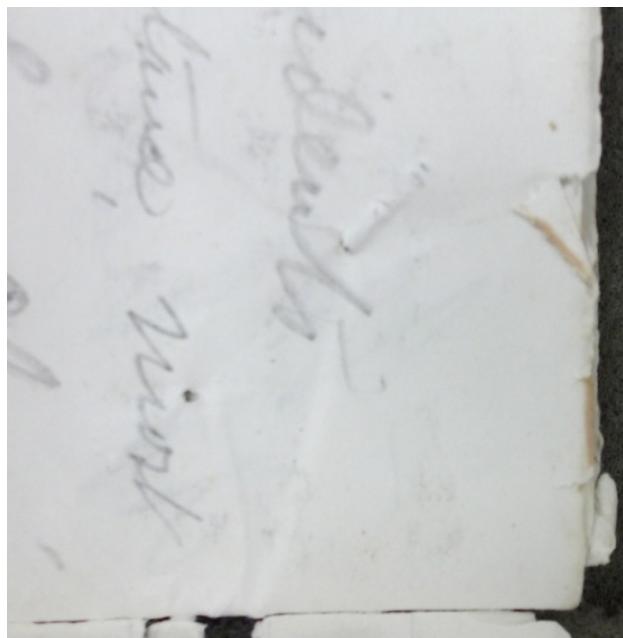
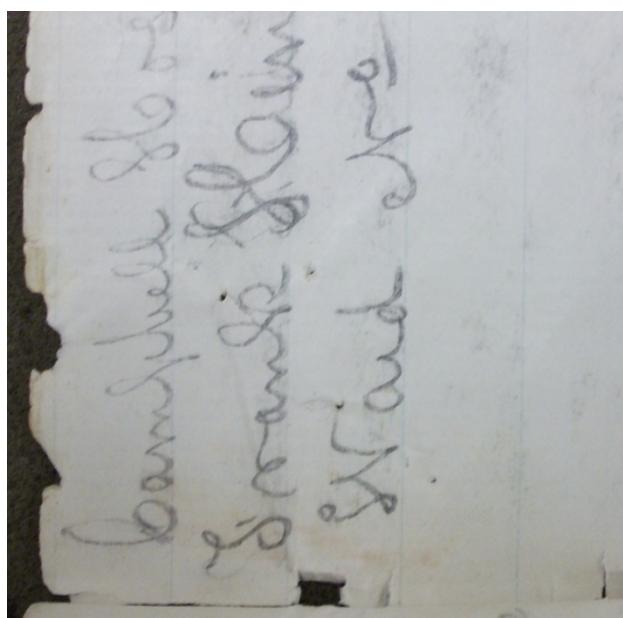


Figure 6.3: Two-page spread of the “Account.” Details A and B on following page. Courtesy of The Trent Collection, Duke University.

only the two, meaning that Whitman did not collate his loose stationary by pinning loose leaves together at the corners, or that he did so sometimes and not others, or that the two pin holes in question are marks in the construction of the “Account.” The pinning of the last two leaves of the notebook, I believe, are traces of the latter; they mark a phase in the construction of the “Holograph Account,” a new phase in *addition* to the phase previously imagined as the notebook’s single, extemporaneous construction for inscriptions made “on the spot.” The pin holes are therefore the first traces of what I have referred to as the temporal structure of the “Account.” The front cover and first page—the cognate leaves of the notebook’s last two leaves—appear to refute this interpretation. The front cover of the “Holograph Account” provides a descriptive title, “Wednesday 4th March / scene up to noon,—Close of the 37th



6.3A: Pin holes and pin imprint. Verso, upper-right corner.



6.3B: Pin holes and pin imprint. Recto, upper-left corner.

Congress—House” (Figure 6.4) and the first leaf bears the only inscription in the notebook made in black pen, in a remarkably neat hand. The penned inscription reads: “4th of March, 1863. Well, here is the 4th of March, and two out of the four years of the Lincoln administration have gone by. And now there are two to follow. What will happen during those two years?” (*NUPM* 2:576; Figure 6.5). If not for the medium, neatness, and oddly theatrical tone of the pen inscription, then it might be assumed that it had been written before the “progressively more irregular hand” that comes after it. It sets the stage for the scene of writing to follow. Yet it is certain that the page was inscribed in pen at some other time, in some other place. Whether those pen inscriptions were made before or after the “on the spot” notes that follow it is more difficult to determine. Grier states that Whitman praised surgeon Frank Hinkle, who appears to have signed-in on the inside back cover of the notebook, in the article “Life Among the Fifty Thousand Soldiers,” published in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 19, 1863 (578n42). It is always difficult to determine the logic behind Whitman’s often repetitive recording of names, addresses, and occupations, as in the case of Bethuel Smith. Still, it might safely be assumed that Hinkle signed himself into Whitman’s notebook sometime closer to the 19th, perhaps so that the poet could send him a copy of the *Eagle* article. The inscriptions made at the end of the notebook would therefore appear to have been made *after* the inscriptions on their cognate leaves at the beginning of the notebook. That is what the linguistic content of the notebook leads us to believe, and yet there is a logic of manuscript in evidence in Whitman’s *livraison* that must be willfully ignored for that content to take priority.

Structuring that content is the noise of writing systems in crisis. If this noise complicates reading, it also mobilizes it by setting its coordinates for new trajectories. What appears to be the linear order of inscriptions in Whitman’s “Holograph Account” will be unbound to become consistent with observations made about Whitman’s writing practices in Chapter Two, Four and Five. The logic of manuscript in Whitman’s writings trace the structure of a subject, or “I,” placed *before* but written *after* inscriptions already made without a subject and with an order of

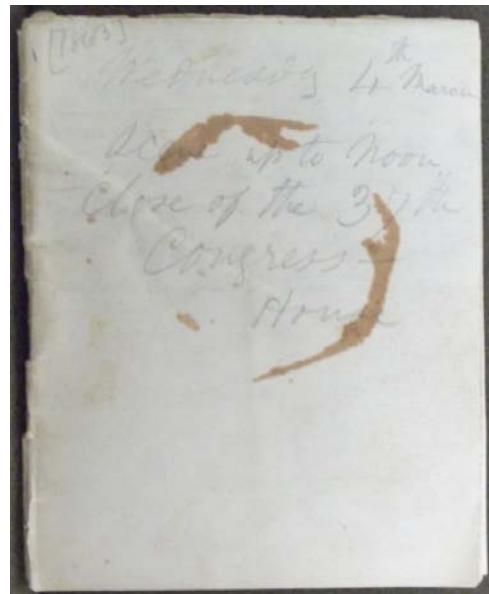


Figure 6.4: Cover of the “Holograph Account.” Courtesy of The Trent Collection, Duke University.

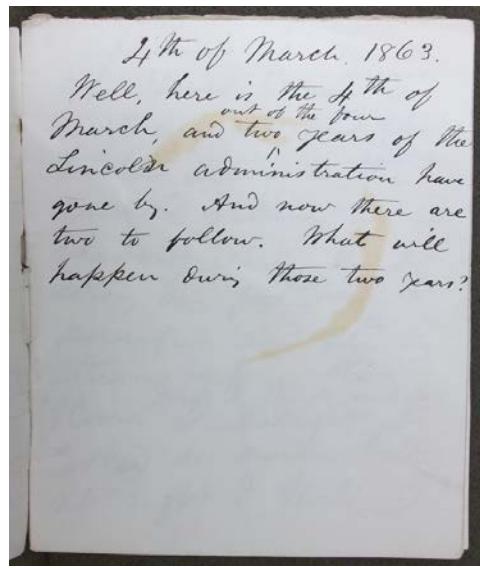


Figure 6.5: First page of the “Holograph Account.” Courtesy of The Trent Collection, Duke University.

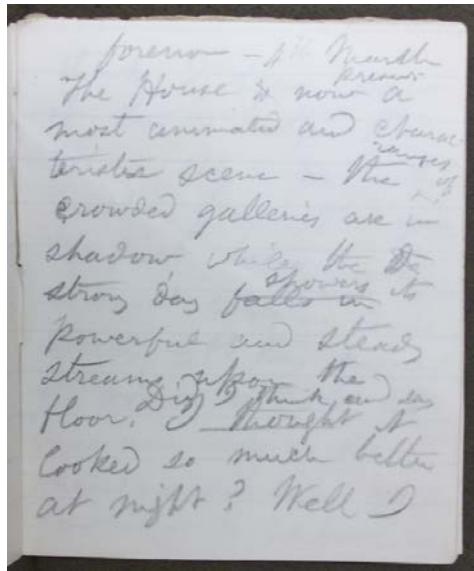


Figure 6.6: Page from the “Holograph Account.” Courtesy of The Trent Collection, Duke University.

their own. This initially risky and speculative interpretation begins to become convincing—perhaps even more convincing than the linear order of inscriptions otherwise received as a natural fact—when pursuing the question of the relations between the construction of the book and its inscriptions.

Let’s return to the fact that the last two pages of the notebook bear inscriptions that have nothing to do with the 37th Congress. All that connects them to the Congress is the fold that makes them continuous with their cognate leaves, bearing what appear to be spurious introductory inscriptions. The inscriptions are spurious not only because the first page of the notebook is inscribed in a regular hand and in pen, and because it repeats the information inscribed in pencil on the cover, as noted, but also because the cover and the first page of the notebook bear documentary information repeated a third time on the second page: “forenoon—4th March The House is now a most animated and characteristic scene” (Figure 6.6). This page begins the “Account,” not the part of it containing the “Holograph Account.” If the account had

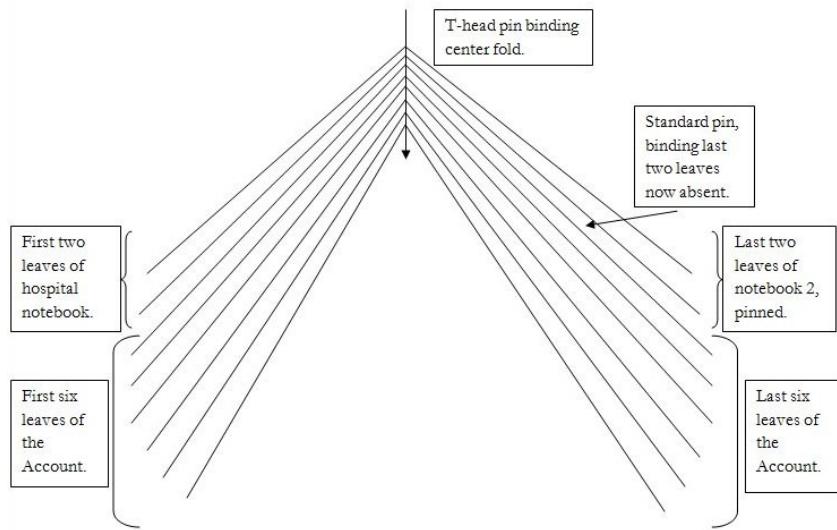


Figure 6.7: Diagram showing the architecture of the “Holograph Account.”

been written “on the spot,” then the documentary process began with the hasty dating and setting of the scene on the second page, not on the first pen-inscribed page, or on the front cover. The second page of the notebook, then, was the original cover of the notebook, especially if it was extemporaneously fabricated “on the spot” with materials regularly stored in Whitman’s haversack. This observation is consistent with Whitman’s own description of the “livraisons” as objects “composed of a sheet or two of paper.” As Grier states, the “Holograph Account” notebook was composed of four sheets of paper, folded twice and cut to make a four-leaf or eight-page booklet. The cover and the first page, along with their cognate leaves, the last page and the back cover, could therefore make a single notebook composed of a single loose-leaf sheet. Thus it can be demonstrated that the covers and the first and last pages of the notebook were not only inscribed after the “on the spot” inscriptions but added to the architecture of the notebook after the notebook had been fabricated.

As shown in the diagram (Figure 6.7), the “Holograph Account” is nested within a recycled “livraison,” which provides covers for the account of the last session of the 37th Congress. The notebook is therefore made of two notebooks, belonging to two different scenes

of writing. The entries place themselves in these two locations: the first was fabricated and inscribed in the House; the second was fabricated and inscribed in Campbell Hospital. The first two pages of the second notebook from Campbell Hospital were left blank because they were stained with what appears to be blood (see Figures 6.4 and 6.5). Although the first two pages of the recycled notebook were stained, the stain, once it dried, would add to the indexical character of the “livraison.”

In my interpretation of the non-linear chronological structure of the notebook and the multiples from which it is composed as a unit, the blood-stained “livraison” does not serve as a historical index of the battlefield or the bloody scene of writing in Washington’s military hospitals. Rather, the blood-stained “livraison” serves as an index of the general conditions of the “hospitalessque,” where the traces of the suffering body could not be properly channeled but were everywhere. The peculiar temporality and structure of the “Account” notebook documents these conditions without positing a spatial historical narrative. Such spatializing narrative tendencies coexist with the deconstruction of the scene they attempt to set. Whitman attempts to narrate the crisis of war but he writes in transit: his situation betrays any attempt to give it a narrative condition. With its blank but blood-stained first leaves, the second notebook would supply a perfect cover and scene-setting page for the documentation of the “present” nested within their folds. Documenting the process by means of which the scene is set for the fiction of “on the spot” writing, the structure of the “Holograph Account” seems to expose heavy-handedly the deferral of its own self-evidence by presenting a structure of repetition (of the same date) and addition (of folds to the construction of the present). Still to be observed are the pages which bear the index of this present, as Whitman’s manuscript “becomes progressively more irregular.” I will limit myself to two examples of this irregularity in the “livraisons.” The twenty-first page of the “Holograph Account” continues the poet’s frenzied manuscript documentation from the next pages: “—the *ef* doorkeepers guard all the doors—the speaker address—he says” (Figure 6.8). A blank has been left in the middle of the page, as if meant to be filled in later, and then the

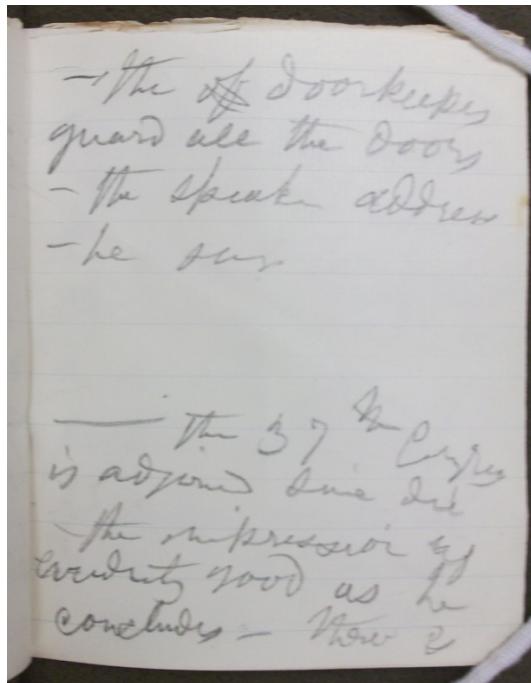


Figure 6.8: Page from the “Holograph Account.” Courtesy of The Trent Collection, Duke University.

irregular manuscript resumes: “—the 37th Congress is adjourned sine die—the impression is evidently good as he concludes. There is

[Figure 6.9] hearty applause and then things are untied—the doors fly open the May-drest public streams in—all is now a crawling jam of people, soldiers boys, hoosiers, gents, &c &c &c—a dust arisis from the

[Figure 6.10] passing tread of so many footsteps—the last dust breath of the 37th Congress rises and fills the air of the most beautiful room in the world—but the light strikes through it

[Figure 6.11] —the crowd waves its hats

What is intriguing about the last entry is that it appears on the recto of the last page of the “Holograph Account” notebook—that is, on the same leaf where the notes on the “President’s Room” appear on the verso (see Figure 6.3). If the front and back cover as well as the first and last pages of the “Holograph Account” were originally a separate hospital notebook, recycled to

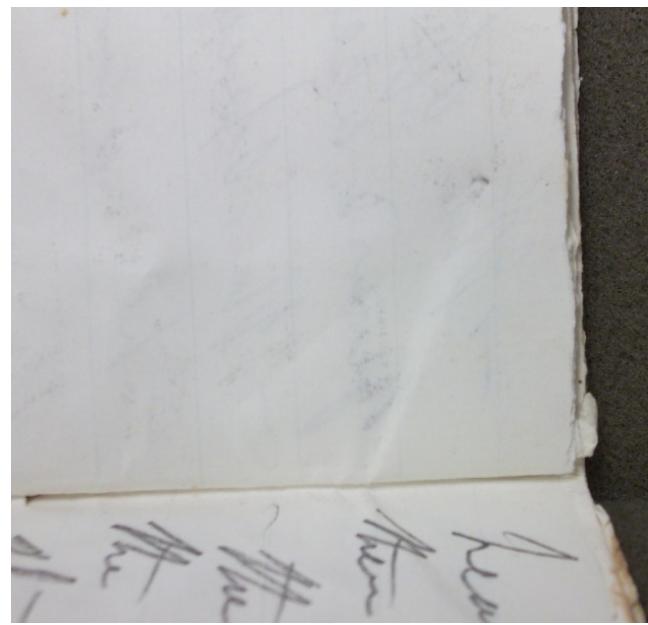
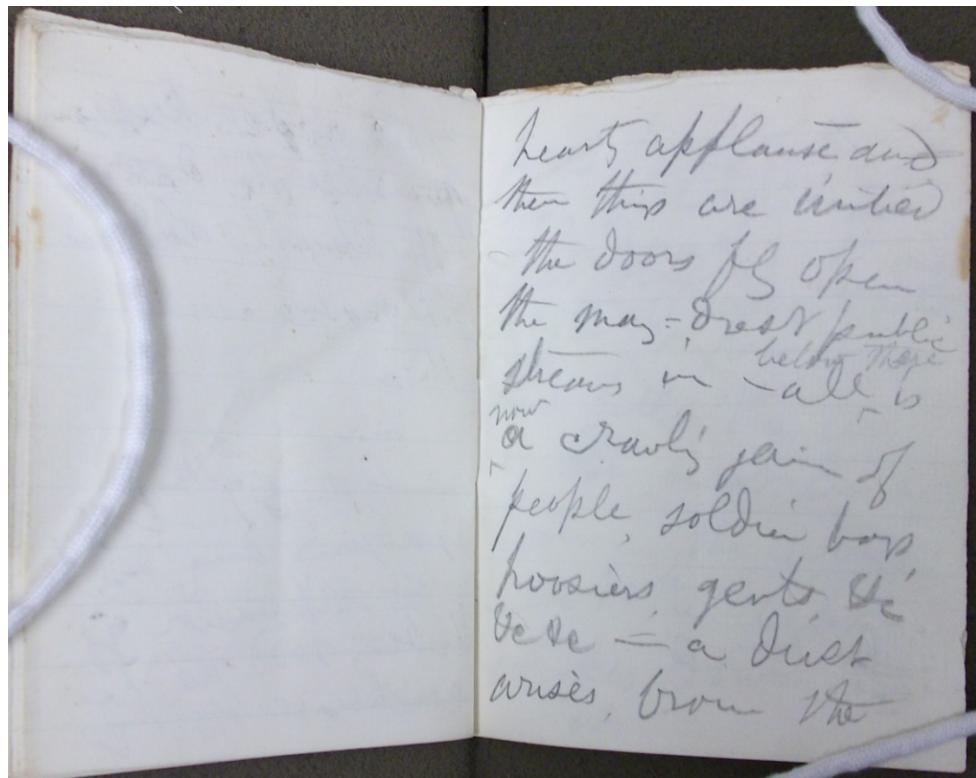


Figure 6.9: Two-page spread from “Holograph Account” and detail. Courtesy of The Trent Collection, Duke University.

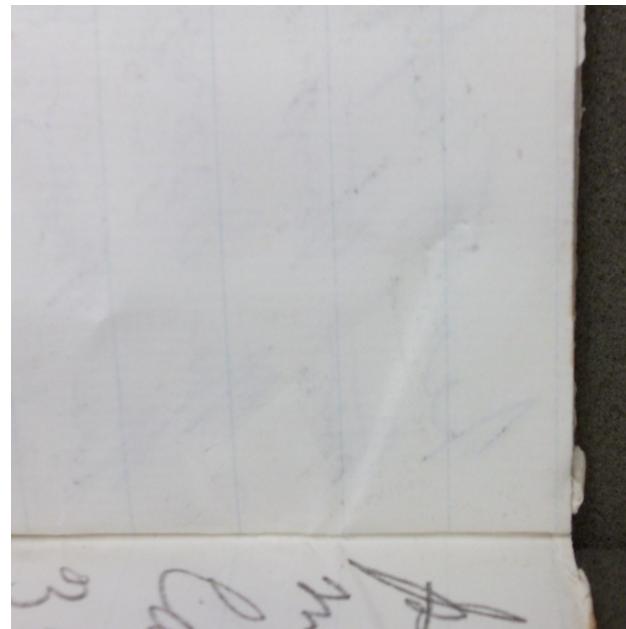
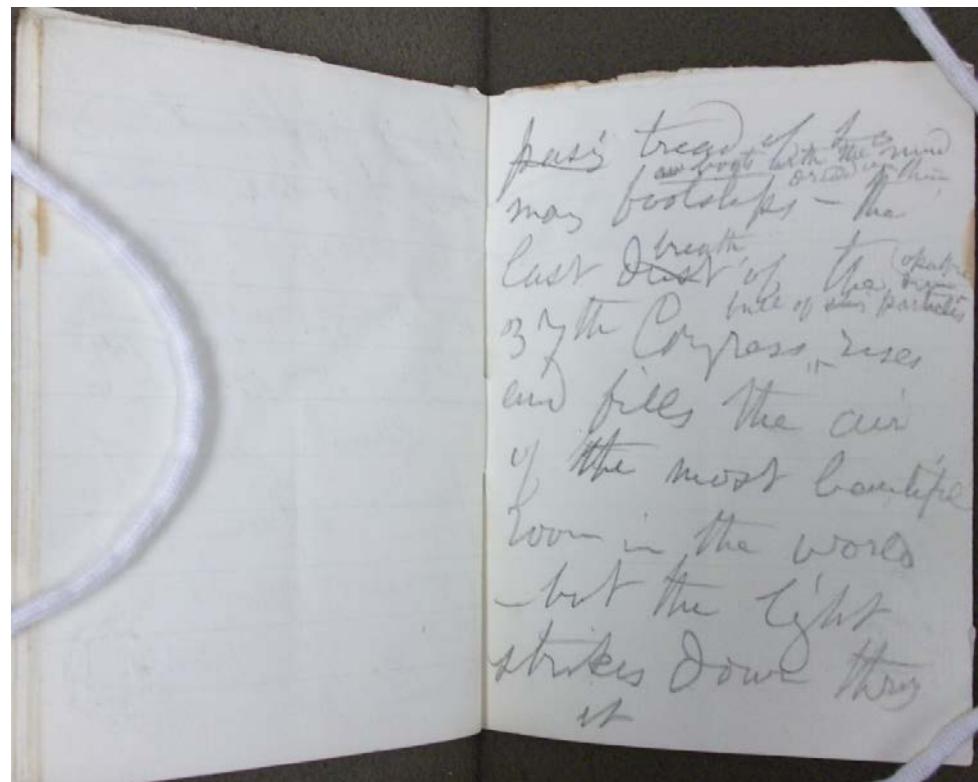


Figure 6.10: Two-page spread from “Holograph Account” and detail. Courtesy of The Trent Collection, Duke University.

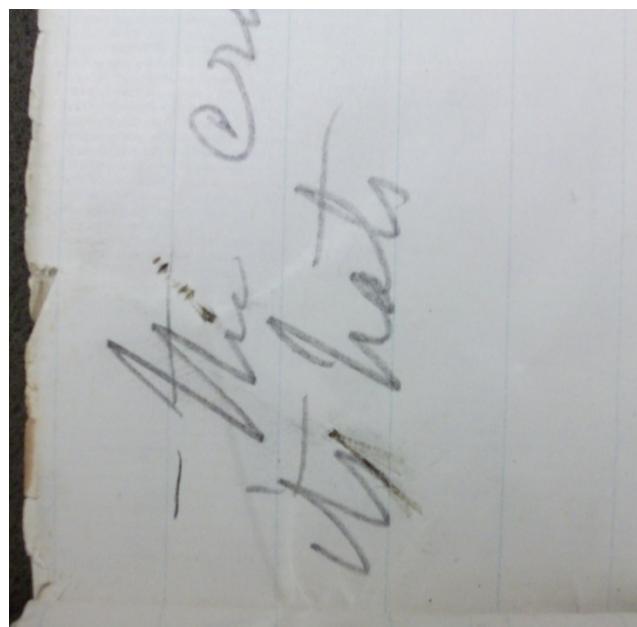
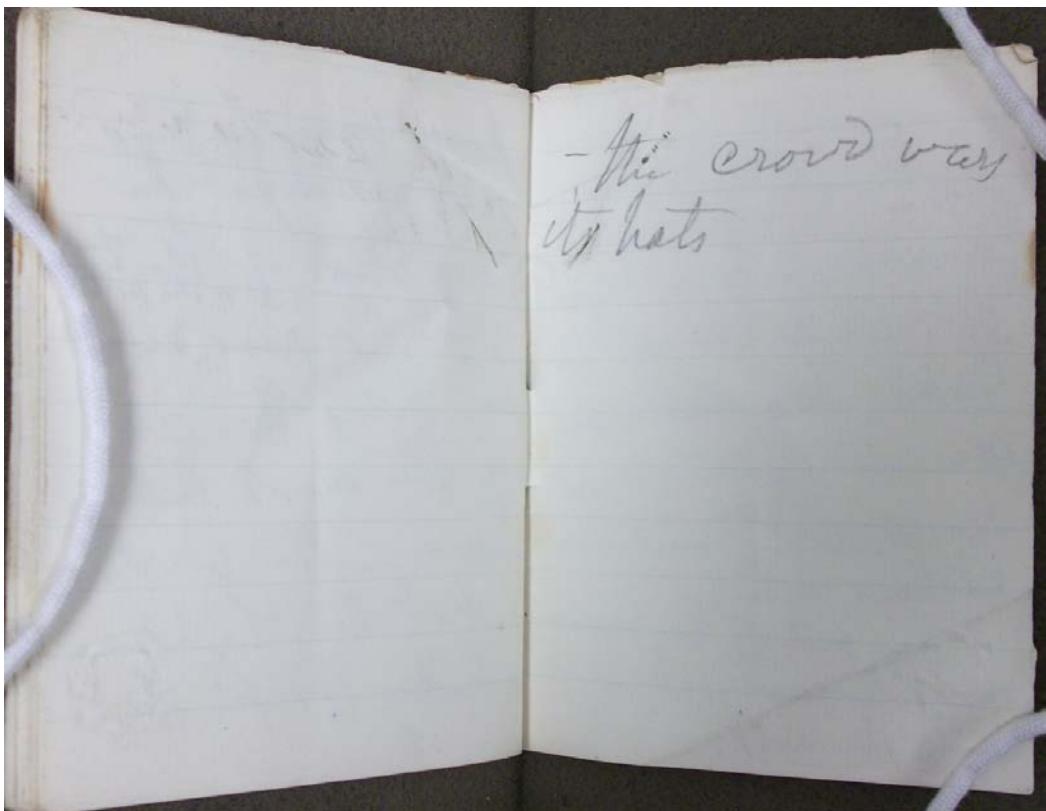


Figure 6.11: Two-page spread from “Holograph Account” and detail. Courtesy of The Trent Collection, Duke University.

provide covers for and to extend the documentary notes nested within its folds, then the irregular manuscript account, beginning “forenoon—4th March” and ending “the crowd waves its hats”—though it provides an exemplary specimen of Whitman’s practice of writing “on the spot”—was in fact written in more than one time and place. The scene of writing in the House could have broken off at any of the points where the continuity of the account is visibly interrupted. The shift from pen to pencil, the placement of an asterisk or blank space, the shift from a regular to irregular hand—all of these marks of the transience in which the poet recorded his documentary account clash with the proper channels of history’s continuous inscription in the moment and on the spot. The space of the scene and the temporality of writing are both in continuous movement; they take place in multiple scenes and between them; they are both writing-in-transit.

This interpretation is merely suggested by the marks and blanks left in the record of the account; they do not offer conclusive evidence of my interpretation. The mark that calls for my interpretation is the mark left by the pin that, at one point, bound together the last page and back cover, as if to bind tentatively a hospital notebook that could not be bound at its center fold because, with its mere two-sheet thickness, it was too insubstantial to bear a pin (Figure 6.11, detail). When the hospital notebook was added to the unfinished account of the adjournment of the 37th Congress, the pin could be removed. But not right at first. The pin used to bind the “Holograph Account” at its center fold was not the same pin that was used to bind the last two leaves of the livraison. A comparison of the mark left by the latter (Figure 6.11, detail) and the pin that still today, just barely, holds together the livraison (Figure 6.12) reveals the difference between them. The one at the end of the livraison, now absent, was a dressmaker’s or standard pin, and the still present binding is a t-head. What this suggests is that the improvised livraison in which the account of the 37th Congress was recorded was later modified to cover and to conserve but also to extend the recording made in the moment and then recalled later, at a hospital, at home, or between any or all of them. It appears that Whitman nested the unfinished record of the adjournment within the four outer leaves of the “Holograph Account” for some length of time, however long or short, in the imprint of the head of the pin that bound the last two leaves

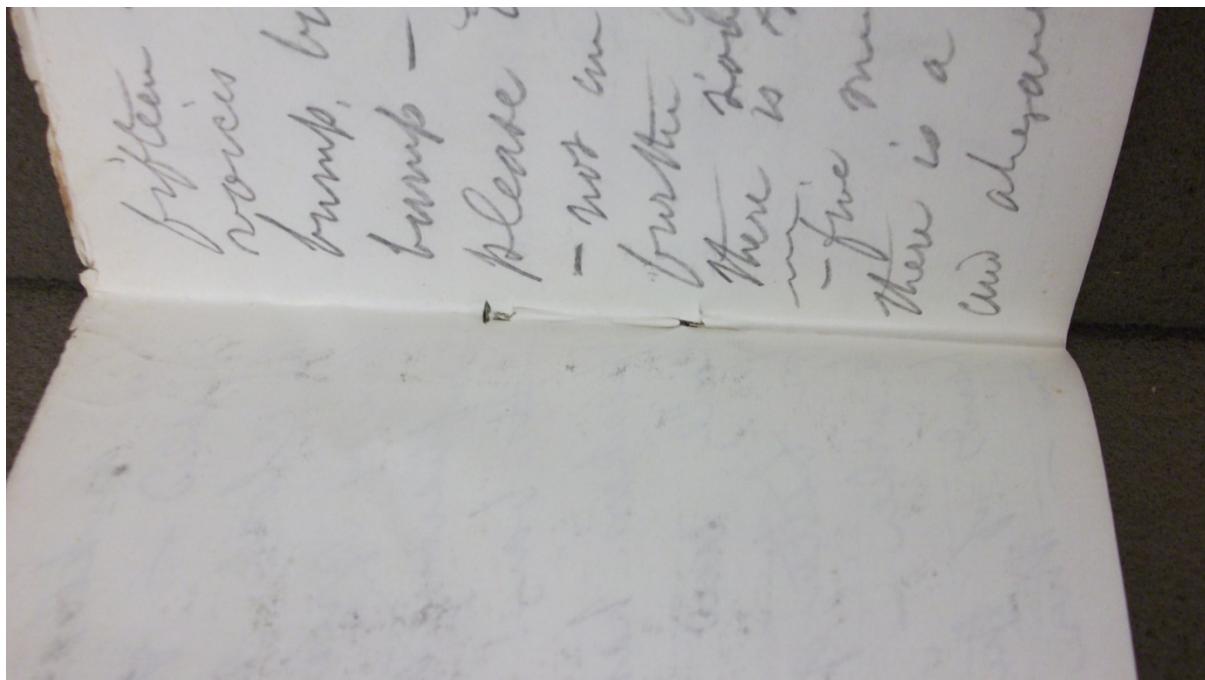


Figure 6.12: The T-head pin binding the “Holograph Account.” Courtesy of The Trent Collection, Duke University.

together on the two pages before it (Figures 6.9 and 10, details). Only when Whitman was ready to complete the “on the spot” recording of the adjournment of the 37th Congress did he remove the pin and write: “—the crowd waves its hats.”

If Whitman’s progressively agitated or excited body is in evidence in the “Holograph Account,” then so is the transient situation in which he wrote. That is not to say that the poet was not responsible for the record he created but to suggest that his writing practices constituted more than a gendered, ethnicized or politicized poetics or “poetry of the body” because his writings embody the displacements of a subject who seeks such positions in the fabric of civic space and social life, who adopts or is denied such positions, who fights long and hard for them and perhaps must continue to do so. This record escapes proper channels that link subjects through practice to public life in civic space, just as it slips away from historical narratives, even those that tell the stories of forgotten subjects, their struggles and victories. This is the record of noise

made by the literary and the practices the literary draws from and places in circulation. The intervention I want to make with my interpretation of the “Holograph Account” is this: that even when Whitman’s manuscript appears to be written “on the spot,” it is almost always written-in-transit, in a multiplicity of spaces that structure his manuscript practice under conditions of accelerating, expanding circulation and its organizational program. What might be called, in one sense, a means of coping with an emergent or a critical situation is, in another sense I have attempted to outline here, self-abandonment to a situation, for better or for worse, over which the writing subject has no control but for the bodily ability to lose itself in an act of unbinding and re-binding. Whitman’s irregular hand may be the index of his growing excitement while recording the adjournment of the 37th Congress, but I might take an even greater risk (to conclude my interpretation) by stating that the traces of the non-linear inscription, binding, and circulation of the notebook persuasively indicate that it is just as likely that Whitman finished his account while riding the rails from downtown D.C. to the suburban Campbell Hospital.

CONCLUSION



Figure C.1: “Capture the city in motion” advertisement on CTA subway car.

In September 2013, Nationwide Sprint Network issued a series of commands to users of its transit system. One of them read: “Capture the city in motion / Tweet your commuting pic or Vine video with #BuiltForChicago” (Figure C.1). The “Built for Chicago” photo and video contest celebrated the updating of 1,100 new cellular towers for 4G LTE service throughout Chicago. “From Flossmoor to Edgewater, from Oak Park to Oak Street Beach,” Sprint’s website claims, “we built a new network for Chicago and all the things you love to do in the city that works.” Sprint doesn’t mean what it says, of course: it didn’t build the network for Chicago and “the things you love to do in” Chicago. It built the network for the people of Chicago, so that

they could do the things they love at speeds 10X faster than 3G, like document their commute to work. And yet the company's web announcement and the command it published in CTA train cars established a circuit that is best represented by the destination of the commuters' pics and videos. If selected by photographer Paul Octavius, submissions would be featured in "Chicago by Chicago," the Art Institute of Chicago's After Dark event on November 15, 2013. The new network was for Chicago, then, as much as it was for the things Chicagoans "love to do in the city that works," not Chicagoans.

Lacan once considered how "The notion of the role of spatial symmetry in man's narcissistic structure is essential in laying the groundwork for a psychological analysis of space." The "mirror projection" of a "spatial field" into the "other's field," mused Lacan, "gives human space its originally 'geometrical' structure" where "the imagery of the ego develops" (99). The city works because the network works; the things you love to do are the middle term in civic space's reflection on itself. But nothing would work at all if it weren't for those things and the love animating them: that multiplicity of things that either conducts any given networked city into the city that works or induces the shock of misrecognition, the horror of the uncanny encounter with what can be made of love. The analysis of space discloses the shock and horror of the break in the city's narcissistic structure, the "/" that marks the spot of the subject's place between the city and itself. The city commands the subject to suture its wound with love for the city that works; analysis marks the wound on-the-spot and on-the-move.

This wound not only reveals the trauma of an anterior process of symbolization under the Law of the signifier but marks a fresh opening, an excess noise at the blurred edges of the network's command to participate in acts of self-representation for the absolute goals of civic space. The subject who attends to this noise documents the command to document, to submit, and to circulate—or to store, to format, and to transmit. This subject traces out the dissonances channeled by networks of transportation and communication; it is a reckless thing, an actor breaking its role, a creature whose letters are not properly channeled and do not slide with the signifier but are cobbled together in an order of their own. This reckless tracing, unbinding the

subject bound by the networks facilitating circulation, advances with the sense that the things we “love to do in the city that works” results in the forgetting of the work of love that unbinds the open-format city and its multiplicity of things. Incapable of getting with the program, the reckless subject who writes-in-transit documents and presents the network’s commands by submitting them not to the network and its institutional spaces but to the work of critical writing that takes place here and now. As Judith Butler has shown us, in order to act on the love that’s in the air, there are always bodies on the line.

Not only must someone’s hand tap and send, but someone’s body is on the line if that tapping and sending gets traced. In other words, localization is hardly overcome through the use of a media that potentially transmits globally. And if this conjuncture of street and media constitutes a very contemporary version of the public sphere, then bodies on the line have to be thought as both there and here, now and then, transported and stationery, with very different political consequences following from those two modalities of space and time. (“BA” np)

Butler helps us remember that the ostensibly stable link uniting contemporary media of self-representation with reality is a site of conjuncture between media (writing systems) and the street (civic space). By tracing the constitutive mark elided by publics, the resistant body returns to the surface of circulation as a historical matter, always shaped differently according to the conjunction that it is technically equipped to elide.

“Whitman’s Inscriptions” has identified the model for this mark-making practice in the irregular handwriting, the counterintuitive use of bindings, and the improper circulation of inscribed materials traversing the poet’s manuscripts and published works. More than any symbolic pattern, content, or hermeneutically conditioned meaning or historical scene to be extracted from the poems and other writings, the record established by the poet’s manuscripts and published works present the reader with a poetics. Letters with an order all of their own, interrupting the inherited commands of the symbolic order, leave us awash in the materials that propel the desire for a writing system that will bind chaos into a civic space. Whitman’s poetics leads the way into the proximity between the possibility of adapting inherited practices to current situations and the desire for an absolute authority that will channel desire into the free play of the

signifier. Between the two facets of this materialist dialectical model lie the mark and its systematic organization into a situation conditioned by applied technologies and their instrumentation in the production of space, its subjects, and the love that holds them together or breaks them apart. That is why an inquiry into the poetics that I have traced across Whitman's manuscripts and published works in the preceding chapters demanded comparative analysis. Whitman's writing system was bound to all of the other systems of practice that co-existed with his own, even as the poet's distinguished itself, unbinding itself from others.

Building a framework for analysis at the intersection of bibliography and media history, I have attempted to demonstrate that the distinctions between the writing systems of mid-nineteenth-century American authors are not only inscribed in their records of material practice but are also shaped by the conjunction of technique and technology distinguishing the historical layers of practice that they inherited, reproduced, and, in their own ways, attempted to fit to their situations. The distinctions between their systems of practice is evinced in their manuscripts and published works by way of comparative analysis, and what this comparative analysis reveals is co-existence of historically constituted systems of practice in the same space, at the same time. This co-existence demonstrates that there is no union to symbolic order, no nationalist imaginary to bind a truly democratically constituted confederation of self-representing publics, but only the reproduction of inherited practices in any given situation, which cannot be successfully enacted without suppressing the noise of history, a noise whose traces lie in the excess and irregularity of the literary. The twenty-first-century scholar of literary history can bring these observations into practice just as easily as the ordinary reader can for the simple reason that the conditions of possibility under which all citizens mediate their social roles back to themselves as to one another are essentially the same. The way we choose to store, to format, and to transmit the decomposing layers bound together by the imaginary and its subjects makes all the difference.

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