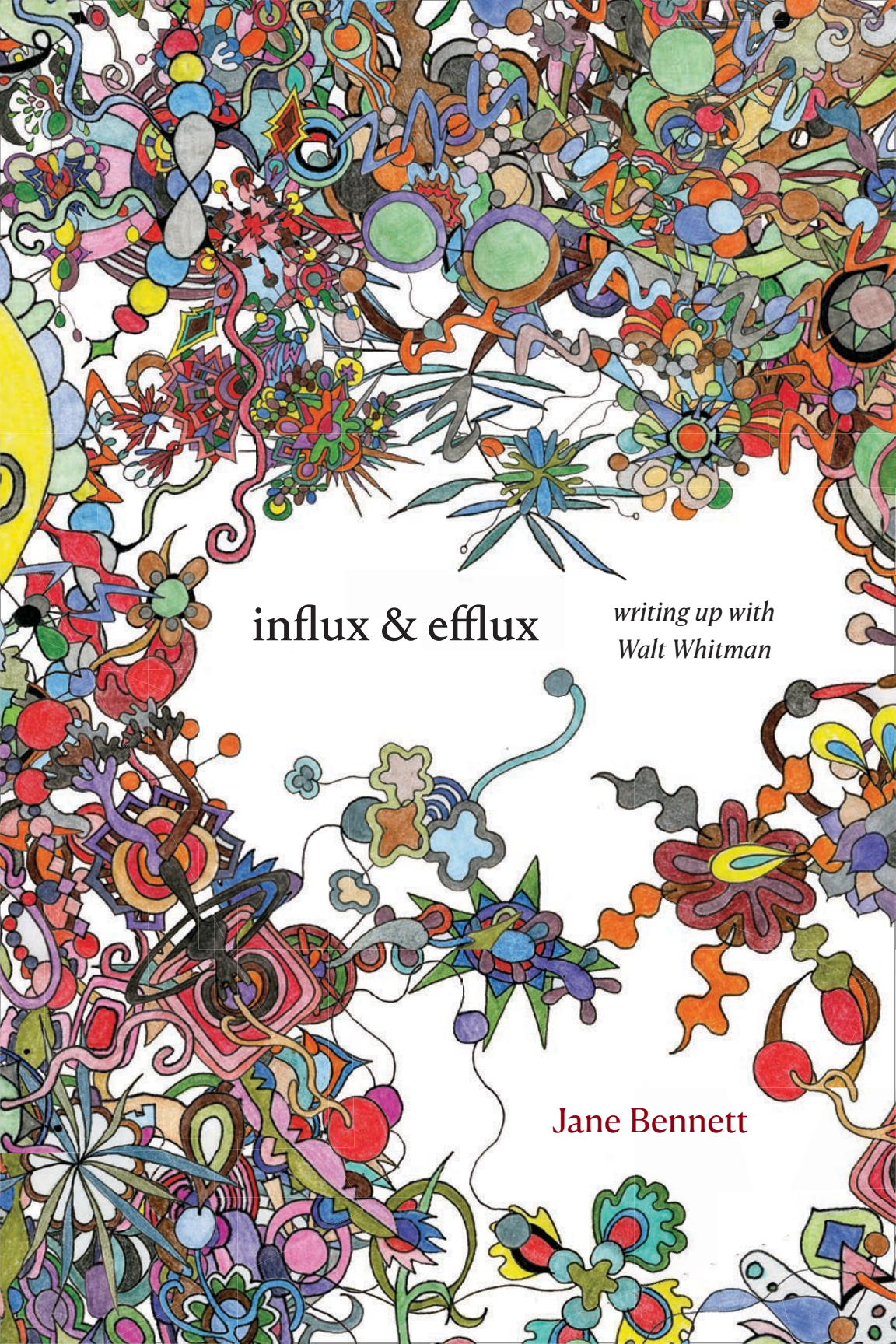

influx & efflux

writing up with Walt Whitman

Jane Bennett

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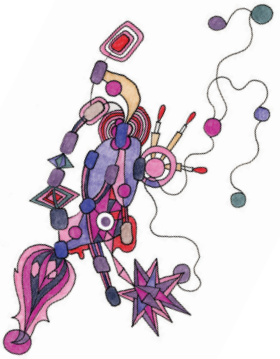

Jane Bennett

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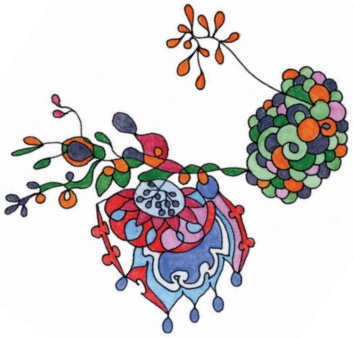

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acknowledgments

In 2005, when I had just joined the faculty of Johns Hopkins, my colleague Michael Moon gave me a copy of the Norton Critical Edition of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass,* which he had edited. (How pleased I was to find it inscribed to "Camerada"!) Michael's gift set me afloat toward what would become *influx & efflux* more than a decade later.

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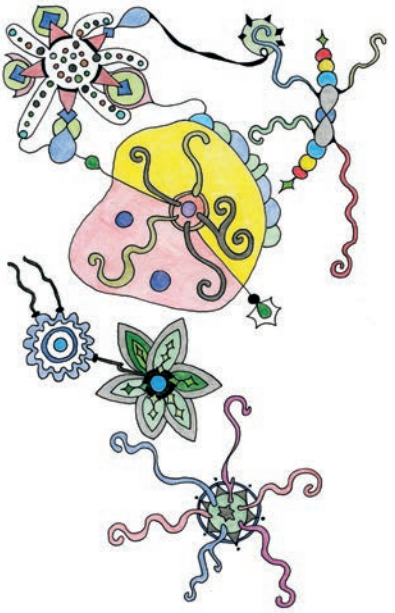
prologue

influx & efflux

I doodle, pretty much any time there is pencil in hand and paper nearby. Lines flow down arm, fingers, length of pencil, to exit at graphite tip and mingle with predecessors already on the page. "Lo, a shape!"[1] I say to myself (quoting Walt Whitman) as it emerges.



Lo, a shape

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Doodles don't need a lot of space; they make landfall on margin of text, corner of napkin, upside down is fine, though they do like to roam. Is the doodle following rules of a geometry or perhaps a "protogeometry"?[2] Or do doodles emerge in real time without a plan, each vague shape engendering a next on the fly? And what is my role in doodling? It seems I *add* something to the aesthetic of what also has the feel of automatic writing.[3] The doodle brings obscure news of a netherworld in which I partake; it is somehow subjective without being the expression of an interiority all my own.[4]

This book was prompted by years of doodling—in meetings, in seminar rooms and lecture halls, on the phone, while trying to read. Doodling helps people to think, to process ideas, concepts, tones, and figures of speech.[5] But doodling sparked the book in another way, too: the peculiar experience of self that comes to the fore while doodling—an "I" at once carried along and creative—became a key theme to explore. Indeed, doodling enacts a formative process that, following Whitman, I call "influx and efflux."

The phrase appears in this passage from "Song of Myself," which features a sea breathing itself in and out as waves and an I partaking in that process:

> Sea of stretch'd groundswells,
> Sea breathing broad and convulsive breaths,
> Sea of the brine of life and of unshovell'd yet always-ready graves,
> Howler and scooper of storms, capricious and dainty sea,
> I am integral with you, I too am of one phase and of all phases.
> Partaker of influx and efflux I.[6]

"Influx and efflux" invokes that ubiquitous tendency for outsides to come in, muddy the waters, and exit to partake in new (lively/deathly) waves of encounter. The process might also be called Impression-and-Expression, Ingestion-and-Excretion, Immigration-and-Emigration—different names for the in-and-out, the comings and goings, as exteriorities cross (always permeable) borders to become interiorities that soon exude. The "and" of influx-and-efflux is also important: it marks the *hover-time* of transformation, during which the otherwise that entered makes a difference and is made different. "And" is the *interval* between influx and efflux, in the sense in which Thoreau says that "poetry puts an interval between the impression & the expression."[7] Poetry is here defined as an array of words able to induce a stutter or lag, a delay before a vibratory *encounter* becomes translated into a bite-sized nugget of (human) *experience*.

Influx-and-efflux is the way of Whitman's world, a world of *Urge and urge*

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and urge, Always the procreant urge of the world.[8] This book highlights affinities between Whitman and a tradition of process philosophy for which metamorphosis, and not only its entities or congealments, is a topic of great interest. "Process," writes Kathy Ferguson, "is not the same as sequence; it is not a parade of already-formed entities past our eyes. It is a 'fluency of becoming.'"[9] Whitman, along with the book's other touchstone, Henry Thoreau (and also by way of Harold Bloom, Roger Caillois, Gilles Deleuze, Cristin Ellis, Dorothy Kwek, the Institute for Precarious Consciousness, Erin Manning, Michel Serres, and Alfred North Whitehead), sets his sights both on cosmic process and on a shape called I. *Shape* is a Whitmanian term of art—it names a formation less stable than *entity*, less mentalistic than *concept*, more haptic than *literary figure*. If for Whitman *body* names a creative agency that readily makes itself seen, heard, felt, and so on, and if *soul* names a set of less sensible, virtual powers, *shape* is a term for what has both those kinds of efficacy.[10]

Whitman, I will suggest, offers a distinctive model of I: it is a porous and susceptible shape that rides and imbibes waves of influx-and-efflux but also contributes an "influence" of its own. It is no easy matter to parse what is involved in that influential effort. It is especially tricky after contemporary theory has taken a nonhuman turn that locates the human on a continuum of lively bodies and forces—a continuum that elides conventional dichotomies of life and matter, organic and inorganic, subjective and objective, agency and structure.[11]

My last book, *Vibrant Matter*, accented the efforts of non- or not-quite-human shapes, arguing that the modern habit of parsing the world into passive matter ("it") and vibrant life ("us") had the effect of understating the power of things—for example, the way landfills are, as we speak, generating lively streams of chemicals and volatile winds of methane, or the way a diet infiltrates brain chemistry and mood. Whether or not such materialities rise to the level of (panpsychic) "life," it seems clear that they do modify the developmental paths taken by human flesh, affections, thought, identities, and relations. Their influx has that peculiarly subtle mode of causation known as *influence*. A swarm of nonhumans are at work *inside* and *as* us; we are powered by a host of inner aliens, including ingested plants, animals, pharmaceuticals, and the microbiomes upon which thinking itself relies. Indeed, during the process of writing *Vibrant Matter*, I came more and more to experience "my" efforts as a writer as but one vector within a much larger group of conative influences.

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Dividuals

The task before me now is to return to the question of I, to try to depict, amidst a world of diverse efforts and trajectories, that *particular* set that is experienced as most local, most personal. How to bespeak an I alive in a world of vibrant matter? How to write up its efforts and endeavors? Now—inspired especially by Whitman, for whom "Personality" persists as a theme even as he affirms cosmic dimensions of self—I consider more closely the value-added, the extra oomph, impetus, or effort, of the human dividual, partaker of influx and efflux. By "dividual," I follow McKim Marriott's notion of "persons—single actors—[who] are not thought . . . to be 'individual,' that is, indivisible, bounded units. . . . To exist, dividual persons absorb heterogeneous material influences. They must also give out from themselves particles of their own coded substances—essences, residues, or other active

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influences—that may then reproduce in others something of the nature of the persons in whom they have originated."[12] *Influx & Efflux* explores the experience of being continuously subject to influence and still managing to add something to the mix.

There lives in *Leaves of Grass*, for example, an I who is both creative writer—locus of a distinctive poetic effort—and sensitive receptor liable to myriad "sympathies": *Mine is no callous shell, / I have instant conductors all over me whether I pass or stop*.[13] This I, which cohabits with a more familiar model of American individuality,[14] is traversed by ambient sounds, smells, textures, words, ideas, and erotic and other currents, all of which comingle with previously internalized immigrants and become "touched" by them, until some of the incorporated and no-longer-quite-alien materials are "breathed" out as positions, dispositions, claims, and verse. The influx variegates the I: *I find I incorporate gneiss, coal, long-threaded moss, fruits, grains, esculent roots, / And am stucco'd with quadrupeds and birds all over*.[15] And this pluralized I returns the favor by *enriching* the mix with new words and winds: *Earth! you seem to look for something at my hands. . . . Behold, . . . I dilate you with tremendous breath, I buoy you up*.[16] I breathes in and buoys up: in "partaking," I alters and is altered.

In what follows, I celebrate Whitman's attempts to sing himself and his audience into generous I's and to "promulge" the best of what America might become—an egalitarian public culture. I don't endorse all of Whitman's claims, ideals, or political tendencies. I recoil from his America-centrism and have much less faith than he does (though he too has his doubts) that providential forces are at work in the cosmos. I am ambivalent about his notion of "manliness," even if there is today a pressing need to develop laudable models of masculinity. Whitman takes steps in the right direction when, for example, he seeks to combine "the strength of Homer, and the perfect *reason* of Shakespeare"[17] with a "manly attachment" called "*sympathy*."[18] But though Whitman tries to be "the poet of women as well as men,"[19] the "vigor" of men is too often paired only with the noble motherhood of women.[20] Neither do I share Whitman's belief, coexisting alongside his criticisms of moneygrubbing and monopoly, in the essentially egalitarian trajectory of markets.[21]

And then there is the matter of his cosmic appetite, his tendency to embrace and incorporate—or is it just to eat up?—all that he encounters. The famous line *I am large, I contain multitudes* does support a magnanimous I experiencing itself as but one of many, many configurations of lively, earthly matter:

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I am he that aches with amorous love;
Does the earth gravitate? does not all matter, aching, attract
all matter?
So the body of me to all I meet or know.[22]

But such lines can also lean into the presumption that every mode of existence is, without remainder, available for I to feel and absorb. This sense of entitlement can be heard in Section 33 of "Song of Myself," with its long, detailed catalogue of things encountered, including a quail (not any quail but the one "whistling betwixt the woods and the wheat-lot"), a cataract (not the generic geological formation but "Niagara, the cataract falling like a veil over my countenance"), and the singular "hounded slave that flags in the race, leans by the fence, blowing, cover'd with sweat." Whitman's portrayal of each item on the list exhibits his talent for poetic contraction—I refer here not to his elision of letters ("ebb'd," "wash'd," "suffer'd") but to his knack for capturing the specificity of a thing by naming its essential posture ("the judge with hands tight to the desk, his pallid lips pronouncing a death-sentence,"[23] "the inbound urge and urge of waves,"[24] "the treacherous lip-smiles" of antidemocrats).[25] And yet his attention to the exquisite singularity of each body can sometimes seem less about its intrinsic value and more like the care with which a chef plates up his meal: *I help myself to material and immaterial; All this I swallow, it tastes good, I like it well, it becomes mine, / I am the man, I suffer'd, I was there*.[26] Here and elsewhere, what may come to the fore is less an ecological sensibility than an American conceit of cultural superiority and entitled consumption. Does Whitman's earthy love and impeccable attentiveness to other persons, places, and things encourage a more wondrous, respectful mode of interaction between dividuals and other living materials? Or do they feed into powerful currents of anthropocentrism, whiteness, colonialism, consumerism, and exploitation of "natural resources"? No doubt they do both, for only a thin and porous membrane separates a love of matter that is nondiscriminatory and radically egalitarian ("flush" in the quotation below) from a consuming lust. Whitman seems aware of this doubleness:

I know perfectly well my own egotism,
Know my omnivorous lines and must not write any less,
And would fetch you whoever you are flush with myself.[27]

It is amid such reservations that I ride and inflect Whitman, whose poetry is the guiding thread of *Influx & Efflux*. The book is as much about a

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process-oriented self—a model of subjectivity consonant with a world of vibrant matter—as it is about Walt Whitman. I draw upon Whitman's adventures into sympathy, affection, gravity, and nonchalance, and upon his fascinating experiments with a process-oriented syntax, and I carry them into insights and techniques from other writers, times, and places.

Storyline

The book begins its exploration of dividuality by asking what all those depictions of bodily postures are doing in Whitman's poems—for example, "crouch extended with unshut mouth," "side-curved head," "arm hanging idly over shoulder," "elbow stretching, fingers clutching," "rigid head and just-open'd lips." Chapter 1, "Position and Disposition," explores Whitman's discernment of a sympathetic current linking outward posture and gait to inner character and disposition. Here we see him going beyond a conventional model of self, wherein physiognomy and physique ("phiz") are but epiphenomenal expressions of an inner, animating Personality. Whitman's innovation is to affirm a productivity *proper to phiz*, a power to shape moods and alter states of mind. Giving a twist to an American variant of phrenology that was more about self-improvement than racial hierarchy, Whitman suggests that people can alter their moral and political character in part by working upon their mien, posture, gait. The desired comportments are, for Whitman, those disposed toward a very pluralistic democratic culture.

After exploring intrabody sympathies—relays between posture and mood—in chapter 1, chapter 2, "Circuits of Sympathy," turns to an examination of the complexities of Whitman's use of the term *sympathy*. The word marks for him not only a moral sentiment linking one person to another but also an atmospherics of indeterminate eros; it is also the name he gives to the earth's utterly impartial acceptance of each and every one of its elements or inhabitants; it appears also as a biological organ (like lungs or heart); and it even emerges an apersonal physical force (akin to sunlight or gravity). With the last image, Whitman seems keen to locate sympathy within the very infrastructure of the cosmos. But here difficult questions arise: as sympathy's theater of operation expands into the geosphere, would it not also take on the *moral* indifference of gravity, electricity, or tropism? And, as such, can appeals to sympathy retain their persuasive force in political life? Those are important questions, especially because Whitman's various invoca-

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tions of sympathy (alongside its agonistic twin "pride") are so interwoven with his larger political project: his lyrical songs of more-than-human sympathies are attempts to induce, from out of an America polarized into two hostile camps, a public disposed toward a democracy that is multicolored and extraordinarily diverse ("variegated") and yet still a functioning whole. He expresses his aspiration to that difficult combination in a conversation with Horace Traubel: "Still debating whether he would write a preface for *November Boughs* [Whitman says this:] 'Why should I?—the book itself explains all I wish explained: is personal, confessional, a *variegated* product, in fact—streaks of white and black, light and darkness, threads of evil and good running in and out and across and through, achieving in the end some sort of unity.'"[28]

Chapter 3, "Solar Judgment," takes up Whitman's strange call for the poet to *judge not as the judge judges but as the sun falling round a helpless thing.* I read this as a call to inhabit more fully the "float" between impression and expression, the "interval" between influx and efflux. To linger in that "and" is to *postpone judgment*, that is to say, to hold off the sorting discrimination often assumed to be the very essence of ethical action. Whitman explores—indeed, pushes to the limit—the idea that one very valuable effort of the democratic dividual consists in the active *elision* of discriminating perception, in a "judgment" as nonjudgmental and magnanimous as the dispensation of light offered by the sun. As we "loafe" in the interval, we are unconsciously feeling things out—receiving and responding to signals operating at what Alfred North Whitehead called the "visceral" level. The chapter turns briefly to Whitehead's attempts to craft a conceptual vocabulary—"prehension," "ingression," "affective tone"—appropriate to that very subtle kind of experiencing. Whitehead helps us to name what is at stake in Whitman's call to "judge not as the judge judges but as the sun falling round a helpless thing."

Between chapters 3 and 4 is inserted a "Refrain: The Alchemy of Affects." As a refrain, it repeats themes developed in the first three chapters, this time by extending them into contemporary issues (the neoliberal contraction of public goods, civic practices of egalitarian culture, and antiracist strategies). "Refrain" explores several attempts to engage politically at the level of affects by performing an alchemy by which, for example, a depoliticizing anxiety may be transmuted into anger or into a sympathy that opens new avenues for action. I try to show how what may at first appear as an exclusively aesthetic set of practices can exercise a political efficacy.

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For Whitman, intrabody and interbody currents, even when felt as a personal sentiment or mood, are streams within a more-than-human process of "influx and efflux." He tends to *celebrate* these atmospheric currents—as enrichments and energizations of an I, as a "joyous electric all" that variegates a self-striving to become as diverse as cosmos.[29] Although Whitman was hardly oblivious to dangerous, ugly, or ignoble forms of influence, they are deliberately understated elements of his poetics. Chapter 4 takes up three stories that focus more overtly and exclusively on the darker sides of influence. While there are many worthy contenders for the role of challenger to Whitman's joyful model of influx and efflux, I choose these three stories because their scope and audacity approach Whitman's cosmic purview, and because they, like *Leaves of Grass*, highlight the fraught and fragile nature of individuation.

The first story is Roger Caillois's, who, writing under the influence of surrealism and claiming to practice a cross-species form of "comparative biology," figures influence as an innate tendency of the organism to give in to the "lure" of undifferentiated "space." Caillois's eerie tale, of individuals swallowed up by milieu, seems to affirm D. H. Lawrence's response to Whitman's call to "dilate" and take in all there is: "I don't want all those things inside me, thank you."[30] Caillois explores the threatening "lure of space" by turning to the insect world, where the organism's tendency to become generic, to mimic its surroundings—a tendency also operating within human beings—is starkly apparent. Caillois highlights a phase of the process of influence that operates below consciousness: an automatic biomimesis working to destroy individuation. This means that influx needs to *be filtered* if any I (Cartesian, cosmic, or otherwise) is to persist. (Chapter 5 will turn to Thoreau and some specific techniques of filtration.)

In a second story, about hoarders and their hoards, I consider how people with a particularly "sensitive cuticle"[31] in relation to objects can be so affected by them that the boundaries of self are experienced as extending beyond the skin. What is at issue here is more the I's fungibility than its fragility. The third tale comes from the literary critic Harold Bloom, who famously confronted the "anxiety" engendered by the influences poets receive from other writers, an anxiety tied to the quest for an individuality that speaks with a voice of its own. Bloom focuses on the efforts of "great poets" to manage the influx, to deploy literary techniques to cope with an irreducible degree of subjection to the influence of precursors. Chapter 4 ultimately compares and contrasts the different ideals of self offered by Caillois, hoarders, Bloom, and

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Whitman. What comes to the fore are Whitman's own hesitations about the desirability of a full-on "merge" with the cosmos.

Chapter 5 turns to Henry Thoreau's take on that subtly intrusive flow called "influence"—in particular, upon his efforts to quarantine some currents and to inflect others *by writing them up*. Like the sympatico Whitman, like hoarders and like Bloom's poets, Thoreau too has a sensitive cuticle: "My body is all sentient—as I go here or there I am tickled by this or that I come in contact with—as if I touched the wires of a battery."[32] But more assiduously than Whitman, and in ways that exceed Bloom's focus on literary tactics in order to include outdoor practices such as walking, Thoreau experiments with ways to minimize his exposure to interpersonal currents and to maximize his contamination by the not-quite-human sparks of the Wild. He actively courts influences arriving from air, water, plants, and animals because *their* potential to refresh and revitalize is great, in contrast to those all-too-human influences whose primary effect is to reinforce stale concepts and percepts.[33] The chapter looks at three encounters with natural influences that Thoreau stages and writes up, with an eye toward how such practices affect the strength and quality of the dilated but also *idiosyncratic* ("eccentric") I that Thoreau wants to be.

Chapter 5 raises once again the question of just how much the Thoreauian and Whitmanian figures of I depend upon a faith in a cosmos that is *providential*. Thoreau, like Whitman, often assumes a benevolent or meliorative tendency at work in the process of influx-and-efflux—often, but not always. Just as Whitman occasionally stumbles over evidence at odds with his picture of cosmos as "joyous electric all"—his figure of sympathy as a natural force akin to gravity, for example, troubles his attempt to enlist sympathy as the glue to repair a broken society—so too does Thoreau stumble. I highlight those occasions when Thoreau acknowledges the limits of a providential imaginary and affirms the presence and power of natural influences even when they do not harmonize with human interests. The question thus becomes how to live well in an apersonal cosmos.

In an epilogue, "A Peculiar Efficacy," I gather together elements of a poetics appropriate to a world of influxes and effluxes and try to sketch a model of action appropriate to that world. The effort is to extract from the book's various explorations of subtle "influences," atmospheric "sympathies," and solar "judgments" some conceptual resources for thinking anew about "human agency" or the efforts of dividuals to sift through and add to influences and to inflect outcomes. What can, in a lively, more-than-human world, re-

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occupy the place of the willful individual positioned above the fray? And how best to describe such a model of self and action? Here I explore the use of "middle-voiced" verbs as a linguistic practice, as a way to "write up" processual agencies. To bespeak from *within* an ongoing process, rather than from an external vantage where the subject of a predicate can either direct activity (active voice) or be acted upon (passive voice)—that is what verbs in the middle voice do. The task is to explore what "writing up" does and how it works.

Calling Out/Calling Toward

As I write up this book, American politics is marked by upsurges of hate, racism, misogyny, xenophobia, conspiracy theories, disdain for the rule of law, private and corporate greed and unprecedented concentration of wealth, officially sanctioned indifference toward the suffering of others, and belligerent denial of that profound, and unequally distributed, precarity that is climate change. All of this finds a powerful advocate in a corrupt president who spins them as forms of national defense. These repellent stances and efforts are met by forceful and livid opposition, by a prodemocratic, antiracist counterpolitics of direct action, mass protest, legal challenge, electoral strategizing, and militant calling out of entrenched structures of privilege and domination.

Antidemocratic and fascist flows must be met with strong and unrelenting opposition, both antagonistic and agonistic. "Agonism," says Bonnie Honig, "names the commitment to the permanence of conflict among would-be equals, but it doesn't only—and this is really important—it doesn't only name conflict. It also names cooperation and mutuality that are always already ridden by strife. So never only the consensual, but also never only the conflictual."[34] I agree with Honig. In what follows, however, I try to highlight the role of yet another set of prodemocratic practices and tactics: those that lean into moods other than outrage, revulsion, and even agonism—not as replacements but as complements to inject into the scene where possible. Following Whitman, I label these other moods "affections" and "sympathies," as those terms become stretched beyond a human-centered, sentimental frame to include apersonal, underdetermined vital forces that course through selves without being reducible to them. I am keen to explore, for example, the ways in which a (vague, protean, ahuman) tendency for bodies to lean, make connections, and form attachments can be harnessed on behalf of

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a more generous, egalitarian, and ecological public culture. Neglect of such efforts has, I believe, made its own contribution to the rise of the neofascist, earth-destroying politics now threatening to become hegemonic.

Again, the effort is not to supplant antagonism or agonism, but to offer an indispensable supplement to them. Thus, the dominant rhetorical groove in what follows is more calling in than calling out. For some audiences, this may seem to disqualify the effort from counting as "political." In response, I am tempted to yield the term *politics* to the realm of agon and then to float the idea that "politics" alone cannot get us where we want to go. But if the political is acknowledged to include all the affects and energies—affirmative and negative—with the potential for societal transformation, then *Influx & Efflux* can qualify as (among other genres) a political work.[35] It is clear to me that even a poetic, Whitmanian America would continue to generate and absorb sinister waves of influence in need of vigorous opposition. It is worth noting that is hard not to be infected by the toxic plumes one vigorously opposes and that the trick is to find ways to counter them without adding to their impetus. Indispensable today are studies devoted to assessing and resisting new waves of fascism.[36] But I share Whitman's intuition that it is *also* important to detect and inflect the more positive inflows and outflows. To the extent that a democracy ignores or downplays these, it becomes ever more susceptible to noxious infections.

This is thus an untimely book: it offers a strangely apersonal figure of self and a nonagonistic set of practices to add to the democratic mix.[37] The work of change always needs a discordant chorus, says Ferguson, "because we have multiple audiences, because different trajectories work together in unexpected ways, because we should never put all our eggs in just one basket."[38]

Writing Up

My discussions of sympathies and influences—of transfers at the borders of outdoors and inside—accent the "influx" phase of process. Also woven throughout the book is a concern with the "efflux" that is a writing up of such encounters. By "writing up," I mean the arrangement of words that repeat, imperfectly and creatively, events that exceed those words but also find some expression in them. It is a writing *up* when it amplifies and elevates ethically whatever protogenerous potentials are already circulating.[39] What are the characteristics of a rhetoric suited to this task? What grammar, syn-

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tax, tropes, and tricks are most pertinent to a linguistic and ethical inflection of a process that includes ahuman, alinguistic influences? (That question is a twenty-first-century echo of Thoreau's nineteenth-centry quest to "*speak* a word for Nature?")[40] Such a poetics would try to give these forces their due while placing them in a wordy, normative milieu that is not really their home.

Thoreau's writing, like that of Whitman and the others I rely upon in what follows, tends to float between genres—part political theory, part mythmaking, part poetry, part speculative philosophy, part political and existential diagnosis. Perhaps this hovering enables it to see more clearly the contributions made by actants whose first language is not human, to write, for example, as "the scribe of . . . the corn and the grass and the atmosphere writing,"[41] and to induce the feeling that, at the very moment you are reading the text, you are amidst a bevy of active forces, some human and many not.

Here is one example of that kind of rhetoric, from Thoreau's journal on July 23, 1851:

> You must walk so gently as to hear the finest sounds, the faculties being in repose. Your mind must not perspire. True, out of doors my thought is commonly drowned as it were & and shrunken, pressed down by stupendous piles of light ethereal influence—for the pressure of the atmosphere is still 15 pounds to a square inch—I can do little more than preserve the equilibrium & resist the pressure of the atmosphere—I can only nod like the ryeheads in the breeze. I expand more surely in my chamber, as far as expression goes, as if that pressure were taken off; but here outdoors is the place to store up influences.[42]

That passage, an efflux in response to the inflow of "stupendous piles of light ethereal influence," acknowledges the force of atmosphere, of barometric pressure plus breeze, plus heat and sun, and perhaps also the mesmerizing hum of summer cicadas. These "influences," with a vitality depicted as more than what is usually meant when one speaks of the weather, are lively participants in an encounter with Thoreau. They face, flow into, and alter the man: in the example before us, his power of thought is suspended, as a more vegetal faculty becomes *enhanced*: Thoreau now nods like the ryeheads in the breeze.

Nodding supplants thinking—but only for a while. Later, back in his chamber, the possibilities for expressing the inflow "expand"—to include not only

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vegetal but literary and poetic iterations. Inside the house, Thoreau is again able to ruminate his encounters—indeed, we hear news of these stupendous, ethereal influences only by way of the thoughtful words he later writes up. Chapter 4 explores in detail this and other of Thoreau's encounters with "natural influences." My focus now is on the effort of writing up, on the paradox of *personal endeavoring* in a world of *pervasive influence*. Thoreau sways back and forth between a nodding and an inventive self, with each circuit engaging different conjunctions of outdoor and indoor, internal and external, powers.

Language will always be an anexact repetition of the press of the outdoors; every wordy composition will be more or less untrue to stupendous, ethereal influences that signal without words. What is more, each writer will contaminate the influences she targets for expression with *unchosen* influences embedded in her perceptual, ideological, social-positional, and body-capacity styles.[43] At least some dimensions of these will remain unmarked, unconscious, vague to their bearer. Attempts to unearth these, and to confess to their influence, is an invaluable part of postcolonial, antiracist, antipatriarchal, and neurodiversifying strategies. But another important task, I think, is to carry those efforts forward without losing the capacity to sing better alternatives, to give the virtual its due, to write *up*.

What would be a poetics of writing up? It would have to be able to display how writers as they write continue to ride the momentum of outside influences. It would dramatize how metaphors remain infused and fueled by the physical forces more obviously at work when one is out in the sun on a really hot day. Such writing could show, for example, how the throat-and-chest feeling of breathing and the texture of wind on your face still vibrate inside the word *inspiration*, or how hearing the phrase "on the one hand . . . on the other hand" induces a subtle rocking to-and-fro of your body.[44] Such a rhetoric might also push the "metaphorical" to the point where it becomes uncertain whether a sentence speaks in a descriptive or an aspirational voice, and also uncertain whether the speaker is positioned outside the scene (like a bird or a god from above)[45] or a body swimming in a processual sea.

Such a rhetoric might also try, to paraphrase Michel Foucault, to bring sentences *to* life, showing not only how sentences *express* the humanist, societal life of their writer, but also *press* forward a vitality proper to ahuman shapes. Such sentences would "light fires, watch the grass grow, listen to the wind, and catch the sea foam in the breeze and scatter it."[46] They would ac-

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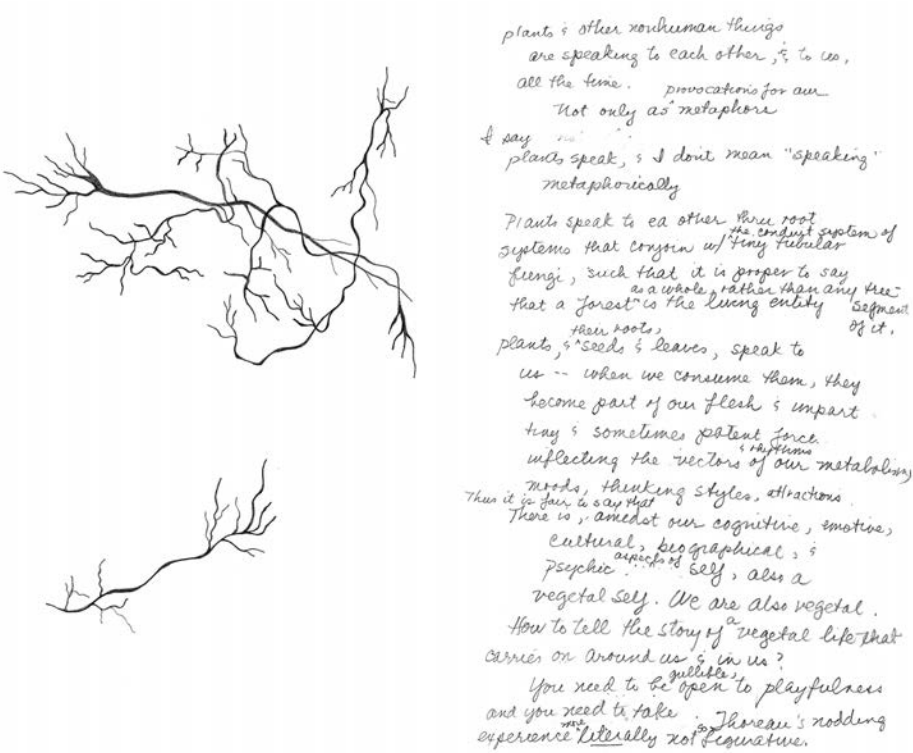

knowledge that (what Thoreau calls) "natural influences" linger in the language enlivened by them.

Whitman also seeks such a poetics when he calls for utterances that are "done with reviews and criticisms of life" and are "animating now to life itself."[47] To animate to life is to throw oneself heartily into an ongoing, creative process. It is neither to "take" a decisive action (as in "to act more animatedly") nor to endure as a patient of an external force (as when Frankenstein's monster is "animated" by electricity). Thoreau makes a similar point in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*:

> A perfectly healthy sentence, it is true, is extremely rare. . . . It is as if a green bough were laid across the page, and we are refreshed as by the sight of fresh grass in midwinter or early spring. You have constantly the warrant of life and experience in what you read. The little that is said is eked

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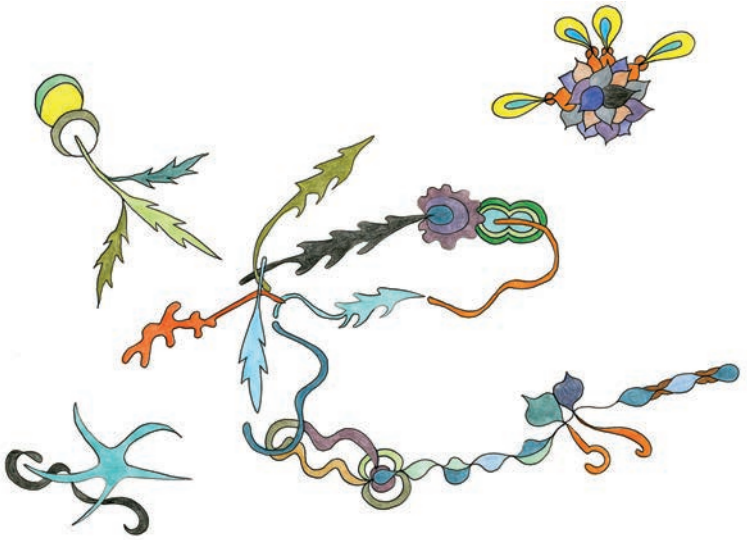

Bough sentences

out by implication of the much that was done. The sentences are verduous and blooming as evergreen and flowers, because they are rooted in fact and experience.[48]

Such a rhetoric might even try to speak with a tongue that is ramified (many-branched), like a huge old tree or a neural network. Or perhaps with a voice that is rhizomatic in the sense of being all branches and no trunk. "The two of us wrote *Anti-Oedipus* together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd," say Deleuze and Guattari.[49] Such a rhetoric would be roomy enough to accommodate a heterogeneous swirl of agents, some human, some not. It would find workarounds to the grammar of subjects and objects—in order to display how "writing up" consists in overlapping waves of expressive effort, some mine, some yours, and some apersonal.

It might also sometimes indulge in the "pathetic fallacy," prosopopoeia, or other anthropomorphizing tropes—thus affording voice to vibrant materials whose first language is not words. When Whitman writes up the "blab of the pave," or when Caillois invokes the "lyrical force" of the praying man-

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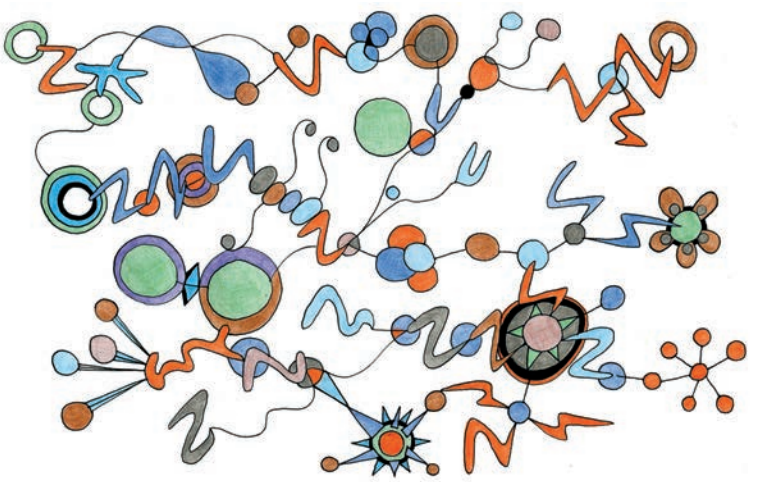

Rhizomatic speech

tis, they allow natural entities, forces, and processes to inhabit and deform the grammatical place of the doer. They release them from the confinement of being merely the "context" or "material conditions" that undergird exclusively human powers of action.

The techniques just listed, plus the use of middle-voiced verbs (*to partake*, *to inaugurate*, *to promulge*, *to inflect*) are on display in what follows.

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notes

prologue

1 • Walt Whitman, "Europe, the 72nd and 73rd Years of These States," in *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*, ed. Michael Moon (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), 224, line 17.

2 • Doodles could be described as what Deleuze and Guattari call "anexact" creatures: they are the subject of a protogeometry concerned specifically with "vague, . . . vagabond, or nomadic, morphological essences. These essences are distinct from sensible things, as well as from ideal, royal, or imperial essences. Protogeometry, the science dealing with them, is itself vague, in the etymological sense of 'vagabond': it is neither inexact like sensible things nor exact like ideal essences, but anexact yet rigorous ('essentially and not accidentally inexact')." Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 367.

3 • "Automatic writing is the most direct of Surrealist techniques. Sit at a table with pen and paper, put yourself in a 'receptive' frame of mind, and start writing. Continue writing without thinking about what is appearing beneath your pen." Alastair Brotchie and Mel Gooding, eds., *A Book of Surrealist Games* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala Redstone Editions, 1995), 17.

4 • A doodle, writes Matthew Battles, is "about anything but expression. Its joys are sensuous and immediate: the dry catch of the pencil point as it tangles in the fibers of the page, the gelid smoothness of the ballpoint unrolling a fat swath of ink, the pliant bouquet of crayons and the stink of coloring markers." Matthew Battles, "In Praise of Doodling," *American Scholar* 73, no. 4 (autumn 2004): 108. Battles notes that Russell M. Arundel, an early theorist of the doodle, claimed that "civilized man's natural state is one of 'pixilation'—a condition of pixie-like enchantment that, though concealed by the lumber and business of modern life, emerges most clearly in the 'automatic writing' he calls 'doodling'" (105).

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5 • For a useful summary of recent work on the topic, see Steven Heller, "The Cognitive Benefits of Doodling," *Atlantic*, August 2015, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/07/doodling-for-cognitive-benefits.

6 • Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," in Moon, *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*, section 22. David Reynolds describes how Whitman borrowed "influx and efflux" from Swedenborg, for whom communications with God happen "through particular parts of the body. . . . The 'divine breath,' also called the 'influx' or 'afflatus,' was taken in from the spiritual atmosphere through the lungs, which in turn emanated an 'efflux' of its own into the atmosphere. . . . [Whitman combined] . . . the notion of efflux with the 'charge' and universal fluid of animal magnetism." David Reynolds, *Walt Whitman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 94.

7 • Henry Thoreau, July 23, 1851, *A Year in Thoreau's Journal: 1851*, ed. H. Daniel Peck (New York: Penguin 1993), 126.

8 • Whitman, "Song of Myself," lines 44–45.

9 • Kathy E. Ferguson, "Anarchist Women and the Politics of Walking," *Political Research Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (2017): 714.

10 • The meaning of the term *shape* appears in "Song of the Broad-Axe," as discussed in chapter 1.

11 • See, for example, recent work by Sophie Von Redecker, Willy Blomme, Samantha Frost, Elizabeth Ellsworth and Jaime Kruse, Ben Anderson, Chas Phillips, Natasha Myers, Anatoli Ignatov, Chad Shomura, Jairus Grove, Anand Pandian, Iris van der Tuin, Derek McCormack, Char Miller, Jeffrey Cohen, Branka Arsic, Stacey Alaimo, Stephanie Erev, Rosi Braidotti, and Lars Tønder, to name just a few.

12 • McKim Marriott, *Hindu Transactions: Diversity without Dualism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1976), 111.

13 • Whitman, "Song of Myself," lines 614–16.

14 • In "Whitman and the Culture of Democracy," George Kateb highlights a Whitman who bespeaks a more individualized American self, with an inner core that persists despite all the cominglings in which it partakes. Kateb draws to the surface Whitman's subtle advocacy of democratic individuality, of a self who can be "alone" with a unique, "interior consciousness." George Kateb, "Whitman and the Culture of Democracy," in *Political Companion to Walt Whitman*, ed. John Seery (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 35. My approach comes closer to that of Morton Schoolman, who presents Whitman as practitioner of an "aesthetic education" in which the "individual as 'variety' and the mass as 'contrasts of lights and shades'" tend to converge. Morton Schoolman, "Democratic Enlightenment: Whitman and Aesthetic Education," in *Political Companion to Walt Whitman*, ed. John Seery, 318.

15 • Whitman, "Song of Myself," lines 670–71.

16 • Whitman, "Song of Myself," section 40, 64–65.

17 • Walt Whitman, in the "George Walker" notebook under the heading "Combination," in *The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman: Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts*, ed. Edward F. Grier, vol. 1 (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 233. Whitman here has in mind Jean Paul Richter (1763–1825), char-

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acterized as having "tenderness and trembling sympathetic manliness" (vol. 1, 233) and "perennial fireproof joys" (vol. 1, 379).

18 • Walt Whitman, *The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman, Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts*, ed. Edward F. Grier, vol. 4, 1515. He also speaks of "manly tenderness" in the 1855 *Preface*, 617. Whitman's admirer John Addington Symonds appreciates Whitman's celebration of what Symonds names as "the free currents of manly sympathy." Letter to Horace Traubel, March 5, 1891, http://www.whitmanarchive.org/criticism/disciples/traubel/WWWiC/8/med.00008.23.html. See also Shane Butler, "Homer's Deep," in *Deep Classics: Rethinking Classical Reception*, ed. Shane Butler (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 21–48.

19 • Walt Whitman, "Talbot Wilson," in *The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman: Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts*, ed. Edward F. Grier, vol. 1, 73.

20 • For example, "The analogy holds in this way—that the soul of the Universe is the genital master, the impregnating and animating spirit.—Physical matter is Female and Mother, and waits barren and bloomless, the jets of life from the masculine vigor, the undermost first cause of all that is not what Death is." Walt Whitman, "The Analogy," in *The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman: Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts*, ed. Edward F. Grier, vol. 1, 176.

21 • Andrew Lawson, in *Walt Whitman and the Class Struggle* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006), presents Whitman's "affirmative statements about the market" as typical of the views of the Jacksonian lower middle class. But Whitman also expressed "doubts and anxieties" about the market "through the poetry's unsettling eroticism, its foregrounding of the destabilizing effects of desire" (4). Lawson describes Whitman's views on political economy this way: the "ideal form of sociability [would] have the fluidity of marketplace exchanges without the buffeting anxieties they generate, the equalitarian solidarities of the artisan system without its restrictive hierarchy" (26). According to Betsy Erkkila, "Whitman wrote from an essentially eighteenth-century view of commerce. . . . Envisioning the commercial spirit as an essentially benign, civilizing, and unifying force, Whitman never carried his critique of capitalism to an attack on the concept of free enterprise itself." Also: "Like Marx, he recognized that the economics of capitalism 'enters every transaction of society' and 'taints its soundness,' but by focusing on the problem of monopoly and corporate wealth, he avoided the potential contradiction between the free-enterprise society he lived in and the harmonious and egalitarian democratic society of his dreams." Betsy Erkkila, *Whitman: The Political Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 37–38.

22 • Walt Whitman, "I Am He That Aches with Love," in Moon, *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*, 93. Whitman's "materialism" also has affinities with a Thoreau-like naturalism or pantheism, as in lines 663–66 from "Song of Myself": "I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars, / And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg of the wren, / And the tree-toad is a chef-d'oeuvre for the highest, / And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven." See M. Jimmie Killingsworth, *Walt Whitman and the Earth: A Study in Ecopoetics* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005).

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23 • Whitman, "Song of Myself," line 590.

24 • Walt Whitman, "From Montauk Point," in *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*, ed. Michael Moon, 426.

25 • Walt Whitman, "By Blue Ontario's Shore," in *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*, ed. Michael Moon, line 6. The role of bodily postures in the poems is a theme of chapter 1.

26 • Whitman, "Song of Myself," section 33, lines 801 and 831. I return to this issue when discussing the slave auction section of "I Sing the Body Electric."

27 • Whitman, "Song of Myself," lines 1083–85.

28 • Walt Whitman, as reported by Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden* (March 28–July 14, 1888) (Boston: Small, Maynard & Co., 1906), my emphasis, https://whitmanarchive.org/criticism/disciples/traubel/WWWiC/2/med.00002.28.html.

29 • Walt Whitman, "As They Draw to a Close," in *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*, ed. Michael Moon, 420.

30 • D. H. Lawrence, "Whitman," in *Studies in Classical American Literature* (New York: Penguin, 1977), 150.

31 • The phrase is Whitman's, as reported by Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden* (March 28–July 14, 1888), http://whitmanarchive.org/criticism/disciples/traubel/WWWiC/1/whole.html.

32 • *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau*, Online Journal Transcripts, vol. 19, December 11, 1855, http://thoreau.library.ucsb.edu/writings_journals19.html.

33 • "What we have touched & worne is trivial our scurf—repetition—tradition—conformity—," writes Thoreau. So much better "to perceive freshly." *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau*, Online Journal Transcripts, vol. 19, December 11, 1855, http://thoreau.library.ucsb.edu/writings_journals19.html.

34 • Janell Watson, "Feminism as Agonistic Sorority: An Interview with Bonnie Honig," *Minnesota Review* 81 (2013): 115.

35 • Speaking of the power of the kind of poet that "is wanted," Whitman says that "The power to destroy or remould is freely used by him, but never the power of attack." Walt Whitman, Preface 1855—*Leaves of Grass*, First Edition, in *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*, ed. Michael Moon, line 185. Moon notes that in later editions, *never* is changed to *seldom*.

36 • Examples here include Georges Bataille and Carl Lovitt's classic study, "The Psychological Structure of Fascism," *New German Critique*, no. 16 (1979): 64–87; the more recent work of William E. Connolly's *Aspirational Fascism: The Struggle for Multifaceted Democracy under Trumpism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017); Nidesh Lawtoo, "The Power of Myth (Reloaded): From Nazism to New Fascism," *L'Esprit Créateur* 57, no. 4 (winter 2017): 64–82; Steven Levitky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (New York: Crown, 2018).

37 • Sometimes these practices take place in "private life," but it is also important to include them in engaging the strife of public contestations. Romand Coles has developed a conceptual vocabulary and a set of practical techniques (for example, the art of pluralizing and moving the "tables" around which democracy takes

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place—from church basements, to community centers, to living rooms, to community gardens, to workplaces, to assemblies in the streets). See his *Visionary Pragmatism: Radical and Ecological Democracy in Neoliberal Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); *Beyond Gated Politics: Reflections for the Possibility of Democracy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); *Rethinking Generosity: Critical Theory and the Politics of Caritas* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

38 • Kathy Ferguson, private correspondence, December 2018.

39 • As Romand Coles puts it, "the style of one's rhetorical engagement with others is one of the deepest aspects of our ethical and political practice. Style is ethical and political because it is powerfully entwined with the constitution of vision—what one can and cannot see—and what those who hear us are enabled and disabled from seeing. Contents, structures, and modes of perception play an integral role in the dynamics of power relations insofar as perception tends to reinforce or resist present power patterns by rendering their operations, damages, dangers, as well as alternative possibilities visible or invisible. Rhetorical-perceptual styles are entwined with the play of power most profoundly because they variously enact and/or disestablish its everyday flows. They perform in the subtlest of innumerable ways a readiness for the present order of things—a readiness to continue seeing things as one expects or as an order demands, or, alternatively, and to varying degrees, a readiness to experiment with or undergo a certain perceptual shifting that involves unwonted transformations, a cultivated vulnerability to reformation that is at the heart of radical democratic engagement and the possibility of more generous relations." Romand Coles, "Democracy, Theology, and the Question of Excess: A Review of Jeffrey Stout's Democracy and Tradition," *Modern Theology* 21, no. 2 (April 2005): 302.

40 • "I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil,—to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of nature, rather than a member of society. I wish to make an extreme statement, if so I may make an emphatic one." Henry David Thoreau, "Walking," in *Excursions and Poems: The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*, vol. 5 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 205.

41 • Henry Thoreau, *A Year in Thoreau's Journal, 1851*, edited by H. Daniel Peck (New York: Penguin, 1993), 188.

42 • Thoreau, *A Year in Thoreau's Journal, 1851*, 126.

43 • By "body-capacity-style," I am trying to mark how health and the bodily configuration, and also how differences in neurological styles, function to delimit what one can feel and say about outside influences. For an excellent discussion of the politics and philosophy of neurodiversity, see Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016) and "Me Lo Dijo Un Pajarito: Neurodiversity, Black Life and the University As We Know It," *Social Text* 36, no. 3 (2018): 1–24. The "trans-humanist" point I am trying to make, with the help of Manning and others, is a development of the claim, characteristic of the linguistic turn, that the writer is not to be understood as only directing language but as also affected by the force of the writing, of a language irreducible to any deployment of it, as when

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Roland Barthes says that in the verb "to write the [human] subject is immediately contemporary with the writing, being effected and affected by it." Roland Barthes, "To Write: Intransitive Verb?" in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) and "To Write: An Intransitive Verb? Discussion," in *The Structuralist Controversy*, ed. Richard A. Macksey (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 134–56.

44 • Iris K. Schneider, Anita Eerland, Frenk van Harreveld, Mark Rotteveel, Joop van der Pligt, Nathan van der Stoep, and Rolf A. Zwaan, "One Way and the Other: The Bidirectional Relationship between Ambivalence and Body Movement," *Psychological Science*, 24, no. 3 (2013): 319–25.

45 • Donna Haraway speaks of "the God trick of seeing everything from nowhere," in "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (autumn 1988): 581.

46 • "I can't help but dream about a kind of criticism that would try not to judge but to bring an oeuvre, a book, a sentence, an idea to life; it would light fires, watch the grass grow, listen to the wind, and catch the sea foam in the breeze and scatter it. It would multiply not judgements but signs of existence; it would summon them, drag them from their sleep. Perhaps it would invent them sometimes—all the better. All the better. Criticism that hands down sentences sends me to sleep; I'd like a criticism of scintillating leaps of the imagination. It would not be sovereign or dressed in red. It would bear the lightening of possible storms." Michel Foucault, *The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, vol. 1, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), 323.

47 • Whitman, "By Blue Ontario's Shore," in Moon, *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*, lines 189–90.

48 • Henry Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, ed. Odell Shepard (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1921), 73.

49 • Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 3.

chapter one. position and disposition

1 • "The phrenologists Orson Squire Fowler (1809–1887), Lorenzo Niles Fowler (1811–1896), and Samuel R. Wells (1820–1875) published *Life Illustrated: A Journal of Entertainment, Improvement, and Progress* between 1854 and 1861, after which the newspaper merged with the *American Phrenological Journal*." Jason Stacy, *Life Illustrated*, in *The Walt Whitman Archive,* ed. Ed Folsom and Kenneth M. Price, accessed March 28, 2017, http://www.whitmanarchive.org.

2 • Sean Ross Meehan says that "the word 'physiological' is one that Whitman offered late as the 'impetus-word' for Leaves of Grass." Sean Ross Meehan, "'Nature's Stomach': Emerson, Whitman, and the Poetics of Digestion," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 28, no. 3 (2011): 97–121.

3 • Walt Whitman, "New York Dissected: V. Street Yarn," *Life Illustrated: A Journal of Entertainment, Improvement, and Progress*, August 16, 1856, in *The Walt Whitman Archive*, ed. Folsom and Price, http://whitmanarchive.org. In an earlier install-

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